

Chapter one – the Moss Troopers Act 1666

“It's not possible” Billy cried slamming his goblet on the table, a wave of its contents slopped onto the long oak wooden table that stretched the length of the room, a fire at one end blazed away, a log cracked and sent embers flying from the open fire into the room, almost in time with the goblet slamming on the table. Some in the room had turned to the slamming of the goblet. Its timing was the only thing that created a link but in one-time splitting moment, they all turned in unison to the fire, though used to the fire cracking. It was the first time that **Billy** the youngest came home drunk. He'd read the paper pinned up in the pub explaining the Moss trooper act.

Frank, the eldest, he'd been a charmer, he'd either stayed out all night or come home with loudness but in a good way frivolous, jovial, always cracking a joke, something he'd heard, a story to tell, friends always by his side looking up at him. The girls loved him with his confidence and bravado. They weren't used to **Billy**, his seriousness confounded them, they didn't really want to hear what was coming, they knew. He'd been with Frank, the eve of his birthday, in the local ale house and had just read about the Moss Trooper Act. He felt those around him needed to know what he saw, he'd tried to tell them in the pub but they, like here at home, were closing their ears to it. He'd read about the Ostrich, and the way it buried its head in the sand when danger came and he saw the same in the people around him. He hadn't quite understood that they knew. It had been coming for years, there was just nothing they could do about it. They'd seen the way things were going and the elders amongst them had seen their proud days with their reputation of being hired as the best cavalry men, were over.

Billy had been quiet as a lad. When raids had been planned, as bairns, Frank had always been the one sneaking peaks over the shoulders of the adults, Billy had always been there but quiet, he'd sat near the door, on a bench by the side wall and listened, he'd not been able to see but watching Frank make a fool of himself, wasting energy, bouncing to see what was happening. Billy had known he was too small and it wasn't worth the effort from him, he had just sat and listened.

He'd always asked Frank what he'd seen, what was going on, and the reply had always been the same, “couldn't see nothin or there was a map on the table, I could see **Papa Dodds** though”, or not, whatever the case had been, but it had seemed important to him to report whether he'd been there or not.

In those days, Papa Dodds would oversee from his then modern rocking chair, rocking away, pipe in mouth watching his son proudly planning an attack from a hay barn with 10 to 20 men. Scottish beef, English sheep or horses, from the either side of the border, it didn't matter unless they got paid to rob from one or the other, then they followed the gold, they were “Reivers”

In **Papa** Dodds's day though, it had been with hundreds of men, in his day it had been like real war, an army that drove deep into English or Scottish territory. Those had been days after prosperity and adventure. He'd lost many friends along the way, but He was still there, watching, proud his son survived and kept the large family together.

It was now autumn of 1666 and the new laws governing their lives had just been enacted. Billy had learned to read. Father Elliot the local vicar had seen potential in him at a young age, quick minded and above all curious. Unlike all the other kids, he'd wanted to learn. From the start he'd always asked **Father** Elliot why this and why that after class. It had been then that he'd introduced Billy to books for the answers and reading became his passion overnight. The priest had taken him under his wing. Billy had hated it first, he'd wanted to be outside, in the sun or rain, playing with the others, that had been his thing, he'd always been the leader in his age group of friends. Then as he started learning things, his imagination had kicked in and he found he got attention from the elders who always asked him what he'd learned that day. He helped bring in the outside world for them.

He could read stories to the younger kids; the elders were always interested in listening to the things he'd learned. Places he'd learned about, Europe and the new continent, "America".

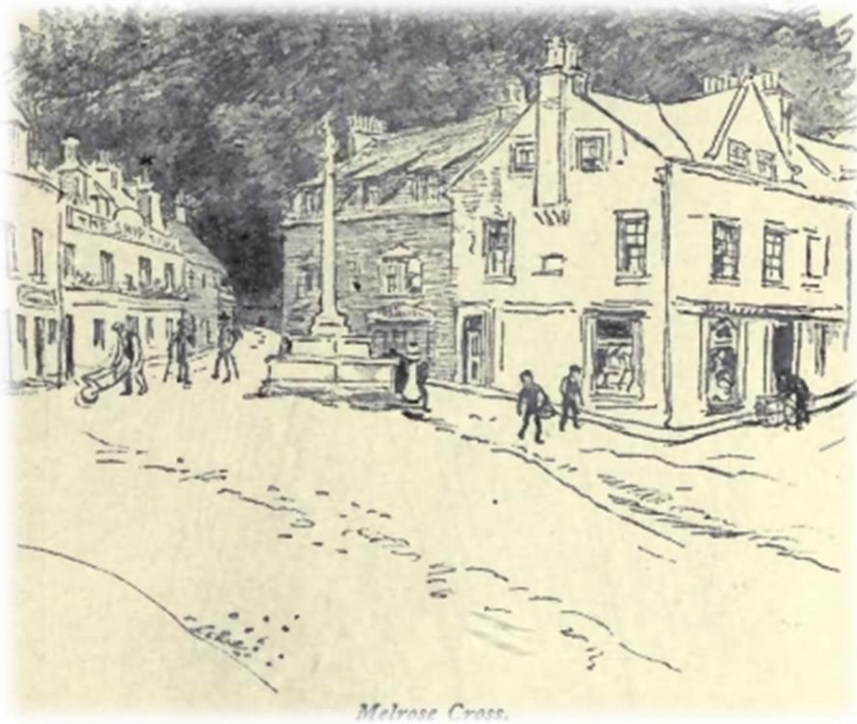
The talk of London and the great fire was still the big subject of the clan. That had been the most recent news, it had been the first time he'd read a proper "news paper", "the Oxford Gazette". It had been on his 16th birthday. A day that changed his life.

He'd got up as usual that morning. He jumped into his breeches and sitting on the end of his cot he pulled on his boots, standing he tucked his linen shirt **in** and trotted down the stairs. No-one else was up, he guessed his brothers were out on a raid as he'd been away a few nights. While doing his chores, carrying 2 pails of grain for the horses, he'd turned and smiled to himself as the sun peaked over the brow of the hill. They had been the last 2 and he was feeling hungry, his stomach churning. The first rays of sunshine traversed the courtyard in the slowly disappearing early morning mist into the wooden barn, the doors were wide open now and the light hit the first box. As he looked forwards, he came to a sudden stop. He hadn't noticed that before, there was a horse's head sticking out over it's gate. It wasn't supposed to be there, that box was supposed to be empty he thought, putting down the 2 pails, he started rubbing his chin. He heard a rustle just before Frank's head popped out from under the head of the horse. The horse brayed at Billy and **Frank's** face shone a huge smile. "Happy birthday brother **Billy**, hope he's the right size. Spotted him in a field on my way back and bought him for you"; "bought him, you actually bought him, for me?" beamed **Billy**. There was a slight twist to Frank's smile for a second but returned. It was then, when the two brothers were smiling that you could see the family resemblance in their faces. Billy slowly approached the box. All thoughts about his turning stomach were gone for the moment. He was a good rider, so he was told, he'd never owned his own horse before though, and she was a beauty. Tanned with a lock of white down her nose. When almost at arms length, he put out his hand slowly and when the horse put out his nose to smell, he stopped and let him. Only a few seconds later the horse was trying to nibble his fingers and speaking gently, tickling the bottom lip of the horse, **he** moved in closer to be able to put his arm round his neck and patted her gently using a soft smoothing voice. "Talk to the ladies like that and you'll have them swooning all over you" **Frank** said. Billy grinned as he ran his hands up the head and gently started caressing the ears; by now he could feel the warmth and the breathing as his head was cuddled into the horse's neck. "What's he called" he asked. Frank sheepishly replied, "don't know, never asked the farmer", picking up his head and tone, "you can name him what you like", Billy lifted his head and looked straight at his brother, "honestly, seriously, you paid for him....". "Of course, you know

what the troopers are like round here: I wouldn't want my brother hung now would I" He looked back at his brother, arms open with a big grin on his face. "cross my heart, hope to die" he finished before Billy grinned back and moved in to hug his brother. "Thanks, she's a beauty, can't name her till I know what she's like, might take her out into town after breakfast if that's ok?". "She's your horse, you can do what you like with her". Billy grinned. Sam appeared in the courtyard, he'd been in the stables spreading out some hay for the other horses. He picked up the two pails that sat there in the middle of the courtyard, "I'll do these" he said and started back to the barn, turning over his shoulder threw one of the family grin's, "Oh and happy birthday". Billy hugged the horse once then ran off thinking to himself how good birthdays were.

"You sure about that, you know, the horse?" Sam asked as he passed Frank. "What do you mean" he turned with a look of hurt on his face. "Well it's only two days ride from where you got her: you sure no-one 'll recognise her". "two days, two days, who do you know that'll travel two days, to come up to a dead-end place like this looking for a horse, it ain't going ta happen, is it?". Sam turned away mumbling under his breath, "I don't know, I don't know". He had a habit of repeating his sentences when he was nervous. "honestly Sam, don't worry about it, it'll all be alright" Frank threw in the direction of Sam's parting back as he lopped further into the barn with the two pails still mumbling to himself, another of his annoying habits Frank observed. Wiping away the dark cloud that was hanging above him for a minute, he found the sunshine smile again and went to join Billy for breakfast, he was ravenous.

It was several hours later, Billy had found the time and was now haring down the mountain path towards town. The cold mountain wind had turned his nose blue he was sure as he grinned. She was fast, sturdy as well, solid with her feet and she needed to be around here. He'd been going for a good 20 minutes now and at a good pace and she was just starting to tire. He was only a mile outside town when he climbed off and started walking with her. Her nose already nuzzling into his neck from behind sending hot jets of slightly damp air down his back. In a way soothing. He had started turning over his Gran's words as he'd left. There had been some look on her face as he'd walked out that left a mark on his conscious. He now couldn't let go of that face, haunting almost, it had been: her eyes, they'd been wide open. He tried to remember her words, "You leave unknowing the weight you bear, the clan will be counting on you, good luck in town and be quick on your feet", there she'd given a grin, but her eyes were distant at the end. She'd not said goodbye, just turned and walked away, more bent than usual he'd thought. He turned the words round in his head until he reached the start of town.



While he was here his **M**a had asked him for a few things. He thought he'd get them for her first before going to the ale house.

As he approached the bar, he went through the list of things he'd been asked to get and that he'd got them all. "Darning needles, black thread,".

It was a simple ale house, a plank on a few barrels, several tables spread out around the room, straw littered the floor as it was a part-time stable as well. There were two serving women working their way round the tables with trays containing both empty and full beer tankards. Billy knew them both and nodding at each of them, he got sweet smiles in return, they knew he was **F**ranks younger brother to them, nothing more however much he'd hoped for a rumble in the hay.

He headed straight for the bar. There was a stranger standing there. A toff, top hat and tails, the way he stood. As **B**illy approached the bar and took his place, he noticed what the man was holding. It was a piece of paper larger than a page from books he'd seen, no cover, just covered with lots of from top to bottom and not large letters, quite small: in fact, looking up and trying to read what was on the other side of the piece of paper, he had to squint. There was some bigger print heading blocks of smaller print. He made out a headline, something to do with the clearing up after the great fire: they had found out where it was started.

"The Great Fire started at the bakery (or baker's house) of Thomas Farriner (or Farynor) on Pudding Lane shortly after midnight on Sunday".

He lost focus on the words as the paper moved to an angle. He followed with his head, and it was only when he was almost toppling over that he realised the man reading the paper, was peering at him from the side. "Reading it were we lad?" he said folding the paper in half and placing it on the

bar. He smiled in a gentle but patronising way. Billy looked at him straight in the eye, “seems the fire started in Pudding Lane, a mister Thomas Farinner”. He nodded with a hhmppf and took a gulp of his ale not taking his eyes off those that were now fixed on him. Having taken his gulp, he placed the glass back down on the bar.

Staring at that stone face started him sweating and he started wondering if he was doing the right thing; he hadn't done anything wrong had he? He hadn't, he re-assured himself, though he felt he would start sweating in a minute, that stare, there was a darkness, something. “I'm a Reiver, of the Dodds clan, and its my birthday” he blurted out, he didn't know where it came from but under those heavy eyes....he couldn't lose, but he'd found something else, another way out. He kept looking and then there was a frown which slowly brightened to a smile and ended up with almost a laugh. Billy couldn't help it but smiled in reflection and although he didn't know what the joke was, gave back two hesitant but audible laughs.

The man looked him up and down. He raised his head and shouted at the barman: “another for the birthday...” there was a slight hesitation, “man”. He turned back to Billy, “Some-one who can stare me out like that, what other hidden talents can you boast to me about, reading, writing” and his eyebrows moved up quizzically”, Billy nodded, “brave and I bet knowledgeable for around here. In fact, I've been round the whole area over these past weeks, and you're the first I've met of your age that can read as freely as you seem to: how did you learn?”. The new drinks arrived. Billy had still a way to go to finish his mug but carried on going till there was nothing left in the glass. With a sharp intake of breath, he slammed the empty mug on the bar. Wiping his mouth by dragging his sleeve across his lips he looked up. There was a feeling of pride overwhelming him for a minute. “My name's Billy, nice to meet you Mr...err” and he put out his hand. The smile that had settled gently on the face of the man became a recognisable grin. He took the hand, “Ralph” he gave simply. Billy felt himself liking the man, he took his second mug and, looking at Ralph, they tapped each other's mug with their own. “to birthdays” Ralph commented before taking a large sip.

Over the next hour, Billy told Ralph how he'd learned from the priest, Billy learned that Ralph had been a soldier on the English side, a ranking one he'd guessed. But he wasn't in uniform now. He said he was on a tour of the local towns, he wanted to get a feel for the people who lived on the borders between Scotland and England. Billy was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable and regretting his outburst earlier. Ralph leaned forwards, and almost conspiratorially he whispered, “Honest, I'm not on duty, I really am just getting a feel for the place”. Sitting back, “actually” and his face became sterner, “actually, I am looking to hire someone as my secretary. I have had to get rid of my last ones or they just left of their own accord. They send me someone from London each time and they can't survive a few months. Would you be interested?” he looked at Billy, who almost coughed a whole mouthful of beer over the gentleman, as that was most definitely what this man was. He managed to keep his mouth closed and forced it down his throat. He felt the warmth as his face went beetroot. It took him a few minutes which Ralph politely gave him not saying a word but keeping a solid eye on the young man. Eventually “What, just like that, you meet me, you offer me a job, where, here?”, there wasn't a pause but Ralph jumped in anyway, “Newcastle's where I live and work”. Billy could only stand there dumbfounded. “And you expect I'll just drop everything, jump in your carriage and come work for you in Newcastle?”. It took Ralph a few searching seconds. He searched Billy's face it seemed to Billy. “Yes” was the straight answer.

"Noo, I'm from here", and he nodded towards the door, those hills out there, they are where I live", he grinned, "got me own horse n'all, he's out there, my brother gave her to me this morning for a present". His grin got wider, "can't say I'm not tempted mind, but can't ride my horse in Newcastle can I?", Ralph was amused by this boy, man he had the gall of a man, mouth and eyes, he'd seen them glint with life, he knew this boy would be curious, and with his talents, reading, writing, and from here, would be a good way to find out what these folk were about. He knew of the reivers, he'd heard the blood curdling tales from people who'd been raided by the reivers, they were a bunch of criminals now, since Scotland and England had become one; there was no room for this type of life; instead of working against each other they were now together to wipe out this lawlessness. Best way to know your foe, take him in, show him your way, he'll show you his ways, then, (**he hoped**) there might be a peaceful way out of this mess he thought grimly. His past few weeks had shown him that they grouped together, clans standing by one another. **W**iping out this lack of obedience to the crown would take years he knew, changing a people's way of life.., even if it was stealing, it was their way of life.

He looked down at this young man, just a touch shorter than him with a little growing still to do; he might end up taller than him he thought, "**Y**ou have till tonight, I leave tonight" he gazed at this **B**illy: you'll do, do quite well, he thought, only your best strength.....it would stop him coming he knew. Loyalty was what this man was about. Having finished his ale, **B**illy thanked **R**alph. "Got to be going, want to get back before dark, nice meeting you", "you to" replied **R**alph, "and think about the offer". Billy grinned, he was tempted but knew it wasn't real, not for him anyway. He turned and went for the door. As he got outside, he noticed it was raining. He pulled up the collar of his jacket and ran forwards to his horse. As he was running he noticed a group of people approaching the horse. She was a beauty. "She yours?", one of them asked. He nodded getting closer. He regarded them with suspicion and felt something not right but continued forwards. "Grab him, he's a horse thief" one of them shouted as he grabbed Billy by the shoulder. Billy shrugged off the hand and twisted. He managed to get free and quickly swung himself onto the back of the horse and was off haring down the street through the rain. Visibility was closing in; the mist was swirling down from the **h**ills, thank **G**od, he thought.

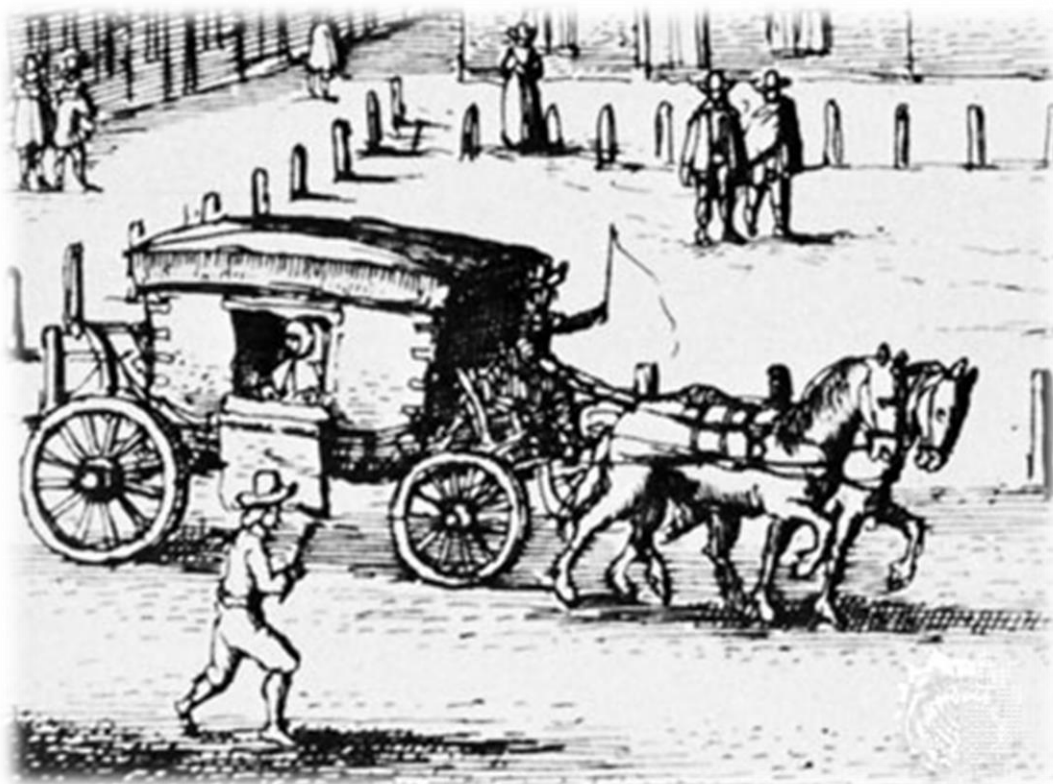
"Fuck you **F**rank" he said quietly to himself standing in the stirrups and bending low as the cold air rushing past him started biting at his bones through the now damp shirt. He was shivering though he wasn't sure if it was the cold or fear. His heart was going crazy, he started remembering with a wince that he'd given his name and where he was from in the bar. He knew then he couldn't go home; they'd be looking for him; hanging was what waited for him there. Speeding through the cold air and parting the mist he continued aimlessly, just getting as far away from town. Panic rose in him. There was a high hedge to one side of the road, he saw a gap in the hedge, he climbed off the horse and walked through the gap that was slightly covered by a hanging oak branch.

He ducked under it and slipped back the other side of the hedge. He waited panting, he wanted to see if he was being followed. "Stupid boy" he thought to himself as he waited shivering; he leaned against the horse for warmth. They wouldn't need to follow, they knew where he was from, "stupid", he cursed himself again. He had been a while waiting and nothing came. They were just going to go straight for his home. Still holding the reigns, he crouched. His **G**ran's words came back to him, "quick on his feet". Well he'd had to be that. Thanks **G**ran and the other words started ruminating in his brain. "The weight of the family", that was a burden. He'd waited long enough he thought, if they were coming after him, they'd be there by now. He edged his way out from behind

the hedge and back onto the main road. The rain was now falling constant and heavy, the water was dripping down his hair and into his eyes. He looked as far as he could both ways. Back, he knew that lead to the gallows, he turned his head the other direction. Squinting into the bleak unknown, he started pacing and picked up speed as the cold **crept** in. Walking as much under the neck of the horse to keep as much the rain off though he knew it was pointless. Tears were now streaming down his cheeks mixing with the rain.

The first he knew something was approaching was the twitching of his horse, he felt the neck attempt to turn and as he looked he saw the ears twitching. Glancing either side of the road for a way to get off: he started cursing himself again, only high hedges and no gaps. He turned: out of the mist came a train of horses pulling a black carriage, **two** men on the running board: he ducked into his jacket, hiding his face. The carriage pulled up next to him and continued. He was just breathing a sigh of relief when the carriage seemed to come to a halt. He stopped, looked up. A head poked out of the side window. To his surprise, it was Ralph, "changed your mind, fancy a lift?" the face was grinning despite the weather. Stunned, Billy stood looking, jaw hanging open. His **Gran's** words started turning again. "I was there in town: I heard you are a horse thief: if you stay here, you'll be hung: guess you don't want that. Attach your horse to the carriage and jump in, anything must be better than feeling that rope round your neck".

Billy's hand unconsciously moved up to his throat and stroked it. He realised there was no real choice, he would have to trust this man.....Having reached his decision he tied the horse to the carriage and gave her a quick stroke and looked into her eyes whispering softly, then climbed into the carriage. It wasn't big inside, the first time he'd been in a carriage.



For the first few minutes there was silen**ce** as they really weighed each other up. Ralph was the first to speak. "Not having the best of birthdays are you". His voice was milder and quieter than **in**

their first meeting. Billy guessed that was something to do with the noise in the bar. Here in the carriage, he had to strain his hearing to hear what was said. Billy's glum face said it all. He didn't reply at first. "You are a law man aren't you, why are you helping me?"

Ralph looked back; there was now a sadness in his eyes. "You're an educated man, you can see that the world is changing, you've read about the Americas", he fished out of his inside breast pocket, the newspaper, "The printed word. That is what is going to change things. Imagine, I've been travelling here for these past two weeks and guess how many people I've met who can read or write". He paused, waiting to see if Billy would say anything. He just saw a blank cold wet and miserable face. "Out of adults and children, you are the only one I have met that can read with ease and I guess write with the same confidence". Billy nodded, "One day everyone will be able to" he let that hang; he watched Billy process the new information. He was listening between shivers. Ralph stood up and reached to the rack above him. Pulling down a thick blanket that Ralph used on cold days, he passed it to Billy. "You are a rare one".

"But, but.....", "The days of the reivers are coming to an end, you are of a people that found a way to live in the middle of conflict, between us and the Scottish. We are all one now, including Ireland; law and order are coming to the borderlands, you must have noticed". Billy nodded again. He'd been seeing the changes; he knew it was coming, it clicked now what his Gran had said. "But...." he hesitated and lost eye contact, he lowered his head, "I'm wanted by the law, you know that; you can just turn me in at the next town, it's your duty ain't it". Ralph sat back, he looked out of the window, the darkness with the rain had closed them in. He looked back at Billy who had looked up, he caught his eye. A faint glimmer of a grin appeared on Ralph's face. "You are right, it is my duty to hand you over except.....except if I've got the story right, your brother did the stealing: you are in line to pay the price for his ignorance". Billy's face clouded over, Frank was to blame for this, it was all Frank's stupid fault. He had promised; if he'd thought the horse was stolen, he wouldn't have gone into town. His brother swore, "hope to die" and Billy could still see the grin on his brother's face. He had believed him. "I have also a duty to the communities of Newcastle and the north. Being a judge, I have to balance what is best. If you want to be my secretary, you have the skills, I have seen for myself", he held back for a second wondering if he should, "If you want the best for the reivers, work with me, teach me, there won't be much left here in a few years time for your people except hanging or starving, I've seen it happen. Move with the times, help me find a way to save your people". Billy was aghast, this man, from the gentry, was asking his help. He sat back, Ralph to sat back; he handed the newspaper to Billy.

Inside the carriage, there were two gas lights illuminating the gloom. "Read, see for yourself and make up your mind. It will be a couple of days before we get to Newcastle" He reached up and grabbed a second blanket, spreading it over his legs, he leaned against the side wall and closed his eyes.

Billy shivered. Eyes still closed, Ralph suggested "get your wet clothes off and wrap yourself in the blanket; you will be of no use to me dead or ill". He turned over and lifted his legs onto the seat, embryo position, it wasn't long before he was snoring. It didn't take Billy long before he made up his mind to follow the suggestion and removing his clothes, he too wrapped up on the seat; it worked, getting out of the wet clothes and wrapped up, he felt comfy. He couldn't sleep though. He had a lot to think about. As the night passed, he went through his options. He couldn't go home, he had no money; this man was offering to help him out, and was being gracious about it.

Billy spent the rest of the night staring at the man opposite him. They should rightfully be enemies, both opposite sides of the law. Billy realised he really had no choice. As he thought about it, a plan formed; if it was a job, he'd be paid. If he kept his head down for a while, saved up his pennies, he might be able to save to go to America: that was where ordinary folk like him were making their fortunes. He made up his mind there and then; he'd put all he was into this and then see. No point feeling sorry about his situation; this was where he was, and he had little choice; in a way, he'd dreamed of leaving for the city, but never really thought he'd ever leave the valley, and here he was, mixing with the other half, heading for Newcastle; best make the most of it.

Chapter 2– What happened to Billy?

Frank sat on a rock outside the cave, mouth agape, “I told you”, **he** kept mumbling as he paced up and down in front of him. “They haven't caught him though; I'll give myself in”, Frank uttered to no-one in particular. He'd been up on the mountain when the troopers had turned up at the farm. Keeping hidden, he had made his way to the cave. Somewhere they'd agreed to meet if anything happened. Sam had made his way up when the troopers had gone. “What and that way I lose both my brothers: no way. Billy has escaped, they are looking for him though they were also looking for you, I think the hangman's noose is waiting for you both. **W**here could he be though? He'd have got word to us by now if he was in the area; he was seen heading out at full pelt on that horse you stole from lord ?????? along the highway to Newcastle. **Y**ou would go and choose **the** best horse in the borderlands wouldn't you”. Frank found a grin for a second and flashed it at Sam who just humppft and turned his back. “This is no joking matter” **Frank** resumed his pacing. “If I hand myself in, tell them it was me, they'll have to leave **Billy** alone, won't they”. Another hummpft from Sam. “You know what they are like, any excuse nowadays to hang us; they'll just hang you both, to them a reiver is a reiver, **nowt** better than that as an excuse to hang you”

Franks head slumped back into the cup of his hands, his elbows resting on his knees, dejected.

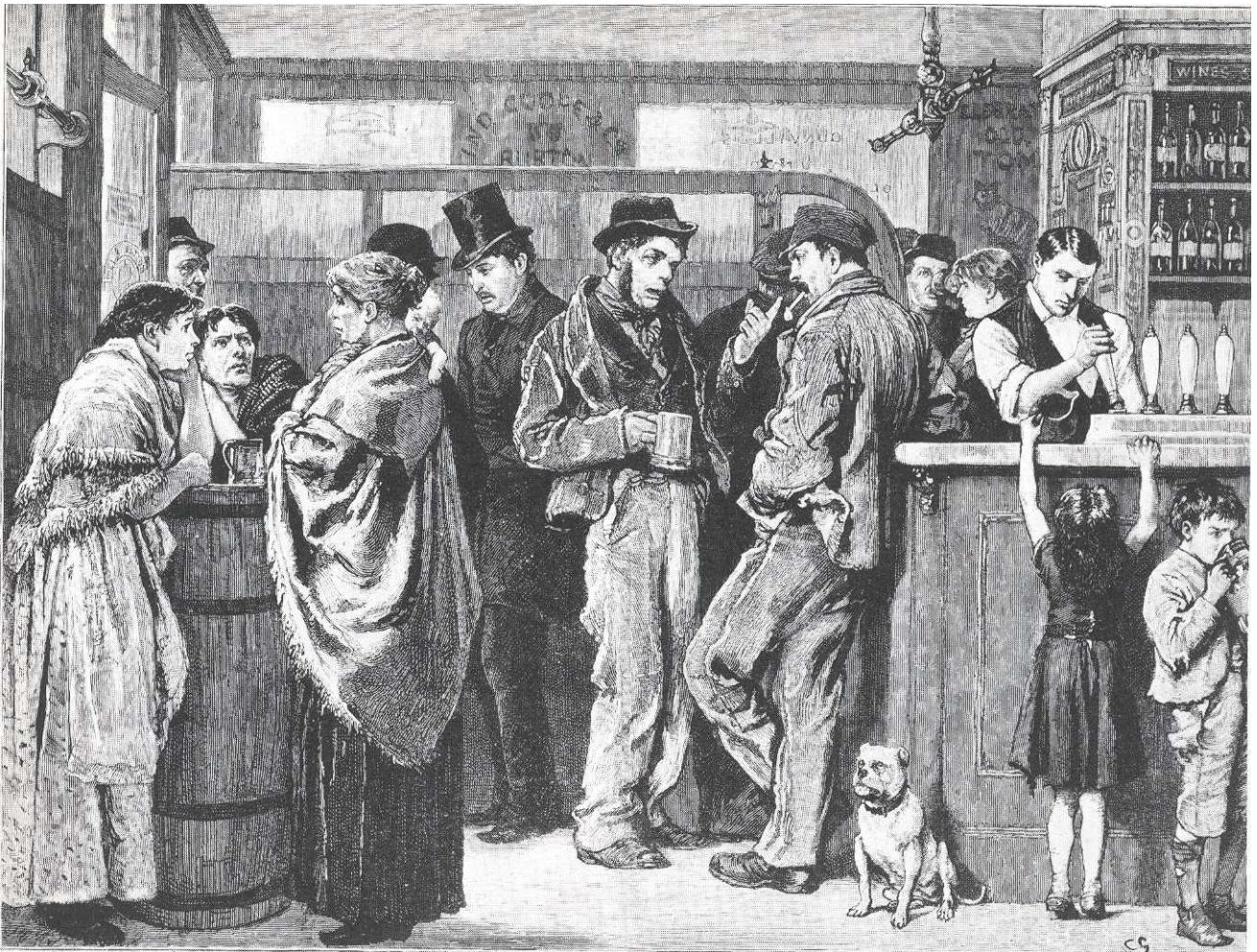
“Where is he???, that's what I want to know”.

“You'd better stay here, keep your head down for the next few days. I'll make some enquiries” and he turned and headed off back down the path towards home.

It was pure gloom. As soon as the troopers had left, the clan separated and visited neighbours asking after Billy. No one had seen him. Sam sat watching his Pa, he'd never seen him like this, his arm round his Ma who had calmed down now though kept dabbing her eyes. Papa Dodds just sat in his rocking chair, not rocking, sitting forwards, and smoking his pipe, something he'd recently taken to. The air around him was foggy. The only one moving was his Gran. She shuffled around the fire place, stirring the horse stew she'd made, stoking the fire. Apart from that there was just silence. The Dodds household had never been this silent before, he thought to himself. “I'm going to town, visit the ale house Billy was in before, see if I can find anything out” and the chair scraped the stone floor as he slid it back. No-one said anything, no-one even looked up, but he caught his Gran's eye who just nodded at him and turned back to stirring the stew.

Grabbing his coat, he slipped out of the door. The rain had stopped; he saddled a horse and set off.

When he walked into the ale house, all went silent for a moment, then the whispering started. Not being one to mess around, Sam went straight to the bar, raising his voice slightly, just so everyone could hear; he said to the barman, “hi, Sam Dodds, brother of Billy, you know, the one accused of being a horse thief. Come to find out what happened that afternoon. OK with you if I ask some of them in here what they saw?” and left it at that, the barman just nodded, his face grim as death Sam thought. Can't be easy running a place like this round here, he thought, not taking side's, having to stay in the middle, friend of all and enemy to none. “I'll take a jug as well” and he leaned casually on the bar and looked round the room for anyone avoiding eye contact.



He spotted someone in the corner. He knew him, Tommy Redesdale. He was looking decidedly **dodgy**. Carrying his jug with him he pushed through to the corner table. "Evening Tommy, wha' ye been up ta?" and he placed his jug on the table and sat. "Hiya **Sam**, how's it going?" He avoided eye contact and was squirming a bit. "What ya so jumpy about" he asked straight. "I'm not jumpy, what makes ya think I am". Sam just leaned forwards, placed his elbows on the table. "Look, I'm here to find out about Billy; you look like you know something about it, John the barman, said he saw you from behind the bar. You seemed to be watching carefully he said you might know something like....". "Oohhh, eeerrrr, yeh, I was 'ere, I saw 'im talking to that toff, he was reading I think, I heard him while looking at some paper thing. I think he called it a newspaper". "Ohh, so you were close enough to hear **h**em speaking". "Ehhr, look, it didn't come from me but it was some toff, ehrr, Carr I think his name was, a judge I think and he offered him a job." Sam sat up, Tom continued, "**B**illy said no, I heard him say he'd rather stay here". Sam asked "What happened next?" and took a gulp from his tankard. "Nothin' really, they continued chatting till Billy left. That was when they nabbed him, well tried to. He just jumped on that horse of his and took off". Sam sat back; he was thinking about the job offer, "and what of the toff, you know, Carr?". "Well," Tom leaned forwards, and poured himself a jug. "He stayed till his coach was ready to go, his own carriage, shiny it was too. Then it started raining and he took off, that's how I remember it".

That was it then Sam thought. He was on his way, running, "Did you see which track **B**illy took off on?" he asked. "The Newcastle road I think, yea that was it". Sam went back to his thoughts. So what would **B**illy do? It was raining and he didn't have his gear for that, he'd have got cold, hidden somewhere. Then an idea occurred to him. What if he'd passed the coach on the way. Billy would

be fast enough to realise getting out of here was what he had to do. There was a job offer, he clicked with the reading, he could see the value in someone his age who could write. "Thanks" he said and stood up, "finish the jug, you earned it" and he turned and leaving his still half full jug on the table and headed off.

His first stop was the farm, where he picked up some gear for the journey. He then went and told the family what he knew. He told them he was going to Newcastle. He had an inkling but didn't want to say more. Then straight back on his horse and he headed off to Newcastle.

The weather was holding so he'd taken his cloak off and placed it over his saddle bags. Evening was already there as he left the town behind. He couldn't get Billy out of his mind. What if this Judge was a real nasty piece of work, hardly fed poor Billy? He knew Billy was canny but he still had a wide eyed view of the world; it was really a nasty place. Sam had been on a few raids in his time. He'd hated it every time, the killing, barbery, raping he'd kept away from; he'd tried protecting a few and only by claiming her whoever she might have been as his. He didn't say much but he listened, he listened to what Billy read, what was going on in the world. He'd heard all the talk about America; he was tempted but he knew it would be just as hard out there to start up. He was a farmer, he had no money, How could he buy land there? He had land here, he knew if they left, they'd have to leave just like that, no money. What would Papa and Grandma do? They'd have to come too, and that would not happen he knew. He knew the life as a reiver was dying if not already dead. He'd had a pride in his youth as he heard the stories told. But now, it was just thievery to live: the strongest survive; he who needs takes. They'd been raided a few times but had always held out. Losing some of their **few** sheep or cattle, **but always** enough **left** to keep on. But it was getting harder; he couldn't get angry at Frank; it was part of who he was, in his blood and his instincts. It would probably do him good to get out. **S**omehow he had confidence in Frank, he'd always get by. Billy, now if he had to get by with his **brain(?)**, he'd know it wasn't the right path, hopefully not too late. He thought about that because of his reading: what would a judge want with a kid who could read and write? If that really had been the reason, he would be in his element, if it wasn't for the other thing: he'd heard stories about judges and children. He wiped that image from his head. He knew he was letting his mind wander. He did it a lot, while cleaning out the stables or moving the herds. His Pa was his main helper, though he spent a lot of time at the ale house. A wound on a raid had done for an arm, he helped as much as he could, Ma too. though there was enough on her plate with all of them, cooking and gardening. They were relying on her garden a lot more than they ever had he'd noted recently. He'd thought about crops but where, the land **they had** was all rock or bracken and that was impossible to get rid of, **and they didn't have enough land anyway for crops.**

He rode through the night, just his thoughts to keep him company. He was used to that. Billy and Frank were the social one's. He listened, did what had to be done, but kept to himself. He hadn't always been like that, he'd been more like Frank, loud, fighting and often drunk when he was young. It was Carol that had calmed him down. As he tried to remember her face, he had difficulty nowadays doing that. She'd died of scarlet fever. They'd been about to get married when she contracted the disease. **I**t had broken him and work was what had saved him. As he thought about it now, 6 years later, he realised he'd not really come out of mourning from that. The following day he started coming upon more towns. He knew he was getting closer to Newcastle. He had a few coins in his purse, his Pa had taken him to one side when he left. He'd tried refusing the

money but his Pa had insisted. His words were still ringing in his head. "Try and have some fun as well son, you need it". Fun! He was out to find Billy, not have fun. What was his Pa talking about?

It was in the evening he saw the outskirts of Newcastle. There were some pastures just ahead and he stopped and camped under a big oak. He could look down over the city and watched as lights started to light up the streets. It was a fabulous sight. Tired, a sleep before going in would be a good idea. He would need his wits about him. He had to work out what to do. It was big, bigger than he'd imagined. He had to find this Judge Carr first. That would be the first obstacle but he imagined there couldn't be too many Judge Carrs. An idea he'd had on the road was to go to a courthouse and ask.

In the morning he packed up, and went into the city. He'd never been in one and the first thing that hit him was the number of people, everywhere, markets, shops, it made him laugh to himself when he imagined it like a beehive. Everyone rushing about, it was alive. He had to get to the centre first, that was where he guessed the courts and rich would be living. He asked directions and got pointed here and there, no-one really had time to chat and it was just arms in different directions before the body's that belonged to these arms rushed off continuing their day. No-one seemed to have any time. Eventually he came across the Cathedral. He knew he was near the centre. He found an ale house, best place to have a chat and get his bearings. He found one without problem, The Black Bull. Being mid morning, people from the markets were starting to fill the place. He got a jug and took a place by the bar. He could listen to gossip and make his plans from that. He was approached not long after getting there by a prostitute. She seemed nice but he made it clear he had no money. She stayed and hung around looking for clients. She was chatty and he enjoyed her company. He said he was looking for his brother, he was looking for the address of Judge Carr. She said she didn't know, but could ask around if he liked. He thanked her, she gave her name as Carol which knocked him for a second. He bought her a drink: she'd taken gin, that time of the morning, but he complied: he wasn't going to judge her. It couldn't be easy her life. She thanked him and he chatted with her for a while till she saw a possible client and wiggled her way to where the new gentleman, her target sat. He finished his drink and decided the first thing was to find a stable where he could keep his horse. The barman pointed him in the right direction. Having safely stables his mare, he decided to try and find the court house. He wandered the little alleys and squares, it was so big, and closed. The Cathedral forever looming its shadow where he went. He asked directions to the court houses and eventually found them. Something seemed to be going on and he decided to go in and see. No-one stopped him and he joined the others in the spectator gallery. He stayed standing. Listening to gossip, he realised there was a murderer being tried. It was difficult to get somewhere he could see but eventually he did. The place was packed and he guessed it was good entertainment for the people. He listened and got the general gist of the case. He'd been there a while and lunch was called. He was just about to go when he spotted a movement out of the side of his eye. Something that made him stop. Something was triggered inside him. He turned back and watched a couple of people in front move against the tide of people leaving. He only saw their backs, but he could have sworn he saw Billy, near the front, sitting with an older man. They had got up and were heading the opposite direction to the rest, going to the front rather than back like the rest. The more he looked, he didn't see a face but the movements, he was sure that it was Billy. He couldn't do anything, he left the building and tried to find a side door, somewhere he might come out from. He found it and took a place a few metres away and lighting his pipe, leaned against the street corner and waited.

He didn't have to wait long. Billy came out of the door with a couple of guards. Sam stayed in the shadows. His first thought was that Billy was being led away by the guards but as he followed at a distance, he realised it was the other way round. Billy was the one giving the instructions!. He still kept his distance; he decided he wanted to see what happened. They got to a street and Billy started giving instructions to more guards that had turned up, and disappeared into one of the houses. Sam took a place far enough away that he couldn't be seen, but could see. Not that long after, Billy came out and with just one guard returned to the courthouse. Sam's head was swimming: what had happened? He'd expected to have to try and save Billy from the horrors his imagination had created, instead this. Billy playing a little lord. He didn't bother going back into the court this time but hung around outside the side door. He waited a long time till eventually he saw Billy coming out, with the man he'd been sitting next to and the Judge. He kept hidden. He was close enough when the Judge gave an address to the cabbie, to hear it. He knew where Billy was staying. He made his way then back to the ale house he'd been in before. He asked for a room and having just about enough, took a room.

He was up at the crack of dawn and taking his stuff, went back to the house Billy was staying at. He hung around and when he spotted a serving maid coming up the stairs from what he assumed was the kitchen he followed a short distance. She was making for the market. He tagged along behind, waiting his moment. It came not long after. She had done her buying and was on the way back. He waited on a corner again. As she came past, he accosted her. He hadn't really a plan and just came out with it. "Excuse me Miss, my name's Sam Dodds, I'm looking for my brother Billy, I believe he's staying in the same house as you". He didn't know what to expect, it had been a spur of the moment thing.

Her eyes opened wide, "Sam, not Frank?" she gasped, and he knew he was on the right track. He smiled and nodded. Come with me and she led him back to the house and into the kitchens. She chatted about Billy, and how clever he was and blushed when she talked about how handsome he was. She said her name was Betty. Sam felt comfortable. He was offered something to drink when he got to the kitchen: he didn't know what it was, brown and warm, sweet as well. He liked it. The kitchen was in a frenzy. It seemed there were guests coming and everyone was busy preparing for them: no-one had much time for him and he just sat. He'd been waiting a while, not long enough to finish his tea, when Billy appeared, a big grin on his face. "Sam, how the, how'd you find me?" It was Sam's turn to grin now. "Not that hard little brother, you look good". They embraced in the kitchen, maid rushing by, the cook hot and sweaty grimaced at them, "get yourselves outside and stop disturbing my kitchen you two", Billy looked with a grin, "Sorry, we'll get out of your way", he knew her exterior was gruff but under it all she was human. She showed it then as they were going out the door. "Well done yesterday" and even though her face didn't change an inch, he knew she rarely gave out compliments, especially in front of everyone else. He knew what it meant. "What did you do yesterday?" Sam asked as they made their way up the stairs to street level. "I've got the day off today, I'll explain. You had any breakfast yet?" he asked. Sam shook his head, "almost out of coin: Pa gave me his last few coins when I left". They found an old Inn and Billy bought breakfast: eggs and bacon, Sam's eye's almost popped out of his head. "How we going to pay for all of this?" Sam asked. Billy grinned. "Got a reward yesterday" and he proceeded to tell Sam about the week he'd had since arriving.

Billy and Sam chat about things, Sam stayed one night but left early in the morning. As Sam rode out of town, he came to a junction. One went the way he'd come, the other lead up the coast. Something stopped him there, he didn't know what, he just hesitated when he saw signs to **Cullercoats and the sea**. He'd learned his letters, the sounds they made and when he really tried hard, he could make a word or 2. He knew he wasn't like Billy but none the less he was proud he'd got something out of those letters. He got off his horse, and just stood there for a moment staring at the sign. Puzzled he decided to sit down across from the directions, on a mound there was a rock. Hands through the reigns, he sat on the rock and filled his pipe. With his flint, he lit the pipe and just sat staring at the sign. He ought to head back he knew. Everyone was worried about Billy. Well, Frank had created this mess so it wasn't too much for him to stew for a while. Sam had no sympathy in that direction. Billy had landed on his feet and that was the most important thing. Ok, the rest of the family would be worried, for that he was torn. He also felt different, being in a city, somehow seeing what the outside world was like, s had stirred something in him. He didn't want to go back straight away. The thing that had been nagging him for a while was coming to the surface. Just sitting and carrying on as if nothing was changing, hoping something would happen would do no good. Having made up his mind, he finished his pipe and shoved it back in his pocket, climbed on his steed and took the road to **Cullercoats**.

After a few hours he came to a point he was riding along a cliff, the sea was crashing on the rocks down below and there was a roar that with the wind, created a raw feeling inside of him. The wind was blowing in his face, his eyes were watering, his hair was being blown in his eyes and all around, but he held his head into it. There was a wild grin fixed and he felt more alive than he'd ever felt before. He kicked Pony, his favourite ride, Steady, not the fastest, but strong and enduring. The road was open in front of him, no-one around, he let out a yell and galloped along the cliff top screaming all the frustration that had been clogging him up for years at the same time. He carried on like this till he felt something else take over and why, he didn't really know why, tears started falling down his cheeks. He slowed, eventually getting off Pony and started walking. The tears were still coming. It was the first time he realised, he'd been on his own, this far from home, away from all the people he had to be strong for, the image of Carol now floating through his foggy vision. A tree, not big, not an old tree, but a solitary tree surrounded by fields of grass that bend and sway in the wind, gusted in one direction and then another, buffering the winds blowing in from the sea. He stopped by this lonely tree and attaching Pony to the tree, sat under it and held his head in his hands. Grief long festering finally let go. He didn't know how long he was there like this, the thoughts and a jumble of emotions washed through him, till without realising, it was gone. He felt emptied: he was just staring at a figure down below, distant but he could make it out. A dot further along the cliff, where it descended into a valley that opened to the blue green vast endless expanse of fury that was the sea. Just sitting, he watched. The figure, making it's way to the edge. He sat watching, as the figure approached the edge. Just sitting, he watched, with no thoughts rushing through his head, just an empty nothingness. He watched the figure: he could make out the dress and assumed it was a woman as she just stood there, it looked like she was just gazing at the horizon. He watched as the figure made a slight movement towards the edge. He sat forwards. A sudden panic seized him as he realised what was happening, he jumped up and swung on to Pony. Kicking her, he took off along the cliff face in the direction of the silhouette, shouting "hheeyyyy" vainly. He knew the person wouldn't hear through the wind. His heart in his mouth he urged Pony on. It seemed like time hung, the wind rushed past but he didn't seem to be

moving. He carried on crying at the top of his voice. As he got closer, he noticed she was on a ledge; he had to get off pony and scrabbled down the grass bank on his bum. He slowed as he could now see the figure clearly, her back still to him and gaze fixed outwards. To his relief, just as he was about to scream again the figure stepped back. He held his spot. The woman raised her hands to her face as she turned. It was then that she spotted Sam and froze. "Eehhrrrr, sorry to....." he stopped, suddenly unsure about himself, he felt awkward. "What you doing there?" came a steely voice. He backed off a bit, sliding his bum back and up a bit. He pointed and looked up where he'd come from. Pony stood at the top looking down. "Eehhrrrr, I was just riding along, ehrrrr, just wanted to check everything was OK. I'll be off, sorry to have bothered you" and he turned to head back up the slope. Feeling like he'd intruded in something private. He was halfway up when he heard her shout, "I'm sorry, please, wait". He stopped, turned and looked back. She was just standing there looking up at him. "I'm being very rude, I live just over there" and she pointed to a large stone building, set back from the cliff, sheltering from the wind in a gully set back a bit. "Join me for something to eat?" she asked. Feeling a tension, he nervously nodded. He turned and continued his climb. Pony had stood patiently waiting and he took back the reins and walked down further to where the path from the ledge joined his path. She made her way and they met there. She held a shawl round her shoulders and now covered her head with it. "Sam" Dodds", he held out his hand. She looked dazed still, she stared at the hand, eventually taking it, "Mandy, Mandy Foster". Her face looked dark and forlorn; he could see the traces of her tears; she wiped her face with the back of her hand, as if conscious of them. She smiled forcefully, "Wind in my eye's you know". And she started along the path leading in the direction of the building. He followed in silence as she led the way. Not a word was said; they got to the door leading in. He had a moment now to look around. There were signs of ploughing, crops that had once been going well, looked forlorn now, unkempt. He stood for a while. It looked like quite an area had been cleared; there was another building set back a bit that looked like a stable of some sort. Although it looked like it was on it's way to withering away, he could see something had been started here. "What happened?" he asked, "looks like you were on your way, you're husb....." He noticed a movement from her that stopped him in his tracks. He said no more but followed her. She didn't say a word. They walked in; there was a pot hanging over the fire that was now just red embers. She bent down and with a poker started agitating the fire, waking up the dying red embers. She knelt down and with face to the fire started blowing. "Errr", she finished for him, "outside, down the side" as if reading his mind. He went out and found the almost depleted wood pile. He stacked his arm's full of logs, as much as he could carry. On his way back, he glanced around. There was a well, an empty barn, the doors were hanging open. He went over and glanced inside, empty as he'd thought. An old horse still stabled, a few chicken here and there scratching the ground. He went back outside again. His eyes passed over the unlooked-after crops, stretching inland. This was a working farm, or could be, not far off. He stopped for a minute and took a look around. There was an unusual mound not too far away, on the brow of a hillock. He started towards it till it clicked what it was. There was a rough, hand- made cross sticking out on one end. He bowed his head. He could guess. He went back inside with the pile in his arms. She had turned the embers into flame with some kindling. He placed the pile in his hands next to the fire. Leaving her to finish with them, he went back outside and round to the wood pile. He'd seen there were some logs waiting to be split. Here had been an axe as well. He got to work. He continued he didn't know how long. At one point the woman came out and drew a bucket from the well. She had a mug in her hand as well which she filled and brought over to him. "Thanks" he uttered through heavy

breathing. He drank and then wiped his mouth and brow. "What happened if you don't mind me asking?", he nodded to the grave. She sat on a log nearby. It was now that he looked at her face for the first time. Pretty he thought. Strong features. He'd noticed she had a solid figure when she'd been pulling up the bucket from the well. She took a moment and he added "it's OK". She looked up, "no, it's me. My husband, he died. Beginning of the year. We'd been married a year before that. I've tried to keep the farm going". Her eye's welled up. Sam turned his head; he felt for her, he'd heard the pain in her voice. "You planted the crops?" he asked. She just nodded. "Good job, hard work I know. I run a little homestead". He quickly added, "with my brothers, Pa and Ma. Mostly livestock though". He looked back at her, she was looking at him. "food' ll be ready soon". She got up and headed inside. He continued chopping for a while before going in.

The fire crackled from time to time to break the silence as they sat eating. "Rabbit stew" he said at one point. She nodded, "James showed me how to set the snares", was about the only thing said. It was dark outside by the time they finished eating. She cleared the table and disappeared into one of the adjoining rooms. He heard crying but just sat there. He took out his pipe and lit it. He was miles away in thought when she eventually came out. She had an armful of blankets. Without a word she placed them on the table and disappeared back into her room. He had one more pipe then set out his bedding and climbed in.

He woke up at his usual hour, just before the sun peaked its head up. He put his boots on and went outside. He loved this time, before the birds started singing, a silence so clean, waiting to be filled with sound and light. He could see the outline of the well and dropping the bucket in, he pulled it back up and splashed the sleep from his body. Looking out, he saw light coming; from here, he looked out across the shimmering expanse of water reaching to the horizon. He just stood watching as first the dull light started spreading across the sky, slowly getting brighter till eventually like a blinding light, the top of it peaked over the lip. He wandered out of the court yard and crossed into the fields. He waded into the sea of corn, running his hands either side through the stalks. They were doing well but he noticed they were wilting at the top. He was so involved in his studying of the crop that he didn't notice her appear next to him. "I planted them and everything has been going well except for the past few weeks. I've noticed there hasn't been any rain for a while so I started watering", she pointed to a clump that didn't show the same wilting. "It seems to be working but I haven't the strength to water the whole field. I've been trying". He nodded, "you're right. They just need water". Just before she turned up, he was remembering something Billy had talked about once: irrigation, he'd not really had crops but he'd listened. "My Brother, Billy, he can read, told me once about this thing called irrigation. What is needed is channels, little gutterings that run through the fields. We pour the water in at the top and it just runs down and waters the whole field. Mind if I give it a go?" he asked. She looked at him, he looked back. There was one of those moments, hesitation. She just turned, heading back. She shouted over her shoulder, "breakfast is ready". He stayed a few more minutes, then followed. Breakfast was filling, eggs with bread. He found the hoe and a spade after finishing, and made his way to the fields and started digging channels.

By mid afternoon, she had joined him. He broke the ground, she shovelled away the dirt and formed the cuve. They carried on like that the rest of the day. "Should I give it a go?" she asked when the sun was low. He looked back at the channels they'd done so far. "Why not?". He wanted to see them working as well. The top of the guttering started near the well. He pulled up the first bucket and carried it over. "You do the honours". She looked at him a tired look but rosy cheeked.

She turned the bucket over pouring the water into the first gutter. They watched as it swilled down, caressing the side as it went...not that far. I think we'll need a lot of buckets to get to the end" he laughed. She laughed too. She went for the next one. They took it in turns and slowly they saw the dark patch showing where the ground had soaked up its nourishment.

"I'll finish if you like", he said when the sun really was showing itself in full for the last time that day. She nodded and turned and headed back inside. His muscles ached, his hands were sore from the handle but he felt good. It had been a long time since he'd felt this worn out. He carried on pouring buckets after bucket into the gulleys till he really could see no more.

The next couple of days went much the same way. He talked a bit more, about his brothers, his family. Joked about things that had happened and she started smiling a lot more, she laughed a few times which warmed him. On the third day, they got to the end of the fields. They started the same routine as before, "I've got to leave tomorrow", he stopped and looked at her. "OK". she replied and he could see her stiffness come suddenly back. "I have to get back, they'll be worried". "It's OK, I understand". He carried on and filled the bucket. As he came back, he said "I'd like to come back if I might". She looked at him, then turned, she ran into the house. He carried on filling the buckets and pouring them. His heart was going out to her, he wanted to drop the buckets and run in, but he held himself back. He wasn't sure but suddenly felt an intruder. Sure it had crossed his mind, this was what he'd been dreaming of, but he had helped just to pay for the food and, and, to make sure she didn't go back to the cliff. Now he was wondering if he hadn't pushed her a little bit closer to that cliff. A thought came to him: without realising, he just dropped the bucket and strode to the house, gingerly, he opened the door. She was standing by the fire, turning whatever she'd prepared for the evening. She looked up and over at him, she wiped her hands on her apron and turned, straight back, "I'm sorry, sure you have to go, you are welcome any time you pass". "It's only a day away I reckon, why don't you come with me", he ducked his head and twitched his feet. He glanced up out of one corner, she was grinning, "Didn't take you to be a shy one", and she blushed wiping away the grin and turned back to the pot. He came up behind her, "I know your husband's name, you know mine, what's yours" his voice low, soothing. She didn't turn round but he heard her, "Helen, now sit down, it's ready". He obeyed. She sat down opposite, she served him and he started, she sat not having served herself. She looked at him. "Why would you want to come back?". She was up front. He sat up straight. "I came here and since I've been here, I've felt.....Where I'm from, life's finished. I've been trying to keep the farm going but we get raided, loose livestock, crops won't grow. I guess it's been a while I've been thinking about getting the family out of there". He cringed when he realised what he'd just said. "I was on my way home from Newcastle, I was going to take the normal route but something stopped me. You won't believe me, I still don't. I changed my plans on a whim. I don't do that, it's not me, but this time I did. I saw you on the cliff top, I realised something was wrong. Really, I just wanted to help out.....but, well, I like you. If I'm honest, I don't want to leave you on your own and I would have come back, One day there, one day back, 3 days and I'd have been back". "Finish your food, it'll get cold", and she served herself. They ate like that, the occasional meeting of eyes that hung together longer than other times. She fished out some bread to go with the stew. She served him a second helping but not herself. "My husband died 6 months ago. I never really loved him, but it got me away from my family; we were poor so I jumped at the chance, I didn't expect him to die on me. He worked hard, and I think we were starting to get on when.....I'll be honest with you, I've been trying to make a go of this, what you see is not grief, it's more pitying myself". "I think

it's a bit of both and you're being hard on yourself", Sam had to jump in. He continued "if it rained, you'd have ended with a good crop and on your own. *SORRY BUT THAT MAN WAS A FOOL TO DIE ON YOU*" he felt the ferocity in his voice and wondered where it had come from. "I didn't mean it like that" he now said gently. "I meant, I find you beautiful", he felt himself blushing, "I'd marry you if you'd have me". As it came out, he wondered again where it had come from.

New chapter 3–Billys first days

Billy watched from the street as Sam rode off; there were mixed feelings then, part of him wanted to be with him, going home, except that, well, he was really enjoying it here. He felt he was meeting people, it was weird he thought, he was meeting people with whom, if he closed his eyes, he could be happy just listening, joining in, asking questions he'd never dared to ask before, and getting answers, like fitting in as he'd never before fit in. It was when he opened his eyes, he knew he wasn't with "his people", their accents, mannerisms. He was also finding that there were many, even with their fine clothes, who were just as stupid as many in the village. OK, there were some very very clever men he'd met that. when he heard some of them explain their theories or plans, it sounded so simple, why hadn't someone else thought of that sooner, but he knew, it was another world, this science.

He watched the brown used jacket from the hill-country Sam was wearing as he turned the corner at the end of the street, looked down at himself, clean shinny black boots, breeches that were held up by braces. He actually had a shirt with frills on the cuffs. Small frills especially compared to some of those that turned up at the household. These cuffs were sticking out of a black made to measure jacket that had gold buttons, gold. Ralph had insisted when he'd refused, "he'd be attacked in the streets, anyone wearing that type of valuable stuff who wasn't known" he'd added, here, with the poor he'd seen, it would be like being a walking target. "You work for me now" had been the reply, "you represent me". He'd been careful not to use the word law as that would create a conflict for poor Billy, "No-one will rob you, out of respect for me", he said a silent prayer to himself, "but more than any of that, I want people to see how much I trust you; it will make working easier for us; you will have to make some decisions at some point without me; I trust your decision but will others? Those buttons may be something simple but they will make it easier for you to make those decisions". Billy knew his cheeks had reddened up, he could feel the heat, he opened his mouth, but nothing came out. That had been how he now wore the jacket with pride. It represented trust, from a stranger, not a clan-member!.

He'd been asked to report to Ralph's office once he'd made his farewells. He had a spring in his step as he went up to the first floor to the room where Ralph had his desk and all his paperwork and books. Frank was free, at least for the moment but he wouldn't think about that. Betty,

images of her face kept popping into his mind. He glanced through each open door as he went to meet Ralph, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. She wasn't at the end of the corridor. He knocked, and Ralph's voice muffled through the door asked him to come in. He did.

It was a large room; in the middle sat a table and Ralph was sitting enjoying a cup of tea. He had a fan of papers in his hand and was busy reading them. He looked over his glasses and motioned Billy to sit. Slightly uncomfortably, having now seen the house, the servants, Ralph's standing, he felt almost embarrassed at how easily he'd been talking to him. Ralph put down the papers in his hand and concentrated on Billy who was still standing. Ralph stood up and went to the big bay window that looked out onto the street; he turned and motioned Billy to come over. Standing next to Ralph, Billy too looked out onto the street. "What do you see?" Ralph asked. Billy glanced at Ralph, before studying the view, the question seemed silly. Having looked and finding nothing spectacular, took a pause to think, eventually "The street, houses, people, a few trees" he said. "Look at the people, who do you see?"

Billy looked again, it was late morning. There was a shop selling coats; the coats were hanging from rafters out side and there was a woman haggling with a man for one of the coats; she wore a white cloth over her head, red shawl and grey skirt, a white apron spread across in front. There were a few other similarly dressed women, wandering up and down the street, glancing through windows at the wares available, as he guessed, on their way home before doing the house work and preparing supper. A man stood on a corner, selling matches, white shirt and waistcoat, brown trousers. There were a couple of gentry slowly pacing their way up the street; they seemed deep in discussion; he could tell they were gentry from their top hats. Heading the other way, a couple of off-duty soldiers. They were on their way home from a long night in a bar or had started early as they swayed down the street. Dogs ran nonchalantly, sometimes chasing getting between people's legs. That made Billy grin. There were few carts and horses, on their way to or from a market somewhere. A few horses were being ridden. He turned back to Ralph, "people, people going about their daily business, some selling, some buying, some just walking and talking".

"Exactly; my job is to make sure they can continue doing just that, live their lives as best they can. The streets aren't full of thieves; people aren't scared going out of their front door; they feel safe and that illusion is what I must keep up for them. If you work for me, you work for them. Remember we serve them, *that* OK?"

Billy looked at him; it sounded all right. "but how do we go about doing that, I mean what do I have to do".

"Follow me, read stuff, take notes when I need them, be like my second memory. I will ask you to write some letters, bounce ideas off *you*. You know what it's like back home; wouldn't you like it to be more like this for them, safer".

Billy had to think about that one: did he want this for them? It was great, he'd only arrived a few days ago, he enjoyed it but, but, he saw there were things he missed already, open space, he hadn't had time or space for himself. He was still recovering from his first week there. But he had a feeling he was going to fit in well here.

The day they'd arrived, Ralph had taken him in and introduced Billy to the staff; it was weird for him. He would normally have seen himself as one of those servants, but they bowed and curtsied

to him, like he was a gentleman. He'd been embarrassed at first to open his mouth, his accent would give him away. It had only been when Ralph had got halfway down the line of servants that he turned to Billy: in a loud enough voice he said "Stop mumbling Billy", with a gentle look at him; he then turned to the line of servants, looking up and down the line, "Billy here is going to be my Secretary; I found him by chance" and he turned and winked at Billy, "He comes from a Reivers family". For the first time in his life, Billy was unsure about being a reiver, he was unsure as to how the other servants would take it, first being one of their class, perhaps even lower, and raised above them. He knew, if he was in their shoes, he'd probably be resentful. Ralph continued "He can read and write better than many I've met, and he's got a brain on him. I want you all to make him feel at home here", Billy felt his cheeks warm.

Betty had been the one that lead him up to his room: "Not got much luggage I see", she said, "Had to leave in a bit of a hurry, you know how it is", he replied. He watched to see how she looked at him, but there was nothing. She led up the stairs, to the top. There were two doors, one on the left, and one on the right. "Yours is that one" and she pointed to the one on the right. "He must trust you", she said, and it was time for her to blush, "Mine is the one on the left. We are the two youngest on permanent staff". "How old are you", he asked. She blushed again, "15" she replied. She opened the door to his room and walked in. "Much the same as mine, I know it's small, but you'll get used to it". He looked in, he'd never had a room to himself, always sharing with his brothers. Sam had moved out when he'd got married but Frank had stayed. The ceiling was sloping down, he knew he was just under the roof, there was a small window you could just see the street from, but it showed him how high he was. There was a small bed fitted just under the window and a table and chair at the foot of the bed. Off to the side, fitting into the angle created by the ceiling, was a door. Betty opened the door, "a cupboard but if you have nothing with you", she lowered her voice, "you will do soon, I heard the master talking to Alice, the maid. They are getting a suit made for you" she turned and looked at him, looked him up and down. Here it comes he thought, but instead, she blushed and lowered her head slightly though not taking her eyes off him, "Is it true you can read and write". Billy grinned, "yes". "Could you teach me? I've always wanted to know what it is on those pages. I see the gentlemen of the house sometimes reading papers. Just black scribbles to me" and she lowered her head. Billy didn't now what got into him, but he reached forwards and put a hand under her chin and lifted her to face him. "I will teach you, it isn't that hard". He looked at her face. She was pretty, "It might take a while, but it would be my pleasure". She smiled, "I'd better leave you; you can get used to your room. "Wait a minute" and he grabbed her arm. "What am I supposed to do?", she looked at him: "Relax; dinner will be in about an hour; I guess you'll be joining us in the kitchen, I've got chores still to do; I'll see you down there ok?". "OK", he turned to look back at his room. He heard the door close behind him as Betty left, he waited till he heard her footsteps disappear before, he took two quick paces forward and jumped onto his bed. It was comfortable, not like the straw filled mattresses he was used to. There were springs and all! He could feel the smile spreading across his face. He placed his hands behind his head and crossed his feet on the bed. "You've well and truly landed on your feet this time Billy my lad" he said looking round the room. The room sank in and his thoughts turned to look over the past few days.

He started thinking about Frank, "He'll get what's coming to him". There was a moment of animosity that crossed his mind when he remembered Frank promising the horse was not stolen. It quickly went as he thought about how lucky he'd been. Then there was fear that crept in, as a

lack of self-confidence wracked him. What was a secretary he thought to himself, and he tried to imagine what it must entail?

He tried to imagine what an hour must be. There were no clocks in here. It was only when he heard the knocking that he realised he'd fallen asleep. Betty's voice came from the other side, "You'd better get downstairs; you're eating with the master tonight, he has a couple of friends over". Billy heart missed a beat. "I've got some clothes here for you to wear: can I come in?". Billy was still recovering from the last bit of news when Betty's head appeared around the door. She immediately saw the look on Billy's face. "Hey, it won't be that bad". "How do you know" Billy replied as a new wave of fear hit him. She placed the clothes she had on her arm on the back of the chair and joined Billy on the bed. Billy sat on the edge, his head bent low. Betty now sitting next to him, put her arm round his shoulders, "I remember my first days here, it was last year. I was so lost, my Da went to prison, he'd been caught stealing fruit from a cart in the market. It was the master that was on the bench that day. My Da is out now; the master paid his fine and for the food he stole, he had to do a few months as punishment and during that time the master took me in. He's a fine man, gentle but I've heard him shout", she shook her hand as if in pain. I wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of him, but he's fair with all of us.... from what I've seen anyway". Billy was now looking up at her face. "You mean it?". he said, looking for more reassurance. She smiled down at him and nodded. "You must be something special, what with him wanting to show you off, that's what he's doing you know!". She reached towards him and gently closed his jaw, "Really, the two others that you're having dinner with, they're his closest friends, judges themselves, but in another part of town" she added. Billy had gone pale, "You OK?" she said looking concerned; he opened his mouth to say something but just the sound of air came out. He nodded nervously. "You'd better get changed anyhow, the dinner gong will be going soon." She pushed the frozen Billy with her shoulder in a friendly way; he reacted, pushing back. I'll come back in a couple of minutes if you like, just check you look ok?" "Please" Billy asked.

Dinner was quite an experience, he'd never been served dinner; he'd been very careful about how much wine he drank though he was sorely tempted to gulp it down to calm his nerves. The other dinner guests were a couple of very friendly gentlemen, about the same age as Ralph, one largely over weight and he drank a lot of wine. He was Judge Wickmore. The other was a slim man, with an equally kind face and smile. They asked a lot of questions about where he was from and how he learned to read and write. Billy answered the questions put to him, as honestly as he could. He was careful not to say much else from fear of putting his foot in it. Ralph too was very quiet, letting the other two do most of the talking. Ralph had taken him to one side just before sitting, "If, while eating, you aren't sure which knife or fork to use, or anything watch me, or look at me, I'll guide you".

Billy had taken that to heart; he was so nervous about the army of cutlery strategically and neatly placed round the field of eating. He had followed and felt he'd done well; it wasn't until desert that he'd actually felt himself relaxing. Apple pie with custard. Hmmm he'd thought and lost himself in his bowl. He didn't listen too much to the conversation except the part that was arranging to watch Judge Wickmore in court the next day. It was arranged that Billy would sit in over the next five days in court. Ralph explained, there was a lot of legal jargon, and Billy would have to get used to the sometimes-unusual practices in court. The final day would be Ralph, who explained that on that day, Billy would write down what he heard and saw.

The last conversation was about the robbery. Billy listened in silence as the story of the town was about the robbery. It seemed that a Jewish moneylender's house had been broken into and the Jew himself had been killed, throat slashed. There was no idea as to how much was stolen but the gentry in Newcastle had been affected. It seemed the Jew had been running something that was called a bank. It confused Billy: the rich gave their money to this Jew to look after, he paid them a figure yearly for looking after the money. He also lent this money out and when an individual had a great need for a large sum of money, then they paid him for the service till they were able to pay off the loan. It was just too confusing for Billy to understand. It didn't make sense: why not just keep the money under your bed like most normal people he thought? This banking idea would never catch on he thought; it was quite normal he thought for someone to steal the money, of course, natural thinking.

It was after dinner, when the guests had taken their leave that Ralph explained in more detail how the system worked. It completely confounded Billy. He'd been to court a couple of times back home though that had been very much knocked together, whereas what Ralph was explaining seemed much more official and organised.

That night, Betty was waiting for him. "Something all the household have been ask to do, by the master 'imself, it's a new thing". And she produced this thing, which looked like a brush but really small. He looked at it for a while; he saw her face; she had a grin as she watched his reaction. She lifted it and put it in her mouth and he couldn't believe what he was seeing, she was brushing her teeth. He'd never seen this before, he'd used twigs sometimes, to get out bits that annoyed him, but that looked painful. She stopped; she walked over to the basin in his room, took a gulp of water from the jug, washed the water around in her mouth and spat it out into the basin. She then smiled at him, showing her teeth, "sheeee?", he looked and true enough, her teeth were sparkling. T"Everyday, morning and at night". She gave him the brush, "This one is yours, was brand new before I used it, hope you don't mind". He shook his head; there was something about putting something in his mouth that had been in someone else's that made him shiver invisibly, but it was Betty. "Go on then, I'll watch you this time, to make sure you do it right. Remember, top and bottom, right to the back and on the inside". He listened to her instructions. He followed them and sure enough, it felt rough. She stared at him making motions with her hands as to where he'd missed. He then gulped some water and swilled it round in his mouth. He then spat it out. It was only afterwards when he ran his tongue over them that he felt the difference. They felt smooth, it was actually a pleasure. With a smile at him that left an image that stayed till he fell asleep, Betty turned and walked out of the door.

The next few days for Billy were mixed with fear and excitement. Betty was always the first he saw each day; she would knock at his door and come in and check his clothes. He'd normally been up for a while before she did this. He liked it, when she fiddled with his collar and tie, he could smell her, he liked her being that close to him. She'd always been chatty, telling him the household gossip. This was then followed by breakfast, normally porridge and a cup of tea. It was new to Billy and he wasn't sure quite what he thought of it. Ralph liked to keep up with the trends and he'd introduced it to the kitchens a few years before. It seemed to catch on within the household and, along with coffee, which Billy found too bitter, had its particular hour of the day assigned to it.

It was after breakfast that Billy sweated. The first few days, Ralph had sat with him in court, explaining who was who and what their job was. As the cases were brought, Billy sensed a change in Ralph. He became more serious. His voice changed and how he explained things, seemed to bring him to life. The enthusiasm he exuded caught Billy and he took notes the whole time. It was on the journey home afterwards that Billy got to ask questions; sometimes he noticed that Ralph's eyes almost sparkled with some of the questions he asked. The most notable was when he asked about objections from the lawyers. Each day he ate his dinner with his head spinning. It was in the evenings, when Betty had done her work, that his favourite part of the day came. He would spend an hour with her, firstly going over the alphabet and how the letters sounded. He'd loved watching her form the sounds with her lips. She exaggerated her mouth movements and it had been the cause of many bouts of hysterical laughter. Then she'd listen to him talking about his day: he explained what he'd learned, what he'd seen and the verdicts. She listened intently to these. It had never been like that back at home. Frank was normally butting in, if he'd been there, and the rest of the family had their own things to talk about. At home, Billy had listened; here he could talk. Someone was listening to him for a change and she seemed to enjoy it.

It was on the day before Billy would sit in on Ralph holding court, that he'd asked how one became a lawyer. He'd been watching the barristers really carefully. Fascinated by the evidence, what it was, was the most shocking, often he'd asked Ralph about certain object, the way the barrister had told his story based around the object. How one had made a perfectly good argument about the object, and then the other had made a perfectly believable story that gave the opposite impression. Witnesses were even harder to gauge. Ralph had explained that it was more a question of trying to work out which ones were lying. Sometimes Billy had come out of the court with a different verdict than the courts based on who he thought was lying, he'd explained why and though Ralph never made a comment himself, he did make guttural sounds that Billy took as confirmation of some of his theories and sometimes, he asked Billy questions that gave him another way of looking at it. It was on this particular question that Ralph sat forwards. "Normally, you have to be born into it, it takes money to send your sons to university. There are exceptional cases where someone has shown an aptitude, that he get's a scholarship". He'd looked at Billy for a moment before adding "If for example you were an adopted son of mine, I could send you to study law. There have also been exceptional cases I've presided on, mainly small courts held in the local inn, that someone asked if they or someone they knew could act as their lawyer. With warnings, I occasionally deemed it ok. I have to admit it often ended badly, especially if the person on the other side was a practiced professional. It's not strictly correct but I have the powers to decide". He left it at that and Billy didn't really understand; he wasn't interested in being adopted.

The last day of the week was when Ralph was the Judge presiding. Billy sat in the crowd with Judge Wickmore. It was a murder case.

Judge Wickmore pointed out the officially appointed barrister *for the prosecution* and the barrister for the accused. He added how much he expected they were paid and Billy was surprised at the difference. The prosecution barrister was paid nowhere as much as the private barrister for the accused. The accused, from the gentry, had lost most of his inheritance but still retained family contacts. It had been through these contacts that he'd been able to recruit Mr Bertie, as far as Judge Wickmore knew.

Judge Wickmore ran through the events as was commonly known. Bertrand Smith was found dead in his tenant home. He'd been shot at close range inside his kitchen. There was known to have been a dispute between Simon Riversmead and the deceased. They had known each other for a long time and it was generally seen that they were friends. On the night, neighbours had heard the gunshot, Simon Riversmead had been seen shortly before, not far from Bertrand Smith's house. Simon Riversmead wasn't well liked in the area for his brutal handling of tenants that didn't pay their rent. Bertrand Smith though, had been regular as clockwork and had never missed a payment. When the constable had been called in, there had been pressure put on the constable to arrest Mr Riversmead. That was the case as far as Judge Wickmore knew.

The case started, and the accused was brought out. Billy was surprised, he'd expected an old man, and at least someone with clothes to match the station he assumed someone who owned property would be wearing. Instead he was dressed very much like the rest of the crowd, flat cloth hat, breeches and shirt that didn't make him stand out. His face showed fear. He looked lost and dejected as he was brought out, head bowed, and hands chained. He turned to the judge next to him, "He doesn't look like a killer", he turned to look at the judge, who was grinning, "looks can be deceiving". There were boos from the crowd as he sat down at a desk next to his barrister who had a completely different air to his client. He stood with his head up, dressed in the black gown and wig signifying his position in court. He had a pile of papers in front of him. Billy guessed he was in his late 20's.

At the table next to him, **sat** another young man dressed in the same style: he looked older, more serious. Billy would have put him in his late 30's. **With his papers** before him, he looked agitated, Billy thought. There was a cry from the door, "All stand for Judge Carr". There was the sound of feet stamping as everyone stood for Ralph as he stepped in. Silence and then as he sat, the same rustling as everyone else sat.

First it was the turn of the defence. **The** barrister stood and walked over to the Jury's table. "Gentlemen, I am here to defend the honourable Mr Riversmead. My case to you is that there is no evidence to prove him guilty except that he was in the vicinity of the crime. The crime could have been committed by anyone. I am not here to find the culprit but here to explain what Mr Riversmead was doing in the vicinity. My opponent here" and he turned and pointed to the man sitting on his own at a table with similar dress to him, "will try and convince you with stories and hearsay that my client is guilty, but he will not be able to come up with any facts to prove his case". He now placed his fists on the table and looking at each one in turn, continued with. "My honourable gentlemen, my client", and he pointed to Mr Riversmead, "is here fighting for his life. Please take that into consideration, his life. Being a landowner and having tenants from whom he must collect his rents, may be disliked for that exact reason, but you are not here to judge the man for his living, just to decide whether or not he killed a fellow man. His life is in your just hands, remember that when you deliberate after the facts have been shown to you, please look at him" and he turned again towards his client, as he did so, so did the jury. "This young man, with his whole life ahead of him, who inherited his properties, can you see on that face, the face of a cold-blooded murderer? I think not" and he turned and walked back to his table. The other man, the prosecutor stood and approached the Jury. Holding his hands together behind his back, he stood in front of them. "If you can judge whether a man **is** guilty by the shape of his face or his age, there would be no need for a court of law", he emphasised the word law and paused afterwards. "The accused is young and does have his life ahead of him, but, if he killed a man in cold blood, does his

age and social standing exempt him from justice? I think not. Please remember that in your deliberations. As my colleague has told you, the accused was seen in the vicinity of the crime just after; he also has a gun that could have committed the crime which we will produce in evidence; one thing that was not mentioned by my colleague, was reason. I will give you that reason and evidence for it as well as the weapon. All that put together can prove only one thing, guilty” and he turned and went back to his chair. Billy looked at the judge next to him. His face, normally quite jolly, had taken a granite look to it. “Hmmm” he heard, “they’re both pretty good”. Billy stayed quiet; he realised this was not like any of the other cases he’d been in on through the week. “Normally the appointed barrister just goes through the process, but I think this one is looking to make a name for himself. He’s taken a bit of wind out of the sails of Mr Charles Bertie” he whispered. “Who is the prosecution lawyer?” Billy asked in return. “Anthony Keck: seem’s your mentor asked for him”. He turned to Billy, “Comes from London” he said, his voice showing a hint of scepticism. “Your mentor likes turning the tables a bit. Perhaps balancing out the arguing factions”.

During this time, Mr Keck stayed standing behind his desk rustling through his papers: “The prosecution would like to call as a witness, a Miss Rebecca Sterling”. A door at the back of the room opened and a woman walked in, a woman who didn’t look like she fitted in the clothes she wore; they were obviously newly made, bright and a bit gaudy he thought. She was smiling and strutting down towards the witness stand. She kept glancing round into the crowd, not looking for anyone in particular, Billy thought, showing off. A chance in the limelight, he thought. He saw the look on Mr Keck’s face and he wasn’t amused.

She took the stand and Mr Keck approached her. “Miss Sterling, on the night of the crime, could you explain for the jury, what exactly you saw”. Raising her hand, she delicately touched the side of her lips, “If you mean the night Bertie was killed, I was walking home, it was late you know, I was on my way back from the ale house, I’d been having a night out with my boyfriend and” there was a laugh from someone in the crowd. She ignored it but showed she was annoyed in the way her lips stiffened. “I turned down Kings Street and I saw someone duck into the alleyway before me. I recognised Mr Riversmead” Mr Keck butted in at this point, “how did you know it was Mr Riversmead if it was late at night”, “There was the gaslight just before the alleyway, he looked up at me, I saw his face before he ducked into the alleyway, he was looking dodgy you know”. “What happened next?”. Mr Keck asked. “Well, I didn’t think nothin’ of it at the time, it was only a few minutes later, I saw people coming out onto the street, I started asking what was going on, and Jim”, she hesitated and scanned the crowd for Jim; she obviously spotted him as she smiled, “...he told me he didn’t know, he told me he’d heard what sounded like a gunshot. Others were hanging around and eventually I heard someone come out of Bertie’s house shouting “he’s been murdered, someone’s done for Bertie”. She paused and looked at Mr Keck who just nodded, “Well, that was when I said to Jim, I’d just seen Mr Riversmead; he told Gary and slowly everyone was talking about him and started shouting he should be hanged. That was when the constable turned up”. “Thank you Miss Sterling” Mr Keck said and returned to his table.

Mr Bertie stood and approached the witness chair. “Miss Sterling”, “yes”, “How many people were there when you got to the street”. “There were loads, over half the street”, “were there any others, apart from those that lived in the street”. Miss Sterling took a few minutes to think about this. She then looked up, “Now you ask, there were a couple of gentlemen I didn’t recognise”. Mr

Keck paused at this, he looked at the woman and then went back to his desk. With his back to her, he asked her to describe the men and how they were dressed.

Ralph was sitting looking down. The way Mr Keck stood had caught his attention, he was looking into the crowd while listening, scanning almost looking for someone he thought. He took a quick glance at Billy who was whispering in the ear of his friend the judge. He was impressed over the past few days: Billy had been asking non-stop questions, about how things worked, and he was even more impressed at some of the things Billy had said, things he'd noticed about the people, things he'd not seen himself; he had a good sense for reading people. He continued listening as Miss Rebecca described the men. He had the impression she was lying but he had to keep that to himself.

Miss Rebecca finished her description. "No more questions" Mr Keck said. Mr Bertie then stood up: he didn't approach her, instead he said from his desk "May I ask the kind and observant young lady if she has any idea where Mr Riversmead lived". She looked a bit puzzled at this, "No your Honour" Mr Bertie blushed at this error and pointed out that he wasn't 'your Honour', that was the judge. His face did redden for a split second, he had no further questions either and Miss Rebecca was led away.

Mr Keck then asked for the pistol to be brought in. "This weapon was found hidden in Mr Riversmead's house" he started. Mr Bertie stood and objected "Your honour, of course the gun was hidden; my colleague is inferring that the gun was hidden because of its reference to this murder; is it not correct that someone would hide their firearm out of harm's way, reducing accidents, this would be normal behaviour for a fire arm". Ralph thought about it and asked Mr Keck to reform his words which he did. He then called to the witness stand a Mr Bartholomew, an expert on weaponry. He confirmed that the weapon was of the same type used to kill Mr Smith as far as he could tell. He also concluded that the weapon had been fired recently as it hadn't been cleaned and the state of decay for the powder used had to be within the past week or so. When it was Mr Bertie's turn to ask the questions, he asked how accurate his conclusions were and Mr Bartholomew said it was an accurate guess. Mr Bertie, turning to the Jury, emphasised and repeated the word guess. It was after the expert was dismissed that Ralph called for a recess for lunch.

Normally the Judges and Billy would eat together in the judge's chambers, but this time Billy asked to be excused, he wanted to have a look at the scene of the crime.

Billy came back after a while; he had a story to tell and he rushed through it knowing time was short. The result of it was two Judges sitting back astonished. They both looked at Billy, mouths agape. Ralph was the first to react and quickly gave orders to the Guard of the court to recruit some men who went off to follow their orders. Then they went back into the court.

It was at this point that Mr Keck went to the Judge's bench and asked for a special exception to normal procedures. Mr Bertie objected strongly. Ralph, knowing that this procedure was very exceptional, allowed Mr Keck to continue. He was forming a dislike for Mr Bertie, though he reassured himself that was not why he allowed the request of Mr Keck. He was also playing for time. Billy's conclusions had seemed so far-fetched, but he wanted to give the constables time to complete their task.

He was starting to wonder how exceptional Billy really was. Somehow, with a stretch of the imagination, he had come up with something so fantastic, it might possibly be true, and it would explain the parts of the case that had seemed obscure even to him.

Mr Bertie returned to his desk, for the first-time head bowed; he looked deep in thought and his air of confidence was turning. Mr Keck stood and faced the spectators. "I would like to call as witnesses, the following" and he took out a list. He started reading from the list and one by one, from the spectators, came those who were called. There were a few that were missing but on the whole, they came forward. It wasn't long before there was a line of women and men standing before the bench. "I would like to remind you all that perjury, lying to the courts, is a serious offence and I will treat most harshly any one of you that is found to be lying". He said this with the most serious face he could muster. "Now please face Mr Keck and answer his questions". They all turned to face Mr Keck. "Thank you, your Honour," he then turned to the crowd who were now facing him. "You are all residents of the street where the victim lived". He walked to the first in the line, "Were you in the street the night in question?", the first witness answered hesitantly, unsure what was coming. "Yes", he replied, he looked down the line and to each he asked the same question, to which they all replied in the affirmative. Still standing in front of the first in the queue, he leaned forward and whispered something in their ear. He then held two pieces of paper, one in each hand. The person pointed at one of the pieces of paper and with a glance up at the Judge, who asked the court recorder to make a note of which one was pointed at. Going down the line he asked everyone of them in a whisper the same question. And asked the same response. When he reached the end of the line, he dismissed them, and they returned to their place in the crowd. He then turned to the Jury, "Honourable gentlemen, I would like to explain, I asked each and everyone who lived in the street and was present on the night in question, who had seen these 2 mysterious Gentlemen, the one's that Miss Rebecca saw, I was forced to ask the judge for special circumstances because I had the feeling there has been some tampering, manipulation of the witnesses. I would now like to point out that the description Miss Rebecca gave, were of 2 men that would stand out in a crowd". He turned to the Judge "May I ask what the results are". The Judge looked down and said "The number of witnesses that did see these 2 men would be just Miss Rebecca and one other. The rest testify that they never saw the 2 men". "Thank you, your Honour,". He then turned to the Jury, I wish to rest my case with this" and he sat down.

This was the point that Mr Bertie stood. He approached the Jury, he strutted with a sure step and face down, which he only lifted when he got to the Jury. "You have heard the case for the prosecution, the defence has no more witnesses, how can I bring witnesses to something that has not happened? You have heard how my client was seen on the night in question, near the site of the murder; the prosecution has made great efforts to point out how suspicious that is. He has not told you, however, that my client lives in the same street, only a few doors down, so what he has implied as being a suspicious event, actually turns out to be something that is really not so unusual. I leave you Learned Gentlemen to work out why it is so unusual that Mr Riversmead was seen a few metres away from his own home. I would also like to point out that Mr Riversmead is of age to join the Army, and has shown an interest; for a gentleman to own a pistol and to want to practice, what is unusual about that". He paused and surveyed the Jury; a few were talking to the person next to them in a whisper; he let them. He walked up and down the Table for a few more moments, he held his chin as he was doing this, absorbed in the air of contemplation as he did so.

He then reached the centre of the table in his pacing and turned deliberately, facing the Jury, he placed his fists on the table as he had done at the start. "Let me recap what I said at the start. Witnesses, the Pistol and being seen..... only 2 Doors from where he lives, there is no evidence of any crime in any of that. In fact, witnesses have shown that there were two other characters that would be more likely candidates for being the murderers. The fact that they were seen by only two witnesses only shows that, in the commotion, people were jumping to conclusions that my client was guilty for reasons that had nothing to do with the case. They were so caught up in a frenzy of accusations, that my client was guilty, they ignored the fact that there were two other suspicious characters in the street that could have been the murderers and none, no effort was made at the time to find anyone other than my client. I put it to you that my client, innocent of the charges, had already been tried, convicted and hung for reasons that lie in his trade and the resentment of those who have had to pay their rent to him. Nothing solid can be found to convict him and all ask is for you gentlemen to find my client not guilty; there is no solid evidence to justify the risk of taking away the best years of a young man's life. The prosecution cannot even produce any reason: what would Mr Riversmead have to gain from shooting the deceased? There is no motive. I charge you with finding my client, Mr Riversmead, NOT GUILTY" and he strode back to his table with an air so confident in himself, he didn't even look over at his colleague. As he sat, he turned to his client and shook his hand, convinced his client would be walking free. Mr Riversmead took his hand and feeling the confidence, he too looked for the first time at the jury. The way Mr Bertie had spoken his words, Billy himself found he was unsure now.

Mr Keck stood and walked over to the table, He didn't have the same character for charm or ability to dramatize his conclusions as his colleague. "Gentlemen, I might not have the eloquence of my colleague. I ask only that you look at the facts. Mr Riversmead, for some reason... my learned colleague is correct to point out, we have not come upon the reason; we just have the facts, he was there, he had the tools for it and, not mentioned before, the victim was killed in his kitchen, there was no sign of a break-in, the killer didn't force his way in, he was invited in, as you would someone you know, not the sort of thing someone would do to two strangers, especially at that time of night. The fact that only two witnesses saw these strangers should bring up serious questions as to the validity of that evidence. The only conclusion possible is that there is no existence of these two strangers, they did not exist and you must therefore conclude that the accused is guilty of the crime. I there rest my case", and he went and sat down at his desk. The Judge then turned to the Jury and gave them his instructions; he was eager to get back to his chambers to hear from the Guards he'd sent out. The jury was led away, and Ralph found himself with the guard he'd given his personal orders to. He listened to what the guard said as he put a purse on the desk, the conclusion of his men's search. Ralph was just about to give the man his next orders when news came that the Jury had already come to their conclusion. The Judge issued his orders to the guard and returned to the court.

When the Jury informed the court that their verdict was that there was not enough evidence to convict, Ralph's face went red with anger. He looked at the man who had been chosen as foreman, "I have heard your conclusion, I demand that the Jury return to their room and deliberate again as to their conclusions: it is my right as judge to give you the opportunity to rethink your conclusions overnight. You are to be locked away, food will be provided and cots for those who require but I demand you to rethink your conclusion". He slammed his hammer on the gavel and walked out of the courtroom. Silence hung for a few seconds afterwards till a murmur

started that grew and grew until there was a din. The jury were taken away, the spectators were cleared and quickly the court was emptied and locked up for the night.

Back at home that night, Billy, Ralph and Frederick (the first name of Judge Wickmore) as he'd asked Billy to call him, sat round a blazing fire. Mr Keck and Mr Bertie had also been asked to join them. To refuse a judge would not have been good etiquette for either of them. Billy, in the centre, had been asked to explain himself.

Feeling intimidated, but at the same time sure of himself, Billy started "Well, my first doubts were raised when the Judge" he couldn't bring himself to use his first name "explained that Mr Keck was paying a lot less than Mr Bertie; I concluded also that to bring a man from London, to defend yourself would cost quite a lot and even though he is a landlord, I couldn't see him having that amount of money". Mr Bernie started going green, "Motive was what was going through my mind, what reason could there possibly be for an argument between Mr Riversmead and Mr Bertrand Smith. The fact that Mr Bertie had been paid a lot of money, and I didn't see Mr Riversmead having that type of cash available, led me to the idea that perhaps the reason for the murder had to be financial. The fact that Mr Smith had invited Mr Riversmead into his home, made me think that the two men were a red herring. I don't know why, but I felt Miss Rebecca was lying about them. I wish to thank and express my greatest respect to Mr Keck for pointing that out; I wouldn't have thought of that", he looked around the room and realising the company, went red.

"Continue" Ralph broke in seeing the young lads discomfort, "You are making sense". Reassured by these words Billy was about to continued, when there was a knock at the door, and one of the servants came in; there was a quick glance as eyes met for a split second between him and Billy that made Billy cringe. The servant whispered into Ralph's ear. Ralph said with a smile to the others in the room, "Please excuse me for a moment" and he got up and walked out of the room. Once the door closed behind him, Mr Bertie turned on Billy, "Who may I ask you are you, you young pipsqueak, you have no training in law I assume, from your age and from your accent, you come from the gutter. Who are you to accuse me?". Billy felt himself quaking in his boots. To his surprise, Mr Keck leaned forwards and placed a hand on Billy's knee. "Courage", he shot a glance that threw daggers at his opponent from court. "I have a feeling he is about to accuse you, my dear friend, of paying the witnesses and perhaps even members of the jury". Mr Bertie stood up in indignation, "I don't have to stay and listen to this libel; I shall have you in court, under charges of the like", his face was beetroot and it looked like he was going to snort smoke out of his ears, "And I will be there to defend you if you need", retorted Mr Keck with a big grin on his face looking directly into the eyes of Mr Bertie. They had not heard the door open. Ralph stepped in, with another gentleman behind him in what Billy saw as very weird garb. He had a sort of skullcap on, he had a beard and his hair, dark, curled down the sides of his face. The man wore glasses and it highlighted his nose, it seemed to give him a mousy type face, tight, looking like he had spent his life deep in concentration but it carried a big smile which softened his appearance. "May I introduce Able Guggenheimer. Son of the bank owner, killed in the robbery. I have had a quick chat and he confirms that the coins we found in a purse hidden under the floorboards under the bed of Mr Smith are from the robbery, Billy you were right", He turned to Mr Bertie, "Please sit; I wish you to hear the end of the story; I realise you were not to know and will not be charging you with any offence", he lowered his voice "Though I believe you have fooled the courts, I will make no record of it, so please, sit" he said with an assertiveness that could not be challenged and as he did so, Mr Bertie started going white in the face.

Ralph turned to Billy, "Please, continue". All eyes were on him now and he felt them. His voice cracked as he restarted. "This is where I am unsure; it came to me that there was a robbery not that long ago in the area, from something called a 'bank". It suddenly occurred to him that the man who had just entered the room was a Jew; he hadn't seen any before but he assumed so. He realised he was staring at the man who was staring back but there was something gentle about the way he looked at him, he didn't feel at all threatened, "That was when I told" he tried it in his head "Frederick" but it felt wrong, "Judge Wickmore what I was thinking. I asked if there was the possibility of doing a thorough search of the alleyway, Mr Smith's house and Mr Riversmead's." Ralph who was still standing took over here, "I ordered the search and a purse was found in Mr Smith's house, I have just confirmed with Mr Guggenheimer that the coins and purse found did belong to his bank. I would like to ask Mr Bertie now if he could help us with this new information, as I affirm in front of these.... honourable men, no charges will be brought against you". Mr Bertie was now as white as a sheet. "Perhaps you'd like a whiskey before we begin. Anyone else?", he didn't wait for an answer. Taking glasses from the side board in the room, he started pouring and handing them out. There were no servants in the room and he didn't want to bring any in. There was silence in the room as the two judges and the two lawyers, the banker and the reiver sat and contemplated the events that had brought them all together. Billy got a shock when he was handed a glass. He looked up at Ralph, who looked down with eye's that showed respect and nodded. Billy didn't know what to say or do; he just took the glass and immediately took a gulp. He'd tried whiskey before and was waiting for the burning in his throat which never came, just a smokey taste that hung like nectar in his mouth.

Mr Bertie eventually, with head lowered confessed. He'd seen no way of defending his client, but the money offered had been something he had been unable to refuse. He had debts from gambling, a habit he'd picked up when he was 18 years old.

He'd completed his BA at Oxford University at the age of 17 and then been called to the Bar in the Middle Temple. Feeling he was too young to take up a career at the time, he'd gone to Europe,

lived in France, Italy and Switzerland. It was during this period he'd got the bug for gambling. He now wanted to pay off his debts and without aid from his family, to pay his own way in life,

The offer at the time it had come, through a letter he'd received via friends, from his client was too good to miss and he'd taken the first stagecoach. Upon faced with the facts of the case, he'd only seen one solution. He had no idea where the money came from; if he had, he knew he would have refused it. As it was, he turned out his purse on the table in front of him. Gold coins similar to the one's found under the floorboards rolled out. Some of it has been spent on bribes, he hung his head in shame. It seemed in his instructions, he had found the purse with the money in a hidden place indicated in the letter. His eagerness to have his client released was to the ease of guilt for not asking too many questions. The others listened in sympathy, some wondered what they would have done in similar circumstances. After his confession, there was a silence as each thought about the dilemma. Mr Keck was the first to react, he leaned forward hand outstretched to his opponent, "I think I understand the temptation, and I respect you for your honesty this night as most important. I don't think I would have had the courage to do the same, especially in a room filled with such people and he looked at his fellows one by one, all of whom nodded. Billy understood and thoughts of his own confession; it lay heavily on him the subterfuge he was living under. As if understanding what Billy was thinking, Ralph turned to him, he raised his glass: "To Billy who on this day, out-thought us all to find real truth and justice, I thank you". There were ayes from everyone in the room and Billy felt embarrassed. It had only felt normal to him. He realised something then. The thing that stood out for him that made him stand out from the others in this room was his upbringing: he'd seen the way the minds of ordinary folk worked, he could see the dirt, the eagerness to get out of it, what people would do to climb out of the cesspit life could be. For the others in the room, Law had been the core of their lives from the word go; they hadn't had to struggle. He'd been involved in the struggle for survival. Perhaps that was what had given him the edge today. He noted it and planned to use it in the future as well.

Conversation started as each came out of his own dream. Billy sat and listened, the whiskey was fogging him up a bit. He saw the way Ralph looked at him from time to time; he knew he'd done well that day, but he was now tired. The talk now was law, he knew he should listen, learn something, but the cogs up top seemed to be floating free for the moment and he just sat back and let it slide over his head. It was Ralph that noticed his eyes falling, "Gentlemen, I think we are forgetting our young genius, he is many years younger than us. I feel we have to let him retire while us old boring bags continue our conversations. They all stood. Billy felt he had to follow though he could have curled up in the armchair and just listened. He stood and made his way out of the door. As he went through the door he heard Mr Keck saying to Ralph, "next time you are in London, you must bring him with you". He stopped as the door closed behind him, in muffles he heard the reply. Ralph had said he was due in parliament soon, he'd bring him with him without fail. Billy made his way upstairs to his room. The thought that he was going to London and the whiskey, he floated up the stairs.

He glanced at Betty's door as he reached the top. He hesitated for a split second then turned and opened his door. There was light already in his room, he saw the form of Betty lying on his bed, she lifted her head as he closed the door behind him, and he saw the smile as she saw him. His eye's felt the same as hers looked. "I'm sorry, I wanted to talk to you, the gossip here is all about you, I wanted to hear it from your lips" she said excitedly "I think I sort of fell asleep". Billy smiled back he climbed up onto the bed next to her, "What's the gossip?" he'd felt a surge of excitement

at her words and he was overjoyed she was there. "They are saying it was you that cracked the case, in court and of the robbery. It's the owner of the bank downstairs isn't it. The one with the funny hair, isn't it? You did it didn't you?". Billy felt really embarrassed now. He turned onto his back, he tucked one arm under his head. "It's not exactly like that, I didn't know, I just suggested it like" he was staring up at the ceiling. He felt her move on the bed and looked down at her, she wasn't looking at him, she just climbed up and cuddled not his side, she put her head on his chest and an arm round him. "Tell me about it" he didn't know but her eyes were closed now. Gently he put his arms protectively round her, "We'll, it was when this woman, a witness called Miss Rebecca.....

Chapter 4 – Franks escape

It was dank in the cave but that didn't perturb Frank; he lay back on his bed of straw, it was cold outside, he had a smile on his face, and he lit his pipe from a twig that he'd placed in the fire earlier.

It had been several years before when they'd found the cave, all 3 boys together. They had been hunting, seen a rabbit and followed it. They had thought they'd caught it, disappearing under a shrub of heather. Only on closer inspection, it had disappeared, but they had found its hole. Well hidden, Billy had been the one volunteered to crawl through the small gap, it had opened into a huge underground hole.

A few hours walk from the clan, hidden in the moors, they'd agreed it'd be a good place to hide if ever they were being chased, by the English or the Scottish troopers; this was where they'd hide out.

Frank lay there, the entrance hole above him and drawing the smoke up, it was working well as a chimney. He was careful not to light it till after dark. He'd managed to catch a rabbit earlier in the day, snared. It was now skinned, gutted, spiked and the aroma wafted round the cave as the juices dripped onto the naked flames beneath adding that sweet sound to the smell. He had a lantern lit and, laying back, watched the shadows flicker round the space. Higher up, roots from the heather and bracken stuck out between rock and stone that also jutted out.

He had a kit bag in the corner with a change of clothes. On the whole things looked good in his eyes. OK, He regretted lying to Billy, but, he thought, all the better, he was now in the city, a good job from what Sam said, with a good man, even if he was a man of the law. Billy can use that head of his now; he was special. Envious at times though he'd ridiculed him for it, Frank was proud of his little brother. Deep down he knew this life was coming to an end. His Papa had seen the heydays of the reivers.

Billy safe, Sam was the responsible one, looking after the rest of the kin; he was a farmer at heart. Sam had been with him several times during raids but he'd seen from the start, the excitement, the fear of getting caught, having to fight sometimes, the retaliation raids, that was part of life for Frank but he'd seen Sam just wanted things simple, safe; that was his way and Frank accepted it and welcomed it; it took away his responsibility from the family, his job normally as the eldest, but he was happy not having the responsibility. He leaned forward adding a few more branches to the fire and turning, adjusting the carcass so it wouldn't burn. He felt his stomach turn in anticipation, not the most patient of people.

He'd been thinking about where to go from here. He knew he couldn't stay here for ever

hower much he was having the time of his life. He loved it here out in the open, surviving off the land,

A smile came to his face as he thought of Gail: he was going to meet her again tomorrow. Even though he trusted her, he was careful for no-one else to see him coming or going from here.

Only Sam knew where he was, and he brought up stuff for him from time to time. He had no worries from him, they'd never rat on him, OK, He'd also had a visit from Cal and Ned, but they were his mates, they would keep quiet as well.

He'd heard of neighbours heading off to America, a new life, others were heading to Ireland or into the big cities in Scotland or England, work being the draw, a more comfortable life for them and their families. The excitement of the unknown in America was tempting, but he knew he couldn't really leave here. It was where he belonged. That left the outlaw life, tha: that made him melancholic. He loved the thrill of it, but he knew, this had been a warning. He knew down that path only the noose was at the end. He raised his hand and rubbed his neck with an uncomfortable feeling.

Enough of that he told himself forcing a smile through the slightly dark feeling that was rising inside him. "No" he said out loud, "Frank Dodds is not going to end up at the end of a rope".

It was now mid-afternoon. Having spent the morning with Gail, he had a jump to his step, he'd come out from the valley and was now walking along the ridge back to his cave. He wasn't that far, just over the ridge and down below. The bracken was high, and he waded through it, still green though the edges were starting to curl and go brown. The smile was fixed, and he was just about to start whistling a tune that had been in his head since his visit to some neighbours a few days ago and then invited him for supper, an offer he hadn't refused. 'It had been fine old night, there had been music and dancing, whiskey had flowed, and his head had hurt the morning after.

Just as he was pursing his lips together, he heard a rustle coming up the other side of the ridge. He dropped, below the fern line; he knew he couldn't be seen unless he already had been. He knew the trick here was not to let it play on your mind, stay still, don't move and use your ears. His Da had drummed that one in on his first raid. As he sat there, he listened to the sounds on the wind; there was the trickle of the stream, a rustle of the fern. Hidden under the surface of the sea of green with the sun shining through, he could see reasonably clearly here, just the stalks like a mini forest. He kept his eyes turned to where the sound had come from He heard the rustle first before he saw the 4 legs. Just 10 feet from him a deer watched, ready to jump, ears twitching, looking over the sea of green, scanning for a movement that wasn't supposed to be there or a sound out of place: she could sense something.

Frank wished he had his bow, he had his knife and the idea was coming in to lung forwards to grab one of the paws and having not moved except to tense his muscles, the deer started, bouncing away, heading back the way it had come. He relaxed his muscles, the adrenalin flowing through him which he released. He lay back, listening to his heart. Then he heard it. A voice, distant still

and incomprehensible, but definitely a voice. That was what had startled the deer. His heart picked up pace, he froze.

It was getting closer. Coming from the other side of the ridge, where his cave was. Straining his ears, he tried to make out words. They got closer and he was able to make the odd word out. He heard the clang of the armour as well. Gail had told him there was a reward out for him which had made him feel a bit uncomfortable though he'd wiped it away with his grin and some quip about being a valuable man. That was then, now his hand went to his neck, he daren't move. He caught the end of the sentence then, "...under the fern bush he said". Frank's heart skipped a beat. "That was it, over there". There was a pause in voices then and Frank assumed they were then finding the hole. "Dark down there, you sure he ain't gonna jump out on us, he's a big lad you know" The second man said "You heard the kid, he left early this morning and hasn't come back yet. We'll be the one's doing the jumping; now get in there" Frank heard a rustling as first one then the other disappeared into his cave to lay a trap for him. It took him a while before he realised he'd been holding his breath and gasped in some air. He lay for a while, half expecting someone to jump out from somewhere. He gathered his thoughts. They'd said someone had been watching him. A boy, that also meant he hadn't seen him return, he hadn't been seen. On his hands and knees now he crawled, the same direction the deer had, and it wasn't till he'd crossed the next brook that he looked back. No-one following: he waited to get his breath back, scanning for bracken moving that shouldn't be and the horizon. No one there. Climbing the bank he moved straight back into the bracken, He had no idea where he was heading, away was all he'd decided. Crouching he continued up the other side and going down the next he was in a full run.

There was a wood not that far; he'd head there and work it out. Hidden in the trees, he'd be able to really see any-one without being seen.

He continued, over the brow of one hill, trying to stay to the bracken but sometimes forced to cross the bare heather fields. Here he kept glancing over his shoulder, down and up till he saw the wood; he continued till he felt the coolness of the forest on his skin. What a relief from the heat. Leaning back against an old oak, wrinkled with knots still showing where the bark hadn't grown back. He got his breath back slowly, eyes glue down the path he'd trodden. He glanced up once. After a while, feeling light headed, he felt a calm float over him as the canopy spread out above him. "What are you doing Frank?" he said out loud to himself between breaths. He gazed up following the branches as they spread out above him, thick, narrowing down as they bent to the pull of gravity on their leaves. The weight having grown the branch into shape through the years. "Get high" a voice called from his memories "scan for followers", more teachings from his Pa. He started thinking about that and the big story his Grandpa always told. This is what he'd been learning while Billy was away learning the books and stuff. This was what it meant to be a reiver he thought as he started griping his way up the stump of the tree. Once he got a hold on the branch, he managed to get an arm round it and swinging his legs, got it right and was up. From there, it wasn't a problem, he could reach the next branches and worked his way up and then along as far as he could, watching the bend till he thought he'd gone too far and came back a bit. Looking out through the break in the curtain of leaves, he could see back half a mile he guessed. He knew he couldn't go back. He relaxed as he stared off, watching the horizon. His mind drifted off; he'd been with Gail just that morning, He'd watched as she wiped her skirt down "how long ya going to stay there, you know in that cave?" she'd said, wrinkling her nose. He'd loved it when she'd done that. "As long as I like" Frank had replied sternly, "I've got everything I need", his face

turned into a grimace, "as long as no-one rats on me., how high is the reward now", "There's talk of it being up to 50 pounds now", He'd asked her: "I can trust you can't I?". She'd looked at him, with that sweet smile, "Of course you can".

He sat there now wondering, had someone ratted him out? He'd thought no-one had known about the cave; he'd been wrong? Someone had been watching him: how long?

He'd been almost about to start whistling that tune again when this train of thought came along. "No time for that day dreaming shit now Frank", he berated himself "You're in the shit", his hand reached for his throat again and his face became serious again. Where to go? He thought about where he was, what was the closest place to him: there was the Potts's place; he couldn't go there, there was a feud between them and Sam over a pig he'd stole once, a long time ago mind. No, that one was off the list. There was the Robsons, his daughter as well, he was tempted. He tried to remember if he'd ever stolen from them. He wasn't sure, there was a sheep that had sort of followed him home once, that could have been them. Not sure, on second thoughts.

He went through the list in the area, the Fenwicks, Milburns, Herons.... after a while he realised there was too much risk. Dossing out on the moors, alright, but how long would that be before he did eventually get caught? It had been different for his Da and his Papa, they knew where they were headed, home. He didn't, he didn't have another place, he'd never really thought about it; he was starting to realise how stupid that really was, especially with his reiving. Feeling more confident, he hadn't seen any movement, there was no-one behind him. Looking down he said aloud "What do you think old oak tree, you are wise? I don't even start to call myself wise, Billy might be, Sam's getting there, Papa, now that's wisdom, but not for these days; even for Pa, times have moved on", Billy, I can't believe I'm saying this but what would Billy do.....actually, I know, he's done it, he's moved to the big city". He suddenly felt a twinge of guilt as he thought about Billy; it was my fault, he thought silently. Suddenly he realised what Billy must be thinking of him at that moment. "But what would he do if he was me? I ain't learned, good with books and stuff. It's the outdoors for me". He waited unexpectantly for a reply that never came. Two soldiers, that's all they sent for me, 50 pounds, thought that'd merit at least four and he grinned to himself. The sun was lowering and as he thought about moving on, he thought better wait till dark; he needed a few more hours, planning. He had to think.....like a reiver, but imagine he was in a foreign land, he knew no-one, could trust no-one, had to fend for himself. He had to get away far, he had to get away fast, to somewhere he wasn't known, big city? there was a temptation to go to see Billy, but he thought better of it.

He still hadn't moved on the branch, he still looked out, "Think like a reiver". He closed his eyes and concentrated, he scrunched up his face, nothing came, he re-adjusted his face, before long he was playing with his face, pulling different ones. Soldier, he'd heard the stories, the army paid well for reivers, they were held in high esteem, except, would they hire someone on the run. OK, he would go north, south, east or west, see what came up, he'd steal a horse and get as far away as possible. That got him really thinking: a good horse, no point stealing just any horse, a good horse...the same stable as before, he did have good horses. A grin came to his face, can't hang me twice, it would be like doing the same crime.

New chapter 5 - Witches

“So, what's in the diary for today” Ralph asked Billy. It was 9 o'clock and the sun was shining through the lace curtain that was billowing in a gust from the open window. It was already warm air. It was turning out to be a fine summer.

Ralph turned back his chair from the window to face Billy who, sitting opposite was leafing through a large book with a blue cover. “It's the courts today, the trial of the witch”, Ralph grimaced. “Awkward” he said, “Many are still of the belief that there is magic. Wwhat is she accused of doing?”. “Well I ran through the charges and it seems she has been charged with killing her landlord; there are witnesses to her threatening to kill the landlord with a spell, her own words and she doesn't deny saying them” There was a gruumpph sound from Ralph. Billy continued with a frown, “The landlortd died the following night, a bit suspicious don't you think” Billy finished with a frown.

Gruumpph from Ralph again. “How did he die?” he questioned. “eeehhhr” Billy flipped through the pages, scanning each quickly. Billy wasn't looking but Ralph, who was watching Billy, raised an eyebrow. He was impressed at the speed Billy was going. “Ahhh, here it is, His wife's testimony is that they finished dinner and while going up the stairs, he clutched his chest and then dropped dead”. Ralph let out a more positive sound, more of a “Hhhmmm”.

“You know what the problem with this case is going to be Billy?” there was a tiny pause, “OK, hhhmmmm” He spent the next few second looking at Billy. “What do you think” he asked, he sat forwards in his chair and stretched out his elbows on his desk. Billy felt the pressure: he was a good listener, he'd listened to the tone of voice of Ralph. He had guessed that Ralph, being

interested in science perhaps, seemed contrary to the charge. Billy stood up, he started pacing behind the chair, up and down a couple of times. He'd seen witches hung, the others had cheered he remembered. He hadn't, he'd found it a bit gruesome. He'd known the woman, not well but he'd seen her at the market, sometimes the worse for wear in the alehouse, she'd been funny, loud, a bit rude, but never nasty. He'd watched her terrified face as she'd climbed the gallows. He remembered their eyes had met for an instant and he'd had nightmares of that instant ever since. He stopped pacing, "Ok, if we think of it as just a woman for a second, she was angry at her landlord and they'd had an argument: let's say, he'd raised the rent, or she'd not had the money and asked for time and he'd said no. So, let's say as well, she'd just made a casual threat. If she really meant to kill him, she wouldn't have let half the street know, wouldn't make sense so, I'd guess she just got unlucky". Ralph had both eyebrows raised and Billy saw, but he held back the smile, he didn't want to show how proud he was of himself for that instant. He could see the face on Ralph and knew he was impressed. He didn't want to show himself cocky though he felt it. "How would you respond to the coincidence, she makes the threat, next day he is dead?"

Billy turned and paced a bit again. While he was doing that, Ralph turned his chair to face the window. It was also to hide his grin. He'd had an idea. "Don't answer that now, you'll have a chance to answer that soon. Get my coat, we must go, the Judge mustn't keep the people waiting". Billy looked up, he caught the side of Ralph's face as he passed him. He seemed eager, Billy suddenly felt uncomfortable. He followed Ralph who seemed to have perked up, he was eagerly pacing off down the corridor, and down the stairs and Billy had to almost run to catch up. To Billy it almost seemed like he was on a charge, he grabbed his cloak on his way through the entrance way, not stopping but straight on and opened the door, he practically jumped down the steps. Billy couldn't believe the next bit. He'd almost caught up but was breathing heavily. Ralph, this serious man, a Judge at that, put 2 fingers in each side of his mouth and whistled loudly for a carriage that was on the other side of the street. Ralph turned back to Billy, "Thought you'd be fitter than that, fresh country air and all that". Billy caught a glint in his eye and with a grin, Ralph turned backhand out to catch the door before the carriage had even come to a stop. "You OK sir" He asked worriedly, he hadn't known Ralph that long, but this was definitely out of character. There was a grin on his face as he motioned for Billy to climb in first, "to the courts" he shouted up at the driver, and make it fast, we're already late. Billy turned to him with a puzzled face as he sat down. The grin was still there, "We're not late sir". "I want to get there a bit earlier, I have to arrange some things". Billy didn't like this, the way Ralph was looking at him sent shivers through him: what was he up to? He went back over the mornings meeting, they travelled in silence for quite a while till Billy jerked up his head, "You said ' You know what the problem with this case is going to be Billy' well, what is that going to be sir?", he asked hesitantly, because he was unsure; he felt somehow, it was going to involve him and he didn't like that at all. That look on Ralph's face, it was the same look he saw on his brother's face, just before he did something wild: from experience, he knew sometimes things didn't work out as they should, like the time when they were all in their Sunday best and were on their way to church, Billy and Frank had been ahead. Frank had got that cheeky grin and, in his eagerness, and curiosity he'd followed. Frank had explained, while walking fast, to get a gap in front of the others so once they were out of sight, they turned off the path, turning cross country, they started running, Frank knew where they had to go so Billy had followed. They reached a hillock just before the brook when Frank had motioned to keep quiet, Frank got on his hands and knees which caught Billy's curiosity and did the same.

They crawled up the side of the bank and when they got to the top, Frank again put his finger to his lips. He slowly lifted his head over the top. Billy had done the same. As he cleared the top he looked down at the place where the river had created a natural pool, they'd been skinny dipping there since they were kids.

But this time as he looked down, he couldn't believe his eyes. There was Lisa grad, she was squatting NAKED in the pool. Frank had heard the intake of breath from his brother and grinned. That was the same grin! Silently they'd watched her splash herself; Billy had seen everything, the first naked woman he'd seen like this, watching secretly till she spotted them, Frank had told him to run, pointing in the direction of the church, "I'll catch up with you later", and he'd stood up. Billy had seen him casually chatting as he'd moved away, he hadn't been looking where he'd been going, and fell into a mud pool. He'd arrived at church, smelly, stale mud covering him. He'd got a hiding that evening, ruining his best clothes.

He had that same feeling, something was not going to work out, he could feel it in his bones, that grin had got his stomach churning and his mind turning, 'what was he up to'?

It took about 20 minutes in silence in the carriage and Ralph's mood seemed to be getting better by the minute and Billy more and more concerned. When they arrived at the courts, they made their way to Ralph's room. After helping Ralph on with his wig and cloak, Ralph told him to send in the councils of the court and unusually asked Billy to wait in the courtroom. Normally Billy waited till Ralph was on the bench before he sneaked round to watch the proceedings. He didn't question; he'd learned not to do that in court; here everything was serious. But Ralph still had that grin. He made his way through the side door and down the corridor where he'd found the councils and informed them that the Judge wanted to see them, then let himself in to what was still an empty courtroom. He'd never seen it like this; he'd always been taken up by what was happening; now he got to really look at the room.

As with many of the buildings around, the walls were white with black beams holding the structure. The high roof sloped in on both sides

.There were two lanterns hanging from the ceiling; they had been already lit. There were two large windows at each end, but it was still dark. In a way Billy felt like he was in church. The benches were in rows down the centre of the room for spectators. In front was a sort of stage with an ordinary table on the raised platform behind which was a large ornate chair. For the judge. There wasn't a dock as such but two tables on ground level in front and to each side for the councils. Growing up with the reivers, he had grown up with a fear of courts; the past few weeks had been a real eye opener for him. He wasn't scared really but did feel a deep respect for the law now, especially associated with Ralph who in his opinion was very just with the wisdom of Solomon. He knew Ralph hated it when he had to sentence some-one to hang. It was only when in the rooms of Ralph afterwards that he talked about the cases. The law was there, and Ralph followed it strictly. He heard the door on the left creak open and a group of people walked in, men and women. Most of the women were dressed the same, wide skirts with an apron hanging in the front. House wives, he guessed, followed by their men, he guessed two were coalmen from their black faces: it was obvious they had come straight from work. As he sat and watched them file in, both the men and women separated by sex but gossiping equally loudly. The talk was about Emily Finch, the supposed witch. From what he could pick up they had already convicted her and the sentence as far as they were concerned was hanging. They seemed to be getting quite worked up about it. He

stayed seated where he was watching the room slowly fill. He hadn't actually seen the room this full before and they were still coming in. There didn't seem to be that much support for her. If anyone did, they were keeping it to themselves. He guessed the whole street had come for a gawp. It was strange for Billy, he knew he was one of them. OK, they lived in the city but upon hearing some of the accents he recognised, he knew some were from the borders.

It was strange, how? Ralph had made him think about this case. He could see their view, it was only having had to think about it, he felt himself questioning. There was a tap on his shoulder, he turned, and it was Danny, one of the councils. The one who stood up for the convicted. "the boss wants you" he said. Billy looked at him. He could feel an animosity directed at him from the man but passed it by. The man was often grumpy.

Billy knocked and waited till he heard Ralph's voice "Come in". Billy entered the small room closing the door behind him. "Ahh Billy, sit down: I need a word, but we have to be quick. Here put this on and I'll explain" and he handed him what looked like Danny's worn out wig". Hesitantly he reached out and took the wig. "The problem with this case is going to be the defence". Danny's ok at his job, he won't test himself and does the process as it is in the book and he goes no further. You on the other hand, you have already more nouse than he'll ever have and.....well, I want to see you tested a bit. You are going to defend this.....now what was her name", "Emily Finch" Billy said dourly. There was that grin from Ralph again, "See, you've already got the important parts to the case, now get out there and do your best, that's all I ask". Billy stood, he was dumbstruck, mouth agape and wig still in his hand. Ralph turned to him taking the wig from his hands and placed it on Billy's head, he spent a couple of seconds straightening it, "There you go, made for you, come on cheer up, it's not you looking at the noose. Remember, just do your best. I guarantee it will be better than any effort Danny would make and putting his hands-on Billy's shoulder's he looked him in the eye. His face was relaxed and the look friendly "You'll be good, I know it" and he winked at Billy. He'd never done that before and Billy's stomach which was threatening to release its contents, calmed a bit. Turning Billy, he gently pushed him to the door, "Now go on then. I'll be through in a minute" and turned back to the looking glass on the wall and started straightening his wig.

Billy dragged his feet as he went through the door, closing it gently behind him. The corridor to the court room was longer this time. As he went through the door into the court, he was taken aback. The room was full, there were people standing by the pews even back as far as the door on the other side of the court. Billy's belly froze solid. He could just about see Danny sitting in his usual place motioning Billy to join him. He squeezed between people and got an accidental elbow in the face. There was some strange looks directed at him when they saw the wig and then his age. They sensed something wasn't right, same as him. As he got to the table for the defence, there was now an empty chair next to Danny. He knew he was blushing and his cheeks felt like they were burning as he sat. Everyone in the room was looking at him till the distraction he'd been praying for. Ralph walked in and a sudden muffled hush of voices took the room, it would have been complete silence except for the rustling and scraping of boots as everyone stood.

The normal formalities of the court came and went. Nothing about Billy was said till Miss Finch was lead in, hands and feet chained. That was overdoing it he thought, only extremely dangerous convicts were brought in that way from what he'd seen. He looked up at Ralph, questioningly. Ralph's only reaction was a quick raising and lowering of his eye brows. It was as if he was being

prompted, but to do what, he felt words coming into his mouth that weren't his he felt, his legs for some reason started working, pulling himself up. In a very broken voice, he almost jumped himself at the volume he heard, "Your honour, do you think the chains are really necessary? It makes her look guilty before we've even started". His legs gave way and before he knew it he was back in his chair, a trickle of sweat ran down his cheek. It was warm in here with all these people, but he knew it wasn't that. He felt as tense as a jack rabbit caught in a snare unable to get away.

Ralph looked at the gaoler and nodded, "Remove the chains". The smile had now completely disappeared replaced by the look of a judge, stone faced and glum.

The chains were removed and Miss Finch was helped to a very ordinary wooden chair by the side of the judge looking out at the court. She had to be helped, she didn't look like she had the strength to make it herself. Her face was white as a sheet, her eyes red, blood shot and she was visibly shaking.

Another man in one corner of the court stood and read out the charges. Billy watched her and as the word witch came out, her eyes bulged and almost looked like they were going to fly out of their sockets. She was young, not much older than himself he thought. There was a murmur amongst the crowd, all eyes on Miss Finch. The murmur became a loud silence as his opponent, the prosecutor, stood up and walked to the front of the table. He looked up at the judge. "Your honour. I think this will be a very quick case: as well as the eye witnesses, the accused herself has confessed". Billy had to grab the side of his chair to stop him standing up and arguing. He knew he had to wait his turn. Danny had sat back and just kept staring at him. He waited impatiently. "I think we can proceed directly to the sentencing.... unless" he let that hang for a second "my learned colleague wants to say anything". He coughed straight after the word 'learned' with a glance to the crowd to whom he gave raised eyebrows. Billy felt something click in himself that instant. The man was looking down his nose at him now, as he returned to his seat. Billy rose slowly, he kept his eyes down as he walked over to the accused. He raised his eyes only when he was standing in front of her. He met her eyes and had to hold himself from stepping back. There was horror in those eye's, he could almost hear her pleading. "Emily isn't it?" he asked, there was a second where the eyes glazed over, till they came back immediately, she nodded. "Can I ask you Emily, is there anyone", and he turned waving his hand across the crowd in front, that you know here or knows you well, a work colleague? Anyone that has spent time with you?". She paused, then, the shakes slowed a bit as she looked out. She scanned from one side to the other, "they are from my street" she said slowly. "They know me but", she turned back to Billy, she looked at him, there seemed to be something going on in her head. She turned to the Judge, "ehhr, your honour, my work mate isn't here, Gail, she didn't want to come, she" and in the gap a tear dropped and ran down her shivering face, "she visited me in the cell, didn't want to come, she said it was too upsetting". Billy nodded. "Where can she be found? I need her here". He was surprised at his voice now, it seemed solid, sturdy, not how he felt, that was for sure. There was a murmur in the crowd, "I know where she'll be, I'll get her if you want". Billy searched the crowd for the person who'd spoken. By the door a young man stood, he was waving his hand at Billy to show it was him. "If you could, as quick as you can, mind". The young man turned, and the doors swung as he ran out of the court. He glanced at the judge who's face remained carved in stone. Not a twitch.

Billy turned to the crowd, an idea had occurred to him earlier and he felt more confident. He investigated the crowd and scanned the faces, then he turned to the table for the prosecution.

"My learned friend" he emphasised the friend part, he turned back to the crowd. "...thinks he is able to judge my client", and he turned pointing at Miss Finch, "and convict her, just like that". He pointed to a plump middle-aged woman dressed like a head cook, hair all over the place. "Please my lady", and with his best cheeky grin, gave a little bow, "I am guessing you work in the kitchens", "Head Cook" she replied with pride. "Tell me, I can tell from looking at you, you run a tight ship", she nodded; there was a look of suspicion, she wore a frown as she said, 'I look after my people, the food always leaves my kitchen hot and tasty", she turned to the women round her and with nods she felt they acknowledged her. "These women work under you I presume". "They do" was the reply She raised her chin with even more pride.

He looked at the women around her, all quite young. There was a look of respect and fear in each of their eyes. Looking at the youngest of them, he asked "does she ever lose her temper?". He saw the young woman cringe and look up at the cook.

The man sitting at the prosecution table stood up and addressed the judge. "Where is this questioning leading your honour? It seems to have nothing to do with the proceedings".

Ralph stared down at the prosecution table "Your objection is noted but I'm curious too as to where this is going but I'm willing to hear". The council retook his chair. "Would my learned colleague like to swear in the witness" he directed at Billy. Billy looked lost, felt lost. He didn't know what to do and just ended up nodding. The man who had read out the charges appeared next to the woman and led her forwards to stand in front of the judge. A Bible was placed in her hand. "Please answer the question", the judge directed at the young woman Billy had singled out. Billy felt terrible. He knew he was in way over his head, but he caught a glint in the eye of Ralph that gave him some courage.

"May I ask your name", "Naomi, Naomi Bligh sir" and she curtsied. She was now facing the crowd. "Naomi, in the kitchens, sometimes things go wrong, accidents and the like, they happen everywhere, but I bet in the kitchens, small space, heat, stress. Remember you holding the lords book, in these moments, does your lady" and he pointed to the cook, "lose her temper". There was a look of shock on her face. He knew he was putting her on a spot and really wasn't sure if this was going to work. The girl avoided looking at the woman, "eehrm", "go on tell him, I'm only human the cook shouted from the crowd. This seemed to reassure the woman standing in front of Billy. "Well of course sir, there are accidents and....and well she curses a lot". "What sort of curses" Billy asked. He was holding his hands together behind his back, hands held in prayer where he could hide them. "Well, she uses the Lord Jesus's name a lot", she started going red, "she's often threatening to have my gut for garters, I am a bit clumsy" there was a hummph from the cook.

"May I ask, do you ever think she will actually cut out your guts from your stomach and make garters out of them?". A grin came across her face, "Of course not sir; I know I might get a beating but, of course not, it's just a saying, you know, like" and she stopped, she looked to be thinking. Billy turned back to the cook, "Would you agree", he asked the cook, "You don't actually mean you are going to take her guts out do you?". There was a giggle from somewhere in the crowd, the cook's eyes went to where the sound had come from, head still turned, "No sir, just a way of making her pull her socks up".

Billy lowered his head, almost a whisper, but loud enough to be heard he repeated "Pull her socks up". He raised his head "Thank you for your honesty: you may go now".

As the woman, smiled into the crowd, she got a cheer from a few of those waiting for her to get back.

Eyes lowered again, Billy went back to his side of the desk. He didn't sit down but leaned back against the table facing them. "Is there anyone here who can describe Mr Hobbs, perhaps tell me a bit more about him?". There was a hum to the silence then as he scanned the room for someone responding. Eventually there was a hand raised at the back, "Come forward please, can we have a look at who I am addressing".

An old man with a grey straggly beard, shuffled through to stand in front of Billy Billy turned to the man at the edge and asked for the Bible, "please take this in your hand". The old man took the book. "How well do you know this Mr Hobbs sir".

"Not very" was the short answer, "I've seen him from time to time in the bar". "Could you tell me, was he overweight?". There was a grin before the nod. "And did you ever see him drunk". The old man drew a loud breath, "Oooh, that would be sure, he is regular as clockwork, on the day for collection of the rent, he'll start before and finish well in to the dark hours of the night. He like his cigars as well, he was a generous man I will add, though may he rest in peace". "Thank you, sir," Billy said. The man hesitated, "Is that all?", "Yes" Billy said and stepped out of his way, so he could go back to his place. The old man instead went straight to the front, he had a better view now. Someone on the front row stood up and gave the man a seat. He hadn't had to do much, but he felt pleased, his work done, now he could enjoy the proceedings. He felt it had been a while since he'd been to a hanging and he was looking forward to it.

Billy leaned forwards and got back to his feet. He walked to the front, just before the judge's table and turned. Facing the crowd, he opened "Ladies and Gentlemen from the testimony of the kind gentleman here" and he indicated the old man who glowered at the attention, "I think we can all agree that Mr Hobbs was not in the best of health. Being a heavy eater, smoker and drinker, I have to say I am not surprised his heart gave way, I think most of you out there know the combination doesn't lead to a long life". He watched, there were a few nods, even the old man nodded still grinning. He looked now at the table the three men of the jury sat. They started conferring though the one on the end was nodding, not taking any notice of the other two.

Just as he was about to start his next sentences, there was a commotion at the door, he waited. The man who'd run out to fetch Gail was back. A thin short woman was with him. Billy smiled, "Could you ask her to wait out in the hallway for a minute, I have something I want to say, and I'd prefer it if she didn't hear". The woman nodded, she looked very uncomfortable as she turned and went back out the door.

Billy waited till the door was fully shut before he continued. "May I thank the jury for listening to what must seem like nothing to do with the case before us, but I assure you I will now attempt to explain". He was feeling good, "Now let me ask anyone here, think for yourselves, how do most of you react when you are angry with someone? You curse them, often something we all say, for example, we take the cook, when angry, she used the phrase guts for garters, and after, the lady said, something about pulling her socks up, like we all do, what about".... and he waited a bit, he looked up as if searching for something. "How many of the people in this room have ever said, the pox on you, or stick a needle in my eye if it ain't true. Have any of you used those phrases ever?" and he paused, he looked out and people started mumbling, "and how about, putting a curse on someone, I know I have, anyone here ever done that?". There were more murmurings. "Now let

us come to Mr Hobbs, I bet he was angry as well, and I bet he went to the bar for his usual and a few more, being insulted in the street. It would have made him mad. In my documents, it was said by those collecting the body that there was a strong smell of whiskey on him; was he drinking whiskey that night?" he turned to the old man again who stood up "I would like to confirm to the courts, he had a skinful that night". He was beaming, he almost took a bow before sitting down again. "A skinful you say". He turned back to the door, "Could you kindly let the lady waiting in the corridor to please come in" The man standing by the door opened it and ushered her in. Billy motioned her to come to the front. The woman was timid, keeping her head down, people stepped to one side to let her through. Gently Billy took her arm and gently guided her to the front. As she turned and saw everyone looking at her, her face flushed red. "Thank you for coming" he started. "You are a friend of the accused are you not?". She turned and looked at Miss Finch before nodding and turning back. "You have worked with her for how long?", she looked up at Billy, "Three years now sir, we started about the same time".

"Would you say you knew her well?"

She smiled now and turned again to Miss Finch, "Ooh yes, we're almost like sisters her and I". Emily nodded as well. She wasn't looking as distraught as before now. She'd been listening intently. "May I ask, sometimes Miss Finch loses her temper doesn't she?". A nervous nod. "We have been discussing the things people say when they are angry. I was just wondering, what does Emily say, we often use the same words, we sort of get used to using the same curses, what sort of things does she say?". He stopped, there was a delay as the woman looked at Emily, Emily looked at her, frightened, but apart from that, there was no other reaction. The woman turned back to Billy, "Well hrrm, she puts the pox on a few people, when she's really angry; she curses them, telling them she wishes them dead and will put a spell on them". There was a sudden murmur from the crowd. Raising his voice over the murmurs, he asked "Do you know if any of the people she has cursed in this way have died by the next day?", the murmurs rose even more, the noise was growing until the loud banging of the judges gavel broke through and silence reigned once again. This time you could have heard a pin drop. Feeling the eyes on her, her voice was wavering as she answered, "Not that I know of". The murmurs became open chatting rather than the whispers they were before. This time Ralph let it calm down by itself. Billy took the time to glance up at the judge and even though the stone face remained the same, Billy caught the slightest of smiles in his direction, he knew he'd done well and was well proud of himself.

New chapter – 6 - Papas story

When sam woke up the next morning, he saw Helen standing in her doorway. Clothd and with a bag, "I'm not saying if I'll marry you or not but, if you still want me to come with you, I'll come with you. One/two days there and back, one day inbetween and back in 5 days". "Yes he said, wiping sleep from his eyes, he'd over slept, unlike him he thought as he got to his feet and pulled his breeches on. She turned her back, slightly ruffled. "It's ok, I'm decent" as he did up the buttons. He knew he had a smile but tried to hide it as he pulled his boots on". "I've some bread and cooked some eggs for the journey". "When did you do that" he asked. "While you slept, you were out? Now there's some breakfast on the table" and she put down the bag and went outside. Once she was gone, he relaxed his mouth muscles, and they spread wide, he felt happy. Over the past few days, something had changed in him, he didn't know what, just he felt more relaxed and there was less thinking going on in his head. There was almost a calmness up there. He sat and the porridge was still steaming. He started spooning it in.

She'd been out a while and when he finished and went to look for her, she was standing with her horse saddled. In the sunlight, it didn't seem as old or as scraggy as he'd first thought. She had a saddle on him, the bag was hung on the back with her roll. She'd saddled Pony as well. He walked over, "You needn't have done mine". "And why not?... just because I'm a woman. Lets get one thing clear here. I've been living here on my own for a year, I've fed myself, looked after the farm, I don't need you, I can look after myself and I will, if I want to saddle your horse, I will!!". She stood looking at him, "Is that alright with you". He looked at her, grinning openly at her.

Sam put another log on the fire. The crackles echoed in the long almost empty room. His Ma, pa and Helen had gone to bed. It was just him and Papa, Papa was gently rocking in his chair. Sam went back to the bench. Cradling his mug in his hands, he gazed into the fire, he wasn't a big talker, better at listening than expressing himself he thought.

"Hmmmmm, fine mess this family has got itself into don't you think". Papa started, he too didn't say much, and Sam knew when he did, he should listen. "Hhhmmmmm" he replied. "This Frank business, you know he'd got to disappear, wonder if we'll ever see him again" Papa added in. News had spread, it seemed to be all around. The gossip mongers were out, and the story seemed quite different depending on which clan you heard it from. Papa had his crowd, mixing with others left of his generation, which wasn't many any more. Sam his farmer friends, the two of them had been exchanging stories earlier. One was that he'd been caught and was being sent to America, one that he was going to get hung which was the more likely they'd agreed if he'd been caught. Neither of them did believe he'd been caught; one thing that seemed to be consistent in the story which was that someone had tipped off the troopers as to the whereabouts of the cave. They had guessed Frank had found out about the trap they were laying and disappeared. They hadn't heard from him in over two weeks now.

"Best for him, you know, out of here. Someone like him! It wouldn't be long before the rope caught up with him! especially nowadays" and Papa bit down on the stem of his pipe, "Not easy for your generation, wasn't for us either but at least we could steal from under the noses of both the Scottish and English crown; they were so busy fighting each other, wasn't easy though, the wars happened, crops were burned, we were in the middle"he exclaimed, "in the middle of an endless war; guess we learned what we saw, and became better, we got them to pay us to raid, just always the other side of the border, cause as much hassle as possible, what did they expect, we became an army of our own, we needed it, to defend and feed ourselves". He chuckled through the pipe, balancing it between his gums.

"What would you have done Papa?" Sam asked, a question that had been burning in his mind for a while: if it had been him, the first to ask would have been Papa; he'd had to escape several times, he'd heard many of the stories, several times, though he hadn't really listened, now he was. He started wondering how many pearls of wisdom his Papa had told him over the years and he hadn't heard. He made a point to try and listen to others a bit more. It had been strange over the past while, Billy and Frank disappearing at the same time. It had been only now they weren't there, that he felt like a shadow was lifting from him, he actually started to feel, the others in his family DID realise how much he did looking after the place. Frank with his raids and girls, he was loud. Billy loud and outspoken, proud as well in a different way, quiet, inwards. But although it was

difficult to agree with his little brother, he had found himself starting to agree with some of the things Billy had been coming out with.

Papa turned in his chair to look out of the small window at the end of the room, "Full moon tonight; hope he's undercover, amazing how much you can see movement on a night like this, no clouds. Not a night to be moving, too visible".

"How did you do it Papa? You were young, when 'ill week' happened, when the queen died, you've told us about that a few times. When you ended up on the run, like Frank".

The fire was now crackling, the lights from the fire danced around the long room, bouncing off the sabres hanging on the opposite wall, family relics. Papa was sitting back now, his eyes seemed to be staring at the swords, Sam thought.

"I was just a lad then, 17. It was 1603, the Queen of England had died, the Scottish king was waiting to be crowned, we knew he hated us, we were the only thing standing in his way of joining Scotland to England, which was coming. We knew then, our days were numbered.

They've been canny though, they didn't send in the armies, they did it with Laws, why it's good Billy got to know a bit, might help us one day. They took their time, look at us now, living in tatters, hand to mouth, steal and you get hung, it's either that, starve or die". He stopped there for a moment. He'd stopped the gently swaying he normally did in the chair, not even a rock, just a gently sway he did when telling his stories. Now he'd stopped, Sam watched as he raised his arm and wiped away a tear with his sleeve, followed by a sniffle, he looked at Sam sideways, "Good times, hard times" he said with a bit of gritted teeth, he then finished with a glint in his eye, "Got a bit off course there...It started in the normal way, we got raided by the Armstrongs they slaughtered two village's, stole all the cows sheep and horses. A young lad, now wait.....James Yarrow his name was. Well whether they left him to tell the tale or he just escaped, we don't know but he came and told us who it was; he reckognised a few of them. The Marsh Warden, John Anderson, got a few of us together. We knew where they came from and we also knew that Liddlesdale and the surrounding area was too well covered. We targetted, like them, some farmsteads around ther, Heiton and Makerstourn, I remember the names. Anderson got the clans together and we were over a 100 men.

Well, it was a reivers' night, no moon. I was riding with the Robson's, there were the Charltons and the Milburns with us, flags flying, it was like a real army. We took the small pathways as usual, travelling at night, we travelled for three nights, that was fun, three days, the men in good cheer, there was a crazy mood about the place though, people were talking about putting things to rights. I was just 17, I swallowed it all in, Camp fires in the morning, just as dawn was coming, riding all night, but the bit your wanting is when we went one farm too far; they knew we was coming and were waiting, not soldiers, but the farmers, with rifles. We hit someone with too much money and lots of defences", Papa looked up and let out a tired giggle, "They even had a couple of cannons firing out of a barn window" his face look stretched as he let go of the smile the giggle had given him as if the giggle had taken all his energy. "Lost my best mate there; that was when I saw the real horror, we rode in, down the valley, it was just a big farm from what we saw, then the bullets started flying, I heard them wizz by me ears. I'll never forget that sound, just a thud, I was riding full gallop, lance in my hand, I remember it was heavy, I was leaning over my mare's head, I

heard another thud and whoever was on my right went down, fell off his horse. I didn't stop, carried on charging, I was so young then". Sam looked over his Papa's wrinkled face, no teeth, arm and leg muscles had withered and were thin. Looking at him now, he couldn't imagine him ever being young, he looked into the eyes of the old man, he grinned, "You're right there". Papa threw daggers with those eyes, tired eyes. "Yer want to hear the story or what?" Sam nodded, grin still locked on his face.

"The young me", and he looked his grandson in the eyes, and grinned, "One day you'll learn, or be hanged like that stupid brother of yours", Sam knew there was pride in the voice, though covered. "Where was I? ohh yes", his face grew serious and he leaned forwards in his chair, "That was when we knew they had canons. Billy Robson, that was his name, he charged and crossed the path in front of me, he was just a bit older than me, he passed with a grin as he looked back, if he hadn't done that, it would have been me who got the blast; as it was, I still see that grin, behind it the cloud of the explosion, next thing I knew, I was in that cloud, my mare reared round, blood splattered me, a mix of the horse's and Billy's there. Only after, I was on the ground, she'd bolted, and half a corpse, Billy's corpse, the edges singed, but half a body, one leg, half a face. I found myself on my hands and knees, in a puddle of blood, staring at what was left of him", his face had a blank stare as he drifted off into the picture, the image that used to wake him in his sleep, now while awake. "Papa, Papa" Sam shouted to get his attention; he heard it and pulled back out of the image. "Anyway, I'd dropped my lance, there was another explosion, and I ran, back up that hill. I'd got to the top when someone, to this day I don't know who, we lost a few that day, but they picked me up by the shirt, they swung me up and we rode, I never got the chance to look up, I hadn't been there long when whoever it was whispered to me, "Fuck they're following". I knew he'd never be able to out ride them with two in the saddle, "Keep hidden" he told me as he shoved me off the saddle into some bracken at full pace. I don't mind though, probably saved my life, I didn't move, three horse came past me chasing, I stayed hidden as told till I saw their backs over the hill, then I ran again, this time I stayed hidden though. Got as far away as I could like that, till night, then I walked, upright, the glen seemed to be clear, I made my way towards the mountain as quickly as I could", he sat back now, looking tired, "one big difference, advantage I have over Frank", he said through strained breathing now, "I knew where I was headed, Frank has to make his own way in that and....." his head dropped to his side. Sam waited, he listened to his breathing, he was asleep. Getting two blanket from the box in the corner, under the window, he returned draping it over his Papa. He looked down, "You did it, you were a real reiver". He paced over to the fire and added another log, he went and laid down on the bench, putting the second blanket over himself, don't want to wake Helen, got to get up soon do the animals", he placed his jacket under his head and snuggled under the blanket. He tried to picture it, his Papa, young, lance in hand, "Nah" he uttered before he too was snoring.

It wasn't long before Sam woke up, though the sun wasn't. "What happened, you fell asleep. I didn't finish". Sam opened his eyes, "No papa, you didn't finish" he smiled. "Well, I was working my way back, I had to keep hiding though, there were riders that kept appearing. Eventually I saw a house, I took a chance, I crept over to the house, I hid under a window and looked in. I was planning on just sleeping in the barn, but as I looked in, there I saw your grandmother, she was so beautiful. I got caught because I spent too long looking and before I knew it, someone put their

hand on my collar and dragged me inside. Well, seeing her face to face, I knew then I had to marry this woman.

We were miles from where we had raided but they guessed. Luckily for me, they didn't get on with the clan we'd attacked and agreed to hide me. I stayed 3 days while there were riders, one even stopped and asked if anyone had been seen. I had panicked for a minute, then I heard the man of the house, the one who had invited me in, denying having seen anyone over the past few days, they kept themselves to themselves. That was the last we saw of them, though I did stay another three days". Papa started coughing and Sam crossed over to him. "You OK", "I'm fine, I'm fine, stop ??fussing??/mulling over me" and he pushed Sam slightly, "I was just getting to the good bit, the wedding" and he smiled back a toothless grin.

"And you'll never guess, when we had to put our mark, next to our names in the marriage book, you'll never guess" Sam hadn't heard this part of the story before; he was wondering if Papa was making it up, he did sometimes go a bit funny and said weird things but this sounded right up to now as far as his memory went, but he'd never heard the bit where the book was signed, he knew Papa couldn't read or write. He knew his mark was his thumb or a cross, "It was the new vicar and after service he sometimes came over to me; he always called me Dodds; it was on the third time he came over to me, I asked. 'Why do you call me Dodds, I'm a Dodd'. The vicar looked at me funny like, and took me back to the vestry, where he showed me the wedding book, I looked, he looked, he put his finger on something on the page, I told him I couldn't read. He told me, that I was written in as Dodds, from one of the Dodd clan; there were two branches in the village!!". He looked at Sam, "I liked it, so I didn't make him change it. It felt good, starting a new clan." He took Sam's hand now, "I've never told anyone that, I don't know if it was wrong" He looked into Sam's eyes, and waited, he waited to see if Sam was OK with it. Sam sat back a minute, "So that's why your brother was a Dodd, not a Dodds. I always wondered what there was between you two. I was young when he died but I remember, you and he used to go at it hammer and tongs, was it about the name. His Papa nodded. "I like it Papa" sSm replied and squeezed his Papas hand. " I like it" and his Papa released his grip tiredly. A look of relief passed over his face before he closed his eyes. Sam slowly freed his hand away and went to feed the animals.

New chapter 7 – Daylight Robbery

Frank had climbed down the tree. Had he gained wisdom from that old oak? He wasn't sure, but he knew travelling 3 days to steal a horse to escape from stealing a horse in the first place was not the wisest of decisions.

Travelling at night was the reiver way, it was a full moon and the landscape took on a different feel. The wind had stilled, and the air flowed with warm currents. He had kept to the moors, but he was now headed south. As he'd been walking, he'd been thinking. It was strange, he'd never spent much time really thinking, ploys to get what he wanted when he wanted it; he never really looked at the consequences but now, he felt them.

His hand went to his side, where he normally kept his sword. He only wore it on raids but now he felt nervous, a twisting in his stomach. He hadn't been this far from home, alone anyway. Normally he was in a band. It wasn't there, he'd had to leave it behind in the cave. He had his 'Dirk' but not the sword. It was part of his heritage, without it and in his brown clothes, he felt like a peasant; he knew he was, but he was also a reiver, that was what hurt so much, having left that sword behind. He looked down over his apparel, he had his boots though, that was what he stuck to and his head lifted, and his pace took more solid paces. Three days now and he was almost out of the foothills. He was still keeping far away from settlements and they were becoming more and more frequent. He stopped in his tracks as he saw the lights ahead. He wasn't hungry. Between sleeping through the day, he set snares and had been doing quite well on rabbit up to now. He'd left the moors when he'd come across a stone road, coming or going from he didn't know where. He'd decided to follow it, he thought he must be far enough away by now; they wouldn't be on the lookout for him this far away. He was on a dirt road; the hedges were high on each side. It was as the road turned on its way down that he made out the outline of a building. There was a small window either side of the entrance door and light came shining through, illuminating the courtyard. He'd heard whinnying from the field, more than 1 horse. That meant they were either reivers (not this far south) or doing OK. He had no compunction about stealing from those who were doing OK. His fear was how far would he get before they realised. Some of these well-off people had long reaches and he didn't want to get involved in that. He moved to the side of the road where he could get a look in through the windows; he sat down by the side, got out his pipe from his inner pocket and shoved it in his mouth. It calmed him even when empty.

He hadn't been there more than 15 minutes when a voice behind him made him jump. «Not planning on robbing that place I hope». Having jumped to his feet, his hand moved to where his sword should have been and instead found the knife secreted behind him and laid a hand on it, but didn't pull it out yet.

"Whoa there lad", the figure came out from the dark under the leaves above and into the open where the moonlight caught his features. He had a big grin on his face and Frank assumed he'd been drinking at first. "Didn't mean to startle you. I come in peace. I was camped in the woods up there, I saw you pass on the road and watched as you sat, just to warn you, there's two sons, bulky and the father and they've got flintlocks". Frank studied him for a minute, "If that's the case", he

turned a grin, "my name's Frank. What about you?" and bringing the hand from behind his back, put it out in front of him. The tables turned, the man looked down at Frank's boots, his eyes came back up. He hadn't yet put out his hand, he still had a wide smile on his face but he was more hesitant. He took Frank's hand, "Jim or Jimmy if you prefer; nice to make your acquaintance". He had an accent. This man was a toff, Frank thought to himself, "I was preparing a rabbit I caught earlier, would you care to join me?". And he turned, not waiting for an answer. He glanced over his shoulder. I have a camp a bit deeper in, away from the road; I think you'll understand". That last bit caught Frank, as they walked further into the forest. He had his hand back on his knife, but he followed. They'd gone for a few minutes when he saw the fire; there were branches collected and lain against each other making a shelter from the rain. He'd been here a while to have made all of that. "You look like your planning on staying here a while" Frank commented bending down again to reach the fire. "Please, grab a log" Jim said with humour in his voice, "Only a few more nights, got a coach to catch" there was that same hint of some personal joke. "No, please, sit," the mirth left his face and became more serious, pulling out a water skin, "wine" and passed the skin to Frank who caught it. He'd not tasted wine before; ale was his thing, but he pulled the cork out and took a swig, wincing as the taste hit him, "Oh, I'm sorry, it's losing its quality, ok, lost it, but it's still alcohol". Frank had been right; this man was pickled. Frank took a log and glanced at the fire; the rabbit was dripping nicely and the fat was sizzling in the fire creating a meaty aroma, he was feeling hungry again.

"You look a long way from home, what you doing round here/". "Me a long way from home! From your accent, I think it might be you that's got a bit off course". Jim sat opposite Frank; the light from the fire now showed off his face, the grin. "You could be right brother". Frank started: this man was definitely not a reiver, but he had a sort of confidence that only came with soldiering, "You're not my brother", he said; his grin had slipped a bit. Who was this man, what was that quip about catching a coach? Frank's senses were on full alert: he had no sword, he'd seen the flintlock pistols under the cape in the shelter and was staring at them. Those among the reivers who had them, had only had them from stealing them, so this man either stole them.....or ... he had an air about him with that accent, what was he doing alone in the woods, camping rough? "Look's like you've fallen on bad times", he thought he'd test the water. Jim grinned back, "to quote, I think that might be you, as well" and Jim slumped his shoulders, "Look, are we going to spend the rest of the night like this? Yes, you've got me right, and if I'm right, you're an out of luck Reiver, no horse no sword, coming out of the hills" Jim stopped watching the reaction. Frank was stunned though he didn't let on; he pushed the grin back into place and held a stare. His next question was: would he stab him in the night? What for? He had no money, the boots, looked like the man had a fine pair already. Eat him? His grin became real, "Ok, look's like we've got each other sussed; I can't see what you'd have to gain", hardly likely he'd been waiting here a few days on the off chance to cash in on the reward. "My, you are suspicious", the grin turned malevolent as his face got closer to the fire, he leaned forwards and turned the rabbit. Frank took another gulp and passed back the skin. "So, Frank, where you headed?". Frank reached in for his tobacco and pipe, he'd shoved it straight back the minute he heard the voice. While filling it with tobacco he pondered: this man had sneaked up on him, not a sound, not a crunch from a stone or the rustle of a foot on a leaf. "Where were you when you jumped out on me? No-one gets that close to me with me hearing them, especially when I'm awake.", he exaggerated a bit for effect, but it was true. Jim laughed out aloud at this, and he threw his head back at the same time. "Wondered

when you were going to ask me that” and Jim raised his eyes upwards; he looked back at Frank and then exaggerated the movement again. He looked back at Frank, and could see the light dawning on the face. Frank tilted his head back, “You were up in the tree when I arrived” Frank relaxed. The man had a good laugh.

Jim took a gulp, “Actually, I’m heading for America, just need to get the fare”, he glanced at Frank now, “Fancy heading for America?”. “Don’t know much about it really; been wondering”. Jim started to get excited, “I’ve heard it’s just huge open spaces, a place a man can go and start from scratch, freedom from.....” the excitement abated as Frank felt a darkness cross the man’s face. “I stole a horse and gave it to my brother; he was accused but got away, now they’re after me”. Jim looked startled “Wwhat’re you escaping?”. There was a moment as Jim took in that Frank was a horse thief.

“I think it’s ready” and Jim broke off a leg from the rabbit and handed it to Frank, then the other side for himself. They both took a bite and chewed. Eventually, Jim licked his finger’s. “The fire, in London; my family’s shop was burned, with them in it. Lost everything”, he turned to the shelter “Except those and another couple, all that was left of the stock. Been surviving since then. Found them useful” and that grin appeared again. “You mean to say, you’ve come from London.....?”. Frank was still looking at the pistols. Instantly seeing the 2 of them triggered a memory, a picture from one of the books Billy had shown him a while back. A drawing, of a man, pointed hat, scarf over his mouth, and 2 pistols pointed at the person looking at it. The way the eyes looked straight at him, had made a mark and now he remembered it, a picture of someone who robbed a stagecoach, Billy had called him ‘a highwayman’, The story had been of a highwayman that had robbed a coach near a town called Ware, he’d been caught and hung, the stories were written in a way seeing them as heroes, sometimes crowds cheered them on at hangings, seen as robbing from only the rich and daring. The cogs started to turn, he looked up, the face was now younger than it had looked earlier, there was now a boyish grin and his head was nodding eagerly. “You’ve guessed haven’t you”, his face had now become even more animated, almost childish. Frank felt his face being searched, a reaction, something to help him guess the reaction. Frank didn’t give any. After a few seconds, Jim gave up the study it seemed and sat back a bit, acting as if he didn’t care, more childish, thought Frank. He was becoming wary of this grown child. “It bloody well works you know, Check the timetable in town for the coaches, wait along the road and then point your guns, they almost beg you to take the money”. Jim stood up, the excitement caught him again like another rush of adrenalin and Jim was now practically jumping from one foot to the other. Frank stayed sitting though Jim had almost crossed the fire to his side, and feeling the heat, jumped back. “How many times you done it then?”, Jim sat back now, “Just the once”. all his bravado gone, “Been up here for a while now; that’s how I heard the stories, in the local ale houses, you know about reivers, how I guessed who you were, clever eehhhh?” Frank was starting to get a bit nervous, there was something wrong here. “Well, there’s another coach due past here tomorrow aaand... well I was wondering.... If you’d like to give a hand...”. Frank was realising he’d been wrong in his judgement about Jim He was now looking dangerous, especially with those two pistols and he didn’t have a sword. “Why’d you need me? You came and got me, remember, I guess for this”. Jim looked at him and nodded. He was back in control of himself now. Jim opened his mouth and hesitated, “It would be easier with two; one can look after the guards”. Frank decided to fish further. He took another bite, their eyes had locked, this...man had seen more than his years, Frank didn’t believe a word of his story. “Something went wrong didn’t it”. There was a

gap before Jim answered, no shaking, no shivering, "Had to shoot a guard, show I meant business. They handed their jewels and cash over quickly after that". He didn't blink. Frank knew killers, he'd killed a few, in the heat of a raid, things happened. This man wasn't one, he had courage, or stupidity, he took risks, there was a bit of madness in there though. He believed him when he said he'd killed the guard but there wasn't the killer feel to him. He acted and had the mannerisms of a soldier, but not the discipline.

Who was he, he thought: "I'll think about it, tell you in the morning" and Frank took another bite. "Don't suppose you've got a sword in there, feel naked without mine", Jim grinned, "you wouldn't be taking me for a fool now would you, not till I know you better". He wasn't a fool Frank realised. Jim passed the skin, "So what happened to your brother?", Frank didn't want Jim to know too much, "He ran, like me, not heard from him since". Jim nodded, "Being without your sword, almost makes you not a reiver, how come you lost it?" his voice sounded distant as he was looking at the ground. "They found my hideaway, laid a trap but I spotted it. Had to leave my sword behind". Frank realised that trying to pry out something from Jim was pointless. It would most likely produce a lie. Jim was still staring at the ground, "I was a body guard, my employer died in the fire, I was also his adopted son. I was on the street as a kid. Mr Grant his name was, he took me off the streets, clothed me, housed me and.....looked after me. He trained me, and I protected him. I failed, he died". Frank raised an eyebrow. Jim's eyes were still on the ground. He slowly raised them, "I never had to kill anyone before that guard, beat up people, you know, get them to pay when they didn't. Mr Grant was a soldier, he trained me to be a soldier, he was also a friend".

Frank didn't look up, it fitted what he'd assumed, but too many lies, he couldn't trust him. He thought he liked him but one eye open tonight. He stood, and unwrapped his roll from his back, lay down and wrapped himself in it, "Can ya read and write?". Jim looked puzzled, "Yes". Frank finished, "I can't; you got that on me" and covered his head with the blanket, only his eyes showing, facing the fire.

The rest of the night passed without incident. The sun was in the sky before Jim emerged from his shelter. Frank already had the fire alight, and was warming his hands on the fire, sitting on the log. He looked at the bleary-eyed Jim. He hadn't stopped on the wine when Frank had crashed out. He had as well: Jim could have sneaked up on him and cut his throat. He hadn't; that wine had something.

"So do we do this on our legs and run away afterwards?". "Wondered when you would ask that question. Got a couple of mares over yonder" and he waved his face vaguely to his right. Frank had thought about it. "What else you got planned?" "Before anything else, tea; we need some tea" and disappeared into the tent, only to emerge with a small sack which Frank assumed was the tea and a kettle. He had a waterskin over his shoulder: "Going to make the tea with wine" he grunted, he was feeling excited, the thrill before a battle. "What else you got in that tent, bloody armchair and table?", Jim grinned. "You'd be surprised, had a spare horse for a while so I stocked up". Frank noted that, a spare horse.

He looked different in the morning light: the darkness, the gloom, seemed to have disappeared for the moment.

"Tell me more about America, I have thought about it, but.... what to do there? The same as here what we are planning for tonight? What does this new world have to offer? Lawlessness, I hear amongst the clan's".

Jim turned and looked at him, his grin even brighter than the day before. He filled the kettle and hung it over the fire. "It's not just that, it's the idea of hope, creating a new world, not controlled by the aristocracy, but by the people. We will have the right to choose the laws we are governed by. Mr Grant told me all these things, I don't completely understand them, but it sounds good. He said we'd go there soon, but not long after, he died". Jim's head sagged towards the end of his sentence. Frank didn't say anything. They drank their tea and Frank shared his pipe with Jim.

After they had finished, Jim went back to his shelter and packed away his stuff. If all went well that evening, he'd be out of there and on his way to Portsmouth, a long journey south that would eventually lead him to America. He guessed Frank wasn't going to come with him. He toyed with the idea of double crossing him. At first that had been the plan he'd made while in the tree, looking down at what he thought was someone planning on robbing the farmhouse. He had told the truth about his past...finally, but Frank, correctly didn't believe him. He had shot the guard. He felt bad about that; the incident had been in his dreams; he still wondered whether the man was dead. He hoped not. Frank on the other hand, he believed, had killed, that was something. He decided to give Frank the sword he had. It would lighten his load and he knew he was no good with the sword anyway, Mr Gant had tried to teach him, the art of gentlemen he called it.

With everything else packed away, he walked back to the fire with his life wrapped up in his blanket and over his shoulder, in his other hand he had the sword. Frank was sitting where he'd left him, on his log smoking that pipe. He saw his eyes open wider as he approached, placing his stash by his log. He reached over the fire with his other hand, the sword held in its leather scabbard held by the middle. "Here, a gift, no use to me really. With my pistols, I know I'm safer" and a broad grin spread on his face. Frank stood, He'd taken the long-stemmed pipe out of his mouth, and took the sword. Jim saw the appreciation in his eyes and smiled to himself.

Frank was overwhelmed. He'd mentioned the sword as a joke, not really expecting Jim to have a sword. It looked really nice as well. "Where did you get it?" he asked as he inspected it. The scabbard was really quite plain, no pattern on the leather, but the handle shone. The hand guard swirled, five bands of shining metal, equally meshed together, that protected the whole hand. Whoever this had been, had looked after it. The metal shone, recently polished, Frank guessed, "Who did you steal this from?" he asked with a sound of astonishment. He immediately regretted putting it that way as he saw the face strain opposite. "It was Mr Grant's. I spent many an evening polishing it. The day he died, he bequeathed it to me with his last breath". "I can't take it". Frank felt squeamish. "He also gave me the sets of pistols; they are of use to me, honestly. Just give all you've got tonight, perhaps I'm saving my life" and he gave Frank a stare that made Frank remember his doubts from the night before. He thought he understood.

It took two hours ride to get to the point Jim had chosen for the ambush. Well-chosen, Frank thought, just round a bend, deep layers of trees either side so no chance of being spotted till the last minute. They had discussed how they would rob the carriage; it was a regular coach that

linked Newcastle and Carlisle. Once every week, the post would travel, with passengers. Jim had watched the past two weeks and each time it was just before dusk. The coach rushed through on its way to Brampton where it would stay the night before its final leg, the next, day to Carlisle. It slowed right down each time, take the bend. They would be waiting behind. Jim had given him the second pair of pistols and a black scarf to hide his face. He also gave him a hat, three corners, the leather curled up along each length between the angles. Frank liked it; he'd been used to the flat bonnet he'd worn back home. This one had style, he grinned, as he inspected it before putting it on to check the fit. The fit was perfect; it squeezed nicely, not too tight but tight enough that it didn't wobble or come off if he bent down to pick something up.

He tied the scarf in a simple knot and then turned it to the back raising the front over his mouth. Checking the fit, he then lowered it and looked down at the box that held the pistols. It was a shiny tan colour with fancy metal curls wrapped around the corners. There was a small clasp on the front that he pulled forwards. He lifted the lid. Red felt surrounded the inside, where the two pistols sat, one handle to the end of the second. Above was the ramming rod and on the left-hand side, two little pouches sat. He took out the first one. It was made of soft leather. He jangled it and heard the metal chinking inside. The metal balls: that meant the other one held the powder. He ran his hand along the handle of the first. Closing his hand around it he pulled it out. It wasn't light. He'd seen them used, but never held one till now. Reaching in with his other hand, he took out the second. Balancing and getting used to the weight, he reached out forwards, pointing both at an imaginary target. "What do I say?" he asked. It had been agreed, they would wait, side by side, in the middle of the road pointing straight at the driver and his man. Jim would then go forwards and lighten the passengers of whatever money or jewels they had. They would then high-tail it into the woods and ride south towards Penrith. Somewhere along the way they'd divvy up the loot.

Frank wasn't bothered really about the loot: already with a new hat, pistols and the scarf, he was up a fortune. He assumed the pistols were to be given back but perhaps he thought, if there was enough loot, Jim would sell him the pistols. Not really sure why he wanted them but with the box and they themselves, he felt almost unworthy of them. They had looked so beautiful in that box with the red felt all around. He'd been taken aback by the spotlessness of it all. "What they say in the south is 'stand and deliver.'". "Stan 'n deliver" Frank said with his deep northern accent. Jim, laughed, "that'll get them" he added. "They'll be foxed, a southern accent and a northern accent together" Frank laughed as well. They waited in the trees; they would hear the coach coming a mile off and they didn't want to be seen by any local. There was a little village further down the valley, a few miles off, so it might be a possibility. Not taking any chances, they'd travelled there off any road and used only small footpaths if they had to, through forest where they could and across moorland where they couldn't. They had come through a clearing in one of the forests, several miles back, where a group of men had been working with their axes chopping down trees. They'd hardly taken any notice as they passed by and they had been the only souls they'd come across all day.

Frank was feeling a buzz, waiting tentatively, waiting on edge. His scarf was up, and he knew he was grinning underneath. He turned and looked at Jim who returned the glance. He was sure there was a grin under that scarf as well. He had a sudden thought, "If you open your mouth, they'll know you're from the south. There are fewer of you round here than me. If we get stopped anywhere round here, your voice'll fit the description too quickly. Why don't I do the talking, it'll

be just like anyone else's voice round here, what do ya think?". They'd both been hunched over their saddles waiting for the sound of wheels rumbling in their direction, ready for the off, tense. Jim sat up, looked at Frank who too relaxed and sat up. "not a bad idea, and then from here, I do the talking; that way it'll put them off the scent, not bad". Frank hadn't thought about the second part being his idea, but wasn't going to turn back the praise. He was starting to wonder about this Jim, since they'd got up that morning; he'd started taking a liking to the man. He was half way through thinking it must have been the dark or the alcohol, when he heard the sound, the distant rumbling that was coming closer, he felt his heart pick up speed. He leaned down over the saddle and saw Jim was already moving to the middle of the road. He kicked his steed forwards and soon stood there facing the bend; time slowed almost to a standstill as the sound came closer and closer, then it came, the horses came into view and then the bulking black box, leaning slightly as it came around the bend. Frank had a sudden flash of what a sight it must have been from the other side. Before he had a chance to open his mouth, the carriage was coming to a stop. The driver was heeling back the reins from a standing position, pushing the long bar that was the brake. The guard next to him was just sitting agape; there was a rifle sitting on his lap and Frank kicked again, coming almost up to the side where the guard sat, almost ramming his pistols up the guard's nose, in an effort to raise the fear and then with a quick wiggle from the front ends of the pistols he then pointed at the rifle and back into his face. The guard looked like he was about to soil his breeches but slowly pushed the gun off his knees onto the ground in front of him and then raised his hands above his head. The driver, having wrapped the reins round the brake, stayed upright, and raised his hands as well. Frank glanced back at Jim who sat tall in his saddle, eyes fixed and both pistols pointing, using his knees, Jim edged his horse forwards till he too was in a position where the two in front of him knew he couldn't miss. Not waiting for a glance in return Frank started making his way to the side door. A voice from within startled him "Driver, what the hell have we stopped for.....", Frank had almost fallen back wards off his horse as the curtain inside opened to reveal a bald head coming out, through the window. Pointing his pistols in the same manner he had earlier, a bald man's face appeared, and the jaw just dropped as he found himself looking down a barrel for each eye. He froze. Using one of his guns, he pointed, as before, to the door. Shaking, a hand from the man reached out of the window and found the handle, he turned it and opened the door. The head returned inside, eyes focussed forwards on the two pistols and stepped out. Frank reached inside his jacket and pulled out a cloth sac he'd put there earlier and handed it to the man. The man took it. His expression was exquisite, thought Frank. He took it, opened it and looked inside: somehow it wasn't registering. The man had a little purse tied at his waist, Frank leaned forwards, tapping the man on the head with one pistol. The man glanced up, his mouth still hanging open, Frank then pointed to his belt where the money sat. The man glanced down and then back up. Frank then pointed to the bag in his hands and just watching the eyes go from shock to anger made Frank realise it had got through. As he looked the man up and down, looking at the clothes he wore, the man reached down and untied his money pouch and grudgingly dropped the purse, into the bigger sac with a final look on his face that threw daggers as he looked back at Frank. Frank suddenly panicked as he realised he hadn't looked into the carriage; there could be a gun pointed at his head, He jerked his head up like a shot that made the man in front of him jump backwards a step and pointed his guns into the darkness where he sensed 3 other people. There wasn't a gun pointed at him which made him relax a touch. His eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness and he made out that, next to the man who had gotten out of the carriage, sat an older looking woman, probably the wife. Opposite a young man sat, his

hands were in the air already and he suspected they had been there all the time. These people weren't rich peasants like him now, they had clothes that matched a station way above him. He could see that there was someone sitting in the back, but couldn't see who it was or what they held in their hand. He pointed a pistol at the old woman, which brought a sharp intake of breath and motioned her out of the carriage, then turning with the same gun, at the man and finally at the shadow that lurked in the back. Without hesitation, the young man was out of the carriage first, he turned and taking the hand of the other woman helped her out. Very chivalrous, Frank thought, and he felt a grin underneath the cloth round his mouth. The first man, not turning or taking his eyes off Frank, as if he was studying him, passed the sac; the second man did the same with his purse. Frank looked up as he sensed the presence of the last person coming out of the carriage. The first thing that hit him was the eyes, green eyes, everything else seemed to fade away as she filled the doorway, her wide skirt and the green dress she was wearing that matched her eyes. He saw her?? as her delicate hands encircled the doorway, helping her get leverage to pass through. The young man turned and took a steps lead to take her hand, bringing Frank back to the scene in front of him. There was jewellery round the old woman's neck and he now noticed gold bracelets round her wrists and a ring, with a red stone of some sort. He motioned to the ring, bracelets and the necklace and then to the sack. There was now horror; she hadn't seemed more than slightly fazed when she had the gun pointed at her but now, undoing the necklace, and sliding off the gold bracelets, there was a look that gave Frank the feeling he was about to take the last treasure. It was as she started to take off the ring that she let out a gasp. Having slid it off, she daintily hovered her hand over the open sac held now by the young man. Having placed the necklace and bracelets already in the sac, her hand couldn't open. Eventually she managed to squeeze her fingers apart and the ring dropped, finishing with a light clink as it hit whatever else was in there. The younger man acted as if he hadn't noticed the show of pain the old lady was feeling. Frank had to pull his eyes off that sad face that he'd first seen as almost defiant, now reduced to looking down in the dirt, shoulders sagged. He followed the sac, remembering to look at each face visible now in turn, watching the eyes for any sign other than fear. The defiant old man had now drooped, his eyes didn't come off his face, but the fire wasn't there any more, there was almost the same sorrow as on the old woman's. Picking up the sac again, with his eyes, he looked up, he followed the curves of the green dress up into the well of those green eyes, he heard his own sharp intake of breath as now he saw the face before him. There was no reaction to tell him that they had heard. He was glad. She leaned her head forwards, reaching behind her neck to undo the clasp of her necklace. Her hands were slightly trembling, and she was having trouble. He realised he was pointing his guns directly at her, something inside of him turned, he slowly spread his hands outwards, so the guns were no longer pointing at her. At that split second, the clasp came, and she dropped the necklace in the sac. She raised her arms, shaking them. Frank realised she was showing him she had no bracelets. Frank looked at the man holding the sac, pointing a pistol at it. At the same time, as he pointed at the man, he lowered his bottom two fingers and wiggled them indicating where he wanted the man to hang the sac. The younger man complied delicately, knowing one wrong move and the gun would go off in his face. Turning his horse with his knees, he turned in his saddle, slipping one of the pistols in his belt. He got a good hold of the sac in the other. Returning his hand to the sac, he pulled open on the neck and reached in, he felt around for a while, eyes still on the crowd behind him. He eventually found what he was looking for, and, pulling out his hand, he held the ring up. Though they were all staring at him, those green eyes seemed to pull him, he was transfixed, and with a jerk of his hand he threw the

ring back. It landed at the feet of the old lady. They all scrambled to get it, except for those green eyes. She didn't move a muscle, a look on her face he couldn't work out. Sharp, almost angry but not, almost seductive but not, though he felt the pull, almost frightened but not. He had to tear himself away, holding the sac and one pistol, he used his knees again to guide himself back to the front where Jim was still stoically holding himself, guns pointing and a glare that frightened even him. He looked like he hadn't moved. Then the statue slowly turned its head in his direction, he nodded, and Frank nodded back. They came together and turned to the forest. Frank was dying to just charge off into the forest, his heart was going like crazy, beating like it was going to burst out of his chest, but he held his nerve. Slowly, as they'd agreed, they kept their pistols pointing till both the horses were up the bank at the side of the road, then they glanced a quickest of looks at each other, eyes sparkling. Pointing his pistols in the air Jim pulled both triggers and with a huge explosion, a sound which the covering blanket of branches overhead magnified. Frank did the same and grabbed the reins, having slipped both guns back into his belt. Leaning over the saddle, both kicked and pushed their mounts to the limits they could reach, disappeared heading south through the forest. A great scream forced its way out, the only way he knew how to release that pumping, driven to it by the exhilaration of it. Jim flying next to him, it felt, on clouds of euphoria, they both yelled till their lungs had nothing left. Jim was the first to reach up and pull his scarf down, the scarf that hid a grin from ear to ear. Frank knew he had the same and followed suit. They carried on for a while, the excitement very slowly starting to dilute; the thrill stayed but they were through the peak. They both carried on in silence, lost in their own individual thoughts. Slowly the pace reduced till they were walking, "You're a cool one, how'd you do it? I didn't hear a word. Not from them, not from you, you fucker, you almost gave me a heart attack. Silence, any minute I expected someone to come around that carriage and shoot me, I didn't want to take my eyes off those two, the driver was cool, the youngster scatty, I didn't know what he'd do if I flinched, purely from fear. BHow'd you do it". Frank turned back with a placid face except for a turn on the right of his lips, "I didn't like the idea of you doing the talking for me" and the youthful grin appeared again, "No really, it just sort of happened: you saw, the coach stopped before I could do the 'stand and deliver' bit. You had them under control. The guy stuck his head out and I pointed my gun at him, he just opened the door and got out, the others did as well and stuffed their belongings in the sac. I didn't have to say a word", Jim saw the sparkle again; he knew it hadn't been like that, but he let it drop. "So, what'd we get?" Jim asked, "Couple of purses, some necklaces and some gold bracelets. I think they could be valuable, so what do we do?" replied Frank. "Keep on all night I guess, get as much distance as we can; they won't have anyone out after us till they get to the next town and they won't go that far. An hour for them to get to Brampton. Once there, at least an hour to get a band together; we've got two hours to get as far south as we can. If we keep going till morning at least, we can stop, quickly eat, share out the takings and continue". "Sounds good" replied Frank. Once more lost in their individual thoughts, they continued through the night.

Chapter 8 -The ring

Sarah sat as the coach continued its jerking, bumping ride. It didn't seem to matter, nothing seemed to be able to jog it from her mind, that stare. It had been like he'd been looking into her soul, it had felt like that. She'd felt it through her skin, under her clothes, as if those eyes had been boring holes into her mind, reading it. He hadn't said a word. Somehow it had been as if he'd held a spell over them. She was going over it in her head, from seeing her father's head stick out of the window, to the shot's fired in the forest as they had left. They'd all jumped at that. But going through it, no one had uttered a word. She had felt safe somehow, she couldn't explain, like she'd been laid bare and it had almost felt comfortable. His gesture, giving back the ring, her ring, the ring that could now, would now, eventually find its way to her hand.

It wasn't an incredibly valuable ring though the ruby stone was worth quite a lot. It was the story behind that ring that made it important. Sarah had never seen her aunt as broken as she had just then, when she thought she'd lost the ring. Her aunt, well that was how she saw her; she wasn't her mother, her mother had died before, when she'd been young; she still had memories of her, but they intermingled with those of her aunt, tucking her in at night, kissing her, playing with her, closer to her than a stepmother, so she called her aunt. She'd explained she felt more a blood relation than a relation by marriage, so she called her aunt. She was a tough woman, she'd known her Dad all his life, had been best friends with her mum. It was her ??mother's?? ring in the first place, passed on when he remarried. Another reason auntie had felt sentimental,. She looked over the events and her thoughts returned to the present. She'd put back the ring. When they'd got back in, James had got over the shock, sort of, he didn't know how to feel, angry at being robbed, grateful at having the ring back. He made sure he got in next to her aunt, Natasha; how he still loved her, she somehow also kept a connection to his first wife. That ring was the only thing they had left of hers. He took her hand and looked into her eyes. She smiled sadly back. "It was only jewellery; I don't suppose there was that much in your purses". She managed to look on the bright side: she still had the ring. There was no reply. She remembered the first time Anna had shown her the ring; she'd already known the story. The two of them had been best friends. She'd been closer to James from the start, a bit of a tomboy, always ready to start a fight with him. She hadn't bowed to his male dominance, back then or now. But Anna had been the dainty one; she'd never known when things changed between them; it was around the time they were discovering about the opposite sex. She'd gone crazy when she'd seen how he'd looked at her and her at him; she remembered feeling left out, then she had been left out and she'd been furious at first. Then James's mother had found her in the library, on her own, reading. She'd understood straight away, she'd taken her straight down to the kitchens and getting the cook to get out some biscuits, explained a bit about boys and girls. It had intrigued her. She'd offered to take Natasha with her on her next trip to London.

There she'd met boys of her own, she got invited to all the dances, and had made a life for herself. She'd enjoyed the boys and the parties so much, somewhere along the line, she'd forgotten to marry any of them. She'd opened a florist's shop, borrowing the capital from James's family and always kept in contact with them. Every year she'd waited for news of them as they had been married only a year after she'd left. It was 10 years later that the fateful news had arrived that Anna had died. She returned as soon as she'd been able to, leaving her shop in the hands of her very capable assistant,. James had been distraught. She'd stayed the whole year before she'd felt she had to get back to the shop. She'd paid back James's Mum for the loan and now it was her

livelihood. James eventually started returning to the world, his family had links in politics, and he put himself back into his work. They saw each other from time to time for a while. But that had sort of tapered off. She'd met Sarah and got to know her in the year she'd spent there. It was when she came to London and Sarah had started helping in the shop, that she really spent time again with James; the three of them just seemed to rebound off each other and quickly James became an older version of who he'd been. The three of them had been almost like when she'd been a child, with Sarah looking so much like her mother; it had been such a good time and after 5 years, James had asked her to marry him. She'd refused at first but seeing how well they got on, she eventually asked him. Francis had gone to Oxford; he was becoming a scholar. He rarely visited, and she felt guilty she hadn't been able to create a bond with him. He was also so silent. Obviously, he had been affected by his mother's death, but he'd been so young, and quiet back then. Sarah had been loud, and it had been difficult to give equal amounts of time. James had shut himself inside himself, and Francis, she guessed, had too, though he'd never really come out of it. As she looked over at him, she saw he was already distant. Sarah, she remarked, she seemed a long way away too. She looked back at James who was still holding her hand. She said quietly, "Its like the spell is still there", he looked up, "what, what?", he stammered; he too had been in a cloud somewhere else. "Have you noticed, did you notice, we've just been robbed and during the robbery, and since, no-one's said a word, except me". James looked at her, then he turned and looked at the other two, "Hey", he shouted, "you two, we've just been robbed: you still there, cat's got your tongues?", Both Sarah and Francis blinked, turned their gaze to their father, Sarah blushed a bit, Francis had a smile covering his face, the glum look from before, had gone, his eyes were dancing, he almost couldn't sit still. "I know, wasn't it exciting, I was so scared when that gun was in my face" James jaw dropped. He hadn't seen his son that animated.....since.....he couldn't actually remember ever. He turned and looked at Sarah; she too had a glint in her eye. She wasn't wearing a grin though, her lips were narrow, not quite a smile. She didn't say anything. Just sat, eyes looking at his, but somehow, he felt as if she was looking through him. He turned back to Natasha, "We will have to give a description when we get to...", Natasha interrupted "we can only give a description of his clothes, we didn't see his face", "Those eye's" Sarah suddenly said, "those eye's, I could draw them, clear as day, still here" and she tapped a finger against her head. "Gone to the fairies, those two" James said, he thought to himself. He felt a tugging at his arm; he turned and saw the look in Natasha's eyes. "We can't give much, no voices, their clothes yes, horses yes. How much did you lose?" she changed the subject. "A few guineas, not that much and I doubt Francis over there who had the time of his life getting robbed, had much in his purse, did you son?" he asked. "Only my term's subscriptions, you gave me when we left, remember?" He did remember, quite a lot, but still, an affordable loss. Natasha was waving her finger under his nose. "Thank God for small mercies; imagine if we'd lost this? What on earth do you think made him return it?" she asked. He shook his head, "No idea why, and as you say, so quiet, no-one, not even the guards, no-one said anything.....magic", Natasha came back with a stern look, "I don't believe in that sort of stuff, you know that, but we must give a description best we can. We know we won't get it back, but it isn't the end of the world" She leaned forwards and turned to Francis: she wasn't going to lose this opportunity to talk to him, now he'd come out of his shell, "Thank you for being so gentlemanly, you didn't seem scared at all" she caressed his ego, "I was, I was shaking in my boots but" and he straightened himself up in his seat "a time of crisis doesn't mean manners have to go out the window" he replied. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the flash of a smile on James's face. 'I've been thinking about joining the army; at university everyone is talking about

it, join the cavalry is what I thought, but seeing down that gun barrel, I am thinking perhaps the navy” as he’d been talking, she’d seen that flash of a smile, turn downwards, “We have a long journey still ahead of us. We can talk about that at anytime, now your studies, how are you doing with them and what are you learning and what do you get up to in your spare time”. Although she sensed a sort of reluctance to talk about his private life, go back to the boring stuff, he started to reply. She didn’t turn her head, she listened but her mind was more on thinking about Sarah. Something had changed, she’d picked up something about the way they’d looked at each other, she didn’t believe in magic, she wasn’t really religious, she believed in herself and that people forge their own destiny, but, if she was right, Sarah had become infatuated by that thug, that robber who almost stole her ring, almost and she felt herself start to soften inside. Sarah had been right about those eyes though.

They had been going all night, the sky was starting to lighten, the sun wasn’t far from peaking its head over the horizon. Frank watched; it was different here, mountains behind him, the foothills only to obscure the view; they had reached what he assumed was the start of real England. The hills undulated before him, light slowly spreading though the different shaped fields, many growing crops from what he could see. He kicked into his horse and galloped up the hill climbing before him. He knew she was tired, he felt the sweat on his breeches, “just to the top, there you can rest” he whispered through the wind that was curling round then as the gallop continued. He was leaning forward now and stroked the mare on the neck,; she seemed to pick up just a touch, he thought; the top was almost upon them. Jim had reacted slowly, but he too galloped up. He seemed to be turning around behind him, Frank thought as he looked past his arm to check he was still there. He reached the top and bounced off. He walked down the side of the horse, stroking him; he got to the front and nuzzled into the horse’s nose, “I can hear a stream, we’ll walk down, and you can get a drink he whispered to the horse. He liked her, he was thinking about asking Jim if he wanted to sell him. He’d kept the pace through the night and though not as sturdy as the mountain horses he was used to, could she go, she’d practically flown through those trees. She had kept up all night. They had interchanged between walking, trotting and galloping, less of that towards the end.

Turning and patting the horse on the neck and the haunches, he checked each paw and fetlock: all seemed in order He reached for the sac that was tied to the saddle. *They’d stopped not long after that first gallop to rehouse the guns. They were now wrapped in the blanket attached to the back of the saddle. They’d agreed it would be a bit too conspicuous just hanging at their belts if anyone came across their path.*

Jim got the sac with the bread and tea, together with the kettle and he threw over his shoulder the skin with the water. They placed the stuff in a pile and the branches and twigs that Frank had placed over the back rug anticipating their stop as they gone through the last forest. He started arranging them and with some lint and the flint from the pistol, he quickly got smoke and then flames from little fire he started. Jim meanwhile hung the kettle of water over the flames on three metal rods he’d placed in a triangular fashion.

Once that was in process,, Frank walked both horse down to where he’d heard the stream. He’d tightened down a line the horses could be attached to. Grabbing the sac, he left the horses and walked back up to the fire. Frank opened the sac with the night’s takings and emptied the

contents onto the floor. He then placed himself on the floor. He got out his pipe, he filled it, lit it and lay back on the floor looking up at the sky as the light spread its way, merging and pushing back the darkness; the line merging the light with the darkness glowed thin but slowly and surely light won the battle, eventually the tip of fire crept over the distant horizon. He could feel the warmth that slowly washed over him. Jim had followed suit with the pipe but sat up, keeping an eye back the direction, they'd come. "You don't think they are on our tail still do you?" Frank asked. "Better safe than sorry" Neither of them had reached for the pile, sitting as if unnoticed, but on both their minds. "What do you do with the jewels?" Frank asked. "The gold we should melt down; I don't know about the rest of the jewellery. I had a fence, but not out here; they're pretty much useless unless we come across someone on the way, I could probably use them in America though, you know, something to get me started. It's what's in those purses that interests me." Neither of them had turned, to the pile. There was a sort of nervousness now, "Or we could continue this: you're a natural, without talking" and Jim shook his head in disbelief.

"You know, Jim", Frank uttered... he'd been thinking about it for the last few hours, now was the time to say it... "You're wrong, it's not me; I gave back a ring. It might have been worth a fair bit but the old woman, I saw it was breaking her heart, so I gave it back". Jim was staring at him in disbelief, you gave them back something you'd stolen?", he looked at Frank, "You're a strange one Frank, somehow. I have to admit, I was nervous of you when you came back round that wagon, you had a funny look in your eyes. I shot my guns partly in the excitement but also hoping you'd do the same, I didn't feel comfortable with you and loaded guns. I've been thinking about it since. I trust you somehow now". The air of suspicion they both had for each other dissipated, "What a crack though" and Jim beamed a grin. "Guess you're not for America either?". He asked.

Frank lifted his body from the soft green he felt under him, "Not my thing either, you know, going to London, it's just a visit, get away for a while, couple of years, it'll all have calmed down back home, head back later" he turned and looked back. The peaks were just visible on the other horizon that was now just coming into light. "It's my home; I guess its because I've got people there". He saw Jim's face crumble ever so slightly though he kept the grin, masking his disappointment. Frank had guessed he had no-one. If you decided you didn't want to go, I'd be happy of the company, but not robbing, for me now, I'm going straight. It was different from raiding: that you do as loud as you can, this was cold calculating, up close. I saw the pain not through eyes of fury but calculating eyes. I felt myself thinking through it. I don't think I've ever thought about it during a raid; it was just instinct, retribution sometimes, anger" and he looked deep in to Jim's eyes, trying to push a picture that would help him understand what he was feeling. He didn't want to look at the purses. The look on the man's face at the end, he now felt like just a common thief, picking a pocket on the street. In the heat of a raid, there was courage, energy, almost a sport. This felt wrong. Those green eyes still haunted him and that look, that final look, he still puzzled over it, drawn to it. Jim had now reached over and laid out the sac, his curiosity getting the better of him; he pulled open the drawstring on the first sac. Emptying the sac, gold sovereigns came pouring out, about 20 of them. Both sets of eyes widened: he immediately reached for the second. Following the same process, this time guineas poured out. What was not that much to the original owners, was more than these two could have imagined. They were both on their knees, now hovering over the coins glinting now as the first direct rays started to reach them. They looked down in shock, looked at each other and the turn of their mouths said it all: mouths open, and grinning, they jumped up and Jim linked arms with Frank and

started dancing the jig. Frank, unable to help himself, joined in, all other thoughts for the moment dissipated with the last of the early morning mist. After a few minutes of the jubilation, Jim let go of Frank and on his knees started separating it into 2 piles, "one for you, one for me", he continued slowly with the process, taking in every moment savouring it. In the end, there were two equal piles. He put one back into one purse and the other into the other purse, and he passed it to Frank, "Still want to stay here? With this, we could get a good start out there". Frank had been standing, left with a weight, a happy one, but still a weight on his mind.

He'd never seen anyone with that much, gold "How much would you want for the horse and the guns?". Jim looked back, "I've seen how you like them; already thought about it. You let me deal with the jewels, and you keep the horse and the pistols; the scarf and the hat are gift's". Frank opened his palm, spat in it and put it out in front of him "A deal", that was one weight off his mind. Frank tied the purse to his belt. Steam had been coming out of the kettle a short while unnoticed till Jim turned, took it off the fire and dropped some of the leaves in, then placed it on the ground. It was later, while they were drinking their tea, that Jim's face suddenly changed colour, he glanced back the way they'd come. "For that much, they won't stop searching. We'd better get going". The inner voice speaking aloud was fear and was enough for Frank. He agreed. Within 10 minutes, they were packed up, they were on their horses and in a zigzag way heading for Penrith. They eventually came to a point where they started travelling on main roads; hiding, they had concluded, especially at this distance from the robbery, would create more suspicion. They continued like this over the next few days, sometimes staying at inns along the way, sometimes preferring to stay rough and outside.

In the first inn they went into, they had managed to change a gold sovereign; that would be enough for the next few weeks. They knew the lookout would be for anyone using gold sovereigns, they were rare. They left that town at night and kept going. They had needed smaller coins to keep away suspicion. Jim had suggested they take their time, they'd headed east for a while then south. Jim's logic was if they left with no obvious direction, they would be harder to find so they'd changed direction each day and finally headed south. Jim had more experience so Frank went along with it.

They finally arrived in Penrith a week after the robbery. In amongst the crowd. Frank felt more at ease. It was here, that he realised how much a hat like his was in style, almost half the men were wearing a hat, resembling his. Leaving their horses in the stabling yard, they paid a stable lad generously to look after the horses and with their clobber, booked into the nearest Inn.

Neither felt like they wanted a rest, both quite excited, so they walked up and down the main street. Looking in shop windows, Frank bought some tobacco and a pouch for Jim. They separated and agreed to meet at the inn later for an ale.

Frank found a crowd around the town square; it was market day. He wandered around feeling dandy in his hat. He smiled at the serving girls who smiled back, and one even curtsied to him which had turned him red face, that had got giggles going. The bravado he'd had when back at home had gone here, he was constantly aware that he was wanted for two different crimes. He grinned to himself when he thought about the robbery: when was it he'd decided to try and do it without using his voice? He guessed it had been when the old man had stepped out of the carriage. The thing that he was still astonished about was how infectious that had ended up. No-one had said a word during the whole event. His head was high, He was sure the warrant for the

horse hadn't got this far. He also was sure, what description could they give, his height, his eyes and his clothes. No different from any one else around really. The first thing anyone would have said was about the English accent. That was what they were looking for, he was tempted a few times just to get up early and leave Jim on his own, but each time he'd felt for him, he'd get caught before long without him and he'd found he was actually growing fond of Jim. Perhaps it was a sort of replacement for Billy, he thought about him more these past days, He still felt an urge to get as far south as quickly as possible though. He thought he'd check out the prices for the coach to London from here and when it left.

He made his way to the stagecoach inn. It was a large two- story building, white walls and black oak beams. Through the centre was the arch for the carriages to go through and he guessed the stables were in the back. He made his way through the huge ornately gilded oak doors. It was nice and cool in here he thought. He saw a group of people waiting at the desk he assumed was for information about the coaches: he approached the group. Their backs were to him. He heard them talking, they seemed to be explaining that they had been robbed.

One of the group turned around, the lady wearing a black cloak over agreen dress, his eyes came up and.....he got caught by those green eye's again.

Chapter 9 - Trapped

He didn't know how long they'd been staring at each other but when sensible thought came back to him, his first reaction was to turn and run. Having his pipe in his mouth was the only thing he could think of as to why his mouth wasn't agape. What were they doing here? He caught himself, he forced his legs to continue forward. Inside he heard a voice screaming, "run, run".

As he got closer to the group, their eyes hadn't broken contact, He was amazed at how controlled his voice sounded. "Is this where we book for the coach to London?", he doffed his hat. The lady in front, visibly quivered, their gaze felt like it had merged, everything outside was blurred, there were sounds but inaudible. "eeeeeehhhhrrrrr, yes" was all she got out, not blinking or taking her eyes off him. He felt like just putting his hands out and waiting for the handcuff's. He knew she knew, she had to know, how did she know?

Natasha stood by James's side, while he discussed their journey and the robbery, the reason why they had no money: normally, however, it would be paid the other end. He had a letter guaranteeing payment, Natasha glanced over her shoulder as she heard Sarah's voice, and the blunt reply which was a bit out of place. All she saw was a stranger, locked in eye contact with her daughter, which was how she felt about her now. "Can I help you young man?" she asked. That broke the contact. Sarah blushed and looked down to the floor. Frank turned; he could feel guilt was written on his face. The woman looked at him sternly; she put out a hand after having looked him up and down, her face grimacing slightly but returning to just stern, so quick he almost missed it. "Natasha ????????", and whom may I be addressing?". "ehhrm, errrr, Frank, Frank Dodds, at your service" and he as daintily as he could he took her hand. He bowed slightly and awkwardly he knew he was stammering. "eehrr, your daughter is very beautiful," he added to try and cover up. That brought an awkward smile to her face, "Is it your business to introduce yourself to every woman that catches your eye?". He too blushed now, standing up from the bow which he had

forgotten to do. Feeling his cheeks reddening, he couldn't help but feel attacked and that gave him some heat under his collar, "Excuse me madam, I am here to find out about the next coach to London, I simply asked your daughter if this was the right place". He was now standing straight, he had some pride.

It was now the turn for Natasha to blush: had she read this wrong? It had for a second felt like She knew this gentleman; her question had been a move to make things awkward. She felt put aback by his solid reply; he seemed like a gentleman, he wasn't dressed like one, but he had an air about him, a certain confidence. "I apologise", she found her humility. "You know what it's like with, as you say, beautiful daughter, traipsing round the country; how many times I have had to reprimand some of their forwardness". Frank felt stronger now, he glanced to his side and Sarah, head still bowed was peaking up at him. She wasn't shy like most girls he knew in the way they would react cockishly, and fake shyness. She just kept that face; he couldn't read it now. He turned back to Natasha. "Apology accepted. I assume this is the desk for the coaches". And he put on his biggest smile, somehow inside he had found how improbable this moment was and found the humour; he used that to push away the fear. "We are staying here in the inn tonight; our coach leaves in the morning. I insist you join us for dinner, as recompense for my rudeness". Frank was stunned, shocked, hopeful and lost, all at the same time. There was nothing he could do to stop what felt like the blood draining from his face. In a stammering voice again "Ehrrr I'd love to". He was about to say that he was with someone, when he realised how bad an idea that would be. "About 8.00 this evening sound good?". Frank just nodded, "I'll come back later for the information I seek. Sounds complicated, your situation. I wish you the best of luck, and. trying not to make it too obvious, he backed out as quickly as his feet would allow him. Once outside the door, he turned, on his heels, and sped off down the hill towards his inn. All thought of being careful and watchful gone, he was going to pack his stuff up and go, even if Jim hadn't got back. When he did, he'd just find an empty bed. As he ran, he started to run out of breath and slowed down, his heart pumping. A flash of those green eyes popped, flashed by in his subconscious; he wasn't really aware of it except that he slowed to a walk: something was fighting the urge to run. By the time he reached the inn, he was just at a brisk walk and instead of going to his room, he went to the bar. He needed something to calm his nerves, something strong and he ordered a whisky. He then sat there, on his own, trying to think this through logically. He got no-where that way. Logic whichever way he turned, it was in favour of getting the hell out of there. Something inside though, for some strange reason, he wanted to stay. That was where he got to when he heard the cry from behind him, "I'll have whatever he's drinking". Jim had just walked in. He came and took the bench opposite Frank and, seeing his face, immediately started scanning the room> His eyebrows had lowered, "What is it?" he leaned in conspiratorially. Frank just glanced up and his head went down, "How'd you do" he asked, uninterested in the answer and his gaze returned to the table. Jim saw the barman coming and started fishing in his purse. He placed a coin in the barman's hand after he'd put the glass on the table. Jim had talked to the barman earlier, joked with him, trying to suss him out. Normally this far out of the centre of town, he knew you'd find those willing to do a bit of under- the- table negotiation. He thought he'd found the right guy; the barman investigated his palm, an eyebrow raised at the side. Jim stayed astride the bench, looking up at the barman's face for the reaction. It was a small risk, unlikely the story had got this far, either the guy would, or he wouldn't. Frank sensed something in the pause that caused him to look up and he saw the barman still looking into his palm. Frank realised what Jim was up to, his shoulders

sank, too late. "How, long you planning on staying sirs?", "That depends very much on you, my good sir" he replied. Frank was almost banging his head on the table. The barman turned and looked at Frank; he seemed to spend a lot of time looking at him, but he eventually turned back to Jim, "We can talk privately upstairs, if my good sirs would like", Throughout the whole process the barman's face hadn't changed apart from the nudge with the eyebrow, Jim noted to his relief. Frank butted in here, "Errmm if our good sir wouldn't mind I have to have a word with my colleague first." The barman nodded, placing the coin back on the table next to Jim who quickly placed his hand over the gold coin sitting there. "When you're ready, just give me the nod" the barman said before turning, still with that fixed glum expression carved in his face, and headed off behind the bar again.

Jim looked perplexed as he swung his other foot over the bench and leaned closer to Frank. He was very aware of the look of panic that was spreading across his face. "What the hell happened? You look like death himself is chasing you". "There, here" he blurted out "I bumped into them, in the coaching inn. I've been invited to dinner with them. I can't go!!". Jim leaned forwards even further, he grabbed a lapel and pulled Frank forwards, "Who's here? You're not making sense". Leaning forwards further than he'd been pulled, he uttered in a whisper "the people we robbed". Jim froze except for his eyes: like a snake, he took in the room, eyes darting left and right. His hand moved the coin from the table into his hand; "Here, where?" "Not here; here, in the coaching inn". Jim sat back, his hand wrapped around the glass in front of him and he downed it: his face shuddered as the fire hit just below the throat; he breathed out whiskey breath. He closed his eyes and stayed like that for a few minutes. Frank watched his face like an eager schoolboy, waiting for words of wisdom from the wise one. He was that lost. Eyes still closed, he asked "you've been invited to dine with them? You mean you spoke to them?". His eyes blinked open, face stern but eyes full of disbelief. Frank told him the story. Jim listened carefully, intently, silently and motionless. From the start to the end he was caught up in the complete impossibility of the whole thing. The first thing he asked when Frank sat back was "You're not pulling my leg?". Frank shook his head, and watched the reaction from Jim's face, hoping expectantly for a look of inspiration, a way out of this. Eventually Jim looked at him, "Only one thing to do". "Run" exclaimed Frank. Jim shook his head. "You have to go, to dine with them". Frank, dumbstruck, just stared. He'd searched, but found not one reason for going. Jim's elbow slipped forwards, "Think about it, if you run, they'll get suspicious and if your right, it sounds like this Sarah already has guessed, possibly even that Natasha woman, and now they know what you look like.....buuuut, if you go, won't that show you couldn't be? If you had been, you'd have run", he finished with a smile. "You'll have to bluff your way out of this one. I saw how you held your nerve. If anyone can pull this one off, it's you". "But, but but, I'll be putting my head in a noose; running, I'd at least have a chance of escape. Now if you", Jim forcefully butted in here, "Eeerrm, not me, you are in this mess, I'm just a southerner on his way to Portsmouth. I'll give you my advice, you choose. But me, I don't know you" and sitting back in his chair, he grinned, "Don't look so shocked; of course I'll be by your side or behind you. Now how about this deal I've got going, OK, here. OK, they may be reporting it, but it won't get out till tomorrow and.....". He thought of a snag. If the barman did give them up, a horse could be sent faster, and they'd be waiting to nab him in London; that wouldn't be nice, He winced, he hadn't thought that far ahead. "Ok, we'll say we met a couple on the road, they paid us for the horse's, they were desperate. They gave us the coin". Frank was thinking, he knew it

wasn't his thing, ohh why wasn't Billy around when you needed him?. He looked at Jim; he was starting to realise how canny he was: his argument about going for dinner was good; why hadn't I thought of it? He was happy in a scared sort of way at that logic. "Ok, sounds good". Jim nodded over to the barman. He led the way, up and along the corridor till they got to their room. Jim had the key and undid the lock.

This time the barman followed them in. The room was much like the outsides, white uneven walls with dark beams, holding it all together. There were two beds, one either side of the room against opposite walls. Frank and Jim walked in between the beds and sat next to each other on one bed and the barman came in and sat opposite on the other. "Ok, what's the story?" he started. Jim told the story they'd agreed on. Once again the barman's eyebrow was the only thing to show there was someone living in the shell facing them. It was at the end of the tale. "Now, let me tell you a story" he said, "I've only been listening to this tale out of respect for him", and he nodded at Frank. A look like a child who had just been smacked for the first time came over Jimmy's face, astonished, he'd been the one who was doing the negotiations, he felt a bit put out, but for the good of the group he bit his tongue. The barman continued, "I came from further north, I heard tell of the stories of the Reivers. I grew up close enough to recognise one". The word Reivers had brought Frank fully back. His face grew tighter: he did not know this man. Jim turned and looked at him. He glanced back and shrugged his shoulder, he had sensed a sort of admiration in the voice when he talked about the Reivers, so, then leaning forwards, he said, trying to look ferocious but calm. "Go an, tell your story, I'm not saying I am and I'm not saying I'm not, but I'm not a man to be crossed". His stare was as close as he could get it to that on Jim that night a week ago. The barman's eyes widened but he kept that glum uncaring look to his face. His tone changed though; suddenly there was life in the voice. "Normally, the riders on the wagons put up in here, cheaper. Well, a few nights back, there was this elder driver and a new guard, they drank themselves silly. The tale they told was of two highway men that robbed an aristo family, jewels, gold sovereigns and a ring, The story went that it was done under a magic spell of silence; not one words was said by the robbers neither by the family, nor the guards. None of them seem to have an answer as to why; they just didn't say anything. Seems they scared the wits out of them, took everything they had, and then gave back the most valuable thing, a ruby ring. They then disappeared in an explosion in the forest with a scream that would wake the hounds of hell. The stories going round are that it must have been some wizards; now whether it was wizards or not, we have been told to keep on the lookout for gold sovereigns and guinea's, just like that one you showed me". He sat back now: "That tale you told me, sound nowhere as good as the one I just told you, now does it? In fact, if half the story is true, I'd clap the men that did that on the back, not in public mind, but privately, like in a room like this, I would" and a smile spread across his face, The whole grumpy appearance was gone; his eyes started to sparkle.

Frank raised the sides of his mouth, "Yours does seem to have more imagination", he too relaxed, he put out his hand, "Frank, Frank Dodds, from the reiver clan Dodd. Privileged to meet you". The man practically fell to his knees taking his hand. He shook it ferociously. "For some reason, we never know why, the reivers attacked all our neighbours, frequently, but they never touched ours. It backfired in the end though, we ended up having to leave because of it: people started thinking we were working with the reivers. It was the right time to go though. We now own this inn. The other families from back there have all gone. I went back for a look a few years back, you know, out of curiosity".

Frank listened. Jim tried to but wanted to get the business done; all well and good but he was from down south, none of this meant anything to him. He did manage to keep the bored look off his face, though.

"My name's Michael by the way, don't worry, your story's safe with me", he turned to Jim, "I can give you ?????? for one sovereign. I might be able to change two but if times get difficult soon, I'll be out of pocket". He was dealing with Jim. Frank sat back, leaning against the wall behind him. He was trying to recall, the story of Michael was ringing a bell, some story his Dad used to tell. Then it came back to him, "Do you have an older sister?" he asked. Michael turned back with a look of curiosity, "I do....." "She'd be about...", and he thought about his Dad's age, "...50 now?". Michael concentrated on Frank now, a smile had spread across his face. "The next time you see her, you can thank her for being the reason your farm was spared". He tried to bring back the name, "Rose, was her name Rose?". Michael now nodded agape, "how do you know?". "As I said, ask her; she'll tell you". He remembered being told that story; it took him back all those years to being a bairn in front of the fire. Sam had been there, but Billy was still a babe. He remembered those days; his Dad had told many stories back then. He realised thinking about it, that he had stopped telling those tales a while back now.

He listened, sort of, as Jim worked out the deal. He trusted him now, to a certain point. He looked out of the window and noticed the position of the sun, "What time is it? I've got to get ready for dinner". Jim wasn't taking any notice, he was absorbed in the negotiation, "He's got a date with death, in the coach inn, tonight at 8.00. Michael looked puzzled. Frank only nodded when he saw the questioning gaze thrown in his direction. His face was becoming glum again now. "You got the right clothes?" he asked "For the coach inn, it's not ordinary gear; you need to be a bit smart. Frank looked at Jim who didn't even lift his head, he was scratching numbers in the side of the bed, counting. "Please come with me sir, better get back into our parts. I think I have just the thing for you. Later, Jim, well work this out OK?". Leading the way, Frank stepped in behind.

The clock in the hallway, outside the dining room, was just chiming 8.00, when Frank walked in; he felt odd, having been forced to have a bath. Michael had then shaved him, He'd let slip who he was eating with and Michael offered to cut his throat there and then if he liked. Frank had explained about the eyes, that look. Michael had just nodded, to himself he uttered, "Women be the death of us all" though Frank heard and winced which left a tiny cut that Michael didn't apologise for; the other two yes. He'd been dressed in a white shirt that had been pressed, he'd only ever done that as a kid on Sundays. It felt tight about his neck, especially with the tie Michael had made him wear with it. A black pair of breeches, though he kept his boots. Michael had grudgingly given him permission to wear his hat. He had to point out that everyone was wearing one in town; he'd seen with his own eye's. "Your funeral" had been the reply. Now, going in through those same oak doors, he regretted it and removed it. He kept asking himself why he was doing this: he really was putting his head in the noose. He handed his hat and cloak in and had been pointed to the dining room. He caught a glimpse of himself in a looking glass; he had refused to wear those frills down the front, too poncy, but there again, Michael had gotten away with it. He raised his hand and took a handful of the lace and felt like just tearing it off when he heard the voice; there was a quaver in it as it called out "Mr Dodds?", looking away from the mirror and releasing the ruffles down his front, he turned to see her standing there. framed by the arched

wooden doorway, the lit dining room behind. He approached her; that look was gone, and it was replaced by a smile which lit up her face, he thought. He didn't feel nervous; he just felt suddenly at ease. She looked at him and, he felt that same strange pull: he wanted to just reach out and touch her, make sure she was real. She broke the gaze this time. She turned and started walking towards the table behind her. He immediately recognised them. He felt a sweat under his collar, the urge to dig a finger in and pull it off was almost irresistible but he smiled. James stood from his place first, "We didn't meet in the coach office" he reached out his hand, "James; Natasha explained the mix-up. I hope you weren't offended." Frank reached out and took the hand "there was no offence to be taken; I completely understand" and he glanced at Sarah who had now taken her place, and then turned to Natasha, and bowed. He admired this woman, strong and independent, defiant. That was when he realised the word for Sarah's look: satisfied but defiant. A waiter had turned up and pulled a chair out for Frank. This was turning out to be a day of many firsts. Before he sat down though, he turned to the young chivalrous gentleman, as he remembered. Francis stood up, hand out "Francis, I hear you might be travelling with us to London". Frank couldn't help his gulp at that moment. He hadn't had time to think about it, but it did seem the obvious conclusion based on what he'd been asking for. Inside he groaned, on the outside he beamed. He took the hand, "Frank, We'll have to see, I never got to make my enquiries", he grinned down the table to James, a smile returned. He was loving his brother Billy these past few days. Billy had often come home from his private learning and played the fool, using words and phrases he'd picked up. He'd always put on that posh accent of his. He'd come home and do a little play, like some prince or merchant, sometimes a soldier. Frank had loved them and had sometimes even joined in. How much he was thinking of those moments now. Sitting down, he looked down the table: there were rows of knives, forks and spoons; he had no idea. He looked up; they were all looking at him; it was almost the same as when he'd ridden off that night, the expressions were different but those faces, he was sure he'd have nightmares about this, if he lived through it. "We can ask the waiter about booking" and he started giving details of the fare and the times and the stops along the way, Frank followed with his eyes, but he was still trying to work out where to start with the knives and forks. He assumed the spoons were for afters. When James stopped talking, Frank just nodded. He didn't want to think about it, the nightmare. Francis was the next to speak, "You heard about us getting robbed in the hallway didn't you". He was glad to have the story that was now the current gossip under his belt; he knew what he should know and what he shouldn't. "I did hear some gossip about it, sounded dreadful. hHe was enjoying this role more and more, as he felt himself easing into it. A glass of wine was poured for them all. He remembered his last taste of wine, so he decided to wait. Francis started recounting the story; he was at the point where he'd got out when the first course arrived. Soup. Now he knew that wasn't knife and fork stuff though it did look thick enough to eat with a fork, he suddenly felt himself very hungry. The aromas floating off were new, almost sweet. He leaned forwards to look at the array of spoon's: he just hung there for a moment. It wasn't until he felt the tap on his foot that he moved. He glanced over; she wasn't looking at him but had picked up the top spoon, rounder than the oval one. Like the rest that were the same shape but of different sizes. She was showing him, she was helping him out, he felt for his spoon, found it and at this point looked round the table. He just caught Natasha lowering her head suspiciously; she'd been watching him, he'd have to be careful here. She was the one to watch out for. Why?, He guessed Sarah knew, or thought she knew, something; she was on his side now, though. The boy and the father seemed as if they were only half there. There was suspicion of some sort with

Natasha, but the other two, didn't seem to have noticed anything. He did watch them eat though. Back home, you'd grab the bowl and scoop towards you. Here they were scooping away, then delicately blowing and then eating. he followed the same process. It was only after a bit, after another tap on his shoe, that he noticed the little finger was always sticking up in the air. He had no idea what was the purpose but he'd watched and held the spoon more like a pen. He had done some studies and that was what it felt like. Not full fisted like at home. Delicate: he felt his stomach rumbling and had an urge to change back to his old ways, but she held on, the soup was cold by the time he'd got to the bottom. Bigger spoons and scoop into the mouth, not away; it was still hot till the end that way, but this was toff and, he was learning new things. He realised, knife and fork were going to be a nightmare. The meal carried on like this, with talk about the great fire. Francis actually joined in at one point as well, asking if Frank had ever been in the navy or army. He denied knowledge of the army but relying on the story Jim had given him, he admitted he'd sold horses to them. It was true as well, and he did know about horses. Horse Trader was his trade, it had been agreed. Best stick as much to the truth as possible, less likely to get thrown Jim had said. The soup plates had been taken away and the main course had arrived, roast beef with potatoes and Yorkshire puddings, It was during this he'd taken his first sip of wine He had first taken a mouthful, he'd rushed it down with the food, hoping to kill the taste; he did this a few times till he felt that tapping at his foot again; this time she turned her head in his direction mouthing the words, "slowly". He tried to imagine what it must have looked like. Ok, he ate delicately like the others: once he'd finished a mouthful, chewing, and swallowed, he took a sip. He was waiting for that bite, that would make him wince. It never came; when he tried it again, the second sip seemed to be more tasteful, he almost liked it. He had by now almost finished the glass and before he knew it, the waiter passed and filled each of their glasses up. He was remembering how hard it had hit him last time: it wasn't like drinking ale. He was feeling more comfortable and decided, with Sarah on his side, he'd attack the mum; he felt his head start swimming a bit. "Natasha, that's an unusual name, where does it come from?" he asked. "Russia, my parents were from Russia; they had to flee when I was young, and we ended up in England". "Russian", Frank said, startled, that was a long way away. He'd remembered Billy once talking about countries in the world. "Cold, I've heard", That brought a smile to Natasha's face, she grinned, "Cold, we lived in a place called Siberia: winter cold, summers hot. There was a huge lake; when it froze which it did every year, the whole village came out and skated on it". "Skated, what's that?" "We had shoes made that had bits of wood running under them; on ice you slid, it was fun". Life seemed to sparkle with everything she said and Frank was mesmerised. She looked across to the other end of the table. Frank saw again that look between them, it was just for a moment, and Frank turned to James: What about you sir, may I ask what field you are in?". "Politics. I work for the city of Carlisle. That's why we had to visit there on our way; we now head back to London; Natasha has a flower shop she needs to look after, Francis here is headed back to Oxford", he turned to Francis then, "I must say, at this moment in time, we need more people involved in science, the advances we are making nowadays, that is where we need our men, I do hope you rethink your ideas about the service; you are free to do as you choose, I am just speaking from what, I now about as a politician," he had kindly eyes, Frank thought. The man was so calm in his demeanour, but he knew, with the standing he must have to have that much confidence, he bet there was fire in there somewhere. It just needed the moment. He remembered the look when he'd been angry a week back. "Actually, Father, I've been rethinking that: the moment I had to place that sac on the man's fingers, I was so close, if I jogged his fingers, I'd have been no more. I

remember his eyes: it was like looking in the eyes of death", Frank sensed the drama in his movements with his hands, "It gave me nightmares, the past two nights I've had them and, you're right, I am too young to die. I bow to your judgment, Father". Frank was surprised, that it didn't bring out the smile he'd expected; James's face remained fixed, caring, but not happy. Frank took another sip of the wine and turned to Sarah. He'd hardly had a chance to notice her though he'd been dying to gaze into her face. Now he felt relaxed and comfortable. He noticed the room moved in the background but that didn't matter. She (??) was focussed on her mouth now, that stayed fixed, "Are you going all the way to London or do you have duties elsewhere?", "I help Natasha out in the shop, have done for three years now," she turned and looked at her aunt, "I am of help aren't I?" she asked, a concerned look on her face. "You are a blessing in that shop; at my age, there won't be many more years I'll be able to run it". Frank wanted her to continue speaking but instead she asked where he was heading, "I was asked to come down and look at some ponies; there might also be a contract for the army, business, though, if I do get some time while there, I'd love to visit this shop. You'll have to give me its address". Sarah smiled a gentle smile, "it would be a pleasure". Everyone had finished their plate and they had been cleared away. "Perhaps, Frank would like to take a stroll for a pipe while we wait for desert". Frank felt a jolt up his spine. This wasn't usual, he thought, even for toffs. He nodded. James got a short bulbous pipe out of his pocket. Frank went to get his pipe out of his jacket that he'd left in the cloakroom. "Nice pipe", he commented as he saw Frank's, "From friends in the borders, typical pipe for up there" and he smiled at the thought. "Spent a lot of time up there?", "Brought up there, that's how I got to know horses", them reivers, what they don't know about horses, ain't worth knowing". "Hmmm", James made the sound as he drew in on his pipe. Frank had lit his and was enjoying the aroma as it floated passed his nose. "I noticed the way you and Sarah seem to be getting on. I thought it best if I ask your intentions", Frank coughed, a seemingly unending series of coughs. When he got his breath back, he looked James in the face, "Honestly sire, I have no idea what my intentions towards your daughter are, Only this morning, I didn't know she existed. I admit I feel like I've been swept away by an angel, but, I have no idea about her feelings and wish to make no false promises". James seemed pleased at the response. He made no comment and Frank breathed a sigh of relief: he'd been waiting for an accusation of being a highwayman. If he hadn't been so scared, he'd have burst out laughing. How the hell had he gotten himself into this mess? "I respect your honesty and hope you can allow a father to show his protective instincts towards his daughter". This man was surely a politician thought Frank, he'd been surprised at his honesty. They went in together and took their seats, Sarah was looking daggers at her Dad now. Frank, sitting next to her, again could feel the strains of curiosity coming from her. Aimed not at him but at her Dad, she'd guessed his question.

Sarah felt encroached on; she hoped her father hadn't said anything out of the ordinary: she knew him though: he may seem miles away, but he spotted everything, she was sure, she asked herself the question then: what did she feel? She hadn't asked herself that question, all she remembered now as she thought about it, was, was like lightning had struck, she couldn't describe it, like she'd been snatched from who she was to, who she was now and it was different; she looked over at Frank; he was listening to Natasha talk about her first time in London. She studied his face: there was a roughness to the outline, the nose, no hairs sticking out, he'd had a shave before coming out. As she got caught up in her study, she didn't notice him turning his head. Her eyes caught his,

they were smouldering, she could see he was caught by her, she had no idea why. It was as if those eyes were going to reach out and grab her: she suddenly saw those same eyes from the week before, she felt that sudden cold, shoot up her spine, it wasn't uncomfortable, smooth but it did make her shiver. She hadn't realised her face change, but for a second she was taken aback, as she was aware of the other

That look, it took away the haziness he'd been feeling recently. He was back. The pudding arrived with the waiter asking what digestives would be required. James ordered 2 brandy's. Back from his cloud, a thought struck him: was James trying to get him drunk? Perhaps he was that crafty after all. "Hoping to see the true cut of his jib": that was a saying Billy had gone through a phase with. Now he understood the meaning. It almost had seemed to be working till a second ago. He realised he'd have to be more aware; there were things he'd probably missed. Now he started thinking, that look from Sarah: she knew, or thought she knew, or at least she believed he was that robber. Why wasn't she screaming for a guard? He was sitting back now, he'd turned sideways in his chair to take her in. He saw James out of the corner of his eye. He was watching him. He saw what he, Frank, hadn't seen in his daughter. He'd seen men like him a dozen times to be sure. He wondered if he was even craftier than that. Did he have suspicions about who he really was.

He turned to listen to Natasha. She was finishing her story about a client in her shop. He'd seen no resemblance in the faces of the two women, not in the eyes, gestures, hair or even skin colour, though what that had to do with anything, he didn't know. It was just then, as he'd turned from Sarah's face, white almost pale, to Natasha's face, darker and the shapes were so different; he couldn't make anything similar, nose, ears, mouth, even Natasha's eyes seemed narrower.

He could feel she had made the connection straight away, she had a feeling, though that was all; she wouldn't take a risk unless she had more proof. What would she do then? He had no doubt, she would turn him in, her duty. He'd have to make sure he didn't give them any proof.

Francis, even though he had thrown odd glances throughout the night, which he put down to ,his being a stranger at the table, he didn't see him having the slightest inkling about either the robbery or... Or what: what he still didn't really know was what it was that he was feeling, he'd answered that question in one way while having the pipe earlier.

They had all finished their dessert and Frank was enjoying his brandy. It was smooth, not like the fire water in the local ale house, if they'd had any. The waiter that had first served them, appeared next to James and whispered in his ear. He seemed to fall into deep thought for a moment, then he nodded, and the waiter parted. "It seems, and I should have thought about it earlier, with us 4 on the coach, there is little room left, if you wanted to squeeze in, we could accommodate you. Frank almost breathed out a sigh of relief, like a heavy weight being lifted off his shoulders, he replied, "I thank you and your family for your incredible hospitality, I really don't want to encroach on your company any more than I have to. Please, I am not in a hurry and can catch the coach a week later". James looked back across. Frank felt there was a slight change in his posture, it was almost as if he felt what Frank himself felt, relief. It was Francis that surprisingly broke the vacuum that now spread through the guests, as if the connection had been cut, the fumes of curiosity had

been doused by fate. "You will stay in contact though won't you. When I visit in London when term finishes, it would be good to see you again". Frank let his smile cover his face easily, perhaps the brandy, perhaps being released from the thought of spending the next days, under this constant strain. "Of course, if you", he turned to Sarah "would be kind enough to give me details of the shops address, I'd love to pay a visit some time". Francis smiled and returned his gaze to the tablecloth. Frank stood up now. He turned to his right, Natasha offered her hand. He took it and gave a nod, "Thank you Ma'am; your apology was paid twice over for the wonderful evening I've had, Thank you". He reached across the table: Francis was brought back from his reverie. With stuttered movements he rose and took Frank's hand. Frank sensed a sort of shaking in that hand shake, the grip was feeble, like a woman's, Frank thought. He bowed his head slightly, Francis grinned at this and returned the bow. James had come around the table and standing next to Sarah now, he put an arm round her shoulders, Jovially, he reached out a hand. Frank took it, he could see the relief visibly now, the face looked more relaxed than he'd seen it "Very interesting to have met you sir" said Frank.

Unlike his son, this grip was firm. "You too, it would be very interesting to meet you again sometime, but I think", he was looking with steely eyes now, "it unlikely". The look stopped Frank in his tracks. There was a warning somewhere there. James kept hold of his hand a moment too long, staring straight at him. Frank realised this was the fire coming out, cold fire, something from deep within saying "Don't mess with me". Frank had made up his mind, he wasn't going to. A phrase had kept playing in his head about women being the death of him. He turned to Sarah, "I'll walk you out, I have to give you the address". Frank nodded, he turned and nodded farewell to the others and followed Sarah out. There was a glare from all three as he went, he almost ran. Sarah stopped at the counter and asked for a pen and some paper. The man behind the desk produced both. Leaning over, she started writing. Over her shoulder, Frank watched as she produced beautiful curls and waves as she wrote. When she turned and handed him the paper, he admired the words. "Should we step out for a minute? I'd like to see the stars". Frank gulped audibly, Sarah's lips curled up slightly at that and she lowered her head coyly. Together they slowly paced to the door, "I do love the stars and, I don't know why, but here I can see them a hundred times more clearly than in London". She led the way out of the door. Frank concentrated on her every word. He had nothing to say, he liked hearing the sound of her voice. Happily, she continued; he didn't look where they were going, just followed next to her. She was talking about the shop and some of the flowers. She did seem intelligent as she said the name of a flower or plant he guessed and then turning and looking at him, said something that sounded like complete gobble-di-gook. Their eyes met, it was a gently smile on her face now. "That is the Latin name for the plant" she added, it is what we have to learn, it helps with classing the plant and its origins, I know a few of the families now". "Sounds fascinating, especially from you" he couldn't help saying it though it sounded soft; he felt stupid after saying it. It took him a few seconds before he realised they had stopped. They were now standing facing each other, in the dark courtyard. She was now looking at him, the gentleness was slowly being replaced by the other look, "Please," She just lifted her finger to her lips, "sshhhh" she made through her lips. He stood looking, feeling like she was studying him, "I just want to know" she suddenly said softly through the silence. The next minute, she was glued to his lips, her head tilted slightly. Her eyes were closed, and he felt her taking his lips, pulling them, she had her hands placed each side of his face. It happened so fast, he had hardly had time to do anything, it had just been her. She broke off taking a deep breath; her mouth was

glistening now in the moonlight. Her eyes were like the tars and she wore an exhilarated look. He smiled, "and?" Without hesitation, she moved her whole-body forwards till he felt hers against his. His head in her hands, unknowingly he placed his hands on her hips and drew her in closer. This time, he felt her push her lips tightly against his, this time he closed his eyes as well and spots of light flashed in his eyelids: if he'd opened his eyes to find himself floating, he wouldn't have been surprised. This time it lasted longer, he had time to sense her perfume, the softness of her face against his, this time he felt her mouth open and the tip of her tongue brush his upper lip ever so slightly, but a spark shot through his body to his feet at that, unable to help it, his eyes flashed open. He felt her pull away from his hands, her face take a distance from his; those eyes stayed fixed on him, though, but she took another pace backwards. There was just an openness there on that face, till she dropped her eyes to the ground. He couldn't work out why but almost as if to herself, the word "yes" found its way to his ears, and before he knew it, she had turned her back and was heading into the inn, leaving him standing there, alone now except for the moon and the stars. Inside he felt warm, stunned but like he was floating on air. He started back to his inn and it wasn't till he got there that he realised he'd left behind his hat and cloak. It didn't matter. He walked in, over to the bar where Jim and Michael stood either side. Michael reached into a drawer under the bar, came back up and placed a coin in front of Jim, "OK, you win". Frank noticed, but it didn't register. "So, you got away with your life eh?". Frank just took a stool next to Jim and sat at the bar. Without being asked, a glass appeared before him, brandy again. He still felt the tip of her tongue, and that "yes" as she left; had that been meant for him or was she talking to herself? He wasn't sure, but he still heard that word wafting over to his ears. The gentleness seemed to caress him still. "Looks like we'd better call the doctor instead, this corpse is still moving". Frank heard but didn't want to break that moment, the cloud he was flying in. He reached for the glass and sipped: it was then the fire water hit his throat, that he jumped back, falling backwards off the stool, and the next he knew he was sitting on the floor, looking up at the 2 of them, tears rolling down the cheeks of Michael, Jim just guffawing. With the shock and the relief from the past week, he too burst into wails of laughter. It felt good. He explained how he was off the hook, there was no chance of ever meeting up again after that, He felt inside his breeches pocket and felt the paper she'd given him He wasn't going to tell about that. He described the dinner and told Jim how rank his wine was compared to what he'd drunk and turning to Michael, said his brandy didn't deserve the same name. There was cheer and into the wee hours of the morning the questions, and answers, continued.

Chapter 10 - Surprise

Frank woke with a heavy head. He could smell the vapours still coming from his breath. He dared not move it too much, "You still alive" he heard from the bed next to his. He just grunted. Daylight was now blaring in through the window. Eye's open, he felt pangs of pain where the light hit sensitive nerves and he winced and turned over to face the wall. Through that odour of evaporating spirits from his breath, he caught a waft of her scent, the perfume, and suddenly he was awake. It must be the shirt, for a split second, he felt her body squeezed against his again. He felt his body awake from the groin. He sat up. It was a week later, and he had put on the same shirt the night before. He had woken the same way each morning, unable to get the thoughts out of his head. He felt it was time to move on. Their coach left that afternoon and he was eager to get on it. They had arranged that they could tie their horses to the back. They would be travelling on their own, just the two of them till the first night where two others would be joining them.

Frank had never travelled in a coach and had been green when he heard about Billy travelling to Newcastle in class.

It was the same each morning: Jim and Frank came down the stairs holding their heads and Michael, was joking and joshing with the other clients. They had some breakfast which solidified the wobble in his stomach, and soon Frank was eager to get on. They'd bought some provisions for along the way and Frank was already imagining himself, sitting back lazily, smoking his pipe, watching the landscape of southern England roll past. A week and he'd be in London. He still had no plans whatsoever, free as a bird. Jim would leave him near Portsmouth. Frank glanced up at him sitting opposite him at the table. The night before was still swirling through his system and he looked a bit green at the gill's. "You alright" he asked? Jim just looked up. At that moment his eyes bulged, and Jim jumped up, he ran to the door and emptied his stomach onto the side walk. He took a few minutes to wipe away the strings still hanging there with his sleeve. Then he stood up straight, got hold of himself and turned back, his face red but the smile was back, "OK, better out than in, feeling lots better, how about an ale?" he asked Michael as he came back in. It wasn't a regular occurrence someone being sick outside in the morning, but it had happened. No-one turned an eye and his ale was placed on the bar. He picked it up and started draining the mug; he kept going. Now the room quietened. He lifted the mug from his lips pouring the last drips into his mouth and placed a few coins on the bar. He turned, faced the rest of the bar. His face was red as he slammed the jug down. Michael watched the smile now; he stopped pulling the pint he was on and watched. The colour started to drain, and almost simultaneously his smile lost its edge. The pale face then started turning green again, there was the jerk and Jim was on his legs out the door again. This time there was aloud guffawing throughout the bar. Even Frank joined in though half-heartedly. He felt empathy for Jim though he was managing to keep it down for the moment. Michael came over to Frank and sat down opposite him. He seemed to have attached himself to Frank, "you'd better move if you want to catch that coach" he said. I'll arrange for your stuff to get carried over there now", he motioned to the pile next to Frank. "It's OK, we can take that lot". "I have got to get going first to the stable and sort everything out there. I'll take my stuff, When Jim's ready, get him over to the carriage, I'll sort out the rest. And thanks, thanks for everything". Michael had seen how attached to the shirt Frank was, he'd made a gift of it in the drunk revelries of the night before. Michael just nodded. Over the week, Frank had noticed the gloom that had seemed a permanent feature of him had softened and there was more of a smile the past few days. "You look after yourself and don't forget to give my greetings to your sister" and he grinned. Michael had sort of worked it out and said, "You to your Dad as well" he took a more serious tone now, "That Jim, he's going to get you in trouble so watch for him, and in London watch out for pickpockets; your *inexperience/greenness(?)* is to obvious, you still look like you've come out of school. Remember it's a rough town. Now I would come to see you off but...", and he looked at the bar that was now filling with stall holders that had either sold their stock or were taking a break. "It's OK, I understand. I'll take your word as warning and take care". They shook hands and, throwing his kit over his shoulder, he realised how much stuff he'd picked up now along the way since leaving the cave empty handed. That now seemed so long ago.

Two hours later, they were trundling out of Penrith. Jim was cuddled up, holding his stomach. He'd made a pillow out of his jacket and had his feet up on the bench next to him. He would be out soon if the jarring of the coach didn't keep him awake. Frank was feeling good. He faced back the way they had come and had his pipe lit. He felt an easiness creeping in: this was style. As he sat there, he reminisced about this trip so far. He actually thought to himself that stealing that horse

had been the best things he'd done in a long time. Gail got a split second of a moment before the memory of her was covered with adventures he'd had since. The day passed; he watched Jim as he snored away now. Frank wasn't looking forward to him going. He'd thought about it and how, when he got to London, not knowing a soul, he had hoped he'd stay with him but he couldn't try and persuade him. America seemed to be the draw for many people nowadays.

They had been travelling for hours now. Dark was upon them and Jim had woken from his snoring. Frank was just sitting there, pipe still in mouth, contemplating the future. Jim had stretched and yawned, his eyes were still clearing, "You know what, you're in love". Frank started, "What, don't be so dumb", Jim just smiled back knowingly. "Think about it, tell me if it isn't true. Since the robbery, you've not been able to think about anything else". Frank defended himself: "Not true, I've been thinking about London". "What have you been thinking about about London?" Frank felt his face go red, "OK, florists shops, among other things" he admitted. "You get the picture, though don't you?". Frank had come to the same miserable conclusion earlier. His soul had been trapped: he couldn't stop hearing her faint "yes", and her smell wafted up his nostrils, causing cloudiness in his head. Her eyes haunted him in his sleep now. "Don't worry too much; it'll go in time. Depends on if you see her again, though". Frank listened as if wise words were being *put before* him. "Don't worry on that score; when I get to London, I'm going in the opposite direction to Charing Cross where ever that is". Jim hid his humour this time. He too lit his pipe. Frank then asked, "you ever been in love?", "Nahhh, you know, ok, there was this one woman. She was a baker: after my shift which was normally as the sun came up, I'd get my bread from her, and you know, we'll we'd chat for a while. I popped round there regularly like, and it wasn't just, you know, we talked. She talked about her dreams, I talked about how I was going to make it big in America, she listened like, you know. I was able to talk to her about, well you know, sad things. She always seemed to pick me up... Was seeing her till I had to leave". Frank was surprised. He had a sensitive streak to him, he thought, did Jim. He was seeing more and more sides to this man.

Frank noticed they had passed a few houses on the way, lights on inside. "We must be almost there, and he started getting his things that had somehow ended up being strewn across the seat. They got out, once they passed through the arches of the coach inn and the coach had stopped. Up to the front desk. They were informed their fellow passengers were in their rooms and would be down for dinner shortly, they were shown to their rooms. Once in their rooms, Jim unrolled his blankets and checked everything was still there. He was somehow certain something would be stolen; it was true, they were out of sight, with the saddles, on the roof. Everything was there. "Let's go meet our fellow passengers". Frank was ready. He got up and they traipsed down stairs. Jim walked into the dining room first. There were only 2 others, so he guessed they were them. He sauntered over, hand out to greet the handsome woman. Her partner seemed a bit young, perhaps her brother, he thought ? *Why?* His hand wasn't taken; they were both looking over his shoulder. He turned to look back, Frank stood, frozen in the doorway, face as pale as Jim had seen it. "How, how, what are you doing here". At first Jim just stood looking from Frank and then to the woman, "Sarah" he let out almost under his breath; she looked at him, responding to her name being called. He wiped his face with a groan. He looked up: "Give him a break" he whispered, in silent prayer.

It was the morning after leaving Penrith that Sarah was woken by Natasha. She looked so pale, that the doctor had been called. "I'm so sorry Auntie" she repeated several times. The doctor sat on the edge of the bed. Natasha waited by the door; the doctor had made it clear he wanted to give her a proper examination. "Please, Madam, this is a private situation between a doctor and his patient. If you would be so kind as to wait outside...". Natasha felt she'd been rapped on the knuckles and closed the door behind her. She waited in the corridor, though. It seemed a bit too coincidental. She was starting to have a bad feeling about this whole business, she didn't like it one bit. Since the robbery, things had been going wrong.*

The doctor was reading a note she'd written earlier. It read: *"Doctor, there is a Guinee in it for you if you follow the instructions to the word. I am to be declared unfit for travel. It isn't serious enough to engage assistance other than can be got here. If the treatment goes well, I will be fit for the next coach."*

She had written it in her best handwriting. The doctor read the letter and looking back, he nodded. He shook his head at her: "Now please turn over, I need to check your heart". Sarah knew he understood and had accepted the deal. She was now handing him the guinea. "Thank you", she mouthed to him. The doctor took out a piece of paper and his quill. He started writing: *"Are you in danger? do you need help?"*. She shook her head. *"Interfering parents?"*. She took the pen, *"Something like that,"* She looked up at the doctor, inspecting him as best she could. She decided she could trust him. She left it at that and handed back the pen and sat back in the bed. A few minutes had passed, and the doctor got up and winked back. He left the room, closing the door as quietly as possible to keep up the pretence. She heard the voices outside, especially that of her Auntie. She smiled: money well spent, she thought, as she heard the doctor refusing entry as she was asleep, and rest was what she needed most. She heard the voices trail off as they went further away. The doctor would do his job she was sure. She lay back now: that was the difficult part of the plan. Now she had a week to spend on her own which she wasn't really looking forwards to. This town really was very small.

There was a small window by the side of her bed; she could hear into the courtyard from there. When she heard the coach leave, it would be the sign that she could get up. "OK", she said quietly but firmly to herself, "what are you doing?", she answered herself with a shrug of her shoulder and a quick grin, "No idea". Then she grew serious with herself, she had been through this non-stop since that night. "You were robbed by highwaymen and you fell....." she had difficulty saying these words, not because she didn't want to, but because she wasn't sure, "...in love with his eyes, ...or was it the gallantry of handing back the ring?" She knew the answer: she had already been *smitten* by that time. She realised, from the moment he had *inspected the* carriage: she'd been on the dark side, the last rays of daylight hadn't reached that far into the carriage. Above that mask, his eyes had walked in and snatched her heart there and then, from that point she'd had no choice in the matter. For a whole week, she'd been haunted by those eyes, her insides had ached to see them again. Then she'd almost fainted that day when he'd walked in, she hadn't

answered him from shock: she'd been using all her energy to stay upright, which she accepted could have been shock. She'd fought it, she hadn't known what to do about it that first time, except that she'd tried to refuse it in a way; she'd hated the way it had felt, like her will had been snatched from her but as she looked back, somehow, she'd known she had no choice. That evening, after dinner, when she had kissed him, it had lifted her up, she'd been floating and a feeling inside had started stirring, feelings she didn't believe existed. As she'd walked away, she had a slight memory of saying something; it had been, though, as if she'd just needed to know. The eruption it had caused, she had been floating ever since. She'd had to find a way to see him. She just prayed he had taken the next carriage. He was a highwayman and.....she couldn't trust him: he'd probably been lying the whole time. Doubts and double doubts had been rushing through her mixing with the ecstasy. She'd come up with the plan on the coach; she still couldn't believe it had worked as she lay there alone in the small room. She heard commotion in the courtyard below. She stood, away from the window but close enough to see and not be seen, she hoped. They were climbing into the carriage. Her father and auntie, but where was Francis? As her aunt climbed in, she threw a glance in her direction. Suddenly her heart sank. The look on Natasha's face was filled with worry. She felt a cringe of guilt. She remedied that with thoughts of how she'd make it up to her: she'd work extra hard in the shop. Final bags were placed on the roof of the carriage and tied down. She could see her aunt hanging out of the window still looking up at her. She stepped backwards just in case. She lay down on the bed, now contemplating the week ahead. She'd get a rider to head back and make the reservations from here. He would be happy to see her. She thought about it, and any doubt she'd had as to his feelings were gone, that kiss, she'd seen his eyes. She'd secretly watched as he'd walked away. He had seemed in a daze: that was the plan, wasn't it? She now heard the shout from the driver, "yeeha" and the sounds of the wheels crunching on the gravel driveway. They were gone, she had a feeling of jumping up and squealing at the top of her voice. She was free.....

Eventually, she did her toiletries, and checked her look in the looking glass and was satisfied she was presentable. She remarked her smile, it was from ear to ear; she consciously tried to push her lips down and take on a serious look. She managed it, but the smile just sprung back. Full of joy, she left the room. She felt hungry now, so she headed down to have some breakfast. There, she got a shock: Francis was sitting there, eating. He looked up as she walked in, the beam across his face reached her, "I couldn't leave a lady in distress. I managed to persuade them it would be best if I stayed to mind for you. Look's like we fooled them". She wasn't sure how she felt about this: in a way she was looking forward to a week on her own. She had never had that, not completely, but she was also glad. The idea of the boredom had frightened her a bit. She wiped the uncertainty from her mind and rushed over, "I'm so glad you're....." A thought hit her, "Why aren't you surprised? I'm supposed to be ill, how did you know I was faking it?", she was being stern now... big sister. His face took on a sinister look, "I know", he grinned, "I know what your up to and...." He motioned her to sit down which she did. He leaned forward and conspiratorially whispered, "I've got to tell you something but not here, after breakfast, we can go for a walk. I'll tell you then".

That had sent questions flying through her head: what did he know, did he know something she didn't? From her experience with him, he was quiet but watchful. He did often know things that were going on that she didn't, he had a suspicious mind and being quiet meant no-one noticed him, but he kept his eyes open, she'd gathered over the years. If he hadn't been her brother, she'd

almost have called him sneaky, there was a dark side to him she knew but had always been too scared to try and tap into. Perhaps this week would be good for them, a time to get to know each other again. Since their mother had died, he'd been shut off, her Dad as well and it had been only Auntie that had been there to help her keep the darkness away.

They had finished breakfast and had gone out for a walk by the river that ran by the town. Now they were walking along the banks. There was a weeping willow half over the river and she decided to sit there. Up to now it had only been small talk. She wanted to get to the bottom of this, there was so much clogging her head at that moment. It might be good to change it. She sat and tapped the grass next to her. She noticed a couple of white swans, gliding gently down the river towards them. "Look" and she pointed. He had been quiet as usual while they had been walking. He glanced up as he sat down. A gentle smile came. "Swans, they are beautiful, so elegant" he commented.

She decided to jump straight in. "So, what is it you know?". "I have to ask you a couple of questions first if that's ok". She squinted at him, "Like, what sort?".

"The personal sort", he was now blushing. She smiled: it was a long time since she'd seen that from him. Over the past few years, he'd only been sultry and silent. She was finding out a lot more now. "Ok, ask away". "Have you been in love before?". This time it was her turn to blush. "No, I've had a few crushes" she admitted. "Boys at school and at the shop with Natasha, men seemed interested; why?".

"Just wanting to see, I've no experience either, so...", he went even redder. "Please, remember sister, I'm thinking of you. Are you now, you know, ...with this Mr Dodds? I am assuming that is what this faking illness is about".

The red in her face was now anger, "That is personal stuff, none of your business". His cheeks returned to their normal colour. "That's why I'm asking, I can see you like him, so did Dad and Natasha". She noticed he gritted his teeth when he mentioned them. She wanted to ask about that, but they seemed on something more important at the time. "When you saw him in the coach inn, did you feel like you'd met him before?". She looked at him> What was he getting at now? She wasn't sure now how to answer. She was angry but held it back, he had caught her attention now, "Where are you going with this now". He looked at her, then at the ground, "You know he's the highwayman from the other night", her jaw dropped: How did he know. OK, she realised everyone knew she felt something for him, but, she wasn't sure, how was he so sure of himself. Her eyes narrowed, "How do you know that?" she asked. "His boots". That threw her, she started thinking about them, it was true, Francis had been so close to them, when he'd handed back the sac. She just looked at him. He realised she was waiting for more. "FD was scratched on the side of one, bit of a coincidence. I noticed when I bent to do my laces up in the inn, the same scratching". She turned and faced the river. Almost to herself, she said, "I knew it was him". She looked at him, he had sad eyes now, "I am sorry, I wasn't sure if you knew. I thought you should". She took his hand, "Thank you, I wasn't sure, but I suspected". She started thinking, "Why didn't you say anything, call a guard or something?". He looked at her, "I saw how you looked at him.....and I liked him, why didn't you". She blushed again, she knew she should have. Another question came to her, she was starting to see her brother in a new light now. "Do you think the others knew?" she delved. He took a few minutes to answer. He had reached up and was running his hand down

one of the branches from the willow, stropping the leaves as he went. "I think Father suspects both your feelings for him and who he is. I think he wouldn't have hesitated, because of the money, and his selfish pride, but he guessed your feelings were involved so he kept it to himself, I think if he'd had any proof, he'd have turned him in. I suspect Natasha is in the same boat". He took the leaves in his hand and threw them towards the river; there being a slight breeze and light as they were, they didn't go far, and the air took control. A few made it to the river sending gentle ripples spreading out from them. "Honestly, I think they thought it was the end. I did, until you pulled this stunt. Now, to be hearing those two conspiring again together, I'd love to know". She picked up the thread again but flew past it. "You do know, if he does turn up, if anything does happen, he's taking a huge risk". Lost in thought, she nodded. She had hoped to sort some things out, but now, she was even more confused. He did make sense, she knew she hadn't really thought about the consequences. She felt she was just getting pulled into something way too deep and she just couldn't stop herself. They spent the rest of the time sitting there under the willow in silence.

The week passed well,

Frank was moving now, towards Sarah and Francis, as if his legs had frozen stiff, the sense of being dragged, by himself. This was not possible: Frank had been struggling all week with his feelings, putting them behind him: OK, he'd used alcohol as his medicine.

With a grin, Jim put his hand up and felt his neck in a show of the noose. He made sure his back was turned. Jim turned back now. Francis ran forwards, "Yes, it's great isn't it? Sarah somehow faked an illness and Pa and Natalie had to go on ahead". Standing straight suddenly, "I couldn't leave a woman in distress alone, so I stayed along". Frank was amongst them, "Jim, my..." Jim jumped in, "we work in the same business, we met earlier in the week and decided to travel part of the way together, nice to meet ya", and he put out his hand. Sarah took it, "Well, well you already know my name, you must be very close colleagues" She said sternly. Frank had already shaken hands with Francis. He turned to Sarah, "eehrrr, could we, errh, is there somewhere we could talk..." he asked, "...you know private like?". The room was still empty apart from the four of them. Sarah crossed her arms under her chest. "If you've talked about me to your, colleague..." she emphasised the word colleague; she had concluded that it had to be Jim that had dragged Frank into robbing; her protection mechanism had worked out logically, if she'd fallen in love with a villain, it couldn't be his fault. It must be Jim that was the dark one. She couldn't see how Frank could be a bad man if she loved him. "...we can easily talk here amongst us all, there are no secrets here". Jim's head swung back as a guffaw came out of his mouth. Even he was surprised at the volume and immediately put his hand over his mouth. Frank turned red, partly out of embarrassment but also because of anger: this damn woman he thought, Michael was right, she'd be the death of him, looking at Jim with a look that could kill, Sarah moved to the other side of the table and sat down, "If we're going to do this, we're going to do this in a civilised manner". She motioned to the chair opposite her, "if you please" and she looked at Frank. The red in Frank's face was not just embarrassment, there was a touch of anger in there. He didn't like being told what to do, he hesitated to look at her, her face was tough, as if she wasn't budging from her position. She felt for a moment sorry for him; that look of lostness in his face softened her, she let a faint smile cross her lips. He noticed and melted. He took his seat but his look was that of a petulant child, she thought. He didn't notice the surprise on Jim's face next to him as he did. Francis turned to Jim with an innocent smile and he indicated one of the chairs remaining. He

moved opposite and sat down. Jim felt he had no option and sat as well. The four of them now sat around a square table, Frank opposite Sarah and Jim opposite Francis.

The dining room was well lit, a fire was burning in the fireplace and candles were dotted round the room illuminating the empty space apart from them. Sounds could be heard behind the door that led to the kitchens behind Jim.

Sarah had been through this moment repeatedly the past few days. Now the moment was here, she didn't know where to start. She opened her mouth, looking at Frank who had recovered himself now. He wanted to cave in, look deep into her eyes, he wanted to grab her in his arms and feel the ecstasy from the other night, but somehow, with Jim on one side and Francis on the other, he held back. Because of their presence, he held onto his dignity. He looked across the table and he thought she was doing the same, though her open mouth and the way she held her body indicated she meant business. "So", she found her voice. "Firstly, Mr Dodds, I am disappointed in you", his mouth fell open and his eyes almost popped out of his head. She was happy with the response. "I have had to lie to my parents because you haven't been brave enough to show your feelings openly". That was enough: he pushed himself back and stood up. A look of outrage on his face, he was about to open his mouth and let her have it when she continued. "Now stop behaving like a child who's had his toys taken away. We must discuss this like adults; now whether we chose it or not, there are feeling between us that however much we are unprepared for, have happened. We must find a solution and seeing as you aren't willing to face them, I am. Now sit". She was amazed at herself. He hesitated, he thought about it, he sat but his eyes showed uncertainty. Jim, sitting like an arbitrator almost between them, just let his jaw drop.

"OK now" there was a sound of the door swinging open behind Jim and a waiter appeared with a bowl, it was his table, feeling the tension, placed the bowl in the middle of the table. Normally he was expected to spoon out the soup, but something told him to vacate the place quickly. He took off the lid and the odour of chicken soup wafted round the table, its habitants frozen. He didn't need to see their faces: he left. There was silence. Jim sat up and served himself. Francis, with a grin was enjoying this: he did the same. Jim grabbed his napkin and tucked it into his shirt and with spoon in his fist started scooping the soup into his mouth. He was that hungry he didn't bother to blow to cool it. Francis did the same and, copying Jim, tucked the napkin in the same manner. He did blow to cool his soup once it was in his spoon. Frank and Sarah, just starred at each other, the thought of food wasn't in their minds. Frank was not going to back down any more and was scared to move in case it brought on a conflict because any more being pushed around, he knew he would explode. He almost jumped when he felt something tap his foot, it took him a few seconds to realise it was her foot, or her shoe anyway, rubbing his boot. His face softened too, he couldn't help it but felt the barrier he had put in place crumble. Francis spoke, "you two not having any soup? it's good" and slurped another spoon, in the same fashion as Jim who noticed the manners opposite: he smiled at Francis with a wink. Sarah stood and poured some soup for Frank and then herself. She delicately took her spoon and looked at Frank who was tempted, very tempted to take his spoon in his fist, but dissuaded himself. He followed suite; he was going to keep his dignity and started spooning towards himself till he spotted the splashes that were now staining both Francis and Jim's napkins hanging from the front of their shirts. He didn't look up till the last minute and scooped away. When he did, he saw Sarah, smiling at him. He felt a strange warmth from her. He continued. There was a sort of silence between the slurping. Jim was first to finish and wiping his sleeve across his mouth, let out an appreciative sound "aahhhhh", and sat back. Francis, not far

behind, did the same. While the two of them waited for the other two, Jim said, "Are we not going to have anything to drink here?" and turned to the door behind. He let out a cry: "anyone there?" and a face swung the door open, "wine" was all he said and the head that had popped out, disappeared just as quickly. A few seconds later, he reappeared with a bottle. He was just taking out the cork as he approached the table, a look of fear on his face; he poured with a shaking hand and left the bottle on the table

. The two men looked fierce and the look on the lady's face told him to vacate. Off he went back to the safety of the kitchen, he knew if they wanted anything, he'd be called.

Jim took a gulp of the wine, Francis did the same. The other two were still locked, eye to eye. He shook his head, "So Francis, what is your trade or are you still in your studies?". Francis's eyes lit up like a schoolboy being noticed by the adults. "Studies, one more year to go", with a faint twist to his smile, "Then I might take up your trade, you know. Must be exciting". That drew a look from his sister that put him in his place. He was impressed by his sister, she seemed to be in control of the table, except for Jim and he smiled to himself. In this uncomfortable fashion, they continued the meal. Jim, acting as if completely unaware of the air between the two next to him, continued his tomfoolery, seeing how far he could egg Francis into being a lout like himself. He was impressed. The wine flowed, Frank too drank, unaware really to how much he sipped; it was almost a nervous reaction that he kept going to his glass. Francis and Jim finished the main course before the other two in the same manner as before. "Francis, do you have a pipe?" Jim asked. Francis reluctantly shook his head. "I have a spare one: would you like to join me outside?" and he stood up, "We can leave these two as they are no fun at the moment except to themselves". Francis stood up with the look of a Cheshire cat. They traipsed out, leaving the two love birds to sort out their next step.

As soon as they had left the room, Sarah put out a hand, laying it on the table. Her courage left her, and she smiled openly at Frank. She wanted Frank to take it. She had held her stiffness as long as she could. He looked at the hand. He held back. There was a hesitation. He knew when he took that hand, he was a goner. He couldn't hold back for long and eventually reached out. The relief showed on both their faces. "What's going on here?" he asked, "This really shouldn't be happening". She looked sympathetically. "I know, I know the risk you are taking here", she meant it she thought. "It's the same for me. I've been fighting it since that night, I can't anymore". There, she'd said it. Frank felt his stomach twist; did she really know he was literally putting his head on the line here? He did. He didn't want to be hung and he was playing with death here. "You know, that night you held your pistols at me". He dropped her hand, but she delicately moved it back into place and placing her fingers round his, squeezed. He knew he was trapped and his heart was exploding. "If you know about that, why..... Why?". It was all he could bring himself to say. She knew how trapped he must feel now. She tugged his hand: "Lets slip out the front, avoid the others, they'll understand. I need to feel your arms around me again", her eye's pleading. He knew even if he tried, he couldn't resist. His legs had already moved, and he was standing, unconscious of what his muscles were doing. He just followed their movement.

It was a few minutes before they were under the stars, walking hand in hand no sound but the soft gurgling river. She held tightly, guiding to the willow tree. Once there, she turned to him. She looked in his eyes: this time, it was up to him to move. She had paved the way, she was uncertain what he would do, she half expected him to let go and run off though that was not what his eyes

were telling her. She knew he should, she knew she should just turn and run back to the safety of the light they had just left. Instead, he put an arm round her waist. He pulled her to him and placed his lips gently on hers. She felt his strength, his hand on the back of her head, she felt she could relax all her muscles and he would still hold her there, she felt safe and warm, this couldn't be wrong, how could this be wrong. It was meant to be.

He stood, he felt her gentle hands enclose his body to hers; she didn't pull, she was just there, in his arms, locked round his lips. She felt like home was supposed to feel. He felt safe though he knew he shouldn't. Their lips separated, but their eyes still locked onto one another's. "Ooooh, why does this have to be so complicated?", he was sort of relieved she knew, he didn't have to hide it from her anymore, but how did she know? He knew she knew, it wasn't a guess any more, she knew. "How...?" She placed a finger on his lips gently. "Once we talk about that, it gets complicated, please; just hold me for a few minutes more". She knew this was the last time they'd hold each other like this without..... without the complications of real life. She wanted to stay in this dream as long as she could. It was Jim's voice that broke that moment. "You two love birds out there! Pudding's on the table and if you don't get back here soon, yours'll be gone". Frank looked down: his arms were locked around her shoulders now. She gazed up through them, a smile he didn't resist and dove into those lips welcoming him. After what seemed like a moment, floating on a cloud, bliss filling her, he broke away, "We'd better get back". She looked up at him, reluctantly turned her shoulders and he released her. "First I have to tell you, Francis knows". "Whaaat?" he exclaimed. He could feel the rope tightening round his neck. "What did you say, why did you tell him". She looked at him sternly: "What do you take me for? You are going to have to get to know me a bit better than; I never said anything; it was him who told me." Frank looked at her "Sorry, I didn't..." Her smile took the anxiety away for a few moments, "It was your boots. He spotted your initials scratched on them that first night. He confirmed it when you came into the coach in them. That was what gave you away". "Frank groaned. His heart sank. "So, the game is up; what'll he do?". She smiled reassuringly, "He told me, he won't say anything. It's complicated. I think he has a resentment to Auntie and Papa". "She's not your mother is she?". Sarah shook her head. "My mum's best friend but I'll tell you all about that another time. But I think he sees this as a way of getting back at his Dad". Frank looked at her. This was serious: his and Jim's life rested on a secret held by a student. How much could he trust that? He didn't feel reassured. They started walking back now. He didn't realise how tightly he held her hand till he felt her wiggle her fingers. "Sorry", he looked at her as she walked. She just smiled gently and squeezed her hand over his.

As they walked in, there was a great guffaw from Jim and Francis who had a higher pitched laugh. Frank stopped at the table: he looked at Francis whose cheeks were showing signs the wine was having an effect. Two plates with roly-poly pudding and custard sat opposite each other, the other two plates were clean and pushed to the middle of the table. Jim has his feet up on Frank's chair. Sarah was glad Francis hadn't done the same thing. She threw a glance at Jim that she hoped would make him feel uncomfortable. It didn't seem to work but he did swing his feet down making room for Frank. Frank felt it unfair that he was carrying the burden alone. His relaxed grin annoyed him. He wanted to tell him the game was up and they both knew. But it was Francis who had guessed. His eyes looked glazed but, in an instant, Frank watched them focus. Francis looked at his sister as she sat down, then at Frank who returned the look, stone-faced. "I know you are wondering if I can keep a secret", then with a wink that looked like it came directly from Jim, "I

can". Jim picked up something, "What's going on?". He too lost his silly grin. Frank glanced round the room, checking there wasn't a trooper or waiter hiding silently in a corner or something. Once sure they were alone, "They know". Although Jim wasn't grinning, he was smiling and something in it dropped in the instant, "Know what?". Frank just stared at him, "No", Jim sat up straight instantly, "what?". Francis leaned forwards seeing that neither Frank nor Sarah looked like they were about to open their mouths. "You should know: Frank has his initials scratched on his boots". Jim looked at Frank for a moment, confused. Slowly the dawn seemed to creep onto his face. He looked from Frank, to Francis and then to Sarah. Clapping his open hand to his forehead, and his shoulders sank. "You stupid fucking reiver, you would insist. I have a spare pair". Mixed with the wine now, his control abated. He closed his eyes now. "So, what happens now? No, no" he put up both his hands in front, "let me guess, the two love birds travel to London together into the hands of her parents who will within time find a way to hang this man that isn't of the right station for their daughter". Francis butted in, "Why would they find out?". Jim opened his eyes and leaned forwards putting his elbows on the table and stared at Francis, "They are both already suspicious, and you", he pointed at Francis: still a student, hold the key. How long till you want to chat up some bird, and, to impress her, tell her that your mates are highwaymen". Francis stood up ferociously. "I have kept secrets before, like the fact that my 'aunt'" he spat the word, "wangled her way into my family: wouldn't be surprised if she had a hand in her death: the two of them probably conspired. I heard them talking, I have kept that a secret" he glanced at Sarah on who's face horror appeared. "Just because of my age, it doesn't mean I can't keep a secret. Well, you're going to have to find out, whether you can trust me", and he stormed out of the dining room and they heard his heavy footstep climbing the stair to his room. The silence left at the table said it all. Eventually Jim broke it, "I shouldn't have been so hard on the boy; he's a good one that one. Cleverer than he makes out". Sarah just looked at him. Frank didn't raise his gaze. He knew he had no option: as soon as Jim was on that boat... and now he would go, without question: it made sense... he'd be left. He looked sideways at Sarah, who met his look with sympathy. Even if she knew what was going on, she had no idea what was going through his mind now. He too stood up. He needed some air, time to think. Without saying a word, he walked out of the room, fishing inside his coat for his pipe.

Chapter 11. Destination London.

Frank was taking such a huge risk, and he knew it. He hated to say it and couldn't believe it, ...for Love. He felt so stupid when he looked at it like that. Only he knew, lying there, he could come up with all the plans and ideas to leave, but he knew, the minute he saw her, and he sighed. He was risking his life for love. It was staring him in the face that morning as he waited with Jim at the breakfast table. He was staring at his mug of tea: odd drink, he thought. In the hills, they'd been made remedies called tea, with a mix of herbs and stuff, with honey; it had been OK. Now he was drinking something that had no resemblance, mixed with milk and honey. He wasn't even ill.

Sarah had got up early on purpose. She wanted to talk with Francis. She had hardly slept that night. Worrying about Frank, and what she felt she was asking of him now she knew. Worrying about Francis and what he'd said. She had realised, somehow, he'd got it into his head that Natasha and her Dad, their Dad, had planned her mum's death. It had never crossed her mind. If that was what he was thinking, it explained a lot; he had never shared his feelings at the time. After trying to think about what to do about it, several ideas had sprung into her mind, but none she felt were right. She had decided that talking to him was the best option. She knocked on his

door, heard a rustling behind then the door opened. She was taken aback, she had expected him sullen as usual but instead, he stood there, ready dressed and beaming from ear to ear. "Good morning", he started. Leaving the door ajar, he went to his desk to pick up his coat, taking it off the chair it had been hanging over, "Doesn't look like we'll be needing it though; beautiful outside". She'd taken a few paces into the room, wondering if she should shut the door, "Come one" he said, I'm famished" and brushed past her, and bounced down the stairs. She was left bewildered in the room. She pulled herself together and closed the door behind her. More sedately she descended the stairs, getting to the dining room, surprised to see she was the last at the table. There was little said between Sarah and Frank, though Jim and Francis, especially Francis, were chirping like the early morning birds singing. Jim had suggested they ride together, just the two of them; they could stop off at an inn or two he'd grinned. Sarah had been about to say something. Frank felt it through her hand which he was holding; he squeezed it, throwing her a glance that said leave it. She had, to his surprise.

Jim hadn't twitched at their movements. He just continued, saying they'd catch up, in their own time. They could move faster. Besides, he didn't want to be stuck in the carriage when it was so nice outside and although he made himself out to be an insensitive man, he'd heard Francis's outburst the night before. He knew that feeling; he'd taken a few broken winged youngsters under his wings. He'd straightened them out all right. He'd had them working, breaking arms and legs of those that didn't want to cough up their dues. They seemed to turn out alright as far as he recollected. Obviously breaking arms and legs was out of Francis's league, but a bit of 'Old Jim's' advice would do no harm. It would be better company than Frank at the moment, anyway. It had been agreed.

They had been going all day. They'd stopped at a pub for a meal after midday. Frank and Jim had arrived not long behind them and stayed when they left. Sarah had thought something was working. She'd never seen Francis like that, chatting away, listening though she didn't want to know what Jim was teaching him. They'd spent the afternoon together on the same bench. She'd lain back in his arms which he'd closed round her tight. They'd opened the curtains fully and the sun came blaring through. The ride had been fairly smooth and straight for quite a while now. She'd watched the landscape pass. She found, if she looked into the distance, the rocking of the carriage didn't blur it as much. Frank had explained his story, leaving out the initial bit about having to run because of stealing a horse: that, on top of the highwayman. would have been too much for her to bear, he was sure. He said he'd set out for London just like that, He told her he wanted to return the money; he'd only been after the horse from Jim. She'd listened. She explained that the family had become wealthy beyond imagination, when they'd been given the ring. She explained about it and why it was so significant. A symbol they knew, but it had sentimental value as well.

Over the next days, they swapped between who was on the horses except when it rained. Jim had got to know the driver and his mate quite well, he'd turned on his charm and one of them had lent him a lute. He'd played with it on his turn in the carriage and nearing the end, he was actually able to make something resembling a tune.

The town of St Albans was coming up and that was where the road turned off for Portsmouth. Frank sensed the moment approaching. Over the past few weeks, his life had taken turns he could

never have expected, and the catalyst had been had been Jim. He felt a sort of nervousness now he knew Jim was going to leave his life forever. He felt slightly torn, the idea of America had wetted his appetite, , but he knew, deep inside, this was his home, where he belonged, not somewhere that far away. The weather had held for most of the journey but now, the skies were grey, and rain threatened. Jim had decided to stay in the carriage. Francis, who had really come out of his shell, risked it. He was never far behind and sometimes he trotted ahead but had decided to continue to risk it.

Frank was leaning back in a corner of the carriage. Sarah was huddled into his side. She was asleep now and he didn't want to move too much for fear of waking her. The roads were now pretty good. He realised the closer to London, the more used they were, the more they were kept in a good state of repair.

They talked quietly now. "He's a good lad really, he does seem to go too deep into his feelings, though. Some strange ways of looking at things, I guess that's what you get from a wealthy education. He just needs a friend". Frank listened carefully. What he really wanted to know, though, was did Jim think he'd keep his mouth shut. Sensing this Jim added. "I think he is holding so many secrets inside, though, he's good at it. I don't think you have to worry about him talking to his Dad or Natalie. He seems to hold some sort of grudge against her. He's uncomfortable with women. If I spent more time with him, I'd get rid of that. Perhaps that's your job" and he grinned his most amiable grin.

Frank felt a twitch, a tightening of muscle that told him Sarah was not asleep.

Goodbye to Jim

Next chapter 12 – Escape from justice

He went up the rickety stairs. There were people milling around on the stairwell chatting, others rushing about, folder and books under their arms, some wearing official wigs, some not. There were glances thrown in his direction all the time. He just had to ignore them. James had summoned him. He hoped the worry didn't show on his face; he was full of questions. James now knew about the secret wedding ceremony he and Sarah had gone through the day before. Sarah had told him she was going to. It was too late; "What could he do?", she'd said. Well, he was about to find out.

He followed the secretary, glad he was there; there was no way he'd have found his way through this maze of corridors. Eventually, he had no idea how many stairs he'd come up, the secretary knocked on a big heavy oak door, carved ornately with leaves spreading round the panelling. There was a voice from within and the secretary opened the door and stuck his head in. "Mr Frank Dodds, Sir" Frank didn't hear a reply but then the Secretary, who hadn't entered the room, backed out of the doorway and ushered Frank in. From the lack of light in the corridors, he felt almost blinded by the sudden light in the room. James's office in the Houses of Parliament was huge. Behind a large table that sat in front of a big window overlooking the Thames, James sat, a pile of papers on one side and another on the other. The rest of the walls were taken up by bookshelves. Frank just stood there aghast. "Impressive isn't it?" James said. not looking or getting up. "Please have a seat." Frank felt like he was up before a judge when he took the seat. If this room was made to make visitors feel small, it was certainly doing its job. James put down his quill and looked across the table at him now.

"I hear congratulations are in order now". There was no smile, Frank had an ominous feeling.

Warrant already issued

"That's not what I meant" Francis shouted as he came out of the room next door, "I told you now, after he was family, so you'd accept him", he was shouting, and his arms were showing more and more agitation. "He'll hang, you knew that, that's why you did it".

James looked at him, "I had to son; he's an outlaw, we can't have that in the family". "He's a man, look, look at him: your daughter loves that man... for your daughter". James faltered there, he hesitated, "for the good of all, it's my duty as a father, a citizen and politician". "What about your duty as a human being, what about that, he'll never do those things again, he didn't choose to do it in the first place, he was trying to get away from all of that". He was screaming now, Frank still stood, listening to the two of them. He was completely flabbergasted at Francis, he seemed a fine young man now, except he was losing control now. Frank could see: every reply his dad gave him, not being able to see his side, was driving him wilder and wilder. "Duty son, it's my duty. You heard me earlier, I offered everything I possible could to help him with a new life, he wouldn't accept it". "Can't you see why, you blind old goat, he won't go because he loves her. Doesn't that make you happy? Your daughter is in love with a man that is in love with her. Isn't that the most important thing a father can hope for". James had started getting red at the old goat part. "I'm not having my daughter married to a criminal. What will he do when things don't go right, take the easy way out like all criminals?". He had experience, he told himself, he had done a time in the courts, all types of riff-raff, drunkenness: violence was never more than a step away. He'd started shouting now. "Not in my family, your Mum would be turning in her grave". "Don't you bring up my Mum" he was screaming now. He walked angrily at James, who was still where he had been when Francis had charged through the door. He started backing off now. Francis was just staring, glaring eyes, at his father as he pushed forwards. He stood where his father had a minute ago. Turning to his side, he opened the desk drawer, reached in and came out with a pistol. Frank backed away into a corner now. The pistol was pointing it at his father. "Don't you dare speak about Mother, you don't have the right to bring up her feelings after what you did to her". "Be careful, it's....." There was an explosion, James was thrown back a bit, he staggered and fell, "loaded" came out of his mouth as a breath. His final breath! Francis had been pointing directly at his heart from less than a pace away. Francis just stood transfixed. He looked down at his father. His face changed, Frank could see from the corner, from red it went to pale, the fire in the eyes slowly faded, his arm started lowering just as the door burst open and a secretary and a guard charged in, Francis turned to look at Frank first: he mouthed the word: "Go". The guard was the first to react, running forward and, throwing himself over the desk, hit Francis unawares and they crashed into a heap. The secretary glanced at Frank before passing in front of him to take a closer look at the body on the floor, lying on his back, blood seeping now through his clothes. Not a breath. There had been a heaving of the heavy chest for an instant but now, nothing: life had left him. Something in Frank took hold of him now. He slipped out of the room, through the door that was still ajar. There were people now milling in the corridor, people still spilling out of rooms. He dodged through. As he turned into the first stairwell, he heard the first whispers, "they got him" and "it's Sir James Rutherford He's dead". He didn't wait to hear any more, he just bounded down the stairs, two at a time.

His objective was to head down as far as he could or till he got to ground level, then head for the first door out. There was a crowd ahead of him, he dropped his face, turned to the balcony and peered over and down. He realised there were a few more flights to go, 8 flights he thought as he looked, that means 4 floors. He waited till the crowd was past and off he shot. He counted as he

went, one..... two.....three..... Four. It was just as he turned holding the knob where the banister changed direction for the next flight. He swung round on it to keep the memento going. He wasn't running, that would draw too much attention. Walking at a fast pace he'd call it. He was back onto the descent but there was someone in the way. He didn't look up, he kept his head down and tried to sidestep the person coming up. He heard a voice: "I thought it was you", he didn't want to be recognised so he side- stepped back but the person in front did the same. Again: "I saw you over the balcony, I thought it couldn't be, I had to check." Frank recognised that voice, but that would be impossible. Who would he know here? He tried one more time, the same again. This time he lifted his head. He was about to throw this man down the stairs, but he wanted to know who was responsible for the rope round his neck. He froze: no it couldn't be. It was, it was Billy. For a second, he forgot he was running. "What you doing here?" Billy asked. "I could ask the same thing". he flashed back. He lowered his tone completely, "I have to get out of here, quick". Billy took a couple of seconds for it to sink in. Frank shrugged off the hands of Billy and continued going, pushing past him. "Not that way" he heard. He stopped and turned. Billy was indicating with his head, there were a couple of men coming down, deep in conversation. Frank turned and followed Billy. At the top of the flight they were on, Billy turned right into a corridor. He didn't turn back at this point and was a few paces ahead. Frank kept the distance but followed. Halfway down that corridor on the left was a door with "Stairs" marked above it. Billy went through. Frank followed. Billy started down, Frank started down. There was no-one else in the whole stairwell from the sound of silence apart from their own steps. Frank kept on counting, five..... six..... seven. Billy walked down and out through a door that led to another corridor. Halfway down he knocked on a door, listened while Frank caught up. There was no answer, so Billy opened the door. He leaned his head in for another check: it was empty. Then he ushered Frank in and closed the door behind him. This room wasn't anywhere near the same size as the one he'd come from. It was an office though. "Whose office is this?" Frank asked, "Mine" replied Billy. Frank's eyes popped. "Well only temporary, while we're in town. My boss, he's the politician for Newcastle, he's been called down for business. We've been here all week. I got this space, so I could write my notes in peace. Mr Carr's office, which I would usually use, has been full all week. Now that's my story. What's yours? I warn you someone might walk in, but they will knock first. Now start talking or I'll kick you out". He looked annoyed. There was a table and they took their seats. First Frank explained what had happened upstairs, then, when he saw the look on Billy's face, he mentioned he was married. That left an even more blank face. So, he started at the beginning. No-one interrupted them. At one-point Billy went to a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. Frank thought about pulling out his pipe, something to calm the nerves. He held back, didn't even ask, thought of the smell of the smoke. At the end of his story, he turned to Billy, "so, you see, I need to get out of here. Can you help me?". Billy glanced out of the small window up to see the lie of the sun. "It's nearly evening, the Houses will slowly empty: the best place for you is here". Billy sat back in his chair; he turned it to the window. He didn't want to turn his back on his brother who looked lost in thought, but he realised why Ralph did it: somehow it made it easier to think if you could see the sky. "The watchmen will be here if your story is true, and I don't doubt it". They will never search the rooms, but out there it will be mayhem. There will be your description out, as you did run from a crime scene". Frank sat there, hat in hands, What was he going to do? He had to get word to Sarah: he should be there, but he knew he couldn't. Billy turned back as Frank was opening his mouth. Billy got there first: "You probably want to contact your wife, Frank, you're married to a genuine lady" he shook his head as he said it. Frank

squirmed(?) squeezed out a smile. "Couldn't help it. I love her. Can you take a message to her from me?". "Do you think it's a good idea right now?". "I didn't do it, it was Francis. He shot her Dad. I didn't like the plan from the start. That's why I must be there, even just a note to say I'm with her. She's lost her Dad and her brother; he'll surely hang for it won't he?". "I would it say seems likely, but you never know when it's lords and stuff. It can all get a bit twisted". "If he dies, she'll have lost all her family, God, what a mess!" and he put his head in his hands. He lifted his head suddenly, "Jim, Jim's sleeping it off in the inn, I've got to warn him". "If the warrant was issued when you said it was, there might be time". He grabbed his hat and cloak off the rack. He pulled piece of paper out, With the quill, "What's the address? I'll send a boy with the simple instructions to find the man and tell him to get out". Frank gave the address, "In the meantime, I'll go and visit your.... wife and tell her your thinking of her". Frank looked up: 'Thank you Billy', "Achhh, I will lock the door behind me: that'll mean no-one till the earliest at 8 o'clock. Now, one last thing, you're in the Houses of Parliament; you've managed to get into all kinds of trouble: here, don't" and he closed the door behind him. Frank heard the turning of the key and breathed a sigh of relief. Good old Billy: had he been these past few months, he'd never have got into this mess. Realising he hadn't slept much the night before, which gave him the start of a grin but quickly it was wiped away for the worry; this was the second night of his marriage, what a nightmare. He lay down on the floor and tried to sleep, but it was impossible.

Billy had done as he said he would, he'd sent a runner and walked as fast as he could to the address Frank had given him. "Phew!!" he said out loud as he turned the corner into the street that Frank now lived. He was just thinking how Frank had gone up in the world, when he realised it probably wouldn't last long and there was a high chance he'd be going out into a different world. He was also worried for himself. He knew he was sticking his head on the line, again for his brother. In some grief-stricken phase(?) way(?) he might end up just being arrested and from what he'd seen about how things were dealt with down here, he'd probably get chucked in jail himself and forgotten about. He came upon the house number; he heard a wail come from inside. His head bowed: that was the scream of grief.

It had seemed like hours had passed to Frank. He'd tossed, and he'd turned. He'd gone over it a thousand times. Somehow he'd convinced himself that Sarah needed him more; he couldn't stay in this dark room, not that night, the second night he was married, his wife probably in grief over losing her brother and her Dad in the same day. He had to be there; he had been turning his thoughts over and over; he knew if he got caught for the highway-man thing, but he wasn't going anywhere near the rooms, where Jim probably was now, he'd not killed James. Francis was sure to take his penalty for what he'd done. He'd been trying to help him; he wouldn't hurt him now. Subconsciously he'd been staring at the little window in the room: he knew he could squeeze through it. His conscious mind then kicked in. He realised he could get out of there. What floor were they on, he tried to remember. Suddenly, instead of it just being an idea, Frank found himself trying the window. It was small, two small square panes wide and four up. He turned the handle and pulled. No force needed, it just opened without a creak or a squeak or anything. He poked his head out the window. There was a floor below him, he could see from the windows below. The ground wasn't that far below, it was dark, and he couldn't properly make it out. He wondered, if

he made it out, hung himself from the ledge, he looked himself up and down, estimating his length. He then compared it if he was hanging on the ledge. He added his arm's length and was sure he'd reach the top at least of the window below. He judged the rest possible if he just dropped. He was just about to lift a leg when he heard a sound coming from the end of the street, a whistling. He dropped, top of his head just sticking out, so he could see. He saw the lantern, swaying in the gait of the man carrying it. The man didn't seem to be hurrying; he was ambling. Frank guessed it was night watchman. He waited, wishing the man would pick up his pace. As he watched, he realised he was shaking. He tried to stop the shaking, he tried to get hold of himself, he started wondering if this was the right thing to do. He tried to convince himself staying was the right thing to do, he knew it was the right thing to do but he couldn't, he had to be with her, she needed him. The whistling had changed tune by the end of the street. He watched the light disappear around the corner. He looked the other way to check there wasn't anyone coming, swung his leg up onto the window frame. Pushing on it, he squeezed first his head, then one shoulder. He knew if he got one through. It went, the second was tighter but he heaved and finally it popped through. Taking hold of the sides of the frame, he lifted his other leg out and dropped it down the outside. Sliding his hands down he then took hold of the bottom with one and kept his balance with the other. He dropped his second leg and took the weight with his hands, now slowly sliding it to the bottom. He was dangling, and he was pleased as he looked down one shoulder, his estimate was not far off. His feet were now in front of the window below. Pushing with his waist, he bounced back a touch and let go. The drop, as he was going down, seemed further than he'd imagined but he was ready on the tips of his feet when it did finally come. Snatching a glance each way, he'd already decided to go the way the watchman had, he assumed it was less likely he turned around and was coming back. He ran on tiptoes to the corner. He peaked round, nothing but blackness, he crossed the road and made it to the other side of the street, and continued in the same direction.

That street was dark but up ahead, he knew was the bridge; that would be lit. He pulled up his collar and sank his head as deep in as he could.

He got to the bridge, he climbed on and started working his way across, He was not long on that bridge when he heard voices coming from the other side. It was a shouting, and he also heard the clang of metal. He stopped, he was between lights, it was dark enough, he started wobbling, talking to himself slurring. He acted as drunk as he ever remembered he could be. He hoped they would be on the other side of the street. He raised his voice in a slurred tune, he started singing. He saw over the brow of the bridge, first the hats, five of them. Forming a square around who ever was in the middle, the prisoner, he guessed from the way the man was walking, hobbling, feet obviously attached. The voice was shouting. Frank stopped his singing and took hold of a rail on the bridge and swung round it, so he was facing the river. Now for the first time he heard the voice clearly. He froze, he recognised that voice. He turned, he couldn't help it. He looked to the other side of the street: that was where they were passing, thankfully. He looked at the men, they were similarly dressed, all except the one in the middle. There was something wrong in the way he spoke, like there was something in his mouth, but he recognised that voice. As they came closer, he knew it was him. There was blood dripping from his face. His legs were shackled and his hands as well. But he was struggling. One look at the guards and he knew he'd put up a struggle. The runner hadn't got there in time. The man on the other side looked across at the figure in the dark, staring at him. For one second their eyes met: there was recognition. Jim turned his head and

looked forwards, "I'm telling you, I work alone, there's no reason to leave that guard behind, no-one'll turn up", and he struggled again, sweeping his shoulders, pulling on the chain dragging in the man hanging on the end of it, he smashed his head forwards into the nose of the guard who was now off balance. Frank heard the thud. His fingers tightened on the bar he was holding: he fought the urge to just charge in and.....a tear slid down his cheek as the image of those green eyes flashed before him. He knew where he had to get to. They'd got Jim, they'd get him if he wasn't careful; he couldn't let that happen. He couldn't have his new wife widowed on the same day as she lost the rest of her family. He just stood and watched as the guard behind shoved a rifle butt into his back, He saw Jim wince and bend forwards at the pain. Another shoved, pushed him on. All he could do was watch.

His fists were almost white as he watched the back fade into the night. It took him a few seconds to get hold of himself now. He started eventually stumbling forward: he wasn't acting dumb, just his legs had gone weak; it took all his energy keeping him up right now. Jim had told him not to go back to the inn, he had no intention of doing that, but he'd warned him. He could have pointed him out, not to be so lonely; he'd seen that back home once: just before they hanged someone, he'd turned to his mate and apologised for dumping him in, he just didn't want to go alone, he'd said. His mate had just enough time to turn to him before the trap doors had opened.

Jim had been made of stronger stuff, he'd warned him, and more tears came to his eye's. Then he started gathering his strength together. He'd seen Jim; he realised he himself was just gibbering. He was made of sterner stuff than this; the south and married life were weakening him. His pace became stronger and once on the other side of the bridge, he knew where to go. He got his pace back, and strode forwards now. He wasn't going to squirm, he held his head up high: if he got caught, he got caught. He moved swiftly though.

Eventually he was standing in front of the house, He stopped and looked up; the candles were still lit. There were voices; he slowly made his way up the stairs. He turned the handle and pushed, he made his way in and around the corner he stood. There were three sets of eyes upon him. Sarah sat on the sofa next to, her holding her hand, was Natasha. Billy was standing in front of them, a glass in his hands. Shock spread from one to the other. Billy's mouth was open, "How, why"? Sarah, upon recognising him, had leaped up and floated into his arms. Her eyes red and puffy, she swung her arms round his neck and he felt the shudders as she started crying again. He just held her tight, "I had to get here" he whispered, "I had to get here" he said louder looking at Billy. He then saw Natasha; she was looking at him, sadness glued there; he couldn't feel any accusation in that look, only sadness. She said nothing, just wringing her handkerchief in her hand, tightening it and loosening her grip. Again, and again, nonstop looking at him. He looked at her, pity welling up in her as he remembered the tenderness he'd seen that fateful night, when he'd demolished her strength and hoping he'd given it back. He now wondered, he felt a sort of guilt, he knew he couldn't have done anything about it at the time. Francis had just been so quick. Natasha's eyes still fixed on him, there was a battle going on in her eye's. He didn't see it, but she felt a tug and gave into it; she stood and made her way over to Frank and Sarah. He lifted a hand from Sarah's shoulder inviting her. She didn't hesitate and joined her niece, crying on the shoulders of a man she felt she should hate somehow, but she knew it hadn't been Frank; somehow Francis had been twisted inside the day his mum died; his fate had been sealed the day he'd started blaming his

Dad, if only she'd seen something back then, perhaps if she'd have been able to talk to him. She surrendered herself to the arms of comfort, she felt she needed to be held. Frank stood there holding both women.

Billy had been shocked when the elder woman had got up and moved into the embrace of Frank, then wonderment as he saw the relief both women showed. This was Frank, his elder brother. Only the last time he'd seen him, he'd been wearing his bonnet in the stables, breeches, nightshirt tucked in, with hay sticking out of his hair, big grin on his face, not a care in the world. Now, in a shirt and tie, his face was screwed up in pain, responsible for the relief of two women in grief. He didn't know this family, he'd only heard about them that afternoon. He watched the face of his brother. In some morbid way he half expected Frank to pick up his face and grin with an added wink as he'd often done. But no, he just stood there; there was a prickle of envy, though he couldn't fathom why.

It was a few hours later; he sat with Billy on the sofa. He'd found a bottle and was pouring them each a drink. Sarah and Natasha were asleep. The doctor who had visited when he'd heard about the tragedy, left a bottle of something to help the women sleep. They'd had some each and with Billy he'd helped them upstairs. He'd kissed Sarah on the lips and she'd softly responded sleepily. Billy sat looking at Frank, his glass still untouched "You really are part of this family" he said "What's left of it" Frank breathed. "I sent a boy for that friend of yours", "Too late, saw him on my way here, in chains and under guard; somehow he warned me not to go back to the inn, brave man". Billy felt a twinge of anguish as he empathised for his brother. He was lost for something to say then. He sat a while, "Thanks brother", Frank turned to him, "Really, I seem to get you into troubles almost as much as myself. Sorry for your birthday present". Struggling against the eyes, he felt, drawing liquid into them, Billy asked "Where is your stuff, your clothes and stuff?". "Don't worry: by chance I moved it out of there and in here a few days ago. There's nothing back there to signify I even existed. ".

"Actually, you did me a favour. I sometimes think what I'd be doing back there. I'm happy, I like Newcastle, the people are friendly, I get to use my brain a lot. No, thank you Frank, you did me a favour". Frank sensed he was being sincere but wasn't sure. He didn't say anything else on the subject, "You got a woman then?" he threw at Billy, who smiled back, "you'll have to visit me sometime, find out". They chatted like this long into the night. It relieved Frank in a way he hadn't felt in a long time. Something from home.

Chapter 13 - Grief

Natasha was the first in the house to wake up. It was as consciousness came to her that the memory of the day before snatched straight away at her heart. Without opening her eyes, her hand reached across to the other side of the bed. Perhaps it had been a dream; the bed was empty, cold where he normally lay. She opened her eyes to see the vacant space. She felt her eyes swell immediately. She vainlessly tried to hold the tears back. Hiding her head under the sheets, she sobbed. Her life passed through her memory, times she'd spent with James as children. It hit her then, the two friends that had helped make the most blissful time of her life were now gone. She had found a part of that bliss when she'd remarried. Sarah had been so like her Mum. Thinking about Sarah caused her to move. She got up and walked to the window. The sun was shining.

The house was noiseless as she made her way downstairs. She remembered she'd given the servants the day off, all except those in the kitchen. As she got to the room they had been in the night before, she saw Frank was lying asleep on the sofa. There were two glasses on the table but no sign of Billy. That had been a shock, first meeting Billy. He'd seemed like a nice man, cultured with rough edges she'd decided. She looked down at the snoring bulk in front of her. They'd obviously had a lot of catching up to do. She felt for Frank. She'd liked him from the first time they were introduced though she'd tried not to. She'd seen the look in Sarah's eyes and remembered how she'd felt the first time she'd realised she was in love; it had been James. She'd not been able to realise that love till a lot later in her life. She wanted Sarah to be happy, not to have to go through the same loneliness she'd felt. She was worried for her, though Frank had made the effort over the past few weeks. He'd got a job, working at the markets, early in the morning, lugging sacks around for the stall holders. He'd got on well with them from the start. It was way below the station he'd have to get used to now they were married. But over the past weeks, he'd shown his true self. Hard working, not scared to get his hands dirty. It was the crowd he seemed to gather around him that worried her, people seemed naturally attracted to his charm and humour. James had liked him, though his sense of justice along with his suspicions and the want to protect his offspring that had caused this tragedy. She was brought back from her reverie as one of the kitchen maids started laying the table for breakfast. This also brought signs of life from Frank. She saw, as he lifted his head, he'd turned to her and their eye's met. In a flash, she remembered being held by him the night before; she knew the comfort she'd felt in his arms, she smiled as she felt his soft eyes lay upon hers and she just nodded at him. He sat up. "Has anyone been to see Sarah?" She shook her head, pleased that his first thought had been for her. Whether he would be good for her, she didn't know. She did know though, that he loved her. For her that was the most important thing. She had a flashback from a few nights before. James had been against the wedding; he'd felt he was just going to lead her into a life of misery. He'd admitted that there was love there between the two but he'd been more on the practical side. He couldn't see how it

would work, from such different backgrounds. He'd walked away that time, grumbling that he saw her ending up as some kitchen maid with rough hands and bent back.

Frank had made his way up first thing. He'd asked if she'd seen Billy that morning. When she'd told him no, he'd mumbled something about remembering him leaving early, as he made his way up the stairs. Natasha ended up eating alone, it was as the maid was clearing up that there was a knock at the door. The maid answered it and it was Billy. She invited him in and sat with him. He explained that he'd worked his way free for the day, He'd arranged for a pass for a visit to see Francis if she wanted to go. Her heart had leapt into her mouth at the offer. See her husband's murderer, who was also her son-in-law? She'd felt a hatred emanating from him. Sarah had tried to explain that he blamed her and James for the death of his mum. It had been so preposterous, she'd felt insulted. She now didn't know how to feel about him. Horror at the thought of having to see him, in the gaol, behind bars. She imagined the picture.

Sarah eventually came down, with Frank behind her. Billy had explained the situation, pointing out that there was no way Frank could go. That had made her mind up. However much she didn't want to face it, she had to go with Sarah. She showed no sign of timidity in this matter: she was going to see her brother. Natasha couldn't work out what she saw in Sarah's eyes. There was fraternal care she could see but mixed in with a bit of hate. She felt the same but didn't know what to do with the hate. Somehow, she blamed herself; if she'd taken more care in the early days after their mother had died, perhaps all of this could have been prevented.

Billy had looked at Frank and saw he was worn out. It would do him good to stay behind anyway. The risk of him going was too great, even Frank must see that. He had found a moment alone to tell him that Jim was in the same cell. They were both going up before the judge first thing that morning. By the time they got there, the verdict on both would have been made and there was really no way he could see anything other than hanging for the both of them.

He was surprised. There were no tears that morning though Billy could see there had been, from the state of all their eyes. He was amazed at some of the people of this class. He'd met a few, both in court on the wrong side in Newcastle, and through Ralph in his rooms. With a lot of them, he'd been amazed at how they seemed to keep a distance from their emotions, or at least managed to keep some decorum. Francis was turning out to be one of them. Jim was another thing altogether: somehow, he was keeping a grin on his face and somehow the two of them were together. He'd made a quick visit before coming here. He'd given them advice though he couldn't see Jim acting demurely in front of the Judge. He knew he was going to hang but he showed a spirit that any reiver would have been proud of. He knew why Frank had hit it off so well with him.

Sarah was shaking as they walked through the dank tunnels, cells off to each side, bars holding several people inside caves. The smell was unbearable. Even Billy had his handkerchief over his mouth. She couldn't believe the strength Natasha was showing. She kept a stony face on but had been able to say a good word here or there about Frank. She'd noticed a turnaround in her

approach to him that morning. She'd expected blame or something towards him. In a roundabout way, she wondered if bringing Francis out of his shell had been what had given him the courage, she burst into tears again, she had had to ask Billy to wait twice in those dungeons while she got herself together. There were people visiting others, milling around this side of the bars. Billy had explained that they brought food for their relatives when they could. There was nothing else for them. The ceiling dripped and had forced her to move on.

They got to the cave/(??cell??) that was holding both Jim and Francis. She put her hands on the bars as she saw the two of them approach. She hadn't expected their good humour, but they both came with grins on their faces. She almost started thinking they must have got off, except that Billy had found out as they went into the gaol that the verdict had been as predicted. That afternoon, they were going to hang. She'd broken down when he'd told her.

Their spirits were high, the bravado from Jim was quite astounding. He explained the story had gone round he was a highwayman. They seemed to get a lot of respect there, though he couldn't work out why.

In truth, he'd arrived in there the night before. Seeing Frank on the way in, had been a godsend. At least he hoped he'd get away. He didn't deserve to hang; he'd been pulled into it, by Jim. It had been Jim's own stupid fault for not going straight to Portsmouth. He'd wanted one last look at London town; and to get Frank on his feet: somehow that boy/young man had a knack of finding trouble and, without him by his side, he'd feared for his safety. In here, somehow, they looked up to him. That had never happened to him in his life. He was the centre of attention. They'd seemed so miserable when he'd first got in there. They'd started asking him a few questions and he'd ended up spending the whole night telling them stories. He'd not wanted to think about the next day: he knew he'd hang. He also knew he'd done some terrible thing when working with Mr Grant. **Mr Grant had** been a thug at heart. He'd made himself out to be this fancy man, in public he was Mr Nice, good word for everyone, good humour and everyone's friend, but behind that, Jim knew he was as ruthless as they came. True, he'd learned a lot from him, but at what price? He knew he was paying for many deeds he'd done for Mr Grant. In truth, he thought he probably deserved to hang. Now, in here, he was getting some respect, people wanting to know him. He wasn't going to spend his last hours in gloom. He was going to eke this out for all he could. He was going to live his last few hours enjoying himself. The guards, knowing what the result would be the following day, had brought some jugs of wine, both for him and Francis. Some had even stayed to listen to the tales, some of which he was making up, some he was just exaggerating, but the best was the truth, the best time of his life had been these past few weeks and, God, did it make for a good story. Francis sat by him, listening quietly. Jim got the feeling he'd made peace with himself. Jim was quiet but controlled. When he'd seen him, he'd wondered what had gone wrong. The plan had been so simple. He'd really believed the toff, Francis's father would have loved his daughters' happiness. He'd seen him warming to Frank over the past days. Jim had seen what he'd thought to be almost camaraderie between Frank and his new father in law.

That had been what had made Jim come up with the plan. The outcome, he'd been certain at the time when he'd suggested it to Francis, would be silence??. Francis had explained that he'd not counted on his father's belief in Justice: somehow that had overridden his feelings. It had made

him see red and he'd known the loaded gun was always there in the drawer. His father had been nervous of some of his colleagues.

It had just happened, Francis explained, when he'd seen red, something from deep inside of him had taken over; he'd explained it like he'd seen what he was doing but it wasn't him, he'd not been able to control his movements, it had been.....strange. When Jim asked him how he felt now, he said almost relieved, like a weight had been taken off his shoulders. Jim saw that but found it a bit strange. Still who was he to judge. Francis seemed more at peace than he'd seen him. There was almost a reverence about him.

Now Sarah was there, he watched carefully from a distance. This was the moment he'd crack, facing a bit of reality. He didn't. He took his sister's hands and motioned for those of Natasha. He'd seen the uncertainty in her when she'd arrived and seen Francis. Now that he motioned for her to come forwards, surprised, she did. He explained what had happened, said he was sorry, first to Natasha. Jim saw sincerity in the eyes of Francis, as he explained he didn't know what had happened and he was sorry about the thoughts he'd had. Somehow, when it was all too late, he'd seen his error. He now had to face the consequences. He hoped in time she could forgive him. He'd kept the sincerity in his face and had held it, when he turned to Sarah. Jim has seen the tears flooding down his cheeks. He'd held his face but had been unable to speak. Sarah too just had floods; she too didn't say anything. Somehow, they were speaking through their eyes. Jim had almost felt the intensity between them. He found out, leaving them for a minute who, the man was with them, Frank's brother. He'd heard him talk about him and he wondered how they'd met up. Perhaps he'd come down for the wedding, just been a bit late. Anyway, he was glad to see him and didn't want to ask the wrong questions. He knew time was short. "How's Frank?", he asked Billy. "Tired and upset but he's safe" Billy replied. "Tell him to be careful", Jim hesitated a moment, "OK, tell him to live, be happy and not mourn for me. Tell him to get out of town; it is too small for him, he needs to be outside, in space. The city was no place for him. Tell him that from me, I hold no hard feelings; I'm getting my dues He's got life in him. Tell him.....tell him, I see him as the brother I never had". To his surprise, he saw Billy's eyes glaze. "Come on, I heard you reivers were hard folk, not touched by emotion, all I've seen of them is you two, and you both blubber like women", he smiled. "Emotionless you're not, hard you are, and when it comes to living, God you grab it by the hand". He glanced at Sarah, then he leaned forwards. "Bit stupid when it comes to love" and he grimaced but followed it up with a smile "He's got a good one there, though". Somehow it was as if that had been the cue. Sarah turned and fell into Natasha's arms. She still had Francis's hand in hers, but his grip slowly loosened till her hand dropped. Francis stepped back into the gloom and turned his back; Billy jumped in on the other side of Sarah and helped her on her feet. He nodded at Jim who had dropped his guard and a melancholy look clouded his face now. He didn't nod back as he watched Billy disappear down that dripping, dank, straw-covered stinking tunnel with moans and groans from the suffering condemned on each side and all around. His heart hit bottom. He wanted to go, there and then, just disappear from the pit of life he really left behind him. He forced back a memory, riding through the forest, Frank next to him, letting off his pistols and screaming as they escaped. As he turned back to see the stooped figure of Francis, the reverence all gone, just a broken shell, he felt that feeling he'd had back then. He stood up straight: "Now, did I get to the bit....." As he spoke to all who were listening, in a brave voice he didn't know he had, he tugged on the sleeve of Francis, bringing him out the dark place he looked like he was seeping into.

"I want to go, I want to get out of here. You" and she pointed at Frank "can't spend anymore time hiding in here, you can't go out, have you still got the money you stole from us". "eehrrr" stuttered Frank, "yes". "I have my bags packed already, so have you. There must be a coach leaving London, heading somewhere north. I'm not going to visit my husband in that gaol or watch you hang". Natasha had seen the way she'd changed in the carriage on the way back. She'd stiffened, not said a word till now. Frank was still wiping the sleep from his eye's; somehow, he'd fallen asleep, but now jumped to his feet. "OK", there was no hesitation. Billy looked concerned. So did Natasha. Sarah didn't stop, She went to the kitchen and sent one of the maids to reserve tickets on the next coach heading north. When the maid had asked where in the north, Sarah had snapped, "anywhere, just away from here". The maid had curtsied and in a frightened flurry, disappeared. It all happened so fast, the following day they got away. They were on a coach heading for Sheffield. Billy had called a cab and got some hands off the street to carry the baggage. Sarah sat next to him, holding onto his arm like she wasn't going to let go.

How did he feel, he didn't know: numb was the best way he could think about it. He looked at Sarah. It was as if she was reading his mind, she said "You needed to get out of there, you're a fells man. There's too much trouble for you to get into here. And it's dangerous". Frank had a glimpse of himself a few years back. On a raid, charging at people in the peak of fury. He could see her picture of him, he hadn't been ferocious. North, he agreed, into the hills, he wasn't sure., lowlands or just countryside. He agreed, in the city, he'd be lost. If it hadn't been for the help of Jim, he'd have been robbed blind within the first day there.

Billy stood in Ralph's office. His head bowed, feeling in disgrace, he hadn't done anything, it was the family name. "OK, sit down and spit it out" Ralph said curtly. "I prefer to stand if that's ok" replied Billy. "Sir, I don't know how to say this.....you have given me something I couldn't even dream of before, you gave me your trust, I .."he paused a minute, he'd practiced it before a hundred times but now it froze in his throat, "I have a confession to make". He told Ralph the story, how Jim, his brother's partner was now in jail, with Francis, his now brother in law. He watched as Ralph's face grew darker and the look became angry. At the end, he just stood there, he was fiddling with his cap that was in his hands. "So what do you want me to do about it", shot Ralph holding back an anger he hadn't felt for a long time. "It sounds like there is nothing that can be done, those 2 in goal deserve everything they get and your brother,.....well your brother, he....." he held back at that point, scared he might say something he'd regret later. "I can't intervene, this will be dealt with by the law of the land and I am a representative, I can't", Billy realising where Ralph was going with this, realised the mistake, putting his hands on Ralph's desk he blurted, "noooo, no, you've got it wrong, I don't want you to do anything", he stood up straight, head bowed again, "it's me, I don't want anything from you, you gave me your trust when you didn't have to, I....i just felt.....i owed you the truth, I don't want your help, I agree, what they deserve, I feel sort of guilty I didn't come to you sooner, I don't want to harm your reputation, it's, it's just he's my brother. I wanted to give him a few days to get some distance, I should have come to you sooner, no I don't want your help, I...they don't deserve it....i just hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me, and, I know I don't deserve it but, hope you can forgive me for not telling you sooner".

Ralph swung his chair round and was looking out of the window, he hid from the tear that was rolling down his cheek, he was struggling to get his voice back, there was a lump in his throat. It was a few moments before he pulled himself together. He cleared his throat and pulled out his handkerchief, he deftly used the moment to wipe the tear from his eye's and cheek, then turned back to Billy. Billy saw his eye's were red and took it to be anger, he felt his heart in his feet. "I'll pack my bags" and he turned to leave. "Wait" came a gentle voice behind him. "Your brother, the one who almost got you hanged by giving you a stolen horse for your birthday, who became a highwayman, who is now on the run and you are still defending him". He stood up, "I never had a son, if I had, I couldn't want him to be anymore than you are", Billy was stunned. You defend your brother, and now you stand here prepared to give up your new life, because you feel you owe me the truth. He held out his hand, I'm sorry, I thought you were going to ask me to use my influence to help him, which, A I couldn't and B I wouldn't. But instead", he held out his hand, "Billy Dodds, you are a remarkable young man and I will be privileged to work with you. Billy stood, unsure what to do, he put out his hand and took the hand of his mentor, tears were now in his eyes. "Look, billy, this has all been a pretty rough time for you, you have done nothing wrong, trouble seem's to follow your brother around, I know he's your brother but he makes his choices, same as you just made one yourself, you seem to make good one's, I won't comment on his. You can make something of yourself. If you want some time off, you just have to ask". Billy looked up, "thank you, I might do that", it had been what billy had wanted to ask, he wanted to visit his family, he hoped things had calmed down and that he might be able to make a visit. He knew things would be tough for them, he had saved a bit and would try and give them some money. "In fact", said Ralph, "if it's OK with you, I think I owe your family a visit, explain that you are of benefit to society and thank them". He knew billy wated to go back and wasq worried he might get caught, if they went together, he was sure no harm would befall him, and he genuinely wanted to meet the parents of this amazing boy. "It's agreed then, we'll set off on Friday in the carriage". Billy didn't know what to say, a big grin just spread across his face and he shook Ralphs hand vigorously. That would be something, turning up at the farm in a carriage!!!.

Chapter 14

It turned out to be a fine day, there had obviously been no way of warning them of his coming and billy was nervous. His chest was tight, his stomach churned. He wondered how much he'd changed, he knew a lot had happened, he was more confident in who he was now. Somehow leaving had made him realise how out of place he had felt, the one who was interested in the world, the stories he'd read with father?????. He made a mental note he wanted to visit him while he was here. Passing through the village he'd hidden, Ralph hadn't said anything, just watched him silently. It was mainly out of fear of being caught he told himself. When he'd seen the crowd that had built up, this fancy carriage had brought out both animosity, mainly among those older than him, but also the excitement of the kids chasing them. News had spread fast and there were lots of people out as they went through. It pointed out to him how inside he felt like the same person he was but in the carriage and with the clothes he wore now, was he different just because of

that. He realised people would see him differently and although he'd seen people he recognised, he realised they had seen what they expected to see and no-one seemed to have recognised him. He felt a relief at that but also a twinge of regret, he wasn't sure why.

The carriage went through the village and the kids followed as they took a smaller track that led to his farm, what had been his home. He saw some of his old friends running ahead, they were obviously going to warn his family that gentry were coming and were obviously curious. That was a moment he was dreading, stepping out and being recognised, was he a turncoat, had he changed sides?. As he watched out of the window, he had flashes of lost moments, memories of the fields, where he'd played, worked. The first tree he'd climbed, the stream he'd played in. Even though it was not really that long he'd been away, it was now another world after the noise and bustle of the city. The colour of people that brightened up an otherwise grey atmosphere, the noise of carts and carriages, the people shouting, selling their wares at the market or just talking, gossiping, from housewives on corners, to the masters making deals while walking the pavements. Here, he could hear the water bubbling and falling and pushing over rocks. The rustle of the high grasses and ferns. Movement of trees and animals in the green fields. It was as if somewhere over the past months, he'd changed, perhaps become an adult. The children running up ahead were the same, he seemed to be removed from them now, the carefree way they were. He imagined just jumping out of the carriage and running with them. Something held him back. Perhaps it was the safety and comfort of the carriage, the softness he'd got used to so quickly,. Like something he now wore comfortably, that he imagined he would feel naked without. Ralph, and the protection he felt being with him. Was he going soft?.

It was as he gazed out of the window he had the feeling something was wrong. He sat up. The fields were empty, there should still be cattle and sheep running around. He stuck his head out of the window and up to where the buildings were. They had just come over the brow of the hill above their farmstead and he could see into the courtyard. Normally the chickens and geese should be running around there with the dogs. There should be life, someone in the barn looking after the horses or getting water from the well, but all was still. The chimney should have had smoke billowing out but there was nothing. He felt his heart jump into his mouth as the fear gripped him, something had happened, the farm was empty. Unknowingly he stood and opened the door. He just stepped out. The fact that the carriage was still moving evaded him. His eyes were just fixed on the empty home. Ralph hadn't a chance to get to him, only managed to get out the start of a shout as Billy just disappeared from the carriage. Ralph had jumped up and made his way to the still swinging open door. HE looked back to see Billy in a cloud of dust rolling on the floor. Ralph banged on the roof of the carriage with the metal end of his stick. The driver having been tapped on the shoulder by his guard, and having been brought out of concentration because of the terrible state of the road, glanced over his shoulder, reined in, now standing on the driver's platform. The carriage came to a halt and Ralph jumped out and ran back towards Billy. Some of the kids were already there before him and he heard a few gasps as they started to recognise who it was. Whispers had started and all around him now he heard repeated "it's Billy Dodds". From the middle of the group, he saw Billy getting to his feet. A boy, roughly the same height as Billy was helping him up. Billy looked dazed and was staring at the farmstead in front of them, he gathered it was Billy's home. It looked deserted. "What happened" he heard him ask the boy who helped him up. "They left, we thought you were dead, there were stories you'd been caught and hung". As Ralph looked around he could see a fear in some of the younger children's eyes, mixed

with an awe. They were cautious to crowd to close and Ralph found it easy to thread through them to get by the side of Billy. He grabbed his shoulder and looked him up and down. "You OK, quite a tumble you took, what were you doing!!" he exclaimed but Billy didn't hear him, he was still gazing at the empty farm. He heard the boy reply, "they left, first it was you and Frank, then Sam disappeared for a while till he came back with a woman and took everyone away with him. What they didn't sell they took, Heard they went to somewhere east called Cullercoats. Went to start again". Billy was looking at him now. "They left" his voice was cracking. "I'm going for a look" he said and turned and made his way to the farm. Ralph looked at the boy, he fished out a coin from his purse. "Is there anything else you can tell me", he still held the coin in his hand. The boy looked at him, "that was all, Sam, his brother just came back with some woman, they stayed 3 days, packed up, and left. Lots of folk are doing it now". The boy smiled and lifted himself, with a grin he said "Me, I'm going to America, Father ????? has talked about it, that's where I'm going, just need some money, like the coin in your hand sir. What do I have to do to earn it?" he asked. Ralph gave him one of his sternest looks then let go with the sunshine and smiled, he tossed the coin spinning in the direction of the boy. You hear anything else, you think I or Billy might want to hear, there is another one for you. The boy snatched the coin from the air, doffed his forehead and with a big grin he turned back to the crowd of other children hanging around. Like the piper with the rats, the other children turned and followed the elder boy back the way they'd come. He could hear them as they went, asking for a look, or a touch.

Billy felt his heart in his stomach as he approached the farm. He'd never in his life seen it empty, dead as it was now. No sounds from the stables or house, no smells of cooking or even the smell of smoke. Just an empty sense of nothingness. He heard the carriage approaching but didn't even turn for a look. He went and poked his head through the big barn doors, no, it was empty too. Walking round the house from the outside, any hope that it was a just dream crushed with every pace he took. Having circled the house he'd pulled himself together. As he got to the front he pointed to the stables. "You can put the horses in the stable for the night in there," he pointed to the well. "Water if needed", he turned to Ralph, "we can stay here the night, too late to carry on now, I'll light the fire and see what I can find to eat".

They didn't find anything to eat but warmed themselves that night by a big fire. Billy spent the night telling stories of his adventures here in days gone by. The beds had gone so Billy made some bedding space round the fire. Ralph stayed quiet and listened through the night. Billy had spent time together with the carriage drivers in the kitchen in Newcastle, so they knew each other. Only Ralph who almost never ate with them, was the outsider. He felt pride from Billy, but he also sensed the discomfort it caused him. When he'd realised he'd be sleeping on the floor, with others, on piles of straw, his first reaction had been a shudder. Billy had been watching him and he got a grip of himself. He'd smiled back "be like when I was younger" trying to cover any image of his discomfort. He knew it didn't really work. Billy was well aware, he'd carried on searching round the house and eventually returned with a few old and used horse blankets he'd found in the stable which he added to the pile to make Ralph's bed softer. Only the drivers actually got some sleep. Billy's nerves, and Ralph missing his feather bed, were the causes of their insomnia. Billy had seen the sun rise and rebuilt the fire. He was in the process of heating some water for Ralph to wash himself when there was a tapping at the door. It was Father Elliot, standing with his big smile and the sun behind him, his voice rang out "Morning Billy, heard you were back in town, hope I'm not bothering you but I wanted to catch you before you left hurriedly again". Billy swung the door open

wide, "Father Elliot, I was going to visit you. Please come in". There was movement from inside as the drivers got to their feet. Billy got a chair, he made room near the fire for the father to sit. "I've brought some bread for breakfast, I am guessing you didn't find anything here to eat".

They were through the bread and jam. The 2 drivers were preparing the coach, the other 3 were sitting at the long table. The fire was still crackling but was down to its last flames. "Sam came round" father Elliot said, "he gave me a message to pass on, he gave also gave me an address" he turned to Ralph, "I am guessing it is your address in Newcastle". Ralph took the paper the father passed to him he read it, and nodded. "He wanted you to know, he has met someone and they plan to set-up a farm in Cullercoats. It is on the east coast north of Newcastle. It seem's he talked about it with your family and has taken them with him". Billy sat looking down at the table, he understood, life here as a reivers was over. It *was* time to move on.

Somehow destiny had stepped in on his part. He looked at Ralph who sat quietly listening. Ralph was looking at him, he had a gently smile on a face that showed empathy, he had been good to him, more than fair. Then he turned to Father Elliot, his first mentor. There was the same look, how had he got so lucky. "Thank you Father, for everything, your time and patience, you have been a good friend of the family, but from me, you opened my eye's, if it wasn't for you.....", he felt the tears forming. "Sorry, I'm getting a bit emotional". The father just nodded, "You were worth it, it has been fun, watching you leap forwards in bounds, I was only doing what felt right, you did the work, I am proud if that helps". He turned to Ralph, "you have a good lad here", Ralph nodded. The father continued "I would be grateful if you could keep me informed of his progress", Ralph looked at him, then back to Billy. "He's quite a handful I have to say, and from what I've seen from him up to now I don't see that is going to stop, I like the energy of his life". His face became darker "Sorry to say it but I do hope your brother Frank is out of your life, I see nothing but bad for you coming from him", and he bowed his head "I am sorry to have to say that but whatever, you seem to have made the right decisions so I trust your decisions, and hope to be someone you can come to at any time you need". The mention of Frank brought up an image of him, the last time he'd seen him, running out of the rain, into a carriage, with a sadness on his face, Sarah on his arm. He could see what Ralph was saying. Somehow he couldn't see much beyond the sadness and pain for him, he wondered was it that he had got lucky and not Frank. An image of the smile from him the day he'd given him the horse on his birthday. He hadn't wanted to harm anyone, he just wanted to see smiles and happiness around him, even if he'd had to steal for it. Perhaps that was it, Frank couldn't see further than the moment and the consequences, somehow passed him by, it wasn't his fault, he hoped Sarah would be able to be his conscience. Sam it seemed had found his way, he smiled, he knew he deserved it, the solid one, with his feet on the ground. His head wasn't in the clouds. Billy was glad, he knew he wasn't that far from Newcastle, he'd visit when he could.

As the coach trundled off down the track towards the village, he looked back, there were the last tendrils of smoke coming from the chimney, the last puffs, he couldn't help feeling an ending as his eye's scanned the now empty farm and courtyard. The father was standing outside the gates, still waving them off. The father had passed him an letter as he left, it was burning in his hand, "open it" smiled Ralph back at him. "I won't ask" and he lay back and closed his eye's. Billy took the envelope out, he had an Idea, as he looked at the writing, he recognised Sarah's writing. He broke the wax seal.

Dear Billy, I am hoping this finds you well. Frank asked me to write, he knew somehow Father Elliot would get it to you eventually. Frank wants to say how sorry he is about your birthday present. He is in need of a change of scene. By the time you read this we will either be in the new world or still on our way. Frank talked about fulfilling Jim's dream. I think he just needs to get away and the opportunity to start again. We have money and Auntie Natalie might be planning on joining us. You know her, full of adventure, she is like Frank in so many ways.

I wish to thank you for all your help in our last days in London, I know the risks you took and from the bottom of my heart I hope this finds you well. This letter will be short as we are rushing to catch the boat this morning. When we have an address in America, and have found our feet, I will write again with more details.

Your faithfully Sarah Dodds

She had signed at the bottom. Billy looked up, he saw the place he grew up falling into the distance through the carriage window, the place several generations of his family had lived in, he felt a sort of betrayal towards them leaving, he knew he would be the last in his family to spend a night there. It had felt like an empty shell when he'd arrived the day before when he'd been expecting to see his family. But that last night he'd spent there, he'd relived memories he had, he'd also visited ghost of the past, memories of stories told that he'd not witnessed but imagined. Now that was all finished. He looked across at Ralph, he realised that with him, his new life would take shape, he thought of Betty and a smile crossed through the darkness he felt inside, a flash of light, what would the future be for him and his family. He sat back, he knew his family were safe, Sam was solid, he'd find his feet, work hard and felt safe new generations would spring from him, of that he was certain. Frank, well he knew him, he only hoped Sarah would be able to control him. If Natasha went, he knew the 2 of them would be able to direct him. He was a good man, just a bit wild. All that was a relief, he also knew HE was headed in a direction that suited him, he WAS the lucky one.

Father Elliot stood watching the carriage disappear over the hill, he glanced back at the old farmstead. The last puff of smoke rising from the building, he'd seen it before, that house would just fall to ruin now. He wasn't surprised really, he was proud of Billy, not all the people who left landed on their feet as well as him, The Dodds clan was one of the last to leave, over the years he had seen the clans disappear one by one as the life became harder and harder. This family was typical, Frank heading to new lands, America was one of the popular destinations, Ireland was another. Sam was staying in the north, farming being in his blood, he knew he'd do well. He knew he was seeing the end of the Reivers legend.

The end