

What Happened After the Clock Struck
'One'

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Chapter 1: Before the Clock Struck 'One'

It was early July. On the banks of the Wisconsin River in Milwaukee, there was a decent sized house, with white, wooden planks and green shutters without. It had one chimney for the kitchen, three bedrooms, a living room, and an outhouse in the back. Bushes grew alongside the house, with primroses, coneflowers, and marigold on the two sides of the gravel walkway. Some intruding buttercups would also pop their little heads up, which made it look all the prettier

To the south-east side of the house, a neatly kept garden could be seen, with cabbages, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, turnips, and cucumbers, all set in neat rows. There was also mint, thyme, rosemary, sage, and parsley, set down on a separate bed for the herbs. An apple tree has firmly planted its roots in a sunny corner, and a well sits not too far from it.

Across the river, stands a mill, which is the business of the owner of this lovely house. This area was a nice place to live, with the sound of the birds tweeting; the river splashing against the rocks and the bank; and with the smell of damp earth, sweet flowers, and a refreshing smell of water. A gentle breeze would blow, carrying along with it, the wonderful smell of pine trees which grew not far off.

The occupants of the house are a family of three: a father, a mother, and a son. Charles Whitmore, is the father of this lovely family, and he works hard all day within the mill, which is the family business.

Charles is a strong and sturdy man, and his strength developed after working so hard for the past few years. His brown, twinkling eyes are sincere and honest, and his blondish-brownish hair is neatly kept. He has a thick moustache, and a kind smile. His smile can reveal some wrinkles, from years of hard work on his mill, and previously, on his father's farm.

Charles is usually dressed in a short jacket and long trousers, which was what he preferred for working. But on Sundays, he would dress his best; wearing his clean, tailored suit, trousers, a top hat, his pocket watch, and his cane.

Alice Whitmore is Charles' wife. Her husband claims that she is the prettiest looking lady in the whole state, which indeed could not be denied. With her merry blue eyes, golden hair, and slim face, not only did she look pretty, but Alice also looked as fragile as a porcelain doll!

Alice wasn't the hardest on fashion, as she preferred her more simple dress, or her dark blue bodice and full skirt, so that she could work in the garden without worrying too much about staining her clothes.

While doing work in the garden, Alice would usually sing; her sweet voice rising up into the air. She would fashion her hair into a nice and neat chignon, and would usually wear her velvet bonnet to shade herself from the sun.

This lovely couple gave birth to their only child, James, in 1855.

As we see him now, James Whitmore is an eleven year old child, who has short, blond hair, which was combed back, and nicely kept. He was quite fairlooking, and had his mother's eyes and his father's smile. James rarely went to school, as usually helped his father in the mill. He usually wore his plain shirt, jacket, knickerbockers, and his sturdy working boots during the long hours he was at work. His mother would teach him at home during her spare time, so James knew how to read, write, and spell. Arithmetic was also something he learned, though it wasn't his strong suit.

As a young child, James loved to tinker with things, and by the time he was nine, he was recognised by all the neighbours for being able to fix almost any mechanical device.

And so, this was the wonderful family that lived in a beautiful house. However, things changed, and I will tell you how it all started:

One evening, after all the dishes had been cleared away, the family began to get ready for bed. It was a rather frightening night, as the wind howled and shook the house so vigorously, that all the dishes and cutlery rattled about in the cabinets. The candle light flickered in a most haunting manner, threatening to go out. The trees outside were bending over, and their leaves were stripped away with the wind. Rain pounded on the roof, and against the windows; so quickly and piercing in fact, that it was almost a miracle that the glass didn't give in!

After they had all said their prayers, and retired to bed, the storm was still going more fiercely than ever. James stayed up for hours, not able to fall asleep with such a racket going. After tossing and turning for what seemed like hours to him, he got up and looked out the window.

The trees were bending most dangerously, though James couldn't really tell, as the sky was pitch black. Suddenly, James heard a sharp "crack," then a slow "creaaak." He squinted his eyes, seeing something heading his way in the very faint moonlight that made its way through the clouds. Then he realized that the sound was of a tree falling over, and he could see it coming closer and closer!

"In a matter of seconds," thought James, "the tree will crush our house!"

James charged out of his room, then he ran to his parents' bedroom.

"Mama! Papa! Get out! Hurry!"

The creaking and groaning got louder and louder, and the sound of trees breaking didn't seem to cease, as the tree that was falling was causing a domino effect!

"Mama! Papa! Hurry!" cried James, and in two seconds, his parents were up.

"Oh, Charles!" cried Alice, as they charged down the stairs.

James' father was very pale, and quickly picked up his wife as she stumbled and fell. James had opened the trapdoor to the basement, and was rushing his parents.

“Hurry! Hurry up! It’s coming! It’s coming fast!”

“Lord, help us! Have mercy on us!” thought Alice, before she passed out in her husband’s arms.

“James! Watch over your mother!” called Charles, as he placed her down gently into the basement. James rushed over.

“Mama! Please do wake up!”

Charles quickly closed the trapdoor, and descended the stairs to where James was kneeling.

“Oh, Mama!” choked James, “Please wake up! Oh please oh please oh *please* wake uuuuupp!” cried James, before he broke into sobs.

“Don’t worry,” said Charles. “She has just fainted, and—”

His statement was cut short, when they heard a deafening “CRASH” as the tree smashed into their house!

James started a new fountain of tears, and Charles became pale. Alice had suddenly regained consciousness, and James almost took her breath away when he gave her a sudden hug.

“Oh, Charles! What has happened?” cried Alice.

“Don’t worry, dear,” he replied, gasping for breath. “Just pray. The Lord has saved us, we must give thanks to Him.” And so, all of them prayed, and they sang a hymn, but on the inside, Charles was very worried about all that had passed. He wondered if he should open the trapdoor and see what had happened, however, the wind was blowing harder than ever, and it seemed like a dangerous thing to do.

“Lord, help us!” Charles thought, and it was the thought that he and his wife shared.

They were all silent for a while, as they cuddled together for heat. Soon, James fell asleep beside his mother, and Charles looked around the basement for things to keep them warm.

In one corner of the room, Charles found an old tablecloth. And among a bunch of other things, he found the old curtain that had once been in the living room.

When he brought them back to the others, he found that James had woken up again, due to a deafening crash from one of the trees tumbling over.

Charles put the table cloth on the floor, and they all lay down on it. They used the curtain to cover themselves. But it took them a long time to fall asleep, as the ground was cold and hard, and they could hear the storm raging right above them. The thunder rumbled, and the earth seemed to tremble, but finally, one by one, they fell asleep. In the morning, they would find what damage had been done.

Charles was the first to wake up in the morning. He was stiff from sleeping on the hard, earth, floor, with just a tablecloth as cushioning. He was also tired from all the commotion that had happened last night, though somehow, it now seemed like a dream. The storm had subdued, and Charles was able to open the trap door, though with some difficulty. As he climbed out, the shock nearly made him fall backwards. It all came back to him, and it was all real again, not a dream.

"Praised be thy name!" cried Charles, as he saw the real damage that had happened. It was worse than he imagined, and he saw that God had saved his family.

Everything on the main floor was a mess. Everything was out of place, dust was everywhere, and the windows were smashed. As Charles went upstairs, he found that both bedrooms, James' bedroom and the one that he and his wife slept in, had been completely destroyed. The branches of a big tree outside of their house was sticking out everywhere!

"Oh! Lord!" gasped Charles. "You are so good to us!" he thought. "Your mercy endures forever! Oh! Praised be thy name!"

Charles was in tears. The Lord *had* saved him and his family! Soon, James and Alice came up.

James stood and stared, before bursting into tears. Alice also started to cry.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, oh, oh!" she knelt down on the ground and wept. "Thank you for saving us!"

James wiped away his tears, his eyes red with crying and anger. He stayed quiet as he wondered how his parents could be grateful in such a time. Then he cried out in anger, clenching his fists, and ran downstairs with tears pouring down his face, leaving his parents to chase after him and comfort him.

"This is what the Lord did!" James cried as he jumped up in anger. "You always tell me that everything is in his hands! You told me he loves us! And look at this! *Look at this!*" cried James, before he started to sob again.

"James," said Charles. "Yes, we did teach you that God is in control, and He does love us. And—"

"If He loves us, then why did he allow this to happen?" cried James, losing control over himself. "Why? *Why?*! If He loves us, then-then He wou-wouldn't do this! He wouldn't!"

James started to sob uncontrollably again and lay down on the floor in a heap.

"I hate you, God! I hate you!" he cried as he choked on his tears. "How could you do this to us?!"

"James! Pull yourself together!" Charles shouted.

At last, after a couple of minutes, James calmed down enough for Charles to explain to him.

"God did this because this is for the best. Everything is going according to His plan. And we should be thankful becau—"

“Thankful? *Thankful?!?*” James yelled as his anger started to stir within him again. “You are telling me to be thankful for this?! How can anyone be thankful in a time like this?”

“James,” Charles said sternly. “The Bible tells us that every good and perfect gift is from above. We should be thankful for everything that God has given us. Everything that was destroyed belonged to the Lord. And we should also be thankful that He saved our lives.”

“Yes,” said Alice. “God saved us. If we were still all asleep, the tree would have killed us. And we should praise God that we have a basement. Otherwise, we would have had nowhere to sleep.”

James stayed silent as he pondered over what he had heard. He was still angry that the Lord had allowed such to happen, but he knew that his parents wouldn’t tolerate any more nonsense. So he stayed quiet, not at all sorry about the trouble that he had just caused.

A few days later, the house was mainly repaired, but the mill, which had also been destroyed in the storm, was still in bad shape. However, a sad thing happened: Alice fell ill.

After all had happened, Alice was very stressed and worried, which eventually led to her falling ill. And if this wasn’t enough, the family was starting to struggle, as they ran out of money, and had no income.

“James,” said Charles one day, “I will need you to help me with my work and take care of mother. We are almost out of money, and you know the state your mother is in.

Charles didn’t need to say anymore, for James saw it all. They didn’t have enough money to get a doctor for his mom, and help was needed at home. The mill wasn’t entirely fixed yet, and Charles and James will spend the next few days trying to fix it. So this is the situation that the family landed in. It brought changes to quite a few things, but most of all, James’ behaviour. Ever since the accident, James would fly into tempers more often and quickly. His faith had been shaken through the incident, and he was starting to lean away from God...

“Some God of love...” he would mutter to himself, every time he was reminded of the things that had passed.

Chapter 2: Another Narrow Escape

James and his father worked hard all day, trying to fix the mill, but not with much success. Their jackets lay to the side, and the sun was beating down hard upon them. The storm had cooled the whole area down, but it felt so hot, all James wanted to do was jump into the river and cool off.

"Huff... huff... puff..." Charles panted. "Jay... huff..." he said, as he tried to catch his breath, "you go down to the other side, and hold the wheel firm, while I drive this bolt in."

Off James went, and he tried to hold it in place.

"Have you got it?" asked Charles.

"Papa!" call James. "I can't hold it steady, I'm not strong enough. Let's switch jobs."

His voice echoed, within the structure, and soon Charles appeared.

"Very well, but mind that you don't jam your fingers."

James went around. Then, he skillfully held the gears together and drove the bolt through. He didn't notice that someone was watching him and marveling at the way he put the parts together. Soon after Charles came back around, they saw the man who was watching. He is a well dressed man with a serious expression. His gaze seemed to look straight through you, drawing all sorts of information towards him. The man has a full beard and moustache, and his dark brown hair is nicely combed back.

"Ah! Mr. Sholes, what a pleasure to see you again!" Charles exclaimed, as he offered his hand.

Mr. Sholes heartily shook it, and as he turned his head towards James, he asked:

"This is your son?"

"Aye," answered Charles.

James made a slight bow, and stood by his father. Soon, Mr. Sholes asked to talk to Charles in person, and James went back to try to fix another part of the mill. After a few unsuccessful attempts, James returned home and studied some of his arithmetic.

When Charles returned, James found out that Mr. Sholes was a printer and newspaper editor.

"He wants you," Charles said, turning to James, "to be an apprentice and help him fix his machines."

"But Papa, then I can't help you!" James cried madly.

Charles gave a reassuring smile and put his hands on the latter's shoulders.

"Don't worry. Instead of giving you housing and clothes and food, Mr. Sholes was generous enough to pay you instead. So you won't really be an apprentice, but you will still learn from him."

And so, James was a new source of income for the family. He now had a new routine; he would wake up, eat breakfast, then go off to Mr. Sholes' home, and there, he

would fix things, and sometimes, Mr. Sholes would drive them out and show James how the press worked. And so, life was getting a little better.

One day, James was on his way to work. He always took the long route over, because he liked to walk by the river's edge in a chance of spotting some deer or birds. Soon, James came to a meadow, the one that he always cut through. As he rounded the bend, he saw a group of boys, about five of them. They were big boys, much older than James, and they had mean looks on their faces.

One of the boys glanced at James, then whispered something to another of them, who was apparently the leader of the gang. A big, ugly sneer came across his face, and he started in the direction James was in.

As they all approached, James was finally able to get a good look at them. The one who appeared to be the head of the gang, was dressed as any regular boy was dressed, but that didn't make him appear like any other boy. His face was a squared one, full of pimples, and an ugly sneer was painted on it. A big scar crossed his left cheek, which made him look all the more terrifying. James eyed his fist, which looked like it had knocked out many children before. He was also tall; much taller than James, and his shoulders were wide, which fit his appearance.

As James inched backwards, towards the place where he had come from, one of the boys pounced, and grabbed onto him and pushed him towards the gang leader.

"He's all yours, Gus," the boy said, crackly quite evilly.

James was altogether too terrified to move or speak and stood frozen before the monster, pale as death.

"Now, let's see," said Gus, as he walked around James, who had been seized by two other boys. "What can we do to this one?" he said, as he looked around him.

"I know," one of the other boys offered, and a wicked smile crossed his face. "Let's make him walk across that bridge."

"Which bridge?"

"*That* bridge. You know? *That* bridge."

"You mean the one where we did *the thing* to the other young lad?"

"Aye!"

"Ah! Yes! Good idea!" exclaimed Gus, as he chuckled in quite an evil way.

James found himself dragged across the meadow.

"Let me go!" he cried, and was all too scared to be angry in the very least.

"Oh! The poor creature is too weak!" Gus mocked, leaning so close to James' face, that James could smell his horrid breath. The other boys laughed.

"Let me go! You corny face! You blunderbuss! You... you gibface! Let mm—"

James was cut short, as one of the thugs put his massive hand over his mouth and pinched his nose.

"That'll teach ye not to speak like that to ones above ye!" a boy with a heavy yorkshire accent said with a sneer.

Soon, they came to the bridge. It really wasn't a bridge anymore, because it was mostly under the water, and the wood was all old and rotting. A newer and more sturdy bridge had replaced this one long ago, as this one is impossible to cross without hurting yourself in some way or the other. The current was also very strong in this area, and James became *very* pale.

"Now," said Gus, turning to James looking quite angry. "You are to walk across *this* bridge, as a *punishment* for calling me *corny face*."

One of the things Gus hated most, was the fact that he had so many pimples. And to call Gus "corny face" was a very dangerous thing to do!

Author's note: corny face is an insult that means: a very red pimped face.

James saw that all was lost, and fell on his knees and begged

"Please, my mother... she.. she.. is ill at home, and.. and.. I.. I.. I need to help my father fix the.. his.. the.. the mill..."

Gus gave a short of snort, and said,

"Oh! He's such a meater," he teased. "Hm... how 'bout this, we will let you go home if you can make it to the other side of the river. If not... well..."

"Then you'll be dead!" one of the other boys put in.

"Oh! But I can't! I can't!" cried poor James.

The other boys laughed and jeered at him. Gus' evil eyes lit up, and he said sarcastically,

"Oh dear, you're right! Yea, it is quite hard to cross the river." but then in quite a different tone, a strict and mean one, "and if you refuse, we will *tie* your hands behind your back and *make* you cross the river!"

All the other boys cheered with approval, then started chanting,

"Bind him! Bind him! Bind him! Bind him! Bind him! Bind—"

"SILENCE!" Gus cried. "We will give him a choice first," he said slyly. "What do you choose, *my boy*?"

James slowly and reluctantly got up, then inched towards the bridge. The bridge swayed dangerously, and the wood looked slippery, as it was all covered in algae. Suddenly, James felt a hard push, and he fell full force onto the bridge. All the boys cheered. Gus had pushed him, and James fell hard. The wood scraped his face, and his cheek now started to bleed.

James got up, and tried to walk across the bridge. He was quite stunned, and fell a few times, but he soon got the hang of it, and was doing pretty well. The other boys

weren't very pleased, as James didn't lose his balance much. Gus was frowning hard, then his evil eyes lit up once more. He picked up a handful of stones and said to the others,

"Pelt him! Let's pelt him with stones!" and all this time, he was picking up handful after handful of pebbles, showering poor James all around!

As a very big stone fell beside James with a splash, he suddenly fell in! A cheer arose from the watchers on the bank, but James didn't hear it at all.

Poor James had plunged into the ice cold water, and was struggling to stay afloat. The next minute seemed like a blur to James. Freezing cold water was trying to force its way into his lungs, and he was choking and spluttering all the time. Even if the water *didn't* enter his body, he still would have frozen, for the water hadn't been heated up from the sun yet. He tried to grab hold of some branches and rocks, but without success. His cheek was smarting from the terrible gash he had got earlier. His vision blurred before him. Everything was spinning and growing dark. James was splashing the water and trying to grab on various objects, though he didn't know it. In the distance, James heard a voice.

"Grab hold, my boy!" it cried. "Grab hold... grab hold..."

James felt something under his armpit, and before he knew it, he was on the banks of the river, coughing and spitting out water. A jacket was wrapped around him, and a familiar voice was calling him.

"James... James..." it said. To James, it sounded so far in the distance. He tried to open his eyes and see who it was, but all he could do was moan. Then he fainted.

When James came back to his senses, he was on the couch inside of his home. The couch had been pushed into the kitchen so that he could lie by the fire, which had been lit. His clothes weren't wet anymore, and a big blanket was covering him, keeping him warm. As he opened his eyes, he saw a worried face looking at him. It was his father.

"Papa?" asked James softly. James found that his voice seemed weak... in fact, his whole body felt weak.

"Don't talk, Jay," Charles said, as he smiled and knelt down beside him. He looked quite relieved, but his face was still quite pale.

"Am I... am I... where am I?" James asked weakly.

Charles smiled, before telling him that he was at home.

"I... I didn't die?"

"No," he said. "The Lord saved your life."

"Oh..." said James, still quite puzzled. "How? What happened?" he said, before he fell into a coughing fit.

"Shhhh, don't talk. I will explain," Charles said.

"The Lord used Mr. Sholes to save you. He was walking along the river, when he heard the commotion and saw you in the river. Then he took a big tree branch, and told you to grab onto it, and pulled you ashore. The other boys ran away, and he is sure that they will never disturb you again."

"... Wait... God was walking by the river?"

Charles smiled and said, "No, Mr. Sholes was walking by the river."

"Oh... so it was him..."

"Yea."

"I thought the voice was familiar..."

James coughed hard again, and his father gave him some tea which warmed him down to his toes. They were both silent for a while before James asked,

"How long was I out for?"

"Only about twelve minutes. Don't worry, Jay" said Charles, as he saw James' worried face.

"Oh, Papa?"

"What is it?"

"Please go tell Mr. Sholes that I am so thankful, and that— cough... that cough—"

"Now, don't talk anymore. Yes, I will go and tell Mr. Sholes." and off he went to find Mr. Sholes, who was just as worried and was pacing around at their front door.

James sighed, for he knew that he was sick and got a cold. He felt his eyelids drooping... he was falling asleep.

The fire flickered, and the flames seemed to dance before his eyes. A piece of coal fell over, and a few ashes arose into the air. The smell of the herbs that hung about in the kitchen made James sigh again. He could hear his father expressing his gratitude to Mr. Sholes outside and the sound of birds tweeting a lovely song.

"Thank you, Lord..." James thought. "Thank you for saving me... I'm sorry that I was so angry at you... I'm sorry... Please... forgive me. You *did* save us, and... and you saved me again. Thank you! Thank you!" And with that, James fell asleep until late in the afternoon, leaving him more humble and thankful than he had ever been before in his life.

Chapter 3: The Tide Turns

On a dreary Sunday morning, a wealthy and well dressed family was getting ready to go to church. This is the Thatcher family, as we can see from the word *Thatcher* embedded onto their carriage. The Thatcher family consists of eight people; a father, mother, an elder son about sixteen years of age, then a daughter about fifteen, followed by another daughter who was about thirteen, then two sons of about eight, and finally a younger daughter, around the age of six.

The father of the family was a tall man. He was very well respected, and had a serious, yet playful expression. How that works, I really don't know, but that is how he looks. His green eyes seemed to always smile at you, and sparkle and dance about.

After everyone got into the carriage, the coachman shook the reins, and they were off to church.

As the family went through the dirt and cobble streets, they seemed to light up the gloomy day. Poorer children who were carrying heavy bundles would stop and stare. And it wasn't because of the carriage, which was an extravagant one indeed; it was because of the family within.

And it wasn't because of how wonderful they looked on the outside, it was because they lived like a Christian, and a light, a wonderful and *very* bright light, seemed to shine through them when they were with others. Many a time had they helped the poorer children who were overworked and were incapable of doing what they were commanded to do.

One of the things that showed that they were Christians, was because they seemed to always be joyful. And their joyfulness seemed to spread, and people around them usually seemed joyful too! People loved this household, as they were happy, and always had comforting words to say. Now let us get back to this gloomy Sunday morning...

We will leave this family for a moment, and speed down about five blocks. Here, we stop outside of a building, with a sign that says: *Jacob Obermann Brewery*. Sitting at a table by a window, was a man, smoking his pipe as he was waiting to meet someone.

Soon, a carriage was passing by.

"What a rich looking family..." the man muttered to himself, as he watched the carriage pass. "And what a cute little 'un." he thought, staring at the youngest child.

Yes, the carriage that passed by was the one with the family that we had met earlier. The youngest child was sitting in between her father and mother. She was a slightly chubby little girl, with golden hair that was done up most intricately with rolls and plaits, and embedded with the most beautiful crowns of flowers. Her eyes were a bright amber colour, just like her mother's, and they sparkled, just like her father's. Though all of the family was dressed well, and they all looked decent, this little girl looked

absolutely pretty. Her form was slender, and her expression was almost womanly. Everyone loved her, and seemed to always respect her.

And so, the man at the window stared at her until their carriage disappeared.

Soon enough, the door to the brewery was opened, and a man stepped in. If he stepped into our day and age, everyone would probably run, for he looked awful. Not that he looked evil, but because he was so filthy and smelly.

This man's face looked flabby and slobbery, because he drinks *too* much. His eyes were a lovely shade of blue, however, they seemed to haunt his looks since they seemed clouded from reality; for he seemed to always be thinking. His clothes are wrinkled and stained, and today, his extremely greasy hair was combed back, in an effort to appear nice. Usually, this man would smell strongly of wine and alcohol, but today, he had bathed himself, as he was trying to make a business deal.

The man by the window got up to greet this man and said,

"Good morning... err... Mr. Brüncker?"

"Goot mornink, my goot fellow! Please do remind me of your name, ja?" Mr. Brüncker said, with a heavy German accent and a very low voice.

"Err... Mr. Schwartz, sir." Mr. Schwartz said after a pause; for he was shocked by how heavy this man's accent was.

"Ah! Ja, ja—goot, goot. Do you fancy a glass or two, Herr Schwartz?"

"Just one, thank you." Mr. Schwartz said. He was very unhappy to find that the man he was making business with was one that looked and smelt awful (even after he had bathed) and one with *such* a heavy German accent, which made it hard to understand what he was saying.

"So," said Mr. Schwartz, after they had both settled down with a drink. "What is it that you are looking for?"

"It just so happens... I am in need of someone to handle a bit of *dirty vork* for me." he said, and gave a little smile when he saw Mr. Schwartz's puzzled face. "You see, I've heard things—oh yes, very *interesting* things. About the riches you have stolen... the people you have taken... the *reputation* you've earned. Quite impressive, really—"

"I have never done such a thing!" cried Mr. Schwartz, who seemed to easily lose his cool. "Are you calling me a *thief*?"

"Ja, I am calling you a thief... *und* a kidnapper! Und you know *exactly* what you did, *Samuel Smith*"

Mr. Schwartz's jumped straight out of his seat.

"How did you... but you didn't... you... you blunderbuss!" he spluttered. "You... you couldn't! You—"

He was interrupted by Mr. Brüncker's sly chuckle.

"Ahh, now, now... calm yourself. There's no need for theatrics. I know your little secret, ja—but... do you want everyone here to know as well?" he said, as he gestured

around him. "That would be... most unfortunate." he said with a sly, evil, and mischievous smile.

Mr. Schwartz sat down, red and angry, giving in. For all around them *had* become quite quiet, and many stared at the two.

"Ah, please, don't worry, ladies and gentlemen." Mr. Brüncker said, as he leaned back in his chair. "Mine friend here—he has simply lost his temper, as he *so often* does. Nothing to be alarmed about, ja?" he said, as he glanced at the latter and gave a small smile.

Samuel sat down quietly. He didn't want to draw more attention than was needed, but he muttered under his breath,

"I ain't your friend..."

"Of course," Mr. Brüncker replied, almost in a pitiful manner. "You may not see it yet... but you *vill* be mine. Friendships can be... *persuasive*, ja?"

Samuel, still looking like he was willing to kill this ugly and stinky old man, gave in and said,

"So what do you want from me?" he said in quite a grouching manner.

Mr. Brüncker chuckled again, for he was enjoying himself immensely.

"Now, before I continue... you must understand—there *vill* be *no* declining this offer. If you do... vell, I *vill* simply have to tell ze public who you *really* are. And you know what happens after *that*, don't you?"

"If you do such, what will stop me from telling them all the things that *you* have told me? If you do that, we will both be caught." said Samuel, thinking that the latter had nothing to say now.

But to Samuel's utter dismay, Mr. Brüncker smiled, a sort of watery smile, and went on to say,

"Of course, of course... but tell me—how does that affect *me*, hmm? I am already broke. I am older than you. Mine life... it doesn't hold much purpose anymore," he said, as he swirled his drink with a dreamy look on his face. "*But you*—if you die... all zat hard work? All zat ambition? It goes *poof, poof*. Just like that, ja?"

Samuel turned red with fury, but he couldn't make a row. If he did, he would draw *too* much attention, as others probably already thought he was acting a little suspicious.

"Alright," he grouched again. "What's the deal?"

"Oh come now," Mr. Brüncker said, as he saw how upset Samuel was. "It's very simple. Just a little theft... a tiny kidnapping. Nothing you haven't done before, eh?"

At this, Samuel jumped up and was ready to knock the old man over. But he restrained himself as Mr. Brüncker gave another smile and went on to say,

"Tsk, ts... striking an old man? *Really*? Your name's already dirt around here. Hurt me—and you'll have more than just *me* to deal with. And when they find out *who* you really are? Ohh..." he said with a sort of chuckle, "that *vill* be *delicious*."

Samuel sat down and tried to control himself. One wrong step, and it would be over for him. He took a few deep breaths, and finally consented. Mr. Brüncker smiled, and said,

“Goot boy, goot boy. Ve’ll meet again—soon, I think. You look a bit... *perplexed*... Ah, und thank you ever so much for ze wine. You’ll take care of ze bill, *naturally*. Ah, yes, vine.” he said, as he saw Samuel’s confused face. “I know—*everyone* here drinks beer. But I have *standards*, ja?”

And with that, he left; leaving a very red and angry man to pay for his drink and giving him no other choice, but to agree to the terms that had been set.

Chapter 4: A Visit

Samuel Smith was waiting for his guest to come and agree to *his* terms. He just hoped that a mess wouldn't be made in his house... or perhaps I should say, in his *mansion*.

It was half past six. His guest was *thirty* minutes late. At last, the knocker was heard, and Samuel opened the door and invited his guest, Mr. Brüncker, to come in! Yes, the very Mr. Brüncker who had tricked him into a deal, only about a week ago.

"Ahh, goot mornink, goot mornink!" Mr. Brüncker exclaimed as he stepped into Samuel's home. "Such elegance, such space!" he gasped as he looked around him. "Tell me... vhat does a man like *you* do with all zis room, eh?" he asked, chuckling to himself. "No wife, no children... ah... but all as vell, ja?"

Samuel wasn't so sure about himself anymore. If this man was going to come into *his* home and gasp and wonder and marvel at everything, only to then criticize and tease him, he was *quite* sure he would turn him out!

"Ahh, so very charming—really!" he exclaimed further, as they stepped into the living room. "But now... let's get to ze business, shall ve? Oh! Is zat vine for *me*? You shouldn't have—but I'm *glad* you did. Dankeschön!" he said, as he took the bottle and filled the glass.

Samuel smiled, a flashing one. Yes, he actually smiled, because it was all going as he planned. Beforehand, he had poured alcohol into the bottle of wine, and set it onto the table for Mr. Brüncker. He had gotten some beer for himself, so that he wouldn't risk getting drunk, which was what he planned to do to Mr. Brüncker, to get him to agree to what he said.

"Mmm! Zis vine is *excellent*! Although... it does taste a little... *strange*, hmm?" Mr. Brüncker said, as he swirled the glass around. "Anyhow—vhat did you call me over for? Just don't forget... you *vill* follow our agreement. Or else... I tell *everyone*. Ze whole *world*, if I must—vho you *really* are." Then he raised his glass and said, "Cheers to honesty, ja?"

"Of course I will follow the agreement. I am a man of my word... as you are too, correct?" Samuel said, as he too raised his glass. The two of them clinked glasses and drank.

"Of course I am a man of my vord... I do as I please, und I always put it into consideration... ze things I have already said."

Then the two of them clinked glasses again. Samuel leaned back in his chair, trying to come up with a backup plan if his original didn't work.

"Vell..." Mr. Brüncker said after a pause. "Vas I supposed to know vhy I'm here? I must have missed that part—or you conveniently left it out," he said as he twirled his glass with a smirk on his face. "You see, people don't invite Heinrich Brüncker over for small talk. So... vhat's really going on, hmm?"

Samuel kept a straight face and said, "Well... you see, I *do* invite people, just like you, Mr Brüncker over, just for a talk, and—"

"A talk, you said—not a *small* talk. Hmm... such a clever little choice of words. So tell me—what are you keeping from me, hmm?"

"Nothing, sir. What *would* I try to keep from you, hmm?" he said, trying to sound as clever as his adversary.

"Vell... I may never know. *Perhaps* you are smart. Not as smart as me, of course—but smart enough to *try* hiding things." he said. Then he leaned forward and said, in a much softer and more coxing voice, "You *are* hiding something... aren't you, *dearie?*"

Samuel became uncomfortable, as Mr. Brüncker chuckled and said,

"It's always fun to watch people squirm when they think I know more than I do. Now, now!" he said, as he saw that the latter was feeling uncomfortable. "I don't know your little secret... *yet*. But I'll find out soon enough, won't I? Secrets... they have a funny way of slipping out, don't they?" he asked, as he leaned back in his seat and sipped on his wine. "So... remind me again. Why *am* I here? Not just for tea and pleasantries, I'm sure. No, no... you have something else on your mind. Don't you, *dearie?*"

"But surely," exclaimed Samuel, "People can invite you over just for a talk, correct?"

"Of course, of course! But surely... you didn't invite *me* over just for a talk, *correct?*"

"Of course not, of course not," said Samuel, as he tried to think of something to say. "But I invited you over, not only to talk, but also to... err... to have some food and drink."

"So... where is this food you were talking about, hmm?" Mr. Brüncker asked, with a smile which is quite too big, even for his face.

"My my... my brain really isn't working today!" Samuel exclaimed, trying to sound surprised, "I completely forgot about it. Let me go fetch it. Oh! And you would like more wine, correct?" he said, as he saw that the bottle was empty.

"Ahh, more wine! Now *zat's* hospitality. You're too kind, really!"

Samuel went off to the kitchen, looking about to see what he could serve. He was relieved as he saw some food that would suit the occasion, and he got out the new loaf that his sister had made for him. Then, he got some butter to go with it, and some of the cookies that he had left over from a few days ago. He then got some peaches and a bowl of cream that his sister had also churned for him. Then, Samuel went on to get another bottle of wine and again, added alcohol to it.

"Mr. Brüncker must be a strong drinker," Samuel thought to himself as he carefully poured one liquid into the other. "He must never get drunk!"

When Samuel returned, he saw that Mr. Brüncker was not sitting in his seat anymore. Instead, he was looking at an object that was sitting on one of the book shelves.

"Where did you get this *vonderful*-looking thing, hmm?" he asked, as he picked up the object and turned it round and around. "So polished... so *specific*. Strange. I saw something just like it... oh, where was it—ah yes. At the *Fehrs Jewelry*, wasn't it? Before some robbery happened one night... about a year ago, I believe." he said with a mischievous smile. "Oh! But I'm sure it's just a coincidence... dearie." he said, then he let out a chuckle. "Unless my memory is *really* zat good!"

Samuel didn't respond. He put the food on the table, and poured out another glass of wine.

"Vhy, how *generous* of you!" he exclaimed, as he saw the newly poured glass.

Samuel decided to distract the man, and they started to talk about what he was to do.

"You see..." Mr. Brüncker said, as he leaned back and folded his hands across his belly. "Wait. Can I trust you?" he asked suspiciously, as he leaned in and studied Samuel's face, giving him an awkward feeling. "Hmm... Yes? Good. Now don't forget. If you don't follow our terms, I will simply tell the public about who you *really* are," he said, before he leaned in real close and said, almost in a whisper, "I will need you to steal a device. Nothing *too* complicated," he said. Then, after glancing around himself, he went on further to say, "It's currently in the home of a man named Christopher Sholes. You will retrieve it for me. And in return... I'll keep *your* secrets safe. Now, if things... go badly, I may need you to kidnap him."

"Who?" asked Samuel, trying to keep the conversation as long as possible.

"Fiddlesticks!" Mr. Brüncker exclaimed, before accidentally spilling wine on himself, as he was already becoming a little bit drunk. "Christopher Sholes, of course!"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Samuel, enjoying himself. "Yes! Yes, Christopher Sholes, how could I forget?"

"Now, if things go even worse..." he said, letting out a little sigh, "I may need you to murder him. I don't *want* that, of course." he said, as Samuel looked shocked. "But sometimes... accidents must be arranged," he said, in such a way that it seemed almost convincing! "And you, dearie..." Mr. Brüncker said, as he swirled his wine around, "you seem like someone who understands necessity," he said, before laughing a tremendous laugh and drooling on himself.

After a little while longer, Mr. Brüncker was finally drunk! At some point, Mr. Brüncker had started laughing, and he was still laughing so hard and loud at this point, that Samuel had to stop him in some way or the other. So he threw a towel on his head, and soon, Mr. Brüncker calmed down.

"Now," Samuel said. "Are you a man of your word?"

"Of *course* I am a man of my *vord!*" he cried, as he wobbled and spilled more wine all over himself and on all the expensive furniture.

"Well then," Samuel said, as he produced a paper, "will you please sign this? It says that we have an agreement with each other, and that I will work with you and be your partner."

"Vhy should I... sign this stupex little paper, hmm?" he asked. Then, he hiccuped and suddenly brightened. "Ahh! Maybe I *should!* Yes, yes—vhat could possibly go wrong, eh?" he laughed loudly and carelessly and thumped the table hard. "Wait... vhat *is* it again?" he asked stupidly.

"Would you like to sign this paper?" ask Samuel in a very coxing manner.

"Me?" he asked, and got a nod for a reply. "Yes, yes! I vill! Or maybe I'll sign it upside down, ja?" he asked, before cracking up and laughing loudly at himself.

Samuel managed to convince him to sign the paper right side up, and it was finished; though it was a little hard to tell that it was his signature, as his hand was wobbling quite hard.

"Vow! *Look!*" Mr. Brüncker exclaimed, holding up the finished paper, his hand swaying because of how drunk he was. "That's—it's *mine!* My *signachure!*" he cried, clumsily jabbing his finger at the paper. "Right there! *Heinrich Brüncker!* That's me!" he said, and he laughed wildly. "I am *important!* See? *I* make decisions!" he said, beaming proudly before drooling on the paper a bit.

Samuel smiled and said,

"Yea, you do make decisions," then to himself, "but not always the most wise ones!"

Chapter 5: A Warning, a Robbery, and a Letter

James was sitting on the couch, looking at the grandfather clock. It was one of the things that hadn't been destroyed in the storm.

"Quarter past nine..." James murmured to himself. "A quarter past nine..."

Alice was already asleep, as she was still ill and wasn't getting better. The dishes had been cleared and washed outside long ago, all except for one plate. That one plate was sitting cold, as no one had eaten it. To whom it belonged? Well, that plate belongs to Charles, who still hadn't come back from working at the mill.

James was not sure what to do. He could go and try to find his father, but he didn't want to leave his mother alone (for during the day, one of the neighbours would come over and help take care of Alice). And if he did go, what if his father came back and started to worry because *he* was gone? James gave a sigh, and looked out the window.

It was quite dark now, not like how it was earlier; with fluffy clouds that were all glowing a vibrant pink, a bright sky that was tinted an orange colour, and with the sun disappearing over the horizon. James yawned, and soon, his eyelids started to droop.

"Oh... but I must wait for Papa..." he thought as he shook himself awake.

James decided to read a book while he waited. He was very worried, as his father would never stay out so late without telling him. He looked out the window again, but there was no sign of Charles.

"Perhaps Papa has told me that he would be out for longer..." he thought, though he could not recall if his father did.

James looked up from his book. He had the sound of hurried steps, and they came right up to the door.

"Papa?" asked James, but he got no reply.

The sound of footsteps died out, and James sighed again. He went to the front door and opened it. There was nothing, and there was no one. But right on the doorstep was a piece of paper. James opened it, exposing a note which read:

Dear James,

I must go. There is something strange going on. Danger is around. Take good care of Mother. I will be back later tonight.

Charles Whitmore

James stared blankly at the quickly scrawled note, not knowing for sure what to think of it. He went on to read it at least ten times, and still wasn't sure what it meant.

"What danger?" James had said to himself, as he paced the room, back and forth. "What danger? I'm *sure* it says danger," he said, as it was a little hard to read the

words. He sat down on the couch, pondering over the strange note that his father had left, his mind wandering from one thing to another.

Some time later, the church bell struck in the distance,

“Dong... dong...”

James looked up from the letter, it was already two o’clock. He gave a sigh, then tucked the note away. Then he blew out the candle and went up to his bedroom.

“No point waiting any longer...” thought James, as he climbed the stairs. And without bothering to change to his nightshirt, James flopped down on his bed and fell asleep.

James woke up late the next morning, to the sound of pots and pans coming from downstairs. One of the neighbours had already come to help prepare meals, do some washing and pegging, and take care of Alice. James quickly dressed and made his bed. Then he crept to the room across from him and peeked in. He could hear the sound of peaceful breathing, and could see the slim figure of his mother.

“Good,” thought James. “Mama is still asleep.”

Then he crept along the hall, until he came to the room where his father slept. Ever since Alice had fallen ill, Charles had moved to the next bedroom down the hall. James peeked in, and saw that the bed had already been made, and the room was all tidy.

“Papa must have already gone to work...” thought James. “I wonder what time it is.”

James went downstairs, and Mrs. Becker greeted him while she was cleaning up the kitchen. She is a plump little woman, who is always quite cheerful.

“Well well...” she said with a smile, “who was sleeping the clock off today?”

James blushed, and quickly ate his breakfast of eggs and potatoes.

Mrs. Becker laughed at the way James gobbled down his food. Then she said,

“Better be off to work, young lad! Yar father was off mighty early today. I came over to bake a loaf, and it were about five o’clock. After I finished my baking, I checked to see if yar were all asleep. And yar father’s room was a’ tidy as ever, and he left without *any* food in his belly!”

Mrs. Becker laughed again, as she saw how James stared hungrily at his plate. “So very different from yar father. Tell ye what, I’ll give ye some of the loaf I made today, but after that, ye better be off!”

James quickly finished his breakfast, thanked Mrs. Becker (as she stuffed more bread into his pockets), and ran off down the lane.

James arrived at Mr. Sholes home, breathless. At the door, stood Mr. Sholes, frowning hard at him.

“Sorry sir. So sorry sir,” James said, as he panted. “I was waiting for my father last night and slept too—”

“That is not what matters right now!” Mr. Sholes said, almost in a shout.

James was startled, as this usually wasn’t Mr. Sholes’ personality. And the way Mr. Sholes spoke, caused James to almost believe that there was a chance that this person *wasn’t* Mr. Sholes!

Mr. Sholes took some deep breaths, before he went on to say, “Look here, my boy. I don’t know what happened, but you must come into the workshop room.”

Then, Mr. Sholes led the way to the room where he and James usually worked together.

You see, Mr. Sholes had been working on a special device which he thought might revolutionize the world of writing. He had told James many times before, “We won’t need pen and ink after this, my boy!” and he would become all fidgety and his eyes would twinkle and dance! But today, Mr. Sholes wasn’t like this. His face was darkened, and his expression was grim.

Mr. Sholes took another deep breath before he opened the door. James now understood why his mentor looked how he looked. The once neat and tidy little study was now an absolute disaster! Diagrams were all over the floor. Books were off the shelves. Some of the glass objects in the room had been knocked over and were shattered. Ashes from the fireplace created a thin layer of dust which covered the floor. But worst of all, the device that they had been working on, their most updated prototype, the one Mr. Sholes said, may possibly revolutionize the world, had been stolen!

James gasped, as he stood outside of the door. But Mr. Sholes just pushed right past James and stood in the middle of the room, as he had done not too long ago.

“You see this?” he cried. “You see this? Now someone else has our design, and now we have to draw *new* diagrams and make a *new* prototype!” he said, gesturing around the room and not noticing that he was stepping on all over his other precious papers. “This... this... what do you call this!” he cried in furry, turning to James.

James was silent, not sure what to say.

“*This* was worth three years work! *This* was going to change the world! *This*... this... arrrrgh!” Mr. Sholes yelled out in stress.

James wasn’t sure about what to do, and he finally decided that it was time for him to act. Boldly stepping into the room, he pushed the red and angry Mr. Sholes out of the room and into his living room. Then he eased him into a chair and fetched a glass of water. Soon, Mr. Sholes had calmed down enough that James dared to speak.

“Have you gone to the police yet?” he asked timidly.

“Good gracious! No!” exclaimed Mr. Sholes, as he jumped up from the couch, upsetting quite a lot of water onto his pants. “Why, I had completely forgotten! I’m going now!” he cried, but was stopped by James. “My dear lad, let me be off. I must go and call them over!”

“Yes,” said James, “but you need to change your pants.”

Mr. Sholes looked down, and sighed. Then he went off to change his pants, and in half a minute, was rushing down the lane on his horse, galloping full speed, leaving James to clean up the mess.

By the time it was eight, all of the mess had been cleared away, and the police were on a lookout for the thief. James had stayed over for longer so that he could help Mr. Sholes.

“Could you please get someone to tell my mother that I won’t be home until late?” James had asked, and his request was granted.

Now, they were sweeping up the remains on the floor, and James was thinking about the letter he had received last night.

“Danger...” he murmured to himself. “Danger was around...” he sighed, and went to open the window wider, allowing a light breeze to flow into the hot and stuffy room.

Mr. Sholes wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and leaned against the wall.

“Would you like a glass of water?” he asked, turning to James.

James nodded, and put his brush down. He too was tired and thirsty. Mr. Sholes left the room to grab two glasses of water. James sighed and looked around the room. It was clean again, though many things were missing. As James turned his head to look around the room, a piece of paper fluttered through the window, catching his attention. James went to the window and looked out, but everything was still in the evening air. He bent down and picked up the piece of paper. It was a note. James opened it, and saw that it was written in a hand that he didn’t know. It said the following:

To ANEE woN hoo iz rElATD To Charles Whitmore DAr iz DANjer ArowND you
mEET mE uNDr DA briJ NorDEEsT from hEEr To moro wEN DA cLok sTrics woN AT NiT

Chapter 6: What Happened when the Clock Struck 'One'

James was on his way home, thinking about the strange letters that he had received, two days in a row. It was getting dark, as James had stayed overtime to help clean up.

"Charles Whitmore..." James mumbled, for he was puzzled by the fact that there was someone who knew his father's name, and who's hand was unfamiliar to him. "Charles Whitmore..."

When James arrived home, Mrs. Becker was already gone. On the table lay two meals, which were not all that hot anymore. James went up to check on his mother.

Alice was sitting up in bed, finishing up her dinner, looking as pale as ever.

"Oh, James!" she exclaimed, and instantly gained some colour as she saw him appear at the door. "What is going on with you and your father?"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked James, even more puzzled than before.

"What's with you coming home so late, and your father still hasn't showed up! Where were you two bad boys?"

"Why!" exclaimed James, quite shocked, "I was at Mr. Sholes' house the whole day! I told him to get someone to tell you I would be home late! And I never saw Papa even *once* today! He had already gone to work when I woke up."

Then a terrible thought hit James.

"Perhaps," James thought. "Perhaps Papa was in danger! There was danger around Papa! There was something strange going on, and Papa got into the middle of it! And Papa never came home, and I thought he already left for work! And Mrs. Becker said he already went to work, but he didn't even come home! And someone found out and gave me a letter! Oh! Papa!"

All of this went through James' head really quickly, and James gave a sudden gasp.

"Are you alright, honey?" Alice asked, as she saw James suddenly become pale.

"Yes... yes..." James replied, as he tried to hide the shock, for he didn't want to worry his mother. "I'm going to go and eat my dinner," said James hurriedly, and practically fled down the stairs.

James ate his dinner in silence, worrying about what had happened to his father. Then took out the two notes that he had received. James looked at the second one again:

To ANEE woN hoo iz rELATD To Charles Whitmore DAr iz DANjer ArowND you mEET mE uNDr DA briJ NorDEEsT from hEEr To moro wEN DA cLok sTrics woN AT NiT

"To 'anee'... no, *any*," thought James. "To any 'won'... *one who is related* (not relatd) to Papa... 'dar'... dare? No... *there is danger* 'arownd'... *around*! To *anyone* who

is related to Charles Whitmore, there is danger around you... meet me *under 'da'... the bridge* 'nordeest?' nord-est... no-rdest? Nord-eest... nord... nord-east! *North-east!* North-east from *here* to 'moro'... *tomorrow when the cloak?* When the cloak *strikes*... No, when the *clock* strikes *one at night*. Hmm" thought James, " *To anyone who is related to Charles Whitmore, there is danger around you. Meet me under the bridge, north-east from here, tomorrow when the clock strikes one at night.*"

James read it again. He had made up his mind. Tomorrow, he was going to go and meet this person.

"This person who doesn't know how to spell..." thought James, as he brought his plate outside and gave it a good wash. Then, he retired to bed, praying to the Lord to keep his father safe, his mother safe, and himself too.

"And also," prayed James, "please protect Mr. Sholes and let him get to know about you, in Jesus name, amen."

"Well, well..." said Mrs. Jones, another one of the Whitmore's neighbours. "Who's orf chump today?" she asked James.

James was feeling very nervous and excited about tonight, and could hardly eat his supper.

"And where did yer father go off today? I didn't see him at all. He could have at least *told* me he were be running late, else I wouldn't have made his supper!"

Mrs. Jones talked on and on, without waiting for a reply, which James was quite thankful for. He didn't want anyone to know he was going to leave the house at night, or they may spread the news to his mother, who would worry herself to death.

Alice had asked James where his father was earlier during the day again, but James didn't know. This worried Alice so much that James forced himself to lie, and said that his father had gone off to a friend's house, the Halls, about thirty miles away, to try to get some help with fixing a more difficult part of the mill.

James made an excuse to go outside so that he could avoid conversation, though it was not likely that a conversation would strike if the only other person to talk to was Mrs. Jones!

At last, night fell, and James was ready to go. He had packed for himself some buns and brought an extra jacket (in case it got cold) and packed it all into his knapsack. And of course, he also brought the little piece of paper which contained the note. There was a full moon out that night, and a few clouds hid it from sight. James headed off to the bridge that was further down the river from his home. He was quite sure that that bridge was the right one; north-east from Mr. Sholes' home.

"And there is no other bridge close to this area of town..." James thought to himself.

There was hardly anyone on the streets, as it was half past twelve. James hurried on until he came to the bridge, arriving roughly fifteen minutes early.

James stood there, feeling quite awkward, as the silence reigned about him. He was just a young lad, standing there and doing nothing at all; shying to the few passersby that were around.

James wasn't sure about what time it was, as he had no means to know. At last, the church clock struck,

"Dong..."

It was one at night. James looked about him. He only saw a group of ladies and gentlemen leaving a party. Their carriages rolled away, and silence reigned once again.

James was feeling very strange indeed now. The poor gas lighting was casting an eerie glow around him, and James suddenly felt scared.

"Perhaps this is all a trap!" he thought, and was about to sprint away right back into his bed, when he thought, "No. It can't be. The spelling was all incorrect. So it was probably a child who wrote it... But I still may be a trap!"

James had an idea, and climbed up a nearby tree to watch. After a minute had passed and nothing was seen, he heard a noise that sounded like,

"Pst... pst... Over here..."

James looked around, but saw nothing.

"Over here! Hurry up and climb down from the tree!"

It sounded like a child's voice, so James was confident in himself. He climbed down and looked around. He turned a full circle again, but saw nothing.

"Who is it?" James whispered, for he felt like he needed to.

"Over here! Under the bridge!"

James went around the base of the bridge, and found (crouching in the shadows) a little girl who looked about four years younger than himself. She was a dirty little thing, and her dark brown hair was very tangled. Her eyes were a hazel colour, and they had a sly and hungry look in them. Her feet were bare and covered in dirt, and her hands were just as dirty.

"Why!" James exclaimed when he saw her. "So you are only a little lass!"

"So?"

"Oh..." said James. "I was just shocked that the person who sent me the note... you sent me the note, right?"

"Why! Of course it was me!" the girl cried, she seemed to be able to lose her temper pretty quickly. "Who do you think it was? You nincompoop!"

"Now, now," said James, quite taken aback. "Cool your jets, I aint trying to fight! No boy ever fights a girl."

The girl calmed down a bit, and stared at James, with a very curious and solemn look on her face. James felt awkward, and looked behind him. But there was no one. Then, the girl suddenly smiled and said,

"I like you. You're a good lad. I like you."

James looked puzzled, but smiled.

"And you said a boy never fights a girl?" the girl asked. "So no boy ever *strikes* a girl?"

"Of course not... well... at least the decent ones don't," said James, as he noticed that this girl has probably had bad experiences before.

The girl sat down on the damp floor, and suddenly held her nose to the air, sniffing about her.

Then she looked at James and said,

"You've got food about you... buns to be exact..."

"How did you know that I brought some?" asked James, shocked, yet greatly impressed.

"I can smell them," the girl replied, almost as if puzzled by the fact that James couldn't.

James smiled, and took a bun out, which was devoured in a most unmannerly fashion.

"Where did your manners run off to?" James asked, as he saw how greedily she ate the food.

"Don't got any," she said mischievously with her mouth full.

"What did your parents teach you?" asked James in shock.

Then the girl suddenly looked like she was about to cry, but blinked back the tears. She swallowed her food, and said in a very small voice,

"I don't have any parents... I... My... My mother d-died when I wa-wa-was s-s-small." she stammered, half choking in her tears; for she also seemed to cry quite easily. "And-and... m-my father was so up-upset, that he sent me awaaaaaay..." she sobbed.

James felt very bad even though he really wasn't that harsh and it wasn't his fault.

"I'm... I'm so sorry... Here, have another bun..." James offered, but the little hand just pushed James' hand away. "Why!" he exclaimed. "How cold you are!"

James reached into his knapsack, and took his extra jacket out.

"Here," he said, wrapping it around her. "This will soon warm you up."

James sat close beside her, and his body heat was warming her up too. James gave her another bun, and this time it was accepted. Soon, the girl was smiling again. She looked up at James with a very happy look on her face.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"James," he replied.

"I'm Margaret," the girl said.

James smiled, and the two of them were silent for a while. Then, James decided it was time to get down to business.

“So how did you know to give the letter to me?”

Margaret nibbled on her bun, and said, “Look at this,” as she took two objects out of her pocket.

There, on her lap lay two things; Charles’ pocket watch and his wallet.

Chapter 7: An Important Conversation and a Scream

James took the two objects from the little girl. They *were* the ones that belonged to his father. The pocket watch was a very old one, and it belonged to James' great-great-grandfather, before being passed down, all the way to Charles. James looked at it; it now read roughly two o'clock.

The wallet was the one that Charles always carried on his belt. Unlike many others, Charles was modest, and had a reasonable sized wallet, unlike the big and elaborate ones that others had on them. It was a really simple one, made of horse leather and buckled down with a simple button. Inside, were a few of the letters directed to Charles, from Mr. Sholes, and a photo of Charles, James, and Alice, taken when James was about nine.

James held the two objects in his hands. As the moon came out from behind a few clouds, James felt himself turning his back on Margaret. Tears had found their way into his eyes, and James didn't want Margaret to see them. But Margaret did see them, and felt sudden sympathy, something she didn't feel very often. She flung herself onto James, and gave him a tight hug. James couldn't help, but smile. The girl who had been giving off the most bad manners he had ever seen, was now trying to comfort him.

"She's not too bad of a little lass after all," he thought.

James turned around and hugged the little girl with tangled hair and bare feet, wearing his big jacket. Then, he gave her another bun, which was eaten, this time, in more of a *mannerly* fashion.

"Where did you find these things," James asked.

"It was just on the street, and they fell off of him... err... your papa, when he got attacked..."

"Attacked!" cried James in shock, turning pale.

"Yes. I was going home... back to my home... and it was quite late. Then, I hear in the distance, someone shouting for help. I rushed over and I hid behind some bushes. You know, like the type that is quite prickly. I peeked over, and guess what? There were two men, and they were holding onto this other man... they were holding onto your papa. And then, one of them knocked him out! And the two of them picked your papa up, and carried him away!"

At this, James became paler than ever, however, Margaret didn't seem to notice.

"I snuck after them, and they walked for ages, and they went *very* fast! And they are so tall, it was so hard for me to keep up! And then they went to this funny little house. It's a very run-down house, and they carried him inside. Then I decided to go back, and I stood at the spot where they were fighting. And I found these. So I read the letters, and I found that you were working at the Sholes' estate... right? Then I wrote a letter, and I threw it through the window. You got it right?"

James gave a horse “yes,” and shivered all over at the thought of someone knocking out his papa... *his papa*.

Margaret looked up at James sympathetically, as she knew what it was like to lose her mother. But as for her father, she had no regards towards him.

James took a deep breath, and said, “I think we should go and tell the police now. They would know what to do.”

But Margaret had a very scared look in her eyes, and held tightly onto James’ sleeve, and while she was tugging, she said,

“Oh! Don’t go! Don’t go! If you do, I won’t show you the way to their house. Don’t go! Oh, oh, oh. Don’t go!”

Margaret looked like she was going to cry, and this startled James so much, that he sat right down and said,

“Alright, alright. I won’t go. But what is scaring you so much?”

Margaret suddenly looked ashamed, and a few tears trickled down her dirty little face. Then she said, in a very soft voice; so soft that James could hardly hear her,

“I told you that my papa sent me away, right? Well, he sent me away to my uncle. And my uncle isn’t married and doesn’t have any children. So he didn’t know how to deal with me, and he seemed so *evil*! So I ran away, and lived on the streets. And...” Margaret then became softer than ever, “I have to steal to live. And if you go to the police... if you... if-if they f-find out,” she said, her voice becoming very shaky, “I don’t know what they-they will d-do to me.” She suddenly became very fierce, and said, “If you go, I won’t show you the way! And when the police search, the people who have your father will be warned, and you will probably never see him again!”

James saw what Margaret ment, and gave in. Obviously, Margaret was smarter than he thought, and she had a know-how from living on the streets.

Margaret smiled again, and peeked into James’ knapsack. It was now empty, and Margaret sighed.

“Next time,” she said, “can you bring more buns... please?”

James smiled and said, “You lead me to my father, and I’ll give you some buns, deal?”

“Deal.”

Suddenly, they were startled by a very high pitched, feminine, ear piercing scream, and the sound of horse hooves galloping overhead. James and Margaret both jumped, and Margaret clutched onto the latter.

“What was that!” she gasped.

James took a few deep breaths, and said, “I don’t know. It was the scream of-of a little girl... right?”

“I... I think so...”

The two of them sat together, under the bridge on the damp floor, not sure what to do. They were silent for a while, and stillness reigned once again. The moon came

out from behind a few clouds, lighting up the scene with a sharp light. It reflected off the water brightly, and everything seemed so calm. So calm in fact, that it seemed almost unreal that a scream had pierced through the air, only about a minute ago.

Margaret yawned (quite disrespectfully) and said,

"Well... I guess it's time to go."

She proceeded to take off the jacket, but James stopped her.

"You can keep the jacket," he said.

Margaret smiled and thanked James sincerely.

"It will help keep me warm tonight." "Where *do* you live?"

"I... I live on the... the streets," Margaret replied, seeming quite embarrassed.

James felt sorry for her, but didn't know what to do. Then he got another idea; a more *risky* one...

"Margaret," he said, "how about tonight... just tonight," and as he was saying this, Margaret's face seemed to light up, knowing that what he was going to say would be good. "Just tonight, do you wish to come to my home?"

Margaret squealed with delight, did a happy little dance, and ran around James till he was quite dizzy from watching her. Margaret tripped and almost fell into the river, scraping her knee on the rocks instead. But she didn't seem to notice, and the two of them walked off happily (though Margaret was skipping, not walking) back to James' home.

"Now," James said, as they neared his home. "You need be quiet, as my mother is asleep. And, you must make sure that no one sees you, else they may send you away. And *please* don't let my mother know you are staying here, or else she may find out that my father has been... has been captured, and she will worry herself until she is even more ill. Yes, my mother has been ill... for a while. And you must be quiet, because every morning, one of the neighbours comes over to help cook meals and do the washing and pegging and keeping the house clean."

Margaret looked puzzled, before asking, "What's washing and pegging?"

"Oh... it's just washing the clothes."

Margaret still looked puzzled, but didn't say much else. Then she asked,

"Is your mother pretty?"

"She is the prettiest lady in the whole world..." he said dreamily. "And the best mother you could ever have! But Mama doesn't look as pretty anymore, because she is paler now, and her smile is... is weaker..."

Margaret sighed.

"I wish your Mama was *my* Mama..."

"Anyways," James resumed, snapping out of his dreamy thoughts. "I will be out of the house during the day, because I must go to work. I can bring you up a meal before I go, but you will have to stay inside for the rest of the time. Does that work?"

Margaret nodded.

“Only can I please go outside while you are at work? I was inside a house before, and I couldn’t *bear* being inside for so long. Please?”

“Well... let’s settle in for tonight, and we will see what happens tomorrow.”

And so, the two of them snuck into the house, and Margaret slept in Charles’ bed.

“This is the best night of my life!” Margaret thought, before falling asleep within seconds.

James gave a happy sigh, and said a prayer of thanks and guidance.

“Lord, please protect Papa, and help Mama. And help tomorrow to go well.”

Then, all was still again, and inside the house, two children were asleep; one with a smile on her face.

Chapter 8: What Margaret did in the Morning

James awoke late the next morning, and was *quite* ashamed of himself.

"Quarter past seven!" he gasped as he looked at his father's pocket watch.

He quickly dressed, and peeked into his father's room, where Margaret had slept at night. The child was still in bed, and James was relieved.

James crept downstairs and was glad to find that the neighbour who had come today was Mrs. Wellesley.

Mrs. Wellesley had twelve children of her own, who were all grown up now. She was a thin little lady, and had motherly care and affection. If she did ask James why he had gotten up so late, James was quite sure she would understand his feelings, and wouldn't go tell his mother.

"James!" Mrs. Wellesley exclaimed, as she saw him coming down the stairs. "Are you feeling alright, dear? You slept for quite a while," she said, as she looked quite worried.

"Sorry... Yes, I am alright, thank you," James replied with a slight bow.

Mrs. Wellesley chuckled, for James' bow had been clumsy, as he was nervous if Mrs. Wellesley had seen Margaret.

"I came up to your rooms to check on your mother, and also on you and your father."

James' heart thumped loud and hard, and he was quite sure that Mrs. Wellesley could hear it. Mrs. Wellesley led him to the sitting room, and continued to talk to him.

"You and your mother were both sound asleep, but when I came to your father's room... instead of your father sleeping there, there was this dirty little girl! And when I came in, she awoke and hid herself inside the covers. I closed the door behind me as I went in, so that she could not escape, and every now and then, she would peek out at me, until she thought I was quite safe," she said with a laugh. "Then I asked her what she was doing, and she said to me, 'shhhhhh... don't tell anyone, but James let me stay here...' and I laughed and tried to be friendly, and she seemed to like me. Then she just spoke to her heart's content, and didn't mind her manners, just like any ill mannered child. And guess what she said? She said, 'Are you James' mother? Because you don't look pretty at all. And James said you were the prettiest lady in the whole world... and you aren't.' And she said it just like that, as plain as ever. And she also said a lot of other rude things, and I decided that this child needed to learn her manners. So I told her that what she said was rude, and that if she didn't apologize, then I would give her a thrashing. But she just stood and then called me a 'dirty old hag'! So I gave her a good scolding, but she just stood and stared. Bad words really don't do any harm to her. So I came down again and looked at the situation. And I decided that this little child really hasn't had any love. So I brought up a basket of food, and spoke to her softly, and she warmed right at once and seemed quite attached to me! So I fed her, and gave her a

bath, and then she fell asleep again. And I asked her questions about why you allowed her to sleep here, but she didn't answer and stayed silent. Even after I enticed her with fresh peaches and cream. And her eyes lit up, but she didn't say a word! So when she fell asleep that time, I snuck out to my house, and I got some of Ada's old clothes so I could dress her better, and I came back and she still hasn't awoken.

"The poor child was wearing only rags! And when I helped her undress, she looked bare flesh and bones! And she refused to bathe, and said that she didn't know how to swim, poor child! So I just picked her up and placed her in the tub, and I used a leather flannel to scrub her, and she cried. How she cried! She seemed to think the world was about to end! And she hated the smell of the soap, but I had to get her clean. And she kicked like a mad little thing! But at last I got her all tidy, except her face, which she didn't let me wash. So after I had dried her and put her clothes on, I pinned her to the floor and washed her dirty face. And she had to keep her mouth shut, else the flannel would go into her mouth! Then I combed her hair, and she got into another fit! She ran all around the kitchen like a mad dog, until I gave her something to eat, which settled her down. And I told her I would give her more if she allowed me to brush her hair, and she agreed and was as quiet as ever! Anyways... Now she smells fresh and looks fresh. And—"

Mrs. Wellesley's speech was interrupted when they heard the sound of a spoon dropping and the hurried sound of feet. They rushed to the kitchen, but it was empty. The breakfast laid out for James, Alice, and Charles still lay on the table. But, one of the plates was half eaten.

"The naughty child!" she exclaimed, as she looked in awe at the plate. "Why! I gave her two helpings! *Two* helpings! Plus half a loaf! Half a loaf! And she still has room in her small body to eat more!

"Margaret, that's her name," said James, "is an orphan, and she lives on the streets. And," said James, as he lowered his voice, "she has to steal food in order to live... that's how she became so cunning..."

Mrs. Wellesley sighed, and picked up the half finished meal.

"I suppose she is back in your father's room..." she said, as she mounted the stairs with James close behind her.

Soon, everything was put back in order, and Margaret learned to behave herself.

"If you don't behave," James had said, "then I will send you out of this house, and you can go back to your home. And I will call the police and tell them about what a naughty girl you have been."

Margaret had sobbed and promised not to steal anymore, and to stay out of trouble. And as a bonus, Mrs. Wellesley didn't question why Margaret was staying here, and didn't tell anybody about it.

"I must go now," James said, after everything was settled, and he ran out the door, as he was already very late!

Some way down the streets, outside of the home of a very rich family, there was a huge commotion going on, and James was worried if Margaret had caused it. But soon enough, James found out what it was all about.

"Poor Mrs. Thatcher!" a woman exclaimed.

"Oh dear... what will Mr. Thatcher think when he gets home?" another said with a sigh.

A child was crying.

"Oh! Oh! But Lizzie was-was my b-b-best frieeeeeeend! Waaaaaaa!"

The police were standing around; some were trying to calm the crowd which had gathered outside of the Thatcher Estate, others were questioning the people who knew more details about what had happened.

"Excuse me, sir," James asked politely to the man standing beside him. "Do you know what has happened here?"

"The Thatcher's youngest, Elizabeth," the man replied, "was kidnapped last night. People say it was about two at night when she was taken away."

"Ah! I see. Thank you kindly, sir."

James walked off, thinking.

"About two..." James mumbled. "I met Margaret at about one... and when I got in bed... it was about three..."

Then it hit him, and James gasped.

"The scream! It was Elizabeth's scream!" he thought. "And the sound of horse hooves! They went over the bridge to the other side!"

James quickly ran back towards the commotion, and he proceeded to question someone else.

"Excuse me, sir... excuse me? Do the police know where to search for Elizabeth?"

"Not a clue," the man replied gruffly. "They say that this kidnapper is extremely skilled, and he didn't leave a trace behind," he said, before walking away.

"This is important... very important!" James thought.

James squeezed through the crowd, towards one of the officers.

"Excuse me, sir," James said.

"Alright, alright," the police officer said, addressing the crowd. "Back off the property a bit. Do not pass these trees. If all of you are trampling the ground everywhere, how is this going to help us figure out where young Miss. Thatcher got taken to? Back off, I say! Back off!"

"Excuse me, sir," said James, as he tried to get his voice in.

But the policeman kept barking orders.

"Everyone who doesn't have anything to say that will help us get on a trail, leave! You hear me? Leave!"

Soon, most of the crowd had dispersed, but James still stood quite close to the officer.

"Young lad," the tired policeman said. "Did you hear what I was saying? I have other duties to attend to, and you do too. I bid thee farewell."

"Sir," James said quickly, before the officer walked away. "I *do* have something to say which I think *may* help."

The policeman eyed James suspiciously, before bidding him to speak.

"Last night," James said, "I was under the bridge... the one down that way," said James pointing. "Some time after two o'clock, I heard a scream... it was a little lass' scream... I am quite sure it was. And I also heard the sound of horse hooves, above my head, crossing the bridge."

The policeman had taken out his notebook, and was quickly jotting down words while James spoke.

"Well done, lad!" he exclaimed, as he shut his notebook. "This information will most likely be helpful. Thank you, and good day!" he said, as he saluted and walked off, leaving a very happy boy to make his way to work.

Chapter 9: Off on a Rescue

When James got back home that evening, he found Mrs. Wellesley in the garden with Margaret; the latter was teaching the other how to plant tomatoes. Margaret still looked neat and tidy, though her hands were all dirty now.

"James!" Margaret exclaimed as she saw him walking up the drive. "Look! I know how to plant tomatoes! Mrs. Wellesley taught me! And she showed me how to do washing and... pe... pa... *packing*?"

"*Pegging*," Mrs. Wellesley said smiling, as she stood up and stretched her back. "This one is a fast learner. I taught her how to wash the dishes and sew and do some washing and pegging. And I just finished teaching her how to plant tomatoes."

Margaret beamed proudly. She liked this lady who seemed to know everything in the world.

"I wasn't sure when you would get back, James," Mrs. Wellesley said. "As you were late for work, and I'm sure it was for an important reason, so I haven't prepared dinner yet. I'll go and do that now," she said, as she scrubbed her hands vigorously in the river. "Come, Margaret. You should also wash those hands of yours. They are full of dirt!"

Margaret skipped over happily and washed her hands, splashing quite a lot of water on herself. Then she went inside with Mrs. Wellesley to help her prepare a meal.

"And mind you don't go poking your fingers into different dishes," Mrs. Wellesley said, reading Margaret's mind. "You will get your fair share later. But if you so much as *touch* one of the dishes and lick your finger, I will make sure you don't get any supper!"

Margaret smiled, and didn't attempt to do such. She liked this lady, and she wanted Mrs. Wellesley to like her too. She had already attempted many of her tricks earlier today, but each time, she was cleverly punished in some way or the other. So in the end, she decided that the best way to earn something was by behaving.

After dinner was finished, Margaret helped clean the dishes. Then, Mrs. Wellesley said goodbye, and Margaret cried quite hard again.

"How's this," Mrs. Wellesley said. "If you are good, then tomorrow I will come again instead of Mrs. Becker."

Margaret squealed in delight and promised to be good.

"Margaret," James said, when they were alone together. "Tonight, we will go and rescue my father, alright?"

"Of course. It's really easy to get there. You just need to cross the bridge, you know, the one we were under? Well, after you cross it, you can go through a lot of little paths and shortcuts... though those men went the long way through the big streets and such."

"Cross the bridge?"

Margaret gave a kind of snort, and said,

"Didn't I just say so?"

"Oh... I was just thinking. Because you know the scream we heard?"

Margaret shuttered at the thought.

"Well," James resumed. "That scream was from a little lass, like I said! The child's name is... Elizabeth... I think... Anyways. The child was also taken over the bridge."

"Oh... So now we need to deal with *two* different things," Margaret said.

"Well... no," James replied. "We just need to deal with *one*, because we don't even know who this Elizabeth child is. I just know that she is in a rich family, and that her last name is Thatcher..."

"But we need to rescue my father, so what will we need to bring?"

"Food."

"Food?"

"Yes," replied Margaret, quite determined. "We may want food, and if we find your father, he may want food."

"Alright. Food. What else? I'll bring some rope. And a few matches. And a candle... What else? Oh, and my father's pocket watch. And some water... we can bring it in the little pitcher and put some sort of lid on it. What else?"

"More food."

"*Margaret.*"

"Sorry."

"That's all we need... right?"

Margaret shrugged.

"I don't understand why we even *need* all of these..."

James sighed.

"You have a know-how, and I don't," he replied. Then, he proceeded to pack everything into his knapsack.

It was dark. Two silent figures snuck out of their house at night and stuck to the shadows. They headed towards the bridge.

"Ow!"

"Sorry."

"Don't walk so close to me!"

The two figures appeared to be quite small, for they were children.

"Margaret, don't you eat another bun!"

"But they are so good!"

"If you eat another one, *I* will carry the knapsack... *my* knapsack."

"Alright, alright."

The two of them stopped and stooped down in the shadows.

"Here," James said. "Give me some of the buns, and let me stuff them in my pockets. And give me the rope, in case I want it."

These were handed over, and the two of them continued their journey.

Margaret led James through many shortcuts; through little lanes and through fields. Through a stretch of forest, and alongside the river. At last, they arrived at their destination.

"This is it?" James asked in a voice, lower than a whisper.

Margaret nodded. The two of them crouched behind a few bushes and surveyed their surroundings. In front of them was the house; the place where Charles was most likely being held captive.

The house was a shabby one, though it still stood upright. And by the house, a little ways down, was a little shed, just as shabby as the house. Around the house was barbed wire, making it practically impossible to enter unless you go through the front gate. Weeds grew everywhere, threatening to poke the feet of someone without shoes, like Margaret. Prickly bushes also grew round the sides of the house, making it very hard to get in through a window. And an enormous mastiff dog on a chain was posted near the entrance of the house by a tree.

"We will need to avoid that dog somehow," Margaret whispered.

But almost as if by miracle, a man came out of the house, took the dog and walked away.

"Well... that solves our problem..." whispered James. "But how do we get in?"

"We can climb that tree," Margaret said, pointing.

And sure enough, there was a tree on the outside of the property, whose branches spanned towards the inside of the property. The lower limbs of the tree had been removed, so that trespassers couldn't get in.

"But we can get in if we use the rope," Margaret whispered.

"How will we escape?" James asked.

"Through the front gate."

And James saw that it was a possible solution, as it was locked from the outside, but not from the inside. He turned around, and Margaret was gone.

"Margaret?" he whispered.

"Over here."

She had gone down the line of bushes, and was looking intensely at the tree that loomed in the distance.

"It looks hard to get the rope up there..." she whispered.

"And our rope doesn't seem long enough."

They were silent for a while; both were pondering over what they could do.

"Perhaps..." Margaret whispered. "No... that's not possible... or... no..."

"What is it?" asked James excitedly, almost forgetting to whisper.

"I mean... well... it may be too hard for you..."

"What? Tell me!"

"Perhaps... perhaps we could climb up that tree," said Margaret, gesturing to a tree quite close to the one they were planning to climb. "If we could get up that one, then we could climb onto this one."

"If you do that, you'll fall and kill yourself!"

"Not me." Margaret replied, quite confident in herself. "I have done things similar to that before. I've climbed across the roofs of houses before, and I'm good at climbing. But you probably couldn't. That's why I said it's not possible."

"Well... if you could do that, then you can lower yourself over, and unlock the gate and let me in!"

"Of course! How did I not think of that?" Margaret said, a little too loudly.

"Shhhh!"

"Sorry," she replied quietly, as the two of them looked around them in fear.

"Are you sure you can do this?" James asked.

Margaret gave a little snort and said,

"Of course! Now, when I reach the place where I will go to the next tree, I will hoot like an owl. And when I get down into the yard, I will hoot again. Then you must meet me at the gate, and I'll open it for you. Got it?"

James nodded and handed over the rope. Margaret exited her hiding place and approached the tree; all the while sticking to the shadows, as she was afraid of being seen. At last, Margaret reached the tree, and climbed up, just like a little monkey.

James watched from below in awe. He had never seen anyone climb like that before.

"Lord! Don't let her fall!" he prayed. "Please, Lord! Don't let her fall!"

James lost track of Margaret as a cloud covered the moon, and as she climbed higher and higher, to the point where both trees were closest together. At last, James heard a low hoot, which sounded exactly like an owl.

"What an extraordinary girl!" James thought.

All the while, Margaret was doing this *without* shoes, and she was as silent as ever. There wasn't the sound of a branch cracking, or the sound of leaves falling; everything seemed dead still.

James waited for another few minutes, before he heard another low hoot. He then made his way, sticking to the shadows, towards the front gate; which wasn't too far off. When he reached it, he found that Margaret had already opened it, and she was waiting for him.

"Sorry I took so long," James whispered.

"It's alright, I only just—"

Suddenly, Margaret looked really stiff and pale.

"Margaret! Are you alri—"

James' statement was cut short, as Margaret clamped a hand over his mouth.

"Quick! Hide in that tree," she whispered, pointing to an extremely overgrown one which was positioned quite close to the house, and quite a distance away. "They are coming back! The dog and the man! Quick!"

James didn't question her, and sprinted off towards the tree. Margaret quickly closed and locked up the door, and was right by James' side in a matter of seconds.

"Climb higher!" she urged him.

"But why?" James asked, before seeing that the gate was starting to open.

James and Margaret climbed up even higher and sat on a branch, panting and trying to catch their breath. They had an excellent view from where they sat, but to their utter dismay, they saw that the man and the dog were coming right towards them!

The dog must have caught their scent, as he suddenly rushed all at once to the tree, and barked madly! James became faint, and Margaret sat frozen, not knowing what to do. The man ran right up and looked into the tree. But there were so many branches and James and Margaret were seated so high, that he dismissed the fact and thought that his dog had gone mad.

"Stop barking! STOP BARKING! Bad boy! Stop barking!"

But the dog didn't stop barking, and kept jumping up at the tree.

"Stop barking! Bad boy! Down, I say! Down!"

The dog stopped barking, but still growled hard.

"Rusty! This is as much your territory as the squirrels!" the man yelled, assuming that his dog had smelt a squirrel and barked his head off, as he usually did. "You may only bark if there are intruders! Bad boy!"

Rusty whined and gave a little bark as a protest.

"No barking! Understand? You have already roused the whole household! They are going to get so mad! Quiet!"

Rusty whined again but didn't attempt any other tricks. Then, the man chained Rusty up again, but it was to the utter dismay of the watchers above; for they had not noticed earlier that the other end of Rusty's chain was tied around the base of the very tree they were sitting in.

"What do we do now?" James whispered to Margaret.

The latter shrugged. They were trapped.

Chapter 10: Excitement After the Clock Struck 'One'

James and Margaret were stiff from sitting in the tree, and were not able to move, because Rusty was asleep underneath the tree, giving a small, warning growl every now and then.

"Oh! What do we do? What do we do?" James whispered to Margaret for the twentieth time.

And every time James asked this, Margaret would shake her head, as she didn't have any idea of what to do. But this time, when James asked again, Margaret was silent, and sat as still as ever.

"Margaret? What do we do? What do we do?"

Again, Margaret was silent, but this time, she looked at James, and her eyes sparkled in the faint moon light. Then she said, in such a low voice, that it was lower than a whisper,

"I may have an idea... but you won't like it."

"Tell me! What is it?"

"I just had a thought... but it also may not work..."

"What? What is it?" James asked a little too loudly, and a growl came from below. "What is it?" he asked more softly.

"I thought... that perhaps I could climb higher to the branches that are thinner, and break one of them off... and drop it on the dog..."

"And kill it?! That's cruelty!"

"Which is why I didn't really want to tell you..." she replied with a sigh. "What if we knock it unconscious and we *don't* kill it?"

"What if it wakes up again?"

"By the time it wakes up, we will probably be out of sight..."

James sighed and consented.

"But you do the part where you knock the dog out..." he said.

Margaret climbed up the tree and found a branch. Then she used a bit of sharpened stone (which she always carried on herself for self defence) and chipped off parts of the branch, bit by bit. Then, when she thought that she had done enough, she stepped down onto the branch underneath, and hung on the branch that she was working on. It creaked under her weight, and suddenly snapped! And Margaret fell down onto the branch below and lost her balance! Luckily, there was a branch right beside that one, which she quickly grabbed onto to prevent herself from falling.

"Are you alright?" James asked from below, who had been anxiously watching. Margaret left the branch sitting where it was, grunted, and came down.

"I'm fine," she said.

"Why!" James exclaimed. "Your hand is bleeding."

And indeed it was, as she had scraped her hand hard when she fell.

"Here," said James, as he took his knapsack and opened it. "Put your hand out."

Margaret did so. Then James poured some water on a handkerchief and wiped away the blood. Margaret winced as he did this and sat down. Then James got a new, clean, handkerchief and bound her hand in it.

"There..." he said. "Hopefully it will stop bleeding soon."

Margaret looked at it and smiled. Then she climbed back up to where she had left her new weapon.

"Here, James, grab it."

James took hold of the other end and Margaret climbed back down.

"We need to break off all the other branches," Margaret said, "so that it won't get tangled."

The two of them proceeded to break all the little twigs off of their main branch, so that it wouldn't get tangled in the canopy.

"Now... I think this is a good spot..." Margaret said, after they had finished smoothing out the branch and went down the tree a bit. "Which end of the branch is heavier?"

"I think it's this end..."

"Yes... I think so..."

The two of them heaved the branch so that it was vertical and faced the right direction; with the heavy side facing down. James scrambled back up the tree, so that he wouldn't need to see what happened, and Margaret dropped the branch.

"You can come down now," Margaret called to James, after she had dropped the tree branch, and the latter climbed down to join the other.

The two of them then went down together, but before they reached the ground, Margaret stopped James and told him to wait. Then she went further down to the floor.

James sat and waited and waited. It was already one o'clock, and James thought about the previous day, when the two of them had first met, under the bridge.

"You can come down now," Margaret's voice said, floating up to James and interrupting his thoughts.

James climbed down.

"Where's the dog?"

"Well... I... I think... I think we killed it..."

James' heart skipped a beat.

"We... you... we *killed* it?"

Margaret nodded grimly.

"What... what if we go to prison?" James asked, stunned.

"We have to go rescue your father," Margaret said, trying to change the topic.

"But what if... what if... what if we—"

"James, your father."

"But... what... what if... alright..." James said, as he calmed down and took a deep breath and heaved a sigh. "Let's try to get in through the front door first. Perhaps it isn't locked..."

They snuck around, and Margaret tried to turn the knob. But, alas! The door stuck fast—it was locked.

The two of them looked around themselves again. Margaret sighed.

"I think we will need to get in through the roof," she said.

And indeed that was a possibility, as the roof was falling apart and was broken. And it would be easy enough to get onto the roof, as the tree's branches spread right over the roof. Part of the roof had also fallen in, making an easy entry into the house.

Up the two of them went, with only the moonlight as a source of light. Margaret was the first to step onto the roof, which dislodged a few shingles.

"Be careful," she whispered down to James.

The two of them crawled on hands and knees across the roof; sometimes making the most bizarre creaking noises, at which they would both freeze and listen to see if anyone heard them. During these times, James was sure that everyone would be able to hear his heart thumping away, loud and hard.

"Can you hear my heart beating?" he asked Margaret.

"No. Can you hear mine?"

"No."

At last, they reached the point where the roof had caved in, and were finally able to stand on *partially* solid ground again.

Margaret's eyes adjusted to the dimness quickly, but James' eyes didn't. The two of them sat down and looked outside.

The moon was out from behind the clouds, casting a sharp light on everything below. James yawned and lay down.

"Do you think it would be safe to hit the hay for a bit?" James asked Margaret.

Margaret gave a yawn in reply, before thinking it over.

"If we fall asleep, how will we know when to wake up? Besides, once we rescue your papa, we can all go back to your house, and sleep until late in the morning," she whispered.

James yawned silently again.

"Alright... let's go now."

The two of them made their way through the attic of the house, which seemed to be used as a store room. Boxes were everywhere, piled up high. At last, they reached the scuttle. But most unfortunately, there was no ladder hanging around, which made it hard to get down.

"I guess we have to jump..." James said, looking down into the yearning hole.

Margaret just shrugged.

"I'll go first," James offered. "And you can come down after me."

James jumped down, and landed with a hard thump.

"Are you alright?" Margaret asked from above.

James moaned a bit before he told Margaret that he was not hurt, just bruised.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of running feet.

"Hurry, Margaret! Hide!" James called, as he tried to get up. "And take my knapsack!" he called, as he flung it up through the scuttle.

Then James tried to find a place to hide, but he wasn't fast enough, as two rough hands grabbed hold of him.

"I got him! I got him!" a man called to his partner. "Quick, shine a light!"

The other men lit a candle, and the flame light exposed James' pale and worried face.

"Why! It's only a little brat!" the man holding up the candle exclaimed.

"How did he get in?" the man holding fast onto James asked. "Everything was locked up. I checked the front gate, the door, the windows, everything!"

"And how come Rusty didn't bark?"

"Anyways, enough of this. We will soon find out. Right now, we need to find a way to punish this boy."

"I'll put him with the other for now," the man holding onto James said gruffly.

"Let me go!" cried James.

One of the men gave a snort.

"As if we would even be *nice* to you."

The two men chuckled evilly and dragged James across the hall.

"Now mind you don't make a noise," the man holding the candle said. "We don't like noise. And we will gag all those who fuss too much, or make too much noise, or cry, or scream, or try to get help... you know?"

"Oh, and we will also give 'em a good thrashing," the other put in.

"We should already give him a good thrashing for breaking in," the first one said.

"Aye, we should. But we should wait for the boss to get back first."

All this time, they were pulling James down many different hallways and passages. And all this time, James was silent, for he was sure that the men were serious about what they were saying.

At last, they reached a room, and the man holding the candle took out a bunch of keys and unlocked the door.

"Here is where you will stay for the rest of the night. And mind you behave, else you may not get any food tomorrow."

James was roughly shoved into the room, and the door was slammed behind him. He heard the sound of the key being turned, and he knew he was locked in.

James sobbed silently, before he heard the sound of someone snoring. As he looked about him, he saw a figure laying down on the floor.

James approached the figure, and was finally able to see it clearly.

"Papa!" he exclaimed.

Chapter 11: When Everything is Pieced Together

“James? Is it really you?”

Charles had just woken up, and was feeling dazed as recently, he had not had much to eat. And it seemed so long since he had seen his son or his wife.

“James... honey... is it *really* you?”

“Oh! Yes! Papa, it is me!” James cried as he flung himself on his father. “Oh, oh, oh! I thought I would never see you again! Papa! Papa!”

The two of them were in each other’s arms in a matter of seconds, hugging each other as if it was the end of the world or as if they had never seen each other for three years.

“How did you get here, James?” Charles asked.

James launched into the story of how he received Margaret’s letter, how he met her, and how they stole into this shabby, old house, and how he got captured.

“What happened to you, Papa? How did you get captured?”

“Well... it’s a long story. But I will tell you.

“I was walking over to the Johnsons to ask for some help in repairing part of the mill, when I overheard two men talking. I caught the words, ‘kill him’ and ‘steal his typewriting machine thing’ and I thought something strange was going on.

“One of the men asked if they could talk at a bar, and they went to a place called *Jacob Obermann Brewery*, and sat at a table. I followed them, and I sat down at a table quite close to theirs, which was quite an annoyance to them. Then I pretended to read a paper. And soon, I heard them say a name. And the name was Christopher Sholes!”

James gasped.

“You know, Papa,” he said excitedly. “Those men were probably the ones who stole Mr. Sholes’ invention! We went into the workshop the other day, and it was completely destroyed! And the typewriting machine was gone!”

“Well...” Charles resumed. “I heard they worked for a man named Mr. Brüncker, and that they were hired to kidnap Mr. Sholes... or something like that. And they said that if Mr. Brüncker decided to not pay them, they would go and kidnap someone else and hold them for ransom. One of them said they could kidnap the Thatchers’ daughter, their youngest. The other said it was quite likely that they would have to do so, because Mr. Brüncker would deny the signature.”

“And they did, Papa!” cried James excitedly, his eyes big and shining like jewels. “They did!”

“Shh. Calm down, and let me resume. I heard that they said they would meet again at around one o’clock at night outside of the brewery again. So I rushed back and gave you the note... I do believe you received it? Well, after that I ran back to the brewery, and I saw the two men. Then, they started to walk together, and I followed them secretly.

“One of them must have seen me and felt threatened, and told the other. Then they walked more quickly, but I still followed. Then, they stopped suddenly, and turned around. And I acted casual, and I kept on walking down the street, and I passed them, and I tipped my cap, all normal looking. So now, I was walking in front of them. But before I could think of a way to get behind them again, one of them pounced on me and knocked me over. And I cried for help and fought back. And they grabbed onto me and one of them must have knocked me out. Because when I came back to it, I was locked up in this room.

“Some time after, a man came in. He is one awful man, and he smells strongly of wine and sweat. And his appearance is *very* unmannerly! And he said that his name is Mr. Brüncker, and that I would have to stay locked up in this room until he was done with his business. And he warned me to behave, because he would make sure I suffered if I didn’t listen to him.

“I didn’t do anything wrong... I believe... but—”

And right there, his stomach growled loudly.

“Have you had anything to eat, Papa?”

“Charles sighed and shook his head.

“Oh! Papa!” James cried. “Here,” he said, as he pulled some buns out of his pocket. “You can eat these.”

Charles ate everything up hungrily, with one arm around his son. Then they talked softly and huddled up together to keep warm, for it was a cold night.

James jumped when he heard the sound of someone knocking from the room across. But Charles just smiled, (though James couldn’t see it).

“That’s Elizabeth,” Charles told James. “We are not supposed to know that she is in there, because it is their secret. And she has been punished for talking to me.”

“Oh! Elizabeth Thatcher?!” James asked excitedly.

A soft, crisp, and sweet little voice came through the wall.

“Yes,” it said. “I am Elizabeth Thatcher, but how did you know?”

James then told the story of how he heard her scream, how he saw a huge crowd outside of her home, and how he found out that it was her.

“Everyone was in an uproar when they found out you were kidnapped,” James said.

“Oh! Poor Mama and Papa!” Elizabeth exclaimed sadly. “They will still be worrying about me.”

“How did you get kidnapped?” James asked.

Charles and James heard a little sigh, before the voice went on and told her story.

“My Nana had already put me to bed in the nursery, but I could fall asleep. Because poor Socks was sick; Socks is my dog.

“Well, Socks was laying by the fire in the living room, and I could sometimes hear him whining, because he was so miserable. And then mother put him in the kennel, and I could hear him whining in there! And after everyone went to bed, I waited for a chance and snuck downstairs and got Socks from his kennel.

“Socks’ kennel is right outside of the house, close to the garden, so I had to sneak outside to get him. Then, I brought him inside and cuddled up with him on the couch. I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke up it was very dark, and I was cold. So I picked Socks up and kissed him and put him back in his kennel, and I was walking back to inside the house, when a sack was thrown over my head, and then I don’t know what happened.

“All I knew was I was really scared, and when we went over a specially rough bump, I screamed really loud because I was scared. But then someone slapped me real hard, and I cried softly to myself and didn’t make a sound until one of them dumped me out and shoved me into this room. And they said I must keep quiet, else they would make sure that I never saw my Mama and Papa again.”

Elizabeth’s voice quivered at the last sentence, and the listeners on the other side of the wall could tell that she was trying hard not to cry.

A rough, stern, and scary voice came from outside of the door.

“No talking, understand? You know the consequences.”

All three people were instantly quiet. Charles and Elizabeth had already gone through trouble and knew the consequences; they were half starved.

“Not even Mr. Brüncker knows about Elizabeth,” Charles said in a voice so low, that James hardly heard him. “It is a secret among his men.”

Silence reigned for a long time, and Elizabeth fell asleep again.

Quite suddenly, they heard a lot of commotion going on outside.

“HURRY! GET UP, WALTER!”

“FIRE! FIRE! HELP! FIRE!”

“We need to get out of here!”

“WATER! WE NEED WATER!”

“It’s blazing! HELP!”

“WHAT HAPPENED?!”

“FIRE! HELP!”

“HELP! WE NEED MORE HELP!”

There was a *lot* of shouting heard and a few screams.

“MORE WATER!”

“HURRY! HURRY!”

Footsteps were heard running in all directions; echoing down the halls. Angry and impatient shouts were heard, and chaos reigned. Thick smoke was curling up high, and its smell filled the air.

“MORE WATER! MORE WATER! WE NEED MORE!”

“The smoke is too strong!” someone exclaimed weakly, before falling into a coughing fit; though he was neglected as they had a bigger situation underhand.

“SOMEONE! HELP ME CARRY THIS!”

“THE ROOF! WATCH OUT!”

“IT’S FALLING! HELP!”

Rough coughing was heard as some inhaled the smoke, and everyone was shouting at the top of their lungs. In the middle of all this chaos, the door to James and Charles’ confinement creaked open, and a face peered in.

“Margaret!” James exclaimed.

Margaret put a finger to her lips.

“Hurry! We need to go! Now’s our chance!”

Charles and James ran out of the room, and were ready to escape.

“We need to rescue Elizabeth first,” Charles and James exclaimed at the same time.

“Where is she?” Margaret asked.

“In this room.”

Margaret took out a bunch of keys and tried three of them before finding the right one.

The door was flung open, and Elizabeth bounded out towards them. She was a cute little thing, and she was probably about six years of age. It was quite hard to see her appearance as it was very dark. In the distance, the chaos still reigned.

“Hurry! We can still escape through the front door while they aren’t paying attention!” Margaret exclaimed.

Chapter 12: Rusty is Gone

The little group which contained Charles, James, Margaret, and Elizabeth, followed Margaret (who was acting like the leader of the party) and made their way to the front door.

Chaos still reigned in the background... for a while. Suddenly, they heard a shout from one of the men.

"THE PRISONERS! THEY ESCAPED! THE PRISONERS HAVE ESCAPED!"

"WHAT?! WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!"

"HURRY! GO FIND THEM! THEY CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN AWAY!"

"THEY STILL MUST BE IN THE HOUSE! RUSTY ISN'T BARKING."

The little group was terrified.

"Hide!" Margaret cried in a low voice.

Elizabeth and Margaret ran into a store room, and ducked behind some crates. James ran into the same room, and climbed up onto the window sill, unfastened the window, and hid outside. Charles hid behind a bookshelf, ready to jump out at a moment's notice.

Angry shouts could be heard coming from various directions, and someone was barking out orders.

"DID YOU CHECK THE OFFICE?!" someone yelled.

"*Why* isn't Rusty barking?!" someone cried, a little exasperated.

"Rusty! Here a boy! Come and help us!"

"WHERE IS RUST?!"

"Did you find them yet?! GO FIND THEM!"

A sudden shout was heard.

"RUSTY IS GONE! HE'S NOT HERE!"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!"

"HE'S GONE!"

"SILENCE!" a man cried; immediately, all was quiet. "Who said Rusty is gone? *Vhat* in the blazes do you all mean by making this *noise*?! I vas gone for—vhat? One hour? ONE HOUR ONLY! And now I return to find you shrieking and squealing like frightened pigs! Someone—*anyone*—speak! Explain this mess to me, *now*!"

"Sir, our prisoners have escaped!" someone boldly cried out.

"Vhat do you *mean* by that?! Who let them escape? *Who*?! Und I thought there vas only one prisoner? Vhat do you mean by *prisoners*? And *vhy* is my house all—*drenched*?! Vhat is the *meaning* of this madness?!"

"Sir, we lost *both* of our prisoners. While you were out, we caught another one."

"Go find them! *Now*! Stop stalling! Anyone who stalls again gets *no food* tomorrow! Do you hear me? *None*! Go! *Go find them*! Move! Stop stalling! No more excuses!" he cried, as one of them started to protest. "Only action! Nothing else! *Go*!"

Footsteps started across the halls again, but this time there was less shouting. A short shout was heard, then they a gasp.

"Rusty!" it gasped.

"What is it?"

"Rusty... Rusty is... is... dead..."

"Rusty is *dead*?!"

"I... I found his body..."

"*Vhat* is going on here?!" the loud voice boomed again. "And where is Rusty?!"

"Sir..."

"Rusty! *Rusty*! You traitorous little mutt!" Mr. Brüncker cried, ignoring the others. "Come here this instant or I'll tan your hide with my *own shoe*! I raised that dog better than *this*!" he muttered to himself. "No loyalty! No manners! Called him five times... and still nothing... Rusty! Where is Rusty?!" he cried to the man beside him.

"Sir... I hate to tell you the truth... but... I... you... well..."

"Vell *vhat*?"

"You... you can come and see him yourself..." the man said softly.

Mr. Brüncker stormed over and looked at what the others were bending over. There lay his dog, Rusty, dead as ever. Rusty's head was smooshed, and dark blood was still oozing out, covering parts of his face. I really shouldn't describe the rest of him, for it would give you nightmares!

Mr. Brüncker cried out loudly.

"Ruuustyyyyyy!"

He turned pale white, then red and purple with rage.

"WHO DID ZIS? HUH? *Who*?! I sveal pure revenge on ze person who killed my dog! I *SVEAR*! I VILL KILL HIM!"

The little group which was still in hiding, all shuttered. For if any of them were found, they were sure that this man would order them to be killed. All of them waited in fear and silence. Their hearts were thumping away, and most of them were sure that the searchers would hear them beating fast. It seemed like hours to them, though it had only been minutes, and they wished that they had never left their prison.

"Zey must have already left zis area! Go in *every* direction und search for zem! *Now!*" Mr. Brüncker barked. "Und some of you, go with Samuel and kidnap Christopher Sholes! *Now!*"

The men dispersed, taking lanterns and other things. Those who went to search for Margaret, Elizabeth, James, and Charles, came to a deserted and lonely area and held a council.

"Look, why should we even work for this Mr. Brüncker man?" one of them said. "He doesn't even pay us!"

"Yes, let those prisoners escape and run off. It will only get him in trouble. By the time they find out, we will be long gone!"

“Yes! Yes! Let’s do that!”

“But this is treason!” one of them exclaimed.

“But Mr. Brüncker doesn’t even pay us! If we commit treason, he deserves it!”

“Yes! Yes! He deserves things much worse than that!”

Eventually, all agreed to the plan, and they ran away and left the country, raiding houses along the way.

And while this was happening, some of the bolder ones stayed with Mr. Brüncker, who ordered them to dig a pit and bury Rusty. Then he ordered the rest of them to go away. The next few minutes were the most miserable of his life, and he wailed without stopping.

“Oh! Ve vill miss you, Rusty! Oh, Rusty! *Ruuuuuustyyyyy!*” he cried. “You vill always be my true dog! You vere always loyal! And trustworthy! Oh, *ruuuuustyyyyy!*” Mr. Brüncker cried, before breaking into sobs.

Rusty was the only companion that Mr. Brüncker had had. And he was the only thing in the whole universe that he cared for. Rusty was also the only source of love which Mr. Brüncker had ever known.

“You vere always dere for me... always...” he cried, before sobbing hard again. “I cannot believe you’re gone... *Rusty*. I trusted you more than anyone... I should have protected you better... I failed you, *Rusty*. I’m sorry... so sorry... Oh! Rusty!” he sniffled. “*Du warst immer treu, Rusty. Ich werde dich niemals vergessen,*” he cried out, his eyes red with tears. “*Wenn ich nur mehr Zeit mit dir gehabt hätte...*”

Then, Mr. Brüncker began to sing “Dre Lindenbaum” sadly, with his sobs interrupting him every now and then.

“Am Brunnen vor dem Tore
Da steht ein Lindenbaum
Ich träumt' in seinem Schatten
So manchen süßen Traum”

Mr. Brüncker looked up into the dark, night sky; how he missed his dog.

“Ich schnitt in seine Rinde
So manches liebe Wort
Es zog in Freud und Leide
Zu ihm mich immer fort

“Ich musst' auch heute wandern
Vorbei in tiefer Nacht
Da hab ich noch im Dunkel
Die Augen zugemacht”

He felt the world was over. He didn't care for anything anymore. He could be caught by the police, but what difference would that make? Quite suddenly, he heard a shout which brought him back to the present time.

"Let me go!" someone cried.

"I got him!" a rough voice shouted.

"Mr. Brüncker! Sir! I've got one of them."

Mr. Brüncker's men came back, and Mr. Brüncker quickly stood up. One of them was holding tightly onto James

"Here is one of 'em, sir. The others must be nearby."

Mr. Brüncker tried to hide his sadness, though he failed to do so.

"Where would you like me to put him, sir? And what should we do with him?" one of them asked.

"Take him... lock him up in ze room again. Und... do not harm him," Mr. Brüncker said, trying to hide his grief. "Ve're probably all going to be caught by ze police anyway... so... less trouble... would be good for me now, ja?" his voice quivered a bit, and he tried to straighten it again. "Go. Do as I said."

"But sir, we don't have the keys."

"Here, take the spare keys. Und just... go. Do vhat you vant," he said, looking away to hide the tears which had come out of his eyes. "Search for them if you must. Take... take vhat you need," and he said this, with his voice growing softer by the minute. "But do not harm them. Not now."

This was so very unlike the Heinrich Brüncker that he was like earlier; not cunning, or evil, or sarcastic. No, he was now in a state so unlike himself, that the others felt concerned, though they were not sure what to do.

"Now please... leave me alone," he went on, which shocked the others all the more. "Rusty... is gone..."

The others whispered among themselves. For the first time ever, Mr. Brüncker had finally asked for his personal space. He was defeated by his grief. He was ready to kill himself. He was ready to die. But he didn't dare to do so.

He wandered about, not sure what to do. The picture of Rusty kept on appearing in his mind.

"Oh! Rusty!" he kept on saying softly, without knowing it. "Oh! Rusty!"

And during all this time, ever since James had been captured, Charles, Elizabeth, and Margaret were fleeing.

"We must go now!" Margaret had exclaimed. "We can get the police, and they will be able to rescue James! Hurry! If we try now, we will all get caught again!"

Elizabeth agreed, and Charles gave in... though not in the most willing manner. So the three of them snuck off together.

Chapter 13: The Chase

"Men!" someone barked to those who were gathered around him.

These people were the ones who were brave enough to stay behind with the once enraged Mr. Brüncker, and there were only about seven of them total. They were now sitting in the shabby old shed which really didn't contain much.

"Ahem. I have some grave news, my men. Mr. Brüncker is now out of his mind about his stupid little Rusty. I am quite sure he would even be willing to go to the police himself and put himself to jail... He might even do so now!"

The man spat on the floor and stomped on it with his boot.

"That's how I feel about him! Stupid old man!" he said under his breath. "We mustn't be caught!" he cried with fury, turning to address his audience.

A murmur arose from all who agreed with him, and the sound of whispers could be heard.

"We mustn't be caught!" the man went on. "So I tell you what! Jacob, you take half of the men and go off and hunt down the others; help the rest of the men find them! There should be a girl and a man; Elizabeth Thatcher and Charles Whitmore. Someone must have rescued them, because Harold doesn't have the keys. Go and track them! Now!"

The man who appeared to be Jacob chose three other men, and they departed into the darkness.

"And you two, Walter and Fred! Go and find Mr. Brüncker, and bind him and gag him. And lock him in here."

"But Albert, sir!" Walter exclaimed.

"Do as you are told."

Walter and Fred went off and bound the dazed Mr. Brüncker. Then they gagged him and threw him into the shed like a sack of potatoes.

"Mmm mm umm!" Mr. Brüncker cried when he fell with a thud.

Albert entered the shed again and looked at Mr. Brüncker with an air of superiority.

"Mmm mmnum!"

"Ungag the prisoner," Albert commanded.

Fred did as he was told.

"Speak!" cried Albert.

"Vhat... is *zis*?! Treason!" Mr. Brüncker cried, tugging desperately at the ropes. "How *dare* you do *zis* to *me*!" he cried in fury, his eyes red with anger and from crying. "You vill regret *zis*... every single von of you! You vill suffer ze consequences! You vill!"

"Fool!" Albert cried, quite enjoying himself. "*You* will be the one suffering consequences! We are going to leave you here, and you will starve to death! And who will rescue you? No one likes you. No one will save you. Only if you get lucky, the police

will come over, and you can spend the rest of your life in jail!" he said, with a scornful look on his face.

"No!" Mr. Brüncker gasped. "No! You can't!"

Albert chuckled evilly. His laugh seemed even more evil than the laugh that Mr. Brüncker would usually give.

"You can't! You can't!" Mr. Brüncker gasped again.

Albert spat at his captive's face.

"Shut up."

Mr. Brüncker seemed to whimper helplessly, which caused Walter to almost feel sympathy for him. Then, Fred gagged him again, and the little party left the shed and shut the door on poor Mr. Brüncker, who went back to thinking and mourning over Rusty and now, himself too.

But now, we need to go back to our little party of two little girls and a father.

"Hurry!" Margaret cried softly and desperately. "Hurry up!"

Poor little Elizabeth was barefooted, and couldn't go quickly.

"Oh! My foot! My foot!" she sobbed, as she stepped on a prickly weed.

Charles picked her up and carried her, and the little trio made their way again. They went through the gate, and headed towards the bridge. Margaret decided to lead them though the little shortcuts, but before they were long gone, they heard a shout.

"They must have gone this way!"

Heavy footsteps were heard, making their way towards them, and they were getting louder by the second.

"Hurry!" Margaret cried. "Go faster!"

But it was hard for Charles and Elizabeth to go quickly; as Charles couldn't maneuver well through the trees as Margaret could. Elizabeth cried out in pain, as a tree branch scraped her and tore off part of her nightgown.

"Sorry, dear," Charles panted. "Margaret! Slow down a bit!"

"Oh! But they are right behind us!"

Angry shouts could be heard in the distance.

"Are you sure they went down the main road?"

"They may have hidden in the bushes, hoping that we would pass."

"Silence! I'm in charge, remember?! Harry, Rob! You two go by the main road. Dave and I will go through the forest."

"Hurry! They are after us!" Margaret kept on urging. "C'mon! Hurry!"

Charles was panting hard, and Elizabeth sobbed silently.

"Oh! I don't like this! I don't like this!" she kept saying to herself.

Charles was praying as he ran after Margaret.

"Lord! Help us! Help us!"

Margaret suddenly stopped, and the other two caught up to her.

"I have a plan. But you two must hide."

"What?!" Charles exclaimed, as Margaret tried to clamp her little hand over his mouth; quite rude indeed.

"Shhh. They are getting closer! Hurry! Go down that way," she said pointing. "And you will see an odd looking tree with overgrown ivy on it. If you part the ivy, you will find a little opening, and you can hide in there. Now go!"

Charles went off, quite confused. But he soon saw a strange looking tree.

"Oh!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "There it is!"

Charles parted the ivy, and inside was a comfortable little hollow that was patted down with leaves and feathers.

"Why! How cozy!" Elizabeth exclaimed as Charles put her down.

Elizabeth sat down and inspected her foot. It was still hurting, and it was starting to swell, though Elizabeth couldn't see it.

"I don't know how long Margaret is going to take, but try to sleep," Charles said, as he too sat down.

Elizabeth cuddled up against Charles.

"Thank you for carrying me," she said, and fell asleep with a small smile on her face, though no one was able to see it.

Charles was also exhausted, and he too soon fell asleep.

All this time, Margaret was making her way through the shadows, *towards* the enemy. She had a plan of her own, which was a really brilliant one indeed!

She approached the party which was going on the main road, and stepped out into the open, a little ways away from her pursuers. Then she pretended to be beaconing to the others.

"There they are!" Rob cried.

"C'mon, Rob! We should sneak up on them," Harry whispered.

"No, it's better if we chase them. They aren't as fast."

So Rob and Harry charged after Margaret (as they thought the others were with her too) and Margaret darted back into the forest. The two men weren't as nimble and quick as Margaret, and had a hard time keeping up with her. But since Margaret's plan was for them to follow her, she slowed down so that they could keep up with her.

The chase went on for a while, and they went deeper and deeper into the woods. Margaret was enjoying herself quite a lot, but the two men were quite out of breath. They didn't seem to notice, for quite a while, that the others weren't there with her.

"Perhaps we should just look for the others!" Harry said, gasping for breath.

"No. If we catch this one, we can use her as bait for the others."

Quite suddenly, the floor seemed to disappear from beneath their feet, and the next moment, they were on the ground moaning in pain.

Dearest reader, you probably don't understand what happened, but I will explain.

You see, Margaret is a beggar, a thief, and has to do what she can to live. About a year ago, she had begun to dig a pit; a deep, deep pit, and covered the opening with leaves, and sticks. This was her trap, so that she could catch some sort of animal, like a deer. When the unsuspecting victim walks over the pit, the tree branches would give in under its weight, and would be trapped at the bottom of the pit. She had just finished digging the whole pit out about a week ago, and she still hadn't caught anything, until now.

Harry and Rob were at the bottom of the pit, moaning and groaning.

"My ankle!" Rob moaned.

But Harry had it worse, because he had fallen on his arm. His arm was now broken, and the bone was sticking out of his arm.

Harry moaned again. Despite the little light that was shed from the moon, Margaret could see how pale his face was, and she immediately felt bad.

"I'm sorry!" she called. "But don't worry! I'll get the police to fetch you!"

Then Margaret remembered the knapsack which she was carrying, and threw some buns down for them, though they were never touched. Then she went to find the other men, and she found them wandering about, not sure where to go. Margaret climbed up a tree and watched them from above. After wandering for a while, the two men landed in the same spot again.

"Blow those stupid people!" Dave cried in fury. "Let's go back. This is so worthless!"

"Yes, I *would* have done that long ago!" Jacob cried back. "But the only problem is, we are *lost*!!"

"Perhaps we should wait here for the others..."

Jacob sighed, and the two of them sat down.

"It will be easier to navigate around in the morning. It's too dark right now."

Margaret waited until she heard heavy breathing (which wasn't very long), then she snuck off back to the others.

Charles awoke with a start. He heard the sound of a twig cracking. Elizabeth, who had been leaning on Charles, awoke too when Charles stirred.

"Shhh," Charles warned.

Elizabeth became pale, as the sound of footsteps approached.

Quite suddenly, the ivy was parted, and there stood Margaret.

"Oh! I thought you were, perhaps, the bad guys!" Elizabeth exclaimed.

Margaret smiled at the cute little girl.

"Come on! We can go home now," Margaret said.

"No, we must first go to the police," Charles said, quite firmly. "I know one of the officers. His name is Thomas, and he will be able to help us. His home is quite close to mine, so we can head that way."

Margaret became a little pale, and Elizabeth saw that.

"Don't worry, Margaret," said Elizabeth. "The police are good people."

But Margaret wasn't sure, and refused to go.

"I'll give you a sweet if you come with us!" Elizabeth said, as she looked up at Margaret in the most yearning manner.

Margaret gave in almost immediately, so the three of them, with Margaret in the lead, went off to officer Thomas' home. It was a peaceful walk back, with the moon out, the cool night air, and the sound of crickets dying off. Elizabeth fell asleep on Charles' shoulder, and Margaret kept on letting off yawns. In between her yawns, she narrated the happenings while they were sheltered inside the tree. But Charles was too worried to listen to Margaret's speech, and kept on praying. He was worried about James. How was he being treated? And what had they done to him?

If only Charles knew that James was alright, and wasn't being beaten or whipped. Albert, Walter, and Fred had decided to flee, before it was too late, and they left James and Mr. Brüncker alone, to starve to death. They had left James a bit of water and stale bread, but that was all.

At last, the three of them arrived at officer Thomas' house.

"Do we knock?"

"I'm afraid we will have to," was Charles' grim reply.

Chapter 14: The Excitement is Almost Over

"Honey! Honey! Thomas, honey! Thomas!"

"Eh... what is it?" a sleepy voice replied.

"There are some people at the door, and they are looking for you."

A sigh was heard.

"Tell them I will be out in a moment..."

"Thank you, Mrs. Clark, and we're so sorry that we had to disturb you at this time of night," Charles said softly, so as not to wake Elizabeth up.

Mrs. Clark laughed a little and sniffled a yawn.

"Well, it's early morning, really. The night is almost over..."

As they waited, Mrs. Clark tried to entertain them and talk to them, but they were all too tired. Charles just smiled wearily at her.

At last, officer Thomas appeared.

"Good... err, morning? Good morning, Charles! How can I help?" Thomas asked.

"Sorry to disturb your sleep..." said Charles as he tried to sniffle a yawn. "But do you think it would be po—"

"You need to help us!" Margaret cried, interrupting Charles' speech; for she was becoming cranky as she was very tired. "James has been captured! And the bad people went off to kidnap Christopher Sholes! And you need to catch them! And I caught two of them already! And you need to hurry, before they escape! And—"

"Whoa, whoa whoa! Hold on a sec, young lady!" Thomas said playfully, though still serious.

Then Margaret remembered her fear again, and became pale and hid behind Charles. But Thomas didn't seem to notice.

"Come on in," he said. "And let's have a talk."

"Oh! But you need to hurry! Or else they may kill James!" Margaret cried, forgetting her fear again. "Hurry up! Or I'll go rescue James myself!"

She was a little too loud, and Elizabeth woke up. She turned around to look about herself.

Thomas gasped as he saw the little girl's face.

"Elizabeth?!"

"Hallo?" Elizabeth said sleepily and rubbed her eyes.

"Phew! How did you rescue her?! Or wait... come in first! Come in! You have quite a story to tell, I'm sure!"

And so they all settled in, and Margaret was quite pleased, for this was the second home that she had ever gone into for a long while besides the Whitmores' home.

"A kitty!" Margaret exclaimed and was quiet for a long while after; as she found a comfortable spot on the couch, sat down and adored the cat. Elizabeth went off after Margaret, and soon, the two of them were cuddled up with Agatha.

Charles was quite relieved, for then he could talk to Thomas in peace. The two of them went into his study, and were there for a little while.

"Well... I'll ring up the others, and we'll be off," said Thomas, as the two of them walked out again "And if you don't mind leading me..."

"Absolutely. I must go. I must see if James is alright..." Charles replied.

"If you would like, we can stop by Ben's house (he's another one of us officers), and we can all go first and see if we can rescue your son..." Thomas replied, for he could tell that Charles was very anxious.

"Thank you sir!"

And so, Thomas, Ben, Charles, Elizabeth, and Margaret (for the two girls wouldn't dream of being left behind) all went off to rescue James.

"Hop in!" Thomas announced as he brought the carriage out from behind.

Margaret squealed with delight. To have the luxury to be able to ride in a carriage! They stopped at Ben's house, and off they went again.

"Ooo! Ooo! Can we go faster?!" Margaret asked in delight.

To her utmost joy, Thomas clicked the reins and they went faster. Off they went, back through the same lanes and paths. All the while, Margaret was explaining how she was able to release James, Charles, and Elizabeth.

"You see, I needed a way to distract them. So I just took some of the matches that James had brought, and I lit some papers on fire. And I put other objects into it too, like some sticks which I had brought, and a few wooden boxes. And it got bigger and bigger and the fire got caught on the curtains. And everyone panicked and went to deal with the situation."

"But how did you get the keys?"

"That was easy enough. When no one was looking, I just took it from his pockets."

"You... took it from their pockets?! How did you do that?!" Ben asked.

"Oh... I... I got good at doing such..." Margaret stammered.

But the others didn't worry about it, and told her to continue her story.

"Well then, I went through all the halls, and I finally found their room and I got them out. But then they put the fire out, and they found out that we had escaped, because I forgot to close Elizabeth's door..."

"So we hid in the spare room, and we waited there for hours. But then, they found James, because he had hidden outside, and they took him and locked him up in the room again. And after that, we ran away, and we hid in the woods. And I caught two of them in a pit, and I do believe one of them broke his arm..."

Soon after Margaret finished her story, they arrived at the house. It seemed deserted, and a spooky silence reigned around the house.

Charles was the first to jump out. He looked about with a worried expression, and all the worst case scenarios were going through his head. Margaret, on the other hand, looked about her, sniffed the air, and thought for a while. Then she gave a low hoot. And heard the sound of James scurrying to his feet, though no one else heard it.

"He's in the same room," she said to Charles, and ran across the lawn towards the room in which James was locked up in.

"Wait!" Thomas called. "It could be dangerous!"

But Margaret didn't care, and opened the front door and was gone. The others rushed after her, and found her unlocking the door.

"James? Are you in here?"

"Margaret!" a voice exclaimed from the other side of the door.

Margaret got the door to open, and James rushed out.

"Margaret! Papa!" he cried joyfully as he rushed into his father's arms.

Tears found their way into Charles' eyes. His son was alright.

The two of them embraced for a long time, and the others backed up and gave them space; Margaret, surprisingly, did so too.

Then, they looked into every single room to see if there were others still about, but they found no one.

"Looks like they are all gone," Thomas said with a sigh as they all went outside again.

But Margaret's sharp ear caught the sound of a muffled moan, and looked in the direction of the shed. She ran over and flung open the doors. There, in the middle of the hay covered floor, sat Mr. Brüncker, as helpless as ever.

"Mmm mmm um!" he cried, his voice muffled by the gag.

"Hey!" Margaret called to the others. "There's a man here!"

The others rushed over, and saw Mr. Brüncker, all tied up and unable to move. Ben undid the gag.

"Oh! Oh!" Mr. Brüncker said in almost a gasp. "Vhat... who... *vhat*?"

"Well, hello, *Mr. Brüncker*," James said as he folded his hands.

Charles looked at him grimly and shook his head.

"Thomas, Ben, he is the one behind all of this!" said James, pointing his finger at the man.

"Who? Vhat? Vhat do you mean?" he cried, as he tried to shake himself free from the ropes which bound him down. "I didn't—I *didn't do all zis*!" he cried in fury, his voice shaking. "Vait..." he said as he caught his breath. "Did you... did *you* kill Rusty?! Oh! Rusty! No... tell me you didn't... Oh! Rusty!"

Thomas and Ben looked puzzled, until Margaret explained that Rusty was his dog. Then Thomas proceeded to unbind the wailing man, who seemed to live in a dream... or nightmare, as he kept on calling for Rusty.

Mr. Brüncker was brought to the carriage and was hauled in. Then they drove off down the main road a little ways down, to the place closest to the pit which Margaret had dug. They were met, on the way, by some of the other policemen, and they continued together until they arrived.

Mr. Brüncker was tied up again, and left in the carriage with one man to guard over him. Elizabeth and Charels stayed behind too, as Elizabeth didn't want to go back into the forest again and Charles was much too tired to continue to do anything else. Then Margaret proudly led the way to the pit in which Harry was still moaning to death.

Thomas let a rope down and climbed down.

"I'm not sure about how we can get them up," he said, his voice sounding quite far away.

A moan was heard again.

"Could someone let down a light?" Thomas asked.

A light was let down on another rope, and a short gasp was heard.

"Hey... could I get two of you to come down? And bring some alcohol. Also, this may take a while. Could some of you go off to find the other people?"

Ben and another one of them slid down the rope, two of them stayed above in case they were needed, and Margaret led the rest of them to the place where Jacob and Dave were asleep.

"Oh..." Ben said dully, as he arrived at the bottom of the pit, seeing the state that Harry's arm was in.

"We will need to put the bone back..." Thomas said.

Harry moaned again.

"Alright boys, in position? Ready? On my mark. Three, two, one, pull!"

Harry moaned hard. The two people above felt sick. The moaning soon stopped, as Harry had fainted, and the operation continued for about three hours. All the time, Rob looked like he was trying to disappear, and he seemed only worried for himself. He didn't care in the least about Harry, and was disgusted when the light had shone down and he could see everything clearly.

While all this was happening down in the pit, Margaret was leading the way to the place where the two men had settled down.

"They are right there," Margaret whispered, pointing to two sleeping figures.

The policemen snuck up, and pounced on Jacob and Dave, who awoke terrified. They immediately surrendered, and were taken back to the carriage and tied up with Mr. Brüncker, who was still going quite mad. They waited for Thomas and the others to come back with the injured prisoner before they all rode back together. This time, they were on their way to the Milwaukee County House of Correction (the prison in

Milwaukee). Along the way, they met with some of the other policemen who had gone to stop Samuel Smith and his gang from kidnapping Sholes.

"They had already knocked him unconscious and put him in a sack when we arrived and caught them," one of them said to Thomas.

All the carriages rode in a line together, like a procession of prisoners

"Put them in stocks," one of them commanded when they arrived. "They will be tried tomorrow."

And so, a bunch of prisoners were put into jail. Harry got a splint put on his arm before he too was put into stocks. Then, everyone returned to their homes.

It was already 4:36, and the sun was already rising! Thomas drove them to Charles' home, and they parted there.

"Oh, and I'll write to Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher and tell them that Elizabeth is alright," Thomas said, before he cracked his whip and rode away.

The door creaked open, and they all stepped in. Then, they went straight up the stairs and collapsed onto the beds. James shared his father's bed, and Margaret and Elizabeth slept on James' bed.

None of them cared to change (for who would?). The moment their heads fell on their pillows, they fell asleep.

Chapter 15: A Very Happy Time Together

"Knock, knock, knock," went the knocker. "Knock, knock, knock."

Charles awoke with a start. He looked at his pocket watch (which had been returned to him only a few hours ago). It was five o'clock. Charles groaned. They had less than half an hour of sleep.

"Knock, knock, knock..."

Charles forced himself out of bed and went to the door; giving his hair a finger-comb on the way down the stairs. Charles opened the door. Standing there were the two anxious faces of Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher!

Mrs. Thatcher's face was slightly flushed and her amber coloured eyes were red from crying. She was a tall and pretty woman, with a slender form and a graceful look. Her hair was done up simply today, for she had rushed over

We have already met Mr. Thatcher, but today he looked a little worried. His face was overall more pale, and his eyes didn't dance and sparkle as they used to.

"Hello!" Charles exclaimed tiredly, and he immediately felt ashamed about how untidy he looked in front of these two well dressed, rich, and proper looking people; especially in front of the Thatcher's who were quite well known throughout the area.

"Good morning, err, Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher?"

"Yes, good morning. Is Lizzie here? Elizabeth?" Mrs. Thatcher asked, looking very worried indeed.

"Yes. But she is still asleep. Please, do come in. And please forgive my looks. We only came back half an hour ago..."

"Oh! Really? We're so sorry. Sorry, we never knew that you just got back..." Mr. Thatcher exclaimed. "We received a letter from Sir Thomas, and we came over immediately. We did not know whether you would be available or not, and did not put it into consideration. I'm so sorry; please forgive us..."

Charles smiled wearily.

"A bit of sleep lost is alright. I understand how you feel, for I felt the same way with my son."

Charles could tell that Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher were interested, but they didn't ask out of respect, seeing how exhausted he was. So Charles gave a quick and short version of the happenings during the night, quite to the disbelief of Mr. Thatcher.

Charles let out another yawn and begged their pardon. But Mr. Thatcher wasn't in the least bothered, just like his wife.

"May we please go see Lizzie?" Mrs. Thatcher asked.

"Of course. Oh, also, there is another girl sleeping with her. Margaret, the one who rescued us."

The three of them mounted the stairs, and opened the door to James' room. There, on the bed, were two little girls (one younger than the other) sleeping soundly

with little smiles on their faces. They were cuddled up close together, and they were in the deepest, soundest, and most comfortable sleep that they had ever had in their lives, even for Elizabeth.

Mrs. Thatcher looked relieved, and her husband instantly gained colour and didn't look so pale. She leaned on her husband's shoulder and sighed.

"How can I thank you for rescuing and taking such good care of my daughter?" Mr. Thatcher whispered, turning to Charles with the utmost gratitude.

"Let's talk downstairs," Mrs. Thatcher whispered.

On their way to the stairs, they passed by Alice's room, and heard a lot of coughing. Charles bid his two guests to go down first, and he went into his wife's room, ending up hearing a lot of confusing questions, such as, "did you get the mill fixed?" and "how was your visit to the Halls?" and "was your journey over safe?" and, "how are you already up at this hour?"

Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher waited for a bit, before Charles appeared once again.

"So sorry, I went to go check on my wife. She has been ill for a while."

"Has she been seen by a doctor?" Mrs. Thatcher asked.

Charles sighed and shook his head.

"We haven't had enough money to do so..."

"May I... may I go see her?" she asked timidly. "I have six children of my own, and have had a lot of experience in doctoring them."

Charles smiled and nodded. He was very exhausted, and talked only if he needed to.

Mrs. Thatcher went up the stairs once again, and entered the room in which Alice had stayed put in for the past few weeks. Alice was quite startled to see Mrs. Thatcher walk straight up to her bedside. But the time that passed afterwards was a happy one, and the cheerful personality of Mrs. Thatcher must have helped Alice recover a bit.

All this while, Mr. Thatcher was thinking about how he could reward the Whitmores and Margaret. He looked about the house and saw a few rough repairs here and there. He saw that part of the wall was broken, and was covered with a blanket to keep the cold night air out when they went to bed.

"How did your wife become ill?" he asked Charles, for he felt uncomfortable to bother him with questions about his house.

Charles then related how the storm had destroyed part of their house, and how his wife had worried herself until she became ill. Mr. Thatcher then understood why there were so many rough repairs on one side of the house. Then the two men talked for a little while, all the time Mr. Thatcher was trying to think of some sort of service he could grant to the Whitmores.

When Mrs. Thatcher came down again, they bid Charles farewell, and said that they would come later in the afternoon to see if Elizabeth had woken up. Then, Charles

went back to bed and didn't even wake up when Mrs. Wellesley opened his door to check on the family.

It was a strange sight for her, for everyone in the house was asleep. Not only that, but they had added two children to the household in a matter of two days.

"What a remarkable family!" she said to herself when she had gone down again.

She didn't prepare breakfast, for all of them were sleeping soundly. So she just sat down and did some mending until the afternoon, when the knocker sounded once again.

And she opened the door to find the *whole entire* Thatcher family (not including Elizabeth of course) waiting at the door. Yes, all five of Elizabeth's siblings had come too, for they wanted to see their sister all safe and sound, and they also wanted to meet her rescuers and protectors.

The house started to buzz with excitement, and all of the people above woke up and got themselves tidy and came down stairs. Margaret had the honour of holding Elizabeth's hand and leading her down proudly, as if she were the owner of the house.

And so, Elizabeth was reunited with her family. Then, a lot of work happened for the next few weeks: the mill was repaired and refurbished by David, the Thatcher's oldest; their house was fully repaired and the costs were covered by Mr. Thatcher; Alice recovered fully through the care of Mrs. Thatcher (who was really much better than any doctor around at the time); and all of Elizabeth's siblings gave them gifts; and Elizabeth made all of them a little embroidery for them to keep; and a lot of other happy things happened.

One of the best parts was for Margaret. Mr. Thatcher hoped to reward her very well, and he put down enough money for her to attend a really good school. And he bought her a lot of pretty dresses, though they weren't the most appreciated by Margaret, who would rather run free without being restrained by the *longness* of the dresses.

"I just wish I could find her a good home," Mr. Thatcher remarked to Charles one day, after he had found out that Margaret was a beggar.

This comment really found a place in Charles' heart, and he began to pray earnestly for the Lord to give Margaret a home.

One morning, Charles woke up *very* early, feeling light headed and uncomfortable. He tossed and turned (though very carefully, in fear of waking up Alice), and yet, was unable to fall asleep. Finally, he got up and went downstairs to get a glass of water, then found himself heading for the front door.

"Fresh air would be nice..." he thought to himself.

As Charles strolled through the foggy streets, he pulled his coat around him tighter, for it was chilly. Not sure where to go, he made his way up the street, thinking of crossing the bridge and heading into the meadows. But not many paces off, he saw a piece of paper, fluttering in the cool, morning breeze, though still in one place, as it was

tied to a lamp post. Though not sure why, Charles took a look at the paper. Here is what it read:

**CHILDREN NEED HOMES! ADOPT YOUR CHILD NOW! GO TO 45
BROOKLAND STREET EAST TO HELP MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE
FOR CHILDREN!**

Yes! That was it! Charles' eyes lit up, he was sure this was the answer to prayer. Margaret would be *his* daughter! He was sure that the Lord had asked *him* to adopt Margaret! Yes, Charles was sure about it. He talked to his wife, who agreed to pray over it, and in the end, they were sure that Margaret was going to become the next member of their family. James was thrilled when he found out, and they decided it was time to tell Margaret, who had become really fond of them during this time.

"Oh! Really?" Margaret cried when they broke the news to her. "Do you really, really mean it?! Oh! Oh!" she cried, as she pinched herself to make sure everything was real. "I'm not in a dream, right?! Oh! Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she cried, as she hugged everyone in turn and danced about the room. "Oh! Is this true?! Oh! Oh! Oh! Thank you! Thank you! I... I... oh! Oh! Thank you! I don't know what to say! Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she cried, as tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks, surprising her quite a bit.

Though she really was too shocked, Margaret still *did* say a lot more and she also did a lot more to express what she meant. I really can't write it all down, for it would take more than two pages to describe everything about her. But I will mention that she squealed and danced and twirled about; not to mention that she shattered a vase in her excitement.

And so, everything seemed to be going right again. The police had been able to retrieve Mr. Sholes' typewriting machine, much to his relief; Alice was well again; and the mill was up and running, more smoothly than ever; life was pretty much back to normal.

Chapter 16: A Special Day

Everyone clapped and cheered as Amelia was drawn out of the water. You see, today, everyone was at church again, for there were a few baptisms happening today.

"When will it be Margaret's turn?" James asked impatiently.

Yes, Margaret was getting baptized too, and was quite willing to, though she was still afraid that she would drown.

"You are *sure* that I won't drown, right Mama?" she had asked for the one hundredth time.

"Yes, darling. I am *sure*," Alice replied, exasperated. "Now, don't ask the question again, because you are getting on my *nerves*. You just need to hold your breath. And if you want, you can plug your nose."

And so, they were now all sitting together in the pews, and witnessing the baptisms. They all clapped again, as another person was baptized.

"When will it be Margaret's turn?!" James whispered impatiently to his mother.

"Shh. I don't know. Just wait."

Their pastor called the next name, it wasn't Margaret. James sighed and leaned on his father's shoulder.

"Do you think Margaret will be next?" he asked quietly.

But Charles didn't hear, and James sighed again. Then he sat up straight and listened.

Everyone clapped as the person was baptized.

James waited impatiently. Now would it be Margaret?

"Margaret Whitmore, I invite you to the baptistery" the pastor said.

James kicked his feet in excitement, and Alice put her hand on his leg to tell him to stop.

Margaret came out from behind and came into the water. She looked solemn and serious; never before had James seen her like this before. She looked down into the water in fear, but she just took a deep breath and stepped in.

"Margaret, what was your life like before you knew Christ as your saviour?" the pastor asked.

Margaret took a deep breath and said,

"Before I knew Christ, I lived with my biological father and mother. My mother passed away when I was very young and my father was very sad and mad. He sent me away to live with my Uncle, who was a scholar.

"My Uncle wanted me to be well educated, but I hated my studies, so I ran away and lived as a beggar on the streets.

"I stole from others to get food and I only cared for myself. My life was in darkness. I had only one friend who was also a beggar, and she wouldn't always stay with me. Her other friend didn't allow me to share an abode with them or food with them,

so my friend was only part-time. And that was what my life was like before I knew Christ.”

“And how has Christ changed your life?”

“My conditions changed when I was adopted by the Whitmores. I was around people who *loved* me. They taught me the gospel and prayed with me and I believed. A surge of hope ran through my body; the darkness turned into light. I repented and my life has been changed forever. Now, I no longer steal, and the Lord has been helping me to obey better everyday. I try to be a help around the house, and I work hard in my studies.

“1 John 1:9 says that ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’”

“And why do you want to be baptized?” asked the Pastor.

“In obedience to Christ.”

“Then, Margaret, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Everyone clapped and cheered as Margaret went under and came out again. Then Margaret exited backstage, with a big smile on her face.

“It wasn’t bad,” she said when she was asked by James later on as they were riding home.

James laughed.

“But you looked so solemn and so serious, I wasn’t sure if it was because you were scared or shy or both,” he said. “So what was it?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t know I looked that serious... but I was a bit scared,” she admitted. “I think I became pale when he said, ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...’”

James laughed and said,

“You actually did... but don’t worry, it wasn’t obvious. I only noticed it because I knew you were scared of water.”

Margaret gave James a friendly shove.

“I’m not scared of water, I’m scared of *drowning*.”

They arrived back at home again. Margaret sighed. She was thinking about the first time she had seen her home; the day that she and James had snuck over and slipped in silently.

Alice gave Margaret a sudden hug, interrupting her daydream.

“Remember this day, Margaret.”

“Huh?”

“Like remember what day it is. August 19th, 1866. Remember it!”

Later on that day, all of them sat outside together and watched the sun setting. It was really relaxing, as they could hear the Wisconsin River splashing at the banks and

the last twitters of the little birds. The crickets were chirping and the air had a sweet smell from the flowers which grew by the house.

Margaret sighed and lay back.

"The day is almost over..." she said.

"Mama," James whispered, "you need to get the present."

Margaret's sharp ear caught what James said and she bolted straight up.

"A present?"

Alice smiled. And glanced at Charles who got up and went into the house.

"Yes, a present," Alice said.

"Ooo! What is it?"

"You have to guess," said James.

Margaret thought and thought.

"It's... it's not a dress, right?" she asked timidly.

Alice laughed.

"You really are the strangest little girl," she said, as she gave Margaret a kiss. "I have never known a single lass besides you who doesn't like dresses!"

"But... is it a dress?" Margaret asked, ignoring her mother's statement.

"No, it isn't."

"Papa, bring the gift out!" James shouted.

"Not so loud!" his mother said.

Charles appeared again, holding something in his hands. It was wrapped in sturdy, brown paper, tied with a string, and it had a little bow on top.

"Open it!" James cried.

Margaret took the package in her hands and held it carefully. This was the first gift that she had ever received that was wrapped. With shaky hands she undid the string and slowly unfolded the paper.

"Just rip it!" James cried impatiently.

But Margaret didn't rip it, and instead she kept on undoing the paper ever so carefully!

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It's a Bible! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

And we leave them there, all hugging each other ever so happily!

Epilogue

Charles and James were going over to the Milwaukee County House of Correction to go and see Mr. Brüncker. Before they left, Margaret told them to bring him some good food, for she had visited one of her uncles before, who had gone to prison.

"It's awful there! And he hardly got any food! And they are forced to work and they aren't allowed to talk!"

And so, James and Charles went off to visit Mr. Brüncker.

"We should forgive him, James," Charles had told him the other day. "He doesn't have any hope in life! What does Romans 12:20 tell us?"

James sighed, for he had just memorised the verse at church.

"It says, 'Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.'" James said monotonously.

Charles frowned. James gave a small smile and apologized. The family kept on praying over the matter, until they felt ready to face their enemy.

"We should forgive him because God forgave us," Charles said.

James prayed long and hard at night.

"He didn't try to attack us," Charles had said to James. "We just fell into it. I wanted to protect Mr. Sholes, because he saved your life. Mr. Brüncker didn't try to kill us... he's just a puzzled old man..."

And so, they were now face to face with this man behind the bars.

"Vhat are you here for?" Mr. Brüncker asked sadly.

Apparently, he was still not over with his grief, even after over a few months of time.

"We just came to say that we forgive you," Charles said, locking eyes with the other man. "God forgave us, so we forgive you. Jesus helped us make the decision."

Mr. Brüncker didn't know why, but a surge of hope flooded into his body. He felt as if he may be able to live, not die... life didn't seem so hopeless...

"Who... who is zis Jesus?"

"Jesus died for our sins. You see, the punishment for sin is death. And our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned, bringing sin into the world. And sin separates us from God, because God is perfect. But God didn't want this to be the way, so he sent Jesus, his only son, to die on the *cross* for our sins. And Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life. He didn't deserve it, yet, he took all of God's wrath upon himself and died. Only to be buried and to rise up again on the third day, conquering death itself! And if we believe in Jesus, if we believe that he died for us and rose again, we can be saved. Because our pre-set destination is hell, eternal suffering. But if we believe in Jesus, we can go to heaven, where there will be no more crying, suffering, pain, or any sin. It is a perfect place. And we can go there if we repent and believe."

By now, tears were making their way into Mr. Brüncker's eyes, and some of them flowed down his cheeks. All this time, his eyes were growing bigger and bigger as he heard the message of hope, coming from a man who seemed to pity him.

"Lord! I am a sinner!" he cried when Charles had finished explaining all his questions. "Und I vant to believe!"

"Do you wish for me to pray for you?" Charles asked.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried between sobs, bowing his head down humbly.

So for the rest of the time they prayed together, and Mr. Brüncker believed!

"Ahem... Sir, your time is up," the guard said.

Charles nodded and beckoned James to get up.

"And if you could," Charles said, handing the basket of food which they had brought, to the guard, "please give this to him."

The guard nodded and said,

"I do not understand this. Here you are, telling your enemy that you forgive him. And praying with him and acting as if you *love* him."

"We can only love because God loved us first."

"Yes," James put in, for seeing Mr. Brüncker's behaviour had really changed his thinking. "And Jesus tells us to love our neighbours *and* our enemies. And to love those who curse us."

The guard said no more, but led them outside and bid them to be on their way.

"But also... come back whenever you want..." he said, for he seemed interested in what they had to say.

Charles and James promised to come back another time, and they left, changing a person's life and witnessing God's work!

One other thing I wish to mention is about the development of Mr. Sholes' invention, his typewriting machine. Let us peek into this window, where we can see two men have just met each other.

"Ah, Mr. Sholes! Good morning! Good morning!"

This was Mr. Thatcher who had just said this, and he was meeting with Mr. Sholes at *Miller Cafe*.

"Good day, sir! How are you doing?" Mr. Sholes asked as he heartily shook the latter's hand.

"Fine! Fine! I heard that you are working on some sort of invention?"

"Yea, yea... it's my pet project really..."

"I was wondering if you would be interested in going to this place... it's called C.F. Kleinsteuber's machine shop, and many ametuer inventors gather there..."

"C.F. Kleinsteuber's?"

“Yes.”

“Hmm... That sounds interesting...”

“Yea. I know a man there, Mr. Glidden, and he’s interested in writing devices and such, I believe.”

“Hmm... How long are the gatherings? And where is this located?”

“It is just a little ways off, down the street about five blocks... and I’m not sure how long the gatherings are... I’m not even sure if they have proper gatherings or if you can just drop by...”

Two years later, Sholes and his partners (one of whom was Carlos S. Glidden) were granted with U.S. Patent 79,265 for their invention! And it was thanks to C.F. Kleinsteuber’s machine shop that this was able to happen!

“You were right, Mr. Sholes,” James said one day, two years after the day Mr. Sholes had received the patent. “You were right that day, when you said that it would revolutionize the world. It has... it has.”

And it is true. The typewriter made its way into basically every single office and into quite a few homes too! And not only that, but the typewriter has led us to the computer, and the QWERTY keyboard. Because the QWERTY keyboard was also invented by Christopher Latham Sholes!

So these events (and many others to follow) are all what happened after the clock struck ‘one’. THE END