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# Micah and the Mayor's Seal

— A time travelling adventure —



by Carrickfergus Museum



Mid & East  
Antrim  
Borough Council

When I was young I loved the **Choose Your Own Adventure®** stories that I regularly borrowed from my local library. I wasn't just reading the story, I got to decide what to do. Inevitably I would turn to page x and nearly always died on the first go, but that never stopped me trying again and exploring every option until I succeeded in my mission!

I have also always been a fan of historical fiction. It can transport you into another world, so different from our own and helps us to imagine what life may have been like for real people facing real situations. Even when it's not particularly accurate it can still inspire an interest in a particular person or topic.

Working in Carrickfergus Museum is like exploring a treasure trove – there's always something fascinating waiting to be discovered in the collections – and from within the town's long and tumultuous history. From King Fergus's ship crashing upon the rock where the castle now stands, to the centuries of prominence and prosperity, and of siege and warfare. It's a real life adventure story stretching from the days of kings and knights to modern heroes of World War Two and beyond. I often joke that I will never get tired of thinking up museum projects – because there's always some aspect of our town's history to delve into.

Developing a story for children to not only enjoy, but to understand the history of Carrickfergus has been of considerable interest to me for some years. But we couldn't fit that all that history into one story! So we decided to start in Medieval Carrickfergus. It might be fiction, but it is full of real characters and real events. We hope that young readers will find it exciting being able to choose their own path – exciting enough perhaps to justify a second instalment in the series? I do hope so. Let us know what you think by clicking the link to the survey at the end of the book.

I am deeply grateful to Mrs Radcliffe and her 2019 P6 class at Eden Primary School. They came up with excellent feedback for the story which we have taken on board, and were genuinely a thoroughly lovely bunch of children. Myself and the team have very much enjoyed working on the project. I'm only sorry that we could not find a way to include unicorns or dinosaurs this time around. Maybe next time.

**Shirin Murphy**, Carrickfergus Museum, Collections Access Officer

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# Micah and the Mayor's Seal

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## A time travelling adventure

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### Adventure book key



Chapter Section



Action Section



# Maud's Cafe 2020



'Did you know Belfast Lough used to be called Carrickfergus Bay?' Josh's nan asks.

You're sitting by the big window in Maud's Cafe in Carrickfergus; you, your best mate Josh, and Josh's nan (who really is called Nan). As usual, Josh grabbed the best table. If you get the angle just right you can see Carrickfergus Castle.

'Why isn't it called that now?' you ask, scraping the bottom of your tub for the last taste of ice-cream.

'Aw, mate, did you have to?' Josh groans and you flip a drop of ice-cream at him. He grins and flips back. A drop of his chocolate ice-cream lands on your nose.

You're about to go to war when Josh's nan says, 'Don't you want to hear the answer to your question?' and you stop messing around. You've a feeling Josh's nan could be a bit scary. For one thing, she used to be a teacher. For another, she's the only granny you've ever seen with dark purple spiky hair. Besides, she's just bought you the BIGGEST ice-cream you've ever had. That's worth a bit of boredom.

'Course I do. Go on, tell us!' Josh pulls a face and you ignore it, staring intently at his nan when she starts talking. It's a skill you learned in school, looking like you're paying attention when actually you're half asleep.

'This,' Nan says, jabbing towards the Lough with her spoon, 'used to be the most important place in Ulster. One of the most important places in Ireland, actually.'

What?

'More than Belfast?' Josh asks.

Nan smiles, wrinkles cascading around her eyes and mouth. 'Absolutely. Belfast was nothing in those days, not much more than a village. This,' she taps the table with her teaspoon, 'was it. This was where the ships came. This is where the castle was, where the soldiers were.'

'Why did they build the castle here in the first place?' you ask, and Josh digs you with his elbow.

'You know this. We did it in school, remember? John de Courcy and the Normans. Miss said it was strategic. In those days this was the best place 'cause everyone had to come through here. Besides, it made it dead hard for your enemies to creep up on you.'

'So history isn't completely boring then?' Josh's nan says, and you struggle to keep a straight face when Josh turns pink. You knew he liked history, he'd just tried to hide it in case the other kids thought it wasn't cool.

'Do you know any good stories about Carrick?' you ask. 'Proper ones, like. Josh says you were a History teacher and Miss won't, she says there isn't time.' She smiles.

'There's so many ... let's see. Did you know King John spent a while here?'

'Eeeevil King John,' Josh echoes, sucking in his cheeks and narrowing his eyes so he looks like a Disney baddie.

'What did he do?' you ask.

'He messed up, that's what,' Nan says, scraping her own carton. 'He came close to losing everything.' She looks across at the Castle. 'People who think they're about to lose everything are dangerous. Especially when they're kings.'

'What's that got to do with Carrick?' Josh demands. 'Come on, Nan. We want proper stories, ones with actual gore.'

Nan glances at her watch. 'Never mind stories, if you're really interested, why don't we go to the Museum?' She obviously thinks this is a massive treat and you grin politely.

Josh snorts. 'There's nothing special about that, Nan. We can walk into the Museum any time.'

She looks at him. 'Ah, but do you?'

Once again, Josh goes red to his ear tips. 'Sometimes. You know, when it's wet and I'm waiting on Mum.'

'Favourite thing?' Nan shoots the question at both of you, but Josh gets there first.

'The bones. The monkey ones, I mean. Not the dog ones, they're gross.' She smiles. 'The monkey is my favourite thing too. It's a Barbary

Macaque, but most people call it an ape. They're originally from Africa.' 'How did it get here?' you ask.

Nan's eyes twinkle. 'That's the question. I have a friend who might know ... and she could get you much, much closer to that ape than you've been so far.'

There's a pause. Josh whoops.

'Awesomest nan ever! I thought you were kidding!' He glugs his drink so fast his eyes pop and nudges yours towards you. 'Hurry up, mate. It's half four, they'll be closing soon.'

You gulp it down, still in the dark. 'Who is?'

'The Museum. The lady who runs it is a mate of Nan's. After we went for our school trip I told her about it and she said— you tell it, Nan.'

'I met the curator when I went back to uni a few years ago. We kept in touch after going our separate ways. When she started at the Museum here she said she'd be glad to give me a personal tour any time I liked. I'm sure she wouldn't mind if my grandson and his best friend came along for the ride.'

'Would she let us see the bones properly?' you ask. 'Properly properly?' 'I'd be surprised if you were allowed to touch them,' Nan warns, getting up and pulling on her coat. It's practically the same purple as her hair. 'Remember, the bones are very old and very fragile. If anything happens to them they're gone forever.'

'We get that, come on!' Josh takes her arm and drags her out the door. You follow, pulling your own coat on. It's early October and getting nippy. Besides, now you know what's happening, you don't want to waste time either. You've been fascinated by those ape bones since you saw them in June.

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When you arrive at the Museum Nan's friend meets you just outside the fort they've built for the kids. She smiles. 'So you're Nan's grandkids, huh? I'm Miri, the curator here. Nan says you've been a few times?'

'We're here all the time after school, miss,' Josh says. It's a bit of an exaggeration but Miri looks pleased. She goes through the double doors into the gallery and beckons.

'Let's see what we can show you.' The gallery is softly lit. Your teacher says museums are often a little darker than everywhere else because bright light isn't good for the artefacts. Plus, it makes all the stuff in the cases stand out. You stare at the case where the ape bones live and Josh grins, holding up his crossed fingers.

'Over here,' Miri calls, and you join her by a small desk like the ones you have in school. She hands out gloves. 'Before we do anything else, put these on.' You obey, going as fast as you can, wiggling your fingers to make sure they're on properly.

'Brilliant,' Miri says once you're all ready. 'Now, it's very unusual for kids like yourselves to handle the artefacts. However, Nan tells me you're sensible and careful, so we'll give it a go. Give me a minute.'

You and Josh are getting super excited, especially when you see her heading



towards the ape's bones. It means you're all the more disappointed when she returns with ... nothing! Your excitement pops like a balloon. Even when Miri opens her hand and you see there's this, this *thing* there, it's difficult to smile politely. It doesn't look like anything much, just a wooden knob or handle of some sort, with a bit of metal at one end.

'Is that it?' Josh says.

Miri stiffens and you don't want to get chucked out, so you chip in with, 'What is it?'

'It's not as good as bones, whatever it is,' Josh gripes and you jab him with your elbow.

'This is the Mayor's seal,' Miri says, putting it gently on the table between you. 'It's nearly 800 years old. Ah!' Her hand covers it when Josh reaches out. 'No grabbing. If you want to hold it, do it carefully.'

'I just wanted to see it properly,' Josh grumbles. He turns it around once before putting it back and honestly, you don't blame him. You came here thinking you'd get to see bones and this seal doesn't cut it. 'Can't we—?'

Nan cuts him off with a sharp 'Josh!' and he quietens. She pats his shoulder and turns to her friend. 'Miri, I do apologise, but they're disappointed. I, um, I may have implied they could get closer to Micah.'

*Micah?!*

'Absolutely not,' Miri says before she's even finished.

Nan tilts her head and smiles. 'Ah, not even for an old friend?'

Miri stops glaring. She looks like she's trying not to laugh. 'I'd forgotten what a piece of work you are, Nannie. Fine, I'll get Micah, but you kids,' she moves a white gloved finger from you to Josh, 'are not to touch unless I say you may. Got it?'

The two of you nod quickly. Nan's smile widens. 'Thanks, Miri. I owe you one.'

'More than one,' Miri grumbles, moving towards the case and you realise that 'Micah' must be the monkey. You strain forward when she returns, carrying a tray, and lowers it gently to the desk. Nan's grip on your arm prevents you from getting closer without Miri's say-so, but it's still way better than being behind a pane of glass. The spotlight above floods the tray with light.

'He's practically the same age as the Seal. Nearly 800 years old,' Miri says softly, her hand caressing the air above the quiet bones. 'We can only guess how he got here. Some believe he was a gift to the Abbot in the friary here ... monks or not, those men could be very rich.'

'What do you think?' Josh whispers.

Miri eyes him. 'It's possible. Or perhaps he belonged to some noble's wife ... or was a stowaway on a ship and was captured.' 'Is there any way of finding out?' you ask.

Miri grins. 'Not unless you can travel through—' She's cut off by a shrieking alarm. 'Is that the intruder alert?'

'Sounds like it,' Nan says, beckoning you to her as though she's preparing to usher you out. Miri shakes her head.

'Better stay where you are. It's probably nothing but ... Stay here. And don't touch anything until I get back!' She's gone by the time she finishes. By then Josh is moving towards the desk, as if drawn by an invisible thread.

'Josh,' Nan warns.

'Relax, Nan,' he says. 'I'm not gonna touch anything, I just want a better look.'

Nan moves beside him, and you do the same, standing on the other side of the desk. Micah is on the table before you. He looks so tiny you can't help asking, 'How big are they?'

'Larger than you'd think,' Nan says softly. 'I've seen them in Gibraltar.'

They're pure trouble, I can't imagine having one as a pet.'

'Micah doesn't look big,' Josh says, leaning in closer. He knocks the desk; it rocks and the seal rolls off. He mutters something and dives for it while you and Nan stare, hardly daring to breathe.

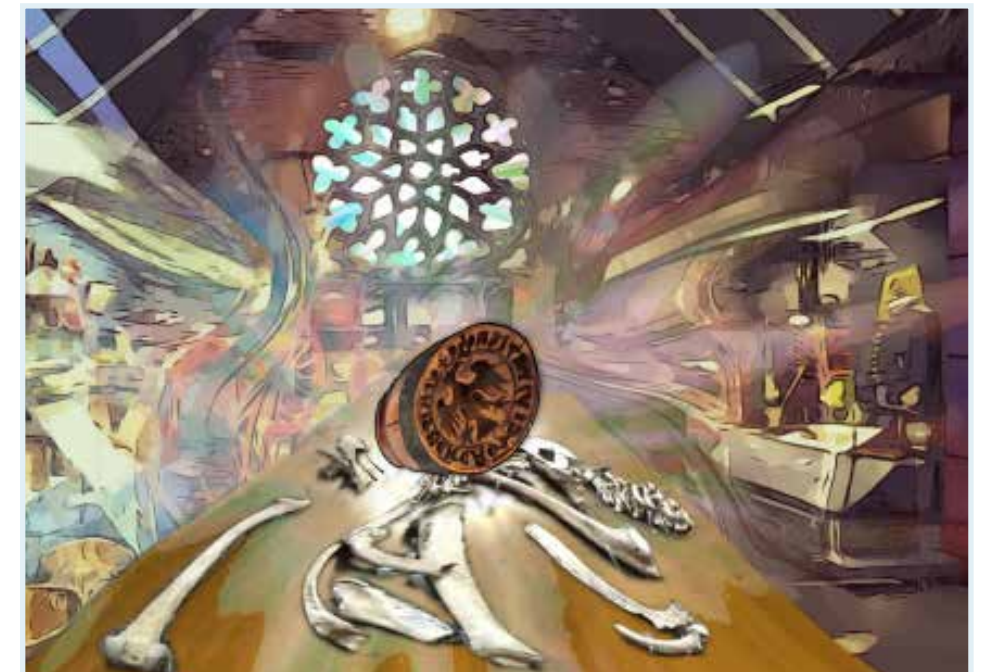
'It's OK, it's not broken,' he says as he stands up, turning it in his fingers. 'Can I see?' you ask.

'Joshua—' Nan starts, grabbing at both of you, but it's too late. Josh has already moved to give the seal to you and you've reached to take it. Nan's grab prevents it from landing safely in your hand.

CRACK!

It hits Micah's bones. There's a white flash

... and the last thing you see is the scared look on Nan's face.



# The Friary Chapel



## THE FRIARY CHAPEL

The smell hits you first. You don't remember it from the museum; it's sharp and sticky-sweet, like incense. A hand shakes your shoulder and you open one eye cautiously to see Josh hovering over you. He looks excited.

'You OK, mate?' he asks and you blink at him. Your head's thumping and you squint against the light streaming through the stained glass windows.

You do a mental rewind.

*Windows?*

How can there be windows?! There aren't any windows in the museum gallery! All at once your mouth is very, very dry, like you've eaten a spoonful of sand.

'Where are we?' you ask once you can get the words out.

Josh is grinning from ear to ear. 'The Museum, of course. We must've fallen through a secret trapdoor or something.'

*Trapdoor?!* Your head gives a particularly nasty thump and you close your eyes for a second. When you open them, Josh is still there.

'Where's Nan?' you ask.

His eyes go round and he vanishes. You hear him shouting. You try to work it out. *Windows*, and not just any old windows, either. Stained glass windows, like you'd find in a church. That smell, which wasn't in the museum. The smooth, cold feel beneath your fingertips. Like stone—only the Museum has carpet.

Your thoughts tumble over each other. Your heart's pumping too fast and your tummy churns like mad as you put two and two together and make—

That's daft.

That's not even *possible*, but the evidence is literally in front of you, under you, and around you. It's like you're not in Carrickfergus anymore— or not the Carrickfergus you know.

There's voices.

You open your eyes once more and this time you notice the ceiling, rising high to a vaulted point. You *are* in a church!

'How did you do it, Nan?' Josh babbles. 'It's awesome. Did you arrange this with Miri? Was there a hole in the floor and we fell through to some new virtual reality attraction? Wait until the other kids hear about this, it's totally *sick*.'

Nan ignores him because she's hovering over you. 'Are you OK?' she asks, holding out her hand to pull you up. 'Are you hurt?'

'Just my head,' you say, blinking away the spinning stars that surround you

once you're upright. You press the sore spot on the back of your head and—*ouch!* Not doing that again. 'I'm ... I'm good. Where are we?'

For answer, she points to one of the long windows. You stumble across the tiled floor to peer through them and you almost forget to breathe.

Your crazy idea might not be so crazy after all. There's no doubt you're still in Carrickfergus. The Castle's looming square keep is unmistakable. It looks bigger than it's ever looked before. You'd think seeing something so familiar would make you feel better, but it doesn't. It makes everything *real*, instead of a dream.

There's people moving around too, you notice, guys in short dresses and funny hats, and women in long skirts with their heads covered. There's horses, their hooves clipping as they pass. Wooden carts trundle behind them through the muck and gravel, because there's no proper roads or footpaths, and you realise that's not all that's missing.

There's no cars.

No telephone lines.

No proper houses made of brick. Most of the buildings look like they're built from wood. Even the Big Lamp is gone.

Your hands go clammy-cold. You wipe them on your blazer before pulling out your phone. It shakes. *You're shaking.* You turn it on and wait for it to start up. You're not totally surprised when there's no signal, no data, nothing. You turn to Nan, who's watching.

'H-have we travelled in time?' It comes out as a squeak.

Nan sits down suddenly. 'It's starting to look like it. Joshua, get over here!'

'I can't work it out,' he says, coming to perch beside his grandmother. 'I can't find any sockets or 'phone lines or anything. Unless it's wireless—'

'It isn't,' Nan says.

'We've travelled in time,' you tell him. 'This isn't a game or anything else. It's real.'

The three of you stare at each other. Josh's eyes and mouth round into huge Os before he laughs uneasily. 'You're havin' me on.'

'We're not kidding,' you say. 'Nan's not kidding, is she?'

'Nan likes to wind us up.' Josh nudges her. 'Where's your glasses?'

She starts and peers at him, poking at her face as though she's just realised they're missing.

'I-I must have dropped them when we fell.'

Josh straightens. 'I'll find them.' He points at you. 'Good one, mate.

You had me for a minute there!'

'I'll help,' you say as Nan stays put. You're glad to move. The fear rolling off her is freaking you out even more.

Ten minutes later, you're starting to wonder if those glasses have disappeared into thin air! Perhaps it's like *Doctor Who* and they evaporated when you travelled through time.

You're crawling underneath the pews when CHITTER CHATTER CHITTER CHATTER

You jump and ... OUCH! You bang your head on the bottom of the pew seat, right on the spot that was sore to begin with. For a few seconds you can't see anything for the stars.

'It's the ape!' Josh shouts as you get up slowly. 'It's Micah from the museum. He's *alive!*' He sounds as if he still thinks this is some kind of game.

'*And he's got my glasses.*' Nan gets up to move towards the lectern where the ape sits, playing with them. She pauses when Micah bares his teeth, like a snarling dog. 'The arms are loose. He'll break them if he's not careful.'

Josh digs into his pocket, producing a familiar packet that's already open. 'Do you think he likes sweets?' The ape freezes, watching with suspicious amber eyes. He yawns so widely you see these huge fang-like teeth, but Josh keeps going.

'Hiya, Micah, d'you want a nice mint?'

The ape looks like a cat, apparently chilled but ready to bolt at any second. Josh pulls out a sweet and Micah stares.

'Carefully, Joshua,' Nan murmurs. 'We got here by dropping the Mayor's seal on Micah's bones. We might need him to get home and if he's spooked—'

'Where *is* the seal?' you ask. Josh is still moving.

Something clatters and you all jump—including Micah, who moves super fast. In a flash, he's dropped Nan's glasses, dived to the floor, grabbed the object Josh knocked—and fled through the open door.

'*That was the seal,*' Nan says, staring after him as Josh shoves his mints his pocket and lifts Nan's glasses. He hands them over and starts towards the door, but Nan grabs him before he gets very far. He tries to pull away.

'Nan, what're you doing? We have to follow him! We have to get Micah and the seal back!'

'We do. But first, have to stop and think,' Nan warns. 'We can't rush off when we don't know exactly what's out there.'

Josh twists from Nan's grasp and looks at you, as if it's your call.

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# THE FIRST CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Run after Micah



Stay with Nan



# Run After Micah



## Run After Micah

You meet Josh's eyes with a thumbs-up. He doesn't hang around, he's heading for the door before Nan's even finished talking. You follow, ignoring her shouts of, 'Come back. Come *back!*'

You catch up with Josh at the little wooden bridge that crosses the stream (where did that come from?!). He's got both hands cupped round his eyes.

'Any sign?' you ask and he huffs.

'Some chance! Look!' He gestures. 'It doesn't look anything like Carrick now. There's fields and trees and all sorts. Bloomin' monkey—'

'Ape,' you smirk and he rolls his eyes.

'Shut up! Ape, macaque, whatever, he can go *anywhere!*' 'Where would you go if you were a tame ape?'

Josh looks at you like you've totally lost the plot. 'See, if I knew that we wouldn't have a problem.'

'No, I mean, if you lose your dog, you think where he'd go. Like, somewhere he knows, or somewhere where's there's food—'

'Like that?' Josh points down the rickety looking track that if you squint really hard you can just about recognise as High Street. 'There's people and stalls up there. Market day?'

'And there's probably loads of stuff to steal, if you're an ape,' you point out and Josh high-fives you.

You're just about to cross the wooden bridge when something grabs you by the scruff of the neck and you twist away, relaxing only when you realise it's Nan.

She looks different. She's covered her head with a scarf and ditched her bright coat. Underneath she's wearing a surprisingly plain long dark dress, and with her hair covered she doesn't stick out as much as you and Josh do in your school uniforms.

'What do you think you're doing?' she hisses at the pair of you. 'Get back in there, you can't be seen!'

'What's the point?' Josh jerks away from her. 'How d'you know someone isn't gonna show up in there? At least this way there's a chance of getting the ape and Seal back!'

'There's a chance of a lot more than that!' She tries to grab for him again. 'Don't be a fool, Joshua—'

'Later, Nan, later!' Josh throws at her and starts running. Nan's so surprised that her grip on you slackens and you take advantage of it, legging it after Josh. He's

disappeared into the crowd of people and carts and horses, and you have to fight your way through. You can't help getting distracted, though. There's pens with live animals, women sitting around spinning wool, there's a even a stall of smelly spicy stuff that reminds you of the Christmas Market in town. There's animal noises, horses, cows, dogs barking. People talking and shouting, and it's weird that not much of it is in English—or English you understand.

By this time you've fought your way towards the centre of the market, and you turn—and spot something vaguely familiar.

It's a stone cross, a cross on this stepped platform, and your breath catches. This is pretty much where the Big Lamp is in the Carrick you know, and you run towards it. At the very least it'll give you a bit of height,

and who knows, maybe then you'll see Josh! His navy uniform should be dead easy to spot when everyone else seems to be wearing really dull colours like grey and sludgy brown.

*Clip-clop-clip-clop* behind you makes you jump, and you find yourself nose-to-chest with this MASSIVE horse. He's huge, like monster huge. There's a guy in chain mail on him and he's got a longbow, the kind you remember seeing in your textbook when you did the Normans in school.

Seeing that in real life gives you actual CHILLS.

Norman Guy In Chain Mail is giving you a very funny look, and you remember you stand out as much as Josh does. You back away, hoping you can get to the Big Lamp that's actually a cross and spot Josh from there. Or he'll spot you. Or Nan will.

Sweat trickles down your spine. Norman Guy is following you, and the sheer size of his monster-horse sends people flying out of his way. Something whacks the back of your heels and you realise you've made it, you're at the cross.

You scramble up it, cupping your hands around your eyes as you squint for Josh and Nan. It's no good, though. You're higher, but not high enough to see properly.

Besides, you've got a problem. A HUGE problem.

You've turned yourself into a stinking great big navy target, and you watch in disbelief as Norman Guy lifts his bow.

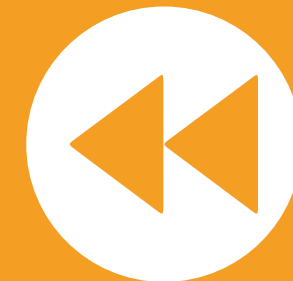
There's an arrow in it. It's quivering, ready to be released. 'Hey, wait—' you start as Norman Guy draws his arm back. He lets go.

The arrow flies towards you and you gape. You've only time to blink before it hits you with a force that sends you flying back off the hexagonal steps. There's sharp pain in your chest, you can't breathe, then CRACK! to the back of your head...

Fade to black. You're dead.

SORRY

TRY AGAIN



# Stay With Nan



Stay with Nan

## Stay With Nan

'This is not a joke,' Nan says tightly. 'Time travel is not something you play with. Kids, we need to be careful. *Really* careful—one wrong move and you could get killed now, in the thirteenth century, or prevent the world as we know it from ever existing at all.'

'The grandfather paradox,' you say, and Nan's eyebrows lift. She nods, encouraging you to continue. You turn to Josh, who is looking more confused by the second. 'It's like, what if you killed your grandad before your mum or dad were born, what would happen?'

Josh frowns. 'They wouldn't exist.' His frown deepens. 'Which means if your mum or dad aren't born, then ...'

'You aren't born,' Nan finishes.

'But you're here,' Josh objects. 'You're my nan. So what if grandad gets taken out, it's not like he's around anyway.' Nan's lips tighten but Josh goes on. 'You'd have met someone else and you'd have had my mum with them—'

'But that person wouldn't be your mum, not your *proper* mum,' you point out. 'And if your mum isn't your mum, who's to say she ends up with your dad? Maybe she decides not to have kids at all!'

Josh blinks as if he's been sucker-punched in the tummy. 'Oh.'

'Exactly,' Nan says. 'We're so far back from our own time we can't predict how our presence in *this* time will affect the history we know.'

'We might make it better,' you suggest, but Nan shoots you a look. You stare at the decorated tiles beneath your feet. 'Or we could make it worse. A lot worse.'

'So what does this mean?' Josh asks. 'If we can't risk upsetting history, how do we do anything? How are we gonna get home? If Micah's out there and we ask someone if they've seen him, how do we know that—'

'I'm not saying it will be easy,' Nan cuts in. 'Of course we're going to have to interact with people in this time, we haven't got a choice.' As she talks, she removes her plain scarf from around her neck and draws it over her head. Then she takes off her glasses, popping them in her handbag. 'We're going to have to fit in as best we can. That means we're going to have to get clothes from somewhere and ... no technology, kids. Make sure your phones are off.'

'They don't work anyway,' you say, turning yours off. 'I checked.'

'What would happen if someone saw them?'

'Think about it, Joshua,' Nan snaps, returning to her own phone to her bag.



'What would you think if you saw ... oh, I don't know ... a flying car?'

'I'd think it's dead cool,' Josh says, chin going up. He's still holding his phone and the glow tells you it's switched on.

'Josh—'

'Stop fussing, Nan!' He pivots where he stands, holding his phone up. It flashes. 'I'm gonna need evidence to prove to my mates I was here, won't I?'

You find yourself grinning. He's right after all, this adventure will give both of you bragging rights forever—if you've proof. You turn on your own phone and yank it out, and both your phones flash away as you take photo after photo. You're enjoying yourself so much that you nearly miss it ...

CREEEEAAAAAK.

You freeze.

A shaft of soft light falls across you.

The three of you whip round to face the single gothic-arched door to one side of the chapel. There's a guy in a long dress standing there. You and Josh are still holding your phones, screen up. You realise the light they cast on your face is spooky and turn yours off, but not quick enough. The guy in the long dress is already backing away. It's obvious he's gonna run or shout for help, and then you'll be done for.

You swallow hard, Nan's reminder about messing with history ringing in your ears. If this guy wants to, he can get you into all sorts of trouble. You don't need Nan to tell you a smartphone would seem like magic in this time. Magic that could get you killed.

You could hide your phone, pretend it didn't exist, and hope Josh does the same thing.

You could grab the guy—there's three of you to his one—and try to make him understand.

You've literally got SECONDS to decide.



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# THE SECOND CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Hide Your Phone



Grab The Guy

# Hide Your Phones!



Hide Your Phone

## Hide Your Phones!

You shove your phone into your blazer pocket and elbow Josh, telling him to do the same thing. The guy in the dress hasn't shifted from the door, he's still standing there, staring. It's uncomfortable and you shift from one foot to the other, but Josh doesn't twitch. Nan seems frozen too. The silence stretches until you can't be quiet another minute. You step forward and the guy in a dress holds up a wooden cross.

'Be still, spirit!'

'We're not spirits, we're real. Look!' You pinch Josh and he yelps. 'See?'

The other guy draws himself up. 'Then you must be intruders.' Before you've a chance to do or say anything else, he's shouted for help.

'That was not the best idea you've ever had,' Josh mutters. 'Now what, Nan?'

She's standing behind him. 'I don't know.' She sounds even more worried than before. 'Be sensible. Do whatever they tell you.'

The place is filling with guys in dresses and you mentally roll your eyes at your own stupidity when you see the bald heads. They're not blokes in dresses, they're monks! One of them, he's so skinny he looks starved, holds up a hand. The others freeze as if they're playing *Statues*.

Your tummy flips.

A finger, long and thin, points at Nan. 'The woman must go.'

'No!' Josh shouts as two monks move closer. 'Leave her alone!' He tries to grab her, but the monks have already reached Nan. Unlike their boss, they're big, bulky guys. They brush Josh off like you'd brush off a fly, and march Nan towards the double doors at the end of the long aisle. They open and close, hiding her from sight.

You and Josh are alone.

'Nan!' Josh tries to get away from the monk holding him. 'Let me go, she's my grandmother! I have to stay with her!'

You've deliberately gone limp, so you're awkward to hold. If the monk's grip on you eases you'll do a runner. Unfortunately he reads your mind and his hold tightens.

'Where will we put them, Father?' he asks.

The boss monk looks you up and down, very slowly. Your skin prickles. 'There's an empty cell beside the scriptorium, I believe?'

'There is,' another monk agrees. He's totally unlike most the of the others, he's shorter and fatter. 'Brother Bernard has been using it while he works.'



'Indeed.' The head monk smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes. 'That is too much privilege for a novice friar, do you not think? Bernard discovered these ... intruders. Let them share with him!' He crooks a finger and the young one, Bernard, comes forward. 'You are too comfortable in the scriptorium, my son. That is not why you are here. Take these children. Clothe them decently. Find a use for them.'

'Father—' Bernard starts, but the head monk glares and he wilts. He bows and turns, gesturing for you to follow him.

You reckon Bernard's better than these old guys, especially that head monk. You grab Josh's arm and pull him along with you, although he's pulling. He probably thinks he could make a run for it and go after Nan, but you haven't forgotten her warning: Do whatever they tell you.

Bernard brings you to this teeny tiny room and you stare.

'Are you a prisoner?' You point at the narrow gap that seems to be the only window (with no glass!) and the bars on the door. 'What is this?'

'This is my room. We call it a cell.' Bernard says softly. He sighs, dropping down onto the thin mattress. There's something poking out of it, like grass or straw. 'I am not a prisoner like those in the Castle dungeons.' He jerks his head at the slit-window. 'But I do not choose to be here, any more than you.'

'Then why are you here?' you ask, leaning against a wall. The cold seeps through your thick blazer and you jerk away.

'I'm a younger son,' Bernard explains. 'My older brother will be a knight. He's at the Castle.'

Every nerve in your body stands to attention. The Castle! It's the one place here you sort of know. Maybe that's where Micah is. Maybe that's where they've taken Nan. You shoot the silent Josh a look and point at the empty spot on the straw bed.

'Can I sit?'

Bernard shrugs and you drop beside him and try to get comfortable. There's no hope of that, the mattress is so thin you can feel the hard floor beneath. An image of your comfy bed in your warm room at home flashes behind your eyes.

*I'm gonna get back, you tell yourself. One way or another, I'm going to get home.*

'Can you get us there?' you ask. 'You saw what happened out there.

That's Josh's grandmother they took away.'

'She shouldn't have been here in the first place,' Bernard says stiffly. 'Women are forbidden, except during Mass.'

'We don't want to be here either, you plonker!' Josh snaps. 'Don't you get it? We don't belong here!'

'Josh!' you hiss. 'Shut up, you're gonna get us into more trouble.' 'More trouble?' Josh laughs. It's not a nice laugh. 'Like that's even

possible. We've lost Nan, who knows what's happening to her? For all we know, they'll ... they'll burn her as a witch!' He kicks the cell door so hard it rattles. Only problem is, the door is harder than his shoes and he ends up hopping on the spot. Any other time and you'd find that hilarious.

You're trying to work out what to do when Bernard says, 'What does he mean, you don't belong here?'

You take a deep breath. This is a risk, but as Josh says, you've already lost Nan. Bernard seems ... nice. He's not that much older than you, maybe he'll help.

'We *don't* belong here.' You start talking, ignoring Josh's complaints, and as you talk Bernard's eyes look ready to fall out of his head. Weird thing is, by the time you've finished he's nodding away as if the impossible stuff you've said isn't that impossible after all.

'Micah,' he says when you stop to take a breath. 'Our abbot has a pet ape, but we don't call him anything—except "nuisance",' he grins. 'He steals here until Brother Jack chases him out of the kitchen. Then he runs to the Castle and steals from there. Their cook keeps threatening to put him in the pot, but he's never managed to catch him!'

'That sounds like Micah, right enough,' Josh agrees, leaning forward. For the first time since Nan was taken he seems properly with it. 'He stole our Mayor's Seal and we need it get home again. Will you help—' He breaks off when the monk shakes his head.

'The ape, I know of. But this 'Mayor's Seal'? That, I do not know of. Carrickfergus is little more than a village, certainly not large enough to need a mayor! The only seal I know of is this.' He reaches into a pocket and produces a small object so like the Seal that Josh lurches forward, and you don't blame him. It's the exact same spread eagle crest you've seen on the Seal—only this has crisp edges and gleams like a shiny new £1 coin. You reach out to run your finger over the eagle and Bernard straightens.

'That's my family crest.' His pride is obvious. 'They call me Bernard here, but my true name is Simon dell' Aquileia. My family are rich, that is why I still have it. Novice friars aren't supposed to own anything.'

You can't help feeling sorry for him. It's obvious he's only here because he

has to be, and that seal is the one part of his old life he's been allowed to keep. There's no way anyone is getting it off him ... which is just as well, if some day his seal becomes the Seal you need to get home.

'Please, Bernard,' you say. 'Help us. We've told you the truth. We've accidentally fallen through time and we think our version of your Seal has something to do with it. We can't go back to where we should be without Nan, the Seal, or Micah.'

His eyes narrow as you talk and he starts tapping his cross as if he's thinking. 'Tell me this, if you will: when you woke up and found yourself in our chapel, where where you?'

'We were all pretty much at the bit where the two aisles cross,' Josh answers. 'Why?'

Bernard's muttering away to himself. You hear snatches. There's lots of 'how' and 'fable' before he finally stops gabbling and faces you.

'Come to the scriptorium. I will get you clothes, proper clothes. While you're changing I must check our manuscripts—and I must do it before my superior sees me looking at forbidden texts.' He pauses and adds, 'After that, I will bring you to my brother at the Castle.' He smirks. 'After all, Father Abbot *did* leave you to me!'

He holds the door and the two of you follow him into the next room. It's completely different from the cell, with high ceilings like the chapel's, a fire, and long tables with benches. There's what looks like writing stuff on it, and the little hairs on the back of your neck lift when you realise the pens are actually *quills*.

Bernard picks a large book from the shelves to one side and places it on the table. He opens it gently and your jaw drops. This isn't like the books you're used to. There's no print, just fancy writing, with gorgeous decoration. Some of the decoration gleams, like gold. After what seems like forever, he closes the book and puts it back before turning back to you.

'Wait here whilst I get clothes.'

'Do you think he'll help?' Josh whispers, shrugging out of his blazer and yanking his tie off.

'At least he hasn't said no,' you point out and Josh huffs.

'Not yet, anyway.' He slumps on the mattress beside you, his elbows resting on his knees. You leave him alone. He's probably worried sick about Nan.

'Now you can make yourselves decent,' Bernard announces when he comes back, carrying a large basket. You can't help pulling a face at the stuff in it. There's a funny smell off it.

'Where will we put our stuff?' you ask, taking off your own blazer.

Bernard points at the sack. 'Put everything in there and I shall hide it until you return.'

'If we return,' Josh grumbles, and all the hairs on your head stand on end. Getting out of here *is* an 'If'. An epically huge IF.

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**NEXT**

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# Grab The Guy



Grab The Guy

## Grab The Guy

Nan nods. You and Josh spring into action, legging it after the guy in a dress. He starts backing away but his foot catches in his hem and over he goes. You pounce. Josh claps a hand over the guy's mouth. Together, you drag him to where Nan's standing.

'Let him go,' she orders. Surprised, you do. You're even more surprised when Nan whips out a cross of her own and throws herself on her knees before the other guy, and then you get it. He's a monk. A young one, maybe just a novice.

'I know you're afraid, I know you think we're demons and you want to cry for help,' Nan starts. 'I beg you wait. We mean you no harm, I swear it on this cross we both carry.' A pause, the long kind that makes you wriggle inside like there's ants in your pants. 'Will you let us explain?'

The young monk looks scared out of his mind. There's another ants-in-pants pause before he nods.

Nan points at a pew. 'May we sit?'

The monk nods again and she ushers you and Josh into a pew beside her. The monk's still standing. You grimace at Josh and he grimaces back. You hope Nan knows what she's doing, because while you're sitting like this there's nothing stopping the monk from making a break for it.

He doesn't, though. 'Who are you? What are you?'

Nan gives him one of her teacher looks. Then she tells him everything —*everything*, even the bit about Micah's bones and the Seal. Your hands are sweating and you wipe them on your blazer. You hope Nan knows what she's doing, because if this monk decides not to believe her ... Suddenly 'you could get killed in the thirteenth century' feels scarily real.

By the time she's finished the young monk's stopped looking freaked out. He's nodding away as if what she's saying makes sense and that's the weirdest thing of all.

'Micah,' the monk says eventually. 'Our abbot has a pet ape. He's a nuisance. He steals here until Brother Jack chases him out of the kitchen. Then he runs to the Castle and steals from there. Their cook keeps threatening to put him in the pot, but he's never managed to catch him!' He finishes with a wide grin and you relax.

'That sounds like Micah, right enough,' Josh says. 'He's stolen our Mayor's Seal and we need it get home again. Will you help—' He breaks off when the monk shakes his head.

'The ape—Micah—I know of. But this 'Mayor's Seal'? That, I do not know of.'

Carrickfergus is little more than a village, certainly not large enough to need a mayor! The only seal I know of is this.' He reaches into a pocket and produces a small object so like the Seal that Josh lurches forward, as if he's going to grab it.

Nan gets there first, though. She puts out her hand. 'May I see?' Your jaw drops when the monk gives it over and she turns it carefully before returning it to him. 'It's very similar. What's the crest?'

The monk tilts it so we can all see. We edge closer and this time you're the one who nearly grabs the thing and runs. It's the exact same spread eagle crest you've seen on the Seal—only this has crisp edges and gleams like a shiny new £1 coin.

'That's my family crest.' The young monk stands very straight. 'I am Simon dell' Aquileia, but here I am known as Brother Bernard.' He touches the crest himself, looking sad. 'I'm not supposed to have it at all, I'm just a novice friar and we're not supposed to own anything.'

'But you'll keep it anyway,' Nan says. It's not a question, and Bernard nods a very definite yes. There's no way anyone else is getting it from him

... which is just as well, if some day his seal becomes the Seal you need to get home.

Even better, Bernard seems to have decided that you're not demons. He's looking you and Josh over, every bit as curious as you were. Eventually he asks, 'What was that ... thing... that flashed when I came in?'

Josh needs no further encouragement. He flips his phone round so the screen faces Bernard and wakes it up. Bernard's eyes look like they're going to pop out of his head.

'What IS this?'

Josh opens his mouth and closes it. You look at Nan, you're not going to even try to touch this one. How do you explain a smartphone to someone who doesn't even have electricity, let alone any kind of phone!

Luckily Nan knows exactly what to say. 'It is many things in one. It's a messenger, a library, a writer, a painter—'

'Selfie!' Josh says, leaning in towards Bernard with his phone held out in classic selfie-pose. The camera flashes again and the young monk blinks. When Josh shows him the photograph his eyes look ready to pop out of his head.

He turns to Nan. 'Are you *sure* it isn't magic?'

'I'm sure,' Nan says, but Bernard's back to looking uncomfortable. He tries to back away and you grab his dress—his habit.

'Look at the Castle,' you tell him. 'Look how big it is. To us, building

something like the Castle without machines is magic.'

'Please, Bernard,' Nan says. 'Help us. We've told the truth. We've accidentally fallen through time and we think our version of your Seal has something to do with it. We can't go back to where we should be without it or Micah.'

As Nan talks, Bernard's eyes get narrower and narrower as if he's just realised something. He walks away from you, towards the spot where you found yourself when you woke up.

'Is this where you appeared?'

'How did you know?' Josh asks. He stands beside Bernard. 'My mate there was just where you are. Nan there and me there.' He points. 'Why?'

Bernard's muttering away to himself. You hear snatches. There's lots of 'how' and 'fable' before he stops gabbling and faces you.

'Come to the scriptorium. You must change into proper clothes.' Josh snorts. 'I may be able to help, but I must check our manuscripts before I promise—and I must do it before my superior sees me looking at forbidden texts. Then you must separate to find what you seek. I have a brother who is a squire at the Castle; mayhap he can find you young ones jobs there, and Mistress Nan, you must go also.'

'I don't like the sound of that,' Josh says and Nan's frowning.

'Neither do I, son, but we'll attract less notice apart. Besides,' she smiles one of those fake 'isn't this great' grown-up smiles, 'you two will find out more without me.'

'What will you do?' Josh asks and Nan turns to Bernard. He taps the wooden cross hanging over his habit.

'I've heard tell that Lord Hugh is bringing a lady friend with him. Could you ... could you serve her?'

Nan stares at him for a long moment. She takes off the scarf around her head and Bernard's eyes pop at her purple hair. Or maybe it's the spikes.

She puts the scarf in her handbag and hands it over.

'I'll do whatever it takes, Brother Bernard, to get these children back where they belong. Do you have, um, *proper* clothes for me to change into?'

He points to the chapel door and holds a finger to his lips. Taking the hint, you follow him quietly, down a path and through the cloisters.

Bernard stops at a door.

'This is our scriptorium. A lady died in the hospital two days ago,' he says once the three of you have followed him in and he's closed the door. 'Her clothes have been washed and mended. I could—'

'That'll do,' Nan cuts in while you mouth 'ewww' at Josh. 'If you would?'

Bernard gives a little bow and slips out, leaving the three of you alone. You look around. The room is very quiet, like a library. It even looks like a school library, with these huge tables and writing stuff on it.

'Do you really have to go off by yourself?' Josh whispers. 'Nan, what if something happens?'

She sighs and puts her hand on his shoulder. You know Josh is seriously freaked out when he doesn't brush her off.

'In medieval times towns and cities were much smaller than they are today. Everyone knew everyone else, and three people appearing out of nowhere ... People would be suspicious, and suspicious people are nosy people. Our best chance of getting home is to blend in as much as we can.'

'You mean we have to disappear,' you whisper, and Nan nods.

'Exactly. You heard our friend there, Micah's very likely at the Castle. It just so happens that the Castle is probably the safest place for us anyway. Servants will be coming and going there all the time, and we can just —'

'Disappear,' Josh finishes. He still doesn't look happy, but before he says anything else Bernard returns, dragging a sack of some sort.

'Here,' he says. 'I've got clothes for all of you. Mistress Nan, here's yours.' He hands over a bundle. 'There's a small room over there, you may change there.'

'What will we do with our own stuff?' Josh asks, shaking out a loose top and a pair of tight leather trousers. 'Hey, cool!'

'They stink,' you say, but Josh grins.

'Nan did say we had to blend in, right?' He looks at Bernard. 'What do we do with our own stuff?'

Bernard points at the sack. 'In there. I shall hide it until you return.'

'If we return,' Josh grumbles, and all the hairs on your head stand on end.

Because Josh can be one numpty, but sometimes he just gets it bang on. Getting out of here *is* an 'If'. An epically huge IF.



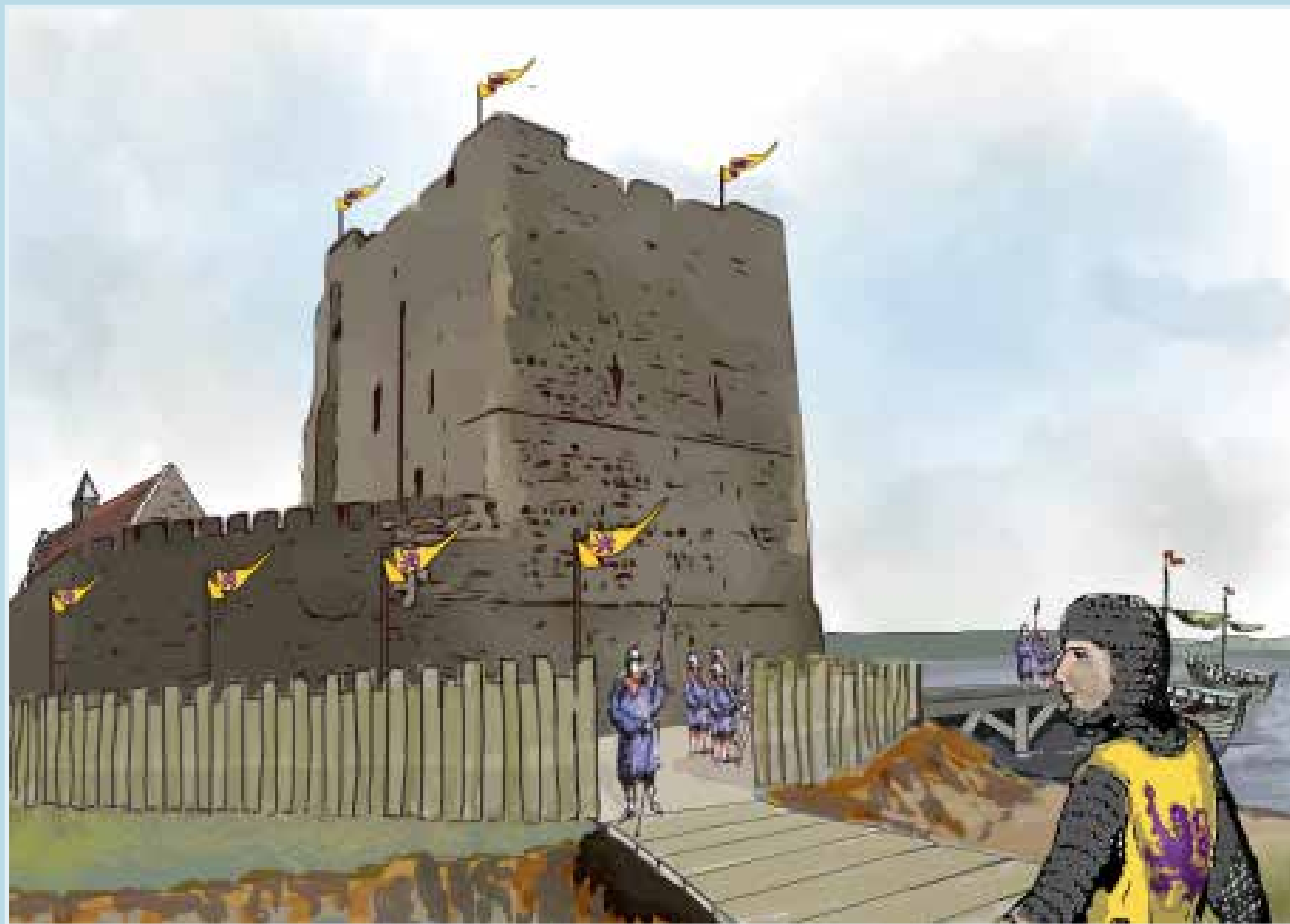
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**NEXT**

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# Carrickfergus Castle



You're both unhappy about being separated from Nan, but you can't help being dead excited when Bernard leads you out of the friary towards Carrickfergus Castle.

It feels weird. You know it so well, but this isn't the Castle you'd recognise in your sleep. The only thing that's the same is the massive square keep. There's no gatehouse, none of the outer walls you've passed a million times. Instead there's these little houses where the outer ward should—will—be. You don't even go in through the front. Bernard brings you over this tiny rickety bridge and down the side, coming to a stop by an arched doorway.

'Is this real?' Josh whispers in your ear. 'I keep pinching myself but I'm not waking up.'

'If you're dreaming, so'm'l.'

You grin at each other. You know you'll be scared again soon, but right this minute? This is *awesome*.

This guy comes belting out and you can't help staring. He's only a few years older than you, but he's wearing mail, actual chain mail like the stuff in the museum! And he's got a helmet with the visor thing pushed back away from his eyes. It's *Robin Hood* plus-plus-plus.

'OMG!!' Josh practically wails in your ear, but the guy's already talking to Bernard. Well, yelling, like older brothers do.

'No... no. NO! How many times must I say it, Simon? Fool! Go away, or I'll have you run off and the Abbot—'

'But why?' Bernard cuts in. 'These are my friends, Harry. I only wish to help!'

The other guy—Harry—grabs him by his habit, yanking him off his feet and pulling him nose to nose. 'Haven't you heard? John's on his way. He's defeated Walter de Lacy in the south and Walter, faithless scum that he is, has handed his brother to the King. Our lord is coming here and doubtless the King will follow. All who are not bound here must flee, and children most of all!'

'Are you talking about King John? Actual Bad King John?' Josh looks super-excited. Meanwhile, poor Bernard gets dumped like a sack of potatoes. He scrambles to his feet, his face chalk-white.

'I see the King's ill-fame has spread,' he says, dusting himself down. "'Bad" is an understatement. King John is ....' He shivers, and his brother leans in.

'Rumour says the King murdered his own nephew—'

'Why?' you ask and Harry rolls his eyes in the medieval version of

*Duh!*

'Arthur was King Richard's heir. By killing Arthur, John made sure he would be King when Richard died. And that is not the worst of it.' He looks over his shoulder, like he's scared the castle walls have ears. 'They say he did it himself, he murdered his brother's son in cold blood. Then he tied a heavy rock to Arthur's body and dropped him in the river—'

'I've heard enough,' Bernard cuts in. If he was white before he's practically green now. 'Come on, let's get away. You can await your grandmother in the friary if you claim sanctuary. Or mayhap you can work with me in the scriptorium. My brother speaks true; this Castle is indeed no place for children.'

'Oi!' Josh objects, beating you to it. 'Who do you think you are, you're not much older than us!'

'I'm nearly sixteen, a man grown,' Bernard snaps, drawing himself up. It doesn't really work, he's still only a few centimetres taller than Josh, but there's that look of fear in his eyes and you don't blame him. Harry's story has left you feeling a bit green yourself.

Josh sees it too. He swallows and you realise he's kicking off because he's scared stiff.

'We—we can't come with you, mate, no matter how dangerous it is. We have to meet my nan, remember? And she ... she's *here!*' He gestures towards the Castle.

'Harry, you must find Mistress Nan,' Bernard says. 'She's a stranger, a woman quite alone. She has gone into the castle—'

'Is she a lady or a serving maid?' Harry asks, pushing his drooping visor away from his eyes with a sharp *click* of metal against metal.

Bernard frowns. 'She ... she could be either, I suppose.'

Harry goggles at him. 'Either?!' He looks from you to Josh, his eyes narrowing. 'Where are you from?'

'What does it matter, we need to find my nan!'

'Poor child,' Bernard says, patting Josh on the back. 'We will find your grandmother, fear not. Harry, why cannot these two come into the castle? Surely even King John will not look twice at servants.'

Harry frowns. 'It could work. What can you do?' It comes out as a bark and you gawp. '*Well?* Can you work metal?'

'Er—no, sir.' 'Leather?' 'Afraid not, sir.'

'Repair a saddle? Groom a horse? Clean armour?' Each time both of you

shake your heads 'no' and he blows out a sigh. 'Then, pray tell, what *can* you do?'

'I can ride a horse,' Josh blurts and your jaw drops. First you've heard of it. 'Well, sit on one. Get on it,' he trails off and Harry snorts.

'Nothing, in other words. That leaves two choices. You may go to the kitchens or the stables. Which will it be?'

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# THE THIRD CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Go to the Kitchens



Go to the Stables



# In The Kitchen



## In The Kitchens

'Keep turning, useless brat!'

You put all the strength you can muster into helping to turn the spit. Bits of scalding fat fly off the roasting pig, burning you, but you've become so used to it you've stopped reacting. It's harder to ignore the pain in your back, though. By now you've learned that by day's end you'll only be fit for crawling back to the straw pallet you're using as a bed. With every passing day, your twenty-first century life feels more and more like a dream—or perhaps this is the dream. Nightmare, more like.

The kitchen's heat is worse than pain or exhaustion. You're hotter than you've ever been in your life. Sweat isn't just running down you, it's *pouring* from you! If you could, you'd crawl out of your own skin.

A flash of white catches your eye and you turn to look. Your jaw drops as a dead swan is placed on the great table that runs the length of the kitchens, its long neck dangling limply over the other side.

'What's that for?' you demand as you put your back into the work. The big guy at the other end of the spit isn't exactly chatty, but he'll be a lot less chatty if he thinks you're slacking. 'The swan?'

He eyes you like you're stupid. 'Cook is a magician who will bring it back to life.' His voice drips sarcasm. 'Fool. It's for the feast when our lord arrives.'

'We're going to eat it?' You're shocked. Swans are such beautiful birds and besides, your P7 teacher told you that it's against the law to kill a swan. They belong to the Queen. Or they will, in the future.

The big guy guffaws. 'You? Eat it? Fat chance. Nah, it'll be leftovers and bread for you—if you're lucky.'

You pull a face. That usually means brown bread, so hard it hurts your teeth to bite into. The big guy's obviously seen, 'cos he scowls.

'Put a bit of weight into turnin' or you won't get that!' He looks happy at that thought, probably because it'd mean more grub for him. 'It'll be the dogs for you, so it will.'

You'd think he was joking, only you know there's dog bones at the Museum. Bones from a bigger dog and and some little ones, bones with knife marks on them. This means they *could* have been killed for food, and your tummy flips. You've got a dog at home, a daft pup with floppy ears, a cute streak of white down her face, and big brown eyes. Amber's one of your best friends. You'd no more eat her than you'd eat Josh.

'Have—have you eaten dog?'

The big guy snorts. 'You'll eat anything if you're hungry enough, brat— as you'll soon learn with King John on his way!'

You swallow the bile that's risen in your throat and put all your strength into turning the spit, but you've been at it for hours and your arms are turning to rubber. Plus, they're starting to strip the feathers from the swan and the air's filling with fluffy white down. It makes you splutter and choke.

'Get outta here, you waste of space!' the big guy yells.

You don't wait to be told twice. If you don't take your chance now, you'll be given another job to do. Moving as fast as you can, you shuffle towards the door, doing your best to keep out of everyone's way. Only yesterday you accidentally caused someone to drop an entire basket of eggs! You were lucky the cook moves dead slow, or you'd have one sore backside by now. The whips here don't look like anything you've seen before. They're long strips of cord with knots tied in them so it hurts more.

The smoke and feathers in the air catch your throat again and you cough so hard it attracts the attention of one of the serving women.

'You look like you could do with a drink, love,' she says as she walks past. You nod. You're so tired that even that hurts. She jerks her head towards the door. 'Wait out there and I'll bring you something.'

You manage a smile and drag yourself outside. Luckily it's dry, because your legs go out from under you so you sit down with a bump. You sip the milk when it comes. It's thick with cream and doesn't taste anything like the fridge-cold milk you're used to, but you don't care.

Now you've a moment to think you start worrying about the others. You haven't seen Nan since the friary, or Josh since you came to the castle. As for Micah, sometimes you wonder if you just made him up. You haven't seen a hair of him since he ran off. What if Bernard was wrong and he's not at the castle at all? You've wasted DAYS you could've spent looking for him!

You're dead tired and your eyelids are getting heavier by the second.

Your head keeps falling forward as you almost-but-not-quite nod off.

'Lord Hugh!' someone bellows and you jerk awake as servants pour into the yard. 'Lord Hugh's back!'

You drag yourself to your feet so you don't get squashed like a bug. The yard is filling with men and horses. Men shout and yell while their horses stamp and blow. They're gleaming with sweat as if they've been galloping for ages. You notice this young guy helping an older woman dismount from her horse. She sticks out because she's the only lady there, and when you see the gold at her

throat you realise she must be rich. There's no time to find out more, though, because you're swept along with everyone else towards the middle of the yard. That's when you get your first sight of the famous Hugh de Lacy.

You've never seen anything quite like him. He's on this MASSIVE grey horse. It's blowing out steam like the *Hogwarts Express*. Every time someone tries to touch it, the eyes roll and the head tosses. Suddenly, the kitchen doesn't seem so bad. You'd hate to get on the wrong side of that horse!

Lord Hugh's a big blonde bloke with a booming voice, but in comparison to his monster-horse he might as well be a pussy-cat. He looks as exhausted as you feel. He has to grab his horse's mane to steady himself when he swings down from the saddle, and as you move closer you see his face is streaked with mud and sweat. This is supposed to be the guy who can protect Carrickfergus—and you—from evil King John, but right now he doesn't look like he could protect *anybody*.

You want to run away. Your feet are ITCHING to run away.

The young guy who helped the rich lady is shouting for a servant to carry her things and some of the crowd around Lord Hugh moves to circle her instead. You turn to the person next to you, the nice serving woman who got you the milk.

'Who's she?'

The woman pulls you back to the wall. 'That's Lady Maud de Braose. She's an old friend of our lord's.' She shivers and leans in. 'You've heard the talk?'

You shake your head. You've been kept so busy with the spit you haven't heard a thing.

'Lady Maud's in trouble with the King. Bad trouble. They're saying that Lord Hugh will stay long enough to see Lady Maud safe, and then—' She shrugs and you're shivering too.

'He'll just go? Leave everyone?'

The woman looks at you. 'If the King's determined to catch Lord Hugh, he'll lay siege to the Castle. If he does that ... if he cuts off our ships coming in ... we're dead. John'll starve us out.'

'Won't he be raging if he gets here and Hugh's gone? Won't he think we helped him?'

'Probably.' The woman pulls her shawl tighter around her. 'John and his brothers, they're not known as the Devil's Brood for nothing. He won't be just *raging*, he'll be ... he'll be near mad with it.' All at once she looks old. 'We're dead either way.'

'Oh,' you squeak.

She looks at you and her expression turns fierce. 'With King John on the way, Carrickfergus is no place for children.' She gestures towards the rapidly clearing inner ward. 'Now's your chance—RUN!'

It's pretty much exactly what Bernard and Harry said, and your tummy feels empty. Not hungry-empty, but dead-scared-empty. It's like that old saying of your mum's, the one about being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. You haven't forgotten about Nan and Josh (or Micah) but none of you will get home if you're dead.

And Nan said you could die here, in the thirteenth century, and you'd be really dead. Gone.

The yard isn't packed with people and horses anymore. There's a clear path to the gates and freedom. The servant woman gives you a gentle shove and you start moving. Your feet go faster and faster of their own accord, and suddenly you're running.

You're within touching distance of the gates when someone grabs you. You're so desperate to get away that you don't even look at who it is, you start kicking at them and they yell.

You freeze. You know that voice. You turn and it's Josh. He's grinning from ear to ear, even though he's got an absolute whopper of a black eye.

'They kicked me out of the stables after I spooked that crazy horse of Hugh's, did you see him? He's a total monster! The horse-master sent me to the kitchen and I was like, finally, mate!'

You try to return his grin, but part of you doesn't mean it. You might not be alone any more, but you know Josh'll never leave Nan behind. Your chance to escape is gone.

You're stuck.

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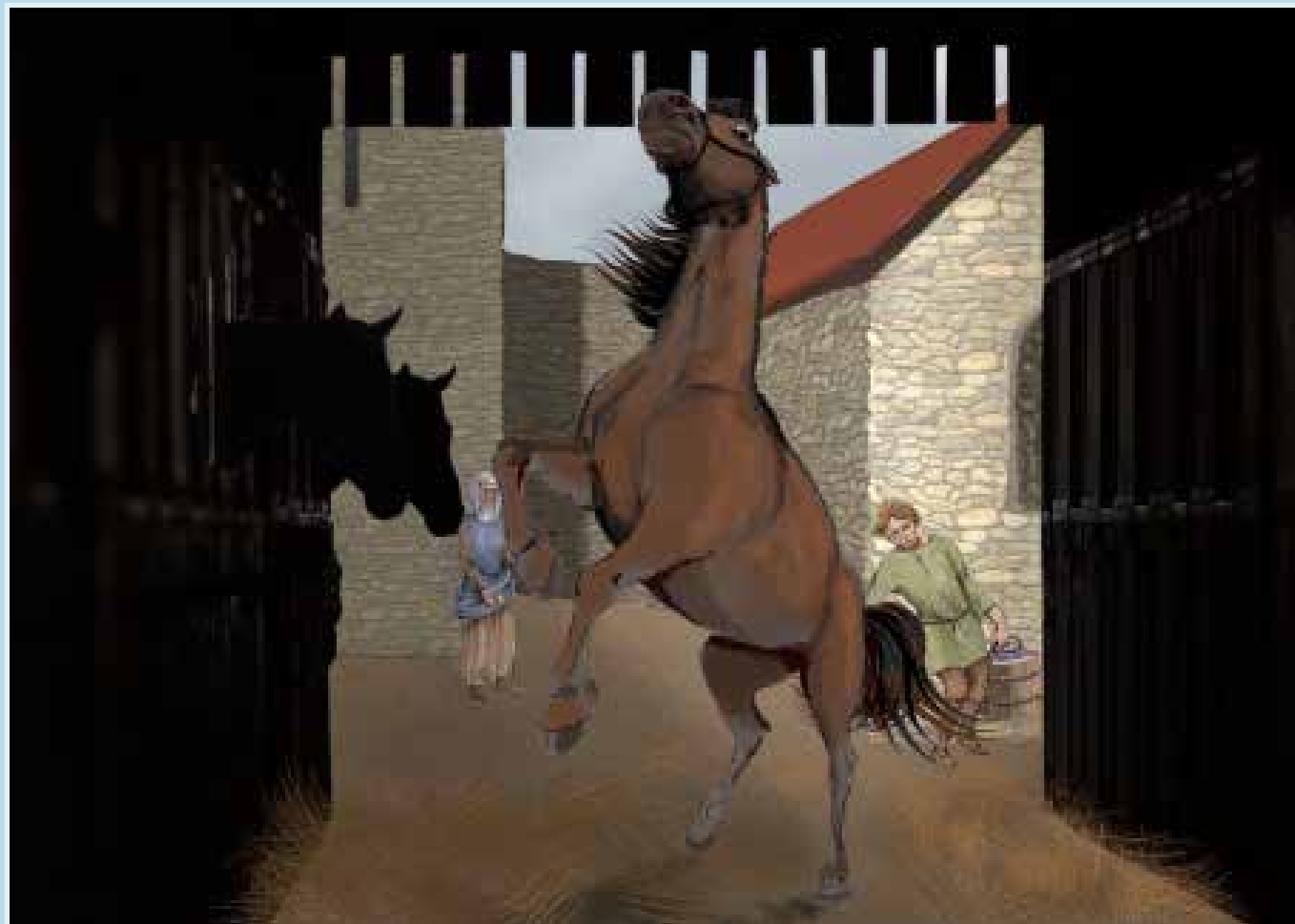
**NEXT**

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# In The Stables



## In The Stables

'There!' The horse-master frogmarches you towards yet another stall filled with yet more horse poo. You know you reek of the stuff. If this continues much longer you'll probably be dreaming about it.

'Get to work, you lazy brat!' The horse-master hands you a pitchfork and departs, glowering. You glare after him but the rumbling noises coming right beside you remind you to keep your wits about you. You'd never realised quite how big horses can be.

*These ones, anyway.*

The ones at the open farm are titchy by comparison. Some are so titchy they're the same size as a big dog. These ones, though ... A humongous hoof stamps down and you skip out of the way just in time to avoid crushed toes. It's not the first time and probably won't be the last. You've never considered horses dangerous before, but this close you're starting to understand why they were ridden into battle. It's not just that their four legs make them faster, it's the fact they're big and powerful enough to kill.

You dig your pitchfork into the mass of straw and dung and start sieving it so that only the dung is left. That's popped into a leather basket. When the basket's full you bring it to the midden near the kitchens and empty it. Then you come back and do it all over again ... and again ... and *again* ...

After a while you stop noticing the stink, but your eyes are stinging, your back is aching and your arms feel like they're ready to drop off. Medieval people don't know anything about human rights, because you're not allowed any breaks AT ALL. Once you tried to sneak off for a toilet break and the horse-master flipped you with his whip. You shifted just enough to avoid the worst of it, but you still got a nasty cut across your forehead. In your normal life you'd enjoy making a drama out of it, but here, it doesn't matter.

'Oi, you!'

You keep working until you get walloped on the back of your head. Startled, you drop your pitchfork. The horse sharing the stall with you freaks out and rears, whinnying.

You freeze, watching those huge, sharp, whirring hooves. If they came down on you—

You're yanked out so fast you yell. The horse-master backhands you across the face, sending you flying across the stables to land in an empty stall.

'What was that for?' you whinge, forgetting that (unlike your teachers) this

guy has a whip and isn't afraid to use it. 'I was *working!*'

'You weren't paying attention, you little whelp,' he sneers, standing over you. 'What did I tell you about moving carefully around the horses? Lucky for you that horse seems unharmed. Otherwise I'd string you up myself, do you understand?'

You turn and see some of the other stable hands around the horse you spooked. They're making rude signs at you and your cheeks burn. The horse might be OK, but even you can see he's not happy, he's stamping and blowing, and you can see the whites of his eyes. You realise you could've been killed and go clammy-cold all over.

'I'm sorry.' You're not just saying it, you mean it. The horse-master *did* warn you about moving carefully around the horses.

'Hmph.' He jerks his thumb towards the stable doors. 'If you can be bothered to shift your lazy backside, Lord Hugh's back. There's thirty horses out there and they all need attention, so hop to it or there'll be no dinner for you!'

You know he's not kidding. You scramble to your feet as quickly as your aching muscles and throbbing shoulder allow, and follow the other stable hands into the yard.

'I'd stay away from Lord Hugh's horse if I was you,' one of them says. 'You're useless, I don't know why the master lets you stay!'

'Because all the other hands ran away,' another one says with a shrug. He smirks at you. 'Better get a grip or he'll give you to King John when he gets here.'

'And that'll be the end of you!' the first one chortles.

You miss Josh. He can be an idiot but at least he's never mean for the sake of it. You're all called away at that point and you find yourself running backwards and forwards with saddles and nose bags and other bits and pieces.

A big hand shoves a rein in your face and you look up. And up.

'He's ready,' this guy says, and he's so tall you can't help staring. He's the tallest man you've ever seen, and his horse is ... well, it's even bigger than the horses in the stables and you thought *they* were HUGE.

You squeak and back away. 'S-sorry, sir, I-I can't!' The guy's eyebrows crash together. 'Can't?'

'I'm scared of horses!' you blurt.

'You're a stable hand.' Tall guy looks like he doesn't know whether to laugh or be angry. 'A stable hand that's afraid of horses?' He scoffs. 'Maguire, get over here!'

You cringe as the horse-master scuttles over.

'Lord William?' He's practically scraping in front of Tall Guy, but still manages to give you the Evil Eye. 'Is there a problem, my lord?' Lord William nods at you and the horse-master's face goes red. Like, tomato sauce red.

'Leave it with me, my lord.' He pinches your ear between thumb and forefinger and drags you off (thankfully, away from the massive horse). You're vaguely aware the other stable hands are pointing and laughing, but you're also scared. More than scared, you're freaking out. Like it or not, the horse-master's the most important person in your life right now. He could have you thrown out of the Castle. For all you know, he could have you killed.

Your heart's going *thumpity-thumpity-thumpity* so loud you can't hear him talking. The next thing you know you're shoved into a busy hot room, and you collide headfirst with another person.

You back away, already muttering apologies.

It's Josh. He looks as hot and dirty as you feel. He grins. 'All right, mate?' You've never been so glad to see him in your life.

'Welcome to Hell,' he says. 'AKA the kitchen.'

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**NEXT**

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# The Great Hall



## THE GREAT HALL

'Have you seen Nan?' Josh hisses as you follow the other servers into the Great Hall, staggering beneath trays you're sure weigh as much as you do. At least it means you don't need to look the pig's head in the face. It's got these slitty dead eyes and the mouth is open. There's all these stubbly hairs all over its head! Gross.

'How could I have seen her? Anyway, it's your job to look out for her, she's your nan! I just want to get out of here alive!'

Josh scowls. 'Thanks for nothing, mate.'

You can't help wondering, though. Where is Nan? What if she hasn't turned up when you find Micah and the Seal? There's no way you can leave her behind.

When you get to the high table you start lowering the pig's head in front of Hugh de Lacy. He doesn't give you a second glance, he just keeps talking to the woman next to him as if you don't exist.

*Rude.*

You overhear part of their conversation.

'—you'll die if the King captures you,' he's saying, and your blood runs cold. 'My lady, in the name of our old friendship, I beg you come with me to France.'

'It's too dangerous to travel in a group,' she murmurs. 'I would slow you down and we'd be too easy to round up. No, Hugh. You must save your own skin and let William worry about ours.'

'Maud—'

'Enough!' Her eyes land on you and you duck under the table to get away from her gaze. She says, 'Watch what you say, my lord,' and de Lacy goes quiet, his lips so thin they're invisible. You roll your eyes. It doesn't matter whether you're in the thirteenth century or the twenty-first, grown-ups never change.

There's a crowd of serving boy and girls around the high table, it's chaos. You take advantage of the confusion to slip into the crowd, hopefully without Lady Maud noticing you again. She'll forget you if she has only seen you once. If she sees you twice she'll remember, especially when she's probably nervous anyway, if what de Lacy says is true. Your tummy quivers and you're suddenly dying for the loo. She's not the only one who's scared. The more you hear about King John, the more you're itching to get away. If only you could find Nan. If only you could find Micah and the Seal, you'd be heading for the twenty-first century so fast you wouldn't be seen for dust.

'Hey, there you are!' Josh yanks you up beside him, pushing a large jug of wine towards you. 'Stop skivin'.'



'I wasn't!' One of the older servers yells at you to hurry up and you pick up your pace, still talking to Josh over your shoulder. 'I was just ... listening in. See if I heard something useful.'

'Better watch where you're going,' he advises and your head whips around in the nick of time. Another step and you'd have tripped on the dais; that would mean a whipping!

You step up carefully, determined not to spill a single drop of wine. The last thing you need is Hugh de Lacy mad at you on top of everything else. Lady Maud is talking, but you're not paying attention. None of your business.

Then everything happens at once. CHATTER-CHATTER-CHATTER

You can't believe your ears.

It sounds like ... it sounds like ... it's MICAH!

He's sitting on Lady Maud's chair as if he belonged there. You freeze and Josh cannons into you, sending you and the wine jerking forward. The wine sloshes out in ... sloooooow ... motion, splashing Hugh and Maud.

Hugh gets slowly to his feet. Wine trickles down his nose and drips off the end. He looks like he's gonna explode. If this was a cartoon he'd have steam coming out of his ears.

The hall goes totally, spookily quiet. Even Micah shuts his face.

Hugh slams his fist down on the great table with such force the plates and trays bounce and rattle.

'GUARDS!'

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# THE FOURTH CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Grab Micah



Grovel

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# Grovel

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## Grovel

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You throw yourself on your knees before the high table, biting off a yelp. The flagstones are hard and not as smooth as they looked. The pain makes your eyes water. For once you don't shake the tears away. Who knows, maybe they'll help.

You look up and clasp your hands together, hoping you look pathetic instead of nuts. 'Please, my lord. Forgive us!'

After a tiny pause, Josh copies you. You've teamed up in enough pranks for him to catch on. Being Josh, he goes for maximum drama and throws his entire body on the floor, 'sobbing' for forgiveness the whole time.

You peek through your lashes at Hugh. He's still scowling, so you make eyes at Lady Maud. You even sniffle and wipe the snot away with the back of your hand as if you're a little kid.

'Please let us stay,' Josh cries, staring fixedly at Lady Maud instead of de Lacy, who looks like he's about to have a stroke. 'We're strangers and we'd starve anywhere else!'

You've a nasty feeling he's enjoying this. You're not, though; Hugh's obviously at the end of his rope, what with being chased by Evil King John and all. Drenching him and his lady friend in red wine wasn't the way improve his mood. Time for you to take control of the story!

'We're all alone,' you say, still sniffing. 'We've been separated from our grandmother, that's why we came here in the first place.'

'Hugh,' Maud starts, but he cuts her off. 'They're playing us, Maud.'

'But they're children!'

'Huh.' He studies you. 'Not young enough to excuse, though. They're old enough to work. Old enough to behave!' His voice rises. 'I've boys learning to be knights here and they look to be of an age with you. If they behaved as you've done, they'd be whipped and sent home in disgrace.'

'Yeah, right. Guess what, we're not knights,' Josh mutters—but not quietly enough. Once again, Lord Hugh looks ready to explode.

'GUARDS!'

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**NEXT**

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# Grab Micah

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## Grab Micah

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These big Norman guys are heading towards you and you turn to Josh. He jerks his thumb in the direction of Micah. You nod, and throw yourself across the table, hands outstretched for the blasted ape—but he’s too quick. Screeching, he takes off, jumping from table to table and sending food flying.

‘Grab those varmints!’ Lord Hugh bellows as the hall descends into total chaos. Everyone’s yelling and you’re running as fast as you can towards one of the middle tables where the ape’s stopped. Some people are making fun of you, others are raging and red-faced. They try to grab you, but you stay free by kicking and stamping. It’s no good, though. Micah’s watching your every move and each time you get close, he’s off.

When he stops again to steal food you do too, remembering some wildlife show on the telly. The predator was more likely to get his dinner if he waited quietly instead of rushing at it, like a bull at a red rag. There’s only one problem with waiting: Micah’s not the only one being hunted in this hall. All it would take is for Hugh to order everyone else to sit down and shut up. Once that happens, the guards will be on you and there’s no way you can dodge them forever. You’re just kids and these guys are battle-hardened soldiers.

On the other hand, maybe being a patient predator *works*. Micah’s still in position. In fact, he’s so distracted by the food he doesn’t notice you edging closer. At one point you’re even crawling on the floor! It’s covered with straw and food and the odd pool of something .... something gross enough to make you get up, wiping your hands on your clothes as you stand.

Micah’s RIGHT THERE. He’s close enough to touch, his bare backside in the air as he stuffs his face. You edge closer ... and closer ... hardly daring to breathe in case it tips him off. You’re reaching out to grab him when—

‘GOTCHA!’ Josh explodes from nowhere and throws himself at Micah. You yell.

So does the ape, showing every pointy tooth he’s got. Those pointy teeth sink deep into Josh’s hand as it snatches a furry leg.

Josh howls, letting Micah go. Everyone nearby howls too—with laughter. You and Josh find yourselves pelted with bits of food, like a stand-up show gone wrong. Josh hunches up against the hail of bread and bones, his good hand clenched around the bitten one. It looks like a bad bite and it’s bleeding a *lot*. His face screws with pain, and you move to help when he turns on you.

‘Don’t just stand there, mate. SHIFT IT!’

You don't need telling twice, pivoting in an almost perfect circle in order to spot Micah.

Nope. No ape.

You go again. And again. And again.... *whooo*.... the room's spinning...

You stop, swaying. Blinking, trying to clear your vision. You even rub your eyes to make sure, but Micah's gone. He's not on the tables. He's not in the rafters. Josh gets up from the floor, still holding his bleeding hand, and shakes his head when you look at him.

You draw together until you're standing back to back.

'Now what?' Josh asks. You can hear his breathing, sharp and fast. 'Can we run? We're not far from the door.'

'We wouldn't make it.' Josh sounds like he's talking through gritted teeth. 'Not with these guards everywhere.'

'Then what?' you demand. 'Just ... give ourselves up?'

'Sounds right to me,' a third voice says from somewhere above you. Slowly, you look up. The tallest of the Norman guys—a big bloke with white-blond hair—is looming over you, smirking.

One heavy hand plonks on your shoulder and spins you so you're facing the high table. Out of the corner of your eye, you see Josh getting the same treatment.

'March!' the Norman orders, sounding entirely too pleased about it. 'Lord Hugh is *waiting*.'

You and Josh exchange a look. GULP.

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# NEXT

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# The Great Hall



## THE GREAT HALL

'BRING THEM OUTSIDE AND WHIP THEM HARD!' de Lacy screams. 'Fifty lashes—each!'

'That's not fair!' Josh yells, trying to pull free from the guard holding him. 'It wasn't our fault, it was an accident!'

Micah chatters at Lady Maud, pulling at her headdress. She laughs and produces a treat. He scoffs it, looking so pleased with himself that you *really* want to strangle him.

'It was the ape's fault!' you blurt.

Lady Maud gives you a look that reminds you of your Maths teacher when you haven't done your homework. 'You were the one who spilt the wine.'

'I saw Micah. I was so shocked I couldn't move!' 'Micah'? How do you know his name?'

'He belongs to the Abbot. Brother Bernard at the friary says so!' Josh puts in. He shoots me a quick glance. 'We—we were sent to bring him back.'

De Lacy lifts an eyebrow. 'And the Abbot will support you in this?' 'Brother Bernard will!'

'Who is this Bernard?' Lady Maud asks, feeding Micah another treat. You're about to answer when Micah ducks under the table and reappears, offering a small object to Lady Maud. Your heart skips a beat and you surge forward.

'That's our Seal! Give it back!'

'And Micah,' Josh adds, breaking free from his guard with a quick twist (and knowing him, a stamp on the guard's toes). He throws himself at the table, arms outstretched towards Micah.

Unfortunately, the ape is too quick (again). Screeching loudly, he bolts for the rafters, chucking treats at your heads the whole time. You pinched a couple in the kitchens. They're nuts dipped in sticky stuff that goes hard so they've got sharp bits. It's like being pelted with gravel and it *hurts*, especially when you can't protect yourself. It's even worse when everyone else thinks it's funny and starts laughing.

'Where did you get that Seal?' you ask, trying to pull away from your own guard, but he's got a grip of steel and you've no chance.

Lady Maud is turning it over. 'The ape found it. He gave it to me in exchange for a treat; it's a game.'

You stop struggling against the guard, aware that Josh is still twisting and kicking against his. This is gonna need brains, not brawn.

'Please, my lady. The Seal is ours. Micah—Micah stole it.' The ape starts pelting you with even more spiky nuts and you twitch every time one lands. Everyone's watching now, they're laughing, and your cheeks are so hot you must be like, tomato-red.

Even de Lacy looks amused. He leans forward, blonde eyebrow raised. 'Micah stole it, hey?'

'Yes, sir. Uh, my lord,' Josh says. 'We need it to get home.'

You can't believe your ears. Did he actually—? If he was closer you'd stamp on his stupid toes. At this rate he's gonna get you both *killed*.

On the upside, Hugh and Maud don't look raging anymore.

'Home?' Lady Maud questions, her mouth twitching as though she wants to smile.

'It's my father's,' Josh gabbles. 'He'll kill me if he thinks I've lost it.'

De Lacy stares at you without blinking, like a cat. He takes the Seal from Lady Maud and turns it slowly in his fingers, looking it over. Your chest hurts and you realise you've forgotten to breathe.

'What a pack of lies,' he says eventually. He doesn't sound amused any more, his voice is ice-cold. 'Doubtless you stole this Seal yourself. I can see it's a valuable thing, it's finely worked.'

'We didn't!' you and Josh yell together.

De Lacy flips his hand. 'My orders stand. Fifty lashes apiece *and* the dungeons.' The guards drag you towards the great double doors and you throw caution to the winds. It's time for claws out, you twist and bite and kick and scream and ...

'Go quietly or that'll be ONE HUNDRED lashes!' de Lacy shouts and your heart sinks. There's no escape, all your future holds is pain and you're starting to wonder if you'll ever get home. You notice Josh isn't struggling either, and he's looking as scared as you feel. You feel a bit better. At least you're not alone.

You've nearly reached the double doors when you hear 'STOP!' and your head snaps to look at Josh. His grin stretches ear-to-ear and it takes you a minute to catch on. In fact you don't realise until the woman standing before the high table whips off her plain servant's headdress.

Her hair is short, spiky, and unmistakably purple.

Your knees turn to jelly. Good thing the guards are holding on to you because otherwise you'd be flat on your face from pure relief. Nan's safe, and what's better, she's *here*.

'Who are you?' de Lacy asks, still in that icy tone.

Nan straightens. 'A woman with the Sight, my lord.' The great hall falls silent as she speaks, even Micah shuts up. 'I've come to give you a warning. Harm a single hair on these children's heads, just *one*, and I swear on my life you'll lose Carrickfergus within the week.'

It's so quiet you can hear the guard wheezing in your ear. You hope he doesn't keel over, you don't want to miss a second of this.

'That's not all,' Nan continues, her voice ringing clearly across the hall. 'Lady Maud and her son will die a slow and horrible death at the King's hands.' Lady Maud sways like she's going to faint and her son isn't much better. De Lacy looks like he's about to throw up, but Nan's not finished.

'Is that the price you're willing to pay for the sake of a Seal and some spilled wine?'

The guards are so freaked out you're able to break away and you make a dash for the high table. You've nearly made it when

SLAM!

The double doors explode open and this guy bursts in, practically galloping up to the high table. Everyone yells. Some even scream.

Hugh de Lacy rises. 'What's happened?'

The rider falls forward on his horse's neck. He's panting hard.

'King John, my lord ... King John. He's here, he's in Ulster! He's been seen talking with an Irish lord ... My lord, we're entirely lost, the King has 40,000 men at his back!'

There's chaos. Complete chaos. Screaming.

People fighting to get out, to get away.

Nan's still up there, beside the high table, and you turn to face Josh. Do you stay or do you run?

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# THE FIFTH CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Run



Stay



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# Run

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Run

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## Run

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Getting out of the Great Hall is nearly impossible. Everyone else has the same idea and they're literally fighting and climbing over each other in an attempt to get out. Josh is trying to reach Nan and you lost sight of him. When you hear a scream 'Josh!' you suspect he's been trampled by the terrified crowd. Trampled and perhaps killed.

Your breath comes in short gasps that don't really pull in enough oxygen. Your heart pumps so hard and fast it hurts. There's people on every side of you, even underfoot. The twenty-first century part of you wants to check they're OK, but the part of you that's trying to stay alive in medieval times will do whatever it takes to survive. Even if that means *literally* walking over other people.

Being a kid helps. You're small enough to squeeze through spaces and you take advantage of it. Eventually you make it into the yard. Panic flutters through you because it's obvious you're no better off. There's more space, but only a little. And—

'Open the gates!' The shout comes from all directions. 'Let us out!' But the soldiers on horseback aren't moving. The gates stay shut.

There's got to be another way. You press yourself back against the stone walls and force yourself to just watch. It's the hardest thing you've ever had to do when your entire body is screaming at you to RUN but you don't.

You focus on breathing in and out. It takes a couple of minutes, but the tight band around your chest eases. Your vision sharpens and your brain kicks in.

You give a mental whoop of relief. There's an escape route just waiting for you, all you had to do was look. It's a wooden hut that's been built against the Castle walls, not that far from the side gate you used when you came, not even a week ago. The walls are high, but not impossibly high. You could climb it if you had to.

You run across, clamber up the hut, and start climbing. The rough stone scrapes the skin off your hands and rips through your shoes. It slices the soles of your feet, but you're so set on getting out of the Castle you hardly notice, although the blood makes it harder for you get a grip. When you reach the top of the wall, you lie panting with your eyes shut. There's a shout. You ignore it. The shout comes again and you dare to peer over the wall.

People are clustered there. People who want to *help*. They're holding out their arms and calling. Your brain is so fried that it takes a minute to twig that they're telling you jump. That they're promising to catch you.

You don't stop to think about it. You jump ...

... a jump that lasts forever, as if you're flying ...

... until you crash to earth. The landing is softer than it could've been, thanks to your human safety net, but not soft enough. A sick-jaggy pain goes through your side as you hit the ground and *breathing* becomes the most difficult thing you've ever had to do.

You're about to pass out when a hand appears, fingers wiggling in a way that says 'grab me!'. You make a massive effort to take it, and it drags you upright. The movement turns everything sparkly-black and only the strong arm around your waist keeps you on your feet. Sort of. After a minute, you're able to blink up at your rescuer.

It's Harry, Bernard's brother. He's bruised and bloodied too, but doesn't seem badly hurt.

'Where's Josh?' he asks and you shake your head. You can't think about Josh or Nan right now. There's a dark fog in front of your eyes and Harry gives you a bit of a shake, forcing you to look at him. He looks worried and you think you should be worried too, but you're in a world of pain and even worrying is too much.

'You're in a bad way. I'll take you to Simon,' Harry's saying. 'Bernard, I mean. Brother Bernard at the friary.'

You're not totally with it on the way there. The pain gets worse. Breathing's nearly impossible. Fear surrounds you. You can hear it. You can *smell* it.

There's hands on you. Gentle hands, but you don't care anymore. There's voices, but you're so out of it you haven't a clue what they're saying.

The pains fills you completely, blocking out everything else. When it softens around the edges you realise you're teetering on the brink of a dark tunnel. It reminds you of the London Underground.

You fall into it.

Your last thought is relief that it's all over. You're dead.

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SORRY

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**TRY AGAIN**

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# Stay

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Stay

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## Stay

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With the Great Hall emptying so fast, it doesn't take long for the two of you to reach Nan.

Josh grabs her arm. 'Nan, we're OK,' he mutters and she glances at him. You see her relief in the way she stands. Lord Hugh must've seen it too, his eyes going from Josh to her and back.

'So these unruly brats know you, Mistress Soothsayer.'

'Yes.' Nan pulls Josh to her. Her free hand reaches behind her back, towards you. You take it and step closer. 'They're my grandchildren.'

Maud looks at her.

'Was any of what you spoke true? Or merely a lie to protect your grandchildren?'

'It was *all* a true seeing, my lady,' Nan says, all softness to Maud's sharpness.

Hugh leans forward. 'You heard the messenger. John's on his way with an army at his back. Just the news of that is enough to send most of my supporters fleeing. Time's short. Your grandchildren are safe at your side; if you're really a soothsayer you can tell us how to change our fates. One good turn for another.'

'Or you'll thrash us anyway?' Josh blurts, and Hugh's mouth twists.

'No matter what your grandmother says, I'm still lord of Carrickfergus and my word is law. I'll do more than thrash if—' He's cut off by Maud's hand on his arm.

'My lord, please. No good is done by threatening them.' She holds out the Seal. 'Here. Take it, as a sign of our good faith.'

Josh steps forward to grab it. Nan hisses 'Manners, Joshua' and he shoots her a dirty look before giving this daft little bob.

'Thanks, uh, my lady.'

Lady Maud clenches her hands so tight the skin stretches white across her knuckles. 'I, I would do more.' She gestures towards the young man standing behind her. They're so alike that you guess they're related. 'What else do you need? The ape? William will help.'

You and Josh exchange looks, but it's Nan who speaks.

'Yes, we need Micah—the ape—too.' She pauses, watching William attempt to coax Micah down with a very ... odd expression. 'I-I'm not sure how much I can—'

'You *have* to help, Nan,' you say. 'Like Lord Hugh says, one good turn deserves another.'

Nan closes her eyes and your heart sinks. You wonder if she's thinking of her warning: *one wrong move and you could get killed now ... or prevent the world as we know it from ever existing at all.*

Her eyes pop open and she nods towards William. 'He's your son.'

Lady Maud glances at him and smiles. 'My eldest.' Her smile fades. 'You said we'd die a slow and lingering death. Knowing the King as I do, I can only imagine—' One hand goes to her neck. 'Please. Not for me, but for my son. If there's any way...'

Nan looks at Josh. Then she straightens, as if she's made up her mind. 'Lord Hugh, you will lose Carrickfergus.' He looks ready to kill her where she stands and she holds up a hand. 'Let me finish. You *will* lose Carrickfergus, but if you act swiftly, it will not be forever.' She steps closer to the high table. 'Flee to Scotland, and from there to France. There's a life waiting for you there; grab it. Make the most of every opportunity.' She hesitates. 'And if ... if you should meet a young boy by the name of Simon de Montfort, spend time with him. Tell him the truth of King John's reign.'

'Why?' Hugh barks. 'Why should I waste my time on a ... a boy?'

Nan doesn't flinch. 'Because this is no ordinary boy. If you do as I say, one day this boy will prevent these lands from ever again having a ruler like King John. He'll make sure power is shared more evenly than it is now.'

Hugh stares at her for a long moment before nodding his head, and you let out the breath you hadn't realised you were holding.

'And us?' William demands, gesturing towards his mother. 'What should we do?'

Nan looks trapped. 'I don't think--'

'Nan,' Josh protests. 'You have to help Lady Maud and William. You have to.'

'You could swop,' you suggest, looking from her to the seated Lady Maud. 'You're about the same size. You could pretend to be her.'

For the first time since the rider exploded into the hall, Hugh looks amused. 'Maud is very tall. Much taller than your grandmother.'

You glare. Does this bloke want you to help them or not? 'So? Who's gonna know when they've skirts trailing the floor anyway?'

'It's an idea,' Nan says. 'My lady, if you were to dress as a serving maid and stay somewhere nearby, William could escape alone. If he leaves now he could be far away by morning. I can dress as you and ride with Lord Hugh from here. Hopefully we can draw John's attention from you long enough to allow you to also find safety. The children can wait for me at the friary—'

'No!' you and Josh yell together. Josh carries on.

'What if you can't get back, Nan? What if John decides to treat you like he'd treat Lady Maud?'

Maud whitens. 'The boy's right. It's too dangerous—'

'It's the only way,' Hugh cuts in. 'Maud, I know better than to order you to do this, but *please*. It's a chance. Take it.'

'I agree,' William says, coming up with a grumpy Micah. He hands the lead to Josh. 'Here you are, one tethered ape.'

Josh accepts it, twisting the lead around his wrist so there's no chance of Micah getting away again. He's standing dead straight and his face is a bit red, like he's trying really hard not to cry. 'We're helping your mum. Will you help my nan? Make sure she gets back to us?'

'Of course,' William says and you relax. He doesn't sound like a grown-up trying to keep a kid happy, he sounds like he really means it. 'I can easily hide alone. Once Mother and Lord Hugh are away, I'll get her back to you. I swear it.'

Hugh gets up. 'Now we're agreed, I'll call for young Harry. He'll get the children to the friary, one way or another.'

Everything's dead quiet. Even the ape has stopped complaining. It's not like library-quiet, it's ... it's weird. *Heavy*. You can feel in on your skin. It stops you from breathing right, in case you disturb it.

Maud stands and your jaw drops. Hugh wasn't kidding, she's practically the tallest lady you've ever seen. She circles the table to stand beside Nan and the two of them look at each other. They don't say a word, they just *look*. It's as if they're reading each other's minds.

Something prickles down your spine and you shiver. There's no turning back now. What's done is done.



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**NEXT**

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# St. Nicholas's Church

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## ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH

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'Why aren't you taking us to the friary?' Josh asks as you trail after him and Harry. You're saddled with Micah and the ape's pulling at his lead.

Watching him is making it harder for you to keep up with Harry and Josh, and in all the craziness it'd be dead easy to get separated, even if Harry is geared up in his chain mail.

He's shoving his way through the crowds and you're not gonna complain, especially as it's got you out of the Castle. Perhaps once you're safely back in your time you'll be able to visit, but right now you never want to step foot within the place again. Josh, on the other hand, is freaking out about not going straight to the friary. That's the fourth time he's asked and you don't blame Harry when he jerks around, scowling.

'Because it's further away,' he snaps, sounding much scarier than before, when he was just Bernard's big bro. 'Every minute counts. My lord said to get you to safety and return; that's what I will do, but time *matters*. So I'm bringing you to St Nicholas's Church. You'll be safe there.'

'But—' Josh complains and you kick his ankle to shut him up. Annoy Harry too much and he might just cut and run! Besides, you can see he's right. You're already walking through the churchyard and the tight coil of panic in your tummy relaxes. There's fewer people here, it's less crazy— and you're a lot less likely to get squashed by accident!

Only problem is, the church's double doors are closed. Not only closed, but barred, locking you out. Harry thumps and thumps on it until this little square hatch opens and a squeaky old-man voice comes through it.

'Go away! This is a house of God, you're not bringing sin and death with you!'

'I'm bringing children to claim sanctuary,' Harry says. 'On Lord Hugh's orders.'

There's a sound a bit like someone blowing a raspberry. 'The de Lacys are finished. King John's coming, haven't you heard?'

'And we all know what he does to children, don't we?' Harry yells. He bangs the door again. 'Now open this door, or I'll finish you myself when this is done, priest or no priest!'

Slowly, so slowly you find yourself holding your breath, the doors open. Harry shoves you and Josh through it, sending you flying. By the time you've got up (that's massive bruise number fifty-three, at *least*) he's marching on the

squeaky-voiced priest.

'Keeping yourself safe, I see,' he sneers. 'There's not another soul here. Unless you're hiding them, of course.' The priest stutters and Harry laughs, allowing the point of his knife to rest beneath the old guy's chin. 'Save your lies. Allow me to remind you, my uncle and your Archbishop are very good friends. If you wish to stay here ... afterwards ... you'll help us.'

'But-but... of course. Whatever you need, my lord, just ask it—'

'My brother Bernard is at the friary.' Harry pockets his knife. 'Get them to him, by whatever means necessary, including the ones I'm not supposed to know about.'

The little priest nods, his face screwed as if he's sucked a lemon. 'Very well.'

'When Bernard tells me all is well, I'll see you rewarded. If not, then

...' Harry trails off when the priest pulls at his arm and points towards the altar. He's saying something about sacred oaths and saints' bones which means nothing to you, but Harry obviously gets it because they go off together, still talking about bones. Josh is looking totally grossed out and you jab him to keep him quiet—and it's just as well, because when Harry and the priest rejoin you, they're less wound up. Chilled.

'I must leave you now,' Harry says. 'The good father here will see you safe, he's sworn it.' He doesn't hang around after that and neither does the priest. As soon as the church doors are barred behind Harry, he lifts a candle and beckons you down the aisle and behind the altar. You follow, bumping into Josh when he stops dead.

'I'm not going down there,' he says and you look around him to see what he's panicking over. After some peering and squinting you realise it's a hole. A hole with steps down into the dark.

'Is that a crypt?' you ask, but the priest shakes his head and points. 'No,' Josh says.

'You have to,' you remind him. 'Harry'll get him otherwise.'

'I don't care, I'm not going down there! What if the candle goes out? We'll be stuck who-knows-where in pitch blackness. What if it's a trap? What if Harry gets captured or killed before he tells Bernard where we are?'

You hadn't thought of that. You pause. 'COME!'

You jump. That was ... weird. The priest's squeaky little voice just sounds ... well, it lifts the hairs on the back of your neck. On the other hand, you haven't forgotten those monster-horses. If King John has men on horses like that, they'll get through the church's barred door in no time. Your hands are clammy

and there's skydiving butterflies in your tummy.

Both options are scary. You could be dead either way.

Josh looks longingly towards the great doors. 'If that priest could open them by himself, we'll be fine,' he promises.

You swallow.

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# THE SIXTH CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Leave the Church



Follow the Priest

# Follow The Priest



## Follow the Priest

'I don't like this,' Josh whimpers into your ear, his breath hot on the back of your neck.

It's the only thing that is. It's freezing down here, cold and damp and musty. Some of the ground underfoot is uneven, so you have to step carefully and that's easier said than done when it's nearly pitch black *and* there's a freaked out ape clinging to one leg. If you weren't so terrified you'd be glad to have found one thing that makes the ape behave.

The priest is edging in front. He must still be sulking because he hasn't said a word, the only reason you know he's still there is the candle he's carrying. It's flickering away, a brave little flame that scares the dark.

Your heart lurches sickeningly when you catch sight of a shadow in the corner of your eye. You forget to breathe, even your shout of warning to Josh can't escape.

King John's men have followed you into the tunnel ...

The shadow shifts again and you realise it's still just the three of you and Micah. Everything shakes around you, like the earthquakes you've seen on TV. There's a thrumming, drumming sound above you and it takes a minute for you to work out that the shaking isn't an earthquake. It's vibrations rippling down into the tunnel from above.

'What was *that*?' Josh asks as the noise fades and the candle's flickering flame steadies.

Micah chitters and clings tighter to your leg. You stamp to try and loosen him a bit, but your foot hits something soft. Something soft that MOVES.

'Ew...'

'*What?*' Josh sounds closer to bawling than you've ever heard. 'What happened?'

'A rat. I think.'

'I wanna go home,' Josh whimpers. 'This isn't fun anymore.' 'Was it ever?'

The earthquakey-noise thing happens again and the penny drops.

'It's the horses galloping above us,' you explain. 'That's why it shaking.'

Josh stops dead, his hand on your shoulder jerking you to a halt. The priest carries on and you turn on Josh, even though you can't see him. You wish he'd get a grip; stopping leaves the two of you (and Micah) beyond reach of the candle's pool of light.

'The ceiling's gonna come d-down on u-us....' His breathing is louder than



yours, it's coming short and fast. 'W-we'll be b-buried u-underground a-and no-one'll ever—'

It's pretty hard to hit someone you can't see, but you manage it. Josh stops gibbering himself into a panic attack and you realise that the candle flame isn't flickering or swaying as much. The priest is waiting for you. Maybe that means you're nearly there.

'Come on!' You reach into the dark and grab the first bit of fabric you can and take off, ignoring Josh's protests and Micah's chittering. You don't stop until you've reached the pool of light and then the two of you (and Micah) collapse at the priest's feet.

'A-are we there?' Josh stutters once you're both up again. He gets in first because you're too busy wiping your hands as best you can. There's something gross and smelly on them. You hope it wasn't a dead rat. Or someone's poo.

The priest holds his candle higher and points downward. Steps! A way out! You rush up them and come to a stop at a wooden door. It whines like a hungry dog when you try it, but it opens. You look at Josh, grinning even though you know he probably can't see.

'We're ... *somewhere*. We can get out.'

It doesn't matter where you've ended up, you know fine well neither of you are going back in that tunnel, no matter what. You'd take your luck with Evil King John first. The priest is muttering at Josh, but all your attention is on that door. The door that will (please, please, *please*) bring you back to the friary—a step closer to home.

You slip through and a glance upwards tells you where you are: back in the friary chapel. You'd know that vaulted ceiling anywhere! Even Micah seems to have relaxed, he's eased his death grip on your leg. The blood rushes back into it and you have to lean against the cut-stone walls for a sec.

'He's gone,' Josh whispers, coming through the door and shutting it behind him. 'Where are we?'

'Back where we started,' you say, your hand tightening on Micah's lead. 'Scriptorium? Find Bernard?'

'Then we get Nan,' Josh agrees with an ear-to-ear grin. 'And go home!' He darts towards the chapel door and you follow.

Josh opens it and turns, frowning. 'Hey, can you remember which way to go?'

You poke your head through the door, looking in both directions and hoping for a clue. You're in a cloister, but it all looks exactly the same. 'We could

separate?' you suggest. 'It's a square, right? Wouldn't we eventually meet in the middle?'

'Oh, no,' Josh says. 'Not happening, mate. Whichever way we go, we go together. So what's it gonna be, left or right?'

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**NEXT**

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# Leave The Church



## Leave the Church

'Are you sure about this?' you ask Josh as the two of you remove the giant bar holding the church doors closed. 'This could be the worst plan ever.'

Josh blows out a breath as the doors creak open. It hangs in the air like a small cloud before dissolving. 'I'd rather take my chances out there than get trapped in that tunnel.' He shudders. 'Imagine. A cold, dark, damp tunnel, probably with crawly things in it. It's not like the entrance is hidden. If King John's men found it and came after us before we'd reached the friary —'

'OK, OK, I get it!' You find yourself agreeing with him. If you're gonna die anyway, better out in the open where you can see Death coming than trapped like a rat. You hold up your fist. 'Ready?'

He punches it with his. "Course. Let's do this.'

He wriggles through the space between the doors and you follow. You're scared out of your wits but the adrenaline has kicked in and you're raring to go. The friary's not that far, you remind yourself. Churches are sacred. Surely even King John's men—

There's a roar from the crowd clustered in the churchyard as you exit. They surge forward. Some are yelling for holy sanctuary. Others are limping and bleeding, holding each other up. People are crying and begging, and they press around you so tightly that you're hemmed in. Panic rises when you glance to your side and realise you're separated from Josh. Even Micah has slipped his lead.

You try to step back against the great church door, but it's not where you expect it to be. You fall backwards and roll out of the way. Instinct tells you to curl up tight, but common sense drives you to your feet. Getting squashed like a bug is as bad as being trapped like a rat.

You escape the heaving chaos the church has become, and plaster yourself once more against the external walls, your eyes skittering as you try to spot Josh. There's no sign, and anyway, there's a more urgent problem.

Fire.

FIRE!

It's not a big fire, not yet, it's licking around the edges of the churchyard. The only problem is, without fire engines and hoses ... the whole town could go up. Now you understand what's driven the townspeople to the church: it's made of stone, and less likely to burn than houses of wood and straw. They can't protect

themselves from smoke, though, and neither can you. You pull your hood up around your nose and blink furiously against the prickling in your eyes. Unless it absolutely pours, that fire isn't just gonna go out.

Time to go.

You run as fast as you can away from the fire, stumbling over clumps of grass and even the occasional body. One of them moans. You pause, stricken, but move on. There's nothing you can do except keep yourself alive and maybe, *maybe*, get home.

You've no idea where you're going, the light is fading and you've deliberately avoided familiar landmarks. It's soft and bouncy underfoot, like grass. Must be fields. The ground dips unexpectedly and you go over hard on your ankle. *Just a twist*, you tell yourself, and force yourself upright despite the agonising pain. You can't bear to put weight on it, but you can't stop either. You grit your teeth and carry on, not even caring that you're sobbing. Who's to hear, after all?

You try hopping. The ground's sloping downwards and you think you can hear water gurgling. You head towards it, because you remember there's a stream by the friary. If you can follow it back—

The gurgling is louder, but now it's so dark you've totally lost your bearings; you're not sure where, exactly, the stream lies. You try an almighty hop and your good foot catches. You're flung forward face down. You're momentarily aware of coldness and wetness before there's an explosive pain in your head and ...

Lights out. You're dead.

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SORRY

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**TRY AGAIN**

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# THE SEVENTH CHOICE

WHAT DO YOU DO?

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Turn Left



Turn Right

# Turn Left



## Turn Left

The scriptorium is down this way, you're 100% sure. If you can only remember which door! Josh is about to chance his arm by opening the first one you come to, but for once luck's on your side. Bernard himself appears, rushing forward when he sees you.

'Thanks be to God, you're alive! You've even found Micah!'

'It's more like he found us,' you say. 'And we've got this.' You produce the Seal and Bernard beams.

He leans in to whisper. 'I found the manuscript I told you of, but Father Abbot must not know. If we look at it together, mayhap you can get home

—' He breaks off with a frown. 'Where is Mistress Nan? Did you not find her also?'

Josh turns red and his eyes go glassy. He shakes his head and Bernard's frown deepens.

'She's not ... she's not—?'

'No! She's ...' You look frantically at Josh, because what do you say? 'She's helping a mate,' Josh says at last. 'Come on, I want to hear about

this old book, manuscript, whatever.' He lifts his chin in the air. 'But she'll be back, my nan will.'

'Then we must be ready, no?' Bernard grins and points. 'Come.' He walks quickly, the skirt of his habit brushing the ground.

'Does it not wind you up wearin' a skirt?' Josh asks in the squeaky voice that means he's not as chirpy as he sounds. 'It'd do my head in, so it would. Don't you trip over everything?'

'It is a habit, not a skirt,' Bernard snarks. 'Although in truth ... if I was not within these walls, I would fear tripping as you say. But now I'm learning to be a brother and I'm not supposed to run, so I am safe enough.'

'Just as well, huh?' Josh seems well back on form. 'Tripping on your habit would be a bad ... er... habit.'

'Ha ha,' you say and Josh smirks. Bernard hasn't got the joke, he's too busy trotting down the corridor.

'Here we are,' he announces, opening a door, and you're back in the scriptorium. It's weird, it's as if your entire life has turned back to front and upside down in just a few days, but you're back in this room and everything is like it was. *Exactly*. Bernard's quill is in the same place and when you squint at his work you're shocked to see he's on the same page. Your teacher would go *mental* if you took that long to write a few lines.

Bernard takes Micah and you give out a *loooooong* breath as he shuts the ape in a cage. It's a big cage, like, but Micah carries on like a cat being taken to the vet.

'Now,' Bernard says, taking the Seal from you and placing it carefully on his desk. 'I found something in here.' He pulls a book towards him. You've never seen one quite like it. It's not very big, but it's really thick and there's jewels on the front, in the shape of a cross. They catch the light, winking.

Bernard's talking.

'To travel in time from this sacred place, several things are needful. You must stand in the chapel in the exact spot where the aisles cross. You must take nothing from this time and leave naught behind.' He pauses, looking very serious. 'You understand, my friends? There's danger outside, but I cannot let you try to go home without Mistress Nan.'

'So we've got to wait,' you say.

'Like we'd've done anything else!' Josh snaps, but he steals a look at you and you're sure you know what's going through his head.

What if Nan doesn't come back? You'll be stuck.

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**NEXT**

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# Turn Right

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## Turn Right

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'We should've gone the other way,' Josh whinges as you set off down the cloister, almost-but-not-quite running. The sooner you're safely with Bernard, the happier you'll be. 'Knowing our luck, something bad'll happen.'

You roll your eyes, knowing he can't see you.

'It doesn't matter, we'll get around the whole cloister one way or another.' You pause at a door. 'Do you think—?'

'It doesn't look like anyone's in there,' Josh whispers, putting his eye to a crack in the door planks. 'It's dark, no candles or anything.'

'True. Next one, maybe. Come on!'

You keep going, your eyes darting as you try to spot something you've seen before—but no luck. Then Josh grabs your arm.

'That's it! I remember seeing that cross there, just opposite!'

You peer at the door he's pointing at, squinting to see if there's a glimmer of light running along the bottom. Candlelight is so much softer than normal lights it's hard to tell and the flames move, which makes it even harder.

'It looks like someone's in,' you whisper, once you're certain there's light. 'Are you sure?'

'Dead sure,' Josh says, and proves it by flinging the door open. Only ... he's wrong.

It isn't Bernard in that room.

It's a skinny old guy. A skinny old guy who looks mad when he joins you in the cloister. Behind him you can see a fire, and you stare longingly at it. The old guy mustn't be as old as he looks, he grabs both of you by the scruff of the neck and gives you a shake.

'You!' Another shake. 'Bernard said you'd gone to the Castle!'

'We did,' Josh explains, looking nervous. He twitches free and points. 'Look, we-we found the ape!'

'Doubtless you stole him to begin with!' the old friar snaps, snatching Micah's lead from your hand and jerking him into the room. He slams the door on the ape before Micah can make a break for it (again) and turns to face you. Finding his pet doesn't seem to have improved his temper, he looks nearly as angry as Lord Hugh did.

'Get out,' he orders. 'This is no place for vagrants!'

'You can't throw us out, we're claiming sanctuary!' you say. Actually, it's more of a squeak.

The monk gives a thin smile before grabbing your collars again, twisting

them so they tighten about your necks. He's stronger than he looks. 'As I'm Abbot here, it's up to me to decide who claims sanctuary. And that is not thieves and varmints like yourselves. Back to the Castle you go!'

'No!' You try to twist free, but the Abbot isn't having it.

He marches you down the way you came, through the chapel and out of the friary. A few soldiers are leaning against the wall, and when they see the monk they straighten as if they've been electrocuted.

'Tie this pair up. Bring them to the Castle!' the Abbot orders. Before you've time to do anything more, you find yourself handed over and tied up. One of the soldiers, a young one who reminds you of Harry, tries to complain.

The Abbot gives him a long look.

'Your family support the de Lacys, do they not? Would you like the King to know of this?'

The soldier looks like he's gonna be sick. 'N-no, Lord Abbot.'

'Then get these brats off the street. They're strangers, no-one will speak for them.'

'Bernard will!' Josh shouts and the Abbot smirks.

'Brother Bernard must obey *me*.' He gestures towards the Castle. 'Take them away!'

The soldier holding you looks way too chuffed at that plan. 'Of course, Lord Abbot. Come on!' He yanks the rope tying your wrists together like you'd pull a lead when a dog doesn't want to walk. You have to struggle to keep your feet and by then it's too late, the other soldier has gone off with Josh. No way are you getting separated! You stumble along, getting bumped and jostled as the soldiers march you back through the Castle gate.

You shiver. Only yesterday this area was busy, full of noise and life. Now it's dead, there's only a dog squabbling with a cat over a pile of scraps and a handful of soldiers. These aren't the same guys you met before, they're wearing different colours, but they're just as big and just as scary. They must be King John's men.

And they're not AT ALL friendly.

'What's this?' one of them says, coming towards you. He looks from you to Josh. 'Prisoners?'

'Abbot at the friary wants 'em gone,' your soldier says. 'Thieving brats he called them, not even from round here. No-one to speak for 'em.'

The Castle soldier grins nastily. 'Just make 'em disappear, eh?'

'That sounds ideal, sir.' Before you and Josh know it, Castle Soldier has called

his mates over and you're being marched to the other side of the keep. There's only six of them, but they're big guys and their bodies would cage you in quite neatly, even if you weren't tied up. Your mouth feels like it's filled with sand. You've finally run out of luck.

You're forced down a corridor, one that looks like it runs into the heart of Keep itself. It reminds you of the tunnel, but there's no way out. You're jerked to a stop and there's a stone wall in front of you. It's a dead end. You wonder if this is just a really mean joke. Maybe these guys are so bored they think it's fun to mess with kids' heads. One of the soldiers opens a hatch in the floor. In the dim light you can just about see the rope he's holding.

'Get them ready,' he snaps, and two of the guys pounce on you, slamming you and Josh back-to-back and tying you together. Josh is howling and you're pretty close to it yourself. Next, you're shoved forward into blackness.

You're falling. You've no idea how deep the the drop is, you can't even put your hands out. You're certain you're a goner.

And then ... suddenly you're not falling quite so fast. You're dropped onto a floor, hard enough to knock your breath out but not enough to really hurt you. Plus, the fall has loosened the ropes and you're able to wriggle out of them, kicking them aside.

'Which one did they use to lower us down?' Josh asks, his voice rough. 'I dunno.' You feel along the floor, wishing that you'd been more careful with those ropes. When you find them your spirits lift, only to crash down again when you realise they're useless: they're not tied to anything.

You hear the soldiers laughing.

'Enjoy your new home!' one yells. His voice bounces and you shiver. Then comes the ringing slam of metal against stone. 'That's it, you're gone,' the voice echoes again. 'No-one knows you're here. No-one cares. Better start praying.'

There's laughing, like those soldiers think this is funny.

When the laughter fades, there's nothing. Just you, Josh, and waiting to die.



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SORRY

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**TRY AGAIN**

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# Friary Chapel

## 1210



## FRIARY CHAPEL, 1210

### TWO DAYS LATER

'I hate having to go to Ves-Ves ... whatever you call it!' Josh grumbles. He's been grumpy ever since you got back to the friary. It's so annoying but you try not to snap his head off. You know he's worried sick about Nan, and honestly, you don't feel good about her either.

'Vespers,' you correct, just to think about something else.

Josh waves. 'Whatever. It's dead boring!' He vanishes around a corner and continues complaining, his voice floating back to you. 'It's dark and smoky and ... AAGHH!'

Your heart actually stops. What's just happened? What if King John's found you? You think about running, but you can't. Not if you don't want to be stuck here forever. You need Josh and Nan and Micah and that blasted Seal. Planting your back against the chapel door, you peep around it, like you're in a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon—and the breath you didn't realise you were holding comes out in an puff.

It's Nan! She's still wearing Lady Maud's dress, but her veil thingy is all twisted to show the purple spikes underneath. She's hugging Josh so tight that he keeps trying to pull away from her, but she won't let him. You snicker at the look on Josh's face, and that's a mistake. She lets him go, marching towards you with a determined gleam in her eye.

'And *you!*' Before you've a chance to protest, you find yourself getting squeezed too, and this time it's Josh's turn to smirk. When she pulls back she looks both of you over.

'Are you both OK? No problems when you—?' She jerks her head towards the friary.

'Bernard looked after us,' Josh says. 'And Nan, he knows how to get us home! He's got this book, this manuscript, and it's got loads of cool stuff. There's even a spell, like *Harry Potter!*'

'We have to find Bernard,' you say. 'He knows everything. Besides, we left Micah and the Seal in the scriptorium.'

Nan stops. 'I can't go into the friary, they won't let me. Last time was a fluke.'

'Bernard'll let you. He has to,' Josh says. 'The magic spot is in the chapel, but he's got our stuff.' Looking worried, he turns to you. 'You stay here with Nan. I'm gonna go get Bernard, just in case she's right about him letting her in.'

He disappears through the friary gates and you're left standing with Nan.

And there's one thing you're absolutely dying to know. 'How'd you get away?'

'It was easy,' Nan says. 'People only see what they expect to see, and Maud's long cloak covers everything anyway. I took her belt and fine veil, just in case, but held on to the simple cloth I was using. As soon as I knew Hugh and Maud were safely gone I hid her things and put my cloth on again. Provided no-one looked too closely I was just another poor lady.'

'Why did you do it? Why'd you help her?' you ask, shifting from one foot to the other. You're not trying to be cheeky, but you can't help wondering. 'You told us messing with history is dangerous and then you—' 'I know.' Nan leans against the outer friary wall, her eyes closing. 'It was a risk, I agree, but ...' She wrings her hands. 'I couldn't do nothing. I know how Lady Maud and her son died, and it was a cruel, horrible death.'

They didn't deserve it. *No-one* deserves it.' 'What happened?'

Nan gives you a long, steady look. Then she says, 'King John kept them imprisoned here for a while before moving them to a castle in England. Windsor, possibly.' She stops again. 'Are you *sure* you want to hear this?'

You nod, a sick feeling churning in your tummy, but you need to know. Once you know, you might understand.

'The King starved them. William died first. Maud ... well, she-she tried to stay alive the only way she could.' Nan swallows. 'She *ate* him, she became a cannibal. Not that it did her any good; she died too.'

You stare at her, totally horrified. Your throat is so tight it hurts.

'Now that won't happen,' you get out eventually. 'They won't die that way. What does it mean?'

Nan pushes herself away from the wall. 'Honestly? I don't know. I don't think much will change, if anything. John will still become the most unpopular king we've ever had ... Josh!' She says it brightly as he runs up, her smile popping back as if it'd never been gone. 'Any luck?'

'He says come now, while it's dark. Hopefully we'll be back home before anyone notices. This way!' Josh goes as quiet as any monk as he draws you and Nan through the gate and down the shadowed cloister. Strips of brightness carved by the moon make everywhere else seem even blacker than it is.

When Bernard opens the door to the scriptorium you practically fall in. 'There's no time to lose,' he says once all three of you are safely in and

he's closed the door. 'The chapel's empty now, this is the best time. Change into your own clothes and then we must away!'

You and Josh nod and take the bundles he's holding. They're your school uniforms and bags. It's ... weird ... seeing them again, as if you're not the same person you were when you took them off. It's not long before you look like your proper selves again. You can't resist feeling for your mobile in your pocket, although there's no point wasting precious battery life by turning it on. Not yet.

'Take Micah,' Bernard orders, handing you the ape's lead. Micah shows his teeth and you do the same back. Nasty ape, you'll be glad to see the back of him ... or rather, the *bones* of him! 'Josh has your Seal, I have the book. Mistress Nan—'

'I'm ready too.' Nan buttons her purple coat.

'Let's do this!' Josh is out the door first and you fall back, allowing Bernard to take the lead. You and Micah come last. The ape keeps pulling on his lead as you make your silent way through the cloister.

One by one you slip through the chapel side door, the one the friars use. You join Bernard where the aisles cross. There's a candle burning before the altar, but other than that it's pitch black except where the moon bleeds in. Your teeth chatter from cold.

'Stand here, if you please,' Bernard says, pointing. 'Very close, so that the three of you are touching. Mayhap it would be well to put Micah in the middle?'

You yank the lead so Micah's trapped in a cage made of your legs.

You're a bit nervous about that, what if he bites?'

'Better go fast, mate,' Josh says to Bernard. 'I don't trust the ape.' Bernard grins. 'Nor I. You're prepared?'

All three of you nod and Bernard opens his book, although it's too dark to read. He must've memorised the poem, the 'spell', because he just rattles it off.

'Repeat after me: *Once lost now found, a special place holds items sound. No horse or cart for me to travel, hold on tight while time unravels.*'

Nan does it perfectly. You get lost at 'horse' and Josh isn't much better. All the same, you close your eyes tightly, waiting for the bright white flash from last time.

And wait.

*Still* waiting ...

'It didn't work!' Josh says, and you open one eye.

You're still in the friary chapel. Bernard is still standing there. Micah is still alive and you think he might be chewing on his lead.

'What went wrong?' Nan asks.

'You must all say it at the same time.' Bernard sounds much older, as if he

really knows what he's talking about. 'You must learn it first.'

'There's no time!' you say. 'Micah's gonna either bite us or his lead, and if we're caught—'

'Just repeat the verse with me,' Bernard says. He makes you say it twice by yourself, and once with Josh. Then he points towards Nan. 'Return home, my friends.'

You and Josh exchange a look, but Josh gets there first. 'Listen, um, Bernard. Thanks. Thanks for helping us.'

The friar's teeth glint. 'It was my pleasure. You are my friends. And,' he grins dead wide, 'I'll make sure my Seal stays here, even after I'm gone.'

'You'd better!' Josh says and the three of you beam at each other before you and Josh go back to Nan. You stand close together as Bernard instructed, with Micah imprisoned once again behind your legs.

'Let's go,' Nan murmurs, her fingers squeezing yours. '*Once lost now found, a special place holds items sound. No horse or cart for me to travel, hold on tight while time unravels ...*'

Everything goes white. Then black. Then *nothing*.

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You wake slowly. It's a minute before you remember and you start pulling out your phone because priorities, right? Your mum'll go ape (ha!) if you don't let her know you're safe.

The phone comes on. You wait for the reception bars to appear, it seems to take forever. *Come on, Vodafone.*

The bars come on! One ... then two ... then five.

'We did it!' you shout. 'Josh, Nan, we made it! We're home!'

You jump up, waving your phone. The screen's still on. The light falls across Josh and Nan's faces, but they don't look happy.

They look scared.

'Look around,' Josh says, sounding like he's got a bad cold. 'Turn on the torch.'

You obey, flashing it here and there, but you already know it's not right. The Museum is warm, but this is cold ... as cold as the friary was, and it's too bright. It takes a minute for you to work out it's the moon, and it's too bright because you're in the friary chapel.

A friary chapel without a roof.

That's not the worst of it. It's the fact the whole place is in ruins. The only thing you can make out is the Castle's great keep. Still dark, still looming ... You shiver, and not just because it's freezing.

'What happened? My phone works, how does my phone work—?' 'Because we *are* in our own time,' Nan says, sounding as rough as Josh.

'It's just not the twenty-first century Carrickfergus we know.'

'Apart from that,' Josh points at the keep, 'it doesn't look like Carrick at all!' He turns slowly. 'There's ... there's nothing! It's like a ghost town!'

The three of you huddle together like chicks at Streamvale Farm. Nan puts her hand on your shoulder. It's shaking and you realise she's as scared as you are.

You never imagined this could happen.

You're back in your own time, but not your own place. You're more lost than ever.

NOW what do you do?



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# THE END

...UNTIL NEXT TIME!

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## FACT OR FICTION

### HOW MUCH OF *MICAH AND MAYOR'S SEAL* IS REAL?

This isn't an easy question to answer. Some parts are real. Some parts are made-up. Some parts are a bit of both. Unfortunately, one thing that is definitely not real is the ability to travel through time—although if you ever find a way, we'd love to know! Two of the three main characters—Nan and Josh—are obviously made up. 'You' are the third main character, and most of the experiences 'you' had in the story either did happen or could have happened in medieval Carrickfergus.

*Micah and the Mayor's Seal* is set very early in Carrickfergus's history.

John de Courcy, the Anglo-Norman knight who started building Carrickfergus Castle in 1177, was forced out of Carrickfergus in 1205, only a few years before the story opens. In fact, he was forced out by Hugh de Lacy with King John's support because the King thought de Courcy was getting too powerful. By 1210, when this story opens, King John had become displeased with Hugh, too—and was determined to capture him, his relative Maud de Braose, and Carrickfergus Castle.

## PLACES

Several places appear in *Micah and the Mayor's Seal*. Most of them were real, and some of them you should know very well.

### Carrickfergus Castle

John de Courcy started building Carrickfergus Castle in 1177. When King John took the Castle from Hugh de Lacy in 1210, Carrickfergus Castle stopped belonging to a knight and became the property of the Crown instead. An army was stationed at the Castle. It stayed there until 1928.

Carrickfergus Castle was used in the Second World War as an air-raid shelter. Today Carrickfergus Castle is one of the best preserved Norman castles in Ireland.

## The Friary

As the story says, the friary stood approximately where the Museum is today. A friary was a type of monastery. You might wonder why there was a friary in Carrickfergus! It is important to remember that *Micah and the Mayor's Seal* takes place before the Reformation. This means all the historical people in the story are Roman Catholic.

The friars who lived and worked there were known as brothers.

Monasteries, convents and friaries were important places in the medieval world. They acted as hotels, chemists, hospitals, libraries, and even schools. The friary at Carrickfergus even had its own watermill! Many friaries were started by wealthy people like John de Courcy or Hugh de Lacy, who expected the monks and friars to pray for them after they died—and left plenty of money for that purpose. Some monasteries, convents and friaries became extremely rich. We don't know exactly how rich the friary in Carrickfergus was.

## Great Patrick Cross

In medieval times the market was one of the most important places in a town. In a time before electricity, telephones, supermarkets or the internet the market was the place to hang out. It was where you bought your supplies, made a bit of money from selling your own goods, learned the news and heard the latest town gossip. As in Carrickfergus, markets often took place just outside a church—in this case, St Nicholas's. 'Market crosses' or 'high crosses' were very common throughout the British Isles. Most were around two metres high, but a few Irish crosses were as tall as six metres! Carrickfergus's market cross was known as Great Patrick, and stood near to where the Big Lamp is today. We do not know exactly how tall it was, but old maps show it was made from white stone and stood on a stepped platform.

## St Nicholas's Church

St Nicholas's was probably built by John de Courcy around 1180 or so—but de Courcy's church did not look like the church you see today! In medieval times the church was shorter and wider than it is now. The ceiling was lower—and so was the floor! Today's floor is nearly a metre higher



than the Norman church because the church has been destroyed and rebuilt so many times.

There are still a few traces of the Norman church. The 'leper window' is medieval, and so are the great pillars. Another interesting fact is the angle of the aisle. This is crooked and it has always been crooked—it was designed that way. This is because legend says that when Jesus Christ was on the cross, His head fell to the right, just like the aisle does.

### **The Tunnel**

At this point in time we do not know for certain if the underground tunnel between St Nicholas's Church and the Friary (today's Museum) ever existed. Stories and legends about such a tunnel certainly exist, but so far no archaeologist has found it! However, we thought it was too much fun to leave out.

### **The Oubliette**

The oubliette is the dark hole in Carrickfergus Castle where 'you' and Josh might have been thrown towards the end of the story (if you were, it was definitely the end of the story for you!). Like many castles, Carrickfergus Castle had an oubliette. This was a dark hole where prisoners were thrown, forgotten, and left to die. Even the name—oubliette—comes from the French word for 'forget'! If you went into an oubliette you were literally out of sight and out of mind.

## **PEOPLE**

### **Brother Bernard**

Brother Bernard as he appears here is a fictional character—but the Mayor's Seal was owned by 'Brother Bernard' who was a chamberlain from Aquila or Aquileia in Italy. We know this because it is written on the Seal itself, around the eagle crest.

### **Father Abbot**

The Father Abbot who appears in the story is an invented character.

However, monasteries and friaries always had a boss monk or friar, and he

was usually known as an Abbot. Abbots could be men from wealthy families, and they could have a lot of influence—not just in their monasteries or friaries, but in the wider community. Abbots and abbesses (the head of a convent of nuns) were sometimes addressed as 'my lord' or 'my lady' because they were seen as God's representatives.

### **Castle Servants & Soldiers**

All of the servants and soldiers who appear in the story are invented— but of course such servants and soldiers did exist. We just may not know very much about them. You may have heard people say 'history is written by the conquerors'. This is another way of saying 'history is written by the winners'. You could say that history is often also written by rich people— because until recently only rich people could read, write, or leave traces of themselves after they died. This means that the further back you go in time, the harder it is to learn about the lives of ordinary people. History, in fact, is like doing a jigsaw puzzle where half the pieces are missing, broken or damaged.

### **Hugh de Lacy**

Like John de Courcy, Hugh de Lacy was an Anglo-Norman knight. This means his family came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066.

They were a very powerful family. Hugh's father became the first Viceroy of Ireland. His stepmother was an Irish princess. His sister-in-law was Maud de Braose's daughter. This meant that Hugh was related by blood or marriage to many of the most important families of the time.

In 1199 Hugh de Lacy made an agreement with King John. In exchange for getting Carrickfergus Castle, Hugh would remove John de Courcy. In 1205, de Courcy was forced out and Hugh had Carrickfergus! By 1210 everything had changed. King John wanted to capture Hugh's de Braose relatives, and Hugh was helping them. Not only that, but Hugh had turned against one of King John's supporters. The King decided enough was enough and came to Ireland to capture Maud de Braose and her son, and to force Hugh de Lacy out. Hugh did not return to Carrickfergus until after King John had died. The new king, Henry III, respected Hugh and asked him for advice on Ireland. When Hugh de Lacy died in 1242 or 1243 he was buried in the friary.

## **Maud & William de Braose**

Maud was born in France in 1155. She married the Anglo-Norman lord William de Braose around 1166—at not much more than ten years old! This happened to many children of wealthy families in medieval times. Maud and William had sixteen children and their eldest son was named William, after his father.

People who lived at the time said that Maud was energetic, beautiful, brave and wise. In 1207 King John and Maud's husband fell out. Some people say it was because Maud was heard to say that the King had murdered his nephew, Arthur—if this is true, it was not a wise thing to say at all! King John was furious. Maud and her eldest son fled to Ireland, to stay with her daughter, who was married to Hugh de Lacy's brother Walter. The King came after them, and Maud and her son tried to escape. In the story Hugh helps them and returns with them to Carrickfergus, but in reality Maud and William were captured before they had gone very far. By then King John had driven Hugh de Lacy out of Carrickfergus, and he held Maud and her son there for a short time before moving them back to England. After a short spell in Windsor Castle, the King moved Maud and William to the dungeons of Corfe Castle, where they are said to have starved to death.

## **The Priest at St Nicholas's Church**

The priest who appears in the story is made up, but such a person would definitely have existed.

## **King John**

King John (1166-1216) never expected to be King. He was the youngest son of Henry II of England and his wife, the beautiful French duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine. Henry and Eleanor had many children—so many that John never expected to have any land at all. He was given the nickname 'John Lackland'.

In the story the children hear over and over how evil John was. This is true. John was not a nice man. After spending so many years being mocked for having nothing, when John saw an opportunity for land and power he took it. It is very likely that he had his own nephew murdered, in order to prevent him from becoming King. Films and cartoons about Robin Hood usually show

Prince or King John as the enemy of the people.

Robin Hood is probably nothing more than a legend, but it is true that John made such a mess of being King that his barons (the important men) forced him to sign an agreement called Magna Carta (Latin for 'Great Charter') in 1215, just five years after King John took Carrickfergus from Hugh de Lacy. One of the reasons for the barons' anger against John was his treatment of Maud and William de Braose. That was why Nan hesitated before agreeing to change history for Maud and William—because she didn't want to risk losing Magna Carta, which is one of the most important documents in history. It limited the power of the king and gave everyone certain basic rights, such as trial by jury.

## **Simon de Montfort**

Simon (1208-1265) does not appear in the story, but Nan mentions him when she 'sees' the future for Hugh de Lacy. Simon de Montfort was a baron who believed that Magna Carta was very important. He agreed that the King should not be able to do whatever he wanted. However, King John's son, Henry III, did not like Magna Carta at all. Simon forced Henry to agree that he would rule with a parliament instead of doing his own thing. There was a war and Simon was killed—but the idea of a parliament stuck.

## **OBJECTS**

The story contains references to many objects that are held in Carrickfergus Museum today.

## **'Micah'**

As the story says, 'Micah' (not his real name!) was a Barbary ape or macaque. His skeleton was discovered near where the Museum is today. This is where the medieval friary was. We think that the ape may have been a pet in the friary, and that's why he was buried near the friars. Barbary apes are not native to the British Isles. They come from North Africa, and were brought to Spain from there (Spain and North Africa are very close together). Carrickfergus traded with Spain in medieval times and perhaps that is how the Barbary ape found himself in Carrickfergus!

## The Mayor's Seal

In medieval times letters were usually closed or sealed with a blob of wax. Important people often stamped the wax with their own seal—an object with a carving on it that identified them, such as their name or coat of arms. That meant the person who got the letter knew who it was from, and (just as important!) that no-one else had opened their letter to read it or change what it said. Once the stamped wax is broken it cannot be fixed. The Mayor's Seal belonged to a Brother Bernard of Aquila or Aquileia in Italy

—but how did it end up in Carrickfergus? We don't know for sure. It is in the Museum today.

## The 'Spell' Book

This is a complete invention, sad to say. However, it is true that monasteries created beautiful illustrated books. One of the most famous examples is the Book of Kells.

## Chain Mail

Chain mail was made of tiny linked rings of metal. This was worn by soldiers because it gave more protection than a leather vest. It has been used by soldiers for more than a thousand years. The Bayeux Tapestry shows Norman soldiers wearing chain mail. It also shows them taking chain mail off dead soldiers! This is because chain mail was very expensive. There is a scrap of chain mail in Carrickfergus Museum today, but it comes from a later period.

## Dog Bones

Dogs were killed for fur and possibly for food in medieval Carrickfergus. We know this because the dog bones you see in the Museum have knife marks on them. People did not usually eat dogs except as a last resort. One example might be if a town was surrounded by an enemy and no food could get in. People starved and would eat whatever they could, including horses, dogs, and rats.

We hope that you have enjoyed the story and have learned something of Carrickfergus's fascinating history. Don't forget to do our survey and let us know what you think!

**HAVE YOUR SAY**

TELL US WHAT YOU THOUGHT OF  
*MICAH AND THE MAYOR'S SEAL*



**DO THE SURVEY!**



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# Micah and the Mayor's Seal

— A time travelling adventure —



by Carrickfergus Museum



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