

SID FLEISCHMAN

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THE WHIPPING BOY

THE PRINCE'S PLAN

ON A NIGHT when the moon gazed down like an evil eye, the young prince appeared in Jemmy's chamber.

"Boy! Tumble out of bed. I need a manservant."

Jemmy saw that the prince was wearing a black cloak and carrying a wicker basket the size of a sea chest. "What you up to now? Walkin' in your royal sleep, are you?"

"I'm running away."

The whipping boy sat bolt upright. Hardly a day passed that he didn't make one plan or another to run off—but a prince? What horrible new mischief was this? "You can't hop off like you was common folks. What's bitin' you?"

Said the prince, "I'm bored."

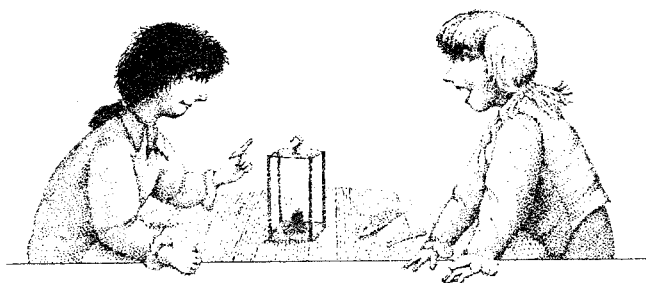
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THE
WHIPPING BOY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER SÍS



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CHAPTER 1

In which we observe a hair-raising event

The young prince was known here and there (and just about everywhere else) as Prince Brat. Not even black cats would cross his path.

One night the king was holding a grand feast. Sneaking around behind the lords and ladies, Prince Brat tied their powdered wigs to the backs of their oak chairs.

Then he hid behind a footman to wait.

When the guests stood up to toast the king, their wigs came flying off.

The lords clasped their bare heads as if they'd been scalped. The ladies shrieked.

Prince Brat (he was never called that to his face, of course) tried to keep from laughing. He clapped both hands over his mouth. But out it ripped, a cackle of *hah-hahs* and *haw-haws* and *hee-hee-hees*.

The king spied him and he looked mad enough to spit ink. He gave a furious shout.

"Fetch the whipping boy!"

Prince Brat knew that he had nothing to fear. He had never been spanked in his life. He was a prince! And it was forbidden to spank, thrash, cuff, smack, or whip a prince.

A common boy was kept in the castle to be punished in his place.

"Fetch the whipping boy!"

The king's command traveled like an echo from guard to guard up the stone stairway to a small chamber in the drafty north tower.

An orphan boy named Jemmy, the son of a rat-catcher, roused from his sleep. He'd been dreaming happily of his ragged but carefree life before he'd been plucked from the streets and sewers of the city to serve as royal whipping boy.

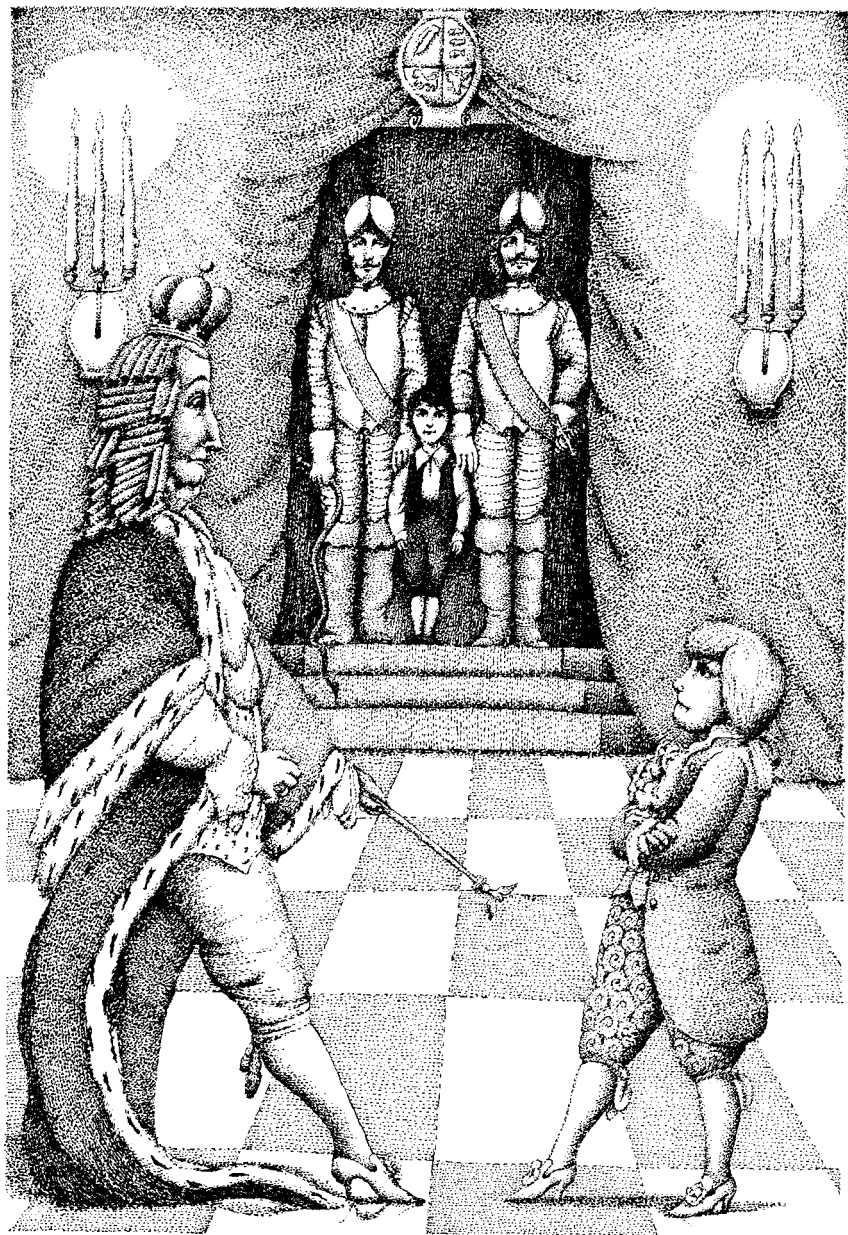
A guard shook him fully awake. "On your feet, me boy."

Jemmy's eyes blazed up. "Ain't I already been whipped twice today? Gaw! What's the prince done now?"

"Let's not keep the great folks waitin', lad."

In the main hall, the king said, "Twenty whacks!"

Defiantly biting back every yelp and cry, the whipping boy received the twenty whacks. Then



the king turned to the prince. "And let that be a lesson to you!"

"Yes, Papa." The prince lowered his head so as to appear humbled and contrite. But all the while he was feeling a growing exasperation with his whipping boy.

In the tower chamber, the prince fixed him with a scowl. "You're the worst whipping boy I ever had! How come you never bawl?"

"Dunno," said Jemmy with a shrug.

"A whipping boy is supposed to yowl like a stuck pig! We dress you up fancy and feed you royal, don't we? It's no fun if you don't bawl!"

Jemmy shrugged again. He was determined never to spring a tear for the prince to gloat over.

"Yelp and bellow next time. Hear? Or I'll tell Papa to give you back your rags and kick you back into the streets."

Jemmy's spirits soared. Much obliged, Your Royal Awfulness! he thought. I'll take me rags, and I'll be gone in the half-blink of an eye.



CHAPTER 2

*Wherein the prince
cannot write his name*

Jemmy could count on a thrashing first thing in the morning. Sure and certain, he thought, as he pulled on his fine velvet breeches and silk stockings. The prince wouldn't know his lessons, the royal tutor was quick as a flyswatter with his willow switch—and Jemmy would be back in rags.

"Take a last look at me, Pa, rest your bones," he muttered to himself. "Did you ever think I'd be holed up in the king's own castle and all rigged up in duds would shame a peacock? Reckon I'll fetch a pair of sharp-toothed ferrets and go to rat-catchin', same as you. Same as you, Pa."

The tutor, Master Peckwit, was a round-faced man with fat cheeks. He pointed his switch at the prince.

"You fiddle-faddled scholar!" he bellowed. "One day you'll be king! And you still don't know the alphabet from pig tracks!"

The prince snapped his fingers. "I can always get someone to read for me."

"You can't so much as write your name!"

"Pish-posh. I can always get someone to write my name for me."

The tutor's cheeks, swelling with anger, almost unhorsed the small spectacles saddling his nose. "It would be easier to educate a boiled cabbage! Prepare to be punished, Your Lordship!"

"Ten whacks at least," said the prince. "And good and hard, if you please."

Jemmy, who was obliged to be close at hand for the daily lessons, reckoned that freedom was now close at hand. The prince threw him a smirking glance as Master Peckwit raised the switch and beat the whipping boy like a carpet.

Jemmy didn't bawl. He didn't yelp or bellow. Ten whacks, and not a sound escaped his lips.

"You contrary rascal!" the prince exploded. "I'm on to you, Jemmy-From-The-Streets. It's pure spite that you won't howl! Think you can cross me and get away with it? Ha! Never and nohow!"

Gaw! thought Jemmy. He's going back on his word!

"And don't try to run away. I'll have you tracked down till your tongue hangs out like a red flag!"

And so it went for more than a year. The prince learned nothing. The whipping boy learned to read, write, and do sums.



CHAPTER 3

The runaways

On a night when the moon gazed down like an evil eye, the young prince appeared in Jemmy's chamber.

"Boy! Tumble out of bed. I need a manservant."

Jemmy saw that the prince was wearing a black cloak and carrying a wicker basket the size of a sea chest. "What you up to now? Walkin' in your royal sleep, are you?"

"I'm running away."

The whipping boy sat bolt upright. Hardly a day passed that he didn't make one plan or another to run off—but a prince? What horrible new mischief was this? "You can't hop off like you was common folks. What's bitin' you?"

Said the prince, "I'm bored."

"With dumping bullfrogs in the moat so no one got a wink o' sleep?"

"Boring."

"And didn't you laugh fit to kill when the knights slipped off their horses and clattered to the ground? You'd hog-greased the saddles."

The prince folded his arms. "Boring."

"And don't you get me thrashed so that this hide o' mine feels like the devil run me over with spikes in his shoes?"

"Let's be off!"

Why me? Jemmy thought. Can't you find a friend to run off with? But no—not you, Prince Brat. You've got no friends. That's why me.

Jemmy pointed to the window. "It's night out," he protested.

"The best time," replied the prince.

"But ain't you afraid o' the dark? Everyone knows that! You won't even sleep without a lit candle."

"Lies! Anyway, the moon's up, good and bright. Come on."

Jemmy stared at him with dreadful astonishment. "The king'll have a gory-eyed fit!"

"Positively."

"He'll hunt us down. You'll get off light as a feather, but I'll be lucky if they don't whip me to the bone. More likely I'll be hung from the gallows. Scragged for sure!"

"Your lookout," said the prince with a dry grin. "Carry the basket, Jemmy-From-The-Streets, and follow me!"



CHAPTER 4

Containing hands in the fog

The night moon had lit their way like a lantern.

But by dawn the runaways, double-mounted on a horse from the castle stable, were hopelessly lost. A thick fog had swirled in, they'd strayed from the road, and trees had closed in on them.

"Forests is creepy things," said Jemmy, hanging on to the basket as best he could. "Gimme cobbled streets anytime."

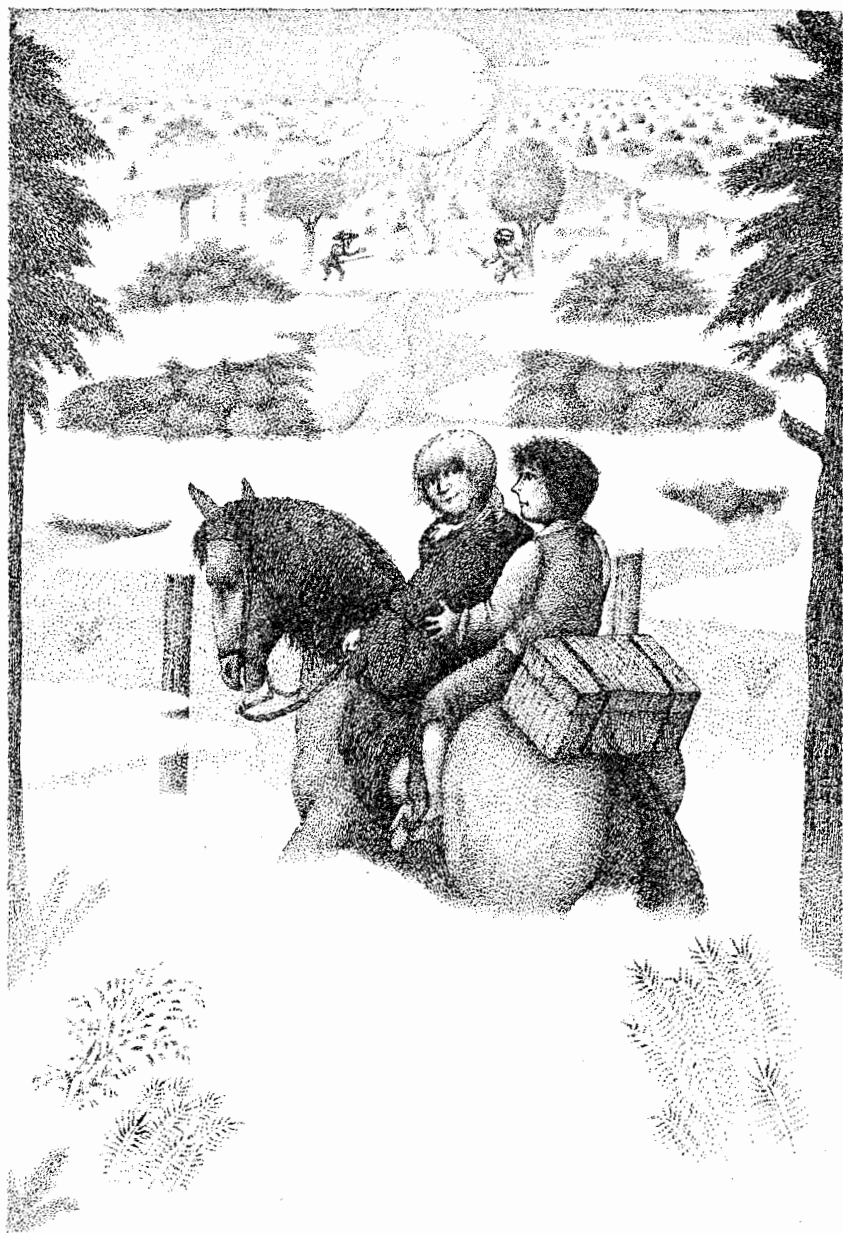
A low branch almost swept them off the saddle.

"Boy," said the prince, "get down and lead this dumb-headed beast."

"Lead it? In this fog? I'd need two hands and a lantern to find me own nose."

But Jemmy slipped off the saddle. A plan had been tumbling about in his head. Here's your chance, Jemmy, he told himself. Slip away in the fog. Run for it! No more whippings for you, not if you can't be found. The great sewers, Jemmy, that's the place to hide!

"What's keeping you?" asked the prince. "Grab the halter."



"I'm thinkin'."

Leaves crackled under Jemmy's feet as he began to back off. His mind was made up. Once the fog cleared, he'd find the river. Hadn't his pa taught him his way through the maze of mighty brick sewers! That's where they'd caught the fiercest rats to sell by the cageful. The dog-and-rat pits paid fancy prices for the best fighters, and that meant sewer rats. Who'd think to look for Jemmy under the city?

Jemmy took another crackling step backward—and froze. A sudden yellow glow floated in the fog. The prince burst into squawks and bellows.

"Who's there? Let go! Take your hands off me, you insolent rascal!"

There came a rough, booming reply. "Well, what we got here?" The glowing lantern swayed. "A noisy brat on a fine beast of a horse."

Jemmy edged closer. A cutthroat! he thought.

Like a snake striking, a ghostly hand darted through the fog and clutched his arm. A second cutthroat! Jemmy looked up and barely made out a long, bony face with hollow cheeks and a nose like a meat cleaver.

"I got another, Billy!" cackled the second man, shoving Jemmy forward.



CHAPTER 5

Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater

Billy pulled Prince Brat from the saddle and threw him into Jemmy.

Raising the lantern, the man held it close enough that Jemmy could feel the heat of the flame. Billy was a big man, he saw, big and raw as a skinned ox. And he smelled like a ton of garlic.

"Not much of a catch—two sparrows," said Billy. "But ain't they trimmed up in fancy rags, Cutwater?"

"Ain't they!" echoed the rattleboned man.

"Got any gold in your pockets, lads?"

"No business of yours!" snapped the prince.

"Ah, but so help me, it *is* my business," Billy said with a thunderclap of laughter. "Don't you know who I am?"

"A clod and a ruffian," declared the prince.

"Worse'n that!" corrected the big man. "Ain't you never heard of Hold-Your-Nose Billy?"

"Famous, he is," put in Cutwater. "Put to song, is Billy."

Jemmy thought he remembered. Hadn't he heard ballad sellers fling that name about the streets? The exploits of Hold-Your-Nose Something-or-other in verses by the yard? "The highwayman, are you?"

"The same."

"The murderer?"

"Only in the line of duty," Hold-Your-Nose Billy chuckled. "So you won't mind if we take your horse and empty your pockets."

"Not a copper between us," said Jemmy. A prince didn't carry money, for he had no use for it, and Jemmy's accounts were kept on the books.

"What's in the basket?" piped up Cutwater.

"Hands off, villain!" snapped Prince Brat. "Don't you know who *I* am?"

Jemmy gave the prince a sudden jab of his elbow to keep his mouth shut. Not a word!

But the heir to the throne raised himself to his full height. "Bow to your prince!"

Fog swirled around the lantern. "Bow to what?" asked Cutwater.

"I am Prince Horace!"

"And I'm the Grand Turnip of China!" Cutwater snickered.

"Dim-witted villains!" shouted the prince. "I command you to turn us loose. Or Papa will hang

the pair of you in chains!"

Hold your trap! Jemmy thought. Don't you have a thimbleful of brains? A prince would make a fine catch for these rogues. "Me friend's muddle-headed," he declared. "His paw's nothing but a rat-catcher. But don't he put on airs, though!"

"Got enough lip for two sets of teeth," chortled the big highwayman. "Cutwater, take the lantern and fetch the horse."

"What do you reckon's in the basket, Billy?"

"Plenty of time to find out."

The lantern floated off. The evil-smelling Billy clutched each boy hard by the ear.

"Stir your legs. Walk! And don't let me catch you on our turf again. Do I make myself clear?"

"Clear as window glass," said Jemmy with a sigh of relief. "If you'd be kind enough to point us toward the river, I'd be ever so much obliged."

"Billy!" came a shout from Cutwater. "They ain't just common sparrows. Have a look at this saddle."

Hold-Your-Nose Billy hung on to the boys' ears. At the horse's side, Cutwater was holding the lantern close to the saddle.

"Skin me alive!" declared the big man in awe. "That's the king's own crest."

"We stole it, horse and saddle!" Jemmy put in desperately.

"Bosh!" retorted Prince Brat scornfully. "Didn't I tell you who I was? Bow low, you fools, and be off!"

But the two men neither bowed nor fled. Hold-Your-Nose Billy threw a bushy-eyed glance at his fellow outlaw.

"Cutwater, what do you reckon a genuine prince on the hoof is worth?"

"His weight in gold at least, Billy."



CHAPTER 6

In which the plot thickens

Wisps of fog clung like tattered rags to the trees, and then the forest cleared. But so thick were the pines that the morning sun barely touched the ground.

Hold-Your-Nose Billy pushed aside a low branch, revealing a rickety timbered hut with a moldy thatched roof.

"There's our castle, Your Young Majesty," he said, chuckling. "Accept our hospitality! I hope you

won't mind sleeping on the floor."

The floor was hard-packed earth. Braided garlic bulbs hung like knotted ropes from the rafters.

"I'm hungry," announced Prince Brat.

"And feast you will," said Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "Cutwater, serve 'em up our finest bread and herring."

Jemmy had made many a meal on bread and herring, when he was in luck, and felt hungry enough to ask for seconds.

Prince Brat bared his teeth. "I'd sooner eat mud!" He reached for the wicker basket, but Cutwater snatched it back.

"What we got here?" muttered the bone-thin man, and threw back the lid. "Roll your eyes at this, Billy! Meat pies, looks like, and fruit tarts—and a brace of roast pheasant! We'll eat like kings!"

"Hands off—that's mine!" the prince cried out.

"Was yours," yapped Cutwater.

Lawks! Jemmy thought. Hadn't the prince run away in royal style! He had even brought a China plate, a silver spoon, and a silver knife for himself.

Digging around deeper in the basket, the garlicky outlaw called out to Cutwater. "Bring the lantern closer! What's this?"

In the gloom of the hut, the big man lifted out a golden crown.



"That's mine!" bleated the prince.

"*Was yours,*" corrected Hold-Your-Nose Billy, placing the crown on the tangled red nest of his hair.

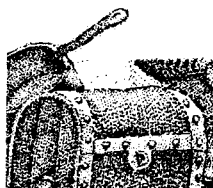
"Prince Hold-Your-Nose Billy!" Cutwater burst out joyously. He began to scratch himself as if his shirt were crawling with fleas, which, Jemmy thought, it probably was. "We're dog rich!"

"That crown? A trifle," scoffed Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "We can be richer 'n dog rich."

The empty-headed prince! Jemmy thought. Why had he brought along his crown? To cock it on his head and expect vagabonds and cutthroats to fall to their knees?

The big, raw-faced outlaw grabbed Prince Brat off the ground and took the heft of him as if he were weighing a sack of potatoes.

"Fifty-five pounds, by my reckoning," he said. "We'll write the king a command, Cutwater. Fifty-five pounds of gold coin in trade for his royal tadpole."



CHAPTER 7

Being an account of a great mix-up

Cutwater rummaged around in a black oak chest of stolen goods. Handkerchiefs flew out like soiled white doves, worn shoes, ladies' combs, a cow-bell—a junk heap. They've had lean pickings, this raggedy pair of highwaymen, Jemmy thought. And maybe not as smart and clever as the song sellers made out.

"Here's a scrap of paper, Billy," said Cutwater, finding it in the pocket of a stolen coat. "But how are we going to do the scribblement? We can't write."

"I've seen it done. Sharpen us a hawk's feather, Cutwater."

"I'm hungry," complained the prince. "I'll have a veal pie, sir!"

Hold-Your-Nose Billy ignored him. He poked around for a beet root and squeezed out the juice with his bare hand. It dripped like blood onto a China plate. "There's ink for you, Prince. Take the hawk's feather and scratch out our message."

Prince Brat folded his arms. "I don't take orders from curs and villains."

"Think of your pa," said Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "He'll be ever so much obliged to know you're safe and hearty."

"I told you I'm hungry!"

"You won't eat a bean till you do us the document."

"But I can't write!" blurted out Prince Brat.

"And crows can't fly!" erupted the big outlaw with a blast of garlicky breath. "You're a prince! Kings and such-like are learned to write and read soon as they tumble out of the cradle. Don't think you can pull the wool over our eyes. Hop to it!"

"But I can't so much as scratch my own name!"

Jemmy shot a calculating glance at Prince Brat. His pesky hide hardly seemed worth saving, but a scheme had leaped into his head. He might be able to trick these mangy outlaws into letting the prince go. And Jemmy would be rid of Prince Brat once and for all.

"Give me the hawk's quill. I'll write the words," he announced.

"That's right," Prince Brat chimed in. "My whipping boy knows his letters. Fall to, Jemmy-From-The-Streets."

"Hold on," said Hold-Your-Nose Billy, his sharp gaze flicking from one boy to the other. "This ignorant whipping boy knows his letters—and the royal prince can't sign his own name. Something's amiss here."

"What you thinking, Billy?" asked Cutwater.

"I'm thinking these lads have mixed themselves up to flummox us."

Jemmy lifted his chin arrogantly and tried to look as princelike as possible. "Nonsense! I'm a mere whipping boy."

The big man rumbled up a laugh, showing a mouthful of yellow teeth. "You take us for bedrock numskulls? Certain as eggs is eggs—you're the prince. The genuine, straight-up-and-down Royal Highness!"

Prince Brat's face turned red as hot iron. "That ratty street orphan?" he bellowed. "That lowborn—"

"Silence!" Jemmy commanded. "Can't you see the game is up? They're on to us. Hold your tongue!"

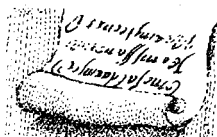
"But *I'm* His Royal Highness!"

Gaw! Jemmy thought. This haughty prince didn't have the sense of a gnat. Couldn't he see a plan afoot? "Save your breath!" snapped Jemmy. "Stop giving yourself airs, you witless servant boy!"

"Servant boy! Dare you address me—"

"Bag your head," snapped Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "Give him a kick, Cutwater, if we hear another peep out of him."

"Hand me the hawk's feather," said Jemmy. "I'll write my papa, the king."



CHAPTER 8

The ransom note

Hold-Your-Nose Billy tilted the princely crown on his head. "What have you writ down so far?"

Jemmy glanced up from the sheet of paper. "'To the King's Most Sacred Majesty. Dear Papa.'"

"Aye. That sounds proper respectful. What else?"

"'Our captors are loyal subjects, but scoundrels by trade. Don't cross them.'"

"Make that a mite stronger," said the outlaw, beginning to pace. "Tell him we're shameful mean, and rough as a sackful of nails. Warn him we fear no gallows!"

Jemmy dipped the quill in beet juice and contin-

ued scribbling. "I'll tell him you've got reserved seats in Hell."

"Aye! That's the ticket!"

Cutwater had begun gnawing away at a roasted pheasant, and his cheek swelled out as if he had a monstrous toothache. "What about the king's soldiers, Billy? Now the fog's lifted, they'll be followin' the lad like a trail of ants. Puts my spine a-shiver."

"Faw!" exclaimed Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "Even rabbits get muxxed up and lost in this forest. We're well hid, Cutwater."

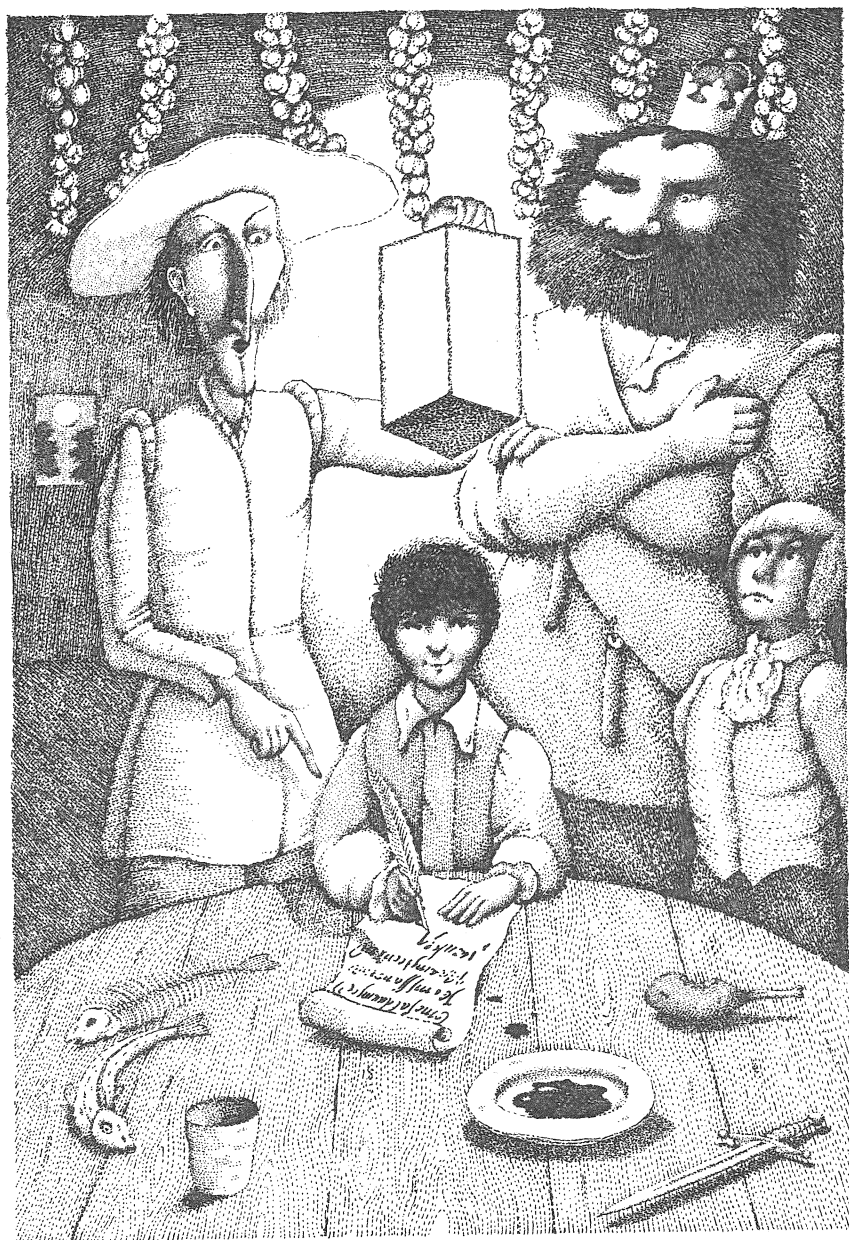
"I'll warn Papa," Jemmy offered generously, "that if you spy out a single uniform, you'll crack my neck like a chicken's."

Prince Brat sat sullenly on a pile of moldy bed straw. He glared icily at the whipping boy who had seized his royal title.

"And don't forget the reward, Billy," said Cutwater. "We want the prince's weight in gold bangers, right?"

"Tell the king that," directed Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "In big letters. Now let me reckon out a safe spot to deliver the loot."

Jemmy dipped the quill, but then paused. Gaw, he thought, it's not enough to choose my words as



if I were a prince. Show some high and mighty, Jemmy. *Think* like a prince.

"Dimwits!" he flared up. "Catchpenny rogues! I will not be exchanged for such a trifle. My mere weight? A paltry treasure you could carry on a shoulder? How dare you insult me!"

Hold-Your-Nose Billy's red eyebrows shot up in bewildered surprise. "Insult you? A trifle?"

"A prince is worth a prince's ransom!"

The eyebrows lowered as quickly as they had risen. "No offense meant, lad. How would you calculate a proper ransom?"

"A wagonload of gold at the very least. And jewels mixed in."

"As I'm alive! A wagonload?"

Cutwater gulped down the wad of fowl in his mouth. "We did forget about jewels, Billy."

"A wagonload it is, then!" exclaimed the hairy outlaw.

Prince Brat's mouth fell wide open at the whipping boy's nervy mischief.

Hold-Your-Nose Billy stood over Jemmy's shoulder and watched the words being scratched out. Finally, he said, "Have you made your sign yet?"

"About to," replied Jemmy.

With as much flourish as he could manage, he wrote:

Your Obedient Son

Prince Horace



CHAPTER 9

*Revealing Jemmy's plan
to trick the villains*

Hold-Your-Nose Billy popped a clove of garlic into his mouth, ground it between his yellow teeth, and helped himself to a veal pie. "Nothing like garlic to clear the head and fend off the plague. Cutwater, give the lads a ration of breakfast."

The scrawny outlaw sliced off two thick pieces of coarse bread. He draped a salt herring across each slice. "Eat hearty, little fellers."

"This smelly stuff!" Prince Brat glared at the bread and herring. "It's not fit for flies!"

"Why, we eat it regular, worms and all," said Cutwater, picking the bones of the pheasant.

"I'll starve first!"

"Suit yourself," Cutwater snickered. "This is the first time we've feasted off the king's own table, and there's hardly enough for me and Billy."

Jemmy sat on the bed straw beside the prince and contemplated his breakfast. He examined the bread closely, hunting for varmint. The prince, he knew, had never been starved enough to pick out wildlife from his grub.

"Eat," he whispered. "I can't find any crawly things in it."

"The bread's stale," grumbled the prince.

"Stale enough to patch a roof, but I've scoffed down worse."

The prince began to nibble around the edges. Hold-Your-Nose Billy glanced over and grinned. "Take a chaw of garlic, whipping boy. It'll improve the taste considerable."

Cutwater wiped his thin, greasy lips with the back of his hand. "Billy, how do we know the prince ain't laid a trap for us in that message? He could have said one thing and wrote another. Where'll we find someone to read it off to us?"

Jemmy lifted his chin to a regal height. "You doubt the word and honor of your prince? Insolent

oafs! Curs! I'll have you horsewhipped."

Cutwater yanked Jemmy to his feet. "Who you calling them names? I'll flog your hide pink as a salmon!"

Hold-Your-Nose Billy pushed him aside. "Keep your wits. It's worse'n common murder to lay hands on a prince. No need to break any more of the king's laws than we have to. If it comes to a flogging, there's his whipping boy."

The prince's eyes widened and his face blanched white. The prospect of taking a whipping himself had never occurred to him. "But, sir, it wasn't me who called you names!"

Cutwater gave a sudden cackle. "'Sir,' is it now? That's more like it. But tell the prince here to keep a civil tongue in his head."

Prince Brat shot Jemmy a poisonous look.

The garlicky outlaw was leaning closer to Jemmy. "See here, Prince, it's not that we doubt your word and honesty. Not a bit! But all the same—let's hear you read off the message."

Jemmy turned away from the man's breath and began to read.

"No, no, lad. Let's have it from bottom to top. Read it *backwards*. I do hope for your whipping

boy's sake you don't stumble and trip as if the real words ain't on paper."

Jemmy shrugged. "It says . . . 'Son Obedient Your.'"

"'Your Obedient Son,'" said Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "Keep at it."

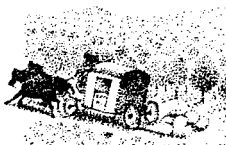
"'Jewels and gold of cart full a of ransom a demand they.'"

"'They demand a ransom . . . of a cart . . . a full . . .'" The outlaw himself began to stumble and trip over the words. "Aye, that's the ticket."

Jemmy read the message through backward. And then a second time before the hairy outlaw was satisfied.

"Now then," he said. "All we got to do is get the message to the king without getting nabbed in the act."

"Simple," declared Jemmy. "Send it to the castle in the hands of my whipping boy."



CHAPTER 10

*In which Prince Brat
lives up to his name*

Hold-Your-Nose Billy clapped a leery eye on the rat-catcher's son. "Prince, do you take me for a precious fool? Send your whipping boy! To blab out where we're hid, eh? The king will come chopping down every tree if he finds out we're nested in the forest."

Jemmy assumed a princely air of indifference. "Then tote the message yourself. It's no skin off my ear if you never get back alive." He filled his mouth with bread and herring. "I declare, this is tasty."

Prince Brat scoffed under his breath. He hadn't shown a moment's interest in Jemmy's scheme to free him. Their eyes met and clashed. Gaw, Jemmy thought, he's fuming like a stovepipe at being unprincied. He'll have me charged with treason.

"I'll stand guard over the prince," said Cutwater. "You're the one to go, Billy."

"Me?" hooted the big man. "Me, that they sing songs about, and pinch their noses? At the first

whiff of garlic, it would be off with the head of Hold-Your-Nose Billy."

"Unlikely," corrected Jemmy. "True, Papa would have you tortured a mite, to loosen your tongue. But he wouldn't have your head—not Papa. He favors slow boiling in oil."

The effect on the outlaws was instant. Hold-Your-Nose Billy's jaw dropped. Sweat broke out across his face like raindrops. "Cutwater, you're skin and bones. You could slip in and out of a key-hole. I'll guard the prince."

"Faw, Billy! I don't fancy being boiled to a crisp."

The hairy outlaw gave a loud and decisive snort. "We'll send the whipping boy."

Jemmy held back a sigh of relief. "And my crown with him."

"Your golden crown?" blurted out Cutwater. "Not by half, we won't!"

Jemmy made the pretense of blazing up with impatience. "Simpleton! I swear there are not two more ignorant, cloven-footed blockheads in the land."

Prince Brat shot Jemmy a quick, thunder-scowl look. "Stop it!" he whispered harshly. "Don't give them the rough side of your tongue. You'll get me whipped!"

Jemmy ignored him. "Donkeys!" he continued.

"Before the day is out, dozens of villains will deliver up false claims. Only my crown will convince Papa that you are the genuine villain."

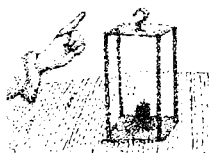
Hold-Your-Nose Billy began to pace, munching garlic cloves as if they were grapes. Finally, he tipped the crown off his head and flung it to Prince Brat.

"Whipping boy! Deliver it to the king! If he doesn't follow our instructions to the letter—"

"The prince'll be done for!" Cutwater snickered, drawing a knifelike finger across his throat.

"And blab all you want," added the other outlaw. "We'll pack the prince off to a different hiding place."

By its smelly tail, Prince Brat tossed aside the uneaten herring. Without showing the slightest concern for Jemmy's fate, he flicked a glance at the two outlaws. "I'll deliver nothing!" he exploded. "I won't go back to the castle!"



CHAPTER 11

Containing a great deal of shouting

Jemmy was struck dumb. Did Prince Brat have sand for brains? Gaw! Didn't he realize he could snatch up his crown and go free?

"It doesn't please me to take orders from common rascals," Prince Brat said coldly.

"It would please me to shake the teeth out of your confounded face!" replied Hold-Your-Nose Billy. "You may live in the castle, but you're only a whipping boy. Do as we say!"

"I'll do what I choose. And I choose not to run your errands."

Jemmy leaped up and gave the prince an angry flash of eyes. "Jemmy-From-The-Streets gets these stubborn fits," he said. "Contrary as a mule! Let me have a word with him."

"I'll whip the mulishness out of him!" exclaimed Cutwater, lurching forward.

Prince Brat dodged out of his grasp, and a sour smile crossed his face. "I'll tear up your vile mes-

sage the moment I'm gone. And keep the crown for myself!"

Hold-Your-Nose Billy caught Cutwater's upraised arm. "Hold off! There's something in what he says."

"You think he's angling for a share of the reward, Billy?"

"Likely is."

"The greedy little snipe," Cutwater bleated. "How much do you reckon we can spare?"

"This calls for private words. Let's parley. Follow me."

The moment the outlaws ducked out of the hut, Jemmy turned on his companion.

"Prince Blockhead! You should wear your crown to fend off woodpeckers."

"Imposter! How dare you insult me!"

"You're enough to give the devil himself fits! Haven't I so muddled their brains they want to turn you loose? And you reward me with a royal squawk!"

The prince had crossed to the wicker basket and snatched up an uneaten apple tart. He gobbled it down.

"I'll return to the castle when I'm ready. When I choose. And not a moment before!"



Jemmy's eyes narrowed sharply. He couldn't fathom what was stirring in the prince's mind. Could he, for once, be concerned for someone other than himself? "It's not *me* you think you're protecting, is it?"

"You?"

"Knowing they'll knock the daylights out of me soon as they find out I tricked them?"

The prince shrugged. "You're quick, boy. You'll think of something."

"I've already thought it. Once you're up and gone, I'll slip away. Out in the forest, I'll be harder to catch than a flea."

"But I'm not leaving," said the prince firmly.

"Gaw! But why? Is it your pa you're afraid of? Is that why you won't go back?"

The prince scoffed. "He won't miss me."

"'Course he will!"

"Let him wait. And mind your own affairs, whipping boy."

"It *is* my affair. Do you reckon you're out on a lark? With murderers outside?"

The murderers shuffled back into the hut. Hold-Your-Nose Billy fixed Prince Brat with a hairy smile. "Never let it be sung about that me and Cut-water ain't generous to a fault, lad. We'll share out

with you a bucketful of gold and jewels!"

"No," replied the prince flatly, as if he'd been offered a bucketful of coal.

"Don't run me out of patience!" warned the huge outlaw.

The prince remained defiant. "I'm staying."

Hold-Your-Nose Billy ripped off his leather belt. "I'll lash a bit of sense into your head!"

Jemmy saw that Prince Brat wasn't going to shift his ground. "You don't need my whipping boy to get into the castle. There's a better way."

"Do say!" exclaimed Cutwater doubtfully.

"My horse," remarked Jemmy. "There's your messenger, sirs!"

Hold-Your-Nose Billy gave a snort. "Faw! That fine beast? We've been afoot since our skin-poor horse turned heels up. We need a mount in our line of work."

"Nitwits!" exclaimed Jemmy, as if his own princely patience were at an end. "With rings on your fingers and gold in your pockets, you can take to the roads like gentlemen. You'll be traveling about in fine coaches. But first you've got to lay hands on the treasure."

Cutwater made a sound through his nose like a pitchpipe. "With that horse outside?"

"One of the king's own. A horse can always find his way home, can't it? That fine beast will make for the castle stables, note and crown. No questions asked!"



CHAPTER 12

Wherein Jemmy is betrayed

With a gleeful chuckle, Hold-Your-Nose Billy dropped the ransom note and the golden crown into a dirty linen sack.

When he'd knotted the sack to the saddle, he turned to Cutwater. "Soon as I'm within a squint of the castle, I'll turn the beast loose. Guard our prisoners!"

"I'll tie 'em up," Cutwater wheezed, giving his heavy partner a foot up into the royal saddle.

From the doorway, Jemmy watched Hold-Your-Nose Billy vanish into the tangled maze of tree limbs and brambles. Then he glanced about at the bare furnishings, the hanging ropes of garlic bulbs, the bed straw, the chest of stolen goods. He'd need some trickery to escape.

The prince fixed him with a smirk. "You're clever, all right. But a common dunce all the same."

"Gaw."

"A cartload of gold and jewels! The ruffians would have been content with a mere jingle of coins."

Jemmy's eyes swung back to the bed straw.

There was his escape!

"A cartload o' moonshine," he said. "It'll never be forked over."

"I'm the prince! Papa will have to pay it!"

Jemmy began burrowing like a barn mouse under the moldy straw. "Not a bit, he won't."

"Papa will foam at the mouth!"

Jemmy was disappearing, limb by limb, under the straw. "Think again. It'll be clear as water the note's a scambly-witted fake."

"Papa'll keep me under lock and key after this!"

"It won't fool a soul, that note. How could you have written it? Everyone in the castle knows you can't so much as sign your own name."

"I never needed to before!"

"It's me that's in the soup. I'll catch it for your mischief in running away. And I'll catch it again when the tutor claps eyes on the handwriting. He'll

say, 'Jemmy! This is Jemmy trying to line his own pockets.' Your pa'll scrag me with his bare hands! So I'll be obliged if you'd help me nip out o' here."

"I promise you my protection," announced the prince with sudden generosity.

"Jemmy protects himself," said the whipping boy. "When that plaguy Cutwater comes to tie us up, tell him I slipped out the door. Soon as he bounces off after me, I'll make a break for it."

"You'd leave me alone with cutthroats?"

Before Jemmy could answer, he heard the sharp squeak of the door. He held his breath.

"Lads, you won't mind if I truss you up like a Christmas goose."

There came a sudden pause, and Jemmy's heart began to thump.

"Where's the prince?" Cutwater snapped.

Jemmy heard Prince Brat answer without the slightest hesitation.

"Him? Over there. Under the straw."



CHAPTER 13

The chase

A thoroughbred of the streets, Jemmy acted on instinct. He didn't wait to be nabbed.

In a burst of straw, he shot up and made a leap for the door. Cutwater, startled, lost the merest breath of time. But it was enough.

Jemmy flung open the door and ran.

His long arms outstretched, Cutwater lurched after him.

And Prince Brat followed.

Jemmy vanished into the wild green tangle. He jumped a great fallen log, ducked under low-hanging branches, and, like a rabbit, made sudden changes in direction.

He could hear Cutwater close behind, breathing like a bellows. "I'm on your tracks! Stop before I get aggravated with you, Prince!"

Jemmy covered the ground at full tilt. Leaves crackled under his feet. Gaw! he thought. He might as well be leading a confounded parade, for all the noise he was making.

He reached a small clearing—and half jumped out of his skin. Sniffing near the skeleton-white roots of an upturned hollow tree stood a wild beast.

A bear!

Jemmy would have preferred Cutwater's own company. But before he could find his legs, the hairy beast took flight.

It went crashing away to Jemmy's left.

Jemmy got his breath back. Then, almost without thinking, he dove into the hollow of the dead tree and snugged himself in.

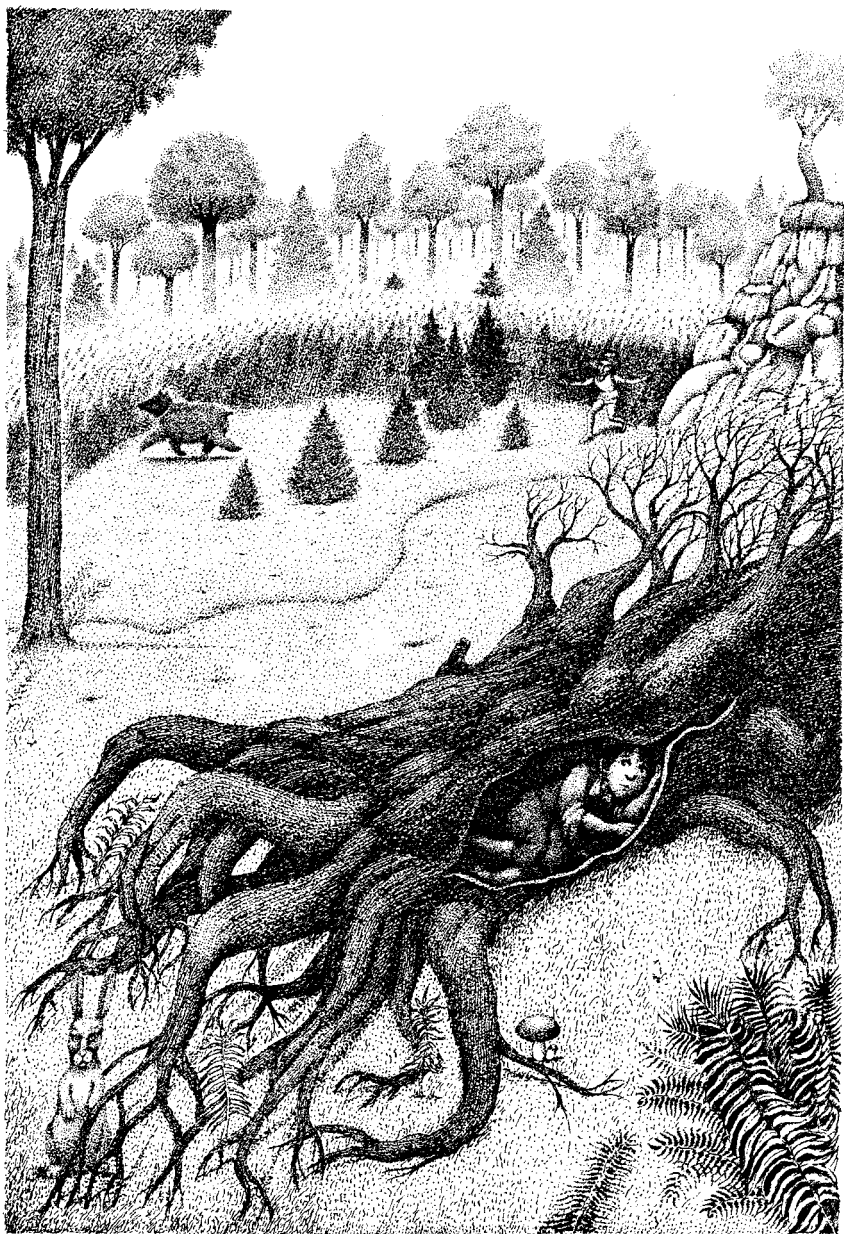
Moments later he caught the merest glimpse of Cutwater cupping an ear. Turning on his heels, the rattleboned man gave a shout. "Practically got you by the hind leg, pesky Prince!"

Jemmy let out a small sigh of relief. Cutwater would have a mighty surprise if he caught that bear by the hind leg.

As the sounds of the chase grew fainter, Jemmy crawled out of the hollow root. The sun was now high enough to send down smoky rays of light through the treetops. Which way was the river?

And then he saw Prince Brat, his face lobster-red from running, at the edge of the clearing.

"Unfaithful servant!" he protested, glaring hard at Jemmy.



Until this moment, Jemmy hadn't had a moment's pause for anger. But now fury shot into his eyes. Curse this blabber-tongued, hateful prince! "You betrayed me!"

"You'd have deserted me without a care!"

Jemmy bristled. "Ain't it me they think is the prince? If you hadn't pointed me out under the straw, Cutwater would have flown off to pick up my tracks. And we could have crept away dead easy. I wouldn't be running my lungs out!"

The prince pondered this for a moment. He nodded. "Then I forgive you."

Jemmy was speechless for a moment. "Forgive me! Don't trouble yourself, my good and loyal Prince. And get yourself another whipping boy."

"But I have not dismissed you from my service," said the prince calmly.

"I dismiss myself," Jemmy fired back. "I'll get where I'm going, and you can find your own way back to the castle."

"I'll go with you."

"Not likely!"

Jemmy turned to the right and beat his way back into the foliage.