

The Fair in Manor Fields

A Crow flies

High in a tree in the grounds of an old manor house a crow looks down. He sees the house but he is not interested. He sees the gardens with rows of vegetables and fruit trees and he is interested in these because among the plants he can sometimes find a dead mouse or a bird and he is ready to swoop down and pick at the remains. Today there are children working in the gardens calling to each other and sometimes laughing until they are shouted at by a man who walks up and down, occasionally cuffing a boy who has paused in his work.

The crow's feathers are ruffled by a breeze which comes up from the river. At one time the breeze would have carried a great stink but now it carried just a faint smell of rot and smoke from the chimneys of houses and workshops. The crow knew that the river often promised rich pickings. He flapped into the air and began to glide down to the river. He passed over the houses with large gardens and circled overhead in case something dead would catch his eye but again there were too many people working or lounging in the garden for the weather was fine and warm.

He flew further south and circled the market square. This was one of his favourite hunting grounds. When the market stalls had gone and dusk was falling he might find the remains of food, fish or lamb bones carelessly tossed aside. Today there was a great noise rising from the square, the calls of street sellers offering pies and peas, whelks and jellied eels, music for dancing and song, cries of showmen calling people to come and see the bearded lady or the pig with two heads, the shrieks of children on the swings and roundabouts. It was the day of the annual fair and though there would be rich pickings to be had later the crow flew on.

The nearer he came to the river the more his hunger drew him onwards. He hardly paused over the shops and alleyways. He swept over the iron road where sometimes great machines shrieked and rattled, belching black smoke and white steam. He soared over the houses and the workshops rotting by the river until he reached the river itself. His sharp eye saw immediately what he had hoped for. On the muddy bank of the river, left by the retreating tide, was a dead rat. He dropped down immediately some feet from the rat. He looked round cautiously then walked forward to begin picking at the rotting flesh.

From under an archway, which carried the iron road towards the river, two eyes watched the crow. They belonged to a boy who was also black but not a glossy black like the feathers of the crow. His was a black built by years of grime on a white skin. It was a dull grey black with smudges of coal black soot. Out of the dirt on his face his two eyes glittered. He understood the crow. He too searched the streets for what he could find. Sometimes it was something he could eat but mostly he searched for the discarded butts of cigars tossed aside by men in thick coats and top hats. He gathered these butts into his canvas bag and he sold them to the tobacco man.

The tobacco man dried the cigar ends and ground them into shreds and sold them on to those too poor for cigars. They would burn the shreds in their clay pipes and kill the pains of hunger by dragging in a moment's pleasure from the pungent smoke.

At one time the boy's mother had called him Frederick but now he was just Fred. He hardly remembered his mother and he had lived on the streets since his father had died and his mother had gone into the workhouse. Anything was better than the workhouse and he had escaped and hidden in the mean streets close to the river. The streets made you hard. You had to look out for yourself. Fred was hard.

He crawled from his night shelter under the railway arch, stiff from lying on the cold ground but that was nothing new. As he crawled out, others also appeared; Leo to begin his endless and hopeless search for the mother who had abandoned him; Richard whose parents had died leaving him on the streets where Leo had found him. Those two clung to each other, always searching for comfort and shelter. Grace and Alice were another pair. They were off to the wholesale market where they would try to buy some flowers or watercress as cheaply as they could so that they could sell them on the streets.

There was a loud roar from one of the arches. That was Joe shouting, "Get away from me you devils! Get away!" He shot out from the archway thrashing around at demons that only existed in his imagination. The children were used to Joe. He was harmless and when he was properly awake he would look out for his little gang of children, frightening others away with his loud voice and his swinging arms. But it was Fred who held this little gang together. They were his gang. He called them to him now. From his canvas bag that he used to collect the cigar butts he pulled some stale bread and hard cheese, which he distributed to the gang. They ate hungrily.

"Alright," said Fred. "You know what today is don't ya?"

Alice piped up, "Yeh! It's the Fair. We saw them setting up yesterday. Me and Grace are going down Coventry Garden to get some flowers and watercress."

Leo and Richard jumped up and started practicing a dance routine so that they could dance for the crowds and beg a penny or two.

Fred sneered at their efforts, "Who's goin' a give you money for that?" he said. "It's Fair day. You're up against the professionals. You goin' to compete with them Spanish ladies or them Gypsies or them tumblers what can throw each other around and catch before they hit the ground? Or the Salamander who eats fire? Naw! You ain't got no chance. There's better pickin's on fair days."

Leo and Richard stopped their dancing and their faces fell.

"Well I'm still sellin' flowers," Alice said. "Them posh ladies and gents u'll be at the fair and if you look sad and starving like they gives you money even if they don't want the flowers. I think they gives it you just to get you to go away. That's how you do it. Keep begging and crying and spoilin' their fun till they gives you a penny."

“Pennies is nothin’,” said Fred, “Not on a Fair day. There’s rich pickin’s on Fair days. Last year I kept miself in victuals for a month on what I got on fair day.”

“Here! You talkin’ about thieving?” Richard said. “I don’t want no theivin’. They transport you for that, send you to that Australi. I don’t want to go there. They’re all criminals there.”

“Naw, that don’t happen no more,” said Fred. “You heard o’ that Robin Hood?”

“I saw him once,” said Alice. “It were in a play in the White Hart. He were all in green and he shot arrows and had sword fights.”

“That’s the cove,” said Fred. “ You know what he did? He robbed the rich and gave to the poor. Didn’t he? And he’s a great hero. Well we’re the poor in’t we so a bit of robbin’ the rich is only fair. We’ll be heroes.”

“I don’t think the peelers see it that way,” Leo said and he looked very unhappy at the idea.

“Now listen,” Fred said, “I thinks to myself. I could spend all day picking dog ends o’ cigars and make a few pennies or I could find a nice empty house where they’ve all gone to the fair and we can lift a few things they’re not goin’ to miss but what will keep us nice and comfy. What do you say?”

No one said anything. The fact is they were all afraid of Fred. He could get really nasty and Grace still had a scar on her forehead where Fred had hit her with a piece of wood for not doing what he asked.

Joe started shouting, “Robin Hood and his Merry Men. That’s what we’ll be. Sherwood Forest. The Sheriff of Nottingham. King John. King Richard.” None of the children knew what he was shouting about but they knew Joe knew lots of things. He had been a schoolmaster they say until he was brought low by all the children who shouted and made fun of him and drove him crazy. The thing was he really liked children. He liked teaching. He just hadn’t been any good at it and he didn’t know why. He had tried teaching in school. He had tried being a tutor to some rich children in their own home but the result was always the same. The children began to make fun of him and then to take no notice at all and then to run riot as soon as he entered the room and because they didn’t learn anything he was always dismissed after a few weeks. “Be quiet you devils,” he shouted now to no one in particular, “Leave me alone.”

“We’ll take Joe along said Fred. He’s a distraction. People will watch him, not what we’re up to. Agreed?”

The children nodded but Richard and Alice and Grace were very unhappy. They were afraid of Fred but they had never done any thieving.

Richard looked towards the river. On the mud flats a large crow was still picking at the carcass of a rat. Richard picked up a stone and tossed it at the crow. The crow cawed and flapped clumsily into the air.

The crow flew north over the iron road, circling once in case a steam train had killed some creature as it passed. He could see or smell nothing. He flew over the shops, which lined one of the streets and he swooped down to a shop with smoke rising from a chimney at the back. Although the crow didn't know it, it was a baker's shop. He did know that often there was spilt grain lying on the ground or stale bread, which he could peck at and fill an empty corner in his stomach. He landed on the roof of the shop and looked down. There were voices raised in the shop and he walked along the roof ridge unwilling to drop down until the coast was clear.

A woman trundled a cart into the yard behind the shop. On it were two large sacks. She walked to the back door of the shop and banged hard. The raised voices from inside stopped and the heavy door was dragged open.

"Come on shake yourselves," Eliza said, "I'm in a hurry I promised I'd take my sister to the fair and she'll be on at me for ever if I don't get back."

Harry came out looking sullen and began to heave a sack of flour into the bake house. He reappeared.

"What's got your face?" said Eliza as she helped heave another sack from her cart. "It's as long as a wet dishcloth."

"He won't let me go to the fair," Harry muttered, "It's always the same, every fair day he's off selling his penny buns for twopence and I'm slaving away back here baking his bread and making his money and what do I get? A shilling – that's it – one rotten shilling."

"Get a move on!" The shout came from inside the shop then Willy Watson, the baker, appeared in the doorway. "Come on," he said, "I'm losing business. I should have been at the fair by now."

Harry stopped muttering. He shouldered the sack of flour and pushed passed Willy into the shop. Willy followed. "See you at the fair," Eliza called to Willy as she trundled her empty cart out of the yard.

"Now," Willy said to Harry, "Keep the fire hot and get that bread out of the ovens nicely done not burnt to a crisp. Have you got that?"

Harry didn't reply. He'd been working in the bakers shop for five years. He didn't need telling.

Willy carried a last tray of iced buns and placed them on the waiting cart. He climbed aboard and gave the tired old horse a nudge with his whip. The horse moved slowly off.

Harry watched them from the shop doorway. He had never, in five years, been to the fair but a job was a job. He was lucky to have it and a warm place by the ovens to sleep and as much left over bread as he could eat. Life could be worse.

There was a loud cawing from the roof. He looked up. A large black crow was walking along the roof ridge cawing and shaking its wings. Harry shuddered. He didn't like

crows. He had heard stories about crows carrying off the spirits of the dead and that a solitary crow meant someone was about to die. He had watched them picking at the mice that the bakery cat had left dead or dying. He shouted and flapped his arms. The crow flew off. He looked longingly down the street towards where the noise of the fair could be faintly heard. He turned and entered the shop.

The crow knew nothing of the stories humans told about the black bird that could bring happiness or death. The crow was just a crow. He flew again over the Fair ground and looked down. He saw but did not understand a man in a feathered headdress, naked to the waist, with arms folded and face painted. Next to him was a fat man in a top hat calling to the crowds. "Roll up, roll up. Never seen before. This fine specimen brought to you from over the seas – chief of the bird people – the American Crow. Watch the war dance that brought terror to the Wild West. See him fire the arrows that brought down General Custer at Wounded Knee."

Above this the crow continued to circle. He did not know that the fat man was spouting nonsense and that the poor "Red Indian" had been dragged from his home against his will and now was made to perform his sacred dances to amuse and entertain. The crow could not see into the man's heart, which was black as a crow feather and which longed for revenge.

He flew on and rested for a time in a large tree in the large garden of a large house. A man was hoeing between rows of vegetables and the crow waited. Men working the earth turned up beetles and worms and though they were alive the crow would peck them up and swallow them whole. The man paused in his hoeing. There were raised voices from inside the house, a woman's voice and a girl's.

"Mama, why can't I go to the fair?" Sarah stamped her foot and glared at her mother.

Mrs Smythe glared back at her daughter, "If I say you can't go to the fair you cannot go. Is that understood young lady?"

"But why?" Sarah wailed.

"I have already told you. A fair is not a place for a well brought up girl. I would be ashamed to have people see you there."

Sarah's three brothers were in a corner of the schoolroom. They were supposed to be reading but they were all ears listening to the argument. If Sarah carried on she was going to be in serious trouble.

"Why can the boys go and not me?" she sulked.

"Boys are boys. That's all there is to it. James will go with them and make sure they won't get up to any mischief."

The three boys looked at each other, dismayed. James was their least favourite servant. He always did exactly as he was asked and he always reported back to their mother when the three boys didn't.

At that moment Ethel came in carrying a coal scuttle. When she saw Mrs Smythe she started and then curtsied. A piece of coal fell out of the scuttle and marked the wooden floor of the schoolroom.

"Oh. I'm sorry Ma'am," Ethel stammered, flustered. "I didn't know you was 'ere Ma'am. I'll come back." She stooped to pick up the piece of coal.

"No. That's all right Ethel. Carry on," Mrs Smythe said, "And when you've finished send Hattie here. I want her to stay with Miss Sarah whilst the boys are at the fair."

Sarah glanced round at the boys. Oscar pulled a funny face and stuck out his tongue. She glared at him but an idea was beginning to form in her head.

Mrs Smythe turned to the boys, "Now come here boys. Let me look at you."

The three boys put down the books they had been pretending to read and stood in a row in front of their mother. It was unusual for their mother to appear in the schoolroom. Indeed they often only saw her in the evening when they were allowed into the parlour to say goodnight. The fact is they were a little afraid of her and always on their best behaviour when she appeared. Ethel slipped out of the room whilst the attention was turned to the boys.

"Oscar," Mrs Smythe said sternly.

"Yes Mamma?" Oscar said looking her in the eye as he had been taught.

"As the eldest I expect you to take charge of your brothers and make sure they behave like young gentlemen in public. Is that clear?"

"Yes Mamma," Oscar said, looking at her innocently.

She turned to the other two boys, "Albert and Thomas, you will obey your brother. Do you understand?"

"Yes Mamma," The boys chorused together.

At that moment there was a knock on the schoolroom door and James and Hattie entered.

"Ah, James," Mrs Smythe said. "You are to accompany the boys to the fair. They may ride on the swings and roundabouts and they may play the games but they are not, I repeat not, to enter any of the booths displaying unfortunate humans or animals and certainly not where there is dancing and the singing of lewd songs. Is that understood?"

"Yes certainly Ma'am," James said, "I shall take good care of them."

The boys looked down at the floor not daring to let their mother see the looks of disappointment on their faces.

“Now here you are,” Mrs Smythe unhooked her purse from her belt and removed some coins, “Here is half a crown for each of you. Now go and enjoy yourselves.”

The boys trailed out of the room followed by James.

Mrs Smythe had still further instructions. She turned to Hattie.

“Now Hattie.”

Hattie blushed and curtsied, “Yes Ma’am.”

“Hattie you will stay with Miss Sarah. She is to remain in the house or in the garden and nowhere else. Is that clear?”

“Yes Ma’am,” Hattie glanced across at Sarah who glared at her from behind her mother’s back. Hattie’s heart sank. She knew what a temper Miss Sarah had and she had more than once been hit by books and other objects that Sarah had flung at her in anger. The fact was that she had little chance of controlling Sarah once she had decided to do something and Sarah knew this, which is why when her mother turned to her and reminded her that young ladies should not be seen running the streets with the boys, she meekly said, “Yes Mamma,” whilst at the same time planning her escape.

In the tree the crow spotted a crawling insect on the newly hoed earth. He dropped down and pecked at a woodlouse and swallowed it down. Three boys came charging out of the house followed by a man in servant’s uniform. The crow flapped into the air once again and soared away to his home tree in the grounds of the old Manor house.

The crow settled in his tree and looked down at the large garden below. There were people working there and there was a figure that looked like a man but which only blew when the wind disturbed its floppy arms. Today was still and the crow was not scared of the figure. He was about to flop down on to some newly turn earth when the back door of the manor house shot open and a boy dashed out. The crow steadied himself on the branch and watch for a quieter time. The boy was called Frank. As he ran he had in his head the picture of Davy lying on the kitchen floor with blood trickling from a wound in his forehead. He had caught Davy clutching the loaf of bread he had been pinching from the kitchen where he, Frank, worked. He had grabbed him and pushed him and pushed him hard. Davy had fallen backwards and cracked his head on the iron grate of the kitchen stove. Frank had panicked. He ran. He ran out of the kitchen into the garden where Robert and Tommy were hoeing between the neat rows of vegetables. As he ran he heard Sally shouting from the kitchen “Stop, Frank, stop!” There was a scream from the kitchen. That would Ruth. She had seen Davy. Frank ran to the wall surrounding the garden. He pulled a wheelbarrow near to the wall and used it to clamber up. He peered over. There was no one in the street outside. He slid over the wall. Just as he did so he heard a cry from the house. “Frank! Come back! Davy...” it was Sally’s voice again. He dropped onto the cobbles on the other side of the wall and could no longer hear what Sally was shouting.

Frank ran. He ran through streets lined with tall houses. He ran through lanes lined by shops. He dodged people who all seemed to be walking in the same direction. He ran down narrow alleyways and eventually, panting for breath he ran out into the market square. There he stopped short. The square was filled with roundabouts and boat swings and booths with platforms outside on which men were calling out the wonders of what could be seen inside – bearded ladies – two head sheep – the strongest man in the world. Frank heard their cries and it dawned on him. This was that day of the annual fair. A policeman was watching all the goings on, slowly swinging his truncheon. He turned towards Frank. Frank panicked again and dodged between two stalls, one selling pots and pans and another selling hot pies. He looked for somewhere to hide. He slipped underneath a cloth covering a table loaded with bread and cakes. The familiar smell of baking calmed him. He could see the feet of the stallholder moving from side to side and the feet of her customers as they treated themselves to a cake or an iced bun.

He sat and gradually his breathing calmed. Why had he run? Why had he panicked? It should have been Davy who was in trouble. They had known for some time that someone was pinching loaves of bread and Frank had caught him. Now he had run away and it looked as though he was the guilty one. What was he going to do? Should he go back to the home and face the music? But if Davy was dead he would be a murderer and he knew what they did to murderers. His hand went up and rubbed the skin of his neck.

He could run away. He could get far away but how would he live. Who would give runaways a job or a home? He could not decide what to do. He carefully lifted a corner of the cloth and peered out. He could see feet and long dresses brushing the ground and among the feet a small boy. The boy carried a canvas bag. He was searching on the floor. Every now and again he stooped and picked up the stub of a cigar discarded by the men in tall hats and black coats. He slipped the stubs of cigar into the canvas bag. Frank looked. Is that what would happen if he ran away? He would end up picking scraps from the street and eating things others had thrown away. He saw the feet of the policeman pacing slowly past the stalls. He dropped the cloth back into place. He had to make a decision and soon.

Back at the manor house, Ruth and Sally and Tommy and Robert were in the kitchen debating what to do. Davy was still on the floor holding on to the loaf of bread with one hand and mopping the wound on his head with an old rag with the other.

“You were nicking bread,” Tommy accused him. “Dr Paterson thought it was Frank but it was you all the time.”

Davy didn't bother to deny the accusation. His head was bleeding and it had started hurting. He scrambled to his feet.

“Please don't tell Dr. Paterson,” he pleaded. “He'll chuck me out, I know he will.”

Ruth spoke up, “You were the one stealing and now it's Frank who's going to be in trouble. You've got to own up and we've got to find Frank before anyone notices he's gone.”

Sally had been thinking all this time and now she spoke. “Listen,” she said, “We've got to find Frank and tell him Davy's not badly injured. We've got to get him back. Robert, you stay with Davy. If we don't find Frank in time we're going to take him to Dr. Paterson.”

Robert was a big lad and strong from all his work in the garden. Davy was thin and small. If Robert was guarding him there was no way he could get away.

Ruth looked troubled. “Sally,” she said, “If we get caught we'll all be in trouble.”

Sally didn't look at her but her voice was firm. “He's my brother,” she said, “he's all I've got.”

That settled it. Sally and Ruth and Tommy set off for the garden wall where Frank had disappeared.

Behind them Davy was looking sad. “I was just hungry,” he said.

“We're all hungry,” Robert said, “but we're not all thieves.”

At this same time Sarah was putting her plan into action. She was facing Hattie who was standing there looking miserable dressed only in her undergarments. Her everyday clothes were on the floor in front of her.

"Now, " she ordered, "Undo my dress."

Unhappily Hattie began to undo the buttons at the back of Sarah's dress.

"Please Miss," she said, "don't do this. If madam finds out, I'll lose my job and then it's the workhouse for me and my mother."

"Don't be silly." Sarah pouted. Although Hattie was her maid she really had no idea what her life was like and she didn't really care. "No one's going to find out." she said. I'll be back well before bedtime and you know mamma never comes to the nursery.

"She did this morning miss."

"Yes, well, she won't come again. Quickly get me out of this dress."

Hattie slipped the dress off Sarah's shoulders and it fell to the floor. Sarah began immediately to put on Hattie's maid's clothes. When she had finished she looked at herself in the mirror and smiled. No one would look twice at a maid at a fair. She tossed her head so that her carefully curled hair swung out and settled prettily on her shoulders. She turned to Hattie.

"Now remember," she said, "You must make a noise and talk as though we are playing in the nursery. If they hear a noise no one will think to come and investigate."

Hattie looked as though she was near to tears.

"Please miss," she said again "you don't know what it's like out there. There are dangerous people. You don't know how to look after yourself."

"No one's going to look at a maid, are they?" Sarah snapped and she opened the door of the nursery and crept out. Hattie burst into tears. She had an awful feeling that something bad was going to happen to Miss Sarah and that she would get the blame. She had to do something, but what. She was stuck in the nursery dressed only in her underclothes. She couldn't wander round the house like that.

As Sarah slipped out of the garden gate a number of other things were happening in Manor Fields. Mr. and Mrs. Greenberg were returning to their tailor's shop from the Synagogue. Their shop was next to the bakery and as they returned they saw Harry standing in the shop doorway looking longingly towards the market square and the faint sounds of people enjoying themselves.

Behind him, in the bake house, the door of the fire grate had been left open and a spark jumped out and landed on some old flour sacks. A wisp of smoke began to curl upwards.

Nearer the river, Fred was leading his gang towards the big houses where he hoped to find some rich pickings. Grace and Alice had little baskets of violets they were going to sell but the others were following Fred because they were afraid not to. Joe was marching in front as though he was leading them on a school outing but it was Fred who was telling him where to go.

Frank was still hiding under the stall and getting more hungry by the minute as soft rolls and iced buns were being sold over his head.

The showman with the Red Indian had drawn a large crowd. In the crowd was Oscar with his two brothers and the servant, James, watching over them. They really wanted to go in a see the show but their mother had forbidden it. What they didn't know was that the Red Indian was going to play a big part in what happened next.

"Come on," Oscar said, "there's no point in waiting here. Let's go on the helter-skelter."

Albert and Thomas trailed after him with James following. Albert looked back longingly at the Red Indian. He had played cowboys and Indians ever since the family had been taken to watch the Buffalo Bill Wild West show. Now he had a chance to see one close up and he was being dragged away by Oscar and tracked by James.

The helter-skelter loomed large in front of them. Queues of children were edging forward and picking up a mat as they climbed the spiral staircase. Other children in ones and twos came screaming down the slide to be dumped at the bottom. If they didn't scramble away in time there was an almighty pile up at the bottom as other loaded mats arrived and laughing and complaining children had to untangle themselves.

One older boy came down the slide kneeling on his mat and with his arms in the air. The showman shouted at him and stopped him joining the queue for another go but the boy just laughed and his mates patted him on the back like a hero.

Oscar felt that he was a little too old for the helter-skelter but he thought that looked like fun. He joined the queue with the other two boys and paid his penny as he picked up a mat. Albert and Thomas went first and they began the slow climb to the top inside the conical tower. There were windows at intervals and through this they could see boys and girls whizzing past as they slid down. There was a hold up at one point and for a time Oscar stared out of the window at the fair below. His attention was caught by a young girl. She was wearing clothes that were a bit big for her and she had curly blond hair. The clothes were rather worn but never the less there was something familiar about the girl. She was wandering around looking about her. Oscar tried to get a better look. He pressed his face against the slit window. The girl suddenly saw something that startled her. She ducked her face and moved away into the crowd. Oscar could just see James. He also seemed to have seen the girl. He made a move in her direction but then looked back at the helter-skelter. He seemed to be in two minds about what to do. At that moment the queue on the stairs began to move and Albert and Thomas reached the top. They had decided to go down together on one mat and now they clutched each other and pushed off with cries of delight.

Oscar knelt on the mat as he had seen the older boy doing and began his slide down. He raised his arms above his head and immediately felt himself swing out over the outside edge of the slide. At the moment he saw the girl once again. "Sarah!" he shouted. And he twisted round as the mat carried him round the corner. His arm caught on the side of the slide. He was dragged off the mat and the speed of the slide flipped him over edge. He fell with a sickening thud onto the hard stones of the market square.

There was immediate pandemonium. James who had seen the accident came running towards the still figure of Oscar. Albert and Thomas had not seen what was going on but rushed to see what everyone else was shouting about. Sarah paused for a moment and looked back. She didn't think James had seen her but in any case the crush round the helter-skelter would cover her escape. She stood by a stall selling iced buns and watched the action from a distance.

Oscar opened his eyes and saw James, Albert and Thomas staring down on him with anxious looks on their faces.

"Ow!" he said, "That hurt."

Albert and Thomas grinned in relief but James still looked worried. "We have to get you home," he said and no matter how the three boys objected he supported Oscar as he got to his feet and then led the way out of the market square.

Sarah watched from a safe distance. She had not seen the accident and wondered where they were going on. As they left James looked round as if searching for something. Before he could look her way Sarah ducked under a cloth covering the stall selling buns and pastries. She breathed easily for a moment feeling safe then she jumped out of her skin when a hand rested on her shoulder. She squealed. Frank put a hand to her lips to stop her making any more noise.

"What are you doing here?" Sarah said before she realised it was a rather silly question.

"I could ask you that," Frank replied, "but I'm hiding just like you are."

"Who are you hiding from?"

"None of your business." Frank said. He looked at the girl who had so suddenly invaded his space. There was something not quite right about her. It was her voice. It did not fit her clothes. That was not a maid's voice.

At that moment Willy Watson heard them moving under his counter. Frank and Sarah saw his red face appear as he bent down to look.

"Here!" he said, "Get out of there. I know what you're up to. I'll have the peeler's on you."

Frank and Sarah did not hang around. They shot out from under the cloth covering the front of the counter, much to the astonishment of the waiting customers.

"Clear off!" shouted Willy, "Little thieves."

The two of them disappeared into the crowds and came to a halt in front of a booth where a fat man was calling to people to come inside and see the savage Red Indian who would amaze them with his skills with the tomahawk and the bow and arrow.

The fat man saw Sarah looking and called to her, "Come on in my dear. Only three pence for the fright of your life." Sarah turned away, not liking the attention. The fat man paused for a moment and looked at her curiously. She was dressed like a servant girl but that blond hair, curled so carefully and brushed only the way a servant could brush it gave the game away. Here, he knew, was a naughty little girl who had escaped her parents guard and probably they would pay good money to have her back again. He watched her glancing back at the booth. He slipped from the podium and walked slowly towards her.

She saw him and glanced away embarrassed. "Now, my dear," he said. "I can see that you would love to see my Red Indian."

Sarah mumbled, "No no. I haven't any money."

"Don't worry about that." the fat man said. "A young lady like you I will let in for nothing."

"Be careful!" Frank said but at that moment heard his name being called. He turned ready to run.

Sarah was drawn towards the booth. She knew that this was a very silly thing to do. Even the boys would not be allowed into the booth to see the Red Indian. But wouldn't that be wonderful. To go back home and in secret tell them that she had had seen something that was forbidden to them.

The fat man could tell that she would take up his offer. He walked slowly back to the booth and as he approached he began again to call to the crowd and encourage them to enter. Sarah followed at what she thought was a safe distance. As she reached the doorway into the booth the fat man pulled a curtain to one side and Sarah slipped through.

Her favourite stories, when she was allowed to read what she wanted, were all about girls who went on adventures and captured villains and overcame great dangers. She dreamt of being one of those girls. Now she seemed to be in the middle of an adventure she felt both excited and afraid.

"Come with me." said the fat man who had followed her in. "You shall have the best seat in the house." And he led her forward and seated her on a bench right at the front of the crowded booth. Other children were on the bench pushing and shouting and calling for the show to begin.

She didn't know it but this was the first part of the trap the fat man had set for her.

To begin with, fire can be a secret thing, slowly smouldering and creeping until the heat builds and then smoke and gases are released and then suddenly, perhaps because of a slight gust of wind the flames burst forth and the fire begins its angry and devouring roar.

Harry, who had spent too long at the doorway of the shop staring toward the fair, turned in panic to be faced with the flames licking and spurting across the bakery floor and climbing the wooden beams of the bake house.

"Fire! Fire!"

He rushed out the shop into the street. Desperately he began hammering on the door of the Greenberg's next door. Mrs Greenberg appeared.

"Fire!" Harry shouted at her. Mrs. Greenberg could smell the smoke. She quickly took in the situation. The bakers shop was attached to their workshop and in their workshop they had half-made garments and bolts of cloth which would be further encouragement to the flames if they were allowed to spread. She called her husband. Mr. Greenberg appeared stretching as though he had been sleeping. Before he could speak Mrs Greenberg was speaking urgently to him.

"Run quickly. Get the fire brigade. Our shop will be next."

"But.. but," Mr. Greenberg stammered. "It's the Sabbath. We mustn't run on the Sabbath."

"I think the good Lord will forgive us." Mrs. Greenberg was shouting now. "Harry, start pumping water. Mr. Greenberg, either you go for the fire brigade or I do."

Mr. Greenberg, who if the truth is told was a little afraid of his wife, set off not quite at a run but at least at a hurried walk towards the square where the newly formed fire brigade kept the fire engine.

Harry was already pumping water into buckets and Mrs. Greenberg grabbed them and began throwing them towards the flames.

Mr. Greenberg arrived out of breath at the square and looked with dismay at the crowds and the stalls and booths of the fair.

He began to push his way through to the far corner of the square where the fire brigade had their fire engine ready with a steaming boiler and horses ready to be harnessed. He squeezed past the crowd round one of the stalls and then realised that it was the baker's stall and that Willy Watson was serving the crush of customers.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Fire!"

There was a sudden panic among the customers and they looked round to see who was shouting. They saw a small man in long black coat and skullcap and they showed mild surprise at seeing a Jewish man out on the Sabbath not walking to the synagogue. Willy Watson recognised him.

"Fire!" Mr. Greenberg shouted again his voice rising in panic. "Your bakery Mr. Watson."

Willy Watson leaped into action. He abandoned his customers and ran towards his bakery shouting over his shoulder. "Get the fire engine."

The abandoned customers looked hungrily at the cakes and buns the baker had left behind. Some took what they wanted and left some coins in payment. Others took but didn't pay.

Now you must imagine that like a crow you can soar above Manor Fields but unlike the crow you can see and understand the workings of the humans gathered below. You can see not only what is in the open air but also inside the houses and stalls and booths of the fair.

You would see, outside the garden wall of a large house, a group of urchins gathered. With them is an older man who is looking around in a puzzled fashion.

The largest of the urchins speaks.

"Right," he says. "This is how we do it. Joe stays on watch in case anyone comes round the corner and sees us. You got that Joe?"

Joe doesn't look as though he is paying attention.

Fred carries on, for this is Fred, "Alice and Grace, you go an' knock at the kitchen door like you're trying to sell your flowers. OK?"

Alice and Grace look very unhappy.

"If there's no one there, you give me a whistle. If we get the whistle, Leo and Richard, you give me a leg up the wall and I nip into the house to see what I can find. We all got that?"

Only Fred seemed eager to put the plan into action.

Now if we look inside the house we can see three boys and a man facing an angry woman. She is speaking quietly but sternly to the man. He is the servant, James. He wants to say that it wasn't his fault that Oscar fell and hurt his head but he knows that this will only make Mrs Smythe even angrier. She orders the boys up to the nursery. The boys trail upstairs. The two younger ones are cross with Oscar because if he hadn't been so stupid they could still have been at the fair.

"But I'm telling you," Oscar is saying, "I saw her. I'm sure it was her." He opened the door to the nursery and immediately saw that his suspicions were correct. There was Hattie in her underclothes and no sign of Sarah. Hattie screamed. The noise brought Mrs. Smythe climbing the stairs. If she had been angry before she was beside herself now.

Hattie was banished to her own room and James was summoned to gather all the servants to set off to find Sarah.

Alice and Grace were just about to knock on the kitchen door when it was flung open and men and women came out led by James. He was giving instructions as they emerged.

"Miss Sarah is at the fair," he said, "We must find her and bring her home before any harm comes to her." And as they hurried away he gave further instructions about who was to search where.

Alice and Grace hurried back to the others. Leo and Richard were ready to heave Fred up the wall but they stopped as soon as the girls appeared. They told the others what they had seen and heard.

Joe suddenly began to speak urgently echoing James' words, "Miss Sarah, we must find Miss Sarah."

The others looked at him astonished.

"What you talkin' about," Fred said.

Joe didn't reply but he marched off towards the fair still muttering. "Miss Sarah we must find"

" 'ere," Alice said. "you don't think this girl's one o them 'e used to teach do you?"

Fred looked at her, his mind racing.

"I think you could be right," he said. "Yeh, there could be good money in this one. If we find her I bet there'll be a reward and if you're right, Joe knows what she looks like."

Soar again above the scene. You can see the group of urchins chasing after Joe who is following in the footsteps of the servants from the big house. You can also see three other searchers. They are Sally and Ruth and Tommy from the orphanage off on their search for Frank. They think they caught sight of him once and they are searching through the fair calling his name.

You can see, in the distance, smoke curling up from the bakery and the sound of a loud bell as the firemen try to force a way through the crowded square.

Now you can look inside one of the booths, which is like a large tent. Inside, it is crowded with people watching the performance on stage. A Red Indian is doing a war dance and banging a drum. He stops and a fat man announces that he will now demonstrate his amazing prowess in throwing the tomahawk. He re-assures everyone that there is no danger for the savage beast in the man has been tamed. A lady dressed as an Indian squaw comes on to the stage and she is strapped with her arms and legs outstretched to a wooden board. There is a roll on the drums and the Red Indian takes up a tomahawk and with hardly a glance he flings it at the board on which the lady is

imprisoned. Magically it slices into the board under her left arm leaving her untouched. More tomahawks follow until the lady is outlined in the fierce axes. She is released and takes her bow to wild applause.

In the front row is Sarah. She has hardly been able to watch the show and now she is feeling a little faint. She begins to sway. The fat man sees his chance. He helps her to her feet and says, "Come with me my dear. I will get you a drink of water." And he leads her behind the curtains at the back of the stage. Sarah hardly knows what is happening to her. The heat and the excitement have dulled her wits and she only comes to herself when she realises that she has been led into a small caravan at the back of the booth. The fat man pushes her inside and Sarah hears a key turn in the lock. Outside the caravan the fat man is watched by the Red Indian, once a chief of the crow people. The Red Indian knows what it is like to be captured and locked away. He will wait for his moment to act.

You now have to imagine the whole scene. Whilst Sarah is being invited into the Red Indian show, Frank is looking round to see who was calling his name. He glimpses Ruth through the crowd and turns away from her thinking he still needs to escape as he does so he runs straight into Tommy who grabs him by the arm. Frank tries to pull away but Tommy holds on and speaks to him urgently.

"It's all right," He says. "Davy's not badly hurt. You've got to come back before Dr. Patterson finds out."

Frank breathes a sigh of relief and then feels really stupid that he had run away without thinking. At that moment Ruth and Sally find them.

"Are you OK?" Ruth says. "We've been so worried. Come on we've no time to lose.

At that moment they were interrupted by the sound of the Fire Engine bell. They were pushed aside by people trying to get out of the way of the engine as it forced its way through to try to get at the fire. The firemen were shouting and the horses were rearing and stamping unaccustomed to such a big crowd.

The fire engine forced its way through and as the noise receded Frank and the others could hear people calling. They couldn't make it out at first and then a man pushed through the crowd calling "Miss Sarah! Miss Sarah!" He stopped by Frank and the others.

"We're looking for a girl," he said, "Fair hair, curly, could be in a maid's dress."

Tommie and Ruth were pulling at Frank but he held back.

"Hang on a minute," he said. "That girl. I've seen her."

"It's nothing to do with us," Tommy said urgently. "We've got to get you back."

"No no, wait," Frank said and he pulled himself away. "Mister!" he called, "Mister!"

James turned to look.

"That girl you looking for. Has she got freckles on her nose."

"That's the one," James said eagerly. "Where is she?"

"I don't know." said Frank "but she went over there." and he pointed to the booth where the fat man was once again calling on customers to come and see the next show. The Red Indian was once again standing showing off his muscles.

James grabbed Frank by the arm. "Here," he said, "come and show me." He dragged Frank over to the booth. Tommy and Ruth and Sally tried to hold Frank back. "Let him go!" they shouted, "He's done nothing."

James didn't seem to hear them. He pulled Frank along with him and stood in front of the fat man.

"You there!" James shouted. "This boy," he said, shaking Frank's arm, "says a young girl came to your booth."

"A lot of young girls come to my booth," the fat man said, "It's very popular."

"You'd have known this girl. She has long blond hair in curls and freckles on her nose."

The fat man looked at James for a moment and then he stepped off the platform and came towards James. He looked around to make sure that no one was listening although he didn't seem to think that children counted because Frank heard every word he said. Not only that but Fred and his gang had caught up with James and they were also very interested though they tried to make it look as though they were just queuing to get into the show.

"This girl," the fat man said, " sounds like she might be someone important."

James looked at him suspiciously. "If you know where she is, you'd better let me know now."

"Not so fast! Not so fast!" whispered the fat man. "You should be careful. You never know who might be listening and if they hear there's a young girl lost from a rich family well who knows what could happen."

James still had hold of Frank's arm but he now let go and made a grab for the fat man. The fat man was surprisingly quick and James instead of grabbing the man as he had hoped found himself gripped firmly by his right wrist. The fat man looked him in the eyes. "Now," he said, "let's get down to business. Suppose I can help you find the girl, what do you think it would be worth?"

"It would be worth you not going to gaol. If you know where she is I suggest you tell me now or I'll have the peelers on you."

"The peelers?" the fat man laughed. "They couldn't find a haystack in a field never mind a needle in a haystack and that's what it will be like trying to find your little girlie without my help. Have you got that?"

James struggled against the man's grip on his wrist.

"Now," said the man, "if you want to see your girlie again in good condition shall we say then you'd better get back to whoever owns you and let them know the price - one hundred gold sovereigns should do it. Have you got that?"

As he was speaking, unseen by anyone except the Indian who had gone back into the booth to prepare for the performance, a woman about the same size as the fat man was hitching a horse between the shafts of a caravan and preparing to move off.

The fat man finally let go of James and whispered one final warning into his ear. "Just remember," he said, "If you want to see her again in one piece then...." he didn't finish the sentence.

James gulped hard. He was not a coward but he knew he could not overpower the fat man on his own and if he tried then Miss Sarah would be in danger. Hoarsely he gasped, "I'll be back." and he started to move off.

"Not here." the fat man said. "You know the railway arches down by the river. That's the place. Be there at eight o'clock tonight with the sovereigns or..." He drew his finger across his throat and with a last sneer he pushed his way back to the booth calling that the show had been cancelled and that the booth was to be packed away.

Now again we need to see the crow's eye view. You could see many things that are not part of this story; small boys and girls spinning hoops down a road, a crossing sweeper sweeping horse dung away so that posh ladies and gentlemen can cross without soiling their shoes and their clothes, a mother nursing her baby in the doorway of a house, a fight that has broken out outside a pub where some men have been enjoying too much ale, a gas lighter moving from one street lamp to another lighting the gas lights and creating pools of light and darkness. These are just some of the ordinary things happening in Manor Fields. But we are interested in other things. Down a narrow lane a caravan drawn by a tired looking horse is making slow progress. If you look carefully you can see behind the caravan the figure of the Red Indian, dressed now in a great cape. He is watching the progress of the caravan carefully. Ahead of it a crowd of people has gathered to watch the fun as a fire engine tries to put out a fire. Its steam powered jet is soaking the inside of the bake house whilst Harry and Willy Watson look on dismayed. Harry is already smarting from the clout round his ear that Willy had administered as soon as he had arrived. There was no doubt that Harry would be blamed for the whole incident. The question was whether there would be a bakery left for him to work in. At the moment it was not looking very hopeful but there was such a deal of smoke and steam that it was difficult to see how much damage there had been. The caravan is brought to a halt by the crowd and the fat man's wife is shouting at the crowd to let her through. They take no notice.

Back in the square two groups of children are arguing vehemently. Ruth and Thomas and Sally are trying to persuade Frank that he should come back to the home immediately before Dr. Paterson discovers he had gone. Actually we could also see, if we wished, that they are already too late. Dr. Paterson is at that moment standing in front of Robert and Davy and demanding an explanation for the absence of the four children. Frank is worried about the girl. He had only seen her for a few moments but he now feels some responsibility to let the authorities know what had happened. They agreed that the only safe thing for them to do is to return to the home and face Dr. Paterson and tell him the whole story. They set off back to the home.

Fred is also arguing with his gang. He still thinks that there is a profit to be made out of the girl but the rest are too scared to follow his lead. They think they should tell the servant what they had seen. "You're all a lot of lily livered cowards." Fred says, "I don't know why I bover wiv ye. You think they'll thank you, them rich coves. Naw they'll still look at us like we shouldn't exist. They'll stick us in the workhouse like as not an that'll be all the thanks we get, you see."

Fred is still thinking how the money is to be made. The fat man, if he got his hundred guineas, might be persuaded to part with one or two. Fred is hatching a plan. The meeting place is down by the railway arch, that is Fred's territory.

Now we must imagine that time has passed. It is dark down by the river. Only one gas lamp is lit forming a pool of light, which makes the surrounding darkness appear even darker. The river flows, dark and threatening. Under the arches, Fred is watching. A figure appears lit by the gas lamp for a moment. It is the fat man. He slips back into the shadows. Unknown to him the caravan his wife has been driving has been held up by the fire and is at that moment still making its slow way along the embankment. It is not, as he supposed on the other side of Kew Bridge, on the way to Epsom Downs. Most of Fred's gang are hiding away under the arches. Joe is nowhere to be seen.

Someone is approaching. He is carrying a leather bag. He stops Just inside the circle of the lamplight and we can see that it is James.

The fat man speaks, "Put the bag down and move away."

James starts at the sound of the voice but grips onto the bag more tightly. "Let me see the girl first," his voice trembles slightly.

"Show me the gold and I'll show you the girl."

James slowly unclasps the leather bag and puts his hand inside and draws out a handful of gold sovereigns. He lets them fall back into the bag. Under the arch Fred's eyes gleam. What would he give to get his hands on that gold?

At the moment there is a loud banging and a shout. Round the corner the Red Indian has finally taken action. The banging is the sound of his tomahawk striking the lock on the

caravan door. The fat man's wife screams. The fat man also cries out startled to recognise his wife's cries. He draws a revolver from inside his coat.

The Red Indian wrenches open the door off the caravan. Sarah is crouching inside scared to death by the noise and the darkness. At that moment a figure pushes past the Indian calling, "Miss Sarah, Miss Sarah!" It is Joe. He had been hiding in the shadows. He leaps into the caravan and lifts up the terrified girl. He leads her out.

The fat man arrives followed by James still clutching the leather bag. The fat man raises his pistol and points it at Joe. "Let her go." he snarls.

Joe clutches Sarah closely to him to shield her from the gun. The fat man's finger tightens on the trigger. There is a whooshing sound and a tomahawk flies through the air. It slices into the fat man's thumb. The pistol fires as it is knocked out of his hand. The fat man sinks to the ground screaming for help.

Whistles are blowing and there is the sound of men running. Three policemen arrive. They look bewildered at the scene before them. They shine their lanterns first at the fat man screaming on the floor clutching at his half severed thumb then on James who is still holding his bag and then on Joe and Sarah. Joe is clutching his arm, which has been grazed by a bullet. They shine their lanterns round but there is no sign of anyone else. Fred has seen his chance of riches disappear and he disappears himself into the darkness. The Red Indian has disappeared into the night. The horse, shocked by all the noise, suddenly rears up and sets off at a gallop dragging the caravan behind with the fat man's wife vainly dragging on the reins.

Well, you will have to imagine how all this was sorted out. There are some things you might wish to know. The policemen arrived on the scene because when Frank told Dr. Patterson the story he immediately sounded the alarm. The Red Indian had had enough of England and he journeyed across the country eventually reaching Bristol where he signed on as a sailor on a ship bound for America and home. The fat man ended up in gaol and we don't know what happened to his wife.

Sarah, of course, was in serious trouble when she eventually arrived home. That is something else you will have to imagine. But you also need to know that Mrs. Smythe was so grateful to Joe that she helped found a ragged school where he could once again teach children. Among his first pupils were Alice and Grace and Leo and Richard, though Fred could not be persuaded that learning his letters and numbers would be of any value to him. To be truthful Joe was still not a very good teacher but he was kind and the children he taught gradually began to accept him.

The other stories you will have to imagine for yourselves. What happened to Harry and Mr. Watson and the bake house? What happened to Oscar and then Thomas and Albert when they were sent away to boarding school? Did Hattie get the sack? What happened to Sarah as she grew up and travelled to America seeking adventures? What happened to the children from the orphanage as they grew up and learnt a trade and joined the adult world of work when they were twelve years old?

So many stories from the place we have called Manor Fields.

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