



THE BLACK ARROW

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



CHAPTER ONE

The Letter

The bell of Moat House Castle at Tunstall rang loudly one spring afternoon. The people of the village looked up at the castle.

'What's happening?' asked one man.

'I don't know,' said another. 'A messenger brought a letter for Sir Oliver Oates, the priest, half an hour ago. It was from Sir Daniel Brackley.'

'But why is the bell ringing?' asked an old man.

Suddenly a handsome young man appeared on his grey horse. He was about eighteen years old and had brown hair and blue eyes. He had a bow and arrow on his back. His name was Richard Shelton and he was Sir Daniel's ward.

Richard Shelton looked at the people around him and said, 'There will be a big battle soon! Sir Daniel wants everyone to fight.'

'Another battle!' cried an angry woman. 'This is terrible! Our men go and die in battles, and their wives and children are hungry.'

'We pay high taxes to Sir Daniel and we don't have any money for food,' said a young mother with three small children.

'Who is Sir Daniel fighting for today?' asked a tall man. 'Lancaster or York?'

'I'm sorry, I don't know,' said Richard, and his face became red.

Sir Daniel Brackley was not a loyal man and the people did not like him. He seemed to always change his mind: sometimes he fought for Lancaster and sometimes he fought for York.

A big man on a black horse appeared. It was Bennet Hatch, Sir Daniel's best friend. He was about forty and had dark hair and an unfriendly face.

'All of the men in the village must go to Moat House Castle and get ready for the battle!' Hatch cried.

Then Hatch looked at Richard and said, 'Let's go to Nick Appleyard's house.'

When they arrived Hatch said, 'Nick Appleyard, you must go and defend Moat House Castle because Sir Daniel is going to Kettley to fight.'

While the two men were talking, a black arrow suddenly hit Nick Appleyard in the back and

killed him.

'Oh, no!' cried Richard. 'Appleyard is dead! Someone in the forest shot this black arrow.'

'Look! There's a message on the arrow,' said Hatch. 'What does it say, Richard?'

Richard took the arrow and read, "'For Appleyard, from John, to make things right.'" What a strange message!

'It's dangerous here, let's go to the church,' said Hatch.

There were about twenty men on their horses outside the church. They were ready to fight.

'Sir Daniel will be pleased with these brave men,' said Hatch.

'Look at the church door,' said Richard. 'There's a letter on it!'

'A letter on the church door,' said Sir Oliver, surprised. He was the priest of the village and Sir Daniel's good friend. 'Young Richard, please read it.'

Richard took the letter off the door and read it aloud.

I have four black arrows.

The first arrow killed Appleyard, the next one will kill Bennet Hatch, because he burnt Grimstone House.

Another arrow is for Sir Oliver Oates, because he killed Sir Harry Shelton.

Sir Daniel will get the fourth arrow.

From John of the Green Wood and his men.

P.S. Remember we have other arrows for your men!

'We live in a terrible world! I'm a good man. I did not kill Sir Harry Shelton!' cried Sir Oliver Oates.

'We know you're a good, honest man, Sir Oliver,' said Hatch. Then he whispered something in Sir Oliver's ear and looked at Richard. Sir Harry Shelton was Richard's father. Richard saw this but he said nothing.

'I must write a letter to Sir Daniel and tell him what happened,' said Sir Oliver.

When the letter was ready he said, 'Richard, take this important letter to Sir Daniel immediately. Be careful on the road because it can be very dangerous.'

Richard took the letter and went to get his horse.

Hatch followed him. 'Richard,' he said quietly, 'you're a brave, honest young man. Listen to me, be careful of Sir Daniel. Don't trust him and don't trust Sir Oliver. They're dangerous men.'

Richard was surprised and started thinking. 'Thank you, my friend,' he said. Then he got on his grey horse and galloped away.

CHAPTER TWO

John Matcham

Sir Daniel Brackley sat next to the fire at the Sign of the Sun Inn in Kettley. He was a tall man of about forty. He was bald and had a big nose and black eyes. He collected taxes all day and now he was thinking about how he could make more money. Sir Daniel was a very greedy man and did many bad things.

A thin young boy was sitting near the door of the inn. He was very sad.

'Come here, John,' said Sir Daniel. The young boy was about thirteen, and had blond hair and blue eyes. He was wearing dirty, old clothes and a big brown hat.

Sir Daniel looked at him and laughed, 'You make me laugh, John!'

'Don't laugh at me!' said John angrily. 'I don't like it.'

'Oh, let me laugh!' said Sir Daniel. 'I'll plan a good marriage for you - you'll see.'

'And I'll make a lot of money with this marriage,' thought Sir Daniel. 'Lord Shoreby will pay me well...'

The young boy went to sit down again.

Sometime later Richard came into the inn.

'Richard, my brave boy!' said Sir Daniel. 'Sit down and eat. You're probably hungry and thirsty.'

'Here's an important letter from Sir Oliver,' said Richard, giving him the letter.

Sir Daniel read it and he was worried.

'Richard, the letter on the church door is a lie!' said Sir Daniel. 'Sir Oliver did not kill your poor father. Ellis Duckworth killed your father, but he escaped and we never found him.'

'Did this happen at Moat House Castle?' asked Richard, looking into Sir Daniel's eyes.

'It happened between Moat House and Holywood,' answered Sir Daniel. 'But now sit down and eat. I must answer Sir Oliver's letter and then you can take it back to him in Tunstall.'

While Richard was eating, he heard a soft voice near his ear.

'Please don't turn around, but tell me the way to Holywood.'

'Take the road by the old church,' Richard whispered. He did not turn around but he saw the boy leave the inn quietly.

'Take this message to Tunstall immediately,' said Sir Daniel to Richard. Then he looked around the inn and said, 'Where is that girl - that boy, John?'

'He left the inn about an hour ago,' said Richard.

'I must find him!' cried Sir Daniel. He turned to one of his men and said, 'James, take six men and go and find that boy!'

Richard left the inn with the message. He rode his horse all night and early the next morning he was near a marsh. In the marsh he saw a young boy on his horse, but the horse was not moving.

'You're the boy from the inn,' said Richard. 'I saw you last night.'

'Yes, I am,' he said. 'I'm lost and my horse hurt his leg in the marsh. Now he can't move.'

'The poor horse!' said Richard. 'I'm sorry, but I must kill it. Please get off.' When the boy got off, he killed the horse.

'Can you help me go to Holywood, Master Shelton?' asked the boy. 'Yes, I can,' said Richard, 'but who are you?'

'Call me John Matcham,' said the boy.

'Why do you want to go to Holywood, John?' asked Richard. 'There's a kind friar at Holywood and he'll protect me,' said John. 'Protect you?' asked Richard.

'Yes, he'll protect me from Sir Daniel Brackley,' said the boy. 'He's a very bad man. He took me from my home and gave me these dirty clothes to wear.'

'But I know Sir Daniel,' said Richard. 'He's not an evil man.'

'He's evil and greedy, believe me,' said the boy. 'One day you'll understand why.' He was silent for a moment and then said, 'I heard that you are going to get married soon.'

'What?' said Richard laughing. 'And who am I going to marry?'

'Joanna Sedley,' said the boy. 'Sir Daniel planned the marriage.'

'Oh!' said Richard and his face became red. 'But I don't know her.'

Suddenly they heard a noise and saw Sir Daniel's seven men on the hill.

'Sir Daniel's men!' cried the boy. 'They're looking for me.'

'Don't worry, I'll take you to Hollywood. I promise!' said Richard. 'Get on my horse quickly.'

John smiled at his new friend and together they galloped into the dark forest.

CHAPTER THREE

Moat House Castle

Richard and John rode through the dark forest of Tunstall, where the tall trees moved in the wind. They stopped when they found a big, burnt house. 'This house looks like Grimstone,' said Richard.

'Grimstone?' asked John. 'What's that?'

'It was Ellis Duckworth's house until Bennet Hatch burnt it down five years ago. It was a very beautiful house before the fire.'

Behind the house they saw some men sitting around a fire. They were wearing old, dark clothes and each man had a bow and arrow. They were eating and talking like old friends, and some were laughing.

Suddenly a man up a tall tree cried, 'I see seven of Sir Daniel's men coming here!'

'Is Sir Daniel with them?' asked a handsome man.

'No, I can't see him,' answered the man on the tall tree.

'Let's attack them!' cried the handsome man. 'Go to your places quickly!'

'I must go and tell Sir Daniel's men about the attack,' said Richard to John.

'But why?' asked John, surprised. 'They're looking for me! You promised to take me to Hollywood. You can't leave me now!'

'You're right, John,' said Richard, 'I'll take you to Hollywood.'

Richard remembered his promise. The men in the forest took their bows and arrows and ran to their places. They started attacking Sir Daniel's men.

When the attack was over one of the men in the forest saw Richard and wanted to kill him.

'No, don't!' cried the handsome man. 'It was Ellis Duckworth, the leader of the Band of the Black Arrow. This boy is Harry's son. We mustn't hurt him. Bring him to me immediately! I want to talk to him.'

Richard heard him and said, 'Oh, no! Let's run away from here, John! Quickly!'

The two boys ran to the top of a hill and two men followed them. John was tired but he

continued running. They soon reached another forest and Richard said, 'No one is following us now - we're safe.'

'I can't walk or run anymore,' said John. 'I'm very tired.'

'Tired?' said Richard. 'What kind of a boy are you?'

John looked at him and started crying.

'Oh, please don't cry,' said Richard smiling. 'Look, there's a river. Let's go and drink some cold water.'

Later, when it was dark, they fell asleep under a tree.

The next morning they woke up and were hungry. But they had nothing to eat.

Suddenly they heard a noise coming from the forest. They saw a friar walking towards them. His head was covered with a big hood. He stopped near them and took off his hood.

'Sir Daniel!' cried Richard. 'This is a surprise! What are you doing here? And why are you dressed like a friar?'

'Richard,' said Sir Daniel, 'we lost the battle against York. It was a terrible battle and most of my men were killed. I am wearing friar's clothes so I can escape. Now I'm going home to Moat House Castle.'

Sir Daniel gave them both some bread and cheese. Richard and John ate quickly because they were very hungry.

'I'm surprised to see you two boys together,' said Sir Daniel. 'But now you're both coming with me, do you understand?'

'Very well, Sir Daniel,' said Richard.

'Yes, sir,' said John quietly.

Richard and John followed Sir Daniel and they soon arrived at the castle. Before going in John said, 'Well, Richard, now we must say goodbye.'

'But why?' said Richard. 'We re both going to Moat House Castle. We're good friends and we can see each other all the time.'

'You won't see me anymore,' said John sadly. 'And I can't explain why. I must do what Sir Daniel says. But remember, Richard, be careful of Sir Daniel.'

Richard did not like this mystery and wanted to know more. 'Goodbye, my young friend,' said Richard sadly.

Moat House Castle was a stone castle with a drawbridge, a moat and four tall towers. There were now only twenty-two men in the castle because a lot of them were killed during the last battle against York. These men were afraid of the Band of the Black Arrow because the band lived in the forest near the castle.

Richard went to his bedroom and closed the door. It was a big, cold room near the top of the castle. He did not have many things inside, just a large bed, a table and chair. Richard liked the room because it was somewhere he could stay on his own and think. Now he went to sit on the bed so he could think about all the recent events.

'What's happening at Moat House Castle?' he thought. 'Why can't I see my friend John Matcham anymore? Why is everyone telling me to be careful of Sir Daniel? Who is Joanna Sedley? How can I marry her if I don't know her?'

Richard was very confused and looked out of the small window in his room. He could see the big forest and he started thinking about the letter from John of the Green Wood.

'The letter says Sir Oliver killed my father,' he thought. 'But Sir Daniel says the letter is not true. He says Ellis Duckworth killed him. Did Ellis Duckworth really kill him? I don't believe Sir Daniel because I think he's hiding something from me. But what? I want to know the truth. I must know the truth and only Sir Daniel can answer my questions!'

CHAPTER FOUR

Joanna Sedley

Someone knocked on Richard's door. It was Bennet Hatch.

'Good afternoon, Richard,' he said, 'Sir Daniel wants to see you immediately.'

'Good!' said Richard. 'I want to see him too. I have a lot of things to ask him. There are too many mysteries at Moat House Castle - too many things I don't understand. Sir Daniel is not telling me the truth.'

'Richard,' said Hatch, 'please be careful. Don't ask Sir Daniel certain questions...'

'What do you mean, Hatch?' asked Richard.

'Well, you know... certain questions about...'

'I want answers to my questions!' said Richard angrily, and he went to Sir Daniel's room. Sir Oliver was there. He was sitting in a corner of the room and his face was white.

'Come in, Richard,' said Sir Daniel. 'Please sit down. You look worried, my boy. Are you still thinking about that letter on the church door?'

'Yes, and I want some answers,' said Richard. 'My father was killed when I was a little boy. People say that you and Sir Oliver killed him. I want to know the truth.'

'Oh Richard, do you really think I killed your father?' said Sir Daniel, smiling. 'Your father was my friend. When he died I looked after you all these years and taught you many things. And poor Sir Oliver! He's a priest - a kind, honest man.'

'Sir Daniel, for many years you used my family's money because I live with you,' said Richard angrily. 'And you'll soon plan my marriage and get a lot of money for it!'

'How can you say these terrible things?' cried Sir Daniel. 'You're making me very angry! But you're still a boy! We'll talk about this when you're a man. Remember, I did not kill your father - I promise.'

When Sir Oliver heard the words 'I promise' he jumped in his chair. Richard saw this and understood a lot.

After he left the room Sir Daniel said, 'The boy asks too many questions - he knows too many things. Put him in the room above the church!'

'The room above the church?' asked Sir Oliver quietly.

'Yes, you heard me!' said Sir Daniel.

Richard went to his room and remembered Hatch's words: 'Don't trust Sir Daniel or Sir Oliver.'

In the evening one of Sir Daniel's men came to his room and said, 'Follow me, Master Shelton, you'll sleep in another room tonight.'

'In another room?' asked Richard.

'Yes, in the room above the church,' said the man. It's nice and big... but it's full of ghosts!

'Full of ghosts?' thought Richard. 'What does he mean?'

Richard sat on the big bed in the new room and he was worried. He did not know that many men were killed in that room.

'I must leave this castle immediately,' he thought. 'Something bad is happening.'

Suddenly someone knocked on the door. It was John Matcham.

'John! I'm happy to see you,' said Richard.

'Oh, Richard, listen to me!' said John. 'I heard Sir Daniel's men talking. They want to kill you! I want to help you escape. I think there's a secret way out of this room.'

They started looking for it and found a small trapdoor under a table.

'This is the secret way out!' said John excitedly. 'We can escape together.'

Then they heard Sir Daniel's voice: 'Joanna! Joanna, where are you?'

'Who is Joanna?' asked Richard.

John looked at Richard and said, 'I am Joanna!'

'You!' said Richard, surprised. 'Then you're not a boy - you're a girl. You're Joanna Sedley!'

'Yes, I'm Joanna Sedley!' She took off her big hat and Richard could see her long blonde hair. She was very pretty.

'You're a brave girl!' said Richard smiling. 'And you're beautiful, too!'

They could hear Sir Daniel's voice again: 'Joanna, where are you?'

'We must escape immediately!' said Joanna.

They opened the trapdoor and went down the long secret corridor. They came to a big door but it was locked.

'What can we do now?' asked Joanna.

'I don't know,' said Richard. 'Perhaps someone will open this door because we're near the church. Let's wait here.'

They sat down on the stone floor.

'Are you Sir Daniel's ward too?' asked Richard.

'Yes, my mother and father are dead and my family was rich. At first Lord Foxham looked after me; he was a good man. Then Sir Daniel took me. After some time Lord Foxham took me back. He wanted me to marry Lord Hamley. When Sir Daniel heard this he decided to kidnap me! He gave me these boy's clothes and said, "You will marry Richard Shelton." Every marriage brings Sir Daniel a lot of money.'

'I'm happy I met you, Joanna!' said Richard.

'I am too,' she said.

Suddenly they realised someone was behind them. It was Bennet Hatch.

'Hatch, what are you doing here?' asked Richard, surprised.

'I'm looking for you, Richard,' said Hatch. 'Sir Daniel wants to kill you, but not Joanna. I want to help you both escape. Here is the key to the door.'

He took an old key from his pocket and opened the big door. 'Now you can escape across the church to the tower. I'll tell Sir Daniel I couldn't find you. Good luck!'

CHAPTER FIVE

Ellis Duckworth

Richard and Joanna ran across the church to the castle tower. Richard tied the rope around a big stone. He looked back and saw no one.

'We must climb down the tower to the moat and swim to the other side,' he said. 'Then we can run to the forest and we'll be free.'

'Very well,' said Joanna bravely.

'I'll go first and you can follow me,' said Richard. 'Can you climb down a rope, Joanna?'

'I'll try!' she said.

Richard started climbing down the rope. One of Sir Daniel's men on the other tower saw him.

'Shelton's trying to escape!' he shouted. He shot Richard in the arm with an arrow. Richard fell into the moat and tried to swim to the other side. Arrows were flying from the tower into the moat.

When Joanna saw Richard falling into the moat, she screamed. One of Sir Daniel's men heard her and took her by the arm. She was Sir Daniel's prisoner again!

Richard got out of the water and ran into the forest. From there he could see Moat House Castle, but he could not see Joanna.

'One of Sir Daniel's men probably caught her,' he thought. 'But Sir Daniel won't hurt her because he wants to plan her marriage. I'll come back and rescue her soon.'

His arm hurt and he could not walk. He fell to the ground on the leaves.

Ellis Duckworth and another man found Richard the next morning. He was very ill, so they took him to an inn and put him to bed.

When Richard woke up he said, 'Oh, my arm and head hurt a lot!'

Ellis Duckworth took his hand and smiled, 'My dear boy, I'm Ellis Duckworth and I was your father's best friend. He was like a brother to me.'

He looked at the other man and said, 'He's Lawless, one of my best men. Now Richard, please sleep. When you're better you'll tell me your story and we'll help you.'

The next day Richard was feeling better and he told Ellis Duckworth his long story.

'I'm happy you're here with us,' said Ellis. 'We're the Band of the Black Arrow, and we want to punish bad people. I know you're brave and loyal, Richard. Together we'll fight and destroy Sir Daniel! And we'll rescue Joanna, too! But first we must find out where she is.'

A few days later a mysterious messenger took this letter to Moat House Castle.

To Sir Daniel Brackley,

You are a bad man; you are greedy and dishonest. Now I know you killed my father. One day I will kill you.

Leave Joanna Sedley alone! I want to marry her soon.

Richard Shelton

Sir Daniel read the letter and thought, 'That boy is dangerous. I must find him.'

Many months passed and it was already winter. The house of Lancaster won a lot of battles and became strong and important. York was very weak now.

The town of Shoreby-on-the-Till was full of Lancaster nobles: Sir Daniel with sixty men, his friend Lord Shoreby with two hundred men, and many others.

One cold winter night in January three men of the Band of the Black Arrow sat in a dark inn.

'I don't like this place,' said one man. 'There are too many enemies here.'

'We're here to help Master Shelton,' said Lawless.

Suddenly a young man came into the inn. 'Master Shelton,' said Lawless, 'Sir Daniel left the inn a few minutes ago with six men.'

'Let's follow him,' said Richard. It was dark outside, but they could see Sir Daniel and his men walking towards the sea.

Near the sea they saw an old lord with some men. He was short and fat. He met Sir Daniel in front of a stone house with a wall around it.

Richard and his men hid behind some trees and watched the two men. But they could not hear them speak.

'It's old Lord Shoreby!' thought Richard angrily. 'He's another greedy man.'

'Tell me, Sir Daniel, how is the young girl?' asked the old lord. 'Is she very beautiful?'

'Lord Shoreby,' said Sir Daniel, 'Joanna Sedley's young, beautiful and... very rich. She'll be an excellent wife. The Sedley family was very rich and very important. She'll bring you a lot of money.'

And I'll pay you a lot of money, Sir Daniel, but I want to see her now,' said Lord Shoreby.

Sir Daniel and Lord Shoreby went into the stone house followed by their men. When they came out, Lord Shoreby was smiling and went home. Sir Daniel and his men went back to the inn.

'Now we know Joanna is Sir Daniel's prisoner,' said Richard. 'And Lord Shoreby wants to marry her - that greedy old man! We must stop this marriage! I want to look inside of the house. Lawless, come with me, please. The others can wait here.'

Richard climbed to the top of the stone wall. From there he could see the kitchen window and Joanna. She was sitting at a table with Bennet Hatch's wife, and three of Sir Daniel's men stood behind her.

'She's very beautiful,' thought Richard. He was happy to see her, but he was angry with Sir Daniel and Lord Shoreby. He climbed down the wall and said to his men, 'I saw Joanna; she's inside. We must rescue her. Let's think of a good plan!'

CHAPTER SIX

The Two Friars

Richard and the men of the Black Arrow decided to attack Sir Daniel's house near the sea and rescue Joanna.

That night Richard and his twenty men climbed over the wall of the house. But Sir Daniel's men attacked them before they could get into the house. Sir Daniel had sixty men and Richard had only twenty. His men fought bravely, but they could not get into the house and rescue Joanna. Many men were hurt and some were killed. They went back to the forest.

When Sir Daniel heard about the attack he said, 'Shelton wants to rescue Joanna and marry her. We must take her to my castle in Shoreby. She'll be safe there and she'll marry Lord Shoreby in a few days.'

The next morning Richard and Lawless sat by the fire.

'If we don't rescue Joanna, she'll have to marry that old lord,' said Richard sadly. 'What can we do?'

Lawless looked at him and said, 'Perhaps I can help you. Follow me.'

'Where are we going?' asked Richard.

'To a secret place,' said Lawless.

They walked in the snow to a small den under a big tree. Inside the den there was a table and a wooden box.

'This is my secret den,' said Lawless.

'Your secret den!' said Richard, surprised. 'It's very small.'

Lawless opened the wooden box and took out a friar's robe. It was old and brown. Then he took out another one.

'What are these?' asked Richard.

'They're two friar's robes. Let's put them on and everyone will think we're friars.'

'But why?' asked Richard, confused.

'With these robes no one will recognise us!' said Lawless. 'We can easily get into Sir Daniel's

castle in Shoreby. Remember, no one stops a friar.'

'Sir Daniel's castle in Shoreby - but why?' asked Richard.

'Master Shelton!' cried Lawless. 'Joanna is now in his castle and she'll soon marry old Lord Shoreby! Now do you understand?'

Richard was very surprised.

'How do you know this?' he asked.

'Young man, I'm Lawless... and I'm much older than you. I know a lot of things you don't know.'

'But how can we stop this marriage?' asked Richard.

'We'll think of a plan,' said Lawless. 'Now put on the friar's robe.'

Richard put on the robe and asked, 'How do I look?'

'Not bad, but I must do something to your face now,' answered Lawless.

He took some dark pencils from the box and drew a moustache and a small beard on Richard's young face.

'Perfect!' he said. 'Now you look like a friar. Remember to keep your hood on and no one will recognise you.'

Lawless put on the other robe and they left the den.

When they got to Shoreby they went to the castle. There were a lot of people at the castle: rich gentlemen with their ladies, soldiers, merchants, musicians and acrobats.

The two friars went to a soldier and said, 'We're here to visit Joanna Sedley.'

'Her room is on the second floor,' said the soldier.

The two friars went to the second floor and found Joanna's room.

'I'll wait outside,' said Lawless.

Richard entered Joanna's room and took off his hood.

'Joanna!' he said softly. 'It's me, Richard.'

She ran to him and they hugged.

'Oh, Richard,' Joanna said, 'I'm happy to see you! What are you doing here?'

'I'm here with a friend to rescue you,' said Richard.

'But how?' Joanna asked. 'I'm Sir Daniel's prisoner and I have to marry Lord Shoreby tomorrow morning! I'm so unhappy because I don't want to marry him.'

'You won't marry that horrible old man!' said Richard. 'I promise, Joanna. I want to marry you.'

He put on his hood and left the room quietly. He and Lawless went to the church to think of a plan. But Richard met Sir Oliver in the church.

'Richard Shelton!' he said, surprised. 'Sir Daniel is looking for you. You're in great danger.'

'I'm here to stop Joanna's marriage,' said Richard. 'I'm not afraid of Sir Daniel.'

'You can't stop this marriage,' said the priest, 'because Sir Daniel will kill you. You must stay in this church until tomorrow morning and then leave. If you try to escape, I'll call the soldiers.'

Richard and Lawless could not move.

At nine o'clock the next morning there were a lot of people in the church. Richard and Lawless were there, too. Joanna was wearing a beautiful white dress and had flowers in her head. But she was pale and sad. Old Lord Shoreby was wearing his best clothes.

Joanna and Lord Shoreby stood in front of the priest. Ellis Duckworth and his men were hiding on the stairs of the church tower. Suddenly a black arrow flew across the church and killed Lord Shoreby!

Joanna and the people in the church screamed. Sir Daniel and his men took Joanna away immediately. Richard and Lawless were angry but they could do nothing. They watched Joanna leave with Sir Daniel.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Victory of York

Richard and Lawless returned to the forest. That night Ellis Duckworth's men sat around the fire.

'There's going to be an important battle tomorrow between the houses of Lancaster and York,' said Duckworth to his men. 'We're going to attack Shoreby Castle. This time York will win!'

'Hurrah!' cried the men.

'And we're going to find my enemy, Sir Daniel. Remember, there's a black arrow waiting for him and his good friends, Bennet Hatch and Sir Oliver Oates!'

'We'll find them!' cried the men.

'Richard,' said Duckworth, 'go and meet the Duke of Gloucester at St Brigid's Cross tomorrow morning. Take him this important message:'

Dear Richard, Duke of Gloucester,

My twenty men will meet your soldiers outside Shoreby Castle before the battle. We will fight together and win!

Ellis Duckworth

Very early the next morning Richard rode to St Brigid's Cross. It was a cold morning and there was a lot of snow on the road. When he got there he saw a young knight dressed in armour on a big black horse. The white rose of the house of York was on his shield. He was alone and he was fighting eight soldiers. He was a good fighter and killed three soldiers.

'I can help you, sir,' cried Richard. He and the knight fought together and the fight was soon over.

The young knight was surprised. He turned to Richard and said, 'Thank you for your help. You're a good fighter and you saved my life! Who are you?'

'I'm Richard Shelton and I'm looking for the Duke of Gloucester.'

'Well, you found him!' said the knight. 'I'm Richard, Duke of Gloucester.'

'Here's a message from Ellis Duckworth,' said Richard, giving him the letter.

The Duke read the letter and said, 'Good! I need more brave men for this battle. Duckworth is a loyal friend and together we'll win.'

Soon the Duke's soldiers arrived. They were carrying flags with the white rose of York.

'Were ready,' he cried. 'Let's attack Shoreby Castle!'

Many of the soldiers at Shoreby Castle were still sleeping when the Duke attacked. Hundreds of soldiers fought in a long battle and many were killed. At the end of the battle there was a fire and Shoreby Castle was almost destroyed. The house of York won the battle and Sir Daniel escaped with Joanna, Bennet Hatch and two men.

The Duke of Gloucester was pleased with the victory. He went to Richard and said, 'You're a brave young man and you fought well. Kneel down, Richard, I want to knight you!'

Richard knelt down in front of the Duke and became 'Sir Richard'. This was a great honour for him.

The next day Sir Richard left Shoreby and started looking for Joanna. He knew she was with Sir Daniel. He travelled all day and in the evening he saw a small fire on a hill.

'Perhaps that's Sir Daniel's fire,' he thought. He moved silently through the trees and got closer. He saw Sir Daniel, Bennet Hatch and a young boy sitting near the fire. They were eating and talking.

'Joanna is dressed as John Matcham again!' thought Richard. 'Sir Daniel is very clever!'

Richard hid behind a big tree and watched them. It was obvious that Joanna was very sad.

He waited until they were finally asleep and then he quietly went up to Joanna.

'Joanna,' he whispered in her ear, 'wake up.'

She woke up and smiled.

'We must be very quiet,' whispered Sir Richard. 'Get up slowly and follow me.'

They moved away very quietly through the trees.

They got on Sir Richard's horse and went into the forest. That night they slept at Ellis Duckworth's camp near Holywood.

When Joanna woke up she said, 'This is like a dream, Richard. We're together again!'

'Yes, and tomorrow we can get married!' Sir Richard said excitedly. 'I'm going to talk to the kind friar of Holywood Abbey this morning.'

'I'm very happy, Richard!' said Joanna.

Sir Richard woke up very early on the day of his marriage. He was the happiest man in the world.

He put on his best clothes and took a short walk in the forest.

Soon he saw a friar walking towards him. As the friar came closer he recognised him - it was Sir Daniel! He put his hand on his sword because he was ready to fight.

'I'm not here to fight you,' said Sir Daniel sadly. 'My men and I fought bravely, but we lost the battle against the house of York. It was a long, terrible battle. And now I have nothing! I lost my castle, my men, my money, my jewels... I lost everything. Now I must escape to France where I still have some friends. I hope they can help me.'

'Go to France, Sir Daniel, and don't come back!' said Sir Richard angrily.

Sir Daniel turned around and continued walking in the forest. But after a minute a black arrow flew through the morning air and hit him in the heart. He fell to the ground and Sir Richard ran to his side.

'Richard,' he said quietly. 'Is the arrow... black?'

'Yes, it's black,' said Richard.

Sir Daniel looked at him for the last time and died.

'I killed him,' said a voice in the forest. It was Ellis Duckworth. 'And yesterday I killed Bennet Hatch.' He walked out of the forest and stood by Richard.

'You killed all of your enemies except one,' said Richard.

'Yes, Sir Oliver is still alive,' said Duckworth.

'Don't kill him, Ellis,' said Richard. 'Let's live in peace.'

Duckworth thought for a moment. He looked at the body of Sir Daniel and said, 'You're right, Richard, I want to live in peace. I don't want to fight or kill anymore. The Band of the Black Arrow doesn't exist anymore.'

At nine o'clock that morning Richard and Joanna finally got married at Holywood Abbey. It was a beautiful wedding and everyone was happy. Richard, Joanna, Ellis Duckworth, the men of the Black Arrow and the Duke of Gloucester and his soldiers celebrated with a dinner.

Richard and Joanna lived a happy, peaceful life in the forest, far from wars and battles.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

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