

# Fire, Bed and Bone

## Chapter 5

We were not, nor would ever be, truly wild. I had known fireside, bed and bone, Rufus's pat and his soft look. All of my life up till then had been lived in the village. But still I was no hand-fed house dog. I knew what to do and how to do it. And the summer had started which brings easy living.

I carried Fleabane, curled limp from my jaws, bouncing and swinging up the hill above the village. Halfway to the top there was a pile of rocks that jutted out from under an earth mound. It smelled a bit of fox, but there were none there at the time. I crept in underneath the rocks, with Fleabane still held safely in my jaws. A passage led back right inside the mound. There was more rock in there and dry, white bones and a spear and helmet with the skull still inside it, all so old that not the faintest whiff of people hung about them.

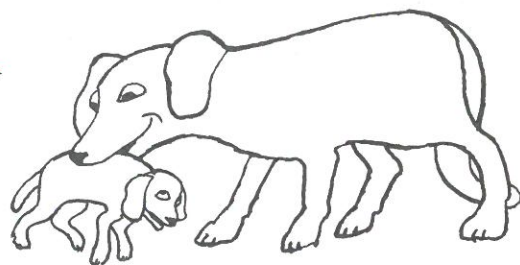
There was a little pile of soft ash near the helmet. Something had burned there, long ago. It made a smooth bed for my Fleabane, and I laid him down. He wanted me to stay with him, but I was hungry.

There was a rabbit warren down at the bottom of the hill, on Great House land. Dawn was coming, when the rabbits would come out to crop and nibble.

I caught one, snapped its neck and felt its warm flesh and blood bringing me life and strength. I caught another one and carried it back to my new home. I let Fleabane nose its fur, though he was too young to eat it.

When I had fed and washed Fleabane, I left him sleeping and went to lie in the mouth of our den. It was a strange and lonely feeling, watching the sun come up, hearing the birds wake and seeing cows at pasture below.

Towards midday I saw what I'd been watching for. A group of soldiers, with four prisoners between them. Rufus and



Comfort and two neighbours. Ede was not with them. Wat and Will and Alice might still be safe with her.

I woke Fleabane and told him I must go away but not for long, and that he must stay in the lair and not for any reason put his small brown nose outside it. There was still one rabbit leg for him to play with.

I wanted to run straight to Rufus, to hear his voice, to feel his hand on my head, to lick Comfort's brown hand. But I feared the soldiers. So I sneaked along, belly to the ground, dodging behind bushes, keeping low in ditches. Rufus did not see me. If he had seen me and called I would have run to him.

The soldiers took him to the stables in the yard of the Great House and pushed him and Comfort and the other two, all four into one stall. They shut and locked the doors behind them. One soldier stood outside.

The priest came and gabbled some rigmarole outside the stable door. I doubt if they could hear him inside. He spoke of treason and rebellion and King Richard's men. He spoke of law courts and execution. Beton, the miller's wife, watched with tears running down her face.

There is an old dog, Filbert, in the Great House yard, and I knew that he would watch the stable and bring me news so I went back to Fleabane.

On the way I saw Humble, hunting along the edge of the village. She spat at me. She has no loyalty at all.

1

What is the narrator of this story and how do you know?

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3 marks

1

2

What does the writing tell you about the person who hid in the passage behind the rocks?

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2

2 marks

3

Why do you think the person was hiding? Find two pieces of evidence to support your idea.

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3

2 marks

4

a) What is Fleabane? How old is he?

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4a

1 mark

b) Give two reasons for your answer.

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4b

2 marks

5

a) What is the relationship between the storyteller and Rufus and Comfort?

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5a

1 mark

b) Give two adjectives you would use to describe the relationship.

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5b

2 marks

6

What happened to Rufus and Comfort? What reason did the priest give for this?

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6

2 marks

Total marks