

# **JAMES THE FREER**

**An English tale**

In the American town of Picketown, there was one boy ten years old lingering about the streets near his school, which had ended half a stound earlier, for his elders weren't set to come back until 7:30 P.M.; his father was at work, and his mother was beseeing some earnest, unsundry dealing of kin. The Sun was already setting, it being late Harvest, toward the schoolday's end.

"I don't like being out when it's this dark," he thought. "I'd better start heading home."

It was cool and windy, and the sky was a wan, shadowy blue. James kept walking, wishing he'd brought his sweater. And he was hungry, not having eaten in a few stounds.

He saw some wretched-looking man leaning against his onefold-white van. The boy found his looks and the hew on his ansen to be swith offputting.

As he walked nearer – the man was right in the middle of his way home – he heard a bit louder than a whisper in a creaky reard, "Hey, little boy.. Do ya like sweets"

James was frightened. "Yes... Yes, I do like sweets. But my mom tells me to be greatly careful near outsiders."

"Look, uh, what's your name?"

"James..."

"Look, I mean you no harm, James. Come on, do I seem like I'd wreak you?"

"Well, I'm still a little scared.."

"Don't be afraid, James! I give sweets out to many of the children about here! Don't you want some yourself? It's safe."

"Okay, I guess I'll have some, sir."

"There ya go! Good boy, I'll give ya some. BUT, ya gotta come into my wain – that's where the sweets are – to pick what kinda sweets you want.. Come on, I swear it's sound."

"Alright.. I'll look..."

James warily crept inside, bewildered to see there were no sweets at all. His heart shook.

"Hey!"

At once he noted he was lying on the floor, blindfolded and bound up. He was being untied.

"Where am I!?"

Somebody, not the former "sweetdealer," took off his blindfold and said, "Get up. Now you're gonna work. This here is a workpen and stonedelf. For now, you'll be picking coffee beans. That man, the boss of this whole fremming, hoodwinked you into this van by

saying it had 'sweets,' and then he knocked you out and drove you here. I'm one of his wards. You better not fand anything."

James wept a great weeping hearing this, longing for his elders so dearly.

He was handed a gray stonen quartern in which to live, new clothes to wear (also gray), and a basket wherewith to gather the beans.

His heart torn asunder, he picked with the utmost hardship, amongst the many other children there, who all looked tough and hardened. For stounds he was made to pick beans, and he was given meek meatdeals, of bread and old-smacking water.

Every time he would think about his elders, home, or whether, and if so when, he might get out, he would begin to shed fulsome tears.

Later that night, James and the other children, who dealt with him not so kindly, were led to their quarterns to sleep. There they had taps of the same old water. After weeping again and beseeching God for eftleesing, he went to sleep, swith tired from stounds of hard work, on his hard, dingy bed.

Now, the Workpen, as it was called, though it also had coal and eal delves as well, was of hulking bigness, acres and acres and acres broad, with the main wield-building, where the wards and lord dwelt; the thewhouse with the children's quarterns, and endless fields of cotton and coffee, and of coal and eal delves. The whole land was umfanged by a seventy-foot tall, thick stonen wall, likely ten feet wide, that also likely raught unto ten feet beneath the ground.

There was a warded foregate wherethrough wickeny wains, looked over by wards, could infare.

James was awakened by a loud bell ringing for everyone to ready himself for more work, as the Sun was barely rising yet.

"Time to wake up!! Time to wake up!!"

Everyone arose, and they were given a bit of bread and a onefold earthwort-brew, smacking threadbare. They ate quickly and then went to their forechosen spots to do work. James took his basket and then began to pick the coffee beans, saddened greatly by his bethewed hode.

Still, none of the other thews, the eldest of whom looked sixteen years old, spoke to him.

After stounds upon stounds of arveth swink, they were all given the first midday meatdeals of the day, even having a fourth-stound breaktime, whereof James had till then known not. He gleed so much to stop working, even if but for a braid; though, he still was overall heartshorn.

He said hello to one of his fellow thews, to which he was grimly anqueathen with a cold “hi,” without eye-meeting. He didn’t talk any further for the rest of the break.

However, many others, those who were sundrily near, were speaking together, James could tell from afar calling each other “thou” and “thee,” which he thought he had heard earlier as well.

Shortly a ward yelled out, “Alright! Back to work! Break’s over!” And everyone eftcame to their spots.

James watched about ten crows seeking for food, that had somehow gotten over the wall by their skill of high-flying. He did not know birds could get in; he felt a little soothed seeing them, a little at rest.

Three months went by, in which James learnt the fellow-children’s yack and way of speaking (calling each other thou, not you, and so on), and he found a “clay stone,” that is a stone made of clay-antimber, which can write like chalk. He had benoted it to talemarm the bygoing days on his wall. He also began to write notes and even leethes, in small writing, sometimes even under his bed. And some staves of each word he left out to keep room.

One thing that he wrote was:

I swithly miss my mother and father  
And there are many other things I’d rather  
Be doing but I’ve become a shame now  
Working, sweating, much from my brow

James indeed was a onefoldly smart boy, and greatly crafty, and he had a wordstock far beyond that of his fellows. He was much more hopeful than them, eke, of getting out. And he still always would bede to God to be let out every night.

Another two months went by, and he had been wrixled for the coaldelf instead of the coffee picking.

He had to wipe off his earlier talemarmks owing to their great rime. And he had to find a new clay-stone from the ground. He benoted a sundry token for the former five months, and he started reckoning the days anew.

James was given a big shovel to benote in the coaldelf, and he would come eft every night filthy from earth and coal. But there were showers in a sunderly building that each thew could benote for sixty braids. The water was swith cold.

James’s work was sundrily uneath; he had to dig in a shrafflike delf amid the dark,

and then he would take the stones in a cart to a heap, which daily was brought to a greater mound. The earth was hard to dig.

About then, James had started talking to his fellow thews. One day whilst working, he and Theodore were speaking toward the delf's nether end.

"Theodore?"

"Yes."

"Dost thou think that it may be mightily – hear me out, my friend – to send a writ outside the Pen, th'a knowst.. By a crow?..."

"James! Don't talk about that! Thou'lt get us killed!"

"Calm down, Theodore."

"James, stop! I don't wanna talk about any of thy 'plots.' It they catch thee, you'rt dead, and I'm dead too if they see that thou were speaking to me about it!"

"I was only... Sorry, Theodore.."

"It's alright, only never talk about these things again."

"Hey, havest thou any weening how the lawmen – even the ferd – haven't shut down this thewstead? It's swith big, and the rich must know what's going on..."

"The lawmen, rich, and wielders are 'in on it,' to put it mildly..."

"WHY?!? The rich isn't that evil!"

"Hey, thou askedst. And thou'st got a lot to learn."

"But if we're caught talking about this they'll wreak us, right? So why art thou telling me this if thou were so afraid before?!"

"Bro, they don't care if we say this kinda shit. Doesn't harm them. But sundry... plots... threaten their whole fremming, but let's stop talking about this."

"Okay.."

Two days went by, smartfully as ever. It was James's eleventh birthday. No-one sang him happy birthday, or even said it to him, but his one friend Theodore.

"I truly feel elder."

"What, overnight?"

"I guess, yes."

"How knowest thou what day it is?"

"I've been keeping talemaks since I got here, I know which day that was, and I know what months have thirty or one and thirty days. And Soalmonth's easy."

"Seems to me thou likest it here, in this hellstow."

"I hate it. I miss Mom and Dad so much. I still have them in my dreams.." He began

to weep. “But... I.. gotta make the best of it...”

“Oh man, James, look, thou keepest saying thou’lt see them again some day.. Only don’t say that before the wards. There’s no way they’ll have thee in here when thou’rt, uh, fifty years old.. Sorry man, but I can’t help thee. At least I’m thy buddy so thou dostn’t get too lonely..”

James kept weeping, shoveling more coal into the cart.

Years went by. In that time, nothing of note happened, other than James waxing more hopeless, caring less, and reaching ripehood, and that one thew who fanded fleeing was killed. James also overheard talk of being sold – as happens to some thews – but that never was born out.

Now James was fourteen years old, and Theodore fifteen. All of Theodore’s hope was fargone, whilst James had a little bit lef. He seldom beded to God anymore, and wiped off his old leethes to write new ones, like:

Thewdom seemingly forever  
I might well leave this hell never  
In a stead beyond wearisome  
Yet I still bear hope of freedom

One day James was bidden to went to another quartern, wherefor he was not told. He was greatly saddened as he had grown a liking to that quartern, and had written much leethework. But now, he would only have to start again anew, he thought. And he did mind the rime of years, months, and days that he had been in this awful stead; he only would have to write the talemaks again.

A few months later, something went swith much: now in the delves, the thews were given TNT (Thri-Niter-Tulushaft) to quicklier reach further into the delf. One thew shortly died from the blast.. And then another. James was so glad that he didn’t, but it was still much deadlier and frightsomer for him and all the thews.

The lord of the Pen, the “sweetdealer” who wiled James nearly four years ago, was seldom ever seen. He bode always in his wicken, or even away from the Pen, and his wards were the only overseers.

Some time later, James was in the delf, but Theodore was missing.

“I wonder what happened to him.. Is he swith sick or something??” James thought.

Thews were never gone for even one day. Indeed, James’s friend was missing. The

next day he was still gone, and James wept, for Theodore was his only friend. His life there had waxen even more bitter.

James was working the delf one month later, and at once a great hopelessness befell him: "You'll never leave the Pen." This saddened him so. Thence forward his eard grew colder and he smirked even less. Now were he to die, he would care less, too; maybe he wouldn't care at all. And he almost never beded any longer.

One could ween the thews had been taking cotton balls for themselves, or maybe coffee beans, lumps of coal, or all of them, as now each night before they could eftcome to their quarterns, they had to be looked over carefully by wards, to asoothe they bore not any of those worthful wares. Some thews said (ones who seldom said anything) that the wards were rining them lustfully.

Life on the Workpen was only growing worse.

Two months later, now in the Summer, for some untold grounds, the thews' quarterns in building two (James was in the building one) were made to wend to the other building, so now there would be two boys a quartern. No-one knew what was wrong with building two.

Now a boy named Ronni was biding in James's quartern. Ronni misliked James and his leethecraft, and sometimes he would make James sleep on the floor.

Shortly thereafter, in the following weeks, James had a thought: he would not work for one day, for there were not always wards watching the thews in the delf. He only stood there to the side, whilst the others swinked away.

One thew, whose name was Jeremy, shouted, "What the fuck art thou doing?! Get thy ass down here to work with the rest of us! What, dost thou think thou'rt better than us?"

And another, Pat, short for Patrick, yelled, "Yeah, Jamie! Have the wards risen thee above us all?!"

James answered wrothly, "No! I only need a bit of a break, y' know.. Come on!"

"Let's beat his ass," Jeremy said, "Herr Softy-needs-a-break!"

As they fought with their shovels, a great shouting went forth, and they beat James wretchedly, greatly outrimed.

"I'll work!! I'll work!!"

"Thou'dst better!" Someone shouted.

So James, now wounded, got to work. Later, when he eftcame to the quartern building, the ward asked meanly, "What the hell happened?!"

"They, the others beat me up."

“You’d better not be getting into any drake, got it?”

“Yes, herr.”

“We can’t have you up to any noughtiness; you’re here to work.”

When James got to his quartern, Ronni laughed at his wounds. And he didn’t say anything back, sleeping that night again upon the stonen floor.

A few days later, something astonishing happened: the lord of the Pen was seen again! Everyone was greatly unheartened, seeing the wicked ansen of he who hoodwinked them into being there, often, but not always through “sweets.”

James quivered upon the sight of that man.

“That’s the one who said he was going to give me sweets!” He shouted, shaking and having awful flashbacks. He was heartwroken, along with a few others.

The man shouted through a loudhorn, “I am the lord of this Workpen. You all must mimmer me. I will be watching you, my little thews, to see how hard you work. Work hard!”

James was all the more frightened. The lord bade everyone to start.

For a time, James and the others in the delf were being creepily stared at by the lord and carefully deemed. Everyone was at their peak work.

Later in the day toward sunset, thews started to be beckoned to go to the lord alone for a leedier doom of their andevens as thews.

At last James was beckoned, greatly afraid. He went to a stead amid the field where the lord stood, holding his shovel for want of a good spot to leave it. There was no-one else about, not even wards. They must have been dealing with what the lord otherwise dealt. And also the lord wished to make his thews even more afraid, which the wards would lessen.

“James.” The lord said swith softly but unfriendly. “I mimmer you from the first time we met. Here, take this.” He held out a hand with something small in it. James walked nearer and carefully took it. It was a small butterscotch sweet.

“Did I not swear you a sweet on that first day, when you were so young?”

James bode still, yet greatly adread.

“You’re a good thew, I dare say.”

James still answered not.

“BUT!” The lord’s ansen went to a more fearsome hue. “You, as some of my best wards have been telling me, have been thinking about fleeing. And James, we can’t have that happen, can we?— I’m sorry, James, I’m going to have to kill you. But eat your sweet first.”

James stood frozen, with it yet in his hand. He shivered and bode still, eyes wide open, still in his spot.

“Well, go on, James, eat it.”

He put it in his mouth and then grasped the shovel fast in both hands. He walked toward the lord and swang it with great strength which he had never benoted in his life, toward the lord’s head.

Before the lord had time to wend, he fell down to the ground, keeling. Then, with his shovel, James beheaded him, and spat out the sweet. He was wary not to get any blood on himself.

James looked through the lord’s clothes and found the keys which whereon were engraven “MAIN BLDG” and “WICKEN.”

James bethought a plot as to how to get out, but he didn’t know how to throughgo the wards and other wickens.

He buried, benoting the shovel, the lord’s lich and blood. He then eftcame to his workstead, without looking amiss. After a while, all the wards were seeking the lord, but they could not find him. James went outside the delf.

Indeed, as he had so hoped, even the wards by the main building’s infare were gone. Otherwise he’d need to fight them. He thanked God for such a blessing as he ran with all the speed he had in him toward the building. Once he got there he unlocked the door and sped down the hallway, hiding when needed, until he raught the lord’s wicken. He unlocked the door,

Almost everybody in the building was gone, seeking for the lord, and thus the wicken was empty.

It was rich-looking, with a golden wedge on the desk, that James reckoned to be of true gold. “BARTHOLOMEW ROTHSCHILD,” it said.

James sought the room for things to benote for his outleap, opening a door leading to an underroom. He switched on the dim lights, and he saw, behold!— at the bottom of the stairs was his friend Theodore, next to a heap of bones. Hapfully he was alive, fastened to the wall in lenches.

“Theodore!”

“James!! Get the key! It’s in the bottom drawer of his wickenboard!”

James ran, got it, ran back and freed his friend.

Theodore hugged him.

“Stop!” James said. “We have swith little time! Follow everything I do!”

“Yes, James!”

They lope back up from the underroom, and James ran to the building's foredoor and he peeped out. The wards in the fore were also gone. He went back and swiped a lighter from the lord's beed, and he thrested the "F. GATE OPEN" knap on his wieldboard, which lay on the beed. He also took his shotgun if he meet any wards in his path.

James dashed down the hall, Theofore following him, to a room he had earlier went by, "BLASTLESTOW." They found thousandpounds upon thousandpounds of TNT inside. James snatched some and told Theodore to bear it. He then lit one of the longer blaststrings in the room, and they fled out of the building to the fore.

They dashed toward the open gate, no wards about. But then at once some atewed and starting weathing after them.

But in a braid— "BOOM!!!"

A bedreading, deafening blast went forth, the whole main building bursting into flames. Of such great dread the wards keeled onto the ground.

The gates began to shut, taking James and Theodore aback; they thought they stood open until the shut knap was thrested, but they fled in time before it shut.

Now with the wield network felled, not even the wards could open the gate; thus they could not hunt James and Theodore.

And now, they beheld for the first time the sight of the world about, outside the Workpen. There were furrow trees and shrubs only, no mansettling unto the skyline; only raw woodlands. And there was only a dirten road leading out of the stead.

Now James and Theodore had two big sticks of TNT with them still. They wicked until the mid of the night, retching what they each underwent. Theodore had been hafted (albeit they were already haftlings) in the lord's dimhouse (the underroom) for befellowing James. They were greatly athrill to eftone, and belived off wild purple yearnovets and pricklewort ovets. The woods were well-stocked with food for days and weeks, even months; having endless groves of ovet-bearing worts. And there was a waterstream nearby, the Pen's waterordfrom, born in by rusty pipes for the thews.

At the time James reckoned were midnight owing to the stars, he and Theodore went by the wall — benoting a speld to light the way, which was a wild stick litten by the lord's lighter — that they believed to be nearest to the thews' wicks, and James set one TNT-stick against the wall.

Swith fearful, James lit the thread and they hurried far away into the bushes.

Seven braids later, BOOM!!!— the wall's bottom brast open enough for one to flee.

Much time went by, till at last wards began leaving through the hole in great rimes, seeking to slay James and Theodore.

Then at once, hoards of thews came running out of the hole as well, ready to die, bearing shovels in their hands for weapons; there were at least one hundred and forty in all. Then they started shrieking, almost like a harwoop. But the wards, who had guns, began hunting after them and shouting too. Some thews died.

So the thews ran back into the Pen by the hole.

“Run toward the other thew building!” Someone yelled out. They all did so, fanding to take shelter, and to see if there might be anything for them to benote, like a weapon — mayhaps that was why they were went from that building to the first.

“The door is open!”

They all ran in, and behold!— there were many shotguns and handguns and kernelblasters! The wards left the door open in their rush to benote the weapons to fang James and Theodore.

Everyone snatched one or more of each weapon.

The wards, having left James and Theodore to fight against the thews, raught the building. Seeing the wards gone, those two went in to help their fellows.

Now the wards were in an unhapful hode: they were all outside in the open lift, fanding to fight those who were inside a building fullstocked with weapons.

About forty thews forword that night, but the rest made the wards to note up their fiones, whilst they had fulth. The thews cast kernelblasters at the wards, and then James yelled out through the hole in the wall, “Hey, wards!!” He stood right at the outfare, fanding to be seen, while Theodore, it being dark, snuck his way near the wards with the lighter and leftover TNT stick. The wards cared more about the other thews than James, not coming after him. Theodore, near the building, lit the TNT, and after five seconds he hurled it toward the wards— “BOOM!!” They all forword at once.

A thew left the building and shouted, “Who are ye?”

Theodore showed himself, and James ran over. “It’s me, Theodore!”

“And James!” he called from afar, still running.

The whole tale of what happened he told to the thews, who began bowing to the ground before him, following after Lucas, who first did so.

“Do ye underfang me and Theodore as your leaders, to take you back to the borough whence we were stolen?”

They all yelled out “Yes!!” gleefully, loaving their great heleths some more.

It was then about two stounds after midnight, and it was swith dark, only dimly litten by Theodore’s speld.

James shouted, “Sicker the rich must be after us by now, or at least they will be

greatly soon, so we'd better gather foodstocks and flee at once!"

Hapfully, the downfall of the main building shut off all the wards' lines to the rich, but a richwickener was set to come and look at the Pen the following morrow, owing to a dearth of answers from the wards.

"Gather up," quoth James, "all food in the kitchen—" which was right next to the building one— "and put it into sacks, and everyone, take four kernelblasters and two shotguns!"

They all did so and then crawled under the hole in the wall.

"The road leading to the town is that way!" James called out, fingering where it was. "Let's take the woodsith, going straight with the road and the stream yonder!" fingering toward it. "Let's follow the stream."

They trod onward for three stounds and three fourths, when at last the mildest hewn light atewed in the East: the Sun was rising.

James leared the feelings on: how to find the North Star; which ovets were eatenly; how to quickly ford the stream; what his plot was for once they raught town; and other lore needful for them in their biding amidst the wilderness, all of which James had an inborn skill for.

The thews were so yearful to eftcome home, that they could walk many stounds without stopping, even though they had gotten swith little rest that night.

The Sun now atewing above yon Eastern hills, James yelled, "All of you, stand still so I can count you! We must keep a reckoning of your rimes the whole way."

So they did, straightening into a line, and he reckoned them at eight and ninety, he and Theodore thereamong.

They kept on walking, and Theodore thewed as the thrum's foreward, bidding them if he yelled out "hemlock," a rather sundry word, they must at once hide, behind a tree, on the ground, and so forth. And the sicker-word was "shellfish."

Some time later, when the Sun had risen sevenfold its width above the hills, the whole trum heard the shout, "Hemlock!!" And in a braid everyone hid as best as mightly. A wieldish bigwain had went by on the road, not greatly far from where they were. After a short time, Theodore yelled "shellfish" and on they went, a little soothed.

An hour before midday, by which they had been walking for eight stounds, they vox swithly weary and needed to rest.

Therewhile, the wieldish wickner raught the Pen's gate, which from that whom did not look amiss. He got out of his wain and thrested the knap to speak to a ward to be letten in. The knaps did nothing, not even ring a callup swey.

“Hello!!” he shouted over the wall. “Any ward there?!”

No answer. He went about the side of the Pen, to the left, and saw the hole in the wall, bewildered, and carefully went through, and saw the slain bodies and the wrake all about, and the ashen main building. He was taken far aback.

He called up the ferd on his handset a bit down the road where it picked up, and bade them to send at once, telling them what he saw. They said they would come right away.

So, James bethought in a braid, and thus he told the thrum, “Sickerly the ferd is after us now. To forbear being seen even by whirlcrafts, we’ll have to hide in a shraff.”

He chose six among them to throughseek in their allotted bearings for such a shraff. They were given a stead to come back when they were done, whither everyone else went straight. It was a spot much further in the woods from the road, beyond the stream.

The Sun was nigh its setting, and then the last of the six boys came back, having not found, like the rest, any shraff. At the skyline they saw whirlcrafts coming toward them.

“We’re doomed!!” adread feelings began shouting. “Woe to us!”

“James, redd us again this time, we beseech thee!”

He, as smiltheaded as he could be, bethought a way to leese them from the F.R. (Foroned Riches) Ferd.

“Wait!” Theodore shrieked. “There’s a onefold answer to this!”

“What is it??”

The whirlcrafts grew nearer.

“Everyone, the trees will hide us! If our whole band is together, they’ll see us. But if each of us finds one tree and wraps about it tightly, they won’t! Everyone, find a leafy tree and hug it! Now! I’ll tell you when it’s sicker.”

They all hurried to the leafiest trees in sight and tightly wrapped their arms about them. Soon the whirlcrafts flew straight above them, adreading all the boys as they almost held their breaths.. And then away..

What felt like stounds later (but was only a hundred braids), Theodore said “Shellfish, everyone; we’re sicker. From now on, whenever I say ‘stonefall,’ ye all must hide right like this, under trees.”

A great mirth and gleeful shout went through the thrum, that they had not been seen.

Theodore, after everyone forthwent in their woodland lode for a short while, saw another five whirlcrafts toward the skyline. He told everyone, and they all were affright anew, some queathing “We’re doomed!” again.

He soothed them, "Don't fret! Last time they didn't see us! I'll say the word again when they reach near, and we'll hide till they're gone. We've got this!"

The trees the thrum was walking amid were thick and forebade them from seeing far, so Theodore went and sought for a glade whence to watch the sky.

After some eerie time of waiting, Theodore yelled out "Stonefall!!" and again they hid themselves under the fulsome boughs, each one to his tree, till Theodore called "shellfish."

As the thrum eftgathered, James told them "We did it! I don't think they saw us! Now let's keep going forward!"

After about half a stound of forth wandering, another three whirlcrafts were spotted, and the same tree-hiding was done again, till they went by. Again they were not seen.

They forthwent in walking, all the more beknowing they needed rest.

"We'll sleep after sunset," Theodore said, though everyone was so weary already. Nonetheless they went onward for another stound, until the Sun lay beneath the skyline and their souls felt about to leave them.

"Let us wick!" James bade, and everyone but he and Theodore keeled onto the earth, falling asleep as soon as their bodies landed. Hapfully they had raught a thicker spot in the woods, where they could not be seen from above.

Thus James and Theodore chose, none of the rest awake, that both of them would sleep, but not at once; James would sleep first, till midnight, when Theodore would wake him, and then he would sleep till James woke him at sunrise, thereby leaving no time unwarded.

James fell onto the ground of weakness, fast asleep, whilst Theodore yearned he could too.

Nothing of note happened in the six hours thence until James's shift, whereat they swapped, again nothing happening amidst James's.

Then the sun began to rise, so James awoke everybody in the camp and had them tiredly bear onwards.

"James," asked one of the boys named Robert meekly, "how long dost thou think till we get to town?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not sicker. Truly, I know nothing. Hopefully not too much longer.

By midday, everyone had eaten all of their foodstock, but there were mickle wild ovets growing on the trees about them, which then they needs ate alone.

A stound later, after having belain being seen by yet more whirlcrafts, Theodore watching amid the woods found a deer! He shot it with his shotgun and affrighted everyone in the main camp, thinking something ill to have happened. But he came back, thrilled, boding what he had caught.

James, willing to deal it out fairly to the thrum, called out, "Who greatly wants deermeat right now?" Everyone rose their hand.

He then fanded to reckon who was the hungriest, and addeemed fifteen among them. He then tended a fire and breeded the deerflesh over it, Joshua and Cameron holding each side of it and wharving it.

James and Theodore, having slept the least, and being the thrum's leaders, ate the greatest helping, while the rest of sundered among the chosen fifteen hungriest boys.

It was so toothsome, them not having eaten meat in years. Aside from some gristle, sinews, bones (the marrow whereof they sucked), the hooves, the horns, and the brain, every bit of its flesh was eaten.

Everyone else was asoothered the next wight caught would be outdealt to other folks than those fifteen.

And thus they forthwent walking, the Sun soon setting, whereat they wickered. Unlike the former night, James and Theodore chose two boys to watch in shifts, Rowan and Eddie, whilst they slept.

Amid Eddie's shift, about two stounds before sunrise, as he was watching the camp, he came upon a bear, his heart leaping of fright. Slowly he walked aback, keeping his sight fast on the bear, till he raught the camp, at which he called out in a loud reard, "Everyone, wake up! Wake up! There's a bear coming nearer! Everyone affright it away!"

They all yelled out a shout and started to hunt it, and Theodore drew his shotgun and shot it. It fell to the ground.

Again a fire was tended, and the bear was cut into deals and breeded, and the forty hungriest were given a helping, as well as Rowan, Eddie, Theodore, and James.

And again, all but the gristle, the sinews, the bones, and the brain was eaten.

Then the Sun rose, but everyone lacking much sleep, they slept a stound further, aside from Theodore who warded in that time.

Once he reckoned a stound had gone by, he called out "Time to wake up! Time to wake up!" which eftminded him of the Workpen wards.

Everyone arose, and they walked further.

Formerly, when they were all thews, the boys did not like each other aside from a few near friends, and there was no onehood or any feeling of shared hardship among them.

But now, after their freeing, they got along swith well and bore love and friendship for each other, almost like a maith or theed.

“It’s time to bathe and clean our clothes!” James boded about midday. “Let’s go in the ea.”

Everyone bedipped themselves in the cold stream, cleansing their clothes, dried them as best as they could, and put them on again. Then they went forth on their way, no longer beset with filth.

It was two stounds and a half after midday that Theodore came back to the thrum in a great hurry.

“Everybody!! There’s a ferdwickner!! Note stealth and let’s slay him!”

A sneaky boy, Stan, ran near to where Theodore saw the wickner, with his shotgun ready, and hid behind a tree.

The wickner took note, but as soon as he atewed to Stan, walking by the tree and about to fang him, Stan shot him right in the head, his lich falling onto the ground. Stan eftcame to the thrum, telling them what he had done.

They kept going onward, and James aset seven boys to foreward alongside Theodore, on all sides of the thrum, to watch for more harmen. Thereof they found no others that day.

As the Sun was setting the thrum came upon a grove amidst the woods of endless prickleworts bearing unreckonly rimes of ovets. The ovets’ outsides were spiky, but in cutting them open shrewdly they ate mickle, hundreds and hundreds.

Then, their bellies full, they slept, the wan evenglow still mildly seenly toward the skyend. And again James and Theodore took their shifts warding.

On the morrow, while the Sun rose, the thrum rose too, and kept walking.

A boy named Nathan went up to James at the thrum’s head, and weakly said, “James, my master, James, I feel sick...”

James looked at him and felt warmth all over his body, beknowing he had a rith. James bethought what to do.

Nathan feeling swith cold, James gave him his shirt, for they had no whittle. And he boded to Patrick to help Nathan walk although ill.

Nathan drank much water from the stream, and was given many ovets to eat. There was little else to do, since he could not rest, it being needful for them all to abide onward.

A stound before midday, Theodore came back to the camp and kithed to the rest “I found a shraff!”

The whole thrum, as James led them, walked straight thither. They asoothered no

fearsome wights were inside, and went in.

In that stead of the woods there were fewer trees, meaning a whirlcraft might see them; but as they bode within the shraff, another six flew over, and they were shielded from sight.

There they rested for a short while, and kept walking onward, after making sicker there were no wightcrafts afoot.

Soon they raught the woods' end and a weasten's beginning. It was stony and had few shrubs and even fewer trees, but was rife with hillocks beswathen in dry grass.

And it was, as they were climbing a mild hill, they came to the top, and behold!— in the far off yonder right at the skyline, was Picketown!

Everyone yelling out of glee, James quoth, "Everybody! I reckon the firl thither is about ten miles! If we only walk a mile each stound, we'll get there by tonight!!"

A great thrill went about the thrum.

"But!" James forthspoke, "We're going to betell the news our thewdom, and the sins done against us!"

"Yay!!— Why 'but?'"

We don't have wick for the night in the borough, and the newstows are only open in the day. Thus we will have to wick in the wilderness one more night... I'm sorry, but we must. Keep walking until I say stop!" And onward they went. Everyone was saddened greatly, for they had thought they would go home that night.

"We can't eftcome home," James said, "until everyone knows of the rich's samplotting. Then we can't be fanged once home. I mimmer where the newstow is."

A few miles later, once they had gotten into another woods of thicker treeboughs, James boded, "Everyone wick here!"

They settled, and at last Nathan could lie down, greatly wearied. It was a stound and a half before sunset.

As the whole thrum lay in the grass, James said to them, "If we go into town with our shotguns and kernelblasters, well... That would not fare well for us. So once we reach a little nearer, we'll have to leave all our weapons on the ground, hidden. We'll bury them. And I'm glad we barely had to note the guns, and never the kernelblasters.."

James and Theodore slept when the Sun set, and again allotted Rowan and Eddie to take shifts warding. Nothing noteworthy happened that night.

Come morning, James awoke and called out, "Rise and shine, everybody! Rise and shine! We're in for a swithly great day! Everybody get going!" And they went on their way.

Two miles later, James spotted a deer and boded that it be slain. Someone shot it, and the fifteen hungriest were given cooked deals of it.

They walked another two miles, wherein they needed to hide from whirlcrafts umb trees once again.

At midday, James called out, "Everyone leave your weapons here! Hopefully we won't need them! Bury your shotguns and kernelblasters!" So they did, as well as James, making it all the eather to walk, to their glee.

Two stounds later, they were nigh the edge of Piketown a thousand yards, and James heartened them in saying, "Half a mile left!"

And it was, at two stounds and a third after midday, the thews, the former thews, eight and ninety in rime, raught Piketown's mark. There the wilderness ended, and they came upon Roose-Hip Lane, a small underboroughish street with many little houses, all belonging to a homeowners' fellowship.

James stopped everyone and said: "Behold, Piketown! Mansettling! But before we income I must loave all of you wonderful folks, from twelve to sixteen in eld, for ye have wight souls and have dealt boldly, fighting the fearsome wards and fleeing the dreadful Workpen; beliving and wandering in the wilderness, in these hard and long days; becoming good friends and fellows to each other for the first time; ye who have at last felt what it means to be alive!"

All the boys went to hug James and Theodore, their heleths.

"Now!" James quoth. "After you.." And he stepped aside, letting everyone else income Piketown's mark before him. Theodore stood by him.

So great was their mirth and their glee to be back, and they yelled out great shouts, and laughed and reeled and lope about; that they at last could set foot on their hometown.

"This is the greatest day of my life!" someone shouted.

"Yeah!!" the rest upheld.

Then James beckoned Theodore to walk over, which he did, and then said, "Now I myself will walk over." And he stepped over the mark, onto the street. He had eftcome to Piketown, after five years.

He wept and fell on his knees. But after being soothed by his friends, he stood up, and was ready again to go onward.

"Let us go to the newstow!" And they all followed him as he went up Roose-Hip Lane to Hallow Street, and thence onto Worth Way.

And half a stound later they raught it: TBF (Theedwide Broadcasting Fellowred) in big staves atop a highrise.

They walked in the building.

“Hi. Can I help you?– Aye, that’s a great many teenelders! What do you need??”

“Well,” James told the man, “we eftcame right now from a rowny thewcamp. We are all those missing children from this town.”

At once the man hailed someone on the fartalker. “Hi. Come downstairs right now! This is BIG news!”

A sixtybraid later, a newsman yclad in all gray showed up.

“What are these kids doing here? What’s the tale??”

“These are the kids who went missing years ago.”

“Holy shit....” He was astounded. “Follow me, kids, up the stairs!”

They all walked up with him a few stairflights, and then through a hall leading to the newscastingroom.

“You’re not gonna believe this, Mike..” said the man.

“What?”

“Kids – teenelders – tell ‘im your tale.”

And they gave him a full reckoning of what he needed to know.

The other newsman, bewildered, yelled, “We have Piketown’s news of the hundredyear! I swear this’ll be in tomorrow morning’s news! And we won’t shut up about this for a month! And we’ll unshroud the rich and the ferd, so they can’t even lay a finger on you!” And the thrum began walking out.

“Bye-bye, kids! Good luck!”

“Thanks!”

They followed James to a stiller street and forgathered for his last speech.

“Boys, be not afraid on your own ways home, and God be with you!

“If ye wish to meet up again, we may do so each week on Sunday at three on the timekeeper, at the Mid Piketown Playstow!”

“Yay!!” They all said they would.

Theodore stepped up and quoth, “I’m so glad I could thew you great folks! I’ll see you on Sunday!”

And they all went to hug him and wish him farewell.

“Nathan, wilt thou be alright?” Theodore asked.

“Yes, my friend. I’ll be fine; my mom will care for me.”

“See you on Sunday!” James said. “And with that, I bid you all my warmest farewells!” They all hugged him, he gave a handtoken to the thrum, and began to walk away.

“Bye James! Bye Theodore!” they all yelled out heartily. And they sundered ways for then, to go back to their own homes. And good hap had it that none of their elders had went in the time they were gone; they all hoped they might see their sons again. Though James had given all the thrum his house’s street and rime, lest they had went.

And it was at nearly the same time of day as when James came upon the “candyman,” that now he was walking home, as if that day five years before had never ended.

“I’m glad I was kidnapped,” James thought to himself. “Otherwise I couldn’t have redded those seven and ninety boys. Too bad some of them died, though... Well, at least I redded the rest...”

And in quick time he raught his home: 2653 Maple Street. He had ended the walk home from school that he had started five years ago.

He knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” his father asked.

“Your son...”

His father, George, couldn’t believe it, but he opened the door, and behold!– James was standing right there, and he swooned. His mother, Sally, ran to the door too and swooned as well.

For now, James’s younger brother, Nick and elder sister Angela were in another room; they would meet him later.

But first James set his unaware elders on the livingroom streen.

“Wake up, Dad! Wake up, Mom!”

They woke up.