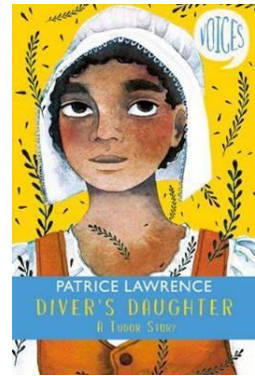


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The Bag of Beads



We'll take you to Southampton." Gina's head poked through the hatch to the hayloft. "We have to leave soon, though."

The head disappeared and it was replaced by a tray held high.

"Take it! Before I drop it all!"

Gina had brought two pies, still warm by the smell of them, and a flagon of... I flicked up the lid. "Is that milk?"

"Fresh from the cow," she replied.

I took the tray and Gina followed it into the loft.

Mama was sitting up, but she was nowhere near the surface yet. She'd only just pushed off from the bottom. Gina went and crouched next to her.

"Is she sick?"

I nodded.

"I'll fetch Griffin."

"No, please—" But she was gone and back a few moments later with her brother. He nodded to me. A good meal and a warm bed for the night hadn't made him any happier.

"Your mother is **melancholic**. Her **humours** are off balance," he said. "She needs warmth and water to redress her balance and, perhaps, an **infusion of hellebore**. We have some with us."

"Are you an **apothecary**?" I asked.

Gina laughed. "We can fix your humours and grind your knives. We can even throw six apples in the air and catch them one by one with our eyes closed."

There was another little laugh. It had come from Mama though her head was still bowed.

Gina broke off a chunk of pie and put it in Mama's hand and raised Mama's hand to her mouth. I saw Mama take a little bite.

"See, she's getting better already," Gina said. "Are we ready to leave, Griffin?"

"Yes. Straight away."

It was hard to **manoeuvre** Mama down from the hayloft. Her legs flopped around and she almost kicked Griffin in the head. I heard him swear under his breath. Finally, we were outside. They were travelling by horse and cart too. Their cart was packed with chests and packages.

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"Some of it's ours," Gina said. "But we also carry things between towns for other people."

We settled Mama in the back and covered her in blankets. Her head rested on a soft bag that I was sure must have been full of lavender. Griffin rode Anastasia, an old **mottled** horse. I gripped the seat next to Gina.

We spent one more night on the road as we didn't want to arrive at Southampton after **curfew**. Also, Anastasia wasn't impressed with her heavier load and was walking like her hooves were made of glass. We lodged with one of Gina and Griffin's cousins in Basing, a mile off the highway. The road was so bumpy, I thought the cart was going to tip right over.

Gina's cousin gave Mama and me a curious look until Gina told them about our mission and then she couldn't be more friendly. Griffin and the cousin's husband went out into the dark and came back shortly after with three rabbits. I watched as Griffin took a sharp knife, skinned them and prepared them for the pot. He turned to see me watching and brought the **cleaver** down so hard it made me blink.

Mama and I slept in the loft room above the buttery. It was cold, but they left us with a pile of blankets. As I cuddled into Mama, she put her arms around me and sighed. Next morning, Gina brewed Mama an **infusion** of herbs scooped from one of the sacks in the back of the cart. She refused to leave Mama until every drop was swallowed. I was also plied with medicine to make sure the last of my fever had broken.

Next stop, Southampton.

Travellers arriving from the south into London are met with tarred traitors' heads on poles on the bridge gatehouse. There's no such welcome to Southampton. We crunched along the gravel highway and waited our turn to pass over a bridge and through a great stone gateway. It was decorated with a painting of Queen Elizabeth and two more of people I didn't recognise. One of them looked like a giant. George Symons hadn't mentioned that there were giants in Southampton. I hoped they were friendly. On top of the gateway, instead of heads, there were fat white gulls, squawking and jostling for space on the ledges. Just like in London, walls stretched out from the gates to surround the town. Griffin paid the toll and we passed through.

I took a deep breath in. In London the air is still, caught in the twists between the alleyways and below the overhanging gables. Here, it felt like there was space for the breeze to dance. A road stretched down from the stone gate that looked like the town's main highway, lined with shops and taverns. There was church spire down to the left and another on the right. That was the way we turned, on to a square. The church was on one side of the square and houses clustered round the other three sides. In the middle was a building on wooden pillars and below that, the ground was stained with blood from the fish market. The market had finished for the day, but I could still smell it. Dogs were **skittering** around the cobbles, bursting through the gulls searching for scraps. High on the hill, was a castle. I imagined standing on the keep and being able to look out across the water. I wondered if they could see the shipwreck from there.

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"Where are you lodging?" Gina asked.

I looked at Mama. It often takes a while for her to find her thoughts when she is surfacing.

"Our lodgings in Southampton, Mama. Where are they?"

Mama frowned, then smiled. "He said we should go to Widow Primmer on East Street."

Griffin nodded. "I know the house."

Mama stayed in the cart while Griffin led Anastasia. Gina and I fell in behind. I knew that I would be sorry to leave her.

"Try and make sure your mother stays warm," Gina said. "Griffin says that the melancholic personality is prone to the cold. And take her for walks by the river too."

"Thank you," I said. "I'm not sure how Mama and I would have survived if we hadn't met you."

Suddenly, I had a thought. I dipped into my pocket and pulled out my poppet. It was battered and dirty and didn't look much of a gift. I offered her to Gina.

"We bought her at Bartholomew Fair. I know she doesn't look much, but the woman said it would bring us luck. And it has. It brought us you. I thought you might like some luck too."

Gina shook her head. "I can't take it."

"Please do." I dropped the poppet in her apron pocket. "Shall we catch up with your brother and Mama?"

Gina touched my arm. "I... I have something to show you. It's not a present, but Griffin told me that you must see it."

She opened her hand. She must have been holding it all this time. It was a small bag, made of smooth, wool-spun **worsted** with no decoration. Gina loosened the drawstring and let me look inside.

"Beads?" I asked. They were wooden ones, enough to make a decent necklace. "What are they for?"

Gina took a breath. "Griffin said that they're to remind you of your debt."

"My debt?"

She swallowed so loudly, I almost thought it was my own throat. "Griffin says that we have fed you, transported you, found overnight lodgings for you and treated your **maladies**. This has been at cost to ourselves and we're not rich people."

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She picked a bead out and held it close to her eyes. "Each bead is worth a penny. He's going to add a bead a day because he says that's another day he – we – don't have the money he spent on you and your mama. He says the last day for payment is May Day."

She dropped the bead back into the bag and drew the string tight so the beads bulged against the thick fabric. When the strings were loose again, there would be room for many more beads.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. She took the poppet out of her pocket. "Do you want your luck back?"

I gently pushed her hand away. "Your brother is right. You're like us and you can't live off kindness. Keep the poppet."

Though I hoped the luck was for her and not for her brother.

The houses on East Street were not like the ones on the square. They were narrower and squashed together. If there was a Southwark in Southampton, this was it. The roaming dogs belonged to no one just like the Southwark ones and, just like in Southwark, they were happy to leave their mess everywhere. They shared the streets with geese. I have always been more afraid of geese than dogs.

Some of the houses looked ready to tumble down but Widow Primmer's house was solid, with tall, twisted chimneys and a slate roof. Widow Primmer reminded me of her house, tall and thin, and she had red curls corkscrewing out of her bonnet. She was quick to smile and really did seem happy to have us there. Her daughter, Claire, had been sick as a baby and had never fully recovered. Her head was shaved to keep her brain cool and she cried and shouted often. Widow Primmer said that she had to be with Claire almost every minute because Claire didn't understand danger. When Widow Primmer was busy, Claire had to be **confined** to her chamber.

Mama and I were to make sure Claire was washed and in clean clothes, ate what was served to her and that her chamber pot was emptied. The first time Widow Primmer unlocked Claire's door, the chamber pot threw towards us, scattering its contents across the floor. Mama whispered that Claire should be recruited to stand on the gatehouse by the quay to defend the town against the French. Claire could do more damage than any musket.

Emptying the chamber pot was the easiest task. Nobody asked Claire what food she liked or when she wanted to eat it or what clothes she wanted to wear, or if indeed she would prefer to have hair or not. I wasn't surprised she was angry. Mama was good at soothing her. She said that she understood how Claire must feel.

We settled into our new life easily, too easily. Every day I tried to tell Mama about the beads. Every day I'd clear my throat and feel the words bubble in my mouth, but then pop before I could say them. I did try and remind her about finding Jacques Francis, but she'd just laugh and tell me not to worry.

"We have months, Eve. Months!"

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One week passed. Then another. One morning there was a knock at the door. Mama was with Claire, and Widow Primmer's hands were sticky with the dough she was kneading. It was strange. I had never opened a front door before. Mama and I were normally lower than the servants who opened the front door – that's if we lived somewhere that had a door at all. I drew back the latch, twisted the key and pulled the door open, an inch at a time. Gina was standing there with Griffin by her side.

I went to hug Gina, but Griffin stepped between us.

"Good morning, Widow Primmer," he called past me. "Are you able to spare Eve this morning?"

I glanced back. "Don't you want me to scrub the pots, Mistress?"

"You can do that later," Widow Primmer said. "Go with Griffin but collect some bacon on the way home."

Griffin pulled the door and nudged me down the steps. As I came down on to the cobbles, we disturbed two cats scavenging for scraps in the gutter. One of them, a scrappy grey thing with a dark blotch across its back, raised its head and looked at us. A fish head dangled from its mouth.

"The cats are getting bold," Griffin said. "Usually they stay hidden. Maybe they've come out to welcome you?"

Gina glared at him. "Leave her alone."

He raised his hands. "I've done nothing to her."

Gina took my hand and tucked it through her arm. "We're leaving tomorrow and Griffin thought..." Another hard look towards her brother. "He thought that you may have forgotten your debt to him."

"To us," Griffin said. "Show her what's owed."

"I don't have to" Gina snapped back.

Griffin stepped towards her. "I said, show her!"

Gina glared at him. With her free hand, she drew the **worsted** bag out of her pocket. She didn't have to open it to show me how much fuller it was. She handed it to me. I could feel its weight in my palm. How many beads were in there now? I was too afraid to ask. I gave it back to her.

"Perhaps you need some assistance finding your diver," Griffin said. "As you don't seem to have enjoyed much success with your search so far."

"We've been settling in," I said.

"And now you should be settled."

"Do you know where he is?" I asked.

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"No," Gina said. "But my brother's decided that we should take you to the places where you might find him."

If it wasn't for Griffin lurking behind us, I would have felt like a rich lady with my own escort showing me the sights of a new country. The places we lingered, though, were not those that rich people usually favoured. We carried on down East Street, out through the East Gate and across a bridge over a ditch. We came out on to common land next to a herd of cows. They ignored us. They were too busy eating.

"If your diver needs wood or peat for his fire," Griffin said, "you may find him here."

"There's a well too," Gina added.

"Yes," Griffin smirked. "Perhaps your diver has become a washerwoman."

Gina turned her back on him. "See over there? Those are orchards."

I nodded, though I knew that I would never recognise an apple tree unless there were apples on it.

They took me to Biddles Gate over by the quay. It was wear boats were repaired and there was a crane hoisting barrels from a small vessel on to the wharf.

"There is sometimes work to be had here," Griffin said. "For those who like to be close to the water."

I didn't mention that Jacques Francis worked with an **apothecary**. Mama had been right. Trust no one.

I followed them to the God's House Tower. We went through the gatehouse and looked down at the water working the mill beneath it.

"There are guns up on the roof," Gina said. I squinted up into the sunshine, but I couldn't see them.

"If your diver has a steady hand with a musket," Griffin said, "he could be there. If he is, make sure you find him soon."

"Why?"

"The tower holds the gunpowder store. Just one spark, and -" Griffin made an explosion sound. If a fire took hold, I wondered if Jacques Francis would dive off the battlements into the water below

"You know Southampton well," I said to Gina.

"I was born here."

"And Griffin?"

"He was born in London. When his father died, Mama married my father. He was from here but had been working in the shipyards in Greenwich. There was too much sickness in London so they came back here and I was born. My granddad had been a porter, taking the

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cargo between the merchants and the harbour. By the time he died, he was bent double like a cartwheel. Even still, my father became a porter too, but the harbours were quieter then. Soon there was little for him to do. He would claim any goods he found in the street, but where there's no money, there's nothing to take."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"He went back to London."

"Was that better?"

Gina shrugged. "We don't know. We never heard from him again. He left no money for us and Mama couldn't marry anyone else because we had no word that my father was dead."

"Where's your mama now?" I asked.

"In the cemetery." She took my arm again, gripping it tighter than before.

We walked past the Watergate, the way to the main wharf, and then back along English Street.

"There's one last place to look," Griffin said.

Gina pulled me closer to her. "We don't have to."

We had arrived by the big stone gate that was the main entrance to Southampton. I now know that it was called the Bargate. I hadn't noticed the **pillories** before, perhaps because they had been empty. Of course, it wasn't the first time I'd ever seen **pillories**. No one can live in Southwark and not meet someone who'd spent time in them.

Today it was a woman in them. A small crowd had gathered around her, laughing and shouting insults. She was perhaps the same age as my mother. Her bonnet had been lost and her hair was loose and wild about her neck. Then I saw it. Of course, I knew that it happened and I must have seen it before, but I'd always looked away without thinking. This time I could clearly see that the woman's ear had been nailed to the pillory post. I'd seen men and women in Southwark who were missing an ear, sometimes two. They lost their whole ear when the sheriff didn't want to waste time unpicking the nail so used a sword to free them instead. A piece of paper was stuck to her forehead. This would have told me her crime – if I'd known how to read it.

An apple core hit her cheek. The woman's eyes swivelled to seek out who had thrown it. She opened her mouth and let out a string of **blasphemy** so strong that my mouth dropped open in shock.

Griffin was behind me. He bent low to make sure I didn't miss his words.

"Danger is everywhere, Eve. I want you to know that."

A man close to the prisoner hurled the dregs from his tankard. The slops hit the cobbles just in front of her, and a little splashed up on to her hem. Her dress was torn and stained.

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One of her feet was wrapped in wool, the other jammed into a tight leather pump that sagged at the seams.

"She's a thief," Griffin said. "And a beggar. The councilors here are quite lenient and the crowd is tame. Perhaps they know her. They are harsher to strangers. I've heard that they gather the dung and the slops left over from the fish market, then search their pantries for rotting cheese and meat. They bring the stinking mess to the square, ready for the spectacle."

I shivered. The same was true in London. Stones were forbidden, but they were hidden in rotting food and rags.

I turned to look him in the eye. "Mama and I are not beggars. We haven't done anything wrong. There's no reason for us to be in the **pillories**."

"Is that so? What do the townspeople know of you? You're foreigners."

"I know we're foreigners," I said. "But we're lodging with Widow Primmer. We're not begging or sleeping on the street. She can vouch for us."

"You know well that there are many reasons why women end up in the **pillories**. If you've committed a crime even Widow Primmer can't save you."

He nodded his head towards the **pillories**. I didn't want to look at them again.

"Sometimes it's a mother who has a child without a husband," he said.

Mama had a husband. She told me about him. He was called Joseph Cartwright and she met him soon after arriving in London. He died when I was a baby and was buried in a **pauper's grave** with no possessions to **bequeath** to her.

"Do you and your mother attend church, Eve?"

"Church?"

Some Sundays we attended, some we did not. Mama slept through the sermon and didn't know the words to the hymns.

"There's a prison below the Bargate," Griffin said. "It's where they keep the people who don't attend and those who stick to the old faith. Perhaps the townsfolk will suspect that your mother still takes mass as a Catholic. Can you prove that she doesn't?"

The woman had stopped shouting. Her eyes drooped like she was trying to stop herself falling asleep. Her head jerked a little. If she slumped forward, she would lose her ear.

"I have to return home," I said.

I freed my arm from Gina's and tried to push past Griffin. He held my shoulder.

"There's one last thing you should know."

"Don't!" Gina shouted.

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"I would be doing Eve disservice if I didn't warn her, Gina." His pale-grey eyes reminded me of ashes. "There's a special whipping post for flogging witches."

"My mother is not a witch!"

"There were two cats at your mother's door today."

"That does not make her a witch!" My voice was louder.

"Who knows what the townspeople will think..."

A scream sounded from the **pillories**. The woman was being released. A man was fussing round her head. I hoped that he was trying to extract the nail rather than taking the quick way. I turned and walked away. I wanted to run, back to East Street and back to my mother. I wanted to feel her apron against my cheek and her fingers in my hair. But I wouldn't run. I would walk. Griffin needed to understand – we were strong.

Next Chapter – The Pearl Earring



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GLOSSARY

apothecary (pages 1&6)	-	person who prepared and sold medicines and drugs.
bequeath (page 8)	-	to leave something that you own, especially something of value, for others after your death.
blasphemy (page 7)	-	speaking badly about a religion, or insulting a god.
cleaver (page 2)	-	a tool with a heavy, broad blade, used by butchers for chopping meat
confined (page 4)	-	cramped in a small space
curfew (page 2)	-	a rule requiring people to remain indoors between specified hours, usually at night.
Hellebore (page 1)	-	a poisonous winter-flowering Eurasian plant of the buttercup family, with large white, green, or purplish flowers.
humours (page 1)	-	a mood or state of mind.
infusion (pages 1 & 2)	-	a drink, remedy, or extract prepared by soaking tea leaves or herbs in liquid.
maladies (page 3)	-	diseases or illnesses.
manoeuvre (page 1)	-	a movement or series of moves requiring skill and care.
melancholic (page 1)	-	a feeling of sadness or depression.
mottled (page 2)	-	marked with spots or smears of colour.
pauper's grave (page 8)	-	a grave paid for at public expense because the dead person's family could not afford one
pillories (page 7,8 & 9)	-	a wooden framework with holes for the head and hands, in which offenders were imprisoned and exposed to public abuse.
skittering (page 1)	-	move lightly and quickly or hurriedly
worsted (pages 3 & 5)	-	a fine smooth yarn

-