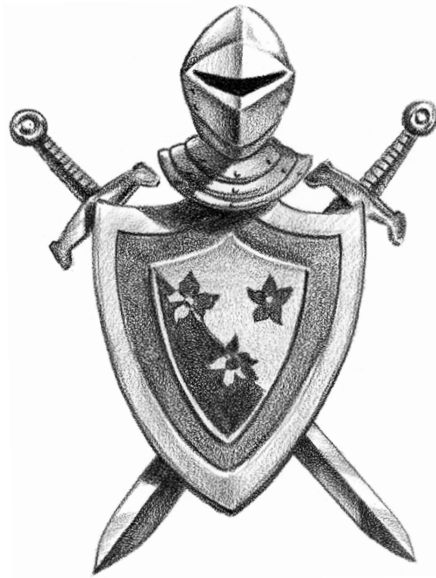


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Background Summary

England in Walter's time, almost 400 years ago, was very different from today. Queen Elizabeth I ruled England with an iron hand. Lords had a lot of power in England too. They could tell almost everyone what to do. Some of the lords looked down on other people. The countryside was also different. Castles dotted the land. Villages were small. There weren't many cities. Most people were farmers. They farmed on land that belonged to the lords. People had to be rich to own their own land. Raising sheep and weaving cloth were important too. Cloth made a lot of money for England. England was a proud and powerful nation in 1600.



1

The Threat

Walter tensed his muscles. What was going on in the other room? The angry voices echoed in the castle.

‘I told you before! *No!*’

‘You greedy dog!’

Two men were arguing in the great hall. Walter listened and frowned. He knew what happened when grown men got angry. Daggers were poised. Glittering swords were drawn. Often, blood was spilled.

Walter liked stories about sword fighting and battles.

THE HIDDEN DAGGER

He wanted to be a knight when he grew older. He couldn't wait to fight in real battles. He also liked to make up his own stories about battles. He frowned. Some people thought he made up too many stories.

But right now, this was just a little too close for him. Walter clutched the cloth he was holding. He was delivering it to the castle for his father.

He hoped the men didn't know he was waiting in the small room next door. He knew he shouldn't be hearing this. He could be in danger just by being there. Angry men didn't like witnesses.

He could just imagine one of the men raising a dagger. The blade would flash in the firelight. Then it would slash downward. Blood would be spilled. He shuddered.

The voices were getting louder. He was sure someone was going to get hurt. If only he could just sneak away. But his father had told him to deliver the cloth. The seamstress needed it to sew more clothes for Lord Fanshaw and his family.

'I will *not!*' A man's voice rang out. It sounded like Lord Fanshaw's voice, and he sounded furious! Walter wondered who could make Lord Fanshaw so angry.

Thud! Walter heard a fist pound on heavy wood. Walter shrank back against the stone castle wall, still clutching the cloth. He was glad he wasn't in the same room with the two men. He wanted them to stop. What if something awful happened? What if they fought with daggers or swords?