

England, 1580

by Kathryn Haueisen

(from [*Mayflower Chronicles: The Tale of Two Cultures*](#))

William rode on alone for another half hour until he spotted a house at the edge of a forest. Smoke rising from the stone chimney gave him hope this might be where he and Good Fortune could rest for the night. A dog barking announced his approach. William stayed mounted as the barking spaniel ran circles around them. Good Fortune moved back and forth and side to side to dodge the dog. Mercifully, the horse didn't rear up.

An elderly man approached, calling the dog back. Amazingly, it obeyed. The loud barking subsided to low growls. An old woman appeared and stood behind her husband, resting on a walking stick.

William tipped his hat. "Good evening. I have traveled far this day. My horse needs water. We could both use somewhere to rest the night. Might my horse and I rest in your barn until morning? I need nothing more than water for my horse and a place to rest. I have provisions enough for myself. The horse would be happy to graze a while in that field."

Both the man and woman looked him over from the tips of his boots to his now bare head. "Where have you come from, and where do you go?" asked the man.

"I hail from Scrooby, Scrooby Manor, on the North Road," he said, pointing the direction he had just traveled. "Cambridge is my destination. I must be there day after tomorrow."

"Cambridge!" exclaimed the woman. "Can you prove it?"

"I can if I dismount." William swung his right leg up over Good Fortune's hindquarters, slid to the ground, and nearly collapsed after so many hours of riding. He reached into one of the leather pouches slung over the horse's rump to pull out his acceptance letter from Peterhouse.

The farmer looked at it briefly and passed it to his wife, who quickly returned it back to William. He suspected neither could read since they barely looked at it. The farmer said, "You seem honest. And young. And strong. Answer my question correctly, and you may join us for supper. That is, if you'll help with the firewood. You're welcome to sleep by our fire for the night. Your horse can have some hay. But first, tell me this, be you Catholic or Protestant?"

William felt sweat forming under his arms. If he answered wrong, he wondered if he'd have time to mount and ride away before they came at him with the pitchfork leaning against the house. He took in a deep breath and answered truthfully. "Sir, as you may know, our manor has frequently been the resting place for priests and bishops in service of the Holy Established Church of England. My father is trusted with both the sacred and royal mail. Would he be allowed such an important duty if we were not Protestant?"

"Well, then you are welcome here. There's the wood to chop before supper." The man pointed to a large pile of logs behind William. By the time he chopped his way through the stack, his arms and back ached. Supper was simple but plentiful. He thanked his hosts and made a bed for himself against the wall, next to the fire. Before settling in, he added several of the logs he'd chopped barely two hours earlier. William rested with his back tucked into the corner, where the stone fireplace met the wood wall. As this was his preferred position, he dozed off sitting up, barely an hour after the sun went down.

Kathryn Haueisen worked in public relations before launching a freelance writing career. She's published dozens of articles and five books. Her forthcoming historical fiction will be released by Green Writers Press in 2020. She blogs about good people doing great things for our global village at www.HowWiseThen.com.