

beside him and held out a large hunk of white bread.

'How do we know that's not poisonous!' said Stella. 'You are a thief after all. They told us all about you in the garden!'

The boy sighed 'I never stole nothin'!'

'Yes you did!' said Stella. 'You took some silver! It's lucky they didn't arrest us!'

The boy slowly shook his head. 'It ain't true,' he said wearily.

Stella frowned at him suspiciously.

'Look. Sit down will yer. An' let that boy 'ave summat ter eat. There's loads 'ere and we ain't goin' no-where 'til the sun goes down. I'm Jack by the way. Nice ter meet yer!'

Despite what she'd heard, Stella couldn't help liking Jack after all. He had a warm smile and friendly brown eyes, and, most importantly, he seemed concerned about Tom.

Soon they were all chewing on the soft white bread and listening to the chatter of the birds in the trees.

'So why do they say you stole something if you didn't?' asked Stella.

Jack shook his head slowly, then started to explain. How his father, Jacob, had been one of the builders of the houses in the garden, and afterwards did regular building work for the Gladstones and the other houses in the garden. How, one day, after some silver went missing in the house, he was falsely accused of stealing

by one of the servants and sent to jail. How he was now free, but was a broken man with no-one to recommend him and without any of his work tools which he'd kept in the Gladstones' cellar. Finally, how he, Jack, had snuck into the house to try to retrieve his father's tools to help him.

'Pa lives fer 'is work,' said Jack. 'An' without it I don't think he'll go on much longer. He'll die of a broken mind or else hunger, that's for sure. An' if it ain't that we'll all end up in the workhouse - an' I wouldn't wish that on anyone.'

The children sat in silence. Stella held her knees and stared at the ground. She felt terrible for having called Jack a thief.

'Anyways,' Jack went on, 'that's when I sees Crawley stealin' silver from the Gladstones!'

Tom frowned suspiciously. 'That horrid man we met in the garden?'

'You *saw* Crawley take the silver?' said Stella.

'Sure as I can be,' said Jack. 'See, I'd snuck inter the kitchen through the garden door ter get ter the cellar, when I 'eard someone comin'. So I slips up the back stairs an' immediately spots Crawley acting funny comin' from one o' the rooms. Looked like he was carrying summet under 'is jacket. 'E never saw me, but 'e disappeared right quick down ter the garden. Saw 'im with me own eyes from the balcony window up there.'

Jack described how he'd gone to look for Crawley in