

Earthen Missiles

by MaryPat Campbell

Now that Ursula is locked in her room, my thoughts of future happiness have faded again. I can't depend on her to be sensible. I can depend on myself to be sensible sometimes, but it makes me wonder if being sensible and being happy are the same thing, maybe not.

I was brought before Denby, the superintendent, early this morning, and that look of weariness and censure had returned to his lined face again. No hefting logs on the fire to warm our cold limbs. No further talk of the joint enterprise of working together on my inheritance. Just awkward silences interrupted by harsh words, until the warden hurried me out of the room and back to the kitchen garden where I resumed my harvesting.

After the events of last night, in particular my mortification at finding myself hitting Ursula, my sense of personal dignity was destroyed again. I had begun to feel that I had some dignity and respect from Denby, now that both he and I knew that I am the son of the Bishop of York. Sometimes I feel that I would rather be happy than dignified. When I'm older, and if I'm lucky enough to be occasionally happy, then being dignified would be a luxury. For me, dignity fits with a full head of white hair, a woollen great coat and a stout walking stick with a silver top. Then I could walk the streets of London and be admired by the passers-by.

Any happiness that might come my way depends on getting out of here, on my own if necessary. If Ursula cannot be my companion on the road, then so be it, I will have to make my own happiness wherever I can find it. Should I try to escape and run away? Or should I stay to try and work out my future with Denby's help? Will he give me the help I need or not?

My ruminations came to an abrupt halt, when I heard Jarvis shouting and caterwauling in the kitchen garden. He too was busy with harvesting, not a job he liked much. He was pulling the potatoes and beets out of the ground and flinging them into the air, shouting as he did so, not caring where they landed. Great clods of earth flew all over the garden, and my fellow inmates shielded themselves with their arms or ducked out of the way of Jarvis's earthen missiles.

"Where is he?", Jarvis shouted, "where is the man who calls himself son of a man of the cloth?"

I stood up straight and shouted back.

"I'm here Jarvis, what are you bellowing about?"

Now he fired the earthen missiles in my direction, and it was my turn to duck and dive out of his way. The beets and potatoes hit the ground with a wet thud, inches from where I stood.

He strode towards me then, shouting that he and I should make a run for it, head north to York and see what we could find out about my father. I suddenly realised he wanted a part in my story, he wanted to come with me. Not that it would be possible or something I would want, but his desperation was clear for all to hear. There was no keeping quiet about my story now.

Jarvis arrived in front of me, tears streaming down his haggard face. I opened my arms and embraced him as the gentle rain fell around us, and our fellow inmates stood still and watched. What a sight, two grown men in a mad house, embracing and weeping in the middle of a torn up vegetable garden. One because he had something at last to call his own, the other because he did not.