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opening extract from

Dick Turpin Legend and Lies

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Chapter 1

The Crowd Saturday 7th April 1739, York.

I remember the day Dick Turpin died.

Crowds filled the twisted streets of York City. They dressed in their best Sunday clothes and marched out of the city gates. They gathered in the fields outside the walls. They met at the scaffold where Turpin would die.

I got there early so I was near the front of the crowds. The scaffold was built of rough wood and I was pushed into a corner right beside it.

A stout woman in a green satin dress shook my arm. "You're too young to be here," she panted. I could tell from her voice that she wasn't from round here. She came from the south.

"You're never too young to watch a hanging," a farmer said. His hands were stained with the soil and his clothes smelled of cow muck and hay.

"My father said I had to come," I told the woman. "He said I had to watch Dick Turpin hang. It will teach me a lesson I'll never forget! Dad says I'll see what happens to villains!"

"Dick Turpin's not a villain!" an old man croaked. His voice was from the south as well. People had come from all over England to see this hanging.

A tall man, thin as a rope, gripped me by the ear. "Turpin was born a villain and he will die a villain." The tall man had glasses on the end of his nose and a worn black suit. "I taught him when he was a boy. I know."

The farmer, the woman, the old man and the teacher crowded into my corner for an hour. The last hour of Dick Turpin's life.

The Spring day was cool and showery. "You should be wearing a hat," the woman fussed. "It'll get warm before the day is done. You need the shade."

"I haven't got a hat," I said shyly. We were too poor for things like that. In the

crowd she couldn't see my feet. I was too poor for shoes.

The woman shook her head. The farmer sneered. "I work all day in the sun. It does me no harm."

"It fried your brain," she snapped at him. She turned back to me. "If it gets too sunny you can stand in my shadow," she said.

That was kind. No one was ever kind to a boy like me. The woman had a soft face and white hands. "Is Dick Turpin really wicked?" I asked her.

"Of course not!" the farmer cut in. "He's a gentleman of the road!"

"You mean a thief!" the woman cried.

"A gentleman thief," the farmer told her.



"The boy should not be here," the woman went on. "To see a man die is a cruel thing. To see an evil man choke and go to Hell is not for a child."

"I'm not a child," I argued.

"How old are you?" she asked me. "Twelve?"

I shrugged. "I don't know."

The farmer spat. "You say the lad shouldn't be here. But you've come a long way to see Dick Turpin hang. *You're* here, lady. Why is that?"

"Revenge," she said softly. "Revenge."