

Big John's SECRET

eleanore m.
jewett



BIG JOHN'S SECRET

ALSO BY
ELEANORE M. JEWETT

Charlemagne
Cobbler's Knob
Felicity Finds a Way
Friend Among Strangers
The Hidden Treasure of Glaston
Mystery at Boulder Point
Told on the King's Highway

Big John's *secret*

by Eleanore M. Jewett



Illustrated by Frederick T. Chapman

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*This book is dedicated
to my husband,
Charles Harvey Jewett,
a physician who has shown me
that a doctor's life, consecrated
to his work, is nobler than that
of any knight in shining armor*

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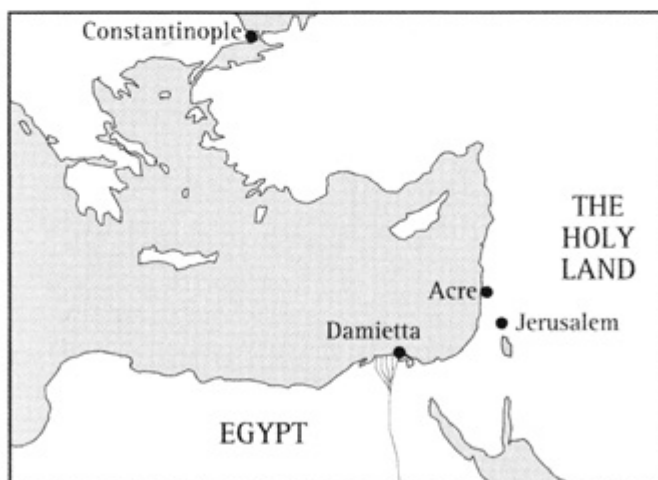
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John's Journey to Venice and Acre



Time of the 5th Crusade, 1218 A.D.



Big John's secret



1. BIG JOHN

BIG JOHN WAS working in his overlord's field near the bridge when a company of knights clattered over it. He straightened up and watched them. When the dust cleared he saw that they were many and wore costly clothing, gay with scarlet and gold. Squires and pages rode after them, and a few packhorses loaded with bundles and knobby, cloth-covered articles brought up the rear. Evidently they were well-born folk — nobles, perhaps even a baron and his friends, going to visit Sir Eustace, lord of the manor. John fol-

lowed them with his eyes until they reached the outer gates of the castle. Knights! How he wished he dared hope to be one someday. But miracles didn't happen often. It was the year 1215 and King John ruled over a restless and fear-filled England that clung to old customs and old ways because it felt insecure. John knew that a peasant lad would have small chance of growing up to be anything else. And yet — and yet — he could not help dreaming! Old Marm's stories and her strange teachings filled his mind and heart with secret hopes.

He bent to his work again, but only for a moment. With a swift clattering of hoofs, a belated rider and his squire galloped up over the bridge. The knight's horse stumbled and fell heavily, tried to get up, then lay back, panting. The knight himself had jumped free and was unhurt, but something ailed the horse. That was evident. John dropped the handle of his harrow and ran up onto the bridge. The squire had dismounted and gone to his lord but was pushed roughly aside.

"See to the horse!" the knight cried impatiently. "I fear me his ankle is broken. I should not have ridden him so soon after his injury."

John was already bending over the animal. It lay trembling in evident pain and could not bear to lay its forefoot on the ground. The boy felt gently along the leg and ankle. An old gash had broken open afresh and was bleeding freely, but John's careful probing gave no evidence of a broken bone.

The knight had approached and was watching him. "You handle the beast with a leech's skill," he said approvingly. "Have you knowledge enough to help me bind the leg so that Rowan can limp to the castle yonder?"

"Yes, my lord," answered John, and, taking the loose hem of his peasant tunic, he tore off strips of it and handed them to the squire, who soaked them in the cold water of the moat and then gave them to his master.

The squire did not offer to touch the injured horse himself, and stayed well away from his hoofs. John glanced at him wonderingly.

"He will be a good fighter someday," said the knight, indicating his attendant, "but my Rowan does not like him, and that counts to me as a point in his disfavor. Now come you, and help me. I trust the ankle is but sprained, not broken."

"I could feel no break, my lord," said John.

"And the beast let you handle him without disapproval? That is indeed a marvel!"

They soon had the ankle firmly bandaged and, with much scrambling and struggling, the big horse got to its three feet, holding the other awkwardly from the ground.

"Lead him slowly and gently. Have a care with him!" the knight commanded his squire, who took the bridle and moved cautiously away, leaving his own horse for his master to ride.

But the knight did not mount at once. He stood looking at Big John, staring at him with a puzzled expression. "Who are you, boy?" he asked at length. "And are you serf-born and bound to my Lord Eustace's land?"

"My name is John, and — no, my lord, I am a villein but not bound. We are free, with a payment of work service."

"We?" questioned the knight. "Do you mean you and your father?"

"Nay, not my father. I live with — Old Marm, who is — who is —" John was plainly uncomfortable. He left his sentence unfinished and fumbled with the torn edge of his tunic, not looking at the lord directly.

"Is your father dead?"

"I — I — know not, my lord."

"What was — or is — his name?"

"I know not, my lord."

There was a pause. The knights eyes were fastened on John's face, and he looked not only puzzled but a little troubled. "And — Old Marm, who might she be?" he asked.

"She is an herb woman and she is wise with simples and medicine and — and she heals the sick." John's embarrassment vanished and he spoke now with pride. The knight cut him short. "But what is she to you?" he asked.

"Indeed, sir knight, I know not exactly, save that she hath reared me and cared for me and — been mother and father to me — and — I love her." He ended staunchly, even defiantly.

The knight smiled for the first time since the beginning of their conversation. "Tell her for me that she hath done well with you. How old are you, boy? I should say you were overyoung to be doing full peasant labor." His keen eyes sized up the lad's big frame, his easy carriage and evident strength, and rested for a moment on his hands, which were long-fingered and sensitive-looking, in spite of the roughness of toil.

"I am twelve," said John, "and the hayward thought

me able to do grown peasant's work, and that I am. They call me Big John in the village."

The knight swung onto his squire's horse but turned again to the boy before he moved away.

"Tell your Old Marm you remind me of someone — someone I once knew and loved." Then he touched his horse with his stirrups and was gone.

John stood for a moment as if rooted to the spot. Then he turned and started to run down the road, his one thought being that he must get to Old Marm at once and tell her. A shout brought him to a quick stop. Over in the lord's field the hayward was motioning to him with an angry sweep of his arm.

"Come back, you good-for-naught!" he thundered. "Tis not even time for the morning meal which Lord Eustace provides — in his bounty and goodness — for all you lazy oafs."

John was already back and had picked up the handle of his harrow. The hayward came striding over the ridged furrows and shook his fist at him. "How dared you leave your work?" he stormed.

"The knight's horse fell," muttered John.

"Was there not a squire in attendance?"

John did not answer. He began his harrowing.

"What did the knight say to you?"

Evidently the overseer was curious. The boy could not conceal a little smile. "Something about the horse," he said vaguely. "His leg had been injured before. It might have been broken — and the horse did not like the squire."

The man guffawed harshly. "So his lordship preferred the aid of the yarb woman's offspring! Faith,

what are we coming to when horseflesh can dictate to the gentry!" He went off about his business, chuckling over his own heavy wit.

The boy heaved a sigh of relief and went back to his excited thinking. The knight had been interested in *him* — John — and had seen or imagined a resemblance! The boy's hands went cold at the thought as he remembered every question he had been asked and his own answers. He was not a young knight; quite old, John guessed. Perhaps — perhaps —

It seemed to him that the workday would never end and leave him free to get back to Old Marm! He worked feverishly, clumsily, at first, so that the harrow handle slipped from his fingers. But the overseer had moved some distance away and did not notice him.

At about eleven o'clock the villeins stopped their work and gathered under the shade of some willow trees at the edge of the field, to eat the noonday meal that the house servants had brought out from the manor kitchen. Good food it was — thick turnip soup, black bread, and cheese. John ate his share quickly, sitting a little apart from the others, scarcely noticing what he put into his mouth. There would be at least four more hours of work before he could get back to Old Marm. He sighed as he picked up his harrow again and gently goaded the oxen. This was boon work the peasants were doing, an extra service the lord of the manor had a right to demand of them all at spring planting and again at harvest time. John should not complain, but the work irked him, especially now, when his mind teemed with thoughts and imaginings of a life he had never glimpsed in reality, but of which Old Marm had

told him endless tales.

At long last the day's task was over. John laid aside his heavy harrow, cared for the oxen, and, without a word to anyone, rushed off down the road, through the manor village, and home.

Home was scarcely more than a hovel built of dried reeds and sun-baked clay — "wattles and daub," people called it — and roofed with a thatch of rushes easy to come by in the marshy fen country. It had a heavy door but no windows. The small patch of ground around it was neat and orderly, not littered with refuse as so many of the peasant homes were, and it was planted with rows of herbs, roughly fenced and protected against the pigs and chickens that wandered freely about.

John threw open the door and dashed in, then turned and closed it carefully behind him. In the dim interior a small peat fire burned, the smoke circling about until it found the hole in the roof intended for its exit. A black kettle full of herbs was brewing over the fire and gave off an aromatic smell, stinging but not unpleasant. Crouched over it, stirring it, was a gray-haired woman in the usual shapeless peasant dress — fustian, of course — belted at the waist by a frayed piece of rope.

She turned with a warm smile and John caught her in his strong arms, lifting her to her feet. "Marm," he cried excitedly, "what think you? A knight, or great lord maybe, accosted me. He questioned me — who I was, my father's name, and was I born free. Oh, Marm, could it mean — anything?" He stood away from her, eagerly gazing down into her face. "Marm" — his voice

was only a whisper — “the knight said I reminded him of someone he once knew — and loved. Marm, could that be —”

All the color in the woman's face had drained out of it. Even her lips grew pale and her startled eyes looked suddenly dark and enormous.

“You could not tell him your rightful name or where you were born, thank God for that!” She spoke in a voice so low that John had to bend his head to hear her.

“But Marm, I *must* know! Am I not doing a man's work even now, though I am but twelve? Surely I am man enough to know my true name and about my family, the whole secret you have kept from everyone for so long.”

Marm shook her head decidedly.

“I would never breathe it to a soul,” he continued. “Torture would not drag it from me, until the right time came. Surely you *know* you can trust me!”

The woman laid a trembling hand on his arm. “John, *you* must trust *me*, and be patient. Suppose this knight who spoke to you had been one of the worthless favorites of King John. He said you reminded him of someone. That would be your father, for you grow more like him every day —”

“But, Marm,” the boy interrupted her, “he said I reminded him of someone he loved, so he could not have been one of my father's enemies.”

“Perhaps not, and perhaps yes. King John's favorites are fickle folk, and the rightful heir to your father's estate would be a danger to some of them. I am afraid for you, John, desperately afraid.”

John put his arms around her thin shoulders and hugged her close. "Afraid, Marm — you? I have never seen you afraid of anyone, and when I was a tiny babe, it was you —"

"Yes, it was I who saved you from certain death, as I have told you so many times, ran off with you when your mother and all the castle folk were brutally slain, or perished in the great fire —"

"Not my father!" the boy interrupted again. "You have never said my father died when his enemies sacked our castle."

"I know not of a surety," said the woman, "but without a shadow of doubt he was either slain or taken prisoner, in which case he would have died long since in some foul dungeon. I myself saw him battling for his life and for your mother's life, against fearful odds. Six ruffians, hired undoubtedly by their betters, fought against his great strength. He was big and strong, as you are, John, mighty above all ordinary men. He would have fought to the bitter end. I am sure of that. In the melee I lost sight of him — and fled, with you in my arms. I have never seen him or heard of him since."

John sank down beside the peat fire, groaning. But in a few moments he was up again, his hands on Old Marm's shoulders. "Marm, you are not sure he is dead! I know you are not! . . . Have you never seen him in those strange visions of yours? Don't you ever 'dream true' about him?"

Slowly the woman nodded her head, smiling up into the tall boy's eager face. "At times, but oh, so seldom, and never clearly, John. I seem to see him in a haze, in some far-off land full of dust and heat . . . and I call

out to him and waken and find I have been sleep-dreaming, not 'dreaming true.' My waking reason tells me he is dead."

"But he may not be! Oh, Marm he may yet be alive and if he is, I must find him! I *will* find him though it take me my whole life long!"

"That I trust you will do! I almost know you will! And your faith and determination renew my hopes!"

"Then tell me more, Marm, now!"

The woman shook her head. "Trust me a little longer, my dear one. Be patient in safe ignorance about many things. Perhaps the time for a great change is indeed nearer than we believe."

And with that, the boy knew he must be satisfied. Marm went about her business of brewing herbs. John lifted the heavy kettle from the fire for her and helped her fill small vials with the water the herbs were boiled in, and put them away in a dark corner of the hut. Hanging from wooden pegs stuck in the walls were bunches of drying whortleberries, gnarled mandrake roots, henbane, rue, and other weeds that grew wild in patches of woods and in the marshy lands. Old Marm knew the properties of every plant, or so John believed.

Then there was the wonder of the power she had, the strange gift. But none, save he, knew aught of that. Sometimes a faraway look would come into her face, she would breathe quickly and evenly, and stand very still, so still and rapt in her attention that she seemed neither to hear nor see anything but the dreamlike creatures that passed before the eyes of her mind. Often, now that he was older, she told John about these vision-pictures. He did not understand them very well,

and he never spoke of them to anyone, of course. She had forbidden that, but he thought about them a good deal. Old Marm's strange "seeing" might be the most important thing in either of their lives. John hoped that sometime he also might be able to "dream true," but so far he had got nowhere at all in learning the art.

They had their supper of cheese and black bread and shortly afterward, as the sun was sinking, John lay down on the pile of straw that served him as a bed in one corner of the hovel.

Old Marm was still busy over her herbs, and he watched her. A mood of depression settled over him. Why should he be so excited because a strange knight had spoken to him and had seen in him a fancied likeness to someone, doubtless now long dead? It would take much more than a passing incident like that to change his life! With a deep sigh he turned on his side and was soon asleep.



ii. playing the game

JOHNS WAS FATHOMS deep in sleep when he was roused by a firm touch on his arm. Old Marm was leaning over him. He struggled through a clawing tangle of dream images and sat up. "Eh?" he said thickly.

Marm gave him a little shake. "We must practice well tonight," she whispered. "Perhaps the time is getting short."

The room was dimly lighted by a rush candle standing in an empty vial on a rough trestle table which Marm had set against the door.

John rubbed the sleep from his eyes, got up, and followed her to an old blackened chest. Quickly they pulled out of it some old wearing apparel, a thin circlet of gold, and a sword in a worn scabbard encrusted with gems.

Over her rough peasant clothing, for they had slept as always in the only clothes they possessed, Old Marm slipped a long full skirt of heavy brocaded silk, cracked and faded. Then she threw a cloak with a moth-eaten ermine collar over her shoulders and placed the circlet carefully on her stringy hair. It was greenish and dingy with age, but when she stood up in the worn and dull, but once rich, attire she held her golden-circled head proudly and bore an appearance of dignity, almost nobility.

John took off his loose baggy garment of harsh fustian and donned an old ragged pair of hose, close-fitting breeches, and a short silken shirt, frayed and worn, with a sleeveless tunic over it. He fastened the sword belt around his waist after making a loop in it, for it was much too large, big though he was. Then he picked up the scabbarded sword with careful reverence.

"Marm," said he before he adjusted it, "I know this was my father's, but you never told me how you came by it. You had me in your arms when you ran out of the castle. You could not have carried off this heavy sword too."

"We lay hidden in the croft of a peasant in the village for some time, as I told you. One day he brought me this sword and told me he had picked it up amongst the rubble of the burned-out castle."

"And you knew it was my father's?"

"Of course! We all knew that sword! Meyance, he called it, and he loved it and intended it for you when you were grown. I hung it under my skirt and carried it all through our wanderings, though it was wondrous heavy. It will be yours, when the time comes."

"But, Marm, if someone found it in the castle grounds, my father must have been dead, or he would never have left it there."

"That we cannot say. It may have been thrust from him in combat and then later he may have been taken away as a prisoner."

John was about to place it in his belt when Marm stayed him. "Not this time," said she. "Tonight you will be a squire, serving in the great hall. A sword would not be worn; it would only hinder you."

They had been speaking in low voices and moved about softly as cats, for it would never do for any curious neighbor or lingering beggar to know what was going on in the hovel in the dead of night.

Marm seated herself beside the table on the one stool in the room. "Now," she said with a regal wave of her hand, "begin."

John approached her, bowing gracefully, "May it please my lady," he said, "the banquet is spread and my lord awaits you."

"Go then," said Marm, "and hold yourself in readiness to serve at table."

John placed a cloth over his left arm, picked up an imaginary trencher, and set it on one end of the table. Marm turned so that she would be facing it.

The game continued in all seriousness. John went through the motions of serving guests at a baronial feast. Then he "sat at meat" himself at the far end of the table, pretending to dip his fingers neatly into a bowl of meat and gravy, cutting his food with his knife, and finally mopping up the scraps with the usual slice of thick bread which still served as a plate on even the lordliest tables.

Marm corrected him occasionally, and made him serve her a second time, making sure he bent on one knee and rose again with ease and grace. Finally he brought her a bowl of water (still imaginary, of course) in which she rinsed her fingers; she dried them with the cloth he carried over his left arm. They had done this same thing many a night before and Marm found little to criticize.

The banquet hall next became a ladies' bower and John was bidden to fetch the game of chess from the cupboard. It was a board roughly marked off in squares, with pebbles for chessmen. The two spoke courteously to one another in low tones, and in the Norman tongue, not the Anglo-Saxon mixture of dialects used by the peasant.

In the midst of careful instructions about the game Marm lifted her head with a start. "Footsteps!" she whispered. "Put these things back in the chest quickly, quickly!"

She seized the rush candle and pinched it out, tore off her skirt and cloak and tossed them, with the gold

circlet, into the boy's arms. Almost immediately there came a heavy pounding on the door.

"Yes? What is wanted?" Marm's voice sounded as if drowned in sleep but she and John were swiftly and silently moving about, getting clothes, sword, and chess-board into their hiding places, lifting the boards off the trestle table and moving them all out of the way. The dark did not seem to hamper them and in a few moments' time all evidence of their strange activity was out of sight, and Marm was fumbling at the door latch.

A man's voice called impatiently from without, "Hasten! Hasten, Old Marm, for the love of heaven! 'Tis a child mortally ill. Come at once with what potent medicines you have. Only come quickly!"

"Anon, anon," Marm answered. "Let me but get the yarbs in a basket and a vial of liquid medicine, and I will be ready to follow you."

"Go with me, John," she said. "It needs must be the sokeman's child, Kinella. She looked but poorly when I saw her yesterday. Her father is a powerful man, and he likes me not."

As soon as they were ready John flung open the door and they stepped out. A tall figure stood in a dim circle of light cast by the lantern he carried. He turned quickly and strode forward with a muttered command to follow. Old Marm and John kept close at his heels.

It was a cotter's home with a bit of land around it, better than the ordinary villeins' hovels. After their hurried walk through the deserted manor village, the line of light shining under the door seemed welcoming. Inside, a wick floating in oil gave a bit of light

better than the usual rush candle. John stood back near the door, out of the way, and Marm moved at once to a pallet on the floor where a child lay tossing and muttering feverishly. John watched, keenly interested as he always was in Marm's dealing with sick persons. She leaned over the little one, laid a gentle hand on her forehead, crooning the while. The child opened big eyes, startled for the moment, then relaxed and closed them again with a little smile. Marm had a way with children.

"How long has the fever been running?" she asked the mother, who hovered anxiously by.

"Four days or more she has been ailing," answered the woman, "but never like this. Since sundown today she wanders in her mind. It is as if an evil spirit possessed her."

"Nay, 'tis no evil spirit, this. 'Tis more like the miasma that rises from the black pools in the marsh. You should have sent for me sooner."

The woman was whimpering now but Old Marm paid no attention. She bade John bring her some cool water from the bucket by the door, dipped a rag in it, and laid it across the child's forehead. Then she picked out some of the dried herbs in her basket, ground them up as finely as she could with a round stone she always carried with her, and put them in a clay mug with some water. After the concoction had stood a while she slipped an arm gently under the child's shoulders, lifting her a little, and held the mug to her lips. At first the small patient would not drink, but Marm coaxed and crooned over her and before long a good bit of the medicine was down. Marm changed the wet rag on

her forehead, humming softly the while until, with a sigh, the little girl turned on her side and slept.

Old Marm left directions with the mother, giving her the herb brew and the vial of liquid she had brought, then, taking John's arm, moved toward the door.

The man who had come for her barred her way. "Will the child live?" he asked harshly.

"That will be as God decrees," said Marm quietly.

"She had better live!" The man stood tall and threatening over her. "You have power enough — over the devil at least — and your yarb knowledge, they say, is black witchcraft. You can heal or kill. If my child dies, it will be the worse for you!" He opened the door but made no move to accompany the two back through the black, empty village. It was the mother who brushed past him and placed a lighted rush in John's hand.

"I thank you," she whispered. "God reward you, Old Marm."

They went out into the dark. There was no moon nor were there any stars, and they walked slowly and cautiously in the blackness of midnight. John held the rush light in one hand, cupping it with the other so it would not blow out. Old Marm clung to his arm and managed to carry her basket without letting any of the loose herbs fall out. Neither spoke until they had got to the parish church, dimly visible as a bulk of blacker darkness. Then Marm relaxed a little and sighed with relief.

"No footpads or evil men would attack us here," she whispered confidently.

"I would not be so sure of that!" John spoke low and glanced around them uneasily. Nothing was visible

beyond the small dim circle of light cast by his reed candle.

"So close to God's presence? They would not dare — and anyway, if we cried out, Father Gregory would hear us in his cottage."

"That is true. But Marm, why was the sokeman so unfriendly? You were doing your best for his child."

"Oh me, 'tis an ungrateful world!" Marm said with a sigh. "The villagers seek me out whenever there is illness or accident, and I have healed and cured many a suffering one, but when all is well with them again they forget. They think that I have some strange power and that I am different from the rest of them. They are afraid of me — and they hate me. You too are different and they resent it."

"Yes, I know, well enough!" John said bitterly. His heart was hot within him. He was angry at the villagers, angrier still with his father's enemies that they should have pitilessly destroyed his home and family. It was their fault that he and Marm must live hidden and afraid, as peasants in a manor village instead of being in a castle with his father, the rightful lord of wide lands and all who worked on them. It was not fair, it was cruelly unjust! If only he could become a knight, find his father, and with his father avenge their wrongs!

By this time they had reached their hovel and were safely inside. "Marm," said John, "you have never told me the name of my father's special enemy, nor why he raised his hand against our house."

"He is a great lord, dear heart, noble in birth but not in spirit. And doubtless he still is a favorite of King

John's. He was jealous of your father, poisoned the king's ear against him with some false tale and then attacked our castle. None would raise a hand to help your father for fear of the king's displeasure."

Marm's hands were trembling as they always did at the recollection of that tragic time. John took them in his own and warmed them.

"Who was he? What was his name? Oh, Marm, why do we wait any longer? I am tired of playing a game in the night! I want to go *now* and seek my father. I want to find his enemy and slay him with my own hand!"

"Gently, my nursling, gently," whispered Old Marm. "Revenge is not a noble thing. Besides, what could you do, a peasant boy to all who looked upon you, without backing from a knight or lord, or any knowledge of the world? When the time has come, I shall know it! And at that moment you must have learned to be at ease as page and squire among high-born folk, and — and —"

"And handle a sword!" John broke in. "I am not too young for that, but *you* cannot teach me how to fight, or even ride a horse in knightly combat."

"I would that I could!" Old Marm sighed so pitifully that all the seething discontent and impatience vanished from John's heart. He threw his arms about her, almost knocking her over.

"Oh, Marm!" he cried contritely, giving her a bearlike hug. "Oh, Marm, I am sorry! You have been everything to me as far back as I can remember, and I love you! I will do your bidding even if it is just to wait — but waiting is so hard!"

The night was far spent and they must be up with the dawn, especially now when they owed boon work on their lord's land at the spring planting. Old Marm and John stopped talking abruptly and lay down in their usual corners of the hovel.

"But, Marm," said the boy after a long pause, "can you not get yourself a vision, 'dream true' about me and about my knight — the one I spoke with this morning? It — it would give me something to cling to, besides just imagining and all this secret play at being page or squire!"

"It is no play!" Old Marm spoke sharply from her dark corner. "All my teaching is most needful. Surely you know that! As for the dreaming true, that cannot be forced." She paused for so long that John was almost asleep when she added, "Only once in a while they come, those strange visions, as if some bright angel drew aside for a moment the veil that hides the future from our eyes and, by his very brightness, lit up a wee small picture of what is to come."

Into the Lion's Den!

Brother Francis listened intently, his face alight with sympathy and, yes, with love. When John had talked himself out, he said, "My dear young giant of a boy, Our Lord and Savior is with us, as always, but most particularly He must have brought you and me together today!"

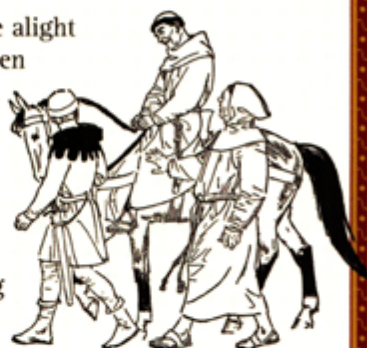
John, completely puzzled, waited for Br. Francis to explain, which, after chuckling at the boy's amazement, he did.

"Where should one seek for a Christian, be it landless knight, or earl or prince, save in the ranks of the Crusaders? They are all gone to Damietta, but their fighting has been of no avail and will never succeed. Not force of arms or killing will convert the Infidels, but love, only love and caring. I myself, unworthy though I am, have come here for the sole purpose of visiting the Soldan in his camp or in the city of Damietta, telling him the wondrous story of God's love and the gracious life and holy death of His Son, Our Lord."

"But—but," John managed to break in, "you could not go into the camp of the Saracens! They would slay you before you got there!"

"I am quite aware of the danger," Br. Francis said firmly. "But I have no fear at all. Enough of that. This is the point for you, my son. *Go with us!*"

It is 1218 and 16-year-old John, squire to Sir Alwyn, is faced with a momentous decision. His greatest longing is to find the father whose name and person he has never known, but who is rumored to be alive. John has arrived in the Holy Land at the time of the 5th Crusade to carry out this search. After battle, capture and setbacks, John is drawn to the remarkable friar whose joyful faith may not only bring a solution to his difficulties, but immediately touches the heart of a lonely boy on the brink of manhood.



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