

# THE SCAR GATHERER

## Extract from *The Falconer's Quarry*

This extract is from chapter 6, when Joe discovers how rich people fast during Lent (and this is only the first course!) but also how long it takes before they are allowed to start eating:

Joe waited until Lucy's aunt was seated, and the two men and the much older lady who had followed her into the room, then sat down beside Lucy.

A manservant entered and approached Lady Jane. "Morley will take his meal while he works, my Lady. He says there is much to do before tomorrow and begs you to excuse him."

"Very well," she replied. "Let them bring the food at once then."

The man bowed and left the room.

In the doorway, he passed a servant boy who crossed the room towards Joe and set a wooden board, a spoon, a tankard and a napkin on the tablecloth in front of him. Beside the spoon, he put down a small, white loaf of bread. Joe saw that everyone else had a loaf already. It seemed like a lot of bread to eat at one meal, but if they were fasting for Lent, perhaps there wouldn't be much else.

The manservant reappeared with a bowl of water with herbs and orange peel floating in it for them to wash their hands. Five boys entered the room behind him, four of them bearing large platters, and one carrying a cauldron. Three of the platter-bearers were dressed identically in what Joe supposed was the livery of the household. So these must be pages, like himself.

The manservant stood beside Lady Jane. "Today, we have salad, my Lady, though, alas, without the boiled eggs. There is also pottage of lampreys, white herring with mustard sauce, minced salt salmon, and trout upon sops." As he named each dish, the boy holding it stepped forward and presented it to Lady Jane. Each one was large enough to be a meal on its own for all of them. So much for fasting, Joe thought.

The boy carrying the pottage began serving Lucy's aunt and then the other guests, while the other dishes were carried over to a sideboard that seemed to be covered with a carpet. Joe wondered if he was mistaken. But it occurred to him that he hadn't seen any carpets on the floors here so far. Perhaps they didn't like to walk on them.

The pages came and sat down at the table beside Joe, while two menservants set to work filleting the herring and trout and serving the food out onto plates.

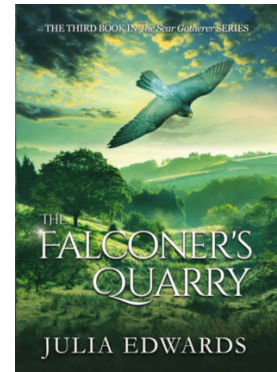
"Shall we say Grace?" Lady Jane nodded to a man dressed from head to toe in black, who had appeared at the end of the table.

"*Benedicite*," he pronounced.

"*Dominus*," replied everyone.

"*Edent pauperes*," the priest continued, "*et saturabuntur, et laudabunt dominum qui requirunt eum: vivent corda eorum in seculum seculi.*"

The Grace went on and on. Joe let the words wash over him, grateful that they weren't



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expected to join in.

"*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem,*" intoned the priest.

"*Sed libera nos a Malo,*" everyone replied.

Joe felt a stab of anxiety. Were they going to be required to say something now? Perhaps they were going to recite the Lord's prayer in Latin, or something like that. He kept his gaze fixed firmly on his lap.

"*Oremus,*" declared the priest. "*Benedic, domine, nos, et dona tua que de tua largitate sumus sumpturi. Per christum dominum nostrum.*"

"Amen," said everyone.

Joe looked up. But the priest still hadn't finished.

"*Iube domine benedicere,*" he began again.

Joe looked down again quickly. Whenever was he going to get to the end? At this rate, the food would be completely cold.

"... *ubi christus est in dextera dei sedens.*"

"Amen," everyone said again.

This time, Joe waited and watched out of the corner of his eye before raising his head.

But everyone relaxed and began to talk again. The priest vanished as abruptly as he had appeared.

Lady Jane turned to address Joe. "Eat as much as you wish," she said, as one of the serving men placed a plate between Joe and Lucy, with a substantial portion of each of the different types of food on it.

"I'm sorry that there isn't more," Lucy's aunt went on, "and of course there's no meat. Lent can seem long, can it not?"

One of the men sitting with them said, "I know of a household where they eat beaver during Lent."

"But that's not a fish!" protested Lucy.

"It is, or at least its tail is, being in water all the time. And who's to know if a bit of the animal slips into the pot with it?"

"Is it true that you can eat duck, too, if it's swimming when you kill it?" asked one of the pages.

"Surely not!" Lady Jane exclaimed.

"I heard worse last week," said the second man. "There was a man near Oxford so desperate for meat that he hauled a cow out of the river it had fallen into, and ate that!"

Everyone laughed.

"That can't be right," said Lucy's aunt, "though I do sympathise. I long for meat again! I hope you'll still be here tomorrow, Master Hopkins? We'll be having at least ten dishes for each remove, and there will be capons, venison, mutton, lamb, goose, chicken ..." Her voice trailed off, and for a moment, it was quiet around the table as everyone contemplated the prospect.

"I'd love to stay," Joe said. "But it depends on when Sir William's answer is ready for the Lord St. John." *And then what?* he thought. *Then I ride out into a world I don't know, without Lucy.* Fear turned over in his stomach.

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