

1. Serfs

"Ivy, Robin, time to get up." Ava shook her children who were still sleeping on a dirty straw mat covered with an old moth-eaten woollen blanket.

5 "Oh mother", Ivy said tiredly, "it's still dark. It's too early to get up."

"If you don't go now, you won't make it in time for the opening of the market", Ava answered.

10 "Please, mother, it's so cold outside", Robin mumbled from under the blanket. "Let's wait until sunrise."

"It's now or never!" Ava made her point. "We need the money from selling the eggs. And the earlier you arrive at the market the better your
15 chances to sell all of them quickly."

Slowly Ivy and Robin got up from their straw mat. It was next to their parents' mat in a corner of their single-room hut where the children lived with their parents Ava and Cedric, and five hens.
20 The family was very poor. Ava and Cedric were serfs. They worked on a piece of land owned by Lord Edmund de Wilford. They had to give most of their crop to Edmund, and they could only keep a very small part of the crop for themselves.
25 In bad years, when there were storms or

droughts, or when grasshoppers ate the plants, there was hardly anything left for them to live from.

Sometimes Ava had to help in the kitchen of the
30 manor house when the lord had hunting parties.
And there were a lot of hunting parties because
hunting was the favourite hobby of Lord Edmund
de Wilford. She never got any money for her
work, but the cook often gave her a piece of
35 cheese or some white bread for her family.
Ava was very proud of her hens, which spent the
day outside in a small garden behind the hut.



At night Ava kept them inside the hut in a
wooden box filled with straw. It was too
40 dangerous to leave them outside during the night
because not only the foxes showed a great

interest in them. A lot of people in the Middle Ages were always hungry, and despite the risk of serious punishment, some of them stole food
45 from market stalls, from fields, and of course, from people who kept their hens outside. Ava collected the eggs that her hens laid, and once a week, on market day, she went to Newbury to sell them.

50 Newbury was about ten miles from Hainford, their little village, and it usually took her three hours to get there and three hours back – all for three or four pennies. But this money was a fortune for her and she saved most of it in a small
55 leather purse that she kept under her straw mat. Today, however, she could not go to Newbury because she had to help in the manor house. So she sent Ivy and Robin to the town to sell her precious eggs. The night before she had carefully
60 put 30 eggs in a small woollen bag filled with straw. She gave Ivy the bag, who slung the string around her shoulder. She gave another smaller bag to Robin. In it she had put some pieces of brown bread and some
65 cheese from the manor house.

“Now be careful”, she warned her children.
“Don’t run and don’t drop the bag, Ivy. If you are clever, you can sell seven or eight eggs for a penny. And don’t leave the town too late. You

70 don't want to walk home in the dark. Robin, listen to your sister and do not leave her side, do you hear me?"

"Yes, mother. Loud and clear", Robin answered.

"Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on her. I'm twelve,
75 and almost a grown man."

"Of course you are", Cedric, their father said.

He had just got up and put on his shirt and belt.

Soon he would leave to go to work in the fields.

He usually took Robin with him. He was old and
80 strong enough to help his father plough the fields or bring in the crops. Robin often had to go to the manor house and help in the stables of Lord Edmund. He liked the horses and often stroked them when nobody was watching.

85 "Alright, children, bring us some money and make us proud", Cedric called after his children as they set off on their way to Newbury.

"Will do", Ivy shouted back. They found the village street which was only a dirt road, and
90 walked in the direction of the town.