

In Time of Need

By Grace Dvorachek

**“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy,
and find grace to help in time of need.”**

—Hebrews 4:16

MORNING dawned in London, England in the same way it had since the beginning of time.

The same birds spread their wings to take flight above the city, the same rats and roaches scurried back to their shadowy hiding places, and the same, flaming sphere rose above the horizon, straining to penetrate the cloud of endless smoke already rising from the factories.

Packed between the shrouds of smog, the tall, brick tenement buildings were just beginning to awaken.

One such establishment—with the faded name of Beasley's Tenement House written on the red brick with whitewash— stood unnoticed among the other buildings.

In a large, upstairs room of the building, countless children slept soundly on their cots, each subconsciously aware that their time of rest was short.

The peaceful slumber was suddenly interrupted as the door burst open, and a man stomped in with the air of a king. Nearly as wide as he was tall, he wore a threadbare suit and a frown.

Surveying the room for a moment, the man quickly moved in on the closest, sleeping child.

“Wake up, you lazy urchins!” He snapped in a voice as coarse as his brown beard, roughly yanking off the thin blanket that covered the child.

A sleepy head appeared, and the young girl leaped out of the bed with fearful hastiness.

The man strode through the room, shaking each child awake in the same, unpleasant manner. Sleepily, they arose, and stood next to their beds, their eyes fixed on the man with a respectful silence.

His furious pacing stopped suddenly next to a cot next to one of the windows, where a small figure still slept peacefully.

“Tad Griffin!” The man bellowed, ferociously shaking the sleeping lad.

Immediately, although still half-asleep, a young boy emerged from underneath the thin blanket, rubbing his bleary eyes.

“Is it time for the noon meal already?” He mumbled.

The man gave a glare that could have melted ice. “Sleeping in like a lazy drifter, are you?”

Tad yawned sleepily, and his eyelids drooped. “I ‘ope we ‘ave soup today.”

A titter spread throughout the room, and the man’s face grew red. “Stop this impertinence at once!” He roared, giving Tad a sound smack in the face.

The boy jumped, and awareness leapt into his hazel eye. “Sorry, Mr. Beasley!” He said, rubbing his cheek where the blow had fallen.

“Just see that you work hard today!”

Tad nodded vigorously. “Yes, Mr. Beasley!”

The tenement owner shot him one last glare before stomping from the room, giving the door a good bang on the way out.

Once Mr. Beasley’s stout frame had disappeared, the room erupted into a steady flow of chatter as the children scrambled to dress and hurry out the door.

Tad shook himself, and pressed his lips to suppress the anger that flashed in his eyes. Standing, he grabbed a threadbare coat that hung on the edge of the bed, and turned.

A little girl, seated on a nearby cot, gave a delighted cry, and an affectionate smile spread across Tad’s face. He bent to give the child a one-armed hug, putting the other arm through the sleeve of his coat.

“Mornin’, Ava. Wish I could stay wi’ ya longer, but I gotta run.” Fondly, he tousled her sandy curls, which resembled his own hair. “Mr. Beasley ain’t in the best o’ moods today.”

Nearby, a red-haired boy snorted as he sat on his own cot, lacing up his worn shoes. “Ha! There ain’t a day when ‘e’s in a good mood!”

Tad sighed, his gaze traveling longingly to the window above his bed. “Ain’t that the truth.”

The other boy jumped to his feet as the last child exited the room. “Come on, Tad! We’d best be goin’, or Mr. Beasley’ll give us a lickin’ fer sure!”

Tad nodded in reluctant agreement. “I’m comin’, Bevan. Jes’ gotta say goodbye to me sister.”

Bevan shrugged, and dashed from the room. His footsteps could be heard pounding down the stairs, hurrying to catch up with the other children.

Tad stared at the door for a moment after Bevan disappeared, and then turned slowly back to face Ava’s sober, hazel eyes. It pained him to have to leave her at the tenement house every day, but he knew he had no other choice.

“You be good today, Ava,” He said, bending down to kiss her forehead. “I’ll be back tonight.”

Then he hurried out of the room, well aware that he would be late if he stayed any longer. And if there was one thing that angered Mr. Beasley, it was a tardy worker.

The bustle of the London streets was a stark contrast to the stillness of the tenement house, but Tad was used to it. He barely slowed as he burst out of the door, and into the hazy, morning air.

Turning, he headed down the street towards a large factory building in the distance, his feet pounding on the pavement.

Somewhere in the distance, a clock struck six, and Tad forced his legs to move faster. Keeping his eyes fixed on the factory's tall smokestack, he ran with determination, somehow managing to dodge the pedestrians who crossed his path.

Won't do no good if I'm late, He thought grimly. *Mr. Beasley's already in a sore mood today.*

So engrossed was the lad in his thoughts that he never noticed the man who was crossing the street just in front of him. That is, until Tad slammed into the man's tall figure in full force.

Tad took the worst of the collision, and would have fallen to ground, if it weren't for the strong hand that reached out to steady him.

"Whoa there, lad!" A kind voice called in surprise. The man to whom the voice belonged to hauled Tad to his feet with ease. "Careful, now. Are you alright?"

Tad, still a bit dazed from his fall, brushed at his soiled clothing, trying to wipe away the worst of the mud. The stains, however, only blended in with the other spots that already adorned his ragged clothes. "I'm fine, mister."

The man, a tall, stately figure clothed in a black robe, studied Tad with keen interest. "Who are you, lad? And where do you live?"

Tad glanced up. "The name's Tad Griffin. I live at Beasley's Tenement 'ouse jes' down the street." He waved a hand to the red-brick building, now a block behind him. "Mr. Beasley lets us stay there in return for workin' at 'is factory."

The stranger, however, didn't seem satisfied with that answer. "Do they feed you well?" He asked, surveying Tad's scrawny frame with a critical eye.

"What do it look like?" Tad snapped, in a less-than-respectful tone. "Me and me baby sister stay there only 'cause we got no place else to go."

The man's distinguished features softened. "Why don't you step into my church over here?" He motioned to a large, whitewashed building just across the street.

"Church?" Tad frowned.

"Well, yes." The man seemed to realize the question was odd, for he hastened to explain. "I'm the reverend there—Reverend Sheppard. I'd like to treat you to some breakfast."

Tad's expression changed from bewildered to indignant. "Treat me nothin'! I don't need no reverend's 'elp!"

"But you do need God's help," Reverend Sheppard replied kindly.

"I don't need no-one's 'elp!"

Reverend Sheppard shook his head. "Whether you realize it or not, you do."

Tad gave his own head a vehement shake, and there was a spark of pride in his eyes. "That ain't what I think! I can get along jes' fine without yer 'elp, or God's 'elp, for that matter!"

"But lad—"

Tad glanced down the street. "Look, mister, I gotta go, or I'm gonna be late."

Before Reverend Sheppard could say another word, the boy was off and running again.

"Who does 'e think 'e is, anyway?" Tad muttered, shaking his head as he ran. "Jes' wants ta do 'is good deed fer the day! Well, I ain't gonna get no 'elp from a preacher, anyway! 'e can jes' 'ave 'is own breakfast!"

At last, the large factory loomed over him. Looking around at the empty sidewalk, Tad realized with a sinking heart that the workday had already begun. He slipped inside, hoping to remain unnoticed.

"You there!" A harsh voice called out. "Tad!"

Tad's steps slowed on the hall floor, and he turned to face Mr. Beasley's glowering face. "Me?"

“Yes, you!” The factory owner snapped. “You’re late again!”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I—”

“Sorry won’t get the work done any faster! You’ll be skipping the noon meal today!”

Tad’s eyes widened. “But, sir—”

“No buts! Unless you want to be out on the streets!”

Tad sighed, and hung his head submissively. “No, sir.”

“Then get to work!” Mr Beasley spun on his heel, and stormed away.

Defeated, Tad turned, and headed down the hall to the workroom.

Later that morning, Mr. Beasley sat in his office at a small desk, the surface of which was nearly hidden by sheaves of paper.

“How could this be happening?” He muttered to himself, studying a document in his hand. Sighing in frustration, he dropped it onto the desk. “There must be a way to cut back on the expenses! The factory isn’t making enough money to cover everything!”

Mr. Beasley paused, picking up another paper, and reading it to himself. He frowned, and tossed it aside with a growl. “If things get much worse, I’ll have to shut down!”

A knock at the door interrupted Mr. Beasley’s grumbling, and he glanced up. “Come in!” He snapped, glaring at the door as if it were his worst enemy.

The offending hatchway swung open, revealing a young woman clad in rather drab-looking clothes.

“Sir,” She said nervously, sensing her employer’s displeasure. “There’s a man here to see you.”

“Humph!” Mr. Beasley’s scowl deepened. “It had better not be another man from the bank!”

“No, sir,” The secretary shook her head hastily. “He said he was a lawyer.”

Mr. Beasley gritted his teeth. “That’s almost as bad,” He muttered. To his secretary, he grunted, “Send him in.”

The woman promptly disappeared, and, a few moments later, a short, dignified-looking man entered the room. He was dressed in an expensive suit, and, though he was only middle-aged, he had the appearance of a wealthy man.

“You must be Mr. Edgar Beasley,” He said, approaching the desk.

“Yes, and you are...?”

A strong hand extended from the man’s suit pocket. “Sterling Sinclair, a lawyer by trade.”

“Hmm,” Mr. Beasley, unimpressed by the man’s intelligent air, ignored the hand. “Sit down.”

Mr. Sinclair glanced around the office, searching for something to be seated upon. His keen eyes fell upon a chair in the corner, half-buried by a stack of books.

Moving the books to the ground, he drew the chair up to the desk, and, seating himself upon it, turned expectantly to Mr. Beasley.

The factory owner regarded his guest with a look of disinterest. “You said you wanted to see me.”

“Yes, Mr. Beasley.”

Mr. Beasley folded his arms brusquely. “Well, you’d better make it quick. I am a very busy man.”

“I’m working for a man by the name of Favian Lambert,” Mr. Sinclair said in a businesslike tone. “Perhaps you’ve heard of him.”

Mr. Beasley's face molded from a cool, indifferent look, to the expression of someone who has just had an icicle slipped down his back. "Favian Lambert? *The* Favian Lambert?"

"If you're referring to Favian Lambert, the millionaire, then yes." Mr. Sinclair's expression remained calm, but his lips twitched at Mr. Beasley's sudden change in demeanor.

Mr. Beasley frowned suspiciously. "But... he's dead."

Mr. Sinclair looked as though he were suppressing a sigh. "Of course he's dead. He's been dead for nearly three months."

"How can you be working for a dead man?"

"Mr. Beasley, I'm a lawyer!" Mr. Sinclair said, exasperated.

Mr. Beasley's apprehensive look melted, and he waved his hand carelessly. "So you are, so you are. Now, would you please get to the point?"

Mr. Sinclair leaned back comfortably in his chair. "When Mr. Lambert died, he left all of his money to his estranged niece, Abigail Lambert Griffin. I've obtained information that she and her husband are also deceased, leaving behind two children. For the past few months, I've been searching for the heirs."

He tapped his fingers together methodically. "It has come to my attention that you have a great number of children working here at your factory, and one of them could very well be Thaddeus Griffin. Do you have anyone here by that name?"

"Y—yes," Mr. Beasley stammered, suddenly excited. "As a matter of fact, I do!" He pasted a smile on his face. "He really is quite a worker, the dear boy! Unfortunately, he's away at the moment."

"Away?"

“Why, yes.” Mr. Beasley lifted his chin. “I make sure the best of my workers get a proper education. Tad—er, Thaddeus—won’t be back from school until this afternoon.”

He shook his head with the air of a proud father. “The dear boy really does have a great mind!”

“And what about the other heir? Ava Griffin?”

“Oh! Ava! Indeed...” Mr. Beasley frowned. “Er... she is at home at this moment, under the care of a governess.”

Mr. Sinclair stood. “Well, that is unfortunate. I supposed I’ll have to stop by some other time.”

“Wait!” Mr. Beasley leaped from his chair.

A startled look crossed Mr. Sinclair’s face, and he paused.

“I— I am the childrens’ guardian!” Mr. Beasley stammered. “You can give me the money now, and I’ll make sure that they receive it at the appropriate time.”

Mr. Sinclair’s eyes narrowed. “That’s odd. I don’t remember seeing anything about a guardian in the records.”

“Oh... really?” Mr. Beasley gave a weak smile. “I suppose it must not have made it in there!” He chuckled nervously.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Mr. Sinclair said dryly. He paused for a moment. “I tell you what I’ll do, Mr. Beasley. I’ll come by this evening, and you can have the boy come here after school. Then I can see for myself how well you’re taking care of them.”

It took a moment for this to sink in. “Of— of course, Mr. Sinclair!” Mr. Beasley finally managed to say, his face brightening. “And don’t worry! I love those two like they were my own children. You’ll find that they’re being treated very well here.”

“I should hope so,” Mr. Sinclair replied. “I’d best be going now. Good day, Mr. Beasley.”

Mr. Beasley's smile broadened. "And a very good day to you, too!"

The door shut behind Mr. Sinclair, leaving Mr. Beasley alone once again.

"Yes," Mr. Beasley sat back down at his desk, his eyes taking on a malicious glint. "A very good day."

The factory was abuzz with clattering machines as a young boy dashed among them, his red curls bouncing slightly. He spotted another lad at the end of a row, and headed towards him.

"Tad," He panted, trying to keep his voice low as he screeched to a halt next to his friend. "I was goin' past Mr. Beasley's office, an' I 'eard yer name!"

Tad glanced up at Bevan with concern, though he never paused in his work. "That's never a good thing wi' Mr. Beasley. What'd he say?" He bent over the machine again.

Bevan glanced around warily. "I couldn't catch most o' it, 'cause 'is secretary caught me, but there was a man in there askin' 'bout you."

"Askin' 'bout me?"

"Yup. It's probably one o' the other factory owners wantin' ta 'ire you."

Tad's head shot up again. "Ya think Mr. Beasley'll let 'im?"

Bevan shrugged his thin shoulders. "'e might, if they give 'im enough money."

"Did they say anythin' 'bout Ava?"

"Nope. Jes' you," Bevan replied. "Most tenement 'ouses won't let babies stay 'ome alone all day, anyway. Mr. Beasley's probably gonna keep yer sister 'ere."

"'e can't do that!" Tad's eyes flashed with anger.

“Ha! Jes’ watch ‘im!” Bevan quickly lowered his voice as another worker glanced their way. ““Sides, you think ‘e cares? We’re more like slaves ‘ere than workers.”

Tad clenched his fists. “Jes’ let ‘im try an’ take Ava away from me! If ‘e won’t let us stay together, I’m leavin’!”

“Leavin’?” Bevan raised his eyebrows. “Where you gonna go? You got some money stashed someplace I don’t know about?”

“I don’t know where we’ll go, but we gotta get away from Beasley,” Tad replied determinedly. “I’ll find another place ta work.”

Bevan shook his head. “It ain’t as easy as it sounds, Tad. Half o’ London’s lookin’ fer work these days.”

“I’m gonna cross that bridge when I come to it. Anything’s better than stayin’ ‘ere an’ lettin’ Beasley take me away from me sister!”

Bevan’s face grew concerned. “You jes’ be careful, Tad. No tellin’ what Beasley’ll do when ‘e finds out yer gone. You make ‘im a lot o’ money.”

“Don’t worry, Bevan. By the time ‘e finds out, me an’ Ava will be long gone.” Tad turned back to his work with a resolute face. “We’re leavin’ tonight, an’ that’s final!”

But when Tad walked into Mr. Beasley’s office that evening, his face was far from determined. In fact, he looked uneasy.

He knew very well that he hadn’t been called away from his machine for nothing. The work-day didn’t end for another half hour, and Mr. Beasley never let anyone off a moment before then.

“What’d you want ta see me for, anyway, Mr. Beasley?” Tad tugged uncomfortably at the new suit he wore. “An’ why’d yer secretary make me put on these itchy things? Work’s almost over for the day, an’ I wanna get back to me sister.”

“Mind your tongue, boy!” Mr. Beasley snapped, looking almost as nervous as Tad. “Now, listen closely. I have a visitor coming to look you over. I expect you to be polite and respectful. And, above all, do not mention anything bad about the conditions of the tenement house or the factory.”

He glared sternly at the boy. “Is that understood?”

“I know what you’re plannin’, Mr. Beasley, an’ I ain’t goin’ along wi’ it!” Tad said rebelliously. “You can’t force me ta do nothin’!”

Mr. Beasley’s face grew red. “Who says I can’t, you impertinent little wretch? You forget that your sister is in *my* tenement house!”

“What does that ‘ave ta do wi’ anything?”

“You’d better make sure you behave, or I’ll see to it that you never see Ava again!”

Tad suddenly looked alarmed. “You’d better not do anythin’ to me sister!”

Mr. Beasley smiled slightly. “I won’t, as long as you cooperate.”

The door opened before Tad had a chance to respond, and the secretary looked in. “Mr. Sinclair is here, sir.”

Mr. Beasley’s eyes lit up. “Send him in.”

The young woman left, and a broad-shouldered figure soon appeared in the doorway. Mr. Sinclair stepped inside the office, looking every bit as distinguished as he had that morning.

“Good evening, Mr. Sinclair,” Mr. Beasley said smoothly. “I trust you are well?”

“Yes, thank you,” The lawyer replied, although his eyes were fastened on Tad. “And this is Thaddeus?”

Tad's eyes widened. "Thaddeus?" He cried indignantly. "Ain't nobody calls me Thaddeus!"

Mr. Beasley's face froze, and he cleared his throat quickly. "Ahem, yes, this is the dear lad." Keeping a smile on his face, he leaned over and hissed, "Mind your manners, boy!"

The lawyer remained silent, his sharp eyes looking Tad up and down.

Mr. Beasley watched nervously until he could stand it no longer. "As you can see, the boy is well taken care of, Mr. Sinclair."

Tad's eyebrows shot up, and immediately lowered. "Well-taken care—"

"And I've given him the best education I could possibly afford," Mr. Beasley interrupted hastily.

"Yes, his vocabulary is obvious proof of that," Mr. Sinclair remarked.

Mr. Beasley nodded eagerly, not catching the sarcastic note in the lawyer's voice. "I would most definitely put that money to good use."

He placed a meaty hand over his chest for dramatic affect. "The boy has his heart set on going to university one day, and this will help make his dream a reality."

"University?" Tad scrunched his face up in disgust. "I ain't been ta school in all me born days!"

A panicked look flashed across Mr. Beasley's face. "Uh... very funny, Thaddeus!" He turned to Mr. Sinclair. "The dear boy has always had a good sense of humor." He chuckled nervously.

Mr. Sinclair frowned. "Yes, I can see that." Then, his face became expressionless.

"Well?" Mr. Beasley pressed.

In response, Mr. Sinclair bent to Tad's eye-level, his gaze serious. "I want you to answer me truthfully, Thaddeus. The treatment you and your sister receive in Mr. Beasley's care—is it satisfactory?"

Tad opened his mouth, but caught Mr. Beasley's glare. He swallowed. "Yeah."

Mr. Sinclair nodded, and stood, looking off thoughtfully into space for a moment. "I believe I've reached a conclusion."

"And that is?" Mr. Beasley's face resembled that of a hopeful child.

Mr. Sinclair smiled. "I'll draw up the papers tomorrow!" He turned to Tad. "Congratulations, young man!" Then, turning, he headed to the door, calling back, "I'll see you both tomorrow morning at eight-thirty sharp!"

Tad frowned as the door shut behind Mr. Sinclair. "What was that all about? An' what's wi' you callin' me 'the dear boy?'" He wrinkled his nose. "I almost hurled me guts!"

Mr. Beasley wiped his brow in relief. "That was too close!" He turned on Tad with a steely glare. "I told you to keep your mouth shut, boy!"

"No ya didn't!" Tad snapped. "You jes' told me not to say anythin' 'bout the tenement 'ouse or the factory!"

"Well, either way, that money is mine!" Mr. Beasley smiled, his eyes flashing with greed.

"You ain't gettin' nothin', Mr. Beasley!"

Mr. Beasley's mouth dropped open at the defiant tone in which the boy spoke. He closed his mouth, and then opened it again, looking much like a fish gasping for air. "Wh—what?"

Tad's young face possessed a determined look. "I've 'ad enough o' yer wily ways, an' I ain't lettin' you use me again!"

With these words, Tad bolted out the door, leaving a rather bewildered-looking man behind.

Finally, Mr. Beasley recovered enough to stand to his feet. "Get back here!" He bellowed, his face red with rage.

But Tad was already long gone.

Anyone who saw the young boy dashing down the cobblestone streets that evening could have sworn his feet had wings. The way he dodged oncoming carriages—as well as pedestrians—was almost inhuman.

However, in Tad's mind, he couldn't run fast enough. All he was thinking about was getting as far away from Mr. Beasley as was possible for a young factory worker without a cent to his name.

So intent was he on running—this time away from the factory instead of towards it—that, once again, he wasn't watching where he was going. When a tall, robed man stepped into his path, Tad plowed into him before he knew what was happening.

This time, it was the unfortunate man who took the brunt of the collision. He went down in a fashion similar to that of a sack of potatoes. Only, this man's fall was a bit more dignified.

"That's the second time I've been knocked down today," The man muttered, picking his tall frame up from the muddy street. He turned to Tad, and his face registered shock. "Why, Tad!"

"Sorry, Mr. Reverend," Tad said sheepishly, recognizing the man. "I was in a hurry again." As if to emphasize his point, Tad looked backwards apprehensively.

"That's quite alright," Reverend Sheppard replied kindly, and knelt to look into Tad's face. "But, you know, I believe I can help you."

Tad clenched his jaw, and glanced away quickly. "No-one can 'elp me."

"That's not true. God can help you, no matter what situation you may be in."

"Ha!" Tad turned back to the reverend with a scornful look in his eyes. "I don't need no 'elp from God!"

"We all do."

Despite himself, Tad's face showed a guarded curiosity. "Why's that?"

"Well," Reverend Sheppard paused. "Have you done bad things in your life?"

"Who are you, a constable?" Tad frowned. "Nobody but them goes 'round askin' questions like that."

"No, I'm not a constable. I'm a messenger of good news."

"Don't sound like good news to me," Tad muttered.

A wagon clattered by, and he jumped, suddenly reminded of his pursuer. Anxiously, he glanced back down the street again.

Reverend Sheppard sensed the boy's uneasiness, but he pressed forward. "You *have* lied and stolen before, haven't you?"

"'Course." Tad shrugged, facing the reverend again. "An' lots o' other things. But I know plenty o' people who do that."

"*That* is called sin, and it's a very serious offense against God," Reverend Sheppard answered in a solemn tone. "In fact, the Bible says that all liars will have their part in the lake of fire."

Tad snorted. "Lake o' fire, my auntie! So what? That means everyone's goin' to 'ell."

"It's true, we all deserve to be in Hell," Reverend Sheppard said calmly. "But it's an awful place, full of fire, and weeping, and gnashing of teeth—"

"I 'eard all this before, you know," Tad interrupted, in an impatient tone to match the reverend's gentle one. "Me an' Ava used ta live in an orphanage that taught all that stuff."

"Really?" Reverend Sheppard raised his eyebrows. "I'm delighted to hear it."

"Yeah, well I ain't," Tad said, folding his arms defiantly. "I couldn't stand all that talk 'bout God an' the Bible, so we left."

"Did they tell you about what God did for you so you don't have to go to Hell?"

"Sure," Tad waved his hand breezily. "'e sent Jesus ta die for us, or somethin'."

Reverend Sheppard nodded. "Yes. You see, without Him, all of us would be doomed to Hell. But because He took your payment upon Himself, you can be saved by trusting in Him, and turning from your sin."

"Look, this is all interestin'," Tad said, casting another glance backwards. His tone implied that he didn't think their conversation was at all interesting. "But I jes' don't think I need 'is 'elp right now."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that, Tad."

"Sorry, mister, but I ain't got time for this." Tad glanced over his shoulder again. "I gotta get back to me sister before Mr. Beasley comes lookin' for me."

"Are you sure you don't want to have a bite to eat first?" Reverend Sheppard asked earnestly. "You look like you could use it."

A flicker of wistfulness passed over the young boy's face, but, in a moment, it was replaced by a determined look. "No thanks, Mr. Reverend." He lifted his chin. "I'm doin' jes' fine."

And, holding his head high, Tad marched down the street. Reverend Sheppard stared after him—a compassionate look on his face—as if hoping the boy would change his mind.

But Tad didn't. Though a part of him wanted to turn back and accept the reverend's offer, he pushed the thought aside, and kept walking.

I'd best take a different route back to the tenement 'ouse, He thought, turning his attention to another matter. *I sure don't wanna run into Mr. Beasley in case 'e comes after me.*

He turned aside into an alleyway, and continued on to the tenement. His plan was set firmly in his mind, but he little knew that it would soon go awry.

When Tad arrived at the tenement house, the other children were just getting ready for bed, and several of them gave him questioning glances. Ignoring them, Tad glanced eagerly around the room, searching for the sandy curls and hazel eyes so like his own.

“Hey, where’s Ava?” Tad frowned, an uneasy feeling settling over him.

“Mr. Beasley locked ‘er up in a different room,” Bevan replied, from his seat on a nearby bed.

“What?” Tad looked around anxiously. “Where is she?”

“Cross the hall.” Bevan nodded in that direction. “But it ain’t no use, Tad. Mr. Beasley was still pretty mad when we left the factory. It ain’t gonna go well for you if ‘e finds you ‘ere.”

Tad set his jaw firmly. “Well, ‘e won’t!”

“Look, Tad, jes’ let me ‘elp you wi’ yer escape,” Bevan said earnestly, leaning in so the others wouldn’t hear. “Mr. Beasley’ll be keepin’ a close eye on you from now on, an’ it’ll be harder to run.”

“Thanks, Bevan, but I don’t need no ‘elp,” Tad declared resolutely. “It’s best if me an’ Ava jes’ leave.”

“But Beasley’s got the only key,” Bevan said. “There ain’t no way you can get ‘er out.”

He had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth before the door burst open. Standing in the doorway was Mr. Beasley, looking none too pleased.

“There you are, Tad!” He growled. “I’ve been looking all over for you!” He took a menacing step forward. “You’d better not run off like that again, do you hear me?”

Tad backed away slowly, but his face still held a defiant look. “We ain’t stayin’ ‘ere no more, Mr. Beasley! I’ve ‘ad enough o’ you!”

Mr. Beasley laughed. “Like you could escape this place on your own! You can’t even save your own sister.”

And he was right, Tad knew. Mr. Beasley was a lot more powerful than he was. His heart sank, and he felt his courage drain away.

A movement to his right caught Tad’s attention, and he turned as Bevan stood to his feet. “’e ain’t on ‘is own, Mr. Beasley!” The boy said firmly. He pointed a finger at the factory owner and yelled, “Git ‘im!”

On cue, every child in the room charged towards Mr. Beasley. The man tried to back up, but tripped over a cot, and fell to the ground in a large heap. The other children piled on top of him.

“Go, Tad!” Bevan called from the middle of the chaos.

“What ‘bout Ava?” Tad glanced over at the door across the hall.

“I’ll watch ‘er for ya,” Bevan grunted, struggling to hold onto Mr. Beasley’s leg. “If you wait to escape with ‘er, yer life ain’t gonna be worth much!”

Still, Tad hesitated. “Yer gonna get in an awful lot o’ trouble!”

“Don’t worry about that!” Bevan said. “Jes’ go!”

That was all the encouragement Tad needed. Without a backwards glance, he dashed out the door.

Mr. Beasley finally managed to throw the children off of him, and staggered to his feet. “No! Get him!”

Exhausted as Tad was, he didn't think he'd ever run so fast. Not that morning, though his legs had pumped fast enough then, and not even that evening, when he'd been running away from Mr. Beasley.

The main reason was that, this time, his legs were driven by fear.

When Tad had run that morning, the only thing he'd been afraid of was being late. When he'd run that evening, he hadn't been afraid—simply anxious to carry out his plan.

But now, Tad was more afraid than he'd ever been. He'd always had some sort of plan, some strategy. And now all of his plans and dreams had collapsed around him. He was terrified of facing the future when that future was unknown.

Spurred on by his fears, Tad ran faster. But, even as he ran, he caught a glimpse of a big, whitewashed building with double wooden doors.

A thought crossed his mind, and he came to a halt. *Maybe Reverend Sheppard'll help me.*

Dashing up the steps, he pulled on the door handle. But, though he yanked on it with all his might, it wouldn't open.

Tad glanced hurriedly behind him, knowing he didn't have much time. "Mr. Reverend! Mr. Reverend!" He yelled, pounding frantically on the heavy wood.

From down the street came Mr. Beasley's furious cry. "After him!"

Wildly, Tad scanned the darkening street. His eye caught sight of an alley next to the church. In a flash, he dove into the blackness.

Footsteps pounded on the cobblestone, coming closer. Tad inched backwards until his head bumped lightly against the brick wall behind him. He waited, trying to quiet his labored breathing.

Finally, the footsteps subsided, and all was silent. Tad let out a sigh of relief, and rested his head against the wall, closing his eyes for a moment.

“If I would’ve told Reverend Sheppard ‘bout it earlier...” He shook his head in remorse. “But now ‘e ain’t there. An’ there’s no-one else ta ‘elp me.”

Tad knew the police would never aid a dirty urchin like himself, and the only homes he’d ever known were orphanages and tenement houses. No-one there would even dream of helping him, either.

Tad glanced around the alleyway. “Might as well stay ‘ere for the night.”

He sat there for a moment longer, engrossed in his thoughts. “Poor Ava,” His voice echoed slightly off the walls of the alley. “All alone in that dark room. She must be scared ta death.”

He shook his head. “And there ain’t nothin’ I can do ta ‘elp her.” He sighed. “I got it all wrong, I guess. I’m the one who needs ‘elp the most. I thought I could do it on me own, but I can’t.”

He cupped his chin in his hand, his face full of regret as he remembered what Mr. Beasley had said. “I can’t even save me own sister.”

Silence ensued, Tad lapsing once more into his own thoughts.

Finally, he spoke again—this time, his voice carrying a trace of hope. “Reverend Sheppard said God can ‘elp me.”

He paused. “I guess I ‘ave done wrong, an’ I deserve to go to ‘ell. I always thought I was good enough, but now I ain’t so sure.” Doubt flickered in his face. “If I can’t even protect me own sister, ‘ow am I supposed ta make it to ‘eaven?”

Tad was silent for a moment, but when he spoke again, his voice was full of longing. “But... maybe God will still listen to me.” He clenched his fist. “I gotta try. There ain’t no-one else who can ‘elp me, ‘cept ‘im.”

He bowed his head, light from the newly-risen moon playing across his golden hair.

“God...” Tad began hesitantly. “I ain’t prayed much before, but Reverend Sheppard said You’d ‘elp me, an’ I believe ‘im. I’m askin’ You ta wash me, an’ make me clean.” He swallowed. “An’ ‘elp me ta get me sister back. Amen.”

Tad leaned his head against the wall again, tipping his face upwards to gaze at the night sky. His sigh came from deep within him, carrying regret.

“I was supposed ta protect Ava, but I don’t seem ta be doin’ much good.” He clenched his fists tightly. “I’ve gotta get ‘er back, somehow. I’ve just gotta.”

After a moment, Tad shook his head, peace softening his determined face. “But God ‘eard me prayer, so there ain’t nothin’ else I can do, ‘cept wait for ‘is answer.”

With these words, the boy closed his eyes, and soon his breathing became soft and even. The moonlight shone down between the roofs and into the alleyway, illuminating his young features.

But as Tad slept, a cloud passed over the moon, and a shadow came across his peaceful face.

Sleep may have come much less easier if Tad had only known what the next morning would bring.

“Wake up, you miserable scoundrel!”

Tad woke as he was viciously shaken by a strong hand on his shoulder. Slowly, he opened his eyes, and they met those of an enraged Mr. Beasley.

Immediately, Tad leaped up, and tried to make a break for the street, which was already lit by the morning sunlight. However, Mr. Beasley grabbed the boy’s arm, and held it firmly.

“Lemme go!” Tad cried, trying to squirm out of the man’s grasp.

“Not so fast!” Mr. Beasley gripped Tad’s arm even tighter.

Tad's struggles ceased as he realized they were futile, and he turned to glare at his boss. "What do ya want from me now?"

Mr. Beasley chuckled. "I've caught you just in time. Mr. Sinclair will be in my office in fifteen minutes with those papers, and I need you there."

"You can't make me do nothin'!"

"Can't I?" Mr. Beasley raised an eyebrow. "You forget who has your sister."

Tad said nothing, but his eyes blazed with anger.

Mr. Beasley gave the boy a shove in the direction of the street. "Now, get moving, or we'll be late!"

Mr. Sinclair tapped his fingers restlessly on the wooden surface of the desk. It was unlike him to be so impatient, but, then again, he'd never had to wait this long for any of his clients. He pulled out his pocket watch, and glanced at the face. Frowning, he snapped it shut again.

Loud voices came from outside the door, and Mr. Sinclair fastened his sharp eyes on it. In another moment, the door burst open, and Tad's small frame stumbled inside, followed by the more stout figure of Mr. Beasley.

"Lemme go!" Tad cried, struggling against the tight grip Mr. Beasley had on his arm. "I tell you, I won't do it!"

Slowly, Mr. Sinclair rose from his chair, his frown deepening.

"Hold still, you ungrateful wretch!" Mr. Beasley yanked Tad farther into the room, and shut the door with more force than usual. He turned, as if to continue, but stopped short when he saw Mr. Sinclair.

Straightening, Mr. Beasley released Tad's arm hastily. "Mr. Sinclair! I— I didn't expect you to be here!"

“Yes, I suppose you didn’t,” Mr. Sinclair replied, a hint of sarcasm in his voice. He surveyed Tad slowly, his frown deepening.

Mr. Beasley smiled pleasantly, and stepped behind his desk. “Do you have the papers with you?”

Mr. Sinclair took another dissatisfied look at Tad, and then withdrew a sheaf of papers from his waistcoat. “Right here.” He glanced back at Tad. “But why is Thaddeus wearing these dirty clothes?”

Mr. Beasley’s head instantly swiveled towards the boy, and his face reddened. Tad, having slept in an alleyway the night before, didn’t exactly look like a pampered rich boy anymore.

“Oh... uh, the dear boy got into a little mischief on the way here! He does love to play!” Mr. Beasley chuckled nervously, and then turned back to the desk. “Now, about the papers...”

“Of course.” Mr. Sinclair set the papers on the desk. “But one thing...”

“Indeed?” Mr. Beasley’s eyes were fastened greedily on the papers.

“I happened to check the records again, and your name does not appear as the childrens’ legal guardian.”

“Oh?” Mr. Beasley looked up, his eyes widening. “Oh! Uh... yes.” He cleared his throat hastily. “You see, their dear mother entrusted me with their care on her deathbed.” Something that looked like a tear glimmered in the corner of his eyes. “She asked me with her dying breath to take care of them, so I promised to do so.”

“Well, that certainly was very generous of you,” Mr. Sinclair began.

“How could I do anything else?” Mr. Beasley was really getting into his role now. “I love the two like they were my own flesh and blood.”

Mr. Sinclair nodded slowly.

Mr. Beasley shifted, and then cleared his throat. “The papers?”

“Ah, yes.” Mr. Sinclair bent over the desk again. “I just need your signature here... and here.”

In a flash, Mr. Beasley snatched up a pen, and scribbled on the papers at a frantic rate. Once finished, he handed the pen to Mr. Sinclair with a flourish. “There you are!”

“And now all it needs is my signature of confirmation.” Mr. Sinclair glanced over at Tad with a small smile. “I suppose you must be excited, eh, Thaddeus?”

Tad, who, up until this point had been silently glowering at the two, shook his head defiantly. “I tell you, I ain’t doin’ it!”

Before either of the men had a chance to so much as blink, Tad threw open the door, and bolted down the hall.

Mr. Beasley’s chair clattered to the floor as he leaped to his feet. “Oh, no, he’s getting away again!”

Mr. Sinclair frowned in surprise. “Again? He’s done this before?”

“Yes... I mean no... I mean— after him!” Mr. Beasley sputtered. He backed up and stumbled on his fallen chair. Staggering to the door, he managed to regain his balance before dashing after Tad.

Shrugging, Mr. Sinclair followed at a jog, a confused expression plastered on his face.

The little, whitewashed church was just as clean and orderly on the inside as it was outside. Even in Tad’s desperation, he paused a moment in the doorway, looking about.

The morning sun streamed through the high windows, and onto the wooden pews. A pulpit, tall and stately, sat on a platform at the other end of the room. The whole place seemed to have an air of reverence about it.

The awed silence was broken as the wind slammed the big, wooden door shut behind Tad. He jumped, and whirled, as if he expected a whole posse of policemen to be standing there.

Footsteps sounded, and Tad turned again just as a side door opened.

Reverend Sheppard—looking as stately as the church—stepped into the room, glancing around quickly. “Who’s there?”

At that moment, he noticed Tad’s small, trembling figure standing in front of the big, double doors. “Tad? What are you doing here?”

Tad dashed down the aisle towards the man, who met him halfway. “I ‘ad ta come, Mr. Reverend! No-one else can ‘elp me!”

Regaining his composure, Reverend Sheppard seated himself calmly on one of the pews. “Well, I don’t know about that. Certainly, God is more able to help you.”

Tad nodded hastily. “I know, an’ I already asked ‘is ‘elp.” Glancing down at the wooden floor, he added in a softer tone, “I- I think ‘e’s the one who sent you ta show me ‘ow ta be saved.”

The reverend’s eyes widened, and he smiled. “Does that mean you have accepted Christ?”

“Yes, sir.” Tad nodded, and continued on quickly, “But now I need yer ‘elp for a different reason.”

“And what would that be?”

Tad glanced over his shoulder nervously. “Mr. Beasley’s gonna take me away from me sister.”

Reverend Sheppard’s mouth dropped open in a very un-reverend-like manner. “What?”

“They’re comin’ ta look for me right now!” Despite his brave determination, Tad couldn’t keep the fear out of his voice.

Reverend Sheppard placed a strong, comforting hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Well, don’t worry, Tad. You’ll be safe here with me.”

“But I got to save me sister!” Tad burst out in desperation.

“Where is she?”

“In the tenement ‘ouse.” Tad waved his hand in that direction. “Mr. Beasley locked ‘er up.”

Reverend Sheppard stood quickly. “Take me there immediately! We must rescue her!”

Tad was more than happy to oblige, and he scampered towards the door, the reverend following at a slightly slower pace.

The tenement house was quiet when Tad and Reverend Sheppard reached it—the other children were still at the factory—but Tad led the way up the wooden stairs timidly just the same. He wasn’t taking any chances. Not when he was finally going to rescue Ava.

Reverend Sheppard, too, seemed to tiptoe up the steps, glancing warily around the dark stairway as if something might jump out at him at any moment. In another moment, they opened the door at the top of the stairs, where a long hallway ran, lit only by the late morning light that streamed through a small window.

“She’s in there.” Tad pointed to a door near the end of the hall. He glanced over his shoulder again, his face tense.

Reverend Sheppard strode forward. "Stand back!" He slammed his body into the door, and it shuddered.

Tad clenched his hands together. *Come on!*

Stepping back a few paces, the reverend threw himself against the door again. This time, it fell inside with a crash that echoed in the narrow hallway.

For one terrifying moment, all Tad could see inside the little room beyond the doorway was an inky blackness.

He sucked in a breath. *Could be Mr. Beasley already moved 'er. Maybe we're too late!*

And then a little, curly-headed figure burst from the darkness, running straight into Tad's arms. He held onto her tightly, all his doubts and fears draining away.

"Ava, I never was so glad ta see you!" After a moment, Tad stood, keeping a protective arm around his sister. "We're gonna go away where Mr. Beasley'll never be able ta hurt us."

Footsteps clattered on the stairs, and Tad froze. He looked wildly around, though he already knew there was no other exit.

"I done told ya, Mr. Beasley, we don't know where 'e is!" Bevan's unmistakable voice came from the stairway.

In another instant, the tenement owner himself appeared in the doorway, followed by the children from the factory.

Mr. Beasley's face, already red with anger, turned a shade of purple as he saw Tad and Ava. "Tad Griffin! What are you doing?" He squeezed into the hallway, and grabbed Ava's arm, jerking her away. "I had her locked up!"

"Leave me sister alone!" Tad stepped forward, his fists clenched.

"Sister?" Mr. Sinclair stepped into the hallway, looking even more bewildered than before. "Isn't this Ava Griffin, the other heir?"

Mr. Beasley whirled around. At least, he whirled as well as a large man could do in a narrow hallway.

“Well... I...” He stammered, searching for an excuse. “She was misbehaving, so I had to punish her!” Mr. Beasley grasped Ava’s arm tighter. “Come along, girl!”

“Wait just a moment, Beasley!” Mr. Sinclair clapped a restraining hand onto Mr. Beasley’s shoulder. “I think you’re obviously not suited for the role as guardian of these two.”

Mr. Beasley’s mouth opened and closed, and opened and closed again. “But—but—”

Ava wriggled free from his grasp, but Mr. Beasley hardly noticed as she ran back to her older brother. Tad grabbed Ava’s hand and held it firmly, his eyes fastened on Mr. Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair nodded decidedly. “And it’s my duty as Mr. Lambert’s lawyer to appoint them a new guardian.” He fixed a steely gaze on Mr. Beasley. “One who will take good care of them.”

Reverend Sheppard stepped past Tad and Ava, out of the shadows. “If you don’t mind me saying, I would be happy to be entrusted with the care of these two children.”

Mr. Sinclair glanced casually at the reverend, turned again to Mr. Beasley, and then snapped his head back around for another look. “Abe? Abe Sheppard?”

Reverend Sheppard smiled, and extended a hand. “Nice to see you again, Sterling. But it’s Reverend Sheppard now.”

“A reverend!” Mr. Sinclair exclaimed, reaching past Mr. Beasley to shake the hand. His voice held a hint of amusement. “Quite a change from when we were young!”

Mr. Sinclair looked at the siblings, and then back at the reverend. “And you say you want to become the guardian of Thaddeus and Ava?”

“That is correct.” Reverend Sheppard smiled down at the two children.

Mr. Sinclair stepped forward, and clapped the reverend on the back. “If there’s anyone who’s capable of it, I’m sure it’s you. I’ll draw up the papers, and get them to you as soon as possible.” His eyes twinkled. “It’s quite a responsibility.”

Reverend Sheppard shrugged, smiling good-naturedly. “Now, I don’t think they’ll be that hard to handle.”

“No, but a million dollars might,” Mr. Sinclair replied smoothly.

For the second time that day, Reverend Sheppard’s jaw dropped. “A— a what?”

“My boss is—was—Favian Lambert,” Mr. Sinclair explained. “Who, when he died, left his entire estate to Thaddeus and Ava, his great-nephew and niece.”

Tad, who had been watching this exchange of words with wide eyes, finally found his voice. “Ya mean we got lots o’ money? And we’re gonna live wi’ a reverend?” He shook his head incredulously. “Never thought I’d be glad ta ‘ear that!”

“I wish ya all the best, Tad,” Bevan stepped forward with a grin. “Rich life, it ain’t for me, but I could tell you was made for somethin’ better.”

“Thanks.” Tad smiled back. “It’ll take some gettin’ used to, that’s for sure.”

“It’s quite a change from this place,” Mr. Sinclair agreed. He turned to the tenement owner, his smile disappearing. “And as for you, Mr. Beasley, I suggest you begin treating your tenants and workers better.” His gaze became steely. “Or I’ll see to it that you never own any kind of respectable business again!”

“But I—” Mr. Beasley turned to Tad. “You— you miserable wretch! If it weren’t for you, I would be a millionaire!”

Bevan snorted. “If it weren’t fer Tad, there wouldn’t be no heir in the first place!”

Mr. Beasley was too enraged to respond.

“I suggest we all go back to my house, and get a bite to eat,” Reverend Sheppard said.

“A good idea, Abe!” Mr. Sinclair agreed. “Now that this is all sorted out, I *am* feeling a little hungry.” He winked down at Ava, who smiled shyly back at him.

“I’m starved!” Tad declared. His face was much more relaxed than it had been in a long time.

“Gather your things, Tad, and we’ll leave this place.” Reverend Sheppard glanced around with a look of disgust.

Tad shrugged. “Me an’ Ava ain’t got no things.”

Reverend Sheppard’s brows lowered.

“Well, then, we’re all set!” Mr. Sinclair jumped in, his voice overly-cheery. He turned to the large man beside him, and frowned. “Good day to you, Mr. Beasley!”

“You— you can’t take these children away!” Mr. Beasley sputtered, motioning to Tad and Ava. “They’re my property!”

“Not anymore, Beasley.” Reverend Sheppard draped an arm across the two children’s shoulders. “They’re *my* children now.”

Tad grinned broadly. “Hear that, Ava? We got us a real ‘ome!”

Mr. Sinclair turned towards the door. “Come, everyone. Let’s go eat!”

“Bye, Tad!” Bevan said, his freckled face lit up with a smile. “I’ll come by an’ visit you!”

Tad, on his way out the door, waved to his friend. “Thanks fer everything, Bevan!”

“Wait! No! Come back here!” Mr. Beasley commanded.

“Goodbye, Mr. Beasley!” Tad called.

Mr. Sinclair grasped the doorknob in his hand. “And good riddance!”

“But— but—” Mr. Beasley stepped forward.

The door slammed shut with a loud bang, sending Mr. Beasley stumbling backwards. Footsteps on the stairs signaled their departure.

After a moment, Mr. Beasley picked himself up with a defeated groan.

Bevan grinned mischievously. "Does this mean we git to 'ave three meals a day now?"

Mr. Beasley whirled, his eyes ablaze. "Be quiet, you little brat!"

"Nothin' doin', Mr. Beasley!" Bevan folded his arms. "'Member, you gotta treat us right, now."

The tenement owner's face turned a shade of maroon. "You little fools!" He glared at the children. "All of you! Especially that Tad Griffin!"

"'e ain't so bad, if you ask me." Bevan shrugged, a sly smile on his face. "'e's the one who got the money, ain't 'e?"

Mr. Beasley cast him an angry glance. "Just get back to work!"

Bevan shook his head firmly. "First, yer gonna give us some food."

"I will not, you impertinent wretch!" Mr. Beasley looked shocked at the boy's defiance.

Bevan shrugged again carelessly. "Alright, Mr. Beasley." He took a step towards the door to the stairs. "I'll jes' be tellin' Mr. Sinclair 'bout this."

"Wait!" Mr. Beasley leaped forward, alarmed. "Don't do that!" He paused. "I— I'll give you the food!"

"Good." Bevan smiled smugly.

Scowling, Mr. Beasley opened the door, and headed down the stairs, his footsteps slow and heavy.

Bevan winked at the other children, and leaned towards the stairs. "An' make sure we get fresh bread today!"

Down on the street below, four figures made their way across the cobblestones. One, a shorter man, stood apart from the others, his keen eyes taking in everything at once.

The other man walked slightly behind the two smallest figures, his tall frame towering over them protectively. His arms rested lightly on their shoulders, and his face shone with pride.

But it was Tad whose countenance displayed a heart full of joy, for God had answered his prayer. He had helped them when help seemed so far away. More than that, He had given them a new home and a new life.

Walking down that street, Tad felt a confidence he had never possessed before. He was ready. Ready to meet this new life and all its challenges head-on.

Because he knew that, no matter what came his way, there would always be mercy. In times of hardship and fear—in times of need—he would have no reason to fear.

For there would always be grace from God's throne.