

# STEEPLECHASE

BY OLIVIA 

“I’m afraid Archie is only going to get worse,” the doctor sorrowfully said.

Poppy’s heart thundered in her chest. How was she supposed to help him? She knew there was no cure for leprosy, though was adamant she could help somehow. The situation became increasingly desperate and as she tried to fall asleep that night, it was the only thing on her mind.

When Poppy woke, she rubbed her eyes and suddenly remembered her dream. The holy water! Something that she believed could save her brother’s life. If only she hadn’t woken up at that moment, she would have found where to get it from. Poppy ripped the tattered animal hide off her bare skin, beginning to feel the cool air nibble at her scrawny legs. While quickly dressing, she began to plan her pilgrimage to this special place. Poppy didn’t care where it was, how hard the journey would be or how far she might have to walk. The only thing Poppy let cross her mind was the great relief she would feel by saving her brother’s life.

Poppy ran out of her hut, around the tight bend that was bustling with people, up the small steps by the village shop and over to her grandfather’s home.

“Grandfather?!” she called curiously. Poppy was longing to see her Grandfather hobble through the corridor.

“Poppy!” her Grandfather exclaimed. “What’s all this rushing for?” Poppy explained all about her dream, the holy water and her desperation to find it. Of course Grandfather knew all about the myth of the holy water, but sadly didn’t think it was possible for

Poppy to find the right path and travel all alone on such a difficult voyage. Poppy was too strong-willed to listen to such minor details and rushed off to pack a bag and find an ampulla for the water, leaving Grandpa to draw a map on an old scroll.

The next morning, with her bag strapped to her shoulder and the hand-drawn map tucked tightly in her cloak, Poppy set off. She had never walked beyond the hills behind her village before, but fear couldn't stop her now. The journey to Walsingham had begun.

The path was long and winding. Poppy's legs ached before the first day was done, and her stomach growled with hunger. She slept beneath trees with only her cloak for warmth. Yet each morning, she rose early and walked with purpose. She passed small villages, thick forests, and wide, lonely fields.

But Poppy didn't just walk. At every church she passed, no matter how small or worn-down, she stopped. She knelt before the altar and prayed. "Please, guide me. Please help Archie." She lit candles when she could, always thinking of her brother's pale face, his tired voice, and the way he used to laugh.

Some churches were grand and filled with music. Others were silent and cold. In one, an old priest gave her a piece of bread and blessed her journey. "God walks with those who walk with love," he said, placing a warm hand on her shoulder. She carried those words with her.

On the fourth day of her pilgrimage, Poppy met a group of fellow travellers on the road. Among them was a woman named Agnes, who wore a heavy wool cloak and carried a wooden cross. Agnes listened as Poppy shared her story. "To Walsingham?" she said, nodding. "Many go there with hope in their hearts. I will walk with you."

Together, they passed through towns and across streams, stopping at chapels and shrines along the way. Poppy grew

stronger each day, her footsteps more confident and her heart more hopeful.

When the towers of Walsingham finally came into view, Poppy gasped. The air was filled with the scent of incense and the sound of church bells. Pilgrims from all over England filled the streets. Poppy gripped the ampulla tightly in her hand.

She entered the Holy House, the same one from her dream. Its stone walls glowed in the candlelight, and a peaceful hush settled over her. She knelt in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary. "Please," she whispered, "let this water save Archie."

At the sacred well, a monk dipped her ampulla into the spring. The water was clear and still. She stared into it, her reflection rippling slightly. She thanked the monk, clutched the ampulla to her chest, and turned toward home.

The return journey was slow. Poppy was exhausted, but her heart pulled her forward. She stopped again at each church, giving thanks for strength, for guidance, and for hope.

Finally, she reached her village. The sky was orange with sunset. She raced up the steps and into her home. Archie was lying still, barely awake. Poppy knelt beside him and gently poured a few drops of the holy water onto his lips, his hands, and made the symbol of a cross on his forehead.

She didn't know if it would work. She didn't know if miracles were real. But she knew she had tried. And sometimes, that's all that matters.

By Olivia 