

The Miller's Boy

RAY WOOSTER

*"I was born
to hang."*

*"If not now,
tomorrow,
But I
will hang."*

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THE JOURNEY

We met the carrier's wagon at Smithfield, my Aunt had loaned my mother her riding clothes, much more suitable for scrambling up and down from the box. Our carrier approached rather nervously, removed his hat, and gave a slight bow.

'Are you our coachman?' enquired my mother smiling and dropping a curtsy, 'and please you Sir, this my son Thomas Hughes and your name Sir?'

'Ben Nighe, madam.'

'Well Mr Nighe, shall we start our journey?'

'Indeed madam'

I handed my mother up onto the box. After a tearful farewell we set off. My mother and I were the only passengers; most people travelled to London not away.

The wagon was pulled by a pair of powerful horses, I didn't realise until much later why the Wagoner showed me how to manage the reins, four in hand. I was as pleased as punch. Little did I realise that there was a method in his madness. Mr Nye did not ride upon the box as we did, he sat on a sack of hay on the fore carriage, occasionally jumping down and leading the horses as required. Most of the time he sat on the fore carriage puffing contentedly on his pipe. It was not until we reached Hillingdon that we had to fit the skid pan which was a strong piece of steel attached to a chain slipped under one of the rear wheels so that the wagon would not overrun the horses. No one was more pleased than I when we arrived at the Inn yard. My arms felt as if they were falling off from dragging on the reins on the way down the hill at Hillingdon.

The horses knew every inch of the way, pulling into the Inn yard and stopping in their assigned place, ignoring my tugging on the reins. Immediately they came to a halt in the yard they began stamping their hooves.