



Ink on His Fingers

Louise A. Vernon

Illustrated by Allan Eitzen

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Books by Louise A. Vernon

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HERALD
P R E S S

Harrisonburg, Virginia

1

The Mysterious Bundle



Shouts outside the church disturbed the final prayer of a holy day service in Mainz, Germany. Twelve-year-old Hans Dunne hurried out ahead of the others. At the bottom of the broad stone steps he discovered a lumpy bundle of coarse brown cloth with the four corners knotted on top. A boy he had never seen before was running down the deserted street and disappeared around a turn of the river road.

Hans dragged the bundle to one side. As he did so, he heard a shout.

“There he is! Stop, thief!”

Startled, Hans glanced up. Two men in leather work aprons darted from the arcade of a nearby

building and ran over the rough cobblestones toward him.

“Stop, thief!”

“Stay where you are!”

The men’s clenched fists and angry, red faces shocked Hans into frightened dismay. These men had mistaken him for a thief. Should he stand his ground and explain or dash back into the shelter of the church? What if the men beat him in front of the churchgoers? What would his widowed mother and his two sisters think — especially eleven-year-old Margaritte? She would tease him forever.

Hans hesitated, unable to make up his mind. Before he could reach a decision, the two men grabbed him.

“You’re coming with us.”

“But I didn’t do anything.”

The men ignored his protests, marched him back to a big house near the market square, and pushed him through a side entrance into a ground-floor shop.

“We’ll see what Bertolf says about this.” One of the men knocked on an inner door. A sturdy workman, with cap tilted low over his good-humored face, peered out. “Did you catch him, Lorentz?”

“Yes, Bertolf. There he is.” Lorentz, small and wiry, folded his arms with an air of triumph.

Bertolf wiped ink-stained hands on his apron and came into the shop room. “But this is only a boy,” he exclaimed. “What would he know about printing or typesetting?”

“What difference does that make?” Lorentz replied. “We caught him with the bundle.”

“Let’s see if all the types are there.” Bertolf

scanned the counter and floor. "Well, where's the bundle?"

Lorentz' eyebrows shot upward as if on a string. "The bundle?" he gasped. "I guess we forgot it."

"Forgot it!" Bertolf gazed at Lorentz with a shocked expression.

"The boy didn't have the bundle on him," Lorentz explained. "It was lying on the church steps."

"Then go get it. Hurry, before master comes in."

Lorentz returned breathless. "It's gone. But it was there. I swear it."

Bertolf grunted and showed Hans a stool by the counter. "Sit down." Hans struggled, but Bertolf's short, muscular arms held him like a vise. "You stay right here. Master will decide what to do with you — as if he didn't have enough troubles plaguing him. Now look at all the time you've made us waste just to catch a thief like you."

"But I'm not —"

Bertolf's strong fingers squeezed his shoulder, and Hans subsided. His thoughts raced. Would Mother worry when she found him gone after church? No. He often went on ahead to check on old Herr Mueller's strange house guarded by watchdogs.

Why hadn't he run when he had the chance? He would be home by this time. What if these men called the constable and had him put in a dungeon? Years later, someone would find his bones and shreds of clothing. Hans lost himself in the imaginary scene. Maybe his jailers would be kind and give him paper — no, parchment — and ink, and he could fulfill his secret ambition to copy the Bible. There, on the dungeon floor, beside his bones, people would find a

beautiful, illuminated Bible, just like Brother John's copy in the scriptorium at the monastery.

But in the meantime, what was going to happen to him? Did he dare lunge past the men to the freedom of the street? If he could reach the bridge without his pursuers seeing, he could hide under the arch, his favorite hiding place.

"Can't I tell my mother where I am?" he asked. "She'll worry."

"She ought to, having a little thief like you for a son."

"But I'm not a thief. I heard the shouts in church. When I came out, I saw this bundle, and I moved it so no one would trip on it."

"Maybe the boy is telling the truth," Bertolf said.

"Maybe he has an accomplice," Lorentz retorted. "The new man didn't show up today, the one Herr Fust insisted master hire. I never did trust Herr Fust. He's up to something. I told master so, but you know how he is — always trusts everyone."

"Herr Fust promised secrecy just like the rest of us, didn't he?" Bertolf asked.

"Yes, but you must remember I've been with master many more years than you. What people promise and what they do are two different things."

A slender, quick-moving man with fur-lined cap and long, parted beard hurried into the shop. His thoughtful, yet brisk, intense manner impressed Hans. This man knew what he wanted.

"Why aren't you in the workshop?" he asked the men. "We have no time to lose if we're going to keep up our quota." He glanced at Hans. "Who's this, Lorentz?"

"It's a young thief we picked up, master."

"A thief? This boy? What did he steal? Wasn't the workshop locked?"

"All we know is that a boy ran out of the shop this morning with a bundle under his arms. We figured he was stealing some types, so we chased him. He threw the bundle down on the church steps and disappeared. We hid, thinking he'd come back, and sure enough, he did. We caught him. Here he is."

"Where are the types?" the master asked.

Lorentz flushed and hung his head.

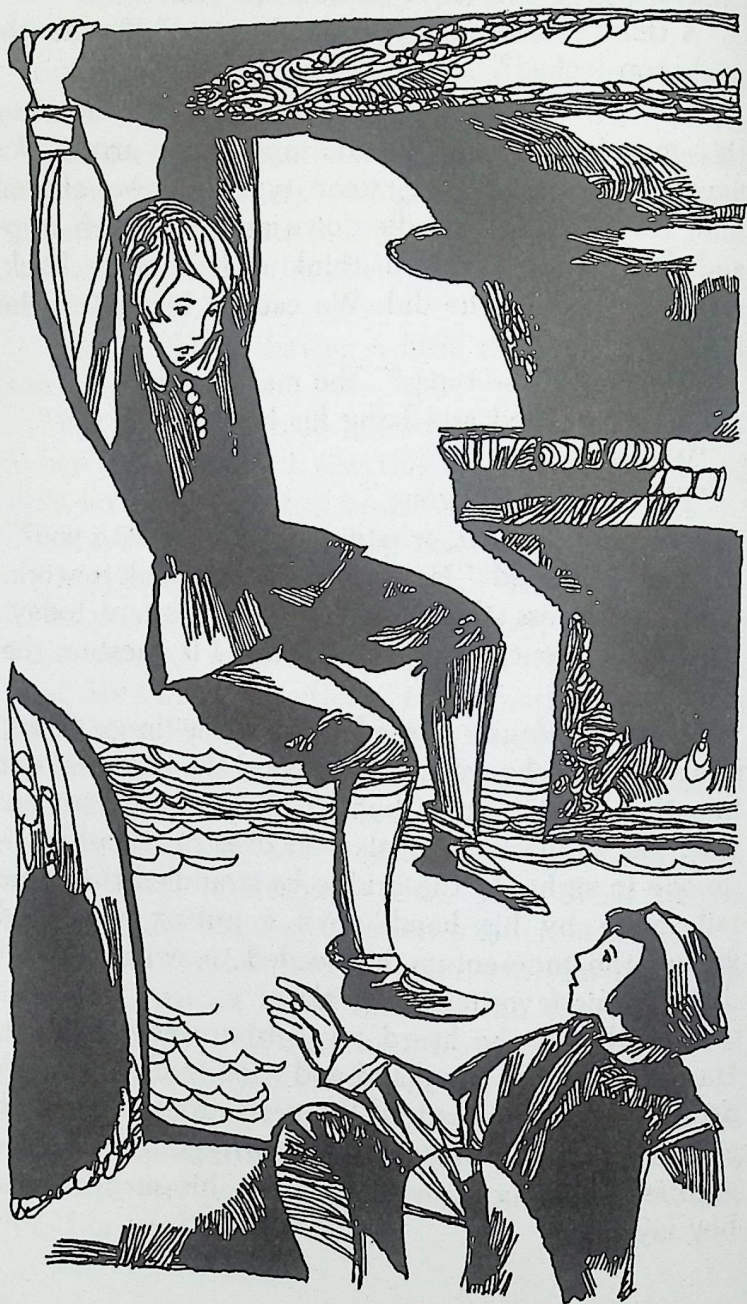
"Well?"

"The bundle was gone."

"Lorentz, Lorentz, whatever shall I do with you?" the master chided. "Now all of you get back to work. If we cast less than four thousand letters today, we'll hear about it from Herr Fust. I'll question the boy myself."

As the workmen turned toward the inner room, Hans saw his chance, sprang toward the door and out into the street. Shouts behind him spurred him on. Near the monastery he glanced over his shoulder — no one in sight. At the bridge he straddled the stone rail, hung by his hands from a jutting rock, and gained the momentum he needed to swing himself down to his favorite hiding place.

As he let go, he heard a yell from under his feet. Hans dangled by one hand and tried to claw his way up. His fingers slipped off the protruding stone knob and he dropped on top of a wriggling boy. He grabbed the other boy's wrists. To his surprise, the boy lay limp.



“Let me go. I’m not a thief.”

The unexpected words, an echo of his own thoughts, astonished Hans. He jumped up so fast he cracked his head on the stone arch of the bridge. “Who are you? What are you doing? How do I know you’re not a thief?” At each question Hans rubbed his head.

The boy sat up, brushed at his rumpled clothes, and straightened his battered cap. “I’m not a thief because I didn’t steal anything,” he retorted with spirit.

“What’s your name?”

“Ulrich Zell. What’s yours?”

“Hans Dunne. Why are you hiding here?”

“Because some men chased me. Why are you here?”

“For the same reason,” Hans admitted. “But this is my own special hiding place.”

“Why do you need one?” Ulrich asked. “Do people chase you every day?”

Hans explained. The boys who worked in the fields teased him on his way home from the monastery Latin school whenever they could catch him.

“But why?”

“Because I’m not a nobleman’s son,” Hans said. “They think I’m no better than they are, and that I ought to work in the fields with them instead of copying prayerbooks.” Ulrich’s interest almost made him forget his wild race from the shop. “Why were those men chasing you?”

“They thought I was a thief,” Ulrich said. “I was looking for my uncle. He said he could get me an apprenticeship. He works for a goldsmith here in Mainz.”

“A goldsmith!” Hans interrupted. “My father was

a goldsmith. He's dead, now. But go on. What happened?"

"I walked from Frankfurt early this morning — with my bundle of clothes, since I'll be living with my uncle — and went to the shop where my uncle was supposed to be —"

"Even on a holy day?" Hans exclaimed, shocked.

"Yes. Anyway, a tall, stout man was there, and I told him who I was. He let me look in the inner room to see if my uncle was there. I didn't see him. All of a sudden, these workmen started shouting 'thief' and chased me. Believe me, I ran."

"Then was that *your* bundle I found on the church steps?" Hans asked.

"Yes. Everything I own was in it. It was heavy — I had some books in it, too — so I threw it down on the church steps. I thought if the men looked at it and saw there was nothing in it except my belongings, they would leave it there and I could pick it up later."

"It's gone."

"Gone? How do you know?"

Hans explained how Lorentz, the master's servant, had run out to get it, but found nothing on the church steps.

Ulrich groaned. "But it had my own copy of the missal."

"You mean you copied it yourself?" Hans looked at Ulrich with new interest. Here was someone else who liked to copy books. "Then you've gone to Latin school."

"Of course. In Frankfurt."

"I'm going to copy the Bible someday," Hans

blurted, then choked. What had made him confide his secret dream to a stranger?

Ulrich nodded as if Hans' ambition was quite ordinary. "I've thought about that, too."

Light footsteps pattered onto the bridge.

"Hans!" a girl called.

Hans recognized his sister's voice. "It's my sister Margaritte," he whispered to Ulrich. "Don't say anything. She doesn't know about this hiding place."

"Hans, come up here. I have something to tell you."

Both boys remained silent.

"I know where you are," Margaritte called.

Exasperated, Hans waited, hoping his sister would leave. The next thing he knew, Margaritte had swung down from his very own handhold and dropped beside the two boys.

"You thought you had a secret, didn't you?" Margaritte taunted, straightening her full dark skirt. "I've known about this place for a long time." She peered at Ulrich in the shadows. "Who's your friend?"

"His name is Ulrich Zell, but you get out of here, Margaritte. This is boys' property. You don't belong. Girls aren't supposed to swing by their hands and spy on people. Go on home, and don't you dare tell anyone about this place."

Margaritte tucked a strand of hair under her tight cap and laughed. "All right, I'll go home. But you won't get to see what they're doing at Herr Muller's house."

"What is who doing?" Hans tried to suppress his excitement at the mention of Herr Mueller, their neighbor whose strange behavior had long been a

mystery to the neighborhood. His three-story house, with peaked red roof, crisscross black beams, and leaded dormer windows looked like other big houses in Mainz. But why had Herr Mueller barred the ground-floor casements with iron pipes thick as a man's fingers? What did he do inside his house?

"Come on and see for yourselves, both of you," Margaritte urged.

"All right, but there'd better be something more going on than those old watchdogs barking." Hans and Ulrich helped Margaritte up the side of the bridge, and the three hurried to Herr Mueller's house.

The chimney of the mystery house belched black mushrooms of smoke. A cluster of people had gathered at a safe distance to watch. Herr Mueller's two fierce dogs lay on the front doorstep with their muzzles on their paws. At every movement they rolled their eyes without moving their heads.

"It's Satan's workshop," someone muttered.

The spectators murmured agreement.

The front door opened. A smooth-faced young man stumbled out, followed by a stout man in fur-lined cloak.

Ulrich clutched Hans' arm. "That's my uncle, and that's the man I talked to this morning."

Old man Mueller's gray hair and beard bounced with anger. He shook his fists at his unwelcome guests. "I'll pay back my loan when it is due and not a day before. Every time you come meddling and spying puts me behind in my work just that much. I don't care what Herr Gutenberg is doing or what the men in Haarlem are doing, whether I am ahead of them or behind them. Just leave me alone until the

process is completed." Herr Mueller flung a brown bundle after the men. "And take your belongings with you."

Ulrich clutched Hans' arm again. "That's *my* bundle."

The stout man and Ulrich's uncle hurried away without a glance toward bundle or spectators. Herr Mueller unchained his dogs, bolted the door, and stalked off toward town.

When everyone had gone, Ulrich undid the knotted brown cloth. "This is my shirt — my books, but what's this?" He held up a leather pouch.

"Isn't it yours?" Margaritte asked.

"No. I never saw it before."

"Open it."

Ulrich opened the pouch. A handful of slender sticks fell out.

Margaritte held up a stick and ran a finger over the metal tip. "What could this be?"

Hans examined a handful. The tiny metal grooves looked somehow familiar, like letters of another language. Hans remembered something. When the monks at the monastery made wood-blocks, they had to carve the letters backward so that they would print correctly when inked and pressed face down.

With growing excitement, Hans traced one of the metal grooves again. It was an *E* molded in reverse. A glance at the other sticks showed him all the letters had been reversed, too.

All at once, Hans understood. *These were the missing types.* They had been found in the mysterious bundle — Ulrich's bundle.

"I didn't take them," Ulrich was saying.

Ulrich's astonishment sounded genuine, but an icy finger of doubt raced along Hans' spine. Was his new friend, Ulrich Zell, a thief?

2

Secret Partner



Ulrich Zell stared at the pile of types. "You believe me, don't you?"

His quiet appeal touched Hans to the quick.

"Of course we believe you, Ulrich," Margaritte said after the boys told her the story. "What an exciting mystery it all is!"

"It may be for you, Margaritte, but it won't be for either Ulrich or me if the constable finds the types in our possession. We could be put in the tower prison, you know," Hans said.

Margaritte shuddered. "I hadn't thought of that. You'll have to take the types back right away."

Hans groaned. "But don't you see? If Ulrich takes

them back, he'll be accused, and if I take them back I'll be accused."

"Then why don't *I* take them?" Margaritte asked. "I'll just explain that I found them. They wouldn't accuse a girl."

It seemed like the best solution. The boys walked with Margaritte to a corner near the shop and waited for her. When she returned, she still had the pouch.

"Nobody was there," she wailed. "I pounded and pounded on the door." She held out the leather pouch as if it were a snake. "Now what will we do? We can't just leave them."

"I'll ask the prior tomorrow when I go to school. He'll know what to do."

"I can't think of any better plan," Ulrich said. "I'm going to find my uncle and find out what he knows. I can't believe he would steal anything, and yet—" He made a gesture of helplessness.

"If you don't find him, come back and stay with us," Margaritte suggested. "Mother wouldn't mind, would she, Hans?"

"No, I'm sure she wouldn't." Hans showed Ulrich their house.

"Thank you, but if I can't find my uncle, I'll go to the monastery. The monks will take me in," Ulrich said.

Hans nodded. The monks' hospitality to wayfarers was well known.

"Besides, I'll be going to Latin school part time when I'm an apprentice. I'll see you there, Hans." With a wave, Ulrich headed for downtown Mainz.

In front of the Dunne's house, four-year-old Else ran to meet Hans and Margaritte. "Hurry! Mother

says Herr Fust, the banker, is coming. We're to watch for him."

"Why would a banker come to see Mother?" Margaritte asked. "On a holy day, too."

Hans shrugged. "Who knows? Probably something about Father's estate. Anyhow, let's watch from my room."

He and the two girls raced up three flights of stairs to his favorite lookout window. Hans put the pouch of types on his sloped writing desk. He would examine them later.

"What does Herr Fust look like?" Else panted.

"How should I know?" Hans opened the casements wide and scanned the tree-lined road. "He'll have a beard, of course, and his cloak is probably lined with fur. Bankers are rich."

Else wedged herself between Hans and Margaritte. "What does a banker do?"

"He sits in his bank and waits for people to bring him their gold."

Else hitched herself up another notch. "Then was Father a banker?"

"Of course not, Else," Hans said. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"People brought *him* gold," Else retorted.

"It wasn't the same thing at all. Father was a goldsmith." Without warning a wave of grief choked Hans. Only a short time ago Father had been alive. Then he had caught the dread fever. For the hundredth time Hans asked himself the question he could not answer. Why had God taken Father in death? What good did it to do plan ahead if a person could die almost without warning?

Else echoed his thoughts. "Why did Father die?" "God wanted him." Hans spoke with an assurance he did not feel. "Now, stop asking questions and watch for Herr Fust."

He must be coming to talk about money. Father had been a master goldsmith. Wealthy aristocrats paid immense sums for the gold vases, candlesticks, and plates he made for them, but perhaps some of them still owed money.

Margaritte leaned over the sill. "There's a man coming."

Hans looked, too. "Margaritte, it's the same one we saw at Herr Mueller's."

They watched the stout man walk toward the house.

Margaritte clapped her hands in excitement. "Go down and let him in, Hans. Maybe you can find out something."

Hans ran downstairs and ushered the man into the drawing room.

"Are you Herr Fust, the banker?"

"Yes. You're Frau Dunne's son, I suppose."

Hans studied Herr Fust's round red face and pinched-up nostrils. The banker looked as if he smelled something unpleasant. "Yes. I'm Hans. I'll tell Mother you're here, Herr Fust."

"Please do." Herr Fust's voice trailed off.

When Mother came in, the banker coughed. "My visit here today is a matter of business. It is necessary to settle some matters about your late husband's estate." He coughed again. "I suppose young master here plans to be a goldsmith like his father?"

Mother smiled. "He hasn't decided yet. He doesn't know what he wants to be."

"I'd like to be a scribe and copy the Bible." The words tumbled out, to Hans' instant regret. Why had he revealed his secret dream for the second time that day — this time to an unpleasant man like Herr Fust?

"Do you believe you have a vocation as a scribe? You might enter the Church, perhaps?" the banker asked.

Hans thought of the many hours he had practiced with reed pen and ink shaping letters to please the exacting eye of Brother John, who trained selected scribes for the great work of copying the Bible. But to live in the monastery? Leave Mother and his sisters now that Father was gone? Hans shrank from making such an important decision.

"I'm not sure, Herr Fust."

The banker hummed, whether with satisfaction or annoyance, Hans could not tell.

"Everything will work out as God wills." Herr Fust drummed two fingers on the heavy polished table. His face was correctly grave, but his plump, twitching fingers betrayed uneasiness — and something else. Could it be greed? Hans dismissed the thought. Why would Herr Fust be greedy? He must have all the money in Mainz in his bank.

The banker cleared his throat. "I deeply regret the passing of Herr Dunne. But we cannot question God's will, can we?"

Somehow, the way he asked the question, Hans understood that Herr Fust, on the contrary, very much questioned God's will.

"It is a very painful occasion," Herr Fust began

again, and mopped his brow.

Was he trying to discuss Mother's income? Why didn't he come right out and say so? But the banker hemmed, hawed, looked out the window, put his hands behind his back, examined the frescoes and tapestries, then tugged at the ruff around his neck.

"Herr Fust, is there something on your mind — something about my husband's estate, perhaps?" Mother asked. "I'd better explain that we came back to Mainz to live because I inherited this house from my parents. Is there some problem about transferring our money?"

The banker turned squarely around. "I don't know how to tell you, Frau Dunne, but it seems your husband was in financial difficulty."

Mother gasped and pressed her hands together. "Why, how can that be? My husband had more orders than he could fill, clear up to the day he died." Her eyes filled with tears. "He always saved his money."

The banker exhaled in almost a snort. "That may have been true until recently. Of course, I know the financial history of your family here in Mainz, but —" He broke off.

"But what, Herr Fust? You must tell us."

"I never dreamed that Herr Dunne would die so suddenly and leave his affairs in such a grievous state. You see, Herr Dunne owed a large sum of money — so large, in fact, that it will take most of your income to pay for it."

Hans heard Mother's quick intake of breath. A nameless fear shot through him. Father always had strong ideas about the shamefulness of debt.

"I don't understand," Mother said over and over.

“Why would my husband go in debt?”

“Herr Dunne borrowed a large sum of money from me. I admit this surprised me, since your husband was a master goldsmith, but I am a businessman, of course. Selling money is a matter of business. I’ll leave copies of the exact amount with you.” He bowed. “I’ll return in a day or so, and you can let me know how you plan to repay the money.” He cleared his throat once more and left.

Mother sat down and pressed a hand to her forehead. “I hope it’s all for the best.”

“What do you mean, Mother?”

“I hadn’t paid your tuition yet. The prior was very kind and said to wait until the estate was settled. Now I can’t pay it. Hans, you will have to drop out of Latin school immediately.”

“Oh, Mother, not now — not when —” Hans held back the torrent of words he wanted to say. Not now when he had become so sure of what he wanted to do. He held back his despair. He would have to help Mother, not hinder her.

“I didn’t know you wanted to copy the Bible, Hans,” Mother added. “You never told me.”

“Yes, and Ulrich does, too.”

“Ulrich?”

Mother listened to the whole story. “Invite him to stay here, if he does not stay with his uncle. There’s plenty of room.”

Suddenly, fierce ambition gnawed at Hans. Ulrich’s future was all settled. But how could Hans copy the Bible if he didn’t continue school? Should he become a monk and leave Mother and his sisters? Was that what God wanted him to do?

“You’ll have to explain to the prior first thing tomorrow,” Mother said.

That meant the prior would question him. He would have to make a decision about his future. “Mother, do you want me to become a monk, and leave you and Margaritte and Else?”

Mother’s voice was steady. “If this is God’s plan for you, we must make this sacrifice. We must pray for guidance and submit ourselves to His will.”

Instead of submission, fiery resentment surged through Hans. Why had God awakened in him a desire to copy His Word — and then taken away the means by which he could do it? Unless, of course, he became a monk. But what would become of Mother and his sisters? Were they to become beggars like the ones he had seen on the streets with their rags, crutches, and running sores? Hans shuddered. No. He could not become a monk. *But how else could he copy the Bible?*

3

Unwilling Apprentice



Upstairs in his room Hans brooded at his desk. If only he could go on to school. . . . If only Father hadn't loaned the money. . . . If only Father hadn't died. . . .

For something to do, Hans opened the leather pouch and spread out the slender type sticks. He ran his fingertips along their grooved metal tips. On an impulse, he took a sheet of paper from his desk, dipped one finger into a squat bottle of thick red ink, and swabbed it on one of the metal tips. He pressed the metal on the paper. An *F* stood imprinted as carefully outlined as if it had been written by a scribe. Entranced, Hans printed letter after letter at

random in an uneven sprawl across the page. Sometimes the ink smeared, but he managed to print several words. More and more pleased, he lost himself in the magic of instant lettering, so different from tracing each letter with a pen.

Else ran in. "Look what we found in Father's old wooden box!" She gave Hans a sheet of parchment covered with Latin words, evenly spaced across the page in black ink. Margaritte brought the box in. "There's something else in here," she said. "I can hear it rattle."

Hans pushed and pried until a thin partition gave way. While his sisters squealed in excitement, Hans lifted out two more sheets exactly like the first and several rolled up smaller sheets.

Mystified, he examined the duplicate sheets. All three had been inscribed with the same words. Hans recognized a Bible passage: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," the page began.

"It's from the Bible, isn't it?" Margaritte had made Hans teach her how to read, but she read mostly from the prayerbook.

Hans nodded, puzzled. Why would a scribe copy three pages exactly the same way? Scribes at the monastery copied page after page. Were there three different scribes at work? No. There wasn't a hair's difference on any of the words on all three sheets. Three different people couldn't write that much alike.

Baffled, Hans unrolled the other sheets. On one he found the names of Father's customers, their orders, and the price they paid. On a still smaller sheet, he found a note written in Father's painstaking writing

under a date two months before he died.

Mainz, April 8, 1452

I have today confirmed a most remarkable miracle — God's Word in multiple, the handwriting of God Himself, yet without employing reed or stylus. In secret doth God His wonders perform, and in secret have I this day loaned the sum necessary to perfect this art. I shall not name the man, for his work must be hidden until God commands it to come forth into the full light of day.

Hans ran downstairs with the papers and spread them on the table by the kitchen fireplace. Mother examined them with a tiny frown of puzzlement.

"Hans, I've just remembered something," she said. "When your father was in his last illness, he kept talking about his secret partner: I didn't pay any attention, thinking it was the fever."

"Oh, Mother, he must have meant the loan. Don't you know anyone he might have loaned money to?" Every time he thought of the loan, hot resentment choked Hans.

She pursed her lips in thought. "I remember now that your father kept talking about some man who was doing important work for the glory of God, but I have no idea who he meant or what he meant. He kept saying this man was being blessed and inspired by God to perfect his art."

Art? What art would God inspire that took money away from people who needed it? Anger rolled up like a ball inside Hans. Father had borrowed money

to lend to an unknown man. But Father had died. The man would have to pay back the loan.

"God is inspiring me, too," he thought. "Copying the Bible is important work — maybe the most important work in the world."

But how was he going to accomplish this ambition?

"I'm going to find out who Father's secret partner is," Hans announced. "I'll make him give us our money back, and then I can go back to school just as before."

The foolishness of his boast struck him at once. He could not identify the man either by name or appearance. He did not know whether the man lived in Mainz or Strasbourg. How could he even begin a search for the man who had borrowed Father's money?

He took the sheets of parchment and the note back to his room. *Who was Father's secret partner?* There must be an answer. There had to be an answer. Hans forced himself to think out the problem. Would it be one of Father's patrons? But people had to be wealthy to afford Father's skilled craftsmanship. Perhaps the man was another goldsmith. Members of the goldsmiths' guild helped each other all the time. Father would surely know the man well. Would it be a goldsmith in Strasbourg or in Mainz?

Then the answer came so quickly Hans was stunned. Who else could it be but Herr Mueller? Who else was working in secret? Who else kept himself aloof from other people? Why? Because he was working on something important.

He determined to go to Herr Mueller's, get past the watchdogs somehow, demand Father's money

back. The more he thought of it, the more he was convinced Herr Mueller had borrowed the money — money which would have sent him, Hans, to school to learn the skills that would enable him to copy the Bible. He would stop first thing in the morning before he went to see the prior. Maybe he could persuade Herr Mueller to give the money back, and he would not have to drop out of school after all.

Hans slept by fits and starts that night. Without telling anyone his plans, he set out the next morning, taking the pouch of type sticks with him. He inspected Herr Mueller's house from a safe distance. Did he really have the courage to knock at the old man's door? The dogs were not outside this morning. That helped. But the tall, narrow house seemed to be waiting for something to happen.

Hans walked slower. What if he were making a foolish mistake? Would Herr Mueller set the dogs on him? Hans faltered. Perhaps it would be better to go on to school and talk to the prior first. Still, he might just knock and see what happened. But he couldn't force himself to lift his hand to the knocker.

Ashamed, he ventured a quick glance at the lower casements. With a shock, he realized someone was peering out. From inside the deep growl of the watchdogs warned him they were alert. Herr Mueller shouted something to them.

Hans started to leave. He heard the front door open and with an effort kept himself from turning around. He tried to shape his lips into a whistle, but no sound came out.

"You! You, boy!"

Hans fled. Behind him the old man's voice quivered

with anger. "Stop! Where do you think you're running off to?"

Hans whirled, heart pounding. Herr Mueller, in work apron, full sleeves pushed back, beckoned to him with an imperious gesture.

Shame burned Hans' palms. This was no way to face situations. Here he was fleeing as if he were a thief. He started back, his face hot. He had to admit to himself that he was trying to run away from something unpleasant. Glad for an excuse to approach the house, yet worried, Hans approached Herr Mueller. *Whatever happens, I won't go inside*, he told himself.

"Come closer," Herr Mueller ordered.

Hans hesitated. All the stories the neighborhood had told about the eccentric old man swarmed through his mind.

"I can't, sir."

"And why not?"

"Your dogs, sir."

"My dogs attack only at my command. If you don't come, I'll let them loose."

Hans saw the watchdogs in the narrow hallway straining at their leashes. He could not keep his gaze off their drooling, slavering jaws.

"Were you looking for me?"

"Well, yes — not exactly, sir." Hans had never been so close to Herr Mueller before. The old man's scraggly gray beard looked tangled, and his bloodshot eyes gleamed with a mixture of malice and purposefulness.

"Well, boy, are you applying for an apprenticeship?"

"Apprenticeship?" Hans faltered.

“Or perhaps you’re a spy. If so, I’ll have the constable take you in.”

Hans stared, speechless. The very mention of the word *constable* made him wish he had left the pouch of types at home.

“Don’t stand there like a country idiot. Why did you come here?”

“Please, sir, I’m here to — to — ” But he couldn’t get the words out. How could he ask this irritable old man to give back Father’s money?

“I can’t use a stupid blockhead. I need a smart boy who knows more than a smattering of Latin.” A crafty, shrewd expression crossed the old man’s face. “You’re a spy,” he announced.

“But I’m not. My name is Hans Dunne. I live up the road. I’ve been going to Latin school at the monastery.”

“Then you must know something. You’re sure he didn’t send you to spy on me?”

“Why, no, sir. Who, sir?”

The old man laughed unexpectedly. “He’s smart.” He squinted and leaned forward. “You see he’s after me.”

“Who is?” In spite of himself, Hans looked over his shoulder.

The old man laughed in a derisive tone. “Oh, he’s too smart than to show himself in daylight. But he knows I have the secret, and he’s out to get it. He knows it will make money, and that’s all he wants.”

Hans shifted uneasily.

“He won’t kill me. No danger of that — he just wants me to give up my secret, but that I’ll never do. Now, my boy, come inside and let me hear you read

Ink on His Fingers



Johann Gutenberg is working on printing the first Bible with type. Twelve-year-old **Hans Dunne** is planning on being a scribe and copying the Bible by hand. But circumstances change and he finds himself working in Gutenberg's shop as an apprentice printer.

Soon, Hans finds himself in the middle of a type-stealing mystery. Herr Fust, the village banker, wants Gutenberg's type and tries every possible way to get his hands on it. Gutenberg is deep in debt and has borrowed from everyone in town. Gutenberg is sure that he will be able to pay everyone back once the Bible is printed, but he is running out of time. Will Hans, and the other pressmen be able to keep Herr Fust from getting the type? Will they be able to finish the Bible so many people will be able to read and learn from it?



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