

THE SEQUEL TO THE ACCLAIMED THE TALE OF RICKETY HALL



# The Tale of HIGHOVER HILL

by  
Penny  
Dolan

The Tale of  
**HIGHOVER  
HILL**

苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章



Other titles by Penny Dolan:

*The Tale of Rickety Hall*

The Tale of  
**HIGHOVER  
HILL**



Penny Dolan  
Illustrated by Wilbert van der Steen

*A Jonas Jones just for Jim!*  
*With love and many thanks for all*  
*your help along the journey.*  
*Penny*

Scholastic Children's Books,  
Commonwealth House, 1-19 New Oxford Street,  
London WC1A 1NU, UK  
a division of Scholastic Ltd  
London ~ New York ~ Toronto ~ Sydney ~ Auckland  
Mexico City ~ New Delhi ~ Hong Kong

Published in the UK by Scholastic Ltd, 2002

Text copyright © Penny Dolan, 2002  
Cover illustration copyright © Klaas Verplancke, 2002  
Illustrations copyright © Wilbert van der Steen, 2002

ISBN 0 439 98235 9

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire  
Typeset in Horley Old Style

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved

The rights of Penny Dolan and Wilbert van der Steen to be identified respectively as the author and illustrator of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed upon the subsequent purchaser.



## chapter 1

Years ago, an ancient house stood high on a hill, half hidden by trees. The house was known as Rickety Hall. Its tall tower and chimneys seemed to tell of secrets and stories, even on a bright winter's day. . .

\* \* \*

The morning sun glinted across the snow-covered land. At the foot of the wide stone steps of Rickety Hall sat an old-fashioned sledge. It was made of wood and iron. Three huge hounds – Ruff, Tuff and Greytail – stood in the leather traces, breathing small clouds into the frozen air. Ruff and Tuff

rattled restlessly at their harness but Mother Greytail soon growled them to order.

The massive door of the ancient house creaked open. Out ran a lad with a long scarf wrapped around his neck and a long list in his hand. The boy was Jonas Jones. At his heels pattered a small stubby-tailed mongrel.

"Come on, Scraps," said Jonas, shoving the list into his coat pocket. "We've a right load of things to bring back today."

Jonas climbed swiftly into the driving seat, and Scraps jumped in beside him.

Jonas glanced up at Rickety Hall. Five old men, each older than the one before, had popped up at the windows. They waved urgently, wishing Jonas a safe return. Beside each was a friendly dog, pressing its wet nose against the glass. Scraps wagged a stubby tail at his furry friends, and Jonas waved confidently back at his rather unusual family. Then he twitched the reins lightly, and the hounds began to pull.





The sledge moved slowly across the snow, sliding between several strange-shaped bushes. Then it gathered speed, and the hounds were soon racing away down the drive. The tight right turn at the stone gateposts swooshed up a flurry of snow, but that was part of the fun.

On they went, passing snowy fields and frosted hedges. Scraps sat beside Jonas, sniffing the breeze. Jonas felt the air cut chill against his face and fingers, and he shivered. Once with the cold, and once remembering the time before Rickety Hall had been his home.

Jonas thought of the freezing days and bitter nights when he and Scraps had been homeless, starving in the winter's frost. Jonas shuddered, recalling the gloating cries of the evil Dog Catcher, and the terrible net tugging tightly around them. Ah well, at least that time was over. Deep within the folds of his warm scarf, Jonas smiled thankfully. He

reached one hand over and ruffled Scraps's furry back.

"Woof!" the little dog replied, wagging his stubby tail.

\* \* \*

The little town of Riddlesden lay just below Rickety Hall, but Jonas and Scraps weren't going there today. Today's trip was across the moor to the very top of Highover Hill. From there, a long steep bank led the road into the town of Hebbing Bridge, with its barges and waterways.

Jonas grinned at the thought of that long, swift slope. He'd be driving the sledge down it himself – for the very first time! He could hardly wait. He knew that the journey back up the hill wouldn't be so easy. Then the sledge would be loaded with parcels, and he'd have to walk beside the hounds.

Jonas held the long reins tight, as the hounds' strong paws pounded through the crisply frozen snow. Bit by bit, the moorland

road rose a little more steeply, until the land dropped away and they reached the crest of Highover Hill.

Ruff, Tuff and Greytail knew the road, and drew to a halt. They waited, with tails wagging wildly, while Jonas walked all around the sledge. He checked the hounds were safe in their harness. He checked that the wooden brakes were good.

Far below them lay the stone-roofed houses of Hebbing Bridge, with the river looping between the buildings like a ribbon of ice. Rows of boats and barges were tied along its banks, caught by the sudden grip of winter.

Jonas eyed the slippery slope of Highover Hill carefully, and was just climbing back on to the sledge when something caught his eye.

Perched right on top of the old milestone was a girl with a mane of fiery red hair. Even though the air was cold as ice, she stood there, balancing on one leg like a statue.

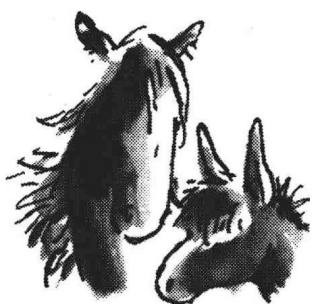


Her arms were stretched out like wings, as if she was longing to leap into the sky.

Jonas couldn't help noticing her angry face, her pale cheeks and thin, starved wrists. He remembered those days when he had looked much the same.

"Hello..." he began.

Immediately, the girl turned, jumped down and spat at him.



## chapter 2

“What are you staring at?” she scowled. Jonas kept on staring. The girl looked about his own age. A thin, embroidered shawl covered her ragged clothes.

“Staring at you,” he told her straight enough. He wasn’t having anyone talk to him like that. “Nothing wrong with that is there?”

“There is,” she said, bitterly, “when you get gawped at half the day already!” The girl turned away, hunching her shoulders as if all thoughts of flight had been folded away.

Jonas paused. “You all right?” he asked, more gently.

"What's it to you, eh? What's it to anyone?" she muttered, and tossed her head.

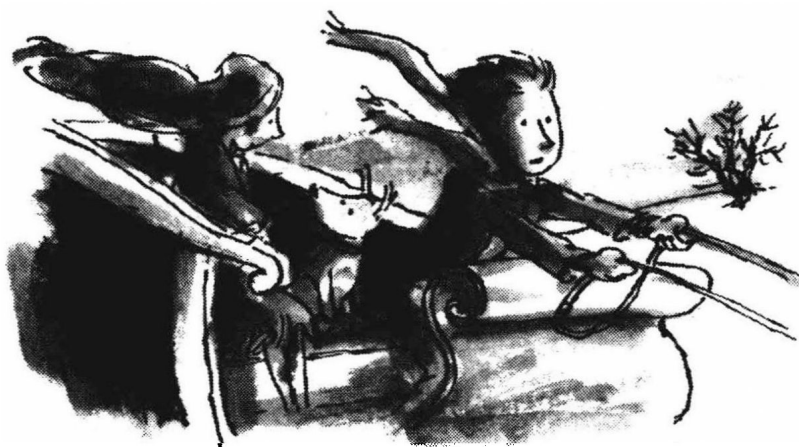
"Don't know unless you tell me, and that's the truth of it," Jonas answered calmly. "Anyway, I was going to ask you if you wanted a ride down to Hebbing Bridge? Do you? My name's Jonas Jones."

He seized the reins, and the hounds rose to their full height. The girl gazed at their thick grizzled coats and strong determined heads, as if she trusted them to carry her safely. But she still eyed Jonas with suspicion.

"Woof, woof!" said Scraps, bouncing down from the sledge and scampering towards her. His tail wagged in such a friendly way that the girl couldn't help smiling.

"This is as far as I can go," she sighed, "so yes, Jonas Jones, I'll join you!"

She jumped in beside Jonas. Scraps squashed his warm body between them, and licked the girl's cold hand. She patted his little head in return.



The girl's face grew serious. "Don't take me right into town, Jonas. Promise? I mustn't be seen."

Jonas wondered about this strange girl. Maybe she was a runaway servant? Or worried by the workhouse? He certainly didn't think anyone was looking after her – not properly, for sure. He'd noticed the bruises around her ankles.

"Nobody will see you," Jonas told her. "I'll have to slow the sledge long before the knobbly cobbles of Hebbing Bridge anyway."

Jonas gave a sharp whistle, and Ruff, Tuff

and Greytail were off. The sledge shot down the long hill, swift as a weaver's shuttle. Jonas steered it steadily between the curving banks, and it felt like heaven.

Jonas glanced across at his passenger. Her bright eyes smiled back, dancing with excitement as the sledge sped faster and faster. They began laughing with the thrill of the ride. All at once, the girl threw back her head and started singing. Her voice was clear and strong.

Down, down, they went – the trees and hedges flashing past them – down, down, until they reached the foot of Highover Hill and met the low road. Jonas brought the dog-sledge to a halt just by Hebbing Common.

“Best thing for ages, and that’s the truth,” the girl said, smiling broadly as she skipped off the sledge. “Thank you, Jonas Jones.” Then she tipped her head to one side, and held out a thin hand. “Hey, you got anything to eat?”



Jonas grinned, reached into his pocket and brought out a couple of rosy apples. She grabbed them urgently, thanked him, and was off, racing across the Common.

Jonas watched her go. She headed for the distant side where, almost in the wood, someone was camping. Jonas spotted a once-handsome caravan, but now the paint was peeling off the wooden frame. Close beside it stood a small cart, roofed with canvas. Someone had strung old blankets beneath the caravan, making a rough shelter from the weather. Strange smells came wafting across on the wintry air, and Jonas heard a clinking and a clattering, and harsh voices chattering.

Nearby, a small donkey and an old horse grazed hungrily on the winter-hard grass. They lifted their tethered heads as the girl ran towards them. She stroked their necks fondly, and held out the apples for them to munch.

At once there was an impatient volley of shouts.