**Jack Toresal**

**and**

**The Secret Letter**

By David Cornelson and Michael Gentry

Chapter One

“Hey Teisha,” said Jack, “Are you selling anything special today?” Teisha looks at Jack and says, “I doubt there is anything in my tent that hasn’t passed through your hands.” Jack blushes and says, “I should go.” Teisha says “See you later … Jacqueline.”

Jack ducked out of the tent quickly. She didn’t want anyone to know her real name. Everyone in Toresal[[1]](#footnote-2) thinks she is a thieving little boy. If they knew she was a fourteen year old girl, they would probably treat her differently. She might end up married to some ugly farmer or working as a slave in someone’s kitchen. Jack always thought she was destined for greatness, even if it were in the little town of Toresal.

Jack wandered through Grubber’s Market, nicking an apple from the fruit stand for breakfast. She knew the alley north of the market was quiet and found a small wooden crate to sit on. Jack was about to take a bite out of the apple when she heard a group of men talking loudly just around the corner. She thought they sounded strange so she hopped onto the crate and climbed to the roof of a shed.

“Okay men, we’re looking for a boy about this tall,” the leader says and his hand is held above the ground at exactly Jack’s height. Jack takes a gulp and whispers, “This doesn’t sound good.”

The leader says, “The Baron is very angry and wants the boy found and brought in. He even made it clear, alive would be best. Dead is okay too. I’m thinking alive because we can sell the boy to a slave-trader and make an extra penny.”

One of the other men asks, “Do we know what the boy looks like?” and the leader says, “He wanders around Grubber’s Market, wears a grey cloak and a funny hat. He goes by the name of Jack.”

Jack feels her stomach grumble, but has lost her appetite. “Why are these men looking for me?” she wonders.

“Okay, go!” the leader yells and the men start working through the crowd. Jack waits for a few minutes and climbs down from the shed. Just as she steps onto the wooden crate, her foot slips and breaks it. The noise easily carries out to the market…

“What was that noise? Check that alley!” one of the men yells. Two men enter the alley and see Jack. They start walking slowly towards her with their arms stretched wide. Jack looks around and realizes there is nowhere to run. Thinking quickly, she dives underneath their arms and runs for the market.

Jack sees men to the east and decides to run south. She passes the spice dealer and stops at the gem peddler’s stand. Suddenly there is a commotion at the back of the stall. The stall keeper shouts, “Come back here you flea-bitten thief!” and for a moment Jack thinks the man is talking about her. But then a small grey animal runs up the market cable, a forest monkey, holding a shiny necklace. The monkey hoots at the stall keeper and disappears into the market.

Jack sees two of the men coming from the north. “I need to get out of here” she says to herself. She runs to the east and sneaks inside Teisha’s tent before any of the men can see her.

“Teisha!” Jack says. “I’m being chased by some of Baron Fossville’s men. Did I do something to upset the Baron?” Teisha seems worried and says, “I can’t imagine stealing an apple here and there is going to worry the Baron. Are you sure these men are looking for you?”

“Yes. They already tried to grab me in the alley and they’re all over the market. I’m going to need a disguise to get past them. Can you help me?”

Teisha looks concerned, “Jack. You know I would love to help you out, but I would get in a lot of trouble if I gave one of our cloaks away without payment. Do you have any coin at all to trade?”

Thinking about that monkey with the necklace, Jack says, “No, but I know where I can get something to trade. I’ll be back.” Jack slowly leaves the tent and heads towards the fruit stand again.

Avoiding the men is easier now that she knows what they look like. The crowd is thickest at this time of day and offers a lot of hiding places. She finally walks up to the fruit stand and grabs a banana.

“Hey! Are you going to pay for that?” the stall keeper asks Jack and when she starts walking away he shouts, “Thief!”

Jack runs southwest, back to Teisha’s tent and runs right through. “Hey Jack…” Teisha says, but she’s already behind her tent and climbing the center post of the market. Once on top, Jack covers her eyes from the sun and looks for the little grey monkey. She waves the banana around in hopes of attracting the little animal.

“Hoot!” she hears the little monkey coming toward her on one of the cables. He’s still holding the necklace. Jack reaches out with the banana with one hand and tries to grab the necklace with the other.

The monkey sniffs the air, whining for the fresh fruit. Jack leans out onto the cable and just as she’s about to reach the necklace, the monkey leaps into the air, grabbing the banana, and dropping the necklace. Jack lunges for the necklace and catches it while falling off the post. Luckily she had a tight grip on the cable and is able to climb back onto the post.

Jack climbs down and goes back into Teisha’s tent with the necklace. “Here it is. Do you think you could spare a silk cloak for a little jewelry, or do I have to take it somewhere else for coin first?”

Teisha’s eyes widen and she says, “No, that won’t be necessary Jack. Let me look around. Here, this green cloak matches your eyes. Just remove your hat - put this cloak on, and those men won’t even notice you.”

“That’s the plan.” Jack says before there’s a commotion outside.

“Have you dims checked this tent?” Jack and Teisha both hear the men pushing through the crowd outside.

“Quickly Jack! You’re going to have to go out the back!” Teisha says. Jack rushes out the back flap of the tent and starts climbing the center post again. One of the men dashes through the tent and leaps up to grab Jack’s ankle and just misses. He tries to climb with his bare hands and can’t seem to pull his weight.

Jack reaches the top while several of the men take turns testing the post. One of the smaller ones says, “Give me another knife. I can climb up and grab him.”

Sure enough, with two knives digging into the post, the smaller man begins to make his way to the top. “Think Jack, think!” Jack says.

Quickly, she takes her grey cloak off and wraps it around one of the cables. She looks down at the men and yells, “Catch me if you can!” and launches herself down the cable towards the fruit stall. As she rides the cable, the other men notice and start to converge on the landing area.

Jack drops the ground, takes her hat off, puts on the green silk cloak. She jams her grey cloak and hat into her satchel and starts to walk south. With her reddish brown hair and fair skin, no one would mistake her for a boy now.

“He’s back there!” the men yell, shoving past Jacqueline without a look.

She turns east and sees the leader, looking up at the center post where the little man has worked his way to the top. While he’s distracted, Jack doesn’t stop walking. She just starts counting in a whisper, “Five, four, three, two…one!”

She made it. She’s past the leader and onto Commerce Street. Those men won’t follow her here. The town guards don’t let men like that wander around with knives and swords out.

Jack switches back into her grey cloak and funny hat. She still doesn’t want anyone to know she’s a girl.

Chapter Two

“Hey Jack!” yells the town butcher while leaning in his doorway. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Jack looks at the butcher and nods a greeting, “Old Man Holstenoffer. How’s the

1. Toresal (tor’-ah-sawl) – A town in northern Miradania. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)