

Forbidden Fruit

By Shirley Young

"You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15, NKJ).



Ginger Bates was up to mischief. Some days earlier, he had noticed a small hole in the boarded fence that surrounded a large house not far from where he lived - and he wanted to look through it to see what was on the other side. So he was now creeping furtively alongside the fence, heading for the place where he'd seen it. When he found the hole, he bent down and peered through it.

Inside he saw a large and beautiful garden. There were lawns, rose beds and a small pond on which floated a number of ducks looking like a small flotilla of boats. Standing beside the pond was a graceful weeping willow tree. There was also a large oak tree, which had a child's swing attached to it. But there were also other trees dotted about and many of these were fruit trees.

It was these trees that Ginger was looking at - and one in particular. The tree that Ginger was fixedly staring at was a Damson plum tree and it was absolutely loaded with round blue/black fruits.

Ginger licked his lips. He was a greedy boy and began to imagine himself eating some of the delicious fruit. This led to the temptation to pick a whole bag of plums and take them home to his mother so she could make him a damson pie with cream and custard on top. But then he had a "better" idea (or so he thought). If he picked some plums from each of the trees he could sell what he didn't want and make some money for himself. He knew deep down inside that it was wrong to steal, but he deliberately ignored his conscience.

As he continued to think about his idea, he saw a man and lady and a small girl come out of the house and get into a car that was parked on the driveway. Ginger began to feel excited. The family was going out. That meant the house would be empty and there would be no one to see him from the windows if he went in and picked the fruit.

As the car drove away Ginger hurried around to the front of the house. Then running low to the ground, just like the army commandoes he had seen on TV, he raced up the driveway and ducked quickly into the garden.

Ginger was attracted by the ducks in the pond and went over to look at them. But they thought he had come to feed them, and started paddling furiously towards the bank, squawking and quacking at the top of their voices.

"Be quiet you silly ducks! Do you want to let everyone know I'm here?" Ginger shouted, forgetting that he was now making nearly as much noise as they were.

The ducks only took Ginger's shouting as encouragement and immediately closed in on him, stretching up their necks and pushing forward for food. Ginger had never been besieged by ducks before and he began to feel a little nervous. Especially when they clambered up the bank and started to jostle and press in around him!

"Get away! Get away!" Ginger yelled, and he began to back away, waving his arms about. But his foot slipped on the edge of the muddy bank and down he slithered, backwards into the pond! The ducks eagerly followed him in, splashing water everywhere.

"Get away from me, you horrid birds!" Ginger yelled again. "This is all your fault!"

Ginger floundered about and then clambered back up the bank. He flopped down and stared in dismay at the mud and weed clinging to him. He

knew his mother would be very cross when she saw the state of his clothes and sandals. Then he turned his head slightly and was startled to see two huge pop-eyes staring back at him. It was a frog! It was staring at him in such an accusing and unblinking manner that Ginger got up and backed away. The frog's steady gaze somehow made him feel very guilty. He knew that he really shouldn't be in this garden at all. It was private property.

Since Ginger was now soaking wet, he decided that he would have to dry himself off before he picked the plums and went home. So he ran across to the garden swing and heaved his body into the seat. He pushed off with his feet and began to float to and fro, feeling as if he were riding on air. Gradually he worked the swing backwards and forwards until he flew higher and higher. He felt so exhilarated and excited that he quite forgot the passing of time.

What Ginger didn't know was that ever since he had furtively run up the driveway he had been spied on by two bright eyes from inside the house.

The eyes belonged to Jock, a very intelligent black Scottie dog. Jack growled low in his throat but purposely didn't bark. He liked to take his victims by surprise. The trouble was that he had been locked in the house when the family had gone out.

"However am I supposed to do my job as guard dog?" he fumed to himself, "if they lock me in and I can't get out at the intruders!"

Jock jumped down from his vantage point of an upstairs window overlooking the garden. He then ran from room to room to see if a window had been left open but they were all closed.

It was then that he remembered the old coal cellar. The door to it led off the kitchen. Since the door stood open Jock ran lightly down the steps into the cellar. He then stared up at the open coal chute, which led to the outside.

In the old days before central heating, coalmen used to shoot coal or logs down this ramp into the cellar. So without hesitating Jock took a run at the ramp and after a quick squirm and scramble he was up it and outside. Quietly he crept along the side of the house and peered around the corner into the garden.

The swing was now empty, but still gently moving to and fro. Ginger had only just left it. He had gone to the far end of the garden where the plum trees were.

Jock stalked his prey silently. He drifted like a shadow from bush to bush until he had Ginger in his sight.

Ginger stood looking up at his favourite plum tree. It was an old tree and had grown quite high, so Ginger could not reach the fruit from the ground, even when he stood on tiptoe. He looked about him to see how best to climb up. The tree stood very close to the corner of a large garden shed, and at the corner of the shed was a tall water barrel that caught the rainwater from the shed roof. "That will do," he thought.

Ginger looked in the shed and picked up an old sack in which to put his plums. Then he took a run at the water barrel, got his fingers over the rim, and heaved himself up onto the edge of it and carefully stood up. He stretched out his hand to the nearest bough of the tree and began to steal a piece of fruit. It was at this precise moment that Jock decided to attack! "Yarf! Yarf! Woof! Woof!" he bellowed at the top of his voice as he suddenly shot out from the bushes and raced at the boy, his lips curled back in a snarl.

Ginger was so precariously balanced on the wet slippery rim of the barrel that the shock of the dog's unexpected attack sent him reeling backwards and - SPLOSH - he fell down into the rain barrel and disappeared from view.

Seconds later he resurfaced, spluttering and coughing as water poured off his hair and out of his nose. Fortunately the water wasn't too deep, but it *was* deep enough to come up to Ginger's chest and shoulders as he stood on the bottom of the barrel.

Outside Jock kept up his frenzied assault. Every time Ginger tried to put his fingers over the rim to haul himself out the dog hurled himself upwards, dancing on his back legs as he tried to leap and bite at the boy's fingers.

The inside of the barrel was wet and slippery with green slime. Ginger found that he could not gain a foothold, and every time he tried to pull himself up he only fell back down again. Then as he again tried to put his fingers over the edge, he felt the dog's hot breath only inches from his hand, accompanied by a blood curdling growl.

Ginger began to feel cold and started to shiver. "However will I get out of here?" Ginger panicked. "Oh, if only that awful dog would go away! I wish I'd never come into this garden. It's full of horrid ducks, dogs and frogs!" he exaggerated.

It was then that Ginger heard the sound of a car engine. The family had returned.

Ginger fervently hoped that the sound of the car would cause Jock to run off and greet his owners, giving him a chance to escape, but Jock wasn't so daft. He wasn't going to let his quarry out of his sight! He barked louder than ever.

When Judy, the little girl, jumped out of the car she exclaimed, "Mummy! Daddy! Jock's escaped from the house!" and she immediately ran off in the direction of the noise.

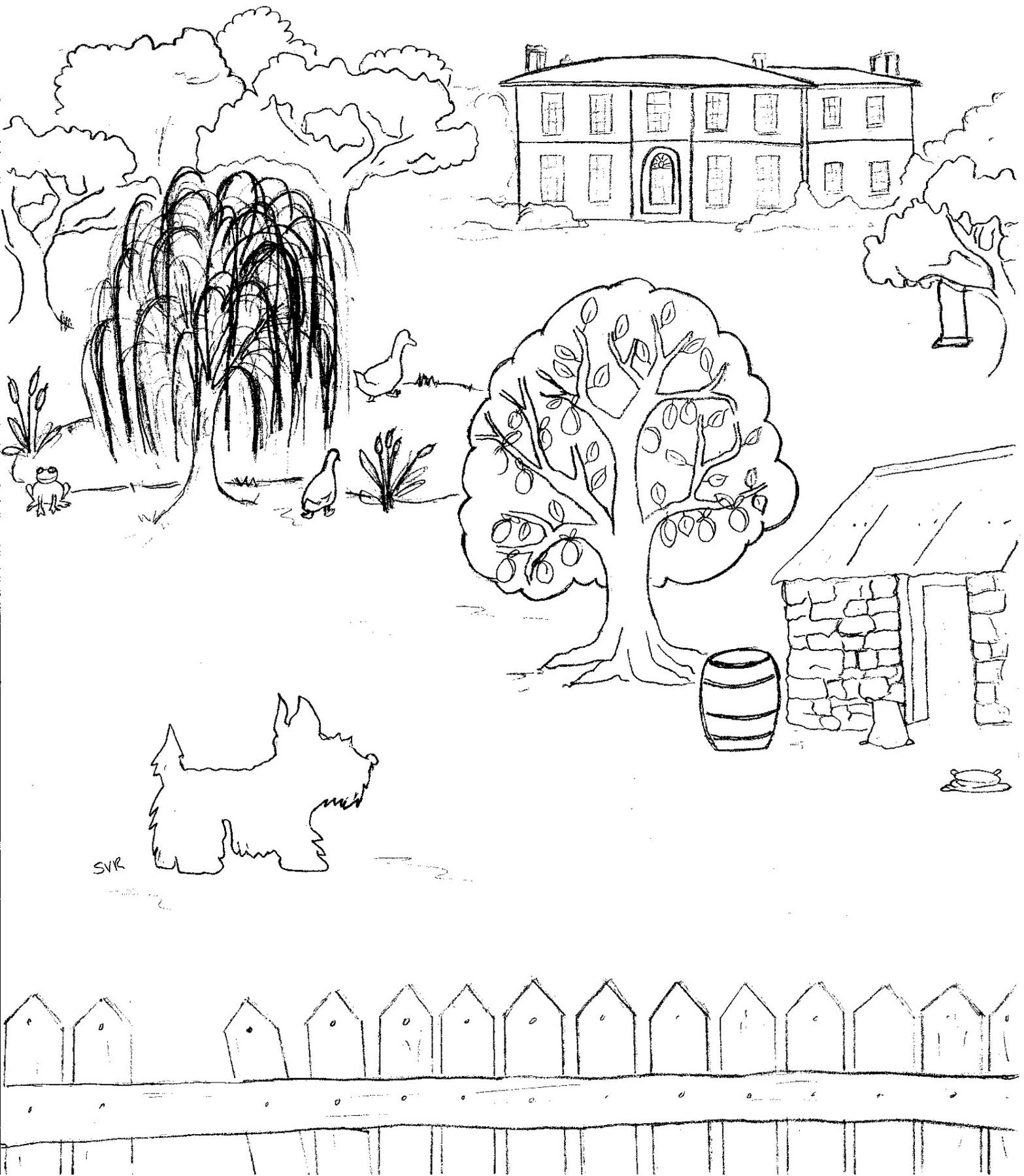
Her parents followed at a slower pace, but when they saw Jock leaping and dancing up and down at the side of the rain barrel they became

suspicious. Daddy looked over the rim and there looking back at him were the two large frightened eyes of a small boy!

Daddy called Jock to heel and then grasped Ginger under the arms and hauled him out of the water. Seeing that the boy was frightened and shivering, Mummy and Daddy immediately took him off towards the house to give him some dry clothes and a hot drink. They would question him later about what he'd been doing.

As Ginger was led away dripping, he told himself firmly that he would never attempt to steal anything from anyone again. He'd already known that stealing was wrong, but now he knew that it also caused a lot of trouble and humiliation too. So Ginger decided that from now on he was going to be a very good boy!

The End



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