



Catherine, Called Birdy by Karen Cushman

Subjects: Middle Ages—Juvenile fiction; Diaries—Fiction; England—Juvenile fiction

Awards: Newbery Honor Book, Best Books for Young Adults, Horn Book Fanfare

Book Lists: Europe, Grade 6

Props: Birdcage with red bird



My name is Catherine, (*Bring out bird in a cage*) but call me Birdy. I got that nickname because I love birds, and I keep cages filled with them in my chamber. The birds are the best thing about my life. (*Set cage down*) The year is 1290. I live in a medieval English manor. I'm being brought up by my mother to be a lady. I would rather be anything than a lady. Ladies don't get to go outside and play, climb trees, go for a swim or even skip rocks. They sit inside doing all the dirty work in the castle—real fun chores like picking fleas out of the beds, picking maggots out of the stored meat, and making medicines out of the dung! It would be better to be the castle pig boy than a lady.

As if all of this isn't bad enough, the other day my father started asking me all kinds of strange questions. "Exactly how old are you daughter" Well I'm 13. "Have you all your teeth?" I smiled for him. "Do you have bad breath?" I wish I'd just eaten garlic so that I could breathe on him! "What color is your hair when it's clean?" "Can you sew?" It just made me nervous at first but then I figured it out. My greedy father wanted more money and more land and he planned to get it by marrying me off to the richest man he could find. I have no choice. He picks and I'm stuck.

The first person he picked looked like a rooster. He sprawled all over the table at dinner. He ate his entire meal with his mouth open and drooled. I had to get rid

of him and fast. So the next day before dinner I rubbed my nose till it shone red, I blacked out my front teeth with soot from the fireplace, and decorated my hair with old bones that the dog had chewed clean. I smiled my gap-toothed smile and (*Bounce head*) bounced my head all through dinner. The Rooster decided he didn't want to marry me after all. My father was mad but I won that one! Next, my father had a special feast and invited a huge, ugly, bearded man. I called him Shaggy Beard. I was stuck sitting next to him and I was disgusted. He sneezed on the meat (*Sneeze*) and then as if that wasn't enough, blew his nose on the table linen. He left wet, greasy slime on the drinking cup that I was supposed to share with him! I did not drink the entire meal. After the meal he took a hunting knife out of his waist band and used it to pick his teeth. Today my father asked what I thought about the Shaggy Beard. I told him I liked him as much as wormy meat. He made me feel sick. My father says no matter. Maybe I'll learn to like him. Anyway he says I'm going to marry him.

I have been betrayed. I have to figure out a way to get out of this because I cannot marry that disgusting man. Can Birdy do it? Can she get out of marrying Shaggy Beard? (*Hold up book*) *Catherine, Called Birdy* by Karen Cushman.