



The Shakespeare Stealer by Gary Blackwood

Subjects: Orphans; Theater; Actors and actresses

Award: Best Books for Young Adults

Book Lists: Europe, Grade 6

Props: Scarf



Have you ever heard of Shakespeare? Of course you have. He was a great writer from the 1500s, early 1600s. His writings have been published all over the world and you can find his plays in any library or book store. However, when he was just becoming a playwright his plays were not published at all. There were only enough copies of each play for the actors. When the plays were performed no one was allowed to leave the theatre with a script. The script was guarded because, as his plays became more and more popular and drew in more and more crowds and made more and more money, they became very valuable. There were many who were jealous of Shakespeare's success and wanted in on the action. They plotted to steal his plays, sell them, and make a tidy profit. This is the story of one such thief.

(Use English accent, put scarf around neck) Me name is Wedge. I never knew me mum nor me da so I don't ken just when I was born. But they say I's 14, born in 1587. But I do ken I lived the first seven years of me life in an orphanage. It weren't so bad, but I's glad to leave it when Dr. Bright came looking for an apprentice.

He taught me how to read n' write in English, Latin, and a new language he made up. He called it "charactery." Symbols mean words or phrases. I's can write down what anyone says as fast as they says it. I's happy to be learning and I thought I'd always work for Dr. Bright. But then, a stranger paid us a visit and me life changed forever. It was yesterday it happened. The stranger stood in the doorway, motionless and silent like. He wore a long dark cloak of coarse fabric with the hood pulled forward casting his face in shadow. He asked if Dr. Bright had created the system of writin' called Charactery. Dr. Bright agreed that he had and said that I was proof of its success. The man made me write down his words, which I did. The man said I was very good and

offered to buy me for the sum of 10 pounds. Dr. Bright agreed, took the money, and says to me, "Go on, do as he says." I fetched me belongings and then was pushed out the door.

I walked for a while next to the stranger who was on horseback until night fell and then the stranger yanked me onto his horse. The forest road became dark n' cold. The tree branches blocked out the moon and we got our first taste of trouble. All of a sudden there was half a dozen shadowy figures in the middle of the road. They demanded our purse, our money. The stranger leaned down, as if to surrender the pouch, but instead, he swung it and struck the bandit full in the face. The stranger then grasped his sword and began kicking and thrusting the sword at the bandits. As the stranger struggled, a one-armed bandit pulled on me tunic. I clung to the saddle and kicked, but it was no use. I toppled from the horse grabbing hold of the neck of the one-armed man and falling backward, crashing to the ground. A rock struck me elbow and then the bandit's head. He lay still. The stranger dispatched the last of the other outlaws and again grabbed me tunic and hoisted me up onto the horse.

We are resting now in an inn. I ken not what strange man I am with. I wish to be back in the orphanage where at least I's safe. What can this man want from me? Where is he taking me? *(Take off scarf, stop accent)*

Widge will soon find that his talent to write quickly will be used in an attempt to make a lot of money. He will be forced to steal, to steal the famous words of William Shakespeare. But stealing is a dangerous game and it rarely ends well. *(Hold up book)* Turn the pages of *The Shakespeare Stealer* by Gary Blackwood to find out what happens next.