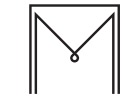
C. J. SANSOM

Lamentation

§



MANTLE

Principal Dramatis Personae

and their places on the political–religious spectrum

In this novel there is an unusually large number of characters who actually lived, although, of course, the portrayal of their personalities is mine.

The royal family

King Henry VIII

Prince Edward, age 8, heir to the throne

The Lady Mary, age 30, strongly traditionalist

The Lady Elizabeth, age 12–13

Queen Catherine Parr

Family of Catherine Parr, all reformers (see Family Tree, pp. xii–xiii)

Lord William Parr, her uncle

Sir William Parr, her brother

Lady Anne Herbert, her sister

Sir William Herbert, her brother-in-law

Members of the King's Privy Council

John Dudley, Lord Lisle, reformer

Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, reformer

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, reformer

Thomas, Lord Wriothesley, Lord Chancellor, no firm alignment

Sir Richard Rich, no firm alignment

Sir William Paget, Chief Secretary, no firm alignment

Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, traditionalist

Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, traditionalist

Others

William Somers, the King's fool

Jane, fool to Queen Catherine and the Lady Mary

Mary Odell, the Queen's maid-in-waiting

William Cecil, later Chief Minister to Queen Elizabeth I

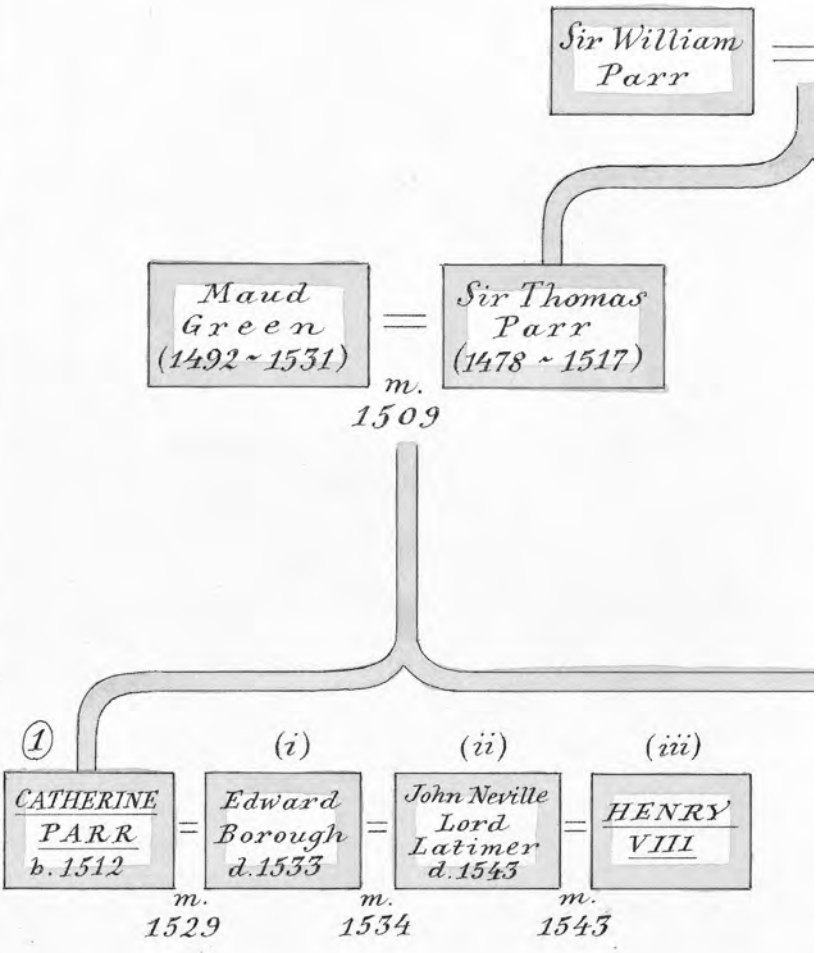
Sir Edmund Walsingham

John Bale

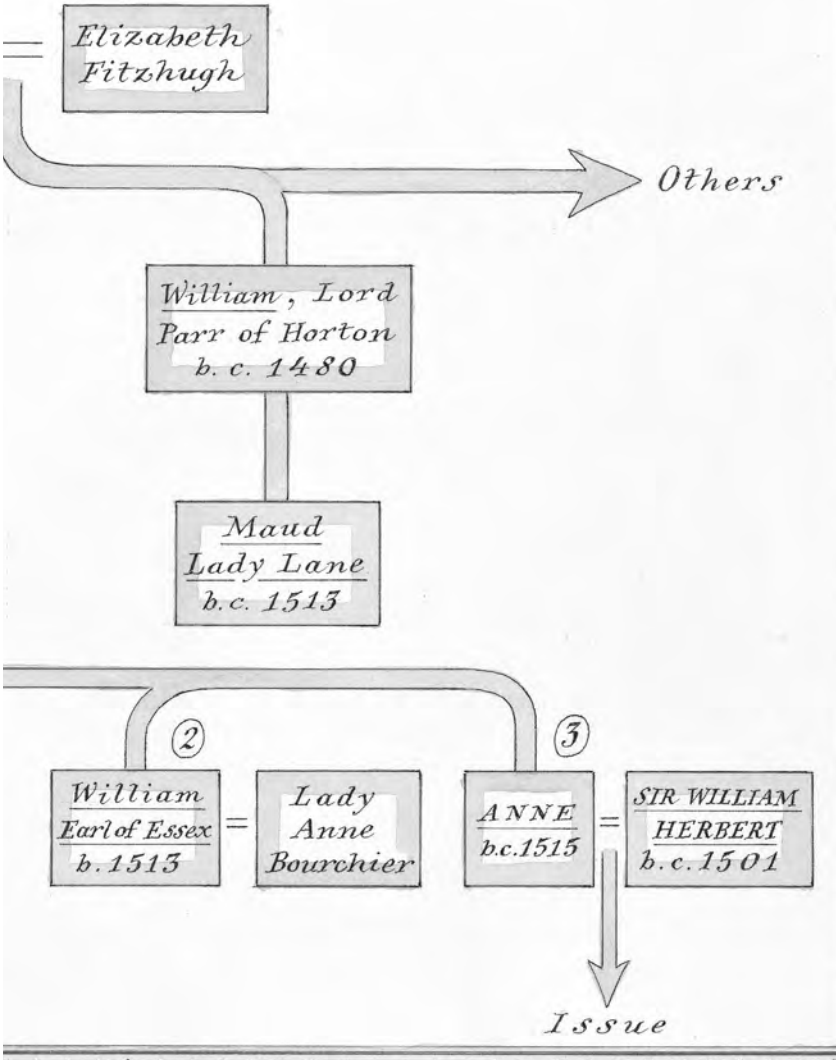
Anne Askew (Kyme)

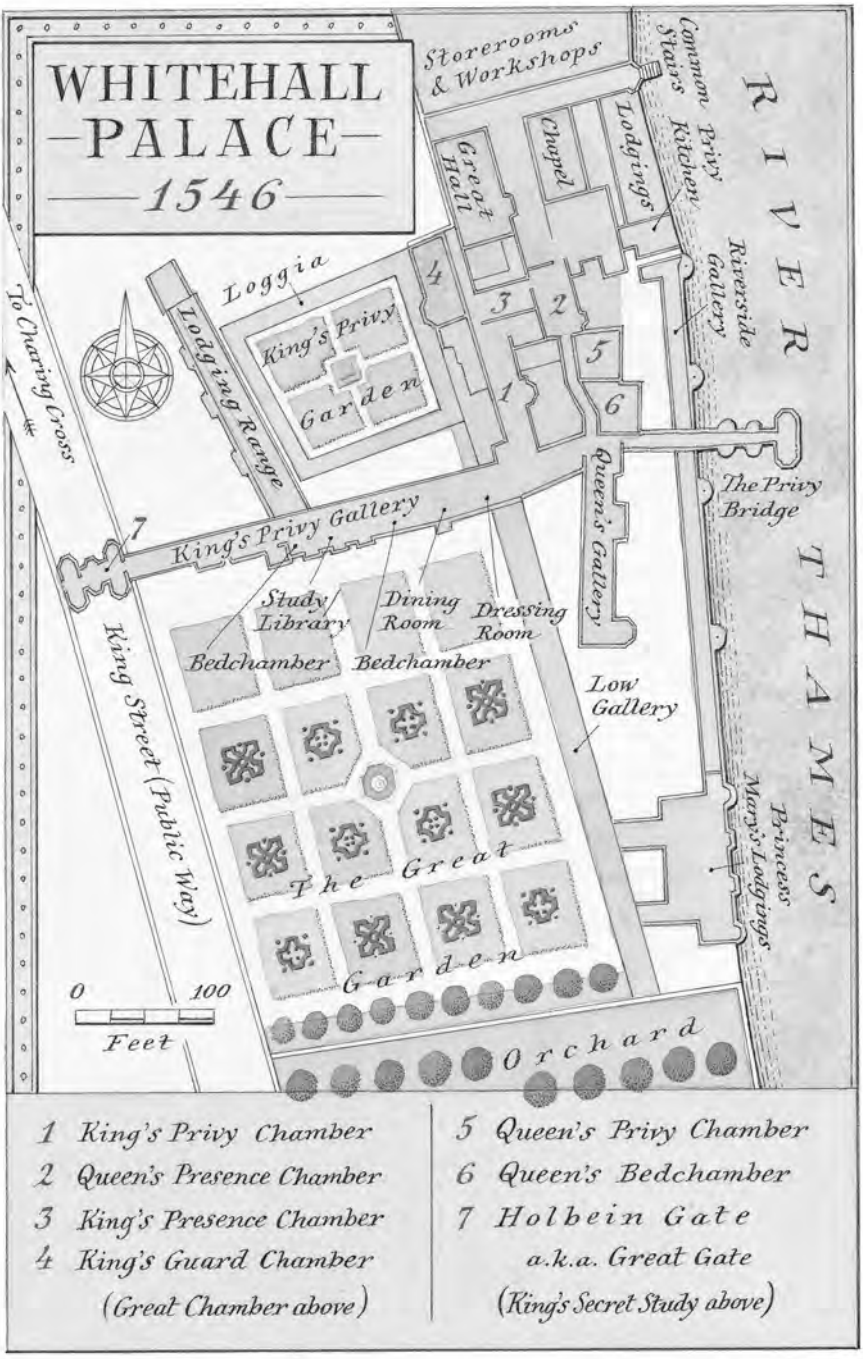
Lamentation

CATHERINE PARR



ABBREVIATED FAMILY TREE




WHITEHALL
PALACE
1546
Storerooms & Workshops
Common Stairs
Privy Kitchen
Lodgings
Chapel
Great Hall
Riverside Gallery
RIVER THAMES
Loggia
Lodging Range
King's Privy
Garden
To Charing Cross
Queen's Gallery
The Privy Bridge
King's Privy Gallery
Study/ Library
Dining Room
Dressing Room
Bedchamber
Bedchamber
Low Gallery
King Street (Public Way)
Princess Mary's Lodgings
The Great Garden
Orchard
0
100
Feet
1 King's Privy Chamber
2 Queen's Presence Chamber
3 King's Presence Chamber
4 King's Guard Chamber
(Great Chamber above)
5 Queen's Privy Chamber
6 Queen's Bedchamber
7 Holbein Gate
a.k.a. Great Gate
(King's Secret Study above)

Chapter One

I DID NOT WANT to attend the burning. I have never liked even such things as the bearbaiting, and this was to be the burning alive at the stake of four living people, one a woman, for denying that the body and blood of Christ were present in the Host at Mass. Such was the pitch we had come to in England during the great heresy hunt of 1546.

I had been called from my chambers at Lincoln's Inn to see the Treasurer, Master Rowland. Despite my status as a serjeant, the most senior of barristers, Master Rowland disliked me. I think his pride had never recovered from the time three years before when I had been – justly – disrespectful to him. I crossed the Inn Square, the red brickwork mellow in the summer sunshine, exchanging greetings with other black-gowned lawyers going to and fro. I looked up at Stephen Bealknap's rooms; he was my old foe both in and out of court. The shutters at his windows were closed. He had been ill since early in the year and had not been seen outside for many weeks. Some said he was near death.

I went to the Treasurer's offices and knocked at his door. A sharp voice bade me enter. Rowland sat behind his desk in his spacious room, the walls lined with shelves of heavy legal books, a display of his status. He was old, past sixty, rail-thin but hard as oak, with a narrow, seamed, frowning face. He sported a white beard, grown long and forked in the current fashion, carefully combed and reaching halfway down his silken doublet. As I came in he looked up from cutting a new nib for his goose-feather quill. His fingers, like mine, were stained black from years of working with ink.

'God give you good morrow, Serjeant Shardlake,' he said in his sharp voice. He put down the knife.

I bowed. 'And you, Master Treasurer.'

He waved me to a stool and looked at me sternly.

'Your business goes well?' he asked. 'Many cases listed for the Michaelmas term?'

'A good enough number, sir.'

'I hear you no longer get work from the Queen's solicitor.' He spoke casually. 'Not for this year past.'

'I have plenty of other cases, sir. And my work at Common Pleas keeps me busy.'

He inclined his head. 'I hear some of Queen Catherine's officials have been questioned by the Privy Council. For heretical opinions.'

'So rumour says. But so many have been interrogated these last few months.'

'I have seen you more frequently at Mass at the Inn church recently.' Rowland smiled sardonically. 'Showing good conformity? A wise policy in these whirling days. Attend church, avoid the babble of controversy, follow the King's wishes.'

'Indeed, sir.'

He took his sharpened quill and spat to soften it, then rubbed it on a cloth. He looked up at me with a new keenness. 'You have heard that Mistress Anne Askew is sentenced to burn with three others a week on Friday? The sixteenth of July?'

'It is the talk of London. Some say she was tortured in the Tower after her sentence. A strange thing.'

Rowland shrugged. 'Street gossip. But the woman made a sensation at the wrong time. Abandoning her husband and coming to London to preach opinions clear contrary to the Act of Six Articles. Refusing to recant, arguing in public with her judges.' He shook his head, then leaned forward. 'The burning is to be a great spectacle. There has been nothing like it for years. The King wants it to be seen where heresy leads. Half the Privy Council will be there.'

'Not the King?' There had been rumours he might attend.

'No.'

I remembered Henry had been seriously ill in the spring; he had hardly been seen since.

'His majesty wants representatives from all the London guilds.' Rowland paused. 'And the Inns of Court. I have decided you should go to represent Lincoln's Inn.'

I stared at him. 'Me, sir?'

'You take on fewer social and ceremonial duties than you should, given your rank, Serjeant Shardlake. No one seems willing to volunteer for this, so I have had to decide. I think it time you took your turn.'

I sighed. 'I know I have been lax in such duties. I will do more, if you wish.' I took a deep breath. 'But not this, I would ask you. It will be a horrible thing. I have never seen a burning, and do not wish to.'

Rowland waved a hand dismissively. 'You are too squeamish. Strange in a farmer's son. You have seen executions, I know that. Lord Cromwell had you attend Anne Boleyn's beheading when you worked for him.'

'That was bad. This will be worse.'

He tapped a paper on his desk. 'This is the request for me to send someone to attend. Signed by the King's secretary, Paget himself. I must despatch the name to him tonight. I am sorry, Serjeant, but I have decided you will go.' He rose, indicating the interview was over. I stood and bowed again. 'Thank you for offering to become more involved with the Inn's duties,' Rowland said, his voice smooth once more. 'I will see what other – ' he hesitated – 'activities may be coming up.'

✝

ON THE DAY of the burning I woke early. It was set for midday but I felt in too heavy and mopish a frame of mind to go into chambers. Punctual as ever, my new steward Martin Brocket brought linen cloths and a ewer of hot water to my bedroom at seven, and after bidding me good morning laid out my shirt, doublet and summer robe. As ever, his manner was serious, quiet, deferential. Since he and his

wife Agnes had come to me in the winter my household had been run like clockwork. Through the half-open door I could hear Agnes asking the boy Timothy to be sure and fetch some fresh water later, and the girl Josephine to hurry with her breakfast that my table might be made ready. Her tone was light, friendly.

'Another fine day, sir,' Martin ventured. He was in his forties, with thinning fair hair and bland, unremarkable features.

I had told none of my household about my attendance at the burning. 'It is, Martin,' I replied. 'I think I shall work in my study this morning, go in this afternoon.'

'Very good, sir. Your breakfast will be ready shortly.' He bowed and went out.

I got up, wincing at a spasm in my back. Fortunately I had fewer of those now, as I followed my doctor friend Guy's exercises faithfully. I wished I could feel comfortable with Martin, yet although I liked his wife there was something in his cool, stiff formality that I had never felt easy with. As I washed my face and donned a clean linen shirt scented with rosemary, I chid myself for my unreasonableness: as the master it was for me to initiate a less formal relationship.

I examined my face in the steel mirror. More lines, I thought. I had turned forty-four that spring. A lined face, greying hair and a hunched back. As there was such a fashion for beards now – my assistant Barak had recently grown a neat brown one – I had tried a short beard myself a couple of months before, but like my hair it had come out streaked with grey, which I thought unbecoming.

I looked out from the mullioned window onto my garden, where I had allowed Agnes to install some beehives and cultivate a herb garden. They improved its look, and the herbs were sweet-smelling as well as useful. The birds were singing and the bees buzzed round the flowers, everything bright and colourful. What a day for a young woman and three men to die horribly.

My eye turned to a letter on my bedside table. It was from Antwerp, in the Spanish Netherlands, where my nineteen-year-old ward, Hugh Curteys, lived, working for the English merchants there. Hugh

was happy now. Originally planning to study in Germany, Hugh had instead stayed in Antwerp and found an unexpected interest in the clothing trade, especially the finding and assessing of rare silks and new fabrics, such as the cotton that was coming in from the New World. Hugh's letters were full of pleasure in work, and in the intellectual and social freedom of the great city; the fairs, debates and readings at the Chambers of Rhetoric. Although Antwerp was part of the Holy Roman Empire, the Catholic Emperor Charles V did not interfere with the many Protestants who lived there – he did not dare imperil the Flanders banking trade, which financed his wars.

Hugh never spoke of the dark secret which we shared from the time of our meeting the year before; all his letters were cheerful in tone. In this one, though, was news of the arrival in Antwerp of a number of English refugees. '*They are in a piteous state, appealing to the merchants for succour. They are reformers and radicals, afraid they will be caught up in the net of persecution they say Bishop Gardiner has cast over England.*'

I sighed, donned my robe and went down to breakfast. I could delay no more; I must start this dreadful day.

✝

THE HUNT FOR heretics had begun in the spring. During the winter the tide of the King's fickle religious policy had seemed to turn towards the reformers; he had persuaded Parliament to grant him power to dissolve the chantries, where priests were paid under the wills of deceased donors to say Masses for their souls. But, like many, I suspected his motive had been not religious but financial – the need to cover the gigantic costs of the French war; the English still remained besieged in Boulogne. His debasement of the coinage continued, prices rising as they never had at any time before in man's memory. The newest 'silver' shillings were but a film of silver over copper; already wearing off at the highest point. The King had a new nickname: 'Old Coppernose'. The discount which traders demanded on these coins made them worth less than sixpence now, though wages were still paid at the coins' face value.

And then in March, Bishop Stephen Gardiner – the King's most conservative adviser where religion was concerned – returned from negotiating a new treaty with the Holy Roman Emperor. From April onwards there was word of people high and low being taken in for questioning about their views on the Mass, and the possession of forbidden books. The questioning had reached into both the King's household and the Queen's; among the many rumours circulating the streets was that Anne Askew, the best known of those sentenced to death for heresy, had connections within the Queen's court, and had preached and propagandized among her ladies. I had not seen Queen Catherine since involving her in a potentially dangerous matter the year before, and knew, much to my grief, that I was unlikely to see that sweet and noble lady again. But I had thought of her often and feared for her as the hunt for radicals intensified; last week a proclamation had been issued detailing a long list of books which it was forbidden to possess, and that very week the courtier George Blagge, a friend of the King's, had been sentenced to burn for heresy.

I no longer had sympathies with either side in the religious quarrel, and sometimes doubted God's very existence, but I had a history of association with reformers, and like most people this year I had kept my head down and my mouth shut.

I set out at eleven from my house, just up Chancery Lane from Lincoln's Inn. Timothy had brought my good horse Genesis round to the front door and set out the mounting block. Timothy was thirteen now, growing taller, thin and gawky. I had sent my former servant boy, Simon, to be an apprentice in the spring, to give him a chance in life, and planned to do the same for Timothy when he reached fourteen.

'Good morning, sir.' He smiled his shy, gap-toothed grin, pushing a tangle of black hair from his forehead.

'Good morning, lad. How goes it with you?'

'Well, sir.'

'You must be missing Simon.'

'Yes, sir.' He looked down, stirring a pebble with his foot. 'But I manage.'

'You manage well,' I answered encouragingly. 'But perhaps we should begin to think of an apprenticeship for you. Have you thought what you might wish to do in life?'

He stared at me, sudden alarm in his brown eyes. 'No, sir – I – I thought I would stay here.' He looked around, out at the roadway. He had always been a quiet boy, with none of Simon's confidence, and I realized the thought of going out into the world scared him.

'Well,' I said soothingly, 'there is no hurry.' He looked relieved. 'And now I must away – ' I sighed – 'to business.'

✝

I RODE UNDER Temple Bar then turned up Gifford Street, which led to the open space of Smithfield. Many people were travelling in the same direction along the dusty way, some on horseback, most on foot, rich and poor, men, women and even a few children. Some, especially those in the dark clothes favoured by religious radicals, looked serious, others' faces were blank, while some even wore the eager expression of people looking forward to a good entertainment. I had put on my white serjeant's coif under my black cap, and began to sweat in the heat. I remembered with irritation that in the afternoon I had an appointment with my most difficult client, Isabel Slanning, whose case – a dispute with her brother over their mother's Will – was among the silliest and costliest I had ever encountered.

I passed two young apprentices in their blue doublets and caps. 'Why must they have it at midday?' I overheard one grumble. 'There won't be any shade.'

'Don't know. Some rule, I suppose. The hotter for good Mistress Askew. She'll have a warm arse before the day's done, eh?'

✝

SMITHFIELD WAS crowded already. The open space where the twice-weekly cattle market was held was full of people, all facing a railed-off central area guarded by soldiers wearing metal helmets and white coats bearing the cross of St George. They carried halberds,

their expressions stern. If there were any protests these would be dealt with sharply. I looked at the men sadly; whenever I saw soldiers now I thought of my friends who had died, as I nearly had myself, when the great ship *Mary Rose* foundered during the repelling of the attempted French invasion. A year, I thought, almost to the day. Last month news had come that the war was almost over, a settlement negotiated but for a few details, with France and Scotland, too. I remembered the soldiers' fresh young faces, the bodies crashing into the water, and closed my eyes. Peace had come too late for them.

Mounted on my horse I had a better view than most, better than I would have wished for, and close by the railings, for the crowd pressed those on horseback forward. In the centre of the railed-off area three oaken poles, seven feet tall, had been secured in the dusty earth. Each had metal hoops in the side through which London constables were sliding iron chains. They inserted padlocks in the links and checked the keys worked. Their air was calm and businesslike. A little way off more constables stood around an enormous pile of faggots – thick bunches of small branches. I was glad the weather had been dry; I had heard that if the wood was wet it took longer to burn, and the victims' suffering was horribly prolonged. Facing the stakes was a tall wooden lectern, painted white. Here, before the burning, there would be a preaching, a last appeal to the heretics to repent. The preacher was to be Nicholas Shaxton, the former Bishop of Salisbury, a radical reformer who had been sentenced to burn with the others but who had recanted to save his own life.

On the eastern side of the square I saw, behind a row of fine, brightly painted new houses, the high old tower of St Bartholomew's Church. When the monastery was dissolved seven years before, its lands had passed to the Privy Councillor, Sir Richard Rich, who had built these new houses. Their windows were crowded with people. A high wooden stage covered with a canopy in the royal colours of green and white had been erected in front of the old monastic gatehouse. A long bench was scattered with thick, brightly coloured cushions. This would be where the Lord Mayor and Privy Councillors would watch

the burning. Among those on horseback in the crowd I recognized many city officials; I nodded to those I knew. A little way off a small group of middle-aged men stood together, looking solemn and disturbed. I heard a few words in a foreign tongue, identifying them as Flemish merchants.

There was a babble of voices all round me, as well as the sharp stink of a London crowd in summer.

'They say she was racked till the strings of her arms and legs perished – '

'They couldn't torture her legally after she was convicted – '

'And John Lassells is to be burned too. He was the one who told the King of Catherine Howard's dalliances – '

'They say Catherine Parr's in trouble as well. He could have a seventh wife before this is done – '

'Will they let them off if they recant?'

'Too late for that – '

There was a stir by the canopy, and heads turned as a group of men in silk robes and caps, many wearing thick gold chains around their necks, appeared from the gatehouse accompanied by soldiers. They slowly mounted the steps to the stage, the soldiers taking places in front of them, and sat in a long row, adjusting their caps and chains, staring over the crowd with set, stern expressions. I recognized many of them: Mayor Bowes of London in his red robes; the Duke of Norfolk, older and thinner than when I had encountered him six years before, an expression of contemptuous arrogance on his haughty, severe face. To Norfolk's side sat a cleric in a white silk cassock with a black alb over it, whom I did not recognize but I guessed must be Bishop Gardiner. He was around sixty, stocky and swarthy, with a proud beak of a nose and large, dark eyes that swivelled over the crowd. He leaned across and murmured to Norfolk, who nodded and smiled sardonically. These two, many said, would have England back under Rome if they could.

Next to them three men sat together. Each had risen under Thomas Cromwell but shifted towards the conservative faction on the

Privy Council when Cromwell fell, bending and twisting before the wind, ever with two faces under one hood. First I saw William Paget, the King's Secretary, who had sent the letter to Rowland. He had a wide, hard slab of a face above a bushy brown beard, his thin-lipped mouth turned down sharply at one corner, making a narrow slash. It was said Paget was closer to the King than anyone now; his nickname was 'The Master of Practices'.

Beside Paget sat Lord Chancellor Thomas Wriothesley, head of the legal profession, tall and thin with a jutting little russet beard. Finally Sir Richard Rich completed the trio, still a senior Privy Councillor despite accusations of corruption two years before, his name associated with all the nastiest pieces of business these last fifteen years, a murderer to my certain knowledge, and my old enemy. I was safe from him only because of the things I knew about him, and because I still had the Queen's protection – whatever, I wondered uneasily, that might be worth now. I looked at Rich. Despite the heat, he was wearing a green robe with a fur collar. To my surprise I read anxiety on his thin, neat features. The long hair under his jewelled cap was quite grey now. He fiddled with his gold chain. Then, looking over the crowd, he met my gaze. His face flushed and his lips set. He stared back at me a moment, then turned away as Wriothesley bent to speak to him. I shuddered. My anxiety communicated itself to Genesis, who stirred uneasily. I steadied him with a pat.

Near to me a soldier passed, carefully carrying a basket. 'Make way, make way! 'Tis the gunpowder!'

I was glad to hear the words. At least there would be some mercy. The sentence for heresy was burning to death, but sometimes the authorities allowed a packet of gunpowder to be placed around each victim's neck so that when the flames reached it, the packet would explode, bringing instantaneous death.

'Should let them burn to the end,' someone protested.

'Ay,' another agreed. 'The kiss of fire, so light and agonizing.' A horrible giggle.

I looked round as another horseman, dressed like me in a lawyer's

silken summer robe and dark cap, made his way through the crowd and came to a halt beside me. He was a few years my junior, with a handsome though slightly stern face, a short dark beard and blue eyes that were penetratingly honest and direct.

'Good day, Serjeant Shardlake.'

'And to you, Brother Coleswyn.'

Philip Coleswyn was a barrister of Gray's Inn, and my opponent in the wretched case of the Slanning Will. He represented my client's brother, who was as cantankerous and difficult as his sister, but though, as their lawyers, we had had to cross swords I had found Coleswyn himself civil and honest, not one of those lawyers who will enthusiastically argue the worst of cases for enough silver. I guessed he found his client as irritating as I did mine. I had heard he was a reformer – gossip these days was usually about people's religion – though for myself I did not care a fig.

'Are you here to represent Lincoln's Inn?' Coleswyn asked.

'Ay. Have you been chosen for Gray's Inn?'

'I have. Not willingly.'

'Nor I.'

'It is a cruel business.' He looked at me directly.

'It is. Cruel and horrible.'

'Soon they will make it illegal to worship God.' He spoke with a slight tremor in his voice.

I replied, my words noncommittal but my tone sardonic, 'It is our duty to worship as King Henry decrees.'

'And here is his decree,' Coleswyn answered quietly. He shook his head, then said, 'I am sorry, Brother, I should watch my words.'

'Yes. In these days we must.'

The soldier had laid the basket of gunpowder down carefully in a corner of the railed-off area. He stepped over the rail and now stood with the other soldiers facing outwards at the crowd, quite close to us. Then I saw Wriothesley lean forwards and beckon the man with a finger. He ran across to the canopied stage and I saw Wriothesley gesture at the gunpowder basket. The soldier answered him and

Wriothesley sat back, apparently satisfied. The man returned to his position.

'What was that about?' I heard the soldier next to him say.

'He asked how much gunpowder there was. He was frightened that when it blew up it might send burning faggots flying towards the stage. I told him it'll be round their necks, well above the faggots.'

His fellow laughed. 'The radicals would love it if Gardiner and half the Privy Council ended up burning, too. John Bale could write one of his plays about it.'

I felt eyes on me. I saw, a little to my left, a black-robed lawyer standing with two young gentlemen in doublets bright with expensive dye, pearls in their caps. The lawyer was young, in his twenties, a short thin fellow with a narrow, clever face, protuberant eyes and a wispy beard. He had been staring at me hard. He met my gaze then looked away.

I turned to Coleswyn. 'Do you know that lawyer, standing with the two young popinjays?'

He shook his head. 'I think I've seen him round the courts once or twice, but I don't know him.'

'No matter.'

There was a fresh ripple of excitement through the crowd as a procession approached from Little Britain Street. More soldiers, surrounding three men dressed in long white shifts, one young and two middle-aged. All had set faces but wild, fearful eyes. And behind them, carried on a chair by two soldiers, an attractive, fair-haired young woman in her twenties. As the chair swayed slightly she gripped the sides, her face twitching with pain. So this was Anne Askew, who had left her husband in Lincolnshire to come and preach in London, and said the consecrated wafer was no more than a piece of bread, which would go mouldy like any other if left in a box.

'I had not known she was so young,' Coleswyn whispered.

Some of the constables ran to the faggots and piled several bundles round the stakes, a foot high. We watched as the three men were led there. The branches crunched under the constables' feet as they

chained two of the men – back-to-back – to one stake, the third to another. There was a rattle as the chains were secured round their ankles, waists and necks. Then Anne Askew was carried in her chair to the third stake. The soldiers set her down and the constables chained her to the post by the neck and waist.

'So it's true,' Coleswyn said. 'She was racked in the Tower. See, she can no longer stand.'

'But why do that to the poor creature after she was convicted?'

'Jesu only knows.'

A soldier brought four brown bags, each the size of a large fist, from the basket and carefully tied one round the neck of each victim. They flinched instinctively. A constable came out of the old gatehouse carrying a lit torch and stood beside the railing, impassive. Everyone's eyes turned to the torch's flame. The crowd fell silent.

A man in clerical robes was mounting the steps to the lectern. He was elderly, white-haired and red-faced, trying to compose features distorted with fear. Nicholas Shaxton. But for his recantation he would have been tied to a stake as well. There were hostile murmurs from some in the crowd, then a shout of, 'Shame on you that would burn Christ's members!' There was a brief commotion and someone hit the man who had spoken; two soldiers hurried across to separate them.

Shaxton began to preach, a long disquisition justifying the ancient doctrine of the Mass. The three condemned men listened in silence, one trembling uncontrollably. Sweat formed on their faces and on their white shifts. Anne Askew, though, periodically interrupted Shaxton with cries of, 'He misses the point, and speaks without the Book!' Her face looked cheerful and composed now, almost as though she were enjoying the spectacle. I wondered if the poor woman was mad. Someone in the crowd called out, 'Get on with it! Light the fire!'

At length Shaxton finished. He slowly descended and was led back to the gatehouse. He started to go in but the soldiers seized his arms, forcing him to turn and stand in the doorway. He was to be made to watch.

More kindling was laid round the prisoners; it reached now to their thighs. Then the constable with the torch came over and, one by one, lit the faggots. There was a crackling, then a gasping that soon turned to screaming as the flames licked the victims' legs. One of the men yelled out, 'Christ receive me! Christ receive me!' over and over again. I heard a moaning wail from Anne Askew and closed my eyes. All around the crowd was silent, watching.

The screaming, and the crackling of the faggots, seemed to go on forever. Genesis stirred uneasily again and for a moment I experienced that awful feeling I had known frequently in the months since the *Mary Rose* sank, of everything swaying and tilting beneath me, and I had to open my eyes. Coleswyn was staring grimly, fixedly ahead, and I could not help but follow his gaze. The flames were rising fast, light and transparent in the bright July day. The three men were still yelling and writhing; the flames had reached their arms and lower bodies and burned the skin away; blood trickled down into the inferno. Two of the men were leaning forward in a frantic attempt to ignite the gunpowder, but the flames were not yet high enough. Anne Askew sat slumped in her chair; she seemed to have lost consciousness. I felt sick. I looked across at the row of faces under the canopy; all were set in stern, frowning expressions. Then I saw the thin young lawyer looking at me again from the crowd. I thought uneasily, Who is he? What does he want?

Coleswyn groaned suddenly and slumped in his saddle. I reached out a hand to steady him. He took a deep breath and sat upright. 'Courage, Brother,' I said gently.

He looked at me, his face pale and beaded with sweat. 'You realize any of us may come to this now?' he whispered.

I saw that some of the crowd had turned away; one or two children were crying, overcome by the horrific scene. I noticed that one of the Dutch merchants had pulled out a tiny prayer book and was holding it open in his hands, reciting quietly. But other people were laughing and joking. There was a smell of smoke round Smithfield now as well as the stink of the crowd, and something else, familiar

from the kitchen: the smell of roasting meat. Against my will I looked again at the stakes. The flames had reached higher; the victims' lower bodies were blackened, white bone showing through here and there, their upper parts red with blood as the flames licked at them. I saw with horror that Anne Askew had regained consciousness; making piteous groans as her shift burned away.

She began to shout something but then the flames reached the gunpowder bag and her head exploded, blood and bone and brains flying and falling, hissing, into the fire.

Chapter Two

As soon as it was over, I rode away with Coleswyn. The three men at the stakes had taken longer than Anne Askew to die. They had been chained standing rather than sitting and it was another half-hour before the flames reached the bag of gunpowder round the last man's neck. I had shut my eyes for much of the time; if only I could have shut my ears.

We said little as we rode along Chick Lane, heading for the Inns of Court. Eventually Coleswyn broke the uneasy silence. 'I spoke too freely of my private thoughts, Brother Shardlake. I know one must be careful.'

'No matter,' I answered. 'Hard to keep one's counsel when watching such a thing.' I remembered his comment that any of us could come to this, and wondered whether he had links with the radicals. I changed the subject. 'I am seeing my client Mistress Slanning this afternoon. There will be much for both of us to do before the case comes on in September.'

Coleswyn gave an ironic bark of laughter. 'That there will.' He gave me a look which showed his view of the case to be the same as mine.

We had reached Saffron Hill, where our ways divided if he were to go to Gray's Inn and I to Lincoln's Inn. I did not feel ready to go back to work yet. I said, 'Will you come for a mug of beer, Brother?'

Coleswyn shook his head. 'Thank you, but I could not. I will return to the Inn, try to lose myself in some work. God give you good morrow.'

'And you, Brother.'

I watched him ride away, slumped a little over his horse. I rode down to Holborn, pulling off my cap and coif as I went.

✝

I found a quiet inn by St Andrew's Church; it would probably fill up when the crowds left Smithfield, but for now only a few old men sat at the tables. I bought a mug of beer and found a secluded corner. The ale was poor, cloudy stuff, a husk floating on the surface.

My mind turned, as it often did, to the Queen. I remembered when I had first met her, when she was still Lady Latimer. My feelings for her had not diminished. I told myself it was ridiculous, foolish, fantasy; I should find myself a woman of my own status before I grew too old. I hoped she possessed none of the books on the new forbidden list. The list was long – Luther, Tyndale, Coverdale, and of course John Bale, whose scurrilous new book about the old monks and nuns, *Acts of the English Votaries*, was circulating widely among the London apprentices. I had old copies of Tyndale and Coverdale myself; an amnesty for surrendering them expired in three weeks. Safer to burn them quietly in the garden, I thought.

A little group of men came in. 'Glad to be out of that smell,' one said.

''Tis better than the stink of Lutheranism,' another growled.

'Luther's dead and buried, and Askew and the rest gone now too.'

'There's plenty more lurking in the shadows.'

'Come on, have a drink. Have they any pies?'

I decided it was time to leave. I drained my mug and went outside. I had missed lunch, but the thought of food revolted me.

✝

I rode back under the Great Gatehouse of Lincoln's Inn, once again in my robe, coif and cap. I left Genesis at the stables and crossed to my chambers. To my surprise, there was a flurry of activity in the outer office. All three of my employees – my assistant Jack Barak, my

clerk John Skelly, and my new pupil, Nicholas Overton – were searching frantically among the papers on the desks and shelves.

'God's pestilence!' Barak was shouting at Nicholas as he untied the ribbon from a brief and began riffling through the papers. 'Can't you even remember when you last saw it?'

Nicholas turned from searching through another pile of papers, the freckled face beneath his unruly light-red hair downcast. 'It was two days ago, maybe three. I've been given so many conveyances to look at.'

Skelly studied Nicholas through his glasses. It was a mild look but his voice was strained as he said, 'If you could just remember, Master Overton, it would narrow the search a bit.'

'What is going on?' I asked from the doorway. They had been so busy with their frantic search they had not seen me come in. Barak turned to me, his face an angry red above his new beard.

'Master Nicholas has lost the Carlingford conveyance! All the evidence that Carlingford owns his land, which needs to be presented in court on the first day of the term! Dozy beanpole,' he muttered. 'Bungling idiot!'

Nicholas's face reddened as he looked at me. 'I did not mean to.'

I sighed. I had taken Nicholas on two months before, at the request of a barrister friend to whom I owed a favour, and half-regretted it. Nicholas was the son of a gentry family in Lincolnshire, who at twenty-one had, apparently, failed to settle to anything, and agreed to spend a year or two at Lincoln's Inn, learning the ways of the law to help him run his father's estate. My friend had hinted that there had been some disagreement between Nicholas and his family, but insisted he was a good lad. Indeed he was good-natured, but irresponsible. Like most other such young gentlemen he spent much of his time exploring the fleshpots of London; already he had been in trouble for getting into a sword fight with another student over a prostitute. The King had closed the Southwark brothels that spring, with the result that more prostitutes had crossed over the river to the city. Most gentry lads learned sword fighting, and their status allowed

them to wear swords in the city, but the taverns were not the place to show off such skills. And a sharp sword was the deadliest of weapons, especially in a careless hand.

I looked at his tall, rangy form, noticing that under his short student's robe he wore a green doublet slashed so the lining of fine yellow damask showed through, contrary to the Inn regulations that students must wear modest dress.

'Keep looking, but calm down, Nicholas,' I said. 'You did not take the conveyance out of this office?' I asked sharply,

'No, Master Shardlake. I know that is not permitted.' He had a cultivated voice with an undertone of a Lincolnshire burr. His face, long-nosed and round-chinned, was distressed.

'Nor is wearing a slashed silken doublet. Do you want to get into trouble with the Treasurer? When you have found the conveyance, go home and change it.'

'Yes, sir,' he answered humbly.

'And when Mistress Slanning comes this afternoon, I want you to sit in on the interview, and take notes.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And if that conveyance still isn't found, stay late to find it.'

'Is the burning over?' Skelly ventured hesitantly.

'Yes. But I do not want to talk about it.'

Barak looked up. 'I have a couple of pieces of news for you. Good news, but private.'

'I could do with some.'

'Thought you might,' he answered sympathetically.

'Come into the office.'

He followed me through to my private quarters, with its mullioned window overlooking Gatehouse Court. I threw off my robe and cap and sat behind my desk, Barak taking the chair opposite. I noticed there were odd flecks of grey in his dark-brown beard, though none yet in his hair. Barak was thirty-four now, a decade younger than me, his once lean features filling out.

He said, 'That arsehole young Overton will be the death of me. It's like trying to supervise a monkey.'

I smiled. 'Fie, he's not stupid. He did a good summary of the Bennett case papers for me last week. He just needs to get himself organized.'

Barak grunted. 'Glad you told him off about his clothes. Wish I could afford silk doublets these days.'

'He's young, a bit irresponsible.' I smiled wryly. 'As you were when first we met. At least Nicholas does not swear like a soldier.'

Barak grunted, then looked at me seriously. 'What was it like? The burning?'

'Horrible beyond description. But everyone played their part,' I added bitterly. 'The crowd, the city officials and Privy Councillors sitting on their stage. There was a little fight at one point, but the soldiers quelled it quickly. Those poor people died horribly, but well.'

Barak shook his head. 'Why couldn't they recant?'

'I suppose they thought recantation would damn them.' I sighed. 'Well, what are these pieces of good news?'

'Here's the first. It was delivered this morning.' Barak's hand went to the purse at his waist. He pulled out three bright, buttery gold sovereigns and laid them on the table, together with a folded piece of paper.

I looked at them. 'An overdue fee?'

'You could say that. Look at the note.'

I took the paper and opened it. Within was a scrawled message in a very shaky hand: '*Here is the money I owe you for my keep from the time I stayed at Mistress Elliard's. I am sore ill and would welcome a visit from you. Your brother in the law, Stephen Bealknap.*'

Barak smiled. 'Your mouth's fallen open. Not surprised, mine did too.'

I picked up the sovereigns and looked at them closely, lest this was some sort of jest. But they were good golden coins, from before the debasement, showing the young King on one side and the Tudor Rose on the other. It was almost beyond belief. Stephen Bealknap was

famous not only as a man without scruples, personal or professional, but also as a miser who was said to have a fortune hidden in a chest in his chambers which he sat looking through at night. He had amassed his wealth through all manner of dirty dealings over the years, some against me, and also by making it a point of pride never to pay a debt if he could avoid it. It was three years since, in a fit of misplaced generosity, I had paid a friend to look after him when he was ill, and he had never reimbursed me.

'It's almost beyond belief.' I considered. 'And yet – remember, late last autumn and into the winter, before he became ill, he had behaved in an unexpectedly friendly manner for a while. He would come up to me in the courtyard and ask how I did, how my business was, as though he were a friend, or would become one.' I remembered him approaching me across the quadrangle one mellow autumn day, his black gown flapping round his thin form, a sickly ingratiating smile on his pinched face. His wiry fair hair stuck out, as usual, at angles from his cap. 'Master Shardlake, how do you fare?'

'I was always short with him,' I told Barak. 'I did not trust him an inch, of course, I was sure there was something behind his concern. I think he was looking for work; I remembered him saying he was not getting as much from an old client. And he never mentioned the money he owed. He got the message after a while, and went back to ignoring me.' I frowned. 'Even back then he looked tired, not well. Perhaps that was why he was losing business; his sharpness was going.'

'Maybe he's truly repenting his sins, if he is as ill as they say.'

'A growth in his guts, isn't it? He's been ill a couple months now, hasn't he? I haven't seen him outside. Who delivered the note?'

'An old woman. She said she's nursing him.'

'By Mary,' I said. 'Bealknap, paying a debt and asking for a visit?'

'Will you go and see him?'

'In charity, I suppose I must.' I shook my head in wonderment. 'What is your other piece of news? After this, were you to tell me frogs were flying over London I do not think it would surprise me.'

He smiled again, a happy smile that softened his features. 'Nay, this is a surprise but not a wonder. Tamasin is expecting again.'

I leaned over and grasped his hand. 'That is good news. I know you wanted another.'

'Yes. A little brother or sister for Georgie. January, we're told.'

'Wonderful, Jack; my congratulations. We must celebrate.'

'We're not telling the world just yet. But you're coming to the little gathering we're having for Georgie's first birthday, on the twenty-seventh? We'll announce it then. Will you ask the Old Moor to come? He looked after Tamasin well when she was expecting Georgie.'

'Guy is coming to dinner tonight. I shall ask him then.'

'Good.' Barak leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his stomach, contentment on his face. His and Tamasin's first child had died, and I had feared the misery would tear them apart forever, but last year she had borne a healthy son. And expecting another child so soon. I thought how settled Barak was now, how different from the madding fellow, who carried out questionable missions for Thomas Cromwell, I had first met six years before. 'I feel cheered,' I said quietly. 'I think perhaps some good things may come in this world after all.'

'Are you to report back to Treasurer Rowland about the burnings?'

'Yes. I will reassure him my presence as representative of the Inn was noted.' I raised my eyebrows. 'By Richard Rich, among others.'

Barak also raised his eyebrows. 'That rogue was there?'

'Yes. I haven't seen him in a year. But he remembered me, of course. He gave me a nasty glance.'

'He can do no more. You have too much on him.'

'He had a worried look about him. I wonder why. I thought he was riding high these days, aligning himself with Gardiner and the conservatives.' I looked at Barak. 'Do you still keep in touch with your friends, from the days when you worked for Cromwell? Heard any gossip?'

'I go to the old taverns occasionally, when Tamasin lets me. But I hear little. And before you ask, nothing about the Queen.'

'Those rumours that Anne Askew was tortured in the Tower were true,' I said. 'She had to be carried to the stake on a chair.'

'Poor creature.' Barak stroked his beard thoughtfully. 'I wonder how that information got out. A radical sympathizer working in the Tower, it has to be. But all I hear from my old friends is that Bishop Gardiner has the King's ear now, and that's common knowledge. I don't suppose Archbishop Cranmer was at the burning?'

'No. He's keeping safely out of the way at Canterbury, I'd guess.' I shook my head. 'I wonder he has survived so long. By the by, there was a young lawyer at the burning, with some gentlemen, who kept staring at me. Small and thin, brown hair and a little beard. I wondered who he might be.'

'Probably someone who will be your opponent in a case next term, sizing up the opposition.'

'Maybe.' I fingered the coins on the desk.

'Don't keep thinking everyone's after you,' Barak said quietly.

'Ay, 'tis a fault. But is it any wonder, after these last few years?' I sighed. 'By the way, I met Brother Coleswyn at the burning, he was made to go and represent Gray's Inn. He's a decent fellow.'

'Unlike his client then, or yours. Serve that long lad Nicholas right to have to sit in with that old Slanning beldame this afternoon.'

I smiled. 'Yes, that was my thought, too. Well, go and see if he's found the conveyance yet.'

Barak rose. 'I'll kick his arse if he hasn't, gentleman or no . . .'

He left me fingering the coins. I looked at the note. I could not help but think, What is Bealknap up to now?

✝

Mistress Isabel Slanning arrived punctually at three. Nicholas, now in a more sober doublet of light black wool, sat beside me with a quill and paper. He had, fortunately for him, found the missing conveyance whilst I had been talking to Barak.

Skelly showed Mistress Slanning in, a little apprehensively. She was a tall, thin widow in her fifties, though with her lined face, thin

pursed mouth and habitual frown she looked older. I had seen her brother, Edward Cotterstoke, at hearings in court last term, and it had amazed me how much he resembled her in form and face, apart from a little grey beard. Mistress Slanning wore a violet dress of fine wool with a fashionable turned-up collar enclosing her thin neck, and a box hood lined with little pearls. She was a wealthy woman; her late husband had been a successful haberdasher, and like many rich merchants' widows she adopted an air of authority that would have been thought unbefitting in a woman of lower rank. She greeted me coldly, ignoring Nicholas.

She was, as ever, straight to the point. 'Well, Master Shardlake, what news? I expect that wretch Edward is trying to delay the case again?' Her large brown eyes were accusing.

'No, madam, the matter is listed for King's Bench in September.' I bade her sit, wondering again why she and her brother hated each other so. They were themselves the children of a merchant, a prosperous corn chandler. He had died quite young and their mother had remarried, their stepfather taking over the business, although he himself died suddenly a year later, upon which old Mrs Deborah Cotterstoke had sold the chandlery and lived out the rest of her long life on the considerable proceeds. She had never remarried, and had died the previous year, aged eighty, after a paralytic seizure. A priest had made her Will for her on her deathbed. Most of it was straightforward: her money was split equally between her two children; the large house she lived in near Chandler's Hall was to be sold and the proceeds, again, divided equally. Edward, like Isabel, was moderately wealthy – he was a senior clerk at the Guildhall – and for both of them, their mother's estate would make them richer. The problem had arisen when the Will came to specify the disposition of the house's contents. All the furniture was to go to Edward. However, all wall hangings, tapestries and paintings, '*of all description within the house, of whatever nature and wheresoever they may be and however fixed*', were left to Isabel. It was an unusual wording, but I had taken a deposition from the priest who made the Will, and the two servants of the old lady

who witnessed it, and they had been definite that Mrs Cotterstoke, who though near death was still of sound mind, had insisted on those exact words.

They had led us to where we were now. Old Mrs Cotterstoke's first husband, the children's father, had had an interest in paintings and artworks, and the house was full of fine tapestries, several portraits and, best of all, a large wall painting in the dining room, painted directly onto the plaster. I had visited the house, empty now save for an old servant kept on as a watchman, and seen it. I appreciated painting – I had drawn and painted myself in my younger days – and this example was especially fine. Made nearly fifty years before, in the old King's reign, it depicted a family scene: a young Mrs Cotterstoke with her husband, who wore the robes of his trade and the high hat of the time, seated with Edward and Isabel, young children, in that very room. The faces of the sitters, like the summer flowers on the table, and the window with its view of the London street beyond, were exquisitely drawn; old Mrs Cotterstoke had kept it regularly maintained and the colours were as bright as ever. It would be an asset when the house was sold. As it was painted directly onto the wall, at law the painting was a fixture, but the peculiar wording of the old lady's Will had meant Isabel had argued that it was rightfully hers, and should be professionally removed, taking down the wall if need be – which, though it was not a supporting wall, would be almost impossible to do without damaging the painting. Edward had refused, insisting the picture was a fixture and must remain with the house. Disputes over bequests concerning land – and the house counted as land – were dealt with by the Court of King's Bench, but those concerning chattels – and Isabel argued the painting was a chattel – remained under the old ecclesiastical jurisdiction and were heard by the Bishop's Court. Thus poor Coleswyn and I were in the middle of arguments about which court should have jurisdiction before we could even come to the issue of the Will. In the last few months the Bishop's Court had ruled that the painting was a chattel. Isabel had promptly instructed me to apply to King's Bench which, ever eager to assert its authority over the

ecclesiastical courts, had ruled that the matter came within its jurisdiction and set a separate hearing for the autumn. Thus the case was batted to and fro like a tennis ball, with all the estate's assets tied up.

'That brother of mine will try to have the case delayed again, you wait and see,' Isabel said, in her customary self-righteous tone. 'He's trying to wear me down, but he won't. With that lawyer of his. He's a tricky, deceitful one.' Her voice rose indignantly, as it usually did after a couple of sentences.

'Master Coleswyn has behaved quite straightforwardly on this matter,' I answered sharply. 'Yes, he has tried to have the matter postponed, but defendants' lawyers ever will. He must act on his client's instructions, as I must on yours.' Next to me Nicholas scribbled away, his long slim fingers moving fast over the page. At least he had had a good education and wrote in a decent secretary hand.

Isabel bridled. 'That Coleswyn's a Protestant heretic, like my brother. They both go to St Jude's, where all images are down and the priest serves them at a bare table.' It was yet another bone of contention between the siblings that Isabel remained a proud traditionalist while her brother was a reformer. 'That priest should be burned,' she continued, 'like the Askew woman and her confederates.'

'Were you at the burning this morning, Mistress Slanning?' I asked quietly. I had not seen her.

She wrinkled her nose. 'I would not go to such a spectacle. But they deserved it.'

I saw Nicholas's lips set hard. He never spoke of religion; in that regard at least he was a sensible lad. Changing the subject, I said, 'Mistress Slanning, when we go to court the outcome of the case is by no means certain. This is a very unusual matter.'

She said firmly, 'Justice will prevail. And I know your skills, Master Shardlake. That is why I employed a serjeant at law to represent me. I have always loved that picture.' A touch of emotion entered her voice. 'It is the only memento I have of my dear father.'

'I would not be honest if I put your chances higher than fifty–fifty. Much will depend on the testimony of the expert witnesses.' At the

last hearing it had been agreed that each side would instruct an expert, taken from a list of members of the Carpenters' Guild, who would report to the court on whether and how the painting could be removed. 'Have you looked at the list I gave you?'

She waved a dismissive hand. 'I know none of those people. You must recommend a man who will report the painting can easily be taken down. There must be someone who would do that for a high enough fee. Whatever it is, I will pay it.'

'A sword for hire,' I replied flatly. There were, of course, expert witnesses who would swear black was white for a high enough fee.

'Exactly.'

'The problem with such people, Mistress Slanning, is that the courts know the experts and would give little credibility to such a man. We would be much better off instructing someone whom the courts know as honest.'

'And what if he reports back to you against us?'

'Then, Mistress Slanning, we shall have to think again.'

Isabel frowned, her eyes turning to narrow little slits. 'If that happens, then we will instruct one of these "swords for hire", as that strange expression puts it.' She looked at me haughtily, as though it were I, not her, who had suggested deceiving the court.

I took my copy of the list from the desk. 'I would suggest instructing Master Jackaby. I have dealt with him before, he is well respected.'

'No,' she said. 'I have been consulting the list. There is a Master Adam here, he was Chairman of his Guild; if there is a way to get that painting off – which I am sure there is – he will find it.'

'I think Master Jackaby would be better. He has experience of litigation.'

'No,' she repeated decisively. 'I say Master Adam. I have prayed on the matter and believe he is the right man to get justice for me.'

I looked at her. *Prayed on it?* Did she think God concerned himself with malicious legal cases? But her haughty expression and the firm set of her mouth told me she would not be moved. 'Very well,' I said. She nodded imperiously. 'But remember, Mistress Slanning, he is your

choice. I know nothing of him. I will arrange a date when the two experts can meet together at the house. As soon as possible.'

'Could they not visit separately?'

'The court would not like that.'

She frowned. 'The court, the court – it is my case that matters.' She took a deep breath. 'Well, if I lose in King's Bench I shall appeal to Chancery.'

'So, probably, will your brother if he loses.' I wondered again at the bitterness between them. It went back a long way, I knew that; they had not spoken in years. Isabel would refer contemptuously to how her brother could have been an alderman by now if he had made the effort. And I wondered again, why had the mother insisted on using that wording in her Will. It was almost as though she had wished to set her children against each other.

'You have seen my last bill of costs, Mistress Slanning?' I asked.

'And paid it at once, Serjeant Shardlake.' She tilted her chin proudly. It was true; she always settled immediately, without question. She was no Bealknap.

'I know, madam, and I am grateful. But if this matter goes on into next year, into Chancery, the costs will grow and grow.'

'Then you must make Edward pay them all.'

'Normally in probate matters costs are taken out of the estate. And remember, with the value of money falling, the house and your mother's money are going down in value too. Would it not be more sensible, more practical, to try and find some settlement now?'

She bridled. 'Sir, you are my lawyer. You should be advising me on how I can win, surely, not encouraging me to end the matter without a clear victory.' Her voice had risen again; I kept mine deliberately low.

'Many people settle when the outcome is uncertain and costly. As it is here. I have been thinking. Have you ever considered buying Edward's half-share of the house from him and selling your own residence? Then you could live in your mother's house and leave the wall painting intact, where it is.'

She gave a braying little laugh. 'Mother's house is far too big for me. I am a childless widow. I know she lived there alone but for her servants, but she was foolish; it is far too large for a woman by herself. Those great big rooms. No, I will have the painting down and in my hands. Removed by the best craftsmen in London. Whatever it costs. I shall make Edward pay in the end.'

I looked at her. I had had difficult, unreasonable clients in my time but Isabel Slanning's obstinacy and loathing of her brother were extraordinary. Yet she was an intelligent woman, no fool except to herself.

I had done my best. 'Very well,' I said. 'I think the next thing is to go over your most recent deposition. There are some things you say which I think would be better amended. We must show ourselves reasonable to the court. Calling your brother a pestilent knave will not help.'

'The court should know what he is like.'

'It will not help you.'

She shrugged, then nodded, adjusting her hood on her grey head. As I took out the deposition, Nicholas leaned forward and said, 'With your leave, sir, may I ask the good lady a question?'

I hesitated, but it was my duty to train him up. 'If you wish.'

He looked at Isabel. 'You said, madam, that your house is much smaller than your mother's.'

She nodded. 'It is. But it suffices for my needs.'

'With smaller rooms?'

'Yes, young man,' she answered tetchily. 'Smaller houses have smaller rooms. That is generally known.'

'But I understand the wall painting is in the largest room of your mother's house. So if you were able to remove the painting, where would you put it?'

Isabel's face reddened and she bridled. 'That is my business, boy,' she snapped. 'Yours is to take notes for your master.'

Nicholas blushed in turn and bent his head to his papers. But it had been a very good question.

We spent an hour going over the documents, and I managed to persuade Isabel to take various abusive comments about her brother out of her deposition. By the time it was over, my head was swimming with tiredness. Nicholas gathered up his notes and left the room, bowing to Isabel. She rose, quite energetic still, but frowning; she had looked angry ever since Nicholas's question. I got up to escort her outside, where a serving-man waited to take her home. She stood facing me – she was a tall woman and those determined, staring eyes looked straight into mine. 'I confess, Master Shardlake, sometimes I wonder if your heart is in this case as it should be. And that insolent boy . . .' She shook her head angrily.

'Madam,' I replied. 'You can rest assured I will argue your case with all the vigour I can muster. But it is my duty to explore alternatives with you, and warn you of the expense. Of course, if you are dissatisfied with me, and wish to transfer the case to another barrister—'

She shook her head grimly. 'No, sir, I shall stay with you, fear not.'

I had made the suggestion to her more than once before; but it was an odd fact that the most difficult and hostile clients were often the most reluctant to leave, as though they wanted to stay and plague you out of spite.

'Though . . .' She hesitated.

'Yes.'

'I think you do not truly understand my brother.' An expression I had not seen before crossed her face. Fear – there was no doubt about it, fear that twisted her face into new, different lines. For a second, Isabel was a frightened old woman.

'If you knew, sir,' she continued quietly. 'If you knew the terrible things my brother has done.'

'What do you mean?' I asked. 'Done to you?'

'And others.' A vicious hiss; the anger had returned.

'What things, madam?' I pressed.

But Isabel shook her head vigorously, as though trying to shake

unpleasant thoughts out of it. She took a deep breath. 'It does not matter. They have no bearing on this case.' Then she turned and walked rapidly from the room, the linen tappets of her hood swishing angrily behind her.