



# Sovereign

*C. J. Sansom*

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592 pages

Extrait

PENGUIN BOOKSSOVEREIGNAfter a career as an attorney, C. J. Sansom now writes full time.

*Dissolution*, which P. D. James picked as one of her five favorite mysteries in *The Wall Street Journal*; *Dark Fire*, winner of the CWA Ellis Peters Historical Dagger Award; *Sovereign*; and *Revelation*, a *USA Today* Best Book of the Year for 2009, are all available from Penguin. *Heartstone*, the fifth book in the Shardlake series, is now available from Viking. Sansom is also the author of the international bestseller *Winter in Madrid*, a novel set in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, also available from Penguin. A number one bestseller, his books have been sold in twenty-five countries. Sansom lives in Brighton, England. **Praise for *Sovereign***

“When historical fiction clicks, there’s nothing more gripping . . . and C. J. Sansom’s fantastic *Sovereign* left me positively baying for more. It’s that good. . . . Rebellion, plots, torture, fanaticism, a murder mystery and a real historical scandal come alive in this deeply satisfying novel.”—Deirdre Donahue, *USA Today*

“Even if heart-pounding suspense and stomach-tightening tension were all Sansom’s writing brought to the table, few would feel short-changed. Added to these gifts is a superb approximation of the crucible of fear, treachery and mistrust that was Tudor England. . . . A parchment-turner, and a regal one at that.”—*Sunday Times* (London)“*Sovereign*, following *Dissolution* and *Dark Fire*, is the best so far. . . . Sansom has the perfect mixture of novelistic passion and historical detail.”—Antonia Fraser, *Sunday Telegraph* (London)“Here is a world where life is short and brutal. Crows pick at the rotting corpses of felons left to dangle gibbets as a warning to others. Religious persecution and political conspiracy are everywhere and trust in anyone is a dangerous assumption. The foul-smelling, festering ulcer on the leg of the now grossly obese king, in Sansom’s melancholy vision, is an emblem of the larger cancer eating into the body of the politic of England.”—Desmond Ryan, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*“The best detective story I’ve read since *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* . . . [a] devilishly ingenious whodunit . . . Sansom’s description of the brutality of Tudor life is strong stuff. . . . He is a master storyteller.”—*The Guardian* (London)“*Dissolution* by C. J. Sansom was an impressive start to a historical fiction series featuring stubborn, admirable Tudor lawyer Matthew Shardlake. *Sovereign* is the third outing, and this series just gets better and better. . . . once again, testing problems for Shardlake are backed by some wonderful research.”—*The Bookseller*“This is an atmospheric thriller where velvet and silk hide putrescence, and beyond the grandeur of a Court lies a world where people rot alive or choke in deep mud. Sansom does a nice line in irony and savage humour, as well as the simple affections which keep people going in nightmarish times.”—Roz Kaveney, *Time Out* (London)“The skill with which C. J. Sansom is able to conjure up the sights, smells and sounds of Tudor England is unrivalled. . . . *Sovereign* is without doubt the best book I’ve read so far this year. In fact, it’s a real treasure.”—Emma Pinch, *The Birmingham Post*“Both marvelously exciting to read and a totally convincing evocation of England in the reign of Henry VIII.”—*The Spectator*

*About the Author and Praise for Sovereign*

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PageCopyrightDedication Chapter OneChapter TwoChapter ThreeChapter FourChapter FiveChapter SixChapter SevenChapter EightChapter NineChapter TenChapter ElevenChapter TwelveChapter ThirteenChapter FourteenChapter FifteenChapter SixteenChapter SeventeenChapter EighteenChapter NineteenChapter TwentyChapter Twenty-oneChapter Twenty-twoChapter Twenty-threeChapter Twenty-fourChapter Twenty-fiveChapter Twenty-sixChapter Twenty-sevenChapter Twenty-eightChapter Twenty-nineChapter ThirtyChapter Thirty-oneChapter Thirty-twoChapter Thirty-threeChapter Thirty-fourChapter Thirty-fiveChapter Thirty-sixChapter Thirty-sevenChapter Thirty-eightChapter Thirty-nineChapter FortyChapter Forty-oneChapter Forty-twoChapter Forty-threeChapter Forty-fourChapter Forty-fiveChapter Forty-sixChapter Forty-sevenChapter Forty-eightEpilogue *Historical Note*Acknowledgements

Select

*Bibliography*Chapter OneIT WAS DARK UNDER the trees, only a little moonlight penetrating the half-bare branches. The ground was thick with fallen leaves; the horses’ hooves made little sound and it was hard to tell whether we were still on the road. A wretched track, Barak had called it earlier, grumbling yet again

about the wildness of this barbarian land I had brought him to. I had not replied for I was bone-tired, my poor back sore and my legs in their heavy riding boots as stiff as boards. I was worried, too, for the strange mission that now lay close ahead was weighing on my mind. I lifted a hand from the reins and felt in my coat pocket for the Archbishop's seal, fingering it like a talisman and remembering Cranmer's promise: 'This will be safe enough, there will be no danger.' I had left much care behind me as well, for six days before, I had buried my father in Lichfield. Barak and I had had five days' hard riding northwards since then, the roads in a bad state after that wet summer of 1541. We rode into wild country where many villages still consisted of the old longhouses, people and cattle crammed together in hovels of thatch and sod. We left the Great North Road that afternoon at Flaxby. Barak wanted to rest the night at an inn, but I insisted we ride on, even if it took all night. I reminded him we were late, tomorrow would be the twelfth of September and we must reach our destination well before the King arrived. The road, though, had soon turned to mud, and as night fell we had left it for a drier track that veered to the northeast, through thick woodland and bare fields where pigs rooted among the patches of yellow stubble. The woodland turned to forest and for hours now we had been picking our way through it. We lost the main track once and it was the Devil's own job to find it again in the dark. All was silent save for the whisper of fallen leaves and an occasional clatter of brushwood as a boar or wildcat fled from us. The horses, laden with panniers containing our clothes and other necessities, were as exhausted as Barak and I. I could feel Genesis' tiredness and Sukey, Barak's normally energetic mare, was content to follow his slow pace. 'We're lost,' he grumbled. 'They said at the inn to follow the main path south through the forest. Anyway, it must be daylight soon,' I said. 'Then we'll see where we are.' Barak grunted wearily. 'Feels like we've ridden to Scotland. I wouldn't be surprised if we get taken for ransom.' I did not reply, tired at his complaining, and we plodded on silently. My mind went back to my father's funeral the week before. The little group of people round the grave, the coffin lowered into the earth. My cousin Bess, who had found him dead in his bed when she brought him a parcel of food. 'I wish I had known how ill he was,' I told her when we returned to the farm afterwards. 'It should have been me that looked after him.' She shook her head wearily. 'You were far away in London and we'd not seen you for over a year.' Her eyes had an accusing look. 'I have had difficult times of my own, Bess. But I would have come.' She sighed. 'It was old William Poer dying last autumn undid him. They'd wrestled to get a profit from the farm these last few years and he seemed to give up.' She paused. 'I said he should contact you, but he wouldn't. God sends us hard trials. The droughts last summer, now the floods this year. I think he was ashamed of the money troubles he'd got into. Then the fever took him.' I nodded. It had been a shock to learn that the farm where I had grown up, and which now was mine, was deep in debt. My father had been near seventy, his steward William not much younger. Their care of the land had not been all it should and the last few harvests had been poor. To get by he had taken a mortgage on the farm with a rich landowner in Lichfield. The first I knew of it was when the mortgagee wrote to me, immediately after Father's death, to say he doubted the value of the land would clear the debt. Like many gentry in those days he was seeking to increase his acreage for sheep, and granting mortgages to elderly farmers at exorbitant interest was one way of doing it. 'That bloodsucker Sir Henry,' I said bitterly to Bess. 'What will you do? Let the estate go insolvent?' 'No,' I said. 'I won't disgrace Father's name. I'll pay it.' I thought, God knows I owe him that. 'That is good.' I came to with a start at the sound of a protesting whicker behind me. Barak had pulled on Sukey's reins, bringing her to a stop. I halted too and turned uncomfortably in the saddle. His outline and that of the trees were sharper now, it was beginning to get light. He pointed in front of him. 'Look there!' Ahead the trees were thinning. In the distance I saw a red point of light, low in the sky. 'There!' I said triumphantly. 'The lamp we were told to look out for, that's set atop a church steeple to guide travellers. This is the Galtres Forest, like I said!' We rode out of the trees. A cold wind blew up from the river as the sky lightened. We wrapped our coats tighter round us and rode down, towards York. THE MAIN ROAD into the city was already filled with packhorses and carts loaded with food of every kind. There were enormous forester's carts too, whole tree-trunks dangling dangerously over their tails. Ahead the high city walls came into view, black with the smoke of hundreds of years, and beyond were the steeples of innumerable churches, all dominated by the soaring twin towers of York Minster. 'It's busy as Cheapside on a market-day,' I observed. 'All for the King's great

retinue.' We rode slowly on, the throng so dense we scarce managed a walking pace. I cast sidelong glances at my companion. It was over a year now since I had taken Jack Barak on as assistant in my barrister's practice after his old master's execution. A former child of the London streets who had ended up working on dubious missions for Thomas Cromwell, he was an unlikely choice, even though he was clever and had the good fortune to be literate. Yet I had not regretted it. He had adjusted well to working for me, doggedly learning the law. No one was better at keeping witnesses to the point while preparing affidavits, or ferreting out obscure facts, and his cynical, slantwise view of the system was a useful corrective to my own enthusiasm. These last few months, however, Barak had often seemed downcast, and sometimes would forget his place and become as oafish and mocking as when I had first met him. I feared he might be getting bored, and thought bringing him to York might rouse him out of himself. He was, though, full of a Londoner's prejudices against the north and northerners, and had complained and griped almost the whole way. Now he was looking dubiously around him, suspicious of everything. Houses appeared straggling along the road and then, to our right, a high old crenellated wall over which an enormous steeple was visible. Soldiers patrolled the top of the wall, wearing iron helmets and the white tunics with a red cross of royal longbowmen. Instead of bows and arrows, though, they carried swords and fearsome pikes, and some even bore long matchlock guns. A great sound of banging and hammering came from within. 'That must be the old St Mary's Abbey, where we'll be staying,' I said. 'Sounds like there's a lot of work going on to make it ready for the King.' 'Shall we go there now, leave our bags?' 'No, we should see Brother Wrenne first, then go to the castle.' 'To see the prisoner?' he asked quietly. 'Ay.' Barak looked up at the walls. 'St Mary's is guarded well.' 'The King will be none too sure of his welcome, after all that's happened up here.' I had spoken softly, but the man in front of us, walking beside a packhorse laden with grain, turned and gave us a sharp look. Barak raised his eyebrows and he looked away. I wondered if he was one of the Council of the North's informers; they would be working overtime in York now. 'Perhaps you should put on your lawyer's robe,' Barak suggested, nodding ahead. The carts and packmen were turning into the abbey through a large gate in the wall. Just past the gate the abbey wall met the city wall at right angles, hard by a fortress-like gatehouse decorated with the York coat of arms, five white lions against a red background. More guards were posted there, holding pikes and wearing steel helmets and breastplates. Beyond the wall, the Minster towers were huge now against the grey sky. 'I'm not fetching it out of my pack, I'm too tired.' I patted my coat pocket. 'I've got the Chamberlain's authority here.' Archbishop Cranmer's seal was there too; but that was only to be shown to one person. I stared ahead, at something I had been told to expect yet which still made me shudder: four heads fixed to tall poles, boiled and black and half eaten by crows. I knew that twelve of the rebel conspirators arrested that spring had been executed in York, their heads and quarters set on all the city gates as a warning to others. We halted at the end of a little queue, the horses' heads drooping with tiredness. The guards had stopped a poorly dressed man and were questioning him roughly about his business in the city. 'I wish he'd hurry up,' Barak whispered. 'I'm starving.' 'I know. Come on, it's us next.' One of the guards grabbed Genesis' reins while another asked my business. He had a southern accent and a hard, lined face. I showed him my letter of authority. 'King's lawyer?' he asked. 'Ay. And my assistant. Here to help with the pleas before His Majesty.' 'It's a firm hand they need up here,' he said. He rolled the paper up and waved us on. As we rode under the barbican I recoiled from the sight of a great hank of flesh nailed to the gate, buzzing with flies. 'Rebel's meat,' Barak said with a grimace. 'Ay.' I shook my head at the tangles of fate. But for the conspiracy that spring I should not be here, and nor would the King be making his Progress to the North, the largest and most splendid ever seen in England. We rode under the gate, the horses' hooves making a sudden clatter inside the enclosed barbican, and through into the city. BEYOND THE GATE was a narrow street of three-storey houses with overhanging eaves, full of shops with stalls set out in front, the traders sitting on their wooden blocks calling their wares. York struck me as a poor place. Some of the houses were in serious disrepair, black timbers showing through where plaster had fallen off, and the street was little more than a muddy lane. The jostling crowds made riding difficult, but I knew Master Wrenne, like all the city's senior lawyers, lived in the Minster Close and it was easy to find, for the Minster dominated the whole city. 'I'm hungry,' Barak observed. 'Let's get some breakfast.' Another high wall appeared ahead of

us; York seemed a city of walls. Behind it the Minster loomed. Ahead was a large open space crowded with market stalls under brightly striped awnings that flapped in the cool damp breeze. Heavy-skirted goodwives argued with stallholders while artisans in the bright livery of their guilds looked down their noses at the stalls' contents, and dogs and ragged children dived for scraps. I saw most of the people had patched clothes and worn-looking clogs. Watchmen in livery bearing the city arms stood about, observing the crowds. A group of tall, yellow-haired men with dogs led a flock of odd-looking sheep with black faces round the edge of the market. I looked curiously at their weather-beaten faces and heavy woollen coats; these must be the legendary Dalesmen who had formed the backbone of the rebellion five years before. In contrast, black-robed clerics and chantry priests in their brown hoods were passing in and out of a gate in the wall that led into the Minster precinct. Barak had ridden to a pie-stall a few paces off. He leaned from his horse and asked how much for two mutton pies. The stallholder stared at him, not understanding his London accent. 'Southrons?' he grunted. 'Ay. We're hungry. How much—for-two—mutton pies?' Barak spoke loudly and slowly, as though to an idiot. The stallholder glared at him. 'Is't my blame tha gabblest like a duck?' he asked. 'Tis you that grates your words like a knife scrating a pan.' Two big Dalesmen passing along the stalls paused and looked round. 'This southron dog giving thee trouble?' one asked the trader. The other reached out a big horny hand to Sukey's reins. 'Let go, churl,' Barak said threateningly. I was surprised by the anger that came into the man's face. 'Cocky southron knave. Tha thinkest since fat Harry is coming tha can insult us as tha likest.' 'Kiss my arse,' Barak said, looking at the man steadily. The Dalesman reached a hand to his sword; Barak's hand darted to his own scabbard. I forced a way through the crowd. 'Excuse us, sir,' I said soothingly, though my heart beat fast. 'My man meant no harm. We've had a hard ride—' The man gave me a look of disgust. 'A crookback lord, eh? Come here on tha fine hoss to cozen us out of what little money we have left up here?' He began to draw his sword, then stopped as a pike was jabbed into his chest. Two of the city guards, scenting trouble, had hurried over. 'Swords away!' one snapped, his pike held over the Dalesman's heart, while the other did the same to Barak. A crowd began to gather. 'What's this hubbleshoo?' the guard snapped. 'That southron insulted the stallholder,' someone called. The guard nodded. He was stocky, middle-aged, with sharp eyes. 'They've no manners, the southrons,' he said loudly. 'Got to expect that, maister.' There was a laugh from the crowd; a bystander clapped. 'We only want a couple of bleeding pies,' Barak said. The guard nodded at the stallholder. 'Gi'e him two pies.' The man handed two mutton pies up to Barak. 'A tanner,' he said. 'A what?' The stallholder raised his eyes to heaven. 'Sixpence.' 'For two pies?' Barak asked incredulously. 'Pay him,' the guard snapped. Barak hesitated and I hastily passed over the coins. The stallholder bit them ostentatiously before slipping them in his purse. The guard leaned close to me. 'Now, sir, shift. And tell thy man to watch his manners. Tha doesn't want trouble for't King's visit, hey?' He raised his eyebrows, and watched as Barak and I rode back to the gates to the precinct. We dismounted stiffly at a bench set against the wall, tied up the horses and sat down. 'God's nails, my legs are sore,' Barak said. 'Mine too.' They felt as though they did not belong to me, and my back ached horribly. Barak bit into the pie. 'This is good,' he said in tones of surprise. I lowered my voice. 'You must watch what you say. You know they don't like us up here.' 'The feeling's mutual. Arseholes.' He glared threateningly in the direction of the stallholder. 'Listen,' I said quietly. 'They're trying to keep everything calm. If you treat people like you did those folk you don't just risk a sword in the guts for both of us, but trouble for the Progress. Is that what you want?' He did not reply, frowning at his feet. 'What's the matter with you these days?' I asked. 'You've been Tom Touchy for weeks. You used to be able to keep that sharp tongue of yours in check. You got me in trouble last month, calling Judge Jackson a blear-eyed old caterpillar within his hearing.' He gave me one of his sudden wicked grins. 'You know he is.' I was not to be laughed off. 'What's amiss, Jack?' He shrugged. 'Nothing. I just don't like being up here among these barbarian wantwits.' He looked at me directly. 'I'm sorry I made trouble. I'll take care.' Apologies did not come easily to Barak, and I nodded in acknowledgement. But there was more to his mood than dislike of the north, I was sure. I turned thoughtfully to my pie. Barak looked over the marketplace with his sharp dark eyes. 'They're a poor-looking lot,' he observed. 'Trade's been bad here for years. And the dissolution of the monasteries has made things worse. There was a lot of monkish property here. Three or four years ago there

would have been many monks' and friars' robes among that crowd.' 'Well, that's all done with.' Barak finished his pie, rubbing a hand across his mouth. I rose stiffly. 'Let's find Wrenne. Get our instructions.' 'D'you think we'll get to see the King when he comes?' Barak asked. 'Close to?' 'It's possible.' He blew out his cheeks. I was glad to see I was not the only one intimidated by that prospect. 'And there is an old enemy in his train,' I added, 'that we'd better avoid.' He turned sharply. 'Who?' 'Sir Richard Rich. He'll be arriving with the King and the Privy Council. Cranmer told me. So like I said, take care. Don't draw attention to us. We should try to escape notice, so far as we can.' We untied the horses and led them to the gate, where another guard with a pike barred our way. I produced my letter again, and he raised the weapon to let us pass through. The great Minster reared up before us. Chapter Two 'IT'S BIG ENOUGH,' Barak said. We were in a wide paved enclosure with buildings round the edges, all overshadowed by the Minster. 'The greatest building in the north. It must be near as big as St Paul's.' I looked at the giant entrance doors under the intricately decorated Gothic arch, where men of business stood talking. Below them, on the stairs, a crowd of beggars sat with their alms bowls. I was tempted to look inside but turned away, for we should have been at Wrenne's house yesterday. I remembered the directions I had been given, and noted a building with the royal arms above the door. 'It's just past there,' I said. We led the horses across the courtyard, careful not to slip on the leaves that had fallen from the trees planted round the close. 'D'you know what manner of man this Wrenne is?' Barak asked. 'Only that he's a well-known barrister in York and has done much official work. He's well stricken in years, I believe.' 'Let's hope he's not some old nid-nod that's beyond the work.' 'He must be competent to be organizing the pleas to the King. Trusted, too.' We walked the horses into a street of old houses packed closely together. I had been told to seek the corner house on the right, and this proved to be a tall building, very ancient-looking. I knocked. Shuffling footsteps sounded within and the door was opened by an aged dame with a round wrinkled face framed by a white coif. She looked at me sourly. 'Ay?' 'Master Wrenne's house?' 'Ar't gentlemen from London?' I raised my eyebrows a little at her lack of deference. 'Yes. I am Matthew Shardlake. This is my assistant, Master Barak.' 'We expected thee yesterday. Poor maister's been fretting.' 'We got lost in Galtres Forest.' 'Tha's not t'first to do that.' I nodded at the horses. 'We and our mounts are tired.' 'Bone-weary,' Barak added pointedly. 'Tha'd best come in then. I'll get the boy to stable thy horses and wash them down.' 'I should be grateful.' 'Maister Wrenne's out on business, but he'll be back soon. I suppose tha'd like some food.' 'Thank you.' The pie had merely taken the edge from my hunger. The old woman turned and, shuffling slowly, led us into a high central hall built in the old style with a hearth in the centre of the floor. A fire of coppice-wood was lit and smoke ascended lazily to the chimney-hole high in the black rafters. Good silver plate was displayed on the buffet, but the curtain behind the table that stood on a dais at the head of the room looked dusty. A peregrine falcon with magnificent grey plumage stood on a perch near the fire. It turned huge predatory eyes on us as I stared at the piles of books that lay everywhere, on chairs, on the oak chest and set against the walls, in stacks that looked ready to topple over. I had never seen so many books in one place outside a library. 'Your master is fond of books,' I observed. 'That he is,' the old woman answered. 'I'll get tha some pottage.' She shuffled away. 'Some beer would be welcome as well,' I called after her. Barak plumped down on a settle covered with a thick sheepskin rug and cushions. I picked up a large old volume bound in calfskin. I opened it, then raised my eyebrows. 'God's nails. This is one of the old hand-illustrated books the monks made.' I flicked through the pages. It was a copy of Bede's History, with beautiful calligraphy and illustrations. 'I thought they'd all gone to the fire,' Barak observed. 'He should be careful.' 'Yes, he should. Not a reformer, then.' I replaced the book, coughing as a little cloud of dust rose up. 'Jesu, that housekeeper skimps her labours.' 'Looks like she's past it to me. But maybe she's more than a housekeeper, if he's old too. Don't think much of his taste if she is.' Barak settled himself on the cushions and closed his eyes. I sat down in an armchair and tried to arrange my stiff legs comfortably. I felt my own eyes closing, coming to with a start as the old woman reappeared, bearing two bowls of steaming pease pottage and two flagons of beer on a tray. We set to eagerly. The pottage was tasteless and unspiced, but filling. Afterwards Barak closed his eyes again. I thought of nudging him awake, for it was ill-mannered to go to sleep in our host's hall, but I knew how tired he was. It was peaceful there, the noise from the close muffled by the windows of mullioned glass,

the fire crackling gently. I closed my eyes too. My hand brushed the pocket where Archbishop Cranmer's seal lay, and I found myself thinking back a couple of weeks, to when the trail of events that had led me here began. THE LAST YEAR HAD BEEN a difficult time for me. Since Thomas Cromwell's fall, those associated with him could be dangerous to know, and a number of clients had withdrawn their work. And I had gone against convention by representing the London Guildhall in a case against a fellow barrister of Lincoln's Inn. Stephen Bealknap may have been one of the greatest rogues God ever set on earth, but I had still offended against professional solidarity in acting against him, and some fellow barristers who might once have put cases my way now avoided me. Things were not made easier by the fact that Bealknap had one of the most powerful patrons in the land behind him: Sir Richard Rich, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations. Then, at the beginning of September, had come the news of my father's death. I was still in a state of shock and grief when, going into chambers one morning a few days later, I found Barak waiting for me, a worried expression on his face. 'Sir, I must speak with you.' He glanced at my clerk Skelly, who sat copying, his glasses glinting in the light from the window, then jerked his head towards my office. I nodded. 'A messenger came while you were out,' he said when the door was closed behind us. 'From Lambeth Palace. Archbishop Cranmer himself wants to see you there at eight tonight.' I sat down heavily. 'I thought I was done with visits to great men.' I looked at Barak sharply, for our assignment for Cromwell the year before had made us some powerful enemies. 'Could it mean danger for us? Have you heard any gossip?' I knew he still had contacts in the underside of the King's court. He shook his head. 'Nothing since I was told we were safe.' I sighed deeply. 'Well then, I shall have to see.' That day it was hard to keep my mind on my work. I left early, to go home for dinner. As I walked towards the gate I saw, coming in, a tall, thin figure in a fine silk robe, blond curls peeping out from under his cap. Stephen Bealknap. The most crooked and covetous lawyer I ever met. He bowed to me. 'Brother Bealknap,' I said politely, as the conventions of the inn demanded. 'Brother Shardlake. I hear there is no date for the hearing of our case in Chancery. They are so slow.' He shook his head, though I knew he welcomed the delay. The case involved a little dissolved friary he had bought near the Cripplegate. He had converted it into tumbledown tenements without proper sewage arrangements, causing great nuisance to his neighbours. The case turned on whether he was entitled to rely on the monastery's exemption from City Council regulations. He was backed by Richard Rich, as Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations that handled the property of the dissolved monasteries, because if he lost the case, the sale value of those properties would fall. 'The Six Clerks' Office seems unable to explain the delays,' I told Bealknap. I had sent Barak, who could be intimidating when he chose, to harangue them several times, but without result. 'Perhaps your friend Richard Rich may know.' I immediately wished I had not said that, for I was effectively accusing the Chancellor of Augmentations of corruption. The slip showed the strain I was under. Bealknap shook his head. 'You are a naughty fellow, Brother Shardlake, to allege such things. What would the Inn Treasurer say?' I bit my lip. 'I am sorry. I withdraw.' Bealknap grinned broadly, showing nasty yellow teeth. 'I forgive you, brother. When one has poor prospects in a case, sometimes the worry of it makes you forget what you say.' He bowed and walked on. I looked after him, wishing I could have planted a foot in his bony arse. AFTER DINNER I DONNED my lawyer's robe and took a wherry across the river and down to Lambeth Palace. London was quiet, as it had been all summer, for the King and his court were in the north of England. In the spring news had come of a fresh rebellion nipped in the bud in Yorkshire, and the King had decided to take a great progress up to awe the northmen. They said he and his councillors had been sore alarmed. As well they might be; five years before the whole north of England had risen in rebellion against the religious changes and the Pilgrimage of Grace, as the rebel army had called itself, had raised thirty thousand men. The King had gulled them into disbanding with false promises, then raised an army to strike them down. But all feared the north might rise again. Throughout June the King's purveyors had roamed all London, clearing shops and warehouses of food and other supplies, for they said three thousand people would be going north. It was hard to comprehend such numbers, the population of a small town. When they left at the end of June it was said the carts stretched along the road for over a mile, and London had been strangely quiet all through that wet summer. The boatman pulled past the Lollards' Tower at the north end of Lambeth Palace and in the failing daylight I saw a light shining from the window



of the prison atop the tower, where heretics in the Archbishop's custody were held. Cranmer's eye on London, some called it. We pulled up at the Great Stairs. A guard admitted me and led me across the courtyard to the Great Hall, where he left me alone. I stood staring up at the magnificent hammerbeam roof. A black-robed clerk approached, soft footed. 'The Archbishop will see you now,' he said quietly. He led me into a warren of dim corridors, his footsteps pattering lightly on the rush matting. I was taken to a small, low-ceilinged study. Thomas Cranmer sat behind a desk, reading papers by the light of a sconce of candles set beside him. A fire burned energetically in the grate. I bowed deeply before the great Archbishop who had renounced the Pope's authority, married the King to Anne Boleyn, and been Thomas Cromwell's friend and confederate in every reforming scheme. When Cromwell fell many had expected Cranmer to go to the block too, but he had survived, despite the halt to reform. Henry had placed him in charge in London while he was away. It was said the King trusted him as no other. In a deep, quiet voice he bade me sit. I had only seen him at a distance before, preaching. He wore a white clerical robe with a fur stole but had cast off his cap, revealing a shock of greying black hair. I noticed the pallor of his broad, oval face, the lines around the full mouth, but above all his eyes. They were large, dark blue. As he studied me I read anxiety there, and conflict and passion. 'So you are Matthew Shardlake,' he said. He smiled pleasantly, seeking to put me at ease. 'My lord Archbishop.' I took a hard chair facing him. A large pectoral cross, solid silver, glinted on his chest. 'How goes trade at Lincoln's Inn?' he asked. I hesitated. 'It has been better.' 'Times are hard for those who worked for Earl Cromwell.' 'Yes, my lord,' I said cautiously. 'I wish they would take his head from London Bridge. I see it each time I cross. What the gulls have left.' 'It is a sad thing to see.' 'I visited him, you know, in the Tower. I confessed him. He told me of that last matter he engaged you in.' My eyes widened and I felt a chill despite the heat from the fire. So Cranmer knew about that. 'I told the King about the Dark Fire quest. Some months ago.' I caught my breath, but Cranmer smiled and raised a be-ringed hand. 'I waited until his anger against Lord Cromwell over the Cleves marriage faded, and he'd begun to miss his counsel. Those responsible for what happened walk on eggshells now; though they denied they were behind it, they dissembled and lied.' A chilling thought came to me. 'My lord—does the King know of my involvement?' He shook his head reassuringly. 'Lord Cromwell asked me not to tell the King; he knew you had served him as well as you could, and that you preferred to stay a private man.' So he had thought of me kindly at the end, that harsh great man facing a savage death. I felt sudden tears prick at the corners of my eyes. 'He had many fine qualities, Master Shardlake, for all his hard measures. I told the King only that servants of Lord Cromwell's had been involved. His Majesty left matters there, though he was angry with those who had deceived him. He told the Duke of Norfolk not long ago he wished he had Lord Cromwell back, said he'd been tricked into executing the greatest servant he ever had. As he was.' Cranmer looked at me seriously. 'Lord Cromwell said you were a man of rare discretion, good at keeping even the greatest matters secret.' 'That is part of my trade.' He smiled. 'In that hotbed of gossip, the Inns of Court? No, the Earl said your discretion was of rare quality.' Then I realized with a jolt that Cromwell, in the Tower, had been telling Cranmer about people who might be of use to him. 'I was sorry to hear your father died,' the Archbishop said. My eyes widened. How had he known that? He caught my look and smiled sadly. 'I asked the Inn Treasurer if you were in London, and he told me. I wished to speak to you, you see. May God rest your father's soul.' 'Amen, my lord.' 'He lived in Lichfield, I believe?' 'Yes. I must leave for there in two days, for the funeral.' 'The King is well north of there now. At Hatfield. The Great Progress has had a hard time of it, with all the rains in July. The post-riders were delayed; often ascertaining the King's wishes was not easy.' He shook his head, a strained expression crossing his features. They said Cranmer was no skilful politician. 'It has been a poor summer,' I observed. 'As wet as last year's was dry.' 'Thank God it has lately improved. It made the Queen ill.' 'People say she is pregnant,' I ventured. The Archbishop frowned. 'Rumours,' he said. He paused a moment as though gathering his thoughts, then continued. 'As you may know, there are several lawyers with the royal train. This is the greatest Progress ever seen in England, and lawyers are needed so that disputes that arise within the royal court, and with suppliers along the way, may be resolved.' He took a deep breath. 'Also, the King has promised the northmen his justice. At every town he invites petitioners with complaints against the local officialdom, and lawyers are needed to sort through

them, weed out the petty and the foolish, arbitrate where they can and send the rest to the Council of the North. One of the King's lawyers has died, poor fellow, he took pneumonia. The Chamberlain's office sent a message asking the Council to send a replacement to meet the Progress at York, for there will be much business there. I remembered you.' 'Oh.' This was not what I had expected; this was a favour. 'And if you are going halfway there already, so much the better. You'd return with the Progress next month, and bring back fifty pounds for your work. You'd only be allowed one servant; best to take your assistant rather than a bodyservant.' That was generous, even for the high rewards royal service brought. Yet I hesitated, for I had no wish to go anywhere near the King's court again. I took a deep breath. 'My lord, I hear Sir Richard Rich is with the Progress.' 'Ah, yes. You made an enemy of Rich over the Dark Fire matter.' 'And I am still involved in a case in which he has an interest. Rich would do me any ill turn he could.' The Archbishop shook his head. 'You need have no dealings with Rich or any royal councillor. He is there in his role as Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, to advise the King on the disposition of lands seized in Yorkshire from the rebels. Neither the councillors nor the King have any real involvement with the petitions—the lawyers deal with everything.' I hesitated. This would solve my financial worries, ensure I could discharge my responsibility to my father. Moreover, something stirred in me at the prospect of seeing this great spectacle; it would be the journey of a lifetime. And it might distract me from my sorrow. The Archbishop inclined his head. 'Be quick, Master Shardlake. I have little time.' 'I will go, my lord,' I said. 'Thank you.' The Archbishop nodded. 'Good.' Then he leaned forward, the heavy sleeves of his tunic rustling as they brushed the papers on his desk. 'I also have a small private mission,' he said. 'Something I would like you to do for me in York.' I caught my breath. I had let him spring a trap. He was a good politician after all. The Archbishop saw my expression and shook his head. 'Do not worry, sir. There is no scurrying after danger in this, and the mission itself is a virtuous one. It requires only a certain authority of manner, and above all—' he looked at me sharply—'discretion.' I set my lips. Cranmer made a steeple of his fingers and looked at me. 'You know the purpose of the Great Progress to the North?' he asked. 'To show the King's power in those rebellious parts, establish his authority.' 'They say the north is the last place God made,' Cranmer said with sudden anger. 'They are a barbarous people there, still mired in papist heresy.' I nodded but said nothing, waiting for him to show his hand. 'Lord Cromwell established forceful government in the north after the rebellion five years ago. The new Council of the North employs many spies, and it is as well they do, for the new conspiracy they discovered last spring was serious.' He stared at me with those passionate eyes. 'Last time they called only for the King to rid himself of reformist advisers.' Like you, I thought; they would have had Cranmer in the fire. 'This time they called him tyrant, they wanted to overthrow him. And they planned an alliance with the Scotch, though the northmen have always hated them as even worse barbarians than themselves. But the Scotch, like them, are papists. Had their plan not been exposed, Jesu knows what might have followed.' I took a deep breath. He was telling me secrets I did not wish to hear. Secrets that would bind me to him. 'Not all the conspirators were caught. Many escaped to the wild mountains up there. There is still much we have to learn about their plans. There is a certain conspirator of York, recently taken prisoner there, who is to be brought back to London by boat. Sir Edward Broderick.' Cranmer set his lips tight, and for a moment I saw fear in his face. 'There is an aspect of the conspirators' plans that is not generally known. Only a few of the conspirators knew, and we believe Broderick was one. It is better you do not know about it. No one does except the King, and a few trusted councillors in London and York. Broderick will not talk. The King sent questioners to York but they got nowhere, he is obstinate as Satan. He is to be brought from York to Hull in a sealed wagon when the Progress moves on there, then sent back to London by boat, guarded by the most loyal and trusted men. The King wants to be in London when he is questioned, and it is safe to question him only in the Tower, where we can trust the interrogators and be sure their skill will extract the truth from him.' I knew what that meant. Torture. I took a deep breath. 'How does this involve me, my lord?' His reply surprised me. 'I want you to ensure he is alive and in good health when he arrives.' 'But—will he not be in the King's care?' 'The Duke of Suffolk is in charge of arrangements for the Progress, and he chose Broderick's gaoler. A man who can be trusted, although even he has not been told what we suspect of Broderick. He is in charge of Broderick in the prison at York Castle. His name is Fulke Radwinter.' 'I do not

know that name, my lord.’ ‘The appointment was made hurriedly, and I have been—concerned.’ The Archbishop pursed his lips, fiddling with a brass seal on his desk. ‘Radwinter has experience of guarding and of—questioning—heretics. He is a man of true and honest faith, and can be trusted to keep Broderick under close guard.’ He took a deep breath. ‘Yet Radwinter can be too severe. A prisoner once—died.’ He frowned. ‘I want someone else present, to keep an eye on Broderick’s welfare till he can be brought to the Tower.’ ‘I see.’ ‘I have already written to the Duke of Suffolk, obtained his agreement. He understands my point, I think.’ He picked up the seal and laid it flat on the desk before me. A big oval lozenge, Cranmer’s name and office traced in Latin round the edge, a portrayal of the scourging of Christ in the centre. ‘I want you to take this, as your authority. You will have overall charge of Broderick’s welfare, in York and then on to London. You will not talk to him beyond asking after his welfare, ensuring he comes to no harm. Radwinter knows I am sending someone, he will respect my authority.’ The Archbishop smiled again, that sad smile of his. ‘He is my own employee; he guards the prisoners under my jurisdiction, in the Lollards’ Tower.’ ‘I understand,’ I said neutrally. ‘If the prisoner be bound uncomfortably, make the fetters looser though no less certain. If he is hungry, give him food. If he is ill, ensure he has medical care.’ Cranmer smiled. ‘There, that is a charitable commission, is it not?’ I took a deep breath. ‘My lord,’ I said. ‘I undertook to go to York only on a matter of pleas before the King. My past service on matters of state has cost me much in peace of mind. Now I wish to remain, as Lord Cromwell said, a private man. I have seen men die most horribly—’ ‘Then ensure for me that a man lives,’ Cranmer said quietly, ‘and in decent conditions. That is all I want, and I think you are the man for it. I was a private man once, Master Shardlake, a Cambridge don. Until the King plucked me out to advise on the Great Divorce. Sometimes God calls us to hard duty. Then—’ his look was hard again—‘then we must find the stomach for it.’ I looked at him. If I refused I would no doubt lose my place on the Progress, and might be unable to redeem the mortgage on the farm. And I had made enemies at court, I dared not alienate the Archbishop too. I was trapped. I took a deep breath. ‘Very well, my lord.’ He smiled. ‘I will have your commission sent to your house tomorrow. To act as counsel on the Progress.’ He picked up the seal and set it in my hand. It was heavy. ‘And that is my authority to show Radwinter. No papers.’ ‘May I tell my assistant? Barak?’ Cranmer nodded. ‘Yes. I know Lord Cromwell trusted him. Though he said neither of you had real zeal for reform.’ He gave me a sudden questing look. ‘Though you did, once.’ ‘I served my apprenticeship.’ The Archbishop nodded. ‘I know. You are one of those who worked in the early days to bring England to religious truth.’ He gave me a keen look. ‘The truth that the right head of the Church in England is not the Bishop of Rome, but the King, set by God above his people as Supreme Head, to guide them. When the King’s conscience is moved it is God who speaks through him.’ ‘Yes, my lord,’ I said, though I had never believed that. ‘These conspirators are dangerous and wicked men. Harsh measures have been needed. I do not like them, but they have been forced upon us. To protect what we have achieved. Though there is much more to be done if we are to build the Christian commonwealth in England.’ ‘There is indeed, my lord.’ He smiled, taking my words for agreement. ‘Then go, Master Shardlake, and may God guide your enterprise.’ He rose in dismissal. I bowed my way out of the chamber. As I walked away, I thought, this is no charitable mission. I am keeping a man safe for the torturers in the Tower. And what had this Broderick done, to bring that look of fear to Cranmer’s eyes? MY MUSINGS WERE interrupted by voices outside the room. I nudged Barak awake with my foot, and we stood up hurriedly, wincing, for our legs were still stiff. The door opened and a man in a rather threadbare lawyer’s robe came in. Master Wrenne was a square-built man, very tall, overtopping Barak by a head. I was relieved to see that although he was indeed elderly, his square face deeply lined, he walked steady and straight and the blue eyes under the faded reddish-gold hair were keen. He gripped my hand. ‘Master Shardlake,’ he said in a clear voice with a strong touch of the local accent. ‘Or Brother Shardlake I should say, my brother in the law. Giles Wrenne. It is good to see you. Why, we feared you had met with an accident on the road.’ I noticed that as he studied me his eyes did not linger over my bent back, as most people’s do. A man of sensitivity. ‘I fear I got us lost. May I introduce my assistant, Jack Barak.’ Barak bowed, then shook Wrenne’s extended hand. ‘By Jesu,’ the old man said. ‘That’s a champion grip for a law-clerk.’ He clapped him on the shoulder. ‘Good to see, our young men take too little exercise now. So many clerks these days have a pasty look.’ Wrenne looked at the empty

plates. 'I see my good Madge has fed you. Excellent.' He moved over to the fire. The falcon turned to him, a little bell tied to its foot jingling, and let him stroke its neck. 'There, my old Octavia, hast tha kept warm?' He turned to us with a smile. 'This bird and I have hunted around York through many a winter, but we are both too old now. Please, be seated again. I am sorry I cannot accommodate you while you are in the city.' He eased himself into a chair, and looked ruefully at the dusty furniture and books. 'I fear since my poor wife died three years ago I have not kept up her standards of housekeeping. A man alone. I only keep Madge and a boy, and Madge is getting old, she could not cater for three. But she was my wife's maid.' So much for Barak's theory about Madge, I thought. 'We have accommodation at St Mary's, but thank you.' 'Yes.' Wrenne smiled and rubbed his hands together. 'And there will be much of interest to see there, the Progress in all its glory when it arrives. You will want to rest now. I suggest you both come here at ten tomorrow morning, and we can spend the day working through the petitions.' 'Very well. There seems to be much work going on at St Mary's,' I added. The old man nodded. 'They say any number of wondrous buildings are being erected. And that Lucas Hourenbout is there, supervising it all.' 'Hourenbout? The King's Dutch artist?' Wrenne nodded, smiling. 'They say the greatest designer in the land, after Holbein.' 'So he is. I did not know he was here.' 'It seems the place is being prepared for some great ceremony. I have not seen it, only those with business are allowed into St Mary's. Some say the Queen is pregnant, and is to be crowned here. But no one knows.' He paused. 'Have you heard anything?' 'Only the same gossip.' I remembered Cranmer's annoyance when I had mentioned that rumour. 'Ah well. We Yorkers will be told when it is good for us to know.' I looked at Wrenne sharply, detecting a note of bitterness under the bluntness. 'Perhaps Queen Catherine will be crowned,' I said. 'After all, she's lasted over a year now.' I made the remark deliberately; I wanted to establish that I was not one of those stiff-necked people in the royal employ that would talk of the King only with formal reverence. Wrenne smiled and nodded, getting the point. 'Well, we shall have much work to do on the petitions. I am glad of your assistance. We have to weed out the silly fratches, like the man disputing with the Council of the North over an inch of land, whose papers I read yesterday.' He laughed. 'But you will be familiar with such nonsense, brother.' 'Indeed I am. Property law is my specialism.' 'Ah! You will regret telling me that, sir.' He winked at Barak. 'For now I shall pass all the property cases to you. I shall keep the debts and the feuds with the lesser officials.' 'Are they all such matters?' I asked. 'For the most part.' He raised his eyebrows. 'I have been told the point is that the King must be seen to care for his northern subjects. The small matters will be arbitrated by us under the King's authority, the larger remitted to the King's Council.' 'How shall our arbitration be conducted?' 'At informal hearings under delegated powers. I will be in charge, with you and a representative of the Council of the North sitting with me. Have you done arbitration work before?' 'Yes, I have. So the King will have no personal involvement with the small matters?' 'None.' He paused. 'But we may meet him nonetheless.' Barak and I both sat up. 'How, sir?' Wrenne inclined his head. 'All the way from Lincoln, at the towns and other places along the road, the King has received the local gentry and city councillors in supplication, those who were with the rebels five years ago on their knees, begging his pardon. He seeks to bind them anew with oaths of loyalty. Interestingly, the orders have been that not too many supplicants were to gather together at once. They are still afraid, you see. There are a thousand soldiers with the Progress, and the royal artillery has been sent by boat to Hull.' 'But there has been no trouble?' Wrenne shook his head. 'None. But the emphasis is on the most abject forms of surrender. The supplication here at York is to be the greatest spectacle of all. The city councillors are to meet the King and Queen outside the city on Friday, dressed in humble robes, and make submission and apology for allowing the rebels to take over York as their capital in 1536. The citizenry will not be there, because it would be bad for the common folk to see their city's leaders thus humbled—' Wrenne raised his heavy eyebrows—'and in case they might be angered against the King. The councillors are to hand presents to Their Majesties, great goblets filled with coin. There has been a collection among the citizenry.' He smiled sardonically. 'With some cajoling.' He took a deep breath. 'And they are talking of us going too, the King's lawyers, to present him formally with the petitions.' 'So we'll be thrust into the heart of it.' Despite Cranmer's promise, I thought. 'We could be. Tankerd, the city Recorder, is in a great lather about the speech he must make. The city officials are sending constantly to the Duke of Suffolk to make sure

everything is done just as the King would wish.' He smiled. 'I confess I have a great curiosity to see the King. He sets out from Hull tomorrow, I believe. The Progress spent much longer than planned at Pontefract, then went to Hull before York. And apparently the King is going back to Hull afterwards; he wants to reorganize their fortifications.' And that, I thought, is where we put the prisoner in a boat. 'When will that be?' I asked. 'Early next week, I should think. The King will only be here a few days.' Wrenne gave me another of his keen looks. 'Perhaps you will have seen the King before, being from London.' 'I saw him at the procession when Nan Boleyn was crowned. But only from a distance.' I sighed. 'Well, if we are to be present at this ceremony, it is as well I packed my best robe and new cap.' Wrenne nodded. 'Ay.' He stood up, with a slowness that revealed his age. 'Well, sir, you must be tired after your long journey—you should find your lodgings and have a good rest.' 'Yes. We are tired, 'tis true.' 'By the way, you will hear many strange words here. Perhaps the most important thing you should know is that a street is called a gate, while a gate is called a bar.' Barak scratched his head. 'I see.' Wrenne smiled. 'I will have your horses fetched.' We took farewell of the old man, and rode again to the gate leading from the Minster Close. 'Well,' I said to Barak, 'Master Wrenne seems a good old fellow.' 'Ay. Merry for a lawyer.' He looked at me. 'Where next?' I took a deep breath. 'We cannot tarry any longer. We must go to the prison.'

Chapter Three

WE PAUSED OUTSIDE the gates, wondering which way to take to York Castle. I hailed a yellow-haired urchin and offered him a farthing to direct us. He looked up at us suspiciously. 'Show me thy farthing, maister.' 'Here!' I held up the coin. 'Now, lad, the castle.' He pointed down the road. 'Go down through Shambles. Tha'll know it by smell. Cross the square beyond and tha'll see Castle Tower.' I handed him the farthing. He waited till we had passed, then called 'Southron heretics!' after us before disappearing into a lane. Some of the passers-by smiled. 'Not popular, are we?' Barak said. 'No. I think anyone from the south is identified with the new religion.' 'All still stiff in papistry, then?' he remarked. 'Ay. They don't appreciate this happy time of the gospel,' I answered sardonically. Barak raised his eyebrows. He never spoke of his religious opinions, but I had long suspected he thought as I did, that neither the evangelical nor the papist sides had much to commend them. I knew he still mourned Thomas Cromwell, but his loyalty to his old master had been personal, not religious. We picked our way through the crowds. Barak's clothes, like mine, were covered in dust, his hard comely face under the flat black cap tanned from our days riding. 'Old Wrenne was curious about whether the Queen is pregnant,' he said. 'Like everybody else. The King has only one son, the dynasty hangs on a single life.' 'One of my old mates at court said the King nearly died in the spring, some trouble with an ulcer in his leg. They had to push him round Whitehall Palace in a little chair on wheels.' I looked at Barak curiously. He heard some interesting nuggets of news from his old cronies among the spies and troubleshooters in royal service. 'A Howard prince would strengthen the papist faction at court. Their head the Duke of Norfolk being the Queen's uncle.' Barak shook his head. 'They say the Queen has no interest in religion. She's only eighteen, just a giddy girl.' He smiled lubriciously. 'The King's a lucky old dog.' 'Cranmer indicated Norfolk is less in favour now.' 'Maybe he will lose his head then,' he replied, bitterness entering his voice. 'Who can ever tell with this King?' 'We should keep our voices down,' I said. I felt uncomfortable in York. There were no broad central avenues as in London, everywhere one felt hemmed in by the passers-by. It was too crowded for riding and I resolved that we should walk from now on. Although the streets were thronged and much trading was going on in anticipation of the arrival of the Progress, there was little of the cheerful bustle of London. We attracted more hostile looks as we rode slowly on. The boy had been right about the Shambles, the smell of ripe meat assailed us when we were still twenty yards away. We rode into another narrow street where joints were set out on stalls, buzzing with flies. I was glad we were mounted now for the road was thick with discarded offal. Barak wrinkled his nose as he watched the shoppers waving flies from the meat, women holding the ends of their skirts above the mess as they haggled with the shopkeepers. When we were through the disgusting place I patted Genesis and spoke soothing words, for the smells had frightened him. At the end of another quieter street we could see, ahead, the city wall and another barbican patrolled by guards. Beyond, a high green mound was visible, with a round stone keep on top. 'York Castle,' I said. A girl was advancing towards us. I noticed her because a servant with the King's badge prominent on his doublet was walking behind her. The wench wore a fine

yellow dress and was exceptionally pretty, with soft features, a full-lipped mouth and healthy white skin. Fine blonde hair was visible below her white coif. She caught my eye, then looked at Barak and, as we passed, smiled boldly up at him. Barak doffed his cap from the saddle, showing his fine white teeth in a smile. The girl lowered her eyes and walked on. 'That's a bold hussy,' I said. Barak laughed. 'A girl may smile at a fine fellow, may she not?' 'You don't want any dalliances here. She's a Yorker, she may eat you.' 'That I wouldn't mind.' We reached the barbican. Here too a crop of heads was fixed to poles, and a man's severed leg was nailed above the gate. I brought forth my letter of authority, and we were allowed to pass through. We rode alongside the castle wall, beside a shallow moat full of mud. Looking up at the high round keep I saw it was in a ruinous state, the white walls covered with lichen and a great crack running down the middle. Ahead two towers flanked a gate where an ancient drawbridge crossed the moat. People were going in and out across it, and the sight of black-robed lawyers reminded me the York courts were housed within the castle bailey. As our horses clattered across the drawbridge two guards in King's livery stepped forward, crossing their pikes to bar our way. A third took Genesis' reins, looking at me closely. 'What's your business?' His accent showed him to be another man of the southern shires. 'We are from London. We have business with Master Radwinter, the Archbishop's gaoler.' The guard gave me a keen look. 'Go to the south tower, the other side of the bailey.' As we went under the gate I turned and saw him staring after us. 'This city's nothing but walls and gates,' Barak said as we came out into the bailey. Like the rest of the place it had seen far better days; a number of imposing buildings had been built against the interior of the high castle walls but like the keep many were streaked with lichen, gaps in the plaster. Even the courthouse, where more lawyers stood arguing on the steps, looked tumbledown. No wonder the King had chosen to stay at St Mary's Abbey. I saw something dangling from the high keep. A white skeleton, wrapped in heavy chains. 'Another rebel,' Barak said. 'They like to drive the point home.' 'No, that's been there a long time, the bones are picked quite clean. I'd guess that's Robert Aske, who led the Pilgrimage of Grace five years ago.' I had heard he was hanged in chains. I shuddered, for that was a dreadful death, and pulled at Genesis' reins. 'Come, let's find the gaoler.' Another pair of towers flanked the opposite gateway. We rode across and dismounted. I was still stiff and tired despite the brief rest, though Barak seemed to have recovered his energy. I must do my back exercises tonight, I thought. A guard approached, a fellow of my own age with a hard square face. I told him we had come from Archbishop Cranmer, to see Master Radwinter. 'He was expecting you yesterday.' 'So was everyone. We were delayed. Could you stable our horses? And give them some feed, they are sore tired and hungry.' He called a second guard. I nodded to Barak. 'Go with them. I think I'd best see him alone, this first time.' Barak looked disappointed, but went off with the horses. The first guard led me to a door in the tower, unlocked it, and led me up a narrow spiral staircase lit by tiny arrow-slit windows. We climbed perhaps halfway up the tower, and I was panting by the time he halted before a stout wooden door. He knocked, and a voice called, 'Come in.' The guard opened the door, standing aside to let me enter, then closed it behind me. I heard his footsteps descending again. The chamber was gloomy, more arrow-slit windows looking out across the city. The stone walls were bare, though scented rushes were scattered on the flagstones. A neatly made truckle bed stood against one wall, a table covered with papers against another. Beside it a man sat in a cushioned chair reading a book, a candle set on a little table beside him to augment the dim light. I had expected a gaoler's slovenly dress but he wore a clean brown doublet and good woollen hose. He shut his book and rose with a smile, smoothly as a cat. He was about forty. There was a pair of deep furrows in his cheeks; otherwise his features were regular, framed by a short beard, black like his hair but greying around the corners of his mouth. He was short, slim but strong-looking. 'Master Shardlake,' he said in a melodious voice with a slight Londoner's burr, extending a hand. 'Fulke Radwinter. I had expected you yesterday.' He smiled, showing small white teeth, but his light-blue eyes were hard and sharp as ice. The hand that took mine was clean and dry, the nails filed. This was indeed no common gaoler. 'Did the stairs tire you?' he asked solicitously. 'You seem to breathe a little heavily.' 'We had to ride through the night, Master Radwinter.' I spoke firmly, I needed to establish my authority. I felt inside my coat pocket. 'I should show you the Archbishop's seal.' I passed it to him. He studied it a moment, then handed it back. 'All in order,' he said with another smile. 'So, then. My lord

Archbishop has written to you, told you I am to have oversight of the welfare of Sir Edward Broderick?' 'Indeed.' He shook his head. 'Though really, there was no need. The Archbishop is a great and godly man, yet he can become—overanxious.' 'Sir Edward is in good health, then?' Radwinter inclined his head. 'He had some rough treatment from the King's interrogators when he was first taken. Before certain matters came to light, and it was decided to hale him to London. Most secret matters.' He raised his eyebrows. He must know that the nature of those matters had been kept from me as it had from him; Cranmer would have told him in his letter. 'So, then, he was tortured before you came.' The gaoler nodded. 'He is in some discomfort, but nothing can be done about that. Otherwise he keeps well enough. He will be in London soon. Then he will be in far greater discomfort. The King wants him questioned as soon as possible, but it is more important that it is done by the most skilled people, and they are in London.' I had tried not to think of what must await the prisoner at the end of his journey. I suppressed a shudder. 'Well, sir,' Radwinter said cheerily. 'Will you have some beer?' 'Not now, thank you. I ought to see Sir Edward.' He inclined his head again. 'Of course. Let me get the keys.' He went over to a chest and opened it. I glanced at the papers on his desk. Warrants and what looked like a sheet of notes in a small, round hand. His book, I saw, was a copy of Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, a reformist text. The desk was set beside one of the narrow windows, giving a good view across the city. Glancing out, I saw many steeples and one larger church that had no roof, another dissolved monastery no doubt. Beyond lay marshland and then a lake. Looking directly down, I saw the moat ran broader on this side of the castle, a wide channel fringed thickly with reeds. People were moving about there, women with large baskets on their backs. 'They are picking reeds to make rushlights.' I started at Radwinter's soft voice beside me. 'And see there?' He pointed down to where one woman was pulling at something on her leg. I heard, very faintly, a little cry of pain. Radwinter smiled. 'They're gathering the leeches that bite them, for the apothecaries.' 'It must be a miserable occupation, standing deep in mud waiting for those things to bite.' 'Their legs must be covered in little scars.' He turned to me, his eyes looking into mine. 'As the body of England is covered in the scars left by the great leech of Rome. Well, let us see our friend Broderick.' He turned and crossed to the door. I took the candle from beside his chair before following him out. RADWINTER CLATTERED RAPIDLY up the stairs to the next floor, halting before a stout door with a little barred window. He looked in, then unlocked the door and went inside. I followed. The cell was small, and dim for there was but one tiny window, barred and unglassed, the open shutters letting in a cold breeze. The chill air smelled of damp and ordure, and the rushes beneath my shoes felt slimy. The clank of a chain made me turn to a corner of the room. A thin figure in a dirty white shirt lay on a wooden pallet. 'A visitor for you, Broderick,' Radwinter said. 'From London.' His voice kept its smooth, even tone. The man sat up, his chains rattling, in a slow and painful way that made me think he must be old, but as I approached I saw the face beneath its coating of grime was young, a man in his twenties. He had thick, matted fair hair and an untidy growth of beard framing a long, narrow face that would have been handsome in normal circumstances. I thought he did not look dangerous, but as he studied me I started at the anger in his bloodshot eyes. I saw that a long length of chain, looped through manacles on both his wrists, was bolted into the wall beside the bed. 'From London?' The hoarse voice was that of a gentleman. 'Are there to be more gropings with the poker, then?' 'No,' I replied quietly. 'I am here to ensure you get there safe and well.' The anger in his gaze did not change. 'The King's torturers prefer a whole body to work on, hey?' His voice broke and he coughed. 'For Jesu's sake, Master Radwinter, may I not have something to drink?' 'Not till you can repeat the verses I set you yesterday.' I stared at him. 'What is this?' Radwinter smiled. 'I have set Broderick to learn ten verses of the Bible each day, in the hope that God's pure word in English may yet amend his papist soul. Yesterday he was obdurate. I told him he would have no more drink till he could say his verses.' 'Get him some now, please,' I said sharply. 'You are here to care for his body, not his soul.' I held the candle up to Radwinter's face. For a moment his lips pressed hard together. Then he smiled again. 'Of course. Perhaps he has been too long without. I will call a guard to fetch some.' 'No, you go. It will be quicker. And I will be safe, he is well chained.' Radwinter hesitated, then strode from the room without another word. I heard the key turn in the lock, shutting me in. I stood and looked at the prisoner, who had bowed his head. 'Is there anything else you need?' I asked. 'I promise, I am not here to

harm you. I know nothing of what you are accused, my commission from the Archbishop is only to see you safe to London.' He looked up at me then, and gave a grimace of a smile. 'Cranmer worries his man may make sport with my body?' 'Has he?' I asked. 'No. He likes to grope at my mind, but I am proof against that.' Broderick gave me a long, hard look, then stretched out again on his pallet. As he did so the open neck of his shirt revealed the livid mark of a burn on his chest. 'Let me see that,' I said sharply. 'Open your shirt.' He shrugged, then sat up and untied the strings. I winced. Someone had drawn a hot poker across his body, several times. One mark on his chest was red and inflamed, oozing pus that glistened in the candlelight. He stared at me fiercely, I could almost feel his rage. I thought, if Radwinter is ice, this man is fire. 'Where did you get those?' I asked. 'Here, in the castle, from the King's men when they took me a fortnight ago. They could not break me. That is why I am being sent to London, to be worked on by men of real skill. But you know that.' I said nothing. He looked at me curiously. 'What manner of man are you then, that my marks seem to offend you, yet you work with Radwinter.' 'I am a lawyer. And I told you, I am here to ensure you are well cared for.' His eyes burned again. 'You think that will suffice, in God's eyes, for what you do here?' 'What do you mean?' 'You keep me safe and well for the torturers in London, that they may have longer sport. I would rather die here.' 'You could just give them the information they want,' I said. 'They will have it from you in the end.' He smiled, a ghastly rictus. 'Ah, a soft persuader. But I will never talk, no matter what they do.' 'There are few who go to the Tower who do not talk in the end. But I am not here to persuade you of anything. You should have a physician, however.' 'I ask nothing from you, crookback.' He lay down again, looking across at the window. There was silence for a moment, then he asked suddenly, 'Did you see where Robert Aske still hangs in chains from Clifford's Tower?' 'That is Aske then? Yes.' 'My chain is just long enough to allow me to stand at the window. I look out, and remember. When Robert was convicted of treason, the King promised he should be spared the pains of disembowelling at his execution, that he would hang till he was dead. He did not realize the King meant he was to be dangled alive in chains till he died from thirst and hunger.' He coughed. 'Poor Robert that trusted Henry the Cruel.' 'Have a care, Sir Edward.' He turned and looked at me. 'Robert Aske was my best friend.' A key grated in the lock and Radwinter returned, bearing a pitcher of weak beer. He handed it to Broderick, who sat up and took a deep draught. I motioned Radwinter into the corner. 'Has he spoken?' the gaoler snapped. 'Only to tell me he knew Robert Aske. But I have seen the burns on his body; I do not like the look of them. One is inflamed, he should have a physician.' 'Very well.' Radwinter nodded. 'A man dead of fever will be no use to the Archbishop, after all.' 'Please arrange it. I will call tomorrow to see how he does. And he should have fresh rushes.' 'Scented perhaps, with sweet herbs?' Radwinter still smiled, but there was cold anger in his voice. 'Well, Broderick,' he continued. 'You have been telling Master Shardlake about Aske. I am told that in the first winter after he died, when all his flesh had been eaten by the ravens and little bones began falling to the ground, they had to set a guard, for people were taking away the bones. Bones from his hands and feet are hidden by papists all over York. Usually in the dunghills, for that is the safest place to keep relics safe from a search. It is also where Aske's bones belong—' Broderick jumped up, with a sound between a groan and a snarl. There was a rattle of chains as he sprang at Radwinter. The gaoler had been watching for the move. He stepped quickly back and the chains holding Broderick's arms tautened, jerking him back on the bed. He slumped with a groan. Radwinter laughed softly. 'Watch him, Master Shardlake. You see, he is not as weakly as he looks. Well, Broderick, I shall ignore your violence, and comfort myself with the knowledge of what awaits you in London. As 'tis well said, there is truth in pain.' He stepped past me and opened the door. I followed, with a last glance back at the prisoner. Broderick was staring at me again. 'You are a lawyer?' he asked quietly. 'I said so.' He laughed bitterly. 'So was Robert Aske. When you see him again, think on what even lawyers may come to.' 'Words, Sir Edward, words,' Radwinter said as I went out past him. The gaoler locked the door and I followed him back downstairs. In his room the gaoler stood and faced me, his eyes cold and his expression serious. 'I wanted you to see that he is dangerous, for all he may look helpless.' 'Then why provoke him?' 'To show you. But I will have the physician fetched.' 'Please do. Whatever he has done, that man is to be treated as well as safety allows. And you should call him Sir Edward—he is still entitled to the courtesy.' 'Safety means he should be kept in no doubt who is master. You do not know what he is



capable of.' 'Very little, chained to a wall.' Radwinter's mouth set in a line as hard as a knife-blade. He stepped forward so his face was close to mine. His eyes seemed to bore into me. 'I saw your sympathy for him,' he said. 'The softness in your face. That worries me, with a man as dangerous as that.' I took a deep breath, for it was true that there was something about people being kept in cells that revolted me. 'I have struck a nerve, I see.' Radwinter smiled softly. 'Then let me strike another. I distrust that sympathy in you, sir. Perhaps those who seem outcasts resonate in your soul. Perhaps because of the condition of your back.' My mouth tightened at the insult, at the same time as my stomach lurched in recognition that, again, he spoke true. He nodded. 'I am the one responsible for keeping Broderick secure, and for getting him back to London. There are those in this city who know he is here and would free him if they could, so I must study and scrutinize all those I meet, look as far as I can into their souls. Even yours, sir.' I stared into those cold eyes. 'Get him his physician,' I said curtly. 'I will come again tomorrow to see how he progresses.' He stared back a moment longer, then gave that little incline of his head. 'At what time?' 'When I choose,' I answered, then turned and left the room. OUTSIDE, BARAK WAS sitting on a bench watching the comings and goings at the courthouse. A chill autumnal wind had risen, bringing more leaves tumbling from the trees. He looked at me curiously. 'Are you all right?' he asked. I must have looked as drained as I felt. I shook my head. 'I don't know which man is the worse,' I said. 'It seemed the gaoler, yet—I don't know.' I looked to where Aske's skeleton dangled. The breeze made it swing a little to and fro, as though the dead white bones were struggling to be free. Chapter Four A GUARD TOLD US THAT to reach St Mary's Abbey we should follow a street called Coneygate. This was another narrow lane full of busy shops, and again we proceeded at a snail's pace. I noted a number of even narrower alleyways leading off, perhaps to squares and courts behind. I felt hemmed in by the city. As we passed a large inn I saw a group of young men in colourful slashed doublets standing in the doorway, flanked by watchful servants, looking out over the crowd as they drank wine from leather bottles. One, a tall handsome young fellow with a dark beard, was pointing out members of the citizenry and laughing at their poor clothes. The evil looks he received made him laugh all the louder. The advance guard of the Great Progress, I thought; these gentlemen should take better care. I thought about Radwinter and Broderick. Gaoler and prisoner, ice and fire. It was clear Radwinter visited whatever petty torments he could on Broderick, to keep him down and probably for his own enjoyment too. Such treatment could be dangerous; Sir Edward might be young but he was a gentleman, unused to privation. That burn on his chest could turn bad; I hoped there were good medical men in York. I wished my old friend Guy was with me. But Guy was far away, working as an apothecary in London. I could not help being troubled anew by Sir Edward's accusation that I was keeping him safe for the torturers. He was right. And yet, for all his brave defiant words, Sir Edward had begged Radwinter for something to drink. And I had been able to order it brought. I remembered, too, Radwinter's remark about my condition making me sympathetic to poor outcasts. How he could see into a man. Did he use such skills to delve into the minds of the heretics in Cranmer's gaol at the top of the Lollards' Tower? But he was right; sympathy for Broderick could cloud my judgement. I recalled the prisoner's sudden furious lunge at the gaoler, and thought again, what has he done that he must be kept sealed away like a plague-carrier? Outside a candlemaker's shop I saw a plump, choleric-looking man in a red robe and broad-brimmed red hat, a gold chain of office round his neck, inspecting a box of candles. The mayor, I thought. The candlemaker, his apron spotted with grease, looked on anxiously as the mayor lifted a fat yellow candle from the box and inspected it closely. Three black-robed officials stood by, one carrying a gold mace. 'It'll do, I suppose,' the mayor said. 'Make sure only the finest beeswax goes to St Mary's.' He nodded and the group passed on to the next shop. 'Doing his rounds.' I said to Barak. 'Making sure everything is in order for when the Progress arrives. And—' I broke off with a start at the sound of a scream. A young woman, standing at the mouth of one of the narrow alleys, was clutching a large basket, struggling to keep it from the grip of a ragged youth with a large wart on his nose who was trying to pull it from her. I saw it was the girl who had winked at Barak earlier. Another churl, a fair-haired boy with a broken nose, held her round the waist. Barak threw me Sukey's reins and leaped from his horse, drawing his sword. A couple of passers-by stepped back hastily. 'Leave her, you arseholes!' Barak shouted. The two youths at once let go, turned and ran pell-mell up the alley. Barak made to follow, but the girl seized

his arm. 'No, sir, no! Stay with me, please, these are for Queen Catherine.' Barak sheathed his sword, smiling at her. 'You're all right now, mistress.' I dismounted carefully, keeping hold of both horses' reins. Genesis shifted his hooves uneasily. 'What happened?' I asked her. 'What do you mean, your basket is for the Queen?' She turned to me, her cornflower-blue eyes wide. 'I am a servant in the Queen's privy kitchen, sir. I was sent to buy some of the things the Queen likes.' I looked in the basket. There were sticks of cinnamon, almonds and pieces of root ginger. The girl gave a little curtsy. 'My name is Tamasin, sir. Tamasin Reedbourne.' I noted she had a London accent and it struck me her fustian dress was expensive wear for a kitchenmaid. 'Are you all right, mistress?' Barak asked. 'Those knaves looked as though they'd pull your pretty arms from their sockets.' She smiled, showing white teeth and a pair of pretty dimples. 'I wouldn't let go. When the Queen arrives her lodgings are to be filled with her favourite doucets, all made from ingredients bought here in York.' She looked between us. 'Are you here to meet the Progress, sirs?' 'Ay.' I gave a little bow. 'I am a lawyer, Master Shardlake. This is my assistant, Jack Barak.' Barak doffed his cap and the girl smiled at him again, a little coquettishly now. 'You are brave, sir. I noticed you earlier, did I not?' 'You know you gave me a pretty smile.' 'You had a bodyservant in King's livery with you then,' I said. 'Ay, sir. But Master Tanner wished to buy a piece of cloth and I gave him leave to go into that shop.' She shook her head. 'It was foolish, sir, was it not? I forgot what a barbarous place this is.' 'Is that him?' I asked, pointing to a thin-faced young man wearing the King's badge who had just left a shop on the other side of the road. I recognized him from that morning. He crossed to where we stood, hand on his sword-hilt. 'Mistress Reedbourne?' he asked nervously. 'What is the matter?' 'Well may you ask, Tanner! While you were choosing cloth for your new doublet, two youths tried to steal the Queen's dainties. This man rescued me.' She smiled again at Barak. Master Tanner cast his eyes to the ground. Genesis pulled at the reins. 'We must go,' I said. 'We are due at St Mary's. Come, Barak, they will be waiting like everyone else to tell us we were expected yesterday.' I settled matters by bowing to Mistress Reedbourne. She curtsied again. 'I am lodged at St Mary's too,' she said sweetly. 'Perhaps I shall see you again.' 'I hope so.' Barak replaced his cap, then winked, making the girl turn scarlet. We rode off. 'That was a bit of excitement,' he said cheerfully. 'Not that there was any danger, they were just ragamuffin lads. Must have thought there was something valuable in that basket.' 'You did well.' I smiled sardonically. 'Rescuing the Queen's doucets.' 'The girl's a little doucet herself. I'd not mind a game of hotcockles with her.' *Revue de presse* "When historical fiction clicks, there's nothing more gripping . . . and C.J. Sansom's fantastic *Sovereign* left me positively baying for more. It's that good. . . . Rebellion, plots, torture, fanaticism, a murder mystery and a real historical scandal come alive in this deeply satisfying novel."

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