

REST NOT IN PEACE

The chronicles of Hugh de Singleton, surgeon

The Unquiet Bones
A Corpse at St Andrew's Chapel
A Trail of Ink
Unhallowed Ground
The Tainted Coin
Rest Not in Peace

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The sixth chronicle of
Hugh de Singleton, surgeon

MEL STARR



LION FICTION

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Published by Lion Fiction

an imprint of

Lion Hudson plc

Wilkinson House, Jordan Hill Road,

Oxford OX2 8DR, England

www.lionhudson.com/fiction

ISBN 978 1 78264 008 0

e-ISBN 978 1 78264 009 7

First edition 2013

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK, August 2013, LH26

Another one for Susan

Acknowledgements

Several years ago when Dan Runyon, professor of English at Spring Arbor University, learned that I had written an as yet unpublished medieval mystery, he invited me to speak to his fiction-writing class about the trials of a rookie writer seeking a publisher. He sent sample chapters of Master Hugh's first chronicle, *The Unquiet Bones*, to his friend, Tony Collins. Thanks, Dan.

Thanks to Tony Collins and all those at Monarch who saw Master Hugh's potential. And thanks especially to my editor, Jan Greenough, who excels at asking questions such as, "Do you really want to say it that way?" and, "Wouldn't Master Hugh do it like this?"

Dr. John Blair, of Queen's College, Oxford, has written several papers about Bampton history. These have been invaluable in creating an accurate time and place for Master Hugh. Tony and Lis Page have also been a wonderful source of information about Bampton. I owe them much.

Ms. Malgorzata Deron, of Poznan, Poland, offered to update and maintain my website. She has done an excellent job. To see the result of her work, visit www.melstarr.net

Glossary

Angelus Bell: rung three times each day, dawn, noon, and dusk. Announced the time for the Angelus devotional.

Arbolettys: a cheese-and-herb egg custard.

Ascension Day: forty days after Easter; May 25 in 1368.

Bailiff: a lord's chief manorial representative. He oversaw all operations, collected rents and fines, and enforced labor service. Not a popular fellow.

Boar in confit: honey-glazed pork fillets, served cold.

Bodkin: a sharp, slender tool for punching holes in leather and heavy cloth.

Book of Hours: a devotional book, usually elaborately decorated and illustrated.

Boss: the decorative junction in a ceiling where the barrel vaulting joins.

Braes: medieval underpants.

Buttery: a storage room for beverages stored in butts, or barrels. A butler would be in charge of it.

Cabbage with marrow: cabbage cooked with bone marrow, breadcrumbs, and spices.

Candlemas: February 2. Marked the purification of Mary. Women traditionally paraded to church carrying lighted candles – hence the name. Tillage of fields resumed this day.

Capons farced: chicken stuffed with hard-boiled egg yolks, currants, chopped pork, breadcrumbs, and spices.

Chamberlain: the keeper of a lord's chamber, wardrobe, and personal items.

Chardewarden: pears cooked in wine sauce with breadcrumbs and spices.

Charlet of cod: fish beaten to a smooth paste, then cooked with wine, vinegar, ground almonds, sugar, and spices.

Chauces: tight-fitting trousers, often of different colors for each leg.

Chewet: a meat or fish pie, rather like a pasty.

Claret: a yellowish or pale-red wine from the Bordeaux region.

Coney in cevy: rabbit stewed with onions, breadcrumbs, and spices in wine vinegar.

Cormarye: pork roasted after marinating in red wine and spices.

Cotehardie: the primary medieval outer garment. Women's were floor length; men's ranged from thigh to ankle.

Cresset: a bowl of oil with a floating wick used for lighting.

Crispels: pastry made with flour, sugar, and honey, and fried in lard or oil.

Cyueles: deep-fried fritters made of a paste of breadcrumbs, ground almonds, eggs, sugar, and salt.

Dexter: a war horse; larger than pack horses and palfreys. Also, the right-hand direction.

Dirge: a song or liturgy of grief and lamentation.

Eels in bruit: eels served in a sauce of white wine, breadcrumbs, onions, and spices.

Egg leech: a thick custard, often enriched with almonds, spices, and flour.

Farthing: one fourth of a penny; the smallest silver coin.

Fast day: Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday; not the fasting of modern usage, when no food is consumed, but days upon which no meat, eggs, or animal products are consumed.

Fewterer: the keeper of a lord's kennels and hounds.

Garderobe: the toilet.

Gathering: eight leaves of parchment, made by folding the prepared hide three times.

Gentleman: a nobleman; the term had nothing to do with character or behavior.

Grocer: a wholesaler of staples, not merely foodstuffs.

Groom: a household servant to a lord, ranking above a page and below a valet.

Haberdasher: a merchant who sold household items such as pins, buckles, buttons, hats, and purses.

Hallmote: the manorial court. Royal courts judged free tenants accused of murder or felony; otherwise manorial courts had jurisdiction over legal matters concerning villagers.

Hanoney: eggs scrambled with onions and fried.

Justice of the Peace:

King's Eyre: a royal circuit court, presided over by a traveling judge.

Kirtle: a medieval undershirt.

Lammass Day: August 1, when thanks was given for a successful wheat harvest. From Old English "loaf mass."

Leech: a physician.

Liripipe: a fashionably long tail attached to a man's cap and usually coiled atop the head.

Lychgate: a roofed gate over the entry to a churchyard under which the deceased would rest during the initial part of a medieval funeral.

Malmsey: the sweetest variety of Madeira wine, originally from Greece.

Mark: a coin worth thirteen shillings and four pence (i.e. 160 pence).

Marshalsea: the stables and their associated accoutrements.

Maslin: bread made with a mixture of grains, commonly wheat and rye or barley.

Matins: the first of the day's eight canonical hours (services). Also called Lauds.

Nones: the fifth daytime canonical office, sung at the ninth hour of the day (i.e. mid afternoon).

Page: a young male servant, often a youth learning the arts of chivalry before becoming a squire.

Palfrey: a riding horse with a comfortable gait.

Pantler: a valet in charge of the pantry.

Pantry: from the French word for bread, *pain*. Originally a small room for bread storage. By the fourteenth century other items were also stored there.

Passing Bell: ringing of the parish church bell to indicate the death of a villager.

Pears in compost: pears cooked in red wine with dates, sugar, and cinnamon.

Portpain: a linen cloth in which bread was carried from the bakehouse to the hall.

Pottage: anything cooked in one pot, from the meanest oatmeal to a savory stew.

Pottage of whelks: whelks boiled and served in a stock of almond milk, breadcrumbs, and spices.

Poulterer: a manor employee in charge of chickens, ducks, and geese.

Reeve: an important manor official, although he did not outrank the bailiff. Elected by tenants from among themselves, he had responsibility for fields, buildings, and enforcing labor service.

Remove: a dinner course.

Rice moyle: a rice pudding made with almond milk, sugar, and saffron.

Rogation Sunday: the Sunday before Ascension Day. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday were Rogation Days, also called “gang days.” A time for beseeching God for a good growing season.

Runcie: a small, common horse of lower grade than a palfrey.

St. Benedict’s Day: June 11.

St. Beornwald’s Church: today the Church of St. Mary, in the fourteenth century it was named for an obscure Saxon saint.

St. Boniface’s Day: June 5.

St. John’s Day: June 24.

St. Stephen’s Day: December 26.

Screens passage: a narrow corridor which screened the hall from the kitchen and from which the buttery and pantry were accessed.

See: the authority or jurisdiction of a bishop.

Set books: the standard textbooks used by medieval undergraduates.

Shilling: twelve pence. Twenty shillings made a pound, although there was no pound coin.

Sinister: the left-hand direction.

Sobye sauce: a sauce for fried fish made with white wine, raisins, breadcrumbs, and spices.

Solar: a small room in a castle, more easily heated than the great hall, where lords preferred to spend time, especially in winter. Usually on an upper floor.

Sole in cyve: fish boiled and served in a yellow onion sauce.

Statute of Laborers: following the first attack of plague in 1348–49, laborers realized that because so many workers had died, their labor was in demand, and so demanded higher wages. In 1351 Parliament set wages at the 1347 level. Like most attempts to legislate against the law of supply and demand, the statute was generally a failure.

Steward: the chief officer of a manor. Occasionally a steward would have authority over all manors belonging to his lord.

Stockfish: the cheapest salted fish, usually cod or haddock.

Stone: fourteen pounds.

Subtlety: an elaborate confection, made more for show than for consumption, often served between removes.

Toft: land surrounding a villager’s house, often used for growing vegetables and keeping chickens.

Valets: the highest-ranking servants to a lord.

Verderer: the forester in charge of a lord’s forest.

Villein: a non-free peasant. He could not leave his land or service to his lord, or sell animals without permission. But if he could escape his manor for a year and a day, he would be free.

Void: dessert – often sugared fruits and sweetened wine.

Week-work: the two or three days of labor per week (more during harvest) which a villein owed to his lord.

Chapter 1

Unwelcome guests may be a tribulation, and when they depart 'tis usually considered a blessed occasion. But not so if the visitor is a knight, and he departs to make his new home in St. Beornwald's Churchyard.

Sir Henry Burley was a small man, with a face that sloped back in all directions from a prominent nose, like a badger's. I should probably not be commenting upon the size of another man's nose. If ability to detect a scent was dependent upon the size of one's nose I could likely track a stag as well as Lord Gilbert's hounds.

Evidently in battle at Poitiers more than a decade past, Sir Henry had done some service for my employer, Lord Gilbert Talbot. What this service was I did not learn 'til later. Lord Gilbert said only that it would cost him little to repay the knight's valor. From this brief explanation I judged that Sir Henry had distinguished himself in battle, to Lord Gilbert's advantage. How this could be was a mystery to me, for Lord Gilbert is nearly as tall as me, and is squarely built, while Sir Henry is – was – small and slender and, I judge, weighed little more than eight stone.

But after nearly a month entertaining Sir Henry, his wife and daughter, two knights and two squires in Sir Henry's service, and several valets and grooms, Lord Gilbert was clearly ready for them to depart. Sir Henry was a demanding sort of man who seemed to delight in finding fault with Bampton Castle and its inhabitants; the garderobe was not perfumed to his liking, and Lord Gilbert's grooms and valets did not show him proper deference.

Three days before St. John's Day, in the year of our Lord 1368, Sir Henry went to his bed hale and healthy after enjoying a long evening of music, conversation, and dancing

in Bampton Castle's hall. The next morn his valet found him cold and dead. Death is but the path to God, but most men would prefer to travel that way in some distant future day.

Shortly after Sir Henry's valet made this disagreeable discovery I was breaking my fast when a loud and insistent thumping upon my door drew me from my morning reverie. Kate was feeding bits of a wheaten loaf to Bessie and continued her occupation, an early summons not being unusual in Galen House. I am often sought at such an hour, either because of my profession, surgeon, or due to my service as bailiff to Lord Gilbert Talbot's manor of Bampton. My summons this day was because of my training as surgeon, but soon called for a bailiff's work as well.

John, Lord Gilbert's chamberlain, stood before me when I opened the door. I knew immediately some great matter had brought him to Galen House. A groom or valet would have been sent for some routine business.

"Come quickly, Master Hugh. Sir Henry is dead."

Why the presence of a surgeon was required quickly, when the patient was dead, did not seem to have occurred to John, but I did as he bid. I had yet a part of a wheaten loaf in my hand. This I left upon our table before Kate, then explained my hasty departure, the reason for which my wife had not heard. Bessie has discovered language, and makes incessant use of the knowledge, often at great volume if she believes her words are not awarded sufficient importance. So Kate did not know who was at our door or what the reason until I told her.

Two days earlier a page had called at Galen House. Lord Gilbert's guest, he said, was unable to sleep. Lord Gilbert wished me to send herbs which might calm a troubled mind and bring rest. I sent a pouch of pounded lettuce seeds, with instruction to measure a thimbleful unto a cup of wine an hour before Sir Henry went to his bed.

Usually when I am called to some place where my skill as a surgeon is required I take with me a sack of instruments and herbs, so as to be prepared for whatever wound or injury I may find. I took no implements this day. Of what use would they be to a dead man?

I questioned John regarding the matter as we hurried down Church View Street to Mill Street, crossed Shill Brook, and approached the castle gate house. As we spoke I heard the passing bell ring from the tower of the Church of St. Beornwald.

"Lord Gilbert wishes your opinion as to what has caused this death," John said. "The man was in good health yesterday. Complained of no illness. Lord Gilbert, I think, fears poison or some such thing which might cast blame on him and his household."

John did not say, but I suspect Lord Gilbert worried that the lettuce seed I provided to aid Sir Henry's sleep might have contributed to his death.

"Is there reason to suspect evil in this?" I asked.

"None... but that the man was robust one day and a corpse the next."

"Men may die of a sudden. 'Tis known to occur."

"Aye, when they are aged."

"But Sir Henry was not. I dined with him a week past, when Lord Gilbert invited me to his table. How old was the man?"

"Forty-six, his wife said."

Faces of those who greeted me in the Bampton Castle hall were somber, lips drawn tight and thin. Lord Gilbert and Lady Petronilla sat in earnest conversation with an attractive woman whom I recognized as Lady Margery, Sir Henry's wife. Lord Gilbert stood when he saw John usher me into the hall, spoke briefly to the widow, then approached. Over Lord Gilbert's shoulder I saw Lady Margery rise from

her chair, her face twisted into a venomous glare. She began to follow Lord Gilbert, but Lady Petronilla laid a hand upon her arm and spoke, and the woman resumed her place. The hate in her eyes remained.

“I give you good day,” I said to my employer.

“Much thanks, Hugh, but the day is ill. John has told you?”

“Aye. Your guest was found dead this morning.”

“He was. And no sign of what caused the death... which is why I sent for you. A surgeon or physician might more readily see what indisposition has caused this.”

“You have seen the corpse?”

“Aye.”

“And you saw nothing out of sorts?”

“Not a thing. All was as a man should be when asleep, but for his eyes. They were open. The body is unmarked. Sir Henry was not a young man, but he was in good health yesterday.”

“John Chamberlain said you feared poison?”

Lord Gilbert shrugged, then whispered, “’Twas but the thought of a moment. We are all baffled. I would not have Lady Margery hear of poison.”

“John,” Lord Gilbert continued, “take Master Hugh to Sir John’s chamber.” Then, to me he said, “’Tis an odious business, I know, to ask of you, but I wish to know if Sir Henry’s death is God’s work or man’s.”

“You suspect man’s work?”

“Nay. I do not know what to think. So I have called for you. Is it possible that the sleeping draught you sent did this?”

“Nay. The seeds of lettuce are but a mild soporific. A man would need to swallow a bucket of the stuff to do himself harm.”

Lord Gilbert turned back to Lady Margery and left me to John, who nodded and led me to the stairs which would

take us to the guest chambers beyond Lord Gilbert’s solar.

Past the solar the passageway grew dark, but at its end I saw two figures. I recognized one. Arthur, one of Lord Gilbert’s grooms, stood at the closed door of a chamber, and another man, wearing Sir Henry’s livery and badge, stood with him.

The two men stood aside as I approached, having been notified, no doubt, that I was to inspect the corpse and give reason for the death. I opened the heavy door and entered the chamber, but none followed. Death is not pleasant to look upon, and the three men who stood outside the door were content to allow me to do my work alone.

Sir Henry lay as he had been found, upon his back, sightless eyes staring at the vaulted ceiling and boss of his chamber. Would a man die in his sleep with his eyes open? Perhaps some pain seized him in the night and awakened him before death came.

A cresset was burning upon a stand, where it had been all night should Sir Henry have wished to rise and visit the garderobe. I lifted it and held it close to the dead man’s face. Two windows gave light to the room, but they were narrow, and one faced north, the other west, so that the morning sun did not illuminate the chamber.

I first inspected Sir Henry’s neck to see if any contusion was there. None was. I felt the man’s scalp, to see if any lump or dried blood might betray a blow. All was as should be. I pried open the lips – no easy task, for rigor mortis was begun – to see if Sir Henry might have choked to his death upon regurgitated food. His mouth was clear.

Because Sir Henry was already stiffening in death I assumed that he was dead for some hours before he was found. De Mondeville wrote that rigor mortis begins three or so hours after death, and becomes severe at twelve hours after death.

A blanket yet covered the corpse. I drew this aside, and with my dagger slit Sir Henry's kirtle so I might inspect the body for wounds or evidence of blows. There were none.

Beside the bed, next to where the cresset had been placed, was a cup. I held it to the window and saw in the dregs the few remains of the pounded seeds of lettuce which had been in the wine. Was some other potion added to the cup? I touched the dregs with my fingertips and brought them to my lips. I could detect no foreign flavor, although this is not telling, for there are several malignant herbs which leave little or no taste when consumed. Monk's Hood is one. And for this they are all the more dangerous.

The walls of Sir Henry's chamber were of stone, of course, and the door of heavy oak. If he felt himself afflicted in the night, and cried out for aid, he might not have been heard, especially if his call was weak due to an affliction which took his life.

I went to the door, where Arthur and Sir Henry's valet stood, and asked the valet if anyone had heard Sir Henry shout for help in the night.

"Don't know," he replied. "I spend the night in the servants' range. I wouldn't have heard 'im."

"Has no other, those whose chambers were close by, spoken of it?"

"Nay. None said anything."

"It was you who found him?"

"Aye."

"Has anything in his chamber been moved since then? Has Sir Henry's corpse been moved?"

"Nay... but for Lady Margery throwin' herself upon 'im when she was brought here an' saw Sir Henry dead. Lord Gilbert drew her away. Told her he had a man who could tell why Sir Henry was dead. That would be you?"

"Aye. I am Hugh de Singleton, surgeon, and bailiff at Bampton manor. You are...?"

"Walter Mayn, valet to Sir Henry... was valet to Sir Henry."

"Two days past I was asked to provide herbs which might help Sir Henry fall to sleep. Was there some matter which vexed him, so that he awoke of a night?"

Walter did not reply. He looked away, as if he heard some man approach at the end of the passageway. A valet is to be circumspect, and loyal, and hold his tongue when asked of the affairs of his lord. The man did not need to say more. His silence and glance told me that some business had troubled Sir Henry. Whether or not the issue had led to his death was another matter. Might a man die of worry? If so, this was no concern of Lord Gilbert Talbot's bailiff.

"Who slept in the next chamber?" I asked the fellow.

"Sir Geoffrey Godswein."

"And across the passageway?"

"Sir John Peverel."

"They are knights in Sir Henry's service?"

"Aye."

"And they did not speak of any disturbance in the night?"

"Not that I heard. There was lots of screamin' from Lady Margery and all was speakin' at once when Sir Henry was found."

I decided that I should seek these knights, and the Lady Margery, if she was fit to be questioned. I told Arthur and Walter to remain at Sir Henry's door and allow no man, nor woman, either, to enter the chamber 'till I had returned.

Lady Margery I had seen in the hall, so I returned there and found Lord Gilbert and Lady Petronilla comforting the widow. Lady Margery's eyes were red and

her cheeks swollen. She had seen me an hour before, but through teary eyes.

“Master Hugh,” Lord Gilbert said, rising, “what news?”

“Hugh?” the woman shrieked. “This is the leech who has poisoned my husband?”

Lord Gilbert answered for me. “Nay, Lady Margery. Master Hugh is as competent as any at his business. He has assured me that the potion he sent to aid Sir Henry’s slumber could not cause death.”

“Of course he would say so. Something did. And Sir Henry took none of the potion until the night he died.”

The woman stood, her fists clenched, as if prepared to strike me. Lord Gilbert saw, and took her arm.

“Tis of that night I would speak to you,” I said. “Your chamber is not far from your husband’s. Did you or your maids hear anything in the night? Some sound which might now, when you think back upon it, have told of Sir Henry’s distress, even if in the night, when you heard it, you paid no heed?”

“Nay, I heard nothing. ’Twas the potion you gave which caused his death. It was to bring sleep, you said. So it did, the sleep of death. This man,” she turned to my employer, “should be sent to the sheriff for trial before the King’s Eyre for the murder he has done.”

“Surely Master Hugh has done no murder,” Lady Petronilla said. “If so be his potion brought death ’twas surely mischance, not felony.”

Lady Margery stared skeptically at Lady Petronilla, but said no more.

Across the hall, as far from the grieving widow as could be yet remaining in the chamber, I saw two knights sitting upon a bench, their heads close together in earnest conversation.

“Sir John and Sir Geoffrey occupied chambers near Sir Henry, is this not so?”

“Aye,” Lord Gilbert replied, and nodded in the direction of the solemn knights.

I walked in the direction of his gaze and the two knights stood when they saw me approach.

“I give you good day,” I said courteously, although my words were but an affectation, for no such day could be good. “You are knights in service to Sir Henry?” I asked, although I knew the answer.

“Aye,” the older of the two replied. “I am Sir John Peverel. This is Sir Geoffrey Godswein.”

Sir John was a large man, taller than me and three stone heavier. His hands were the size of a dexter’s hooves. Sir Geoffrey was smaller, a man of normal size.

I introduced myself and my duty, and asked if they had heard any cry in the night, or any other sound to indicate that Sir Henry might have been in distress. Both men shook their heads.

“Heard nothing amiss ’till Walter shouted for help,” Sir Geoffrey said.

“When he did so you went immediately to Sir Henry’s chamber?”

“Aye.”

“Who entered first?”

“I did,” Sir Geoffrey replied.

“What did you see? Tell all, even if it seems of no importance.”

“Walter stood at the door, which was flung wide open, bawling out that Sir Henry was dead. I pushed past and saw ’twas so.”

“Were the bed clothes in disarray, as if he’d thrashed about?”

Sir Geoffrey pursed his lips in thought, turned to Sir

John as if seeking confirmation, then spoke. "Nay. All was in order. Not like Sir Henry'd tossed about in pain before he died."

Sir John nodded agreement, then said, "His eyes were open. You being a surgeon would know better than me, but if a man dies in his sleep, they'd be closed, seems like."

I agreed. "Unless some pain awoke him before he died."

"Then why'd he not cry out?" Sir Geoffrey asked.

I had no answer.

"When did you last see Sir Henry alive?"

"Last night," Sir John said.

"After the music and dancing," Sir Geoffrey added.

"We retired same time as Sir Henry and Lady Margery."

"Did he seem well? Did any matter trouble him?"

The two knights seemed to hesitate, slightly, but I noted it, before they replied.

"Nay," Sir Geoffrey said. "Lord Gilbert had musicians and jongleurs to entertain here in the hall after supper. Sir Henry danced an' seemed pleased as any."

"When he went to his chamber did he stand straight, or was he perhaps bent as if some discomfort afflicted his belly?"

Again the knights exchanged glances, but this time Sir John spoke with no hesitation. "Sir Henry always stands straight, being shorter than most men. Wears thick-soled shoes, too. Was he bent last eve we'd have noticed, that being unlike him."

"Think back again to this morning, and when you first entered Sir Henry's chamber. Was anything amiss, or in disarray?"

"When a man is found dead," Sir John said, "other matters are trivial. I paid no heed to anything but the corpse." Sir Geoffrey nodded in agreement.

I thanked the knights, bid them "Good day," whether it was or not, and motioned to Lord Gilbert that I wished to speak privily to him.

"What have you learned?" he asked when we were out of Lady Margery's hearing.

"You saw the corpse?" I asked.

"Aye," he grimaced.

"Sir Henry's eyes were open in death."

"Aye, they were. What means that?"

"I do not know, but the fact troubles me."

"Why so? You think violence was done to him?"

"Nay. I examined the corpse. I found no injury. If a man dies in his sleep, his eyes will be shut. I'm sure of this. If Sir Henry awoke, and felt himself in pain, he would, I think, have called out. But no man, nor Lady Margery, heard him do so."

"The castle walls are thick," Lord Gilbert said.

"As are the doors. But between the bottom of the door to Sir Henry's chamber and the floor is a space as wide as a man's finger is thick. If Sir Henry cried for help I think he would have been heard through the gap, unless the affliction had greatly weakened him."

"Mayhap the malady took him of a sudden."

"Perhaps," I shrugged.

"You are not satisfied to be ignorant of a matter like this, are you?" Lord Gilbert said.

"Nay."

"Tis why I employed you. But you must remember that only the Lord Christ knows all. There are matters we mortals may never know."

Lord Gilbert Talbot, baron of the realm, valiant knight, now theologian and philosopher.

"You wish me to abandon my inquiry?"

"The longer you continue, the more distress for Lady

Margery. If you think it unlikely you will ever discover the cause 'twould be best to say so sooner than later. Men often die for no good reason."

"There is always a reason, but other men are ignorant of understanding the cause."

"And you do not like being deceived, even by death, do you?"

"Nay. And if I cannot discover what caused Sir Henry's death, Lady Margery will tell all that 'twas my potion which did so."

"Another hour or two, then. Have ready an opinion by dinner."

I promised to do so. As I left the hall Sir Henry's daughter entered, as red-eyed and puffy-cheeked as her stepmother. Lady Anne, I had been told, was Sir Henry's daughter by his first wife, the Lady Goscelyna. The lass looked to be about nineteen or twenty years old, and was followed by two youths – squires, I remembered, to Sir Henry. The lads were somber, but showed no sign of terrible loss. Lady Anne is a beautiful maid, and surely accustomed to being followed by young men.

I returned to Sir Henry's chamber, nodded to Arthur and Walter, and entered the room. Perhaps, I thought, murder was done here in some manner I had not discovered, and when Sir Henry was dead all marks of a struggle had been made right. But if such had happened, why did Sir Henry not shout for assistance when he was attacked? Whether the man died of some illness, or was murdered, I could make no sense of his silence.

I sat upon a chair, ready to abandon the loathsome task I had been assigned. The Lord Christ gives to all men their appointed tasks, but occasionally I wish that he had assigned another profession to me. My eyes fell upon the fireplace. It was cold, and the ashes of the last blaze of

winter were long since disposed of, but 'twas not the hearth which seized my attention.

A poker stood propped against the stones, and my mind went to a rumor which passed among students while I studied at Balliol College. A rumor concerning the death of King Edward II. Mortimer and Edward's faithless queen deposed him nearly a half-century past, and he was taken to Berkeley Castle where, some months later, he was found dead of a morning. Folk living near the castle were said to have heard terrible screams in the night, but, as with Sir Henry, no mark was found upon the King's corpse to tell of violent death.

A red-hot poker, rumor said, was thrust up the deposed King's rectum, doing murder and cauterizing the wound at the same time, so no blood flowed to disclose how the felony was done. And no visible wound was made to indict the murderers.

There had been no blaze in Sir Henry's fireplace, but I went to the hearth to examine the poker nevertheless. The iron bar was dusty with ashes from its last use, which had been as was intended, not to do murder.

I replaced the poker against the wall, but the thought of Edward II's death caused me to consider again Sir Henry's corpse. Surely if a man was murdered as the King was, his screams would have been heard throughout the castle, stone walls and oaken doors notwithstanding.

But what if he was silenced with a pillow over his face? Would that muffle his shrieks? Or might a pillow have been enough to suffocate the man and silence his protest at the same time?

I turned to the door of the chamber to seek Arthur and Walter and conduct an experiment with the pillow. 'Twas then I saw the tiny brown droplet upon the planks. I knelt to inspect the mark, thinking at first it might have been

made by a drop of Sir Henry's wine. The color so matched the wood that 'tis a wonder I saw it at all. Some man, or men, did not.

The circular stain was smaller than the nail upon my little finger, and when I scraped a thumbnail across it I was able to lift some of the substance from the floor. Wine will not thicken so. A tiny drop of dried blood lay before me.

Could this be Sir Henry's blood? If so, whence did it come? I approached the corpse, turned it upon the bed, and spread the legs so I might inspect the rectum for some sign of violence. I saw none, although I admit I might have performed the examination more carefully.

When Sir Henry was again upon his back I made another search of the corpse for some wound from which the drop of blood might have come. As before, I found none. Was there some other orifice of a man's body whereby he might be stabbed and murdered, the wound invisible? I had already peered into Sir Henry's mouth and seen nothing amiss. I tilted the head back and inspected the nostrils to see if any trace of blood was there. None was.

Sir Henry was stiff in death, but I managed to turn his head so that I could inspect his left ear. 'Tis all dark within a man's ear, so at first I saw nothing, but it seemed to me that Sir Henry's ear was darker than might be expected. I drew my dagger and with the point teased from the ear canal a flake of dried matter identical to the drop of dried blood upon the floor. If a man died in the throes of apoplexy would the strain cause an eardrum to burst? I had never heard of such a thing, and Galen and de Mondeville wrote nothing of such a phenomenon.

I needed my instruments. I bid Arthur and Walter maintain their watch, told Lord Gilbert my examination was near complete, and hastened to Galen House. Bessie toddled to me, but I could spare her but a peck upon a

cheek before I seized a sack which I keep always ready for a time when my skills are called for.

Often when I walk the bridge over Shill Brook I stop to observe the water pass beneath, but not this day. I hastened to the castle, and at Sir Henry's chamber I selected my smallest scalpel with which to prod the dark recess of Sir Henry's ear. A moment later I drew forth a clot of dried blood.

If an awl is driven through a man's ear, into his brain, will he die so suddenly that he does not cry out in pain before death comes? I did not know, and do not know yet, for there is no way to make experiment to learn if it may be so.

But I was then sure that Sir Henry was murdered. Some man thrust an awl or thin blade through his ear. If such a wound bleeds much – I had no experience of such a wound to know, and no writer has treated the subject – the felon had mopped up the blood so as to befuddle all who sought to find the cause of Sir Henry's death. They had overlooked one drop.

I must now report this sad discovery to Lord Gilbert, and he must send for Sir Roger de Elmerugg, Sheriff of Oxford. Murder upon Lord Gilbert's lands would generally be my bailiwick, but not when the deceased was a visiting knight. I was pleased that seeking a murderer would be another man's business. Sir Roger entertained other thoughts.