

the
Heretic

Landscape architect, property developer, and pastor, Henry's career was diverse before cancer struck in 2006. "*There's nothing like an open coffin to make a man rethink his priorities.*" On the day of his surgery, Henry started to write a novel for his sons, expressing the deep things that he might never get to show them. He did not know then that he would survive, or that from his hospital bed a new career had been born. He now works as an author, speaker, and recording artist, pursuing his love of history, philosophy, and the arts. Following the publication of his first novel, *The Heretic*, Henry is now researching a prequel called *The Knight*, set in the Renaissance courts of Italy.

Henry and his wife Ruth live deep among the mountains and lakes of northwest Cumbria, in a barn they rebuilt to contain their expanding family and goat herd. "*Three feet thick walls are ideal when you have five lively children!*" Their favourite hobbies include mountain expeditions, swimming in the lakes and rivers, films, reading copiously, and making an awful din with various musical instruments.

"A gentle man of God who has faced life's great mountains." – **Bear Grylls**

1536

Who will survive
the new world
order?

the HERETIC

HENRY VYNER-BROOKS



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 095 0
e-ISBN 978 1 78264 096 7

First edition 2014

Acknowledgments

Page 14: Artist's reconstruction of Saint Benet's; used by kind
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British
Library

Printed and bound in the UK, August 2014, LH26

To my father, for teaching me to love history and art.

To my mother, for showing me how to love people.

To my wife, for loving me.

To the 200 million Christians who still suffer for their faith.

To my children, that you may learn to love & endure as they do.

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*The first duty of a man
is the seeking after
and the investigation of truth.*

CICERO

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is the great privilege and joy of the historical fiction writer to be able to spend long hours in research, which of course usually means plundering the riches of other people's hard labours. So, at the outset, I must acknowledge with profound gratitude the work of historians and academic writers like Eamon Duffy, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Leonard Verduin, Alister McGrath, C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton – to name only the few that come immediately to mind. You have been like many friends in my mind these last years, like Virgil guiding Dante through the underworld! But let me not leave out those who contribute to web resources like Wikipedia, and then also the great fiction writers – most notably Hilary Mantel in my case – who have brought this period to life for so many. My wife and five children deserve awards too, for bearing with me on grizzly days, sharing my research and keeping me caffeinated! Also, I must thank and praise my agents Pieter and Elria at Piquant for bearing with me, pushing good books my way and believing in this project. And then, I suppose, doubly so Tony Collins and the team at Lion for believing in this book enough to invest so much in it, and giving me such an experienced novelist-editor in Penelope Wilcock; sincerely, my thanks to you all. The world merely sees the author, but we authors know that we stand on the shoulders of giants, and only some are listed above.

CHARACTER LIST

THE FENTONS

Master Fenton (father and stepfather)
Elizabeth (mother)
Beth (daughter)
Richard (son)
Piers (son)
Samuel (son)
James (son)

ANABAPTISTS

Pieter (Eel-catcher)
Sarah (Pieter's sister)
Christopher Burgh (Cambridge scholar/reformer)

THE ABBEY

William Rugge (Abbot & Bishop)
Robert Stoneham (Prior)
Brother William Beccles (Cellarer)
Brother Aloysius (Librarian)
Brother Almoner
Brother Porter
Brother Gerard (Herbalist)
Brother John (Infirmarian)
Brother Pacificus (formerly Sir Hugh Erpingham)
Mark (Novice)
Simon (leper, formerly Sir Cecil Erpingham)

THE HERETIC

FROM BINHAM PRIORY

Wulfric (Prior)
Bede (deceased)
Aelfric
Anthony
Benedict
Sigismund

FROM HICKLING PRIORY (AUGUSTINIAN)

Prior Robert Aeyns
8 other canons

AT COURT

Henry (King of England and France)
Thomas Howard (Duke of Norfolk)
Henry Howard (Duke's son and Earl of Surrey)
Charles Brandon (Duke of Suffolk, King's friend and brother-in-law)
Thomas Cromwell (King's Secretary, Lord Privy Seal, Master of the
Rolls, Chancellor of Cambridge University, Vicar General of the King's
new Church of England)
John Blount (captain of the king's bodyguard)
Catherine Howard (the Duke's niece and future Queen)
Eustace Chapuys (Ambassador to Emperor)
Thomas Wyatt (English nobleman, ambassador and lyric poet)
Thomas Cranmer (Archbishop of Canterbury)
Sir Geoffrey de Hastings (retired ambassador)
Lady Maria de Hastings (Sir Geoffrey's niece)

CHARACTER LIST

THE DEAD

Richard Nykke (Bishop of Norwich)
Brother Bede (novice of Binham Abbey)
Catherine of Aragon (King's wife)
Anne Boleyn (King's second wife)
Sir Thomas Erpingham (Hugh's heroic, Lollard forebear)

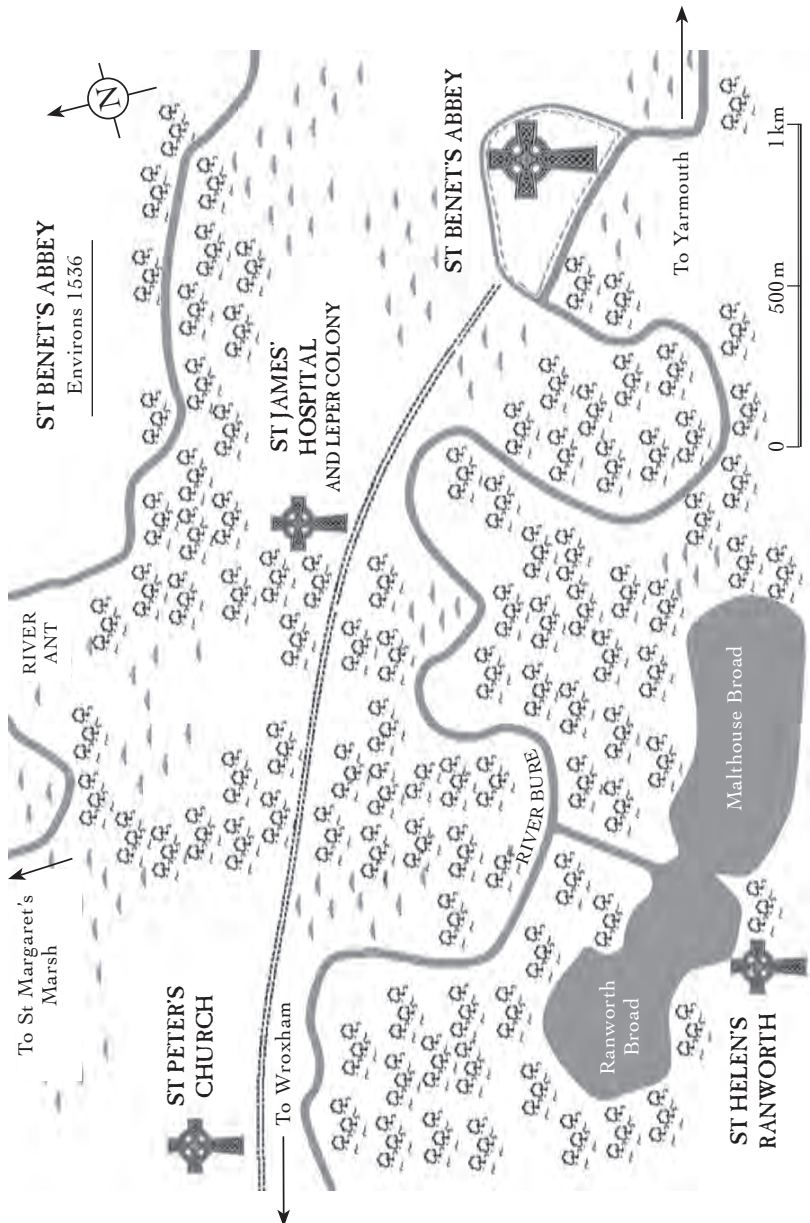
NORTHERN REBELS

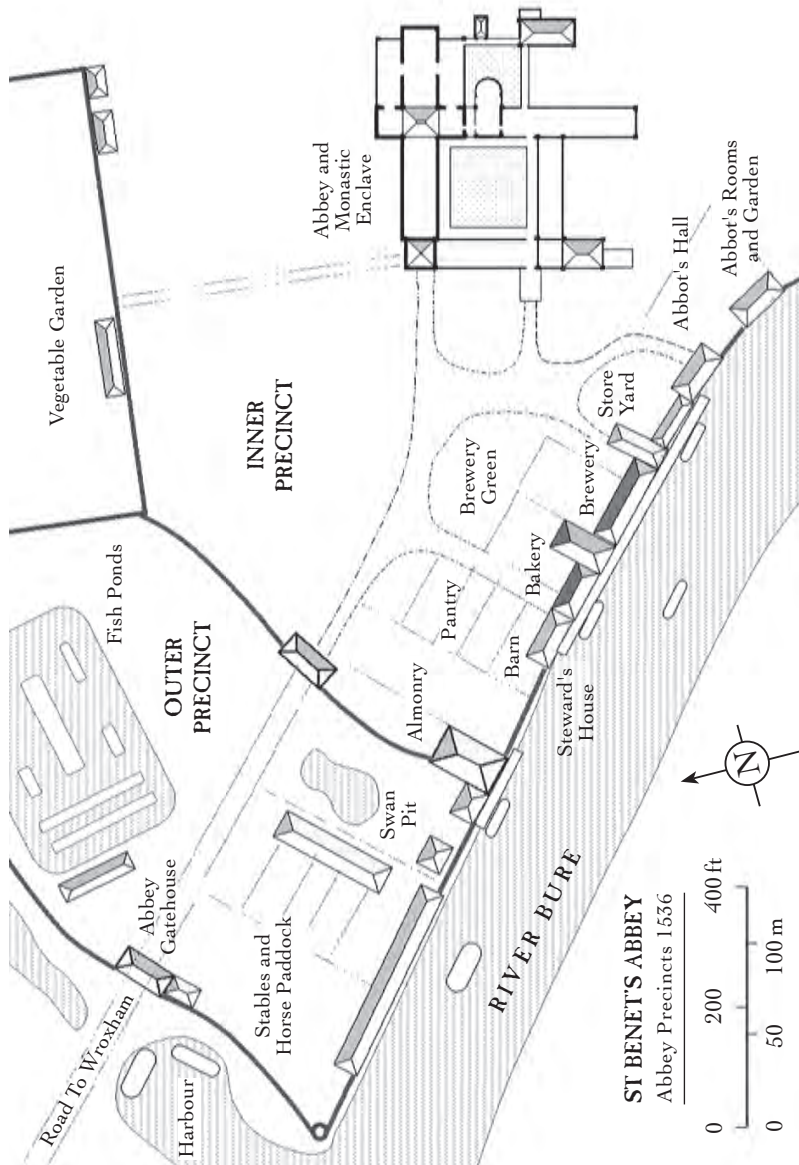
Thomas Moyne (Lincolnshire lawyer)
Robert Aske (Yorkshire lawyer)
Harry Percy (Earl of Northumberland)
Thomas Percy (Harry's brother)
Thomas Darcy (First Baron Darcy of Temple Hurst)
Maddison and Heneag (the Lincoln envoys to London)
and all northern nobles, clergy and a third of the realm

SAINT BENET'S: AN ARTIST'S
RECONSTRUCTION

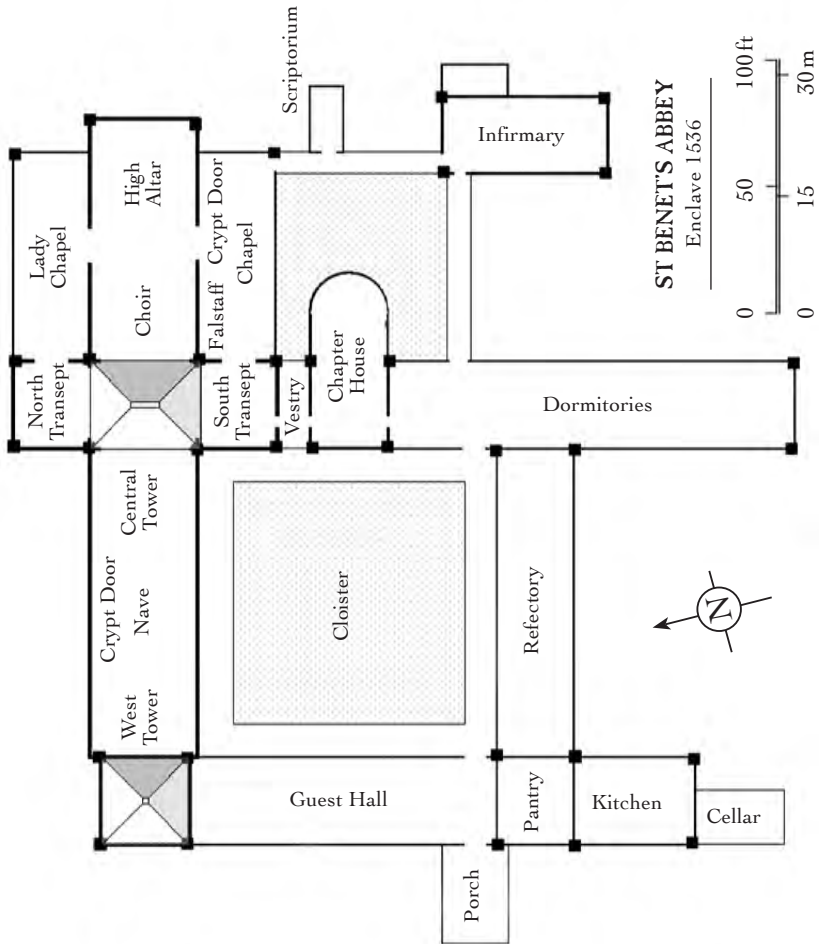


N.B. Stable area in outer precinct not shown here, as supposed
on the other maps for the novel





ST BENET'S ABBEY
Abbey Precincts 1536



1536

THE ACT OF SUPREMACY

Be it here enacted by the authority of this present Parliament that the king our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of the realm, shall be taken, accepted and reputed the only supreme head of the Church of England, called Anglicana Ecclesia, and shall have & enjoy annexed and united to the imperial crown of his realm, as well the title and style thereof, as all honours, dignities, pre-eminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits and commodities to the said dignity of supreme head of the same church belonging and appertaining:

And that our said sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of the realm, shall have the full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts and enormities whatsoever they be, which by any manner spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, corrected, restrained or amended, most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's Religion, and for... the peace and unity and tranquility of his realm.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORPHANS

Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis

Times change and we change with them

Stone columns, dark arches, candlelit pavement, stained glass ablaze in the dying light of Lady Day Eve, March 1536.

“Upon my word, sir, I shall cleave you from head to toe!”

With such ferocious words and a maniacal eye, the knightly Piers brings a broad sword down hard upon his older brother’s golden head.

“Aaaargh!” Richard wheels back. “You hit me! You – you – ” And turning to his sister, “Beth, I am *hit!*”

Beth heaves yet one more great sigh. “Why must you always play with those silly sticks? What do you *expect* but a cracked skull?”

The knightly Piers, all four foot nothing of him, drops his wooden sword. His arms are at once around his stricken brother. “Why did you not block my strike, like I told you?”

“Why must you always do it so hard?” Fourteen-year-old Richard pushes his brother away and drags an already mottled sleeve across his eyes and then his nose. “Why can’t you just pretend?”

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Piers, two years junior, hair blond and thick as barley, is hard to resist at the best of times. He crouches beside his brother, laying a comforting hand on his shoulder. “I am sorry – but we’re still knights, aren’t we?”

“Knights!” Beth scolds, her face scrunched like a merchant’s purse, more because of his too ready apology than at their childish obsession with knights – for even at fifteen years, she herself has scarce apologised for anything in her life, much less meant it. “A pretty pair of knaves you are! Fit for nothing, either of you, but the land, *or the church.*”

But now she catches herself; she has said too much, and that too loudly. Suppose the monk hears her talking in such a way? She returns to tending her two youngest brothers, toddler Samuel and the babe James, both of whom she still dotes on with great tenderness and patience. But too late, what with Richard’s screams and her unguarded comment about “the church”; a monk by the name of Pacificus advances down the nave towards them, eyes like thunder, forehead furrowed like a March field under plough.

Like all grown-ups he is very old, perhaps ninety Piers guesses, perhaps mid-fifties his sister thinks. Even so, the children do like Pacificus, for this monk will at least let them play in church if they are quiet (which they never are). And he has never beaten them as the priest has – a man easy to loathe, if you are young.

And so here he stands before them, this Benedictine whom we shall all come to know well as the story unfolds. He rows a leaky coracle every morning from Saint Benet’s Abbey some few miles along the River Bure to here, Saint Helen’s Church, Ranworth. This insignificant Norfolk village, barely more than a hamlet, nestles like a bittern’s nest on the shore of Ranworth Broad. This small body of water, dug for peat under a licence from the abbey in the reign of King Edward, lies between the great city of Norwich some nine miles distant and the great port of Yarmouth,

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gateway to the world. Its parish routines and characters are as staid and brackish as the dyke waters that surround it. It is out of the way and, like all backwaters, nothing ever happens here, neither to person nor property; that is, until today.

The monk has come to repaint the rood screen. He has barely started this work – to which he does not feel equal in the first place – and so is irritable for many other reasons than the children’s squabbles, but they are nevertheless a good excuse to vent his frustration. His voice is deep, hoarse, like the chafing of boots on gravel.

“What cavorting and fooling is this?” The monk awaits his answer, hands on hips. But there is none, just hung heads and quivering bottom lips; there is nothing to say after all. Pacificus drops his hands and then his shoulders with a long sigh. “Swords in God’s house, eh? Did you not hear the fate of those knights who killed Becket?” He uses a thumb to examine Richard’s emerging bruise. “If you would be knights, then first honour the sanctity of God’s house.”

“He dropped his guard. I meant naught by it,” Piers protests.

Pacificus sees the boy’s shoulders slump further and Beth’s suspicious eye, for she has observed the scars on Pacificus’s wrists, deep red, almost black in places. Her father has often warned them against friars and monks now the smaller houses are being shut, as there are all sorts wandering the lanes these days. She observes the monk’s face, burnt like a book, bound in tight leather, and telling nothing. The babe strains in her arms; little Samuel has wandered away and is now climbing on the font. She chides him but Samuel gives no heed. She glances back at the monk and thinks she almost sees a smile.

The monk reaches his paint-stained fingers to lift Richard’s chin and hold it there. “Second thing, lad: never drop your guard, even at play. It is a bad habit, and bad form, particularly against such a wily enemy.”

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Richard wipes his tears and forces a smile. Piers beams at the compliment.

Pacificus raises Richard's sword arm, helping him into a close-fighting stance. "Feet like so, left arm here, blade here, parry and sidestep here. No more sore heads – got it?"

Piers too imitates the move with speed and flow, both boys delighted. Will he teach them more, they ask. He smiles, "*Multa me docuit usus, magister egregius.*"¹

Beth sighs and stoops to pick up baby James as he wriggles free yet again in a bid to pick up Richard's sword. There is no talking to men or boys on these things.

"Is it true you make the black paint from burnt bones?" Piers says.

The monk examines his blackened fingers. "Some have done so, it is true."

"Do you? They say you do!"

"Do they, indeed?"

"Don't you want to know who?"

"Piers, hold your tongue," his sister chides.

"She says so."

"I do not!"

"She does so, and other things –"

"Vile wretch!" She goes to cuff him with her free arm, but halts and listens, for she hears swift footsteps at the gate, then in the porch. Further off down the lane also, the sound of horses, and men barking orders. The oak doors scream on their hinges and a woman pours in like molten metal, near tumbling at the monk's feet, gasping for breath, one hand on the font. "Run, children, hide!" she heaves for air. "For the love of God, hide *at once!*"

"Mother, what is it?" Beth gasps. Baby James strains for his mother, and Samuel runs to her skirts. She hugs him fiercely but then she pushes him back with tears. "No! To your sister now – go, child, there is no time to explain! Hamberly comes for you

1 "Necessity, that excellent master, has taught me many things." (Pliny the Younger)

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with the law – but go to now, *hide!* Beth, take them – fly!” Swift and urgent, she beseeches the monk, “Brother, by all you swear holy, pledge me you will spare these my orphans.”

“Spare... orphans?” He gapes, appalled. “What business has Squire Hamberly with you?”

“Mother!” Richard says, his lip beginning to tremble.

“Go, Richard! GO! Hide – I cannot help you now!” She pushes him away towards the door of the bell tower. He starts to well up, he cannot think. What is she doing? Beth wastes no time but clutches James close, hustling Richard through the door towards the steps. She glances back and whispers to her mother, “To the eel-catcher?” Her mother nods emphatically. Piers, waiting for no further command, grabs little Samuel’s hand, towing him in the opposite direction down to the altar. The toddler, delighted at last to be included in a game, runs willingly. His mother makes as if to stop them, but Pacificus raises his hand. “Best, lady, if they separate.” And she sees the sense of it.

The sound of hooves is in the churchyard now, the clink of steel.

She looks towards the altar in the Lady chapel, where she was churched only last spring after James was born. Even in this surreal and terrible moment, Pacificus cannot help but admire the beauty of the steward’s wife, quite legendary in these parts, though he has not been as close to her as this before. He sees early signs of age, the lines and some grey amongst the gold, but even so a rare face, and he had seen many. Perhaps it is the fierce meaning of those eyes, fast and blue as a swallow, darting now this way, then that. He knows those eyes, understands them exactly. She looks like the Saint Agatha he has been trying to paint all week, desperate and yet steeled to face the inevitability of awful providence. What could she have done? He consciously tears his own eyes from her towards the door. And in this brief hiatus of thumping hearts, quickened breath, sweating palms, she murmurs, “Men used to seek sanctuary at the altar.”

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Pacificus, caught off guard by the woman and the moment, finds it hard to say more than, “Yes, in another age.” And then straightaway thinks, *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*,² but it is too late to impress her that he really is more than the average dog Latin monk. For time is gone and the doors fling wide, as her husband’s employer, Squire Hamberly, swaggers in, face like a broiled gammon, hair grey and mottled as a dead badger. Pacificus would stand between them but knows it is not his place, not now.

“Promise me,” she whispers urgently, touching his wrist. “My children – promise me!”

Her eyes fix him, pleading, but he says nothing. Does nothing. He’ll not be cornered by this woman, whoever she is, whatever her plight. Pick your battles, first rule of war.

Then, hot upon Hamberly’s heels, comes John the Miller’s son, an ambitious oaf with a lithe step and strong arm, and swift behind him, the sheriff’s reeve from Wroxham with two men at arms. Ah, thinks Pacificus, she must be guilty of something to have roused that sluggard from the sheriff’s house.

“Led us a pretty dance, Mistress Fenton,” Hamberly wheezes above a ruff that makes his face look like a boar’s head on a platter. “Tis no use hiding in God’s house when all your devils have forsaken you. We have your husband and now we come for you and that devil’s spawn you call your children – or have you sacrificed them to Lucifer?”

Pacificus glances at her. Could it be? Surely not.

“Thank you, squire.” The reeve, a squat creature that smiles too easily, sidles past Hamberly. “We will take matters from here; see the law is served to the letter, so we will.” Which is about right, for the villagers say the reeve is so narrow-minded, he can look through a keyhole with both eyes. He clears his throat with a great show of gravity, for this is the part of his work he really looks forward to. “Now then, is this the woman you saw, heard and did testify about, John Miller?”

2 The times change and we change with them.

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Miller confirms it with barely concealed glee. “Oh aye, that’s her all right!”

Noisome caitiff, Pacificus thinks, sizing the man. I thought Judas was only allowed out of hell for one day at Candlemas to cool himself.

“Very well. Mistress Fenton, I arrest you on charges of heresy and treason. You will come with these good men – you and your family – to a place assigned you by the bailiff until the day of your trial and sentencing.”

The guards step forward, but Pacificus moves to intervene. “Prithee, gentlemen, I believe in such instances a warrant is usual?”

The reeve retrieves one from his doublet, whereupon Hamberly seizes it and thrusts it at Pacificus. “Read it if you must! The whore is arrested fairly.” He turns his gaze on her. “And to think we had so graciously let these vile Fentons manage our estates!”

“I believe – ” She draws in her breath and speaks clearly. “I believe my husband’s care saved your estates from ruination, and that nothing displeased you until you demanded more than you were entitled to receive.” At this she turns the full blue fury of her eyes upon him, but the sally makes little impression, though it is understood by the others.

“Well, that is where you are wrong. You could have stayed on if we had not so timely received confirmation of your infamy from Miller here.”

Throughout this exchange Pacificus registers the charges with blinking eyes. He speaks past Hamberly to the reeve, “Serious charges, with evidence I presume?”

“My word, damn you, my testimony!” Hamberly cannot abide being spoken over. “Who are you, monk, telling the Justices their business? Be sure I will speak to Prior Thomas about it, Brother...?”

“Pacificus,” Pacificus supplies.

“Indeed, my son, and others have spoken of you.” Hamberly scratches the pockmarks on what is still visible of his neck. “Yes, I

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have heard of you. Well, Brother Pacificus, your prior often brings his hounds onto my land, and so I have his ear right enough.”

“I’m sure he will not mind that I was seeing the law served correctly on this side of the river,” Pacificus says. He would dearly love to remind Hamberly there was a time when squires won their spurs before they won their estates, but he knows his own situation is already precarious.

“The law?” Hamberly mocks. “You talk of the law, monk, and what is this?” He directs the reeve to observe the paint pots and brushes by the rood. “Does not His Majesty’s ban on religious art mean anything to this monk? Or perhaps he still thinks the church is above the law?”

“Come now, squire, it is restoration, not creation.” And then, rather immaturely for a man of his position, though he has always been a snob, Pacificus says, “And besides, if we were to examine the *letter* of the law, would not the Sumptuary Laws forbid the silk embellishment of doublets worn by those of the yeoman class, and, for that matter, the carrying of a rapier in public?”

Hamberly is near to exploding with his fists, but the reeve – much to his credit, for he is not used to taking initiative – steps forward. “Pray let us deal with the matter in hand, gentlemen. Mistress Fenton, will you come willingly with these men?”

She nods and steps forward now, hoping by hastening her own fate to spare her little ones. No sooner does she step forward than she hears the nasal voice of the reeve.

“And the children, Mistress? The children?”

“They are in God’s keeping now – you will not find them.” She speaks with confidence.

“What murder, malice and malignity,” Hamberly vents on her. “What did I say, reeve? She doubtless has killed them!”

“Then, squire, if it be so, I have saved the law any further trouble in doing it, or isn’t that what you intend for all of us? Prithee let us go now. You have what you came for,” Elizabeth says.

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The reeve is not sure and even though he would believe anything possible of her, he would not risk his job for want of a little searching. After all, it was to here that she had run from them.

The men at arms who have been lingering in the background are sent to search the nave and Lady chapel. Miller offers to search the bell tower.

The woman is praying, Pacificus can see that, but it cannot do her good now, he thinks. There is nowhere for the children to hide up there if Miller goes all the way – and he doesn't look the sort to stop. I should not get involved, he mutters inside his head. It'll bring trouble. His eyes follow Miller, but when the tower door shuts, they focus on the waning orange glow in the west windows behind him. "The light is fading, I must see to my brushes. Mistress Fenton, gentlemen –"

Hamberly is still too angry to do more than let out a half-grunt, half-snort. Pacificus does not meet her gaze again as he departs, for fear of coming under suspicion himself. But as he strides down the nave with apparent unconcern to all, the mop of golden hair and then the beady blue eyes of Piers emerge from behind the base of the altar. The quick shake of the monk's head sends the boy back to where his infant brother crouches. No one has seen, Pacificus thinks, at which point he realises he has begun to be sucked in. The reeve's men come close to the rood screen and make to go into the chancel.

"You may see behind the screen from here, and you can also see the choir stalls are quite empty, but beyond that you may not go, lest the bishop hear of it." He thinks by these words, said with as much disinterest as he can muster, to dissuade them further. But one of them, Thomas Carter of Aylesham, who has never had a good word for priests, friars or monks, will not be told anything. He steps through the carved arch of the screen while a half-painted Archangel Michael looks on. Carter approaches the altar step, so close now that he will hear the children's breathing if he hears nothing else. Pacificus follows him into the choir,

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dragging his feet to obscure any noise and very intent to convince this heathen that any sacrilege will not go unreported. “You are at liberty to fetch the priest to search there, if you do not trust me,” he adds by way of reconciliation.

“You go then – to look, I mean,” Carter says.

“Very well.”

Pacificus genuflects, mounts the step and walks behind the altar, keeping to the back wall, so as not to step on the bairns. He sees Piers feeding James crusts from his pocket – clever lad. But Samuel grabs Pacificus’s habit; he wants to be lifted up and cuddled. Thankfully his mouth is too full of bread to make much noise. “Nothing here,” Pacificus says, slightly louder than necessary. He sees Elizabeth looking back as the reeve leads her out. Piers cups the toddler’s mouth and pulls a funny face to distract him. Meanwhile Pacificus moves round to the other side and follows Carter out. That was too close, he thinks.

He pretends to busy himself with the paints and then to his utter amazement Miller appears from the bell tower empty handed. What magic is this? Impossible, he thinks, unless the brute has done something with them. Soon they are all gone and the place falls silent for a moment as if nothing but good had ever happened within the walls.

Pacificus tells Piers to make no noise and keep Samuel close, while he goes to search outside the church. He hears the horses someway down the road to Wroxham. There are no other houses near them, thankfully.

Back inside he hears steps on the bell tower stairs. A moment later Richard tumbles out, breathing short and fast, white as a sheet even in the fading light. “Our mother?” His eyes alone are enough to break the hardest heart but Pacificus can say little more than, “Boy, how did Miller not find you?”

Richard, distracted for the moment from his aching heart by the cleverness of their scheme, tells the monk how they realised they

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had no place to hide but one: behind the trap door as it opened onto the bell tower roof. “Really, it is only a half-hiding place, and barely enough to cover us all, but we did it, and when he opened the door from the ladder, we just kept behind it and hoped that he didn’t do more than peep at the roof.” He shrugged. “Anyway, he didn’t. It was Beth’s idea, really.”

Beth and James appear at the bottom of the steps. Her face is streaked with tears; she has descended that circular staircase like Dante’s cardinal descending into hell. Being careful carrying the baby through that narrow, winding space has given her plenty of time to take it all in. She came into church this day a happy child, but re-enters it now an orphan; she came here carefree, with all she needed, and stands here now with nothing in the world.

“Where is our mother? Where have they taken her?”

“Wroxham, then to Norwich. The charges are serious.”

“And Father?” Piers adds, as he joins them.

“Him too.”

“But what have they done wrong?” Beth demands.

“You do not know?” Pacificus looks at her carefully.

“Well, I know there was something, something that was secret, that they would tell me when I was ready but not before.”

“Do your parents attend Mass?”

“Every week.”

“And they take the sacrament?”

“Of course.” She puts the baby down on the floor rushes, and then folds her arms. “Why ask of it?”

“Never mind now.” He is not sure at all whether she does know something after all. “Do you have other family where you can go now? Who can hide you?”

“Our father’s people are from down country, we know not where; he did not speak of them.”

“And your mother, child? What of her?”

“Aylesham – though she always said she could not be seen there again.”

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“Why?”

“I know not, but it is God’s truth.”

This he doesn’t want to hear, but Beth – realising this man is their only ally in the world – has not finished, for there is one understanding her mother has always drummed into her. “But Mother said that if ever anything bad happened to her and Father, if we were left alone, she said we should search out the eel-man, up river beyond Ludham, way up in the marshes, she said.”

“Ah,” Pacificus says. “I have seen him – the Dutchman. He is sometimes at the monastery to sell his catch.”

“That is more than us, then,” she says. “We have never met him – or I don’t think we have – and we have no boat to cross the river, and we don’t know the way to his house.” She looks anxious. “They say the marsh is very dangerous there.”

Silence falls between them as Pacificus looks again at the light through the west window. He could loose the moorings of a boat at the staithe and bring it back in the morning, but the light is going fast, and he must be at Vespers. He can’t not do that and traipse up with these children in the marshes. But dusk is good for cover, and more than anything else he does not want to be seen with these children – or have anything to do with them in fact. His situation at Saint Benet’s is not easy already; this sort of thing could finish him. What did Benedict rule? That a straying man may be received again “even unto the third time if he promise amendment”. The abbot had hoped this work beyond the precinct at Ranworth might cool his temper, help him earn his name, but it seems trouble has found him yet again.

He feels Piers at his right hand. “You *will* get us there, won’t you?”

“Yes. I owe your mother that much at least.” Pacificus has made his plan. “You children will split up. Maid, you take the babe – and stop his crying.”

“I cannot. He is wet, hungry and needs his – ” Her voice trails off in a moment of realisation.

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But the monk is not listening now anyway; he is making plans. “And you, lad,” he says to Richard. “Go quietly in the shadows of the hedgerows to Heron Point. Wait there in the reeds for Piers and me.”

“How will we get there?” Richard says.

“You will take Old Man Raker’s boat from the staithe.”

“But if anyone sees me, or if I can’t do it?”

“You make sure they don’t, particularly your face, you hear? From now on, no one south of the river must see any of you. Just get that boat, or another, and meet us at the point. You’ll see me rowing up the cutting to the river; follow at a distance. There’s a staithe near Saint James’ that I use. See where I put in, deep in the reeds. If no one is watching or near, do likewise.”

“And *then*,” Richard says, “you will take us to this eel-catcher?”

“No, I have no time. I will be missed at the abbey. But I know someone among the lepers who will take you from there.”

Beth claps a hand to her mouth. Lepers! She has seen the small colony attached to Saint James’ Hospital, but only from her side of the river. Monks may go near them but she would not – not ever. But she then thinks: That was then – before all this. Now we are *all* outcasts. She lowers her eyes slightly. “I would prefer it if you took us.”

“Maid, you cannot *prefer* now, only take what is offered. The leper Simon can be trusted absolutely, you have my word on it. He knows the marshes up the River Ant. You will be safe with him.” He turns to the door. “Gather what you have now. Let’s get gone.”