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# Re-Imagining Marginalised Tudor Voices: Working Women, Print Culture and the Rejection of Female Silence

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**RE-IMAGINING MARGINALISED TUDOR VOICES: WORKING WOMEN,  
PRINT CULTURE AND THE REJECTION OF FEMALE SILENCE**

by

**KATHERINE GLEW**

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in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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## **Author's Declaration**

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**Re-imagining Marginalised Tudor Voices: Working Women, Print Culture and the Rejection of Female Silence**

**Abstract**

Though the recent work of historians has begun to reveal the rich and complex lives of working women (Hubbard, 2012, p.1), their narrative potential has mostly been ignored by writers of modern historical fiction. Working women are infrequently protagonists and when they do appear, their domesticity is emphasised; those Tudor women who traversed the gender divide to attain employment in male-dominated fields are almost entirely marginalised. This project seeks to address this gap by offering a novel, *Carew*, that foregrounds the experiences of a working woman, the fictional Hannah Carew, whose character is inspired by the printer Elisabeth Pickering. It conceptualises how a Tudor woman might have experienced Tudor societal expectations, using the printing press to give physical form to gender boundaries. The novel also seeks to creatively consider notions of ‘history’ and how ‘histories’ are constructed and, in so doing, explore possible reasons why working women’s voices have been marginalised. The inclusion of epigraphs establish history as a contested space, while the composition of the *First Examination of Anne Askew*, an account of the Tudor martyr’s first trial for heresy, is used to explore how historians make use of literary techniques. The project also seeks to challenge, subvert and resist common representations of working women in historical fiction who are often subordinated by their upper-class counterparts.

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# Crew



## Part One

# The English Sweat

*May, 1546*

‘The sweating sickness returned, briefly and inexplicably, to London in May 1546. It affected, first, the Cunningham Press on Fleet Street before moving west through Temple Bar and Charing Cross. Here it was contained and by the close of May, no other deaths were recorded. The Carew Press, neighbour but one to the Cunningham Press, was not spared infection and three succumbed to the disease: Jonathan Estbury, Henry Lamber, and William Carew himself. Here marks the end of this industrious man’s career, cut short by the injustices of illness; here, too, marks the final chapter of the business. By 1547, the Carew Press ceased to exist.’

Prof. Timothy Axton-Smith, 1901

*Printers of Fleet Street, 1520-1550: A Comprehensive Study*

‘For Hannah Carew, the sweating sickness provided an opportunity for personal and financial liberty that traversed the rigid gender structures of Tudor society...’

Dr. Mina Abbot, 2003

*Hidden Women: Gender and the Early Modern Book Trade*

## Chapter One

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‘There’s a woman downstairs.’

*She’ll have to wait.* Hannah’s eyes are caught on the beams. It’s dusk now, low light. The shadows have a depth to them that can suck out a person’s soul. Black, like burnt charcoal. Nothing should be up there but oak supports and bunched herbs—or a bird perhaps, a sparrow, trapped inside when the physician ordered the window bolted. She listens for the rustle of a wing, the tip-tapping of tiny, raw-boned toes. A crack breaks the air.

Half of William has fallen from the bed. His head lolls on the floor, mouth agape. Spittle dribbles across his face. His legs, however, remain abed, tangled in the sweat-soaked sheets. Agnes drops towards him and takes his head into her hands. Slick skin slips through her fingers and his skull cracks against the boards once more. He groans. Agnes lifts his head into her lap. ‘I can feel blood,’ she says. Hannah can see it, crimson against the white of her apron. More loudly: ‘His skull is broken.’ She looks up. ‘There’s blood.’ *It’s your fault.* ‘Mistress.’

William flails his arms and yowls. The sound is guttural and raw, lodged in the back of his throat, the sound of an animal cornered, wounded, dying. Agnes drops his head and tries to scuttle backwards but her shoes catch on the folds of her skirt and she’s brought up short. One of William’s hands strikes her cheek and she gasps.

Hannah seizes her husband’s shoulder from the other side of the bed. ‘Find your feet, Agnes, and be ready to push against his chest.’ She grips the crook of his elbow. ‘Hurry.’ She digs in her nails to stop her fingers slipping. ‘Now, Agnes: push.’ His body is as heavy and unwieldy as a sack of grain but between the two of them, he is righted.

Agnes starts to work the linens, pulling them taut before tucking the ends beneath the mattress. ‘They should have been tighter,’ she mutters. *This, too, is your fault.*

‘But not too tight.’

‘He’ll fall.’

‘If we swaddle him like an infant, he’s more likely to fight his bindings.’ Hannah tugs the sheet over William’s toes. The rank smell of him abrades the soft tissues of her nose. She keeps her head turned, her breathing shallow.

“‘Tight, but not too tight.’” Agnes affects Hannah’s strict enunciation. *Cambridge talk*, William calls it. *Cambridge fussiness*.

He begins to stir.

‘Loosen the sheets, Agnes.’

William kicks out, one heel thudding into a bedpost. The entire frame shudders. He yelps. Hannah looks away. Agnes starts to release the tension in the sheets. When Hannah looks back, she sees that that housekeeper’s hands are trembling.

‘There’s a woman downstairs.’ Agnes’ voice has lost some of its sharpness.

‘Nobody’s to be admitted while the sweat remains a-hold of the Press. Except—’

‘I wasn’t the one who let her in.’

—a *priest, a searcher*. ‘Then who?’

‘Alice.’

‘Ensure she knows not to admit anyone else. No one is to leave, either.’

‘I don’t need to be told.’

‘I’m telling you to tell the others. Someone will need to fashion a cross of straw for the front door and back gate.’

‘If it even is the sweat. The physician was unsure.’

‘Sure enough to leave as quickly as he came.’

William stiffens. Hannah steps back, motioning for Agnes to do the same. Stiffness becomes shivering, shivering convulsions. He looks like a hooked trout, quivering and suffocating on the riverbank. Hannah’s belly wricks. She loathes trout. She

loathes their pinprick black eyes and vomerine teeth and how they mangle their bodies trying to return to water. *Turn away*, her father used to say, but she couldn't. She'd hold her breath and watch as they squirmed and choked. Then her brother would poke his fingers through the gills and work their jaws while making *glub, glub* noises. Sometimes, he'd flick blood and water at her when no one was looking. She'd taste their saltiness in the air and wretch. Once, she'd nudged one back into the river. It darted away so quickly it left a shadow in the water.

William stills.

Agnes unstoppers a vial of cloudy, fetid liquid. *Have him drink this*, the physician said.

Hannah holds out her hand. 'I'll do it.' But she stoppers the vial when Agnes passes it to her. She isn't about to nudge her husband back into the water: people who survive the sweating sickness rarely die if they catch it twice. The thought catches her unawares. She pulls out the cork and lets three small drops fall between William's lips.

'She's a gentlewoman by her shoes and clothing.' *The woman downstairs*. 'She asked for the master.'

'What's her name?' Hannah pushes the cork back into the vial with her thumb and places it on the bedside table.

'Anne Kyme.'

'Kyme?'

'She said she's known to the master.'

'Not Anne Leynham?'

'Anne Kyme. A gentlewoman, not a merchant's wife. And I've seen Mistress Leynham often enough to know her from a stranger. It's not her.'

'What else did she say?'

'Little else.'

‘Nothing about her business with the master?’

‘Her business isn’t with me, it’s with him.’

‘But she didn’t elaborate when you told her he has the sweat? She made no mention of a message that can be passed along, a note of some sort?’

‘What could I have said?’

‘That the sweating sickness has affected the Press; that Master Carew is stricken; that others are stricken; that it is best to leave.’ Hannah raises her eyebrows.

Agnes’ hands find her hips. ‘We don’t know if it *is*—and I was to go to the master directly. Directly I came. And it’s fortunate I did, or he’d still be sprawled across the floorboards with you gazing up at the ceiling trying to see the,’ she waves a hand at the beams, ‘the sky.’

Hannah closes her eyes. The noises around her intensify. William’s pinched breathing. The creak of the floorboards as Agnes levels her weight. The intermittent cracking of the walls as the spring-warmed timbers cool. It’s a lifeless thing in the Carew Press, peace. There’re no nooks to hide inside, no willow trees to crawl beneath, no fronds to shutter the world beyond. In Cambridge, she’d jump flagstones to the lea beside the river and settle amongst the tall, stiff grasses. Crickets would mistake her for wood sorrel or meadow buttercup and crawl over her bare toes. On warmer days, she’d lie on the riverbank and let the water flow between her fingers. Later, she’d slip back into the kitchen, wipe the dirt from the soles of her feet and return to being Hannah Rondel, master-printer’s daughter. There aren’t any willows on Fleet Street, no forget-me-nots to sink into, no insects to tickle her toes, no river to carry away her thoughts. There is only the Carew Press and she is only Hannah Carew, printer’s wife.

Hannah opens her eyes. Agnes is kneeling by the bed, pressing a sodden cloth to William’s temple. He shivers but doesn’t struggle. Agnes briefly turns her head towards Hannah and murmurs something indistinguishable, something chastened.

‘Is his head still bleeding?’ Hannah asks. Her voice sounds tart. She clears her throat. ‘Is his head still—’

‘It needs binding.’ Agnes’ knees creak when she stands.

‘There are some clean linens—’

‘I know: downstairs.’ She passes Hannah the cloth. The door hushes shut.

Tepid water trickles down Hannah’s fingers and tip taps onto the floorboards. The air behind her right ear quivers. She looks up. The shadows have slunk lower and wrapped themselves around the beams and bunched herbs. Somewhere, up there, she hears a noise, a soft fluttering like wings struggling against an obstruction. The noise stops as soon as she becomes aware of it, as if her awareness has frightened it away. She runs a finger across her lower lip before pinching it between her thumb and forefinger. A wren, perhaps? A robin?

William’s laboured breathing tightens to a wheeze.

She folds the cloth and lays it across his forehead. He turns away, eyes closed.

Hannah studies the room. The contents have started to disappear into the gloom. She lights a candle. The door to the linen press is ajar. She closes it. William’s shoes are on their sides. She rights them. The sleeve of his doublet trails the floor. She folds it onto the stool.

Air rattles through William’s mouth. Hannah clears her throat and swallows a glob of saliva.

Agnes returns, strips of cloth folded across one arm. ‘I don’t need help,’ she says.

Hannah watches instead. The housekeeper removes the damp cloth and presses a wad of dry linen against William’s wound. He trembles but doesn’t try to force her away. Her movements are swift, sure-handed. She turns his head this way and that, negotiating hair and sweat and the heaviness of his skull until the dressing is secure. Then she sits

beside the bed and starts to daub at the thick, yellowing mucus that has accumulated below his nose with the edge of her apron.

‘He’s quieter now,’ Agnes murmurs. ‘Quieter already.’

*Stricken at dawn, dead by sunset.* That’s what they say. That’s how it happens.

Hannah gathers William’s keys from the table and sorts for the one that will open the chest by the far wall.

‘Those are the master’s keys,’ Agnes says.

‘We may have need of a searcher,’ Hannah says. May—*will*.

Agnes continues to daub at William’s face. ‘It’s not the sweat.’

‘It is, Agnes.’

‘And there’s money in the housekeeping purse.’

‘The physician has it.’

‘What of the rest?’

‘Spent.’

‘On what?’

‘Grain, cabbage, ale, linen, thread, lye, your wages, and Alice’s.’ Hannah lights another candle. ‘Tallow.’ She places the candle beside the chest. The frail light nudges shadow into the knots and faults. She runs a finger along one edge. The wood is cool to touch, familiar. She’d brought it with her to the Carew Press two years ago but, somehow, at some point, it had become William’s. The contents once smelled of lavender and rosemary; now the scent is tangy and heavy, like corroded metal and musty paper. Books and leather pouches have replaced her dried herbs and keepsakes.

She moves aside a Caxton Bible. Her father used to displayed a copy in his office.

*A piece of the past, he’d say. And, Let’s never print so poorly again.*

The writing had been set at an angle, the contents of *Leviticus* disappearing off the right-side margin near the bottom of the page: ‘If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of—’ something. Something, something.

*That’s why we go to church*, she’d said, a joke.

*It’s one of the reasons.*

Below the Caxton is a bundle of letters tied together with dark green ribbon. Bartering letters. A daughter for marriage weighed against her dowry. She’d read William’s negotiations over her father’s shoulder.

‘Elder daughter?’

‘I’m sure he means that you are the eldest child.’ He reached for a quill. Blunt. ‘Where is my...?’

‘Under Lockwood’s invoice.’ Hannah pushed the papers aside and passed him the sharpening knife. It shook in his left hand. ‘I can...if you want...’

‘You might have to.’

She pared the quill tip to a point with quick, efficient cuts while he pressed his trembling hand between his knees. Whoops could be heard through the walls: her brother and his friends gambling in the kitchen.

‘They’ll be gone soon,’ her father said. He took the quill, dabbed it into the ink well and shooed her away. *Let me write*. But she’d remained, half perched on the armrest, correcting his spelling.

Below the letters are two more books; below these an old woodcut of the Carew Press’ printer’s mark and a few leather and velvet bags. One carries a signet ring, another a filigree chain and jewel. The filigree Hannah knows to be painted copper, the jewel a moulded piece of stained glass. Her late mother-in-law’s possessions, purchased before William had finished his apprenticeship. The largest of the bags contains a number of



coins. She removes enough to pay a searcher if—when—one is needed and returns the bag to the chest.

Something sharp catches the edge of her finger. She recoils but it's only loose paper: the corner of a pamphlet. She eases it out from under the relics and paste and stills. The title *Transubstantiation* dominates the upper quarter of the cover. Below is an image of purgatory. Flames curl around mangled bodies. Mutilated hands reach for mercy. Mouths screech soundless agony. Snarling, hairless, wolf-like creatures tear flesh from bones and toss amputated limbs into a cauldron overflowing with hands and feet and legs and heads.

Hannah glances at Agnes. The housekeeper has William's chin grasped between her fingers and is attempting to drip some of the physician's tincture between his lips. Hannah alters the angle of her body so that the pamphlet cannot be seen by either.

Snakes—jaws open, fangs proud—border all four pages. Their bodies tangle around each other in such a way that they appear to writhe before her eyes. She glances at the text and tries to see it without comprehending, but the words are too familiar to be imperceptible—she's heard them gossiped on the corners of the city and whispered behind hands at mass. *Transubstantiation is a wickedness: it does not offer a path to Heaven or absolution.*

Bread and wine. Body and blood. One and the same.

Or not.

The king says not. *This is the very body; this is the very blood.*

*Damn the king*, the gossippers say.

*Damn the gossippers*, says the king. And he *can* damn the gossippers: his word is law; his *word* is the gospel. Pope who? *Henry VIII, King of England; Henry I, Pope of England.*

But there had been no hasty burning of paper or hiding of illegal books in the Carew Press when he ordered the Fleet Street presses searched. No need with a master who leans into tradition and *this is the very body, this is the very blood*.

Hannah watches Agnes release her husband's face. Exhaustion has completely replaced mania. He looks older than he has ever looked but different, too, in some other way.

The door opens.

Hannah scrunches the pamphlet into her hand. 'Has Toby returned, Alice?'

Alice stares at William.

'Alice!' Agnes snaps a finger.

Alice says, 'No. But the lady is asking after the master.' She trips over the words as if they are new and unusual.

*The woman downstairs.*

Agnes says, 'Did you explain that Master Carew is stricken?'

Hannah smooths out the pamphlet, folds it by halves until it is no larger than the palm of her hand, then tucks it into her apron pocket. The searchers coins clink against one another.

Agnes and Alice are speaking back and forth:

'I said the master ails and is a-bed with fever.'

'And what says she?'

'I don't know. Luke was lugging dirty water and he treads loudly when he carries something heavy.'

'Why would Luke be lugging water in the parlour?'

'The lady'd come into the kitchen.'

'The kitchen? Mary Mother, did you leave her there?'

Hannah locks the chest and attaches the keys to her belt. 'It's no matter, Alice. Go back to the kitchen and tell the lady that Master Carew has the sweat. Tell her to leave now, while she can. Accompany her, Agnes.'

'I'll tell her,' Agnes says. 'You,' she turns to the maid, 'can tend to the others.'

'What if she doesn't want to leave?' Alice asks.

'She will,' Hannah says. 'Go on.' She closes the door. When she hears their footsteps on the stairs, she locks it.

## Chapter Two

---

A noise.

Hannah looks up at the beams but they're gone, hidden amongst the shadows. The frail light of the candles is powerless against the coming of night. Darkness reaches down the walls and pockets itself into the corners of the room.

*Stricken at dawn, dead by sunset.*

William's face has slackened. Each breath catches on the mucus in the back of his throat. She's tried to make him talk. Gentle, coaxing; sharp, commanding. She's clapped her hands, clicked her fingers. She's emptied the entirety of the physician's tincture into his mouth and waited. Waited. Waited.

The pamphlet turns between her fingers. *Transubstantiation*. The word blurs in her mind. There's something about it she cannot place, something that keeps slipping away at the edge of her understanding.

One of the candles gutters and the smell of spent wick wends its way through the sick-room air. Something tip taps in the corner.

Hannah returns the pamphlet to her pocket and opens the window.

She meets Alice in the hallway. The young girl's face is grey and clammy. Dried mucus has formed a thin, white layer under her nose. She's straining under the weight of an over-filled basin; water sloshes down her apron and over her shoes. Hannah lifts the basin from her hands.

'Wipe your face,' she says.

Alice nods and rubs her cheeks and nose with a sleeve.

'Rinse your hands.'

Alice dips them into the water.

'And catch your breath a moment.'

‘I spilled water on the stairs.’

‘I’ll sort it.’

Alice removes her cap and gives it a good shake.

‘Better?’

‘Yes.’ She covers her hair, tucking loose strands under the headband. ‘Robert has it too, now, mistress.’ Hannah follows her into the pressers’ bedroom. Robert Caley is on his knees, hair tangled across his face, vomiting onto the floor. Henry Lamber lies on his side. Quiet, shivering. The air is thick, a fug of stale regurgitated food, sweat and tallow.

‘How’s Jonathan?’ Hannah sets the basin on a stool.

‘Luke’s with him. Mistress, the woman downstairs...’

‘What about her?’

‘She’s still here.’

Hannah pulls back the shutters and opens the window. Her movements are slow. She keeps her back to the others. ‘Is she?’

‘I saw her just now.’

‘Downstairs?’

‘Yes’m.’

Hannah dips a cloth into the basin and presses it against Henry Lamber’s forehead.

‘Take over, will you?’

Alice takes the cloth.

In the next room, Luke the younger is struggling with the window latch. Hannah nudges him aside and forces the hinges open. Shattered rust crumbles onto the ledge.

‘Physician be damned,’ Luke says. Sweat curls the hairs at the nape of his neck.

Jonathan, foetal and whimpering, clutches his stomach as if someone has kicked his gut. Perspiration darkens the bedsheets.

‘How long has he been like this?’ Hannah asks, close to Luke’s ear.

‘An hour or thereabouts.’

She touches her apron pocket and feels the outline of the pamphlet within. ‘Can he speak?’

‘He won’t or he can’t.’ Luke’s face is pinched.

Hannah kneels beside the bed. ‘Master Foreman?’

Jonathan flinches.

She tries again, gentler in voice. ‘Master Foreman?’

He curls away from her.

Hannah lowers herself onto her legs and waits, still and quiet. She looks at her hands and the lines across her palms. She pinches the loose skin of her finger joints into soft peaks and watches as they fall back into place. It’s like waiting for a shrew to come out of the long grass: if she keeps her movements slight and her attention averted, she isn’t a danger. After a little while, when her legs begin to ache, she says, ‘Master Foreman?’

Jonathan presses himself into the wall.

Hannah stands.

Luke asks, ‘What did the physician bring?’

‘Nothing of use.’

‘This morning, all was well.’ He wipes his cheeks with the back of his hand.

‘What’s to be done? What can be done?’

‘We wait for the fever to do as it wants.’

‘That’s all?’

She nods but he isn’t looking at her. ‘Yes, that’s all.’

‘I’ve not the skill for waiting.’

She touches his sleeve once, briefly. ‘Perhaps the time has come to fetch the priest.’

‘The priest.’ He wipes his face again. ‘Yes.’

‘He may be fickle when called to contagion.’

‘Not if he believes he’s being called to something else.’ The elder Luke stands in the doorway. ‘You go, Luke. I’ll watch over our foreman.’

‘Good man,’ the younger says and ducks out.

The elder sinks his old bones onto a stool. Hannah rests a hand on his shoulder. He covers it with his own. ‘Don’t you worry about me,’ he says. Then, ‘Our Toby has returned. At last.’

‘At last indeed,’ Hannah mutters.

She finds the apprentice gulping beer in the kitchen. Sweat of a different kind has dampened his hair and street dust clings to his skin. He snaps up straight when he sees her and wipes his hands down his shirt.

‘What response from Christopher Lytton?’ Hannah asks.

Toby passes her a fold of paper.

*Mistress,*

*Inform me of any changes.*

*I’ll pray for him.*

*C. Lytton.*

The letters are ink-heavy and ill-formed. Hannah turns the paper over. Blank, but for the leak-through of excess liquid. To Toby she says, ‘Where else did you go?’

‘Nowhere.’

‘You’ve been gone nearly two hours.’

‘Master Lytton wasn’t at Chancery.’

‘Then where? Home?’

‘Yes, but—’

‘Two hours, Toby.’

‘They wouldn’t open the door.’ His voice has risen in pitch. ‘Not at first. I had to beat against the downstairs window before the housekeeper appeared and then she came at me with sharp words saying neither she nor the Master had time for urchins and layabouts. I introduced myself as Master Carew’s apprentice and messenger but she shooed me away, *No, you’re not, you’re some layabout urchin*, and it was only when I took her in hand that she quietened enough to let me talk.’

‘You took her in hand?’

‘I didn’t hurt her.’ He shifts under her gaze. ‘I didn’t.’

‘What next?’

‘She wouldn’t let me enter on account of the illness, but she did take your letter. She’d’ve had me leave, too, but I said I wouldn’t, not until I had a reply. That’s when I caught a glimpse of him, Master Lytton, watching from one of the upstairs windows. He hid himself away, though, when my eye met his and I didn’t see him again until I was on my way away and looked back.’

‘He watched you leave?’

‘Not after I looked back.’

‘You say he hid?’

‘Yes’m.’

Hannah holds up the note. ‘How long did you wait for this?’

‘Not very long. I didn’t go anywhere else,’ he adds.

‘No.’ She folds the note in half. ‘Are you familiar with the location of the Parish Clerk’s office?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you seen the women that hang around there?’

He says, slowly, as if the word is foreign to him, ‘Prostitutes.’



‘They aren’t prostitutes, Toby.’ Or some may be. ‘Searchers,’ she says. ‘We may need one. I may need you to fetch one. But not now: you’re needed upstairs. Be ready to go when I say.’

Toby darts out. When the door closes, Hannah scrunches the note into a ball and drops it onto the dying embers of the kitchen fire. Prayers. Prayers are a given; prayers are not what she asked for. The edges begin to char and glow red and as the paper unfolds in the heat, it looks as if it is writhing.

## Chapter Three

---

William's office is as William is: ordered, plain, particular. Everything has its place. There's a hook for the keys, a pot for the quills, a bowl for the scrap-ends that Agnes empties each evening. The ledgers have their rows; the loose papers their piles. William's cloak hangs behind the door. His hat rests on top of a bookshelf. The oakwood boxes that line the far wall are identical. The bookshelves match. The desk matches the bookshelves. The chair matches the desk.

The unoccupied surfaces are polished, the metal fixings shine. Hannah presses a finger to a chest's cold hasp and watches as her fingerprint leaves a mark, the only mark.

She sits at the desk—his desk—in his too-low chair, and opens a drawer. Candlelight flickers across a bundle of unused quills, half a dozen ink vials and a roll of leather. The leather she removes and unrolls. Inside, five small quill knives are held in place by fabric pockets.

The second drawer holds other office paraphernalia: the Carew Press seal; red wax for the fastening of letters; blotting paper; a set of pewter scales and weights; a counting frame resting on its side. Hannah spins one of the wooden beads and shuts the drawer before it comes to rest. When she stands, her skirt catches against something rough. She pulls it loose.

The light is nearly gone. She lights four more candles and spreads them around the room, then starts on the boxes. The nearest is a quarter-full of fresh paper. The second holds discarded edits. Each sheet has been pushed into a corner so that their edges align.

'You're here,' Agnes says.

Hannah looks up. The housekeeper stands on the threshold, pale-faced and heavy-lidded. Loose grey hair sticks to her skin. Her cap, Hannah sees, is clenched between her fingers.

‘What are you doing?’ Agnes continues. ‘This is the master’s room.’

Hannah opens a third box. She shouldn’t say *For now*, so instead asks, ‘How is he? How are the others?’

The box contains letters, each opened and pressed flat, one atop another, ordered by descending date. Business communications for the most part; some Guild goings-on; an invitation to dinner; a request to visit the Press; a confirmation of sale, a notice of cancellation. She lifts this, the cancellation, the most recent letter, into the light. It’s dated *six May, fifteen forty-six*. Yesterday. No details are given: not the text that was ordered, nor the quantity, the anticipated date of completion, the font, the size, the reason for cancellation—

Agnes is saying something about candles and a waste of tallow.

Hannah returns the letter and closes the box. As she does so, she catches the sound of movement, of tiny toes and a shuffling of feathers. She looks up. Agnes, too, looks up.

‘Sparrows,’ the housekeeper murmurs.

Hannah opens the window.

‘The physician ordered the windows to be shut,’ Agnes says.

‘He also charged two weeks worth of a maid’s wages for a vial of brackish water. It’ll be a surprise if *that* isn’t what kills William.’

Agnes stares at her, then unfurls her cap. ‘He’s not dead yet,’ she says. She tugs the cap over her hair and ties the laces under her chin.

‘No.’

‘He may yet live.’

‘He may.’

‘You should return those things to their correct place.’ She indicates the leather roll of knives on the desk, the unstacked boxes. Then she is gone, the dash of her dark-dyed skirts a ripple in the gloom.

Hannah pours ale into a cup and sits, once more, in William's chair. Her fingers play against the rounded edge of the desk, the still-damp hem of her sleeve, the outline of the pamphlet in her apron pocket. She sips the ale but it's warm and she wants something cold. She pushes the cup away and take out the pamphlet, worries the now-blunted corners against the undersides of her nails. Again that feeling of something slipping away in her mind. She taps her thumb against the desk and tries, instead, to imagine William the Reformer. It's like trying to dress a goat in hose and a doublet.

She flattens the pamphlet and presses her finger over the title *T*.

—*ransubstantiation*.

The wiry snakes coil their bodies as she slackens her focus.

—*ransubstantiation*.

The word blurs into an uneven line of black ink.

Hannah removes her finger and turns to the bookshelves. Some house books as well as ledgers and some will be Carew Press books. She piles all those with the Carew Press seal onto the desk and starts to flick through their pages. The first book is no help, nor the second. The third—for a moment it's the one she's looking for but the speck that's caught her eye is only loose paper. The fourth: no help. The fifth, Virgil's *Aeneid*... She angles the book closer to the light and blows against the page to confirm that she hasn't just noticed another fleck of detritus. She hasn't. She snaps the book shut, folds the pamphlet back into her pocket, blows out all candles bar one and goes to the workshop.

## Chapter Four

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The air is cooler in this part of the house; it riles the hairs on Hannah's bare arms. She pulls her sleeves down to her wrists but hisses when molten tallow drips from the candle over her fingers. The wax solidifies almost instantly, leaving a thin layer on her skin that feels tight and hot. She picks at it with her nails and blows on the itchy pink swellings it leaves behind.

The door to the workshop is well oiled; it closes after her with a soft breath and a click.

The breath claims her candle's feeble flame and she is plunged into a darkness so thick she may be able to reach out and touch it. She does reach out but doesn't touch anything, not until she steps forward, tiny steps, and her hand meets something solid, something wooden. She uses it as a guide, her hand tentatively feeling along its parts—the plank, the coffin, the cheek—until there is only free air before her once more. Three more steps and her stomach collides with the edge of a dresser. She begins to open drawers. The sharp scent of ink powder and cold metal threaten to stopper her nose but she breathes through her mouth until her body has acclimatised to their acidity.

Her fingers touch solid blocks of tallow; linen pads; paper off-cuts; quills; a small wooden box. This she shakes and the contents rattle. She removes the lid and feels around for flint and firesteel. Three strikes and the candle is re-lit. She finds two more candles in one of the smaller drawers and lights their wicks against the first. The darkness quivers as the flames find their strength; gloom soon replaces pitch.

The presses loom through the dimness like wooden monoliths: motionless and silent, their great bulk dominating the workshop. As a child, she would weave between the legs of her father's presses. She would nestle between their feet with a book or sit cross-legged on their caps. If they ever seemed severe, she'd tap their frames like she

would a horse's nose. They'd snort and shake their manes and flick away the flies and she'd be safe to climb over them again.

William's presses, however, don't know her. They seem taller than the ones she grew up with, bulkier, broader. The headbolts above the cap glint in the light like eyes and watch her, watch her. She moves forward and gently touches the tip of her shoe against the foot of the nearest. She runs a finger down its flank—the coffin—and lays a palm on the head. The wood is cool, smooth. Yielding. She sets to work.

The types, the basic units of a text, are stored in a case by the far wall, each type sorted into different compartments by letter, font and size. She locates basic roman type, size twelve and begins to construct, within a composing stick, the word *Transubstantiation*. When the stick is full, she transfers it to a galley, then returns to the case and continues to compose and transfer, compose and transfer until all the uppercase *T*s have been used. She secures the types into the galley with string then places it onto the press' carriage.

Then to the inks. She finds a bottle, unused due to the premature closing of the workshop, and pours all that she will need onto a marble plate. The leather-headed ink balls are tucked into racks on one side of the press. She takes one down and begins to work the head into the ink, turning and kneading the leather until it is evenly coated. Once done, she begins to tap the inkball against the types. It had taken her a while to master the skill of beating ink when she was first introduced to it by her father. A sufficient amount of pressure is needed to transfer the ink onto the surface of the metal, but not so much that it sinks into the crevices and distorts the words into indecipherable splodges. She continues to tap the sections, hitting the letters so that the ink is distributed uniformly across their surfaces. He used to stand by her shoulder, noting her successes and remarking on her misses.

An ache starts in Hannah's arm. She ignores it until the types have been inked, then drops the ink ball onto the marble plate and works her elbow, once, twice. The pain remains but the ink is drying.

She casts around for paper—there. One sheet is all that is needed. She dampens a linen pad with water from a pail beside the dresser—today's water, still un-emptied—and dabs it over the sheet so that it is just moistened. The pad she leaves to dry; the paper she fits into the tympan frame with pins. Once the frisket has been secured atop the tympan, she lowers the paper onto the inked types and rolls all under the patten.

Then, haste. She takes a good grip of the handle and pulls until it reaches resistance, braces her foot against the press, and pulls with all her weight. The muscles in her arms tense, as do those in her shoulders and across her back. It feels like a betrayal, the way her body is working against her. She's too out of practice, too long out of the workshop. When the sheet has been printed and the handle returned to its place of rest, she drops her foot and loosens her arms, manipulates her back, catches her breath.

Breath caught, Hannah removes the paper and clips it onto one of the lines that crisscross the other half of the workshop, next to the day's earlier work. Then she sets about removing and cleaning the types and returning them to their compartments—except for the uppercase *Ts*. These she leaves in a pile on the typesetter's desk. Tidying up is a simple, repetitive task—this thing here, that thing there—but she gives herself to it. She doesn't look at the heresies drying on their line; she looks at the types and their grooves and their edges, their sharp corners and their furrows.

She doesn't look until she has to, though not before something else catches her attention. The words on the sheets make little sense without context, something about something, but it's not the words she's looking at, instead, a small mark the size of her thumb. She touches it. Not a mark: a thinness, where the pulp has been spread unevenly before drying. She examines the others and finds similar faults in most. Uneven texture.

Craggy edges. Sections so thin she can see, through them, the shadows of her fingers. Different to the books she'd examined earlier. A change in supplier. Why? When? The heresies flicker in the light. Questions for another time.

Hannah unclips her printing and lays it out across the typesetter's desk next to the unfolded pamphlet. It's no trick of the light, no distortion by a shard of loose paper this time. She holds her thumb over the pamphlet's *T* and, in so doing, covers the fault, the slight nick in the horizontal line. She presses her other thumb over the *T* of the third, newly printed *Transubstantiation*, covering the same fault, the same nick. Identical. And identifiable.



## Chapter Five

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‘Did you hear me?’

*He’s dead.*

The ledgers are spread out across the office floor, their pages open and marked with quills. Hannah stands amidst them all, arms crossed, eyes fixed on the nearest, *February 1545*. Heat has settled between her shoulder blades as well as a restlessness she cannot dislodge. The pamphlet is a weight in her pocket.

‘Did you hear me?’ Agnes says again.

‘I did: he’s dead.’

‘He’s in God’s hands,’ Agnes corrects.

Hannah doesn’t say, *He’s in purgatory*.

‘The priest was here.’

Yes, she’d heard him tell Luke to leave the front door ajar. She’d waited until he was safely upstairs before leaving the workshop, the heresies clutched in her hand. They’re ash, now, in the kitchen grate. She’d nudged the burning paper apart until there was nothing left but fine flakes and powder. The ink had flared—or had she imagined that?

‘He came in time, if you care to listen.’

Hannah wipes her face. Her cheeks feel warm. She turns to the housekeeper. Agnes remains at the threshold, one hand gripping the latch. Shadows flicker across her face. ‘I’m glad to hear it.’

Agnes’ face suggests she does not believe her. ‘And now?’

‘We require a searcher. Send Toby: he knows where to go.’

Agnes hesitates. Her eyes sweep over the ledgers.

‘Agnes?’

The housekeeper pinches her lips together. 'Understood,' she says and disappears into the dark hallway.

Hannah touches her cheeks once more. Still warm. She taps them with her palms. Still warm. Even with the open window, they are still warm.

## Chapter Six

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The searcher's shoes are scuffed and grazed and too large for her feet. Each step is an uneven, cumbersome clomp.

'And you're the mistress of the house?' she asks. Wrinkles dig into the sides of her mouth. She unknots her shawl and, in doing so, loosens a stench of wet wool and over-cooked barley. She's looking at Agnes.

'No,' Agnes says tartly, nose pinched. Toby, beside her, is ready to flee. She has one hand gripped around his elbow, keeping him in place.

'You, then?' The searcher looks at Hannah, who'd arrived a step behind the housekeeper.

'Yes.'

She looks Hannah over as Hannah continues to do the same to her.

Some sort of malady has taken root in the backs of the woman's hands. Her skin is pink-ringed and dry, almost scaly, itched raw. The cuffs of her sleeves are rough and broken. Her hems are loose-stitched and uneven. The hair that pokes out from her cap is oily and matted.

Agnes says, 'He's upstairs.'

Toby goes first, quick as a field mouse. He doesn't look back to the creature behind him as she negotiates the narrow steps with her heavy, oversized shoes.

At the door to William's room, the searcher says, 'Wait here,' and goes inside.

Hannah leans against the wall. Tiredness bears down on her shoulders. A dull ache roots about in her brain. She closes her eyes but opens them again when Agnes says, 'She's in there now.'

Alice and the younger Luke have come out of their sick rooms. Luke's shirt clings to his chest. He looks hot, too hot.

‘Are you—’ Hannah starts but he shakes his head.

‘It’s just water,’ he says.

‘What does she look like?’ Alice whispers to Toby.

‘Dirty,’ Toby whispers back. ‘Grubby.’

‘Unwashed?’

‘Hush,’ Agnes says.

The door opens.

‘With all surety, it is the sweat,’ the searcher says. It’s a practised phrase, level toned and dispassionate. She turns to Agnes, ‘I have need of water and herbs—whatever you have, though I’d prefer rosemary—and a length of cloth to wrap the body.’

Agnes nods curtly. ‘Toby—’ but the boy is already off. She grumbles his name and follows him back downstairs.

Hannah says, ‘To your duties, Alice,’ then follows the searcher into William’s bedchamber.

William’s face is uncovered. He’s paler now than he was before, and still in a way that doesn’t feel natural. The thought prickles her skin. She pulls down her sleeves.

‘You’ve not seen death before?’ the searcher asks. She draws a sheet over William’s head. The thin linen moulds to his nose and lips and the hollows of his eyes, a death mask spun from cotton thread.

‘No.’

‘It’s unusual to meet a person who’s never seen death.’

‘Death and I have been out of step.’

‘You two must’ve been, to be how old and missed it?’

‘Twenty four.’

‘Twenty four? Yes, that is... You’ve been blessed.’

‘Have I?’

The searcher nods. 'But others are ailing?'

'Three.'

'Your family, any of them?'

'No. Jonathan is the foreman. Henry and Robert are pressers.'

'Pressers?'

'My husband's trade is printing.'

'What do you print?'

'Books, mostly. Indulgences, pamphlets, legal texts, treatises, Bibles, poetry.'

*Illicit pamphlets.* 'Whatever people pay for.'

'Poetry?'

'Sometimes.'

'And medical texts?'

'Yes. Why?'

'Oh,' the searcher lifts her shoulders and lets them fall. 'No reason. Curiosity.'

She looks about the room. 'Poetry?'

'Poetry is favoured by the noble families.'

'And the medical texts?'

'They are more popular in Europe.'

'You send books to Europe?'

'No. The Press is commissioned to print books by traders who have routes in Europe. Why?'

'You look cragged and in need of distraction. I can be silent, if you prefer.' The searcher pushes her sleeves behind her elbows.

'I don't have a preference.'

'I'm sure you do.'

The water is brought, the herbs, the cloth. Toby won't cross the threshold so Agnes is left to lug the bucket over to the bed. She doesn't look at William.

'Was he shriven?' the searcher asks.

'The priest attended him,' Agnes says.

The searcher snorts. She separates the herbs with her fingers. Rosemary, thyme, fresh sage, lavender, strawflower. She selects the lavender and stirs the sprigs into the water. 'He came and went as soon as he came, I imagine. And gave your folk cut-price rites.' She crosses herself, palms her hands, closes her eyes and mutters under her breath. 'Just so and over.' She opens her eyes. 'And a penny for purgatory.'

'We don't believe that here,' Agnes snaps and leaves.

The searcher folds back the shroud. 'This needs to be burned, as will the sheet beneath and his clothing.' She takes a good grip of William's nightshirt and begins to yank it up over his body. 'Do you have children?'

'No.'

'Your husband? Any sons?'

'No, neither.'

William's skin is as pale as chalk. His legs are thinner than she remembers, his hips bonier, the skin of his chest looser.

'Any family? His or yours?'

'None.' None that she knows. The rest are dead. She looks away when William's nightshirt catches on his chin.

'Know much about printing, do you?'

'Yes.'

'He taught you?'

'My father taught me. William doesn't believe women should to be in workshops.' Doesn't. *Didn't*. 'No matter that there are many women in many workshops.'

‘You should marry quickly,’ the searcher says. She drops the nightshirt onto the floor. ‘The first man that asks you, when it’s proper, say yes. I saw you looking at me before, working me out. Incomes and figures and profits and losses. What margin between you and me. You might be able to do it: take this business and make it work. It might work—you’ve got the temperament. You’ve got to be a little cold inside.’ The searcher touches two fingers to her chest. ‘You’ve got to be a little cold in here.’ She steps closer, her legs touching the bed frame. ‘But there’s a chance you’ll break yourself in two trying to make it work and then you’ll be worth scrap copper, searching a man’s body for the malady that killed him—a malady that might kill you, too. That won’t happen if you marry. Women need to be governed. We don’t do well trying to govern ourselves.’

‘I don’t appreciate gossellers,’ Hannah says.

‘I’m not gossiping. I’m only telling you what I wish I’d been told.’

‘You’re not qualified to pass judgement on my prospects. You don’t know me. You don’t know this business. You don’t know this trade.’

‘I know you’re a woman.’

Hannah loosens her breath. ‘Find me when you’re done so I can give you your scrap copper.’

## Chapter Seven

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Agnes waits outside, arms crossed, face pinched.

Hannah says as she passes, ‘Tell Toby to come to the office when the hour tolls. He’s not to tarry.’

The floorboards move beneath Hannah’s weight. At William’s desk, she strikes flint and lights a candle.

Ink. Quill. Paper.

*Lytton.*

The tip of the quill scratches across the page. Ink splutters.

*Dispense of your prayers: William is dead.*

The pressure in her writing hand builds to an awkward sort of pain. She flexes her fingers and continues:

*There are things to be done. The will needs to be read, its articles implemented.*

*And more: a conversation is required regarding the contents of the ledgers.*

The quill snaps. She crumples it into her fist and takes up a new one.

*The time to leave things be has passed.*

She signs her name, folds the paper and drips tallow wax onto the seam.



A light breath of air touches the back of her neck. It's coolness makes her aware of all the places her too-warm body is constricted by her clothing. She unbuckles her belt, loosens her kirtle, shakes out her sleeves. Her feet itch where the leather ties of her shoes have rubbed against her skin. She unties the knots, slips out her feet and rests them as flat as she can against the uneven floorboards.

It's not the sweat.

She holds three fingers to her forehead. They feel both hot and cold.

It's not the sweat.

Standing by the window eases some of her discomfort. She removes her cap and leans against the wall.

Movement catches Hannah's eye. She looks hard into the shadows and makes out the form of a man standing at the edge of the street. One of his hands rests on his belt; the other plays with something small and round. He raises that hand from the belt in greeting, and she imagines his face splitting into a grin, his white teeth penetrating the gloom. But such an image is ridiculous: a conjuring from the playhouse. She steps back and closes the shutters.

The bell begins to toll midnight.

Hannah returns her feet to her shoes and tightens her kirtle.

Toby appears. She gives him the note.

'For master Lytton. Go as quickly as you can. Use the kitchen door and the back gate and return that way.' Hannah takes Toby's shoulder, not ungently, and escorts him to the kitchen. 'No diversions.' She closes, but does not lock, the door behind him.

Heavy footsteps descend the stairs. An uneven clomp. Hannah pauses in the kitchen, out of sight.

‘Bolt the door,’ the searcher says, her voice muffled by distance. ‘Admit no one but the parish clerk’s men. There is to be *no* movement in or out of this house until the sickness has cleared. Forty days—’

‘I know,’ Agnes says.

‘—and forty nights. If another perishes—’

‘*I know.*’

‘—you must restart the count. If another perishes, you must restart the count. Then you may re-enter the world. Do you understand?’

Agnes’ reply is curt. The front door closes with a snap. When Hannah enters the hallway, the housekeeper is muttering *cockroach* under her breath and wiping her hands down her apron.

Thin smoke has started to trail down the stairs. The searcher’s work. She must have built up the fire with enough rosemary and sage to purge every crack in the house.

‘Did she shut the windows?’ Hannah asks.

‘She *ordered* them shut.’

‘Open those that have been closed, then join me in the kitchen.’

When Agnes returns, her eyes are streaming.

Hannah pours her a cup of ale and sits back in her chair. Agnes lowers herself onto the edge of the kitchen table. The wood creaks under her weight but doesn’t shift. She runs a finger over the cup’s rim.

‘We don’t have enough for forty days,’ Hannah says. ‘The grain we can stretch, but not the rest. One of us will have to leave, if not this week, then the next.’

Agnes nods, once.

‘One of the brooms is losing its threading,’ Hannah continues. ‘It can be repurposed to be our...’ She doesn’t know the word for the four-foot long pole that must be used by anyone abroad of a house with the sweat. Two straw crosses, made while

Agnes attended to the windows, rest on the table. She will have Luke affix one to each of the outer doors and then everyone on the Fleet will know the Carew Press has been infected with the sweat. 'The Parish Clerk's men will be here soon to remove William's body.'

Agnes' face moves. She says nothing until she says, 'Someone ought to tell our lady visitor.'

*The woman downstairs.*

Hannah sits up. 'She's still here? Where?'

'The parlour. Someone,' Agnes lingers on the word, 'ought to speak with her.'

The parlour door is ajar. A lone candle, almost spent, flickers in the darkness. A woman sits by the shuttered window, her head lolling against the wall. Her bare feet rest on a leather bag.

'I'm not asleep,' she says, straightening her head and pulling her feet under her hems. She pulls the candle closer. It adds depth to her face.

*Anne.*

*Anne Askew.*

## Part Two

# Hannah. Hannah. Hannah!

*Spring, 1545*

The continued focus on delivering high-quality books endeared him with London gentlefolk and by the mid 1540s, the business had grown sufficiently successful for William to marry<sup>1</sup>. In 1545, however, the financial stability of the Press began to deteriorate, a consequence of

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1. In early 1545, he wed Hannah Rondel, daughter of Cambridge-based printer Henry Rondel (1491-1545)

Prof. Timothy Axton-Smith, 1901

*Printers of Fleet Street, 1520-1550: A Comprehensive Study*

‘...Hannah’s letters to her father suggest the marriage to Carew, though brief, was happy. That she was able to slip so easily into the role of Master Printer on William’s death implies she was, to some extent, already involved in the running of the business. Women were often unofficial helpmates to their husbands and the implication of Hannah’s letters (‘I am kept busy’) imply she was similarly employed...’

Dr. Mina Abbot, 2003

*Hidden Women: Gender and the Early Modern Book Trade*

## Chapter One

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Old Father Benedict is sermonising again, waving his stiff, arthritic hands through the air as if the rickety wooden crate on which he stands is a pulpit and the whole of Fleet Street his church. An indulgent crowd has gathered. Agnes says it's a duty when the old man comes out of his solitude to listen to his discourses. Some remember him from the early days when he was a young and supple priest. Hannah cannot imagine him without white hair and a bowed back.

The crate wobbles and hands reach out to steady him. Bless him. *Bless our old Father Benedict.* There aren't many like him left anymore.

Hannah tucks loose hairs under her cap. She's too far into the crowd to push her way out now and there's little waiting for her back at the Carew Press except her new husband and household chores.

What's the gospel today? The breeze steals away a number of Benedict's words:

'As a—masterbuilder, I—the foundation, and—buildeth thereon.—man take heed—no other foundation—laid,—than—Jesus Christ.'

*Corinthians.*

She slips a thumb under the strap of her bag to lessen the strain against her shoulder. She's heard enough of *Corinthians* to fill in the gaps.

A child nudges past her knees. The bottles in the bag crack together. Hannah stills them with a hand. A parent waves an apology. Hannah shakes her head, *No matter.*

Her father calls Corinthians 'ladders'. *You can't have a top rung without a bottom rung and the bottom rung is always Christ.* And this is faith in her father's house: Christ as foundation. *But don't labour it, though, love—just forget about it. No need to see Christ in the May blossoms or the barley ears or staring back at you from the depths of the fens. No need to think of grain every time you eat bread.*

She doesn't think of God when she eats bread, she thinks of her father and how he uses his nails to hook rye grains from his teeth. They'd had this pattern before she left: she'd admonish him, *Do you have to?* and he'd look rueful and smile and tug her cap and say *Sorry mistress Aitch*. Their little two-part, one-page play. Her brother had missed it all, nose deep in ale or half rising, half on his way: people to meet, things to do, cards to gamble, money to lose, talent to waste, a business to squander.

No one calls her Aitch in London. What had William said? *I can't introduce you as a letter*.

So here she's Hannah and she's curled Aitch up inside herself.

Benedict's skin looks pleated, like overstretched leather loosened after years of being pulled taut. Thick, purplish veins thread his arms and knot together in the crooks of his elbows. He's stooping now, more so than before, an angle of man, teetering and soon to topple. The crowd is ready for the end. It's too hot, too close; the sun is too direct; the smell of bodies too thick and syrupy. The man before Hannah has removed his cap and is swilling it in his hands. His exposed scalp is red and blistering. Somewhere a young boy giggles incessantly. Two children a way away to her right are fighting thumbs and toeing people's shoes. Someone swears. A goodwife neighbour smiles at Hannah and rolls her eyes. Hannah nods. A little girl pushes through the press of bodies and the movement to let her pass knocks Hannah into the woman standing at her side. Fur brushes Hannah's cheek. Her nose fills with the scent of elderberries and soap and something floral like rose or honeysuckle and beneath it all a hint of sweat.

The woman barely flinches, her narrow body firm and rooted. 'He's quoting *Corinthians*,' she says, ignoring Hannah's murmured apology. 'The papist.' Her tone is a mixture of moods: annoyed but amused, aloof yet conspiratorial.

Hannah glances at Father Benedict. No one can accuse him of being a Protestor. 'He's just an old believer.'

‘He’s a papist fool: purgatory doesn’t exist. Do you hear what he’s saying?’

The wind tumbles Benedict’s words into themselves:  
‘If any...work shall be...he...suffer.’

“‘If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.’” The woman pulls the words apart and fills in the gaps. ‘He’s twisting *Corinthians* to justify the existence of purgatory. He’s saying, ‘Oh, you’ve lost a loved one? Your mother’s been taken by sickness? Here, put a coin in my mitre and I’ll start praying her into Heaven. Come again tomorrow, and the day after. Pay double on Sunday and on Monday we’ll work out a contract for the next thousand years. Oh, no, your children are going without? Think of your mother! What’s a little hunger compared to the unrelenting agony of purgatory’s flames?’ It makes me shiver.’ Her eyes remain fixed on Benedict.

Hannah says, ‘Are all priests bishops now?’

‘Every priest is a bishop in his head.’ She makes a noise in the back of her throat.  
‘Or the pope. Is no one going to tell that old man up there he’s a fool?’

Benedict flourishes his hands.

The woman mimics the action and laughs.

Hannah turns away. A hand finds, then grips her elbow.

‘No, don’t go yet,’ the woman says. She looks younger out of profile, soft-faced and apple-cheeked. When she smiles, which she does briefly, almost breathlessly, the skin at the corner of her mouth creases. ‘Watch this,’ she whispers and steps forward. Hannah’s arm slips through her fingers.

‘Wait,’ Hannah says. She reaches out and grasps at the woman’s cloak, but the material is too thick and oily.

‘He cannot go unchallenged,’ the woman says. She nudges aside the blister-headed man.

‘Stop.’ Hannah seizes her wrist. The joint feels hollow and delicate, easy to snap. She loosens her fingers. ‘He’s an old, ailing priest,’ she says close to the woman’s ear, voice firm. ‘He’s seventy years into his faith and unlikely to be moulded. You’ll provoke nothing but distress. Leave him be or leave yourself if you can’t tolerate his words.’

The woman unpicks Hannah’s fingers. ‘I’m not so dull-witted as to believe I’ll change *his* mind,’ she says.

‘Let her go if she wants to go.’

Hannah glances at the blister-headed man, whose attention is now keenly fixed on their close-quartered exchange.

‘A fellow protester,’ the woman says and looks at Hannah as if to say, *See?*

The man laughs and shakes his head. ‘Not in this crowd,’ he says.

‘Another reason to leave,’ Hannah says, but the woman is already slipping through the press of bodies. ‘Fool,’ she mutters. She turns to the man. ‘Bored are you? Unable to think of another form of entertainment except to watch a young woman shout at a frail old man while she gets jeered at by a crowd of papists?’

‘Oh hush, little goodwife. She isn’t a child and Benedict isn’t dead. She wants a challenge and he might enjoy being called out.’

‘With what little breath he has left.’ She shifts the bag of bottles.

‘You don’t know who she is, do you?’ He swills his cap in his hand. A taunting, self-indulgent smile pulls at his face.

Slapping him would be an overreaction. And petty. Even imagining it only brings her temporary satisfaction. She wants to say, *I don’t care*, but that’s a child’s response and not entirely accurate. ‘Who is she? Tell me since you want to.’

‘Just wait.’

*Mary, mother.*



The woman has found herself an empty fish crate. Father Benedict, now silent but with one quivering hand still raised in the air, watches her drag it closer. Dust turns in the air. Benedict covers his mouth. The woman tests her weight and stands. His stooped back and her acquired height brings them eye to eye.

‘You—’

But she is already talking, her hands fluttering through the air, drawing people in. ‘The sacrament that hangs over the altar is not the very body of Christ. It is a sign, a shape, a similitude of what it represents. Words like *real* or *really* that men such as this—’ she infuses the word with derision: *this* insect, *this* snake ‘—that men such as *this* use are not of sound faith. It is not in the sacred scriptures. It has been sophistically borrowed from pagans by the like of Bonner and his fellows to corrupt our Christian faith. Beware of their filthy poison.’ Her voice cuts through the wind. ‘The perfect belief of Stephen and Paul and Solomon was that God does not dwell in temples made with hands. He does not dwell in a box. Heaven is his seat. Says David in Psalm 113: ‘Our God is in Heaven.’’

‘Our God *is* in Heaven,’ Benedict shouts. The effort cracks his throat. A fit of coughing contorts his juddering body. Phlegm dribbles down his chin. His next words are dismantled: ‘Kno—who, heretic! damned wom—Ask unbelie—’

‘Anne Askew,’ the blister-headed man tells Hannah. ‘The heretic? No? She’s come from Lincolnshire to gospel the new religion.’

‘She’s certainly found herself an audience.’

‘She always does.’

‘People like a spectacle,’ Hannah says, ‘when there’s no other easy entertainment.’ The bag of bottles has started to weigh down her shoulder. ‘She’s tempting arrest.’

‘They won’t arrest her. Her family has connections to those up there.’ He nods his head in the direction of Hampton Court palace, far away across the city. ‘Her father sat

on the council that condemned Nan Bullen. And even if they did arrest her, she'd just recant. Look at her shoes.'

'What about them?'

'They're not the sort of shoes worn by someone who can withstand discomfort. One hint of flame and she'll be on her knees proclaiming the error of her beliefs and pleading for forgiveness. And then it'll be 'Adieu mistress Askew: back to Lincolnshire with you.'''

'You have it all before you.'

Father Benedict is nigh undone, his words halved and quartered, their guts disembowelled by the wind. 'Blasp—my. Blas—my!'

'I would rather read five lines in the Bible than hear five masses in the temple,' Anne Askew continues.

'Blas—my.'

'I wondered when we'd get to the Bible,' the blister-headed man says. 'Do you think she has one about her person? There's enough room under that cloak.'

Askew shouts, 'This isn't blasphemy! One edifies me and the other does nothing, it does nothing. As Saint Paul witnesses in chapter fourteen of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, 'If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?' Christ—'

'Perhaps a Bible isn't needed,' the man says, 'since she seems to have it by heart.'

'—Christ has commanded *us* to search the holy scriptures, for in them and in only them, is eternal life. And God says, 'Add nothing to my word, take nothing away and if you do—you,''' she points out people in the crowd, 'you, you, *you*' she points a finger at Benedict, 'shall be a reprobate and a liar.'''

The crowd is edging closer, leaning forward, reaching in. Someone touches the fur on Anne's cloak; another plucks at her sleeve. She yanks the cloak away. Benedict's face is mottled red. Someone has taken hold of his cassock to keep him standing.

Anne Askew continues, 'Saint Paul willed that nothing should be uttered in dead speech or that the congregation should always be silent. Five words of scripture provide more understanding than ten thousand words of the tongue. Papist temple services are worth nothing. They are an uncertain trumpet and do not prepare anyone for battle.'

'Father Benedict's sermons *could* be shorter,' the man says. 'Especially in the summer when it's hot and we're crushed into Saint Brides like cattle.'

Hannah says, 'She's not advocating for shorter services.'

Benedict has a question.

'Do I...?' Anne leans towards him. 'No. No, I do not think that private masses help the souls of the departed.' She pulls to her full height. 'It is great *idolatry* to believe more in private masses than in the death of Christ. Here rises the serpent of cockatrice eggs. If your masses are of God's creation, ordinance of commandment, or if they had been in any point necessary for mans' benefit, they would have been registered in the book of life—which is the sacred Bible. But there is no mention of private masses. It is a papist invention and I name it with rust, chaff, draff, swill, drunkenness, fornication, menstruation—'

Hannah begins to push her way out of the crowd.

'Going already?'

She ignores the man.

'—man's dirt, adders' eggs, poison, snares, the bread of wicked lies and the cup of God's curse—'

'It'll get good soon,' he drawls.

And then she is free of the crush of bodies. The air is clearer; her lungs loosen.

‘Here you are,’ Agnes says, approaching from a baker’s stall. ‘Who’s caught Benedict’s attention?’

‘A reformer.’ Hannah gives her the bag of bottles and shoulders, instead, the housekeeper’s basket of vegetables.

‘A gospeller?’ Agnes cranes her neck to see.

‘A woman from Lincolnshire.’

‘I can only see her cap.’

Hannah sorts through the vegetables. ‘Is there anything still to be purchased?’

‘It’s all there.’

‘The salt as well?’

‘In a packet at the bottom.’

A sudden thump and the sound of splintering wood yanks Hannah’s attention back to the crowd. Anne Askew remains on her crate but Benedict has dropped from view. People push forward; others push them back. Names are called. Curses fly. Someone shouts, ‘Make way!’ and then Benedict emerges through the throng, head lolling to one side, his body supported by another priest and a blacksmith.

Agnes has one hand pressed to her chest. ‘He’s never dead—’

‘His legs are moving, Agnes,’ Hannah says. She watches Anne Askew pull her cloak tighter around her neck and step down, disappearing from sight. ‘Wait for me here.’ She sets the basket by the housekeeper’s feet and starts to work her way back through the crowd. The crush has started to lessen. Some people are following Benedict; others are returning to the paths they’d followed before he’d set foot on his market pulpit. Snippets of conversation reach Hannah’s ears:

‘He’s too *old* for this—’

‘—silly man—’

‘Did you see her face?’

‘—reformist nonsense—’

‘I’d be angry, too—’

‘—isn’t worth discussing—’

‘We’d all be richer—’

‘Mistress Carew?’

Hannah takes two, three more steps before remembering ‘Mistress Carew’ is her name now. She turns to see a small, grey-haired man barely an arm’s length away. ‘Master Lytton.’ Christopher Lytton, William’s lawyer.

‘Well met, Hannah.’

It’s the closest she’s been to him since the day she wed William eight months ago. She remembers the frayed, red cord on his hat and the discolouration on the lapel of his jerkin where a brooch must once have sat. They’ve passed each other in the between places of the Carew press—*Greetings*, in the hallway; *God save you*, at the front door; *Pardon me*, at the bottom of the stairs—but never stood together and talked. She can see fine lines creasing at the corners of his mouth and a few grey hairs threading through his eyebrows.

Agnes thinks he has a look about him: *Academic...you know, learned*. She’d imbued the words with a hint of unattainability. *And handsome, too, for an older man*. He’s not so much older than William, perhaps forty-eight, forty-nine. Hannah sees a man who holds his body straight and his face void of excessive emotion. She’s not seen him smile, only talk and nod and observe his environment. Perhaps he will loosen his collar and roll up his sleeves during the summer months, but he also seems the sort of person to keep his discomforts hidden and suffer instead.

‘Quite the commotion here today.’ Lytton’s eyes flicker across Hannah’s face and then down to the base of her neck, but no lower. ‘Unusual for Benedict to be challenged while delivering a market sermon.’

‘Indeed.’ Hannah glances back towards where she’d seen Anne Askew retreating and gathers her skirts. ‘Good day, Master Lytton—’

He steps forward with her and stops when she stops. ‘You’re a woman of learning are you not, Mistress Carew?’

‘I was educated according to my father’s wishes, yes.’

‘And as an educated woman, you’ll be familiar with current religious discourses?’

‘No more so than most.’

‘What say you of the lady gospeller?’

Hannah releases her skirts. She watches Lytton’s face but his features remain unyielding. ‘I believe,’ she says, ‘that she’ll find a more peaceful life in Lincolnshire.’

‘She doesn’t seem to be a woman seeking peace.’

‘Then perhaps she is best placed in London.’

‘And what of Father Benedict? Where might he be best placed?’

‘Of the two? Lincolnshire.’

‘Not on his pulpit?’

‘There are pulpits aplenty in Lincolnshire.’

‘So you would remove the traditionalists from the city and replace them with reformers?’

Hannah tilts her head a fraction to the right. ‘I have no particular preference as to whom lives here and whom does not.’

‘Is it your preference to live here?’

‘It must be, mustn’t it?’

‘And how do you find the city?’

‘Intrusive.’

One corner of Lytton’s mouth moves almost imperceptibly upwards. ‘Here is your housekeeper come.’

Hannah turns to see Agnes approaching, bowed down and breathless under the weight of ale and vegetables.

‘God keep you, Mistress Carew,’ Lytton says. He nods once then cuts a path through the crowd.

Hannah watches him until the bodies of Fleet Street’s inhabitants fill his wake.

‘I told you we had nothing left to purchase,’ Agnes says.

Hannah settles the basket handle into the crook of her elbow. ‘Then let us return to the press.’

She glances back towards Anne Askew’s path of retreat but sees nothing but market stalls and traders.

## Chapter Two

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Someone has left the workshop door ajar. The sharp, acidic scent of oak-gall ink pierces the air like a thousand tiny needles. Agnes covers her nose; Hannah breathes it in until she sneezes. She can feel the gentle thrum of the presses through the floorboards, can hear the clack and creak of the coffin and the platen and the spindle. In her mind, she has hold of the operating handle. One foot is braced against the frame. She waits for her press partner to secure the paper and beat the ink, then pulls the lever until it reaches resistance. Then: relax; remove the paper; clip it to the line. Retake your position and repeat.

Something happens to the mind while printing, a sort of soothing of the senses. All that is physical loses its substance and begins to dissolve. Sounds, now soft and airless, coalesce with the haze. Conscious thoughts quieten and little exists except the present moment: the press, the operation, the repetition, the clack and the creak of the coffin and the platen and the frame. Nothing until: *Hannah. Hannah. Hannah!*

A man's head has appeared through the gap in the door. 'What are you doing?'

She gazes at him for a moment, not knowing who he might be. She looks at his hooded eyes and his angular jaw and the way his hair dips down over his forehead so recklessly in contrast to his rigid posture. One arm is braced against the roof of the doorframe. It makes him look taller than he is. She knows who he is. William Carew: the man she married.

He repeats the question.

Hannah glances at the basket hooked over her arm and lifts it to say, *This is what I'm doing.*

'Don't linger here,' he says and steps back into the workshop. The door closes behind him with a sharp snap.

She does linger, though only for a few more moments.



In the kitchen, Agnes is examining Alice's fingers. The skin around the girl's nails is peeling and bleeding; her knuckles are red and cracked.

'It's the washing board,' Alice says. 'Can I have some tallow?'

'Better to wait for the calluses to form,' Agnes says. 'Look away or close your eyes.' As soon as Alice has turned her head and squeezed shut her eyelids, Agnes pinches down on one tiny strip of loose skin and nips it off with her nails.

Alice shudders. 'I feel sick.'

'No, you don't.' Agnes nips away two more. 'Done.'

Alice sucks on one of her fingers.

Agnes pulls her hand away. 'Don't do that. Are all the shirts hanging outside?'

'Yes.'

'And the hose? Are they soaking?'

'Yes'm.'

'Your skirt and apron are, too.' Agnes steps back and shakes out her own clothing.

'You're sopping wet. Go up and change. No dawdling: come straight back down.'

The stairwell shudders as Alice hurtles up the steps.

To Hannah, Agnes says, 'She's lazy.'

Hannah empties the basket onto the kitchen table. She shakes loose soil from the beetroot tails and flicks a slug off the squash. It curls up into a tight, glutinous ball.

'She's not used to working through the day,' Hannah says. 'She'll grow accustomed to things in time.'

'And she's a skittish thing. Jumpy like a fox.' Agnes folds the slug into a scrap of paper and drops it out the kitchen window.

'She'll settle.'

Agnes taps two fingers on the table. 'But when? How long?'

Hannah passes her the carrots and shrugs. 'Be kinder, and it'll happen sooner.'

“Be kinder.” Agnes scoffs. ‘I’ll be kinder if she works harder.’

‘Tell her, not me. And shake on it.’

‘I will.’

‘Good.’ The house rattles. ‘Now’s your chance.’

Alice enters the kitchen in disarray. Her hair streams across her shoulders and her hems are caught under her belt. ‘I forgot, I forgot, I forgot,’ she says breathlessly.

‘*Tie your shoes!*’ Agnes shouts. ‘Miracle is you didn’t fall and break your *neck*. I’ll break your neck!’

Alice half falls over to tie her laces. ‘A letter’as come for you, mistress,’ she says, face hidden behind a curtain of hair. ‘You said to tell you soon as, if a letter’d come.’

‘But not so quickly as to risk your life,’ Hannah says. She lifts the girl to her feet. ‘Plait your hair and find your cap. Agnes needs help with the vegetables. Where’s the letter?’

‘On the mantel.’

‘Thank you.’

The paper is warm, the wax slightly tacky from the rising heat of the fire. Hannah breaks the seal and smooths out the creases. Her father’s handwriting:

*Daughter.*

She can hear him say it. Teasing, mock serious, straight-faced but with the hint of a smile.

*Daughter.*

‘Father,’ she murmurs. Mock serious. Straight faced. She ducks into the garden and settles beside the rosemary.

*We are waiting again. One commission done with, another to be secured. The workshop is dark and the presses returned to their rigid form. The men initially took up residence in the kitchen but, occupying too much space and causing too great a distraction to the cooks and maids, have been sent away. Not away, away: to the garden, the river, their rooms, their own houses. Rumour suggests some have been searching for new employment, knocking on the doors of the other Cambridge presses and begging audience with the master printers. The masters know them for our men and send them away but perhaps it is best to let one or two go: they have families and a need for money and ours is running low—and will run lower if this dry spell of work persists. I leave the decision to your brother. For now, I will continue in the office, balancing the ledgers and spinning beads on the abacus. Do not worry about us (imperative!)—I do not write to worry you, only to tell you our circumstances lest you hear it from someone else. Business will return. Tis only the betwixt time. Tell me, instead, of your life in Fleet Street. It is unfathomable to me that you have been gone eight months. Eight months! Tell me of your days and all that keeps you occupied.*

*With all my love, my darling daughter, your father, Henry Rondel.*

Hannah presses the paper to her nose. It still smells like him and home: slightly musty with a hint of lavender. She used to dry the flowers, pack them into fist-sized muslin balls and tuck one into every drawer in the house. Sometimes the cotton thread

would burst and spill blue-grey petals across the contents and they'd be picking bits from their clothing and papers and bowls for days.

In the parlour, quill gripped a little too tightly between her fingers, Hannah writes:

*Father,*

She imagines him slumped in his chair, hand pressed to his side, cheeks ashen and blue eyes murky; the pain in his stomach, once a twinging inconvenience, now relentless. The physician visits him weekly to prod and poke and measure the mass distorting his abdomen. The earthy women of the town visit more often, bringing herbs and compresses and the tinctures they brew in their hovel houses. Hannah's brother shoos them away but they creep back at night when he's drinking or gambling or so drunk he cannot tell noblewoman from peasant woman. These are the women that helped Hannah's mother birth her children; these are the women who saw her through her childbed fevers. But even they cannot help much anymore.

'It is what it is,' her father says. 'It is what it is.'

*Father* (she writes),

*I am well and loved and kept busy.*

*A commission will come soon—two or three at once, most likely, and then all with be frantic and chaotic again, as you like it. I will not worry (imperative understood) (though I will worry a little—of course I will). When is Garrett back from the continent? He's always reliably in need of a printer.*

*There was commotion in the market today: gosseller versus priest. The gosseller won, though it wasn't a fair fight: he's old/infirm and she's young/sturdy. And monied, as I suppose she must be to have the time to gossip. Who keeps her, do you reckon? A cousin? An uncle? Apparently she's from Lincolnshire. Surely she can gossip at home? Though I suppose it is more striking to say, 'I gossip in London' than 'I gossip in Lincoln.' Maybe...It's hard to say as someone who has no desire to gossip.*

*Luckily for her and those of us caught in her makeshift market church, the weather has improved. No rain for three days and the roads have started to dry out. It is warm—not too warm, but on the edge.*

*Stew for dinner tonight—carrots and beets and probably slugs. Why are there always slugs?*

*Take care, take care, Hannah Carew.*

She signs the letter *Hannah R*—but stops and reshapes the *R* to a *C*.

## Chapter Three

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In the kitchen, Agnes is supervising Alice's cutting of the carrots. Each segment is unique: triangular, rectangular, circular, and other shapes that defy definition.

'Inventory?' Hannah asks.

'Anything but this,' Agnes says.

'What happened to kindness?' Hannah asks when they are beyond Alice's hearing.

'I'm trying.'

'Try harder.'

'Yes'm.' Agnes mimics Alice's form of address but her tone is sardonic.

Hannah loosens her breath. 'The cupboard in the hallway first, then on to the parlour if there's time. I'd get a stool, Agnes.'

'I don't need a stool,' Agnes says. She kneels awkwardly, her skirts catching too tightly beneath her knees. She tugs them free and opens the cupboard door. 'Though you're welcome to use one.'

Hannah settles herself onto the floor instead, with her back to the wall and the inventory balanced on her crossed knees. The stone slabs are cold through her clothing, but not uncomfortably so. The only light comes from the open kitchen and parlour doors, just enough to see with without needing a candle. She unscrews the ink jar and takes up a quill. 'Ready?'

'I'm waiting for you.'

This scrappiness from Agnes isn't new. She's a woman with vinegar in her mouth and an itch to her skin she can't shake off. Nothing fits correctly; nothing tastes quite right. This could be further to the left; why didn't you put that to the right? Close the doors. Stop slamming the doors. Chew quietly; stop wasting the ale. Why didn't you ask

me before you did that? I'd have told you how to do it properly. Only William is spared her irritation. He sees it; he ignores it. He leaves them all struggling in the water and walks away.

Agnes wipes her sleeve across the top of the cupboard. Dust, disturbed, clouds the air. She wafts it away with her hands then starts sorting through the cupboard's contents. 'Four, five, six candlesticks.'

'Sick candlesticks.'

'Tallow candles...sixteen.'

'Sixteen.'

'Ten linen towels.'

The kitchen and the storeroom are done, their contents noted in black ink. Agnes sorts and Hannah writes. Copperware. Ironware. Wickerwork. Scales, bellows and ladles. Grain vats, spice bottles, dish stores. Cinnamon, ginger, cardamon. Prickers, knives and spoons. One of this, two of that, five—should be six—of those. And on. Hannah's writing is small and tidy. She daubs excess ink with her thumb and keeps her sleeves pinned above her elbows so that the corners of the paper don't catch on her cuffs.

'Ten towels.'

Agnes taps her fingers while she waits. 'This and that. Two and five. Chaff and draff. Sixes and twos.'

'Thank you, Agnes.'

The workshop door opens. For a moment, the sound of the presses at work intensifies, then fades as the door is closed once more. Footsteps approach, voices. Agnes moves out of the way.

Jonathan, the foreman is saying, 'There's Thomas Ramsey's lad. He's of an age for apprenticeship: fourteen, or thereabouts.'

'Can he read?' William asks.

‘He can be taught if he can’t.’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Toby.’

The air moves as the men walk past. They smell like ink and metal.

‘Bring him here,’ William says. ‘And ask around the guild for other options.’

They disappear into the office.

Alice appears around the kitchen door. ‘An apprentice printer?’ she asks.

‘A maid out of work?’ Agnes returns. ‘Are the carrots chopped?’

‘Yes.’

‘The beetroot?’

Alice nods.

‘What about the fire? Is it still hot?’

‘I think—yes.’

‘It better be.’ Agnes leans backwards to better see into the kitchen. She makes a noise in the back of her throat that is halfway between annoyance and frustration. ‘Christ, child—help me up.’ Alice holds out a hand but Agnes grips her forearm. She heaves herself to her feet. ‘It’s not hot enough.’

Hannah watches them go, then glances at the open cupboard and its unaccounted for contents. She could do the rest herself. She could. Instead, she secures the ink bottle lid and stretches out her legs.

‘Are you left alone?’

Hannah looks up as the elder Luke approaches from the workshop. He has a light step for a stocky man. More than once she’s found herself in his company without having heard his arrival. She nods in response to his question. ‘Sit with me a moment, Luke.’

‘Happily, mistress.’



The floorboards move under his weight. They sit almost shoulder to shoulder and the warmth of his body feels unexpectedly comforting.

‘Are the men at afternoon rest?’ she asks.

‘They are.’

‘For how long?’

‘A quarter of an hour.’

‘It’s the same at the Rondel press. My brother,’ she rubs a finger across her lower lip, ‘would prefer a shorter break.’

‘He’s a hard worker.’

‘No.’ She laughs once, with bite. ‘He’d rather not work at all.’

They both turn towards the office at the sound of raised voices. The door muffles the words and makes them indistinguishable.

Hannah says, ‘William is looking to take on an apprentice.’

‘As replacement for Francis.’

‘Francis is leaving? Why?’

Luke shakes his head. ‘It’s not my place to say, mistress.’

‘I understand.’ Then, ‘An apprentice doesn’t replace a skilled craftsman.’

‘It’s your husband’s preference,’ Luke says.

A fool’s preference; it’s something her brother would do.

The office door opens and Jonathan stalks back to the workshop.

Luke says, ‘I’ll take that as my cue to return to work.’ He uses the wall to hoist himself to standing. ‘Why is the ground so far away?’

‘I couldn’t tell you.’

## Chapter Four

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Toby arrives six days later, a scrap of a boy with hair in his eyes and a tendency to cling to the edges.

‘*Can* he read?’ Hannah asks the elder Luke that evening while Agnes harries Alice and the pressers play cards.

‘English, yes. Well—’ Luke hovers his hand in the air. *So, so.* ‘He has a few Latin conjugations. A little bit of French.’

‘You mean he can say *bonjour* and *au revoir* and count to ten?’

‘He’ll learn.’

‘He’ll have to and quickly.’

Alice sets a heavy pot of stew onto the table. The smell of overcooked cabbage wafts about the kitchen.

Luke sets a hand on Hannah’s shoulder. ‘Don’t you worry about us.’

‘I do worry,’ she says, close to his ear now that the others are turning in their seats.

‘He’s an apprentice, not a replacement.’

Alice begins to ladle stew into bowls. Thin, oily liquid drips down onto the table.

The bells toll the hour. Agnes stops Toby when he picks up his spoon. ‘We wait for Master William and our master foreman.’

They wait ten minutes before Agnes says, ‘I’ll take them a tray.’

‘No.’ Hannah stands. ‘I’ll take it. She motions for Agnes to return to her seat and for the others to begin their meal. Alice huddles over her own food while the elder Luke passes around the bread.

Hannah passes Jonathan in the hallway.

‘Lytton’s here,’ he says and turns her around by the elbow.

‘I’ll just—’ Hannah starts but he is already gone, taking the stairs two by two.

Hannah steps forward. She can hear snippets and snatches of conversation.

‘...not again...’

‘...as suggestions go...’

‘...too great a risk...’

Lytton says, voice louder, ‘It’s not unreasonable to suggest other, alternative measures. In this instance—’

‘No. Enough.’ William’s voice rises to match the lawyer’s. ‘It is decided. I will not be convinced to pursue this sort of venture.’

Hannah steps forward further until she can just see through the sliver of open door. Lytton is leaning against the desk on balled fists. William, sitting, has his arms crossed.

‘Hannah.’ Jonathan’s voice in her ear. Pottage spills onto the tray. Jonathan steadies her arm. ‘Come away.’ This time, he does not release her elbow. She glances back. William stands at the door, watching. Jonathan indicates the tray. William closes the door.

## Chapter Five

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*Daughter.*

‘Father,’ Hannah murmurs.

*News! A run has been commissioned. It’s nothing you’d like: a legal treatise on English trusts and estates. We are instructed to leave a full page blank before the start of each chapter for engravings—and I’ve seen the designs. They are gaudy and overly complicated. Chapter Three, ‘Animus Revocandi’ (does this require an entire chapter? I have not read the work, but fifty-six pages on the revocation of wills seems...you’ll have a good word for it—*

Excessive.

*—but it is their prerogative, so...), but Chapter Three, the engraving is of doric columns and gargoyles, not dissimilar to those that perch atop Cambridge Cathedral pulling their lips wide and sticking their fingers up their noses. It is described as ‘an intersection of legacy’ in the treatise description. Amusing. Also a little ridiculous? Look out for it!*

*The order is large and the pay good enough to settle the pressers’ concerns. The inkers say they were never concerned—well! Is that why you bought Master Robin ale last week? And sat with him a while discussing the intricacies of printing? ‘Oh we use this ink, but I know you use that sort and that sort is better in so many ways’—pah! But they’re our men and they’re skilled in their work,*

*and your brother has little interest in training replacements. It matters little now that the work has come and the deposit has been paid. The betwixt time is finished with, once again. Pray the next will be years in the making.*

*Your brother celebrates tonight. I do not expect his return until the early morning. Pray, also, that he is not so drunk that he cannot handle the letters tomorrow. The deposit calms our nerves but the full payment will still them completely. Sometimes I think you were born with his share of seriousness and he with yours of lightheadedness. Why didn't God balance you out? Ah, no: ignore that. I'd tear this paper to pieces and start again if I had the energy for writing. Just ignore that last sentence. It's the betwixt time for him as well, and he has his own way of marking its passing.*

*How fares London in the days that have passed? How fare you, mistress of the Carew Press?*

Mistress of the linen press. When Agnes shakes out a sheet that has been scrunched up at the back of the cupboard, forgotten, dust and lint make Hannah's nose run.

'Just get rid of it,' she says, covering her mouth and nose with her sleeve.

'Gladly,' Agnes says.

To her father, Hannah writes, *Very good news! Tell Thomas to drink less.*

His reply is brief and emphatic:

*You tell him!*

So she does.

*Thom,*

*Father's health continues to decline. Don't you think it is time to drink less and manage the press more? Stop taking the Rondel name for granted. It is what he made of it and you will undo his work and ruin his legacy if you keep on as you do. Think on it.*

*Hannah.*

She doesn't expect Thom to reply and she doesn't linger on waiting to be proven correct. There's work to be done as there is always work to be done, even with a seasoned housekeeper and a maid. Soiled, sweat-soaked linens need to be scrubbed of their stains in chamber lye and rosemary. William's kersey doublets must be beaten of their dust. Frayed edges have to be restored. Loose ends of blackwork should be teased into place. Dark, gritty rye flour has to be mixed to dough and kneaded. Bundles of desiccated lavender and chamomile require unhooking from the rafters and must be replaced with fresh. Cobwebs are to be swept from the crooks, and woodlice and earwigs must be forced from their crevices and stamped under foot. Alice cannot stand the pests and flees with a squeal, leaving Agnes muttering oaths under her breath and stooping with a groan to pick up the broom that has just been dropped.

## Chapter Six

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Agnes has the kneading in hand. She stretches the dough as thin as skin and folds it, layers it, presses it under the heels of her palms. The table creaks as she works; flour dashes into the air. By the look on her face, her mind is elsewhere. She doesn't seem to see Alice dip the tip of her finger into the laundry bucket and lurch backwards when the water burns her skin. Nor does she see Robert steal through the kitchen door and pocket the last of the gingered bread. She doesn't see Hannah, either, watching her from the corner, quill in hand.

Tiny globules of black ink drip onto the household accounts. Beneath these, a letter from her father.

*Hannah,*

*Today marks ten months since you left the Rondel press. I still listen for you in the mornings. Margaret made an apple pie with the leftover flour (John has left us for the Morvern press—more on that another time—so our supplies are greater in quantity this month). It reminded me of October 1528. Your sixth birthday. We took you and Thom to the orchard and I lifted you up into the trees. You chased up the branches like a squirrel and when you came back down there was lichen in your hair and sap under your finger nails. When your mother took you down to the river to clean your hands, you ran off and spent the next half an hour sticking your fingers together and pulling them apart while evading capture. Do you remember? You were grinning like you'd found Christ Mass treasures.*

*Do you miss the trees in London? I suppose there must be some to shelter under as you sheltered under those at home.*

*I'm being a fool, but I'll send this anyway. Just burn it, love.*

Hannah's thoughts are half in the kitchen, half in the past. She is at once as she is now but also eighteen years younger, with a plumpness to her cheeks that has long since hollowed away. When she touches her fingers together, she can feel the sap sticking to her skin. A tiny piece of lichen has fallen from her hair and down the back of her dress. She can feel it trapped somewhere between her shoulder blades and shimmies about, contorting her spine to force it loose. Her mother says, *What insects have crawled up your legs?* before she captures her and brings her down to the river. They lie on their stomachs and tickle the slow-moving water with their fingertips. Somewhere nearby, Thom is kicking around a ball. Every so often, when the sound of his foot colliding with the leather hide sounds too close, Hannah ducks her head but her mother only laughs. *They're far away.*

'You're far away,' Hannah murmurs.

To her father she writes,

*There's a willow at the end of the Fleet and I pause there on my way home from the market to talk with our neighbours. It reminds me of mother and of Eleanor.*

Perhaps there was once a tree at the mouth of the Fleet before the city expanded its reach along the river. More than one, maybe even a whole copse of trees—and grass and flowers and the sounds of crickets and warblers; and clear air; and underfoot the droppings left by deer instead of piles of horse manure; and the smoke from the chimneys



that hazes the air; and the clamour of hawkers and traders; and the seasonal dried dirt or the seasonal, claggy mud.

She imagines him reading her letter knowing she is lying. He's visited London, not for many years, but he's stayed in Fleet Street and bargained with Fleet Street craftsmen—he knows. He doesn't contradict her in his reply:

*That's a blessing for you, Hannah.*

She should have said, *I listen for you, too*. But that isn't the truth, either. She doesn't listen for him; she hears him everywhere already. She hears him in the workshop when she's standing behind the closed door. She hears him in the typesetter's voices and in their tread as they walk the hallways. The creak of a chair is him pulling it out from under the table one-handed and then throwing all his weight upon it, convinced that it will hold. The elder Luke slurping his soup, that's her father. William counting out the men's wages, that's her father, too.

*I want to come home.*

Hannah crosses out the words so thoroughly that all that's left on the paper is a thick black, uneven line. She curls the paper into a ball and lets it fall into the fire.

Agnes drops the dough into a bowl and covers it with a damp towel. Her movements are quick, efficient. 'Market?' she asks.

'Take Alice,' Hannah says. She shakes the housekeeping purse, her apron, the old pot above the kitchen mantle. 'Wait here.'

The door to the workshop is closed. Hannah touches the latch but pauses: the press isn't her place to be, William has made this clear. She considers knocking. She considers

waiting until someone exits. Instead she opens the door and steps inside. The presses still as the men look up. The new boy, Toby, stares at her, quiet and wary.

‘The master’s in his office, mistress,’ the elder Luke says.

Hannah nods. She surveys the room, her eyes passing over the typesetter’s benches, the machines, the printed pages hanging upon their lines. The warmth of the room touches her skin; the smell of ink and paper tickle her nose. She nods again and walks backwards out the room.

William’s door is ajar. She can hear Jonathan talking and, as she draws nearer to the office, William answering.

‘...the loss is enough to cause substantial damage.’

‘It doesn’t need to be said.’

‘Did they give a reason?’

Hannah looks around the door.

William tosses a book onto the desk. ‘Page nine,’ he says.

Jonathan holds the book up to the light. Hannah leans in but the gap is too small to see anything more than she already does.

‘Can the commission be salvaged?’

‘No. I’ve tried.’

‘What now?’

‘We continue printing the orders we have.’

‘The money lost—’

‘We will manage.’

Jonathan moves. Hannah steps back, then steps forward. She knocks on the door.

‘Not now.’

‘William,’ she pushes into the room—

‘I said not now, Hannah.’

‘It can’t wait.’

William stands. ‘Jonathan.’ He ducks his head to the side. The foreman nods once and leaves. The door clicks shut behind him.

‘I need money for the purchase of food.’

‘Take it from the house fund.’

‘The house fund is depleted.’

She expects William to step forward, to narrow his lips, to make himself seem taller but instead he wipes a hand over his eyes and nose. ‘How has this happened?’ His voice is quiet but not barbed.

‘Prices have risen.’

‘You need to be more discerning with your choices.’

‘I am discerning.’

‘Cut something out.’ He pulls out his chair. The two back feet scrape across the floorboards.

‘Such as?’

‘You’re mistress of the house. What do we waste?’

‘Nothing.’

‘What do we waste?’

‘Nothing.’

He removes a few coins from a drawer and pushes them across the desk. Hannah spreads them out.

‘This isn’t enough.’

‘It will have to be enough.’ William turns away and opens a ledger.

Less fish; more cabbage. Go for the smaller cabbages, the ones people choose last. No meat. Buy the rougher grains. *This much* less ale. Make do. Eek things out. Serve smaller portions.

Rye sticks in her teeth. The vegetables sit heavily in her stomach.

‘Stop giving Robert extra to take home: he has his wage and it’s not for us to feed his children.’ William’s last word on the matter.

## Chapter Seven

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One of the Fleet Street children kicks a ball through the parlour window. It smashes into fourteen jagged pieces that have to be wrapped in off-cut paper and dropped into the cesspit. Agnes catches the tip of her finger against an edge and swears, *Mary Mother*, shaking her hand as if she can dislodge the pain as well as the blood.

William says, 'Use paper and paste for now.' *For the window*. 'And empty the room of anything valuable.' Now all that's left is furniture and books and thread and needles. The silverware and candlesticks are locked in a cupboard. 'We don't need them anyway.' He sells them later. 'Coin for fish,' he says. 'Less cabbage this week, Hannah. Fewer turnips. Buy salt.'

More talk on the street about the fair gosseller. Fair?

'Wealthy,' the Fleet gossips say.

'Who keeps her clothed and fed?'

'Not her husband, whom she left in Lincolnshire.'

'Left?'

'Divorced.'

'Ha!'

Hannah pushes her way through the crowd and gossip. Words follow her, words of Anne Askew's vocabulary, entwining with market conversation.

*Draff, man, it isn't worth that.*

*Adder's eggs as good as.*

*I'll name you for what you are: menstruator.*

Alice asks, 'What does she look like, this gosseller?'

'What does it matter, Alice?' Agnes hurries the girl along.

Everyone has an idea: she's dark haired, dark eyed, medium height, medium weight and has a piercing look.

One woman asks Hannah, 'Is it you? Are you the fair gospeller?'

Agnes has been asked, Alice has been asked, others have been asked.

No.

Not me.

Not I.

Do I look like my father was a sir?

The gossipers say, 'I quite like her.'

'So do I.'

'She talks a lot of sense.'

'And Benedict's a fool, really.'

Alice leans into the group, 'I quite like her, too.'

Agnes pulls her away. 'Keep such thoughts to yourself.'

'Why should I keep such thoughts to myself?' Alice asks later in the kitchen as she shreds cabbage.

'Hush, girl,' Agnes says. 'Cartwright's here and he doesn't need to hear you talking nonsense about a heretic gospeller.'

'But—'

'Do as Agnes instructs,' Hannah says, touching the feathered end of a quill to her lip. The household accounts are spread open across the table; an abacus rests at her elbow. William has reduced their monthly allowance—

'Why?' Hannah had asked, when he gave her that month's coins.

'We spend too much.'

'We spend as much as needs to be spent.'

He pulled a ledger closer and took up a quill. 'Don't argue with me, Hannah.'

—and something has to be removed to balance the wages. Cheese? The men argue over the last morsels. Grain? The bread is sliced as thin as Eucharist wafers. Vegetables? Just water for the stew then.

‘—and she’ll be arrested,’ Agnes says, ‘that’s why.’

Hannah looks up.

Alice scrapes the cabbage into a bowl. ‘My mother says purgatory’s a myth.’

‘That’s enough, Alice,’ Hannah says. ‘Return to your work and work in silence.’ She looks back down at the account book but the figures begin to blur. A dull ache has rooted itself in her forehead; she presses her palm across her eyes but the pain remains. It’s too warm in the kitchen, too close, too loud. She closes the accounts, tucks them under her arm and seeks the cool, quiet parlour.

Before she reaches the door, her name is called from the office.

Cartwright stands on the threshold. ‘I thought I heard footsteps. Come, come.’ When she doesn’t immediately move, he gestures for her to approach.

William sits at his desk, one hand resting almost protectively across a pile of papers. He glances at her, than glances away.

Hannah steps into the room. ‘Well met, master Cartwright.’ She dips her hems.

‘Well met, Hannah. I have a question for you, master-printer’s daughter that you are.’

William seems to look further away.

Cartwright continues, ‘Your husband and I cannot agree on font.’ He holds up a sheet of paper printed with two paragraphs of text. ‘Here is one option, size twelve Roman. And the second, size twelve Augustyn. I am moved to use the former, William the latter.’

‘What text have you commissioned, sir?’ Hannah asks. She takes the paper when Cartwright pushes it against her left hand.

‘Xenophon’s *Anabasis*.’

‘In the Greek?’

‘Indeed.’

‘Roman.’ She returns the paper.

‘You have no qualms disagreeing with your husband,’ Cartwright says and laughs.

‘Does she, William?’

‘She does not,’ Williams says.

‘Roman is my preferred style,’ Hannah says. ‘I would use it in most instances.’

‘And your father’s too?’

‘He is known to lean more towards Roman than Augustyn, yes.’

‘And William to Augustyn.’

‘We all have our preferences.’

‘That is true and you and I—and your father, it seems—share the same preference.

Not tempted to join us on the Roman side, William? Follow your wife’s lead?’

William doesn’t answer but Cartwright has already moved on, flicking through a manuscript on the desk. ‘About the contents page—’

William, though, catches Hannah’s eye. There’s nothing warm in his expression, only controlled coldness. She holds his gaze, just a moment, then ducks out of the office.

That evening at dinner, he takes the seat beside her and says, voice quiet, ‘Why embarrass me today?’

‘I didn’t embarrass you.’ She stirs salt into her bowl of pottage.

‘And yet.’

‘And yet nothing. Cartwright spoke of font types not...’ she casts around for something less trivial. ‘I don’t know. Income.’

‘What do you know about the Carew press income?’

‘Very little.’



‘Very little to nothing.’

‘Not quite nothing.’ Hannah blows on a spoonful of vegetables, brought cut price  
at the end of the day’s trading.

‘Don’t instruct me, wife.’ William turns to his own meal.

‘Yes, husband.’

To her father, she writes,

*I told a lie today; should I say twelve hail Marys?*

In return:

*Twenty for good measure.*

## Chapter Eight

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*Daughter.*

‘Father.’

*Master Garrett has returned to us. He passes on his best wishes and says he may seek books from the Carew Press on his arrival in London (he leaves us tomorrow, or perhaps Thursday depending, in his words, ‘On the kindest of mistress Colby’—we know what kindnesses she offers). He has bought from us twenty-five copies of a new French medical text. Expect a diagnosis for all your concerns when he does make it to the city. I have ‘Eel Thing,’ a contamination of the upper dermis, according to his observations of my person and readings of page sixteen of ‘Les Nouvelles Methodes En Medicine.’ Really, though, the redness on my arm is the lasting consequences of a wasp sting (they are brutal this year) but no, ‘Impossible! This is Eel Thing, my friend.’ And I must apply a topical lotion of beeswax and pray three times a day to our Lord for mercy on my soul. I did both (the lotion, the first ‘Our Lord’) under his watch but neither since. If he asks, play ignorant: I said nothing, you know nothing.*

This is Richard Garrett: a new day, a new interest. Yesterday it was metallurgy; today it is medicine; tomorrow it will be the distillation of rose oil or the recitation of York Mystery plays.

He arrives in London two weeks later.

‘I don’t know this trader,’ William says above the noise of the Stationers’ Guild.

‘He does business with my father’s press.’

‘His reach?’

‘To the south of England: Truro; to the north: Northumberland, Cumberland. Occasionally, he crosses into Scotland and up to Edinburgh but no higher. In Europe, he will go as far as Italy but usually not beyond France. It changes each year.’

‘Based on what? Why doesn’t he follow a defined route?’

‘He says he follows his stomach.’

William makes a disapproving sound in the back of his throat and turns away to speak with other, more reliable book traders. Hannah waits until his attention is fully elsewhere then pushes through the crowded guildhall to Garrett’s table.

‘Was that your husband I saw you talking with just now?’

‘Did you stand on your wares to see us above the crowd?’

‘Isn’t it reductive to answer a question with another question?’

‘I’m not sure; is it?’

Garrett raps her shoulder with a book then pulls her into a brief, tight hug that endures her struggle for personal liberty. ‘You’re thinner. Aren’t you supposed to be swelling?’

Hannah grabs the book from the table and hits him across the head.

‘Ow.’

‘Yes, ow—and well deserved.’

Garrett straightens his hair. ‘How’s your father?’

‘Well.’

‘Did he tell you I was able to identify his affliction?’

*A growing mass in his belly.* ‘What affliction?’

Garrett takes Hannah’s hand and points to her forearm. ‘He had on his skin, here, a fiery rash and itchiness. Eel Thing, as it is commonly known. I prescribed beeswax and prayer, which reduced the inflammation and diminished the redness.’

‘And the itching?’ Hannah pulls her arm free and pulls down her sleeve.

‘Not all symptoms can be controlled so quickly.’

‘I see. What is the uncommon name?’

Garrett waves his hand in the air, *It doesn’t matter*. ‘I have something for you from the continent.’

‘Oh?’

He hands her a sealed envelope. She feels the contents: some sort of powder. She lifts it to her nose and inhales. Sweet. Spicy. Slightly woody. ‘Nutmeg.’

Garrett reclaims the envelope and cracks the seal. ‘The colour of this nutmeg, though, Hannah.’ The powder is a rich reddish brown, the colour of sun-baked clay. ‘I bought it from a trader in Perpignan.’ He passes it back to her.

‘Thank you. Perpignan? That’s south for you.’

Garrett touches his stomach. ‘I could smell the salt coast.’

‘Is baked salt coast a delicacy in France?’

‘*Anchois de Collioure* rather—the best to be found are in Perpignan.’

‘Though I imagine you don’t say that aloud in Collioure.’

‘No, or I’ll be smacked about the head by an impassioned young woman.’

‘And you’ll still deserve it. Tell me about Perpignan.’

‘It’s hot and dry and pale. The sand is yellow-white.’

‘I’ll visit.’

‘You won’t regret it.’

Hannah shakes her head and tucks the nutmeg into her bag.

‘He has a cube for a face, your husband.’

Hannah follows Garrett’s gaze. ‘Yes, I suppose he does.’

‘Cheekbones,’ Garrett says, running a hand over his own, looser face.

‘Yes, he has those.’

‘He’s looking at us.’

‘I suppose it’s fair since we are looking at him.’

William turns away and begins walking to the door.

‘I don’t think he has a mind to trade with you.’

‘There’re plenty of other guild members that will,’ Garret says. ‘Must you go?’

‘It’s a wife’s duty to stay by her husband’s side.’ She doesn’t say that she could walk the city for hours and not be able to find her way back to Fleet Street from the Stationers’ Guildhall. The roads look too similar. Each corner has a baker, a hawker, a trader. Each throughway is half-blocked by horses and carts and riders and people who know how to flit through the cracks.

‘In that case, good day, Mistress Carew.’ Garrett bows, mock low. ‘Check that the nutmeg is still good before you eat it—it’s been in my pocket for nearly a year.’

Hannah pulls a face and returns the mock bow with a suitably low curtsy. ‘Master Garrett. I shall inform the parish clerks that my death, should it occurs, is entirely your fault.’

‘Obliged, mistress.’

## Chapter Nine

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*Daughter.*

*Rain today, the first proper rain in thirty-five days. Was a month ever so dry? All the neighbouring farms are flooded to some degree. On Saturday, the men helped Mark Cressy move his sheep to higher ground. They could be spared a few hours, though your brother was concerned about printing progress. We are not ahead with the 'New Methods in Medicine,' nor are we behind: a few hours given to the sheep will not damage our deadline. Your brother's temper worsens with the weather. We leave him to his bluster. He's always been choleric, but if you hear of any medicines that may balance his humours, they will be gratefully received.*

Robert Garrett with his cures and teasing humour are gone but the rain comes to replace him, sent from Cambridgeshire. The ruts that run down the length of the Fleet turn to leats, then to underwater trenches as the water rises. The cracks in the dry earth fill, too, but absorb little, with the compacted dirt as proofed as the tar and pitch-coated hulls of the wherries. On Monday, Hannah can stand on the step outside the front door; on Tuesday she has to stand on the door frame to save her shoes from the water. They shut the doors and line the thresholds with old linens stuffed with cotton. The roof holds; the glass doesn't break; but the herbary beds turn to soup. Mint, marjory, lavender and rosemary float in the mess like limp leafy vegetables in mouldy pottage. Printing continues, as it must, though the inescapable damp that clings to the workshop window makes the paper curl. William orders more candles to be lit and Agnes has Alice boiling up a mixture of flour and water paste that they use to fix thick rolls of linen across the

disintegrating window frames. The damp has gotten into the wood and the wood has started to break away in soft chunks.

‘It’s a new house,’ the elder Luke tells Hannah as he runs a thumb along one of the kitchen frames. ‘They’re built too quickly.’

‘Will it last?’

‘Will what last?’ William asks, coming into the kitchen. ‘The press?’

‘The house.’

‘Yes.’ He says the word slowly, firmly, as if the suggestion that it may not is absurd.

*You are too easy on Thom (she writes to her father). Tell him to rant at the wall or to an open field and leave everyone alone with his temper.*

*Yes (he says in reply), that’ll work.*

The neatness of his handwriting has started to decline. Some letters are poorly formed; *Ds* look more like *Os* and the evenness of his lines has been replaced by a rising slant in parts and a lowering slant in others.

*Have you spoken to the physician?*

She imagines him sighing, leaning back in his chair but wincing as the movement catches at the mass in his stomach. He steeples his fingers and glances out the window until he finally takes up his quill to write:

*It is what it is, my love.*

Hannah takes up her own quill.

*Thom—how is he really?*

Thom, Thom, Thom: talk to me, please. Stop ignoring my letters.

She sits in the parlour and watches as the Fleet moves outside the window, waits for a body to push free of the crowd, knock on the Carew press door and bring her a note from Cambridge. She wants to go there herself, to layer up her clothing, lace her boots and walk until she reaches her father's door. She'll question the physician and talk to the earth women and knock the whiskey bottle from her brother's hands. She can feel the sting in her palm where her hand will connect with the bottle. The lip will catch one of her fingers at an odd angle and leave behind a tiny blue bruise that'll fade in three or four days. She can see Thom in her mind, can hear the argument that will ensue. He will raise his voice; she will raise hers to match. He'll hammer a fist against the table and step forward with his full height but she'll not move. She knows how to stand her ground and she will. She will.

She doesn't move from the window.

Thom doesn't know how to reason.

The voices of two men arguing outside draws her attention:

'...fool to be...'

'...bedsprawler...'

'...further from the truth!'

Something about profits. Half the talk on Fleet Street is about profits. Profits and stability and commissions and *Master So-and-so's in trouble, did you hear? Trader You-know failed to pay his commission.*



When she asks William about it—‘Doesn’t the Carew press have business with You-know?’—he brushes her aside.

‘It’s men’s business, Hannah.’

She hammers her own fist on the table with enough force to make the cups rattle. He pretends to be too far across the room to notice.

## Chapter Ten

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A hush has settled over the house. The prolonged absence of the gentle thrum of the presses draws Hannah to the workshop door. Agnes is already there, standing just beyond the threshold, one arm braced against the wall. When Hannah reaches her, she sees William and Jonathan on their knees examining one of the presses. The others stand around them, waiting, watching. Toby hangs back.

‘What’s happening?’ Hannah whispers to the elder Luke when he joins them at the door.

‘There’s a split in the base,’ Luke says. ‘This long.’ He holds out his hand and measures the length of his palm.

‘New?’

‘New since this morning—and growing.’

‘Has William sent for Jem?’ The carpenter.

‘Not yet.’

‘Why the delay?’

‘They want to see if it can be left a little while longer.’

‘They want to do what?’ She’s unable to contain the last word to a whisper. ‘It’ll topple.’

‘Perhaps.’ Always even-handed, the elder Luke. Always the mediator.

‘It will.’

‘It won’t topple.’ William’s voice draws her attention away from Luke. His voice is loud and clear. ‘It will not topple,’ he says to the others. ‘Away, Hannah.’

‘Best to go, mistress.’

What she remembers isn’t the sound of a press toppling, it’s the feeling: when eighteen-hundred pounds of solid wood and metal pummel the ground, it sends tremors

through the floorboards as if the earth itself is bucking against the sudden onslaught of weight.

The press bed shatters, firing splinters of oak through the air that lodge in the walls, in clothing, in skin, in *eyes*.

The bar, dislodged, punches into whoever has it in hand, breaking ribs and puncturing internal organs. She's seen a man caved in, his middle sunken, his spine protruding from his back.

Legs and arms are amputated from their bodies; hands and fingers and toes. Bones protrude through flesh, surrounded by blood and gore.

Dust, erupted, mutes the light, mutes sight. Screams rupture the air.

The smell of it—she holds a hand across her mouth. *The smell of it.*

Robert and Henry, operating the bars, will have their organs battered into their spines.

The Lukes, at the frames, will be crushed by the buckling carriage.

William and Jonathan, at the typesetter's tables, will suffer a hundred tiny cuts.

Toby, clipping pages to the line will be blown backwards into the wall.

'It won't topple,' William says again.

Hannah's heard those words before, spoken by her father's neighbour. She and little Charlotte Cooper were playing *catch me, catch me quick* in the Cooper kitchen while their fathers talked business—until they weren't. Hannah was on the floor, instead of hidden behind the garden door, her legs kicked out from beneath her by the roiling earth. *It won't topple*, Master Cooper had said. *The crack is only this long.*

Hannah can feel the shake of the earth in the soles of her feet. She can feel the shudder. She can smell the dust and hear the guttural screams of the pressers.

A hand touches her shoulder; William's hand. He moves it to her cheek, three fingers soft and light against her skin. 'Go now, Hannah,' he says, voice quiet. She can

smell pottage on his breath. A half-crushed grain of rye is lodged between two of his teeth. His lips are dry and cracked in places. The neck of his shirt is yellowing and a button on his jerkin has come loose. He watches her, watches as she watches him. He isn't a tall man. He isn't large. He occupies little space. She's not afraid of him and she knows in this moment he doesn't want her to be afraid of him. But she cannot talk to him when he stands this closely to her, cannot talk to him when he talks to her like this. Is he looking at her teeth? Can he smell her breath too? Is the neck of her chemise yellowing? Are the ties of her kirtle loose? 'Go now,' he says again. And she does.

## Chapter Eleven

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Two days pass and the split continues to grow. William sends for Jem, who knows already what has happened and has been waiting.

Agnes, yawning, is the one who admits the carpenter.

‘What’s disturbed your sleep?’ he asks.

‘Nothing,’ she says.

She keeps her eyes on William and has to be asked twice to cut the bread.

## Chapter Twelve

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The leg needs to be replaced.

‘How long will it take? How much will it cost?’

Jem speaks into William’s ear.

William shakes his head. ‘No, earlier.’

‘That would be impossible.’

They go to the office.

Robert exhales loudly. ‘I’m a loose part,’ he says. ‘The draff.’ He flicks water at Toby’s back. The apprentice squirms.

‘Leave him be,’ Agnes says.

Robert laughs, ‘I’m not bothering him.’

## Chapter Thirteen

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‘Here rises the serpent of cockatrice eggs. If your masses are of God’s creation, ordinance of commandment, or if they had been in any point necessary for mans’ benefit, they would have been registered in the book of life—which is the sacred Bible. But there is no mention of private masses. It is a papist invention and I name it with rust, chaff, draff, swill, drunkenness, fornication, menstruation, man’s dirt, adders’ eggs, poison, snares, the bread of wicked lies and the cup of God’s curse—’

Hannah waves away market smoke.

‘She’s back again,’ the fabric-seller’s goodwife says.

Anne Askew. The fur-lined cloak is gone. Her hair is loose to the wind.

Hannah coughs. Tears in her eyes. A momentary loss of balance. Someone steadies her shoulder and leads her away to a canopy at the edge of the market.

‘You’ll breathe easier here,’ a woman says. ‘Damned ovens.’

Hannah wipes her eyes and, sitting on the stool indicated her, is brought into a semi-circle of older women. One is tending a small potted plant, pinching off dead leaves and curled petals. Two others are spinning white-grey wool fibres to yarn. A fourth, elder to the others, balances an embroidery frame on her knees. The linen is pulled so taut the weave is visible.

‘Her name is Hylde,’ murmurs the woman who led Hannah to the group. ‘She doesn’t talk any more, but she appreciates company.’

Hannah watches Hylde pierce the linen and continue to sew. Needle through, then back, then back through a third of the way, then back, and on. When the thread becomes too small, she cuts more, touches the tip to her tongue, presses it flat between her thumb and forefinger and slides it through the eye. Needle through, then back, back through, one third, and back. The needle scratches against the fabric. Hylde hums under her tongue.

The next time she pauses to rethread the needle, Hannah touches her finger to the embroidery and follows along its curves and grooves and ridges. The pattern is simple: thistles and fleurs-de-lis. Half are dark blue, the rest, yet to be sewn, are outlined in cream. ‘This is opus anglicanum, isn’t it?’ *English work*. Hylde offers Hannah the needle but she withdraws her hand. ‘I’d prefer to watch.’ Hylde returns to the frame. ‘Were you once a nun?’ Hannah asks.

Hylde pauses, then nods.

‘I’m sorry.’

Hylde touches her shoulder to Hannah’s.

Hannah says, ‘I was told by a friend—by a nun that you sew opus anglicanum to bring you closer to God. Monks illuminate manuscripts and nuns sew. My father—who’s a printer—says that toiling at the press brings him closer to God.’

Hylde nods.

Hannah continues, ‘Something happens to the mind when printing. It’s something like...I feel—or I felt...soothed.’

Hylde looks at Hannah with one eyebrow slightly raised, her head tilted to the side.

‘I print little these days,’ Hannah says. She traces one more fleur-de-lis. ‘Is that what happens to you when you sew?’

Hylde nods again and continues to weave her needle through the linen. Watching her work carries Hannah back to Cambridge, back seven years, to a small priory made of smooth, honey-coloured stone. A woman is waiting for her at the door. Her skin is touched by the sun, her palms—when she takes Hannah’s hands into her own—are worn yet gentle. Greying hair peeks out from under her white wimple. The sweet scent of summer jasmine envelopes them both and Hannah’s body feels as if half her weight has been lifted from within itself.



Voices cut through the market smoke.

‘...bread of wicked lies...’

‘...quite the fair gospeller...’

‘...man’s dirt!’

Hannah stands with such haste that her stool almost topples. She secures it with a hand and gives Hylde an apologetic smile.

‘Away already?’ asks the woman who led her to the canopy.

‘The sooner I complete my tasks, the sooner I can leave this—.’

‘It’s hellish, isn’t it? Damned ovens. All the wood is wet.’

Hannah steps back into the market proper and returns to the fabric-seller. The crowd surrounding Anne Askew has grown. Hannah keeps her eyes averted.

‘Just the one?’ The goodwife asks when Hannah indicates a bolt of undyed linen.

‘Yes, just the one.’ She hands over the coins.

Anne Askew’s sermon is half words, half coughing.

The goodwife says, ‘She’s still trying. I suppose suffering is to be expected when toiling for God.’

‘Is that what she’s doing?’

‘What else might she be doing?’

‘Toiling for herself.’

The goodwife shears the linen in two. ‘She’s quite small, isn’t she? I imagine her taller.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t know, I just do.’

‘Perhaps we are all too used to seeing her raised high. On her fish barrel.’

‘Higher than that. Do you know that her father served the king? She’ll be gospelling at court soon, if not already.’

‘Gospelling heresy to the head of the English church? Goodness.’

‘We ought to feel grateful.’

‘How so?’

‘She gospels to us as well as them.’

Anne coughs and covers her mouth with her silk sleeves.

## Chapter Fourteen

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Benedict stumbles at Mass. Hands reach out to catch him but he falls. Eucharist wine spills across his chasuble, finds the cracks in the flagstones and veins out across the church.

He's been unwell.

The warm air has loosened his lungs.

Illness has weakened his legs.

Papistry has bewildered his senses.

This is what people whisper when they carry his body to the sacristy.

'It's the cup of God's curse—'

'Be quiet, Alice.'

## Chapter Fifteen

---

‘What’s your name?’

Hannah rests her palms on her legs. ‘I’m not going to tell you my name.’

‘What are you going to tell us?’

The room is light, open. The window is unshuttered. Sounds of the city wend their way inside, but it’s quieter here. There are fewer people and fewer rowdy businesses. The chair on which she sits is cushioned. It raises her feet a breath above the floor. She has to perch to keep them flat—and she keeps them flat. Ready to flea if she can.

‘Do you have something to say regarding the gospeller Anne Askew?’

The sun is in her eyes. It sheers her vision. She blinks, twice, three times.

Movement close by. The sound of weight on a stool. Someone’s knees near her own. She smells onions and wine and leather. It’s too warm for leather. Sweat has gathered under her arms and down her back and the thought of leather on bare skin or even over linen...

Ale is poured and a cup pressed into her hands. The metal is cool. She touches a finger to her ear lobe. A clock, somewhere, is ticking. Her breath is much quicker.

‘Are you acquainted with Anne Askew?’

‘No.’

Her skin feels as fragile as a moth’s wing. Another feeling starts in the space between her shoulders. A shuffling. An irritation. A growing warmth that spreads to her chest and then into her stomach. Not nausea. Constriction. Her toes curl in her shoes and lift off the floor. She’d felt this way two hours earlier when the King’s authority had cut off the market roads and pulled people out at random from the crowd. *We just want to talk to you*, they said. *King’s business*.

‘You have some other connection to her?’

‘No.’

Weight shifts, his, not hers.

‘Have you seen her gospel?’

‘Yes.’

‘You have sought her out?’

‘No.’ She looks up, blinking. ‘Never.’

The man before her is older, grey-haired, thin. One of his legs is bent beneath the other. Ink has gotten under his nails and into the creases of his fingers. The collar of his shirt crumples under his beard. ‘Close the shutter, Thomas,’ he says.

A young man, as straight and rigid as a pilaster, rises from the desk and tugs the shutter. Shadow falls across Hannah’s face.

‘Did you hear Anne Askew gospelling heresy?’

‘Yes.’

‘What did she say, specifically? Just tell us what you can.’

There are others like her downstairs, waiting, wondering if their families or masters know where they are.

The interrogator taps two fingers on the desk. He says again, ‘Just tell us what you can.’

Hannah says, ‘You must already know what she’s been gospelling or you wouldn’t care to know she exists.’

‘She says that God is not in temples made with hands. Have you heard her say that?’

‘Why not ask Anne Askew what Anne Askew says?’

‘Do you have things to do today, mistress? People to call on, places to be?’

‘Like every London goodwife.’

‘Tell us what she gospels—or confirm, if you prefer, what we have heard—and we will let you be on your way.’

‘What cost to be on my way?’

‘Anne Askew’s words.’ He shrugs, *Little cost*.

‘What cost to Anne Askew?’

‘We’ll have her on her way, too. Wherever that may be: Lincolnshire, her husband’s house—if he’ll have her.’ When Hannah looks away, he says, ‘Come *on*, mistress. We just want her gone from the market squares. No one needs to keep hearing her incessant pontifications.’

‘She did say that God is not in temples made with hands.’

‘Good. What else?’

‘That the sacrament that hangs over the altar is not the very body of Christ but a sign or a shape or a similitude of what it represents.’

‘You remember her words well.’

‘As you said: she pontificates incessantly.’

‘Anything else?’

‘She names Bishop Bonner a corrupter of Christian faith who borrows beliefs from pagans.’

The man’s lips tug to the side. ‘Did she?’

‘Do you not need to write this down?’

‘No, no. Will you testify against her?’

The cushion slips up behind her when she finds the ground with her feet. ‘Isn’t it enough to tell you what I’ve heard?’

He moves his head to the side, left and the right, thinking, contemplating. ‘Perhaps we will make some notes. Thomas: paper and quill please. Transcribe what I say. Today

is the fifth of the month in the year of our Lord, 1545. I converse with mistress—your name please mistress.’

‘I’ve told you I won’t tell you my name.’

‘Thomas, name her as a goodwife of London.’

The feathered tip of the quill scurries through the air.

‘But note that she is not a native Londoner. That her family is of the middling craft sort. Her hair is brown, her eyes are brown and she wears a green kirtle and a belt embroidered with thistles and fleurs-de-lis. Goodwife,’ he continues. ‘Do *you* believe the sacrament hanging over the altar is the very body of Christ?’ He’s looking at her as if the question is as simple as *Do you like salted fish?* Yes or no. *It isn’t important, I’m just curious.*

Hannah looks for the door. It’s shut. The window is also shut. Candle smoke has started to hang in the air.

Under his breath, Thomas repeats his instructions. *Not a native. Of the middling sort. Brown hair, eyes, green kirtle. Do you believe—*

‘Yes,’ because the King says so.

‘And you believe that the wine and the bread only look like wine and bread during Holy communion?’

‘Yes,’ for the same reason and because there are too many other things to worry about than whether or not the bread and wine are bread and wine or body and blood.

‘What do you say to Anne Askew’s assertion that the sacrament is not the very body of Christ but merely a sign or shape or similitude?’

‘I disagree with her assertion.’

‘How so?’

‘I believe that the sacrament is not a sign or shape or similitude.’

‘What do you believe it is?’

‘I believe that it is the very body of Christ. As the Bible teaches.’

‘As the Bible teaches?’

‘As I have been taught by men who read the Bible.’

‘Have you always believed what you’ve been taught?’

‘Yes.’

‘No one has ever changed your mind?’

‘No one has changed my mind. My beliefs haven’t altered.’

‘How old are you?’

The door opens. A man—heavy-set, sweating, mopping his brow—enters, kicks the door shut and sets a collection of ledgers onto the desk. The candlesticks and ink bottles clatter.

‘How old are you, mistress goodwife?’

A bird lands on the window ledge. She can hear its wings fluttering against the glass.

‘I am twenty-three years old.’

‘And you have witnessed many changes due to the Reformation of religion?’

‘As we all have.’

‘You will have seen many gospellers such as Anne Askew.’

‘A few. Not many.’

‘Were you ever swayed by their teachings?’

‘No, never.’

‘Never.’ He taps two fingers on the edge of his chair. ‘Do you consider the Bishop Bonner corrupt?’

‘No.’

‘And will you testify against the woman who says otherwise?’

‘No.’



‘You claim to not know Anne Askew’

‘I do not know Anne Askew.’

‘You claim no acquaintance with her.’

‘I am not acquainted with her.’

‘Perhaps you are.’

‘I am not.’

‘You do not wish to face her—why, unless you know one another?’

‘I do not know her.’

‘That makes it harder for us to have her removed from the city. People have been giving her money, did you know that? And she accepts it. Poor people. Old people. Young mothers. Have you not heard that she takes their money and this is her primary motivation to gospel?’

## Chapter Sixteen

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‘If Father Benedict does die—’

‘He won’t.’

‘But if he does—’

‘He won’t, Alice.’

‘Who will replace him?’

‘Father Michael.’

‘I don’t like Father Michael.’

Agnes wipes fish scales from her knife. ‘You don’t know him.’

Alice says, ‘He looks at people in a strange way.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘Like this.’ She squints and pulls up her lip.

‘He doesn’t.’

‘He does.’

Hannah says, ‘He doesn’t, Alice.’ She brushes breadcrumbs from the unopened letter sitting before her on the table.

‘Are you finished yet?’ Agnes to Alice.

Alice removes her hands from the mixing bowl. They are sticky with honey and dried, ground ginger. Agnes tips the bowl forward. ‘More honey—I’ll do it.’ When she lifts the honey pot, a ring of thick amber liquid is left on the table.

‘I like Father Benedict,’ Alice continues.

‘He’s not going to die.’

‘But when he fell—’

‘He was caught before he hit the floor and has been tended to by the physician. His body is not broken.’

‘Robert said he saw a bruise.’

‘A bruise won’t kill a man.’

‘He’s old.’

‘And your grandfather’s older. Stop prophesying the priest’s death.’

‘Robert said—’

‘Ignore him.’

‘But—’

Hannah’s voice is quiet, ‘Enough, Alice.’ She breaks her father’s seal.

*Daughter.*

*Have the rains passed in London?*

Hannah feels the tension ease from her body. It has been weeks, *weeks*, since his last letter.

*All is ice here in Cambridge—it makes little sense: ice? In spring? God has his own plans and we cannot predict them. We must walk with both eyes to our feet. The step outside church is treacherous. More have fallen in this spot than can be counted. I’m fortunate to not count myself among their number, though your brother was turned upside down yesterday morning. It has been years since I saw him so ruffled by anything other than drink. I mean literally as well as figuratively: his hair was a mess, his cloak was asunder, his hose was ripped and he was—and remains—as angry as a rooster. I laughed. God forgive me that I laughed at my own child in such a state, but it couldn’t be helped. He’s none the worse for the fall, bar the societal embarrassment. It’ll pass, of course, and some discomfort in public will do him good.*

*With all my love, my darling daughter, your father, Henry Rondel.*

The air stirs when the kitchen door opens. Agnes. She drops a basket onto the kitchen table with a thump and removes her cap. Hair streams down across her face.

‘When did you...?’ Hannah tries to recall the last moments: Agnes scaling fish; Alice crumbing bread; father Benedict and his health.

Agnes waves a hand before Hannah’s face. ‘You look slightly dazed.’

‘I am if you’ve been and gone and returned.’

‘I didn’t get far,’ Agnes says. ‘I got mobbed—or as good as.’ She starts to pin her hair back into its bun. ‘There was a surge at the market when the news came in.’

‘What news?’ Alice asks.

‘She’s been arrested.’

‘Who?’

‘The heretic gospeller Anne Askew. She’s to be examined.’

‘Examined.’ Alice breathes the word.

‘It means they’ll ask her questions about her beliefs,’ Agnes says.

‘Will she be burned?’

‘No,’ Hannah says. ‘She’ll admit her heresy and recant.’

‘But if she doesn’t recant—’

‘She will.’

‘I’ve never seen a burning before.’

Agnes snaps, ‘And you’re not likely to see one. If you’re finished with that,’ the gingered bread, ‘finally, lay it out on its board and sweep the floor of your mess.’

## Chapter Seventeen

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It's not a night for sleeping. William moves about the house restlessly, his footsteps heavy. To his office, the press, the kitchen, his bedroom, to his office. It's too warm, too still. Hannah kicks away the blankets and then the sheets, rolls her nightgown up her legs and hangs her feet over the sides of the bed. Something nips at her skin, something small and invisible in the gloom. She itches her arms, scrapes together her heels. Fitful drowsiness clings to her body. She thinks about tomorrow's chores, tomorrow's food, tomorrow's gossip. She hears Anne's name in the air. *Anne Askew*.

*Anne.*

*Anne.*

*The gospeller Anne.*

## Chapter Eighteen

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A crowd has gathered outside Saddler's Hall. Gawkers. Hawkers. Street sellers. The sweet smell of spiced bread and ale muddle with tanning leather and salt. It's cold still, the sun newly risen. Breath and smoke lour the air. Hands are tucked into sleeves and shawls are tightened. People jostle for the front but those near the windows say things are only being set up: Anne Askew is not here yet.

Hannah warms her fingers over a brazier. Someone is speaking to her about the cost of chestnuts and what the heretic will be wearing. *Cloth of red or blue? Fur on her collar, perhaps, though she'll be too warm to stay that way once the Hall fills. Simple shoes or embroidered? Not that we'll see her feet.* Hannah lowers her hands until her skin starts to throb and redden.

There is talk of the Windsor Martyrs.

'What were their names?'

'One was Robert something. Tester. Testward.'

'Testwood.'

'Which one was he?'

'The musician who knocked off the Virgin Mary's nose with a tankard.'

Laughter. 'I remember.'

'And an Anthony.' *Anthony Pearson.*

'Anthony Pearson.'

'He had the hair.' A hat is removed, curls are ruffled.

'Who was the third?'

*Henry Filmer.*

'Were there four?'

'Three. Robert Testwood, Anthony Pearson and—'

*Henry Filmer.*

The crowd parts for two men carrying a trestle table. When the doors open, people surge forward but they are blocked and pushed back. Hannah doesn't move. Her hands are in her pockets now. She can still feel her skin tingling from the fire.

'Henry Filmer.'

'Yes, of course. The tailor.'

'Do you think they'll burn Anne Askew?'

'No.' The word is half laughed. 'She'll recant.'

'And she's not a tailor.'

When Anne arrives nearly two hours later, the crowd has spilled into the neighbouring streets. People crane their necks to see her pass—not in a cart, on foot, guarded by six men. She doesn't struggle against their grip or show any alarm when the press of people intensifies. Her cap is gone. Her hair falls over her shoulders. There is a cross at her throat. No cloak. No fur. Her shoes are simple slips of leather. Her kirtle is blue, her chemise white. For a moment she is close enough to touch. Real once more. A woman. When she turns her head, Hannah turns her whole body. She hears them pass.

Voices clamour and hands hammer at the door when it's shut and bolted. The shutters, too, are bolted.

'There'll be enough smoke in there to set tan.'

'And now we wait.'

'For how long?'

'As long as it takes.'

'Not long.'

'I can't stay long.'

'Then go.'

'I want to hear the outcome.'

‘You’ll hear it.’

People start to break away. One or two at a time, then more. The streets start to empty as apprentices duck back to their duties and goodwives shoulder their baskets and head for the markets. A quarter of an hour passes. Thirty minutes. An hour. Men in carts and riders force the dwindling crowds apart. Dogs nip at the ankles of those who stand on their toes. The hawkers disperse. The scent of cinnamon is overwhelmed by salt and leather and drying hides. Boys’ ears are cuffed, *Why are you standing around?* Girls straighten their aprons and create excuses for their absences. Some stay. Some pray. Hannah stays. She keeps her back to the wall and her arms crossed. When the sun is obscured by the growing clouds, she pulls her cloak together across her chest.

At eleven, nothing.

At noon, a woman takes Hannah’s hands and tries to sell her trinkets and bones. Saint’s bones. Pilgrim pins. She shakes her off. A jewel from Jerusalem. A potion for children. A powder for her teeth. Hannah pushes her away.

At one, Lytton.

He walks straight past Hannah without seeing her. She watches him weave through those that have remained. Nudge others aside. Wave away the traders. He speaks to one of the men at the door, slips something into his hand, steps back. Wraps a hand around his throat. Straightens his collar. Slips back through the crowd. She follows him.

He outpaces her. Then he slows. Saunters. Buys something hot. Raises a hand in greeting—not to her: she’s behind him in the corner between two roads. To another lawyer. Words are exchanged. A laugh. He moves on. Ale from a barrel one street further. She hesitates, looks back. Saddler’s Hall is no longer visible but she can feel its pull. Lytton knocks on a door. A sign swings in the breeze. Red and white livery. Guild country: leather sellers. He disappears inside. Lawyer’s business, she presumes.



Hannah returns to the square. No movement, no news. She settles against the wall and waits.

## Chapter Nineteen

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At two, Anne is escorted out of Saddler's Hall and taken to the river and a wherry. The crowd surges in pursuit.

Someone tugs on a guard's sleeve. 'What's happening? Where are they taking her?'

*Smithfield.*

Hannah's entire body feels brittle as she's carried by the press of bodies towards the water.

'The Baker Street Counter.'

Prison.

'Why?'

'She won't confess anything.'

'She will soon enough.'

## Chapter Twenty

---

One day passes. Hannah takes stock of the kitchen.

Agnes says, 'What could've changed since the last survey?'

Another day passes. Hannah sews, reads, sews, takes over the kneading of the bread, dismisses Alice and wrings the shirts herself. The skin around her fingers softens and tears. Her nails go cloudy and bend and break when they catch on rough edges.

A third day. She removes all the clothing from the cupboard in her bedroom, shakes out dust that isn't there, checks for loose ends and tears and rips, folds everything to the same size and returns them to the shelves. After midday, she stands by the window and counts all those that pass wearing brown jerkins. Three hundred and ninety-eight. Then Agnes calls. Something about young servants and discipline. 'Do *not* raise your hand, Agnes.'

William looks out the workshop then slams the door shut. The house rattles; Hannah's teeth rattle.

The fourth day moves at its own pace. Slow. Leisurely. She wants to take a wooden spoon to its hide but there's nothing there but air. She stacks and restacks the logs in the parlour and sweeps away earwigs and woodlice and the dead flies that have settled amongst the kindling.

Fifth. Church. They walk down the Fleet to Saint Bride's as a household. Robert joins them at the door, wife in hand, children under foot. Father Benedict is propped up with cushions and blankets beside the pulpit. A Bible rests on his knees, but he doesn't speak. Michael leads the sermon, the prayer, the Eucharist. He refuses to touch people's mouths and drops bread into their hands instead. Alice's falls between her fingers and is squashed underfoot. Agnes tears her own in half but Alice says it isn't enough.

'I should go back.'

The Carew Press door is in their sights.

Agnes grips Alice's elbow. 'Don't abuse your daily responsibilities.' There's dough to be kneaded and floors to be swept.

Agnes says later, 'We'll be damned together.'

Alice trips over her feet.

Sixth. Hannah eats too much bread. The grains sit in her belly, heavy as ballast.

Seventh. Market day. She lingers at the stalls, listening to Fleet-Street gossip and the name *Anne Askew*. People talk. *No news*. Some say she has fled the city. Others that she's already dead.

'No, no. We'd know. We'd have seen it.'

Day eight.

Day nine.

Day ten.

Day eleven. Church. They walk down the Fleet to Saint Brides as a household. Robert joins them at the door, wife in hand, children under foot. Father Benedict is propped up with cushions and a blanket, a Bible on his knees, but he doesn't speak. Michael leads the sermon, the prayer, the Eucharist. He refuses to touch people's mouths and drops bread into their hands instead. Alice catches hers this time. She swallows it before she's chewed it properly and coughs. Agnes slaps her back with a closed palm.

Day twelve. Hannah takes a misturn at Saint Andrew's church and crosses water into Cow Lane. The air is heavy with the tang of iron and smoke. Somewhere a fire burns and pops. Metal teeth grind through bones and flesh. Beasts bellow and snort, wrestling against their restraints. She steps back. Skinless animal carcasses hang from metal hooks, their stomachs cut open. Her shoe slips. Slick intestines and livers spill from buckets. Fresh blood smatters the cobblestones. Strong-shouldered men, their mouths and noses hidden behind cloths, slice through tendons and muscle. Gore squelches between their

fingers. She heaves. Then everything starts to twist and blur. Someone catches her shoulder but her vision is black. She presses her palms against her closed eyelids, vaguely aware that she is being led away, until odd colours and shapes slide through the darkness. A voice punctures the tumult but it's indistinct. Ringing fills her ears. She hits her head, twice. A hand pulls her hand away and puts something into it—a cup. Words again, still hazy, then louder. Breath on her ear. She jerks away.

‘Drink!’

Wine, warm and cloying, coats her tongue and slips down her throat. She chokes, metal air rasping against delicate tissues. The wine curdles in her empty belly; she grasps her stomach, pitches forward and vomits.

Hands stop her from falling. ‘F—st —ime?’ the voice asks, muffled.

‘What?’ she gasps.

Louder, clearer: ‘In this your first time in Cow Lane?’

‘Yes.’

Vomit has splattered across her shoes and kirtle. It burns her mouth and throat. She can feel it in the back of her nose, burning hot.

‘Rinse your mouth.’

Hannah pushes the cup away as her stomach turns.

‘Just rinse. Don’t swallow.’

She spits instead but it makes little difference. She takes the wine and swills a mouthful around her teeth and gums.

‘Now spit.’ The man pulls her skirt out of the way. He gives her a cloth. ‘Blow your nose.’

It makes her gag once more, but not vomit.

The smell of slaughter is weaker. Her vision starts to clear.

‘Can you breathe again?’

Hannah looks up. A butcher, strong as oak, temple flecked red with blood—

She presses a hand across her mouth as her stomach begins to sour.

‘This way.’ He leads her around a corner into shadow. The temperature drops and Cow Lane, its sounds and smells and sights, reduces. Hannah leans against the side of a building, the coarseness of the wattle and daub and newfound coolness starting to steady her sickness. She catches her breath. Her heart thuds against her chest; a vein throbs in her neck.

‘It’s the smell,’ the man says. ‘It gets to everyone the first time. Even the goodwives, who tell us they know blood.’

‘It’s different,’ Hannah says. She speaks shallowly, breathes shallowly. ‘And it’s not just the smell.’ She doesn’t think of the stiff, splayed bodies or the red-black organs or the *sounds*...she closes her eyes and takes a breath.

‘It stays with you a little while, the first time.’

‘I believe you.’

‘Who do you have business with in Cow Lane?’

‘No one.’

‘Then you’ve taken a misstep. Smithfield—’

‘I *have* taken a misstep, but not to Smithfield. To the Fleet,’ she says. ‘Fleet Street.’

‘You’re quite a way from Fleet Street.’

She nods. *I know.*

‘That’s not much to see at Smithfield today anyway.’

‘I wouldn’t come even if there was.’

‘Burnings aren’t to everyone’s...taste.’

‘Taste.’ She laughs once, one breath, but it hurts.

‘There’s worse things that can happen to a person.’

‘Spoken like someone who’s attended a burning and will attend again.’

The butcher nods. ‘That’s how things are in London, though there hasn’t been a burning in a while. May be one soon, so say. The gossellers have started coming out of their holes again. We’ve had one here—’

‘Anne Askew?’

‘Askew? No. Adams. John Adams. Or Tom Adams. Something Adams. Adams the baker. You’ve seen the famed woman gosseller?’

‘Yes.’

He whistles. ‘The difference between Cow Lane and Fleet Street. We’ve all heard about her, though she’s not been here.’

‘Who says there may be a burning?’

‘Everyone, since she’s yet to recant. The king doesn’t like people talking against him. You’re not from London?’

‘Cambridge.’

‘It’ll be different in Cambridge. Here, they single out a gosseller and make him an example to the rest. Or her,’ he concedes. ‘Could be a woman—*has* been a woman, though it’s less likely to be a woman. On your feet now, mistress.’ He lifts her by the elbow and shoulder. ‘Steady. Your legs feel like gelatine?’

‘I can stand.’

‘I’ll lead you right.’

‘I can walk.’

‘I’ll still see you right.’ He lets go of her arm when she tugs it away.

Hannah keeps one hand on the walls. The wood is sun-warmed, splintered. It nips at her skin but keeps her upright.

‘So...Fleet Street.’

‘What about it?’

The wood becomes more dented. Her fingers dip in and out of the cavities.

He shrugs. 'I'm not often on Fleet Street. My master supplies the markets south of the river.'

'Will you be punished for neglecting your duties to help me?'

'For helping a goodwife in need? No. My master likes to drink.' He mimes the emptying of a cup in one. 'He's dazed by afternoon.'

'Dangerous for a butcher to drink.'

'He's not lost a finger yet, but it'll happen. One day he'll swing that cleaver and sever his hand from his wrist rather than a hock from a leg.'

'You don't sound concerned.'

'There's always work for a butcher.'

Plaster replaces wood. The grainy surface grinds her finger tips.

'What trade your husband?'

'Printing.'

They cross the Holbourne bridge. The river is a trickle of tepid, fermented water. Green and browning slime covers the exposed banks and a few plants, those that have survived the extended heat, wilt under the direct sunlight. It's a wholly different smell to the smell of the slaughterhouse.

'I'll be well on my own, now, thank you.'

'I'll stay with you just a little longer.' He guides her to the side of the road.

Her hand finds, again, the building walls.

'You'll still feel sick a while,' he continues. 'And the shakes will stay in your legs for a few more hours. You might not feel like eating, but you should. Don't gorge yourself—'

Hannah feels the hairs on the back of her neck rise at the thought.

'—but take small bites of simple foods and continue to drink.'



‘Thank you.’

They stand in silence as a cart crosses the bridge.

‘You’re sure you’ll be well on your own now, mistress?’

‘I’m sure.’

‘Good day to you then.’ He dips his cap. ‘I’d stay away from Cow Lane in future.’

‘Thank you.’

‘You’ll need to wash your shoes.’

‘Thank you.’

‘God bless.’

On day thirteen, a summons is nailed to the door of Saddler’s Hall for those who will testify against the gospeller. *Tomorrow, at noon.*

‘I’ll stand,’ a man says.

‘No, you will not.’ He’s pulled away by his wife.

‘What? I heard her talk.’

‘You heard nothing.’

Hannah steps around them.

## Chapter Twenty One

---

‘And so she’s gone. Exiled. Back to Lincolnshire and her husband.’

A sense of disappointment threads its way through the markets.

‘It’s over, then.’

‘You wanted a burning?’

‘That’s not what I mean.’

‘Then fix your face. She talked some sense.’

Hannah doesn’t buy anything until the talk is of other things.

And they talk about her for three weeks. Sometimes, *What’s happening to Anne Askew?* Or, *I wonder how she finds her husband?* Then the summer arrives, the heat digs in its heels and the calefaction of London begins. Exposed hair and bare legs be damned: the old wives pull off their caps and knot up their hems as their husbands—the butchers, the coopers, the blacksmiths, the bakers—remove their shirts and show the city their chests. The peppery smell of sweat and unwashed bodies thickens the stagnant air and irritates the soft tissues in peoples’ noses. Mucus is wiped away on the backs of hands and phlegm is coughed up and spat onto the crumbling streets. Stale, tepid water becomes currency and the apprentices go for each others’ throats to sooth their blistering skin with the dregs left by the masters. Children skip free of their irritated parents and go to the wherry docks where they float bloated cow bladders down the river until they pop. Exhaustion slows the city to a sluggish crawl. Bread is shovelled out of the ovens half a dozen to normal and half the loaves are dropped by clumsy, tumid hands. Barrel slats are hammered into place less than a quarter to order. Horses shift their weight as the farriers drop more nails between their clammy fingers than they hammer into shoes. On Sunday, in church, goodwives and goodmen flutter any scrap of material to disturb the sitting air amidst the crush of bodies. Babies wail and grandfathers lose their balance as the priests

stutter through their sermons. The wine is choked back. Withered bread sticks under peoples' tongues and wedges between their teeth. The prophetesses, prophesiers, fortunetellers and fortune seekers are turning profit with their predictions for tomorrow's rain—so long as they keep moving, neighbourhood to neighbourhood. No one talks about Anne in the summer. No one thinks about her.

Then, Autumn. Wet. Mild. Half the apples rot on their branches. Grubs dig cavities through plum flesh. Rain leaches through the woodwork and moulds window frames. Summer dirt turns to mud, thick and sticky. It works into boots and clogs, tearing away soles and settling between people's toes and under their nails. The smell inside is musky, heavy, cloying. Everyone coughs, some more than others. The searchers are in business. The coffin makers. The priests. The purgatory pots fill and flow over. Wine runs low; they dilute it. Bread is broken into smaller chunks. They pray and they don't think about Anne Askew. Those quiet moments of contemplation are not used to imagine the moment she was brought into a cold room with little light and no women. They don't think about her at all.

Winter tricks them all, pretends it's still autumn. A lull, a peace. Few expect the ice at the turn of January. Finger tips shrivel and turn blue. Gloves are hurried out of storage, holes are sewn, leather is stretched. Noses redden, run, are rubbed raw. Hands chap and numb. The coopers let slip their hammers onto their knuckles. Nails feel as thin as hairs. Even the bakers blow into their palms and breathe in the hot air of their ovens. Only the blacksmiths are warm. The river freezes and children, apprentices, desperate adults break their ankles and twist their knees trying to cross the glassy surface. Someone sees Jesus in the waters below. It's too cold: not even the priests take the advantage. *It is just the sun*, they say. *It is just your eyes*. They bank up their fires and shorten the Eucharist. *Drink quickly. Chew quickly. Cross away your sins, keep your faith—do it quickly, quickly*. And Anne is forgotten. No one thinks about the darkness of the Bread

Street Counter. Or the rats. Or the thick slime and brackish water that coat the walls. Or the urine that is collected too infrequently. The smell. The sounds. The days that pass from one to another with nothing between them but a continuation of the nothingness of daylight.

Spring again, a thaw, not untimely. The wherryman unshackle their boats, smooth the rough edges of their oars and return to the docks. Colour pokes its head through the cracks. Grass, petals, bees, damselflies searching for water. The birds return, the sparrows, the swallows, the starlings. The noises of the streets change: louder, denser. Chatter, bargaining. Less hurrying. Heads up. Stay a while. Women on their doorsteps. Children play-fighting knights beyond their parent's reach. The fortunetellers haven't stopped moving. Anne, too, is on her feet. Not that anyone knows it yet. No one has been thinking about her and what it has been like trapped in the house of her husband. First the city surroundings: fields, sheep, hellebores and buttercups. Then Houlbourne where the buildings increase in number but the air is still cool, not yet pressed between bodies. On along the Bares, past Ely Place and Saint Andrew's Church until, finally, some stops later, the Carew Press. No one sees her for who she is. No one has thought about her. Not Hannah, who says, 'If you want to leave, we will not stop you.'

She looks different. Thinner, hollower. Her hair is limp. Her skin pallid. She smells unwashed and salty. The fur of her cloak, slung across the chair, is matted. Her shoes are ruined. 'I want to stay,' Anne says, 'despite the disease. You are William's wife?' There is no sign of recognition.

'Hannah Carew.'

'William and I were friends from before.'

Hannah glances at Agnes. The housekeeper has stilled. 'You are welcome to stay.'

'My thanks.'

'Though we have little room here.'

‘I am used to small spaces.’ Cells. Prison. ‘I can sleep here.’

‘In the parlour?’ Agnes’ tone is incredulous.

‘If a pallet can be brought.’

‘You’d do better to leave,’ Agnes says.

‘I want to stay.’

Hannah says, ‘Agnes, tell Luke to bring a pallet to the parlour. Gather some linens for Mistress Askew.’ Agnes lingers. ‘Now, please.’ She leaves the door open. Hannah closes it. When she turns back, she says, ‘Are you hungry?’

‘No.’

‘Travelling can quell hunger.’

‘Why do you say I’ve travelled?’

‘Your shoes, your clothing.’

‘Don’t look at my feet.’ Anne shuffles her toes under her hems.

Hannah nods. ‘Do you wish to see him? Since you were friends?’

A query crosses Anne’s face. She doesn’t blink. Then, ‘William, yes. Please.’ She follows Hannah up the stairs.

‘Shall I wait for you?’ Hannah asks.

‘No, that isn’t necessary.’

The door closes.

## Part Three

# Letters from the Black Sea

*May, 1546*

‘Robert Redman enjoyed a prosperous printing career in London until his death in October 1540 of an unknown illness. The press was inherited by wife Elisabeth and then sold to neighbour William Middleton approximately one year later. During her ownership of the press, goodwife Redman printed only two editions of her husband’s books, a significant decrease in production that ultimately necessitated its purchase.’

Prof. Timothy Axton-Smith, 1901

*Printers of Fleet Street, 1520-1550: A Comprehensive Study*

‘Elisabeth Pickering, widow of Robert Redman, printed thirteen books between 1540 and 1541, eleven of which were published under her own name.’

Dr. Mina Abbot, 2003

*Hidden Women: Gender and the Early Modern Book Trade*

*11th May, 1546*

*Mistress Carew,*

*On account of your husband's passing, please consider my order of twelve copies  
of Aeschylus' The Oresteia cancelled.*

*May God keep you,*

*James Gardiner, Book Trader*

*12th May, 1546*

*Mistress Carew,*

*Consequence of the death of your husband, I wish to cancel my latest order  
(Morte Arthure, thirty copies).*

*God bless you,*

*Thomas Litcott, Book Trader*



12th May, 1546

*Mistress Hannah,*

*I was deeply saddened to hear of William's premature passing. The sweat is a great curse and I am so very sorry it has troubled your family. I pray his passage to Heaven is swift and the same for the easing of your grief.*

*To matters of business: I wish to push on with my order (you will find in your husband's accounts details for Ovid's Epistulae ex Ponto). Though I would prefer to extend the deadline to account for the losses amongst your employees, I am bound by the date of my departure for Europe. If you are able to honour the agreed deadline, consider the order secure.*

*God bless,*

*Richard Cartwright*

## Chapter One

---

Day four has become day one. One death has become three. The sun has come down on them again and they are no closer to the end.

Hannah presses her heels against the wall and looks elsewhere as the parish clerk's men manoeuvre Henry's body around the stairwell corner. Whoever designed the house meant for the escalier to be navigated vertically, but who dies downstairs in the parlour or the office, the workshop or the kitchen? Numbers are in her head; figures and trends. Her thoughts click together like abacus beads. Perhaps twenty people in one hundred die downstairs. What of the rest? Must their heads knock against the walls as they are stretchered to their graves? Must their legs be bent at the knees to clear the corners? She closes her eyes but the sounds tell her exactly where Henry is and how far he's got to go.

Feet shuffle to her left.

Alice.

Hannah can still see the flame of the girl's candle through her eyelids. She can hear her weeping and Agnes, beside her, offering soft-voiced but stern consolation. Robert sits crossed-legged on the floor a little way away. His head lolls against a doorframe. A bowl, blessedly free of vomit, rests in his lap. The younger Luke stands firm in front of the hallway window, his back as straight as a broom handle. The elder crouches by Hannah, his hands pressed together with the tips of his fingers touched to his lips.

Some part of the stretcher raps against the stairwell wall and Hannah flinches. Quiet, stoic, good-natured Henry. She'd rather they un-thatch the roof and lift him out than this.

Hannah feels the air move as Luke stands. She opens her eyes and, in doing so, catches a glimpse of Anne Askew peeking through a sliver of door. This is the first she's

seen of the gossamer since the night she arrived. She'd escorted her upstairs to William's bedroom and lost sight of her amidst the things that needed to be done, the tending to the sick, the boiling of water, the grinding of herbs, the opening of windows. And then exhaustion had taken Hannah, a fitful, feverish exhaustion. At some point, the parish clerk's men had carried away William's corpse. At some point they'd returned for Jonathan's. Someone turned down William's bed and dressed it with fresh linen. Somehow four days have passed. Somehow Anne has hidden herself away in William's room and hasn't been seen by anyone.

Unseen, but not unheard.

'Bible words,' Alice has whispered to Hannah. 'When I collected her tray, I heard her speaking Bible words.'

'You heard her praying?' Hannah asked.

Alice's eyes moved to the left as they do when she's thinking. 'I suppose so.'

'Did she eat her food today?'

'No'm. Same as yesterday: untouched.'

Hannah nodded.

And the next morning, Alice said, 'When I went to collect her chamber pot, I heard her, you know—' she mouthed the word *vomiting*.

'You heard her being sick?'

'Yes'm. Is it the sweat?'

'Praying isn't raving.' Still, Hannah had stood outside William's door and listened. Bible words; no vomiting. No raving. No thrashing fever.

The low light reveals little of Anne's face except the redness of her eyes and the pallor of her skin. One hand clutches her belly. Then she steps back and closes the door with a soft click.

The elder Luke touches her arm. 'They're gone, mistress.'

Hannah nods and indicates a return to the kitchen. All but Robert, lifted off the floor and returned to his bed, join her downstairs.

‘And now starts day one,’ Agnes says, sinking onto a stool. ‘Again.’

‘The last day one,’ Hannah says. ‘Tomorrow will be day two and we will keep moving ahead until forty days are accounted for and we are released.’ She ignores Agnes when she shakes her head and says, instead, ‘Tomorrow is also the day we re-start the presses. Luke,’ she looks to the elder, ‘is our new foreman. Toby, you will move from the typesetter’s bench to assist him with the first press. Agnes, you will assist the younger Luke with the second.’

Agnes’ face contorts and she says, before Hannah can continue, ‘I will *n*—’

But Hannah cuts her off in turn. ‘This is not a discussion. Luke will instruct you.’

‘I *refuse*—’

‘Nor is it a negotiation.’

The elder Luke, eyes on Agnes, says, ‘We can make the Gardiner order with just one press, mistress. We need not have both in use.’

‘The Gardiner order is cancelled,’ Hannah says.

For a moment, the room is quiet.

Then Alice, shrew-voiced, asks, ‘What does that mean?’

‘It means,’ the younger Luke says, ‘that we have printed three quarters of a book for nothing.’ He rubs his eyes.

‘Is the binder retained, mistress?’ the elder Luke asks.

‘Yes.’

‘That at least accounts for resources.’

‘Time is a resource, too,’ the younger Luke says. ‘Our time is a resource.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Hannah says.

‘What of the Cartwright order?’

Hannah nods. 'This is our task. Cartwright is happy to proceed, so long as we make the original deadline. Which,' she pauses, 'is early June.'

The younger Luke says, 'That's impossible. Even with a team of six it would be difficult, but we're a team of three and without a typesetter.'

'I'll set type,' Hannah says.

'You?' Agnes asks.

'Yes.'

'It's not like writing.'

'I'm aware, Agnes.' Hannah looks at them all. At the younger Luke sitting with his arms stretched out across the kitchen table. At the elder Luke leaning against the stone wall. At Toby by the fire, one hand gripping his forearm. 'It has to be done.'

'It will be done, mistress.'

They all look to the elder Luke.

Hannah says, 'If we do not complete this order by the agreed date, I will not be able to pay your wages.'

'It will be done, mistress,' Luke says again.

Hannah nods. 'It will.'

'It will,' the younger says, quietly.

'And then what happens?'

Hannah looks at Agnes. 'Then we print the next order.' She does not add, *Once one has been secured.*

'I mean, what happens to the press?'

'Ownership of the press will be finalised once probate has been completed.'

'The business will pass to you?'

'Yes.'

Yes, though she has yet to find William's will and has heard nothing from his lawyer.

'You?'

'Yes, Agnes.'

The housekeeper looks away then shivers. 'That window,' she mutters and pulls it shut.

The bells of Saint Bride's begin to toll the hour. Alice counts them to eleven under her breath.

'It's late,' the elder Luke murmurs.

'Time to sleep,' Hannah says. 'To bed. Agnes,' she tilts her head to the side: *Stay a moment.*

When the others have departed and the door is shut, Hannah takes a seat at the table and indicates for Agnes to do the same. The housekeeper sits at the far end.

'Robert is improving daily,' Hannah says. 'Your assistance in the workshop need only be temporary.'

Agnes shakes her head. 'The master was always very specific about who could and who could not enter the workshop. It's not my place to—I'm a housekeeper, not a presser. It wouldn't be right. It'd be,' she pauses, 'disrespectful to his memory.'

'The failure of the business would be disrespectful to his memory.'

'It'll fail anyway,' Agnes murmurs. She looks up. 'It'll fail anyway,' she repeats, voice louder, firmer. No brook for dissent. *It is what it is.* 'William was struggling—and he wasn't play-acting business manager and typesetter.'

'I'm not play-acting,' Hannah says. 'William may've kept me outside the workshop but my father raised me in one. You need not believe me—and I'm not going to attempt to persuade you otherwise tonight—but you'll see tomorrow and in the days that follow that I know what I'm doing. It's not a pretence. Don't judge me on

William's...' She searches for a word. 'I don't know: his criteria, his principles. If he'd brought me into the workshop as soon as I'd arrived we'd have finished the Gardiner order ahead of time, taken payment *and* saved the cost of an apprentice.'

Agnes is shaking her head. 'It won't work.'

'Give it chance to work before you condemn it.'

'It's not normal.'

'It doesn't have to be normal. It's legal.'

'No, it isn't. Not yet. Nothing is settled until probate's complete.'

'Agnes...'

But the housekeeper has found her feet.

'Agnes, if you don't help us, we won't be able to complete Cartwright's order.'

'It's impossible anyway: you heard Luke.' She reaches the door.

'Luke is not the authority on what is and what isn't possible.'

'You are, I suppose. Of course you are. Of course you are.' She steps out before Hannah can reply.

## Chapter Two

---

The will.

It isn't in William's office. She's emptied every drawer, sifted through every chest. She's looked behind the bookshelves and flicked through the books. It hasn't fallen behind the furniture or dropped between the cracks—there are no cracks.

It isn't in the workshop.

It isn't in the parlour.

It isn't in the kitchen or the larder—why would it be in the kitchen or the larder?

It isn't in the ground-floor hallway cupboard or tucked between the sheets in the upstairs linen press.

It *may* be in his bedroom.

Hannah pauses outside the door. She can hear Anne's murmuring voice, hurried and repetitious; a woman at prayer. She imagines her on her knees, the uneven floorboards pressing knots into her thin skin, her hands clasped before her, knuckles turning white. Hannah's knuckles had turned white when she'd first prayed with Eleanor. It had been cold in the Sydenham Arnoud chapel, a winter-sharp cold that nipped at her skin and leadened her limbs. Her hands, though, had shook, and she'd gripped her fingers together to still their trembling. She must've looked more like she'd been pleading for God's mercy than offering her obedience.

Nervousness, however, had been as much to blame for her shaking hands as the cold. The chapel had seemed larger than before, the ceiling higher, the windows blindingly colourful. She'd gazed up at the altar, the rafters, Christ on his cross until Eleanor had tugged on her sleeve and nudged her forward. When Hannah knelt, the corners of the flagstones pinched her knees. She'd shuffled awkwardly, grappled with her



stiff postulant's habit, negotiated the veil, until she felt Eleanor rest her hand in the small of her back, and stilled.

She looked up.

There was Father Joseph dozing in the corner, an open Bible almost falling from his lap.

There was Sister Mary, inspecting a tiny red welt on her elbow where she'd been stung by one of her bees.

Here was Sister Eleanor, whispering in Hannah's ear the words of the oath.

'Why were you nervous?' her father asked later when she bid him goodbye at the priory gates.

'I thought God might realise the truth and reveal me for a player.'

'God knows people take the cloth for reasons other than faith.'

So, too, do they pray.

Hannah knocks on William's door. The murmuring stops and she hears light, faltering footsteps cross the room. When Anne appears, face dimmed by shadow, Hannah asks, 'May I come in?'

Anne steps back and Hannah steps inside.

Hannah sees her face only for a moment, before Anne turns and walks across to the bed. She'd expected the woman to be haggard and drawn. She'd thought her eyes would be raw and tissuey. Her skin: she'd imagined this to be grey and waxy. One arm would be clutched around her stomach, the muscles of her abdomen pulled taut from heaving. But her arms are by her side; her spine is straight; her cheeks are no paler than Hannah's, and her eyes are bright and undamaged.

The bedroom reflects its occupant's health. Loose chamomile petals have fallen from the oak supports and gathered between the floorboards. The smells of illness and death are unnoticeable, masked by sweet rosemary and lavender. Sunlight illuminates the rafters. Sounds of the Fleet carry through the open window: chatter and laughter, children carrying messages, horses shucking their harnesses. All is light and calm.

The bed creaks when Anne sits. She rests her hands on her knees and looks for a moment as if she'll be sick. And then it reaches Hannah's nose, the pungent leftover smell of old vomit, worming its way through the dried herbs and fresh Fleet Street air. She glances at the chamber pot, but it's empty.

'It isn't the sweat,' Anne says, following Hannah's look. 'I don't travel well by sea. It makes me...I can't say the word or I'll...' *Vomit*. One hand touches her belly, almost absent-mindedly. Her eyes, in this new light, have a hint of red in their edges. Her spine is perhaps not so straight as it had been a moment ago.

'I understand.'

'It's stopped now, though.'

'That's good,' Hannah says. Her words feel hollow. When she looks at Anne, she sees how she may have looked in the Bread Street Counter. When she looks at Anne, she sees herself in the office of the king's authority, telling his men the heresy Anne had gossiped at the Fleet Street market. Anne, however, looks at Hannah as if she is a stranger. Is she, to her? Does she remember the woman who grabbed her wrist and bade her leave be the priest? Anne meets Hannah's eye and raises her brows.

Hannah clears her throat and looks across the room. 'I need to search that chest.' She points to the far wall. She can feel Anne's eyes on the bare back of her neck and bites the inside of her cheek, hard.

'If you want.' Anne lifts her legs up onto the bed and draws the blanket across her lap. Doing so tips a number of scrunched-up paper balls onto the floor.

Hannah picks up the nearest. It's covered in small, neat, black handwriting. Bible words perhaps; prayers.

'Don't worry yourself with that,' Anne says and reaches out a hand. When Hannah hesitates, she flutters her fingers until Hannah places the ball in her palm. Her hand closes immediately and withdraws. 'What are you looking for?'

The words *Don't worry yourself with that* almost break free of Hannah's mouth.

'Money?' Anne asks.

Hannah's *No* is quick as a switch and terse.

Anne tips her head slightly to one side. Her eyes flit across Hannah's face. They linger on the crease between her brows, the blemish high on her cheek, the red mark under her jaw. Hannah shifts, as if touched. Anne doesn't look away. Hannah shifts again but Anne continues her examination. Her nose, her forehead, her chin. Hannah touches her chin and sees the corners of Anne's mouth curve upwards almost imperceptibly. She drops her hand and rediscovers her spine. 'William's testament,' she says. 'He's sequestered it somewhere, possibly here.'

Anne ignores the colour of Hannah's tone, the blight on William's character. 'Doesn't Christopher have a copy?'

*Lytton.* Hannah remembers him scurrying away from Saddler's Hall and the puckish words he'd spoken to her in the Fleet Street market. *What say you of the lady gospeller?* What say *you*, master Lytton? Where do *you* think she is best placed?

'I suppose the quarantine limits your communication.'

It shouldn't: it's easy to push a letter under the Carew Press door, and equally as easy to drop one out of the office window.

Anne asks, 'What happened to your neck?'

'Alice over-starched my collar.'

'Who's Alice?'

‘The girl who brings you your food and removes your chamber pot.’

Anne’s face seems to soften and she lowers her eyes. ‘I am indebted to you and your household.’

Hannah searches her face for the seams of performance—a crack, a crease, a stitch come undone—to reconcile this new, deferential Anne to the Protestant gospeller, the head-held-high Catholic victim, the gentlewoman who flutters her fingers as if hurrying a dog to return its ball, but finds nothing. When Anne looks up and asks, ‘What happens to the business now that William is dead?’ it isn’t an act of removing one mask to reveal her true face or to replace one mask with another, it’s a shift to a different aspect of her character.

‘I suppose it depends on the will,’ Anne continues. ‘Since you have no children, I presume you’ll inherit the press?’

There’s something so unfixed about Anne that she seems impossible to touch. If Hannah were to reach out a finger, she’d encounter wool and linen and then...air...unless she wants to be touched and then she’ll be flesh and blood but only an eighth, a twelfth of herself—the Anne of the moment, the Anne that wants to be touched. She’d make Holbein a liar; but not, perhaps, Picasso.

‘Do you want to take over the press?’

Writers will make her gentle and soft and terse and brave; she’ll weep, she’ll recite, she’ll cower, she’ll fight, and still she’ll be wool and linen and air.

‘Yes.’

‘Why?’

‘I want to be in charge of my own life.’

Anne nods in agreement. Protestant Anne, who’d rather abbeesses stitch opus anglicanum on the street than lead their Houses, nods in agreement.

Hannah turns abruptly, crosses to the chest and unlocks the latch. She hears the bed frame creak as Anne shifts her weight but doesn't turn. Instead, she sorts through the chest's contents. Papers, notes, letters. Anne says nothing. Hannah flinches when her finger catches on something sharp but it isn't another fervid pamphlet. She wrings out her finger.

'Are you—'

'I'm well,' Hannah snaps. The bed creaks again. 'You ought to stand and exercise your legs. Staying abed will only prolong your weakness.' She turns and almost tips over: Anne is standing immediately behind her.

'You're bleeding,' Anne says.

Hannah wipes her finger on her apron.

'But you've found the will.' Anne offers Hannah her hand.

To refuse her assistance would be churlish but Hannah chooses to teeter to her feet unaided. 'I'm bleeding,' she mutters.

Anne drops her hand. 'It wouldn't have mattered.'

She's still very close. Hannah steps back.

'Aren't you going to crack the seal?' Anne asks. 'What does it say?' she adds before Hannah has done anything other than glance at the packet in her hand. She should take it back to the office. 'Perhaps you should take it to the office,' Anne continues. Hannah's eyes flick to her. 'The opening and reading of a will might best be conducted with some ceremony.'

It's how William would have done it.

Hannah cracks the seal with her thumb and unfolds the document.

Anne says nothing but, from the corner of her eye, Hannah sees her smile.

'What does it say?'

Hannah debates not telling her, but what would be the point when the rest of the household will know as soon as she musters them?

‘I am named heir.’ It is as expected, but the confirmation eases her shoulders. The press is hers.

‘As anticipated.’

Hannah continues to read, one finger guiding her eyes through the legal jargon.

‘Are there any intriguing stipulations?’

‘Intriguing?’

‘Unexpected.’

*Light a candle for me and pray for my rapid passage to Heaven.* ‘Nothing like that.’ *Pay no small sum to Saint Bride’s church for repairs to the east-side roof.* His stipulations are standard to any will. *Money is to be set aside for tithes negligently forgotten.* Something shifts in Hannah, a knot of a question she’s been trying to pick apart. She touches her hand to her apron pocket and feels the worn outline of the pamphlet. William hadn’t been a reformer. No reformer would stipulate for tithes negligently forgotten in their will. The difference she’d seen in him that final night had just been the sweating sickness warring with his body.

Hannah folds the will and tucks it into her apron. It barely fits alongside the pamphlet.

‘My neighbour,’ Anne says, ‘was instructed by his late mother’s will to deliver a loaf of bread once a week to the midwife who helped birth him.’

‘Had it been a traumatic birth?’

‘Not that I’ve been told. My brother,’ she continues, ‘believes it was a bribe.’

‘To do what?’

‘Pray her out of purgatory. She couldn’t ask the family to do it: they’re all for reform. Except the mother, of course.’

This time Hannah ignores Anne's steady gaze and asks, 'Does he do it? The loaf?'

'Mm. He said he wouldn't, but every week he drops off the bread and every Sunday he drops a coin into the priest's purse. A fraud of a reformer. A spineless, papist-indulging fraud.'

Hannah asks, before Anne can unleash her pulpit flurry of curses, 'Did you discuss faith with my husband?'

Anne bites her lip. 'William and I were barely acquainted.'

'Define *barely*.'

Anne looks set to avoid the request until Hannah notes, 'You're in my house now.'

'We met once.'

'Why seek shelter in the house of a man who you'd only met once?'

'It was a last resort.'

'How so?'

'I have been away from London. My friends have now rejected my return. I disembarked from the ship, traipsed across the city and knocked on every door of every house I know. Only your housekeeper granted me permission to enter.'

'Why were you turned away?'

'I don't know.' Anne taps a hand to her mouth. 'That's not true: I know, or at least, I suspect why they don't wish to see me. And their reasoning is...unreasonable.'

'How so?'

Anne shakes her head. *It doesn't matter.*

'What would you have done had William or I turned you away? Would you have found another ship and sailed home?'

Anne's face contracts. 'I can't go back. My family...it's impossible. I would've slept in a doorway that night rather than leave London.'

'You would've been robbed or worse.'

‘Then thank God your housekeeper let me in. Thank God you gave me leave to stay. I don’t have anything worth stealing, anyway. Paper, as you see, a quill, ink, a few coins, my clothing.’

‘How will you earn your keep?’

‘How will I—?’

‘This isn’t a wealthy household. We barely have enough for ourselves let alone an unexpected guest.’

‘I can give you the coins I have, but, as I said, I’m quite poor.’

Hannah snorts.

Anne opens her mouth but Hannah cuts in, ‘Can you read?’

Anne looks affronted. ‘Can I read?’ Her tone is incredulous.

‘Can you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you ever set type before?’

‘Type?’

‘Printers’ letters.’

‘Never.’ Anne retreats a step. ‘Am I to be employed in your workshop?’

‘We have an order to fulfil and too few hands to meet the agreed date of delivery. Your assistance would be invaluable.’

‘Can you not agree to a new date?’ Anne touches her belly as if nauseated. ‘The sweat, the loss of William, the quarantine: surely these are acceptable grounds to bargain for more time.’

‘Even if it were possible to renegotiate the completion date, we’d still have to pay a fine to the client for each day of lateness.’

‘That’s not a guild rule, surely?’

‘It’s a Carew Press rule, written into every contract.’



‘A cumbersome rule.’

‘It is what it is.’ Her father’s saying slips into her speech. It takes her by surprise to hear his words in her voice.

‘I don’t think I can help you. My body—’

‘You are clearly recovering quickly.’

‘I have a task—’ Anne waves her hand at the crumbled balls of paper. ‘It’s *imperative* that I continue.’

‘How much paper do you have left?’

‘Paper?’

‘And ink? Quills? That one,’ she indicates a stub of calamus, ‘is beyond use.’

‘I have others.’

‘How many?’

‘Three.’

‘Is three enough for your project?’

Anne takes a breath. ‘What you’re going to say next is, *I will provide you paper, ink and quills if you provide me your assistance in the workshop.*’

Hannah nods.

‘I’m not strong.’

‘You don’t have to be.’

‘I’m not quick on my feet.’

‘You’ll sit more than you’ll stand. Do you take instruction?’

‘That depends on the content of the instruction.’

‘The composition of words.’

Anna sighs.

Hannah asks, ‘Would you rather confine yourself to this room?’

‘No, not especially.’

‘Paper, ink and quills in exchange for your assistance. It’s a fair bargain.’

Anne sighs again. ‘Must I spit on my hand before we shake on it?’

‘I’d rather you didn’t.’

‘Good.’ Anne holds out her hand. ‘Does this make me your partner?’

‘This makes you my employee.’

## Chapter Three

---

Alice, sitting at the table, starts and hides her hands behind her back when Hannah enters the kitchen. Before her is a pot of tallow.

‘Where’s Agnes?’ Hannah asks.

‘In the garden, ‘m, hanging the line.’ Alice tries to nudge the tallow behind a cup with her elbow.

‘Today isn’t a day for laundry.’

‘It’s for the birds, ‘m.’

‘For the birds?’ Hannah shakes out her cap. ‘Open the window, Alice,’ she says. ‘It’s too hot to have the fire lit and the window closed.’

‘But Agnes said—’ Alice stops and looks down.

‘What did Agnes say?’

Alice dips her hems and shakes her head, eyes fixed on the floor.

‘You might as well finish now you’ve started.’

‘Agnes said to keep the windows shut no matter what.’

‘Did she say why?’

‘To keep the birds out.’

Hannah pulls her cap back over her head. ‘Open the window, Alice,’ she says and crosses to the garden door. She props it open with a basket of kindling.

Agnes stands by the far wall, affixing thin linen thread to a nail. Other threads criss-cross through the air forming a gossamer fishing net.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Trapping sparrows. They’ve been getting into the house: I can hear them in the rafters.’

‘They’re just sparrows, Agnes,’ she says. ‘Not rooks.’

‘They’re pests.’

Hannah touches one of the threads. It feels sharp against her skin. ‘Take this down, Agnes.’

The housekeeper continues looping linen around the nail.

‘Why must you fight me on this?’ Hannah follows the nearest thread to its nail and begins to unravel it.

Agnes finishes tightening her own thread then moves to another.

‘And you keep closing the windows,’ Hannah says. ‘I open a window, and then you close it.’

‘Birds,’ Agnes says. ‘*They keep getting in.*’

Hannah winds thread around her palm. ‘Why weren’t you in the workshop this morning? You know you’re needed.’

Agnes says nothing.

‘Agnes!’ Hannah clicks her fingers.

The housekeeper stops and looks Hannah straight in the eye. There’s barely a stride between them and the air feels thicker, denser and somehow conductive: if Hannah were to lift her finger, even by just an inch, Agnes would be able to feel it. Hannah doesn’t move. She doesn’t blink. And then the housekeeper is turning away and returning to her net. Her shoulders have slumped forward. Her dress looks too big for her body. She’s been eating less, as they all have. She’s been sleeping less. She’s been running through the arteries of the house with cloths and poultices and bowls of water that are too heavy for her to carry and she says nothing. No word of complaint, no chastisement to the ailing. When she snaps, she snaps at Hannah.

‘We’re running low,’ Agnes murmurs. ‘Grain, ale, vegetables.’

‘I’ll send Alice.’

‘I’ll go. She’ll dawdle and she doesn’t know what we need. If you ask her for cabbage, she’ll return with beetroot.’

‘I need you in the workshop, Agnes.’

‘Alice doesn’t properly understand the quarantine rules. She won’t keep people at a distance and the parish clerk’s men will be down on us again.’ Agnes knots the thread and moves to the next nail.

‘Agnes.’

*‘I’m working.’*

## Chapter Four

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*I'm working:* an hour later when the lines have been hung.

## Chapter Five

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*I'm working:* two hours after when the grain and ale and vegetables have been bought and need storing.

## Chapter Six

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*I'm working:* that evening when she's drying the dishes.



## Chapter Seven

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Hannah remains at the kitchen table while Agnes puts the fire to sleep. The housekeeper grumbles something about *Alice* and *inattention* as she stokes the embers.

Hannah says, ‘I’ll talk to her about it.’

‘*I’ll* talk to her about it.’

Hannah sighs loudly enough for Agnes to hear but Agnes continues to prod the fire with the poker. After a few moments, Hannah says, ‘Your assistance in the workshop need only be temporary.’

‘It isn’t right—and,’ Agnes attacks the fire one final time, ‘you won’t convince me otherwise.’ She returns the poker to its hook and begins to pile wood into the grate. ‘I will not be moved.’

‘*Temporarily*, Agnes: I’m not asking you to move into the workshop permanently.’

‘For a day, a week, a month, or forever; it’s still not right.’

Hannah watches her work. ‘We’re struggling more than you know,’ she says quietly.

She’d found the truth of it in William’s ledgers. Entry after entry: *No business, no business, no business*. And, worse, *Order cancelled, order cancelled, order cancelled*. Worse still, in thick ink, *Debt incurred, debt incurred, debt incurred*.

‘William made mistakes,’ Hannah continues. ‘The cheaper paper he’s been using bleeds ink. We’ve had three clients demand financial restitution for smudged pages and rips and tears. We’re not the high quality press we once were and buyers have been going elsewhere. Our *pressers* are going elsewhere, like Francis: gone to Middleton. Toby might be worth a quarter of Francis’ pay but he can do less than a quarter of his work.’

Agnes shakes her head.

‘We’re in trouble, Agnes. Every commission is important, more so now than before. If we don’t make the Cartwright order, it might be the last order the Carew Press makes.’

Agnes sits back on her haunches.

‘If we don’t fulfil the order, I won’t be able to pay everyone’s wages.’

‘Are you going to hold Robert Caley’s children over me? I’m not their parent.’

Hannah grimaces.

‘I’m a housekeeper. I keep houses.’

‘Agnes...’

But she’s turned back to the fire. ‘I will have no part in this play.’

Hannah watches the candlelight flicker across Agnes’ face. Her mouth is set, her eyes, her brow. She looks like stone; she looks deader than the presses.

## Chapter Eight

---

The day-time smell of ink is almost overpowering. It's dry acidity cuts through the stench of hot bodies and sweat like a blade.

Anne holds her breath. Hannah can see it in the height of her chin and the tension in her neck. She looks as if she's trying to breathe above the smell.

Hannah says, 'Breathe through your mouth until you grow accustomed to the scent. It won't take long.'

'Why not open the windows?' Anne's voice is pinched by her attempt to speak without inhaling. She raises her hands to her mouth.

Hannah tugs at her sleeve. 'Dust from the road and moisture in the air will damage the paper and equipment. Printing is fickle: it's for us to suffer.'

Anne lowers her hands but does not immediately breathe.

'You'll get used to it.'

'I'm not sure I want to get used to it.' The words use up the last of Anne's air. She inhales, her face contorting as if this action has been forced upon her, and splutters.

'You'll get used to it,' Hannah repeats.

'I don't want to get used to it.' Still, she follows Hannah into the workshop.

'Breathe through your mouth.'

Anne makes a sound in the back of her throat.

'You'll—'

'—get used to it. I know. I heard you but I don't quite believe you.' She turns a full circle. 'This is a slightly oppressive room.'

Hannah turns the same circle and sees the typesetters' bench, the dresser, the presses, yesterday's papers hanging on their lines. 'Is it?'

Anne touches a sheet of paper, then runs her finger across the near-side cheek of the closest press. 'The leg is a different colour,' she says, nudging the wood with her foot. The younger Luke, half hidden between the paper lines, turns away.

It's a little past eleven. The sounds of the Fleet, fully awake and about its business, permeate the Carew Press' walls, but they're muffled and indistinct as if heard through water. Every so often, a passer-by glances through the window, his or her face dissected by the multitude of mullions and transoms. No one stops or taps on the glass and those in the Press, Hannah and the Lukes, working since daybreak, continue with their tasks. Even Toby, still skittish and prone to distraction, keeps his eyes on the press.

Anne's arrival, however, prompts a pause. The elder Luke stills his mixing of the ink; the younger halts his unpinning of yesterday's papers; Toby looks up from the coffin.

Anne turns her full circle. The papers flutter on their lines. 'It feels as if I've stepped into a book,' she says. 'And all its words have taken physical form.'

'Only if that book is a manual for printing,' Hannah says. 'If there is such a thing.' She beckons Anne over to the cases of letters and for the rest to return to their work. 'Are you familiar with Latin?'

'Familiar, yes.'

'Fluent?'

'No.'

'Well, familiarity is better than no knowledge at all. This is for you.' Hannah passes Anne a composing stick. Anne rests it across her hand where it teeters from side to side. 'Hold it like this.' Hannah shows her how to grip it between her palm and fingers. 'Keep it steady. The only thing keeping the letters from falling is the correct angle.'

Anne nods.

'These are the letters.' Hannah opens a lid. 'Basic roman type, size twelve.'

Anne touches an uppercase *E*. 'It isn't sticky.'

‘Thank God it isn’t: it’d be disastrous if it was.’ Hannah removes Anne’s finger. ‘Every letter is cleaned at day’s end. It’s best to select what you need using your thumb and forefinger as a pincer.’ She demonstrates the action. ‘Always lift from the base otherwise the oil on your skin will alter the ink and damage the print.’

Anne pincers her finger and picks up the *E* on the second attempt. ‘It’s fiddly.’

‘All aspects of typesetting are fiddly until you get used to them.’

Anne returns the letter to its case and follows Hannah to the typesetter’s bench. ‘I thought you said I’d be sitting.’

‘I said you’ll sit *and* stand.’ Hannah positions Anne in Jonathan’s place.

‘And these are the frames.’

‘We call them galleys.’

Anne touches one with the tip of her finger. ‘It’s cold.’

‘It’s metal,’ Hannah says.

‘I can taste it in my mouth.’ Anne chews on her tongue. ‘Something else to get used to?’

‘You’ll get used to everything after a while.’

‘Even the smell?’

‘You may even grow to like it.’

‘I don’t think so,’ Anne says. ‘Though it’s true the air doesn’t smell quite so pungent.’

Hannah continues her instruction. ‘This is the Cartwright manuscript: Ovid’s *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Have you come across it before?’ She flicks through the pages while Anne looks over her shoulder.

‘I haven’t.’

‘It’s a collection of four books, each comprising letters intended for family and friends.’

‘Epistulae...letters?’

‘Letters from the Black Sea. Ovid was in exile there towards the end of his life.’

‘You enjoy reading Roman literature?’

‘Not especially; I’ve printed this text before so I’m familiar with its contents. This page is for you to typeset.’ She hands Anne a sheet of paper. ‘Bring this with you to the cases of type and select as many letters that’ll fit into the composing stick. Words are formed right to left, which will feel very unnatural to begin with. Also, we don’t leave gaps between words: it’d be impossible to recreate the exact distance each time. Instead,’ she crosses the room and locates a space type from the case, ‘use one of these.’ Once Anne has taken a good look, she returns it to its place. ‘Try the first line.’

Anne fumbles with the first few letters. One takes three attempts to pincer from the case. Another falls between her fingers. When she leans down to retrieve it, the composer’s stick tips and drops its contents across the floor. Anne mutters under her breath.

Hannah helps her gather the letters and return them to the case. ‘Slow your movements,’ she says. ‘Speed accompanies practice.’

‘How long did it take for you to learn?’

‘Several years.’

‘I don’t have that long.’

‘Neither do we. We have approximately five weeks.’

‘The latin doesn’t help.’

‘No, it doesn’t. Spell out one word at a time, or two to three if the words are familiar.’

‘I’m familiar with tu, tui, tibi,’ Anne murmurs. She selects a lowercase *t* and flicks it out the case.

‘Good. Better.’ Hannah steps back to give Anne more space. She glances across the workshop. Toby has taken over the unpinning of the paper. The Lukes operate the press nearer to the window. There is gentle chatter between them:

‘Secure?’

‘Secure.’

‘A little to the right.’

‘Further?’

‘No, that’s far enough.’

‘Ready?’

‘Ready.’

Hannah looks back at Anne. ‘Stop, stop,’ she says, stepping forward. ‘You’re still trying to construct words the reading-way around. Look here to the *a* and the *e*: they’re incorrectly ordered.’

Anne licks her lips. ‘Several years, you said.’

‘I did say that. Continue.’

Anne switches the *a* and *e* and flicks out the next few letters. When the composer’s stick is full, Hannah walks her back to the bench.

‘Transfer the type to the galley. Yes. Good. Now back to the cases to select the next section of text.’

Hannah locates her own page of *Epistulae ex Ponto* and begins pincering out letters and slotting them into a composer’s stick.

‘You make it look easy,’ Anne says.

‘It is easy.’

‘You’re crowing,’ Anne says and laughs. ‘I’m sorry, but you are—don’t look at me like that. It’s amusing.’

Hannah wipes a hand across her cheek. ‘I’m not crowing.’

Anne laughs again. The sound is warm and soft and slightly conspiratorial. ‘You are,’ she murmurs, still smiling.

Hannah watches as Anne continues to compose. She looks younger now—and sturdier, harder to break. When she concentrates, a crease appears between her eyebrows. Eleanor’s eyebrows had creased that way, too.

Hannah returns to the letters and thinks, instead, of the feel of the types between her thumb and forefinger: their coolness, their fiddliness.

‘What do I do when there isn’t enough space on the line for the entirety of a word?’

Hannah joins Anne at the bench. *Libellos* is half spelled on her galley.

‘Remove the *e* and replace it with a hyphen.’ Hannah gives Anne one of her own.

‘Then continue *e l l o s* on the next line, flush to the right.’

Anne makes the correction. ‘Who taught you this? William?’

‘My father.’

When Anne completes her first page, she stands back and crosses her arms while Hannah inspects its contents. ‘Everything is correct. Secure it with string, just so, and take it to the presser’s bench.’

The elder Luke waves a hand. ‘Over here, Mistress Kyme.’

Kyme. This is how Anne had introduced herself the night she’d arrived: ‘My name is Anne Kyme.’ Kyme, not Askew. Why not Askew?

Anne gives Luke her galley than returns to the typesetter’s bench. When she notices Hannah’s gaze, she asks, ‘What is it?’

Hannah says, ‘You need to mark across the manuscript page to note that is has been set.’ She dips a quill in black ink and draws a thin line between two corners. ‘Place it face down on the pile to your left and continue with the next.’ She’s too aware that Anne is watching her face rather than her hands. ‘Understood?’

‘How many more pages need to be set and printed?’



‘Several hundred.’

‘I see.’ Anne takes up her composer's stick and returns to the cases.

Hannah reorders her cap.

They settle into silence. The metallic clack of the letters joins the steady, rhythmic creak and strain of the oak presses. The pressers continue their gentle chatter:

‘Page count, Toby?’

‘Fifty eight.’

‘To the left a little. Stop there.’

‘Ready.’

‘Brace, brace.’

‘Steady, now.’

‘Fifty-eight, still.’

Anne shows Hannah her second completed page. ‘All correct?’

‘All correct.’

Anne shows Hannah her third completely page.

‘All correct.’

She doesn't show Hannah the fourth. She carries the frame to the presser's bench and continues with the fifth.

## Chapter Nine

---

‘Hello, Agnes.’

Hannah looks up from the galley to see the housekeeper hovering at the workshop door. One of her hands grips her skirt, the fabric bunching between her thumb and forefinger.

The elder Luke raises a hand to accompany his greeting.

Agnes’ eyes dart around the room.

Anne looks up. ‘Is it noon already?’ she asks.

Agnes begins to turn away.

‘Come in, Agnes,’ Hannah says, quickly. She finishes slotting the final three letters of a word into the galley, sets down her composer’s stick and crosses the room. Agnes watches her approach. When Hannah reaches the door, the housekeeper steps back. Hannah joins her in the hallway. It’s cooler out of the workshop; the air lifts goosebumps on her arms.

‘Come in,’ she says again.

Agnes pinches her lips. ‘It doesn’t feel right,’ she murmurs. She drops her skirt and clasps her hands together. Her face looks tight, as if the skin is too small for her bones. Hannah remembers that feeling. She’d believed it’d just been a consequence of the winter-biting cold until her father asked her why she’d been nervous.

‘You can come in, Agnes.’ She keeps her voice soft as her father’s had been soft when he’d told her, *God knows people take the cloth for reasons other than faith.*

Hannah turns when she hears footsteps approach. The elder Luke leans through the door. ‘Come join us, Agnes.’ He beckons her forward. ‘You’re very welcome.’

Agnes takes a breath and steps into the workshop.

## Chapter Ten

---

Anne shows Hannah her fingers. They're red and swollen. 'You did say it's for us to suffer.'

They're in the parlour. Alice had laid a place for them at the kitchen table, but Anne had picked up a bowl of pottage, tucked a spoon between her fingers and slipped out the door.

Hannah had followed her.

'My head,' Anne said, nudging the parlour door open with her shoulder. 'I feel as if there are a hundred tiny needles pricking the inside of my skull.'

Hannah slowed down.

'No, stay.' Anne had reached out with her free hand to pinch Hannah's sleeve. 'A kitchen of chatter is too much but I'd enjoy your company.' She'd added a little emphasis to *your* and her smile was the same one she'd worn when she'd whispered *Watch this* and stepped up to challenge Father Benedict. An *I see you* smile; an *I have chosen you* expression. Hannah had pulled her sleeve free and took a seat by the window.

Anne, at the table, takes one more look at her fingers than wipes her spoon with her skirt 'I'm not especially hungry,' she says, but scoops up a chunk of turnip anyway. 'Is there meat in here somewhere?'

'You might have to search for it,' Hannah says.

Anne nods. She drops the turnip back into the bowl and stirs the contents, first round one way, and then the other.

Hannah lets out a breath.

Anne looks up. 'What is it?'

'William used to do that.' She mimics the clockwise, anticlockwise stirring motion.

‘It’s not an uncommon movement.’

‘No, but it just—’

‘It reminded you of him.’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re grieving.’ Anne’s tone is matter-of-fact. She returns to her food.

Grieving. Hannah’s felt many emotions over the past few days: confusion and fear, frustration and sadness. But not grief. She knows the feeling; she knows the weightlessness of it in her belly and the way it constricts her lungs. The sleeplessness it brings and the exhaustion. The sudden, sharp stabs of desperation that make her want to grab hold of the nearest object and throw it against a wall. When she does sleep, she dreams she’s lying on the edge of a cliff, face to the clouds, hair tipping over the edge. The ground starts to tilt and she’s slipping, slipping down, down, hands scrabbling to find something to hold onto. The grass slides between her fingers; the stones turn to dust and she wakes in darkness. But the darkness is still the dream: the feeling of falling remains. William’s death doesn’t tilt her off a cliff’s edge, but it does make her dream of a dozen hands plying her apron pockets.

Anne picks out more turnip.

‘How are you acquainted with Lytton?’ Hannah asks.

‘Christopher? We met at church during an especially busy mass. I was practically sitting on his lap. It would’ve been strange not to exchange a word or two.’

‘Was he the one who introduced you to William?’

‘Mm.’ Anne wipes stew from her lips as she chews.

‘Why?’

Anne pauses for the barest of moments then swallows. ‘He believed we might share a common interest.’

‘Which was?’

Anne shakes her head and smiles. 'I'm not sure what he was thinking, but, for the sake of shelter, I'm glad he did.' She turns her full attention to her bowl.

The pamphlet turns in Hannah's mind. She thinks of removing it from her pocket and laying it flat on the table. Her fingers move—then still.

'Is there salt?' Anne asks.

'In the kitchen.'

Anne glances at the door.

Hannah says, 'I'll get it.'

She pauses at the kitchen door. It's ajar, wide enough to see into the room beyond. Alice is drying bowls and spoons. Agnes has her feet resting on an upturned pail. The elder Luke is gazing out the window, lost in his thoughts. The younger Luke, his sleeves secured above his elbows, is scrubbing one of the metal pans. Robert has been cushioned next to the open window, a blanket covering his knees. His head lolls against the wall while his fingers play with the loose splinters on the chair's arm. He's pale but the most alert she's seen him since the sickness first took hold of his body. Alice steals glances at him, looking away whenever their eyes meet. Agnes watches them, face taut.

Alice says, 'I don't understand. What's to sort through? She's his heir, isn't she?'

'She may be his heir but she's also a woman,' Robert says. 'There aren't many women Press owners in Fleet Street.'

'Mistress Hannah knows what she's doing,' the elder Luke says, turning away from the garden.

'How do you know?' Robert asks. 'Forgive me, Luke, but you're a presser, not a manager.'

'She didn't come from nothing,' the younger Luke says. He uses his nail to scrape away the last of the char. 'Her father—'

‘Oh, we know: her father was a master printer. It doesn’t say anything about her, though, does it? My father was a cooper—what do I know about barrels?’

‘You know how to drink through them,’ Agnes mutters.

The elder continues, ‘It says a lot that she can enter the workshop with a few day’s notice and typeset a latin text as quickly and as accurately as the master could, or Jonathan. She’s skilled in the trade and she knows how to manage deadlines.’

‘You’re behind,’ Agnes says.

‘We were already behind, Agnes,’ the elder says. ‘We cannot blame her for that.’

‘Then you are no further ahead.’

You, you, not *we*, as if she hasn’t spent half the day pressing inked letters into paper. And doing so with skill: Luke, in charge of Agnes’ tuition, had barely given her half an hour of supervision before he’d returned his attention fully to his own work.

‘And she’s not always accurate,’ Toby adds, stepping into sight.

The younger Luke returns the pan to its place on the shelf. ‘We all make mistakes.’

‘A *master* printer—’

‘Master William made mistakes, too, Toby,’ the elder Luke says gently. ‘Let’s not raise William’s pedestal to lower Hannah’s.’

‘Might she be pregnant?’ Alice asks.

Agnes snorts, Robert a step behind her. ‘By the master?’ he asks.

‘By another?’

‘Don’t say things like that,’ Agnes snaps.

‘Not Hannah,’ Robert continues. ‘She wouldn’t open her legs—’

‘Enough, Robert Caley.’ The elder Luke’s voice is loud enough for Hannah to hear without straining. Warmth flushes her cheeks. She clenches her jaw.

Robert shushes him. ‘You’ll bring her down on us.’

‘On you, more like,’ Agnes says.

To Robert, the elder Luke says, 'Women can do very well in their husbands' places. You'll remember that when Master Pickering died in 1540, he was succeeded by his goodwife Elisabeth. She took on the business and preserved it in the time she had it.'

'Elisabeth Pickering,' Robert snorts. 'Remind us how long she took charge of the Pickering Press before Middleton bought it?'

'Close to a year.'

'Nine months. And by that time it was cheap enough to be bought.'

'The Press prospered. It was her decision to sell it.'

'If you say so.'

The elder Luke sighs and brushes some dust from Alice's sleeve. 'I'll help you fold the linens,' he says and takes the corners.

Agnes says, 'Women shouldn't manage men. It's unnatural.'

'It's true,' Robert continues. 'It doesn't work. Elisabeth Pickering's a testament to that.'

'And Eve—'

'Hush, Alice,' the elder Luke says, firmly but not ungently.

Robert says, 'Let her speak.'

Alice's face reddens. 'Eve managed Adam. And man fell.'

'And Eve was born of Adam's rib so perhaps it was his fault.'

Robert puts on a voice, deep and dramatic, 'Luke the Elder, theological scholar.'

Hannah tightens her fist. Robert Caley; *Goddamn* him, but they need another presser.

Alice giggles. Luke shuts the linen cupboard with a smart snap.

'That's enough, Alice,' Agnes says.

'Come and sit with me, Alice,' Robert says, his eyes not on the maid but the housekeeper. When Alice takes a seat next to him, he pulls her chair closer to his own.

‘Your strength seems to be returning quickly,’ Agnes says.

‘That’s God’s blessing,’ Alice says.

Robert helps Alice with the knot in her apron strings. His fingers linger at her waist.

‘And what news of your wife and children, Robert?’ Agnes asks, watching Alice shift in her chair. ‘They must be relieved to know you’re not dead nor likely to die.’

‘Hannah was kind to ask the neighbour’s boy to act as courier for your messages,’ the younger Luke adds.

Robert nods and keeps nodding. ‘Yes, they are well.’

‘You must miss then,’ Agnes continues.

‘I do.’

Alice leans away and tucks her hands between her knees.

Agnes fans herself with one of her hands. ‘God, it’s too hot.’ She flicks away a fly.

‘You’re the one closing the windows,’ Robert says.

‘Damned quarantine,’ Toby adds.

‘Don’t swear,’ the younger Luke says, nudging the apprentice with his foot while swilling dregs in his cup.

Toby looks to Agnes.

She says, ‘It can’t end soon enough.’

‘Amen,’ says Robert.

Agnes narrows her eyes.

‘And then what happens?’ Alice asks.

‘Change,’ Agnes says.

‘What sort of change?’

‘The business will fail and we will lose our positions.’



‘Might you not consider the opposite outcome?’ the elder Luke asks. ‘The business may turn a corner and prosper and we’ll all be secure in our positions.’

‘Aren’t you the true supporter of Mistress Hannah,’ Robert says. He tugs at one of his pillows. ‘Help me, Alice.’

‘Yes, Luke is Hannah’s best and fiercest defender,’ Agnes says. ‘Saint Luke.’

‘And you’re her harshest critic. Where does that ill humour originate?’

‘My humours are balanced, thank you, Luke.’

‘Did you ever think to marry Master Carew, Agnes?’ Alice asks.

Agnes’ feet hit the floor with a thud but she laughs. The sound is hollow and unconvincing. ‘Yes, girl, I was of a mind to marry Master William.’

For a moment, the room is silent. Hannah sees Robert drink from his cup and raise his brows. Toby’s eyes flick between Agnes and the elder Luke. The younger Luke says nothing. He rolls his fingers together and keeps his gaze fixed at the window. A small group of sparrows flitter past, their chatter the only sound in the kitchen.

‘You’re jesting?’ Alice asks.

‘Of course I’m jesting!’ She returns her feet to the stool. ‘Stupid girl. Why would I have a mind to marry master William?’

‘I just thought—’

‘Alice.’ The elder Luke touches her shoulder and shakes his head. ‘Hush, child.’

‘You’ll stay with Hannah, I take it?’ Agnes asks the elder Luke.

‘I will.’

‘And you?’ Agnes turns to Alice. ‘What will be your fate? Will you stay with Hannah until the business sinks into the Thames, or will you leave?’

‘What would I do if I leave?’ Alice asks.

‘You might find a new position,’ Robert says. ‘Or you might return to your family. Or you might marry.’

‘Marry—’ Alice glances at Robert.

‘It’s decided, then,’ Robert says. ‘Our Alice is to be wed. Who to Mistress Alice? Who to? Who is this man?’ He wriggles his fingers into her side and she laughs, pushing his hands away.

‘You’ll do well to stay where you are,’ the younger Luke says.

‘It’s not for you to say,’ Robert says, his attention still with Alice. ‘Is it, Alice?’

‘No, it’s not.’

He hugs her shoulders. ‘Good girl.’

‘And you, Robert?’ Agnes asks.

‘Listen: I’m not saying that she doesn’t know her way around a workshop and I’m not saying she doesn’t have some ability with the ledgers, but I won’t be ruled by a woman. Once this quarantine is over, I’ll be gone. I’ll take the Carew Press good name with me before its damaged forever.’

The desire to open the door further, to reveal herself, to reveal her knowledge of their words makes Hannah’s hand twitch. She takes a breath—and remains stationary.

‘And you, Luke?’ Agnes turns to the younger.

Luke’s fingers continue to turn. ‘Time will tell,’ he says.

‘Toby?’

Toby looks to Robert. ‘I’ll leave, too.’

‘It’d be a mistake to leave an apprenticeship,’ the elder Luke says softly.

‘I’ll find another.’

Robert laughs. ‘Will you? Do you think acquiring an apprenticeship is as easy as picking out bread at market?’

Toby looks away.

‘What about you, Agnes?’ Alice asks.

‘I’ll not stay here to drown in her rising debts.’

A sparrow lands on the window ledge. Agnes shoos it off with a tap to the glass.

‘We need more lines,’ she says.

## Chapter Eleven

---

A note from Lytton finally arrives as they break their fast.

*Mistress Carew,*

*Forgive the delay.*

*As William's executor, I am proceeding with probate. The grant is still pending but I will ensure that you are informed once it has been accepted. It is unlikely there will be any difficulties or further delays, although the court may, as I indeed do, contest you being named William's sole heir until it can be proved you are not with child. Time will tell.*

*I also ask that you familiarise yourself with the Carew Press' accounts. The business may seem to be thriving but William has accrued debts that need to be paid. These will greatly diminish your inheritance. As William's friend as well as his lawyer, I counsel you thus: marry as soon as your period of mourning has come to an end. Your neighbour William Middleton seeks a wife and, as my own client, I can attest to his good nature and his ability to revive your late husband's business.*

*Perhaps you are considering managing the Press yourself. A note of warning: buyers commission books from master printers, not their widows. You have dependents (your employees); think of them before you make a decision that will significantly affect their livelihoods.*

*I will be in contact by and by.*

*God bless,*

*Christopher Lytton*

Hannah slips the letter into Virgils' *Aeneid* and joins the others in the workshop. Anne hovers by the typesetters' bench, one finger playing along the edge of her empty galley.

Toby opens the shutters. The sunlight is low and sharp and needles Hannah's eyes. She indicates that he should pull the shutters to just so. Shadow falls across the bench and she can see again. Anne, too, had looked away. Now she's blinking, a hand waving away invisible dust in the air.

The elder Luke is in the far corner mixing powder and water. The dry, biting scent of fresh ink grazes the inside of Hannah's nose. She breathes it in, deep breaths, until her lungs feel full.

The younger is checking the presses, manipulating the levers and tightening the screws.

Robert is shaking out his apron. Agnes had come to Hannah that morning, *Put Robert to work*. 'He's recovered enough.'

Hannah had followed Agnes' gaze to Robert. The presser was at the hearth, one hand resting on Alice's shoulder as she stirred a pan.

'Robert,' Hannah called. 'Back to the workshop today.'

He'd pinched his lips then ducked his head. 'Yes, mistress.'

Three days have passed since the kitchen conversation. She'd returned to Anne—

'Salt?'

'Salt?' *Salt*. 'Wait here.'

'Hannah,' Anne said, laughing.

—then returned to the kitchen, scuffing her shoes two, three times on the floorboards so that her arrival would be anticipated. They'd dispersed somewhat by then,

Alice to the hearth, the younger Luke to the garden, Agnes to the storeroom. The elder Luke looked guilty when Hannah entered—Luke, of all of them. ‘Salt,’ Hannah said.

Robert covered his mouth, hiding a grin.

She raised her eyebrows, *What’s funny?* but he’d turned to look out the window, pretending not to have seen her question.

‘Is this how tiredness manifests in Hannah Carew?’ Anne asked later when Hannah placed the bowl of salt on the parlour table.

‘I’m not tired’ Hannah said.

Anne leaned in closer.

‘I’m—’ *Furious. Embarrassed. Frightened.* She might use any of these words.

Anne would reply:

‘Fury is a tool.’

‘Don’t feel embarrassed.’

‘Weaponise your fear.’

‘I know that rage.’

‘Embarrassment is useless.’

‘Ignore fear if you can’t control it.’

And Hannah would stir salt into her bowl and regret that Anne chose her gossamer self to respond.

‘I’m—weary,’ she’d said instead.

Anne leaned in closer and said, with her conspirator’s smile, ‘*That* is the same as tired.’

It had needled her, Anne’s tone, her presumption of intimacy when she continued to switch from one version of herself to another. It was unfair that Anne should have the advantage of figuring out only one Hannah when Hannah has to figure out multiple Annes. It had needled her, just as the early morning sun had needled her.

She glances at Robert.

Agnes has her eyes on him now as she rolls up her sleeves.

He hadn't wanted to return.

Agnes said, 'If he doesn't return to the workshop, neither will I.'

When Alice made a noise of protest, Hannah said, 'You'll start tomorrow, Robert.'

He'd pinched his lips together and nodded.

Hannah waits until Agnes has secured her sleeves before asking the room, 'Ready?'

'Ready, mistress,' the elder Luke says. A trickle of readys follow.

'Then let's begin.'

Without meaning to, the first galley becomes a competition. Anne is swift, her fingers moving deftly across the types, but her speed is restricted by her lack of latin. Hannah is swifter, though not defter. Her skin tingles against the edges; she tastes metal on her tongue. The others wait for the first galley. Hannah beats Anne to it. Toby collects the frame and carries it to the presser's bench. Hannah turns to her second. Anne finishes her first. The gentle, rhythmic movement of the presses begins. Oak on oak. Taut. The clack of the frames, metal on metal.

Through the window, the noises of the Fleet merge into one sound, a tangle of voices and laughter, coughing and sneezing, footsteps and hooves, cart wheels and barrows, arguments and new deals. The presses work on. Latin. Ovid. Tap, tap. Creak and switch.

Anne shifts in her seat, angling her body closer to Hannah. Their skirts touch and Hannah moves away. She finishes her fourth galley, stretches her fingers and helps Toby mix more ink. The apprentice stands back as she crushes dried ink lumps with a pestle.

She beckons him to step closer but he leans forward instead, bending his back in the middle as if bowing.

At ten, they move to the kitchen. Robert stretches his back and lays a hand briefly on Alice's head. Agnes cuts gingered bread into squares and gives the plate to the younger Luke to pass around. The room smells like spices and honey—the last of the honey, Alice tells her later.

‘There was a spoonful left, but Agnes told me to use it anyway.’

Hannah nods.

They return to the workshop.

At midday, they break for lunch.

‘My back hurts,’ Anne whispers when she ladles stew into Hannah's bowl.

‘It will.’

‘I'm getting quicker, though.’

‘You are.’

‘Though my fingers...’ She holds up her hands. Her skin is red and crisscrossed by the impression of the letter edges. ‘Show me yours.’

Hannah briefly holds up one hand.

‘You have smooth skin,’ Anne says.

‘I lost my calluses.’

‘Why didn't William allow you into the workshop?’ Anne asks.

Agnes looks up from her bowl.

Hannah says, ‘It's not important.’

No one talks in the afternoon, not even the pressers. A lazy breeze wafts through the open doorway carrying with it the smell of fresh bread and jasmine which does nothing to alleviate weariness. The steady thrum of the presses is almost hypnotic. A bee flits from surface to surface, having found its way into the workshop. It hangs, belly



heavy, near Hannah's head, its legs bulging with pollen. Hannah waves it away gently, careful to avoid touching its body. She wipes her eyes. Her fingers have lost their dexterity; she keeps dropping letters into the galley. The once regular clack, clack has become uneven and unpredictable. Everything feels awkward, even her thoughts. That evening, when Anne asks for paper, she has to be told the question twice to comprehend her words.

'Paper? As agreed?'

'In the office beside the bookcase. Third chest down. It's labelled *Ephemera*.'

'Thank you.'

Hannah falls into bed. She dreams she's on the edge of a cliff but its not grass or stones she's grasping at but hands. Her father's hands; Eleanor's hands. Someone grabs her hair and yanks her backwards.

Morning comes too soon.

The day passes slowly.

She falls into bed.

Morning comes too soon.

The day passes quickly.

Another day comes, then another, and another.

'How long have we been here?' Alice asks. In quarantine, she means.

'Ten days,' Agnes says.

## Chapter Twelve

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‘How long have we been here?’ Alice asks.

Fifteen days,’ Agnes says.

## Chapter Thirteen

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‘How long have we been here?’ Alice asks.

‘Twenty days,’ Robert says.

‘Christ, girl,’ Agnes snaps. ‘Learn to count!’

## Chapter Fourteen

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Raised but whispered voices draw Hannah along the upstairs hallway. Agnes and Alice. Hannah opens Alice's bedroom door. The maid is sitting cross-legged on her bed, crying. Agnes stands above her, gesticulating, her entire body moving as she says, '—of all the *thoughtless* things to—'

'What has happened?' Hannah asks. She walks into the room and closes the door. Alice gazes up at her, raw-eyed.

Agnes steps back and wipes her mouth. Her cheeks are red.

'Well?'

Agnes glares at Alice. 'Tell her.'

Alice hugs her knees into her chest and looks at the floor.

'Alice?'

The girl mumbles something.

'Speak so the Mistress can hear you,' Agnes says, voice sharp.

'It wasn't meant—Agnes doesn't—I didn't think...' Alice's voice trails away.

Hannah turns to the housekeeper. 'Agnes?'

Agnes crosses her arms. 'I found her with Robert.'

'We weren't—'

'They were embracing. Kissing. He had his hand—'

'Don't tell it wrong!'

'You tell it, then.'

Alice drops her knees. 'He had his hand on my leg.' She won't meet Hannah's eye.

'Was his hand on top of your clothing?' Hannah asks.

Alice looks back at the floor. 'Under my chemise.'

Hannah can see Robert's face in her mind, his mocking, ill-mannered face. She can hear him say, *She wouldn't open her legs*—and fury makes her stomach jolt. Somehow, she keeps her voice even when she asks, 'Where did this happen?'

'In the parlour.'

'Did anyone else see the two of you together?'

Alice shakes her head. 'Only Agnes.'

'Luckily for you,' Agnes says.

'There's no need to sound so, so...' Alice pauses, searching for the right word. 'So superior.' Her voice has risen in pitch.

'On *this* occasion...' Agnes mutters and looks heavenward. 'Dear *God*.'

Hannah raises a hand. 'That's enough, Agnes.'

Alice mumbles something else.

Hannah says, 'If you have something to say—'

Alice's words burst from her mouth. 'It's not fair for her to judge me harshly just because she doesn't have a man to love her.'

'*Dear God*,' Agnes snaps. 'Is this your reasoning?'

'Robert is married, Alice,' Hannah says. 'He isn't free to love you.'

'He does love me.'

Agnes snorts.

'He does!'

'Kissing you in the parlour with his hand on your leg isn't love,' Agnes says. 'It's a kiss and a hand on your leg.'

'Has anything else passed between the two of you?' Hannah asks. 'Anything beyond,' she shifts, 'kissing?' The word feels awkward on her tongue, like trying to chew on a dried apple ring too large for her mouth.

'Have you laid with him?' Agnes asks, bluntly.

‘No!’ Alice half falls off the bed as she finds her feet. ‘No. Not *that*. He wouldn’t do *that*.’

‘He would do that,’ Agnes says. ‘He *has* done that.’

‘With his wife.’

‘Sweet child, are you two years old? You’re fifteen! But you’ve done well to remember he’s married.’

‘He doesn’t love her.’

‘Stop using the word ‘love’,’ Agnes says. ‘It isn’t love that draws him to you.’

‘You don’t own the definition of love. You can’t tell me what I’m feeling is this or that or is or isn’t—and you can’t tell Robert that either.’

Agnes rubs her eyes and mutters, ‘Mary Mother.’

‘Sit down, Alice,’ Hannah says.

Alice hesitates but returns to the bed. Agnes leans back into the wall, her arms crossed.

‘When did this start?’

Alice’s voice is knotted. ‘Not very long ago.’

‘When did he first kiss you?’

‘Three days past.’

‘But he’s been flirting with you for longer than that,’ Agnes says. ‘Hasn’t he?’

Alice nods.

‘Robert’s a flirt,’ Agnes says. ‘Haven’t you seen him at church? He’s always looking and rarely at his wife.’

‘He looks at me.’ Alice sticks out her chin and Hannah sees herself, but at eight years old, demanding another sugared apple after having been denied one earlier.

‘He looks at you,’ Hannah says, ‘because there isn’t anyone else to look at. He’s trapped in a small house and he sees you because you are available and you’re too naive to think it’s anything other than love.’

Alice is shaking her head.

Hannah continues, ‘As soon as this quarantine is over, he’ll look for someone else to satisfy his lasciviousness and he’ll stop looking at you.’

‘That’s not true. I live here and he sees me every day whether we’re quarantined or not. How would he be able to look at me again if he pushed me aside? He couldn’t.’

‘He won’t care, Alice,’ Agnes says. ‘He will not care.’

‘You’ve always disliked him.’

Hannah glances at Agnes.

Agnes says, ‘Not that you’d know that, but yes, I have.’

‘Just because he’s not your sort of man.’

‘He shouldn’t be yours either.’

Alice shakes her head and wipes her cheeks. ‘You’re wrong about him.’

‘What sort of man, what sort of *married* man takes a young girl somewhere secluded to do to you what he did to you knowing that he is not able to protect her modesty or defend her honour. He says he loves you—’

Alice cuts Agnes off. ‘He does love me.’

‘But how far does that love extend? Will he remove your chemise entirely? Will he lie with you? And then what?’ Alice is shaking her head but Agnes ignores her. ‘And then what? What happens if he gets you with child? He can’t marry you.’

‘I told you, he wouldn’t do *that*.’

‘Alice,’ Hannah says, ‘If he’s willing to do what he’s done then he’s willing to do more. Maybe he does love you, but he isn’t free to love you.’

‘I love him.’

Agnes turns a finger in the air, *This is circular*.

‘I’ll not love another.’

‘You will love another,’ Agnes says. ‘Someone who’ll see you as more than just a , a—’

‘I’m not a whore.’

‘I wasn’t going to call you a whore.’ Agnes closes her eyes. When she opens them again she says, more quietly, ‘I don’t think you are a whore, I think you’re young and an innocent and that you’ve been led astray but I’ll reserve my dark words for him. When I first came to this city, I didn’t have anyone to look out for me.’

Alice looks heavenward. ‘This story again?’ She puts on a voice. ‘Thirty-four years ago, when I was twenty—’

‘Alice.’ Hannah cuts through her apery. ‘That’s enough.’

Agnes is holding her breath. Hannah has never seen her look this way before. She’s taut, like a bolt in a bow, barely contained and ready to pierce through plate armour.

‘He wants to divorce his wife,’ Alice says.

‘Her name is Mary,’ Hannah says. ‘Let’s use it. He told you he wants to divorce Mary?’

‘Yes.’

‘And who do you know that’s been granted a divorce. Don’t say the king. Who? Anyone? And even if he could dissolve his marriage to Mary, where does that leave her? And what of their daughters? Who will pay for the rooms they rent? Who will buy their food? How will they survive?’

‘Mary would work—’

‘And the girls? Are they to sit at home each day? Elizabeth is still a baby. She can’t even walk yet.’



‘I don’t know—I don’t know.’ Alice sounds fractious like an overwrought infant on the edge of exhaustion.

‘And what happens when he tires of you?’ Hannah asks. ‘What happens to you?’

‘He loves me. He’d never abandon me. He wouldn’t.’

‘He used the same words with Mary and he’s used the same words with his other women.’

Alice’s lip twists. ‘Why do you have to be so cruel?’

‘Your mistress is being honest.’

They all look to the bedroom door where Anne now stands. She steps inside and closes the door.

‘I heard your voice,’ Anne says to Hannah. She turns to Alice. ‘Your name is Alice, isn’t it?’

Alice’s lips are thin. She nods.

‘And you’re how old? Fifteen? Sixteen?’

‘Fifteen.’

‘I was in love at fifteen, and married not long later. I was too young.’

‘And you’ve come, to tell me, to...’ Alice’s voice dissolves. She doesn’t look at Anne. She doesn’t look at anyone. ‘Why must you all know better just because you’re older?’

Anne says, ‘You have three women before you, each of them warning you of this man’s ill intentions. Is it so difficult to consider the possibility that we may be right?’

Hannah watches Anne. One hand is cupped around her upper arm, her thumb stroking her sleeve. She looks tired from the day’s work: her skin has grown paler, her lips are slightly swollen and she blinks too often as if the air is dry. Despite the weariness, she looks alert. When Hannah glances down, she notices the fingertips of her right hand are stained black with ink.

Alice, says, '*You*, Agnes, said that there is a proper order for things.'

'God first,' Anne says. She comes to sit beside Alice.

'Then men,' Alice continues.

Hannah asks, 'Do you mean mankind?'

Agnes says, 'I *meant* men.'

'Maybe,' Anne says.

Hannah's eyes flick from Anne back to Alice. 'So it doesn't matter how many women gather to protect you. You will always trust a man first and foremost.'

Agnes exhales and turns away.

'A wife must submit to her husband,' Alice says.

'You are not his wife,' Anne says.

Hannah asks, 'Has Robert made you any promises?'

'No. But that doesn't mean—'

'I suppose that excuses him from breaking a promise,' Agnes mutters, more to herself than to any of the others.

'Promises can't be broken,' Alice says.

'They aren't meant to be,' Anne says. She touches Alice's hand. The movement is cautious, hesitant as if she's reaching out to touch a nettle or stroke a dog whose temperament has yet to be established. Hannah wants to tell her, *Alice doesn't bite. She barely knows how*, but there's something calculated about the action, even something calculated about the way Anne had held her arm and stoked her sleeve. This isn't gossamer Anne, but it's an Anne not so far removed. 'It's best to do without men, at least until you're older and can tell the good ones from the rotten.'

Alice reclaims her hand. 'Robert isn't rotten.'

'Those who have known him longer than you have suggested otherwise.'

'They're both wrong.'

‘Don’t let yourself get tricked,’ Anne says. ‘I was fifteen when I was tricked. Tricks are cruel. They hurt at any age, but you’ll feel their pain longer if they happen earlier.’

Alice tugs the bedspread up to her chin and rubs her eyes.

Agnes murmurs into Hannah’s ear, ‘They need to be separated.’

‘How?’ Hannah keeps her voice soft. ‘I can’t remove him from the house.’

‘Of course you can’t; there’s an order to fulfil.’

Hannah faces her. ‘You don’t know me even a little, do you?’

‘When have you ever given me the chance?’

Hannah turns back to the bed.

Anne is saying, ‘...I didn’t like him from the beginning. I can’t recall his first words to me but they were probably something droll or polite a *hello* or *greetings*. *Hello, my almost sister-in-law*. His face, I remember—not its features, which I hope never to forget so that if I pass him in the street I will know him for the man he is and not a stranger, but its composition of emotion. He was bored. Uneasy. He looked around our parlour as if it was offensive. Perhaps it was the smell, and that it didn’t smell like sheep. Nothing ever smelt like anything other than sheep at the Kyme house.

‘They were farmers,’ she adds. ‘I’d heard from my brother that none of the Kymes knew how to read but that was just family gossip to tease my sister about her new betrothed. Their marriage made sense to everyone. She needed to be married and his family had money. New money, though: you could see your face in their coins they were that shiny.

‘He’s short. Not as short as I am but I can stand on my toes and raise myself above him—I could: I’ll never see him again. His hair is brown, a dull brown, like ditch water. And his eyes are brown or grey, dull-like. I suppose if he was a different sort of man, I’d find some sort of attractiveness in his features, but he isn’t and I choose not to. Martha

saw him as handsome, or she said she did. We spoke about it once, at night, when the candles had all been blown out and it was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. She said she would love him. I'd asked her how, *How could you love that boy who's as boring as the floorboards?* She said yes, it was possible and she would do it, for it was better to be happy with a husband than sad. She might've loved him, had she the chance. He might've let her love him too.'

Alice wipes her cheeks.

Hannah says to Agnes, voice tight but quiet enough for only the housekeeper to hear, 'We will keep them separated and our eyes on them at all times. He is not to be alone with her and she is not to be alone with him. If he breaks this rule, I will rescind his employment.'

Agnes scoffs. 'As threats go—'

'It's the only threat I can make. What else can I do? Tell him I'll lay my fists on him and then he'll be sorry?'

Agnes looks away. 'If the master were here...'

'William isn't here. I am. I'm not sure what William would have done—'

'He would've put the fear of God in him.'

'Agnes,' Hannah says, 'stop rewriting his character.'

## Chapter Fifteen

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Robert grins and thumbs his lip and leaves the office with a half laugh. 'Yes 'm,' he says.

Hannah grips the edge of the desk between her thumb and forefinger until the pressure of the knots digging into her skin becomes painful. She knees shut an open drawer and yanks her skirt free from the splinter of wood that has hold of it. Somewhere in the house, someone laughs.

## Chapter Sixteen

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‘What’s this?’ Anne asks, holding up the *Aeneid*.

The dislocated *T* pushes all other thoughts from Hannah’s mind. And the pamphlet, still in her pocket, feels suddenly heavy even though it has barely any weight at all.

‘May I?’ But Anne isn’t looking at the book, or even the page on which the book has been opened, but at Lytton’s letter, now weeks old. No others have arrived; none of Hannah’s own—

*I am not with child.*

*Proceed with probate.*

*I am familiar with William’s debts; I’ve seen his debt collector outside my window.*

*I am very concerned for my dependents’ futures.*

—have been answered.

‘If you like.’

Anne drops Lytton’s letter onto the desk before closing the *Aeneid* and returning it to the shelf. Hannah watches her read the lawyer’s words.

‘Goodness.’ Anne glances up at Hannah. ‘I never thought: *are* you with child?’

‘No.’

‘How can you be so su—?’ Anne stops and clears her throat. She returns to the letter. ‘Christopher advises you to marry, I see.’

‘I have no intention of marrying.’

‘Who is this Middleton man?’

‘Our Fleet Street neighbour directly opposite.’

‘What sort of man is he?’

‘Not the sort I wish to marry.’

‘I’m intrigued.’

‘He likes to drink.’

‘I like to drink.’

‘He drinks for drinking’s sake. After a time it makes him belligerent.’

‘Oh?’

‘He says, *Tell me something*, and if you refuse he won’t move on until you offer him some piece of information. He takes up more space than his body. It’s...’

‘Annoying?’

‘Yes.’

‘What information have you given up for peace’s sake?’

‘Nothing of consequence.’

Anne eyes her.

Hannah shifts in her chair. ‘Small family details. My father’s name. My brother’s name.’ She returns to her original focus: May’s accounts.

‘You have a brother?’

‘Barely.’

‘My brother is also barely my brother,’ Anne says. She leaves her words hanging in the air.

Hannah ignores them and instead traces the feather-tip of her quill down the page of the ledger until it reaches Cartwright’s name.

Anne says, ‘I wouldn’t marry him, Hannah.’

‘Your brother?’

‘Lord no! Middleton.’

‘I won’t.’ She writes into the column *Employees* the names of the Carew Press staff. The Lukes, Robert Caley, Toby Ramsey, Hannah Car—she pauses then draws a short, sharp line through *Car* and replaces it with *Rondel*.

Anne folds the letter and returns it to Virgil. ‘Do you want to get married again?’

‘No.’

‘You’re very sure.’

‘Do you wish to marry again?’

‘No.’ Anne tips her head from side to side. ‘I see your point.’ She fiddles with the quills and the lid to the ink pot. ‘Men!’

The suddenness of her exclamation makes Hannah’s hand lurch. She shifts in her chair and dabs at a misplaced drop of ink.

Anne continues, ‘Wouldn’t our lives be easier in a world of women?’

Again, Hannah looks for that stitch in Anne’s face, the hems of her performance. Protestant Anne, who’d rather abbeesses stitch opus anglicanum on the street than lead their Houses, preaching for a world of women.

Hannah pushes back her chair. The feet screech across the floor, a noise she feels in her teeth. She pulls the errant quills from Anne’s hands and screws the lid back onto the ink pot. ‘It’s late,’ she says. ‘I have things to do. The accounts. The ledgers.’ She busies herself at the bookshelf and doesn’t turn around until she hears the sound of the office door closing. She shuts her eyes.

The road had been churned-up clots of dirt. The regular ruts had been destroyed by the constant barrage of heavy carts and well-shod hooves. The grass on the verges had been flattened and had started to decay in the searing sun. Hannah had pulled her hat down and watched her feet. Still, she’d tripped and stumbled.

One of the gates had been torn from its hinges and broken down into kindling, the pieces dumped by the side of the track. The flowers had been broken by wheels.



Amputated cowslip and harebell heads littered the ground, their petals torn and ripped. The orchard remained standing but several of the trees had been marked with white paint. The gentle, steady hum of the hives was absent. Instead, the bees were a frenzy of yellow-black bodies, barrelling across the sky in awkward, irregular lines. Hannah had stood on the tips of her toes to see into the field beyond. The hives had been dismantled and Sister Joanna, who spent more time with the insects than her sisters, was missing.

One of the oak trees had been felled. Its branches splayed across the ground. The trunk had been gutted, great chunks of wood hacked away and piled in pyramids. They did this—they still do this—to the men who defy the king: they cut open their bellies and pull out their intestines. A bird's nest had crunched under Hannah's foot. She'd jumped back but it was already empty.

'Stand aside, girl,' a coarse male voice had said. It's owner, a bare-chested, foul smelling labourer, put out his arm to keep her back while a cart hurtled by. It was laden with fragments of coloured glass. She'd looked beyond the man to the entrance of the priory. Men poured in and out of the main doors, carrying boxes and chests, armfuls of books, candlesticks, chairs, tables, cushions, the chapel lectern. Some dictated the commotion with their hands. Other's barked orders.

The way inside is like a river's current. She's carried along through the hallways and the walkways too quickly for her eyes to accommodate the change in light. All is blackness and limbs and the smell of unwashed working bodies.

'Eleanor!' she shouts. 'Eleanor!'

'I'm long dead, Hannah.'

That warm, clover voice. She follows it through the darkness, through the corridors she'd come to know so well before she'd been sent away. She follows the voice into the library. The shelves are derelict; pages scatter the floor. She smells—smoke.

'She's long dead, Hannah.'

Hannah turns to see Anne Askew standing behind her, a lit taper held in one hand.

Anne says, 'She's already in hell.'

## Chapter Seventeen

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They press on.

Anne tries to draw Hannah's attention with a greeting, a question, an observation about the nature of printing, but Hannah keeps her eyes on her galley and offers only the barest interaction:

*Good morning.*

*That's correct.*

*Yes, perhaps.*

When Anne is at the cases, Hannah is at the bench; when Anne is at the bench, Hannah is at the cases. During the overlap, Hannah angles her body away. During their brief pauses, she watches Agnes beat ink and operate the coffin. The housekeeper doesn't talk when she works. She keeps her eyes on the powders and the ink balls and follows the elder Luke's instruction without question.

At lunchtime, Hannah remains in the workshop while the others move to the kitchen. Anne rejoins her at the bench moments later. She places a sheet of folded paper atop her empty frame.

Hannah pretends she hasn't seen it.

'You've been avoiding me,' Anne says.

'I haven't been avoiding you,' Hannah says, slotting a hyphen into her galley.

'You won't talk to me.'

'I do talk to you.'

'You've spoken perhaps six words to me this entire morning.'

'I need to concentrate.'

'Hannah, I think you could typeset this book while reading another.'

'That's an exaggeration.'

‘I’m trying to draw you out.’

‘I’m aware.’

Anne watches Hannah slot in two more letters than fetches a stool. She settles her skirt around her knees and unrolls her sleeves. ‘Thank you for the paper,’ she says.

‘It is as we agreed.’ Hannah blows invisible lint from her composer’s stick and returns to the cases.

‘I’m writing a letter,’ Anne says. She waits for Hannah to reply. When she doesn’t, she continues, ‘But I’m having difficulty framing what I wish to say. Whatever I write feels repetitive.’

‘We all have trouble writing.’

Hannah can feel Anne watching her. She shifts her weight from one foot to the other. She can feel her dress on her shoulders and, acutely, the nakedness of her neck. For a moment, she considers removing her cap and letting loose her hair.

‘You write a quantity of letters,’ Anne says. ‘Perhaps you can guide me.’

Hannah continues to pincer letters into the composer’s stick. ‘I’m not a tutor.’

‘You tutored me in the art of printing.’

‘Then I am not a writing tutor.’

Anne says, after a pause, ‘What I said bothered you.’

‘What did you say?’ Hannah asks. It’s a petty question but instinctive. She exhales. Her lungs feel too full—and she’s picked up a lowercase *d*; she needs a *P*, an uppercase *P*.

‘I said that women’s lives would be easier in a world without men.’

‘Your words were hollow.’

‘How so?’

Hannah turns. 'You support a movement that destroys the only places in England where women *can* live without men.' She turns back to the cases and begins to flick out the letters she needs. One she drops. Another falls from the stick.

'You mean nunneries?' Anne asks.

'What else?'

'The nunneries were found to be corru—' Anne stops and takes a breath.

'Of course they were found to be corrupt,' Hannah says. 'The king needed them to be corrupt to justify their dissolution.' She rubs two fingers together. 'It's all about the money. Do you know what happened to the nuns?'

'They were given pensions and returned to their families.'

Hannah scoffs and catches Anne's eye. 'How much do you think those pensions are worth? And what of those without family? To whom did they turn Where did they go?'

'I don't know,' Anne says.

'Scrap cooper,' Hannah says. 'Enough to feed a child. Not enough to pay for rooms. Not enough to purchase new clothing. Not enough to pay for a physician. Not enough to keep a fire lit through the winter. Those without families perished and those still living whore themselves out to live. Some might have been corrupt. But so what? Find those sisters and discipline them; cast them out of their order; mark them for what they are. Why must everyone suffer for the faults of a few? This is what you stand for: the fall of women. This is what you preach for: the fall of women.'

Anne glances away.

'The *menstruators*. The *Eves*. The rust, the chaff, the draff, the swill. You can't complain about the injustices of men when you've helped perpetuate the denigration of women.' Hannah turns back to the letters. Each one looks the same. She closes the lid with a smart snap.

‘You know me as Anne Askew, don’t you?’ Anne asks. ‘You’ve been calling me Kyme, but you know that’s not my real name.’

‘Kyme or Askew: what’s the difference?’ Hannah wipes her face. Her cheeks feel hot and clammy though the workshop isn’t warm.

‘When we met, you called me Mistress Askew.’

‘When we first met, I had no notion of who you were.’

After a moment, Anne says, ‘I don’t understand. You called me *Askew*.’

Hannah laughs, a breathy, derisive laugh.

‘We’ve met before,’ Anne says. It’s less a question and more a realisation.

Hannah nods once, curtly.

‘When? Where?’

‘Think on it.’

‘I *am* thinking on it!’ Anne’s words are sharp. Her nostrils flair. Her eyes move from left to right as if her past has been rendered in her memory as prose. ‘When? Where?’

‘Last spring, in the Fleet Street market. I tried to stop you confronting Benedict.’

‘Benedict?’

‘Our priest.’

‘Benedict.’ Anne’s eyes continue to flick side to side. ‘I recall a woman grabbing my arm.’

‘I did grab your arm.’

‘*You* were that woman?’

‘Yes.’

Anne begins to examine Hannah as if she is entirely new.

Hannah doesn’t move; she doesn’t shift her weight or turn away.

‘*You?*’

‘Yes.’

‘Why did you try to stop me?’

‘I told you at the time.’

Anne half shakes her head—

‘I *did*,’ Hannah says.

‘I don’t recall what you...’ Again she reads across the air. ‘He’s old, isn’t he, your Father Benedict?’

‘He’s not ‘My Father Benedict,’” Hannah says, ‘but he *is* old and infirm.’

‘You wanted to protect him.’

‘I thought one violent argument with you might kill him.’

‘You thought me violent?’

‘I thought you disposed to disregard the condition of others in favour of your own objectives. And you proved me correct.’

Anne bits her lip. ‘He is *wrong*—’

‘But perhaps there are better ways to further your cause than attacking old men whose influence extends to *one street*.’

‘If he doesn’t have the strength of body or mind to counter criticism, then perhaps he shouldn’t stand in the market square and gospel.’

Hannah catches and holds Anne’s gaze.

Anne bites her lip and looks away.

Silence descends between them, a dense, prickly silence. Hannah returns to her galley, half full of latin.

Anne says, ‘I should...’ She looks towards the workshop door.

‘Perhaps you should.’

But Anne lingers. She works her fingers along the edge of the bench. She shuffles her feet. She pinches her earlobe.

Hannah continues with Ovid. She imagines the heat of the Mediterranean, the sound of the sea, the feel of a stylus in her hand, the smell of wax, the taste of pomegranates and olives and wine. Wine. Warm and cloying and bloody.

Anne, her voice quiet, asks, 'Did you know a nun?'

Hannah pincers out another letter. 'No.'

Eleanor's face, soft and creased, appears before her.

'Didn't you?'

'No.'

After a little while, Hannah hears retreating footsteps and the door creak as its hinges are worked. For a moment, the sounds from the kitchen intensify: the clatter of plates, Robert laughing, Agnes chastising Alice. Then the door swings shut and the workshop is quiet once more.

Hannah rests both palms on the bench and bows her head. Something wet runs down her nose and drips onto the galley. Her father would say, *Hannah! Moisture!*

Her father. Her father, her father, her father.

*Father.*

Another tear trickles down her nose.

He doesn't answer.

A third. A fourth.

She's on the cliff edge and the land is teetering, teetering upwards.

*Father.*

*Father!*

*Daughter.* But it's not his voice, it's cold, cool Hannah's.

*Father.*

She holds her breath until her lungs feels like they're being teased apart.



Then she teeters over to the press with the broken leg and runs two fingers along its flank. The wood is cool like her, and solid, unmoving. She touches the coffin, the head, the till, the spindle. She touches the old nicks, the stains, the bolts, the nails. She smells the ink and the paper and the warm metal. She leans into the frame and lets it take her weight. It moves, almost imperceptibly, and, just as imperceptibly, creaks.

Anne's folded sheet of paper remains atop the galley.

Hannah smooths open the crease. A page of neat, clipped writing. At the bottom, one line is enlarged: *I did not waiver because I believed; I do not waiver because I still believe.*

## Chapter Eighteen

---

A creak of floorboards; weight on the stairs.

Hannah blows out the last of the candles and lets the moonlight illuminate the office.

Footsteps along the hall. A pause. A breath.

‘Don’t pass me by,’ Hannah says.

Anne appears at the door, her face haloed by golden candlelight.

‘I have something to show you,’ Hannah says.

Anne hesitates. She lowers the candle and her face blurs in the darkness.

‘Come in,’ Hannah says. She watches as Anne steps across the threshold. ‘The door.’

Anne turns her back to close it. She doesn’t sit until Hannah tells her to do so.

Hannah reaches into her apron pocket. Her fingers touch the soft corners of the pamphlet, dulled after weeks of troubling then with the undersides of her nails. She hesitates then places the pamphlet on the desk.

Anne’s eyes flick from the pamphlet to Hannah, her face asking, *What is this?*

Hannah nods. *Open it.*

Anne gently peels apart the paper until the pamphlet is completely unfolded. Then she leans back in her chair. ‘Oh.’

‘You recognise it?’

‘Yes.’

‘I found it the night William died. It was hidden away, tucked inside a chest.’

‘I’m surprised he kept a copy,’ Anne says. She touches a finger to the illustrated border, then follows the curve of a snake. When her finger reaches the fanged head, she shivers.

‘I thought you’d like this sort of work.’

‘No.’ Anne’s voice is firm. ‘I’m a gossamer. I appreciate the image: I’m sure this *is* how purgatory would look if it were real, I just prefer to talk.’

‘Talk.’

‘I prefer to talk,’ Anne repeats. She pushes the pamphlet away. ‘Why did he keep it?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘I don’t know either, I’m afraid,’ Anne says. ‘When you found this, were you unsure of his faith?’

‘Almost.’

‘Did you ask him about it?’

‘I tried.’

‘Tried?’

‘He had the sweat, if you recall.’

Anne leans back in her chair with a soft thump. ‘I do recall. But you did try to make him talk, I’m sure.’

‘I didn’t hold him down and raise my fist, if that’s what you’re thinking.’ Hannah doesn’t say, *I raised my voice; I tugged at his shirt; I pinched the fleshy skin between his thumb and forefinger*. ‘I’m not surprised he kept it.’

‘He wasn’t a reformer.’

‘But he kept everything. He accounted for everything. Each order, each payment, each cancellation. Even this illicit order. Spring 1545. *Monies received from CL. Delivery of manuscript due. Date of collection to be confirmed.*’

‘CL is Christopher Lytton,’ Anne says.

‘I know.’

‘He was the one responsible for it’s publication.’

‘It’s a dangerous thing to commission Protestant propaganda.’

‘He didn’t commission it. And I don’t like this word *propaganda*. It makes it sound low and dishonest.’

Hannah doesn’t say, *It is low and dishonest*. ‘But you don’t like it.’

‘I’d rather protest my faith orally.’

Hannah runs a finger over her dry and cracking lip. ‘Who did commission it, if not Lytton?’

‘John Bale.’

‘I don’t know who that is.’

‘You do. If you walk a quarter mile in the city, you’ll stand on a hundred of his pamphlets. He writes them, not all of them, but most of them—he might say he writes the best of them.’

‘I try to ignore the dross on the streets.’

‘So do I.’

‘He has a lot to say, your John Bale.’

‘He’s not my John Bale. We’ve never exchanged a word, either in person or on paper. He’s an exile in Europe,’ Anne continues. ‘But he does what he can.’

‘What did he do to make him an exile?’

‘Protest,’ Anne says.

‘He’s lucky he wasn’t burned instead.’

‘Few are burned these days,’ Anne says.

A breeze filters in through the open window, bringing with it the smell of something sweet and putrid.

‘Slops,’ Anne says. She looks down as if doing so will save her from the stink.

Hannah doesn’t smell slops. She smells iron and smoke and the tang of fresh blood. Her stomach contorts. ‘Were you frightened?’ she asks.

‘Frightened?’

‘When they took you to Saddler’s Hall; were you frightened?’

No.

Yes.

Anne just looks at her. ‘I dreamed about it once,’ she says. ‘I was led to a pyre in my nightdress. A woman approached me with a bag of powder and tied it around my neck. I said to her, *Bring me a cloak; Bring me a kirtle.* Then I awoke.’

Hannah’s dream is different. She’s standing atop a dais in Saddler’s Hall and talking, talking, reciting all she has heard Anne say; talking, talking, uncontrolled, unbidden until the walls start to dismantle themselves and the paint melts into puddles to reveal that the bones of the building are splintering and those on the streets surround them are either softening or degrading until all that is left is sand-coloured earth and a pyre of logs and kindling, as dry as cinnamon, while a woman with her face, Hannah’s face, waits to be tied to the cross, her hair wild in the wind, as wild as the flames that have started to lick her toes, her feet, her bare legs, her waist, her chest, her throat, she screams, she *screams*—

‘Hannah?’

She throws out an arm. The walls of the Carew Press are solid. Rough timber and white paint.

‘Hannah?’

She means to say *Anne*, but her throat cracks, fire dried.

A cup is pressed to her lips. Wine. She splutters. ‘Water.’

‘You’ll be sick.’

‘Not to drink.’ Her voice is thick. She can feel the wine coating the inside of her mouth and congealing into thick clots in her stomach. She heaves but with too little force to expel anything but air. ‘Water,’ she says again.

She hears a rustle of fabric, the creak of the hinges, footsteps retreating down the hallway.

Hannah's hands feel bloated and heavy. She cannot straighten her fingers. *It's too hot.* Hot as a slaughterer's furnace. She checks her face. It's wet with sweat. She wipes away what she can with her sleeve. She touches the point on her chest where she can feel her heart. It's running, running away from her. She presses down her palm as if the force of her hand will slow it to its usual speed. Her breathing becomes shallow, fractious. She holds her breath and thinks of the river and the willows and the gentle movement of the reeds as the water sifts through their lengths.

The hinges creak once more.

'Water,' Anne says.

She kneels beside Hannah on the floor. The floor? When did she find her way to the floor?

'You're very pale,' Anne says.

Hannah dips her hands into the basin Anne has brought with her. The water is almost the same temperature as her skin, but the feeling of floating is soothing. She closes her eyes and remembers the river in Cambridge. Her foot twinges but she pretends it's just a cricket crawling across her toe. A case of mistaken identity.

Water trickles into Hannah's eye. She blinks and looks up.

Anne mumbles something, then wrings out her cap, which she has removed and dampened, before returning it to Hannah's temple. 'Is it the sweat?' she asks, voice low.

'No.' The air that passes through Hannah's throat is dry and rough. She swallows.

'How can you be sure?'

'It's been and gone for us,' Hannah says. She traces the bottom of the basin with one finger and leans her head back against the wall. The beams have disappeared into the

gloom, but through the darkness she can just hear something. Something small and raw-boned.

‘You must be ill for the slops to affect you this way,’ Anne says. ‘You vanished for a moment. Did you hear me saying your name? I touched your sleeve. I had a mind to slap you—’

‘I’m glad you didn’t,’ Hannah says.

‘What is it if not the sweat?’

Hannah murmurs, ‘A guilty conscience.’ When Anne looks at her, Hannah begins to say, ‘I was...’ but the words disintegrate on her tongue. ‘Help me up,’ she says instead.

‘I think you should stay here a little while longer.’

‘I’d prefer to be in a chair.’

‘Perhaps in bed instead? I can call for Luke—’

‘No, no,’ Hannah says, her voice too sharp. ‘It was a passing moment.’ She holds out a hand and starts to rise. At her first stumble, Anne takes her hand and hoists her to standing. ‘You’re strong,’ Hannah says.

‘What made you think otherwise?’

When Hannah is settled in her chair, she says, ‘Distract me.’

‘How?’

‘Tell me how you become involved with *that*.’ She leans her head towards the pamphlet.

‘William needed convincing.’

‘I’m sure he did.’

‘He was too...’

‘Papist?’

‘I was going to say traditional.’

‘Tactful.’

‘Even with his troubles...’ Anne pauses.

‘His troubles?’

‘With money.’

‘Oh. I know about those, believe me. *Intimately*. You needn’t concern yourself with my feelings on that account.’

‘The need for money wasn’t quite good enough to overcome his faith. Lytton wanted me to talk with him. I can be convincing.’

‘Yes, I’ve seen you gospel.’

‘I didn’t think I’d be able to move him, though, but...’

‘You like a challenge.’

Anne inclines her head. ‘But we got along, William and I.’

‘You got along?’

‘He and I and Christopher. We talked and drank wine and discussed the country and the city and the river and the wherries and the books in favoured in Oxford. He told me about his first apprenticeship in London and how his master squandered his profits on gambling and left his Press destitute.’

‘I didn’t know that.’

‘Then he told me about his crossing to Europe and that the sea boiled and prevented his ship from landing at Calais for two full days.’

Hannah takes a breath.

‘Then he spoke about his time in Paris running errands for a baker, a cooper and a master printer until his French was sufficient to convince the master printer to buy his apprenticeship.’

‘I didn’t know he had French.’

‘It was so-so, he said.’ Anne straightens her back. ‘We didn’t talk about the reformation.’



‘He told you more than he ever told me.’

‘He said...’ Anne looks at her hands.

‘What did he say?’

‘He said that he doesn’t talk to his wife because she will not talk to him.’

The chair creaks when Hannah shifts her weight. ‘That’s what he said?’

‘He said the time for talk between the two of you had passed.’

‘That time,’ Hannah says, ‘never existed.’ She rubs her neck. Her skin feels tight and hot. ‘And this night of talk and wine loosened William’s papist resolve?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nothing else?’

‘What else? No. No! Nothing like that. He agreed to print the pamphlet and I never saw him again. Christopher told me he would not print another. He was disappointed.’ Anne’s voice curls around the final phrase.

‘He abandoned you, too?’

Anne nods once, curtly.

‘Does this have something to do with what you’ve been writing?’ Hannah asks.

Anne nods once more.

‘Tell me.’

‘You won’t like it.’

‘I’ve fulfilled my yearly quota of swooning, so it’s unlikely you’ll be able to upset me further.’

A smile, faint, brief, appears on Anne’s face. ‘Very well.’ She sits up. ‘Last year, I was arrested and examined on charges of heresy.’ She examines Hannah’s face. ‘You already know?’

‘Yes. I was...’

‘You were?’

Hannah shakes her head. 'It doesn't matter. You were arrested and examined...'

'And exiled from London. Returned to my brother,' she says. 'I exchanged one prison for another.'

'How did you escape?'

'Locks can be picked.'

'You know how to pick a lock?'

'In this instance, I made use of the housekeeper's keys.'

'I see.'

'But I was rejected on my return to the city.'

'This you've told me.'

'What I didn't say is that my friends believe I recanted to save myself from execution.'

'It's a reasonable assumption.'

'Is that what people on the street think?'

Hannah takes a breath before saying, quietly, 'People don't talk about you, Anne.'

'They don't?' Something passes across Anne's face too quickly for Hannah to identify. 'Why would they, I suppose.'

'And what you're writing?' Hannah prompts. 'You wish to declare that no such recantation took place?'

'It didn't.' Anne leans her palms against the edge of the desk. 'But I'm finding writing to be trickier than talking.'

'It is, for many people.'

'And it's not just the writing aspect. When I talk with a person, I can respond to *their* responses without having to predict what those responses might be. Because I cannot explain myself in person, I'm caught in this act of supposition and soothsaying. It's maddening.'

‘Perhaps a change in approach would be useful.’

‘What sort of change?’

‘Pretend that I am the people to whom you’re writing.’

‘Pretend you are Joan Boucher and Christopher Lytton and the rest?’

‘Yes.’

‘You aren’t.’

‘Pretend, I said.’

‘*Can* you pretend to be a reformer? What’s your best Protestant façade?’

‘You can offer me direction if I falter.’ Hannah leans forward.

Anne hesitates. ‘A moment ago you were slumped across the floorboards.’

‘Oh well.’ Hannah raises her eyebrows. ‘What is the first thing you wish to say to your friends?’

‘Friends.’ Anne sighs through the word. ‘My *friends*. I wish to tell you that my faith is true.’

‘Of course it isn’t. For what other reason might you have been released?’

Anne blinks at her. ‘I’d prefer less hostility, please.’

Hannah smiles, then touches her lips to put them back into place.

Anne says, ‘This is my response: because my faith is unshakeable. Since you—Joan, Christopher, John, Joseph, Mary—since you have known me...Have you ever known me to...My faith is unshakeable. I am made strong by the grace of God. My faith is constant and I am, and always have been, a fast and true member of Christianity. My persistence of faith is, is...’

‘Stop. Stop.’ Hannah waves a hand through the air to clear Anne’s muddle of words.

‘I’ve never had to prove my faith before,’ Anne says. ‘Explaining the tenets of belief is fairly simple by comparison.’

‘You keep circling around the same point.’

‘What else is there to say? It’s the truth. I *am* faithful. And my faith has withstood earlier trials of life. I’ve *never* recanted—’

Your friends may say, *But this trial was different.*’

‘It was different, but I didn’t recant.’

‘If you didn’t recant, why weren’t you executed?’

‘A technicality,’ Anne says. ‘The woman who stood against me didn’t respond to the court’s summons. With no witnesses to my heresy,’ Anne ingrains the words with spite, ‘it could only be alleged that I was a heretic. It’s not enough to commit a person to the pyre.’

Hannah swallows away the taste of metal and blood from her tongue.

Anne eyes her. ‘This is too much for you.’

‘I’m well.’

‘You’re pale.’

‘I’m always pale. I work indoors.’ Hannah wipes her face. ‘Perhaps a different strategy is needed since you seem to have exhausted the one you’ve been working on.’

‘What sort of strategy?’

‘Simply tell them what happened. Dispense of the gesticulations about faith and go through the examination methodically. What were you asked? How did you respond? What were the circumstances of your release?’

‘Show that I was faithful, rather than tell them.’

‘To show is to tell.’

Anne fiddles with a quill. ‘Questions and answers?’

‘I’m presuming these were the main components of the examination?’

‘Somewhat.’ Anne pushes the quill away. ‘I don’t remember all that I was asked. I can’t tell you the detail of the questions—some were expansive. I can’t even recall the entirety of my own responses.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ Hannah says. ‘If your faith is unshakeable—’

‘It is.’

‘Then if you were examined tomorrow, you’d likely answer similarly as you did last year.’

‘Possibly.’

‘It doesn’t need to be an exact recollection, just one that implies the truth.’ Hannah picks up a quill. ‘Let’s start things off.’

‘You want to be my scribe?’

‘I’m a quicker writer than you.’

Anne removes her cap. Hannah can feel her eyes on her hand as she dips the quill tip into ink and begins to write.

‘I haven’t said anything yet,’ Anne says.

‘I’m writing the date of the examination.’

‘March, 1545.’

Hannah nods.

‘To begin: my faith is unshakeable.’

‘No.’ Hannah lifts the quill. ‘None of these religious gesticulations. Start with the first question.’

‘Shouldn’t there be some sort of introduction?’

‘Very well.’ Hannah taps off excess ink and writes,

*To satisfy your expectation (says she) this was my examination in the year of our Lord 1545 and in the month of March.*

Anne says, 'I'd never say something like that.'

'What would you say?'

'I don't know. Not that.'

'I can change it.'

Anne taps two fingers on the desk. 'Add *good people* after *expectation*.'

Hannah looks up at her. 'Good people, these friends that abandoned you?'

'I need to be contrite.'

'Why? You say you've done nothing wrong.'

'I haven't.'

'So, why...?'

'Others may see the letter. I don't want to seem...aggressive.'

'You want to portray yourself as a victim?'

'I *am* a victim of papist cruelty,' Anne says. 'Technically.'

Hannah dips the quill back into the ink and adds Anne's correction. 'Good people,' she murmurs. 'These good people like to be entertained.' She remembers the slaughterer. 'They like a burning. *Can* you be a victim?' she asks. 'Shall we have you swoon and blush and weep?'

'I don't want to be that sort of victim,' Anne says. 'Make me steadfast but don't make me the aggressor.'

'Is that true to the event?'

Anne dips her head from side to side. 'Yes. No.' She shrugs. 'I was afraid, but we don't need to say that. I'd rather be steadfast.'

'Like a martyr.'

'I'm not a martyr,' Anne says. She gently pinches Hannah's arm. 'Feel that? Not a martyr.'

Hannah pulls her hand away. 'I stand corrected. It is somewhat contradictory, to be contrite and steadfast.'

'Perhaps contrite isn't the right word.' Anne chews her lip. 'Nor victim, either, not in the swooning, blushing, weeping sense.'

'We can return to it,' Hannah says.

Anne nods.

'Who examined you?'

'Christopher something.'

'You don't remember the name of the man who examined you?'

'Hannah, he was one of many.' She blows air out from her cheeks. 'Dare. Christopher Dare.'

'You're sure?'

'No, but I think it was him.'

'You think?'

'The others can correct me if I'm wrong.'

Hannah hesitates. 'I suppose we can correct it later.'

'We can.'

'And what was this man's first question?'

'It was something about Bibles and masses.'

While Anne's eyes read through the air, Hannah writes,

*To satisfy your expectation, good people, this was my examination in the year of our Lord 1545 and in the month of March. First Christopher Dare examined me at Sadler's Hall, he being one of the quest, and asked...*

‘Why do you say that you would rather read five lines in the Bible than hear five masses in the temple?’ Anne looks at Hannah. ‘More or less.

‘And what did you say?’

‘I probably rolled my eyes.’

‘Let’s leave that out.’

‘Agreed. I would have said something like, *Yes, of course—*’

Hannah, writing, omits *of course*.

*‘and not for the fault of either the Epistle or the Gospel but because one edifies me and the other does nothing at all. Paul says...I need my bible.’* She’s up in an instant and gone, a swish of linen and hair.

Hannah writes,

*I confessed I said no less. Not for the dispraise of either the Epistle or Gospel, but because the one did greatly edify me, and the other nothing at all. As saint Paul...*

‘As saint Paul witnesses in chapter fourteen of his first Epistle to the Corinthians,’ Anne says, newly returned, slightly out of breath, *‘If the trump giveth an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself to battle?’*

‘Did you have a bible with you during the examination?’

‘I did.’

‘You don’t have it memorised, then?’

‘Hannah, who has the time to memorise the bible *and* gospel? I know certain sections. Everyone knows certain sections.’

‘You knew this section.’



‘No, actually. But I’ve been thinking about it. If I’d recalled the link quick enough I would have indeed quoted Saint Paul to Christopher whatever-his-name-is at the time.’

Hannah hovers the quill above the paper.

‘Put it in, Hannah.’

‘By the book?’

‘Word for word.’

‘Now you *are* someone who has time to memorise the bible and gospel.’

‘Lucky me.’ Anne waits while Hannah writes.

‘What next?’

‘Secondly, he laid unto my charge that I should say *If an ill priest ministered, it was the devil and not God.*’

‘Did he?’

‘Yes. I remember this one clearly.’

‘And your response? A roll of the eyes once more?’

‘Don’t put that in, Hannah.’

‘I won’t.’

‘I’ve never said *If an ill priest* and the rest—I mean, I’m sure I have, but for the sake of my, my...’

‘Victimhood?’

‘It really isn’t the right word. But, yes, for the sake of my *victimhood*, I’ve never said it. Instead, I would have said, *Whoever he were, this ill priest which ministered to me, his ill conditions could not hurt my faith. In spite of him, I’d receive never the less the body and blood of Christ.* I have said this. Did you hear me say this in Fleet Street?’

‘No. I stopped listening quite early.’

‘I probably said it.’

‘It’s in your repertoire.’

‘Exactly.’

Hannah writes Anne’s words, reciting them as she goes.

‘You have a good memory,’ Anne says.

‘Alas.’

Anne continues, ‘Thirdly. Thirdly.’

‘You *don’t* have a good memory.’

‘Oh he probably asked me some other stupid, dross question about the sacrament.

He *did* ask what I say of confession.’

‘What do you say?’

‘I say as saint James says: *Every man should tell the other his faults and pray, the other to pray for him.* This I *do* know.’ She opens the bible anyway. ‘Or not quite. *Every man ought to acknowledge his faults to the other, and the one to pray for the other.* It gets my tongue, this one,’ she says.

‘Close enough.’

‘It ties it in knots.’

‘It *is* the bible.’

‘Is that why you don’t want to read it?’

‘I never said that.’

‘But you don’t?’

‘You need not concern yourself with my faith, Anne.’

‘I concern myself with every person’s faith.’

Hannah sighs. ‘Let’s concern ourselves with only your faith tonight. What might the fourth question have been?’

‘Something about the King’s book. *What do you say to it?*’

‘You’ve read it?’

‘No.’ Anne’s *no* has a range to it: a *no*, a *yes*, a *maybe*, a *I won’t be pressed to tell*.  
‘I never saw it. Then I was asked if I had the spirit of God in me.’ Anne widens her eyes.  
‘I said yes, of course. But don’t write *Of course*.’

*Fourthly, he asked if I had the spirit of God in me. I answered that I had.*

‘Add,’ Anne says, ‘*If I had not, I was but a reprobate and a castaway.*’

‘Did you say that?’

‘No, but I would have meant it.’

‘Are you sure *reprobate* and *castaway* will be consistent with the tone of your characterisation?’

‘I think we’ll be able to get away with it,’ Anne says.

Hannah writes, then flexes her fingers.

‘Let’s stop here,’ Anne says. ‘I can finish the rest myself.’

## Chapter Nineteen

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The day is long and dry. They're at that part of an order when the end is within sight but not yet within reach. The angles of the types cut into Hannah's skin. She blows on her fingers to cool the sharp rawness; it helps for a moment, but the pain returns. Anne has taken to doing the same, though she turns in her seat and hides her hands behind her turned body

The chatter from before is gone. No one speaks unless to say something necessary. Agnes has let her mind go. Sometimes, when Hannah glances across the workshop, she sees thoughts play across her face: a furrowing of her brow, a tightening of her lips. No one gives her their attention. Robert wipes sweat from his forehead and nose. Toby loosens his shirt. The Lukes battle their way through cramping muscles and the strain of the levers. The wood creaks and sighs. Even the presses are ready for an end.

At midday, Hannah takes her bowl of pottage and hard, moulding bread to the office. She picks off the green spots and drops them into a small pile on the table. The pottage is overcooked, the vegetables falling apart in the weak, thin broth. There is a hint of rosemary, but the taste is overpowered by eggy, sodden cabbage leaves. She drops her spoon into the bowl. Liquid drops onto the wood. She wipes them aside with her sleeve.

The Press shudders as it does when the front door is closed with force. The glass trembles in place. Raised voices: *Why is this yet to be done?* Agnes. Hannah looks through the open office door as the housekeeper passes down the hallway, fighting with the strings of her cap. When Alice appears, Agnes snaps, 'Leave me alone.' *Wretch*. There's bite in her words, thorns. Alice turns and stalks back into the kitchen.

At work's end, the kitchen is silent. Alice slices bread into awkward angles, thick wedges and paper-thin slivers. Agnes aggressively stokes the fire. When she returns the poker to its hook, it clangs against the stone mantle. The pressers don't talk. Even Robert

is holding his tongue. Weariness, the remnants of illness and the hours of the day, have dulled his nerve. He sits back in his seat, arms crossed, staring into nothing. The elder Luke helps Alice carry a steaming pot to the table. Toby leans away to give them room. His eyes are swollen and red. The younger Luke takes over the bread knife. Anne sits at the head of the table, as straight as a broom. Every so often, she manipulates her back and shoulders.

‘How much longer now?’ Alice asks the elder Luke. She hasn’t spoken anything other than *Yes’m*, *No’m* to Hannah since that night. Hannah’s heard her crying; the evidence is the redness of her eyes.

Anne has told her, ‘You’ll feel better soon.’

But Alice shrugs her away.

Agnes keeps her eyes on the girl and Robert within her sight.

Hannah watches Alice scoop stew into bowls, never dropping a lick of liquid.

‘A few more days,’ the elder Luke says.

They may complete the order in time. They may not. The stress of it sits in Hannah’s stomach heavier than the soggy vegetables.

‘Two or three or...?’

‘Three,’ Luke says.

Could be three. Might be four. It has to be three.

‘What’s after that, mistress?’ Luke asks Hannah. ‘What’s to be our next commission?’

They have one more order in the ledgers, the only other order that hasn’t been cancelled.

‘Gaius Plinius the Younger,’ Hannah says.

‘The letters?’

‘Yes.’

‘We’ve printed those before,’ Luke says.

‘It’s a shame the frames aren’t still set to type,’ Anne says. Everyone looks at her. More quietly, eyes lowering, she says, ‘I know why they are not.’ She dips her spoon into the stew. It’s too hot still, but she pretends that it isn’t.

Hannah glances across table. The younger Luke is staring into his bowl as if it isn’t there. Toby sits on his crossed-knees and is tearing bread into crumbs. Even the elder Luke is despondent his face drawn and pale.

‘We’re working to deadline,’ Hannah says. They all turn to her. ‘We’ve done well and we will continue to do well.’

Agnes stirs her bowl. The spoon grates against the pewter sides. She pulls apart her portion of bread. ‘This’s tough,’ she says to no one in particular. ‘Over kneaded.’

‘But fresh,’ the elder Luke says.

‘Bitter,’ Agnes continues, smelling the stew.

Alice grips her spoon and looks away.

The elder Luke positions his chair closer to Hannah’s. ‘She’s upset,’ he whispers, nodding at Agnes.

‘More so than the rest of us?’

‘There’s never been peace between the two of you, not really.’

‘Do you know why?’

‘You don’t? I presumed there’d been a disagreement.’

‘There have been many disagreements,’ Hannah whispers. ‘But not one to start the rest off.’

‘She’s always been, since I’ve known her...’ he lifts and see-saws a flattened hand in the air.

‘Unstable?’

‘Changeable, certainly.’

‘She doesn’t trust me. Sometimes I think she may hate me.’

‘I think sometimes she hates all of us.’

Hannah stirs her stew and sighs. ‘I’ve had enough of this.’

‘Of the soup or our housekeeper?’

‘Both, in varying degrees.’

‘You know, there was a time I thought of you and Agnes as not wholly dissimilar.’

Hannah looks at him.

‘Changeable, I mean,’ Luke continues.

‘When you first came to the Carew Press you seemed...’ He searches for the word, ‘Sad.’

‘I was.’

‘And barricaded, fortified, as if you were wearing plate armour.’

‘I suppose I was.’

‘Why? The master said you’d welcomed the marriage.’

‘“Welcome” is a large and broad word.’ Hannah dips her spoon back into her bowl then glances across the room. Robert is talking at Toby, something about levers and pulleys. Agnes is already done with her food and is picking vegetable rinds from the floor, muttering words against Alice as she does. Alice stares out the window and ignores them all. Anne, her head on her palm, has her eyes closed. Hannah says, ‘I needed to leave my father’s house.’

‘You loved your father.’

‘It wasn’t about him. Or rather...He was unwell and my brother—’ She sighs. ‘He took over the running of the Rondel Press when my father was unable to continue running it himself. Thom, though, he isn’t a natural manager. He likes to drink and gamble and supervise, in a very loose sense. He makes bad choices and he won’t listen to advice. He doesn’t learn. He’s never learned.’

‘Master William disliked your brother.’

Hannah looks at him. ‘He did? He told you that?’

Luke nods. ‘He did. You’ll remember the first time he went to Cambridge to meet you.’

‘I do, quite clearly, yes.’

‘He was nervous.’

‘William? Of what? He looked severe. Did he tell you this too?’

‘He didn’t need to, I could see it in the way he was. A lot of the way he was...it was nervousness. Some people drink it away. Perhaps that’s your brother’s motivation—’

‘No,’ Hannah interrupts. She lowers her voice. ‘Thom drinks for pleasure, not for any other reason.’

‘William drank for pleasure too. But his nervousness...he did as you do: he put his armour on. Unlike you, he never took it off. It hardened him after a time, although there were still things that found the chinks. Like you.’

‘Why was he nervous?’

‘Your father was a master printer, and the son of a master printer. And you are the daughter of a master printer and the granddaughter of a master printer. William was the son of a blacksmith. It’s the type of discrepancy that can find the chinks.’

‘We weren’t imperious.’

‘You needn’t have been. He went to Cambridge ready to be attacked: he would’ve taken any slight as a sign of assault.’

‘He was ridiculous, then,’ Hannah says. She rests a hand across the base of her neck. Her pulse feels strong and fast against her palm. ‘Why did he dislike Thom?’

‘He didn’t say.’

‘Then how did you know?’



‘It was the way he said his name.’

‘Like it was some sort of dead animal?’

‘Those are your words.’

‘I’ve spoken his name that way before. Never with William, though.’

‘It might’ve made a difference between the two of you. A point of commonality.’

‘Maybe.’

Luke pulls the crust from his bread and dips it into the stew. ‘You came here to escape your brother?’

‘We—my father and I—we didn’t know how long he had left. The pain...Everything had grown worse. Thom...he...’ She bites her lip. ‘We anticipated that on inheriting the Press after my father’s death, he would marry me off to whoever he wished without my consent or consideration or opinion. It seemed the better option to choose myself.’

‘Do you regret the choice?’

Hannah nods. ‘I regret the time I spent here while my father was still living. I regret that William barred me from the workshop.’

‘That was his nervousness,’ Luke says. ‘He was wrong to keep you out.’

‘He was and now we’re paying for it.’

‘Not everything is his fault.’

‘No, I know, but its difficult to see beyond what *is* his fault to what *isn’t*.’

Luke rests a hand on her shoulder. It’s the first time anyone has touched her properly in months. The wight of his hand, the warmth of it through her dress...She pulls away and looks to her food. Luke smiles briefly, then lets his hand fall back to the table.

## Chapter Twenty

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‘I need to tell you something.’

Hannah’s eyes flick to Anne then back to her galley.

Anne leans in closer. ‘It’s important.’ Her voice is low. She glances up at the pressers then back to Hannah.

‘Tell me,’ Hannah says.

‘Last night, someone came into my bedroom.’ Anne’s voice is barely a whisper.

‘Who?’

‘I don’t know. It was dark. The shutters were closed. Whoever it was had a candle but the light was faint and fractured, half hidden behind her hand.’

‘Her?’

‘Her weight was light on the floorboards.’

‘It could’ve been Toby.’ Hannah glances across to the apprentice as he clips a sheet of paper onto the line.

‘It wasn’t.’

This is a new Anne. The tautness of her lips, the way she holds her jaw, the slight tremor in her fingers. No seams, no edges, no cracks. Hannah follows her darting eyes to Agnes. The housekeeper reads ink across a galley of words, her back half turned to the typesetters’ bench.

‘Tell me what happened, exactly as it happened.’

Anne breathes her words. ‘I didn’t hear the door open but I heard movement and saw the light. The person, whoever it was, opened the chest at the foot of the bed and rummaged inside.’

‘Do you keep anything in the chest?’

‘No, nothing. Then she searched the wardrobe. There’s nothing to be found in there except my cloak and shoes.’

‘I recall you brought a bag with you.’

Anne nods almost imperceptibly. She sets two more letters into her galley. ‘To carry a few small possessions. A bible, a belt, a few coins. My ink and quills.’

‘An English bible?’ Hannah checks her voice, which has risen in volume. ‘A bible in the English tongue?’

‘Yes.’

‘You should burn it,’ she says, under her breath. ‘Unless it was taken?’ Hannah leans just far enough away to see Anne’s face.

‘It wasn’t taken and I won’t burn it.’

‘We have bibles here, we’ve printed them in the past.’

‘Your bibles are in Latin, a language which, if you recall, I do not read.’ Anne’s throat trips over the whispering.

‘I can translate for you.’

‘Like a priest.’

‘I’m hardly a priest.’

‘I like to make up my own mind.’

‘You trust Tyndale or whoever wrote your English version.’

‘Tyndale is a learned scholar of the reformed faith. Let’s not argue over this.’

‘If English bibles are found here, it will put us all in danger.’

‘I appreciate that.’

This Hannah ignores. ‘What happened then?’

Anne slots three letters into her galley. ‘She checked shelves and the cupboard and then she looked under the bed, which is where I keep the bag. Beneath my head,’ she adds.

‘She found it?’

‘Yes. I heard the buckles open, and the contents removed one by one, then returned.’

‘All of them returned?’

‘Yes, the Bible was returned.’

‘And the coins?’

‘Yes, all three of them.’

‘Up close, could you make out more of the woman’s features?’

Agnes or Alice? Grey-brown hair or fair? Slender weight or thickening waist? Not Alice. It wouldn’t be Alice. Would it? But why Agnes?

‘I’d closed my eyes to maintain the appearance of sleep.’

‘She didn’t suspect you were awake?’

‘She might’ve done, though I have no way to know for certain. Her movements didn’t suggest she knew.’

‘Did she smell of anything notable?’

‘The usual. Unwashed linens, lavender, rosemary, cabbage.’

‘And her height?’

‘Hard to say.’

‘And then she left?’

‘Yes.’

Anne repositions herself.

Hannah slots a letter into her frame, then looks up at Agnes. The housekeeper is wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. The elder Luke catches Hannah’s eye. She shakes her head and he returns to his work. Agnes turns, briefly, to look at Anne, missing, by the barest of moments, that Hannah’s eyes had been upon her.

## Chapter Twenty One

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Hannah watches Agnes. She watches her leave her bedroom in the morning and descend the stairs; she watches her at the hearth, at the kitchen table, when she works the ink balls and hefts the levers. She waits for her to climb upstairs to her bed and then she lingers, waiting. The housekeeper does not reappear.

## Chapter Twenty Two

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Agnes has caught the sun. Her forehead is tinted red, a soft blush of colour that makes her itch.

Hannah glances out the kitchen window into the garden. The sun has moved on to the other side of the house. They always miss it: while they set type and work the presses, the sun illuminates the herb beds. When they break for the evening, it's long gone, sunk behind the thatched roofs.

A scrabbling of feet draws her attention. She looks up into the rafters but there's nothing there, just dried rosemary and cobwebs.

The hinges creak when Hannah pushes open the window.

A sparrow sits on the garden wall, hopping across the bricks and catching insects. It flaps its wings but doesn't come any closer.

Agnes's linen nets dissect the air.

## Chapter Twenty Three

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‘How much longer?’ Toby asks.

‘Ten days,’ the elder Luke replies.

## Chapter Twenty Four

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‘And today?’

‘Can’t anyone count in this house?’ Agnes snaps. She whips a kitchen linen against the table and stalks upstairs.



## Chapter Twenty Five

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Someone has left a candle burning in the kitchen. Hannah pushes through the door to see Agnes at the table with her head resting on her outstretched arms. The smell of dry tallow smoke threads through the air. The candle itself is nearly down to its last dregs of wax, but it's dangerously close to Agnes' cap. The housekeeper doesn't move. Hannah crosses the room on silent feet and moves the candle further away from her sleeping form. As she does so, she notices a sheaf of paper half caught under Agnes' arm. The title makes Hannah's stomach twist. *Wanted*.

She tugs the paper out from under Agnes' weight.

*Wanted*

*For failing to respond to summons*

*Anne Kyme*

*Also known as Anne Askew, of Lincolnshire*

*On charges of heresy*

*Information that leads to her capture will be rewarded to the sum of—*

The sum of—

Hannah presses her hand into the base of her neck. Her pulse beats against her palm.

## Chapter Twenty Six

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A candle is alight in Anne's room; the flame flutters under the door. Hannah can hear Anne's voice within, muffled. The floorboards creak under Hannah's feet. The muttering stops. Prayer, no doubt. Hannah shuts her bedroom door and changes into her night clothes. The linens smell musty, used, almost oily beneath her fingers. There isn't enough water to wash as often as usual. There aren't enough hands to clean and sweep and cook and sew, not while Agnes is in the press, not while they are a house of eight. It's too large a house. She can feel the gaps and the empty spaces. The air is thinner, the breeze carries further and with greater strength. It'll be worse when the order is sent away with Cartwright and the boxes of manuscript pages are removed from the workshop and the hallway. The downstairs arteries will echo again. Voices will bounce around the house. And when the presses are still, any whisper will be a shout.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

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10th June, 1546

*Mistress Hannah Carew,*

*I have been made aware that the Carew Press is without a master and that your husband has passed into God's hands. I had been in correspondence with him in late April concerning the printing of a Latin text: the letters of Pliny the younger. I had yet to pay the binder but my name may be in your husband's records. As a courtesy, I wish to inform you that I will no longer continue with this order.*

*God bless,*

*Roland Sidney, Book Trader*

Hannah crushes the letter in her hand then rests her head on her arm. She'd had to read some parts three, four times to settle the words, which kept shifting into *Wanted, Anne Askew, Charges of heresy, to the sum of—*

To the sum of enough money to house and feed an ageing housekeeper when she leaves her place of employment. And a journey, perhaps, to rejoin family. Agnes has never said where she's from only that she travelled to London at the age of twenty. She has a sister somewhere, and a brother-in-law, a nephew and two nieces. Is there anyone else? Markham. Agnes Markham. Her father's name or her husband's? *Hang the man who gave me that name*, she's said. *Hang him, gut him, sew his skin into footballs and kick him 'til he bursts.*

The office is as hot as a forge and dry as tinder with the windows closed and the shutters bolted. At any moment, sparks may cross from hearth to desk, from candlewicks

to accounts and set the whole place aflame. Sweat dampens the back of her neck. The fabric of her chemise clings to her skin. Still, she starts to feed discarded edits into the grate, watching as the corners curl red and the black ink flares. There's money on the desk in neat piles. Wages, expenses, the cost of a boat or a coach and enough for bread and ale along the way. She doesn't suppose which way Agnes will go when she leaves, only that she will. Perhaps the roads will be as flat and straight as those to Cambridge. At least it's summer and the snow is long gone, the ice, the floodwater. June already. She should've known by the lack of apples but she hasn't noticed as their quantity decreased. She'd had her mind on other lessenings, like the honey and the paper and the orders and coin. 1547 will be different. There will be less of a lessening, perhaps even an increase. She'll sell one of the presses—not the one bought with her dowry: that one's hers and will be hers forever. It'll be moved to the middle of the workshop like an island. Something to be seen from all angles; something to be walked around and admired. A reminder, too: *Yes, we still print here, despite the spring of 1546*. The rooms upstairs will need filling. Not with pressers: lodgers. Alice can keep her room but the Lukes can separate and have space to themselves. Toby can take Agnes' room until he's taller. The others, Williams's, Jonathan's and Robert's, can be leased. When printing orders dwindle or if it's the betwixt time comes again, the Carew Press will not be without other avenues for profit.

A knock at the door disturbs her plans. She scrunches up Roland Sidney's letter and drops it into the fire. 'Enter.'

The younger Luke steps into the room. He takes up a position in front of the desk, hands by his side, gaze level. He doesn't comment about the heat of the room, though his eyes do briefly flick to the grate. When she tells him to sit, he respectfully refuses.

'I'm not going to be happy with whatever it is you're here to say, am I?' Hannah asks.

Luke removes his cap. 'I wanted to tell you as soon as I made a decision.'

It really is the betwixt time.

‘You’ve been offered employment in another Press.’

‘Yes, mistress.’

‘Whose?’

‘Harrison’s.’

‘I can’t fault you on that. He’s an excellent printer and a good employer.’

‘He needs a new foreman.’

‘And you’re his man.’

‘I am.’

‘I need a foreman, too.’

‘Luke is your foreman.’

Hannah leans back in her chair. ‘What use is a foreman without anyone to manage?’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Don’t be sorry. I understand and I don’t blame you for seeking greater security elsewhere. But you could tell me if there’s any way for me to convince you to stay. Though, to be realistic, the only incentive I can offer is an increase in pay and at the moment that isn’t possible.’

‘There isn’t anything, mistress.’

Hannah lets out her breath. ‘Would you stay if our finances were in a better way?’

Luke turns his cap in his hands. ‘I cannot say. It’s something I’ve thought about. Perhaps, but the future is wide and it’s possibilities widen when a woman takes charge.’

‘And possibilities can be bad as well as good.’

‘That is so.’

‘How did you secure your new position? Did you leave the Press?’

‘I’ve not set foot beyond these walls, mistress. Agnes carried my initial enquiry to Harrison and then one of our neighbour children carried the rest of our correspondence.’ Luke opens his mouth, pauses a moment, and then says, ‘I believe that Robert may, however, have broken the quarantine, also with the intention of finding a new position.’

Hannah laughs, a lone exhalation of breath. ‘That saves me from a potentially awkward conversation,’ she says. ‘I already had the intention of letting him go.’

‘He’s not right for the Carew Press,’ Luke says. ‘He’s not the right shape. The master should’ve let him go years before, but he valued loyalty and Robert was always loyal to him.’

‘It’s easy to confuse loyalty to one’s income with loyalty to one’s employer. Harrison isn’t taking him, too, is he?’

‘No. Middleton.’

‘Middleton. You know, William’s lawyer, who I suppose is my lawyer, wishes me to marry Middleton.’

‘I wouldn’t, mistress.’

‘I won’t. When do you leave?’

‘When the Cartwright order is complete.’

‘Good man.’

## Chapter Twenty Eight

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‘Where’s Robert?’ Hannah asks when she enters the workshop.

The elder Luke removes his cap. ‘He’s gone, mistress.’

‘Gone.’ Her voice is flat. Of course he’s gone. On the final day: he’s gone.

‘Yes.’

Hannah glances at the younger Luke. He shakes his head and looks away.

Anne asks, ‘What do you mean, he’s gone?’

‘He’s broken quarantine to take up employment elsewhere, mistress Kyme,’ the elder Luke says.

‘He said this to you?’ Anne asks. ‘Hannah?’

‘I suspected.’

‘What does that mean for the order?’

‘It means we work as if there’s a tempest behind us. Toby: you mix the inks. Let’s start. No delays, anyone.’

She should’ve mixed the inks herself. Toby’s movements are brusque and heavy. He adds too much powder to the bowl, then too much water. Globules of thin, grey-tinged liquid splatter onto the floor and across his apron.

Hannah takes the bowl in hand and directs him to Robert’s vacant place. ‘Change your apron. Don’t put it there,’ she adds when he tosses it over a stool. ‘Hang it on one of the hooks.’ She sifts more powder into the bowl and works the mixture until it’s smooth and fluid, free of lumps and streaks of colour.

The younger Luke takes his share of ink and begins to knead the ink balls together.

Out of the corner of her eye and before she can stop him, Hannah sees Toby pry at the press lever, pulling it so far until it catches his weight then letting it go. A loud crack breaks the air when the patten, suddenly released, jumps up a hands breadth. Toby

stumbles back into the wall. ‘Don’t ever do that again.’ Hannah’s voice catches in her throat, raised, an almost shout. ‘Never again.’

‘The master’d told you before,’ the elder Luke says. ‘You can crack a press in two doing that.’

‘Can you buy the mistress another?’ the younger Luke asks.

Toby half turns, half turns back. He opens his mouth to speak but Luke cuts him off, ‘You can’t, so don’t.’

The elder Luke rests a hand on Toby’s shoulder but the boy shrugs it off.

‘Are we ready to start?’ Hannah asks. ‘Again.’

‘Yes,’ the younger Luke says.

They begin.

By midday, they should be finished, but they aren’t. The tick of frustration, of an order almost complete but not quite, works its way through limbs and minds. Arms and legs are shook out, necks manipulated, backs worked. When the bells toll twelve, the younger Luke drops the ink balls into their bucket from too great a height. Ink dashes his apron and he swears, the first time Hannah has ever heard him swear.

*Mary Mother.*

Toby jumps on his mistake: ‘Can you buy the mistress another?’ Luke raises his hand and Toby stumbles back, untouched.

‘*Enough,*’ Hannah snaps.

They pause when the bells toll ten, but only for a moment. Hannah stands by the window and looks out onto the Fleet. She watches the Middleton Press and the frequent movement of people in and out of the building. Books being collected. Orders being delivered. Paper. Ink powder in sacks. Money in purses. Long-term city patrons and booksellers whose reach is as far as the Levant. He sees her, Middleton himself, and lifts a hand in greeting. She should return the gesture: it’s all peace on the Fleet. Competition



is masked behind goodwill and a dash of neighbourly encouragement, but her hand is heavy.

It's not just the Middleton Press. There's the whole of the Fleet, busier than Saint Brides on Sundays, but everyday, and the Carew Press, silent, vacant, dead. People glance at the door, at the straw cross and glance away. Some continue to look and she can see their lips moving, working out figures, how much for the building, the business, can they afford it, how much to loan, which lawyer to hire, which master printer's daughter to marry, which master printer's daughter's dowry to acquire and spend. When Middleton waves again, she steps back to the typesetter's bench and continues slotting letters into the galley.

## Chapter Twenty Nine

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The bells toll midnight. Hannah needs to go to bed. She's slept, briefly, fitfully and dreamt of a woman with loose hair and a fire. She says, *Bring me a cloak. Bring me a kirtle.*

Her neck hurts from the angle of her body: two legs resting atop the desk with her back pushed into the corner of the chair. She moves her hair, loose from her cap, from where it's trapped between her head and the wood. It smells like sweat and old lavender and dust. She thinks of the river in Cambridge and what a river down Fleet Street could do.

She cannot sleep here.

She needs to be flat.

She needs to leave the office, but the stairs feel too many, too steep.

She needs to...

She needs to tell Anne she can't...

The candle gutters. She can hear a rustling from somewhere above. The shadows have a depth to them that can suck out a person's soul. Black, like burnt charcoal. Nothing should be up there but oak supports and bunched herbs—or a bird perhaps, a sparrow, trapped inside when the physician ordered the window bolted. She listens for the rustle of a wing, the tip-tapping of tiny, raw-boned toes. A creak breaks the air. She looks up.

Anne slides through the door.

Not a sparrow. Perhaps something else. Something with talons.

'Still awake?' Anne asks.

'Yes.' Hannah's voice is thick and groggy.

'I saw the light,' Anne says, 'as I was coming downstairs.'

'You are abroad a lot at night.'

'I've never needed much sleep.'

‘You’re fortunate.’ Hannah closes her eyes.

‘Are we not friends today, Hannah?’

‘Are we friends?’ Hannah asks. ‘Can we say that we are?’

‘Aren’t we?’

Hannah sits upright, slowly, gingerly, mindful of the stiffness in her back. ‘Is there another reason Joan Boucher and her kind won’t see you?’

‘What other reason might there be?’ Anne asks. She pulls the unoccupied chair closer to the desk and sits.

‘Think about it,’ Hannah says.

‘I don’t need to think about it. Why else would they reject me?’

‘You are wanted by the king’s authority.’

‘That was before. You know that.’

‘No. Now. You are wanted *now*.’

Anne’s eyebrows furrow. ‘I don’t know what you meant.’

Hannah can’t look at her but not looking at her feels awkward, almost painful, like hitting her elbow against a wall. ‘You are wanted for failing to respond to a summons. ‘Anne Kyme,’’ she quotes, ‘‘also known as Anne Askew of Lincolnshire, on charges of heresy.’’

Anne’s head tilts down and her mouth parts. She slumps in her chair. ‘I don’t understand what you’re saying.’

‘I saw a notice with those words. You are wanted on charges of heresy.’

‘That’s impossible. I’ve been in Lincolnshire. I’ve been here. How could...’

‘They are offering a reward for information that will lead them to your capture.’

‘How can I have committed heresy? When was the time?’ Anne sits straighter. ‘It’s impossible.’

‘It is possible.’

‘How do you know—a notice?’

‘Don’t ask me.’ *Please*. ‘Just believe that it’s true.’

‘On God, Hannah, I swear: I didn’t know. I *swear*.’

‘Would you still have come here if you had?’

Anne rubs her forehead with her palm.

‘You would have.’

‘I don’t know. I...I don’t know.’ There’s a hint of something in Anne’s voice, something tiny and fragile. Hannah wants her to breathe it out so she can snatch it from the air and toss it into the fire. She wants gossamer Anne. She wants the Anne who’ll stand on a fish crate and denigrate the crowd’s favoured priest. She wants conspiratorial Anne. The Anne with the smile and the *look* that says, *I have charge of this*. She wants the Anne sitting before her to break at her seams, to unstitch her hems, to remove her mask.

‘I can’t stay here. The pamphlet. Lytton. You’re too connected. It’s too dangerous.’ Still her voice is tiny and fragile, hollow, like a bird’s bones.

‘We never thought you might stay,’ Hannah whispers.

‘No.’

‘You should leave London.’

Anne says nothing.

‘You should return to Lincolnshire.’

Anne smiles faintly and touches each of her fingers to her thumbs.

‘You have family in Lincolnshire.’

‘Hannah,’ she says, looking up, ‘would you return to yours?’

## Part Four

# The Rondel Press

*June, 1546*

‘My female colleagues have suggested there is more to be considered of women in the early modern book trade, but let us remember the strictness of Tudor society. The realm of women was the realm of the domestic.’

Prof. Timothy Axton-Smith, 1901

*Printers of Fleet Street, 1520-1550: A Comprehensive Study*

‘Although Pickering and Carew encountered obstacles in their careers as a result of their gender, their achievements demonstrate that it was entirely possible for women to navigate the patriarchal world of London’s Fleet Street.’

Dr. Mina Abbot, 2003

*Hidden Women: Gender and the Early Modern Book Trade*

## Chapter One

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And then it's done. Agnes is the one who prints the final page. The elder Luke moves her forward, lifts her hands to the lever and stands back as the final sheet of paper is pressed with black ink.

For a moment there's silence.

'It's done,' Agnes murmurs.

'It's done,' Hannah says. 'It is done.'

Luke removes the sheet from the press and clips it to the line. Tomorrow, he and Toby will unpeg the remaining pages and add them to those already printed.

'With time to spare,' the younger Luke says.

'Just,' Agnes adds.

'*Just* is still time to spare.'

Agnes makes no cutting retort. She wipes her hands on her apron and manipulates her shoulders. At the lunch table, when Alice drops a bowl, she raises an eyebrow. No harsh word of chastisement; just a raised brow. When the elder Luke lifts the spoon to ladle stew into their bowls, Agnes commands him to pause and sprinkles a mixture of dried spices into the pot. She pours the ale. She cuts the bread. Luke finds Hannah's eye. She shakes her head. It was like this when William was master, to some degree. *That*, though, gives her pause.

In the afternoon, they spread the manuscripts across the parlour floorboards and begin to sew their spines. Anne sits with the Lukes, who take turns to show her how to guide the needle in and along and out. She sits with her nose barely an inch from the paper, lips held taut.

The needle feels sharp between Hannah's fingers and her fingers swollen and clumsy. She wipes her hand down her skirt, the stiff fibres rasping against her skin.

Tiredness has settled across her shoulders and into the back of her skull. When she leans over to tie a knot, her whole body droops. Still, she watches Anne and she watches Agnes. Every so often, Agnes casts a glance towards Anne, but only for the barest of moments before she returns to her sewing. Anne doesn't look up except to ask Luke a question.

Hannah barely glances at Ovid's words as she checks the pages are in the correct order. They blur into a mass of black ink. Until, that is, she hears a noise above, a rustle, a tip-tapping of raw-boned toes. She looks up, but there's nothing to see. Agnes looks up, too, and when she looks down their eyes meet for the barest of moments before the housekeeper returns to her work. When Hannah looks down, she catches a glimpse of words forming amongst the blur of ink. The words become lines, sentences she can read:

*Hope, that goddess, who, when all the other deities fled  
from sinful lands, was left alone on the god-forsaken earth.  
She lets the man digging ditches live, shackled with chains,  
believing that his limbs will be freed from the irons.  
She lets the shipwrecked sailor, who sees no land at all,  
still flail his arms about in the midst of the waves.  
Often the skill and care of the doctors fails someone,  
but hope will not die though the pulse grows faint.*

When the bells chime eight and Agnes steps out to the kitchen, Hannah follows her.

'I just need something to moisten my throat,' Agnes says, looking back over her shoulder. 'You've no need to scold me.'

'I have no complaint about your work,' Hannah says. She closes the kitchen door behind them. 'You are a skilled presser.'

Agnes scoffs.

‘You don’t believe me?’

‘It would be praise coming from Master William.’

‘It’s praise coming from me, Agnes.’ Hannah lowers herself into a chair. ‘Surely these weeks have proven to you that I’m at home in the workshop.’

‘Necessity demanded that of you. You might feel at home, but that doesn’t mean you’ve a right to be there.’

Agnes pours ale into a cup. Her hands, Hannah notices, are trembling.

‘No one has a right to be anywhere. We go where we can and sometimes we go where we should.’

‘I came to drink half a few mouthfuls of ale, not listen to philosophy.’

‘How about morality instead?’ Hannah indicates a stool. ‘Sit with me.’

‘I’ll stand if I’m about to be chided.’

‘I’m not here to chide you. Please sit.’

Agnes steps backwards until she can lean on the dresser. ‘What do you have to say?’

‘A few nights ago, I came into the kitchen and found you asleep at the kitchen table.’

‘Send me to the tower.’ Agnes raises her eyes to Heaven.

‘You had beside you a document. A poster.’

Agnes pinches her lips together then reaches into her apron pocket to remove a fold of paper. ‘You mean this?’ She opens it and hangs it in the air.

*Wanted*

*For failing to respond to summons*

*Anne Kyme*



*Also known as Anne Askew, of Lincolnshire*

*On charges of heresy*

Something cool and sharp runs down Hannah's neck. 'Put it away, Agnes.'

'Before someone sees it and realises we've been housing a wanted heretic?'

'Yes.'

'But you knew all along, didn't you? You knew that this woman Anne *Kyme* who came to our door forty-odd days ago is Anne *Askew* the market-square gossamer and heretic. Don't deny it. 'Gather some linens for Mistress Askew,' you said. You *knew* and you let her remain.'

'I knew who she was but not that there was a summons for her.'

'You knew she was a heretic.'

'I knew that she had recanted and had been returned to her family in Lincolnshire. This,' Hannah glances at the poster. 'I did not know about this.'

'Would you have let her stay if you did?'

No.

Yes. Would she?

*Did* she?

That Anne Askew is here at all feels unreal now. Seeing her set type and sew spines, eat at their old, chipped table and use their old, chipped pewter spoons, all of it is unreal. She's not in the accounts, Hannah's seen to that; she *might* be in Hannah's imagination, saved from a cold night so she, Hannah, might clear her conscience. Perhaps she's in her cousin's house. Perhaps she's drinking ale with her friend Joan Boucher. Perhaps she's already in prison. Perhaps she's on a boat bound for the Low Countries. Perhaps she doesn't exist at all.

Hannah says, 'She'd already been exposed to the sweat.'

‘So, like a good neighbour, like a good *Londoner*,’ Agnes scorns the name, ‘you let her stay.’

‘Yes.’

‘And put us all in danger.’

‘Agnes, I didn’t know about the summons.’ Hannah takes a breath. ‘I don’t want to fight with you.’

‘Why else follow me and raise the topic of morality?’

‘Are you going to tell the king’s authority that Anne is here and claim the reward? I know you’ve been leaving the house and I suspect I know why.’

‘This entire place is a sinking wherry but you refuse to admit it. Robert has already gone; Luke will be going as soon as the order is complete. All that’ll be left in this great house is you and an old printer and an apprentice and a maidservant. Is that a Press? Is that a business? It’s a wooden vessel with holes in the hull. I won’t wait for my nose to fill with water. I won’t.’

‘I want you to stay.’

‘Why? Why? You dislike me. I dislike you. We can barely exchange a word to one another without some sort of barb.’

‘We don’t have to like each other. You have a place here; the Carew Press is your home.’

‘That’s sentimental for you.’

‘What’s your alternative? A new position? They aren’t easy to find.’

‘Not that you would know. You’ve not worked a day like I have. You had your father and then your husband to support you. We don’t all have your luck. And no: I have not found another position. If I had, I wouldn’t be carrying this.’ She folds the poster in four and returns it to her pocket. ‘Out of eyesight, as requested.’

‘The reward is generous but it won’t keep you indefinitely.’

‘I’ll find a position before it’s spent.’

‘Will you, Agnes? I am not so naive to your situation as you believe. Forgive me, but you are older yourself and you are a housekeeper. People already have their housekeepers, and if they need a new one, they’ll promote a maid. You’re too old to be a maid and you’re too used to being a housekeeper to be back to swilling chamber pots and being told what to do. Stay here. Stay with us.’

‘A sinking wherry,’ Agnes says again, enunciating each word. ‘*A sinking wherry.*’

‘We’re still afloat.’

‘Soon you’ll be sunk.’

‘I have a bargain for you, if you’ll hear it.’

Agnes wipes her face. ‘I can’t stop you talking.’

‘If you stay, I will put aside from the Press the same amount of money offered for the reward. This won’t be a promise of money, it will be coins, in a bag, in a chest, for you. If we sink, I will give you that money, without quibble.’

‘What money? We have no orders and no clients have been sending us letters for commission. No one is knocking on the Carew Press door. And even if they do, the workshop is undermanned. You’d need to hire three more men at least to return it to its full working capacity. But I suppose *I* will remain in the workshop, that is your plant.’

‘You may remain in the workshop if you choose, but it isn’t compulsory.’

Agnes looks at her, disbelieving. ‘I don’t believe you. You’ll call on me even though you know I hate it.’

‘I won’t and that will be in your new contract of employment. Agnes Markham, you will work here as either housekeeper or printer or as both. It is up to you. I will not force you to do something you do not wish to do.’

‘And this money? Where will that come from?’

Hannah takes a breath. ‘I’m going to sell one of the presses.’

Agnes opens her mouth but says nothing. Then, quietly, ‘You will undo William’s work? His life’s work?’

‘His life is over, Agnes. And the rest of us will not suffer this destructive need to maintain his reputation. I’d rather eat. I’d rather sleep knowing that the roof over my head is not about to collapse in on itself.’ She pauses. ‘This is my offer to you. Money, set aside as assurance; a role of your choosing. And all I ask is that you burn the summons and do not act upon it. Regardless of what you think of Anne, a summons like that...it is her *life* that you have power over. Her *life*.’

Hannah rubs her forehead. ‘I don’t expect an answer from you now. Think about what I’ve said and tell me what you decide tomorrow when the doors are opened.

## Chapter Two

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That night, Hannah feels as if the walls of the house have disintegrated.

She can see the elder Luke sleeping in his bed.

She can see the younger Luke propped up on his elbow, reading by a slant of moonlight.

She can see Toby scowling, frowning, half-weeping, with his blanket pulled up to his nose.

She can see Alice clutching the front of her nightdress, turning, tossing, cursing the world and Hannah and Agnes.

She can see Agnes sitting on a stool, eyes closed, her body rocking to and fro. Two fingers tap on her thigh, counting out a song only she can hear. Hannah watches as she opens her eyes. Hannah watches as she moves to bed and blows out her candle.

Anne, though, she cannot see. She walks through the empty door frame into William's bedroom and everything is as it was when the parish clerk's men removed his body. The bed is stripped. The pillows are stacked on a chair. The air is stale. The floorboards are swept. All is silent. Hannah looks up at the beams, but there's nothing there.

By morning, the walls are rebuilt and solid beneath her fingertips.

## Chapter Three

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Alice has been waiting by the front door since first light. When Hannah sees her, she's sitting crossed-legged on the flagstones. Later she hugs her legs to her chest. Then she carries a stool into the hall and sits with her back pressed against the wall.

Agnes has told her, 'Get about your work, girl,' but she ignores the order.

Mid morning, the younger Luke places a wool blanket across her shoulders. She pulls it tight to her neck.

Hannah brings her a bowl of pottage when the clocks toll midday.

'When will they come?' Alice asks. She won't look at Hannah and hasn't since that night.

Hannah sits on the floor beside her, her head level with the maid's knees and blows on the pottage. 'When they remember us,' she says. 'Here: eat. You're cold.'

'I want to see my family,' Alice says. Her face breaks a little and her eyes become shiny. She wipes her cheeks. 'I want to see Robert,' she whispers. 'Why didn't he tell me he was leaving? Why didn't he say goodbye?'

'I know, Alice.' She blows on the steaming vegetables once more.

'He told me such things.'

'People like Robert, they know how to use their words. They know how to knead them into what they need, what they want.'

'I want to see him,' Alice says. 'There must have been a reason why he didn't...perhaps he couldn't...'

'I'm sorry, Alice.'

'You're happy he's gone.'

'Not *happy*.'

'You didn't give him chance.'

‘It was his decision to leave. Go to your family first before you go to Robert. You have a sister, don’t you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Take her with you if you do decide to see him.’

‘Like I’m a high-born lady?’

‘You deserve to be treated with respect, Alice.’ Hannah stands and gently lowers the bowl onto the maid’s lap. ‘Take care: it’s still too hot to eat.’

Alice turns away.

When she’s further down the hall, Hannah looks back and sees her cup the bowl in her hands.

In the kitchen the elder Luke asks, ‘Do we have any idea when?’

‘No.’

Agnes pulls a face. ‘Isn’t it bad enough that we’ve been trapped here for forty-odd days, living off boiled turnips and cabbage, and they can’t even lift the quarantine at first light?’ She takes a breath. ‘What happens if we leave? The door isn’t locked.’

‘The fines are hefty for those who break the rule of quarantine,’ the elder Luke says. ‘A man has been sent to prison before for such a crime.’

Agnes swears under her breath, *Mary Mother*.

‘Agnes,’ the elder Luke chides.

‘Oh, let me be. Let me be, all of you. Let me curse the world for its maladies and for this city’s *useless* parish clerks—’

A hammering sounds through the house.

The elder Luke grins. ‘Useless?’ He pulls off Agnes’ cap and rushes out into the hallway. Agnes, cap balled in her fist, chases after him.

Anne meets Hannah at the bottom of the stairs. ‘Is it happening?’

‘Yes.’

She exhales. 'At long last.'

'Where's the key?' Agnes shouts. 'Luke, if you've put it somewhere for safe keeping—'

'I have the key,' Hannah says.

They make way, all of them. The Lukes, Toby, Anne, Agnes and Alice, her bowl of pottage spilled across the floor.

'You better clean that up,' Agnes mutters.

Hannah turns the lock and pulls back the door.

No one is there. She steps out, the others behind her.

'Where—?' Agnes starts. 'If this is some sort of trick—'

'Look behind you, Agnes,' Hannah says.

They all look to the door. It's bare but for its weathered paint. No cross; no nail.

'We were wrong to expect a ceremony,' the elder Luke says.

Alice slips past them.

'The *bowl*—'

'Let her go, Agnes,' Hannah says. 'I'll clear the broken pieces. All of you go. Go breathe the outside air.'

'I'll do it,' Agnes says. 'I *am* your housekeeper after all.'



## Chapter Four

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Cartwright arrives at one, wiping his brow and flapping the neck of his shirt.

‘It’s too damned hot!’ he says, then pulls Hannah into a hug.

Hannah feels her body go rigid, her spine as straight as a broom, but Cartwright doesn’t seem to notice. When he releases her, he keeps her at arm’s length, both hands grasped around her elbows.

‘It’s been a trial for you, Mistress Hannah,’ he says.

‘Indeed, Master Cartwright.’ She eases back until her arms are free. ‘Come inside.’

‘Is it as hot in the Press as out? The sun today is unbearable.’

Hannah leads him into the dark hallway.

He sags. ‘This is much better.’

‘Wine, sir?’

‘Forget the wine; take me to the books.’ He claps her shoulders and her entire body shakes.

‘This is your order,’ Hannah says, indicating the chests stacked along the hall wall.

‘All of it?’

‘All of it.’

‘You’ve worked a miracle.’

‘A miracle would’ve been printing them with enough time for binding.’

‘No, no, I have a man in Italy for that. These are *Italian leather copies*.’ He affects a voice and posture of aped grandeur, then laughs. He prises the lid off the nearest chest and removes one of the manuscripts. He weighs it in his hand for a moment then nods. ‘It is *good* to get to this stage of an order,’ he says. ‘Now I know the book is real.’

‘Very real, sir.’

Cartwright flicks through the pages, careful of the open bindings. ‘This is good work, Hannah. You have your husband’s touch. It’s fortunate he taught you what he did.’

Hannah glances away and resists just, *just*, the urge to look heavenward as Agnes might. ‘I’m thinking of renaming the Press,’ she says.

‘Oh?’

‘The Rondel Press. My father’s name; my name for most of my life.’

‘The Rondel Press.’ Cartwright weighs the name as he weighed the book. ‘Then I will offer you the first Rondel Press order. Cicero, *In Verrem*—what is that face?’

‘Save me from Cicero,’ Hannah says. ‘Save me from that man’s writing: why does everyone want to read Cicero? Why not Pliny? Or Horace? Livy even!’

‘Pliny! Dry as the dirt on the road. Nothing can bore me more than another description of nature. ‘Yes, sir, you have seen a plant. Well done.’’

‘Then you know how I feel about Cicero and his speeches.’

Cartwright laughs. ‘I’ll pay you, Hannah.’

‘You’ll have to, sir.’

## Chapter Five

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‘There’s something I have to tell you before you leave,’ Hannah says.

Anne, adjusting the strap of her bag, says, ‘You’ve almost left it too late.’

‘I know.’ Hannah smooths down her sleeves. ‘I should have told you earlier.’

‘What’s that?’

A large cart passes by the open front door, barrels rattling inside it’s bed.

‘I am the woman who testified against you.’

A child runs by, screeching. Anne watches him until he’s out of sight. ‘Are you?’

Hannah nods. She cannot look at Anne, only above her shoulder.

Anne leans close and rests a hand in the crook of Hannah’s elbow. ‘Don’t be sorry,’ she whispers, an easy smile pulling at her lips.

‘I’m the reason you were arrested.’

‘You aren’t. They would have arrested me anyway. Don’t feel ashamed. Don’t let it trouble you any longer.’ Anne lets her hand fall.

‘I remember this Anne,’ Hannah says. ‘You’re the one I met in the market.’

‘I’m sorry that I barely remember.’

‘Don’t be sorry.’

‘Shall we agree neither of us ought to feel sorry?’

‘Yes.’

Anne smiles and adjusts her bag once more. ‘Then we are agreed. Farewell, Hannah Carew.’

‘God bless, Anne Askew.’

Anne steps out into the crowd. ‘Oh. Hannah.’ She turns back. ‘If you’re going after Christopher Lytton, feel free to use my name.’

## Chapter Six

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Lytton is not in his office.

‘Where do I find him? Home or court or elsewhere?’

‘Home.’

A mile away; thirty minutes in a crowd.

She knocks once and stands back. A window above creaks open. When she looks up, the sunlight stings her eyes. No answer at the door. She bangs it with her foot, three, four, seven times until she hears the sound of movement beyond. It opens just enough for a person to look through.

‘You are Lytton’s housekeeper?’ Hannah steps forward, securing her foot between the door and its frame. The woman scuttles back. ‘I have business with your master that cannot wait or be answered with a placating note.’ She’s had two more since the last. *God keep you...All being well...Depends on your condition.* ‘Is he here?’ She pushes into the hall. ‘I can wait if he isn’t.’

The housekeeper is small, pale-faced. She looks as strong as a shrew. ‘Master Lytton sees only those who have arranged appointments.’ Her voice is milky, weak.

‘Consider this an arrangement.’ Hannah closes the door.

Another opens. Lytton steps out.

The housekeeper says, ‘I tried—’

Hannah cuts her off and leaves her in her wake. ‘Is this your office?’

Lytton bows her entry. Awkward. Clumsy. His hair is in disarray. His collar is limp, his cuffs dirty and picked with loose threads. Red lines spider his eyes.

‘When did you last sleep?’ she asks.

‘Very recently.’ A lie.

The mess of him extends to the office. Papers aslant, ledgers upended, boxes half lidded. He clears a chair of books for her, which she takes.

‘Wine?’

‘No.’

He leaves the cup by her hand anyway then fumbles with the shutters.

‘It’s been over forty days,’ she says. ‘Yes,’ she adds when Lytton opens his mouth, ‘I know: God keep him. God can keep him.’ She removes the folded pamphlet from her bag and places it on the desk.

‘God rest his soul. William’s will—‘

‘I’ve read it.’

‘I have it here.’ He searches through a chest.

‘I know its contents.’

‘A more formal conversation is necessary.’

Hannah crosses her legs and waits as Lytton stumbles through the will.

‘So you understand,’ he says, ‘that you will inherit the entirety of the business, but on condition that you are not with child. Until then, we must wait.’

‘There is no such condition and I will not wait,’ Hannah says. ‘You will cease this pause. I am not with child and delaying probate only lengthens the insecurity of the Press. I need it to be mine.’

‘Are you even considering remarriage?’

‘No. And you will cease, too, this compulsion to have me wed.’

‘Whatever good reputation William accrued will dissolve until it is nothing. You’re acting the fool. Buyers commission master printers not their widows. You have dependents: Luke and the others. The girls. When you cannot pay their wages, will you take out another loan? And another and another until the amount you owe and interest is crippling? Use even cheaper materials until the paper is so thin it can be used as glass?’

The Press is foundering. William could barely keep it turning. With you it will stop sharp. Marriage is the most sensible option.'

'I'm sure you've said all this to me before,' Hannah says. 'In fact, you did, and I kept that letter, though I should've burned it.'

'It is our official communication as lawyer and client.'

'It's your opportunity to presume my future.'

'I am duty bound to protect the interests of William's children, including those that are yet to be born.'

Hannah leans back. 'Do you see that moulding fold of paper on your desk?'

'What is it?'

'Open it and see.'

Lytton peels apart the folds. Hannah watches his face contract. 'What is this?'

'Something with which you are familiar.'

'This is not something with which I am familiar. And it should be burned.' He scrunches the pamphlet into a loose ball and drops it into the grate. 'It's heresy.'

'I found the order in William's ledgers. Do you remember that you told me to familiarise myself with the business's finances? I found this and a note: *Monies received from CL on receipt of Unnamed. CL. CL...*'

'I am not CL. CL could be anyone. Charles Lawson. Charlotte Lacy. Cuthbert Lewis.' Lytton rises to stand by the window. His eyes pace the street beyond.

'Though it is more likely to be CL Christopher Lytton than any of those fictional patrons.'

Hannah goes to stand by his shoulder. She sees little except the dirt road, scabbed by hoof marks and wheel ruts, and the tarnished white paint of his neighbour's houses. Twin pear trees bob under the slight breeze. A dog runs past, chased by a laughing child. When the air settles, four sparrows dip down and roll their wings in the dust.

Hannah says, ‘Anne Askew names you as CL.’

Lytton tenses. His head turns and there is little space between them. She can see sleep pocketed in the corners of his eyes and a growing redness beneath his lower lids. He steps back into the window frame with a soft thump. For a moment, they are the same height. Then, he straightens. Tugs his collar. Neatens one of his cuffs. Hannah waits until his stills then returns to her seat.

‘Anne Askew.’

‘Your Protestant compatriot.’

‘You’ve dredged her name up from the Thames,’ Lytton says. ‘She’s a heretic. I’m a lawyer.’

Hannah smiles, a small tugging smile. ‘Why not be both, Master Lytton? You’ve made good work of it so far.’

‘And you’re showing your hand. It’s weak. I presume you have a bargain in mind? Your silence on the matter of this pamphlet for my renewed pursuit of probate? You cannot tie me to this. It’s but two letters in a ledger. You can’t even tie the pamphlet to the Press. ‘Unnamed,’ you said.’

‘There is a tie,’ Hannah says. ‘Not a strong one. Actually, it’s as weak as linen thread. But the thing about linen thread: it can be sharp. And sometimes it can bite.’

‘I cannot fathom your words.’

‘Fathom this.’ She reaches into her bag and pulls out the *Aeneid*. Lytton refuses to take it from her so she places in on the desk. ‘Turn to page seventy-four and look at the first line.’

Lytton shakes his head. ‘I need not indulge these—’

‘Page seventy-four, Christopher.’ She puts Anne Askew’s gossamer voice into the name, her strictness, her rising tone.

One of Lytton's hands irritates the hem of his doublet. Hannah waits. He pinches his lips then opens the book.

'The first line, Master Lytton.'

'Tum vero ardemus scitari et quaerere causas.' His voice has regained some of its steel edge but the latin words tumble in his mouth. He looks up. 'I still cannot fathom what this is.'

'Look at the line, I said.'

Hannah watches as Lytton re-reads the line, his mouth forming around the words. He looks up. 'What am I supposed to be looking at, specifically?'

'Anne saw it,' she says. 'Straight away. She's perceptive, isn't she? You know she is.' Before Lytton can finish saying, *I don't know her*, Hannah has covered the uppercase *T* with her thumb. She removes her hand.

Lytton leans in then blows on the page.

'It isn't lint,' Hannah says.

Lytton looks up. 'The letter is broken.'

'Yes.' She leans down to the grate, scoops up the pamphlet and eases out the creases. She points to the bisected uppercase *T*. 'It's the same.'

Lytton takes a breath. 'Where is it now, this letter?'

'Out of the workshop. Do you understand what this means? If someone were to read one of these pamphlets and any of the Carew books that were printed with this letter, a connection can be made between the two. That someone would know that we have been involved in the production of illicit Protestant material. And the ledger would tell them who commissioned the work.'

Lytton snatches up the pamphlet and drops it into the grate once more. It takes four strikes to light the flint. The paper opens partially as it burns, the snakes curling



tighter in the heat. 'These pamphlets were produced a year ago. Do you think anyone will come across one?'

'I did,' Hannah says. 'And these things; they get around your ankles even months after they've been spread through the city. Some will have found their way into the outhouses; some will be lining the walls of a person's house. The king's authority has a copy; they have a copy of everything.'

'You'd damn yourself and the Press.'

'Maybe,' Hannah says. 'Maybe they'll see me for what I am: widow to the man responsible.'

'You'll be made an example.'

'Maybe, again, but the alternative is a drawn out probate that'll damn the Press anyway. And if I don't damn you; Anne Askew might the next time she's examined.'

'I do not know that woman.'

'She knows you. And she'll testify against you.'

'Making friends with heretics is dangerous.'

'So, too, is making them your enemy.' Hannah leans forward. 'This is your opportunity, Lytton. I will speak no other word of the pamphlet or of your involvement in its production if you do one small thing for me. Will you?'

### **Author's Note**

The words used for Anne Askew's gospelling and those that appear in her written account are taken from *The First Examination of Anne Askew*, which was first published in 1546, a few months after her execution for heresy at Smithfield.

# **Re-imagining Marginalised Tudor Voices:**

## **Working Women, Print Culture and the**

### **Rejection of Female Silence**

#### **Introduction**

‘The narrow streets and lanes of early modern London were filled with women’s voices. Chatting, quarreling, and advertising their wares, London women notoriously took every opportunity to defy conventions of feminine silence, adding their irrepressible noise to the raucous clatter of urban life. In the historical record, however, this cacophony of female voices is largely silenced’ (Eleanor Hubbard, 2012, p.1).

In historical fiction, the voices of Early Modern working women are also largely silenced. Though the recent work of historians has begun to reveal the rich and complex lives of working women (Hubbard, 2012, p.1), their narrative potential has mostly been ignored by writers of modern historical fiction. Working women are rarely protagonists. Domesticity is emphasised and those historical women who traversed the gender divide to attain employment in male-dominated fields such as printing, smithing and accounting are almost entirely ignored. This project seeks to address this gap by offering a novel that foregrounds the experiences of a working woman, the fictional Hannah Carew, whose character is inspired by the historical woman printer Elisabeth Pickering. It also seeks to challenge, subvert and resist common representations of working women in historical fiction. The novel begins with the death of Hannah’s husband then moves on to cover her first forty days as owner of his printing press, exploring the difficulties she encounters as she takes over the business, both from inside

(employees and household staff) and outside (the wider printing community). The novel also seeks to creatively consider notions of ‘history’ and how ‘histories’ are constructed and, in so doing, explores possible reasons why working women have been silenced. The writing of the *First Examination of Anne Askew*, an account of the Tudor martyr’s first trial for heresy, is used to help give form to this exploration and aligns the novel with historiographic metafiction, a subgenre of historical fiction first proposed by theorist Linda Hutcheon in the 1980s.

Historical fiction set during the Tudor period enjoys enduring popularity (Anderson, 2020). Although it has not always been taken seriously—a consequence of its historical connection with the Romance subgenre (Cooper and Short, 2012, p.2)—the recent critical and commercial successes of Hilary Mantel with *Wolf Hall* (2009) and its sequels *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012) and *The Mirror and the Light* (2020) and Maggie O’Farrell with *Hamnet* (2020) have encouraged broader reader interest and academic scholarship. Tudor fiction ranges in genre, adding to its appeal. Though these novels are books about the past, they can also be thrillers, murder mysteries, biographies and fantasies. Rory Clements’ thriller series *John Shakespeare* (2009-2015) follows a government recruit as he uncovers plots in Elizabethan England. C. J. Sansom’s Matthew Shardlake investigates unexplained death and murder in the *Shardlake Series* (2003-2018). Philippa Gregory explores the lives of the Tudor period’s namesake family, Henry VIII, his six wives and their relatives (2001-2017). Lucy Weston reimagines Elizabeth I as a vampire hunter in *The Secret History of Elizabeth, Vampire Slayer* (2010).

The Tudor period is both strange and familiar, which adds to its appeal as a setting for fiction. Social mobility was uncommon. There was little protection against disease and those protections that did exist—such as wearing a hare’s foot to ward off disease—were unsophisticated and lacked scientific validation. Laws were upheld by

corporal punishment, with execution, flogging, branding and time in the stocks common. Society was strictly patriarchal and women were treated as second-class citizens, to be controlled by men at all times. While some of these overt differences are unidentifiable in the twenty-first century, consequence of scientific and technological advances (antibiotics, for example, have replaced hares feet and the death penalty was fully banned in 1998), traces of others can still be identified. The violence of the sixteenth century is noted in continued cases of police brutality and the enduring need for feminism is evidence of persistent gender inequality. Other societal and technological developments of the Tudor period draw parallels to today: social order expanded with the emergence of a middle class; the invention of moveable type allowed for the mass production of books and other printed texts; radical reformations of the Roman Catholic Church altered the religious and geographical landscape of the country; population swelled and migration to the cities—the economic hubs of England—increased. This mix of the familiar and unfamiliar adds to the appeal of Tudor-set fiction as readers seek engaging ways of exploring the known yet unknowable past and trace connections to the present day.

Historical fiction has many roles. Just as it resists a singular definition (Stocker, 2019, p.68), it also resists a singular purpose. It can be used to reconstruct or rehabilitate figures of the past, engaging with, and attempting to shape cultural memory. Until the mid twentieth century, for example, Thomas Cromwell was considered by historians as a ‘sacrilegious ruffian’ (Pollard, 1911) and the fiction that featured him highlighted his antagonistic qualities. He is a villain in Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Fifth Queen: And How She Came to Court* (1906), Maxwell Anderson’s play *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1948) and Robert Bolt’s 1960 play *A Man for All Seasons*. Since the 1950s, however, Cromwell’s character has undergone a period of rehabilitation, and he has emerged as a pragmatic, intelligent and capable statesman. This redrawing of Cromwell can be noted

in his sympathetic portrayal in recent fiction, most notably Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and its sequels. Mantel's contribution to the rehabilitation of the shared cultural memory of Cromwell is evident in Carol McGrath's *The Woman in the Shadows* (2017), who similarly portrays the statesman sympathetically.

Cultural memory extends beyond singular figures; according to most modern historical fiction, working Tudor women were confined to domesticity. Maids, servants, midwives and seamstresses abound, but those who pursued other professions are largely absent. Their absence contributes to the mistaken belief that Early Modern women were confined to the domestic sphere; my novel seeks to address this falsehood by foregrounding the experiences of a working woman who was involved in a typically male-dominated trade (printing). By resisting the stereotypical presentation of working Tudor women in fiction, the novel seeks to join and build on those few other Tudor-set novels that have started to destabilise the reputation of working women as being wholly confined to domesticity, most notably Kate Morrison's *A Book of Secrets* (2019). Morrison defies the notion that printing excluded the participation of women by emphasising protagonist Susan Charlewood's involvement in her husband's press and capability with setting type. By confining Charlewood to the role of assistant for the majority of the novel, Morrison also draws attention to the existence of Early Modern gender divisions. Though this is useful work, Morrison inadvertently adheres to negative stereotypes of female weakness by making Charlewood a typesetter rather than a press operator; further, Charlewood's inheritance of the press is noted rather than explored—a missed opportunity to engage more actively with gender divisions. My novel establishes Hannah's own capability as a setter of type, but imbues her with physical strength as well as intellectual talent: just like the men of the Carew Press, she is able to cope with the physical demands of operating machinery, defying conventions of feminine weakness. Hannah's ownership of the Press is a primary focus of the novel,

and gender divisions are more extensively examined through the resistance she encounters as a woman business owner, resistance that is notable for its absence in *A Book of Secrets*.

In this way, the novel also engages with another opportunity provided by historical fiction: to fill in gaps in the historical record. As Hubbard noted above, working women are often absent from the historical record. Historical fiction can be used to create them a history, although, to date, only a few historical writers have pursued such an aim. Kate Morrison is rare in her consideration of a Tudor woman working in a male-dominated field; the others confine their protagonists to the domestic sphere. Alison Macleod's *The Heretics* (1965) considers servant Nancy Scarlett; Suzannah Dunn's *The Queen of Subtleties* (2001) considers confectioner Lucy Cornwallis and her 2020 novel's *The Testimony of Alys Twist* eponymous heroine is a laundress; Elizabeth Fremantle's *Queen's Gambit* (2013) considers servant Dot Fownten; and Naomi Miller's *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020) considers servant Rose Commin. While the experiences of working women based in the domestic sphere are worthy of exploration, the dearth of those who traversed gender divisions deserves attention.

Although working women are brought to the fore in these novels, it is noteworthy that their narratives still intersect with Tudor royal or noble figures. Nancy Scarlett is servant and friend to Anne Askew; Lucy Cornwallis' story overlaps with that of Anne Boleyn with whom she shares narrative perspective; Alys Twist is employed in the households of both Mary I and Princess Elizabeth, and acts as informant to the former; Dot Fownten is servant to Queen Katherine Parr and shares with her dual narrative perspective; Rose Commin is servant and later friend to Lady Mary Sidney Herbert. In many instances, their narratives are overpowered by those of their famous, wealthy counterparts: Nancy Scarlett is primarily positioned as witness to Anne

Askew's life; the brevity of Lucy Cornwallis' perspective chapters suggests a need to hurry back to the 'main story' of the novel (Anne Boleyn's fall); the framing of Rose Commin's narrative suggest that she is important because she has been marked as such by her employer. My novel seeks to draw attention to this problematic marginalisation of working women in historical fiction through the inclusion of Anne Askew. Her presence at the Press is resisted, as is her potential to overwhelm the narrative: Hannah maintains narrative perspective; Hannah remains the primary focus of the novel; Hannah does not act primarily as Askew's witness; Hannah has a measurable effect on Askew's contribution to the historical record (Askew's first account). In this way, the novel also acts as a site for dissent, where the foregrounding of the wealthy upperclass is challenged and problematised.

The circumstances surrounding Askew's composition of her first account are unaccounted for and open for speculation. Richard Slotkin argues that historical fiction can be used as a tool for historical enquiry adjacent to the work of historians, one which can presume the truth of a theory and 'credibly represent a material world in which that theory appears to *work*' (2005, p.227). Mysteries of the past can thus be explained (albeit temporarily, confined as they are within their narratives), and give rise to counter explanations, all of which, so long as they are treated by the writer as 'certainly true' (Slotkin, 2005, p.221) contribute to the development of our understanding of the past. In *Carew* the possibility that Askew composed her first account in collaboration with a working woman is treated as being certainly true. This presents the opportunity to do two things: firstly, to address the gap in the historical record concerning the composition of Askew's account; and, secondly, to write a working woman into the historical record by having her act as Askew's collaborator. Doing so helps to retrieve a working woman from the margins of history.



‘History,’ Slotkin argues, ‘is what it is, but it is also what we make of it. What we call ‘history’ is not a thing, an object to study, but a story we choose to tell about things’ (2005, p.222). ‘History,’ therefore, can be thought of as a form of literature, a story whose components have been ordered for specific aims, not unlike historical *fiction*. Some novels engage explicitly with this idea of history as a construction, drawing the reader’s attention to its artifice and, concordantly, the differences between ‘history’ and ‘the past’. Linda Hutcheon labelled this type of historical fiction as historiographic metafiction (1988, p.113). Writers of Tudor-set historical fiction rarely engage with self-reflexive considerations of ‘history’. Maggie O’Farrell, however, does so in her 2020 novel *Hamnet*. At the conclusion of a passage that seems to lay out Agnes Hathaway’s past, the narrator comments: ‘This is the story, the myth of Agnes’s childhood. She herself might tell a different story’ (p.51). There is a multiplicity to history/story/myth that separates it from the past, a consequence of the intentions of those who tell the history/story/myth. Hathaway’s neighbours will piece together the events of her early life to create one version of history; her perspective of these events creates another. Both are true, even though their emphases are different. The decision to emphasise some details over others is demonstrative of how history is shaped. I engage with this explicitly in *Carew* during the construction of Askew’s account. Conversations between Hannah and Askew regarding how the trial is framed, how Askew’s character is presented, and what is left in the account and what is removed demonstrate the malleability of history.

These conversations, in addition to the ones above, contribute to the project’s aim of confronting, resisting and reimagining the marginalisation of women in the historical record and historical fiction. Accompanying the creative element is a critical thesis that contextualises such conversations. Chapter One focuses on how Tudor women printers experienced gender divisions and how the historical novel can act not

only to fill in gaps but also act as a site for feminist rebellion. Chapter Two moves to consider how the creation of Anne Askew's account of her first examination can be used to demonstrate the formation of 'history'. Chapter Three concludes by surveying the ways working-class protagonists are often subordinated by their upperclass counterparts and some of the ways *Carew* resists such subordination.

## Chapter One

### Crossing the Gender Divide: Women Printers in Historical Fiction

In October 1540, the newly-widowed Elisabeth Pickering took over the running of her late husband's printing press in Fleet Street, London, having been named co-heir to his estate and executrix of his will. Though Robert Redman's will omitted any reference to the press, Pickering chose (and was allowed to do so, as he had no living sons) to pursue the business rather than sell it and, across the next ten months, published a number of legal texts and small books. Rather than continue the business in her husband's name, Pickering published under her own; *Lytle treatyse composed by John Sta[n]dysshe...against the p[ro]testacion of Robert barnes* is notable for being the first extant text that can be attributed to a woman printer in England (Kreps, 2003, p.1054). Later, in 1541, she sold the press to Fleet Street neighbour William Middleton and remarried.

Pickering's story is not unique: historian Helen Smith estimates there were at least 130 women involved in the early modern book trade between 1550 and 1650 (2003, p.163). The full extent of women's involvement, however, is unknown, a consequence of their marginalisation in the historical record and by historians. Regarding the former: their appearances within official records and accounts (or colophons, as evidenced by Pickering) are limited and many do not appear at all, having taken part in the book trade unofficially—a common practice for various trades (Mendelson and Crawford, 1988, p.258). Regarding the latter, historians have, in the past, ignored early modern women and it is only in the past few decades that their stories have begun to be recovered (Mendelson and Crawford, 1988, p.259).

Early modern women printers, and working-class women in general, have been silenced and the vibrancy of their lives remains unaccounted for amongst the facts and figures of parish records, legal notes, financial ledgers and colophons. How these women felt about setting type, sewing manuscript spines, operating presses, interacting with employees and traversing the boundaries between the female domestic sphere and that of their male counterparts has been lost. Their voices have been silenced, their lives rendered invisible.

Though these silences may be problematic for historians to navigate, for writers of historical fiction they are sites for exploration. Historian and writer Richard Slotkin argues that the writing of historical fiction sits alongside the work of historians as a way of exploring theories about the past for which there is limited information. In his 2005 paper 'Fiction for the Purposes of History,' Slotkin notes that 'historians often *understand* more about the stories they tell than can be *proved*' and, consequently, must choose between 'telling the whole story as he or she has come to understand it' or 'what can be proved, with evidence and argument' (p.223). Contemporary Tudor anxieties over the maintenance of social order (Mendelson and Crawford, 2011, p.256) suggest, for example, that the blurring of boundaries between the female and domestic spheres may have created conflict. There is little evidence to prove such a supposition, but it is certainly possible. Historical fiction provides the opportunity to traverse what is known and what is supposed to present one possible supposition *as* the truth. It need not be the only truth (other novelists may have other theories) but so long as it is treated as being 'certainly true' (Slotkin, 2005, p.221), with a thorough grasp of the context of the fiction, it can serve as a useful form of historical enquiry. In the case of early modern women involved in the book trade, historical fiction can be used as a tool to explore their possible lived realities, regardless of the lack of evidence and, in so doing, reject the silences of the historical record.

To date, Kate Morrison's 2019 novel *A Book of Secrets* is the only work of historical fiction that focuses on a Tudor woman printer. Though Morrison does some useful work to suggest that women were a part of early modern printing businesses, the minutiae of day-to-day press life for a woman is superseded by the novel's primary threads: the protagonist's search for her brother and her involvement with Catholic plots. Consequently, her portrayal of Susan's encounters with the press workshop are somewhat sterile and her exploration of gender spheres and expectations is limited.

The aim of this project is to engage creatively with the silences in the historical record to explore the possible lived realities of women involved in the early modern book trade. *Carew* utilises the work of historians, incorporating what is known and using it to imagine what might have been. The novel also builds on the work done by Kate Morrison in *A Book of Secrets* (2019) by exploring, more fully, women's encounters with printing, how they negotiated the gender spheres and their reception by their male counterparts. To date, Morrison's work has yet to attract the attention of literary critics despite offering the opportunity to explore how fiction may imagine the lives of early modern women printers. Generally speaking, critical analysis of novels that feature working-class female protagonists is limited. Apart from Stephen O'Neill, who argues in his 2021 paper "'And Who Will Write Me?': Materializing Networks of Remembrance in Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet*" that Maggie O'Farrell explores memory and motherhood with Agnes Hathaway in her 2020 novel *Hamnet*, and Robinson Murphy who asserts that Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2008) is a site of feminist defiance in relation to her portrayal of working-class nun Elizabeth Barton in his 2015 paper 'Elizabeth Barton's Claim: Feminist Defiance in *Wolf Hall*,' critics have mostly ignored novels with prominent working-class characters. Though this may be a consequence of the limited number of novels that focus on working-class protagonists (Tudor-set fiction is dominated by stories of the upperclass, something that will be explored in greater

depth in Chapter Three), it is worth noting that more and more writers are turning their attention to working-class women. How these women are drawn and how writers use their novels (for example, as a means to reject silences in the historical record) is worthy of exploration. In this chapter I offer analysis of the ways in which Morrison conceptualises a Tudor woman printer to help address the lack of critical consideration of Tudor working class women in historical fiction. I also identify the ways in which my own creative work (in the form of *Carew*) builds on her achievements, with emphasis placed on how I use character and place to more fully conceptualise women's encounters with gender boundaries.

### **Part One. *A Book of Secrets* (2019) and *Women Printers***

The premise for Kate Morrison's *A Book of Secrets* (2019) is intriguing and ambitious: her protagonist is the fictional Nsowah, renamed Susan by her master, the benevolent father/mentor figure Sir Thomas Framfield. When Framfield's involvement in a pro-Catholic plot is revealed and he is imprisoned, Susan marries London printer John Charlewood, who, like Framfield and Susan, is Catholic. Much of the narrative focuses on the Charlewoods' participation in the Catholic cause (specifically through the printing of illicit religious texts) in addition to Susan's attempts to locate her brother, from whom she was separated in infancy. Towards the novel's conclusion and on the death of her husband, Susan takes over the running of the Charlewood press until her son reaches maturity. While the printing element of the novel often feels more incidental than essential (the Catholic plots often take narrative precedent), Morrison does some useful work to imagine the possible lived reality of a woman involved in the early modern book trade and, in so doing, rejects the silences contained within the historical record.

Women, Morrison suggests, may have been an unremarkable presence in a press workshop. When Susan is first shown around the workshop, she is greeted with friendliness from Tom (2019, p.81) and indifference from Philip (2019, p.81); neither character demonstrates any negativity at her presence, and this remains the case for the entirety of the narrative. There is a distinct lack of gender-based bias towards Susan: she is evaluated based on her skills rather than her gender (2019, p.82), her questions are answered without tying her ignorance to her gender (2019, p.80-84), and she is employed in the workshop permanently rather than temporarily until a man is available to take her place. This aligns with historian Helen Smith's argument that women were 'unremarkable' (2003, p.183) to their male peers.

Tudor society was strictly ordered and the division of labour within the household was based on gender (Mendelson and Crawford, 1988, p.256). Such divisions are apparent in *A Book of Secrets*. John Charlewood serves as gatekeeper to the workshop: he tells Susan to ““Come in, come in!”” to the press from the kitchen and leads her through by the hand (2019, p.79). Though he does not explicitly reference the boundary they have crossed (between domestic and work, female and male) or attempt to bolster it, he is still placed as gatekeeper: Susan only enters when he gives her permission to do so. Having entered the workshop, Susan then experiences some concern: she is hyperaware of the presence of the men when Charlewood quizzes her on what she knows of printing (2019, p.80) and, when handling printing tools, feels as if she is “an indulged child playing at work’ (2019, p.82). Historically, women were not totally confined to the domestic sphere and household boundaries were fluid, a point argued by historians Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford in their comprehensive study of the lived experiences of early modern women, *Women in Early Modern England* (1988, p.206). Such fluidity, however, was accompanied by anxiety: popular ballads, such as *The Woman and the Plow and the Man to the Hen-roost*, ridiculed those

that crossed the gender divide, with the implication that doing so ‘turned the world upside-down’ (Mendelson and Crawford, 1988, p.256). By having Charlewood and Susan experience crossing the gender divide differently, Morrison suggests that contemporary Tudor reactions were not universal. Susan’s thoughts, however, offer an additional interpretation:

Surely John did not mean me to actually take on the labour of printing?...Perhaps he just wanted me to understand how it all functioned. Or maybe printer’s wives really did know the secrets of the trade (2019, p.82).

Writers of historical fiction tend to keep working women confined to the domestic sphere. The small number of novels to emerge in the last decade with working-class protagonists feature a confectioner (Suzannah Dunn’s *Queen of Subtleties* (2001)), two servants (Elizabeth Fremantle’s *Queen’s Gambit* (2013) and Naomi Miller’s *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020)) and one laundress (Suzannah Dunn’s *The Testimony of Alys Twist* (2020)). Karen Brook’s protagonist in her 2016 novel *The Locksmith’s Daughter* has her father’s skill with locks, but her narrative is primarily concerned with political intrigue; Brenda Rickman Vantrease’s protagonist in *The Heretic’s Wife* is a bookseller, but domestic details are often overwhelmed by the narratives focus on religious upheaval. This restriction, coupled with the marginalisation of working women within the historical record and the historic lack of academic enquiry into such woman may give the impression that Tudor women were not involved in work that was dominated by men. Morrison rejects this explicitly by including a woman printer as the protagonist for *A Book of Secrets* and subtly with the inclusion of Susan’s final thought above, ‘Or maybe printer’s wives really did know the secrets of the trade (2019, p.82).’ By removing personal pronouns, this line transcends Susan’s ownership and obliquely addresses the reader by acknowledging and challenging their preconceptions. Doing so suggests that Morrison is not only concerned about engaging with silences within the



historical record but also with using her fiction as a site of rebellion, one that confronts stereotypical presentations of Tudor women in historical fiction and offers an alternative.

In some respects, *A Book of Secrets* is a feminist novel. Writer and academic Roxane Gay defines the feminist novel as one that ‘explores what it means to not only be a woman, but to be a woman from a certain time and place’ (2014). For Susan, who lives within patriarchal Tudor society, this means being relegated to positions of subordination, which Morrison explores through Susan’s relationship with Charlewood. Although their marriage is often happy, Susan still feels contained and controlled. She is shut out of important matters (2019, p.200), physically threatened (2019, p.231) and chastised (2019, p.239). Later, Susan becomes fearful of confronting Charlewood about his involvement in Catholic plots and frustrated that she feels unable to do anything but ‘wait and watch’ (2019, p.223). She attributes this lack of action to her gender:

[To wait was] a woman’s place, yes, but should a woman wait and watch as the sea came in until it washed her all away, or should she pick up her feet and run? (2019, p.223)

Morrison’s decision to move from first person perspective to third expands the subject ‘woman’ to encapsulate all Tudor women, suggesting an intention to highlight that Susan’s feelings are not unique to her and can be applied to Tudor women in general.

In the context of the workshop, Susan and Charlewood’s relationship is framed as student-teacher and employee-employer. As a teacher, Charlewood is a physically-dominating presence: ‘John...[places] a rectangular length of wood in my left hand, curling my fingers around it and positioning it carefully so it pointed upwards’ (2019, p.82). Rather than explain orally how to hold a compositor’s stick, he takes on the role of puppeteer and forcibly casts Susan as his puppet, rendering her inanimate and fully subordinated. Though Susan quickly learns the skill and is judged the equal of the men

(2019, p.84), this scene establishes that Charlewood, in addition to being gatekeeper of the male work space, is also gatekeeper of knowledge and learning. Further, he is a gatekeeper of remuneration. It is worth noting that while Susan contributes to the running of the press, she is never paid for her work, unlike her male counterparts. Though Susan's presence within the press is considered unremarkable to the other employees and her work to be of the same standard, she remains a subordinated 'employee' (in the loose sense of the word). Both forms of subordination are commented on, albeit obliquely: Susan desires to remove her hand from her husband's (2019, p.82) and she only truly flourishes when he dies and she takes over the running of the press.

Though Morrison demonstrates that gender boundaries did stretch, she never pushes them to breaking point, preferring, instead, to explore a stable gender-hierarchical household. The narrative concludes not long after Susan takes over the business and Morrison focuses on the conclusion of Susan's conflict with former lover Rob rather than her reception as business owner. There are other missed opportunities: while it is useful to demonstrate how a Tudor woman may have felt about entering a male-dominated sphere, the lack of resistance to Susan's presence from either Charlewood or the other household employees suggests a universal acceptance in printing workshops despite evidence that the blurring of spheres caused anxiety. These are two points that I build upon in my own creative exploration of women in early modern print culture.

## **Part Two. *Carew* and Women in the Workshop**

One of the primary aims of this project is to conceptualise how Tudor women may have experienced the book trade. Like Kate Morrison, my focus is the printing workshop;

other aspects of the book trade (composition, editing, binding, distribution, etc.) are referred to tangentially, but are not considered in-depth. Unlike Morrison, I do not propose that women's participation in the printing of texts was considered unremarkable. Instead, I propose that the undercurrent of contemporary Tudor anxiety regarding the disintegration of societal order was too strong to render the blurring of gender boundaries unchallenged. In *Carew*, such anxieties are intensified when the established gender hierarchy is flipped upside down by the death of master printer William Carew and the inheritance of the business by his wife, protagonist Hannah. Roxane Gay argues that feminist novels '[explore] the question of *identity*—the stories of who we are' (2014); *Carew* examines the conflict between Hannah's own identity and that which has been forced upon her as consequence of Tudor social anxieties. I engage with space dynamically, treating the Carew Press and adjoining house as a manifestation of gender boundaries. Supporting character Agnes (the Carew Press housekeeper) is used to demonstrate another woman's (negative) perspective of the change in gender hierarchy.

The subordination of women in Tudor society is subtly, but unmistakably rendered in Kate Morrison's *A Book of Secrets* (2019). Susan is a student and then an assistant, unpaid but a welcomed member of the press workforce. It is possible to interpret men's acceptance of her as being contingent on her subordination, which leads to the question: how might a woman who is not easily subordinated be treated by male printers? In Part One—Chapter Four, Hannah is established as capable in all aspects of printing: she can typeset, beat ink and operate the press, demonstrating literacy, physical strength and mastery of the printing process. References to her past show that these are skills she learned as a child from her father. Despite her capability, it is indicated that they are not skills that have been used for a while:

The muscles in her arms tense, as do those in her shoulders and across her back. It feels like a betrayal, the way her body is working against her....She's too out of practice, too long out of the workshop. (p.30)

In Part Two, William Carew's continued refusal to let her enter either his office or the workshop suggests that her lack of recent involvement in the printing business is his explicit wish. Hannah is confined to the domestic sphere and her role relegated to 'wife' and 'mistress of the household'; her knowledge of, and her presence within the male work sphere is neither acknowledged nor tolerated. She is either in the market, the kitchen, the hallway or the parlour and her tasks are often banal (she purchases food and takes stock of the house possessions). Her listlessness is demonstrated through her silences: in Chapter Two, the reader is not alerted to her presence until after Agnes has finished chastising maid Alice about her work; in Chapter Seven, she neither speaks nor appears:

Two days pass and the split continues to grow. William sends for Jem, who knows anyway and has been waiting.

Agnes, yawning, is the one who admits the carpenter.

'What's disturbed your sleep?' he asks.

'Nothing,' she says.

She keeps her eyes on William and has to be asked twice to cut the bread. (p.92)

The brevity of this chapter, and its list-like quality suggest a disengagement with what is happening at the Carew Press, a direct consequence of having her concerns regarding a faulty press dismissed. This brevity and lack of active participation continues in Chapter Eight:

The leg needs to be replaced.

'How long will it take? How much will it cost?'

Jem speaks into William's ear.

William shakes his head. 'No, earlier.'

'That would be impossible.'

They go to the office.

Robert exhales loudly. 'I'm a loose part,' he says. 'The draff.' He flicks water at Toby's back. The apprentice squirms.  
'Leave him be,' Agnes says.  
Robert laughs, 'I'm not bothering him.' (p.93)

This entire sequence is dominated by the voices of men; Hannah has been subordinated even within her own narrative and rendered invisible. This invisibility speaks not only to the harm caused by patriarchal Tudor anxieties but also to the marginalisation of women within the historical record. As Tudor women have been silenced and made invisible from the historical record, so too has Hannah within this record of her life, demonstrating how easy it is for women to disappear.

Though Hannah experiences listlessness, she also rebels against William's subordination of her and the identity he attempts to force her to fulfil—that of wife and mistress of the house. The Carew Press house itself is used to help give form to this rebellion. Just as John Charlewood was gatekeeper to the male sphere/workshop in *A Book of Secrets*, so too is William in the Carew Press. He controls the male spaces (specifically the office and the workshop) by using their doors, restricting Hannah's access to both by keeping them closed. Hannah, however, tests these boundaries, challenging her subordination. In Part Two—Chapter Two, she listens in at the workshop door and takes advantage of it being left ajar by peeking through the gap (p.55), in Chapter Six she pushes through the office door without permission (p.73). Despite his efforts, he cannot contain her within the (female) sphere he has allotted her. Consequently, the relationship between Hannah and William has broken down: their marriage exists in name only. The elder Luke later explains that William's antagonism towards Hannah was derived from anxiety over her background:

'Your father was a master printer, and the son of a master printer. And you are the daughter of a master printer and the granddaughter of a master printer. William was the son of a blacksmith. It's the type of discrepancy that can find the chinks [in a person's armour]' (p.223).

By depicting their relationship as being dictated to by William's anxieties over gender hierarchy, *Carew* demonstrates how such anxieties are harmful and destructive; a comment that might be read forward into the twenty-first century by the reader.

Physical boundaries are used in a similar way in Maggie O'Farrell's 2019 novel *Hamnet*. Protagonist Agnes does not fulfil the standard societal expectations of femininity. She is considered slightly wild and untameable: 'cat-like' (p.49), fox-like (p.207), un-Christian in her ability to foretell the future (p.58) , a 'creature...elf...sorceress...forest sprite' (p.207). Buildings are used as physical boundaries to confine and tame her nature. This is emphasised during her two labours. During the first, Agnes anticipates that she will be forcibly trapped in a house so that she will give birth in a civilised, societally-endorsed way; she escapes and instead gives birth in the forest, a return to nature and an explicit rejection of societal expectations. She is unable, however, to avoid confinement for the second labour and O'Farrell portrays her capture in horrifying terms:

Agnes is taken, half carried, half dragged, not to her own narrow slip of a house, but to theirs, through their wide door, down the passage and up the narrow stairs. A door is pushed open, and through she sails, her ankles held together, like a criminal, like a lunatic (p.227).

The staccato nature of the sentences creates a sense of breathless panic and claustrophobia that suggests O'Farrell is compelling the reader to share in Agnes' treatment and experience with her the damaging quality of control. By compressing the distance between the reader and the narrative, O'Farrell also compresses the distance between the Tudor period and the present; doing so implies that her negative portrayal of the subordination of women is as much a comment on the treatment of women today as it is a comment on their treatment in the past. Like Kate Morrison with *A Book of Secrets*, O'Farrell uses her novel not only as a way to engage with silences in the record

(in this case, the life and character of Anne Hathaway) but also as a site of feminist rebellion, one that highlights the unfair treatment of women in the past and encourages the reader to draw parallels to their own time. In both *Hamnet* and *Carew*, physical space and structures are used to give form to such rebellions.

When William Carew dies, Hannah becomes the de facto head of both the household and the business, effectively dismantling the boundary between the male and female spheres. A similar situation occurs in *A Book of Secrets*: when Charlewood dies, Susan takes over the running of the press until her son reaches maturity. Morrison establishes early in the narrative that she envisions women to be an unremarkable (though subordinated) component of a press workshop; the reader may assume she treats ownership the same way by the lack of comment on Susan's new role. Though the world of the Charlewood Press has been turned upside down by the displacement of a man as head of the male/work sphere, Susan faces no resistance either from within the business or from the wider printing community. Narratively, this is justified: the majority of the main plot points have been resolved and the introduction of this new expression of gender-based discrimination would detract from the novel's final conflict and resolution. Further, Susan's (albeit temporary) acquisition of the business is a component of her triumph over a society that has subordinated her, both as a woman and as a woman of colour. She is no longer a slave, a wife or an assistant and declares her liberty with a boldness that rejects her previous anxieties:

This is my domain now. My workroom...I choose which books we print. I register them at Stationers' Hall. I take the risks and add up the money...I am head of the household...I go to the Guild dinners. (2019, p.325-7)

Resistance to Susan's new position of superiority could detract from her triumph and compromise the satisfaction of the ending.

Such an approach does, however, render Morrison's presentation of women's subordination inconsistent and suggests that contemporary Tudor anxieties were easily mollified. I use *Carew* to explore the opposing theory that such anxieties were pervasive and tenacious and, in doing so, engage with a silence that Morrison has passed over. The narrative of *Carew* is structured with this in mind: William dies approximately halfway through Part One, which allows for the majority of the novel (excluding the flashback sequence of Part Two) to focus on Hannah as she navigates the first forty days in her new role. Excluding Part Two, the narrative is also predominantly contained within the Carew Press itself, a decision made in reference to the contemporary Tudor view that the household 'functioned as a microcosm of the State' (Daniel and Sheeha, 2020, p.2). Tudor society was structurally patriarchal, and I imagine 'structure' literally and physically in *Carew* as the male-designated office and workshop. Just as the structures of Tudor society sought to resist the superiority of women, so do the Carew Press office and workshop. Part One establishes that William is near death and Hannah is poised to replace him as both head of the household and owner of the business. Her succession will cause a total dismantling of the boundary between the male and female spheres. Hannah does not, however, wait for William's death to cross the gender divide: in Chapter Three, she enters and occupies his office (ostensibly to search for his will) and, later, the workshop. Both rooms react negatively to her presence: the office furniture pulls at her clothing (p.25) and the darkness of the workshop (caused by the guttering of her candle) challenges her ability to use the presses (p.28). These rooms' resistance, which is both physical and abstract, represents the reluctance of patriarchal Tudor society to accept the burring/dismantling of the gender spheres.

The presentation of the rooms as sentient gives them, and the Tudor misogyny they represent, a physical form that is threatening. This is seen more acutely in the workshop (the most restricted male space in the house) than the office, the latter of



which only nips out at her clothing. When Hannah enters the workshop, her candle is extinguished by the closing of the door and she is confronted by seemingly solid darkness (p.28). With her eyesight forcibly removed, Hannah has to rely on her other senses to cross the room but even these the room attempts to stifle: the sharp scent of ink irritates her nose and the dresser conceals its contents (specifically the tools to light a candle), protracting her sightlessness (p.28). The presses themselves are presented as intimidating. They ‘loom’ through the darkness (p.28) and ‘[dominate]’ the workshop with their ‘great bulk’ (p.28). They are also slightly wild and animalistic. Their headbolts ‘glint...like eyes’ (p.29) and they ‘watch’ Hannah approach (p.29). This portrayal of Tudor patriarchy reveals it for what it was: a harmful societal structure that sought to restrict women and deny them the opportunity to realise their potential. The use of physical structure is also reminiscent of the twentieth-century term ‘the glass ceiling,’ coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978 to describe the cultural barriers that prevent women from rising in the workplace (2017). This similarity, though oblique, draws a connection between the early modern and the modern and encourages the reader to consider not only earlier expressions of sexism but how this sexism remains prevalent in society today. By revealing and condemning historical and current discrimination, *Carew* acts as a site for feminist rebellion. This rebellion goes beyond revelation and condemnation: as noted above, Hannah rebels against the structures that attempt to keep her subjugated. She is unbothered by the workshop’s rejection of her presence and tames the presses with ease.

The decision to conceptualise space as a sentient, reactive being that can be used to engage with a societal ideal is influenced by Susannah Dunn’s 2020 novel *The Testimony of Alys Twist*. Dunn’s focus is the boundary of class, which she explores using working-class protagonist Alys Twist. Dunn suggests that class boundaries were tightly controlled: ‘[Alys]’ place was at the tubs and wringers and, at best, outside the

chamberer's room...it was simply how it was' (2020, p.24). Like the gendered spheres, the boundary between working and upper-class spaces is understood geographically: some rooms are accessible to the working class, others are restricted. Similarly, restrictions lack balance: the upperclass can move around the house unconditionally, just as the men can in the Carew Press. Dunn notes, explicitly, the dominance of the wealthy in Alys' understanding of her place and, implicitly, through the use of space. When Princess Elizabeth enters and occupies the laundry to witness a search for treasonous communication, the room reacts negatively to her presence: the linen '[hisses] against her shins' and the 'rushes [rasp]' under her feet (Dunn, 2020, p.174). The adjectives hiss and rasp imply discomfort at Elizabeth's invasion of the room and its appropriation as a site for upperclass, political intrigue, which does not necessarily benefit its working-class inhabitants but could put them in danger (2020, p.175). Although the transformation of the room into a sentient, reactive being is subtle and transitory, it provides Dunn the opportunity to condemn the iniquity of Tudor class differences. Though sentient space represents something a little different in *Carew* (the office and workshop are analogous with harmful societal ideals and are antagonistic to, rather than representative of the protagonist), they provide the same opportunity to engage with and critique boundaries established by the Tudor state.

Though Tudor conduct literature portrayed the house/hold as a place of safety and order, other forms of literature considered it a place of danger (Daniel and Sheeha, 2020, p.2). Historian Frances E. Dolan argues that this danger was located 'in the intimate rather than the invader' (1994, cited in Daniel and Sheeha, 2020, p.2) and, with this in mind, Agnes (the housekeeper) emerges as the main antagonistic character within the narrative of *Carew*. Unlike Hannah, Agnes endorses the gender-based separation of society and reacts negatively when the boundary between men and women is challenged. She is Hannah's foil and is used to represent the Tudor women who

subscribed to their own subjugation even when it undermined their financial security and limited their opportunities for progress. Though Agnes and Hannah often quarrel, it is established in Part One that there is an undercurrent of tension between them derived from their oppositional attitudes to gender equality. When Agnes sees Hannah in the office, she reinforces the idea that this space is reserved for men: “What are you doing?...This is the master’s room” (p.26). The directness of her question suggests that this is also an admonishment, an attempt to remind Hannah of her place within both the hierarchy of the house and within the hierarchy of society. Later, in Part Three, she reaffirms her defence of gender-based spatial separation, noting that, ‘The master was always very specific about who could and who couldn’t enter the workshop’ (p.133). Not only does she espouse patriarchal ideas, she also takes an active role in preserving them, emulating William as gatekeeper within the Carew Press.

In doing so, however, she restricts herself, an action that is self-conscious: “It’s not my place to [enter the workshop]—I’m a housekeeper not a presser” (p.133). This speaks to the insidious nature of sexism: Agnes has been led to believe that the subjugation of women is beneficial and thus necessary (evidenced by her belief that the business will fail if it is managed by a woman (p.133)) but it has, instead, contributed to the Carew Press’ financial deterioration. By refusing to allow women into the workshop, William has denied the business access to free labour and, consequently, incurred debts, missed deadlines and replaced an experienced presser with an untrained apprentice. By reinforcing gender roles, Agnes refuses to acknowledge the harmful nature of sexism and perpetuates the business’ decline along with her own financial and employment stability: if the business fails (which is more likely without her help in the workshop), she will lose her position. Although Agnes is an antagonistic force within the novel, her character allows *Carew* to conceptualise a spectrum of contemporary Tudor responses to gender equality. As Roxane Gay notes, ‘A feminist novel is one that...illuminates

some aspect of the female condition' (2014); Agnes is used to illustrate how the female condition can be twisted by dominant patriarchal ideals.

Agnes' self-restriction also provides another opportunity to explore how physical space can be used to give form to Tudor societal structures. While Hannah has no qualms about crossing from one gendered sphere to another, Agnes is often contained within the threshold that exists between the two. In Part One, Chapter Three, she observes Hannah in William's office but does not cross into the room (p.25); in Part Three, Chapter Nine she refuses to enter the workshop, preferring, instead, to wait outside the door (p.161). Thresholds can be considered spatial expressions of liminality, that is, sites of transition and change. Historians Robert Daniel and Iman Sheeha argue that, as the Tudor house developed in size, so too did its liminal spaces (2020, p.1). In the introduction to the 2020 special issue of the *Early Modern Literary Studies* journal, titled 'Door-Bolts, Thresholds, and Peep-Holes: Liminality and Domestic Spaces in Early Modern England,' they designate 'apertures and casements, stairwells and alleyways, gates and gardens' (p.1) as liminal spaces. In the earlier parts of *Carew*, Agnes is often seen in liminal spaces and, consequently, is isolated from the other members of the household: from the men in the male/work sphere (the office and the workshop), Alice in the domestic sphere (the kitchen) and Hannah who traverses the two. There is an interesting parallel that can be drawn between thresholds and the widespread contemporary Tudor belief in purgatory, where the souls of the dead are caught in a world between Heaven and Hell. The horrific nature of purgatory is established in Part One when Hannah finds the illicit Protestant pamphlet her husband once printed:

Flames curl around mangled bodies. Mutilated hands reach for mercy. Mouths screech soundless agony. Snarling, hairless, wolf-like creatures tear flesh from bones and toss amputated limbs into a cauldron overflowing with hands and feet and legs and heads (p.16).

Agnes, this suggests, suffers for being caught between the two: she is not just isolated but also, metaphorically, at the mercy of wild and terrifying creatures. Ultimately this speaks to the danger of patriarchal division and encourages the reader to feel sympathy for Agnes even though she is explicitly responsible for her own isolation. Such a moment occurs in Part Three, Chapter Nine. Having agreed to assist in the workshop, Agnes finds herself unable to cross between the spheres and is once more stuck in a liminal threshold. She only does enter the workshop when invited to do so by the elder Luke, suggesting that she still clings to the idea of subjugation. Again, this suggests the pervasiveness of sexism and the effect it can have on women.

Ultimately, Agnes is a victim of Tudor sexism and, consequently, is portrayed sympathetically within the narrative. Her concerns for the future of the Carew Press, for example, are not unfounded: she has never seen Hannah operate a press or contribute to the management of the business. Hannah's occasional listlessness also does not encourage Agnes to trust her in times of crisis. Even Agnes' (albeit temporary) decision to inform the authorities of Anne Askew's location is not without due cause: because of her age, she is unable to secure another position of employment should the Carew Press business fail and the substantial reward money would provide her some financial security. Most important, however, is her change of mind. Once Hannah proves herself a competent and capable printer and manager, Agnes agrees to remain at the Press and decides against pursuing the Askew reward. Roxane Gay argues that a 'feminist novel...allows for hope and the possibility of a better world' (2014)—Agnes' redemption, which forms part of the novel's conclusion, gives form to this hope: women's subjugation could and can be resisted.

### Part Three. Beyond the Boundary

Having dismantled the boundary between the female/domestic and male/work spheres, attention can now be turned to how Hannah experiences her new-found liberty. Kate Morrison suggests that the breakdown in gender boundaries allows women to flourish in *A Book of Secrets*. The self-possession that Susan feels is palpable when she claims ownership of her late husband's press: 'This is my domain now....I choose which books we print. I register them at Stationer's Hall' (p.325). The repetitive use of personal pronouns suggests that Susan is a woman who is not only in control of her life, but aware of her newfound power. Her liberty is also sexual in nature: 'I have lovers. I am careful, but a widow may court until she marries and so I do' (p.327). Again the implication is clear: patriarchy has restricted Susan; having traversed the boundary she is now able to live her life as she wishes.

Though Hannah is never explicit in her awareness of her liberty (partly a consequence of the third-person narration); her flourishing is suggested implicitly. For example, in Parts One and Two, she is often quiet; after inheriting the Press she is frequently in conversation, suggesting that a weight has been lifted from her. Her boldness also develops. By the novel's conclusion, she confidently blackmails lawyer Christopher Lytton to proceed with probate despite his (erroneous) assumption that she may be pregnant. More so than this, *Carew* allows Hannah to rise and inhabit the role of Master Printer, which is understood to mean not just a manager of a press but also a teacher. Susan Charlewood is never provided this opportunity in *A Book of Secrets*; despite her ownership of the press she is never able to rise to the same level of capability as her husband because she is not demonstrated teaching as he was. *Carew*, on the other hand, provides a detailed scene that promotes Hannah to teacher when she introduces Anne Askew to the skill of typesetting. Her extensive knowledge is foregrounded in her interactions with Askew:

Hannah passes Anne a composing stick. Anne rests it across her hand where it teeters from side to side. 'Hold it like this.' Hannah shows her how to grip it between her palm and fingers. 'Keep it steady. The only thing keeping the letters from falling is the correct angle.'

Anne nods.

'These are the letters.' Hannah opens a lid. 'Basic roman type, size twelve.'

Anne touches an uppercase *E*. 'It isn't sticky.'

'It'd be disastrous if it was.' Hannah removes Anne's finger. 'Every letter is cleaned at day's end. It's best to select what you need using your thumb and forefinger as a pincer.' She demonstrates the action. 'Always lift from the base otherwise the oil on your skin will alter the ink and damage the print.'  
(p.155-156)

By depicting Hannah as a teacher after she has crossed the gender divide, *Carew* implies that she is only able to excel when patriarchal structures are removed. Again this leans into the modern notion of the glass ceiling, further demonstrating ties between the present and the past.

Despite this, Hannah still experiences challenges to her new role. The opening letters of Part Three suggest that the wider printing community distrusts her ability to successfully manage a printing press, for example:

*Mistress Carew,  
On account of your husband's passing, please consider my order of  
twelve copies of Aeschylus' The Oresteia cancelled.  
May God keep you,  
James Gardiner, Book Trader (p.126)*

The blanket assumption that the press will be unable to succeed under the direction of a woman is taken up by others, including lawyer Christopher Lytton and Carew Press employee Robert, who later leaves to take up a position elsewhere. Unlike Kate Morrison's Susan, Hannah is not able to succeed her husband in triumph: crossing the boundary between the male and female spheres brings its own challenges. The decision to demonstrate these further acts of resistance was made to suggest that while women

could and did traverse gender boundaries in the Tudor period, men remained anxious as to the consequences.

## **Conclusion**

Historical fiction can be used to explore gaps in the historical record, theorising about the ways people lived in the past. *Carew* engages creatively with the silences of marginalised working-class Tudor women by imagining how women printers experienced the English book trade. The novel uses the fictional character Hannah Carew to conceptualise how historical Tudor women such as Elisabeth Pickering might have negotiated gender boundaries. Physical space is used to illustrate how patriarchal structures have attempted to keep women subordinated in the past, and encourages the reader to consider how such structures operate in the twenty-first century. Housekeeper Agnes is used to demonstrate the insidious nature of sexism, while external figures such as the wider printing community are used to further indicate contemporary Tudor anxiety over women taking on traditionally male roles in the business.



## Chapter Two

### *Carew and History*

Historian and writer Richard Slotkin notes in his 2005 paper ‘Fiction for the Purposes of History’ that

History is what it is, but it is also what we make of it. What we call ‘history’ is not a thing, an object of study, but a story we choose to tell about things (p.222).

The differentiation between *the past* and *history* is well established in the field of historiography<sup>3</sup> and has prompted on-going conversations about the nature of history as a narrative. Such conversations invariably incorporate literary studies, consequence of the proposition that *history* and *fiction* are not as diametrically opposed as they were once considered. American historian Hayden White made such an argument in his influential 1973 book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, rejecting the idea that only fiction writers invent their stories (p.6), and suggesting that history is subjective rather than objective/neutral/scientific (p.2) as was once believed.

The rejection of objectivity aligns White’s theories with postmodernism. While postmodernism remains difficult to define (Sim, 2011, p.xiii), it can be described as a ‘form of scepticism’ that seeks to ‘undermine other philosophical theories claiming to be in possession of ultimate truth’ (Sim, 2011, p.3). The awareness of subjectivity contributes to the undermining of a singular truth by revealing the possibility of alternative truths. History, therefore, is plural, its narratives shaped by each historian’s personal perspective. As historian Keith Jenkins notes in his 1991 book *Re-Thinking*

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<sup>3</sup> Historian Alan Munslow provides a useful account of the development of *history* as a concept and how it differentiates from *the past* in his 2007 book *Narrative and History*.

*History*, ‘no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a ‘narrator’’ (p.12).

Recognising historians’ subjectivity helps to explain why certain groups of people are absent from the historical record. Jenkins uses women to demonstrate this point:

...although millions of women have lived in the past...few of them appear in history, that is, history texts. Women, to use a phrase, have been ‘hidden from history’, that is, systematically excluded from historians’ accounts (1991, p.7).

Historians, particularly feminist historians, are, as Jenkins notes, “writing women back into history” (1991, p.7); writers of historical fiction are similarly engaged in this project, using their novels to explore stories of the past that have been marginalised. Although many novels set in England during the sixteenth century focus on members of the royal family (Katherine Parr, for example, appears as protagonist in six major novels published between 2006 and 2021)<sup>4</sup>, a growing number consider, instead, or in addition to, women of the Tudor working class. For example, Suzannah Dunn’s co-protagonist in *The Queen of Subtleties* (2001) is a confectioner, while the protagonist in her 2020 novel *The Testimony of Alys Twist* is a laundress. Elizabeth Fremantle includes servant Dot Fownten as co-protagonist in *Queen’s Gambit* (2012); Naomi Miller similarly includes servant Rose Commin as co-protagonist in *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020). A bookseller is the focus of Brenda Rickman Vantrease’s 2010 novel *The Heretic’s Wife*, while Karen Brooks focuses on a locksmith in *The Locksmith’s Daughter* (2016). While these novels do some useful work to write working-class Tudor women back into history (at least in a fictional sense), they do not explore why such women may have

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<sup>4</sup> Carolly Erickson’s *The Late Wife of Henry VIII* (2006); Suzannah Dunn’s *The Sixth Wife* (2007); Elizabeth Fremantle’s *Queen’s Gambit* (2012); Jenny Mandeville’s *A Crown of Despair* (2013); Philippa Gregory’s *The Taming of the Queen* (2015); and Alison Weir’s *Katherine Parr: The Sixth Wife* (2021).

been excluded in the first place. Discussions on subjectivity, as one of the primary causes of marginalisation, are ignored in favour of telling a gripping story. A rare example of a text that does discuss the nature of *history* and the subjectivity that goes into its making is Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* (2020).

O'Farrell's subject is Agnes Hathaway, known popularly as Anne Hathaway, wife to famed Tudor playwright William Shakespeare. That little is known of Hathaway is indicated by the breadth of characterisation she is given in literature: in Hubert Osborne's *The Shakespeare Play* (1911) and its 1917 sequel *The Good Men Do*, she is ill-tempered and quarrelsome; in Robert Nye's 1993 novel *Mrs Shakespeare: the Complete Works*, she is sexually liberated; in Arliss Ryan's *The Secret confessions of Anne Shakespeare* (2010) she is imagined as a writer and the actual author of William's plays. O'Farrell alludes to this fictional multiplicity by referring to her own version of Hathaway's childhood as a 'story' and a 'myth,' noting that Hathaway herself (presumably the actual Hathaway) 'might tell a different story' (2020, p.51). By emphasising the fictional quality of her writing (the story, the myth) and noting that it might not correspond to the actual Hathaway's version, O'Farrell reveals its artificiality. Such an interjection disrupts the façade of the fiction and reminds the reader that *Hamnet* is fictitious. It is a possible truth not *the* truth.

Such disruptions are common within novels considered historiographic metafiction. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon coined this term in the late 1980s to describe postmodern historical novels 'which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (1988, p.109). These novels explore and problematise the supposed boundary between history and fiction, revealing—often explicitly—that both are 'human constructs' (Hutcheon, 1988, p.5). As literary critic Amy Cross notes, 'historiographic metafiction position readers to be aware of the way that reality is filtered through storytelling, or how the past is

constructed through narrative’ (2015, p.13). It is this self-reflexivity that sets them apart from historical fictions, which maintain rather than explore the façade of their narratives and avoid conversations regarding subjectivity, the plurality of truth and the individuality of experience.

I am wary of definitively describing *Carew* as a historiographic metafiction—it does not fulfil some of the key requirements of the genre, lacking, for example, sustained reflexivity and relying more on implicit rather explicit explorations of history/fiction—but do acknowledge that it engages in conversations regarding subjectivity and truth that are common within the form. My intention with *Carew* is to explore, albeit obliquely, the marginalisation of women within history and how subjectivity can effect the construction of their narratives. In this chapter I consider three ways in which I engage with this intention: the inclusion of secondary quotations as epigraphs at the beginning of each of the four ‘Parts’ of the novel; the presentation of Hannah as a subjective narrator/historian; and the creation of Anne Askew’s account of her first trial for heresy. These strategies encourage the reader to recognise subjectivity and the effect it can have on the creation of histories, further emphasising their fictionality.

## **Part One. Revealing Historian Subjectivity**

One of the aims of this project is to consider how Tudor women have been ‘hidden from history’ (Jenkins, 1991, p.7) and, in *Carew*, historian subjectivity is identified as a contributing factor to women’s marginalisation. The historical-novel form can do more than respond to gaps in the historical record by conceptualising how women of the past might have lived; it can also reveal that some of these gaps have been maintained by (some) historians. This is not to say that historians are to blame for a lack of material

evidence—this will always prove problematic, especially in the case of working-class Tudor women, whose lived experiences are often absent from documents of the past (Hubbard, 2012, p.1)—rather that their subjectivity can result in the marginalisation of material evidence that does exist. In recent years, historians have begun working towards remedying this marginalisation by refocusing their studies. In the 1980s, for example, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford began a project with the primary aim of exploring the lives of early modern women; their findings, published in 1998 as *Women in Early Modern England*, cover a range of topics including religion, politics, identity and female culture. It is notable that they not only had to research undocumented material evidence (1998, p.5), but ‘[rewrite] the history of early modern England from women’s perspective’ (1998, p.5), an implicit comment on the marginalisation of women within the field of historical studies up to this point.

It is fair to say that perspectives change over time. The development of feminism, for example, has helped reshape historians’ attitudes to women of the past. Skepticism towards grand narratives and their claims of universal truth has provided space for the emergence of *petits récits* (little narratives) (Lyotard, 1984, p.60) and the individuality of experience. Top-down history, which foregrounds the elite as the principle producers of change, is countered by bottom-up history, with its focus on ordinary people and their contributions to society. Discourses on perspective, perspective changes and the interrelated subjectivity of historians are common within the field of historiography; within historical fiction set during the Tudor period, however, they are rare. *Carew*, in contrast, foregrounds them. Doing so not only allows the novel to explicitly situate itself within such conversations (all historical novels, whether they acknowledge it or not, are products of subjectivity) but also reveals to the reader the plurality of history and how subjectivity/perspective has contributed to the marginalisation of Tudor women within history.

This is achieved through the inclusion of epigraphs. *Carew* is split into four parts: *The English Sweat*; *Hannah, Hannah, Hannah!*; *Tales from the Black Sea*; and *The Rondel Press*. Each of these parts opens with an epigraph comprising two quotations attributed to historians Timothy Axton-Smith and Mina Abbot. While epigraphs are not uncommon in novels set in the Tudor period, they rarely include secondary citations. Alison Weir, for example, includes quotes from Thomas Wriothesley and Katherine Parr at the beginning of her 2021 novel *Six Tudor Queens: Katherine Parr, The Sixth Wife*, while Brenda Rickman Vantrease uses quotes from noted figures connected to the Reformation and Tudor society in her 2010 novel *The Heretic's Wife*. In both instances, the epigraphs help ground the fictions in their historical contexts. In the case of Weir, it is also used to suggest, obliquely, the purpose of the novel. Weir's inclusion of contradictory appraisals of Katherine Parr's character—

She is a woman, in my judgement, for certain virtue, wisdom and gentleness, most meet for his Highness. And sure I am that his Majesty had never a wife more agreeable to his heart than she is (Wriothesley, in Weir, 2021)

and,

Considering my miserable life, my heart is of marble, wilful and unreasonable (Parr, on Weir, 2021)

—suggest she intends to dispute Wriothesley's portrait of Parr's character, which has permeated fiction: Jean Plaidy, for example, emphasises her 'virtue' and 'gentleness' in *The Sixth Wife* (1953), presenting her as a quiet, fearful woman who describes herself as a 'coward' (p.73). References to historians are usually reserved for the Author's Note, which is often used by writers to provide greater historical context for their novels and to justify occasions when the historical record has been altered. Literary critic Laura Sexton notes that accuracy is commonly brought up in conversations regarding historical fiction and that the Author's Note is used to demonstrate, explicitly, what is

fact and what is fiction (2020, p.127). ‘Critics,’ she argues, ‘often regard accuracy as a marker of merit’ (2020, p.128). This desire to be accurate, and thus worthy of merit, problematises, somewhat, the fictional component of historical fiction even though fiction can be a valuable tool with which to explore gaps in the historical record (Slotkin, 2005, p.222). It also passes over discussions of subjectivity within the creation of history: historians are included to prove accuracy not to provoke conversations about perspective.

Weir, unusually, does comment on perspective in her Author’s Note for *Six Tudor Queens: Katherine Parr, The Sixth Wife*:

When I came to write this novel, I had not researched Katharine Parr for thirty years, during which time new perspectives on her have emerged (2021, p.495).

The lack of exploration of perspective beyond this point, however, suggests that Weir’s comment still sits within the realm of proving accuracy: her version of Parr’s character might seem different to those that have come before it but only because historians’ interpretations of her character have evolved. The nature of perspective and what might influence perspective are not discussed.

*Carew*, however, foregrounds such discussions through the inclusion of (fictional) secondary sources within its epigraphs, with the intention of encouraging the reader to consider why perspectives might change over time. The contradictory nature of these sources is imperative to highlight subjectivity and how interpretations of the past differ between historians and across time. Professor Axton-Smith emphasises the role of men in Tudor society and diminishes the contributions of Tudor women. In Part four, for example, he dismisses the suggestion that women traversed the gender divide: ‘...let us remember the strictness of Tudor society. The realm of women was the realm of the domestic’ (p.244). Abbot, however, takes the alternate view, arguing that women could and did cross the gender divide (p.8) and were heavily involved in the London

book trade (p.125). The reasons for their differing opinions are not stated explicitly, but might be located in the details of their publications: Axton-Smith's conclusions were published in 1901, while Abbot's appeared in 2003. This separation of approximately one hundred years may account for the development of feminism within historical enquiry. This is further suggested in the title of Abbot's publication: *Hidden Women: Gender and the Early Modern Book Trade*. Her focus is women specifically, not early modern printers in general. There is also the suggestion that Abbot's conclusions are based on material evidence that Axton-Smith did not have access to: in part three, he comments that Elisabeth Redman printed only two books during her brief management of her late husband's press (p.125); Abbot suggests she published thirteen, eleven of which were under her maiden name (p.125). Whether Axton-Smith had access to this material evidence is, however, called into question in part four, when he chastises feminist historians for suggesting women traversed the gender divide: this suggests a preference for grand narratives, which obscure the individuality of experience. Abbot, with her consideration of Hannah Carew and Elisabeth Pickering, does not seem to ascribe to such a perspective. Axton-Smith emerges as a historian responsible for the marginalisation of women within historical accounts, while Abbot appears to be part of the movement countering such marginalisation. By including these epigraphs, the novel not only contributes to exploring gaps within the historical record by focusing on a working-class protagonist, it also prompts discussion about the treatment of such women by historians.

In the previous section, I emphasise that the reasons for the disparity of opinion *might* be found in the details of the historians' publications, and that the time gap *may* account for the development of feminism: it is up to the reader to notice these details and to respond to them in their own, subjective way. This not only upholds the novel's postmodern stance (the rejection of singular truth) but also casts the reader as historian



themselves. This decision is influenced by A.S. Byatt's 1990 historiographic metafictional novel *Possession*. *Possession* follows fictional literary critics Roland Michell and Maud Bailey as they uncover previously lost material evidence that details an affair between (fictional) Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. The novel contains expansive sections of material evidence in the form of poetry, letters and diary entries (written, in the most part, by the poets) that sit alongside Michell and Bailey's narrative. Byatt often presents this material evidence without elucidation—that is, the reader is provided space to interpret its nature before Michell and Bailey draw their own conclusions. This is most notable in Chapter Ten: *The Correspondence*, which comprises a large quantity of letters exchanged between Ash and LaMotte. By providing the reader their own opportunity to form an opinion—which may or may not differ from that of Michell and Bailey—Byatt compels the reader to take part in the academic activity of processing new material evidence. Doing so adds another layer of interpretation to the text and rejects the concept of universal truth. *Carew* provides similar space, although for the evaluation of secondary sources: these remain unremarked upon by the novel's narrator (and, indeed, sit beyond the narrative) and are left in the reader's hands to evaluate. The insistence of a universal truth is, consequently, avoided.

Of course, epigraphs do not exist in isolation: they interact with the narratives that succeed them. This interaction is often oblique and is reliant on the reader's involvement. Alison Weir's epigraph for *Six Tudor Queens: Katherine Parr, The Sixth Wife*, for example, subtly suggests to the reader that the narrative is a revision of past discourses; Brenda Rickman Vantrease's epigraph for *The Heretic's Wife* is used to ground the narrative in its Tudor/religious context. In both cases, the epigraph is used to guide the reader's interpretation of the text. *Carew*'s epigraphs establish history as a contested space, subject to the perspectives of those that write it; the novel's narrative,

therefore, is positioned as a component of this contest and must seemingly prove true either Axton-Smith or Abbot's conclusions. Authority, however, is impossible to establish: Axton-Smith's patriarchal version of the past is not necessarily untrue when compared to the narrative, though it is highly selective and exclusive; Mina Abbot's feminist interpretation is not necessarily entirely accurate (some of her conclusions are based on subjective material evidence). Both correspond, to some degree, with Hannah's experiences; neither, therefore, is able to prove itself more *true* than the other.

*Carew's* epigraphs demonstrate that the historical novel form can be used to reveal and explore historian's subjectivity, and the role this subjectivity may have in maintaining gaps within the historical record.

## **Part Two. Subjectivity and the Unreliable Narrator**

The problem, however, with using *Carew's* narrative as a method for testing the theories of Timothy Axton-Smith and Mina Abbot is that it might be considered an objective recreation of the past rather than a subjective one. I, the writer have my own biases, intentions and interpretations of the past that render *Carew* a personal construct; I also take liberties with gaps in the historical record to imagine, without material evidence, the whereabouts of Anne Askew before her final arrest. It is most certainly not provably accurate and should not be used as a gauge for accuracy beyond the context of the narrative and the epigraphs. Of course, the novel must work as a novel; as Roxane Gay notes of those narratives composed with feminist intentions:

The challenge of the feminist novel is that a novel has to tell a compelling story. The feminist ambition cannot override the narrative ambition, or one has not written a novel (2014).

And this is true for historiographical metafiction, whose form *Carew* leans into and borrows from. According to Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction 'always work

*within* conventions in order to subvert them' (1988, p.5); so, *Carew* must be able to stand on its own as a novel first and foremost and *then* be used to explore subjectivity and perspective. The narrative must be cohesive, engaging and, most importantly, true to itself, that is, the rules of the fictional world in which it exists must be consistent and adhered to. But *Carew* is also a postmodern novel that seeks to reveal both subjectivity and the plurality of history within itself; it is therefore important to suggest, even obliquely, that the novel's narrative is only one possible version of the events and characters it depicts rather than the whole truth. One of the ways I approach destabilising narrative certainty in *Carew* is by portraying Hannah as an unreliable narrator, specifically in relation to her portrayal of Anne Askew. Like historians, her conclusions are based on her own perspective; in this case she is influenced by her religious stance and views on women. Hannah's subjectivity is communicated, subtly, through the use of free indirect discourse.

Free indirect discourse is, itself, subjective in that the boundary between the third-person narrator and protagonist is blurred to such a degree that the ownership of narrated (but unspoken) statements is difficult to establish. Gérard Genette notes that, 'the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then *merged*' (1986, cited in Stevenson 1998, p.34). *Who* is narrating is not clear and this lack of clarity removes the objective neutrality of the narration, pushing it towards subjectivity. It also decreases the distance between narrator and character, enabling the character to become the narrator. In fiction, the use of free indirect discourse can have a destabilising effect (Stevenson, 1998, p.35); in *Carew* it is used to draw the reader's attention to the possibility that Hannah (as the novel's narrator during moments of merging) is subjective and not entirely neutral or reliable. Emma Donoghue explores this idea in her 2016 novel *The Wonder*.

*The Wonder*, set in Ireland in the 1850s, follows young English nurse Lib Wright as she observes, in a medical capacity, eleven-year-old Anna, who has supposedly not eaten for several months. Lib believes Anna to be a fraud (p.18) and presumes she has been eating secretly; in the early parts of the novel, Lib attempts to discover how this fraud has been committed. The novel is written in the third-person perspective and many of Lib's words are communicated directly using dialogue tags and quotation marks. Her thoughts are similarly reported directly, for example:

Lib thought of saying, in a very cool voice, *Doctor, I see that I've been brought here in hopes that my association with a very great lady might cast a veneer of respectability over an outrageous fraud* (2016, p.18).

Italics are used here to demonstrate that these are Lib's thoughts and function as the equivalent of speech marks used in quoted or direct speech. Interspersed, however, with Lib's direct speech (both vocalised and thought-based) are third-person perspective observations on Anna and her fasting that challenge the expected objective neutrality of the narrator. The content and tone of these observations correspond with Lib's opinions. For example, when Anna's doctor notes that she is religiously devout, the 'narrator' comments, 'Ah, so this was a religious enthusiasm, perhaps, not a medical matter at all' (2016, p.12), reflecting Lib's scepticism and, as is revealed as the novel progresses, her anti-Catholic feeling. Her anti-Irish sentiments also pervade the narrator's storytelling: 'Ireland, an impoverished mother, seemed to ship half her skinny brood abroad' (2016, p.23). This is similarly the case regarding her dismissive attitudes to the working class: 'This was only a small-holder's daughter' (2016, p.65). Such sentiments are not only clearly subjective but also clearly belong to Lib. The distance between Lib and the narrator has narrowed to such a degree that their perspectives have merged and Lib now dominates the narrative.

This merging of voices and the dominance of subjectivity is indicative that the narrative style has shifted to free indirect discourse. Donoghue's use of free indirect

discourse demonstrates how subjectivity can be both dominating and restricting. The pervasiveness of Lib's perspective not only restricts her own ability to see the truth in Anna's situation but also the reader's. As literary critic Maite Escudero-Alías argues in her 2023 paper 'Estrangement and the Ethics of Attention in Emma Donoghue's *The Wonder*':

The multiple gaps and cruxes in the text are reinforced by a narrative that is biased by Lib's focalization, so much so that it prevents us from discovering the truth at any point except at the very end. It is only when Lib abandons her arrogant and distant position towards the Irish that she is able to become involved with Anna's dying condition and hence act accordingly. (p.55)

These 'gaps' can be read as absences of objectivity within the narrative: the reader sees only what Lib's biased perspective deems important to see and consequently misses out on information that might allow them to form alternate interpretations of Anna's illness. In this way, she is an unreliable narrator.

In *Carew*, Hannah's unreliability is explored through her portrayal of Anne Askew's religiosity. Before Askew arrives at the Carew Press, Hannah has only been exposed to her as a zealous Protestant gospeller. This, therefore, is the primary characteristic Hannah ascribes to Askew during the early days of the quarantine. For example, when she hears Askew's 'murmuring voice, hurried and repetitious' (p.135), she presumes she must be praying. Hannah reinforces this conclusion by constructing for the reader an image of Askew at prayer: 'She imagines her on her knees, the uneven floorboards pressing knots into her thin skin, her hands clasped before her, knuckles turning white' (p.135). This encourages the reader to view Askew as devoutly religious, a woman who cleaves ('clasps') to her faith and suffers for it—in other words, zealous. In actuality, Hannah has drawn a picture of herself, one conjured from her memories based on the presumption that Askew's words are religious in nature. Hannah might also have seemed devout when '[her] knuckles had turned white when she'd first

prayed with Eleanor' (p.135), but she refuses to draw a parallel between herself and Askew, blaming, instead, the coldness of the chapel for the colour of her skin (p.135) and, later, the fear that her reasons for taking holy orders, which were pragmatic rather religious, might be discovered: "I thought God might realise the truth and reveal me for a player" (p.136). Instead, she uses Askew as a leaping block to explore an episode from her past in an attempt to create distance between them: she, Hannah may be religious but she is not a zealot.

Hannah's limited interpretation of Askew's character is seen by her failure to consider two possibilities: that Askew is not praying, or that she, like Hannah, might use prayer as a pretence. This is further expressed when Hannah presumes that Askew's writing, which she sees on entering the room, is religious in nature: 'Bible words, perhaps; prayers' (p.138). In Hannah's opinion, there is no other option than for this woman, who she has built up in her mind (and in the mind of the reader) to be wholly religious, or to be writing on any subject other than religion. This conclusion, limited in its nature, however, reveals her bias and provides the reader the opportunity to consider Hannah's potential for unreliability—not a purposeful, intentional unreliability, but an unreliability derived from her personal perspective.

These moments of subjectivity and unreliability help to destabilise narrative certainty in *Carew* and dispel the idea that the narrative is objective. They also provide an opportunity to problematise the boundary between history and fiction and engage with Hayden White's assertion that historians as well as novelists invent their stories (1973, p.6). Hannah acts as a historian in the sense that she constructs a character for Anne Askew based on the evidence available to her. She selects information she believes to be relevant (in this case, Askew's religiosity) and presents her as the evidence suggests. By demonstrating to the reader, however, that Hannah's conclusions

are based on subjectivity, her portrait of Askew takes on a fictive, or inventive quality. By reducing the gap between history and fiction, *Carew* suggests that history can be fictive and, like fiction, a personal, human construct.

### **Part Three. Composing *The First Examination of Anne Askew***

The suggestion that history is a personal, human construct not wholly different from fiction is explored in greater depth in *Carew* during the composition of Anne Askew's account of her first trial for heresy. Unlike the majority of the characters within the novel, Askew was a real Protestant gospeller. Her story, what we know of it, is fascinating, not least for its gaps. According to the historical record, Askew was born in 1521 to a wealthy, landowning Lincolnshire family. Her father, Sir William Askew, was a knight and member of parliament for Grimsby who had connections to the royal family (Hoffman, no date). Anne grew up in a world of religious flux consequential of the Reformation: England broke from Rome, Henry VIII became head of the newly-established Church of England (1534); religious houses (monasteries, priories, nunneries, etc.) were dissolved (1536-41); and the Bible could be read in English (1535). The effects of the Reformation could be felt even in rural Lincolnshire and it is believed Askew was raised in the new religion (what is now called Protestantism) (Beilin, 1996, p.xviii).

In 1536, at the age of fifteen, Askew married affluent neighbour Thomas Kyme, fulfilling the role of bride intended for her older, but now deceased, sister. Askew later denounced the marriage as being against her will and sought a divorce first in Lincoln and then London. Although her petitions were refused, Askew remained in London and began gosselling (preaching) Protestantism. By this time, Henry VIII had started to revise his previous alterations to Christian doctrine. The Six Articles (1539) made

Consubstantiation heretical and restricted the reading of the bible to clerics and those in the upper classes (gentle and noble women such as Askew could now only read it in private). Askew's gospelling was deemed heretical and she was arrested on three occasions (March 1545, June 1545 and June 1546), examined twice (June 1545 and June 1546), condemned a heretic subsequent to her second examination and executed at Smithfield in July 1546<sup>5</sup>.

In 1546, *The First Examinacyon of Anne Askew*, an allegedly self-authored account of her first examination, was published. A second account, which covered her second examination and, most notably, her torture at the hands of senior statesmen, followed in 1547. These accounts turned her into a cause célèbre. They provide detailed information about her examinations (what she was asked and how she responded), but they are often dispassionate and omit details of Askew's life and her emotional reactions to such details.

These gaps have been taken up by novelists, and she has appeared in several works of historical fiction. She is the focus of three novels: *The Heretics* (1965) by Alison MacLeod, *Only Glory Awaits* (2003) by Leslie N. Nuernberg and *Fire of the Word* (2016) by Carol Pratt Bradley; she also appears as a supporting character in several others, including *The Sixth Wife* (1953) by Jean Plaidy, *Queen's Gambit* (2013) by Elizabeth Fremantle, *The Taming of the Queen* (2015) by Philippa Gregory and *Six Tudor Queens: Katherine Parr, The Sixth Wife* (2021) by Alison Weir. It is interesting, however, that the composition of her accounts is often omitted from the fiction that features her; preference is given to exploring her life as a religious radical rather than her writing career. Engagement with Askew's accounts is limited to quotation. Writers use sections of the *Examinations* to help construct Askew's trial; Pratt Bradley, for

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<sup>5</sup> Although there are inconsistencies within the historical record regarding the dates of Askew's arrests, Elaine Beilin, a leading scholar in Askew studies, suggests that the dates above are the likeliest (1996, p.xxii).



example, follows the structure of *The First Examination* closely in *Fire of the Word*

(2016). Askew's recollection that,

...first Christopher dare examined me at Sadler's hall, being one of the quest, and asked if I did not believe that the sacrament hanging over the altar was the very body of Christ really. Then I demanded this question of him, wherefore S. Stephen was stoned to death? And he said he could not tell. Then I answered that no more would I assail his vain question (Askew, 1996, p.19-20).

is rendered,

Dare leaned forward. She was not prepared for his next words. "Mistress Kyme, do you believe that the sacrament to be the literal body of Christ?"...Anne looked away, up to the beamed roof, then returned to his stare. "Can you tell me why the disciple Stephen was stoned to death?" (p.183).

Alterations have been made for the sake of fluidity and consideration of the twenty-first century reader, but the question/response structure and the contents of these exchanges are maintained. This is similarly the case in Nuernberg's *Only Glory Awaits*; and while Macleod omits the trial in *The Heretics* (her protagonist, servant Nancy Scarlett is not permitted to attend), she does quote *The Examinations* almost verbatim to recap for the reader what has been missed. The emphasis placed on quoting *The Examinations* in these novels suggests that writers are conscious of adding legitimacy to their narratives, which corresponds with literary critic Laura Sexton's observation that accuracy is linked to merit in historical fiction (2020, p.128). There also seems to be a desire to contribute to the preservation of Askew's voice. Regardless of their reasons, by using *The Examinations* in the way they do, these writers suggest, albeit obliquely, that the text is an objective, accurate and full account of Askew's trial. This is unlikely given its extensive nature. Askew was examined on a number of topics, by several men and in different locations; although presumptions regarding the capacity of her memory are perhaps not appropriate, the detail contained within the accounts does encourage scepticism towards the level of accuracy. Accuracy is also called into question by the

dispassionate tone of the writing and the lack of descriptive details. Whether the account was intended for public consumption or not remains unknown (Costley King'oo, 2014, p.30), but, nevertheless, Askew's reasons for writing the account are rarely taken into account by the writers who feature her in their novels. That the account might be subjective is similarly ignored, as is the process of composition.

*Carew*, alternatively, foregrounds the idea that *The Examinations* is a subjective reconstruction of Askew's trial rather than an objective one. It covers conversations such as memory (Askew acknowledges that she does not remember the intricate details of the entirety of the trial), the tone of the writing (Hannah suggests 'gesticulations' (p.211) are removed) and how Askew is characterised. By revealing these conversations, *Carew* not only explores an aspect of Askew's story that has been passed over by writers of historical fiction (the composition of her account) but also uses them as a way to problematise the boundary between history and fiction, demonstrating to the reader that 'reality is filtered through storytelling' (Cross, 2015, p.13).

Regarding memory, *Carew* is explicit in its rejection of the idea that Askew might remember the full details of her first examination: "I don't remember all that I was asked. I can't tell you the detail of the questions—some were expansive. I can't even recall the entirety of my responses" (p.212). Doing so allows the novel to suggest that invention, commonly associated with fiction, can be used to create narratives about past events and, in so doing, blur the line between fiction and history. Hannah's comment that "It doesn't need to be an exact recollection, just one that implies the truth" (p.212), evokes the tension between facts and truth, suggesting that these should not be considered oppositional. Askew might not recall the specific details (the facts) of what happened, but she is able to create a picture of the past that is true.

There is, of course, some revision of past events. Askew, for example, tells Hannah to add a quote from the bible to the account that she had not referred to during

the examination (p.215). This reveals the account to be subjective rather than objective, its contents dictated by Askew's intentions for the piece. Her subjectivity is further demonstrated through discussions on how she is to be characterised in the account—again suggesting that historians (in this case, Askew) incorporate invention and character construction in their narratives, both techniques of fiction writing. This is expressed explicitly in dialogue:

'I need to be contrite.'  
 'Why? You say you've done nothing wrong.'  
 'I haven't.'  
 'So, why...?'  
 'Others may see the letter. I don't want to seem...aggressive.'  
 'You want to portray yourself as a victim?'  
 'I *am* a victim of papist cruelty,' Anne says. 'Technically.'  
 Hannah dips the quill back into the ink and adds Anne's correction.  
 'Good people,' she murmurs. 'These good people like to be entertained.' She remembers the slaughterer. 'They like a burning. *Can* you be a victim?' she asks. 'Shall we have you swoon and blush and weep?'  
 'I don't want to be that sort of victim,' Anne says. 'Make me steadfast but don't make me the aggressor.'  
 'Is that true to the event?'  
 Anne dips her head from side to side. 'Yes. No.' She shrugs. 'I was afraid, but we don't need to say that. I'd rather be steadfast' (p.213).

*Carew* establishes that the Askew who appears in the account is not an accurate recreation of the real Askew but, instead a fiction inflection, created to sway popular opinion to her side. It is important to note, however, that this is only a fictional *inflection*: as Askew notes above, the characteristics they ascribe to the Askew they've created are both true and not true to the events of the examination and though they affect the tone of the history, they do not alter the broad strokes of it. The questions she was asked and the responses she made are, more or less, accurate, even though they have been altered for affect. The inclusion of this section allows *Carew* to engage with postmodern, and historiographic metafiction, conversations about the nature of history and fiction and problematise the boundary between the two.

## Conclusion

In recent years, writers of historical fiction set during the Tudor period have begun to include working-class protagonists in their novels. Although these novels do some useful work to provide new perspectives of the sixteenth century, they rarely consider why working-class women have been marginalised within history. Some historians suggest that subjectivity has contributed to this marginalisation and *Carew* seeks to foreground this possibility. The novel uses epigraphs to engage with this suggestion, presenting two competing historians' views on Tudor women and women printers to establish history as a contested space. The novel also further engages with subjectivity by presenting Hannah as an unreliable narrator/historian whose perspective on the Reformation and women affects the way she portrays Protestant gospeller Anne Askew. Subjectivity is explored more explicitly in the creation of Anne Askew's account of her first trial for heresy, and *Carew* uses this as an opportunity to problematise the boundary between history and fiction. Doing so aligns the novel with historiographic metafiction, a form of fiction that seeks to postmodern demonstrate scepticism towards grand narratives of objectivity.

## Chapter Three

### Challenging the Narrative Subordination of Working Women in Tudor-set Historical Fiction

The inclusion of Anne Askew in *Carew* provides an opening to explore the ways novelists approach narratives set in the Tudor period that feature both upperclass and working-class characters.

In 2009, Hilary Mantel published *Wolf Hall*, the first in a trilogy of novels that explore the life and career of Tudor statesman Thomas Cromwell. Until this point, the primary focus of Tudor-set historical fiction had been the royal family (Anderson, 2020). The success of *Wolf Hall*, however, has encouraged writers to look beyond the royal family for their protagonists, and there has been a rise in novels foregrounding working-class characters, such as Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* (2020) and Suzannah Dunn's *The Testimony of Alys Twist* (2020). While O'Farrell explores working-class stories solely in *Hamnet*, Dunn's narrative instead focuses on the intersection of working and upper-class lives (in this case, laundress Twist, Princess Elizabeth Tudor and Queen Mary I). This is the second time she has taken such an approach: her 2001 novel *The Queen of Subtleties* featured confectioner Lucy Cornwallis and Queen Anne Boleyn. She is also not alone: Elizabeth Fremantle's *Queen's Gambit* (2013) and Naomi Miller's *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020) also feature both working and upper-class women; Alison Macleod's *The Heretics* (1965) is an early example of this narrative focus.

The inclusion of working-class characters provides these authors the opportunity to explore well-known historical figures from a different perspective, which Fremantle describes as 'a 'below stairs' view' (no date). Twist provides a laundress' experience of the tension between sisters Elizabeth and Mary; Fremantle's servant Dot Fownten is

privy to Katherine Parr's queenship; and Macleod's servant Nancy Scarlett witnesses Protestant heretic Anne Askew's gospelling career.

Fremantle's acknowledgement of the 'below stairs' perspective suggests that Fownten's primary role within *Queen's Gambit* is that of witness. This speaks to a larger issue within Tudor novels that feature working *and* upper-class protagonists: the working class character is often subordinated within the narrative in favour of their upper-class counterpart. An analysis of the above novels suggests three forms of subordination: the relegation of the working-class character to the role of witness; the problematising of the working-class; and the use of narrative structure to favour the upper-class character.

Historical fiction can be used as a site for dissent. Diana Wallace notes that the 1980s saw a movement towards reclaiming women's history through the writing of literary 'herstories,' a response to the exclusion of women from male author's historical novels (2004, p.176). These novels, Wallace argues, also sought to disrupt the Conservative Party's attempts to mould Britain on Victorian values and perpetuate the idea that feminism, among other movements, had caused the country to degenerate (2004, p.176). This project of dissent has continued and in Chapter One, I explored how *Carew* is a site of feminist dissent, used to condemn patriarchal social structures. In this chapter, I explore how *Carew* is also used to resist, challenge and subvert the presentation of working class characters in the canon of Tudor-set fiction.

## **Part One: The Presentation of Working and Upperclass Women in Tudor-set Historical Fiction**

### **Working-class Women as Witnesses**

Elizabeth Fremantle's assertion that working-class characters in Tudor-set historical fiction can provide a 'below the stairs' (no date) perspective suggest that the primary role these characters have within their narratives is that of witness. The events they witness are usually connected to either the royal family or the wealthy upperclass, further demonstrating a continued fixation with Tudor aristocracy.

Alison Macleod's *There Heretics* (1965) can be used as an example. Although the novel's protagonist is the working-class maid Nancy Scarlett, it's focus is Anne Askew. This is established immediately by the novel's framing: Scarlett is visited by theologian and writer John Foxe and asked to recount Askew's story so that it might be included in his martyrology (an allusion to Foxe's 1563 work *Actes and Monuments*). Scarlett, Askew's childhood friend and maid, is explicitly termed a '[witness]' (1965, p.7) by Foxe and this is the role she fulfils in the narrative: she has no discernible character arc and Macleod rarely uses the novel to explore either Scarlett's life or her experiences of the reformation. Instead, she chronicles Askew's marriage, gospelling career and trials. Notably, Macleod uses first person narrative perspective for the novel. Although this does suggest a foregrounding of a working-woman's voice, it also aligns with literary critic Horace Engdahl's assertion that

One does not become a witness only by observing an event with one's own eyes. A witness is a person who speaks out and says, "I was there, I saw it, I can tell people!" (2001, p.3)

The emphasis of the first person as a component of witness literature is captured by Macleod's use of the first person perspective in *The Heretics*. Scarlett was there, she saw it and she tells Foxe what she has seen (1965, p.10).

Scarlett is also used by Macleod to provide exposition. This is most notable concerning Askew's first examination for heresy. Although Scarlett was not present (a missed opportunity to explore, in detail, the exclusion of women and working-class women from certain official events), she reads the pamphlet written about the event, and

Macleod uses this as an opportunity to explain the religious allusions and references contained within it. When Askew asks “Wherefore was Saint Stephen stoned to death?” (1965, p.164), Scarlett explains:

Can you imagine a man setting himself up as learned, and fit to try a heretic, when he did not even know that Saint Stephen was martyred for saying that God did not dwell in temples made with hands? (1965, p.164).

Macleod’s framing of the narrative becomes, consequently, somewhat flimsy here: it is unlikely that John Foxe would need Askew’s reference to Saint Stephen clarifying. The disintegration of the novel’s framework further reveals Scarlett’s role in the narrative for what it is: witness and chronicler of Askew’s life.

Suzannah Dunn also uses a working-class woman as witness to upperclass characters and events in her 2020 novel *The Testimony of Alys Twist*. Dunn’s use of the word ‘testimony’ in the novel’s title establishes her protagonist (the laundress Alys Twist) as a witness before the narrative opens and this is her primary role throughout the story. The novel focuses on the strained relationship between princess Elizabeth and queen Mary I; Twist is employed in the laundries of both and is later recruited to report on Elizabeth’s activities. Much of the novel’s tension is derived from the sister’s antagonism towards each other and Twist is present to chronicle this (again, a first person perspective is utilised). For example, she witnesses Mary losing her temper over Elizabeth: ““Princess”!’ the queen said disparagingly to her cousin. ‘How can anyone think that I’d have as my heir the bastard of a trollop and her lute-boy?’” (2020, p.30-1). Twist’s response to overhearing such a comment is marked by its excitement:

As soon as we were across the chamberers’ room, I hissed, incredulous, to Bel, ‘Did you heart that?’...‘That!’ I couldn’t even articulate. ‘That! That!’ I was practically jumping up and down (2020, p.31).

By having Twist react this way, Dunn emphasises the centrality of the royal family to the narrative, which is indicative of the centrality of the aristocracy in fiction set during



the Tudor period. Doing so, however, subordinates the working-class Twist, and reaffirms her role as witness.

Dunn's intention seems to be to provide the same 'below the stairs' perspective of Tudor political intrigue as Fremantle in her 2013 novel *Queen's Gambit*; both novels do provide some rich detail of working-class lives even though both Twist and Fremantle's Dot Fownten emerge, primarily, as witnesses. The primary nature of Fownten's role in the narrative is emphasised by her absences. In the later part of the novel, Fownten is separated from her employer (queen Katherine Parr) and spends some time homeless on the streets of London. Dot's experiences of vagrancy are, for the most part, ignored. When the reader meets her again, her homelessness comes to an end and the details of her life on the streets are vague: she smells, looks dirty, and is thinner (2013, p.338-9), and comments that she has seen things she had not anticipated in her life (2013, p.340). Beyond this, she is silent, although the reader may infer some trauma in her refusal to explain her time away to Parr. That her perspective is cut during this traumatic episode but *not* during her imprisonment, which preceded her time on the streets and was directly linked to court intrigue is suggestive of her narrative role: to provide perspective of events central to the royal family.

Although it is useful to consider working-class perspectives of well-known Tudor events and characters, the persistent focus on the aristocracy contributes to the subordination of the working-class and neglects the opportunity to explore other aspects of sixteenth-century life.

## **The Problematising of the Working Class**

In addition to acting as witness to Katherine Parr, Fremantle's Dot Fownten is also subordinated by the nature of her narrative arc, which comprises the acquisition of

upperclass privileges. In the novel, the line between employer/employee and friend is blurred. For friendship to emerge, however, the working-class character has to undergo a process of change, taking on traits more commonly associated with the wealthy. Doing so problematises the working class, suggesting that they are not worthy of the friendship of their upperclass counterparts unless they acquire upperclass traits.

Fownten's changes are noted explicitly. Early on, she notes that she has changed too much for her family: 'she has grown into the wrong shape for that life' (p.48) and 'Everything was different but most of it was she who had changed; she'd felt out of place in the cottage...She'd got used to a different kind of life' (p.49). This change is permanent. When Fownten is finally reunited with her mother, she is aware of their differing circumstances: 'Dot felt distant from her, as if she were a foreigner and a great ocean separated them' (p.390). This distance originates from their clothing. Though Fownten's dress is 'plain,' it stands in stark contrast to her mother's, which is 'patched at the elbows' and 'hitched up and tucked into her pinny' (p.390)—a dress made practical for work. The hem of Fownten's dress, in comparison, remains at her ankles: she, like her upperclass employer, does not require practicality in the same sense as her laundress mother. Difference is also noted in their hands: Fownten's hands are 'soft and white'—Fremantle states, explicitly, that Fownten's hands are 'a lady's hands'—while her mother's are 'red raw and rough' (p.390). Dot's hands once looked as her mother's ('[Dot] holds up her...calloused hand' (p.46)) but as the line between employer and employee blurs to friendship, Fownten spends less time at her work and appears more like Parr.

Though Fremantle does some useful work to demonstrate social mobility (albeit mobility borne of good fortune rather than skill: Fownten is lucky that Parr does not support social barriers), some of this good work is undone by her decision to have the servant lose her awareness of social differences. This awareness is noted explicitly in

Fownten's opening chapter perspective: when Meg, one of the younger upperclass characters, states that she wishes she could swap places with Fownten, she replies that Meg "wouldn't last an hour" (p.46). When Fownten reunites with her mother (detailed above), she has brought her a gift of expensive material. It is only then that Fownten remembers that such a gift is useless for a woman of her mother's social class: 'what would her ma do with a stretch of satin the colour of apricots?' (p.390). As with the upper-class Meg, Fownten—now embodying a noblewoman—is rendered (albeit temporarily) ignorant of the lived realities of working women. That this comprises Fownten's character arc is problematic: her working-class roots are neither explored nor celebrated but presented as something to be dispensed with.

The necessity for a working woman to change in order for friendship to form is also evident in Miller's *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020). When Rose Commin arrives at Wilton House to begin work as a servant, she is taken under the wing of Lady Catherine Herbert who notes her burgeoning talent as an artist. Lady Catherine also teaches Commin to read. The development of Commin's education comes before she meets the second protagonist of the novel, Mary Sidney Herbert—an upperclass, educated woman. When they do meet, Commin is more similar to Lady Mary than she is her previous self and it is this that eases them into friendship. The change in Commin does, unfortunately, lead to alienation from her family. In the period between Lady Catherine's death and Commin's first meeting with Lady Mary, she returns to her family; she anticipates change—"I went home to my family in Amesbury. To a life I no longer fit" (p.79)—but does not anticipate her father's disapproval of her skills. When she draws in the margins of an account book, he reprimands her: "You're a child no longer, Rose. There's no time for these scribbles when there's real work to be done" (p.102). Miller presents Commin's skills, honed by her upperclass mentor, as incompatible with her working-class roots. The tension between father and daughter

continues until he burns her drawings, ostensibly because their contents may be construed as witchcraft, but more as an attempt to regain control. In doing this, Miller positions these two classes as antagonistic towards each other, which further reinforces the idea that one of the women in the working class/upper class relationship must change to cross the barrier between them. Commin changes as does Dot in *Queen's Gambit*.

It is worth noting that while the upperclass protagonists of *Queen's Gambit* and *Imperfect Alchemist* undergo character development, they do not change to become more like their working-class counterparts. This suggests, erroneously, that working women do not possess anything of value that may be considered desirable by wealthy women. This privileging of the wealthy is problematic. Though wealthier Tudor women had greater access to academic learning, they were not exposed to other sorts of knowledge, such as specific artisan trades including printing, blacksmithing, gunsmithing, as working women were. Working women were also afforded greater freedoms than wealthy women in other aspects of life: movement around the country was not uncommon as unmarried girls and women sought employment; marriage could be based on personal preference rather than parental hereditary concerns; widows could inherit and run their dead husband's businesses. Though Fremantle and Miller seek to provide a working woman's perspective of the Tudor period, their narratives ignore some of the more interesting aspects of Early Modern working-class society, problematise working class backgrounds in cross-societal relationships and privilege the upperclass.

## **Narrative Structure and the Subordination of Working-class**

### **Characters**

In the following novels, it becomes clear that, while working women are brought to the fore, they often lose narrative space to their upperclass counterparts.

Suzannah Dunn's 2001 novel *The Queen of Subtleties* explores the events preceding and contributing to the fall of Anne Boleyn. Lucy Cornwallis (a historical figure in so far that her name appears on a roll of servants associated with the royal household) is employed in Henry VIII's kitchens as a confectioner and provides one of two narrative voices. Although the narrative is split between the two women, the novel belongs to Boleyn: her perspective chapters open and close the narrative; her sections of narrative cover a broader period of time (from before her marriage to Henry VIII until her execution in 1536; Cornwallis' sections, in comparison, take place over, approximately, one year, 1535-36); Boleyn's death ends the narrative, and, therefore, ends Cornwallis' 'life', which is lived only while the novel continues. Boleyn's narrative is consequently dominant and dictatorial and the inclusion of Cornwallis' requires justification. This justification comes in the form of a sugar rose that she gifts to one of Boleyn's rumoured lovers and which contributes to Boleyn's downfall. This is one of only two moments when the narratives of these women intersect. If it is this intersection that is necessary for the narrative to succeed, then even the use of dual narratives is problematic, reinforcing the idea that the narratives of working women are only justified when they work alongside the narratives of their upperclass counterparts. That is not to say that the use of a dual narrative does not have potential: Dunn allows the reader a glimpse into the lived reality of a working woman as well as the opportunity to experience a noteworthy event from a new and different perspective. Further, the tension between the narrative voices, with Cornwallis' perspective being introduced subsequent to Boleyn's, suggests an attempt to show how working women have to fight for space in historical fiction—as does the use of Boleyn's perspective as book ends, which confine Cornwallis within Boleyn's narrative. The brevity of

Cornwallis' sections, however, suggests a need to hurry back to the 'main story'—Boleyn's fall. Despite Dunn's attempts to give voice to a marginalised name in the historical record, Boleyn's draw proves too strong and Cornwallis remains on the periphery.

It is possible that novels that include famous, popular historical figures will have difficulty navigating the tension between the known and the unknown, with the draw of the familiar proving stronger than the unfamiliar. Naomi Miller's 2020 novel *Imperfect Alchemist* provides the opportunity to test this theory as one of her two narrative perspectives is given to Lady Mary Sidney Herbert, who is an upperclass historical figure but one who lacks the fame of Anne Boleyn. The other narrative perspective belongs to fictional servant Rose Commin. While the reader is again provided the opportunity to experience a working woman's life (Miller provides some detail of Commin's duties and the condition of her living) the dual narrative still proves problematic. Although the first chapter is from Commin's perspective, it follows a prelude that comes from the perspective of a wealthy, upperclass woman: Lady Catherine Herbert. This prelude concludes with the dedication '*To the next Cleopatra*' (p.13), which introduces something to be inherited. By moving directly to Commin's narrative, the reader may presume that she will be the next Cleopatra; her narrative is marked as noteworthy not because of her personality or skills (which have yet to be introduced) but because of Herbert's dedication. The reader understands that Commin is, or will become noteworthy because an upperclass character has marked her out as such. The prelude also contains the novel's initial narrative hook: what is a Cleopatra and what will she inherit? Though Commin's first chapter is engaging and opens with an intriguing first line—'My mother was a witch' (p.17)—the mystery of the prelude's dedication remains, at this point, the novel's primary draw.

Commin's narrative is only of interest if it intersects with Lady Herbert's narrative. This encourages the question whether the novel's narrative would be successful if Commyn's perspective chapter had preceded all others; Miller's positioning of her chapter suggests not. Commyn's role is to continue the story started by her upper-class counterpart. Familiarity of the upper-class character does not necessarily contribute to the domination of the narrative.

Neither Miller nor Dunn take full advantage of the potential offered by dual narratives beyond giving a different perspective of wealth. Monica Spiridon highlights in her 2013 paper 'Fractured Narratives in Novel and Film,' that a split perspective can allow the reader to experience 'two diverging narrative *discourses* which overtly compete to dominate the interpretation of the fiction' (p.376). Miller does not use diverging narratives this way, and Dunn engages only obliquely: Boleyn is presented as intelligent but a victim of political machinations; Cornwallis sees her as a scheming intruder within the royal family. Boleyn's portrayal and Cornwallis' impression of her correspond with Boleyn's changing reputation: in the past she was viewed as a witch-like seductress, now, more commonly, as ahead of her time (Bordo, 2014, p.8). Dunn's narratives compete, but Cornwallis is situated to lose: Boleyn's narrative dominates as does her characterisation.

In both novels the working-class characters are subordinated by their upperclass counterparts.

## **Part Two. Challenging, Subverting and Resisting Working-class**

### **Subordination in *Carew***

Having established that there is a trend in historical fiction set during the Tudor period to subordinate working-class characters, *Carew* is used to resist, subvert and challenge

such representations. I approach this in a number of ways including the use of third person, free indirect discourse; the positioning of Hannah as teacher to Anne Askew; and Hannah's role in the construction of Askew's account of her first examination.

## **Narrative Style**

As noted above, the use of first-person perspective in novels that feature both working-class and upperclass characters can prove problematic, evoking the possibility that the working-class characters serve as witnesses to their upperclass counterparts. As a way of avoiding such a possibility, *Carew* is written using third-person perspective, free indirect discourse style. As explored in Chapter Two, free indirect discourse takes on the qualities of a first-person perspective, but maintains the illusion of distance created by the third-person perspective. For example, when Hannah sees that Askew has been writing, she presumes her work to be religious in nature: 'Bible words perhaps; prayers' (p.138). The lack of thought-dialogue tags render the owner of this presumption difficult to define: this might be Hannah's conclusion, but it might be the narrator's—or both. By refusing to delineate whose opinion is being presented, *Carew* seeks to destabilise the presumption that Hannah is solely responsible for the novel's narration.

Free indirect discourse also does some work to destabilise the possibility that Hannah is an objective observer; as explored in Chapter Two, Hannah's opinions of Askew are subjective to her perspective. This is noted in her exaggerated portrayal of Askew's faith. In the above example, Hannah presumes Askew is copying the bible; in actuality, she is writing a letter to friends. Hannah's unreliability prevents her fulfilling the role of passive chronicler that Alison Macleod uses Nancy Scarlett for in *The Heretics* (1965). Hannah, unlike Scarlett, cannot be trusted by the reader to witness Askew or the notable events of Askew's life accurately.



## Hannah as a Teacher

In Naomi Miller's *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020), the upperclass Lady Catherine Herbert emerges as a teacher, providing the working-class maid Rose Commin the tools and tutelage to gain literacy and to dramatically improve her drawing abilities. Across the historical fiction analysed above, the upper-class character is usually positioned to teach while the working-class character is positioned as a student. The lack of alternative suggests that working-class characters have little to offer in terms of skills to their up-class counterparts. This not only problematises the working class but limits detailed description and exploration of skills and knowledge in fiction.

*Carew* takes an alternate approach to counter this representation: Hannah is positioned as teacher to the upper-class Anne Askew by teaching her how to typeset in the printing press workshop. In Part Three, Chapter Eight, the reader is given a comprehensive account of the typesetting process as Hannah tutors Askew, for example:

...Hannah passes Anne a composing stick. Anne rests it across her hand where it teeters from side to side. 'Hold it like this.' Hannah shows her how to grip it between her palm and fingers. 'Keep it steady. The only thing keeping the letters from falling is the correct angle.'

Anne nods.

'These are the letters.' Hannah opens a lid. 'Basic roman type, size twelve.' (p.155)

In this section, Hannah is presented as a capable and confident teacher. Her superiority of knowledge is demonstrated through the detail of her instructions ("Hold it like this...Keep it steady" (p.155) and her fluency in latin (p.157). This latter point is especially notable as language is often the possession of the upperclass in the aforementioned novels: in *Carew*, Hannah, not Anne, possesses the greater level of literacy. By positioning Hannah as a teacher, *Carew* suggests that the Tudor working-

class had skills and knowledge worth obtaining and that intellectual knowledge (such as language) was not solely the possession of the wealthy.

### **The Construction of Anne Askew's Account**

One of the primary issues with positioning a working-class character as a witness to the lives of the aristocracy is the possible passivity that can be observed in this role. Nancy Scarlett, for example, has little effect on the narrative in *The Heretics* or on Anne Askew's character: her role is to watch and chronicle rather than take an active role in the story. Although *Carew* is fundamentally focused on Hannah's inheritance of the printing press, it also considers the composition of Anne Askew's first account of her trial for heresy. Rather than taking a passive role, however, Hannah is actively involved in the account's composition. For example, she provides critique for Askew's initial attempts, noting that she '[keeps] circling around the same point' (p.211) in her attempt to prove her faith, and provides a solution: to 'dispense of the gesticulations about faith and go through the examination methodically' (p.211). This suggestion aligns with what is ultimately published: the historical Askew's account has a question-answer structure. By having Hannah make this suggestion, *Carew* not only allows her to take an active role in the account's composition but also imaginatively writes her into the historical record.

### **Conclusion**

Historical novels set during the Tudor period that feature both working and upper-class characters provide the opportunity to explore how writers approach the presentation of different social classes. A pattern emerges of working-class subordination and

marginalisation: upperclass characters tend to dominate the narratives in which they appear. I used *Carew* to resist, subvert and challenge the presentation of working-class characters by destabilising the possibility that Hannah is simply a passive witness to Anne Askew; by positioning Hannah as a teacher and suggesting that working-class knowledge and skills are worthy of attention; and by having Hannah take on an active role in the construction of an account which forms part of the historical record. Doing so helps bring a working-class woman's voice and story to the foreground of the novel and rejects silence.

## Conclusion

Historical fiction set during the Tudor period enjoys enduring popularity (Anderson, 2020). Early modern England is both strange and familiar, and writers and readers alike continue to seek engaging ways of exploring this known yet unknowable past in fiction. Although historical romances dominated the field in the twentieth century, writers have begun to engage with a broader range of genres: murder mysteries, thrillers, biographical fiction and fantasies have emerged as popular, with titles from CJ Sansom, Rory Clements and Philippa Gregory regularly appearing on best-seller lists. The recent commercial and critical successes of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and Maggie O'Farrell's *Hamnet* (2020) have also helped establish the form as worthy of wider academic interest.

Despite the continued fascination with the Tudor period, the focus of these novels often remains on either the royal family or the upperclass. Queen Katherine Parr, for example, has appeared as protagonist in six major novels published between 2006 and 2021, including Gregory's *The Taming of the Queen* (2015) and Alison Weir's *Six Tudor Queens: Katherine Parr, The Sixth Wife* (2021). The continued focus on figures such as Parr is indicative not only of the 'drama' (Anderson, 2020) of the Tudor dynasty but the intangibility of the past, consequence of gaps in the historical record. Working-class women, however, appear less frequently as protagonists, even though they experience the same intangibility associated with their upper-class counterparts. When they do appear, they are often confined to the domestic sphere: Suzannah Dunn considers a confectioner and a laundress in *The Queen of Subtleties* (2001) and *The Testimony of Alys Twist* (2020) respectively, Elizabeth Fremantle's co-protagonist Dot Fownten in *Queen's Gambit* (2012) is a servant, as is Naomi Miller's protagonist Rose Commin in *Imperfect Alchemist* (2020). When writers do consider occupations outside

of the domestic sphere, they rarely focus on their protagonists' experiences of crossing the gender divide. Brenda Rickman Vantrease's protagonist in *The Heretic's Wife* (2010), for example, is a bookseller, but the narrative is more concerned with the events of the Reformation; Karen Brook's protagonist possesses her father's locksmithing skills but the novel is primarily a political spy thriller rather than an exploration of her trade.

This project sought to respond to the presentation of working-class women in historical fiction set in the Tudor period by foregrounding the experiences of a woman printer in the novel *Carew*. Hannah Carew is inspired by Tudor printer Elisabeth Pickering, who, on the death of her husband, managed the Redman Press for approximately ten months. During this time she published thirteen books, eleven under her maiden name; one of these books is noted as being the first extant text attributed to a woman printer in England (Kreps, 2003, p.1054). Little is known of Pickering, but her existence stands as proof that women could and did traverse the strict gender divides of Tudor society and pursue occupations within the male sphere. *Carew* considers this in detail, conceptualising how a Tudor woman printer might have negotiated the gender spheres.

*Carew* builds on the work of Kate Morrison, whose novel *A Book of Secrets* (2019) is a rare example of a text that not only focuses on a woman printer, but also considers, albeit quite lightly, the gender divide in Tudor England. Unlike Morrison, however, *Carew* focuses almost exclusively on a woman business owner rather than a workshop assistant. *Carew* also suggests that the breakdown of the strict division of gender caused anxiety, contradicting the general acceptance evident in *A Book of Secrets*. Hannah encounters resistance when she crosses between spheres, both from within the household and beyond. This resistance is communicated not only through character (Agnes, for example, emerges as an antagonist, who seeks to maintain male

spaces) but also through physical space: the Carew house itself gives physical form to the societal boundaries that sought to control early modern women. Male dominated spaces (the office and the workshop) resist Hannah's attempts to occupy them and evoke the twentieth-century concept of the glass ceiling coined by Marilyn Modest in 1978. The decision to conceptualise space as a sentient, reactive being is influenced by Suzannah Dunn's *The Testimony of Alys Twist* (2020), which uses the physicality of a laundry room to condemn the iniquity of Tudor class differences. The sustained consideration of how a Tudor woman might have experienced societal gender norms and expectations positions *Carew* as a feminist novel, utilising Roxane Gay's definition of such novels as those that '[explore] what it means to not only be a woman, but to be a woman from a certain time and place' (2014).

The project also sought to engage with postmodernist conversations regarding the nature of history and subjectivity as a way of considering, obliquely, the marginalisation of women within historical accounts. It leans into and borrows from the historiographic metafiction form, which was first conceptualised by literary critic Linda Hutcheon in the 1980s. *Carew* problematises the boundary between history and fiction and emphasises the effect of subjectivity on the creation of narratives about the past. I approached this in three ways. Firstly, I include within the novel four epigraphs that demonstrate to the reader how representations of the past have altered over time due to changes in perspective. These epigraphs establish that history is a contested space and that truth/history exist plurally rather than singularly. Secondly, I suggest that Hannah is a subjective and therefore unreliable narrator through the use of free indirect discourse. Her subjectivity helps to destabilise narrative certainly in *Carew* and dispel the idea that the narrative is objective. Thirdly, I use the creation of Anne Askew's account of her first trial (published in 1546 as *The First Examination of Anne Askew*) as a further way of problematising the boundary between history and fiction, noting that invention is as

much a component of the composition of history as it is the composition of fiction. My approach is often oblique and intended to suggest rather than tell, in keeping with postmodernism's scepticism of universal truths.

Finally, the project sought to consider whether and if so, how, writers of historical novels set during the Tudor period have contributed to the marginalisation of working-class women in fiction. The novels surveyed suggest that there is a general trend of narrative dominance by characters belonging to the Tudor aristocracy: working-class women are often passive, related to the role of witness or student. I use *Carew* and its protagonist Hannah Carew to provide an alternative presentation of the working class, positioning Hannah as an active participant on the novel, a teacher and a contributor to the historical record.

To conclude, this project sought to respond to a gap of representation within historical fiction set during the Tudor period. By foregrounding working-class women, specifically those whose occupations enabled them to traverse the gender divide, I aimed to confront, resist and reimagine the lives of a group of people who have been marginalised. The inclusion of postmodern scepticism towards grand narratives and singular truths also allows the project to suggest, obliquely, why such marginalisation has occurred in the first place.

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