

Chapter 17

THE JEWS WAITED PATIENTLY. Sheriff William glanced over at them, every now and again during the course of the morning, as he dealt with the business of the county court, but he pointedly did not call them. They sat to one side, looking dignified and unworried and - as always - a little different from everyone else, their hair cut in a slightly odd way, their clothes subtly foreign, an indefinable way of sitting and standing, talking and gesturing.

William treated them with contempt, but all the same they made him nervous. He had a sneaking suspicion that the dark rituals and secret blasphemies they performed behind the locked doors of their solid stone town houses would one day bring him to perdition.

He left them until last, but nevertheless he had to take their case before dinner time, because there was so little business before the court. This must be the quietest county court in England, he thought bitterly. Year by year its receipts fell. People preferred to take their problems to other courts. The local hundred courts were popular. Most of them were presided over by Aliena, standing in for her brother the Earl, who had taken up permanent residence in the Holy Land. Kingsbridge and the surrounding area had its own borough court run by the town guild. In villages owned by the Priory, Philip had jurisdiction. People could choose which court they complained to about an assault, a theft, a dispute over field boundaries or an unwarranted imposition by a minor noble. Aliena and Philip had acquired a reputation for swift, low-cost justice that William could not match. Consequently William's profits from the county court had always been

disappointing.

That was why he had never repaid the hundred pounds he had borrowed from Malachi sixteen years ago. Irritably, he now called the Jews, as there was no one else left to call. Malachi stood up and read out the amount of money William owed him. 'With interest at the unusually low rate of twenty pounds a year for every one hundred pounds owed, lord Sheriff, you now owe me one thousand, eight hundred and forty-eight pounds, sixteen shillings and ten pence. My brethren here bear witness.'

William recalled the day Malachi had turned up with the money in an ironbound chest on a cart, with an escort of Jews and a deed, written on vellum, which he had foolishly expected William to sign. William had done no such thing, of course, but the other Jews had seen Malachi hand over the money, and they were here today to testify that the loan had been made. Malachi did this once a year on the anniversary of that day. There was no way for him to force William to pay him back, of course; and now that the sum had reached such ludicrous proportions William had no intention of paying him ever. All the same, the annual reminder was faintly embarrassing to William.

'I find that there is no ^ac_se to answer,' William said to the Jews. 'Court is closed.' They all turned away and walked out in a silent protest that was unpleasantly eloquent. William heaved himself up out of the big carved chair. He was looking forward to his dinner, as always. At the age of fifty-four he was a great deal heavier than he had been, and his legs gave him trouble. Limping slightly, he left the great hall and crossed the courtyard of Shiring Castle to his private quarters. There he found Bishop

Good, but we need to establish this
much earlier in the book.

Waleran waiting for him.

Waleran had not got fatter as he aged. He was about ten years older than William, and as scrawny as a serf's chicken. He looked a bit like a chicken, William thought, with his thin neck and beaked nose; a black chicken with white clawed hands, and a look of injured protest. There had been a time when Waleran thought he might become Archbishop of Canterbury, or even a cardinal. William remembered Waleran telling him wistfully, a few years ago, that an English monk called Nicolas Breakspear had become Pope Adrian IV. Waleran was a disappointed man, a man who felt he had never fulfilled his potential.

William sat down at the table and poured himself a large goblet of wine. He offered the jug to Waleran, who declined with a motion of his hand. 'I've got bad news,' Waleran said. 'The king is back.'

Henry had been out of England for four years. William found that the king's absence had a liberating effect, and Waleran felt the same. 'A pity,' William said.

'There's worse. He's going to hold an Inquest of Sheriffs.'

William froze with his wine goblet half way to his mouth. Slowly he put it down on the rough wood of the table. 'Inquest? What's that?'

'An inquiry into how well sheriffs perform their duties and whether they dispense justice.'

'Duties? Anyone would think he paid us wages! Someone should remind the king that most of us bought the office of sheriff from him, and bought it very dear.' But his protest was mechanical. He was deeply worried. There was no arguing with King

How does William know this?

Henry once he embarked on something like this. His investigators would be determined and thorough and heartless, and Henry would act on their findings. William had a lot of things on his conscience but by far the most dangerous was the loan from Malachi. If King Henry had taken it into his head to reform the sheriffs, he was perfectly capable of making William sell everything he had to pay that damned Jew.

'One more thing,' Waleran said. 'All sheriffs are going to be suspended from office during the inquiry.'

The cook brought in a fragrant dish of lambs' hearts braised in wine. William served himself mechanically. It was one of his favourite meals, but he had somewhat lost his appetite. 'What do you think I should do?' he said.

'You've got time to put things right,' Waleran said. 'It will take a few weeks for the writ of suspension to reach you, and it may be a month or two before the inquest gets under way.'

William shook his head despondently. 'The one thing I can't do is pay Malachi back.'

Waleran frowned. 'Then we may have to think of another way of dealing with him,' he said.

Are we supposed to worry about Malachi?

Not clear how this scene advances the story

William liked murders. There was usually money to be made out of a murder. If the perpetrator were found, he would have to pay a fat fine; and if not, the inhabitants of the district in which the corpse was found would have to pay the same amount. If someone was accused but failed to come to court to stand trial, William could confiscate all his possessions. If the perpetrator was found and turned out to be penniless, then of course William could not get any money out of him, so the man would be hanged.

When an unnatural death was reported it was William's duty to view the body immediately. He liked to do this himself, although he had three reasonably competent deputies. Where there was money to be made he preferred to handle the matter personally. Besides, there was always something fascinating about violent death. William liked to look at the face of a man or woman who had drowned or suffocated or bled to death, and imagine how the person had felt in the last few moments.

However, he did not like the travelling. The days when he enjoyed riding fast on a spirited courser were long past. Now he rode a steady, sure-footed ^{Nor a mare: he would} mare who would not stumble in ruts or trip over tree roots. He never galloped: a trot was the most he could manage without suffering agony in his legs. The village of Longmeadow was almost a day's journey from Shiring. It was quite close to Kingsbridge, although not close enough to come within the jurisdiction of the Kingsbridge borough court. William arrived somewhat saddle-sore.

Longmeadow was within the estate of the Earl of Wiltshire, and was sub-let to one of the knights who had gone to the Holy Land with Earl Richard. Most of those knights had come back, but a few

had found the Kingdom of Jerusalem congenial, as Richard obviously had. Longmeadow was effectively ruled by the knight's father, Alan Fitzjohn, a man of about sixty with thinning white hair and watery blue eyes. Alan was waiting for William outside the wooden village church, sitting on a chair surrounded by villagers. The villagers backed away nervously as William and his entourage arrived. Alan got up to greet him.

The body would be in the church. William dismounted gingerly and nodded to Alan. Alan began to tell him the facts, obviously giving a prepared speech, but William walked past him and went into the church, leaving him to follow. It was best to put the local gentry firmly in their place right from the start, William believed.

The body lay on a trestle table in the middle of the little church, covered by a linen sheet. There was a weeping woman sitting on a chair next to the body and a grim-faced man standing behind her with his hands on her shoulders. The body was small. It's a child, then, William thought, and these are the grieving parents. He ignored them and pulled off the sheet. The mother gave a small cry of shock at the abruptness of the action.

The body was naked. The victim was a boy of about twelve years, still a child. The face was darkened and a little swollen, and there were heavy bruises on the neck: he had been strangled. William pulled back an eyelid - the mother gasped - and found, as he had expected, that the white of the eye was bloodshot. 'Where was he found?' he said without looking at anyone.

Alan answered. 'In the forest, two miles from the village, near a pond where the children swim.'

'Naked, like this?'

'Yes. He had probably been bathing.'

William took hold of one ankle and lifted the leg high, at the same time rolling the body toward him slightly, so that he could see the anus. The mother burst into tears and the father said angrily: 'Hey - '

'Look,' William said. There were traces of congealed blood and a whitish deposit that looked like dried semen. 'This is the work of a pervert.'

'He should be castrated,' the father said in a hoarse voice.

'If we find him,' William said. 'Were any strangers seen in the area?'

Alan said: 'I was trying to tell you, outside. The Dean of Shiring, Baldwin, was seen talking to the boy at Kingsbridge market.'

William looked up sharply. 'When?'

'On Sunday morning, the day the boy was killed. Baldwin passed through the village that afternoon, alone. The children were out at the pool. There was a quarrel, the other children came back to the village, and this boy stayed. At sundown the parents went looking for him, and found him dead.'

The mother burst into sobs. 'Get her out of here,' William said. Alan nodded to the father, and the two parents left the church. William was cross and anxious. Baldwin Dean was a protegee of Waleran's. He had been an archdeacon, then Waleran had made him dean of the new church at Shiring. He was a notorious pervert, but until now he had confined himself to seducing young priests, most of whom were more or less willing. This act of rape

Why would he want to?
Might he use it to get something from Walvern?

and murder was going to be extremely difficult to cover up. And there would be no profit in it for William, after all.

When the parents were outside, William turned to Alan. 'Why didn't you warn me?' he hissed.

'I tried to, outside - '

'You should have mentioned it in your message.'

'When I sent it I didn't know about Baldwin.'

'We must tell the bishop.'

'I sent for him as soon as I found out the dean was involved. He should be here soon.'

'Good. Let's have some supper.' William went to the door. Alan covered up the corpse. William waited impatiently for him to finish. They went out together.

The villagers were standing around outside, looking expectant. They all knew that Baldwin had been seen talking to the child, of course. It was unlikely that they knew of Baldwin's reputation, but they would automatically suspect a town priest of depravity, and now that William had shown the father the evidence of rape the peasants would expect nothing less than the arrest of Baldwin. He looked around, wondering what to tell them. Finally he said: 'This may have been the work of outlaws.'

The villagers muttered angrily. William pushed through the crowd, accompanied by Alan. His men were waiting, still mounted. 'We'll have supper at the manor house,' he said to Walter. 'Go on ahead. Take my horse.' 'It was not worth the pain of mounting for a ride of a couple of hundred yards.'

They walked along the village street, followed by the hostile stares of the peasants. The outlaw theory was a feeble one but

William had not been able to think of anything else on the spur of the moment. He was racking his brains for an alternative when he saw a group of horsemen enter the village from the opposite direction. They had good mounts and were riding hard. As they came closer William recognised their black-robed leader: it was Bishop Waleran. William felt relieved. Now Waleran would take responsibility.

The riders reined in, and Waleran dismounted. He stayed silent until he was close enough to William to speak quietly.

'Well?'

'It looks bad for Baldwin,' William said in the same low tones. 'The child was bugged and strangled.'

'Damn Baldwin,' Waleran said. 'I've half a mind to let him hang for this.'

'It might be the simplest solution,' William said.

Waleran shook his head. 'Baldwin is too useful to me.' Let's have a look at the corpse. I've got another idea which might just work.'

They walked back along the street, followed by Waleran's companions and Alan Fitzjohn. William wondered what Waleran's 'idea' might be. The bishop still had a devious brain, even though he was getting old.

The crowd outside the church parted to let them through. The light was fading, and Alan told the priest to fetch a candle. William and Waleran went in. At the door, Waleran turned to Alan and said: 'You stay out here.'

William showed Waleran the bruises on the neck and the bloodshot eyes. The priest brought the candle. William sent him

out and then showed Waleran the evidence of rape. Waleran was disgusted. 'I despise men who cannot control their appetites,' he said.

'What are you going to do?' William said practically.

'Do the villagers know about the buggery?'

'Yes.' William decided not to tell Waleran that it was he himself who had shown the evidence to the father.

'Never mind,' Waleran said. 'We may still be able to turn this to our advantage.'

William was surprised. 'How?'

Waleran took a heavy four-inch iron nail from within the folds of his black robes. He took the left hand of the dead boy and laid it flat on the table with the palm upward. He put the point of the nail on the centre of the boy's palm and then, with a swift movement, pushed the nail through the flesh of the corpse. He withdrew the nail. A little dark blood welled out of the hole. Waleran moved around to the other side of the table and took the boy's right hand.

William was horrified. 'What the devil are you doing?' he said.

'Creating a martyr,' Waleran said. 'Uncover his feet.'

Scene seems like a vile joke
Again, no real drama or
tension between William and Waleran.

Kingsbridge was still getting bigger. It had long ago outgrown its original walls, which now enclosed less than half of the houses. About five years ago the guild had built a new wall, taking in the suburbs that had grown up outside the old town; and now there were more suburbs outside the new walls. The meadow on the other side of the river, where the townspeople had traditionally held Lammas Day and Midsummer's Eve festivities, was now a small village, called Newport.

On a cold Easter Sunday morning

William rode through Newport and crossed the new stone bridge that led to Kingsbridge proper. He passed through the formidable city gate and went up the main street, which ~~was now~~ ^{had recently been} paved. The dwellings on either side were all stone houses with shops in the undercrofts and living quarters above. Kingsbridge was ~~now~~ bigger, busier and wealthier than Shiring, William thought resentfully.

He reached the top of the street and turned into the priory close; and there, before his eyes, was the reason for the rise of Kingsbridge and the decline of Shiring: the cathedral. It was breathtaking. The immensely tall nave was supported by a row of graceful flying buttresses. The west end had three huge porticos, like giants' doorways, flanked by twin towers which were not quite finished. William dismounted and, leaving Walter to take care of the horses, limped across the green, negotiating a path through the market stalls, and entered the church.

It was even more impressive inside. The nave followed the style of the transepts, finished many years ago, but the master builder had refined his design, making the columns even more slender and the windows larger. But there was yet another innovation. William had heard people talk of the coloured glass

made by craftsmen Jack Jackson had brought over from Paris. He had wondered why they made such a fuss about it, for he imagined that a coloured window would be just like a tapestry or a painting. Now he saw what they meant. The light from outside shone through the coloured glass, making it glow. The effect was magical. The church was full of people craning their necks to stare up at the windows. The pictures showed bible stories, heaven and hell, saints and prophets, disciples, and some of the Kingsbridge citizens who had presumably paid for the windows - the baker carrying his tray of loaves, the tanner and his hides, the mason with his level. I bet Philip made a fat profit out of these windows, William thought.

The church was packed for the Easter service. The market was spreading into the interior of the building, as always happened, and as he walked up the nave William was offered cold beer, hot gingerbread, and a quick fuck ~~standing up against the wall of the~~ ~~side-aisle~~ for threepence. The clergy were constantly trying to ban peddlers from churches but it was an impossible task. William exchanged greetings with the more important citizens of the county. But despite the social and commercial distractions William found his eye and his thoughts drawn upward by the sweeping lines of the arcade. The arches and the windows, the piers with their clusters of shafts, the ribs and segments of the vaulted ceiling, all seemed to point toward heaven in an inescapable reminder of what this building was for.

The floor was paved, the pillars were painted, every window was glazed: Kingsbridge and its priory were rich, and the cathedral proclaimed their wealth. In the small chapels of the transepts

there were gold candlesticks and jewelled crosses. The citizens also displayed their wealth, with richly coloured tunics, silver brooches and buckles, and gold rings. His eye fell on Aliena, and as always his heart missed a beat. She was as beautiful as ever, although she had to be over fifty years old. Her mass of curly hair was a lighter shade of brown, and cut a little shorter, and she had crinkles at her eyes, but she did not look old. If her magnificent bosom was a little lower than it used to be, and her hips a little wider, she was no less desirable. She acted like the earl, rather than his mere sister, and she had a deferential crowd around her. She wore a yellow cloak with a red silk lining, and red leather shoes. There was a tall red-haired man beside her whom William at first took for Jack. However, the man was in his twenties, and William realised it must be the son of Jack and Aliena. The boy looked like Jack before Jack grew the beard. However, he was dressed as a noble, not as the son of a builder, and he carried a sword. Jack himself stood beside his son, an inch or two shorter, his beard more bushy than ever. He was younger than Aliena, of course; about five years younger, if William's memory was right; but he, too, had lines around his eyes. He was talking animatedly to a young woman who was surely his daughter. She resembled Aliena, and was just as pretty, but her abundant hair was pulled severely back and plaited, and she was quite plainly dressed. If there was a voluptuous body under that earth-brown tunic she did not want anyone to notice it.

William moved across the nave to avoid them. He was too old and too weary to continue his vendetta against Aliena. He had destroyed her father, raped her, taken her castle, burned her wool,

and exiled her brother, but every time he thought he had finally crushed her she came back again, rising from defeat to new heights of power and wealth. Now William was fat and gouty and too poor to pay the Jew he was indebted to, and he realised that he had spent his life in the power of a terrible enchantment.

The congregation became only a little quieter as the service began, but then the voices of several hundred monks were raised in song, drowning the conversations and the ~~cries~~^{cries} of the hawkers. There never used to be this many monks, William thought. The priory had grown too.

There was a murmur of comment when Waleran came in, clad in his most gorgeous bishop's robes. He was rarely seen^{here} in his own cathedral. The burgers of Shiring had reluctantly financed the building of a new church there, much less impressive than this one, and Waleran used that as his headquarters, despite the failure of his lifelong campaign to make Shiring the cathedral city. William saw Aliena looking from Waleran to William and back again with an expression of alarm. She knew that if they were both in Kingsbridge they meant trouble. She whispered something in Jack's ear. Jack frowned and looked around until he caught William's eye. But they had no way of guessing what was going on, so all they could do was worry.

William moved about aimlessly throughout the service. Standing was worse for his legs than walking. When he went to Shiring church Walter carried a chair for him. Then he could doze off for most of it.

At last Waleran mounted the pulpit. The congregation was amazed: it was unusual enough for the bishop to be here, but nobody

could remember the last time he had preached a sermon. He began by re-telling the story of the crucifixion, a normal enough topic for Easter Sunday. Waleran was a bloodless character and his delivery was dry and factual, but he dwelt on the gruesome details, especially the nails in the hands and feet, and the interminable hours, sometimes days, it took the victims to bleed to death. William felt quite sick. Waleran also emphasized the role of the Jews. He made no mention of Pontius Pilate and did not say that the Romans ruled Judea or that crucifixion was a Roman method of execution, but he struck the lectern with his fist, and raised his voice, every time he said the word Jew. William found himself getting angry with the Jews.

'He was the Jews' Messiah, promised by the Jewish holy scriptures, come to save the Jews... and what did the Jews do? The Jews mocked him. The Jews rejected him. The Jews spat upon him. The Jews crucified him.'

The congregation murmured angrily. Waleran's voice had attained a sing-song rhythm as he enumerated the horrid crimes of the Jews. Then he suddenly changed it, breaking the rhythm, and began to speak in a forceful but matter-of-fact tone. 'But I want to tell you about another crucifixion,' he said, and William thought: Here it comes. 'This did not take place a thousand years ago - it took place last week.' There was another rumble from the congregation: they had heard the rumours. 'It did not take place in Jersusalem, but in Longmeadow, an hour or two from here. The victim was not the Messiah, but, God rest his soul, he was a saint.' Waleran raked the congregation with his eyes. 'Can you imagine, an innocent twelve-year-old boy...' He lowered his voice

to a growl. '...crucified?'

A woman near the front burst into tears. 'Think of his childish terror,' Waleran went on. William began to feel upset himself, even though he knew the entire story was a fabrication. 'Kidnapped, while playing innocently, by strangely-dressed, dark-faced men. Bound and gagged and blindfolded, taken he knows not where. When at last he is allowed to see, he finds himself in a dark room smelling of foreign spices, dimly lit by dirty lanterns, with weird and blasphemous markings on the walls.' Waleran was not saying the Jews any more but everyone knew whom he meant. The congregation was spellbound. Aliena was frowning with disapproval, but she was exceptional. Behind the pulpit, in the quire stalls where the monks sat, William could see Prior Philip, his face flushed with anger under the fringe of silver hair.

'See them gather round him now, and listen to them order him to curse Christ. Hear his piping voice as he refuses to deny his religion. Look at the childish tears rolling down his beardless cheeks. See the wooden cross in the corner of that evil room.'

Someone shouted: 'Shame!' and several voices were raised in support. Waleran had better ease up, William thought, or they'll riot here and now. Some of the women were openly sobbing. Suddenly Jack Jackson left Aliena and headed for the door. He had to be stopped. William caught Walter's eye and indicated Jack with a slight inclination of his head. Walter followed Jack.

Waleran began to describe the agonies of the boy as the nails were driven into his hands and feet. The atmosphere in the cathedral became hysterical. People moaned as if they could feel the pain themselves. Even the whores and the peddlers had stopped

doing business to listen. One or two people began to look toward William. A prosperous-looking burger^h angrily hissed at him:
'You're the sheriff - why haven't you done something?'

Waleran reached his climax. 'Little Edward is now in heaven, with the saints,' he said, and William was sure there was a quaver in the bishop's voice. 'He has played his part in the battle against devilry and and blasphemy.' He paused, and when he spoke again it was in a shout. 'It is up to us to honour his memory by carrying on the fight!'

A roar of approval went up from the congregation as Waleran descended from the pulpit. Philip stood up in the quire, his face like thunder, and started a psalm. The singing of the monks failed to hush the crowd. Somebody said: 'Get the Jews!' The cry was repeated.

William watched Philip. The prior confronted the bishop behind the altar. William could not hear what was said but Philip's face showed disgust and fury. Waleran walked past him.

Philip came to the front of the altar. He held up his hands for quiet. The noise level dropped only a little. Philip called out: 'There will be no Jew-baiting in this town!'

The crowd responded with a discontented muttering.

Philip said: 'If anyone is to be accused of murder, let us hear the evidence - in court!'

That was William's cue. Philip had played straight into his hands. 'That's right!' William shouted, turning to face the congregation. 'Malachi must stand trial!'

It was all they needed. 'Malachi!' the shout went up. Some of the men turned toward the doors.

'No!' Philip shouted. 'Come back!' But no one was listening. He dashed out through the door that led to the cloisters.

William joined the crush of people trying to get out through the main doors. Jack had built huge doorways to allow large numbers of people to come in and go out without crowding, but he had not allowed for a riot. Aliena came up beside William. 'You devils, you planned this,' she blazed. 'Is there no end to the evil you will do?' William ignored her and pushed toward the door.

Outside, the men were running through the priory gate. The women followed only a little more slowly. The market traders watched bemused as the congregation poured out of the church and rushed past their stalls.

William spotted Walter over by the stables and hurried to his side. 'Well?'

'You were right - he was going to warn the Jew,' Walter said.

'And?'

Walter jerked his head toward the interior of the stable.

'The lads and I roughed him up a bit.'

William nodded. The 'lads' - his deputies - had probably held Jack still while Walter punched him. Walter was too old to beat people up on his own any more. So was William, for that matter. 'Well done. Come with me now.' William joined the crowd leaving the priory close. Walter followed close behind him. The mob turned left out of the gate and then went left again, along the street that ran parallel with the west wall of the close. It was a street of large stone houses. Of course, William thought, the murdering Jew would naturally live in one of the best streets in

town; then he remembered that the Jew had not actually done the murder, Dean Baldwin had.

The mob had found the house. It was a solid burgher's house made of the same stone as the cathedral, with an undercroft at ground level and a main entrance at the top of a short flight of steps. Three or four young men were hammering on the oak door while the crowd milled about, filling the street. At the other houses, nervous householders were closing the shutters and barring the doors.

The vanguard became impatient. From knocking on the door they graduated to knocking the door down. The heavy oak withstood their blows. The Jews build well, William thought, because they are always afraid. From out of the crowd an axe materialised. The biggest of the young men at the top of the steps grabbed it and started to attack the woodwork. Suddenly the door opened and Malachi stepped out.

He was a short, portly man of about sixty years, his curly hair still mostly black. He looked so calm and dignified that at first nobody did anything. It was as if no one wanted to be the first to touch him. A woman looked out of the door. She was weeping hysterically. Someone pulled her back inside and slammed the door. William understood what Malachi was doing. If he stayed inside they would break the door down and then they might attack his wife and children. By giving himself up before the door was broken down he hoped to save his family.

William nudged Walter, and Walter shouted out: 'Hang the Jew!'

The crowd took up the cry. 'Hang him! Hang the Jew!' The

men who had been attacking the door now picked Malachi up by the arms and legs.

Kingsbridge had a scaffold: William had checked. In the old days, when the Prior had held the only court in town, there had been no hangings; but since the town became a borough, and the borough court was run by the merchants' guild, hanging had become much more common, and there was a permanent scaffold set up in Eastgate Square, the main business centre of the city, just outside the old town wall.

Quietly, William said to Walter: 'You remembered the rope?'

By way of reply, Walter pulled open his shirt: a long, thin rope was coiled around his chest.

The men carried Malachi along the street. Several people spat on him as he passed by. William and Walter followed the procession, past the priory gate, through the old east gate to the square.

Prior Philip was standing on the scaffold.

Hesitation rippled through the crowd. William noticed that older people held back, but younger ones pressed impatiently forward. It occurred to him that there were a lot of people in Kingsbridge who had no memories of the early days, when the place had been a sleepy village, and so had no conception of how Philip had built the place up. Nowadays the priory was just one part of the city. Once upon a time, no one in Kingsbridge would have dared to defy Philip. Now it could go either way.

Philip shouted: 'Hang me! Hang me! I'd rather die than live in a city that lynched an innocent man!'

The men carrying Malachi stood at the foot of the scaffold,

visibly wavering. From nowhere, Bishop Waleran suddenly appeared by William's side. He had shed his ceremonial robes and was now dressed in his usual sombre black. The cold wind had reddened the point of his nose. 'What's happening?' he said.

'The prior is trying to stop them.'

'Damn Philip.'

'I don't think he's going to succeed.'

'Listen.'

Philip was pleading with them. 'You all know Malachi - you know his wife, his children, his grandchildren. You know he never killed anyone.'

Walter shouted out: 'Hail Saint Edward, the boy martyr!'

The young men at the front of the mob took up the cry. 'Hail Saint Edward!'

Philip yelled: 'He's not a saint, he's just a boy,' and then his words were drowned out in a chorus of booing. A crowd of men mounted the scaffold, with Malachi somewhere in their midst. Philip was elbowed aside. He stood at the edge of the platform for a moment, looking old and frail. Then he was nudged off. The crowd surged around the base of the scaffold and Philip was lost from sight.

'Someone's got a rope,' Walter observed.

'But can they tie a noose?' William said.

They waited and watched. Someone could tie a noose. The huddle of men on the platform parted to show Malachi in the middle with the rope around his neck. William permitted himself a sigh of satisfaction. In a few moments the Jew would be dead, and then no one would care about the money William owed. And no one would dare

raise the question of who murdered the boy.

One by one the men started to jump off the platform. Malachi's lips were moving: he was probably praying. William thought he could hear a prayer, but it was being chanted by several voices. He frowned, puzzled. He saw where the chanting was coming from at about the same time as the crowd noticed it.

From the other side of the square came a procession of monks. That won't do any good, William thought; if the crowd won't listen to Philip they certainly won't take any notice of the other monks. But contrary to his expectation the crowd fell away before the procession. After a moment William realised why, as the crowd began to murmur: 'The Weeping Madonna!'

William heard Waleran mutter: 'To hell with those monks.'

Six of the monks were carrying the statue on a trestle. A seventh, a very tall one, led the way. They walked ~~steadily~~ slowly through the crowd. On the scaffold, Malachi stood with the noose around his neck, white-faced, staring. He was standing on the hinged edge of the platform, which was supported by two props. William said: 'Walter - go and kick away those ~~damned~~ props, quickly, before they rescue the damned Jew!'

Walter began to push through the crowd. The monks reached the scaffold first. They lifted the statue off the trestle and placed it on the platform, turning it to face the crowd.

'She weeps!' they said. 'See how she weeps!'

Waleran muttered: 'It's the cold. She always weeps in the cold. It's a fairground trick.'

The tall monk who had headed the procession slowly mounted the scaffold and faced the mob. He was young, about thirty-five,

and unusually big, something of a giant. William could see Walter shoving his way through the crowd. 'She weeps for an innocent man, accused by liars and arrested by fools,' the tall monk said. 'She weeps for our sin. For was not Mary, the mother of God, herself a Jew?'

Walter was almost there. But the monk reached over Malachi's head and took hold of the rope. He eased it off Malachi's neck and lifted it over his head. A sigh of disappointment went through the crowd. Walter turned at the scaffold, looked over to William, and shrugged.

The monk said: 'Let us all ask God to forgive us our sins.'

Malachi fell to his knees, shaking like a leaf, and buried his face in his hands.

William said: 'The devil take that monk! Who is he, anyway?'

Waleran said: 'That's the sub-prior, Brother Jonathan.'

'Oh- the priory orphan.'

'I didn't know he was the priory orphan,' Waleran said.

'Yes. When Philip became prior, he brought a baby with him - don't you remember? I suppose it is over thirty years ago. I wish the baby had drowned in its bathtub. He's just saved Malachi from the noose.'

Brother Jonathan was praying in a loud voice, asking God to forgive the terrible sins of the people of Kingsbridge, and the idiots were listening with bowed heads. William could hardly contain his frustration. He had come so close! But now he still owed hundreds of pounds he couldn't pay.

'I'd forgotten about Philip's baby,' Waleran was saying. He did not look as devastated as he ought.

William said: 'What good does that do us?'

'A lot, if we handle it right,' Waleran said. 'Don't you see? Philip brings a baby to the priory. Where did it come from?'

'It was left in the porch of the chapel at his old priory, if I remember aright,' William said.

'Better and better. He has brought the child up as if it were his own son, as I recall.'

'So I believe.'

'And now has made him sub-prior.'

'He's very well liked.'

'I myself have heard people say that one so gifted must surely become prior one day.'

William did not see what Waleran was driving at. 'So what?' he said irritably.

'Jonathan is obviously Philip's child.'

It was the last thing William was expecting. He had always assumed that Philip was as innocent as his reputation. 'No one will believe that,' he said.

'Don't you think it looks suspicious? I say Philip used to have a mistress, when he ran that little priory out in the forest. He left the mistress behind, when he became Prior of Kingsbridge, but the girl didn't want the baby if she couldn't have the father. And Philip, being a sentimental soul, brought the baby with him, and passed it off as an orphan.'

'Yes, but how do we know?'

'If the baby was abandoned, how can he prove where it came from?'

'He can't,' William acknowledged. He looked up at the tall

monk praying on the scaffold. Philip had joined him, and now they stood together. Jonathan was at least six inches taller than Philip. 'They don't look alike,' William said dubiously.

'You don't look like your mother, thank God,' Waleran said.

'Philip will swear blind the baby was a foundling.'

'Will anyone take his word for it? Would you believe such a story?'

'No, but - '

'Nor will the ecclesiastical court.' Waleran smiled at the white-haired figure on the scaffold, his ancient enemy.

'Fornication and nepotism,' he said with relish. 'Philip, I believe I've got you at last.'

*Good, but better if William
at the end was more
excited and enthusiastic.*