

THE  
Master's  
Reliquary

BOOK TWO

The Song of the Cross



by Jim Dameron



Also by Jim Dameron:

*The Master's Reliquary: Book One, The Man  
of Signs*

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The Song of the Cross  
by  
**Jim Dameron**

Reliquary - A vessel enshrining  
that which is beyond price.

"...such mighty works are wrought by his hands..."

"Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary...?"

Mark 6:2,3



AKW Books, Washington

# Credits

Cover concept by Diana Leonard  
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# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to the One to Whom  
we sing.*

# Prologue

## Scotland AD 1057

Bridi retreated down the hallway. Behind him he dragged his father's sword, though it was nearly too large for him to wield. He paused to lean for a moment against the hall's cool stone wall, and pushed the long, dark hair back from his forehead. Something wet came away on his hand. He raised it up and stared at blood. It was Brec's. He thought of the sacrifice that Brec and his father's other retainers had made to protect him. Bridi alone had reached the shelter of the tower. Even now He could hear the slayers of his brave friends breaking through the oaken doors below. Impatiently Bridi wiped away tears and continued on to the door at the hall's end. He took a deep calming breath and entered.

Soft light from a single high-up window illuminated the small chapel. A fragile peace began to fill his heart as he remembered times spent here with his father and mother. He turned and barred the door behind him. This door was far less stout than those at the entrance of the keep. It would not hold his

pursuers for long. It would be long enough.

He stepped before the tiny altar and knelt. There beneath the altar, draped with gold-threaded cloth, stood what his father had called his most precious possession – their ancient wooden reliquary. Bridi tried to recollect the stories which his father, the great warrior Aidan, had woven for him many nights in front of a warming fire in their Great Hall. Stories of how his long-ago namesake *Ri* Bridi nOengusa, son of *Ri* Conall nOengusa, had been led by a vision to find this very chest on the Holy Isle of Brude.

The clash of steel on stone steps tore Bridi from his reverie. Canmoor's men had finally broken through the lower door and were coming. Quickly Bridi reached into the satchel at his hip and drew out the roll of parchment it contained. Gently he unrolled the scroll, the age-old record of his clan. At the top, barely legible, were connected the names *Conall nOengusa* and *Taezal mettMaelcon*. After these came a long list of Mother's of the Great and their sons who had become *Ri*. At the bottom of the long list was his own name, written at his birth sixteen years earlier. *Bridi nOengusa*, last of their line. The previous winter, when Bridi's father had been struck down by fever, he had admonished Bridi to hide this cherished proof of their heritage in the reliquary. "The reliquary shall endure, and therefore the memory of our lineage shall also.

In time of trouble, place it in the reliquary.” Bridi had nearly left it too late.

A sudden hammering on the chapel door urged Bridi to action. Hastily he threw off the golden cloth from the chest and removed its lid. Amid cries and poundings on the door he pulled out cups, silver plate, and a large book of scriptures. Below these items was the false bottom a clan leader had installed sometime in the far past. His father had shown him how to first slide, then tilt, the thin board to reveal a small space in one corner. There Bridi reverently laid the rolled-up parchment.

Behind him Bridi heard splintering wood as door planks finally surrendered to steel. There was no time left. Swiftly Bridi tossed the articles back into the chest and replaced the lid. The door flew apart. Bridi in one motion rose, turned, and lifted his father’s sword heavenward before him.

In spite of his fear, Bridi’s anger kindled as Canmore’s soldiers rushed in to profane his family’s sanctuary. The sweating, blood-covered men paused briefly at the door, eyes darting about to identify what resistance remained.

“Come forward and feel my father’s sword!” called out Bridi.

As the soldier in the lead realized that their only foe was a single boy with an over-large sword, he laughed. “My friends, the day is won. Dispose of this one and let us be to our

drink.”

The leader and two of his men stepped unhurriedly toward Bridi in a tight semicircle. Bridi, his back to the altar, hoped that he could strike at least one blow before he was cut down.

“Hold!” came a commanding voice from behind the men crowding the entrance. All eyes turned to the tall, mail-clad figure who strode into the chapel. The man looked at Bridi and gestured his soldiers back.

“Well, Bridi of Oengusa – do you continue?”

It was Canmoor himself. Bridi’s anger rose anew. He fought to keep his composure, wishing only to throw himself desperately on this man who had brought ruin to his clan. To all Scotland, for that matter. But Bridi knew that would accomplish nothing. His arms struggled to hold the sword. His only chance to hurt this man was to hold his ground and hope Canmoor became careless. He might yet have the opportunity for one swing.

Canmoor came closer. “You could have spared good men this day, boy. Your lands are gone. Your pretense at title is annulled, given by King Edward to me.” Canmoor rested the point of his sword on the wooden floor and leaned casually on its hilt. “Still, I would not have the clans think I war with children. I will grant you your life and those of your misled men I hold captive, if you will publicly renounce your claims. It is best for the people.”

Bridi said nothing. It seemed Canmoor did not want to kill him outright, perhaps leaving the title in doubt. He looked at Canmoor's down-turned sword. He measured the two paces to Canmoor's throat. Any distraction, and he could have his moment.

*"Bridi, my son, lay down your sword."*

Startled by the command, Bridi answered aloud. "Who speaks?"

*"Bridi, do not come to Me with a bloody heart. Lay down your sword."*

"Lord, it is not right that I should submit to this evil man. How could I do such a thing?"

*"You submit only to Me. See, I give your enemy into your hand."*

From behind Bridi came an instant brightness. Outside the small window high up in the wall the clouds parted, allowing the full sun to blaze directly into the eyes of Canmoor, who threw one hand up in front of his face. Bridi felt strength as never before in his arms. He took two quick steps and drew back his father's sword for a strike at Canmoor's neck.

*"I will send you to another land, and there your sons' sons will serve Me. Lay aside your sword."*

Tears rolled down Bridi's face as he checked his swing. He lowered the weapon. He no longer saw Canmoor or his men but instead saw the long green hills of his father's and grandfather's dreams. Hills where the legendary Conall nOengusa, had hunted. Hills where

he and his own heirs would no longer walk.

Bridi dropped the sword. He turned and knelt at the reliquary before the altar, letting his tears be hidden by long raven locks. Men rushed around him.

“To You only, Lord, I submit,” he said softly.

“That is good,” said Canmoor. “I rather thought you might.”

# The Song of the Cross

London, A.D. 1381

“And they sang a new song...”

Rev. 5:9...

# Main Characters

Mary Oldfield

Paul Angus

Hugh Bennet . . . . . Cantor at St. Paul's,  
longtime friend of Paul

John Oldfield . . . . . Mary's father

Julia . . . . . sister to Mary

Idonea . . . . . sister to Mary

Roger . . . . . Julia's beau

William Walworth . . . Lord Mayor of London

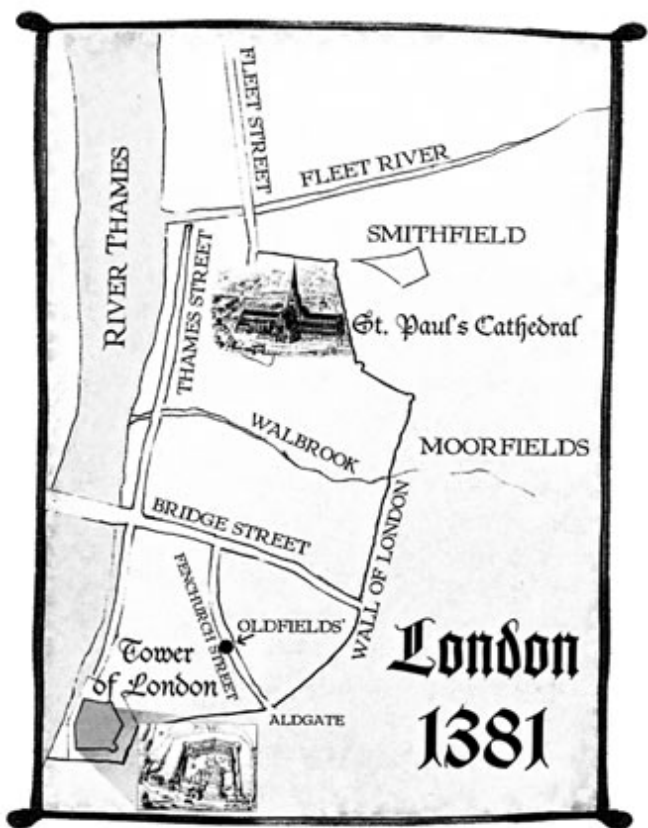
King Richard II

John of Gaunt, . . . . . Duke of Lancaster  
uncle of Richard

Princess Joan . . . . . mother of the king

Friar John Ball

Wat Tyler . . . . . rebel leader



RIVER THAMES

FLEET STREET

FLEET RIVER

SMITHFIELD

St. Paul's Cathedral

THAMES STREET

WALBROOK

MOORFIELDS

BRIDGE STREET

WALL OF LONDON

FENCHURCH STREET

OLDFIELDS

London

Tower of London

ALDGATE

1381

## Chapter 1

Mary awoke with anticipation. Today her father would return from Winchester. Quietly she left the room where her younger sisters still slept. She was careful to avoid those floorboards, which might protest and break the stillness. Early morning light lay on the landing and stairs, drawing her down step by step. At the windows of the Hall below she looked out. The sun promised afternoon warmth as it sparkled in the dew-fall on eaves and cobble streets. Mary always savored the first hours of the day, so full of calm and peace. With a smile she remembered standing here alongside her mother many times, just the two of them sharing the secret of a morning's endless potential.

The Hall, taking up nearly the whole of their bottom floor, had changed much since her mother's death. Mary's father had prospered as a mercer and no longer sold from the street entrance. Gone were the long counter and screen, which had turned the front end of the long room into a shop. Now there were stately chairs grouped around a small desk near the fireplace where John Oldfield received other Guild merchants.

Eager to stand in the freshness of the outdoors, Mary slipped on her shoes. As an afterthought, she stepped to the oak mantle over the fireplace and took down her mother's lute, carrying it with her to the door.

Outside, the crisp air tasted of spring, and the whitewashed walls and brightly painted timber-framing of Fenchurch Street's houses shone clean in slanting sunlight. Sitting on the stoop, Mary strummed chords and hummed a tune while she watched the city awaken. Few were out and about at this hour, but further up the road Mary saw a street warden, probably checking for accumulated refuse. Closer, a water seller made his rounds, stopping at the more prosperous houses, as he had done yesterday at their own.

Until recently, Mary had done the fetching of water for their household, occasionally taking one of her sisters with her. She enjoyed wheeling their cart to the city conduit where she filled her jars. She didn't mind the work, for though she was slim, her legs and arms possessed wiry strength. But her father had wished to relieve her of the burden. Likewise he attempted to reduce Mary's other labors by having her purchase ready-baked loaves and other prepared foodstuffs, and also by sending most of the laundering out.

In this way John Oldfield had made time for his daughters to attend schooling at St. Helen's parish church. Already her two sisters, Juliana and Idonea, were making great strides in their learning. Mary, perhaps because she was older than the others, was proceeding at a slower pace, her Latin still very halting. Rather than being pleased to be freed from what her fa-

ther presumed to be drudgery, Mary did not welcome his efforts. She had found satisfaction in filling her mother's place in the household. She did not know if the loss of that place could be filled by Latin.

Bells tolling the hour of Prime broke her reverie, chiming distantly from St. Paul's Cathedral, whose high pinnacle Mary could just see over the rooftops. The bells granted permission for the day's commerce to begin, and already a rising murmur foretold the din to come.

Mary rose. Chilled by her inactivity and dissatisfied with her meditations, she went in to begin the morning meal.

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"Oh Mary, let's leave this 'til later," said her sister Idonea after breakfast. "We'll be late to Mass."

Mary continued polishing the table, saying "Please take away the crockery, Idonea. We won't be late."

Juliana, youngest of the three sisters, caught Idonea's eye and urgently jerked her head toward the scullery. Idonea frowned, but followed her sister out of the Hall with her arms filled.

Once they were out of Mary's hearing, Juliana asked "Idy, wouldn't you like to go to St. Paul's today for mass instead of St. Andrew's?"

"Of course," answered Idonea petulantly, placing the dishes on the washtub's sideboard. "But you know Mary won't take us there. We always go to dreary St. Andrew's. Though that's better than all this," she said, waving at the work to be done.

"Just leave it to me. I know Mary's weakness. And don't make her angry!"

"Well, I'm no scullion! I don't see why Father won't get servants. He can surely afford them."

"It is because Mary tells Father that the three of us can do it. Which we can. Now go for the water."

In the Hall, Mary found herself staring down into the now-shining wood of the table as if something of importance lay there. Shaking her head impatiently, she walked to the window overlooking the kitchen garden. In the wide pane of Flemish glass she saw her reflection superimposed over the scene of her sister Idonea fetching water from the barrel. Though not normally given to vanity, she now looked critically at her image. Her face had graceful lines and an expressive mouth, but was it perhaps too sober for a young woman barely twenty?.

With a sigh she turned and went through to the scullery where Juliana was humming over the dishes as if there was nothing else she'd rather be doing.

"We'll be done in good time, Mary," said Juliana brightly. She paused as Idonea entered

with the water, then continued, "I do wish, though, that I had time to put out some loaves to rise for Father. You know how he favors ours over the baker's."

This was very true, but Mary had to keep from smiling as she saw the trend of the conversation. "Yes, Juliana, but we'll be due for Mass." St. Andrews Undershaft, the principal church of Aldgate ward, was close but still required a few minutes walk.

"Mary," returned Juliana, "I've just had a wonderful idea. You know St. Paul's has a later Mass. We could do the loaves and still have time to go there." She quickly went on as she saw Mary about to speak. "And you'll never guess what I've heard – they're having a Flemish cantor at St. Paul's today!"

Mary again had to hide a smile at her sister's conniving efforts. Yet in spite of herself she discovered a hint of excitement. Normally the thought of St. Paul's noisy merchants and impious crowds was distasteful, and she always keenly felt her responsibility over her sisters, especially during her father's absences. But she loved music, and the opportunity to hear Mass sung in the Flemish style was a temptation. A restlessness inside urged her to break from pragmatic routine.

Looking at Juliana and Idonea holding their breath, and round-eyed in anticipation of her answer, made her finally laugh. "Sisters," she said, "let's go to St. Paul's."

"Oh, how fun it will be!" cried Idonea. Juliana kicked her shin as Mary continued.

"Idonea, please go engage Roger at the stables to carry us by wagon to St. Paul's and the return. I'll go up to lay out our clothes. And Juliana; thank you – I know Father will enjoy the loaves." Mary considered also having Roger supply a single mount for herself, for she took joy in being on horseback and had not been riding since the advent of good weather. However, she decided that such indulgence might not constitute proper chaperonage of her sisters.

Leaving the excited girls, Mary passed back through the hall and ascended the stairs which led to their room and also to their father's. On the upper landing she paused as she usually did at the portrait of her mother. Mary had always seen her mother as a beautiful and mature woman. Lately it had occurred to her that she herself was now only a few years younger than the woman in the portrait. Her mother had died scarcely a year after the sitting, struck down by the tail-end of plague. She had left behind three daughters, the youngest only months old. At first Althea, their mother's ancient nurse, mothered them, but she soon passed also. From that day, Mary, as the oldest, had taken on the responsibility.

Restlessness returned to Mary as she turned left into the room she shared with her sisters. What had she accomplished compared to her mother? She no longer had any close

friends who were not caught up in the joy of new and growing families. Her sisters, though growing into young women, had each other, and looked upon her as more mother than sister.

Mary's father was negotiating on her behalf with both St. Helen's Bishopsgate and the Franciscan house of Minoreesses, and this they would discuss upon his return, but she knew he dreaded the possibility of her departure. In a way, she and her father had been each others' protection against the grasping London society. Mary fulfilled her father's need of a hostess to Guild and Church functions. Matrons setting out to disturb the peace of his widowerhood ran into her as an obstacle. He in turn shielded Mary from the importunities of suitors eyeing her as something of an heiress. How complex life sometimes seemed to her.

She began to draw out clothing for the excursion. Her sisters' large wardrobe made this an extensive task. Though her father's eminence as a Guild mercer was surely a blessing, sometimes the multitude of fabrics he brought to his daughters was maddening for Mary. Her sisters were continually tempted to construct another new gown as fashions appeared in London.

She put aside several gowns made by Idonea with tight upper sleeves and bodice in the current brazen style, finally choosing ones more modest. Juliana's was of the brilliant

green she liked so well, with funnel sleeves and embroidered linen ruff. Idonea's was a deep red, and full-skirted.

For herself, Mary moved to the large chest in the corner which held all of her mother's things. Kneeling, she turned back its quilted covering and ran her hands over the smooth wood. Many years ago Mary's mother had told her that this ancient reliquary had been in her family for generations. She said a soldier ancestor of theirs had brought it back from Scotland during the conquests of Edward I. Always Mary had felt closer to her mother when kneeling by the reliquary. It was as comforting as a faithful old family retainer.

As Mary put aside the chest's lid, a wonderful scent of another time and place filled the room. Reaching inside, she drew out her mother's favorite gown, long, flowing, and a deep blue undimmed by time. It, too, had its own fragrance, distinctly her mother's.

Beneath the gown was a tattered book which had always lain at the bottom of the reliquary. Mary now lifted and turned the book's face to the morning sun. Many times since her mother's death Mary had leafed curiously through its ragged vellum pages, wondering what it was. Her father said it must be a book of scriptures, but knew nothing beyond that. Indeed, the richly illuminated characters spoke of scripture, but the language was nothing she or her father had ever seen.

Replacing the book, Mary lovingly donned her mother's gown, but once standing and smoothing its folds with her hands, she was overcome by a terrible loneliness and ache to be held close as her mother had once done.

Within her welled a need to feel that she truly rested in God's will. Should she continue to keep her father's house? Or should she enter St. Helen's or the Minoreesses? Should she even be taking her sisters today to the worldly and bustling transepts of St. Paul's? Mary found tears coursing down her cheeks, falling onto the pale streak of wood of the chest's corner.

"Lord Jesus, show me your will," she prayed. "Guide me with your loving-kindness."

Gradually, not answers, but peace flowed over her. There came a relief and assurance that hands other than her own would aid in the unfolding of her life. And perhaps one answer had come, for she was surprised to find a new enthusiasm for today's visit to St. Paul's.

Mary knew she had taken longer than she realized when both girls came from their tasks to dress. She wiped the tears from her eyes, but her sisters were too intent on their apparel to notice.

"Mary, can't I wear this one?" asked Idonea, holding up one of her tight-bodied creations. A warning look from Juliana caused her to subside even before Mary answered.

"No, dear, you'll look beautiful in this crimson. Did you get Roger?"

"Oh, yes. He said he wouldn't let John Oldfield's daughters go clear across London without himself as escort. I think he likes Juliana."

"He does not! And even if he does, I certainly ..."

"And when will he come, Idonea?"

"Why, he's there now, with that little open coach."

"Then I'll go down, and you two come when you're ready." Mary smoothed her mother's dress once more, took a deep breath, and went below.

## Chapter 2

Paul was late. The Cathedral bells in the distance chimed their agreement with that fact. Paul was tempted into a detour he gradually realized he should not have taken. He crossed the Fleet River and followed the alleys fronting the stream, meaning to pass eventually down through Ludgate and thus to St. Paul's Cathedral. Here, where he had played as a boy along the waterway, he saw signs of an ominous change in the city. Ramshackle dwellings crowded the banks, and refuse littered the once-clean streamside. More and more, Hugh had said, criminals and run-away villeins were drawn to the city's edges.

Nearing Fleet Prison, he skirted behind its moldering stone walls through a deserted alley toward Ludgate. In the shadow of the prison the bright morning was shut out, and, in the dimness, Paul's senses came alert. Experience gained in the cities and byways of the Continent had taught him caution in such places. His hand strayed to his sword's hilt as he saw ahead a band of loiterers eying him while they passed a jug. Cudgels rested on the shoulders of several.

He could turn and retrace his steps to Fleet Street, but he feared the time lost. Hugh would be waiting. Instead he walked boldly toward the group. "Good day to you, my friends," he said when he had come abreast of them.

The man holding the jug stepped into Paul's path. He was heavy-set and dirty. "You are no friend of ours, you fish-stealing Gascon," the man said. He stood glaring as if waiting for Paul's reaction while his mates watched impassively.

Paul well knew that the fellow was bent on trouble, yet he might only be reacting to Paul's undoubted accent. Years of travel had inserted a foreign flavor into his English. His long raven hair, for generations a mark in his family, also gave him a continental appearance, though family tradition actually placed their origins somewhere in Scotland. "Keep a civil tongue," he said. "I am no Gascon. I was born a Londoner the same as yourselves, and ran these streets as a boy."

"And a liar, too," the man snarled, more to his friends than to Paul. He seemed to be working his allies up to support him in whatever it was he planned. Paul saw the moment when the heavy man's eyes slid sideways to him, and a dirty, bare forearm tensed in preparation to strike.

As the jug came swinging up toward his head, Paul quickly side-stepped. The other men moved swiftly to block his escape, cudgels in hand. In one sweeping motion Paul pulled loose his sword and swung it with all his power a bare finger's breadth above the knuckles of the nearest. The hard ash of the man's cudgel severed cleanly, and he staggered back in

amazement. Even as the leader's jug arced vainly by Paul's skull, Paul darted in and hit him hard on the temple with the pommel of his sword. Stunned, the man dropped to the cobbles. Paul stepped through the breach and turned to face the remaining men, who backed muttering down the alley.

Breathing heavily, Paul turned and walked rapidly until out in the wide expanse and crowds of Ludgate. He stopped then to gain back his breath. The tall spire of Saint Paul's Cathedral lay dead ahead, and he hurriedly turned his steps in its direction.

Minutes later he caught sight of the stout form of his friend Hugh, standing where he had promised by St. Paul's Cross. Hugh was impatiently tapping his foot, obviously searching the milling crowd for Paul.

"My friend, forgive my lateness."

Hugh turned to find Paul by his side. "I shall if you fabricate an adequate excuse."

Paul laughed. "No fabrications. I will tell all as you lead on. Which way?"

"Follow me." Hugh found a break in the crowd and headed toward Cheapside. "And your excuse?"

"I would tell you of the ruffians who delayed me, but the truth is, I dawdled too long in Farringdon."

"I cannot fault you for wishing to visit the streets of your nativity." Hugh stopped and took Paul by the arm to steer him around an

overburdened wagon. "But the ruffians...?"

"They were real enough. I think they disapproved of my finery."

Hugh shook his head, looking over Paul's tight pants and gold chains. "You have become such a dandy. I am glad they did you no harm."

"You have the costume suitable to your station, and I have mine," said Paul with a smile.

Hugh shook out the heavy priestly robes he wore. "Hmm, yes, and sometimes I do tire of this costume!"

As they continued toward Hugh's mysterious meeting, Paul took in the bustle of the London morning, exhilarated to be in the city of his boyhood. Faint resentment at having been uprooted from here years ago was submerged by fond memories evoked by familiar sights and sounds. Hawkers of lavender, apples, and every other kind of ware raised their cries in tenor, soprano, or bass voices across Cheapside, counter pointed by the percussive ringing of ironmongers and wire makers in their shops.

"My friend," said an amused Hugh, "you appear to approve of this clamor."

"I truly do. This is the way it should be. If you close your eyes and listen, it is a joyful noise, sent up to the heavens."

"If you close your eyes, you'll be stripped bare of everything you own," grunted Hugh. "And if I were God in heaven I would stop my ears at this music. Come, the turn's ahead."

They had been making their way down Cheapside toward the Shambles, and the turn took them thankfully away from the growing stench of the butcheries there. Soon they were out of the crowded market and near the city gate at St. Botolph's.

As they walked, Paul was able to look over and consider his old friend. Music had begun their friendship, both of them working through the courses at the Flemish University of Bruges. Then came years in Reims under Canon Machaut, who firmly unburdened them of everything learned at the university. What an opener of musical doors Machaut was for them. They had composed not only Masses, but all the other forms of which Machaut was master. It was Machaut also who first introduced Paul to the lute.

The old Canon's death had finally sent Paul and Hugh out to see where their musical art fit into the world. Hugh took priestly orders and came to London as a cantor in St. Paul's Cathedral. This contrasted with Paul's past four years of uncommitted traveling. Though Paul had taken minor orders, something caused him to stop short of the steps which would confine him to the priest's life.

Once again he relived his father's disappointment when Paul had made that decision. A pious man, Peter Angus had stressed throughout Paul's boyhood that one's purpose was always to serve God. Why had Paul turned

away from that path? Perhaps it was his drive to search for musical perfection, which had drawn him on to Nuremberg, and through France and Rome. And now again here to London.

Paul wondered if Hugh also considered him something of a wastrel, a mere troubadour or jongleur. Paul sometimes wondered himself.

Yet these past years seemed to have robbed Hugh of his carefree ways. When Paul arrived in London the previous week, he had been almost shocked at the change in Hugh. He was stouter, slower moving. Around his tonsure, light hair was already thinning. His wry wit, always quick, now had more of an edge and bite. Perhaps these things were simply indications of maturity, but from Hugh's comments it appeared that the politics of the Church, and perhaps of the city itself, weighed heavily on him.

They left London's city wall behind and turned down Cock Lane and into Holborn. "Better to be outside the city. London grows large, and the eyes of Gaunt, and even Avignon, are all about."

Paul was surprised at the comment, for John of Gaunt, the king's uncle, would certainly be at the opposite political pole from Pope Clement in French Avignon. Where did this leave Hugh? Paul realized that he understood little of the intrigues which seethed here.

Hugh finally gestured to the door of a

small saddlery near Thavies Inn. "This is the place I spoke of," he said.

Inside, Paul found the shop filled with the smell of fresh leather. Several apprentices looked up, then bent back to their labors at sight of Hugh. Hugh did not linger in the work area, but drew Paul through to a rear room. There, a group of men were sitting in earnest conversation around a worn work table.

One of the men, large and florid, raised his hand to silence the others upon seeing Hugh. "Greetings to you, Hugh," he said with a booming voice. "And who have you brought us?" Eyes looked Paul over speculatively.

"Ah, William, what a bellows," returned Hugh. "Your vocal powers were not fashioned for discretion." The others laughed, and to Paul it was a measure of Hugh's standing here that they were both seated without first answering William's pertinent question. When they had accepted a tankard of weak beer, Hugh continued.

"Friends, this is Paul Angus, who eclipsed me in all our studies, and has since traveled into some areas I think may be of interest to you."

A sound of surprise came from an older, well-dressed man across from Paul. "Will Peter Angus be your father, then?" he asked Paul. "You have the look of him."

"Why, yes. Peter Angus is my father. But he hasn't been in this country for a dozen

years. Do you know him?" It seemed a fatuous question since the man obviously did, but Paul had been unprepared to be thrust so soon from his relative anonymity. He was not sure he wanted to be pulled into any of his family's old connections in London.

"Of course. A fine man. I haven't seen him since he moved his business to Ypres, but he is still very helpful at the Flemish end of things. I'm John Oldfield, and I believe I may have last seen you climbing an oak in my kitchen garden."

There was a chuckle around the table, and Paul was startled to realize that he had a hazy remembrance of the occasion. With their fathers talking of business matters, Paul and the Oldfield's serious young daughter had been forced into each other's company outdoors.

"That's all well, but we've pressing matters. What can he tell us?" This came from a young man in the robe of the Blackfriars.

"This is James Clerk, Paul," said Oldfield. "His zeal is commendable, if not his tact. Hugh says you've been from Bruges to Rome. We are wondering what you may have seen of the court at Avignon."

Paul found that he liked John Oldfield, but he shifted uncomfortably in his chair, for he knew he understood little of these men's aims.

"Gentlemen," broke in Hugh, "I asked Paul to come with me today because his education up to this point is lacking, and he needs to

be aware of what is happening in this country. Perhaps if we give him some background he'll understand what would be of help to us."

"There's a point," barked William. "I'd like to know myself what is happening, if anyone other than God knows!"

"Paul, some of us fear that there's going to be trouble in London," began Oldfield. "Probably all through the south, for that matter." He paused as if searching for a simple way to explain a complex situation. "Every man here is loyal to King Richard, but Richard is only fourteen, and John of Gaunt runs the government. Richard doesn't realize that the people are fed up – I think this poll tax is going to be the last straw."

"And what of Clement?" Clerk the Blackfriar spat out the French Pope's name like a bad taste in his mouth.

Oldfield nodded. "Yes. With Pope Clement in Avignon and Pope Urban in Rome each calling the other Antichrist, it's opened the way for such as Ball's preaching. He's stirred up every bondsman from Maidstone to Essex. And of course Wyclif hasn't helped matters with his denunciations of the Bishops and their high living. True as it may be, there's little enough respect for the cloth these days as it is. But if Clement were to accept Urban's election, it could go far toward cooling the simmering pot."

Paul felt it was time to speak. "Even as little as I know, I can tell you that this isn't

likely to happen." Small sounds of consternation came from around the table as he continued. "In France they all love their Pope. I watched a procession in Avignon where the King and Clement together rode through the streets. Everyone was cheering and throwing flowers."

"And in Rome?" asked Oldfield.

Paul smiled as he remembered how some wit at St. Peter's had changed their cantankerous Pope's name from Urbanus to Turbanus. "They're not throwing flowers, but Urban is a Roman, and they hate the French."

Oldfield let out his breath with a sigh and sat back. "So. No more than we thought." He looked with interest at Paul. "You are well traveled. What brings you back to London?"

"Hugh and the Bishop are allowing me to help with a Mass at St. Paul's."

"Modesty to the point of dishonesty," protested Hugh. "The Mass was entirely composed by Paul, in the style of Machaut, whom the Bishop adores. The Bishop and I do just as we're told." He smiled at Paul's discomfiture.

Oldfield seemed impressed, but looked at Paul's clothing and the sword belted to his side. "You are not a priest?"

"The Bishop has granted a dispensation, so that he may also sing in the choir," answered Hugh. "As a matter of fact, we must leave soon to prepare for the Mass."

"We might do better to have less of

Machaut here," grumbled the dour Blackfriar.

Paul found himself irritated by the frowning Clerk, who was scarcely older than Paul himself.

Hugh stepped in, reminding Paul that not only he, but Hugh also, had been fond of the old Canon. "And what do you find objectionable in Machaut, James?" Hugh asked mildly.

"He complicates the music unnecessarily; all those voices one atop the other. One syllable is drawn out past its measure, and you lose all sense of what the words are saying."

"Of course, now I understand," said Hugh. "The listening flock in the pew finds the words garbled and gain no benefit from the text!"

This drew a hoot of laughter from William, since everyone, including the scowling James, knew that not one in a hundred in the pews had ever understood the Latin of the Mass anyway. Amid appreciative chuckles, Hugh rose and, with Paul, prepared to leave.

"Thank you for your perspective, Paul," said Oldfield. "I hope to speak with you again."

Paul nodded, though he was unsure of what other help he could be.

"Farewell, gentlemen," said Hugh, leading Paul to the door. "We have a Mass to sing!"

### Chapter 3

Mary and her sisters tried to see everything at once as Roger escorted them through the throng moving toward the north transept entrance to St. Paul's Cathedral. Many around them were carrying baskets, parcels, and papers, preparing to do business with scribes and tradesmen inside, or merely passing through to the south entrance as a convenient thoroughfare. Some of the crowd were veering off to the left where an itinerant friar harangued from the open-air pulpit of St. Paul's Cross.

Juliana and Idonea looked interested in this, but Roger shook his head. "I know that one," said Roger. "He spouts nothing but Wyclif's heresies."

In spite of the noise and distraction, Mary still carried the sense of calm assurance she had been given earlier. The cathedral was huge, by far the largest building in London. Height upon height, the cathedral's lines led her eye heavenward, past the crowded lower level, up past the endless clerestory windows and airy buttresses. Up to where, atop all, and seeming to pierce the sky, rose the central tower and spire. But she could not pause for long in the streaming flow of people, and was carried along to the entrance. There, contrasting with the splendor of the cathedral and gaily dressed crowd, sat the beggars, each with his station at pillar or door. One, a cripple she knew, greeted

her, and she paid her alms into his bowl.

Once inside, they were finally able to turn with other worshipers into the peace of the great nave. Mary loved the rows of columns, each seemingly a cluster of lesser columns. They made her think of huge bundles of reeds. Light streamed in from windows low and high, leading Mary and her sisters down the aisle toward the stone latticework which screened the choir. But the real glory of the cathedral lay beyond, filling the entire east end of the nave. Here the vast disc of the Rose Window glowed as if with the glory of God.

The three sisters and their escort found seating as near to the choir screen as possible. While Juliana and Idonea craned their necks to take in all the colorful apparel, Mary let her gaze rest on the Rose, its hues deep and vibrant from the southerly-slanting sun. She wondered at the artistry and piety of the builders, and puzzled over what significances the window's elements had possessed for them. So engaged was Mary that at first she failed to notice someone appear beside her on the pew. At a squeal from Idonea she lowered her eyes to find her father smiling next to her.

"Good day, daughters," he said. "Well met! I hadn't thought to find you here. And good day to you, too, Roger."

Whatever Roger might have replied was drowned in a flood of questions. But Oldfield held up his hand. "I'll tell all, but later. This

noise is unseemly." He pointed at the priest and choir filing in.

Mary took her father's hand and said a silent prayer of thanks for his safe returning. Then she leaned against him and asked softly, "Father, do you approve my shunning of St. Andrew's today?"

Oldfield squeezed her hand. "My serious daughter," he whispered, "I approve your decisions over almost anyone else's. And as you see, I have an interest in this Mass also."

Soon the priest began his reading. Mary let the words flow over her, soothing though unintelligible except for a few phrases newly-learned from her lessons. Those few, however, piqued her imagination as she saw that with continued study the hearing and reading of scripture could be fully opened to her.

Eventually the priest droned to a close and the choir stirred. Mary watched the robed figures, obscured by the tracery of their stone barricade, rise in their tiered stalls. A moment of stillness, then a single tenor voice began with unfaltering pureness to sing.

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,  
Dominus Deus Sabaoth  
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria  
tua.*

As the words increased in fervor and volume, Mary could hardly believe that one voice could so fill that huge space. She peered through the stone interstices, trying to see

which of the choir owned such sureness and power. This must be the Flemish cantor of whom Juliana had spoken. After a minute of searching, she felt a light touch on her arm, and found her father discreetly pointing to one of the center stalls. There she caught a glimpse of upturned profile and moving lips. She watched, entranced.

*Hosanna in excelsis.*

*Benedictus qui venit in nomine*

*Domini.*

*Hosanna in excelsis!*

On the last bell-like *excelsis!*, the virtuoso stopped, face still uplifted for a moment, modeling his own words. Then, as if sensing the weight of Mary's rapt gaze, he turned full-face in her direction. Mary caught her breath, wondering if somehow, by her intense scrutiny, she had brought herself to his attention. She guiltily felt as if, in seeking his identity, she had violated the spirit of his praise. But she quickly realized that he was only turning to cue his fellows, for now he began again, and new voices added to the melodic worship.

They sang at first in unison, then the tenor voice broke away into a higher harmony, while the choir continued as the foundation. In a moment, still others followed their leader to his new heights. They had started a line later than their choir-mates, as in a roundelay, creating a great swell of harmony. Mary, her eyes raised to the vast glow of the Rose, felt her heart

race with exultation.

But they were not yet done. Again that noble voice led the way to a new harmonic, and again he was followed, though nothing of the former was abandoned, but was continued by a portion of the choir. The air quivered with the resounding song, until Mary wondered if the stone walls could contain it. At last the full chorus came together to once more sing *excelsis!* in a thunderous crescendo that left stray echoes returning long after the living throats were stilled.

As the choir slipped away, an excited hubbub of admiring comments arose in the pews, though Mary wondered that they could so soon break the spell of that majestic music hanging in the air. Between the memory of the song and the view of the rose window, she barley noticed communion and the remainder of the Mass.

Moving into the aisle, Mary, with her sisters and Roger, surrounded her father, and once more he was deluged with questions.

"Master Oldfield, I have the small coach near St. Michael," said Roger. "Will you ride with your daughters and myself?"

"Gladly." He began with broad arms to shepherd his little flock out of the Nave. "I bring only what you see, for I've sent all else ahead to the house." This he said with a broad wink to Juliana and Idonea.

"Oh, Father! What have you brought?"

And what places have you seen?"

"What do I always bring? More fodder to feed your vanities!" He paused as he saw Mary hesitate, half turned back and looking toward the empty choir stalls.

"It was wondrous, was it not?" he said, laying his large hand gently on Mary's shoulder.

Then he leaned in closer and whispered, "And you know, I think we have not heard the last of that voice."

## Chapter 4

A melody was playing unbidden through Paul's thoughts. This was the way it always seemed to happen, the music coming, unsought. He had been leaning out the window of his room in the College of the Canons, searching out over the broad, tide-lazy Thames for nothing in particular, watching the barks and barges nestle into Queenhithe quay. Then the music was there. New, yet somehow familiar. Paul sometimes wondered if there was but one great Song, and that he heard only portions at any one time. Now he listened to it play, humming and tapping time on the sill with his finger. Gradually he began to hear the harmonies, first high, as a bird soaring over the melody lying far beneath, then low, as a dolphin might keep pace with a vessel on the surface. Height upon height, depth upon depth, flowed the music, continuing on beyond his vision or hearing, a fullness uncompassed by human ears.

Paul found himself at the deal desk rapidly transcribing while loudly singing the melody with nonsense words to keep the music fresh as his inner chorus began to fade. After an unknown time he stretched stiffly. He had managed to set down four vocal parts and a lute accompaniment. He was content to have captured something of that elusive Song, yet, as always, vaguely dissatisfied with the result.

"That is a fine sound," said Hugh's voice at the door. "But the lyrics will require much work."

"Hugh! You heard?"

"I'm sure much of Castle Baynard heard." Hugh came to the desk and looked down at the transcription. After a few moments he grunted in satisfaction. "God has given you a great gift, my friend."

"He has made me sweat a good deal for this gift."

"Don't be arrogant. Even a gift you must reach out and take. You watched me sweat alongside you for years, and I could never produce this."

Hugh turned and walked over to the window, looking out over the sparkling river. "Why have you stayed on in London, Paul?"

The question surprised Paul. It was true he had told Hugh that he would be returning to Ypres, and it had been a week since they sang the Mass. His passage had yet to be arranged.

"I don't know," he answered. "I suppose I've missed being here. It was a happy time, before my family left. Something holds me here, perhaps a yearning to make London my home once again."

"Even if it is a home where you are attacked and nearly killed?"

Paul laughed. "Not nearly that serious. Common robbers. Do you know, I believe my accent goaded them. But what of you, friend?"

Are you satisfied here in London with the Church?"

"What a thing to ask! I'm married to the Church. Do you ask whether one is satisfied in their marriage?"

"It seems to me that as part of the Church you would always have an assurance. Not wondering whether your life is moving in the right direction."

Hugh came back and perched his ample form on the edge of the desk. "Yes, it is comfortable to get off of one's own feet and climb aboard this great ecclesiastical wagon. Restful it can be. But not if the wagon isn't going where you want to go. I tell you, Paul, sometimes I think the wagon I'm on has a drunk or a fool for a driver!"

Paul knew that Hugh was deeply troubled by the dissensions in the Church, its undercurrents and corruptness. For Hugh's sake he wanted to avoid pursuing the subject. He picked up a note from the desktop and handed it to Hugh. It had come earlier that day from John Oldfield, asking Paul to compose and perform a motet for his Guild's upcoming processional.

"This, at least, is an excellent reason for staying on a little longer," said Hugh after reading the missive.

"I hadn't decided whether to accept. What do you think of this as a start?" Paul gestured to the composition on the desk.

"What do I think! Why, I think it is twice too good for the Mercers Guild. But do it for John. He's a good man."

"He was there, you know, with his wife near the front when we sang the Mass."

"That is probably how he has learned your worth. But that could not have been his wife. She is long dead, and he has never remarried."

"Who, then, would be the young woman in the blue gown?"

"Blue gown, is it! I'd have sworn you had eyes for no one but the choir. Well, John has three daughters. Your young woman must have been one of them."

Paul hastened to change the subject. "Hugh, if I do the motet, will you sing with me?"

"Hmm, perhaps if the sentiments are suitable."

"I do have an idea for the text." Paul dug through notes in a folio. "At Urban's court in Rome last year, there was a woman, Catherine Benincasa from Siena, who had great influence. She died just before I left, but I wrote down a prayer she delivered at St. Peter's. Yes, this is it." Paul quickly began translating the words from the Latin, onto his music.

"You're writing them in English?"

"Yes, what do you think?"

"I think you'll soon be a Wyclifite. Your father would be pleased," he said with a grin.

Paul grimaced at the reminder of the cause of his family's self-exile from England. He stood and fetched his lute from its case. Waving Hugh to join him on the window seat, he stroked the ribbing of the instrument for a few moments.

"Do you remember this, Hugh?"

"Yes. Machaut's own." A slight softening came to Hugh's features. "I had hoped to hear it again."

"So you shall." After a quick tuning, Paul strummed a few opening chords to set the key, and they began to sing this most recently revealed portion of the Song.

## Chapter 5

Their home always seemed brighter to Mary when her father was there. She pulled open the hall windows to allow in the afternoon's warmth, thankful that it was yet too early for the summer's swarms of insect. Her father sat at the broad oak table heartily dealing with Juliana's offering of fresh bread, while upstairs Juliana and Idonea went through his latest discoveries in fine cloth.

"Come sit, Mary," said Oldfield, speaking around a mouthful. "I know you can busy yourself endlessly. But there's a time for everything, and now's the time for talk."

"Very well, Father," said Mary, though before sitting she fetched a cloth and some of the silver that needed polishing.

"You know I would spare you this," he said, gesturing to her busy hands. "Your mother worked every day of our marriage."

Mary watched as his gaze faded momentarily into the past. With an ache for him, she realized again how much he had loved her mother.

"She never had the leisure I swore to give her. I would have liked ..." John Oldfield, then turned back to the present. "I've had a successful trip. There's no reason we can't get a bit of help around here, now is there?"

Though Mary might have told him that the last thing she would wish for was an alien

presence robbing her of her purpose, she hesitated to spurn his well-meant efforts. However, she thought she had detected in his comments, or rather in his lack of comments, another line of attack.

"Father, I had been looking forward to-day to your lively and amusing stories from the road as usual."

Oldfield looked rueful, and smiled at Mary. "I can't put anything by you, can I? Well, bad news travels fast enough at that. You'll soon hear." His voice grew serious. "There was nothing amusing on my road, though it was lively enough. Everywhere people are angry, even rebellious. I heard much heated language in the inns against the French war and those such as John of Gaunt who support it." He shook his graying head. "There's talk that some in London have fed this discontent and urged the rurals to come here and press the King to end the poll tax. And that's not all – they'd have an end to villinage also. "Leave it to the townsmen to lead the poor rustics to put their necks on the block."

"But Father, I've heard you condemn this tax yourself."

"True, it's outrageous. A shilling from each man and woman! That's a goodly week's wage. Yet life's blood is dearer still, and I fear it will come to that."

Mary was alarmed by her father's concern. She knew him to be an uncontentious

man and not generally given to mixing in the petty politics of guild and town.

"Daughter," said Oldfield, smiling away the worry he apparently saw in Mary's eyes, "I think we have more immediate things to discuss."

Mary took a breath. "Did you speak with the Abbess then, Father?"

"No, but I've been to the Bishop, and he will see to it that we are well-received at St. Helen's." He looked at Mary searchingly. "That is, of course, if it is still your wish."

"When may we visit there?" she asked.

"Early on the morrow, if that suits you. Your sisters can go there at the same time for their hour of study."

Mary thought back to her prayer for guidance that morning, when she had knelt before her mother's old reliquary. She felt troubled that she had no strong leading. But her sisters were nearly grown, and it seemed apparent that the household would not suffer should she depart. As a pragmatic person she was determined to act. "I'll be ready," she said.

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The next day was as bright as the previous one had been. Mary's sisters were gay with the morning, and her father was obviously enjoying this rare outing with all the family. The Oldfields walked along Fenchurch Street, and

Mary thought that Aldgate had never looked so peaceful and unchanging. Further on they passed St. Andrew's, so solid and permanent. Mary realized that this was what she sought – a sense of permanence and continuity. This was what she hoped to find with the Benedictines at St. Helen's.

Once into Bishopsgate ward, they could see ahead the short tower of the Priory. This was a prosperous area, and John Oldfield occasionally nodded or made a greeting to those with whom he did business. Soon they stood at the Priory's double entrance. The south door led to the parish church where Mary and her sisters had always entered for their lessons.

"Study well," Oldfield said to Juliana and Idonea, bestowing a kiss on each. "Mary and I will be to fetch you when our business is done."

He and Mary turned toward the north door, which none of the sisters had ever had occasion to enter. Actually, it was a twin to the south door, with gracefully pointed arch, and crenellations on the upper wall more decorative than defensive. But it held some trepidation for Mary. Could this be the door to her future home?

Inside, the doorkeeper showed that, indeed, they were expected. "You will be Master and Mistress Oldfield," she said in a well-bred voice. "Prioress Magdalena will return soon. Please come with me."

Mary was surprised at the elegance

shown in the young woman's apparel. Fine embroidery was worked into her collar and cuff, and a silk wimple was tied far back to show a high forehead and a bit of blonde locks. Of course, Mary knew that St. Helen's was financially well-endowed and had even been favored by Edward II's queen, Isabella.

Mary and her father followed the woman through the chancel past rich woodwork, brasses, and ornate marble effigies. They continued through the inner precincts down a long hall lined with intricate stained-glass windows depicting the Fall and continuing to the Crucifixion.

Their arrival in an inner courtyard coincided with that of a boisterous pack of hounds and a small group of riders. Over the baying of the hounds Mary heard a commanding contralto voice, and she was amazed to see that one of the riders was a woman, one of substantial proportions. Another rider, apparently a groom, hurriedly alighted and brought over some small steps, which he held steady as the horsewoman climbed from her mount.

"Take charge, John," she said. "And be sure these good fellows are fed," she added, fondly patting one hound. "I see that I have guests."

"Prioress Magdalena," said their guide, gesturing to the approaching woman. The Prioress was a robust figure, wearing a sumptuous, ermine-lined robe bound by a gold chain at the

waist and a heavy, jeweled crucifix at the breast. Her exertions had brought a ruddiness to her face, and she puffed slightly as she came up to them.

"Ah, Master Oldfield! A good day to you. And to your daughter," she added, nodding to Mary. To Oldfield she held out her hand to be kissed, which he dutifully did.

"I hope our visit has not come at an inconvenient time, Prioress," he said.

"Oh, certainly not. We've had a fine romp out Mile End. My pups do want their exercise, and it's a glorious day, is it not? Perhaps I'll take them out again later, if the weather holds good."

She was pulling off her riding gloves as she turned once more to Mary. "Mary, I would speak with your father. Will you accompany Sister Martha here? A tour of the dormitory and so forth."

Though Mary felt a bit like a child being dismissed, she did want to see the living arrangements. "Yes, Prioress," she said.

Sister Martha led her across the court through a colonnaded entrance adjacent to the sanctuary. Inside was a comfortable and well-appointed sitting room warmed by several charcoal braziers. A number of Sisters sat reading or working on stitchery, their faces lighting with curiosity upon seeing Mary. Sister Martha passed through without stopping, however, and exited into a long corridor hung with tapestries.

"These are the private apartments." She paused at one door which stood ajar, inviting Mary in with an upraised palm.

The room had an air of refinement, with gleaming paneling and high-canopied bedstead. Mary was drawn to a desk set in front the window, where an inkwell and open manuscript showed someone's recent work.

"This is an exquisite hand," said Mary appreciatively.

"Thank you, it is my own," responded Sister Martha with obvious pride.

"Then this is your room!"

"Yes. Of course, all are similar in their general layout. Would you like to see the sacristy?" Assuming assent she led the way back out into the corridor toward the sanctuary.

As they passed an archway to their left, Mary caught the scent of freshly-baked bread. "Oh, are the kitchens nearby?" she asked. "I'd very much like to see them."

"If you wish. They're here, just off the Priory wall."

At the outdoor ovens an older lay woman was just pulling out some of the day's loaves. As the beautifully browned bread brought its tantalizing scent into the bright sun Mary saw a look of satisfaction cross the worker woman's face.

"They're wonderfully done," said Mary when the woman noticed their presence.

"Thank you, Mistress. Good day to you,

Sister. Yes, it's a fine day for the baking, and that's rare enough." She paused to consider Mary with curiosity. "Might you be staying at the Priory, young mistress?"

"Possibly. And if so, I would enjoy time spent in such work as yours."

"Oh, that won't be necessary," said Sister Martha. "The kitchens and all charwork are maintained by lay people."

Mary was surprised. "But none of the sisters have household duties?"

"There are many more suitable duties to occupy our time, as you saw in my chamber. Perhaps you may wish to be a copyist." Nodding to the old woman, Sister Martha led Mary once more toward the vestry.

Mary felt embarrassment as she automatically followed. She knew that she had years of study before she could be of any use copying Latin texts.

Mary shortly found herself at a stout door with a heavy hasp. Sister Martha produced keys and pulled the door wide.

"The Sacristy also holds gifts and valuables the Priory has received, which are quite substantial," she said.

The chamber's only light came from the open door, but even in the dimness Mary could see the rich glint of gold and silver plate among the service utensils and costly vestments. She was astonished and impressed at the wealth contained here. After a few moments, however,

she felt an oppressiveness, perhaps from the room's closeness and dim light. She thought, too, of the crippled beggar at St. Paul's, and wondered if there were not better uses for these riches than to lie hidden here in this vault.

Mary turned away from all the dull glitter and stepped to the doorway. A short way along the passage she could see where they had earlier passed from the chancel to the dormitory. She realized that she needed to sort through the perplexing feelings this visit had evoked. "Sister," she said, "would it be possible to spend some moments in the sanctuary?"

"Of course. You know the way? Then I will meet you there."

Once alone in the sanctuary, Mary made no definable prayer, but only a wordless supplication. She sought again that peace and assurance she had felt when kneeling at her mother's reliquary. She wished that she was there now, where it seemed easier to find God's presence.

By the time Sister Martha appeared, Mary found that she had come to a decision.

"Shall we go now to await the Prioress?" asked the Sister.

"Thank you, Sister, but please give the Prioress my farewells. I must be leaving."

"But your father..."

"Will you tell my father I'll see him at our home? And thank you for your attendance on me, Sister." Mary left the bewildered woman

nodding speechlessly. She walked to the priory door and out into dazzling brightness and warm, spring-scented air.

## Chapter 6

Paul handed the scores he had prepared to the two chantry priests enlisted by Hugh for the occasion. Hugh himself at that moment bustled into the large and echoing empty Guildhall.

"I'm just ahead of the procession from St. Olave's," he puffed. "My apologies, Brothers. Unavoidable."

"Here's your score, Hugh, though I doubt you'll need it," said Paul.

In another moment the great doors at the front were thrown open. Paul and the others watched as the Guild masters, ladies on their arms, filed into the Hall wearing the livery of the Mercers. Paul could see John Oldfield in their midst escorting the same young woman from the Mass at St. Paul's. The procession broke into informality, and where a few minutes before the Hall had been empty and silent, now it was filled with laughter and color.

Oldfield caught sight of Paul and Hugh and led the way to where they stood by the dais.

"Good day." Oldfield nodded to the four men in general and then spoke to Paul. "Thank you for favoring my request. After hearing your Mass at Saint Paul's, I'd hoped to bring you to our Hall."

He turned to his daughter with mischievous crinkles about his eyes. "Mary, Paul Angus, our 'Flemish cantor' from St. Paul's.

Perhaps you recall that I said we might have the pleasure of his voice again one day. Paul, my eldest daughter, Mary"

Mary looked in confusion at the well-dressed young man before her and tried to relate him to the vaguely-seen robed figure in the choir stalls at St. Paul's Cathedral. Her imagination had conjured up an unworldly chantry priest, or perhaps a mild Benedictine Brother. The humble figure at the Mass had been in keeping with the spirit and majesty of that wonderful music. This cosmopolitan person before her seemed somehow fraudulent.

"You are not a priest, then?" she asked.

"No, Mistress Oldfield," Paul answered, "though I have taken minor orders. I obtained the Bishop's dispensation to sing in the choir," he added, feeling defensive before the level gaze of this mere girl in whose company he had apparently spent a carefree afternoon so long ago.

Remembering her recent visit to St. Helen's, it suddenly came to Mary that this young man might have started on the path to priesthood, only to find, as had Mary, that this was not God's will for him.

"I wish you Godspeed on your return to Flanders", she said.

"Neither is he Flemish, but an honest Englishman born, though of Scottish blood," broke in Hugh. "You might be hard pressed to believe so by these continental fashions." To her amusement, he feigned a critical appraisal

of Paul's sharply-pointed boots, minever-lined cape, and heavy gold chain. "And I truly believe he may be in danger of the Sumptuary Apparel Laws!"

"Then he must obtain another dispensation," laughed Oldfield. "Mary, this is Hugh Bennet, of whom I have spoken. We are to be favored by a motet."

Mary made a small bow, acknowledging the introductions. "I will look forward to it." She excused herself and joined several other young women nearby.

"Master Oldfield," said Hugh after Mary had gone, "there is news from Essex and Kent I would speak of."

Oldfield's amiable countenance became serious. "Of course," he nodded. "When you are finished, there is a room in the rear of the Hall we can use." He pointed. "I will come to you there."

"And you also, Paul?" Hugh asked, turning to his friend.

Paul had been only half-listening, gazing over toward Mary. She possessed a calm quietness he had not before seen in a woman so young. At the courts he had visited in France and Rome the young ladies seemed to exhibit either brittle wit or vacuous giggles with wagging hands.

He pulled himself back to the conversation. "What is this news of?" he asked.

"It would better wait. As the Hall waits

now," Hugh said, gesturing to the socializing throng. "Where shall we hold forth?"

Taking leave of John Oldfield, Paul led Hugh and the chantry priests to a spot beneath the Mercer's Arms depicting the crowned Virgin Mary. As he raised Machaut's lute and smoothed its woven strap across his shoulder, he left behind the distractions around him. The noisy Hall, the uniformly dressed Masters and their ladies bright with more-than-the-rainbow's hues, echoes of disturbing news from Essex, even the intriguing Mary, all blurred away to indistinctness.

With a ritual – though unnecessary – glance at his music, he poised his fingers and stilled himself to ready his singing mates. His first few strums were lost to the farthest reaches of the Hall, but then the four began to sing with full-chorded harmony, and everyone was brought to attentiveness.

*Oh, Holy Spirit  
Come into my heart.  
Guide it by Thy power  
To Thee, True God.*

Hugh had chosen the two chantry priests well, thought Paul. Their extreme tenor and profound bass bound together the heights and depths that Paul had first heard in the Song.

*Grant me love  
With fear of Thee.  
Guard me from  
All evil thought.*

Now the other three dropped to muted accompaniment as Paul sang the heart of Catherine's prayer alone.

*Warm me and inflame me  
With Thy Love!  
Holy, my Father  
And Sweet, my Lord!*

*Help me now  
In all my labors  
Christ, Who art Love,  
Christ, Who art Love!*

To Mary, standing with her sisters, the words seemed to express exactly the longings of her own heart – the longings to draw nearer the Lord, to have work for her hands, and to find love in her soul. She listened with eyes closed to shut out the image of the singers, especially the distractive finery of the young man from Bruges.

She heard the voices die away and the lute take up a new fullness. While yet sounding the original chords of accompaniment, the lute now at the same time gave forth a quickening series of pure single notes which evoked wonderfully the singers' earlier words.

It was not until the voices once more took up the motet that Mary realized she had never before heard such music accomplished on a single lute. She opened her eyes expecting to see that one of the priests had produced an instrument and had also commenced to play, but

there was only Paul, his fingers moving with such speed that Mary could not follow.

When it had ended, Mary again, as at St. Paul's, felt a disappointment in the loud calls of approval and instant hubbub which followed. She saw Paul and the three priests disappear into a back room. Her father took his leave and followed. Mary had an impulse to follow too, to thank the singers for that prayer-in-song, but she suppressed the urge and turned to the dais where costumed players were beginning a devotional enactment of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

In the back room Paul was also resisting an urge, his being to excuse himself from the room and any involvement with the cares and intrigues of these people. Though he did not know for sure, he suspected that it was just such political scheming which had led to his father's self-imposed exile from London when Paul was a boy. He would much rather seek out John Oldfield's daughter and ask her reaction to their motet. But he felt that he owed his friend support, and he also liked and respected Oldfield, who was now introducing a heavy man of middle years.

"Gentlemen, greet Adam Carlisle. He is an alderman with me in Aldgate and shares our concerns. Adam, Hugh here has told us there is news from Essex, though doubtless none good." He raised a questioning eyebrow at Hugh.

"As Paul will tell you," began Hugh, "I

was late arriving today. Just before I set out, a friend from Essex arrived at St. Paul's. He had been a clerk with the tax commissioner at Brentwood, where there's been resistance to the poll tax. Yesterday, a large group of freemen and villeins attacked them, and the commissioner was badly mauled. All their records were seized and burned, and they felt lucky to get off so lightly."

Carlisle broke in. "Do I recall rightly that the commissioner at Brentwood is Thomas Sedly?"

Hugh nodded. "So my friend named him."

Carlisle grunted in disgust. "The man's a grasping rascal with no discretion. He's sure to have stirred up a hornet's nest."

"That may be as you say," continued Hugh, "but Peter, the clerk, says the whole countryside is of like mind with Brentwood. During his return to London, he heard that the squires of Fobbing and Corringham are also resisting the commissions, and that the same is true around Canterbury. There was much talk of marching on London and appealing to Richard."

"He'll not give them a hearing if they do!" snorted Carlisle.

"Perhaps not," said Hugh thoughtfully, "but there are many in London who will; those who would relish tumult and upheaval for their own ends."

Paul wondered if these men were not making too much of what was just another outcry against the cost of two generations of war with the French. He knew that it was the same in Flanders, where the people were tired of the endless conflict, to the point where civil war threatened there. Still, what could a handful of common folk do?

"There's others who should hear of this," said Oldfield. "Friends, I ask you to be my guests at Fenchurch Street on the morrow if I can so arrange it. I will ask the Lord Mayor Walworth to join us there also."

"Walworth?" questioned Hugh.

"Yes, Hugh, I know we've had differences with him, but this is not about the price of fish." He went on to promise them all early notice of the meeting time.

Paul followed Hugh from the Guildhall into the still-bright spring afternoon. "What is this about the price of fish?"

Hugh sighed. "You guess rightly my concern." He glanced around at busy shops of Cheapside and apparently judged that the bustle about them afforded sufficient privacy to talk. "I do not trust Walworth. He and Oldfield have been at odds in the past. The Lord Mayor and his friends control the grocers' and fish-mongers' guilds - all the provisioning for the entire city and beyond. They've made huge fortunes by shutting out the foreign competition of the Gascons and Flemish so as to keep prices

higher. I believe Walworth, or at least his party, is behind recent efforts to stir up the townsmen to attacks on foreign merchants."

"Such as the attack on me?"

"Possibly. At any rate, these Flemish merchants are just the people John and the other Mercers and Drapers depend on for their cloth and woolens and so on. The interests of John and the Mayor seldom coincide."

"That explains the fish, but what has all this to do with the clamor against the poll taxes?"

"Exactly John's point to me. He seems to feel that this new trouble transcends Guild squabbles. He doesn't want the city thrown into agitation, so he wishes the Guilds to stand together. But again, I don't trust Walworth. He'll make stock of this trouble somehow." Hugh turned and caught Paul's eye. "You'll come with me to Oldfield's? It means much to me to have your thoughts."

"Mine?"

"Yes, you have an outsider's clear perspective. And you know more than you think. Not many have traveled as you have, and through some dangerous regions."

Paul shook his head. He'd enjoyed being again in London, but he didn't want to think about all this incomprehensible civic infighting. More, he sensed uneasily that he was being led on a narrowing path to some inevitable and unknown destination. For one sharp moment he

had the vision of having reached a high watershed where a single step in any direction would change the direction of his life's flow forever. He felt an impulse to gather his few things and take ship that very night.

They paused for a moment at the street side to allow a heavily laden wagon to pass. Paul stood and looked about at the many faces moving through the crowded lane, each intent on his own affairs, each impelled by some purpose. What was his own purpose here? Or anywhere? When he had become able to travel about on his own, he had avoided London, roving to far places, as if putting off some reckoning. Now he had returned, and he realized that always, felt but unarticulated, had been the belief that someday the puzzle of his life would be resolved here in the place of his birth.

Hugh continued blandly. "Eating as you have been at a bachelor's table, I'm sure you would appreciate the offerings of the daughters Oldfield."

Paul could not help smiling at Hugh. "You needn't resort to such blatant temptation," he said. "I'll come along with you tonight."

"Well then, good!" said Hugh. He put his arm across Paul's shoulders, and together they stepped out into the road toward St. Paul's.