

# CHARLES *and* ANNE

## *Wind and Compass*

*A Howard Family Story*



GREG BUHRMAN

Charles and Anne: Wind and Compass  
A Howard Family Story

by

Greg Buhrman

A Historical Fiction Novel

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## Prologue

This book is the second Howard Family Story that I have written. Like the first one, this book is a work of historical fiction. Many people who read the first Howard Family Story, “William and Hannah: Iron and Salt” have been asking for another one. A lot of people want to know what happens to William and Hannah’s sons Ezekial and Peter. If you are one of those people, I am sorry to disappoint you, but this book is not about them. That’s another story for another day. I plan on writing their stories, but first I need to take a step back. This book is about William’s grandfather, Charles Howard, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Carlisle and builder of Howard Castle.

The basis for “William and Hannah” was a Howard family story written by Grover Latham Howard, a Howard family historian. For “Charles and Anne” I did not have a Howard family story to work from, but I did have an extensive historical record. The real Lord Charles Howard, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Carlisle, led a life of amazing accomplishments. Not only did he build Castle Howard, one of the most iconic castles in England, he raised a large family and rose to impressive political prominence, holding numerous offices and titles over a long political career. At the apex of his career, Lord Charles Howard was trusted as the Lord Justice of the Realm between the reigns of Queen Anne and King George I.

This book is not about any of that. Instead, this book is my attempt at imagining what youthful adventures could have shaped such an impressive life and career. The historical events in this book that occurred in England between 1683 and 1693 are real, but the story you will read here is fiction. At its best, historical fiction is a beautiful combination of historical research and imagination. This book is my attempt at that beautiful combination. You can decide how well I did.





## Chapter One The Wedding Beneath the Yew

Henderskelfe Castle, Yorkshire, October 1683

Mist from the valley filled the park up to the old stone chapel. The grounds were quiet. The only sound was the rustle of leaves beneath the footmen's boots as they escorted guests to their seats. The yew tree towered over the proceedings like a silent witness. Beneath the boughs of its dark green foliage, a simple altar had been hastily set up, a narrow table draped in white linen with a copy of the Book of Common Prayer beside a Bible, opened to Genesis 2:24.

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.*

The young Lord of Morpeth, Charles Howard, not yet fifteen, stood beside the altar in a new coat of blue silk. He stood patiently, without fidgeting or smiling, but on the inside, his stomach was in knots, and he feared he might be sick. The Reverend Thomas Newland, an elderly pastor from York, stood patiently beside him. He had performed too many hurried marriages in troubled times to be surprised by this one.

Edward Howard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Carlisle, and his Lady Elizabeth stood rigid and unspeaking behind Charles, witnesses and orchestrators of this political alliance. Their presence lent dignity, if not warmth.

Only a handful of guests had been invited: witnesses from the Capel household, Howard family representatives from Norfolk, the family steward, and Charles's tutor. The absence of celebration was conspicuous. It was a wedding of necessity, not display.

A small tremor passed through Charles's fingers. He had never met her. He knew her by name; the Capels were a powerful and influential family in Whig circles, and rumors circulated Whitehall about the mysterious circumstances of her father's death. Anne Capel was the daughter of a man declared a traitor by the Crown, who had died behind the Tower walls only a few months ago. Charles didn't know his bride at all. Yet she was to be his wife.

As Lord Morpeth waited, he gazed at the castle in the distance. Henderskelfe Castle was the ancestral seat of the Carlises, but to say it had seen better days would be a significant understatement. The old tower house squatted on top of the ridge. Its walls were limestone rubble with faded mortar and crumbling battlements. Ivy climbed vigorously up the tall, narrow chimneys. The roof was a ramshackle combination of slate and wooden shingles, the result of years of barely sufficient repairs. The castle's state was a stark reminder to everyone present that the Carlisle line had been neglected and needed repair.

Lord Thomas Howard, of Norfolk, stared at the crumbling mass of Henderskelfe Castle with open disdain. He nudged his companion, the Lady Margery St. John, and whispered, "You know, I was told this wedding would take place at the Howard seat in Yorkshire. They neglected to mention the seat had collapsed."

"It's still upright. Mostly. I think the place has character," Lady Margery replied hopefully.

"Character?" Thomas snorted. "My dear Margery, Arundel Castle has character. This place has damp ambition. I have seen sturdier masonry in abandoned abbeys. I daresay I've seen more promising architecture in Cromwell prisons."

"And yet here you are. Wearing your best cuffs, no less. Too bad Henry couldn't make it. I do hope his gout improves soon."

Thomas stared at his companion in disbelief. "My brother doesn't have gout. That was just an excuse. He wouldn't be seen within a mile of these Capel traitors. That's why he sent us. To keep up appearances. For the family."

"Well," Margery exclaimed, "I'm glad to be here. It's a beautiful day in the country, and I think young Morpeth looks quite dashing in his blue silk. The least you could do is try to enjoy yourself."

Charles lingered in the shadow of the yew tree, all but hidden from the view of the guests. The murmuring voices of Thomas and Margery reached him on the breeze. "*abandoned abbeys... prisons... traitors...*" What were his

parents thinking? He was being made a laughingstock. He closed his eyes, jaw tight, but did not step forward. It was nothing he hadn't heard before; this time, it stung because he *almost* agreed.

But then came his father's voice, a remembered conversation from three days ago, standing in this exact spot.

Edward Howard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Carlisle, was a man of few words, especially for his son. He spent most of his time in London and left child-rearing to the women, so the fact that he had requested a private walk with his son was remarkable enough to make Charles worry. What was this about? Did mother tell him how he'd lost his best boots gambling in York?

His father stood beside him, gloved hands resting on a carved walking stick. "You see those fields, Charles? All this land was once profitable, from the river bend to the ridge. Sheep, wheat, timber rights... but debt eats faster than any tenant farmer. The coffers are not what they once were."

"Then why the wedding, Father? Why now?" Charles asked. "Everyone knows the Capels have less money than we do."

Lord Howard arched his brow slightly. "Because it is necessary, Charles. Arthur Capels death has made the girl both inconvenient and powerful. The Tories won't touch her, and the Whigs won't see her unprotected. She brings no vast dowry, but she brings something better: *legitimacy*. We marry into her legacy and inherit her politics. We become the house that protected a Whig martyr's daughter."

"And if I refuse?" Charles replied.

Edward looked hard at his son. "You won't. Because you are not a boy now. You are Lord Morpeth, and this is how families endure. Our position with the Whigs will make the Crown think twice before demanding anything from us."

As the memory faded, Charles opened his eyes...

Let Thomas mutter from Arundel's halls. Let him scoff at the rubble and the ivy. Henderskelfe was failing, but the Carlisle line would not. He wouldn't

let it. He stepped out of the shadow of the yew tree just as a gust of wind blew through the trees and the wedding bells rang.



The chapel's air was cold. Anne Capel, only thirteen years old, stood in the center of the dim room lit by candlelight. Three handmaids swirled like moths around her, adjusting her dress. Her wedding gown was unadorned ivory wool fastened at her waist, with a modest veil of Brussels lace covering her back. Her mother, Lady Elizabeth Capel, adjusted the cuffs and smoothed the sleeves.

"You are beautiful, my love," her mother whispered. "More than I was on my wedding day."

Anne nodded faintly, "I do not feel beautiful."

"Just be brave then," her mother said as two handmaids reached down to help her adjust the lace.

Just then, the door of the chapel creaked open. It was Mr. Wharton, one of Arthur Capel's oldest friends.

He bowed to Lady Capel, then turned to Anne with a look of urgency and sympathy.

"I beg your pardon," he said softly. "But I was entrusted by your father ... before his arrest... to give this to you."

Anne turned. Her breath caught in her chest as Mr. Wharton produced a small, white leather purse.

With a bow, he placed the purse in her hands.

No one spoke.

Anne's fingers trembled as she loosened the drawstrings and opened the purse. Inside was a small brass compass and a letter from her father.

She opened the letter and read.

*My dearest Anne,*

*If this reaches you, all that I feared has come to pass, and I am no longer there to walk you down the aisle. I am suspected of plotting against His Majesty's life. It is a grave and false accusation, but I fear that innocence will not shield me from His Majesty's wrath. I have spoken out against tyranny and in support of liberty. I have spoken when others held their tongues and remained when others fled, and now I fear I am caught. Should I be taken, I go to my fate with a clear conscience. My only regret is leaving you too soon.*

*When you asked why I carried this compass in my coat, you were only a child. I told you it was to find my way in the forests of Ireland, but that was only part of the truth. I kept this compass with me to find the road and remind me never to lose my bearings, even when the night is darkest, and the stars are lost.*

*You are young and innocent, dear Anne, but the world is not. You will have many difficult choices and will often be tempted to choose the easy path. When those times come, use this compass, think of me, and choose the right path.*

*I love you.*

*Your Father,*

*Arthur Capel*

*Earl of Essex*

Anne's hands clenched the letter. A tear slid down her cheek. She did not sob or collapse, but her breath was ragged as she slid the compass and letter into the purse and closed the drawstring.

"I miss you," she whispered.

Her mother stopped fussing over her dress and wrapped her arms around Anne's shoulders. They stood together in the candlelight, mother and daughter, holding the last words of the man both loved best in the world.

Anne tucked the purse beneath the sash at her waist.

“I’m ready,” she said.

Her mother kissed her forehead.

Together, they stepped out of the chapel. As they walked toward a yew tree, a solemn boy, and an uncertain future, the bells rang.



## Chapter Two Capel House and Whispers

### Capel House 1687 Late Summer

Capel House was one of several impressive houses that lined Lincoln's Inn Fields. The three-story red-brick house had sheltered two generations of Capels. Still, the times were turbulent, and an impressive house and old money were no longer a guarantee of safety and security.

Anne sat near the drawing room window, her embroidery resting idle in her lap. Anne had no interest in embroidery; she only kept it in her lap so she wouldn't have to talk to anyone. Lady Capel had invited all the usual people for Lady Russell's birthday party, but only the adults had been invited this time, and all they did was talk politics. Anne would rather have been anywhere else, but her mother had insisted, saying she needed to start acting like a lady. Anne had no intention of participating in any of the conversations, but she couldn't help listening. Voices near the hearth spoke of the old King repeatedly dissolving Parliament to prevent the passage of the Exclusion Bill.

"And now we have his brother instead," a woman added. "A Catholic King, and one who does not trouble himself to disguise it."

Lady Russell's cousin, Lord Edward Russell, and Lord William Cavendish exchanged uneasy glances. Lord Russell turned his wine glass in his hand, watching candlelight ripple through the dark claret. Lady Cavendish fancied she felt a sudden chill and wrapped her arms in the white wool shawl draped over the back of her chair. Lord Cavendish, perhaps grateful for something to do, stepped toward the hearth and gave the fire a poke with the iron. The conversation paused, as the guests, all Protestant Whigs, ruminated on the implications of a Catholic King in England.

"The Rye House plot was folly," Lord Cavendish said at last. "A farce, if it had not ended so badly."

Lady Capel, standing near the mantel, turned. "Nothing was amusing about it."

Anne's fingers tightened on her embroidery hoop. She knew where this was going.

"I lost my husband to the Tower because of the Rye House Plot," Elizabeth complained bitterly. "Lady Russell and I are widows because of Charles and James."

One of Anne's best friends was Rachel Russell, their daughter. She and Rachel had spent months together consoling each other while their mothers mourned their dead husbands. For months, their mothers were so immersed in their grief that Rachel and Anne were left quite to their own devices. She was glad she had a friend to share that with, but she didn't want to be reminded of the worst time in her life right now.

"And Monmouth?" a younger man ventured. "Surely Sedgemoor was worse."

"I heard the story from Churchill himself," Lord Russell said. "James likes the story so much that he makes Churchill talk about it at every council meeting. Monmouth was an idiot, and his men didn't stand a chance. Monmouth thought he could surprise him by attacking at night, but Churchill wasn't surprised. Monmouth was the one who was surprised. Surprised by a drainage ditch that was as deep as the Thames. To make matters worse, when they were stuck in the ditch, some idiot fired his musket, waking everybody up. The way Churchill tells the story, it was like shooting ducks in a barrel."

"Except the ducks were farmers and boys. Monmouth took anyone into his army, even boys, even students."

"Well, Sedgemoor didn't last more than an hour," a grim-looking gentleman explained, as he paced back and forth from the hearth to the tall window by the door. "Most of Monmouth's men surrendered or tried to hide. I was a conscript in Norfolk's Regiment. We searched the Somerset swamp for days, looking for survivors. We found one man hiding inside a swamp cypress a week after the battle."

"Norfolk's Regiment is full of Tories and run by Catholics. I never knew you were a Tory, Edward."

“I’m not a Tory! I told you, I was conscripted. I owed Lord Howard thirty pounds. He said I could either work it off in the regiment or stay in prison till someone paid my debt. I chose the regiment, but I wish I had chosen prison.”

“It was awful for the ones we caught. It wasn’t enough to hang them. Jeffreys had them drawn and quartered and hung the pieces in their own towns. Mothers had to walk past their sons’ body parts rotting on the gates.”

“I sometimes think those were the lucky ones. Most of those boys were sold and sent to the Caribbean as indentured servants. Ten years on a sugar plantation in St. Croix might as well be a death sentence. Not many survive that long.”

Anne’s mother, who had been crying to herself ever since the talk turned to the Rye House Plot, finally came out of her reverie and looked around in shock. This was supposed to be a party, not a wake. Most people in the room were either gesticulating wildly or crying on their partner’s shoulders. Lady Capel clapped her hands, told everyone to get a hold of themselves, and finally had the birthday cake brought out. A giant three-tier red velvet cake with white coconut icing was brought to the center of the room and lit with candles. Everyone entertained themselves by wishing Lady Russell a happy birthday, and all talk of the past was swept away for now.

In Anne’s opinion, this was the worst birthday party she had ever endured. Anne rose and crossed to the window. Time to go outside and find some of her friends. Lincoln’s Inn Fields appeared unchanged, carriages passing, children playing, genteel life continuing by some fragile agreement no one wished to test.



Anne and her younger sister Elizabeth were running late for Algernon’s cricket match. “Elizabeth, hurry up and get dressed. Algernon’s match starts in half an hour, and I don’t want to miss a minute of it,” Anne exclaimed, as she finished tying a white lace ribbon to secure her French braid.

“Oh, please, you’re not fooling anyone,” Elizabeth replied. “You don’t care a fig about cricket. You want to flirt with that Cavendish boy, and you’re afraid that Rachel will beat you to it.”

“That’s a dirty lie, Elizabeth,” Anne fumed. “I’m married to Charles. I can’t flirt with anyone. Besides, even if I wanted to, someone would see it and say something. The Howards have people everywhere.”

“Well, that’s true, those widows from Portugal Row parade around the Fields all day long. They live for juicy gossip, and they have eyes like hawks. I guess you’ll have to let Rachel have him.”

“Not if I can help it,” Anne muttered. “Now let’s go!”

They took the front steps two at a time, skirts gathered, laughing as they reached the street. The road led straight to Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The main entrance to the Fields was between Portugal Row and the approach to Lincoln’s Inn Garden.

The square was already filled with people. There were barristers in dark coats, clerks, and students. Ladies arranged themselves upon benches with studied casualness or strolled towards the grounds. Beyond them rose the walls of Lincoln’s Inn itself, solid and self-contained.

“It is said,” Elizabeth remarked, “that more treason has been spoken within those walls than anywhere else in London.”

Anne knew this. Everyone did. Lincoln’s Inn was a Whig stronghold, a place where lawyers and members of Parliament debated freely. Everyone knew plots and rebellions began there, whispered into being behind walled gardens and closed doors.

But Anne and Elizabeth cared little about that as they raced past the bollards, through the iron gates, and down the flagstone path that led to the gravel walk surrounding the Fields.

Lizzie and Rachel waited impatiently underneath a tall elm tree bordering the cricket field. Lizzie was their nickname for young Lady Elizabeth Cavendish. The Cavendishes and Capels spent so much time together that Anne had quickly grown tired of having a sister and friend with the same

name. One day, she declared that Elizabeth Cavendish was Lizzie, and that was all it took; the nickname stuck. Lizzie wore a rose-colored silk dress with ribboned sleeves and a wide-brimmed hat trimmed with pink roses that matched her dress. “Where have you two been?” she exclaimed. “We thought you weren’t coming! It doesn’t matter anyway. The boys are running late as usual. William got halfway here, realized he’d forgotten the bat and balls, and had to run back to the house. Where’s Algernon? We thought he’d be with you.”

“Elizabeth took forever to get ready,” Anne explained, slightly exasperated. “She had the devil of a time getting all those golden curls tucked under her cap. I have no idea where Algernon is. He never stays in the house if it’s nice out, and I’m not his keeper.”

Elizabeth’s golden curls had escaped her lace cap, but the overall effect was stunning as they matched her lace-trimmed dress. Anne was dressed in a dove-grey dress that complemented her long chestnut hair. Lady Rachel Russell, modestly dressed in pale blue wool with a prayer book tucked under one arm, stood by, listening intently. Her dark brown hair was tucked under a plain white bonnet.

Just then, a gaggle of laughing boys ran up the gravel path toward the four girls, with the young Lord William Cavendish in the lead, followed by young Lord Algernon Capel and six other boys in white linen shirts and dark grey breeches, with black stockings.

“Are you girls ready to cheer for the best cricket players in London?” William shouted boastfully, swinging his bat in a wide arc.

Rachel smiled. “I am.”

“Well, where are they?” Anne asked, after shooting Rachel an annoyed glance. “Surely you aren’t talking about yourselves.”

“We certainly are,” Algernon replied confidently, tossing a ball up and down in his right hand. “I’m the best bowler in London, and William is one of the best batters. With the two of us, we are a match for anyone.”

“Come on, boys! John, go get that branch for a wicket and let's play ball!” William, clearly the leader, shouted instructions that were instantly obeyed.

John broke the branch in two across his knee, slammed them into the lawn a few inches apart, set a small twig across the top of the two branches for the bail, and took his place behind them as wicket-keeper. Algernon ran out to the bowler's position, Charles Spencer set up a second wicket and bail, about twenty yards away from the first one, and the boys scattered around the field while William and James took vigorous practice swings with bats that looked like, and may have been, clubs the night watchmen used to break up fights if things got too rowdy.

William stepped confidently up to bat, just in front of the wicket. “You'll never get one by me, Algernon!”

“We'll see about that,” Algernon replied, sending a low, bouncing shot toward the wicket that William hit with a loud thwack, sending it skimming just past Charles Spencer, who dived a second too late to grab it. William and James managed one run before the boys retrieved the ball.

“Nice shot, William!” Rachel cheered.

“You'll get the next one out, Algernon!” Lizzie shouted encouragingly.

“You bet I will!” Algernon grumbled angrily before pitching a low, fast, straight shot that knocked the wicket behind James cleanly.

“Oh, you're dismissed, James!” teased Lizzie, an Algernon supporter.

The game continued for some time, with Rachel cheering every good play William made and Lizzie doing the same for Algernon. Elizabeth and Anne clapped politely and chatted with the girls for a while, but Anne finally decided she'd had enough of sitting on the sidelines.

“William, surely your arms are getting tired by now. Why don't you give me a turn?”

“No way!” complained Algernon. “I can't pitch it properly to a girl. What if I hit you? Mother would be furious with me.”

“You’re just afraid you won’t get it by me,” Anne retorted. “I’m going to hit it past all the boys.”

“Let her try, Algernon,” William said, handing Anne the bat. “Be a good sport.”

“William, be a dear and show me where to stand and how to hold the bat properly,” Anne begged with a smile.

Smiling, William obliged, grabbed Anne by the waist, and positioned her in front of the wicket, then, standing behind her, showed her how to hold and swing the bat. “Hold it right down there, by the base. Just like that, and swing. Put your hips into it. That’s right, you’ve got it.”

“William, you’re such a good teacher. I think I’ve got it now,” Anne said, smiling slyly at Rachel.

“I can’t believe she’s acting this way,” Rachel complained. “She’s flirting with your brother for all the world to see.”

“I can’t believe William is going along with it,” complained Lizzie.

“William and Charles were best friends all last year. If Charles finds out, he is going to be furious.”

“Oh, I doubt that will happen,” Elizabeth replied. “Charles doesn’t give a fig about Anne. He hasn’t been to the house once this year. He spends all his time at court or gallivanting around Europe with his friends. The rumors are he’s quite the lady’s man when he’s abroad.”

“That does not excuse it,” Rachel said firmly. “Anne is married. Whether her husband attends to her or not, her place is with him.”

Just then, Algernon pitched the ball toward the wicket. Anne hit it with the loudest thwack heard all day, and the ball sailed past all the boys, straight into a drainage ditch, rolled into a muddy bog at the edge of the field, and sank.

“Well, I guess that’s the end of the cricket match,” Anne exclaimed brightly. “Who’s hungry? We’ve got roast pigeon and meat pies at the house.”

“I am!” all the boys exclaimed in unison.



Lord Morpeth had his quarters at Carlisle House in Soho Square. Carlisle House was a dignified brick townhouse overlooking the square with a small, well-kept backyard garden. Carlisle House was just a short twenty-minute walk from Whitehall or St. James’s Palace, where Charles spent most of his time as a junior diplomat-in-training. Charles had already served as an attaché on several diplomatic trips abroad and was planning to leave in a few days on another trip to Venice.

Charles paced back and forth in the hallway outside one of the reading rooms at Whitehall, rereading a letter from Venice that he had read a hundred times.

*My dearest Charles,*

*When are you returning to Venice? I am counting the hours. Our last night together was the best of my life. My feet were light as air, and I felt like I could dance all night with you. You are such a wonderful dancer, Charles. You are also wonderful at other things that I dare not put in a letter. What a wonderful night, but now that night feels like a distant memory I can barely recall. My feelings for you haven’t changed, but I am afraid you’ve forgotten me. I am incredibly bored without you here with me. I go to parties every weekend, of course, but they have been awfully dull, and I have been forced to dance with the worst sort of boring men imaginable. Rescue me, Charles.*

*You simply must return soon.*

*Your dearest LL.*

“Not still mooning over your mystery lady, are you?” Charles’s tutor asked as he opened the door of the reading room and walked into the hallway.

“You’ve been back from Venice for months, and all you do is re-read that old letter. You’re already way behind in your Italian. If you spent more time studying, your grandfather might make arrangements for you to go back.”

Charles sniffed the perfumed letter one last time and put it back in his breast pocket. "I must get back to Venice," Charles replied. "If I don't return soon, she is bound to find some young Italian to entertain her. She says she's bored. That's what she was saying the night we met. I've got to speak with my grandfather."

"Well, you're in luck, because he wants to speak with you right now," Charles's tutor informed him. "Grab your books. You're wanted at Carlisle House. He's been waiting for you for over three hours, and you know your grandfather doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Unable to hide his relief, Charles grabbed his books and raced back to Carlisle House. His grandfather was waiting for him in the study, his brow furrowed in anger.

"Don't be angry, grandfather, I ran back here just as soon as I heard you wanted to see me," an out-of-breath Charles sputtered. "I've been studying Italian every day for a month. Tutor says I'm ready for the next level, but I would progress much faster if I were studying in Italy. He thinks I should go back to Venice."

"Do you think I'm a fool, Charles?" his grandfather asked. "Everyone knows the only Italian you've been studying is a love letter from that Venetian courtesan. Lady Lorraine is famous for her taste in young Englishmen. You aren't her first, and you certainly aren't going to be her last. You aren't going back to Venice anytime soon, so forget about her."

"But my Italian ..." Charles stammered.

"No, Charles," his grandfather said firmly. "You aren't going back, and that's that. You are going to stop acting like a fool and start paying more attention to your wife. I have been told she has been seen flirting with William Cavendish in public. People are starting to talk. If you're not careful, you will be laughed out of Whitehall. A diplomat can't do anything if he isn't taken seriously. The Howard reputation is at stake, and I did not waste all my time, money, and influence to watch you squander it."

"That is not fair!" Charles pouted. "I shouldn't be punished because Anne is acting ridiculously. What do you expect me to do? I am not going to live at

Capel House, and she is certainly not coming here. Father told me when I agreed to marry that girl that we wouldn't have to live together."

"That was three years ago, Charles. You are both growing up, and you will have to start acting like it. Everything has been taken care of for now. Lady Elizabeth has been spoken to, and Anne will not be allowed to embarrass us again, but you are going to start spending more time together, so you'd better get used to the idea."



## Chapter Three Escape From England

### Capel House

“If I must spend another hour staring at knitting patterns, I shall scream,” Anne complained to her sister. “It’s your own fault, and you know it!” Elizabeth responded haughtily. “You should never have been flirting with the Cavendish boy in public like that. Practically the entire Portugal Row saw you! The way you let him grab your waist like that! It was completely scandalous!”

“It was, wasn’t it?” Anne replied, a mischievous smile crossing her face as she recollected the ‘battering lesson’. “Well, I think I’ve paid for it enough. I haven’t been allowed out of the house for weeks. The Russells’ party is next Friday. If I am not there, Rachel will have William all to herself. I simply have to be there!”

Anne’s mother entered the room. “I’m afraid that’s entirely out of the question, Anne. You are a married lady. You’re not a girl playing at tea parties anymore. The Howards are still furious about the Cavendish incident. Just think of the position you put poor Charles in! He is trying to make a name for himself as a diplomat at court. They’re saying that he can’t even keep his own house in order. If it weren’t for his grandfather, he’d be out, and where would that leave us? No, you are done playing with boys at tea parties. It is time for you to grow up, Anne. Besides, how can you think about boys and parties with the state of things? Haven’t you been paying attention to anything happening in France?”

“What is happening in France?” Elizabeth asked, brightening at once. “Are the new dresses out yet? Are we going to Paris for the new season? Every gown I own is hopelessly out of date.”

“No, Elizabeth. We are not going to Paris. I am not talking about the latest fashion news! I am talking about the Huguenots. The Protestants in France are being treated horribly. Since Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes last year, our Protestant brothers and sisters have been persecuted and tortured. Most of the French clergy were driven out or killed, and all the remaining

French Protestants were told to convert or else. Now Louis is sending his dragoons into Protestant homes to torture them until they convert. It's awful! Louis won't even let them leave, because they are the best artisans in France. You know, the Huguenot seamstresses are the ones who make all those beautiful dresses you care so much about, so you ought to care about how they are treated."

"That is awful, Mother, but what are we supposed to do about it?" asked Anne, concerned. "We're not soldiers."

"Anne Capel, you are your father's daughter, and you had better start acting like it. What do you think Arthur would say?" asked Lady Capel, in a quiet, yet stern voice.

"He would tell me to be brave, and to do the right thing, even if it was hard," replied Anne, as her hand unconsciously rubbed the outside of a small pouch that she always carried with her.

"That's right," Anne's mother smiled, "and that is exactly what we are going to do now. I've got someone I want you to meet." Lady Capel gestured to the chambermaid who had been standing near the outer door of the drawing room. "Bring her in, Mary."

Mary stepped out and then returned with a quiet, shy French brunette with the largest, most expressive brown eyes Anne had ever seen.

"Anne, Elizabeth, meet Marguerite," Lady Capel exclaimed proudly. "Marguerite is a Huguenot who escaped from La Rochelle and will be staying with us for a while."

The girl gave no curtsy, nor did she lift her chin to speak. She only held tightly to a small leather bundle and kept her gaze low.

"She doesn't speak much," the housekeeper added, with a glance toward Anne. "Not in English, anyhow. And scarcely in French. I think she's been silent a long while."

Anne took a step forward, uncertain whether to extend her hand or simply speak. She chose the latter.

“I’m Anne,” she said softly. “And you’re safe here. No one will harm you.”

The girl looked up just enough to reveal a face pale and drawn, too old for her youth. She did not reply, but Anne thought she saw the barest nod, more felt than seen.

“We’ll put her in the old nursery,” Mary said. “Not the south rooms, too cold.”

Anne nodded. “Let me show her.”

The housekeeper left them. Anne turned, gesturing for the girl to follow.

They walked down the hall past several doorways. Anne spoke as she walked, expecting no reply.

“This was my mother’s house before it was my father’s. The nursery was mine until I moved upstairs.”

They entered the nursery, a small room with paintings of native trees and flowers. There was a lit fireplace for warmth and a small bed with new sheets, pillows, and a quilt.

Anne turned. The girl paused by the doorway.

“You may sleep as long as you like,” Anne said. “No one will wake you unless you wish it.”

Anne crossed to the fireplace and knelt to prod the coals. “Marguerite is such a pretty name. Is that what you want us to call you, or do you shorten it?” she asked, almost to the flames.

Marguerite didn’t answer her right away; she just stared off into space for several minutes, but after a while, she looked at Anne and spoke.

“My father called me Margie,” she said. “Before the dragoons killed him.”

Anne swallowed. She rose and approached Marguerite, not touching her.

“I’m so sorry,” she said.

Marguerite’s fingers clutched the leather bundle tighter. “They lit the Bible first, then the beds. Then...”

Her voice trailed off. Anne stepped closer.

“You’re not alone now,” she whispered. “We will remember them together.”

Marguerite gave no reply, but her shoulders shook violently, trying to shake free from her terrible memories.

Anne reached forward and held Marguerite’s hand.

### **Capel House, The West Parlor**

Anne and Marguerite sat close to the hearth, trying to get as much warmth as they could. Anne sat perched on a cushioned stool beside Marguerite, who sat perfectly straight in the large chair usually reserved for visitors. A basket of yarn lay between them, and Marguerite’s slim fingers moved deftly, almost automatically, the needles clicking in a quiet rhythm. Anne’s hands were clumsy; she had already unraveled three rows.

“I’m sorry to be such a bother,” Anne complained to Marguerite. “We’ve been stuck in this house ever since you got here, and I haven’t been able to take you anywhere. You must be terribly bored. Mother thinks you can teach me how to knit, but I just don’t have the knack for it. I must be the worst student you’ve ever had.”

“Not quite the worst. I once tried to teach my younger brother. He was worse.”

Marguerite patiently guided Anne’s hands. “You must let the yarn do the work. If you pull at it, it only tangles.” They worked in silence for a while. Marguerite’s hands moved gracefully in rhythm to the ticking mantle clock above the hearth. At least Marguerite was talking more now. It had taken weeks, but she was beginning to emerge from her fear. Anne and Elizabeth spent every day coaxing Marguerite to speak more, and it was starting to work.

“Oh, it’s no use at all,” Anne exclaimed as she unraveled yet another row. “I just don’t have the patience for this, Marguerite. I need to get out of this house. Elizabeth and Rachel have been to at least three parties while I’ve been stuck here. We are missing all the fun.”

“Why do you stay here? You should go to the parties with your sister. I will be fine here with my knitting,” Marguerite said, pulling her blanket tightly around her.

“It’s not you, Marguerite. I can’t go to the parties because I was caught flirting with William Cavendish,” Anne explained. “My mother is afraid I will embarrass Charles again.”

“I don’t understand any of it,” Marguerite complained. “Arranged marriages for children who don’t even like each other make no sense to me. I haven’t seen your ‘husband’ one time since I’ve been at Capel House. If he won’t even come to see you, what do they expect you to do? Go to your parties and have fun, but please leave me here.”

“I don’t think I’d be much good at a party,” Marguerite said, as she bit her lower lip. “I’m afraid I’ve forgotten how to laugh and have fun. After the dragoons killed my parents, I ran. I feel like I’ve been running and hiding ever since. I like sitting here knitting. It’s the first time I’ve had peace and quiet and felt safe in a long time.”

Anne reached over and held her hand. “I understand. After my father was murdered, I didn’t leave the house for a month. I thought I’d never smile again, either, but you’ll see. We’ll get out of this house soon, and I’ll help you remember how to have fun again.”

### **Lincoln’s Inn Fields**

The wind blew in gusts, rattling the shutters of the old buildings. Anne held a bundle of pamphlets close to her chest, their edges neatly trimmed, the title printed boldly in both English and French: *A Testimony of the Martyrs of La Rochelle and the Ravages of the King's Dragoons*.

Beside her, Marguerite stood stiff and pale, her gloved hands clenched tightly around her own stack. Her eyes scanned the square, in case the cobbles themselves might rise against her.

“See, I told you I would think of a way to get us out of the house. Mother thinks handing out pamphlets is a brilliant idea. She says I’m really starting to act like my father now.”

“I think I’d rather be sitting by the fire, knitting. It’s too cold out here, and what happens if the Catholic King’s spies see a Huguenot girl handing out pamphlets? They might send me back to France.”

Anne turned toward her friend, placing one firm hand over hers.

“We cannot live our lives in fear. That’s what they want us to do. Anyone who sees you will see a girl telling the truth. Not hiding, not running. You’ve survived worse than the stares of old ladies from Portugal Row. Besides, James’s men seldom come here. This place is a Whig stronghold. They would not dare to risk it.”

Marguerite shook her head. “In France, they watched us, too. Before they came with muskets.”

Anne softened, adjusting Marguerite’s scarf against the wind. “You said your father preached with his whole heart, even when he was afraid. What would he say now, seeing you silent while the truth goes unspoken?”

Marguerite looked down. Her bottom lip trembled.

“He would say... it is better to die in the light than live in the cellar.”

“Then let us be in the light,” Anne said, and pressed a pamphlet into Marguerite’s hand.

They stepped forward, toward the edge of the square where tradesmen loaded barrels and women bartered for cabbage. A few curious eyes followed them, but no voices rose.

Anne held out the first pamphlet to an elderly man with white whiskers and rheumy eyes. “Sir, if you care for liberty of conscience, read this. It tells of what our neighbors across the Channel have suffered.”

He grunted, took it, and squinted at the print.

Marguerite found her courage and handed one to a young woman holding a child. “Pour les Huguenots,” she said softly, and the woman, hearing the French, accepted it with a nod of sympathy.

They moved slowly, deliberately. The fear in Marguerite’s step faded with each exchange.

Until the tavern door creaked open.

Four men emerged, tall and broad-shouldered, laughing in the coarse way of soldiers who'd been long at their ale. Their red coats marked them as regulars, but to Marguerite's eyes, they were something else entirely.

She went white.

"Dragoons," she whispered. "They've come for us."

Anne turned, startled. "They're not dragoons, they're just..."

But Marguerite had already grabbed her hand. "*They will know my face!*"

Then they ran.

Through the muddied square, past startled vendors and geese scattering underfoot, down the alley behind the baker's yard. Anne's breath came sharp in her throat, her skirts tangled around her boots.

"They're not following!" she tried to shout, but Marguerite's panic was too strong. She pulled Anne on, through a narrow court and over a stone step.

At last, they ducked behind the ivy-covered wall of the churchyard, both panting, hands braced against the stone. No footsteps echoed behind them. No soldiers shouted at them. Anne looked at Marguerite. Her eyes were wide, her lips trembled.

"The uniforms, the muskets... They looked just like the dragoons," she said.

Anne nodded, her voice tender. "But this is not La Rochelle, and you are not alone now."

They stood together, the wind tugging at the papers in Anne's cloak. The soldiers were gone, or perhaps they had never followed.

### **Whitehall Palace**

The hall outside the Privy Council chamber was mostly empty. The fire had burned low in the sconce by the door, casting long shadows against the carved paneling. Lord Thomas Howard lingered in the passage. His attention was fixed on the murmured voices within the chamber.

The door was slightly ajar.

“...She’s Capel’s daughter, is she not?” came a voice—measured, clipped, unmistakably James II.

“Aye, Your Majesty,” answered Captain Hensley. “She was seen distributing seditious pamphlets, accounts of the French rebellions. Some even in her own hand.”

Thomas heard the soft scuff of the king’s heel against the hearthstone.

“She is no better than her father,” James said. “Bold blood will out. The Whigs make martyrs faster than they breed sons.”

Another voice started speaking. This voice was lower and colder, with a foreign accent. Thomas knew it: the Marquis de Lavardin, a French ambassador.

“Such girls are best shaped young, Your Majesty. The Ursulines at Rouen have corrected worse.”

“She will be taken under the pretense of protection,” James said. “There is already a courier bound for Louis. I shall send her east. The French know how to tame Protestants.”

Then James said softly, “She will thank me, in time. Or else learn to pray.”

Thomas turned silently, stepping back into the shadow of a pillar as the door opened. Lavardin passed first, lips pursed, his perfumed gloves tucked under one arm. Captain Hensley followed, not seeing Thomas.

When the corridor had emptied, Thomas stood still, thinking.

Anne Capel, Charles Howard's wife in name, if not in spirit.

They meant to smother her, to carry her from her country like contraband, silence her in a convent cell, strip her of everything that made her dangerous: her name, her God, her mind.

No charge or trial.

Henry needed to be told. He’d know what to do. Thomas marched quickly down the hall towards his brother's office. Henry was in a meeting with

several advisors, but Thomas ignored them and spoke bluntly to his brother. “I need to talk to you now, in private. It’s urgent.”

Henry Howard was momentarily flustered. He wasn’t used to impertinent interruptions, but he quickly regained his calm demeanor. “Very well, Thomas. Gentlemen, I believe our business is concluded. Kindly give us the room.”

The Howard advisors quickly bustled up their parchments and headed out the door, leaving Thomas and Henry alone.

“Well, what in the King's name is so urgent? This had better be important,” Henry said with irritation.

“It is Henry. I just overheard James and Lavardin. They are going to arrest Anne Capel and send her to a French convent.”

Henry looked immediately concerned. “Anne is my cousin’s wife. She’s a Howard now, whether she likes that name or not. This must be stopped. You need to warn Charles. He will have to get her out of London tonight.”

“As you wish, Henry. Charles should still be at Whitehall. I’ll find him right away.”



Charles was still shaking from Thomas’s news. He had one advantage. They didn’t know that he knew. They likely wouldn’t do anything until tomorrow. That gave him a head start. If his luck held out, he’d have all night to get Anne to safety.

Let them call it treason. He would rather be a traitor to tyranny than a servant to a crown that feared young women.

The wind howled through the trees as Charles Howard ran to the house, boots hitting the cobbles with a slap.

The lanterns had long since been doused, but a faint glow came from the east wing, the old parlor. He pounded on the door with the flat of his hand.

A minute passed. Then two.

At last, the bolt scraped. The door opened a few inches, and Anne, wrapped in a shawl, blinked at him in astonishment.

“Charles?”

He pushed through the threshold before she could say more.

“You must go,” he said, breath ragged. “Now. They are coming to arrest you.”

Anne’s brow furrowed. “What? Who’s coming?”

Charles looked at her, really looked at her, for the first time in years. She was older than he remembered. Her long chestnut hair fell in loose curls about her face, brushing the high curve of her cheekbones and the soft flush in her oval cheeks before tumbling down over her bodice. She was more fully figured than he remembered, the graceful fullness of a grown woman rather than the slender girl he had married, and the realization caught him off guard.

Her mouth, too, was fuller now, the lower lip slightly parted. She had begun to speak and then thought better of it.

But it was her eyes that held him. Large, deep brown eyes that widened with shock at the news of her impending arrest. She was fiercely beautiful and utterly stunned.

“The King has ordered your arrest,” he said. “You’re to be taken to France, to Rouen, a convent.”

Anne’s mouth parted. “That’s not possible. I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“You’ve handed out illegal propaganda,” he said, his voice sharp. “And you bear your father’s name. That’s enough.”

Footsteps sounded in the hallway. Marguerite appeared, barefoot, her braid loose over one shoulder, eyes wide.

Anne turned to her. “You heard?”

Marguerite nodded. “We must go.”

Charles looked between them. “Who is this girl? Your servant? Never mind, there’s no time to argue. Bring her with you if you like, but the main roads are likely being watched.”

Anne’s hands trembled. “Where do we go?”

Marguerite stepped forward, eyes clear and calm despite her pale face. “There is a weaver family in a cottage just outside of the city. I stayed with them before the Capels took me in. They will shelter us.”

Charles blinked. “You’re sure?”

“I survived because I listened,” she said. “You must do the same.”

Anne didn’t hesitate. She reached for Charles’s hand.



The small cottage was tucked innocuously into the side of the hill. Ivy covered the front in an unkempt way, making the cottage look abandoned. The only sign of life was a small bit of smoke rising out of the chimney.

Marguerite knocked twice, then once more with a rhythm that clearly meant something. Anne and Charles stood behind her, cloaked and breathless, muddy to the knees from crossing the frozen meadow.

The door opened a crack.

The face that appeared was that of an older man, gaunt and bearded, with eyes too sharp to be surprised.

“*Mademoiselle?*” he said softly.

Marguerite nodded. “*C’est moi. Avec des amis.*”

He opened the door without another word and ushered them inside.

The interior was warm and dimly lit, the fire banked low to keep the smoke from rising. The air smelled of wool and wet ash. Bales of linen and stacked baskets of dyed thread filled the corners of the cottage.

“You’ll be safe here,” the weaver said in English. “So long as you don’t speak above a whisper and leave before dawn tomorrow.”

Marguerite thanked him. Anne offered her hand. Charles bowed.

The weaver disappeared behind a curtain to fetch blankets, leaving the three of them alone with the fire.

Anne sank onto a low stool, burying her face in her hands.

Charles crouched nearby, trying to still his trembling hands. “Are you hurt?” he asked her.

“No,” Anne murmured, without looking up. “Only shaken.”

Marguerite, still standing, removed her cloak and shook off the frost. Her hair had come loose while they ran, tumbling over one shoulder. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes alight.

She turned to Charles.

“You risked everything to rescue her,” she said softly. “You knew no one else would warn her in time.”

Charles blinked, unprepared for the praise. “She is my responsibility.”

Marguerite smiled faintly. “Still, not all husbands would have done it.”

Her voice held something gentle, admiring, almost reverent. Charles held her gaze briefly before glancing away.

“I could not let her be taken,” he said.

Marguerite took a step closer. “I would not have let them take her, but you...” she paused, then added, “You saved us.”

Anne stirred but said nothing.

Charles looked up at Marguerite, at the way her eyes glistened with admiration and something else. The silence between them was charged.

But then the curtain stirred, and the weaver returned with blankets.

Charles stood abruptly. “Thank you,” he said, taking one and crossing quickly to Anne.

Marguerite turned back to the fire, wrapping her arms around herself.

She had imagined this, once, in a dark cellar in La Rochelle, when she was hiding from the dragoons. She had imagined a rescuer.

She had not expected him to be real.



“We can’t stay more than a day,” Marguerite said with a firm voice. “The weaver's daughter swears no one saw us arrive, but someone always sees.”

Charles turned, rubbing a hand across his tired face. “I know. The question is, where do we go next?”

Anne raised her eyes. “You mentioned Ireland.”

Charles spread the rough coastal map across the table, weighing each corner with pewter cups from the sink.

“Our family knows a few Protestant sympathizers in Ulster,” he said, tapping the northern coast with his finger. “They loathe the king and should offer us shelter. Some of our extended kin have lands near Antrim.”

Marguerite snorted softly. “James has a whole army of Irish Catholic loyalists. If we go there, we may as well send him our itinerary in advance.”

“There are Protestant militias too,” Charles countered. “Ulster isn’t the rest of Ireland. The ports are easier to reach than the Dutch coast. We could be there in three days by sea if we reach the coast at Hull or Whitehaven.”

“But the ships are watched,” Marguerite said. “And once we land, who protects us?”

Outside, a cart rattled along the road, and all three of them instinctively fell silent until the sound faded into the night.

Anne whispered. “What about the Netherlands?”

Marguerite nodded sharply. “That’s what I’ve been saying. The Dutch Republic is a sanctuary for Protestants. William of Orange rules there. If we make it to Rotterdam or The Hague, we might even find allies.”

Charles looked uncertain. “We are nobodies to him.”

“For now,” she replied. “But you’re a Howard. You speak French and some Dutch. You’re married to the daughter of a man who died for liberty. If anyone can win sympathy in William’s court, it’s you.”

Anne broke in softly, “My father had friends there. Men who escaped before the Rye House plot was exposed. I remember their names. I could try to reach them.”

Charles hesitated. “It’s farther. The sea is rough this time of year. We will have to take a smuggler’s route.”

“But once we’re there,” Marguerite said, stepping forward, “we are safe.”

Anne looked up. “Ireland is quicker, but riskier. The Netherlands is safer, but harder to reach.”

Charles ran a hand through his hair as he thought.

“Ireland is familiar ground, but the Netherlands... the Netherlands is the future.”

He paused, then looked at Anne.

“I will not decide this alone. Your safety is paramount. Where would you go?”

Anne answered without hesitation.

“Holland.” She touched the purse at her side. “My father would have gone there if he had time. That’s where the resistance gathers. That’s where I’ll go.”

Marguerite smiled, relief softening the tension in her face.

“We can find passage on a ship in Ipswich.”

Charles nodded, already picturing the long eastern road. Ipswich was many miles away across the cold autumn countryside.

“The journey is too far to go on foot. We’ll need horses.”

He looked from Anne to Marguerite.

“I trust you both can ride.”



The three rode in silence down the dark wooded lane. Charles rode ahead, keeping his hand near the pistol holstered beneath his cloak. The road twisted through farmland and wooded hills, sometimes narrowing to little more than a cart track. Behind him, Anne kept a steady pace, her posture calm and upright despite the fatigue in her face. Marguerite brought up the rear, scanning the shadows with sharp eyes.

They had spoken little since leaving the weavers. Silence was safer.

As they approached a half-ruined barn nestled at the edge of an orchard, Charles raised a hand and dismounted. “This is the place. The priest said the owners are in London. The hayloft’s dry.”

He led his horse to the side, tethering it beneath the lean-to, and helped Anne down from her saddle. She gave him a nod of thanks, her gloved hand lingering on his arm longer than expected.

“We’ll need to be gone before first light,” she said.

Charles nodded. “You should rest. I’ll take first watch.”

“I’ll take second,” she replied, without waiting for agreement. Then she moved to a corner of the barn and began loosening the straps on her saddlebag.

Charles turned to help Marguerite, but she was already off her horse, brushing the straw from her skirts and flashing him a crooked smile.

“Well,” she said softly, stepping into the shadows beside him, “not quite the romantic holiday you imagined, I suppose.”

He gave her a look, halfway between exasperation and amusement. “I imagined surviving. That was the extent of it.”

She tilted her head, the candlelight from his lantern catching the fire in her eyes. “Do you know what it is to be bound to such a woman? Anne Capel, daughter of a martyr.” She lowered her voice. “She terrifies me, some days.”

“She steadies me,” Charles said, but it wasn’t a rebuke. His eyes drifted toward Anne as she spread out her cloak on the straw, preparing a corner to sleep.

Marguerite watched him. “Do you love her?”

“I respect her.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Charles turned, his gaze level. “That is between Anne and me. You should not be asking those kinds of questions.”

A flicker passed over her face, part challenge, part retreat. Then she took a step closer, lowering her voice so only he could hear.

“Just for tonight... let me believe someone like you might have chosen someone like me.”

He said nothing.

And then, softly, unexpectedly, he reached up and brushed a curl away from her cheek. A young man’s uncertain gesture.

“I did not choose any of this,” he said. “But I will protect both of you. That I do choose.”

Marguerite looked away, blinking hard. “You’re a boy, Charles Howard, but not for much longer.”

She passed him and climbed into the loft.

Charles sighed as he prepared to take the first watch of the long night.

Anne’s voice drifted down from above. “If she flirts with you again, you might at least have the courtesy to pretend you don’t enjoy it.”

His mouth opened, then closed again.



They rode out an hour after dusk. The horses moved carefully over the narrow tracks, their hooves muffled by fallen leaves and soft earth.

Marguerite led now, her instincts sharp, while Charles kept one hand on the pistol beneath his coat.

Anne rode in the middle, her eyes flicking from hedgerow to treeline, alert but unreadable. They were only a day from Ipswich now. If they made it there safely, they could vanish, but as the day slipped away, they grew afraid. It started with a rustle in the underbrush.

Then a distant creak of cartwheels. Then a lantern far off in a field, flickering once, then gone. Then nothing.

Still, every sound stretched their nerves tighter. At one point, a large, slow shape moved along the road ahead. Charles reached for his pistol, but it was only a cow. They let out their held breaths and pressed on.

As the eastern sky paled behind the hedges, they crested a low hill and saw the road into Ipswich and two guards blocking their path.

They were red coats. Their muskets were slung over their shoulders, and their faces were hidden by their hats.

Charles pulled the girls off the road and into a patch of brambles.

“Damn,” Marguerite whispered. “No way around. We’d need to circle miles south.”

“They’re checking papers,” Anne said, squinting. “Or worse. They’re not local militia, look at their uniforms.”

“King’s men,” Charles muttered.

They crouched in silence, then Charles stood.

“Stay here,” he said.

“Charles...” Anne’s voice was sharp.

He turned to look at the girls. “If I don’t go, we don’t get through. I’ll draw them off. You go straight to the priest’s house, the one in the old vestry lane. Knock four times, then twice. That’s what he told me.”

“You don’t even have a proper weapon,” Marguerite said.

Charles smiled faintly. “I’ll think of something.”

Before they could stop him, he stepped out onto the road, dusted himself off, and limped forward.

He approached the guards with a half-panicked look and a torn sleeve.

“Thank God,” he said, panting. “I was set upon by three men. They took my horse and my satchel.”

The guards exchanged a look.

Charles pressed on. “They went west, toward the river. I ran here. I’m from Colchester. Son of a merchant. I have friends in Ipswich....”

“You don’t say,” one of the guards muttered.

The other squinted. “Which merchant?”

“Levington. Tobias Levington. Linen and rye imports. Please, there’s no time. If you hurry, you can still catch them.”

It was just convincing enough.

One guard muttered a curse and started down the road with Charles in tow, lantern swinging. The second guard stayed behind, watching the dark hedge where Anne and Marguerite crouched motionless.

Then he followed the other guard down the road.

The girls waited, then ran straight to the priest’s house.

The narrow lane was empty when they reached the house. Anne knocked four times, then twice, on the crooked green door beside the vestry.

The door creaked open. A man in a wool cloak and cassock looked them over, then stepped aside. “Get in.”

They were given a tiny room off the hall, cold, bare, and mercifully quiet. Anne paced. Marguerite sat, then stood, then sat again.

An hour passed. Then another. They said nothing for a long time.

Finally, Marguerite spoke. “He’s brave. I didn’t think he had it in him.”

Anne’s voice was low. “He is brave. More than I expected.”

“You sound surprised.”

“I married him for my mother’s sake. I’m only just beginning to get to know him.”

Marguerite leaned back against the wall. “And what do you think of him?”

Anne didn’t answer right away.

Just then, the door opened. Charles stumbled in, his face flushed from excitement or exertion, and grinning broadly.

“Well,” he said, “they’re not terribly bright, those two. One of them couldn’t read a direction marker, and the other nearly fell into the river, but I’ve arrived. Is there any bread?”

Marguerite exhaled with a laugh and threw her arms around him without thinking. Anne looked down, smiled faintly, and then stepped forward, placing a firm hand on his shoulder.

“You’re mad,” she said.

“Possibly,” he replied. “But effective.”



The priest’s study smelled of ink and old tobacco. It was a clergyman’s den, though one more useful to fugitives than parishioners. The windowpanes were thick with condensation, and the candlelight made halos of dust above the writing desk where Father Ambrose sat, his sleeves rolled and a quill in hand.

Charles, Anne, and Marguerite stood silently while he worked, the only sound the scratch of the quill and the faint crackle of fire in the hearth.

Finally, he looked up.

“Your names,” he said softly, “are now Pieter, Elisabeth, and Lotte Van Veen. You are linen merchants from Ghent, driven out by Papist mobs. You speak French poorly, Dutch better, and your English is shaky. You will speak only when spoken to, and never first. Is that understood?”

Marguerite gave a low whistle. “Van Veen. Ghent. Linen. Right. I’ve always wanted to be foreign and persecuted.”

Father Ambrose gave her a flat look.

“She’ll manage,” Anne said. “We’ll keep her in check.”

He passed each of them a small parchment wallet, folded and sealed with a wax crest forged from a cracked Flemish merchant’s stamp.

“These would pass under normal circumstances,” he said. “They will not pass if you are searched by someone who suspects you.”

Charles turned it over in his hands. “We were hoping to book passage out of Ipswich.”

Father Ambrose sighed. “Then I hope you weren’t hoping too much.”

“Why not?” Charles asked.

“Because Ipswich is full of Dutch ships and spies. The king’s men are watching every vessel there. Every merchant is questioned, every passenger matched against lists. If you so much as cough with the wrong accent, they’ll have you on a cart back to London.”

Charles frowned. “Then what’s the alternative?”

“Walton-on-the-Naze,” the priest said, tapping a finger against the map laid open beside his ledger. “There’s a smuggler’s harbor two miles south of the main dock. A ship’s captain named Julien Ardent. He trades in spices, lace, and things better not written down. He’ll take you to Rotterdam, no questions asked, for a price.”

“And the risk?” Anne asked, her voice steady.

“You’ll be at sea longer. The boat will be smaller. If a Royal Navy cutter sees you, you run. If it catches you, you pray.” He leaned back. “But the difference is this: at Ipswich, they are looking for you. At Walton, they don’t know you’re coming.”

Silence fell over the room. The candle guttered once in the draft from the chimney.

Charles looked at Anne. She gave a faint nod.

“To the smugglers, then,” he said. “When do we leave?”

“You leave tonight,” Father Ambrose replied. “Julien sails on the tide.”

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