THE SWIFT AND THE HARRIER

Minette Walters is the critically acclaimed and internationally bestselling author of suspense novels, including *The Devil's Feather*, *The Sculptress* and *Acid Row*. She is the recipient of an Edgar Award and two Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger awards, among other accolades. Minette is also the author of two bestselling historical novels set during the time of the Black Death in fourteenth-century England, *The Last Hours* and *The Turn of Midnight*. She lives in Dorset with her husband.

OTHER BOOKS BY

Minette Walters

The Ice House (1992)
The Sculptress (1993)
The Scold's Bridle (1994)
The Dark Room (1995)
The Echo (1997)
The Breaker (1998)
The Shape of Snakes (2000)
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Innocent Victims (2012)
A Dreadful Murder (2013)
The Cellar (2015)
The Last Hours (2017)
The Turn of Midnight (2018)

MINETTE WALTERS

THE SWIFT AND THE HARRIER

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For Hermione

And my three closest friends during Covid lockdown:
Lambert, Butler and Mr Rooster

Author's note

THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

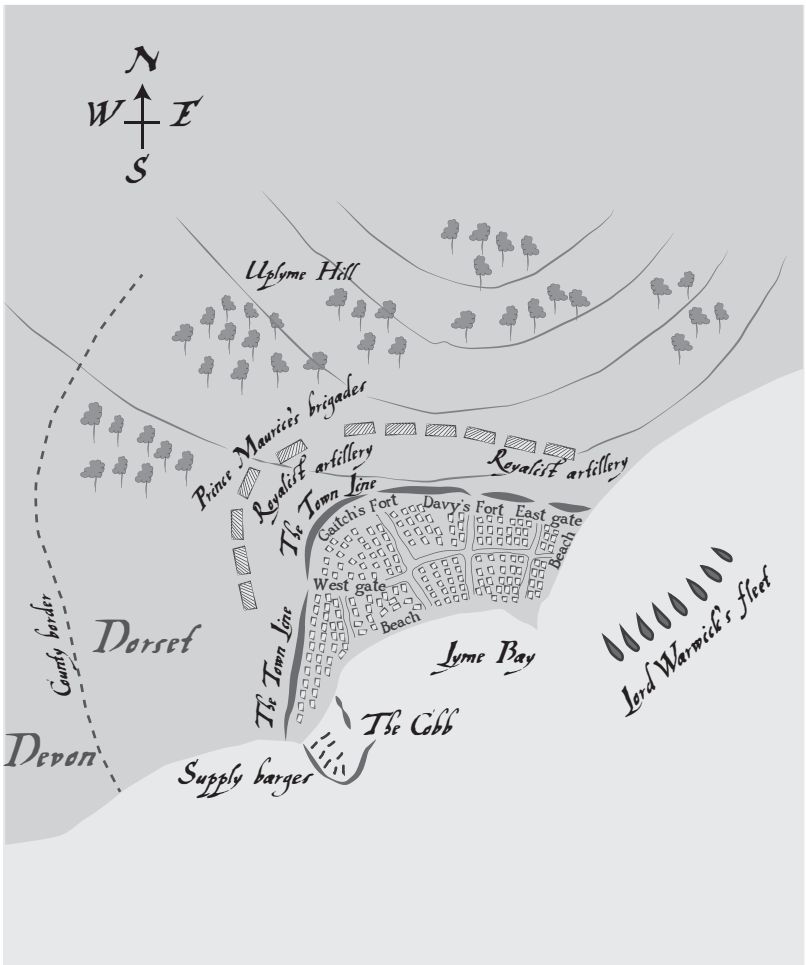
The first phase of the civil war was fought in England and Wales from 1642 to 1646 and was sparked by Parliament's questioning of King Charles I's belief that, since his authority came from God, he could not be held accountable by an earthly power. This doctrine, known as the Divine Right of Kings, caused both political and religious division. Adherents to the Protestant Church of England, of which the King was the head, tended towards the Royalist cause; while non-conformists—Puritans, Presbyterians and Independents, who believed the Church of England was modelled too closely on the Catholic Church and needed further reformation to rid itself of governance by bishops and priests—tended to side with Parliament.

Parliament's aim was to pressure Charles into relinquishing absolute power in favour of shared power, and, to that end, several attempts were made to negotiate the terms on which he could keep his throne. The King refused them all, including those presented to him after his surrender to a Scottish army in June 1646. Knowing he still had support in Scotland, he made a treaty

with the Scottish Parliament to impose Presbyterianism on England in return for being restored to absolute power by a Scottish army. This led to a war between Scotland and England in 1648, which was of short duration and finished in victory for England's New Model Army. The King's treason against his English subjects resulted in his execution on 30 January 1649.

An uneasy ten-year republic followed, with Oliver Cromwell emerging as its leader under the title of Lord Protector. However, his early death in 1658 left Parliament divided over who should replace him, and the decision was taken to invite Charles II to accede to his father's throne. Known as 'the merry monarch', Charles II ruled wisely for twenty-five years and was greatly loved by his subjects. Nevertheless, Parliament's victories in the English Civil War established the precedent that a monarch could not rule without the consent of his people through Parliament, and this set the nation on the path to universal suffrage and true democracy.

The County of Dorsetshire 1642–1649



The Siege of Lyme Regis 1644

Swift: a fast-flying, medium-sized brown bird with a white throat and forked tail that can outdistance most birds of prey.

Harrier: a large sharp-sighted hawk which hunts by gliding low and silently over open ground with its wings held in a shallow V-shape.

No bird soars too high when he soars with his own wings.

WILLIAM BLAKE

The SWIFT *and the* HARRIER

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1642

The English Civil War begins on 22 August when King Charles raises his standard at Nottingham. Three days earlier, a Catholic priest is executed in Dorset for treason.

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ONE

Dorchester, Dorset, 19 August 1642

As the hour for the priests' execution approached, the press of people heading for Gallows Hill grew denser and more impatient. Jayne Swift had expected crowds, but not such a multitude as this. It seemed every Puritan in Dorset had come to gloat at the spectacle of Catholics being hanged, drawn and quartered, because there wasn't a road or street in Dorchester that wasn't thronged with hard-faced men and women, their eyes aglitter in anticipation of papist blood being spilt.

Jayne's only means of making headway against the tide was to stay close to the fronts of houses and try to move forward each time there was a gap, but she was attracting unwelcome attention by doing so. She made the decision to retreat into a doorway and wait for the crush to subside after a man rounded on her angrily for knocking against him. She raised her hands in apology, but the suspicion in his eyes as he studied her gown alarmed her. She lowered her head submissively to prevent confrontation, and

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sighed with relief when his wife and the flow of humanity carried him on towards Gallows Hill.

The embrasure was deep enough for her to withdraw into the corner where the door was hinged to the wall, allowing her to avoid further curiosity by facing the way the people were walking. All were dressed in the drab uniform of Puritanism—simple dark clothes with plain white collars and, in the case of women, tight-fitting bonnets and starched aprons—and Jayne wondered whether it was fear of being thought less righteous than their neighbours or sincere belief that Catholicism was evil that had brought them to the executions. She hoped it was fear, for she struggled to accept that tolerance of other religions was entirely dead in Dorset.

The two priests slated for evisceration that day had been arrested by a customs officer five months earlier when they boarded a ship for France in Lyme harbour. Since then, they had languished in Dorchester gaol, awaiting trial and inevitable sentencing. Yet their crime was not that they were Catholic. Rather, they had been convicted of treason for taking a ship too late to obey the King's edict that all priests must leave the country by the tenth of April, and it mattered not that neither had seen the writ or knew the required date of departure.

Had Jayne felt any animosity towards Ruth, she would have cursed her cousin for summoning her at such an inopportune time; but since she did not, she pressed herself deeper into the embrasure and prepared to wait for the crowd to thin. All might have been well had the door not opened behind her to reveal a thin-lipped matriarch of some sixty years, clad in unforgiving black, who was clearly affronted to find a young woman loitering

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on her step, particularly one as tall as Jayne, who overtopped her by a good four inches.

She ran a critical gaze over Jayne's apparel, lingering on the lace trim around her bonnet and apron, and the slashes in her sleeves which revealed pale green silk beneath the dark blue of her tailored gown. It was hard to say if she was being taken for a trollop or a Royalist sympathiser because, under close inspection, none of Jayne's garments could pass as 'plain' and 'unadorned', in the Puritan style; though glimpsed at a distance in the streets of Dorchester they usually escaped notice. With a smile of apology, she adjusted the strap of her heavy leather satchel, which she wore across her shoulders, and made ready to set off again.

She was prevented from leaving by a surprisingly firm hand gripping her right wrist. 'You have a crest embossed on the flap of your bag. Name it for me, please.'

'Swift, ma'am. I am daughter to Sir Henry and Lady Margaret Swift of Swyre.'

'What brought you to my door?'

'Nothing, ma'am. I have urgent business in High East Street and sought shelter inside this embrasure when it became impossible to move against the press of people.'

'Which house in High East Street?'

'Samuel Morecott's.'

'I know Samuel. What business do you have with him?'

Jayne smiled slightly. 'With respect, ma'am, that is none of your affair.' She tried to pull away. 'May I leave now? I have no wish to cause you further inconvenience.'

'You'll inconvenience me more if you're suspected of having sympathy with priests. I was sitting at my window and saw the anger in the face of the man you jostled.' She drew Jayne inside and

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closed the door. 'It will be another hour before you can continue safely. Only servants with tasks to perform will be out on the streets once the executions begin.' She led the way into a chamber to the left. 'You may wait in here.'

Jayne followed, wondering who the woman was. Her austere dress suggested an allegiance to the more extreme forms of Protestantism, as did her acquaintanceship with Samuel Morecott, and neither gave Jayne confidence that her reasons for rescuing a stranger off the street were benign. Perhaps loneliness was the cause. The house seemed deathly quiet after the noise outside, with nothing to suggest that anyone else lived there. Not even servants.

She dropped a respectful curtsey. 'I thank you most sincerely for your kindness, ma'am, but I spoke honestly when I said my business was urgent. If you have a door at the rear of your house which opens onto a less travelled street, I would choose that.'

'There's no hurry. I saw Samuel and his disciples pass this window some thirty minutes ago. If he knew of your meeting with him, he has forgotten it in the excitement of the executions.'

Disciples? What a strange word to use, Jayne thought, while being grateful to learn that Samuel was already absent from home. 'You asked which house I was visiting—not which person.'

'I recall Samuel's wife was a Swift before they married. Do you have kinship with her?'

'Ruth is my cousin, ma'am.'

'Through marriage or blood?'

'Blood.' Jayne shook her head before another question could be put, finding the woman's curiosity ill-mannered. 'Time is passing, ma'am. May I ask again if you have another exit?'

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'I do, but you will find the same press of people on that side also. Every road leads to Gallows Hill eventually.' With a slight wince, the woman lowered herself into a chair and nodded towards another at its side. 'Sit and talk with me awhile. Am I right to think you're Jayne Swift, the physician, and that your cousin has called on you to help her son?'

The question discomfited Jayne because Ruth had been most insistent that the reason for her visit be kept secret. And how could someone she'd never met guess her name and profession so easily? Jayne had some small celebrity in country areas but none at all in Dorchester, where only men were accepted as medical practitioners. 'No woman would claim such a title, ma'am. To do so would be fraudulent since she cannot be granted a licence by a university or college.'

'Few men are so honest. The town is full of quacksalvers who pretend learning and licences they don't have. My brother praises you most highly. You treated his gout some six months back, and he's not had a recurrence since.' She canted her head to one side and studied Jayne closely. 'He described you very well. He said you were unusually tall for a woman, had yet to reach twenty-seven and carried yourself with confidence.'

The mask of confidence was a trick Jayne had acquired from her tutor, Doctor Theale of Bridport. *You'll never win a patient's trust by looking nervous*, he'd told her. *School yourself to appear calm at all times, look a person in the eye when you speak to him and do not fidget whatever the circumstances.* The lesson had been learnt through five long years of training and was now second nature to her. 'Does your brother have a name, ma'am?'

'John Bankes of Corfe.'

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Jayne made a play of lifting her heavy satchel from across her shoulders to give herself an excuse to lower her head and avoid the other woman's all-too-penetrating gaze. She could hardly accuse an elderly matriarch of lying, but her disbelieving expression would have made her scepticism clear. Sir John was the King's Chief Justice, owner of Corfe Castle and a Royalist to his core. His booming voice could often be heard condemning Parliament for inciting discontent, and he pledged his castle and his household to the King's cause as soon as war became inevitable. How could he be brother to this pale Puritan who looked as if strong meat and intoxicating liquor never touched her lips?

The reason for Sir John's gout had been obvious in his huge girth and the broken veins in his bulbous nose and fat cheeks, and he hadn't taken kindly to Jayne's removal of the tankard of brandy that he hugged against his chest. As for praise, there had been none. Sir John had had only insults for Jayne throughout the time she'd ministered to him. When she wasn't an 'imperious despot' for forcing him to drink water in 'hideous' quantities, and a 'vile torturer' for holding his throbbing foot in a bucket of costly imported ice, she was a 'two-faced shrew' for teaching his wife to prolong his persecution. Every other physician bled him with leeches. Where were hers? And how dare his friend Richard Theale send a woman in his place?

The first lesson Richard had taught Jayne when she began her studies with him was never to betray a patient's confidence. If she couldn't earn a reputation as a physician through the success of her healing methods, she'd not do so by naming her clients and their ailments. Leave that to the quacks, he'd said. Men of little ability had no other way to attract business than by listing which members of the gentry they'd tended.

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'Forgive me, ma'am, but I doubt your brother would want you discussing him with a stranger. I know mine would not.' To divert the woman's attention, she gestured towards the portrait of a handsome man, hanging on the wall behind the chairs. 'Is that your husband?'

The matriarch's mouth twitched. 'My husband had a cast in his eye and would never allow me to paint him. That's John when he was a struggling young lawyer. He was quite beautiful before the King's patronage turned him rubicund and fleshy. I've caught his image several times during his life.'

Jayne could see the likeness now that it was pointed out. The shape of the face might have changed but not the eyes. 'You're a fine artist, ma'am.'

'Some say so.'

Jayne moved closer and made out a signature in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting. It was a name of some renown, Gilbert Jackson, and she wondered if the woman had lied about being the artist or had forged the signature to add spurious value to her work. Either way, Jayne decided she'd rather take her chances on the street than remain in this house. Neither solitude nor religious fervour was healthy, and it was a strange lunacy that adopted the manner and dress of Puritanism while claiming close connections with artists and prominent Royalists.

She reached for her bag again. 'You must forgive me, ma'am, but I truly must leave. My cousin begged me to make haste and I am pledged to honour her wish.'

The matriarch nodded. 'No doubt requesting that you come during the executions when she knew Samuel would be away?' When Jayne made no answer she went on: 'It won't help you. Ruth will have no more authority to admit you in her husband's absence

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than when he's there, so you must be forceful in demanding entry.' She pushed herself to her feet, wincing again at the effort. 'Allow me and my footman to escort you. Three will make better progress than one, and William has the strength to push against the door if the need arises.'

There was no gainsaying her. She led Jayne through an interlocking room, magnificently furnished and with several more portraits on the walls, and thence down a corridor to the kitchen. Several startled maids dropped deep curtseys and a footman rose from his seat at a table and bent his neck in a bow. 'You should have rung, milady.'

'I'm saving time, William. My young friend is in a hurry to reach High East Street, and I believe she'll have a better chance from this exit than from the front.'

'You wish me to accompany her, milady?'

'We will both accompany her. The house she seeks is Samuel Morecott's and I doubt she'll gain entry without assistance, since I'm told all visitors are refused.' She turned to the oldest of the maids, a woman of some fifty years. 'Mistress Swift needs to cover her gown, Molly. Will you fetch her a cloak and one for me also? Perhaps a plain bonnet as well? The one she's wearing has far too much lace and does little to hide her curls.'

As the maid hurried away, the footman pulled on a plain dark jacket and brushed imaginary dust from a pointed hat. 'I would prefer you to remain here, milady,' he said with unusual firmness. 'The Sheriff fears rioting if anything goes amiss with the executions, and I can't be responsible for two if that happens. My duty is to you, which means Mistress Swift will have to fend for herself. Do you wish to put her in such danger?'

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'You're a tiresome person, William.'

His eyes creased in an affectionate smile. 'There's a powerful crowd out there, milady. You'll not keep your feet if they push against us. Humour me and stay inside.'

She sighed. 'I humour you every day, even though your single aim in life is to spoil my fun. My desire is to observe, not engage.'

'You'll not observe anything if you fall, milady. Does the window at the front not serve the purpose?' He gestured behind him. 'We see faces well enough through this one.'

'But do you feel what they feel, William?'

'Thankfully not, milady, since I don't have their thirst for Catholic blood. The problem will be if the priests recant. There'll be no holding the mob if they're cheated out of their pleasure.'

The maid reappeared with cloaks and a bonnet. 'May I help you dress, milady?'

'Not this time, Molly. William refuses to take me.'

The woman gave the footman an approving nod. 'As he should, milady. Your leg hasn't mended from the last time you were caught in a crowd. To risk such a press again would be madness.' She turned to Jayne. 'If you give your bag to William, ma'am, I can better ensure your head and gown are properly covered.'

Jayne did as she was bidden, since she doubted she'd have better luck opposing the stern-faced maid than the mistress. She handed her satchel to the footman before allowing Molly to thrust her smoky brown curls beneath a second bonnet and use pins to stitch her into a brown woollen cloak. Once properly covered, she turned with a grateful smile to her rescuer.

'You've been most kind, ma'am. Please remember me to your brother.'

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The woman nodded. 'I will,' she said. 'If what he tells me about you is true, you're better qualified to help Ruth's son than the ignorant quacksalver Samuel has been employing.'

'May I ask which physician it is, ma'am?'

'Robert Spencer. Do you know him?'

'Only by name and reputation. I'm told his cure for gout is to plunge the foot into near-boiling water while instructing the sufferer to drink vinegar.'

The matriarch's eyes lit with amusement, but she delivered a warning nonetheless. 'Even so, he's an elder of Samuel's church and highly respected in the town. Ruth must have summoned you without Samuel's knowledge, for I cannot imagine a single circumstance where he would permit another physician to question Robert Spencer's ability. Samuel's too ambitious to improve his status to make enemies unnecessarily.'

Jayne thought this a perceptive description of Samuel, who had distanced himself from his family rather than admit his humble origins. 'Ruth says their son is dying. Surely any father would seek a second opinion in those circumstances?'

'You would hope so.'

'But not Samuel?'

'I fear not.' The matriarch urged Jayne towards the door. 'With William's help, you've a better chance of forcing your way inside. I wish you luck in saving the little boy's life, but know that Samuel will give the plaudits to Robert Spencer if you do. He guards his future prospects too carefully to give credit to a woman.'

Jayne followed William's instruction to walk in his shadow and hold firmly to the strap of her satchel, which he wore across his

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shoulder. He was some thirty years of age, strongly built and of a good height, and seemed to have little trouble forging a path between the oncoming crowd and the houses which fronted the road. Several times, he nodded to individual passers-by and received an answering nod in return, but none questioned his purpose in taking the opposite direction to them. When they reached High East Street, he turned to the left instead of attempting to push through the press of people to their right, and drew Jayne into an alcove formed by the narrow projecting porchway of a bakery. The doors were closed, but there was enough room for them both to shelter from the teeming mass that thronged the road.

'They're waiting for the priests to be brought from the gaol,' he murmured. 'It won't be long before the cart appears, so I suggest we do the same. The crowd will follow or disperse once they've hurled their insults.'

'I'm sorry to have put you to this trouble, William. I should have accepted your mistress's invitation to remain with her for an hour.'

'Why didn't you?'

Jayne gave a wry smile. 'I found her a little alarming. She assumed I knew who she was, but I don't.'

'Lady Alice Stickland, widow of Sir Francis Stickland. She took up residence in Dorchester when her son inherited his father's estates and title two years ago. Young Sir Francis is even less tolerant of her waywardness than her husband was.'

Jayne longed to ask what form the waywardness took, but didn't choose to show the same ill-mannered curiosity as his mistress. 'Is her brother as tolerant?'

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'When he's in Dorset. He wouldn't embrace her so readily if she lived in London.'

'Why not?'

The question seemed to amuse him. 'He'd lose the King's patronage if he acknowledged a sister as outspoken as Lady Alice. She makes no secret of her support for Parliament.'

Jayne kept her voice low. 'Yet she spoke critically of Samuel Morecott, and there's no more ardent supporter of Parliament than he.'

'It's the only belief they have in common. Nothing else about him attracts her.' He looked above the heads of the people in front of them. 'The priests approach. You should turn away if you don't wish to see their anguish.'

Jayne questioned afterwards if it was stubbornness that made her reject his advice. He was overfamiliar for a servant, towards both his mistress and herself, and she was inclined to recite her own lineage in order to put him in his place; but the opportunity never arose, for her voice would have been drowned by the raucous shouts of the crowd. There was no slur too bad to cast at the thin, frail-looking men who stood with their hands tied in front of them in the back of a horse-drawn cart. Children chanted 'papist pigs' and flung cow dung; adults favoured 'spies', 'traitors' or 'Devil's spawn' and stepped forward to launch mouthfuls of spittle.

One of the priests, the younger, was so frightened he was visibly shaking, and the other took his tethered hands in his own to give him strength. Jayne guessed the older to be close to sixty and wondered if it was age or faith that was allowing him to face his execution so calmly. She saw his mouth move and fancied he was urging his friend to trust in God's love and mercy, but, if so,

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his words fell on deaf ears. The younger man shook his head and gave way to sobbing.

William spoke into her ear. 'He'll recant at the foot of the gallows. The Sheriff must hope Hugh Green remains steadfast or the crowd will become ungovernable.'

'Is that the name of the older priest?'

'It is. He was confessor to Lady Arundell before his arrest. She wrote to my mistress, begging her to go to the prison and assure Father Green of her continued prayers and devotion, because she wasn't strong enough to make the journey herself. Lady Alice visited him several times during the months he was held.'

Jayne thought of how anti-Catholic feeling in the country had grown with the rise of the Puritan faction in Parliament, and wondered that Lady Alice was so willing to show kindness to a priest. 'Was she criticised for it?'

'If she was, she paid no heed. She cares nothing for what others think as long as she believes that what she is doing is right.'

Jayne watched the cart turn onto High East Street and head towards Icen Way. 'Will she fight against her brother if war comes?'

'In as much as they'll be on opposing sides.'

'And her son?'

'The same. He, too, is for the King.'

'I find that sad.'

'Do you not have the same dilemma in your own family, Mistress Swift? Your cousin's husband is for Parliament, but I've heard that your father, Sir Henry, is for the King.'

His prediction that the crowd would thin once the priests were out of sight was correct. Some crept back to their homes or shops, but most followed the cart, their jeers echoing back along

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Icen Way as Jayne said, 'You and your mistress seem to know a lot about me, William. How so?'

'Sir John spoke of you at length. The conversation piqued Lady Alice's interest and she asked me to discover what I could about you.' He gave a low laugh. 'I doubt she expected to make your acquaintance so easily, however. One of my tasks was to try to arrange a meeting.'

'To what end?'

'You refused to align yourself with Sir John and the Royalist cause, and you treat the rural poor for free. Milady hopes that means you're on the side of Parliament and the people.'

Jayne gave a surprised laugh. 'Then I'll disappoint her as badly as I disappointed her brother. I support men and women who seek an end to division, not those who look to make it worse.'

'Do any such exist?'

'I know of one: the doctor who trained me. He makes no distinction between political or religious beliefs, and requires all who learn with him to sign a pledge to treat the sick to the best of their ability regardless of circumstance, status or conviction. Were the King and Parliament as tolerant of difference, there would be no talk of war.'

William eyed her cynically. 'You're a dreamer, Mistress Swift. War will come whether you desire it or not, and neither side will accept pleas of neutrality to let you pass. Even to reach your cousin's house today, you've had to accept my help and dress as a Puritan. What would you have said if someone had challenged you?'

'The same as I told your mistress: I have urgent business at Samuel Morecott's house.' She held out her hand for her satchel. 'I'm quite able to gain entry on my own, William, and you will

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serve Lady Alice better if you follow the cart and bear witness to Hugh Green's martyrdom. She must have sympathy for him or she wouldn't have visited him several times. He will die well, I think, and she will want to hear that from someone she trusts.'

He passed her the bag. 'Indeed. When your business at Mister Morecott's house is concluded—with good health for the child, I hope—will you do Milady the kindness of returning her cloak and bonnet? Her son starves her of money and she is not so rich that she can afford to replace them.'

'I can give them to you now. The road is almost bare of people and it will take me but half a minute to reach Samuel's house.'

But he was already several paces away, his ears firmly closed, seemingly intent on obliging her to return for a second visit with his formidable mistress.

As Jayne approached the Morecott house, she saw that every shutter was closed, even those at the upstairs windows. On another day, she would have assumed the house to be empty, but she knew from Ruth's letter that this couldn't be the case. Her cousin wouldn't have begged her on paper stained with tears to hasten to High East Street if she and her son were in residence elsewhere.

Jayne halted before the door, wondering what to do. It was two months since Samuel had banished her permanently from his house after she'd questioned one of his more foolish interpretations of a biblical text, and the servants would refuse to admit her on that basis alone, with or without orders to keep all visitors away. Preferring guile over force, she moved three houses down. 'Doctor Spencer has sent me with a delivery of medicine for Mister Morecott's son,' she told the footman who answered

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her knock. 'My instructions are to go to the rear of the building and place it in the hands of a servant so that the little master isn't disturbed by noise. Can you tell me how to find the entrance to the kitchen quarters?'

He pointed to an alleyway some fifty yards farther on. 'Walk to the cross path, turn left and count off six doors,' he said. 'Give the medicine to the cook. She's the only one with the courage to hand it to Mistress Morecott of her own accord. The rest are too afeared of their master to act without his instruction.'

Jayne produced a shy smile. 'Would it be possible for you to accompany me, sir? I'm sure the cook will answer more willingly to you than a stranger. Doctor Spencer was most insistent that the child start his medicine this morning. He would have come himself were it not for the executions.'

The footman eyed her for a moment, perhaps trying to assess how truthful she was being, and then, with an abrupt nod, closed the door behind him and led her towards the alleyway. Mention of the executions had loosened his tongue, and he regaled Jayne with complaints that service to another meant he was unable to attend. How was this fair, he asked, when high days and holidays were so few that all men should be allowed to enjoy them?

Jayne was relieved that he didn't expect anything more than sympathetic noises by way of answer, and that his impatient steps brought them quickly to the house they wanted. He knocked loudly, calling out his name, and the door cracked open a couple of feet to reveal a timorous maid holding a finger to her lips. With the shutters at the window closed, the entire kitchen was in darkness, although light from the doorway reflected off the white aprons and bonnets of other women in the room. All were whispering 'shush' as if their lives depended on it.

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With a murmured thank you to the footman, Jayne stepped around him and pushed her way inside before the maid could close the door again. 'Don't be alarmed,' she said, picking out faces in the gloom. 'Some of you know me from previous visits. I am Jayne Swift, cousin to your mistress, and have come at her request. Only she and I will be blamed for my presence here.'

'The master banned you, ma'am.'

'He did indeed,' said Jayne, shooing the barely seen women aside and moving firmly towards the door that led from the kitchen to the rest of the house. 'And when he returns, you may tell him I used deceit to gain entry.'

'Have you come to help little Isaac, mistress?' asked another voice.

'I have.'

'Then you'll need our prayers, ma'am.'

Jayne opened the door to the corridor. 'I'd rather have your assistance than your prayers,' she answered. 'Will one of you show me to Isaac's chamber?'

It seemed not. The request was met with silence, as if the household felt they'd already transgressed enough.

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