

UNCORRECTED BOUND PROOF

THE SILVER WOLF

Publicity enquiries:

Kate Straker – katestraker@atlantic-books.co.uk

Sales enquiries:

Isabel Bogod – isabelbogod@atlantic-books.co.uk

THE
SILVER
WOLF
J. C. Harvey



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This one is for Nick, who started it.

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Author's Note



Now Read On

Gentle reader, hello.

The events in *The Silver Wolf* stand in much the same relation to the events of the Thirty Years War as a tapestry does to its support: in other words, with just enough points of connection, I hope, to bear the weight. Every writer of historical fiction has to decide where the needle dividing the two, the historical and the fictional, comes to rest, and in the case of this book, and the two to come, I have played fast and loose with documented history, opening real historical doors onto landscapes and happenings that never existed until I made them up. Then again, all too often, I would hit the horrid truth that no matter what I might create in my imagination, the actual events of the war would be worse: stranger, crazier, even more hideously comic; more incredible, more appalling. And if all history is a matter of interpretation, that of the Thirty Years War is so as much as any and more than most; a consequence of its vast geographical spread and of the number of opposing forces it drew in. Alliances formed and were dissolved in the time it took a messenger to gallop from one stronghold to the next; under the banner of a religious war, of Catholic versus Protestant (or rather, of Catholic versus Calvinist, Lutheran and Anglican), any number of ancient grudges and territorial disputes were brought out and brandished anew. Everything, in this war, was happening everywhere at once. The following is very broad

brush therefore, but if the Thirty Years War is unfamiliar to you, and some background would be useful, well then – now read on.

In the early seventeenth century there were members of the Habsburg family on the thrones of three of Europe's great powers. In Spain itself, Philip IV; further north in the Spanish Netherlands, so-called, his younger brother Ferdinand of Austria; and to the east, in the Holy Roman Empire, that enormous chunk of central Europe including Austria, Bohemia and most of what is now modern Germany, there was the Emperor Ferdinand II. Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist rubbed up against each other throughout the states of the Empire, but in the rest of Europe Habsburg dominance was both feared and mistrusted; especially by the people of the Valtelline in northern Italy, who had endured Spanish troops marching through their territories, up to the Spanish Netherlands, for years; especially France, even though France had its own Protestant religious dissenters, the Huguenots, to deal with; and especially the Dutch United Provinces, who had been at war with Spain for decades.

The Thirty Years War began in the Bohemian capital, Prague, a little after 9 a.m. on 23 May 1618, when three men – Vilem Slavata, Jaroslav Borita von Martinitz and Filip Fabricius – were ejected from a summit meeting of the Bohemian nobility in Hradschin Castle via one of the castle's windows. All three somehow survived their seventeen-metre drop into the moat; all three were loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor; and all three were Catholics. Those ejecting them were not, and the men they had thought to throw to their deaths were, they said, 'enemies of us and of our religion'. Drunk with its own daring, Bohemia then invited the Calvinist prince Frederick, ruler of the Palatine in Germany, to occupy its throne rather than the Holy Roman Emperor. Disastrously, Frederick accepted the invitation. Very shortly after that, an Imperial army overran Bohemia and

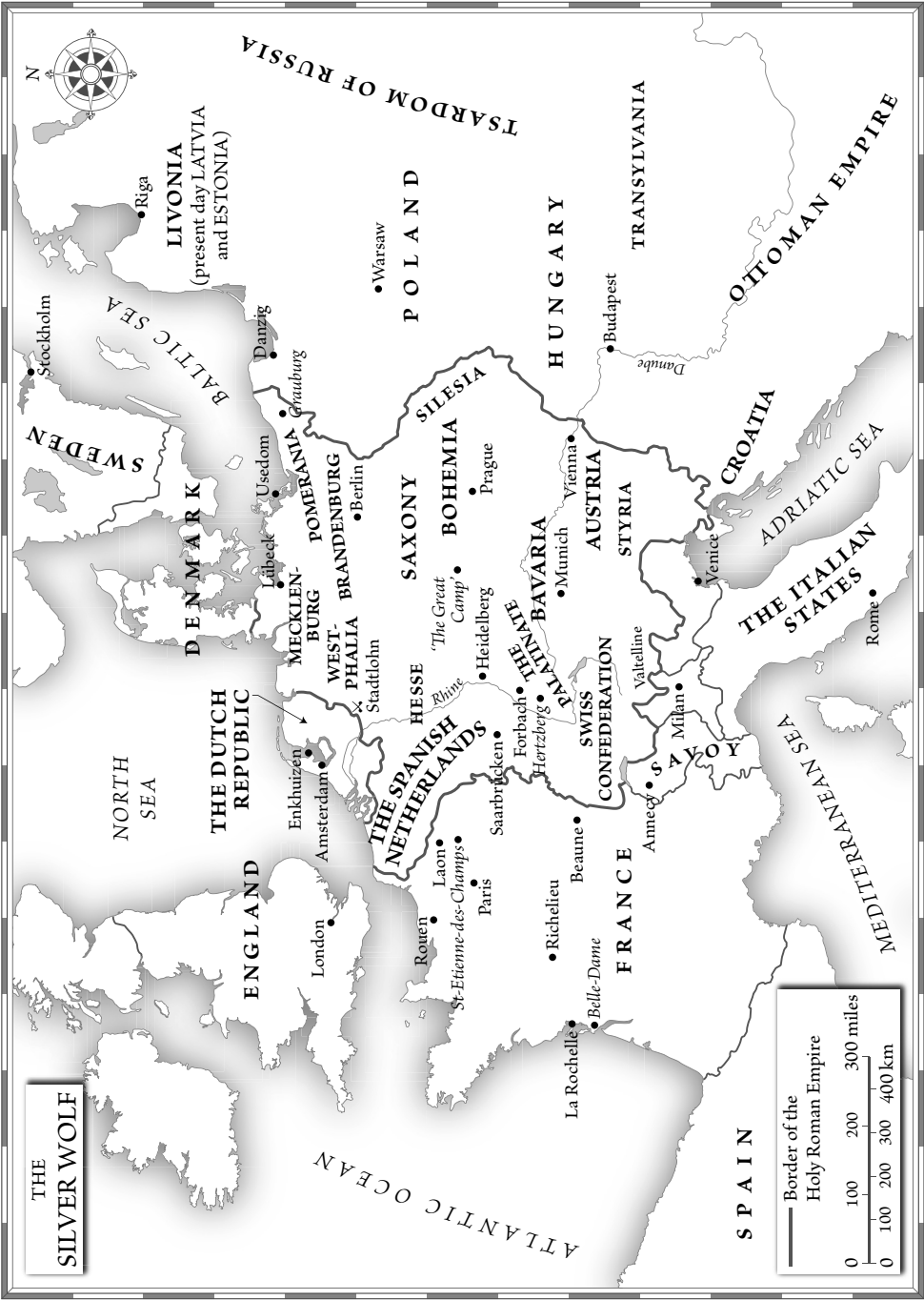
decorated Prague's lovely bridge with the heads of the Emperor's enemies. Then Ferdinand moved in on Frederick's kingdom in Germany. Frederick, now in exile, beseeched his father-in-law, James I of England, and every other Protestant ruler for assistance, and thus brought into being a tatty coalition of English and Scottish mercenaries and the rulers of Brunswick, Saxony, Prussia, Brandenburg, Hesse-Kassel, and, on the pretext that Ferdinand was threatening the Baltic, Denmark, where Christian IV of Denmark coveted the role of Protestant champion every bit as much as did Frederick himself; and ultimately, Sweden, where the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, had been quietly honing his talents and his armies in wars with Denmark, Russia and Poland since 1611. The Emperor, for his part, could call upon all the wealth and all the men of his empire, all that of Philip IV of Spain, and upon all the greatness of the Catholic grandee Maximilian of Bavaria, too. Meanwhile, manoeuvring against both Emperor Ferdinand and Philip of Spain (and with an eye over his shoulder to England and the Baltic to boot) was Cardinal Richelieu of France, and his monarch, Louis XIII.

Thirty years later, when the war finally ended with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia on 24 October 1648, it had claimed the lives of twenty per cent of the then population of Europe – some five million individuals. Some estimates put that figure as high as twelve million. There were parts of Germany where sixty per cent of the population was lost. Towns were decimated, trade and industry destroyed, villages wiped from the map. A century's worth of population growth, of people, simply disappeared. There were over a quarter of a million men in arms in Germany by 1635, and if the violence they brought with them didn't kill you, the plagues and famines that inevitably followed in any army's wake would, even more easily and in even greater numbers. Every statistic, where the Thirty Years War is concerned, is hideous and/or incredible, in equal measure.

This is especially true where its finances are concerned. We're used to Europe having a single currency, the Euro, but in the seventeenth century it had guilders, florins and marks, *kreuzers* and *pfennigs*; French *livres* and francs; Swiss *finfers*; Dutch (and German) *stuivers*; Italian *lire*, *ducats* and *soldi*; Spanish *pistoles*, *escudos* and *reales*. And there was the Imperial thaler, of course, which, if you are reading this book in North America, is where the word 'dollar' comes from. So long as your coin was gold or silver, someone would take it, but as war progressed and the structure of society rotted away, counterfeiting and inflation galloped forward hand-in-hand. Vineyards and fields were stripped, marched over or burnt out by invading troops; military encampments decimated supplies for miles around but could make suppliers rich; the wandering masses of refugees walked through crops ready to harvest and put an enormous strain on the resources of any town where they came to rest. Where there was no-one left to sow or harvest crops, land had no value; and if land had no value, nor did anything else. Leipzig, for example, was bankrupt by 1625, just seven years after the war began; while the town of Marburg in Hesse took *two centuries* to pay off the debts it incurred during the war.

Unsurprisingly, even at the time, those living through the war seem to have understood that what they were enduring was without compare in terms of the horrors it inflicted upon them, and they responded by writing their experiences down – in diaries, journals, letters and accounts of all sorts; some to inform friends, some aimed at descendants, some as a record of atrocities and outrages aimed at what you might call the court of time. One such was Hans Heberle, a shoemaker from the village of Neenstetten, whose description of the beginning of the war I make use of in Chapter Six of Part One. Hans had to flee from his village no fewer than thirty times between 1634 and 1648.

Equally unsurprisingly, such dreadful times gave rise to tales of magic and monsters; of men who could raise mists and miasmas with their breath or by scattering dust on the wind, and hide themselves therein; of the Devil walking abroad and striking pacts with the unwary; and, of course, of the hard man, the merciless warrior who had gone beyond the power of iron or lead to harm him. One such hard man has come down to us by name. 'Captain Carlo Fantom,' John Aubrey informs us, in his *Brief Lives*, 'a Croatian, spake 13 languages... was very quarrelsome and a great ravisher.' Carlo Fantom would move from the Thirty Years War to the English Civil War, where 'Sir Robert Pye was his Colonel, who shot at him for not returning a horse... The Bullets went through his buff-coat and Captain Hamden saw his shirt was on fire. Capt. Fantom took the bullets and said he, "Here, Sir Robert, take your bullets again." None of the soldiers would dare fight with him; they said they would not fight with the Devil.' Reading Aubrey's description was one of the moments when I felt the inescapable clench of a plot coming into being. I owe Hans Heberle and his contemporaries much in the way of inspiration for *The Silver Wolf*. I owe John Aubrey and the two volumes of his *Brief Lives*, also; but Aubrey would be most surprised to discover he had ever written a third, or that one Jack Fiskardo should feature in it, first as Carlo Fantom's helpless victim, and then as his sworn foe.



Cast of Characters



PART I

In Amsterdam

Mungo Sant, a Scottish mariner, captain of the *Guid Marie*
Jack Fiskardo, a thirteen-year-old vagrant, living rough on the
docks as best he can
‘Ringle-Eye’, a dockyard gang-lord
‘Copperknob’, his second-in-command
Yosha Silbergeld, a wealthy merchant, Sant’s business partner
Zoot, Yosha’s housekeeper
Cornelius, her son
Paul, Yosha’s steward
Beatrice, Zoot’s maid
Yosha’s household servants, including:
Old Jan, a gardener
Master Nicholas, a schoolmaster and tutor of fencing

At the Carpenter’s Hat, on the road to Annecy, Savoy

Reinhold Meier, landlord
Tabitha, his daughter
Captain Balthasar, ‘the Shadow Man’, one-time scout in the
army of King Henry IV of France
Ravello, an army intelligencer. A spy.

At the Écu de France, St-Étienne-des-Champs, Picardy

Robert, landlord
Mirelle, his sister

On the Bergstrasse, heading toward the city of Heidelberg in Germany

Walther Kleber, a carter
Hartmann, a horse-dealer, sadly now deceased
Oleg, Hartmann's hired hand
Deaf Peter, a military courier
Jo-Jo, his lackey

In Hertzberg, a town in Saarland, Germany, a mustering place for the Imperial army of General Tilly

Fat Magda, a tavern-keeper
Paola, her partner
Ilse, their serving girl, Jo-Jo's sister
Gotz, a gunnery sergeant
Luckless, his newest recruit
Eberhardt Rauchmann, a brewer
Rufus, a headsman of the Roma
Yuna, his wife
Emilian, his son
Benedicte, his brother, a seer
Carlo Fantom, Croat mercenary and hired assassin



PART II

In the village of Belle-Dame, near La Rochelle, Poitou

Jean Fiskardo, one-time captain of cavalry in the army of King
Henry IV of France

Sally Arden, his English wife

Monsieur Gustave, a wealthy farmer

Anne, a widow, newly returned to the village from Paris

Marguerite, her daughter

The villagers, including:

Madame Marthe

Salty Pierre

Didier-France

Pastou

Séraphine

The children of the village, including:

Claude

Sebastien

Didier-Marie

Adèle

In Paris, at the palace of the Louvre

Concino Concini, an Italian mountebank, now ennobled as the
Marquis d'Ancre; advisor to Marie de' Medici, widow of the
late King Henry IV of France

Armand du Plessis, Bishop of Luçon, Secretary of State, later
Cardinal Richelieu

Nicolas de L'Hôpital, Marquis de Vitry, captain of the royal guard



PART III

In the army of General Tilly

Cyrius, a one-time miller, now an army sutler

Agetha, his beloved

Squirrel, her daughter

The scouts:

Aesop

Holger

Titus

Korbl, a blowhard

Christian of Brunswick, leader of the rebel army of Frederick V
of Bohemia

In the great camp

Bronheim, colonel of an Imperial cavalry regiment

‘Herzog Heinrich’, one of his captains

Heinrich’s crew:

Hans

Gunter

Stuzzi

Matz

Gretchen, Bronheim’s whore

Bertholdt, leader of Bronheim’s crew

Officers in Bronheim’s cavalry, including:

Captain Mannfred

Lieutenant Eickholz

In the town of Grauburg on the Polish border

Torsten ‘the Bear’, captain in the army of Gustavus Adolphus,
King of Sweden, wintering above Grauburg with his regiment
Zoltan, his ensign

On the island of Usedom, off the coast of north Germany

Zoltan, now Jack’s second-in-command

The men of Jack’s company, including:

The Executioner

The Gemini

Otto

Ziggy

Karl-Christian von Linderborg (Kai), Jack’s ensign

He was left orphan very young, which (said he) determined all the course of his life; for having fought to live, so he grew to the taste of it, and lived to fight. He was first made Captain in the army of Gustavus Adolf, the Swedish King, and coming back into Germany with the said King's troops, had such skills in the bearing of arms that it was said he had purchased them of the Devil, in especial, that he was a Hard Man, so could not be put down by bullets nor by steel; and that he carried with him always the silver token of a wolf, such as the Hard Men use, so that one may know another. Yet being asked if he was indeed proof against shot or blade, he gave a great laugh and answered: those that say it, they should see my scars.

His father was a gentleman-at-arms under King Henry of France and there was much black work, as the soldiers say, in his father's death, and in his mother's too. For many years he set himself to uncover those accountable; whether he did so or no I cannot discover...'

John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, Volume III

PROLOGUE



June 1630

AND AWAKE. HEART banging at his breastbone like a fist upon a door, the dream unravelling, pulling back down into its hole, the light of a midsummer morning filling the room with its unholy brightness, and the girl patting his face.

‘Was ist?’

She peers at him, narrowing her eyes. For a moment the shape of a body – wholly shrouded, even the face – had hung there behind her, like a chrysalis on its thread. *No. You’re here. Not there.* Sweat, cooling on his neck. Outside, the squeal of gulls; their shadows dive across the bed. He closes his eyes.

‘Du heter ut,’ he hears her say. *‘In sömnen.’* Her tone is offended. It can’t be welcome, to have your bedmate yelling in his sleep.

A rattle through the languages now waking in his head: French, English, German, shreds of Dutch, bits of Polish... Swedish, that’s the one. The dream has muddled his thoughts, the way it will. We are in Stockholm, we speak Swedish, and this evening (more’s the pity), this evening we embark. He takes her hand. *‘Tack,’* he says. Thank you.

Her face is still unsure. She’s dark for a Stockholm lass, with something snub about her; small and neat and dark and, at this moment, just a little wary. Though she’d been full of spark and pepper the night before, come jouncing across the room and hauled him to his feet announcing, ‘Now, I fuck the devil!’

‘The devil has a handsome cock,’ she tells him, now. She manages to make this sound almost prim. ‘But, he has bad dreams.’

He feels like asking her, *What did you expect?*

The sound of a door banging open downstairs and footsteps – bootsteps, rather – out into the cobbled yard. ‘Your men,’ she says.

‘I know. I recognize their dainty step.’ A shout – Zoltan, chivvying the rest. The *hur-hur-hur* of laughter. ‘Not to mention, their angel voices.’

She props herself up on one elbow, the small weight of her breast against his arm. She still wears her shift, yet has somehow contrived to remove every stitch of clothing he’d had on him. His boots are one in one corner of the room, one in the other. His breeches on the floor. His coat on the bedpost. His shirt hangs like a trophy from the corner of the tester up above their heads. She says, ‘Your men are very proud of you. They paid for me.’

‘They did?’

She nods her head, lays her fingers to her upper lip and mimes the extravagant curl of a moustache. ‘This one. He paid me. And I cost a lot.’

Zoltan.

‘And they tell me about you.’

He pushes himself up to face her. ‘My men,’ he tells her, ‘are a bunch of shameless, murderous liars. Don’t trust a word that comes out of ’em.’

‘They say the Devil taught you how to fight, until you beat him, too.’

‘For sure he did. You should see me with a pitchfork.’

A snort of laughter. ‘They say you sold your soul,’ she says. Growing bolder now. ‘They say all those who stand against you die.’

‘Sweetling, soldiers tell tales. They make up stories. It’s what they do.’

'They say five Polish troopers emptied their pistols at you, one after another. And not one bullet grazed you. And that you killed them all.'

'First,' he says, 'two of 'em shot at each other, all I had to do was duck. The third unhorsed himself; I doubt he's more than bruised. The fourth I took out the saddle and yes, he, I'd say, was done for. The fifth turned tail and ran. Although they did annoy me somewhat, true.'

Her eyes are wide, wide open now. 'And the King,' she says. 'You saved the King. And he made you a captain, on the battlefield.'

'My firm belief is he mistook me for another.' It does have that feel to it, even now, an episode from one of those soldier's tales perhaps: sunset, the small space opening, the back-wash of smoke, the little crowd, the two figures. In his remembrance of it he'd been down on one knee, like a suitor.

She shakes her head. 'I believe your men,' she says. 'I think they have you right.'

Over the rooftops, out from the quayside, out from where the great ships lie at anchor, the sound of a drum. At once the shout goes up from the yard below: '*Domini!*'

'Listen to them,' he says. 'Why would you believe that pack of dogs and not me?'

She leans toward him. 'Because they say that you are shy with women.' Her lips brush his forehead, as if giving him a blessing. 'And you are.'

Not shy with them, he thinks, *but bad for them*. Perhaps being taken as diffident is better.

The one drum is now two. Another shout. '*Domini! Wo sind sie?*' Where are you?

She watches as he dresses, a cool appraisal, as expert in her territory, he supposes, as he is in his. 'Are you scared, to be going into Germany?'

'Not yet. But then I was there before.' He nods toward the

window. 'They are, I think. They wanted to stay in Poland. With the Polish girls.'

A sniff of disdain. 'Polish girls are all bones. Like cows.' She bangs her knuckles together. 'Bomp, bomp, bomp.'

His sword hangs under the coat. He lifts it over his shoulder, buckles the belt about his waist, and as he does so, her face makes that same small change he's seen so many times before. She asks, 'When were you in Germany?'

'It was one of the places.' A weight pulling down one pocket, tiny but heavy, so gold. A Polish zloty, perhaps. He sits back down with her, boots at his feet. 'First there was Amsterdam – No –'

No, there was not, any more than in reality there had been the kindness of a shroud. '*First*, there was France. Then there was Amsterdam, which is a city with a port, like to this.' Working on the boots now, stamping to get his heel down. 'Then there was Germany. Then there was Poland. Then there was here.' He stands up. When she comes to pull the bed straight, she'll find the zloty slid between the sheets. 'Will I do?'

'Tell me,' she asks. 'When you call out, what gives you bad dreams?'

Bold as you like, this one. He thinks, *I will remember you*. 'What's your name?'

'Lilla,' she says.

'Lilla. I dream of my father, because I never saw him dead. And I dream of my mother, because with her, I did.'

'They were killed?'

He takes her hand. 'They were killed.'

Her fingers tremble. The smallest tremor, but they do. For all her boldness, her gaze has slid to the little silver pendant, there on its cord at his breast. 'Who killed them?' she asks.

He lifts the fingers to his lips. 'A ghost.'

PART I



May 1619 – December 1622

CHAPTER ONE

The Dock-Rat



‘The clouds gather thick in the German sky...’

John Rushworth, *Annals of The Reign of King James of England*

MUNGO SANT, BORN Dundee, more years ago than he cares to remember, stands on the foredeck of the *Guid Marie*. A fine wind spansk her forward, her sails are full, and her bowsprit is aimed straight at the future like a lance. What times these are.

Beneath the bowsprit the *Guid Marie* herself (a hideous little totem, distorted as driftwood and black as a shrunken head) has what Sant would think of as a smile within the crack that serves her for a mouth, and the chisel marks that are her eyes, like her master’s, are fixed on the horizon, where a grey smudge has become visible, a thickening in the sea.

There comes a thump from underneath her decks, some twenty feet down from Sant’s right boot.

Sant hears the thump, assesses then dismisses it. He lets the lids of his eyes fall shut – *closing mah ports* – and relishes across them the strum of wind and warmth and sun. Gold. It is Sant's favourite colour.

Sant calls himself a trader, but the names smuggler, pirate, sea-wolf (or perhaps in his case a sea-fox – wily, cunning, nose ever-lifted to the breeze) would do equally well. Dame Fortune may have been a little slow to smile on Sant, but she's smiling now, oh yes. He can smell it. He can feel it in the lifting of the sea. And all because of one man: the Golden Jew.

My Golden Jew, thinks Sant, and smacks his lips. Simply saying the man's name is like the opening of a treasure chest: Yosha Silbergeld, my Golden Jew. Now there's a fox, if you like. It has taken Sant years to get within the business ambit of the Golden Jew, but he's in there now, by God he is.

Another thump. Sant heaves a sigh. All those years of readiness and waiting, and what's his cargo? A horse. One single horse. Even Noah was trusted with two.

Ah, but... that one single horse is the Buckingham mare. Bedded easy, so Sant hopes, remembering the thump, on three soft feet of golden hay, still fragrant from the Norfolk meadows. Two hundred guineas' worth of equine perfection. Her tiny, shiny hooves. Her Arab face, dished and curvaceous as a viola. The rolling globes of her rump, gleaming like polished walnut. And somewhere outside Stockholm, in a pine-fringed field, a stallion stands waiting for her, a stallion with a two-foot prick curved like a stick of giant coral, and all across Europe the horse-riding nobility eagerly await the progeny resulting from their union.

And Sant is carrying the Buckingham mare into Amsterdam because Yosha Silbergeld is brokering the deal. There's some God-damned uppity new powers come into being recently under the Northern Lights, flexing their Protestant muscles, and trade with them requires both subtlety and skill.

Sant opens his eyes. The smudge of grey has broken free of the horizon and is taking shape: masts and cranes and warehouse gabbling. *It's a braw time to be a man o'business*, thinks Sant: the line of ships waiting to get into Amsterdam must stretch back a mile into the sea.

Yosha Silbergeld's factotum is waiting for them on the quayside. The usual bunch of urchins, urgent as gannets, surround the man, entreating *Myn heer! Myn heer!* The man claps a hand to his hat and locks an elbow over his purse; Sant, looking down from the foredeck, permits himself a smile. The man calls up:

'You haf her?'

'Aye, aye,' Sant calls down. 'Any news?'

'Ah!' says the man. 'Bo-hem-yah has new king!'

'Oh aye?' Bohemia. The arse-end of Europe, and landlocked to boot. 'Who's that, say?' Sant enquires, but only to be polite.

The answer is so unlikely that for a moment he doubts his hearing. 'Freedreek ov Heidelberg!' comes the cry.

'Frederick of Heidelberg?' Sant leans out over the rail. 'What, he as wed the wee English princess? *That* Frederick?'

'Ja, ja.'

'And what's the Emperor had to say to that?' In the checkerboard of European faith, Bohemia's neighbour, Imperial Austria, is more Catholic, some would argue, even than her cousin Habsburg Spain. 'Frederick's a Calvinist!'

Yosha Silbergeld's factotum pulls himself up a little taller, on his own stiff, Dutch, Calvinist dignity. He steadies himself for a bellow.

'BO-HEM-YAH HAS CHOSE!' he declares proudly. 'ISH WILL OF GOD!'

Predictably, one of the urchins takes this moment to pull at the man's pocket. The man takes off his hat and uses it to beat the boy about the head. '*Myn heer* Sant, be so good,' he calls up imploringly. 'Ve unload our lady-horse, *please*.'

*

Below the deck, the Buckingham mare gives a gentle whicker to herself. Odours fill her nostrils, flood her brain: mud, coal smoke, people. But the Buckingham mare is plucky. She has stood the voyage; now she stands the strange sounds from above her head and the appearance before her of the *Guid Marie*'s first mate. She lets herself be led forward under deck, tolerates the explosion of blue sky as the hatch is levered up, even the constriction of the canvas cradle round her belly. She watches with keen interest as the square of hatch rotates beneath her swinging legs and is replaced with wooden deck. When the first mate reappears beside her and tugs on her rope she understands, and trots obediently forward. Now she is on the gangplank. Her velvet nostrils gape.

And then – what was it? Did a circling gull scream too loud? Did a sail flap, just too close? The Buckingham mare throws up her head, the rope flies out of the first mate's grasp, there is a scrabble and a scrape and the Buckingham mare, in reverse, collides with the *Guid Marie* and comes to a stop with her rump wedged up against the creaking rail; three legs on the gangplank, rigid with panic, and one, hind right, hanging in thin air.

Two hundred golden guineas, poised to slip into the mud of the Zuyder Zee and so be lost for good. 'You mosh DO something!' the factotum booms.

'You bloody do something!' counters Sant. 'Yon's your bloody horse!'

The Buckingham mare dips her head to her knees. On deck and off, Sant's crew surround the gangplank and consult.

'Pull 'er 'ed.'

'You pull 'er 'ed, she'll pull you over with her!'

'Smack 'er arse.'

'Smack 'er arse? You mad? Look at her – one wrong step, and she's gone.'

The first mate moves a hand toward the rope. The Buckingham mare rolls up her lip at him and he retreats. What the bloody hell was it, wonders Sant (*whit the bluidy hail*), that set her off?

There's quite a crowd now, on the docks. And out of the crowd there comes a boy: hair like pulled taffy, like frayed rope, scabbed and ragged as a beggar; and he squints up at Sant and announces, 'I'll get her.'

And he speaks English. That in itself would make him stand out. And maybe a bit of Gallic in there too, some tell-tale cadence in the boy's speech, and maybe that's no more than Sant's imagination. Sant surveys this little dockyard offering. 'You'll get her?'

'Two gulden,' the taffy-headed one replies. 'You gimme two gulden and I'll bring her down safe.'

Two gulden. It's a ridiculous amount. But make a bollocks of this, thinks Sant, and that'll be that for any further dealings with his Golden Jew. 'Two shilling,' he says. 'You bring her safe down here, I'll give you two shilling.' If anyone is going into the drink with half a ton of horse on top of them, better this little dock-rat than one of his crew.

'Done,' says the boy. He walks slowly up the gangplank, rubbing his hands together. The tide is rising still, the angle now a good twenty degrees. Sant hears his first mate query, 'Where'd he come from, then?'

The Buckingham mare watches the boy; three legs on the gangplank, one held quivering in space. The boy clucks his tongue, and her ears swivel to the front. He rubs his hands together one last time, holds them out to her, and she licks and nibbles over his palms. ('What's that about?' asks Sant's first mate.)

Cautiously, the boy picks up the dangling rope, puts it between his teeth, and, with the nose of the Buckingham mare buried in his palms as in a cup, leads her down the gangplank, docile as a lamb.

'I'll be buggered,' says Sant's first mate.

Sant and the boy conclude their business at the quayside while Yosha's factotum checks over the Buckingham mare. 'A shilling,' says Sant.

'Two,' says the boy, in the weary tone of one who had expected this.

'One and sixpence,' counters Sant.

'English or Scots?' the boy says, holding out his hand.

English coin is worth twelve times as much as the Scots variety. 'English, you little punk,' snarls Sant, digging out his purse. Damn it, even the blasted dock-rats have become a walking Bourse.

The boy bites each coin to be sure they're true silver before buttoning them into the little bag hid under his shirt. 'What set her off?' Sant asks, as he makes to walk away.

'Sunlight,' the boy calls back. He has a wary eye on the small posse of his kind lurking at the back of the crowd. 'It's the sun on the water. They don't understand it. Don't know what it is.'

A shilling and a sixpence for a bloody sunbeam. Sant watches the boy, hightailing it down the quay, posse in pursuit. *Long may you live to enjoy it*, he thinks, viciously.



MUNGO SANT STANDS in the first-floor chamber of the house of the Golden Jew, on boards not one whit less sturdy, wide or scrubbed than the deck of the *Guid Marie* (and considerably better polished – the floor is like black ice), and waits for the tiny creature bunched up on the far side of the table to cease shuffling through the many papers piled before it and acknowledge his existence.

'A good crossing?' Yosha Silbergeld has half-a-dozen languages at his disposal, depending on his listeners and his mood: English for Sant; Dutch for his neighbours; French

when he is feeling louche; Russian if lugubrious; Latin, which never fails to impress, if he finds himself in a tight spot; and if angry or upset, nuggets of Yiddish surface in his conversation like fruit in a batter.

‘Easy,’ says Sant, proud. ‘Four days, there and back.’

A squeaking noise. Yosha gets from one end of his office to the other by pulling himself about in a burgermeister’s chair. Think first a laundry basket, only made of oak, most vigorously carved and comfortably upholstered, and cut away at the front. Then put it on eight curved wooden legs, each with an ebony caster. There. A burgermeister’s chair.

Yosha’s own legs dangle out the chair’s cut-away front, shapeless and jointless as those of a rag doll. Is there anything in those stockings at all? Sant wonders, uncomfortably. Does the man have legs?

Yosha speaks. ‘I have another cargo, coming out of Lübeck on the twenty-eighth. Would you be interested?’

Lübeck. So what would that be – timber? Barley? Furs? No matter. Knock out a few of those bulkheads, it can all be slotted in. ‘Aye, sure,’ says Sant, game as ever.

A gentle scritch at the door. It opens, and Zoot, Yosha’s housekeeper, enters, bearing a tray.

Sant has a tender secret passion for Zoot, has had ever since he first clapped eyes on her. *This*, he thinks, watching her approach, *is what a woman should be*. Blue-eyed. Comely. Mothersome. In charge. He looks for the small shadow of her son, who is usually to be found hiding somewhere there behind her, but this time she’s alone.

‘Now,’ Yosha says, ‘we drink.’

A moment’s trepidation on Sant’s part. Yosha, who spent his youth an onion-skin above starvation, has in his riches developed a taste for exotics, and a mischievous penchant for trying them out on his guests. The last time Sant stood in this room, business had concluded with an invitation to taste a drink from

the Americas, so Yosha assured him, referring to the substance as 'toclet'. It came in a dullish darkish plug, which Zoot had first to grate, then whisk with boiling water, strain and pour. The resulting concoction was nonetheless gritty as mud, poisonously bitter, and with an abiding aftertaste that left Sant's teeth and gums strongly in mind of the odour of fresh caulking – a fine smell, but not one as you'd wish to have in your mouth. This time he is relieved to see that on her tray Zoot bears no more than two Venetian glasses and a bottle of Dutch gin, clear as water and so gloriously spirituous that for hours afterwards Sant will hesitate to light his pipe.

'The Buckingham mare,' says Yosha, raising his glass. 'Tell me. Is she as pretty as they say?'



LÜBECK IS BARREL after barrel of stinking pitch. The crew hold their noses. Then as the last wagon empties, the shipper takes Sant to one side. There is a second cargo, or there could be. 'You make port in Amsterdam, I'll have my agent collect,' the man says. 'But you keep this one to yourself. You can do that, hey?'

Thirty crates of sword-blades, finest tempered steel: the blades as long and thin as barracudas, and as deadly. Their weight lowers the *Guid Marie* in the water in a manner that has the first mate sucking his misgivings through his teeth. 'Where are these headed?' Sant asks, hoping to God it's nowhere he knows, but the shipper answers only, 'What do you care?'

It almost sinks his boat. Rounding the tip of Denmark, halfway home, the *Guid Marie* runs head on into a yellow squall. The squall becomes a storm, and nowhere, in Sant's experience, can do a storm like the Baltic. Foremast cracked, rats foaming up from the bilges and the pumps working round the clock, the *Guid Marie* finally wallows into Enkhuizen three weeks late. Sant is forced to endure first the sight of her, dismasted like

a hulk; then the worse indignity of watching her being towed down to Amsterdam; and lastly, on his own, beset by Furies, pay for his cargoes to be loaded onto carts (the carters drunk, as all Dutch carters always are) and suffer with them the bumping four-day voyage overland. Sant returns to that house on the Prinsengracht with his purse as flat as a eunuch's ball sack, raw with the misfortune of it all.

And finds himself proclaimed a hero. A second Ulysses. A dozen ships lost in the tempest for sure, yet Sant not only brings the *Guid Marie* safe home, but Yosha's cargo too. Zoot makes up a bed for him, a bed with linen sheets of such purity and whiteness a man might go snow-blind, and in the morning she shaves him, bending across his face to afford him such sensations as might otherwise only be known to a sailor in a last coddled embrace with a mermaid. And Yosha, who had thought the *Guid Marie* so surely lost that he has written as much to Lübeck (though he does not share this with Sant), does share with him, at breakfast, the notion that the *Guid Marie*, as so weatherly a craft, and Sant, as so stout-hearted a sailor, perhaps deserve some reward. The *Guid Marie* might be strengthened, new pines found for her masts, her holds cleaned out, rebalanced, and he himself, he modestly suggests, would pay. No, not a loan; let's call it a partnership. Perhaps Sant might care to meet his shipwright?

Sant would. Squalls and storms and the misgivings of his conscience are nothing, mere pebbles in his shoe; now this is something like. No mere carrier he, no hired hand, but a partner with the Golden Jew.

The shipwright knows his business. He walks about the *Guid Marie* and lays his hands upon her swollen timbers in the tender manner of an accoucheur; then has her towed into dry dock under Sant's watchful eye and the gables of Yosha's newest, largest warehouse. Her masts are levered out, her keel scraped, the interior of the ship, which had so recently slopped with salt

water, still admixed with a little hay, becomes dry and sweet and piled with wood shavings. Her exterior becomes a camp: ropes and tarpaulins, cauldrons of tar, ladders and scaffolding; a camp populated with timber-merchants, carpenters, sailmakers...

Dock-rats. They steal the ropes, they steal the tarps; they steal the workmen's lunches out their laps – gone in a twinkling. They'd steal, so Sant's first mate opines, the hairs from your head if you left off your hat, and then they'd take your hat and all.

Patience, says Sant.

Within a week, the workmen and the dock-rats reach a truce. The dock-rats work the bellows for the forges, heft the awkward loads, and the workmen pay them in copper and iron – the same copper and iron, Sant notes, as should be going into the timbers of his ship; but a man can now put his hammer down without finding it gone when he next reaches for it, and the dock-rats can loiter round the camp without some enraged carpenter laying into them with a length of rope.

Yosha is philosophical. Pennies and ha'pennies, phut.

The men work about the *Guid Marie* like ants clearing a carcass. Day after day the hammers ring, the saws squeak and rasp, and every evening Sant goes back to the house on the Prinsengracht and that clean white bed with a dust of hemp fragments from the ropes over his head and shoulders.

Rivalries break out between the boys. The generalissimos of the dockyard gangs fight for the best jobs, battering each other into bloody and uneasy and short-lived quietude, then dole them out amongst the younger boys, taking a cut from each. It's a foolhardy soul seeks to set up for himself. Sant watches two such of the older lads – one damn near full-grown, with a staring eye and nasty feral twist to his face, plus another, with that fierce Dutch red to his hair – in furious consultation, with their gesticulations suggesting that the subject of their exchange is a third boy, who's sat surrounded by wooden deadeyes, rubbing them smooth with rottenstone. Sant isn't close enough

to hear the conversation, and wouldn't understand it even if he was, but if he could, he would hear this:

'I told him, I said, it's you in charge of who gets what round here, and he said no man was in charge of him, least of all some pissant scut like you, and what he got was his.'

Outrage. 'He said that? I'll fucken scuttle *him*.'

Sant, his attention wandering, peers over at the lad sat there with the deadeyes, intent on his task. Why, it's his Taffy-Head.

And the boy has grown. Not quite up there with the redhead (whom Sant christens Copperknob), and certainly nowhere near the size of Generalissimo Ringle-Eye, but he'll be a bruiser, this lad, should he live so long. Look at the size of those feet!

To be honest, his chances do not look good. Ringle-Eye marches up on Taffy-Head and sends him sprawling. The boy picks himself up, regards the back of his attacker with his head to one side. Measuring him up. *Good for you*, thinks Sant.

The shipwright interrupts his musings. 'She coom along goot, *jah?*' the man calls out, in that extraordinary looping Low Countries accent. From breaking down, now they are building up. Next day a new mast hangs above the deck, ready to be lowered into place, two more are taking shape down in the yard even as Sant watches, and men hang on ropes about the sides of the *Guid Marie*, raking out the old stuff between her planks, ready to stuff in the new – and oh, look at that. There's Copperknob.

Sporting a black eye.

Sant locates Taffy-Head at the stern of the *Guid Marie*, human counterweight to a pair of blocks being lowered into place for a handy little cannon. Sant wonders if his Dutch is good enough to risk a joke – something about sterns and farts and fire-power – and decides that on balance it probably is not. Instead he indicates the boy, swinging above their heads, those promising feet planted against the side of the *Guid Marie*, marching across her

like a crab as the men on deck direct the operation. 'Doing a good job, is he?' he enquires of the shipwright.

'*Jah*, so,' the man replies. 'Ish qvik, ish strong, does vot ish told.' And at the man's words the boy twists his head round like an owl, and he flashes Sant a sudden, wide and unexpected smile.

Sant turns to the shipwright. 'What's that one's story, do you know?'

The shipwright makes a face, raises his hands. 'One day ish here. Koom oop on *aak*.'

'*Ark*?' Sant repeats.

The shipwright's brows are knitted with effort. 'Wit men of barsh.'

Ah, a *barge*. 'Where from?'

The shipwright gives a shrug. He looks up, following the boy's progress as the men on deck haul him in over the rail, as if pondering the mystery of his origin. 'But ish good boy. Not like you, you thieving little snot,' he continues abruptly, breaking into his mother-tongue and lashing a brushful of hot tar in the direction of Copperknob, who's loitering just out of reach. 'Get out of it!'

It would appear Copperknob got the best of the fight. Sant's Taffy-Head, once back at ground level, displays a split lip, a cut to his forehead and a bit of a hobble when he walks. But all the same. Laid a keeker on him. Nae bad.



A DAY LATER, and two fishermen have found a body floating beyond the dock. They're hauling it from the green waters as Sant and his first mate approach. It comes up star-fished, legs akimbo. It's obvious it is the body of a child.

There, thinks Sant. He feels obscurely cheated, as if his care of Taffy-Head (which was what, exactly?) has been thrown back in his face. Also he is pierced by something almost as pure

as grief – Jesus, such a little life. Who'd it have hurt, to let it continue a while longer?

Nae sae bluidy tough then after all. A bitter, an almost angry regret.

The body breaks the waters. The boy's hair is red.

They lay the body down upon the quayside. Water leaks from it, running between the stones. At the back of the boy's skull is a soft concave declivity, the dint that a spoon makes, tapping an egg. 'Ee 'it the 'ed,' says one of the fishermen, explaining, to Sant. 'So, ish drown.'

'Look at his hands,' whispers Sant's first mate.

The knuckles of one hand are discoloured and swollen, of the other split down to the bone. 'Christ,' the first mate says. Back in Folkestone he has two boys of his own not much older than this. 'Christ, they're a savage bunch of little shits round here.'

And Taffy-Head has disappeared. Gone; vanished; not to be found.

Sant spends the morning watching the new mast go in with the words *good for you* appending themselves to the boy's image, whenever the latter pops into his head; the afternoon in company with the same but now with a coda hanging off them: *whir'iver the hail ye'are*. The shipwright, seeing him distracted, takes him in the evening to a beer-house by the docks, from which Sant emerges hours later with a gait that would do him more credit on a sloping deck in the Roaring Forties. Zigzagging to the water's edge he pisses like a horse, and the relieving of the pressure on his bladder makes him all the more aware of the uneasiness lurking in his thoughts. The boy. Where the devil is he?

If he were dead, Copperknob would still be alive. If he were whole, he'd be making himself as visible and acting as much the innocent as he could.

Therefore he's hiding, and he's hurt.

Foxy Sant surveys the yards behind him, all his foxy instincts on alert. So. If I were small and hurt and hiding, where'd I be?

Not round here. Not Yosha's warehouse, far too close to the scene.

He starts with the warehouse next door, and a pair of guard dogs comes flying at him like chain-shot. So not that one, either. At a loss, he looks down the long line of the quay, stretching out before him into indigo and star-speckled darkness, and the moon on the water catches his eye and gives him a wink, as if to say *that's right*.

He walks along the quay, sheds and warehouses on one side, growing smaller in size and fewer in number, and on the other boats and smacks and little craft, all knocking on the tide. Tarps and crates, a flotsam of timber and rope – hiding places innumerable, and not that easy to negotiate either, not with six pints inside you. He's coming up to the end of it, that long, stone arm. Discarded piling. A nest of barrels. He pushes against them, thinking to force himself a path, but there's one barrel in there weighted with something. There is a canvas draped across its mouth. It has, in fact, every appearance of a den.

Experimentally, Sant reaches into the barrel, up to his oxter. 'God *damn!*'

He dances backwards. At first he thinks he must have caught himself on some sharp hidden edge, but bringing his hand to his nose, he sees the cut is straight as only a blade could make it. Something in there is armed with a knife.

Ye wee son of a bitch.

He casts about for a solution. There's a pile of sacks close by, such useful stuff as is often left about a docks. Sant takes one up, splits it, wraps the sacking round his hands; thus muffed, goes in to try again. 'Come on, Diogenes. Let's be having you –' and plucks the boy out.

The boy's head lolls; his eyes roll back. His legs are splayed;

when Sant attempts to put him on them they will not bear his weight. He's racing with fever, and one arm, under Sant's grip, feels somehow marshy. When the boy lifts the knife again, it almost drops from his grasp.

Crawled in there. Crawled in there like the wounded thing it is.

Sant hefts the boy into his arms; bowlegged, begins to walk.

Five minutes hollering and banging on Yosha's grand front door with the boy growing limper by the second in his arms. Then that burly factotum cracks the door open, demanding, 'WIE IS HET?'

Sant sticks his boot in the crack. "Tis me, ye baw-heid.'

Once in the hall, the man blocks his way forward. The women peer down from the stairway, safe above. Sant holds the boy out to them, as Abraham with Isaac.

'I have here a wee friend o'mine,' says Sant. 'In need of a bit of help.'

It is Zoot who finds the child a bed, snips off his filthy clothes. Thus also Zoot who discovers the wound an inch below the arc of his ribs, crusted with pus, like the fissure in a geode. Thus also Zoot who summons the doctor.

The doctor says the boy will die. 'No he won't,' growls Sant, the good faery at the christening, nay-saying the curse.

Zoot, in her nightgown, hair in a loosening plait, strokes at the boy's face. He lies between them on the bed, respiration hardly moving the sheet. The bulkiest thing about him that splinted, bandaged arm.

Sant knows no more of medicine than how to get a fish-hook out your palm and the extraordinary area a man can cover if hit amidships by a cannonball, but in this case he is right. The boy hangs for a week – one-handed, one assumes – ready to drop off into darkness, then begins the slow climb back toward the light.

On the third day of the second week, Yosha has himself

carried, burgermeister's chair and all, up the stairs to the first floor of the attics in his six-storey house, where the boy is being tended. He pushes himself to the bed, and receiving no reaction from its occupant, bursts out, 'What are we to do with this?'

Zoot, measuring a trembling quarter-drop of laudanum into a tiny glass, ignores him. Sant, in calling her a housekeeper, has done her a disservice; Zoot is far more than that. For instance: Yosha, as a Jew, even amongst the unheard-of liberalities of the United Provinces, is still forbidden from employing Christians in his house; therefore nominally all his servants work for Zoot and all household expenses are paid from her purse. (It is also forbidden for a Jew to make love to a Christian, which explains much of Zoot's careful chaperoning of her son.) Zoot has had fifteen years with Yosha; they have left her plenty wise enough to distinguish those moments when he expects an answer from those when all he requires is an audience.

'Are we meant to take it in?' The wheels of the chair squeak round the bed. 'Little *yungatsh*. It could be anything. From anywhere. For all we know, it is poxy. Or it has the plague.' Yosha glares at the boy; glares too at the silver pendant Zoot had taken from about the boy's neck and placed carefully on the table where, should his eyes open, it will be the first thing he sees.

This is a child, Zoot intones to herself. You feed it, keep it warm, and watch it grow. Simplicity itself.

'Is this what we are meant to do? No – it is impossible.' And in his apparent fury, Yosha catches a wheel of the burgermeister's chair against a leg of the bed, and jolts it, and its occupant, who has a nice sense of timing and a mature appreciation of dramatic effect, not to mention the sense to have kept his eyes tight shut throughout, lets forth a tiny moan. Zoot rushes forward, Yosha scoots back. Voice a-quiver with remorse, he asks, 'Did I hurt him?'



HE'S IN HIS boat, that's where he is, it's rocking on the waves. He must be very small; because Maman can fit into his boat as well. Her knees rise up like mountains either side of him and her hand on his forehead is warm as the sun. She smiles at him. 'Maman has a secret, Petit Jacques.' He reaches up to touch her face. Her eyes close. Her skin grows chill beneath his touch. She is high above him; she is swinging out of reach. *Maman... Maman...*

He opens his eyes. The dream-world drifts and fades, and seems to vanish down the sides of the room.

There is another boy standing by his bed.

The boy is smaller than him, but has all the glossiness of those habitually well fed. He is immediately jealous. Also the boy wears the most absurd, complete, adult suit of clothes, all the seams intact and no dirt on it anywhere. Most puzzling of all, the boy is clutching to his midriff a small cat, barely out of kittenhood.

'*Goedemorgen*,' the boy says, bobbing a quick half-bow. He has the eager manner of one anxious to please, and he speaks the kind of careful, simple Dutch this most polite of nations reserves for those they think won't understand. 'My name's Cornelius. Who are you?'

'Jack,' says the boy, uncertain if this is another dream or not. But communication is established. Cornelius (who also has the fluttery pulse and clammy palms of one who knows he shouldn't be there in the first place) tries a nervous smile. 'D'you want to see my Turkish cat?'

The Turkish cat is Yosha's latest exotic. It has one yellow eye, one blue, and other than a pale apricot tail it is, of course, a piercing, blinding white.

Cornelius puts the cat on the bed, where it sniffs at Jack's fingertips, turns itself upside down and starts to purr. Jack smiles. 'It looks like it's got the wrong tail,' he points out.

'Her name's Catarina,' Cornelius announces. 'She goes swimming. In the canal.'

Jack shakes his head. 'Cats don't swim.'

In fact Catarina does swim, with every appearance of enjoyment, almost daily, but her owner decides to leave this to one side. Cornelius has had to glean his knowledge of this secret guest from hiding under tables while the adults talk above, and he has a request of his own. 'Can I see it?' he asks. 'The place where you were hurt?'

The secret guest seems to find nothing unreasonable in this at all. 'Sure, if you want,' he replies, and pushes back the sheet.

Cornelius had primed himself to expect something fearsome, but perhaps not quite as fearsome as this. He had not expected stitches to be so prosaically stitches, for a start, sewing, through the skin. He had brought his head down close for the inspection, now he jerks upright and backs away. Catarina, startled, jumps off the bed and darts through the open door.

'It's all right,' says Jack, seeing his discomfiture. 'It don't hurt now.'

Cornelius is round-eyed. 'Did it hurt when it was done?'

'Well, it hurt then. For sure it hurt then.' He regards the wound as if he were almost fond of it, although touching it still makes the sick feeling rise in his throat.

'What was it like?' Cornelius asks.

'Like a punch,' Jack replies, authoritatively. 'Then it got hot. It burns and stings.'

'They said—' Cornelius begins, but at that moment a voice drifts up the staircase: 'Oh, that accursed cat!' There is a clatter, as of large and heavy-laden maidservant with small cat getting underfoot. Then the voice says, and is sharper now, as of maidservant putting two-and-two together: 'Cornelius? Are you up there? What did your mother tell you? Come down this minute!'

He opens his eyes again. He has another visitor. The man from the docks. The man with the horse. 'Well now,' the man says. 'How's it with you?' And adds, 'Me laddie.'

'What am I doing here?' Jack demands.

‘You don’t remember?’

He does, and he doesn’t. He remembers the fight, and staggering forward, the stone quayside flying up to meet him, and the pain in his arm like a bolt being shot across a door. He remembers hugging the arm to him, and thinking how he must not pass out, then seeing his enemy coming at him again. He remembers kicking out with his legs as the only weapon he had left. What had happened after that?

Sant, seeing the wandering look on the boy’s face, sits himself carefully on the bed. ‘You had a fight,’ says Sant. ‘You and yon red-haired lad.’

And that, he sees, the boy does remember. A sharp beam of anger. ‘He stole my money, fuck him,’ the boy says. Sant is taken aback. His gaze lights for a moment on the little silver token of the wolf, propped up there on the table. It seems an odd thing for a child to have about its neck, a distasteful thing, if Sant is honest – the graphic modelling, the red enamel (eyes, teeth, bulb of the phallus) – astonishing that such malevolence can be concentrated in something less than two inches high, but it seems to be almost the only possession the boy has. Other than that equally alarming, business-like knife.

‘Aye, well,’ says Sant, ‘he’ll no be trying that again.’

The boy is watching his face – reading it, it seems to Sant. His eyes are notable: light centred (very light), dark ringed around the iris, very dark lashed. He lifts the arm, in its splints. He says, ‘I didn’t start it.’

Sant is touched. ‘Of course you didnae.’ He stands, and walks about the room. ‘It was I, brought you here. You know where you are?’

‘No,’ says the boy, keeping his eyes on Sant the while.

‘This is the house of Yosha Silbergeld. You’ve heard of him, no doubt.’

He thinks, *The old man who was carried up here in that chair.* He answers, ‘No.’

‘Ah,’ says Sant, disappointed, and the boy, as if in compensation, offers, ‘There was a boy like me.’

‘Cornelius.’ Sant is amazed. It seems wildly unlikely Zoot would let her darling come up here. ‘Part of the family.’

‘His grandson,’ the boy suggests.

‘Aye, sure,’ says Sant, who’s far from certain. And changing the subject, asks, ‘So I hear the name is Jack, that so?’

The boy nods.

Sant glances back at the knife. An ivory hilt, Adam carved to one side, Eve in her snake-dance on the other, and a spring-loaded button (Sant has tested it) that sends the blade out the hilt with the speed of a striking cobra. And most intriguing of all, the silver knop engraved not with a J, but with the bold flourish of a B. ‘And where might you hail from, young Jack?’

For the first time, the boy’s gaze tracks from Sant’s face. He points, seemingly at random, out the window. ‘Back there,’ he says.

It occurs to Sant that he is being mocked. He peers at the boy suspiciously. ‘So how’d you find yourself in Amsterdam, eh?’

‘I worked a boat,’ says the boy. And for a moment Sant finds himself wondering if that pointing arm was indeed aimed at random; it’s just possible the boy had checked the position of the sun, got a bearing from it, and given his answer.

‘And what boat was that?’

Something within the boy’s eyes becomes just a little opaque. A ghost of the laudanum, thinks Sant.

‘The *Sally Arden*,’ the boy says, vaguely.

The *Sally Arden*. It raises a vague tolling in Sant’s mind, as of a buoy above a wreck. Indeed of a buoy above a wreck. There was a *Sally Arden*, out of Gravesend, mooring at Dunkirk, that nest of piracy; Sant knows it well. He knew the *Sally Arden*, too. From behind an upturned tavern table, Sant once watched the master of the *Sally Arden* lay out four men one after another, surging from the wreckage all about him like a bull. He remembers the

man's fists, tattooed with open fangs across the knuckles, like the twin mouths of hell. But didn't man and boat go down off Finisterre? This, Sant decides, is a goose-chase. 'So now you're here,' he says. 'What do you think to it?'

'It's pretty good,' says the boy, cautiously.

'A'cause there's an idea downstairs as they might make a place here for you.' He waits. 'Think you might like to stay?'

The boy sits upright, as if the conversation has suddenly become serious. 'I don't know,' he says. He looks down at himself. 'I mean I'm not going about *nakit*. Where's me clothes?'

The clothes – quivering with vermin – have been burned. And the minute the splints come off his arm, Jack is plunged into a copper bath before the kitchen fire, and has Zoot going over him with a scrubbing brush. No protests are enough to hold her back. She clips at his hair with a pair of iron scissors, revealing triangles of white behind each ear that never saw the sun, and scrapes through what's left with strong soap and a nit-comb. She puts him in a decent suit of sober black, and a shirt with a collar wide as an open book, while his feet are hidden in a pair of good buff-leather boots. The boy stands on one leg then the other, like a stork, to admire them. Zoot makes him face about, and there he is, revealed – good wide brow, well-set shoulders, that lift to his chin and those clear eyes – *that's not a bad-looking lad, that*, thinks Sant.

One last pulling straight of his collar, one last patting down of his hair, and off Zoot sends him, for his interview with Yosha.

Jack enters at one end of the room; Yosha propels himself forward from the other. The light is again behind him. He brings himself to a halt. The boy's expression is one of curiosity.

'So,' Yosha says. 'You decided not to die. You like to make the doctor look an idiot.'

Jack says nothing.

‘So now we must decide what happens to you next,’ says Yosha. He reaches out, and takes Jack’s chin between finger and thumb. Children dislike this, he knows. His own Cornelius cannot endure it.

His visitor has a very steady gaze. Instead of discomfort, or even fright, Yosha finds he is staring into a perfect mirror of himself, two twin reflections, and moving under them the passage of the boy’s thoughts: *Old. Can’t shift for himself. But he’s got this big house. Not met his type before. Let’s wait and see what he does next.* Yosha is impressed.

‘What happened to your legs?’ Jack asks, breaking the silence.

‘Burned them,’ says Yosha. ‘In a fire.’

Jack looks around the room – the marble pillars either side of the chimney-breast, the whiteness of the ceiling – as if for signs of damage. ‘What, here?’

‘No. Another place,’ Yosha answers, short. ‘And a long, long time ago.’ Changing the subject, he asks, ‘So. You like to stay here, yes?’

Jack has given this much thought. Being under a ceiling is strange, and sleeping in a bed again, all tangled up in sheets and blankets, is plainly ridiculous, but there are advantages: he’s fed, he’s warm, and then there are his boots... ‘I might,’ he says.

‘So. In this house, everyone works. In this country, everyone works. If you stay here, what can you do?’

‘Well,’ says Jack, ‘I can run errands. I can fetch and carry stuff; I’ve done that. I can deliver messages and get them right. I can do knots and ropes.’ He pauses, counting how far he’s got in his list of accomplishments. ‘I can sail a little boat, and I can fish. I can find places, not using a map. I can make a fire without a tinderbox.’ Another pause. ‘And I can ride.’

‘What can you ride?’ asks Yosha, sensing the unlikelihood of this. He is reaching for the bell.

Back comes the answer. ‘Anything.’

Paul, Yosha's factotum, reliable as always, quiet as ever, there in the doorway. 'Ah, Paul,' says Yosha. He rocks back and forth in the chair. 'Up, up. We are going to see Prince Maurice.'

Prince Maurice is fourteen hands high, and a handsome chestnut. A thick streak of Schleswig Kaltblut in his ancestry has given him magnificently feathered legs, but if you look very closely, and know what you are looking for, it is still possible to discern, somewhere in his profile, a trace of Barbary stud. He is occasionally harnessed to a cart, to carry Zoot on forays into the countryside; Cornelius is periodically threatened with being made to learn to ride him. Other than that his main purpose has been to allow Yosha to exercise his quirky sense of patriotism: Prince Maurice, after Maurice of Orange, Stadtholder of the Netherlands and thorn in the Spanish backside.

'So,' says Yosha. 'You can ride that?'

As befits the house, the courtyard is large too. Prince Maurice wears a woven halter, but he has neither saddle nor bridle on him, and the mounting block is yards away. Paul makes as if to help the boy, but Yosha waves him back. In silence, as Paul waits, puzzled, Jack steps forward. He's rubbing his hands together. He holds his palms out flat toward Prince Maurice.

'What is that?' Yosha demands. 'This thing you do with your hands – what is that?'

'You rub your hands together, it brings up the salt on 'em. Horses like salt.' Prince Maurice is working his muzzle over the boy's hands like a washcloth. 'It's how you make friends.'

He rubs Prince Maurice on his nose, then slowly walks around him, smoothing a hand against the horse's flank as he does so. Prince Maurice leans against the hand and blows out a lengthy sigh. Jack kneels, taps a back leg and has Prince Maurice rest the hoof in his lap. Then he goes around the other side and does the same. Paul finds he must fight down a smile: the boy could

hardly be making more of a meal of his inspection if he were going to make Yosha an offer on his horse.

‘Well?’ Yosha demands.

‘I could ride him,’ Jack says, finally. ‘I could, but he’s got a limp.’

‘A limp?’ exclaim Paul and his employer, simultaneously.

‘There,’ says Jack, having Prince Maurice raise the back hoof again. ‘You can feel it. Must’ve banged his leg.’

Yosha is squinting up at Paul in mock, or mock-ish, outrage. ‘You let my horse have limps?’

Paul crouches down beside the boy. ‘See?’ Jack says, guiding his hand, and there it is, unmistakable, a little swelling and a little heat under the horse’s skin. ‘*Myn heer*,’ says Paul, standing up, ‘I do not know how this can have happened.’ There is still a suggestion of unsteadiness about his mouth.

‘Might just have done it now,’ says Jack, magnanimously. He is holding Prince Maurice’s head, letting the horse huff at his neck. ‘They’re none too clever, horses. Though he’s a nice enough old fella,’ he adds, as if the horse might be offended, ‘ain’t you, hey?’

‘So,’ says Yosha, giving Paul his most acute, side-angled stare, ‘you think you can find a place for this boy? This boy who can tell if my horse has limps?’

‘Oh yes,’ says Paul, gravely. The cheek of the little beggar! ‘Yes, *myn heer*. We can find a place for him.’

So. He assists Paul with Prince Maurice. He helps with the endless chopping of logs for the house’s many fireplaces, sweeping up the debris after good as can be. He’s energetic filling jugs and pitchers at the pump; he’ll peel parsnips and potatoes without complaint. ‘Handy with a knife, ain’t he?’ as the cook remarks. A chicken, brought dead in a basket, miraculously revives in the heat of the kitchen, and when the maids run shrieking as this half-plucked, half-dead thing leaps squawking

round the room, the boy catches and dispatches it as fast and with as little hesitation as if he were twisting the green part off a bunch of carrots. He runs errands to the market. He runs errands for Yosha. Yosha sends him down to the docks with twelve silver stuivers to pay off the sailmaker (not an enormous sum, by Yosha's standards, but a fortune for a dock-rat) and the boy returns, at the expected time, and with a receipt. 'So,' says Zoot, standing quietly in a corner of Yosha's office, 'you are satisfied now?'

'I am satisfied *so far*,' Yosha answers.

Zoot finds Jack seated at the top of the flight of stone steps that lead from the kitchen down into the courtyard. The cook has put a hunk of cheese in one of his hands and an apple in the other, and he is munching through them in alternating bites. He turns – Zoot, in passing, had been unable to prevent her hand from cupping the round of his head, and as he stares after her, astonished, for a moment his face drops apart. It was Zoot just went past behind him, wasn't it?

The people in your head are safe; he knows that now, he understands. It doesn't matter how hard it is to keep them there; it's just a thing that must be done.

You lock a door on them; no-one can hurt them. And nor can they hurt you.

And when the *Guid Marie* – remasted, rebalanced, remade – is relaunched, he's there as well. Standing on the quayside, to the right of Yosha's chair, with Zoot, Cornelius, and all the rest of them.



SANT'S FIRST COMMISSION, in his remade ship, should be the transport of those barrels of pitch up the Thames to the royal docks at Deptford. But there's a mean wind blowing

all the shipping in the Channel south-south-west, and Sant might either spend the next two days tacking down and up, like a thread being run through a hem; or he might put into Dunkirk, say, and wait for more favourable winds to take this one's place.

Dunkirk is not a place where questions are welcome. Nonetheless, Sant finds a likely spot, an old watering-hole of his, and two likely old lads sat inside the door, sucking beer through their moustaches. One sounds as if he comes from Hull; the other has the unmistakable sharp-pitched tang to his speech of the London Basin. Listening to them grumbling in duet is like listening to a shanty for a bassoon and a piccolo. Sant sits himself down beside them and opens the conversation with a 'Been a whiles since I was here,' but gets no answer.

'Looking for a boat,' he continues, lying smoothly. 'The *Sally Arden*. Her master, Josh Arden – he had a mooring here. Any idea where I might find her?'

'Oh aye,' says Hull, with relish. (His companion still has yet to say a word.) He points, with his pipe-stem, out toward the sea. 'Straight oot and straight down. Crab-food.'

'No!' says Sant, feigning horror, shock, dismay. He lets a little more Scots come back into his voice, as one might under the influence of strong emotion. 'You dinnae say.'

'Her and every soul aboard,' Hull says, and sticks the pipe back in his mouth as if plugging a leak. There is silence for a moment. Then the whippet-like snap of the Cockney breaks in with 'Friend of Josh Arden, were yer?'

'Wouldn't say a friend,' says Sant, cautiously. 'But I remember his boat.'

'Aye,' says the other, shortly. 'Many do.'

Sant beckons to the publican, indicates their tankards – his, Hull's, the whippet's – and holds up three fingers. Hull and the whippet take note, and the atmosphere between the three becomes rather smoother-edged.

'So when did she go down?' Sant asks, once the round has arrived.

'Must be – oh a good twelve year ago now,' says the whippet.

'More than that,' says Hull.

So if Josh Arden left some poor bitch fresh in whelp before he went to feed the crabs, reckons Sant, that might just fit. Mentally he swings the legs of a compass over the boy, measuring likelihood... yes. Josh Arden would have been old to become a father, but that wouldn't have stopped the man, not as Sant remembers him. 'He have any family you ever hear of?' queries Sant. 'Any children?'

'Had a daughter,' says the whippet. 'Named his boat for her.'

Indeed? In his head, Sant swings the legs of the compass back on themselves. Josh Arden. Not the father then, the grandfather. Hull has put his head against the wall and let out a long luxurious sigh. 'Bonnie lass, was she?' Sant enquires, remembering the boy and those dark-lashed eyes. There's a nice rose-tinted bubble coming into shape now in Sant's head with the image in it of himself and the boy – grown, washed, hair cut, in his decent clothes of good Dutch woollen – and some braw rose of a woman, fulsome with teary gratitude as Sant returns her son to her.

'Knock your eye out,' Hull replies. 'How old Arden fathered her God knows.'

'Not all he tried to do to her, I heard,' says the whippet, and there is a wettish splutter from Sant, which might only be a mouthful of ale gone down the wrong way, or might just be the popping of a dream.

'What become of her?' Sant asks, once he's mopped himself up.

'Run off,' says the whippet.

'Died,' says Hull, in the same breath. The whippet pauses for a beat, then nips back in again. 'Run off *and* died,' he informs Sant, as the last word on the subject. 'Poor little flower. Sad.'

So a dead trail in every sense. And best left that way, by the sound of it. Sant, feeling strangely mournful, drains his tankard

and gets to his feet. 'You off then, are yer?' says the whippet, whose tankard is also empty.

'Aye,' answers Sant, abstractedly, gathering his thoughts. But what, he asks himself, did he expect? Some faery-tale ending and he, Sant, the bringer-about? Not in this world, that's for sure. 'Time and tide and by your leave, friends. Good day to the both of you.'

'Tide don't turn for three hour yet,' mutters Hull, as they watch him go.

The whippet leans toward his neighbour. 'You wasn't going to tell him 'bout the Frenchie then?'

'What Frenchie?' Hull replies. 'Him what poor Sally wed?'

'No, not him, the other one. The one who come by asking questions. You remember. Little fella. Him with the rattler of a cough.'

'Give over,' says Hull, with scorn. 'No, I were *not*.' Out comes the pipe, jabbed at the back of the retreating figure. 'That's Mungo Sant. The last time Sant did anyone a favour, Moses was still in his basket. Poor little Sally. Let her rest in peace.'

In London there is English broadcloth, to go down to Bordeaux. From Bordeaux there is wine, to be carried round the Isle of Wight to Southampton. In Southampton there is lashing rain, and a delay of weeks, then a burst of sun and a deluge of ripe golden corn into the holds, like Zeus mistook the *Guid Marie* for his beloved Danae. The corn is for Göteborg. Yosha believes in having a partner show off his paces. In Göteborg there's timber, for Gdansk. Gdansk is leather and pig iron, ice alongside the ship, and more news from Bohemia – whole place gone up in smoke, so Sant's first mate informs him, breathless with the cold: the Emperor, predictably, has marched his armies in, and handsome Frederick and his English bride, Winter King and Winter Queen, are gone, gone, gone; unhappy exiles in the Hague, the pair of them. 'Could have told you,' Sant

replies. 'Soon as I heard they'd chose Frederick. Now there'll be trouble.'

'Could'a told *you*,' the first mate retorts. 'Soon as folk began a-shipping sword-blades.'

The iron goes to Hamburg; the leather to Rouen, en route to the cobblers of Paris. In Rouen, there is brandy. The brandy is for Lowestoft. One day slides into the next, the *Guid Marie* floating in the rhythms of the sea, the skies, punctuated by the sudden frenzy of a port – the loadings and unloadings, the business of business, and all the usual irritations too: drunken doxies, crewmen gone missing, harbour dues and tolls. It will be fifteen months before Sant sees the warehouses of Amsterdam rise out the mists and sudden inundations of the Zuyder Zee again.



FIFTEEN MONTHS is a lot of days. You're ten years old, and even a single day can seem as long as a prison sentence. And like a prisoner within the confines of his cell, Cornelius has mapped every place in every single one of his days where he will encounter Fear.

Fear is Cornelius's shadow. It governs his relationship with Yosha, makes him stupid, tongue-tied, when he is far from stupid, in fact. It is Fear makes him shivery and awkward when he hears people laughing behind him. When Prince Maurice is out of his stable. When a dog wants to smell his hand.

For most of his conscious life, for as long as he has been aware of Fear (and he cannot remember a time when he was not aware of it), Cornelius had thought everybody lived and felt and Feared as he did. That was why it was never spoken of. When, recently, it began to occur to him that perhaps this was not so, still it did not seem to him that he could speak of it – if Fearing as he did was peculiar to him, perhaps it was something of which he should be ashamed? In any case, what would be

the point? Whatever other people's lives might be, this was his, and always would be. How could anyone else help? And who would he tell? The servants are servants, so cannot be friends; his mother is both, so cannot be either. Cornelius has grown up on a lonely island of one.

Sometimes, from the safety of his room, Cornelius looks down on Amsterdam and all the people in the streets, and none of them even knowing that he watches them, and he thinks Amsterdam is the best and greatest toy-box in Creation, a Noah's Ark of wonders and delights; and at other times he looks down and something else seizes him and he knows he is going to see something so horrible it will destroy him. Spanish soldiers charging round the corner. Catarina squished by a cart. Paul, with his face bleeding. Any one of a thousand horrors – he doesn't know how he knows them all.

There is a thing Cornelius calls the Hand of Fear. At least it feels like a hand. This dismembered item, with its shattered stump of wrist, lives in his gut. Sometimes it clutches at his insides in terror; sometimes, aghast, it raises itself on three fingers and thumb and points with quivering index at whatever source of Fear he is about to encounter, and sometimes, and these are the worst, the Hand balls itself into a fist and smashes down on his viscera to punish him for being so afraid. At such times he is flush-cheeked and feverish, and Zoot keeps him in bed. Cornelius is not a coward – it takes considerable strength of mind to live like this – but he is scared of almost everything.

Or he was. Because in those fifteen months, Cornelius has discovered the secret of joy. And the secret of joy is to live without Fear.

It is Yosha's habit, when he has some suitable errand to be run, to send for Cornelius to do it. In this way, Cornelius will start to learn the business. The errands are not a great deal in themselves: a visit to some colleague Yosha knows to be good with children, a scrip of paper to be borne home plus maybe a

trip around a strong-room, but the little insights thus gleaned may of themselves add up to much. And thus far, Cornelius has always accomplished these errands successfully. (Success so far only implies to Cornelius that the next trip will be even more difficult, thus even more to be Feared. One day it will be a task of such complexity that Cornelius will get it wrong, and then what will happen to him? He will cease to exist, he imagines.)

Amsterdam in its streets is not like Amsterdam viewed from the safety of an upstairs window. It is noisy, crowded, people shove into you. There are shouts. You might get followed. You might never get home.

The task of such complexity that it is bound to go wrong is to take a fork, a sample and a rarity, to a dealer in mother-of-pearl, to be given a measurement, to take the measurement to a jeweller, to get a price from the jeweller, to take the price back to the dealer in mother-of-pearl and, depending upon what the man says, either leave the fork there, or bring it home again. The Hand is aghast. What if Cornelius forgets the price? What if he forgets the fork?

‘Take Jack with you,’ says Yosha, as his parting shot.

Cornelius is baffled by Jack. How can he manage such grown-up things? Lead Prince Maurice about? Deal with fires and splinters? Be left, unsupervised, with knives? The two of them depart the house together, Cornelius attempting to lead the way, and Jack sauntering along behind, as if it hasn’t even occurred to him what a marvel he is.

They are halfway to the dealer’s when Cornelius hears the first reedy cry pursuing them. Jew boy! Then two voices: Jew boy, Jew boy! Then more. Their followers don’t shout, or some conscientious adult would admonish them; they time their cries till the street is deserted, till you almost think they’ve given up and gone home, then you’ll hear it again. Jew boy! The Hand is clutching his innards and whimpering. Now Jack will know it too, that when Cornelius goes out he is followed, and mocked,

and worse. They will make one of their darting runs and tug at his jacket, they will elaborate their cry: Where you come from, Jew boy? Who's your papa?

If Jack has heard the cries, he gives no sign. Perhaps he has not connected them with his companion. Cornelius's heart begins to beat again.

They come out of the dealer's and within a matter of paces (the street is quiet, it is noon), the cries have begun again. There can be no mistaking their object now. Jack swings about and stares down the street, and the band of boys, four of them, check slightly, and pull back.

'Why do they do that?' Jack demands, as the gang ducks into doorways, out of sight.

'Trying to make trouble,' Cornelius answers, from the depths of his despair. 'Zoot says to ignore them. Says to turn the other cheek.'

'Oh yes? Do they follow her about, too?'

'Of course not!' Cornelius exclaims, appalled.

'So what's she know about it, then?'

They make their way to the jeweller's in silence, both acutely conscious that their followers, even if mostly staying hidden, are still there.

They come out of the jeweller's, retracing their steps. The cries start again, immediately. 'I've had enough of this,' says Jack. 'Let's fix 'em.'

Cornelius's mouth falls open. 'How?'

'Get to the corner,' says Jack, pushing him forward.

They reach the corner. The cries are stronger, louder now. Any second there will be the crescendo of running feet. And then a bolder spirit, right on cue: 'Who's your friend?'

Jack turns. The boys are ten short yards away. He turns and he does something Cornelius has never seen before, yet understands the import of at once: an insult of such peerless obscenity you recognize it by instinct. Jack claps right hand in the crook of

left arm, raises left hand in a fist, puts two fingers out of the fist, then thrusts the thumb between them. Fuck you, cunt.

The gang of boys recoils in disbelief, then as one comes thundering forward.

Cornelius and Jack round the corner, blood, panic, frenzy, pounding in Cornelius's ears. There is the same door they passed on the way to the jeweller's, there is the same piece of timber propping it open. 'Give me that,' Jack demands. Cornelius snatches it up; it's wrenched from his grasp as the first, fastest, boy comes round the corner. Jack swings the timber into the boy's stomach. The second gets it over the shoulders, like an axe. The third runs smack-bang into it. The fourth rounds the corner, brakes, changes gear, leaps a fallen companion and hares off down the street.

Jack throws the timber to the ground, goes to the first boy, yanks him upright, and with his fist twisted in the boy's collar, slams him against the wall. He says, 'You come after us again, I'll take your fucken head off. They'll fish you out of that canal in *bits*. You got that?'

The boy is gargling for breath. Jack shakes him. 'Got that?'

The boy manages what might just be a nod.

'Then let me hear you say it.'

The boy chokes out, 'Got it.' Jack lets him go. The boy falls to the ground, whooping. It's all happened so fast Cornelius has to replay it in his head to be convinced he actually saw it. *They were going to kill us! Now they're on the ground!*

Jack dusts off his hands, says, 'Come on,' to Cornelius, and sets off, leading the way. Cornelius has to scamper to catch up.

'So how long's that been going on for?' Jack asks, in a companionable manner, after a moment or two.

'This year. All this year. Some of last.' Cornelius should be shame-faced, but he is not. He is breathless, grinning, open-mouthed.

Jack sighs. 'Look,' he says, 'when something like that happens, you don't put up with it, you put a stop to it. Right?'

And Cornelius, dizzy with liberation, the world opening before him like a lily on a pond, essays what he will later remember as his first joke. His grin is so wide it feels as if his cheeks might split. 'Got it!' he says.