

Deeds of Men

M A R I E B R E N N A N

*O, act, most worthy hell, and lasting night,
To hide it from the world!*

–V.viii.389-90

RED CROSS ALLEY, LONDON: 2 June, 1625

They found him in a narrow alley, within smelling distance of the riverside wharves and the pestilential tenements that crowded them, with his throat slit from ear to ear.

Sir Michael Deven knelt in the muck, not caring that he ruined the knee of his breeches, and bit down hard on a knuckle to hold back tears.

The long, gangly limbs sprawled without grace, like a child's doll thrown aside. Even in the poor light, occluded by the overhanging jetties of the buildings on either side, the rich green taffeta of his doublet gleamed incongruously bright, a spot of elegance and wealth in a place that knew neither. Deven noted these details with fierce determination, trying not to acknowledge the bloodless face, the staring eyes, out of which the dreams had gone forever.

For the first time in over six decades of life, he felt old. *Because this is what age is. Not the weakening of the body, nor the dimming of the mind, but your hopes lying shattered at your feet.*

He forced down the hard knot in his throat, and took the knuckle from between his teeth. Truncated string-ends showed on the belt, where a purse should have hung. "Murdered, by a common thief."

"Beggin' yer pardon, milord, but I don't think so."

The diffident voice was not one he wanted to hear, not when its owner had come to tell him a young man lay dead in a Coldharbour alley. But he made himself look, as Mungle sidled forward. The fellow appeared a dockside labourer, one of the rough cobs who unloaded goods from ships into London's voracious maw. A mask, of course, but he wore it well.

Mungle went toward the body, with hesitant steps that gave Deven time to call him back. Grimacing, he bent and rolled the head the other

DEEDS OF MEN

way, so the clouded eyes no longer stared in accusation. Mud caked the left ear, but something still hung from its lobe. “Earring’s here,” Mungle said. “And shoes. And that belt. Worth more than a ha’penny, those would be; any slower getting here, and you’d find them gone. A thief worth his cut would take them.”

“Perhaps the thief was interrupted.”

“In Coldharbour?” Mungle laughed, then swallowed it guiltily. “Who’d bother? I’d guess they took the purse to make it seem ordinary. But they was no thieves. And look—” Mungle lifted one pallid, unresisting hand, stained with blood from a small wound. “Rapier, I’d say; nicked him on the sword hand. He was fighting somebody—a gentleman.”

Deven stood, moving carefully against the growing sickness in his gut. Mungle was right. This wasn’t simply an unfortunate encounter with a cutpurse. The murderer had a reason beyond gold, and Deven knew of only one great enough to suffice.

Henry Ware’s death was a consequence of the world Deven had brought him into.

Which was, in a way, good news. Because whichever faerie had murdered him, Deven could and would see the creature responsible hanged.

*To shine
Bright, as the Moone, among the lesser lights,
And share the sov’raintie of all the world.*

–II.i.35-7

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 21 January, 1621

Bright laughter danced among the leaves and flowers of the night garden, blooming in a perpetual spring beneath a sky of stone. The

buried waters of the Walbrook sang counterpoint as the elegant lords and ladies of the Onyx Court ran down the paths, playing some game whose rules Deven could not discern. But the faeries paused in their flight, bowing or curtsying out of his path with a friendly murmur of “my lord,” before resuming their pursuit.

Lune was not among them. He found her seated in a quiet corner, beneath the satin-soft petals of an apple tree, attended only by Amadea, the elf-lady appointed chamberlain of the court. Upon seeing Deven, Lune smiled and gestured the lady away, making room for him on the cushion at her side. “Welcome home, my heart.”

He had been gone only a few days—a customary absence, to protect himself against the dangers of time spent among the fae. Still, her words were apt; his return always felt like a homecoming. If not to the Onyx Hall, then to her.

They were not so hidden as to be private, so Deven contented himself with a kiss upon her ungloved hand, her skin cool against his lips. Nonetheless, he heard a mischievous giggle from the underbrush of the garden. The fae were hardly puritanical in their behaviour, but they still found delicious scandal in the decision of their Queen to take a mortal consort. Dalliance was one thing; many of them indulged in it from time to time. But love? The emotion—not what the Queen did in her bedchamber—was shocking, even after all these years.

Certainly Deven’s own fellows would be appalled, if they knew he remained a bachelor for love of a faerie Queen.

Already they said too much about him. A man might live fifty-eight years and no one would remark on it. But to live fifty-eight years and show scant sign of it...his health was unflagging, his hair untouched by grey. When in public, he took care to move slowly and stiffly, as if his joints pained him in the damp. That pretence, though, could not hide the smoothness of his face, where time ought to have carved lines marking the passage of his mortal span. Men noticed, though they did not know the cause.

DEEDS OF MEN

Lune said, "You are brooding on something."

She spoke the words lightly, chiding him for bringing heavy thoughts into her garden diversion. She might have been the subject of a pagan fresco, there beneath the flowering apple tree, with her moon-bright hair loose like a maiden's, and the sight of her gave his heart a sudden pang. As little as he had changed, she changed even less: only the style of her hair and gown, idly following in the wake of mortal fashion as it pleased her. Time would never touch *her* face—nor would death.

Her silver gaze sharpened. "What troubles you?"

Deven bent his head, playing idly with her long, delicate fingers. He accepted the impossibility of hiding the evidence of his thoughts from her, but that did not mean he must share their substance. "Nothing you wish me to speak of," he told her.

But the words were ill-chosen; he might as well have hung out a sign. Lune's expression darkened, and she drew her hand from his. It shivered there between them: *mortality*.

She could shelter him from it, a little. The faerie touch he bore, the legacy of a cup of wine, slowed his aging. Every moment he spent in a faerie realm was a moment in which time stopped. But to stay among them forever would shatter his mind, and so instead he walked between the two worlds, mortal and fae.

And in time, the mortal side must win.

"That day," she said, "lies far off yet."

"May it be so," Deven said, long habit suppressing the more common invocation of God. They would not thank him for that, here in the heart of the Onyx Hall. "But Lune...we must speak of what will come."

"Why?" It came out angry, but he understood. "'Twill come when it comes, and when it does, my heart will break. Then you will be gone, and I will live on in grief. What is there to speak of?"

"The Onyx Court," he said.

It stilled the trembling of her shoulders, armoured in their midnight silk. Lune had never studied for sovereignty, not as a prince might. Then again, neither had old Queen Elizabeth. But both women shared a quality that stood them in good stead where no number of books and tutors would: they both held an unwavering commitment to the stability of their realms—though Elizabeth had refused to wed and bear an heir.

Lune's heir was not in question; immortal creatures need not concern themselves with such things. Deven, however, was another matter.

"You made a promise," he reminded her.

"Always to rule with a mortal at my side. I have not forgotten."

Mortal and fae, hand in hand, had created this enchanted palace, hidden beneath the very streets of London. That was the whole purpose of its presence here: to bring together two worlds which otherwise stood aloof. "When I am gone," Deven said, "and you are in your grief... what will become of your promise then?"

She answered him fiercely. "I will keep it. Do you think I would not?"

"I have every belief you will. But for you to search for a successor, in such a moment..."

He left the sentence unfinished. Lune sighed, and the fire went out of her body. "I know," she said, and shifted closer, so she could lay her head upon his shoulder, and he could curl his arm about her waist. "If I cannot face the thought now, how can I face the deed then?"

Deven slid his cheek along the cool silver of her hair. "I have a thought for that. Not a full remedy, I fear, but—"

A tremor in her body; it turned out to be amusement. "What, no miracle? My faith in your omnipotence is shattered."

Deven smiled. If she could find the heart to jest, then he did not fear to go on. "I am two things to you: your lover, and the man who rules at your side. One of these will be replaced." The other might be

DEEDS OF MEN

reproduced, in time. Fae loved rarely, but they could do so more than once, if passion were sparked that could overleap the eternal grief. Another man in her heart—he tried not to think on it. “I believe it would profit us to separate the two,” Deven went on. “Create a title, some office I may occupy in my capacity as your consort. Such a thing may be passed on—*before* I am gone.”

She had not expected it. And it drove back the fear, a little; Lune sat up and tilted her head to a familiar angle, considering the prospect. After a moment, a smile curved her sculpted lips, and she gave him a merry look. “You mortal courtiers—always seeking advancement, honours, titles...”

“Your gold turns to leaves in the world above,” he said with a mock-apologetic bow. “I must have *something* to show for all my flattery and service.”

Lune’s merriment faded too quickly, but not to anger or melancholy. “’Tis a thought,” she admitted, “and a useful one, too. To make of this a political thing... wouldst be a faerie king, then?”

He hadn’t aimed that high, and she laughed to see the startlement on his face. “Prince, perhaps,” she suggested. “Enough to make you royal.”

And not enough to imply he stood above her. It was one of the reasons Elizabeth had never wed: few husbands would agree to the lesser position of consort, leaving their Queen-wives to rule the realm. But Deven had been a consort for decades, and did not mind. He said, “Prince *of* something? Not Wales, obviously; the Tylwyth Teg would not thank us for that. But it needs more than the bare word.” He pondered for a moment, then suggested, “Prince of the London Stone?”

Lune frowned. “I’d liefer keep that secret; ’tis too vital to the security of our realm.”

Vital was perhaps too mild a word for it; that unimpressive block was the heart of the Onyx Hall. She was right to keep it concealed. The sound of the phrase appealed to him, though. “Prince of the Stone,

then,” Deven amended. “Where the stone in question might be the onyx of the Hall.”

She repeated his words, as if tasting them. “It might do,” she said at last. “And some ceremony, to bestow it upon you; then you may bear it until another is found.”

Found, not prepared. No doubt Lune had already surveyed the prospects, even as he had, and deemed them lacking. Few mortals had any dealings with the Onyx Court, despite his and Lune’s efforts; even fewer of them knew it. The fae were slow to entrust their secrets, when iron and Christian faith could hurt them so badly. Of those who walked these halls freely, none, in Deven’s opinion, was fit to be his successor.

You are hardly an impartial judge, he reminded himself wryly. *No more than Lune*. Both their hearts were bound up in this matter, and to contemplate a change was painful.

But that was, after all, the point of doing it.

He made himself think. A gentleman, at the least—someone with political connections and influence, who could be of use to Lune. Politically aware, or capable of learning. Trustworthy enough to keep their secrets. And agreeable to Lune; she was no mortal Queen, forced to wed for the sake of alliance, with no regard for her inclination.

“I will look,” he promised her, lifting the slender hand once more to his lips. “In all of England, there must be one man I would trust to stand at your side.”

*These can lye,
Flatter, and sweare, forswear, deprave, informe,
Smile, and betray*

–I.i.27-9

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 2 June, 1625

“You suspect someone at court,” Lune said.

DEEDS OF MEN

“*This* court.” They stood alone in the bedchamber they shared, without even a sprite to attend them. Word would spread soon enough of Henry Ware’s death—Deven knew better than to assume Mungle would stay silent—but he would keep his suspicions hidden as long as he could. “’Twas no secret we groomed him to become Prince after me. And I can think of half a dozen ambitious to put their own favourites in his place—Aspell, Carline...”

She stilled in her pacing. Her composure rarely showed a flaw, even in private, even with him; whether it was the product of decades in this court, or simply her nature, Lune gave little outward sign of grief or guilt. But Deven knew it lay beneath the surface. Henry’s easy gift for friendship had worked as well among fae as mortals, and Lune felt the loss.

“A dangerous gamble,” she said at last. Her voice had gone distant, as it often did when she turned to politics—when she thought as a queen, instead of an elfin woman. “No certainty of success, even with Henry removed; I might choose a rival’s favourite. And if the murderer were discovered...”

But dangerous gambles were a beloved pastime in the Onyx Court. After all, the fae needed something to fill the endless ages of their lives. Under Invidiana’s rule, such treachery had been meat and drink to them; the habit of scheming had not yet died out, and now they lived under the gentler hand of Lune, who was less likely to execute them for it. A deadly pairing. And Deven had brought Henry within its reach.

“We shall have to see who puts their favourite forward now,” Lune said.

He pitied the faerie who did. Lune was not half so cruel as Invidiana, but neither was she gentle with those who treated mortals as disposable pawns. But her courtiers knew that. “If he’s clever,” Deven said, “he will wait, and let someone else invite your wrath.”

Lune said nothing in reply, but the twist of her mouth told him he was right.

Warming his hands at the fire, against the constant chill of the shadowed air, Deven wished for some more active way to uncover the author of this crime. As if hearing his thoughts, Lune said, "I doubt we will find any proof upon them—even if I wished to invite trouble by searching their chambers."

Faerie notions of private property were not so sacrosanct as among the mortal English, but they came close enough. "No," Deven said, hands hovering in mid-air, halted by inspiration. "We cannot track it that way. But we can begin with Henry—and follow *his* trail. Why was he in Coldharbour?"

Lune's eyes narrowed, and she sank upon a low stool, skirts billowing and then subsiding around her. "It holds no entrance to the Onyx Hall," she said. "Nor would he pass through it on his way to one. Was he coming from the river?"

The image of Henry's fallen body had graven itself upon Deven's memory, in every last detail. If Mungle was right about a swordfight, though, the young man's final position meant nothing. "Perhaps. But again—why Coldharbour? There are river stairs more convenient to wherever he might have been going, and safer, too."

"Then perhaps he was going *to* Coldharbour," Lune said, echoing Deven's own conclusion. "Fleeing his murderer, and hoping to lose him in the warren. Or following someone, or meeting. It could even have been bait for a snare."

It made the most sense of any possibility yet. Their courtly subjects rarely deigned to set foot in the muck of London's underbelly, but the more common folk, the goblins and pucks and hobs, found it just as interesting as the glittering amusements of the wealthy. And they sometimes worked for the courtiers.

Softly, Lune said, "I almost wish he had lingered. Then he might answer all our questions."

As a ghost. No one in the Onyx Hall could draw them out a-purpose, not any longer. A determined enough spirit, though, could

DEEDS OF MEN

make itself heard...and mortals who dealt with the fae were more likely to linger than most. But they had seen no sign of Henry's shade.

Lune permitted herself a single, heavy sigh, then rose again, once more composed. "I would help you if I could, but the French ambassador—"

She didn't have to finish the sentence. The Onyx Court's relations with the Cour du Lys had collapsed spectacularly some years before, and she was still trying to repair the damage. "You are busy enough," Deven said. "And that is not something I can help with much. But this is the death of a mortal, and falls to me regardless. In fact..."

He snapped his fingers in sudden thought, and Lune looked inquisitive. "Mortals," he said. "Henry may have said something to one of them, regarding Coldharbour. I will ask at court—the other one—and see if he said aught to his friends there."

*The first ascents to soveraigntie are hard;
But, entred once, there never wants or meanes,
Or ministers, to helpe th'aspirer on.*

—I.ii.294-6

ST. JAMES' PALACE, WESTMINSTER: 29 September, 1622

"You shall be retained to no person nor persons of what degree or condition by oath, livery, badge, promise, or otherwise, but only to his Grace, without his special license..."

Deven suppressed a yawn as the words of the oath were read out. He had heard them enough times to recite them backwards. The membership of the Gentlemen Pensioners changed but slowly; after decades of an old Queen and a peacemaker King, the days when those well-bred bodyguards faced the danger of battle were forgotten memory. But he was among the longest-serving of their number, now, and had

seen many younger men come and go.

It was one of the few things that made him feel old-looking at young pups like the one currently kneeling on the floor. *Was I that fresh-faced and eager? No doubt.* Henry Ware was younger than Deven had been when he swore the oath, scarce two and twenty, with a dreamer's eyes. He did not seem to care that he was entering an old man's court, with Scottish James more often ill than not. Or perhaps he was one of those who looked already to Prince Charles, and the heady possibility of war with Spain.

Scottish James. Another old man's thought. This boy had barely been out of swaddling clothes when Elizabeth died, ceding her crown to her cousin in the north. Young Ware would not remember a time when a Stuart did not sit the throne of England.

Which worried Deven. The years slipped away: nearly two of them, since Lune created him Prince of the Stone, and still no successor in sight.

And the need for one was real. His influence at James' court waned as the men he'd known succumbed to inevitable time, and he lacked a strong enough position to be a useful patron to the younger generation. Meanwhile the whispers continued, commenting on his unlikely vigour.

Lune needed a younger man, one who attracted less attention. One who could be of more use, in the court of a King who knew nothing of the fae and their aid.

Fortunately, his melancholy contemplations were interrupted. The oath-taking done, it was time for the feast. James had taught his court to drink deep, and while the Gentlemen Pensioners had not needed lessoning, they took the royal encouragement gladly. Soon Robert Penshaw was atop a table, roaring some song, a cup in one hand and the other around Henry Ware's shoulder, swinging him in a precarious circle.

Deven could have held his own against the younger men—or so he liked to believe—but he affected elderly moderation, keeping himself to

DEEDS OF MEN

a quiet corner and a careful cup of wine. The others were accustomed to it, and left him in peace. He was therefore surprised to look up from contemplation of his shoes and find someone standing before him.

It was young Ware, cheeks flushed with excitement and wine. "You are Sir Michael Deven," he said, in the bright tone of one who thinks he's far less inebriated than he is.

"And you are Henry Ware," Deven said, answering the boy's smile. "Congratulations on your achievement."

"Oh, it is no achievement," Ware said, moving to collapse next to him, then stumbling to a halt as he realised he had not been given leave to sit. Deven's grin grew broader, and he gestured the young man into the chair. *Before his feet up-end him.* "My father bought the place for me, is all. He is a baronet—Sir Robert Ware."

Deven knew the man, or else he might have snorted—an incautious habit he had never beaten out of himself. *Baronet.* A silly invention, but one that served its intended purpose; when the hereditary knighthoods were created and offered for sale, James had refilled his echoing coffers almost overnight. Of course, he had just gone on to empty them again, lavishing gifts on his favourites, but his beloved Duke of Buckingham kept finding ways to scrape together more coin.

Such as selling commissions in the Gentlemen Pensioners. But Deven did not begrudge young Ware his father's pretensions; Sir Robert was hardly the only wealthy London merchant to put his gold to use buying respectability. "Well," Deven said, "that is often how our brotherhood grows. 'Tis an advantageous place to be; if advancement at court is what you seek, your father has served you well."

Ware shook his head. "I am not ambitious."

There was no censure in his tone, only a strange thread of regret. Curious despite himself, Deven asked, "Then what do you seek?"

Ware's hand described a lazy arc in the air. He had long fingers, and seemed briefly mesmerised by them. "They say in the Spanish colonies there are great pyramids atop which the savages used to cut out human

hearts. In the Afric jungles, whole tribes of men grow no higher than my knee. In Cathay—

Amused, Deven said, "Adventure, then."

"Wonder," the young man answered fervently. "Something more than this familiar round."

If Deven's memory served, Sir Robert Ware had two sons, of which Henry was the elder. "So you bear the burden of your father's aspirations, while your younger brother has the freedom you desire."

"For all he values it." Ware let his head thump against the back of his chair, then rolled it sideways, regarding Deven with blurry intensity. "*He* will sit in Parliament someday, I warrant. But take ship for the New World? Never. He has no interest in wonder."

Not as young Henry did. Unless it was simply the wine talking—but Deven thought not.

A hearty roar went up from the far end of the chamber, along with a feminine squeal. Deven was accustomed to the sound, but for a moment he saw the scene through this pup's eyes: rowdy and artless, much given to coarse pleasures. Men liked to say it had been better in old Elizabeth's day; they said a great many charitable things about her, building an image that had more to do with what James was not than what his predecessor had been. But Deven might grant this one: for all her courtiers' diversions, they had not been reputed in the countryside as a pack of drunkards and sodomites, wasting their days and nights in endless and unChristian debauchery. It was exaggeration, of course—but only in part.

Or perhaps that is simply decades of the Onyx Court speaking, where the courtiers, at least, are refined to a fault.

His mouth quirked at the possibility—then shifted to a more thoughtful set. The Onyx Court: wonder enough to satisfy one Henry Ware.

He cast a sidelong glance at the young man. Ware's attention was elsewhere—or perhaps nowhere; he was hanging on to alertness with his

DEEDS OF MEN

finger-nails. He did not seem to notice the scrutiny.

Just because he was a dreamer did not mean he could be trusted. Deven had to be cautious of those he brought below; one frightened newcomer could threaten them all, betraying their secrets to hostile eyes. But if Ware proved reliable, then he would have the wonder he sought.

And he was a baronet's son, and a Gentleman Pensioner, positioned near the king. He might rise at court—if given a reason that appealed to him, more than simple ambition.

"Off your feet already? For shame! You drink like a woman, Henry." It was Penshaw, eyes glittering with wine. His insult brought young Ware lurching to his feet, sputtering denials, and Penshaw laughed. "Come prove it, then, or pay my forfeit. We are not done yet!"

That quickly, Henry Ware was gone, swallowed once more by the revelry. But he left Deven in thoughtful solitude, wondering if he had found his answer at last.

*Thy follies now shall taste what kinde of man
They have provok'd*

—II.ii.8-9

WHITEHALL PALACE, WESTMINSTER: *6 June, 1625*

The funeral was a private one; Henry Ware went to his rest in the churchyard of St. Nicholas with none but family in attendance. Deven visited his grave later and stood silent before it, thinking of the blessed rites the parson might have withheld, had he known the company Henry kept before his death.

Then he went west, out of the City to Westminster. King Charles was at Whitehall, awaiting word of his new bride, delayed by storms in France. The Gentlemen Pensioners attended him there, those who were

serving that duty period. Henry had been one such, and Robert Penshaw was another.

Deven found the man playing tennis, and not well; his shots kept going wild, as if he were paying little heed to the game. It reminded Deven that Henry had been a friend of his, too. When he accosted Penshaw after the match, he phrased his question as gently as he could. "You might know better than I—has there been any discovery of the murderer, that he might be brought to justice?"

Penshaw's face hardened into a mask, and he yanked his doublet straight before buckling his sword on once more. "No."

How old was the man? In his thirties, Deven guessed. Too old for his rash nature. If Penshaw knew anything, he would have charged off to pursue it already. Deven had to ask, though. "You spent as much time in Henry's company as I did, or even more; I am, after all, an old man, and not much for tennis or riding. Perhaps he would have told you what took him into Coldharbour."

The name drained the blood from Penshaw's face. "*Coldharbour?*"

"Yes," Deven said, startled. "That is where he was found. Did you not know?"

"I—I was told he—" Penshaw pulled himself together. "I was told he died in the City, but no more." His eyes might have been two stones. *Too rash*, Deven thought in dismay. *He will go on a rampage through the tenements, demanding answers.*

Certainly Penshaw had nothing of use for Deven. "I doubt 'twas significant," he lied. "Likely a wherryman left him off there, and he was to see his family. I'm told Henry asked for a few days' liberty from his duty."

Penshaw nodded, calming.

"Well, if you see his family, please pass along the compliments of my condolence. I know his father through the Guildhall, but he has not been there of late."

"I will," Penshaw said, and they parted ways.

DEEDS OF MEN

They had walked as they spoke, moving apart from the others; Deven was left in a deserted gallery, jaw clenched in frustration. Not the slightest shred of luck, and now he did not know what path to pursue. Henry had other friends, but none half so close as Penshaw. Who else knew him well?

“You are Sir Michael Deven.”

The words brought him up like a curb bit. The voice was so very like... Deven jerked around, half-expecting to see Henry’s ghost staring at him down this Whitehall gallery, translucent in the courtyard sunlight, asking why Deven had let him die.

It was not Henry. The jaw was too square, the nose too straight; the fingers on the hands were blunt and strong. But the voice, the hair, the eyes—they spoke a family resemblance too obvious to be missed. And on a boy young enough to deserve the name, they told Deven whom he faced.

“You must be Antony Ware,” he said, swallowing down his heart.

Henry’s younger brother stood stiff-legged, as if holding in some great emotion. Grief? Yes, but over it lay something else.

Anger.

Through his teeth, Antony Ware said, “You killed my brother, sirrah.”

The words struck like a knife to the heart: not the truth, but close enough to hurt. Deven tried to remember how old Antony was. Sixteen? No, seventeen. More than old enough to take worthy offence if Deven slipped up and called him boy. “Not I,” he said, as gently as he could. “Some cutpurse—”

Three swift strides devoured the space between them, putting the young man less than arm’s-length away. Deven almost reached for his sword, but checked the motion in time. Ware was armed, too, and angry enough to answer him in kind. “You did not wield the knife,” the young man said, his furious voice leashed so the words did not carry beyond the two of them. “But Henry’s dead because you lured him into

your foul and unnatural world.”

All the blood in Deven’s body congealed, ice-cold, in his feet. “H-how did you—”

“Learn of it? He told me, and begged my forgiveness before God for his sin.” Contempt and disgust warred in Ware’s expression. “I should have chained him to the wall before I let him return to you.”

Foul and unnatural. Deven wanted to protest the description; though the Onyx Court harboured creatures who merited it, the court as a whole was not so. Had Henry truly deemed it a sin? Or was that merely the judgment of Antony, the younger son, the practical one, who did not seek wonder as Henry had? Whatever conclusions the young man might have drawn while his brother still lived, they had undoubtedly been poisoned still further by his death.

For which he placed the blame rightly enough.

Deven swallowed down his guilt and forced himself to meet Ware’s eyes. “I never intended it to be so,” he said. “And had I realised the danger...” That other factions among the courtiers opposed Henry’s advancement, he knew—but not that they would go to such lengths to stop him. “All I can do now is find the one responsible for his death, and make that murderer pay.”

Ware scowled. He no longer looked like a boy; his anger befitted a man. As did his ability to control it: most young gentlemen would have called Deven out by now. But no, a duel would make this too public. And it seemed Ware, thanks be to both God and the powers of Faerie, was willing to keep the secrets of the Onyx Court.

For now.

“Do you expect,” Ware spat, “that finding the murderer will absolve you of your guilt?”

“No. But I will do it—I *must*—and will not rest until I do. After that...” Deven’s shoulders sagged. He could not offer this young man full satisfaction; he was Prince of the Stone, and staying alive was among his obligations. A duel would be too risky. “I will absent myself

DEEDS OF MEN

from here forevermore, and go into exile." Into the world below. He had already seen one king come and go; he lacked the will to face another. Someone else could find his successor.

The tension did not leave Ware's body, but it abated. "How will you catch him?"

I have no idea. But it wasn't true, and that slender thread of inspiration—and an even more slender thread of hope—made Deven say, "With your aid, if you will give it."

He did not expect any cooperation between them to erase Ware's hatred. It might not do any good at all. But if Deven could make even the smallest conciliation on behalf of the fae—if he could heal that wound to a scar, and lessen the chance that Ware would finish his vengeance by betraying them to the world—then he had to try.

Ware's jaw tightened, then released. For the first time, he looked uncertain. "I do not know what I could do."

"Follow me," Deven said.

On then, my soule, and start not in thy course

—II.ii.20

LONDON ABOVE AND BELOW: 26 April, 1623

"You're being exceedingly mysterious," Henry said, not quite succeeding at making it sound like a complaint.

Deven smiled. "You would sail halfway around the world to discover the mystic riches of the Orient—but begrudge me a little mystery?"

"We are standing in a dank and filthy alley, with a fine English spring about to gift us with cold rain on our heads. I have yet to see any riches justifying you drawing me away from Robin Penshaw's cards, let alone his excellent wine."

"If 'tis more drinking you'd prefer, we can abandon this and find a

tavern—" Deven made as if to go.

Henry's undignified yelp of protest turned his smile into a laugh. "No?" Deven asked, with a solicitous bow. "Then bind your eyes, and let me guide you on to wonder."

The young man accepted the kerchief Deven offered him. The alley they stood in *was* both dank and filthy, and moreover well-cloaked in night; a mind more fearful than Henry's could easily populate the shadows with cutpurses and goblins. But there was no risk of the former, and no need to imagine the latter: a goblin *did* lurk in concealment, both to defend the Prince of the Stone, and to help with Henry Ware should all not go as planned.

Deven hoped the watching goblin would not have to earn his keep. Henry had proven a ready audience for tales of faeries and enchantment—though Lune had sighed in disgust when she learned Deven had given the young man both Spenser's poem and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Neither was anything like a faithful model for the court below—in fact, Lune had encouraged the *Dream's* frivolity, as an antidote to the cruelty of her predecessor's rule—but they were useful for what they showed him of Henry. And what Deven saw in the young man was exactly what that first encounter suggested. He would not run, nor lash out in fear, when he saw the truth Deven had hinted at all this time.

Or so Deven hoped.

Henry had covered his eyes. Taking him by the elbow, Deven led his friend around a corner, the goblin following silently. Ahead lay a steep set of steps, and at their base a door, which let onto a dark cellar. Henry, unsteady and blind, relied on Deven's grip. And then the cellar was a cellar no more, and they stood in an antechamber of the Onyx Hall.

It might be better to unbind Henry's eyes there, allowing him to take in the strangeness of the faerie palace before he saw anything more—especially with the wine in him. But Deven, thinking of poetry,

DEEDS OF MEN

and of his friend's character, held to the plan he had developed with Lune: he led Henry onward, still blindfold, and let the goblin go before them to clear their path.

Henry knew something had changed. Deven heard it in the way his breath caught, in the wary caution of his footfalls. The man could hardly overlook it; the very air felt different here, cool and dark, without the damp mustiness of the cellar. Soon enough they were in a narrow passage—not one of the public ways of the Onyx Hall, but a hidden corridor, one of many he and Lune had discovered in their realm. It terminated in a bronze-bound door, which the goblin opened for them, and beyond lay the chamber where Lune waited.

She smiled at Deven, easing his nerves a little. There was wonder aplenty in this chamber, with the silver-and-midnight figure of Lune and the ceiling showing the alignment of the hidden stars above—enough, or too much?

The time had come to find out. And if Deven had chosen poorly, then they must fog Henry's memory, and return him to the mortal world, and hope they had not jeopardised the security of this realm.

Deven steeled his nerves, and unbound Henry's eyes.

From her seat beneath a small canopy of estate, the faerie Queen of the Onyx Court said, "Be welcome to our halls, Henry Ware, and may you find what you seek here."

Henry stared at her for ten drunken, agonising heartbeats, without making a single sound—then collapsed in a faint.

*He that, with such wrong mov 'd, can beare it through
With patience, and an even mind, knowes how
To turne it backe.*

—I.ii.316-8

LONDON ABOVE AND BELOW: 6 June, 1625

With Henry, he had taken every precaution he could; with Antony, he took almost none.

There seemed little point. Deven did not know, and feared to ask, exactly what Henry had disclosed to his brother—the location of the Onyx Hall? Its entrances? But Antony Ware would never abide the kind of secrecies employed before, and from his brief dealings with the young man, Deven suspected honesty would serve him better than any amount of hedging.

He said only, “You have my oath to God that those I am about to lead you among intend you no harm, and that furthermore, should they offer any, I will hazard my own life to protect yours. In exchange, I would ask—but ask only—that you offer no violence in return. We do not go for your brother’s murderer, for we do not yet know who he is; those you will see are allies, who may be able to aid us in our search.”

Ware’s lip curled in disgust. “What value lies in the sworn word of one such as you?”

Henry had said once that his brother was not a passionately religious man. Deven still believed it; the question did not sound like the doubt of a godly Puritan, but rather the distrust of a grieving soul. Nor was it surprising: given the antipathy Christian things held for the fae, Ware might well doubt Deven’s oath.

As security, all he could offer was his own grief. “I have already lost Henry. If only for his sake, I would not endanger you.”

The young man gritted his teeth, but nodded at last.

Deven took him to the St. Nicholas Shambles, by Newgate, for it was among the least alarming choices; he did not want to see Ware’s reaction to being swallowed by the alder tree entrance. It was the same route by which Henry had come, two years before, and if any sympathy could attach to Antony by following in his brother’s footsteps, Deven welcomed it.

Lune would not approve. Not in the slightest. But for thirty-five years, authority over the mortal affairs of the Onyx Court had been

DEEDS OF MEN

Deven's to wield. He rarely acted on his own, any more than Lune determined faerie matters without consulting him—but this once, he had to gamble.

They crossed the dirt floor of the cellar, and between one step and the next it shifted from dirt to marble, and the black walls of the Onyx Hall.

“What the devil?” Ware exclaimed, and steel rasped across leather as he pulled his sword free.

Deven turned to face him—slowly, with his hands relaxed at his sides. He knew better than to startle an armed man. Any more than he had already. “There is no threat to you here, Master Ware. Eat and drink nothing, of course; faerie food does have its effect, just as the stories say. But Henry was not the only mortal to come among them, nor am I. You are a stranger here, and for that they may stare and whisper—but they respect my title, and will not trouble anyone I bring with me.”

Antony stood wide-eyed through this entire speech, and Deven was not certain the boy had absorbed more than one word in three. Had Henry said anything of Deven's title? Likely not, but now was not the time to explain. Gently, Deven said, “Will you sheathe your sword?”

For a moment he thought Ware would refuse. Then Antony blinked, like a man coming out of a waking dream, and put the blade away. His face had the obvious rigidity of a mask, as if he refused to let anyone see further astonishment from him. It was one thing to know of the fae, but another entirely to step into their world.

And their world alone was strange enough. Neither weight nor a shortage of funds bound the ceilings to the earth; they curved upward in pointed arches, sometimes ornamented, sometimes austere stone. Deven, seeing the palace through Ware's eyes, cringed a little at the ever-present black, which gave their surroundings an ominous cast. But his true apprehension was reserved for the court's faerie subjects: with no goblin to clear their path, and Deven leading Ware by public ways, they could not go far without encountering someone.

He exhaled in relief when it came. *A lubberkin—could be worse.* The creature was dwarfish, and its joints might have been assembled by an apprentice who had not heeded his model, but its wide face was more comical than intimidating. “My lord,” the lubberkin said, and bowed to let Deven pass.

He saw the puck note Ware with a narrowing of the eyes. *’Twill be all over the Hall before the hour is up.* The fae were terrible gossips.

It would not slow the rumours any, but Deven said, “Bear word to the Queen that I crave her company in my study.” Better that than dragging young Ware into the presence chamber, or the night garden, or wherever else Lune might be at this hour.

The lubberkin bowed again and ran. “’Tis not much farther,” Deven said to his guest, embroidering the truth only a little, for reassurance.

For the first time since his exclamation, Ware spoke. “Anne of Denmark has lain dead these six years. And Henrietta Maria, though wed, is not yet crowned.” His throat shifted, and then he said, “You meant some other.”

“I did,” Deven agreed. “A gracious and gentle lady, who holds as her foremost concern the well-being of the mortals of England. If she be not in conference with some adviser or ambassador, you will see her soon.”

Yes, he thought, watching Ware take in those words, they have their advisers and ambassadors. They are not so different after all.

Which was a lie. There *were* differences, and they could be profound indeed. But better for young Ware that he should see kinship, not foreignness.

They reached the relative security of Deven’s study. The only faerie there was his servant Podder, a hob scarce as tall as Ware’s hip, and ugly as old leather; he had prepared the room, setting out chairs by the fire, and pouring two cups of wine. Deven’s own stock, taken from the world above, and safe for any mortal to drink. But he hardly expected Ware to believe that, and so he waved the hob away, wine and all.

DEEDS OF MEN

Fast as Podder must have run, to reach the chamber before them, he scarcely outpaced Lune. She entered before Deven could even begin considering how to fill the silence, and she came in alone. Of course: the lubberkin could not have failed to recognise the family resemblance, and Lune knew enough of Henry to guess what that meant.

She was not in formal apparel, but she still made an impressive enough sight, with opals and sea's tears in her slender coronet, and the smooth gait that made her seem an airy being, hardly physical at all. Ware stared at her. After ten heartbeats he was still on his feet. The silence stretched out for another ten, Deven reluctant to break it with the customary words of courtesy, until Ware at last said, "I will not bow to you."

Human royalty, raised in the assurance of privilege, might have been offended; Lune's pride was not so fragile. "You are welcome among us, Master Ware, whether you bend knee or not. I am sorry for the loss of your brother."

"What was he to you?"

Honest sorrow tinged Lune's voice as she said, "Our hope of the future. Henry was two years among us: more than enough time to call him friend."

The sorrow was calculated, but not contrived; Lune could lower the mask of her composure when it served her purpose. And the gentle note of her grief might temper Ware's defensive hostility. But not immediately, for the young man said, "And what price that friendship? What did he surrender to you?"

"Nothing," Lune said, spreading her gloved hands. "We laid no snare for him, Master Ware. He came and went freely. We only gave him what he desired: a source of wonder in his life."

The young man glared at her. "So too would the Devil speak."

Deven winced. "We took nothing from Henry—if you like, I will swear that, too, with a holy book beneath my hand. But not here, where it would cause her Grace much pain." Lune had undoubtedly swallowed

a bite of mortal bread before entering the room, in case she needed its protection, but Ware need not know that.

"Swear rather to give me his murderer," Ware said violently. "Or was that merely the bait to lure me, as your promises of wonder did him?"

"No bait." It was like speaking to a growling dog: a level voice, no sudden movement, and always watching to see if the dog would bite. Deven wondered if Lune had guards outside the chamber, in case Ware's hostility turned to action. "'Tis a player's trick I have in mind—but it may work, with your aid. Tell me: do you think you could counterfeit Henry's manner? His carriage, his habits of speech?"

He expected Lune to see where he struck; what surprised him was the speed with which Ware arrived at the same conclusion. "You think to deceive the guilty party, by the imposture of his ghost. But I am not so like him as to be mistaken for such."

"And so we have come here," Deven said. "By faerie arts, you can be given the appearance of your brother, and you have the familiarity necessary to carry it off. There are two most likely of guilt—not themselves murderers, but who would have given the order. With her Majesty's aid, we can contrive instances for them to encounter you here, and thereby provoke from them some sign."

It worked in plays. Deven had some hope it would work here. The dead were a familiar thing to the fae, who discoursed with them on All Hallow's Eve; the guilty courtier would be unlikely to blurt out a confession at the sight of a ghost. But they needed no confession, only a hint to guide them in the right direction.

Young Ware was still struggling with the notion of letting a faerie lay any charms upon him. Lune said, "The Prince and I will spare no effort in this endeavour, nor flinch to punish the guilty, once found. Murder of any kind is abhorrent to me, and the murder of a mortal ally, doubly so; but Henry's death goes far beyond that. We must ensure this does not happen again."

The boy's attention returned to her, and for the first time Deven

DEEDS OF MEN

noticed what he should have seen from the start: that Antony Ware met Lune's gaze without flinching. Her eyes might have been two new-minted shillings, a pure silver never seen among humans, and most mortals found their shine disconcerting. If Ware shared that apprehension, he showed no sign of it.

Instead he asked, "And the price for this?"

"None," Deven said, knowing no sensible human would believe it from a faerie. "Nor any consequence to you afterward. Think of it as paint, such as an actor wears upon the stage. Once washed off, it is gone forevermore."

Ware's body had tensed again, as when first he confronted Deven, with his hands curled tight into fists. But this time, the cause was not anger: he stood as a man at a precipice, nerving himself for the leap.

"Do it, then," Antony Ware said. "For my brother."

Arr. *A riotous youth,*

There's little hope of him.

Sab. *That fault his age*

Will, as it growes, correct.

—I.i.106-8

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 29 July, 1623

Henry's laughter bubbled out of him, his cards momentarily forgotten. "You cannot be serious. Immortal creatures, the very air they breathe the stuff of enchantment—and they care what drunkard James and his ministers do?"

"Not all," Deven said, gesturing for his friend to continue the game. "But her Majesty, yes, and many of those she keeps about her. Less for the King and his ministers, in their own persons; I think what personal loyalty Lune felt died with Elizabeth." For a myriad of reasons, he

suspected, ranging from the kinship of one Queen for another, to the simple fact that Elizabeth had been English. “They shape the fate of England, though, and for that she cares a great deal.”

“But she does not live in England,” Henry pointed out. He made a careless discard, then sank back into his chair. “She has her own realm—and you yourself speak of *worlds*, this one separate from ours.”

He was not entirely wrong. They sat in one of the Onyx Hall’s smaller gardens, surrounded by a careful pattern of tulips, ordinary flowers alternating with stranger breeds from other faerie realms. The mortal flowers, lovely as they were, sat motionless; the faerie blooms gently flexed their petals in the still air. They did not hail from the same soil, and it showed.

Deven said, “Not separate. The fae have more distant realms, to which that word might be applied; when a story or song tells of a man riding to Elfland, or a mariner coming upon a strange island in the sea, that is Faerie itself. But the hollow hills, and the hidden glens, and this palace here—those stand adjacent to our own land. The Onyx Hall *is* part of England; ’tis London’s shadow.

“And that has a certain consequence. The roots of Lune’s sovereignty lie in this place, but I have often suspected that even her ordinary subjects feel a similar bond. They rarely travel, you know.”

“But they have ambassadors, you tell me.”

He smiled. “I said *rarely*, not *never*. It may well be that those fae who crave a change of place volunteer themselves for such tasks; I have never asked. And, of course, those who dwell in this court once came here from somewhere else.”

Henry grinned as he pondered Deven’s most recent move. “Like rural knights, coming to London for Parliament, but always pining for their country homes.”

“Worse,” Deven said, feelingly. “We humans are nothing on the fae for such attachment.” Strangers had arrived in the years following Lune’s accession, curious about her new ways; thirty years on, many of

DEEDS OF MEN

them still spoke as if they were only visiting. Once converted, though, they were steadfast.

“So they care what happens to England because they’re connected to it?”

Also because it gives them a game to play—one that endlessly changes. “They helped thwart the Armada, back in Elizabeth’s day,” Deven said, studying his cards. “And the Duke of Buckingham is not the only one providing James and his ministers with reports on the situation in Spain, these endless negotiations over Charles’ wife.”

Henry made a sound of disgust. “Buckingham. He will *sink* those negotiations, right when they should have been concluded.”

It was the popular opinion, but also uninformed. “Spain has no intention of concluding anything—not until the Second Coming or Charles’ conversion to papistry, and I know which one they hope to see first. Buckingham is the Prince’s steadfast shield against the seductive arguments of the priests. And Spain, in the meantime, is doing its best to ignore the question of the war in the Palatinate, and James’ pleas for aid to help the Elector regain his throne there.”

Henry’s eyes widened, and for a second time the cards were entirely forgotten. “But without that aid, what do we gain from taking a Catholic viper to our bosom?”

“Very little,” Deven admitted. He laid down his cards and reached for the wine. “If this marriage collapses, we may be the better for it—save that Charles is twenty-two and yet unmarried, with his father ailing, and the succession not secured beyond that single heir.” Dangerous words; in the world above, to speak of the King’s death—even as a possibility—could be accounted treason. But Deven had not steered the conversation in this direction out of mere idleness.

Valentin Aspell had a mortal client in the Onyx Hall, the bastard son of a baron; Lady Carline had her own candidate. And they were not the only ones putting men in Lune’s path. But in two and a half years of searching, Deven had not found anyone he favoured more to succeed

him than Henry Ware.

The young man wasn't perfect. Henry was politically naïve; he took most of his opinions from the likes of Robert Penshaw, who was more than happy to influence an impressionable mind. Lune depended upon Deven—upon the Prince of the Stone—to keep her informed of the mortal court and its doings, and that required a mind that would not be swayed by every eloquent gentleman who opened his mouth.

But Henry had his own merits. He had a good place at court, and—thanks to his father's wealth and connections—every chance to rise higher. He also made friends easily, both here and in Westminster, which laid solid foundations for alliance.

And Lune enjoyed his company.

That last consideration, perhaps more than any other, persuaded Deven. *If I must contemplate surrendering my place to another, I would rather it not be the cut-throat protégés the others put forward.* He could trust Henry to have a care, not just for England, but for Lune's happiness.

The politics could be learned. *That* could not.

Now Deven was the one neglecting his cards and the ongoing game. "If her Grace would help England," Henry said, apparently oblivious to his distraction, "then she should contrive Buckingham's downfall. He is corrupt beyond the telling of it—and who can say what he has been whispering in Charles' ear, while they gambol about Europe?"

"Lune can," Deven answered him, grinning. "Her knight Sir Adenant is among their train."

Henry's eyes widened. "A faerie knight—riding with the heir to England's crown?"

"Not that any among them know. 'Tis a risk," Deven acknowledged. "Lune sent him with a goodly supply of bread, but Charles and Buckingham have been in Spain long months now—far more than anticipated. Adenant has been forced to negotiate with the Spanish fae for protection, at no little cost to this court. But Charles is, as you say,

DEEDS OF MEN

the heir. If he insists on being mad enough to put himself into Spain's hands, she must do what she can to protect him."

Fingers playing over the petals of a faerie tulip, Henry mused this over. "They say he *is* mad, for love of the Infanta."

As mad as any twenty-two-year-old man might be, unwed and constrained by both position and personal inclination from the kind of dalliances that might dull the edge of his desire. "Enough to leap a garden wall, at least, for a glimpse of his promised wife. But the journey itself? 'Twas a matter of diplomacy, more than passion. Charles went—and James allowed him to go—because they hoped it might tip the balance, pushing Spain into agreement."

Henry snorted, and that was comment enough.

"And now they keep him," Deven said. "The latest word is that he will depart at the end of August; Lune hears a great many disturbing things about the promises the Spanish offer, to keep Charles there without Buckingham at his side, but neither man has much trust for such promises any longer. As for your original point..." He had to smile, ruefully. "I have no great love for Buckingham, but his corruption is of the same sort found in every great lord and minister; his venality differs only in degree, not kind. And, no doubt, 'tis hated in greater proportion because he began so low. But he is beloved of both James and Charles, which promises a modicum of stability that will serve England well, when that day of transition must come."

"That's what worries me," Henry muttered. "He is *too* beloved, of James in particular. No man who is not King should have such a voice in the governance of a realm."

Except, perhaps, a Prince. Would this work, when the time came? Would Lune be able to rule alongside a man she did not love? For as much as Lune found Henry pleasing, Deven knew it went no further than friendship.

It had to work. Lune might not be a mortal Queen, forced to wed for the sake of alliance, but in the end it might come to the same thing.

She needed a Prince, someone to speak for the world above. It was not so different from Charles' marriage, after all.

Henry fingered his cards, hesitating, before finally laying them down. Deven displayed his own hand, and his friend sighed in defeat.

No, not perfect. But Henry could learn. He had already begun. And Deven was more than willing to teach him, for the sake of both Lune and the Onyx Court.

*For, night hath many eies,
Whereof, though most doe sleep, yet some are spies.*
—V.iv.70-1

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 8 June, 1625

Steam veiled the bathing chamber, wafting up from the salamander-heated water, such that Lady Carline did not see the pale figure until it was nearly upon her.

She yelped in surprise, setting the water to sloshing, but gave an impatient sigh when she saw the figure properly. "Of course you would linger," she said to the ghost, in the tone of one not expecting a reply. "I wonder if his lordship troubled to mention it, that you might end up as some wretched shade. Well, along with you; whatever message you bear, I have no interest in it." She settled her head against the pool's rim, muttering under breath, "I would we had that Eurydice creature still, to dispose of these remnants."

Had the lady been attending, she would have seen a nonplussed expression cross the spectre's face. Deven, watching from concealment, suppressed a smile. After a moment's hesitation, the ghost of Henry Ware drifted away, soundless on the stone floor.

Deven pulled him aside just before a servant came through to wait upon Carline, and together they slipped out while the two were

DEEDS OF MEN

distracted. Still wearing his brother's deathly seeming, Antony Ware said, "I would never have believed a person could dismiss a ghost so easily."

"She isn't a person; she's a faerie." Deven wiped steam from his face and said, "She did not look guilty to me."

"Nor to me. The ladies here intrigue with such venom, that you would suspect her?"

"They see little reason why human notions of womanly behaviour should affect them, unless they wish it. After all, what holy book commands *them* to propriety?"

For all that this masquerade had been his own idea, it disturbed Deven to look at the illusory face of Henry. And he could not decide which was worse: when Antony behaved as himself, incongruous with his appearance, or when he adopted the mannerisms of his brother. He did the latter unnervingly well.

Antony shifted uncomfortably, as if trying to settle a doublet that kept binding across the shoulders. "How many do you intend to test?"

As many as I must. But he couldn't parade Antony in front of every courtier and subject in the realm; sooner or later someone would notice the illusion. "One more," Deven said, "that I think a likely suspect. If that yields us nothing, we must consider our next move. Come, before someone sees you."

The passage they entered was a secret one, and little more than a cramped tunnel, which they traversed on their hands and knees. Lune had arranged for it to be cleaned, at least, so they would not emerge filthy on the other end. Though it ran straight enough, the path it followed obeyed no mortal geometry; despite the stair they had climbed to reach the opening, Deven knew they were passing below several chambers. And when they reached the far end—

Antony gasped when he saw what lay before them. "I hope you do not fear the height," Deven said.

The young man shook his head, though his eyes were wider than

usual. "But how are we to get down? I have no wings."

Deven's throat tightened with unexpected tears. The chamber before them was called the Vault of Birds, a soaring space punctuated by columns, arches, bridges, and platforms, an aerial maze built for play. The first time he saw it, and the flying fae who gambolled there, Henry had asked if he, too, could be given wings.

The Vault was empty now, by Lune's design. "There are handholds," Deven said, once his voice was steady. "And a bit of a path, that will take us much of the way without climbing."

It was still a heart-stopping experience, and by the time they were done he suspected Antony's true face was pale. But the young man breathed not a word of complaint, and followed Deven silently out the triple archway on one side of the chamber, before ducking into a cramped room whose door was invisible in the black wall.

The hidden closet was too small for furniture; one chair, with a man sitting in it, would have left scarcely enough space for the other to stand. But it stood near the chambers of Valentine Aspell, Lune's Lord Keeper and the other likely murderer, and so Antony slid down the wall to the floor, folding his legs to leave room for Deven to sit as well. "These suspects," he said abruptly. "The ones who may have ordered my brother's death. Why them? Or rather, why *him*?"

As awkward as it would be to share the floor with the young man, looming over him would be worse. Deven crouched in the remaining space, ruing that even faerie-bestowed youth could not make his knees happy. "Patronage. I favoured Henry for a position, and those I suspect had their rival clients. This court was once a murderous place indeed, and not all, I fear, have fallen out of such habits."

The young man brooded upon this for a moment, then said, "*Your* position. Am I right?"

"How did you guess?"

"A tiredness in your manner," Antony said. "As if you had a burden you thought to lay down, but now must carry a while longer."

DEEDS OF MEN

And that was true enough. It was not so much that Deven minded his responsibilities as Prince of the Stone; they were part of what he shared with Lune. But the need to find a successor weighed heavily upon him, and more so now that Henry was lost.

"What *are* you?" Antony asked. "She called you the Prince. That... Queen did."

"Her mortal consort," Deven answered him. "I am her love, and she is mine, but no man can inherit that bond. What I mean to pass on is my role in her court. Lune assists mankind where and as she can—particularly as it concerns politics—but she needs one of us to advise her how best to do that. And I will not be with her forever. I was educating Henry to follow me."

"Henry!" It was a startled exclamation, all the more jarring because it seemed to come from the young man himself, ghost-pale in the dim light. "Since when did he care for such matters?"

Deven's reply was soft with sorrow. "Since he came among us."

Antony, it seemed, had no answer to that, for they waited in silence until a scratch came at the door.

Opening it, Deven found a figure outside, twig-like and scarcely larger than his hand, with bat-wings of mere gossamer. "He approaches?" Deven asked, and the creature nodded, before taking off into the air.

Antony rose with the ease of the young. Already they heard footsteps; Deven gestured for the young man to conceal himself to one side of the entrance into the Vault of Birds, and stepped back into his own hidden chamber, leaving the door cracked the merest sliver, and the light inside extinguished.

The footsteps passed him and then paused. And then came a voice that nearly stopped Deven's heart.

"Well, young master! Not entirely dead after all, I see."

A chilling rasp—not the sibilant elegance of Valentin Aspell. A voice Deven knew, and Antony did not, because he knew almost nothing of

the fae, and did not know the creature he had accosted was not their target, but a fetch.

As Deven fought with himself, whether to stay hidden or to leap out in Antony's defence, the fetch went on. "Did you learn—" But then more footsteps echoed down the passage, and the words cut off. A whisper, almost too quiet to hear: "*This way.*"

Clenching his hands, swallowing down the curses he wanted to spit, Deven stayed where he was. The newcomer approached his hiding spot. The instant he was past, Deven slipped out, and saw Valentin Aspell crossing the Vault of Birds, a minion in tow. Antony was nowhere in sight.

They could not have gone down the passage, not with Aspell there. With a silent prayer, Deven chose a direction at random, dodging into the forest of columns that filled the soaring chamber. If Antony Ware died of this—

He rounded a thick pillar and found himself face-to-face with the fetch.

"Why, my lord Prince," Nithen said, and gave him an ironic bow. "I didn't think *you* would be behind this game. Did you think a glamour would fool me long—me, who calls death a personal friend?"

Behind him stood a sheepish Antony. No fear in his eyes; he did not understand Nithen's words. "The ruse was not intended for you," Deven told the fetch.

"Ah—for the one behind me, I'm guessing." Nithen's eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Who's your friend, then? I'd like to see his face."

"You shall not." Now Henry's face protected Antony. Surely it would not be an omen of death, if the fetch took on the appearance of a young man already gone. Deven said, "Those words you spoke, before you fled. You know something of Henry Ware's death."

Nithen bowed again, fawning. "Not *I*, my lord. My hand to my heart—I bore no such omen to him."

Now Antony was beginning to understand. He backed a step away.

DEEDS OF MEN

“I am not accusing you of murder,” Deven said, leaving open the possibility that he might accuse Nithen of other crimes. “But what of the days before Henry’s death? ‘Did you learn’—what might he have learned?”

The fetch squirmed, not meeting his eyes. “Oh, a great many things, my lord—he was a curious young man, seeking knowledge here, in Westminster—”

“—and in Coldharbour? If you prefer, we can go before her Grace, and *she* will compel you to tell me what you know.” Deven folded his arms. “Or we can do it without troubling her.”

No courtier, mortal or fae, wanted that sort of attention from his sovereign. Nithen sighed. “He bade me follow a man one night. Went to a house in Coldharbour, the fellow did, and that’s all I know—save that young Ware wanted to know what he was about. Which I couldn’t tell him.”

Antony gave a minute shake of his head; it meant nothing to him, either. “Who was the man?” Deven asked.

The fetch shrugged. “Some mortal. Well-dressed, neither old nor young. I don’t attend much to who they are, unless death walks at their heels.”

A mortal. Nithen would know had it been any of the favourites at court, and Deven did not think he was lying. Some stranger—but not to Henry.

“Which house?” Antony asked.

Nithen snorted. “They don’t have signs down among the tenements, Master Wearing-Another’s-Face. Go west three alleys from where they found his corpse, face the end, last house on your left. There was a dead dog on the front step when I was there, but I expect someone’s eaten that by now.”

Coldharbour. They had missed confronting Aspell—but this would gain them more than any number of ghostly ambushes, for it could tell them what Henry had been doing above.

A single glance at Antony told Deven which course the young man favoured.

“Very well,” he said to Nithen. “If you tell anyone of this–”

Nithen gave him an ingratiating bow. “Say no more, milord. I shall be silent as the grave.” Grinning at his own jest, the fetch departed.

Antony twitched like a man desperate to be rid of an uncomfortable garment. “Get this enchantment off me, and show me the way back above.”

*The prince, who shames a tyrannes name to beare,
Shall never dare doe any thing, but feare*

–II.ii.40-1

WHITEHALL PALACE, WESTMINSTER: 1 March, 1624

“God’s blood!” Henry exploded, hurling his unlit pipe to the floor. “How can the King *think* of it? How can he listen to more promises from the Spanish? After that farce in Madrid last year, and all the reports from the Prince and the duke, about the duplicity of the Spanish–”

Deven answered him in a single word. “Peace.”

“The whole point of the Spanish match was to gain us help for *war* in the Palatinate!”

Perhaps more than a single word was needed, after all. “Peace with *Spain*. Whom James views in a friendly light, as he has always been wont to do.”

Henry opened his mouth to reply, but stopped himself. The young man was learning to chart the winds of these storms; what he still struggled with was remembering to do so *before* he gave his mouth free rein. Deven waited, patiently, not prompting him with any clues. How much had Henry learned?

DEEDS OF MEN

"The Commons," the young man said at last. "James had to call a Parliament if he were to have any coin at all for war, in the Palatinate or otherwise—but the Commons would rather see us fight Catholic Spain. A war of religion, against an old enemy."

"Whereas James," Deven finished for him, "wants only to restore the Elector Palatine to his dominion in the Germanies—mostly for the sake of his daughter. Were she not wed to the Elector, this would be a much smaller matter."

"But Buckingham is on the side of the Commons, is he not? Against Spain."

"Not quite." Deven kept sparse quarters here in Whitehall Palace, liking his ability to claim a room, but not often bothering to occupy it. The furnishings, however, did include a chess board. He fought the urge to place a piece in front of Henry and ask him to list the players in the question of Charles' marriage, and the Palatine war. "Buckingham sees, not states, but something else. The Habsburgs."

Henry paled. "Spain—and Austria."

"And anywhere else they have extended their influence. Which is much too far, and that is why Buckingham hopes to check them."

"Hence courting France," his friend said, comprehension dawning. "They can be Catholic all they like, so long as their sovereign is not a Habsburg. Though isn't his Queen of that house?"

Deven scratched behind his ear, grimacing. "Yes, Anne of Austria. Sister to King Philip of Spain. Round and round the kinship goes, and that is why Buckingham fears the House of Habsburg. Henrietta Maria, by virtue of being Louis' sister, is clean of that taint—and if this French match Buckingham desires goes through, it will bind France into alliance with England. First for the Palatinate, and then, perhaps, for more."

Henry's breath blew out in a long, impressed sigh. Then he said, "No wonder James quails."

"Precisely." The Scottish King had always been a peacemaker,

detesting war; it must be a bitter pill indeed, in his old age, to see Europe crumbling into chaos, the Protestant corners of the Holy Roman Empire against those that remained Catholic.

Deven let Henry consider it in peace, rising to stoke the fire against the day's damp chill. The young man knew the details of the Armada's defeat; he might well wonder what aid the fae could lend, if it came to war against half of Europe. That was the question Deven and Lune had debated for many long hours, with no answer offering even a semblance of satisfaction.

But when Henry spoke again, he chose quite a different tack. "This marriage with France, Buckingham's attempts to ally with the Dutch—all of it will come to nothing if James crawls back to Spain's empty promises."

"Buckingham will convince him," Deven said. "That worrisome influence does have its uses."

"Enough to bring James to war with Spain? And Austria, too? I have not known him as long as you, but Robin says he will never turn on them, not after so many years of seeking alliance."

Penshaw might well be right. Spain was too canny to give James serious offence, of the sort that would drive him to war. And the King was ailing, his good days fewer and further apart. What old man would accept the death of the policy to which he had dedicated his life, so close to that life's end?

Charles was another matter. Here in Whitehall, Deven dared not speak openly of the succession, but he said, "The Prince has begun to feel his strength, since returning from Spain, and he is more of Buckingham's mind."

"Good," Henry said feelingly, and Deven thought, *he is young*. Henry, like Penshaw, like many of the Gentlemen Pensioners, wanted a war. Against Spain, for preference, but they would take what they could get, so long as there was glory to be had. James' peace had lasted too long for their taste.

DEEDS OF MEN

But it seemed Henry was thinking closer to home. “So what can we do?”

“We?” Deven asked, unsure who he was including in the word.

“You more than me, I suppose. To push matters in the direction they need to go. Isn’t that your responsibility? To do things on behalf of...a certain lady?”

Lune. Henry had not needed reminders to be discreet, when outside the Onyx Hall. “To consult with her,” Deven corrected him. Then he grinned. “Mind you, when I was a younger man, I indulged in my share of action—running across rooftops, lying to astrologers, and generally risking my neck. But I am old and sedate now, if not precisely wiser.”

Scandalised, his friend said, “You are not old.”

The grin turned into a laugh. “Flattery never loses its appeal. But I am happy to leave such vigorous pursuits to younger men, I assure you. Regardless, the time has not come for me to do anything. England cannot go to war without allies, and the Dutch are not enough. If you want to take action, then pray with me that nothing provokes us against Spain before we have France on our side.”

Henry looked faintly disappointed, but he nodded. Deven breathed an inward sigh of relief. *You have years before you, my young friend. Do not race to meet a war that will come to us soon enough.*

*A man factious, and dangerous,
A sower of sedition in the state,
A turbulent, and discontented spirit*

–III.i.380-2

COLDHARBOUR, LONDON: 9 June, 1625

The tenements that crouched where once the great house of Coldharbour had stood were, despite Nithen’s words, not quite so desperate a place that their inhabitants resorted to the eating of dogs.

But neither were they civilised enough that anyone had bothered to move the carcass; it still rotted on the doorstep of the building the fetch had named, adding its reek to the general foulness of the air.

It was obvious, long before they reached the alley in question, that Antony Ware had never been in any part of London half so poor. The boy looked appalled—and it was a good thing, Deven reflected, that he was not the sort of young gallant who gave the City and Court a reputation for excess in apparel, or he would make of himself even more of a target than his manner already did.

The awareness of that danger had delayed their investigation a day, while Deven secured a guide and guard. He and Ware were both armed, but could use someone to watch their backs, and Mungle knew this area well. Without the bogle, Deven might spend half the day finding his way back to the right alley.

“That the house?” their goblin guide asked, jerking one thumb at the door.

Deven peered around the corner and nodded. “I believe so.” *If Nithen did not lead us astray.*

“Now what?” Antony murmured, shifting with unease. They could hear voices through the thin walls of the buildings, but stood alone in the mud of the lane, the jettied upper storeys almost blocking out the sky overhead. “I hardly imagine we can knock on the door and ask who has visited of late.”

Mungle gave an ostentatious sigh, puffing out his chest. Even disguised, he made an ugly man; he considered it a great insult to his kind to put on a more handsome face. And in a parish like this, where few could afford the services of a doctor, his deformities stood out less than either of the two gentlemen. “You’d break your well-born legs, like as not, trying to sneak in by the roofs. I’ll go—but I want bread. A whole loaf.”

“I can’t give you that,” Deven said, astonished.

“*He* can.” Mungle jerked his twisted thumb again, this time at

DEEDS OF MEN

Antony.

The young man blinked. "You want...bread."

"I'll explain later," Deven said. "For now—you have my word, Mungle, as Prince of the Stone, that a loaf of bread will be yours, in exchange for your services here. Investigate that house—find out all you can of who dwells there, who visits, what purpose Henry might have had in coming here—then, having done so, return to us here before the hour is out, to guide us back to ways we know, and tell us what you have learned." He had to be specific, or the goblin would find some way to twist it. Nothing serious—a jape was not worth bringing the Queen's anger down upon him—but Deven had no patience for it, however small. Not today.

Mungle sighed, gave a very bad approximation of a bow, and vanished.

Quite literally: the bogle whisked off his tattered cloak, whirled it around, and when the motion settled he was nowhere to be seen.

"What the *devil*?" Antony blurted, as he had once before.

Deven settled his back against the filthy wall, the better to watch their surroundings, and said, "A charm against seeing. 'Tis a weak thing—there are ways to break it—but enough to serve."

Antony shook his head, still staring at where the goblin had been. "Had you told me a fortnight ago...I never would have believed any of this. Faeries beneath London, and I among them, seeking out the truth of my brother's death."

For once, his confusion and amazement blunted the hard edge of grieving anger. Considering it for the first time, Deven realised, with some little startlement, that he liked Antony Ware. Henry's dismissive account of him had always made Deven envisage a plodding stone, but Antony was more than that; phlegmatic he might be, especially when compared with his brother, but it gave him a foundation to stand upon when confronted with unexpected strangeness.

Then Deven considered *that* thought—and the words Antony had

just spoken. "But—"

The young man tilted his head. "But what?"

Coldharbour might not be the place to ask it, but Deven's curiosity was too strong to be denied. "But Henry had told you of the Onyx Court, at least in part. Did you think him simply a madman?"

"I..." Uncharacteristically, Antony stuttered, lost for a reply. "That is—"

Deven straightened. "How much had he told you?" *Wrong question.* "How *little*?"

"H-he told me—"

"Nothing." Deven could hardly believe the word, even as it came out of his own mouth. "You had no idea. Of any of it."

The dropping of Antony's gaze answered him clearly enough.

Deven thought back frantically. What had Antony said, accosting him that day in Westminster? "What world did you think I brought him into, if not the Onyx Hall?"

"It wasn't you," Antony said to his mud-caked shoes. "I figured that out, in time. Henry never said who. I just assumed—you were one of his great friends in Westminster, he spoke often of you—and you have been in the King's service for years."

He could not possibly have meant James' court; Sir Robert Ware was the one who sent Henry into that world, buying him a commission in the Gentlemen Pensioners. "What in God's name did you think I'd done?"

Antony's shoulders went back—young shoulders, not yet to their full breadth, but he would be a solidly-built man by the time he was done, and he stood with all that future solidity, meeting Deven's eyes even though his cheeks burned with shame. "I thought you had made him your catamite."

In sixty-two years on God's earth, surely there had been a time when Deven was as hard-pressed for words as he was now—but in his dumbfounded state, he could not remember any. Henry, his *catamite*?

DEEDS OF MEN

James' court was so reputed, as a sink of drunkenness and sodomy. The drunkenness was true, and as for the other...

It was the sin not named by Christians, at least in principle. In practice, the sodomite gentleman was a stock figure of satires, mincing down the lane with his smooth-cheeked boy in tow. Was that how Antony had seen Deven? Old as he was—Christ above, it was like the whispers no one dared speak aloud, of how Pembroke and the Archbishop had flung the fair-faced George Villiers into the path of the King, hoping to oust the previous royal favourite. Now that pretty young gentleman was Duke of Buckingham, and more dear to James than ever his late wife was.

Henry had been no girlish ganymede. Neither could Deven reconcile him with the appalling figure of Christian fear, violating the very foundations of God's order for the world, brother to the heretic and the sorcerer—but there were sodomites among the fae, for they paid little heed to the laws of the Almighty. Deven's years in the Onyx Court had therefore worn the edges off that fear, leaving him less horrified than a priest would wish him to be. He knew sodomy happened among mortals, though few if any thought of it by that terrible name.

But Henry had. This—not his faerie association—was the sin the young man had confessed to his brother.

Deven was saved from having to find some reply by the return of Mungle. The bogle appeared out of thin air, made even more hideous than usual by his wide grin. "Ha! Some filthy foreigner rents a room there—a Spaniard, by the name of Quijada." The bogle butchered the pronunciation, and Deven winced.

"Who?" Antony asked, looking equally grateful for the distraction. "Was that who Henry had followed?"

Nithen would have noticed if the gentleman in question had been a Spaniard. And since he had not—

"Antony," Deven said, the words leaping from his mind to his mouth without pause for consideration, "when you accosted me in

Whitehall—you thought Henry's death came about because of me. Why?"

Embarrassed, the young man repeated, "It wasn't you."

"I know that. But why did you think his death was connected? Divine punishment for his sin, or some more tangible reason?"

Mungle was doing a terrible job of hiding his curiosity. But Antony had clearly forgotten the bogle's presence, caught up in the pursuit of Deven's idea. "He—I thought to persuade him to forswear his...friend. And he told me it was already done, because his friend kept far too dangerous company, and he did not like their games."

A gentleman, neither old nor young, in Coldharbour. Visiting a Spaniard.

Dangerous company. A friend whose name Henry feared to confess.

"Robert Penshaw," Deven said, and Antony's eyes widened. Like a consort of ill musicians slowly coming into tune, the strands of this murder were sorting themselves into order. Not all of them, yet. Deven had not the slightest clue what business Penshaw meant with Quijada—though he'd heard that name before, in some report Sir Adenant had made to Lune. Henry had thought their games dangerous enough to avoid.

But not entirely.

Deven smiled past the pain in his heart. "It seems I may have gotten Henry killed indeed—but not in the manner either of us thought."

"I do not understand," Antony said. Despite Deven's words, the hostility he had carried all this time was gone, leaving only confusion in its wake. Confusion, tempered with a readiness for action.

I taught Henry too much...and not nearly enough. "Mungle," Deven said. "You have earned your bread, and may yet earn more. Keep you a watch over this house, and follow Quijada if he leaves. Master Ware—you and I must see the Queen."

DEEDS OF MEN

While I can live, I will prevent earths furie
—II.ii.191

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 17 January, 1625

Henry stood like a schoolboy reciting his lessons, but no schoolboy ever had such a fervent gleam in his eye—at least not in any school Deven had ever attended. “If the Dutch lose Breda, Spain will be free to put the soldiers they have there to other uses, and the money used to maintain them, too. Would that not aid the Habsburgs?”

“It would,” Deven agreed. “But for James to send a force to relieve the Dutch would be an act of war against the King of Spain.”

“But France has asked it of us! Aren’t we allied now, with the marriage to Henrietta Maria all but secured? And the fastest route for Mansfield’s expedition to the Palatinate would be to go from France through the Spanish Netherlands, but if James is so afraid of angering the Spaniards he will never allow that, and besides which Louis is so upset over Breda that now he says Mansfield can’t land in France at all, and you know all of this already, don’t you.” Henry’s rapid speech, whirling like a spinning top, suddenly wound down and fell over.

Deven admitted it with a nod. Political difficulties with the Cour du Lys meant Lune received no voluntary information from the French fae, but she had a spy of her own on the other side of the Channel—plus ears at the keyholes of Buckingham and the King. “But I wanted to hear what *you* knew.”

“That is almost the sum of it.” Henry dropped abruptly into a chair. “Except that there’s also the Huguenots at La Rochelle, and at court they say James will help Louis put them down, even though they’re Protestants.”

They were rebels against their anointed sovereign; to James, that mattered before religion. Letting a smile quirk one corner of his mouth, Deven said, “The Devil himself could not make a worse mess of Europe

than mortal men have done these past few years, but you have grasped it well. Tell me—which lady in Lune’s train did you seduce, to gain this information?”

Henry flushed far redder than the words merited. Was he truly so shy of such questions? Not Carline; she had her own mortal in tow, still hoping for the chance to produce the next Prince of the Stone. Nianna? Far too brainless, that one; she paid attention to politics only insofar as knowing about them was pleasing to her Queen. Ailis? Yfaen?

“Who says I must learn it from a faerie?” Henry asked, his tone halfway between plaintive and demanding. “There are mortals who care about these things too, you know.”

A desire for James to open hostilities against Spain, and a concern for the Protestants at La Rochelle. “Robin Penshaw?”

Another flush. “You needn’t say his name with such surprise.”

Deven wasn’t surprised; he was disappointed. Penshaw might care about these things, but his vision was far too narrow. He had proven that at Christmas-time, when the Gentlemen Pensioners assembled to attend upon the King: one drunken rant after another, all upon the twin themes of Spain and Catholicism. “Let me guess. He would prefer James to sail to the support of La Rochelle—even if that cost us Henrietta Maria.”

“Well, what use is a French princess, if neither James nor Louis will commit to war?”

“They *will* commit—but not if La Rochelle flares into full rebellion. Does Penshaw know Louis has plans to fight the Spanish in northern Italy? No, I thought not. But no king is foolish enough to send his soldiers away if they might be needed at home. The Habsburgs would like nothing better than for the English and the French to be at each others’ throats over those Huguenots. And that is exactly what Penshaw would have us charge into.”

Henry’s sources for information might still be too limited, but despite that, Deven was pleased. The young man who had sworn the

DEEDS OF MEN

Gentlemen Pensioners' oath would not have known a tenth of what Henry just recited to him. His progress was encouraging.

Without warning, Henry asked, "How do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Keep all these things in mind, all these factors and complications. James does one thing regarding the French in La Rochelle, and it means something else happens for the Spanish in northern Italy. When you told me England was your concern, I thought to myself, I understand that. But it isn't just England, is it? France, and Spain, and Holland, and the Germanies, and onward without end."

Honest bewilderment tinged his voice. "Not without end," Deven said, trying to make light of it. "We have no dealings with Cathay."

"Perhaps I should go there, then," Henry said, with a melancholy sort of violence.

Deven crossed the chamber and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "'Tis not always so fraught. Ten years ago, Europe was a calmer place, and no doubt in ten more years it will be so again."

"But one cannot always depend upon calm."

"No, one cannot." Deven sighed, and pressed his fingers into his own brow. "In truth, I think Lune spreads her net too far. She makes no attempt to affect events in those other lands—" *Mostly*. "But she tries to understand what goes on in them, and it *is* too much. James follows it all, but he has ministers for such things: the lords of his council, and all their gentlemen and agents and so on. He does not do it alone, or with a bare handful to aid."

Henry straightened from his slump. "What happens in France, though, or Spain, or all the rest, can affect what happens here. How can she ignore it, if she wishes to keep England stable?"

A dry chuckle escaped Deven. "You have just parroted her own words, when I tried to persuade her to a less ambitious course."

"And what did you tell her then?"

"That she might be the first to answer the question of whether a

faerie can work herself to death.”

It both delighted and alarmed the young man. “To say such a thing to a Queen! But if it deters her from answering that question, then so much the better, for all of us.”

“She has promised to keep to England’s shores,” Deven said, “as much as she can. I have no doubt that here she will find enough to occupy even an immortal life.”

And a series of mortal ones. Watching Henry stoke the fire, Deven wondered if the time had come to explain to his young friend the purpose of all this tutoring. Henry had likely guessed already, but neither of them had spoken the words. As if, by doing so, they would make real Deven’s age, and the inevitability of his death.

Deven tried to pretend that was not his own reason, and failed.

He must do it soon. It would be easier, once he let go of his position as Prince, and lived only as the Queen’s love. But the letting go would be hard.

I will do it soon, he promised himself. Lune still needed him, not just for herself, but for her court; however much Henry had learned, Deven still knew more. But once this French match was settled...

Then he would step down, and be Prince no more.

*He that will thrive in state, he must neglect
The trodden paths, that truth and right respect;
And prove new, wilder wayes*

–III.iii114-6

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 10 June, 1625

“Quijada.” Lune pronounced the name thoughtfully, her accent far better than Mungle’s. “Until recently, he was in the retinue of the Marqués de la Inojosa, but he was dismissed months ago—I cannot recollect the cause. Don Eyague watched him for a time, having some

DEEDS OF MEN

interest in any Spanish mortals wandering about London.”

“The faerie envoy from Spain,” Deven said to Antony. “Though more like an immigrant to this court, after so many years. The Marqués—”

“Is the resident ambassador from King Philip,” the young man said. He added defensively, “My father sits in the Guildhall, you know, *and* Parliament. And I pay attention.”

Deven bowed to take away the sting of any insult he might have offered. “I think ’tis fair to say Henry was not in charity with Penshaw the night he set Nithen to follow him. Shortly thereafter, Henry turns up dead, not far from the room Quijada rents. Someone has made an effort to make it seem a robbery, but with little success.”

Lune said, “Quijada. Inojosa used him for underhanded matters, murder included. Unless this Penshaw is the sort to slit a man’s throat in a back alley?”

“He was genuinely startled when I told him Henry was found in Coldharbour,” Deven remembered. “Or so it seemed. I would wager Quijada performed the deed, and didn’t tell his master, lest Penshaw fault *him* for their discovery.”

“But what discovery?” It was to Antony’s credit that he asked the question, rather than leaping straight to the question of vengeance. “Why was Henry following Penshaw?”

Deven closed his eyes, wishing he did not see his young friend’s face as if painted on his eyelids. “Because he wished to prove—to me, or to himself; perhaps both—that he could serve this court.”

Lune murmured, “And the well-being of England.”

“What?”

Deven opened his eyes and made himself face Antony. “Armadas, Gunpowder Plots—the fae have had their hand in thwarting such things. I told you they aid mortals when they can. I fear that Henry, seeing some scheme afoot, acted to prevent it. But rather than sharing what he knew, and seeking aid, he thought to carry it off on his own.”

It was the sort of thing Henry would have done, and they all knew it, Antony best of all. An unreadable mixture of feelings played across the young man's face, before focusing once more. "What threat could one gentleman and one disaffected Spaniard pose to England?"

His choice of phrase for Quijada made Deven frown. "Spain...Penshaw harbours a great animosity for them. He wanted James to agree to a Spanish war, and no doubt thought his chances would improve once Charles took the throne. But France—"

"Is reluctant to commit to an alliance," Antony said, seeing where he struck. "And without their aid, England would be far too vulnerable. So if Penshaw wants that war, he needs something to provoke both Louis and Charles into action."

"And who," Lune said, weaving the last thread into the fabric, "sits at Boulogne, waiting for the weather to permit a crossing to England?"

Deven answered her flatly. "Henrietta Maria. Louis' sister, and Charles' new bride."

Married by proxy at the beginning of May, now on her way to join her husband. A lovely girl, not yet sixteen, and the bargaining-piece for an alliance between France and England, in support of the Palatinate, in opposition to the Habsburgs. But there was one circumstance in which her loss could cement that alliance better than her presence ever could.

Antony worked through the logic methodically. "The Spanish might think Quijada was attempting to regain his master's favour, by such a desperate move. But every one else—or at least England and France, who are all that matters—would see Spanish treachery, and his dismissal from Inojosa's service as a ruse to disguise the truth." He paused, horrified. "Would it *work*?"

"The deception? It does not have to," Deven said. "By the time anyone sorted out the truth, opinion in both England and France would already be set. Those who mutter for war now would scream for it then. Which is precisely what Penshaw wants."

DEEDS OF MEN

A crash of glass brought them both back to themselves. Lune had flung the nearest wine-cup into the fire, and her eyes glittered like the fragments in the light. "At the price of one innocent girl's life."

Cold-blooded murder, to precipitate two nations into vengeance.

"If we are right," Antony said. "This...my father has taught me politics, but he speaks of the City and Parliament, not royal murder. Would Penshaw truly do this?"

Deven's heart ached a little for the disbelief in the young man's tone, the sound of a piece of his innocence dying. "I believe so. We will know soon enough—for I have no intention of letting him succeed."

*He is wise, will make him friends
Of such, who never love, but for their ends.*
—V.v.163-4

BLACKFRIARS, LONDON: 15 February, 1625

Deven's house increasingly felt half-abandoned, more empty every time he came to it. He and Lune had long since worked out the pattern of his days, which ones he spent above, which below—but that pattern had begun to disintegrate these last few years, as he poured his efforts into preparing Henry to follow him. And Lune, whose conception of time was not as secure as it might be, had not noticed.

She would notice soon enough, if he were not careful. The resulting madness was distinctive.

He dismissed the thought with a snort. *I am not that close to lunacy.* But it was a danger nonetheless, and so he came here, to the quiet emptiness of his Blackfriars house, inhabited too often by only his few servants.

Henry found him there that evening. "I did not know you *had* a house," the young man said, looking around with frank curiosity.

It touched too closely on Deven's own worries, and that made him peevish. "Where have you been of late? I tried to find you all yesterday, but you were nowhere to be found—above *or* below."

The cheerful expression faded from Henry's face, replaced by surprise. "I—I did not know you were searching. I went hunting with Robin Penshaw, and we stayed the night in his lodge, for it was too late to ride back." Defensively, he added, "I have not gone hunting for months now. All my leisure time I spend underneath London."

And that turned Deven's own peevishness into guilt. "I am sorry, Henry. I never meant the faerie court to seem a burden to you, and if it has become one—"

"No, no." Henry waved the apology away. "Merely that I craved the free air. The Onyx Hall is a marvellous place, and I might spend my whole life exploring it—just so long as I need not spend every *day* of that life there. I miss the company of horses and hounds and hawks. And Robin has excellent specimens of all three."

Deven gestured his friend into a seat and called for wine. "Whereas I am lamentably deficient in all three. But 'tis not true you spend all your leisure time beneath London; from what I hear, a good half of it is spent in whatever tennis court is most convenient to hand, losing your last penny to that same Robin Penshaw."

Henry flushed and muttered something indistinct. Deven took pity on the boy and said, "He is a good friend to you, I know—though I might wish him a good enough friend to teach you better tennis."

"He is very dear to me," Henry admitted. "In truth..."

He left the sentence hanging, until Deven prompted him. "Yes?"

"I have no right to ask this," Henry said, shaking his head.

"No right to ask what? I do not call you friend simply because I like the sound of the word; if there is anything I can grant you, I will."

The young man swallowed, then spoke in a rush. "How do you decide who to bring below?"

DEEDS OF MEN

It sobered Deven. He had not expected to regret his generous words to Henry, but this brought him close to it. "You wish to bring Penshaw among us."

Henry nodded.

"Why?"

"I—I think he might like it. You are more... permissive, and he chafes, sometimes, at the strictures of James' court."

Lune would not like that answer. Deven was not certain he liked it himself. A man who came below seeking his liberty might well carry it back to the world above, and with it, the secrets of the fae. But he could not simply refuse Henry out of hand—not if he truly meant to have the young man succeed him.

Instead he asked a question. "How well do you trust him?"

Henry gave it serious consideration. *Good*, Deven thought, already feeling more sanguine. This wasn't a pure whim on Henry's part, and that restored his confidence, even as he watched the young man stop and start a number of replies.

Finally, Henry said, "Not well enough."

Deven wondered what reservation had prompted that answer. He would not ask, though; Henry seemed uncomfortable enough as it was. "That, at least in part, is your answer: we first weight our trust." His friend smiled in rueful understanding. "But if your mind alters, do not hesitate to ask again. I trust your judgement, Henry. I would not have shared the Onyx Court with you, did I not."

Henry nodded, unwontedly sad. "Let me find out what has happened to that wine," Deven said, rising to give him a moment of privacy. "Unless my man is picking the grapes himself, it should have been here by now."

*It must be active valour must redeeme
Our losse, or none.*

DOVER, KENT: 13 June, 1625

In the privacy of his mind, where the words could not offend the fae accompanying him, Deven thanked the Lord God that Robert Penshaw had a sense of pageantry about Henrietta Maria's death.

Had he not, they might never have had a chance to stop him. While faerie agents were seeking proof of Penshaw's intentions, Quijada slipped their net; the Spaniard was on his way to Dover by the time they discovered his departure. The storms that kept Charles' bride delayed in Boulogne had blown clear, and she had landed in England. Had Quijada shot her on the docks—or worse, had Penshaw smuggled him to France, ere she ever set sail—he might have done it cleanly.

But there was the pageantry to consider. Henrietta Maria slept in Dover Castle, her first night on English soil. The King was on his way; together they would journey to Canterbury, there to consummate their marriage, and to crown Henrietta Maria as Queen.

It would be easier to reach her later, when confidence and use had slackened the guard about her, but it seemed that was a delay Penshaw could not stomach. Or perhaps it was the thought of a Catholic Queen of England that he could not endure.

Either way, Henrietta Maria would die just as her husband came to claim her.

No, Deven vowed, she will not.

He could have left the task to Lune's hand-picked group of fae: two elf-knights, three goblins, and more than enough to take care of one murderous Spaniard. But no power under Heaven could stop Antony Ware from riding to Dover, and so Deven went as well, to watch over him and keep him from folly—assuming he could keep the young man from *anything*.

They rode faster than the Spaniard could, on faerie steeds that knew

DEEDS OF MEN

no weariness, and arrived in Dover in the small hours of the morning on the thirteenth. Deven, unlike Penshaw, had no need for pageantry; to rescue the French princess publicly would cause more trouble than it was worth. They would stop Quijada without delay. "Track him," he said to Dead Rick, the black dog that ran at their heels, and threw down a scrap of cloth from Quijada's bed in Coldharbour. The skriker sniffed it, growled softly, and ran off into the night.

Speaking for the first time since they had departed London, Antony Ware asked, "Once we find him—what then?"

"My first concern," Deven murmured back, "is preventing this murder. After that... what would you see done?"

The moon was a bare sliver in the sky, often hidden by clouds; Antony was all but invisible in the darkness, and his voice gave little hint of what was in his mind. "We have no proof we could bring before a judge, to convict Quijada of murder."

"A knight and a baronet's son, against a Spaniard? We would not need much in the way of proof."

Antony did not answer that, but sat waiting for the skriker's return.

Dead Rick was gone for some time, though, while the moon played chase with the clouds. Deven kept himself occupied by trying to guess Quijada's plan. Tomorrow the royal party would ride out from Dover Castle to Canterbury, along the same road that had brought the fae from London. Deven and his companions had paused outside the port town, close enough to smell the salt air, but not to catch the attention of the constables. They might be in the very spot from which Quijada intended to shoot.

No sound warned of the skriker's approach; a blackness simply melted out of the shadows, and writhed upward into the form of a man. "By the docks," Dead Rick said, and Deven nodded. Where a Spaniard would excite less comment. "I'll lead you."

A mounted company of armed men descending upon a dockside inn ran too much risk of alerting Quijada; they left their horses outside

town and proceeded on foot. Soon the buildings closed about them, warehouses and forges and carpenters' shops, all the attendant facilities of a major port. These were dark in the night, but up ahead was light, for the docks did not sleep with the sun.

No more did the men who worked them. Sailors and labourers were in the streets, some working, some drinking away their pay. After the clean air of the Kentish countryside, the reek was like a physical assault. Deven hoped they could subdue Quijada quietly; it was a coin-toss whether the Dover constables would ignore the sounds of a brawl, or wade in to arrest them all.

"In there," Dead Rick said, nodding toward a three-storey inn that leaned dangerously over the street. The sign was too battered to read in the lantern light. "Don't know what room; I came back for you first."

Deven set his jaw. *Sixty-two years old, and charging into a Dover hell in the middle of the night.* This was a game for younger men.

He turned to say as much to his companion—and found Antony gone.

For one blank heartbeat, his mind would not work. Then it jerked into motion once more. What had waylaid Antony did not matter; none of the possibilities were good. Whirling, Deven saw his companions had arrived at the same conclusion. "Find him," he snapped, and Dead Rick went, not even pausing to conceal himself. Between one stride and the next, the faerie man dropped to all fours, and then the black dog ran back the way they'd come, the others at his heels.

Scarce two houses down, the skriker's keen nose led them off the street into an alley, into the warren of Dover's dockside. It was black as pitch in those back ways, and Deven could not see in the dark as the goblins did; he slipped in the mud, stumbled over things invisible to him, falling further behind.

But suddenly the buildings gave way to open grass. Deven, after an instant's disorientation, realised the shadowed hulk in the middle

DEEDS OF MEN

distance was Dover Castle; Dead Rick had led them eastward, parallel to the docks and past the town's edge. And in the scant light of the moon, he saw why.

Two figures struggled on the slope leading up to the castle, dancing to the music of steel. Gritting his teeth, Deven trusted the ground and ran, wrenching his sword free as he went, knowing the fae would beat him there and that none of them would be in time.

For he recognised Antony, even in the darkness, even at this distance—and the young man was losing.

Retreating hastily from the other's blade, Antony's heel caught against something and betrayed him to the ground. He parried one thrust, rolling desperately, but lost his sword to the second, and as his opponent struck for the third time—

Dead Rick's flying leap carried him clear across Antony's body, and his jaws closed on the other man's throat.

Deven arrived last of them all, gasping as he had not for years. His pretence of age and infirmity had robbed him of his wind in truth. "Are you hurt?" he asked; one elf-knight stood over Antony, while the other had followed the goblins to Dead Rick.

"N-no," Antony stammered, sitting up. Even allowing for the light, he looked deathly pale. "My ankle twinges a bit, is all." He flexed it in his boot, but refused help in standing.

They both looked down the slope to where the skriker and his victim had rolled. Dead Rick shifted back, spat into the grass, and said, "Spaniards taste like shit."

"Quijada?" Deven asked.

"I believe so," Antony said. "He was on the street in town—I would have thought nothing of it, for how am I to know his face? But he saw mine, and ran."

Because of his resemblance to Henry. Deven walked down the slope to the body. Dead Rick had taken no chances, but had torn the Spaniard's throat out. One of the other goblins searched the corpse and

found a brace of pistols, with powder and shot, a dagger, and a coil of rope. "He must have thought his chances of escape better if he struck during the night," Deven murmured. Was his assessment of Penshaw wrong? Or had Quijada made his own plans?

Either way, the man was dead, and Henrietta Maria was safe.

Antony had followed him, and stood hesitating a small distance from the group. He was seventeen, and he had lost his brother; he might resent being robbed of his vengeance. But he squared his shoulders, drew near, and thrust his hand out toward Dead Rick. "I owe you my life," he said, voice rough. "My thanks—though they are little enough to repay you with."

The skriker took it readily enough. "Buy me an ale," he suggested. "To wash the taste from my mouth."

The young man mustered an uncertain smile. "And a loaf of bread?"

"Wouldn't go amiss," one of the others said, and something inside Deven relaxed. The hostility with which Antony had first greeted him had not, in truth, been intended for the fae, but the revelation of Henry's secret life could still have made an enemy of this young man.

One of his secret lives, at least. There was still Penshaw to deal with.

After nearly dying on Quijada's blade, Antony could have been forgiven for not thinking of such matters. But as the group made its way back into town, to report the dead Spaniard to the local watch, Antony fell back to speak with Deven.

"Penshaw is a gentleman himself," he said. "A judge *would* need proof for him."

They were close enough to the docks now for the occasional lantern to be hung out. Deven took advantage of the light to watch Antony's reaction as he said, "Must it be a trial?"

"I would not sully my brother's name by calling him out," the young man said flatly, confirming Deven's evaluation of him that day in Westminster. But then he followed Deven's gaze to the disguised goblins ahead of them, and guessed his true meaning. Antony set his

DEEDS OF MEN

jaw, then said, "Yes. It must be a trial."

And not a second murder in the night. Deven said, "Then we shall find a way."

*The coward, and the valiant man must fall,
Only the cause, and manner how, discernes them*
-III.i.334-5

THE ONYX HALL, LONDON: 27 March, 1625

Soon enough the Gentlemen Pensioners would be called to attend upon Charles, but not yet. For tonight, they were left to their own devices, while in the streets of London men said in tones varying from horror to satisfaction, *The King is dead. Long live the King.*

And occasionally, in hushed tones, *Buckingham has poisoned the King.*

It was arrant nonsense: whatever his political ambitions, however close his friendship with Charles, Buckingham had loved James. And it needed no poison to kill an elderly man who had been ill for months, even years. But the Duke was the most hated man in all of England, and an easy scapegoat for the upheaval that attended the death of a monarch, even with the succession assured to be peaceful.

"Now what?" Henry asked Deven, as they walked through the passages of the Onyx Hall.

"Now Charles will be crowned," Deven said. "And Buckingham will go to fetch Henrietta Maria as soon as may be—though this will delay it a little." The new King had no living brothers; he needed an heir. Until he produced one, the crown would not rest secure.

Henry gestured at the black stone of the walls. "I meant for *this* court."

Deven shrugged, perplexed. "As before. They need not change when the mortal crown does, and there is no cause for Lune to interfere."

The young man went a few steps away, staring at a tapestry on the wall. They stood in a long gallery of such tapestries, and Deven did not know whether that particular image had caught Henry's eye, or whether he was staring blindly at whatever hung before him. It showed a swordsman in a moonlit glade, gazing up at the silver disc above.

"You want me to succeed you," Henry said, not facing him. "As Prince. Don't you."

Deven found himself glad he had waited for Henry to broach the subject. It meant the young man was ready to address it. "Only if you wish it," he said, resisting the urge to cross his fingers. "I would not force you to it, if your desires lie elsewhere."

Henry's long-fingered hands curled, then relaxed helplessly. "I—not that I do not wish it, but—" A long pause, and then his shoulders slumped and he turned. Unhappiness and fear chased across his face. "I do not think I *can* do it. I know you've been teaching me, and I've tried to learn, but I'm not ready—"

What could Deven say to that? He took his young friend by the shoulders, stopping the words. "You need not be ready, not today. I am hale enough, thanks to this place. You have time to finish learning."

Still Henry would not meet his eyes. "But surely there must be someone better."

"Who? Henry, you've seen the other men in this place; half of them don't have the birth and position to be of use to Lune, and the other half can't be trusted out of sight. Which is not to damn you with faint praise: I *chose* you, knowing you needed time to grow into the responsibilities of the Prince. As indeed you are doing."

Henry scrubbed at his eyes, dislodging one of Deven's hands. "You do not think me a coward, for what I have said?"

"I would rather a man honest enough to admit his fears, than one who lies out of bravado."

It made Henry straighten. "You are sure?"

Deven smiled and gripped his shoulder more tightly. "I am."

DEEDS OF MEN

"Then I will find a way to be worthy," Henry said, with fervent determination. "I will prove to you that your trust is not misplaced."

I already believe it, Deven thought, watching the young man walk away. But when you believe it, too—then, Henry, you will be fit to bear the title Prince of the Stone.

*We are mortall;
And can but deedes of men: 'twere glory 'inough,
Could we be truely a prince.*

—Ben Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall*

I.ii.227-9

BLACKFRIARS, LONDON: 27 July, 1625

The servant led Antony into Deven's parlour, then left the two in peace.

Deven was attempting to tune his cittern, which he had not played in far too long. But he laid the instrument aside when Antony entered, for it was apparent from the young man's expression that he had news of import. "Penshaw is in prison," he said, "and the trial will be soon." His eyes echoed the satisfaction of the words.

"Good," Deven said. Despite the confidence he showed to Antony, he had not been certain it would work; much depended on the strength of Penshaw's mind. But it seemed the man felt guilt over Henry's death, even if his own hand had not wielded the blade. And that was lever enough to move him—at least with faerie aid.

Lune had proven her words to Antony: she did not flinch to punish the guilty. The night Penshaw heard of Quijada's failure and death, he dreamt of Henry, and every night thereafter the spectre returned, accusing him of his crimes. Not Antony, this time, but a faerie sent to plague his sleep. Lune would fabricate no evidence against the man, but she felt no compunctions about provoking him with what they knew.

Penshaw lasted a month before he confessed.

His family had enough wealth and influence to keep the matter from the public eye, and Charles had no desire to jeopardise the fragile alliance with France—let alone his marriage, which had not begun well. But neither had it begun so badly he would countenance his gentlemen plotting against his wife, and the Penshaws were far from mighty enough to save their son. Robert Penshaw would die for his crimes. Quietly, and without fanfare.

His conduct with Henry, though, remained a secret. As Deven had asked Lune to ensure.

It was a gift to Antony, though one left unspoken. Whether the young man counted sodomy among the crimes Penshaw should die for, Deven had not asked, and never would. They would each deal with that knowledge in their own way. And in the meantime, Henry would rest in his grave with his name, as Antony had said, unsullied.

Melancholy thoughts. Deven called for wine, and went back to tuning the cittern, hoping to lighten the young man's mood, and his own. He was surprised to find some time later that the evening was drawing down; they had passed the whole afternoon in company. And if it was not as convivial as with Henry, Antony being far more reserved in his manner, it was pleasant enough.

"Will you dine with me?" Deven asked, once he noted his growling stomach. His larder was passing bare, but they could go out.

The young man looked surprised by the suggestion. "I will—and thank you."

Deven laid the cittern aside, then hesitated. "Perhaps I should wait to say this," he admitted, "but I would not want you to think my friendship offered under false pretences. Regardless of how you answer me, that offer stands. But I must ask: now that this business is done, will you come below again?"

Antony's eyes softened briefly, showing hints of many things: healing grief, puzzlement, uncertainty.

And, perhaps, a hint of wonder.

DEEDS OF MEN

“Henrietta Maria,” he said. “You mentioned the Armada, and the Gunpowder Treason. Are these...assistances something the fae do often?”

Yes would be the persuasive answer, but not entirely honest. “Sometimes,” Deven said. “They also dice, and drink, and gamble at cards; they take mortal lovers, laugh at new fashions, and sing the most scurrilous broadside ballads they can find. They are not entirely noble, and I would be lying if I presented them as such. But they can be good.”

One blunt-fingered hand lifted briefly to rub his throat—remembering Dead Rick and Quijada, Deven suspected. Then the young man said, “Yes. I will come below again. If they will have me.”

“We will,” Deven said, laying the faintest stress on the pronoun. “And I am glad of it.”

Antony met his gaze. “Why?”

How much honesty was too much? With this man, more was better than less—which might, in time, be a detriment to him. But Deven did not think so. The fae could use a dose of sturdy honesty, to counteract all their twisted dealings. *Hanged for a lamb...*

“Because,” he said, “I have found myself considering the prospect of you as Prince after me.”

It was enough to rattle the young man’s solidity. “*Me?*” Antony exclaimed, astonished. “You must be jesting.”

“Not in the slightest. You have a good head, and a good eye for politics. And you have no fear of Lune, no awe that would prevent you from standing up to her when she needs it.”

Antony blinked. “Does she need it often?”

“More than she thinks. But she agrees with me in this matter—that you might do well indeed.” Better than Henry, though it pained Deven to admit it. He had tried to shape the young man into the necessary form, because he seemed the best clay available. And Henry had been willing. But Antony, though less pleasing in company, and positioned

more for Parliament than for court, was better suited to the task—if only Deven had known it sooner. The irony would forever tinge this memory, that Antony would never have come among the fae had Henry not died. The elder Ware would never have thought to introduce his brother to such wonder.

Pragmatic as always, Antony said, “I did not think she liked me.”

Deven chose his words carefully. “You will never have an easy friendship, I think. But that may, in certain ways, be good. She... will need someone who does not seem a replacement for me.” Antony’s eyes narrowed, and he nodded in thoughtful understanding. “But what she needs foremost is a good Prince. And we believe you might be that.”

He let Antony consider that for a moment, then added, “I expect no answer from you now; I would not take it if you gave me one. You do not know well enough what it is to be Prince of the Stone. But you should know that I have thought it.”

Antony sat, mouth slightly open, for quite a long time. Finally he said, “You are right—I do not know.” Then another stretch of silence, before he said, “But I would be willing to learn.”

Deven’s heart warmed. It was no promise, from either of them; Antony might refuse, or prove unsuitable after all. It was hope, though, and the light of possibility, shining a path through the darkness ahead.

Rising, he offered his hand to Antony. “Then we shall dine below, food from a larder kept safe for the likes of us to eat—if you will trust me.”

“I will,” Antony said, and accepted his hand.



The earlier adventures of Michael Deven can be found in *Midnight Never Come*. The tale of Antony Ware are continued in the sequel, *In Ashes Lie*, published in June 2009.

If you would like to see more Onyx Court short fiction in the future, consider stopping by my website, Swan Tower, to drop a little money in the PayPal kitty:

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