

*The Land
Beyond the Sea*

ALSO BY SHARON KAY PENMAN

THE HISTORICAL NOVELS

The Sunne in Splendour

Here Be Dragons

Falls the Shadow

The Reckoning

When Christ and His Saints Slept

Time and Chance

Devil's Brood

Lionheart

A King's Ransom

THE MEDIEVAL MYSTERIES

The Queen's Man

Cruel as the Grave

Dragon's Lair

Prince of Darkness

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To
Enda Junkins and Paula Mildenhall

CAST OF CHARACTERS AS OF 1172

Royal House of Kingdom of Jerusalem, Aka Outremer

Baldwin III, King of Jerusalem, deceased 1163; uncle of Henry II, King of England
Amalric, King of Jerusalem, Baldwin's brother

Maria Comnena, Queen of Jerusalem; great-niece of Manuel Comnenus, the
Greek emperor of what is today known as Byzantium

Sybilla, daughter of Amalric and Agnes de Courtenay, b. 1159

Baldwin, son of Amalric and Agnes de Courtenay, b. 1161

Isabella, daughter of Amalric and Maria Comnena, b. 1172

Nobility of Kingdom of Jerusalem

Baudouin d'Ibelin, Lord of Ramleh and Mirabel

Richilda, Baudouin's wife

Esquiva and Etiennette, their daughters

Balian d'Ibelin, Lord of Ibelin, Baudouin's younger brother

Hugh d'Ibelin, their elder brother, deceased, 1169



Renaud (Denys) de Grenier, Lord of Sidon

Agnes de Courtenay, his wife; mother of Baldwin and Sybilla; daughter of Count
of Edessa, who died in a Saracen dungeon

Joscelin de Courtenay, brother to Agnes; son of the Count of Edessa



Humphrey de Toron, constable of the kingdom

Philippa, a princess of Antioch; Humphrey's wife

Humphrey de Toron, the constable's son, recently deceased

Stephanie de Milly, widow of the constable's son; heiress to Outrejourdain

Humphrey de Toron, their young son



Escfiva, Princess of Galilee
Hugues, her eldest son and heir
William, Odo, and Raoul, his younger brothers



Miles de Plancy, seneschal of the kingdom
Guyon, Lord of Caesarea; cousin to Lord of Sidon
Gautier, Guyon's brother and heir
Walter de Brisebarre, Lord of Blanchegarde
Guidon de Brisebarre, Walter's brother
Mary de Brisebarre, their sister
Amaury de Lusignan, French lord newly arrived in Outremer

Churchmen of Kingdom of Jerusalem

Emeric de Nesle, the patriarch
Lethard, Archbishop of Nazareth
Joscius, Bishop of Acre
William, Archdeacon of Tyre
Eraclius, Archdeacon of Jerusalem

Military Orders

Odo de St. Amand, grand master of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, better known as the Knights Templar
Jobert, grand master of Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, better known as the Knights Hospitaller
Jakelin de Mailly, Templar knight

Principality of Antioch

Bohemond, Prince of Antioch: cousin to King Amalric and the Count of Tripoli
Mary, Bohemond's sister; wed to Manuel, emperor of the Greeks

Reynald de Chatillon; wed to *Bohemond's* mother, Princess Constance, now deceased

County of Tripoli

Raymond de St. Gilles, Count of Tripoli; cousin to King Amalric and Prince Bohemond

Saracens

Nūr al-Dīn Abū al-Qasim Maḥmūd b. ʿImad al-Dīn Zengi, ruler of Egypt and Syria

al-Sālīh Ismaīl b. Nūr al-Dīn, Nūr al-Dīn's young son and heir

al-Nasir Salāh al-Dīn Abū al-Muzaffar Yūsuf b. Ayyūb, Nūr al-Dīn's vizier in Egypt, known to history as Salāh al-Dīn or Saladin, called Yusuf by family

al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Saif al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ahmad b. Ayyūb, Saladin's younger brother, best known as al-ʿĀdil, called Ahmad by family

Taqī al-Dīn, al-Malik al-Muzaffar ʿUmar b. Shāhanshāh b. Ayyūb, nephew to Saladin and al-ʿĀdil, called ʿUmar by family

Farrukh-Shāh, ʿIzz al-Dīn Daʿud b. Shāhanshāh b. Ayyūb, Taqī al-Dīn's younger brother, called Daʿud by family

European Rulers

Henry II, King of England

Eleanor of Aquitaine, his queen

Louis Capet, King of France

William, King of Sicily

Frederick, Holy Roman Emperor

Philip, Count of Flanders

MAP TK

*The Land
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PROLOGUE



February 1163
City of Jerusalem, Outremer

Agnes de Courtenay knew that most people would say she'd been blessed, for she was both beautiful and highborn, the daughter of the Count of Edessa, cousin to the rulers of Antioch and Jerusalem. None would have believed her had she confessed her secret fear—that she was accursed. But how else explain why her family had suffered so many sorrows?

Their litany of woes had begun with the loss of Edessa. Agnes was ten when the city fell to the Saracens. She'd known that the young Christian realms of Antioch, Tripoli, Edessa, and Outremer were viewed as infidel intruders by their Muslim neighbors in the Levant, saplings surrounded by enemy oaks. But she'd not realized how vulnerable they were, not until Edessa was captured and its citizens slaughtered.

Her father had clung to power for a few more years and when Agnes was thirteen, he'd wed her to Reinald, the Lord of Marash. Her new husband had treated her kindly and Agnes had been happy as his wife, envisioning a tranquil future as the Lady of Marash.

It was not to be. She'd been wed less than a year when the Prince of Antioch was defeated by a large Saracen army. Among the dead was the prince himself and Reinald, Lord of Marash. The stunned young widow returned home to her family, where worse was to come. Agnes knew her father was a flawed man, caring more for his own pleasures than the welfare of his subjects. But she still loved him and grieved when he was captured by the Saracen amir, Nūr al-Dīn. Refusing to ransom him, Nūr al-Dīn had him blinded, condemning him to die in an Aleppo dungeon. It was then that Agnes understood—God had cursed the de Courtenays.

Her mother, Beatrice, had done her best, securing a pension from the emperor of the Greeks, Manuel Comnenus, for herself and her children, Agnes and Joscelin. They'd moved to Antioch, having enough to live upon but not enough to

provide a proper marriage portion for Agnes, and she soon discovered that beauty alone would not tempt a highborn husband.

The years that followed had not been happy ones for the de Courtenays. Then, in early 1157, Hugh d'Ibelin came to Antioch and was smitten with Agnes. Hugh was just eighteen, more than three years her junior, but he was the heir to his mother's wealthy fief of Ramleh in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and his father was dead, so there were none to protest his willingness to wed Agnes without a marriage portion. He was a handsome lad, too, and Agnes gladly agreed to marry him, grateful that the Almighty had restored her family to His favor.

That summer, Agnes, Joscelin, and their mother had traveled to Outremer, where Hugh awaited them. But upon their arrival at Jaffa, Agnes learned of yet another battlefield defeat, this one on June 19, when a force led by King Baldwin was ambushed by Nūr al-Dīn. While Baldwin had escaped, among the men taken prisoner was Hugh d'Ibelin.

Agnes had despaired, for how could Hugh raise his ransom? His brothers, Baudouin and Balian, were too young to help, and his mother was dying. Only King Baldwin could rescue Hugh, and so she sought out the Count of Jaffa, the king's brother, Amalric. She'd heard that Amalric was unlike Baldwin, who was renowned for his generosity. Amalric was said to lust after money even more than he lusted after women. She did not see why he'd object to spending his brother's money, though, and was hopeful he'd agree to approach Baldwin on her behalf.

Her meeting with Amalric did not go as planned. He was obviously impressed by her beauty and she was willing to flirt with him if that would win his cooperation. But within moments, she found herself fending off a mauling that went well beyond flirtation. She managed to free herself and flee. She'd heard the gossip that he was no respecter of marital vows. She'd not expected to be treated like a whore, though, for she was Amalric's cousin. She'd not realized that with Hugh and her father both held prisoner in Aleppo, Amalric might well see her as fair game, vulnerable as only a woman without male protectors could be.

This sudden understanding of her peril—a guest in his castle, his city—had impelled her to confide in her mother and brother. Joscelin had been angry at this affront to his sister's honor, but was wary of antagonizing so powerful a man as the king's brother. Their mother had more steel in her spine, and she went to confront Amalric, warning him that Agnes was no peasant wench to be swived at his pleasure, reminding him that she was his kinswoman, the betrothed of one of the king's most loyal vassals. Agnes could only hope that would be enough to shame Amalric to his senses.

But when her mother finally returned, it was with stunning news. Six years later, Agnes could remember that scene as vividly as if it were yesterday.



“Well, it seems we misread the count’s intentions. Amalric swears he would not have raped you. He wants to marry you.”

Agnes gasped, shocked into silence. But when Joscelin let out a whoop of joy, she glared at him. She opened her mouth to say that she did not want to marry Amalric, catching herself in time. Marriages were not based upon personal whims, after all. “Count Amalric seems to have forgotten that I am plight trothed to Hugh d’Ibelin and in the eyes of Holy Church, that is a binding commitment. Moreover, we are fourth cousins and thus forbidden to marry.”

Joscelin insisted plight troths could be broken, dispensations issued for cousins to wed. Agnes ignored him. “Mother? Do you want me to wed this man?”

“It is a far better match than the one with Hugh d’Ibelin. You would be the Countess of Jaffa and Ascalon, your rank second only to Baldwin’s queen once he weds. Our family’s fortunes would be mended, restoring us to the prominence we enjoyed ere your father lost Edessa—”

“And Amalric is the king’s heir,” Joscelin interrupted. “If Baldwin dies ere he marries and sires a son, Amalric will be king. You could be the queen one day, Sister!”

While Agnes was fond of her younger brother, she’d never taken him all that seriously. “Jos, leave us alone for a time,” she snapped and, as unhappy as he was to be banished from this crucial family conclave, he obeyed; she’d always been the stronger of the two. Once he’d gone, Agnes crossed to Beatrice’s side. “I will be honest with you, Mother. I do not deny this is an opportunity none of us could have expected. But I would rather wed Hugh d’Ibelin. As Lady of Ramlah, I would be respected, and I am sure Hugh would do his best for you and Joscelin. Whilst he may not have the power that Amalric wields, he has a more generous nature.”

Beatrice seemed to sigh. “There is something you need to know, Agnes. I had a long and forthright conversation with Amalric. When he said he wanted to marry you, he seemed as surprised as I was to hear those words coming from his mouth. I think it was only then that he realized he wanted more from you than a quick tumble in bed. It appears you’ve bewitched him as you did Hugh. With one difference. Amalric is a young man accustomed to getting what he wants. Now that he has decided he wants you, he means to have you. He is indifferent to the

plight troth, to your lack of a marriage portion, or that you are cousins. And he would be just as indifferent to your refusal should you tell him nay.”

“You are saying that he’d force me to wed him?” Agnes tried to sound indignant, but what was the point? The Church said a marriage was not valid without consent. Yet in the world beyond the Holy See, it was not so unusual for an heiress to be abducted and wed against her will. If it could almost happen to Queen Eleanor of England, who would care if it happened to the penniless daughter of a man rotting away in an Aleppo dungeon?

“We do what we must, Agnes. Even if this marriage is not entirely to your liking, there is much to commend it. You’ll have a privileged life with the king’s brother, and you’ll have power. That is not a draft you’ve ever tasted, but I think it is one you will learn to savor.”

“And Hugh?”

“You can get Amalric to pay his ransom.”

Others might have found that answer cold, uncaring. Agnes did not. Her mother was simply recognizing the reality confronting them, as women had been compelled to do down through the ages.



There had been opposition to the marriage. The Patriarch of Jerusalem had objected, raising the issues of consanguinity and Agnes’s plight troth to Hugh d’Ibelin. But Amalric paid him no heed. If it was not a happy marriage, it had been a successful one. Even after the novelty wore off, Amalric continued to desire her, while Agnes fulfilled a wife’s primary duty, giving him a daughter and then a son. She did not find the pleasure in his bed that she’d have found in Hugh’s, for she was not attracted to him. Her mother had been right, though. The taste of power was intoxicating.



“My lady? Do you think your lord husband will be back soon?”

Agnes blinked as her past receded and her present came into focus again. “I expect so, Mabilla.” She knew her ladies assumed she was daydreaming of her golden future, and why not? She was finally to be rewarded for all the sacrifices she’d made, for all she’d lost. King Baldwin had suddenly sickened and his doctors could not save him. He’d died five days ago, leaving behind a grieving young widow but no children. The heir to the throne was his brother, Amalric. It was true that the crown was elective, not strictly hereditary, yet Agnes saw that as a

formality. Amalric was meeting now with the High Court, composed of the barons of the realm. By week's end, he would be crowned and she would be Queen of Jerusalem.

Sitting on a coffer, Agnes relaxed as Mabilla unpinned her hair. It reached to her waist in a swirl of pale gold. Amalric often said it was a pity that women could not venture out in public with their hair uncovered; he was proud of having such a desirable wife and enjoyed the envy he saw in the eyes of other men. Agnes decided she would wear it loose at her coronation, as only queens and virgin brides could do, and for a moment, she envisioned her long, flowing hair graced with a jeweled crown—the ultimate accessory, she thought with a smile.

Amalric returned as the city's church bells were chiming for Vespers. He strode into the chamber, glanced at the women, and said, "Out." As they fled, Agnes's eyebrows rose. Even for Amalric, who was taciturn on his best days, that was unusually rude.

Agnes got to her feet, studying him with a puzzled frown. For a man who'd just been given a crown, he did not look very happy. "How did the High Court session go? Is it settled?"

"Yes, it is settled." He moved restlessly around the chamber, like a man in unfamiliar surroundings, and he'd yet to meet her gaze. "It did not go as I expected."

Agnes had rarely seen him so tense. "Surely they chose you as the next king?"

"They agreed to recognize my claim to the crown." He paused and then raised his head, looking her in the face for the first time since entering the chamber. "But they would only do so if I end our marriage, for they will not accept you as queen."

Agnes stared at him in disbelief. "You . . . you are not serious?"

Amalric had been seething since his confrontation with the High Court, and it was a relief now to have a target for that rage. "You think I would jest about this? The patriarch insisted our marriage is invalid because we are related within the forbidden fourth degree. He even raised your plight troth with d'Ibelin again. And the barons backed him up. I could tell the whoresons were enjoying it, too, getting to play kingmaker!"

Agnes was desperately trying to make sense of this. "The Church often gives dispensations for consanguinity. Why could the papal legate not issue one for us?"

"You think I did not point that out? The legate refused to consider it. He agreed with the patriarch that we'd been living in sin and I could not be crowned until I put you aside."

Agnes's body was reacting as if she'd taken a physical blow, her breath

quickenings, her knees going weak. But her brain was still numbed, still struggling to comprehend. "Why?"

Amalric shook his head impatiently. "They all acted as if their motives were as pure as newly fallen snow, that they cared only to make right this grievous wrong. But I know better. Our bishops were punishing me for defying the patriarch by marrying you. And the barons wanted to assert their authority over me, to show me that I owed my kingship to them." He gave Agnes a look that was oddly accusatory, as if their predicament was somehow her fault. "Baudouin d'Ibelin was among the most vocal; clearly he still bears a grudge against me for claiming his brother's bride. Christ Jesus, that was nigh on six years ago!"

"And . . . and you agreed, Amalric?" She sounded so stunned that he flushed, his hands clenching into fists. She'd later realize that much of his anger was defensive, that he was ashamed of yielding to the High Court's demands. Now she was aware only of her own anger, her own pain, and her searing sense of betrayal. "How could you? By denying the legality of our marriage, you made your own children bastards!"

"No," he said sharply, "I would never let that happen. I insisted upon a papal dispensation, recognizing their legitimacy even if the marriage itself is invalid."

"I see. You found the backbone to defend your son and daughter, but not your wife!"

"I had no choice. They told me that if I did not agree to their terms, they would offer the crown to my cousin Raymond, the Count of Tripoli."

"You owed me better than this, Amalric!"

He gave a shrug and then the brutal truth. "You are not worth a crown, Agnes."

She flinched and then said, very low, "God will punish you for this."

He shrugged again. "You can continue to call yourself the Countess of Jaffa."

"How generous," she jeered. "Are you going to give me Jaffa as my dower?"

"Of course not."

"That is not unreasonable," she said, gritting her teeth to keep from shrieking. "Your brother's widow was given Acre as her dower."

"She is a Greek princess."

His matter-of-fact tone was the ultimate insult. She felt so much hatred that she feared she might choke on it. "Will it not shame you, my lord king, to have your former wife begging for her bread by the side of the road?"

He was stung by her sarcasm. "The children will remain with me, of course."

"No!"

“Surely you’d have expected that. Sons are never left in their mothers’ care for long.”

“They are until age seven. Baldwin is not yet two!” When he did not bother to argue, she realized there was no hope. “And Sybilla? You cannot take them both away from me!”

“Do not play the bereft mother, Agnes. I am willing for you to see the children.”

If you cooperate, if you do as you’re told. The threat was an unspoken one, for it did not need to be put into words. Agnes had begun to tremble. She sank down on the edge of the bed, her face blanched. She looked so devastated that Amalric found himself wanting to tell her that he was sorry, that this was not his fault. He said nothing, for if she knew he felt guilty, she’d use that knowledge to coax him into letting her have Sybilla. It was not a risk he was willing to take; he feared she’d pour poison into the little girl’s ear, turning her against him.

“I have also asked the papal legate for a dispensation absolving you of any moral blame for entering into an invalid marriage,” he said at last, and Agnes raised her head to stare at him.

“How magnanimous of you, Amalric! And what a short memory you have. Have you truly forgotten that you coerced my consent?”

“That is nonsense! You were as eager as I for the match, for you saw that I could offer you much more than d’Ibelin.” No longer feeling pity for her plight, he started for the door.

Seeing that he was about to walk out of their bedchamber, out of her life, Agnes panicked. “For the love of God, how can you abandon me like this? What am I supposed to do?”

He halted, his hand on the door latch. “Hugh d’Ibelin did not marry after paying his ransom and regaining his freedom. Mayhap he’ll take you back.”

Agnes would later be thankful she’d had no weapon close at hand, for she did not doubt she’d have used it. She wanted to claw him till he bled, to kick and bite and scratch, to curse him and the patriarch and the papal legate and the High Court and God, to make them all pay for doing this to her. But Amalric had not waited for her response and the door was already closing.

Lurching to her feet, she reached for the table to steady herself. It was set for a private celebration of Amalric’s kingship. There were two goblets of the red glass for which Acre was famed, a flagon of his favorite wine, a plate laden with wafers, and a silver bowl of almonds and dried fruit. She cleared the table with a wild sweep of her arm. Her gaze fell then on his new tunic, hanging on a wall pole.

Snatching up the fruit knife, she slashed at it until the garment hung in tatters. A book of his was the next to feel her wrath, flung into the smoldering hearth.

She was panting by now. She still held the knife and she stumbled toward the bed she'd shared with Amalric. After shredding the coverlet, she turned to the pillows, stabbing so fiercely that she was inhaling a cloud of escaping feathers as she plunged the blade into the mattress.

“My lady!”

Agnes paused, knife upraised, to see two of her ladies in the doorway. They had yet to move, staring at her in horror. If they were so distraught over the wreckage of her bedchamber, how would they react to the wreckage of her life? At that, she began to laugh, laughter so shrill and brittle that, even to her own ears, it sounded like the laughter of a madwoman.

CHAPTER 1



*April 1172
Jerusalem, Outremer*

It was a great destiny to be a queen, but it was not an easy one. Maria Comnena had been only thirteen when she was wed to the King of Jerusalem, a man almost twenty years older than she, a man who spoke not a word of her Greek while she spoke not a word of his native French. Even religion had not been a bond between them, for he followed the Latin Church of Rome and she had been raised in the Greek Orthodox faith. And she soon discovered that her husband's past was inextricably entwined with her present, for Amalric had two young children and a former wife, a woman very beautiful and very bitter.

Her new kingdom was not a welcoming one. Known as Outremer, French for "the land beyond the sea," it was a country cursed with pestilent fevers and the constant shadow of war. Nor were her husband's subjects enthusiastic about the marriage; she'd soon discovered that the Franks scorned Greeks as untrustworthy and effeminate and were suspicious of this new alliance with the Greek empire. It was, in every respect, an alien world to her, and she'd been desperately homesick, missing her family and the familiar splendor of Constantinople, which made Jerusalem and Acre and Tyre seem like paltry villages. Looking back now, Maria was embarrassed to remember how often she'd cried herself to sleep in those first weeks of her marriage.

But she was a Greek princess, great-niece to the Emperor Manuel Comnenus, and she was determined not to bring shame upon the Greek royal house. She set about learning French. She spent hours memorizing the names of the bishops and barons of Outremer. She hid her shock at the sight of clean-shaven lords; beards were a cherished symbol of masculinity in her old life. She adopted the Frankish fashions, wearing her hair in two long braids and not always veiling her face when she ventured out in public, as highborn ladies of the Greek empire did.

And she did her best to please her new husband. Her mother had warned her

that Amalric would not be the easiest of men to live with. He was courageous, strong-willed, and intelligent, and men believed him to be a good king. He inspired respect, not affection, for there was a coldness about him that kept others at arm's length. He was reserved and often aloof, a man of few words who was sensitive about his slight stammer. But Maria had not expected to find love in marriage, or even companionship, asking only that her husband show her the honor due her rank. She'd learned at an early age that theirs was a world in which men set the rules and women had to play by them—even queens.

In her infrequent letters back home, she'd assured her parents that Amalric treated her well, and that was not a lie. While he was unfaithful, he did not flaunt his concubines at court. He'd not consummated their marriage until she was fourteen, and at first, she'd been worried that he found her unattractive, for Greek brides of twelve were deemed old enough to share their husband's beds. But it seemed that was not the custom among the Franks, who believed pregnancies to be dangerous for half-grown girls. When Amalric did claim his marital rights, Maria did not enjoy it and she sensed he did not enjoy it much, either, merely doing his duty to get her with child. He'd not reproached her, though, for failing to get pregnant straightaway and she'd been grateful for that. In public, he was unfailingly courteous, in private, preoccupied and distant. They never quarreled, rarely spoke at all. The truth was that even after more than four years of marriage, they were still two strangers who sometimes shared a bed.



Easter was the most sacred of holy days for both the Latin and the Greek Orthodox Churches. It was also a social occasion and Amalric's lords and their ladies had already begun to arrive in Jerusalem, not wanting to miss the lavish festivities of the king's Easter court. For Maria, these royal revelries were a mixed blessing. She enjoyed the feasting and entertainment, but not the inevitable appearances of Amalric's onetime wife.

She'd not expected that Agnes de Courtenay would continue to play a role in their lives. Fairly or not, scandal attached itself to a repudiated wife and she'd assumed that Agnes must have withdrawn to a nunnery as such women usually did. Instead, Agnes had promptly remarried, taking as her new husband Hugh d'IBelin, who'd once been her betrothed, and as Hugh's wife, she had to be made welcome at court, however little Amalric or Maria liked it. When Hugh died unexpectedly on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela three years ago, Maria had naively hoped that Agnes would retreat into the sequestered shadow world of widowhood.

To the contrary, she'd soon found another highborn husband, the Lord of Sidon, and continued to haunt the royal court with her prickly presence, reminding one and all without saying a word of her checkered history with Maria's husband.

As always, there was a stir as Agnes entered the great hall, heads turning in her direction. She paused dramatically in the doorway—to make sure that she was the center of attention, Maria thought sourly. Amalric avoided Agnes whenever he could and he'd put in a perfunctory appearance earlier, then disappeared. In his absence, Maria knew she'd be the other woman's quarry, and she was not surprised when Agnes began to move in her direction, as nonchalantly as a lioness stalking a herd of grazing deer. At first, she'd wondered why Agnes hated her so much, finally realizing it was because she had what Agnes so desperately wanted—not the gold band on her finger—but the jeweled crown that had been placed upon Maria's head on the day of her coronation.

She watched Agnes approach. Maria was not yet eighteen and Agnes must be nigh on twenty years older, her youth long gone, but Maria knew she would never be the beauty that Agnes once was. Agnes could make her feel awkward and inadequate merely by arching a delicately plucked brow. No matter how often Maria had reminded herself that she was the Queen of Jerusalem, she'd been acutely uncomfortable in the older woman's presence, tensing whenever that cool sapphire-blue gaze took her measure, knowing she'd been judged and found wanting.

But she was no longer intimidated by this worldly, elegant enemy. Turning to one of her attendants, she said, "Let me hold her," and as soon as the baby was lifted from her cradle and placed in her arms, she felt it again—a surge of such happiness that it was as if God Himself was smiling over her shoulder, sharing her joy. When the midwife had declared that she'd birthed a girl, she'd felt a stab of guilt, fearing that she'd failed Amalric by not giving him a son. Yet once she held her daughter for the first time, all else was forgotten. She'd not known she was capable of a love so intense, so overwhelming; she spent hours watching the baby sleep, listening to her breathing, marveling at the softness of her skin, the silky feel of her hair. That past week, Isabella had smiled for the first time and Maria did not doubt that this was a memory she'd cherish till the end of her days. Why had no one told her that motherhood was so life changing?

But it was only after Isabella's birth that she fully comprehended how much Agnes de Courtenay had taken from her. When Amalric told her that his two children with Agnes would come before any child of hers in the line of succession, it had seemed a remote concern to a thirteen-year-old girl with more immediate worries of her own. Now, though, as she looked down lovingly into the small, petal

face upturned to hers, she felt a resentful rage that her beautiful daughter would never be a queen, cheated of her rightful destiny because Amalric had been foolish enough to wed that hateful, unworthy woman.

Agnes's curtsy was so grudgingly given that those watching smothered smiles and edged closer; interactions between the two women were morbidly entertaining to many. Their exchange of greetings was edged in ice, followed by silence as Maria waited for the customary congratulations due a new mother. When she saw it was not coming, she made an effort at courtesy, acutely aware of their audience. "Your lord husband is not with you?"

"Oh, he is around somewhere," Agnes said with a graceful wave of her hand. "I see your husband is missing, too. Mayhap we should send out lymer hounds to track them down."

Isabella began to squirm then, and Maria lowered her head to brush a kiss against that smooth little cheek. To some, it might have been a touching tableau of young motherhood; to Agnes, it was an intolerable reminder of all she'd lost—her crown and her children.

"I'd heard that you gave birth to a daughter. I hope you and Amalric were not too disappointed?"

Maria's head came up sharply. "I am young. God willing, we will be blessed with many sons in the years to come."

Agnes's smile faded. "May I see her?" she asked, poisonously polite, and before Maria could respond, she leaned over to study the child.

"Oh, my," she murmured, sounding surprised. "She does not look at all like Amalric, does she? Dark as a Saracen, she is." Her smile came back then, for as soon as she saw Maria's face, she knew she'd drawn blood. "But a sweet child, I am sure," she added dismissively, and turned away, sure that she'd gotten the last word.



Hours later, Maria was still seething. The words, innocuous in themselves, had been infused with such venom that they'd left her speechless, and thank God Almighty for that; if not, she might have caused a scene that the court would be talking about for years to come. It was not even the malicious insinuation about Isabella's paternity that had so enraged her, for that was too outrageous to be taken seriously. It was that Agnes saw Isabella—saw her daughter—as a legitimate target in this ugly vendetta of hers. She would come to regret it, to regret it dearly. Maria swore a silent, holy vow to make it so, but even that did not assuage her fury. She needed to give voice to her wrath, needed a sympathetic audience.

Amalric would not want to be dragged into what he'd see as a female feud; catfight; he preferred to deal with Agnes by ignoring her. And friendship was a luxury denied to those in power. Maria had been taught that the highborn dared not let down their guard. Servants could be bribed or threatened, handmaidens suborned, and spies were everywhere. But she was luckier than most queens, for she did have a friend, one whom she trusted implicitly.

It was language that had brought them together initially, for Master William was a linguist, fluent in four languages, one of which was Greek. Maria had been thankful to be able to converse with someone in her native tongue, and she'd been grateful, too, that William approved of her marriage, believing an alliance with the Greek empire to be in the best interests of his kingdom. He'd engaged a tutor to teach her French and began to instruct her in the intricacies of Outremer politics. Having grown up at the highly political royal court in Constantinople, Maria was fascinated by statecraft and power. When she'd tried to discuss such matters with Amalric, she'd been politely rebuffed, but William found her to be an apt pupil; as their friendship deepened, Maria no longer felt so utterly alone.

Such a relationship would have been frowned upon in Constantinople, where women led more segregated lives, with few opportunities to mingle with men not of their family. But William was a man of God, now the Archdeacon of Tyre, and that helped to dampen any hint of scandal. So, too, did Amalric's approval. He admired William greatly, commissioning him to write histories of their kingdom and their Saracen foes. Two years ago, he'd even entrusted his son, Baldwin, into William's keeping, making him responsible for the young prince's education. He had no problems with his queen spending time with William, provided that they were chaperoned.

While William and Baldwin were often in the coastal city of Tyre, they were back for the king's Easter court, with quarters here in the palace. So, when her inner turmoil did not abate, Maria knew what she must do. Summoning two of her ladies and her chief eunuch, Michael, she announced that she was going to visit Master William.



William's lodgings showed how high he stood in the king's favor. Space was at a premium at court, even in the new royal palace, yet William been given two rooms. The antechamber was comfortably furnished with a table, desk, and chairs, for it was here that he did his writing and met with guests. Double doors opened onto a small balcony, and a closed door led to his bedchamber, which she knew would be

austere and simple. Unlike many churchmen, William had no taste for luxury; whatever money he had, he spent on books. He was holding one in his hand now as he opened the door, his face breaking into a smile at the sight of Maria.

Even in her agitation, she'd not entirely forgotten her manners. "Forgive me for bursting in like this, Master William, but I had such a need to talk with you. Agnes de Courtenay is surely the greatest bitch in all of Christendom! You'll not believe what that woman dared to say about my daughter. She—"

She got no further, for it was only then that she saw the shadow cast by the man standing on the balcony. She clapped her hand to her mouth, dismayed that she'd uttered such intemperate words for a stranger to hear. But worse was to come. As he moved into the chamber, she gave a horrified gasp, for she knew him. Balian d'Ibelin, the youngest of the Ibelin brothers, Agnes de Courtenay's former brother-in-law.

For a moment, they stared at each other. She shuddered at the thought of him repeating what he'd overheard. How Agnes would laugh to learn how hurtful her words had been. Dare she ask him to keep silent? But why would he? "I . . . I fear I have been indiscreet. . . ."

"My lady queen," he said with flawless courtesy and reached for her hand, his lips barely grazing her clenched fingers. And then he smiled. "It is not indiscreet to speak the truth. I know Agnes well enough to assure you that if there are any in Outremer who do *not* think she is a bitch, they have not yet met her."

Maria's eyes widened and then she surprised them both by laughing. Balian had never heard her laugh before; whenever he'd seen her in public at Amalric's side, she'd been serious, even somber, with a gravity that seemed sad to him in one so young. He liked this Maria better, he decided, and with a gallant bow, he ushered her toward a chair, as if he and not William were her host, asking if he could fetch her wine.

"No, I'll not stay. I do not want to interrupt your visit with Master William." When Balian claimed he'd just been about to leave, Maria shook her head, insisting he remain. William did not argue, for he sensed that she was still embarrassed. Maria was not comfortable with the unexpected, and what could be more unexpected than sympathy from Agnes's brother-in-law?

Michael and her women did not speak French, so they looked puzzled when their mistress told them that she was leaving. She smiled at William and then at Balian. While she felt as if he had given her a gift, she was not about to unburden her heart to him. "Master William, I shall speak with you later. Lord Balian, I bid you a good morrow," she added politely, retreating into the formality that served

as her shield. And before the men could react, she had gone, leaving behind only the faintest hint of perfume and the memory of a moment in which she'd shown them a glimpse of the girl hidden away behind the turrets and towers of queenship.

William sat down again. "That was very chivalrous of you, lad, easing her discomfort the way you did. I know you have that unaccountable liking for Agnes, so—"

"What makes you say that, William?"

"Well, I've heard you defend her in the past, so I assumed . . . ?"

Balian was shaking his head. "The little queen is right. Agnes is a bitch. I understand, though, why she became such a bitch, so I suppose I judge her less harshly than others." He grinned then, saying with mock regret, "Truly, it is a curse—seeing both sides of every issue. It has gotten me into trouble more times than I can count."

"I daresay it has," William agreed, with a grin of his own. "Even those who are ignorant of Scriptures seem to know that verse from Matthew: 'He that is not with me is against me.' I confess I am glad to hear that you are not fond of your former sister by marriage," he said, for he was very protective of his young charge and considered Agnes de Courtenay to be a detrimental influence upon her son. But he seized this opportunity to indulge his curiosity. "Was your brother happy with Agnes?"

He was not surprised when Balian paused to consider the question, for as young as he was—in his twenty-second year—he was deliberate in all that he did, utterly unlike his elder brothers, Hugh of blessed memory and the impulsive, hot-tempered Baudouin. "I think he was, William, at least at first. Hugh was besotted with her. It well-nigh broke his heart when Amalric married her whilst he was languishing in that Saracen gaol. So, when she came to him after her divorce and offered herself, he was eager to take her as his wife. But it is no easy thing to live with a woman so filled with rage. I suspect it wore him down. . . ."

Not wanting to talk about his brother, whose untimely death still had the power to bring tears to his eyes, Balian nudged the conversation in another direction. "What's this I hear about young Baldwin's latest adventure? Is it true that he tried to ride the king's roan destrier?"

"Sadly, it is. The lad is a fine rider, but he's too young to ride a fiery beast like Caesar. Yet that is exactly what he would have done had he not been caught by one of the grooms."

"It is a wonder the lad was not trampled as soon as he ventured into that stall," Balian said, for Caesar's ill temper was known to all who'd ridden to war with King Amalric.

"Baldwin is too clever by half. He confessed he'd been sneaking into the stable

with treats for the stallion. At least I got him to promise he'd not do it again, and he keeps his word. But I am sure he'll think of another scheme just as daft."

Balian knew William had not expected to become so fond of the boy. But watching them together now was almost like watching a father and son, for William gave Baldwin the affection and attention he did not get from Amalric, who was not one for displaying his emotions even with his only son and heir. For that matter, Balian realized, there was something paternal, too, in William's friendship with the young queen. Looking over at the older man, he startled and pleased William by saying, "The day that Amalric chose you to tutor his son was a lucky day for Baldwin . . . and for the kingdom. With your guidance, he is sure to grow into a good king one day." Balian was not often so serious and he could not resist teasing, "Assuming, of course, that you can keep the lad from breaking that spirited neck of his."

William laughed and began to tell Balian about some of Baldwin's other escapades, never imagining that he would later look back upon that moment with such bittersweet regret, recognizing it for what it was—the last afternoon of utter innocence for him, for his young charge, and for the kingdom Baldwin was destined one day to rule.



Later that evening, William entered Baldwin's bedchamber to make sure he was settled in. That was not one of his duties, but Baldwin had a friend staying the night and William wanted to be sure that they got to bed at a reasonable hour; Baldwin was too good at charming servants into bending the rules for him.

As he expected, they were doing anything but sleeping. Feathers floating on the air gave evidence of a recent pillow fight. Baldwin's wolfhound was helping himself to the remains of their bedtime snack. The boys' bath had apparently turned into a splashing contest, for towels had been spread around the tub to soak up the overflow. The boys themselves were sprawled on the bed as they took turns carving a thick tallow candle. William got only a glimpse of their handiwork for they hid it under the sheets as soon as they realized they were no longer alone. It looked to him as if they'd been trying to whittle a woman's torso from the soft wax, and his initial disapproval gave way at once to resignation. Baldwin would be eleven in June, so it was only to be expected that he'd have begun to show curiosity about the female body.

"We were going to bed," Hubert insisted, for he was very much in awe of their tutor.

Baldwin was made of sterner stuff. “Eventually,” he said with a grin that William found hard to resist. He did, though, saying calmly that eventually was now. Baldwin raised no protests, seeing no point in fighting a war he was sure to lose. Under William’s watchful eye, the boys stripped off their shirts and braies and slid under the sheets of Baldwin’s huge bed. William reached out to stop the wolfhound from joining them, but forgot the dog when he noticed Baldwin’s bruises.

“What happened to your arm? Did you fall?” The boys exchanged glances and Baldwin nodded, but when William moved closer, he saw that the bruises were spaced at intervals, as if deliberately done. Giving Baldwin what they privately called “the look,” he waited for the truth.

“We were playing dare,” Baldwin admitted, and Hubert nervously explained that dare was a challenge game in which boys pinched one another, the winner being the one who held out the longest without showing signs of pain.

“We were playing it yesterday with Arnulf, Gerald, and Adam,” Hubert continued, naming three of the boys who attended classes with them. “Baldwin won. He always wins, and that vexes them no end. They think he somehow cheats!”

Both boys laughed, but William was looking at a deep scratch on Baldwin’s wrist. When Hubert got up to use the privy chamber, he called the scratch to Baldwin’s attention. “The other boys did this, too?” Frowning when Baldwin nodded. “That was foolish, lad. Pinching is one thing, but a scratch like this could easily become infected. I thought you knew better than that.”

Baldwin could have made light of a lecture, but not the disappointment in William’s voice. “I will not play the game anymore,” he promised. “I did not know Arnulf had scratched me like that, for I did not feel it.” Glancing around to make sure Hubert was still in the privy chamber, he lowered his voice. “I do not feel pain in my hand or arm. That is how I always win. Do not tell Hubert, though.”

“You feel no pain? How long has that been true, Baldwin?” The boy shrugged, saying it was not long. William said nothing more, but he could not take his eyes from those mottled bruises, a memory long forgotten beginning to fight its way to the surface, one that sent a chill rippling up his spine.



William was seated on a bench in the courtyard, staring up at the window of Baldwin’s palace bedchamber. Despite the lateness of the hour, he’d gone at once to Amalric, who ordered a medical examination on the morrow for his son. He’d reacted to William’s news with his usual sangfroid, but William knew he was concerned. William was waiting now for the results, squinting as the sun rose

higher in the sky while doing his best to allay his own anxiety, reminding himself that he'd been trained in the liberal arts, theology, and the law, not medicine.

He leaped to his feet when the doctor finally emerged, hastening to intercept him. Unlike many of his countrymen, he did not approve of consulting Saracen doctors, but he did have some confidence in Abu Sulayman Dāwūd, who was well educated and a Syrian Christian. He knew better than to ask, for the physician would deliver his report first to the king. He intended to be there for that, and after an exchange of greetings, he fell in step beside the other man. The doctor was uncommonly tall, his height accentuated by his bright yellow turban, and William, who was of moderate stature, had to hurry to match his longer strides. He was out of breath by the time they reached Amalric's private quarters and his heart was racing, although he did not know if that was due to the physical exertion or his lingering unease.

Amalric was dictating to a scribe; even his critics acknowledged he was not one to shirk his royal responsibilities. He dismissed the scribe and the others in the chamber as soon as William and the doctor were announced. "Well? Did you find out what ails my son?"

"No, my lord king. It was impossible to make a diagnosis of the young prince. I can tell you only what might be afflicting him. To be certain, we must wait to see if he develops other symptoms."

Amalric scowled. "Forget certainty, then. Tell me what you think is causing his numbness."

"It is probably the result of an injury. Lord Baldwin insists he suffered no falls, yet even a minor mishap can cause nerve damage." Knowing that Amalric's medical knowledge was confined to the treatment of battle wounds, the doctor offered a brief explanation, one a layman could understand. "Nerves are hollow ducts that originate in the brain and control movement and sensation. So, if they are injured, the result can be a lack of feeling such as your son is experiencing."

"Can this nerve injury be treated?"

"Yes, my king. Poultices often help. So does rubbing the afflicted limb with warm olive oil. And there are herbs, of course: wormwood, foxglove, and red nettle to name just a few—"

"But you cannot promise these remedies will work?"

"No, my liege," the other man said calmly. "We are all in the Almighty's hands. Your son is young, though, and otherwise healthy. He ought to respond well to these treatments." Seeing that Amalric still looked unsatisfied, he said, "And we can rule out a far more serious malady than an injury, God be praised. When I was

first told of the young lord's symptoms, I feared it might be a deadly ailment called diabetes, but that is diagnosed by frequent and excessive urination and your son assures me that he has no great need to pass water."

Amalric glared at the physician, thinking that leeches always told men more than they wanted to know. Why even mention this diabetes disease if Baldwin did not have it? "Start treating him straightaway," he ordered, and the doctor inclined his head. But despite being dismissed, he did not move.

"There is something you need to know, my liege. I am not saying it will happen, but because your son is the heir to the kingdom, you must be prepared for all eventualities. If the lad does not respond to treatment, it is possible that his condition could worsen . . . that in time he could lose the use of that hand and arm."

"Christ Jesus!" Amalric stared at the doctor in horror. "A king must lead men into battle. How could Baldwin fight with a crippled arm?"

William was so relieved that the doctor had not spoken of what he most feared that he took the risk of paralysis in stride. "Baldwin is young enough to learn to wield a sword with his left hand. It might even give him an advantage, for men expect their foes to be right-handed."

Amalric continued to pace and curse, and William was not sure his words had registered with the other man. But Amalric had a practical nature, utterly lacking in sentimentality, and he never wasted time or energy in denying a truth merely because he did not want to accept it. If there was a chance, however slight, that his son might be crippled, better to face it now. "But how could Baldwin control a destrier if he were unable to grip the reins?"

William had the answer to that, too. Abu Sulayman Dāwūd was quicker, though. "My brother has served as your son's horse master since he was old enough to get his feet into the stirrups. He tells me the boy is a natural-born rider, that he is utterly fearless on horseback. He could be taught to control a horse by the pressure of his knees. It is not so difficult to learn, either for men or stallions. Look at the Saracen archers if you need proof of that."

Amalric considered that for a long moment and then nodded. The Franks had never learned to shoot from horseback as their enemies did, but if the Saracens could guide their mounts without the need of reins, then Baldwin could, too, by God. And it might never come to that. "Send your brother to me," he instructed the doctor. "And nothing that was said here is to leave this chamber. Is that understood?"

The doctor obviously resented this warning, as needless as it was insulting. Bowing stiffly, he backed toward the door. There he paused, his hand on the latch.

“There is another malady that can cause a loss of feeling or paralysis. I am not saying I fear the young lord has been afflicted with it, for there is no evidence of that. Yet I would be remiss in my duties as a physician if I did not mention it to you, my liege. I do not believe you need—”

“By the rood, man, spit it out! What is this ailment?”

The doctor met Amalric’s gaze steadily. “Leprosy.”

William sank down abruptly on a nearby coffer chest. The blood had drained from Amalric’s face; he opened his mouth, but no words emerged. And then he lunged across the chamber, grabbing the doctor and shoving him against the door. “If I ever hear you say that my son could be a leper, I’ll cut your tongue out myself!”

The other man looked more offended than alarmed. “My first responsibility is to my patient. I would never break a sickbed confidence, would never speak of Lord Baldwin’s ailment to anyone but you. If you do not trust me to honor my vow, it might be better for you to seek another doctor for the young prince.”

Amalric was the first to look away. Stepping back, he released his hold on the doctor’s arm. “I trust you,” he said, his voice thick and scratchy, and Abu Sulayman Dāwūd yielded, knowing this was as close as the king could come to an apology.

As soon as he departed, Amalric strode over to a side table and poured himself wine with a shaking hand. Emptying it in several swallows, he splashed more wine into the cup and brought it to his mouth. But he did not drink, instead flung the cup to the floor. A swipe of his arm sent the flagon after it, soaking the carpet. He stared down for a moment at the pooling wine, as red as newly spilled blood, and then crossed the chamber, slumping into a chair beside William.

“You were not surprised,” he said after a long silence; there was no accusation in his voice, though, nothing but exhaustion. “Why would you ever have suspected that?”

“I would not say I suspected, my liege; that is too strong a word. It is rather that I was remembering. When I was a boy in Jerusalem, a neighbor’s son was diagnosed with that vile malady.” He did not elaborate, not wanting to tell Amalric that the boy’s first symptom had been a lack of feeling in one of his hands, not wanting to say anything that would connect their blessed young prince with that doomed child.

Amalric leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. “Christ on the cross,” he muttered, as if to himself, and another oppressive silence fell. “I do not believe it,” he said abruptly. “Not any of it. I do not believe Baldwin will not heal or that he’ll be crippled. As for the other . . .” His mouth twisted, as if he’d tasted something

unspeakably foul. “There is no way that my son could be stricken with that accursed disease. God would never let that happen—never.”

William studied the other man and then slowly nodded. “I do not believe God would let that happen, either, my lord king.”



The rest of the day passed in a blur for William. He delighted Baldwin and the other boys by canceling their classes, and sought to occupy himself with his writing. Despite spending hours on his task, he was unhappy with what he'd written and ended up scraping the parchment clean, erasing all his afternoon's efforts. It was the eve of Maundy Thursday and the service that night was the hauntingly beautiful and tragic ceremony of Tenebrae, one of his favorites. But even as the candles were symbolically quenched, one by one, until the church of the Holy Sepulchre was plunged into darkness, he remained distracted and restless, unable to meditate upon the Savior's suffering. He retired early to his own chambers. When he realized he'd been sitting for an hour with a book open in his lap, not a page turned, he put it aside and, picking up an oil lamp, made his way into the stairwell toward Baldwin's chambers.

The boy was already in bed. His attendants greeted William by putting fingers to their lips. He indicated he'd not wake the young prince, detouring around the wolfhound stretched out on the carpet by Baldwin's bed. He stood for several moments, gazing down at the sleeping child. A lock of sunlit hair had fallen across his forehead and William resisted the urge to smooth it back into place. It was then that the boy's lashes flickered and he looked up drowsily.

“Are you here to scold me for what I did today?”

“No . . . what did you do?”

“It was just in fun. . . .” Baldwin yawned. “You do not know? Well, I'd be foolish to tell you, then,” he murmured with a sleepy smile. “You might not find out. . . .”

“I always do,” William reminded him. “It does not involve Queen Maria, does it? You promised me that you'd play no more tricks upon her after that last bit of mischief.”

“She has no sense of humor at all.”

“Baldwin, you let a bat loose in her bedchamber!”

The corner of the boy's mouth twitched in amusement. “My mother would have laughed.”

William doubted that, but he usually tried to hold his peace where Agnes de

Courtenay was concerned, not feeling it proper to share his disapproval of the woman with her young son. In truth, the boy did not really know his mother, for once Amalric realized how bitter she was about their divorce, he saw to it that her visits with Baldwin were infrequent and always supervised.

“You did keep your word about the queen?” William persisted, relieved when the boy nodded. He was sorry, although not truly surprised, that there was so little affection between Maria and Baldwin. Baldwin had been six at the time of her marriage to his father and he’d not been pleased, seeing her as an intruder into their lives. And what thirteen-year-old girl was equipped to be a stepmother to a youngster who was resentful, strong-willed, and somewhat spoiled? It did not help, either, he thought with a sigh, that Baldwin was such a tease and Maria so protective of her dignity. Just a few days ago, William had been worried about their failure to forge any sort of bond, realizing that their rivalry was likely to get worse now that Maria had a child of her own. Tonight, it no longer seemed to matter.

“Go back to sleep, Baldwin,” he said softly. “I did not mean to awaken you.”

“Master William?”

“Yes, lad?”

“My arm . . . it will get better?”

“Yes, I am sure it will. Have you been worried about it, Baldwin?”

“No . . . not until I saw that you and my father were worried.”

“Well, now that you’ve seen the doctor, none of us need worry.” William looked into the boy’s candid blue eyes and summoned up a smile. “May God and His holy angels keep you safe, lad.” It was a blessing he’d often bestowed upon Baldwin and the words came to his lips of their own bidding. But as he spoke them tonight, there was a catch in his throat.