

## Praise for THE ART OF A LIE

“This book has a notably perfect ending. . . . A flirtatious cat-and-mouse game ensues, with heartrending results.”

—Crimereads

“How I long to visit the Punchbowl and Pineapple on Piccadilly . . . I simply couldn’t look away from *The Art of a Lie*. A story as sweet as ‘iced cream,’ as tense as spun sugar, as clever as a trickster and as beautifully written and masterful as everything by the wonderful Laura Shepherd-Robinson. An absolute treat of an historical crime novel. Sheer perfection.”

—Janice Hallett, bestselling author of *The Appeal*

“*The Art of A Lie* is a delicious mystery and I savored every twist and turn. An impeccably atmospheric, startling, and clever historical thriller that kept me guessing to the final page. Completely brilliant!”

—Jennifer Saint, bestselling author of *Ariadne*

“Exquisitely drawn and meticulously researched, fast-paced and tightly plotted and full of heart. This gorgeous novel had me turning pages late into the night, and I am still thinking about its two brilliant protagonists long after finishing the final chapter. In a word: decadent.”

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“A thrilling ride through the streets of 18th-century London, full of twists and turns, unforgettable characters, evil deeds, and delicious food.”

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“Richly imagined, fiendishly clever, and twisty as hell, this an up-past-midnight page-turner from a writer at the top of her game. An absolutely glorious cat-and-mouse tale.”

—Ellery Lloyd, author of *The Club*

“A glorious tale of men and women with secrets, love and heartache, deceptions and comeuppances . . . and, oh, I want an ice-cream now. Historical but also thematically current, highly recommended!”

—Sarah Pinborough, author of *Behind Her Eyes* and *Insomnia*

“A delicious romp of cat and mouse infused with sumptuous plotting, *The Art of a Lie* is a novel of rich delectable appetites to be savored right to the very last chapter.”

—Susan Stokes-Chapman, bestselling author of *Pandora*

“Nothing short of exceptional . . . meticulously researched and with writing as carefully, deliciously crafted as the sweets filling its pages.”

—*The Bookseller* (UK)

“This book is an absolute treat, with deceit layered on deceit. As always, Laura brings Georgian London to life in all its wit and wickedness. I devoured the story like a bowl of fresh ice cream, and I won’t be able to walk the length of Piccadilly without thinking of Hannah Cole and her shop of sweet temptations.”

—SJ Bennett, author of *The Windsor Knot*

“The queen of historical crime has done it again: *The Art of a Lie* is a propulsive, twisty, and immaculately researched mystery, bringing the grime and glamour of Georgian London to roaring life.”

—Caroline Lea, author of *The Glass Woman*

“Laura Shepherd-Robinson has excelled herself with this most artfully constructed novel, which toys with our emotions and wreaks havoc with our expectations. She has an instinctive feel for the textures of eighteenth-century life—and an almost supernatural knowledge of contemporary confectionary skills and the art of the sophisticated con-trick. Read and enjoy. Historical crime fiction doesn’t get any better than this.”

—Andrew Taylor, bestselling author of *The Ashes of London*

“A deliciously clever and complex confection of love, artifice, mystery, and ice cream, with exquisitely drawn characters. Laura Shepherd-Robinson’s best book yet.”

—Anna Mazzola, author of *The Book of Secrets*

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THE ART  
OF A  
LIE

A NOVEL

**LAURA SHEPHERD-  
ROBINSON**

**ATRIA** PAPERBACK

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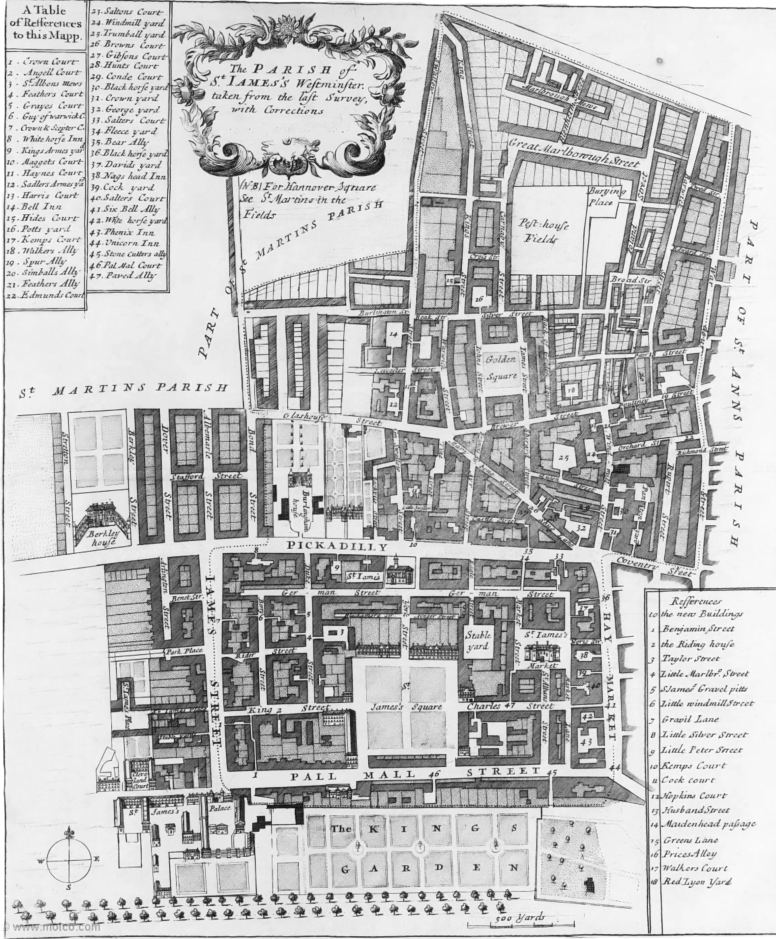
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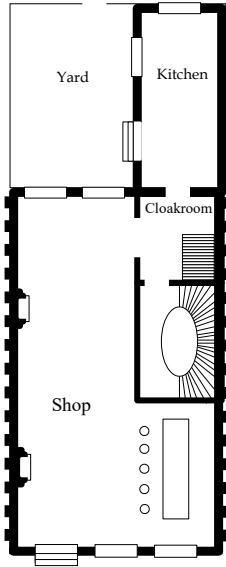
*For Billy,  
who stole the buttons*

# Parish of St James's, Westminster

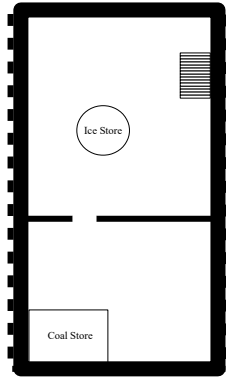


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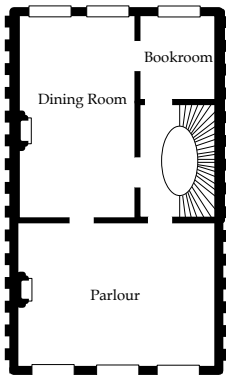
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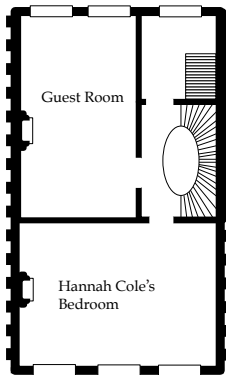
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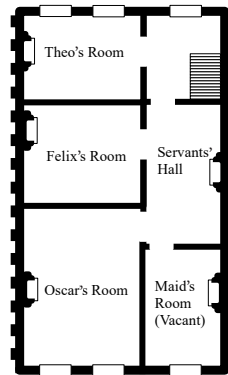
First Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor





## PART ONE

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### *The Mirror*

*A lover, when he is admitted to cards, ought to be solemnly silent, and observe the motions of his mistress. He must laugh when she laughs, sigh when she sighs. In short, he should be the shadow of her mind. A lady, in the presence of her lover, should never want a looking-glass; as a beau, in the presence of his looking-glass, never wants a mistress.*

Henry Fielding, *Love in Several Masques*, 1728



## CHAPTER ONE

NINE TIMES OUT of ten, when a customer walks into the Punch-bowl and Pineapple, I can guess what will tempt them. It is the confectioner's principal art, anticipating wants and needs—and people betray their desires in countless small ways. For a young lady taut with nerves, dressed to make a house call, I suggest a pretty basket of French macaroons to impress her friends. For a young buck in the first flush of love, seeking a gift for his mistress, I propose a *petits puits d'amour* (the name and oval shape might make him smile, though I act oblivious to any indelicate connotations). For an older gentleman—picture one crimson from hunting and port—a rich plum cake spiced with cinnamon and mace. For a widow in mittens, a box of scented violet wafers—or if she is bent with the rheumatism, bergamot chips. For a little boy with a cough, I prescribe a *guimauve*: a soft cake of honey whipped with the sap of the marsh mallow plant. And for his governess, a sweet syllabub, to be eaten at one of my tables, while she ponders how life's misfortunes brought her here.

That day, the fifteenth of June 1749, I was watching a gentleman in the mirror behind my counter. He'd just strolled in, escaping the bustle of Piccadilly, remarkably unsullied by the dust and heat of the day outside. His finger hovered over my golden nests of spun sugar, each filled with marchpane eggs and topped with a sugar-work bird—a new creation I'd put my hand to whilst the shop had been closed for mourning. Like my birds, he was a colorful creature—his coat a smoke-blue silk with silver embroidery at the collar and cuffs, a topaz pin in his cream

cravat, and a plump meringue of a periwig beneath a smoke-blue hat adorned with a peacock feather. The patina of the mirror speckled his tawny skin, the warp of the glass distorting one golden-brown eye.

Not a sugar nest, I thought, not unless he was looking for a present for his wife—and he had taken a stool at my counter, which suggested he intended to eat. An apricot tart, I decided. Refined, yet unadventurous, like most of my customers.

To my surprise, he pointed to a silver tureen, where half a dozen glass goblets of ice shavings nestled amidst larger shards of ice. “Is that a Persian sherbet?” he said. “I haven’t had one in years.”

“Perfect for the weather, sir,” Theo said.

I could imagine how she’d be looking at him. Fifteen years old, and men still a mystery she presumed delightful. “The goods are behind the counter,” I’d sometimes remind her. “Not in front of it.”

“I’ll do it,” I said, turning. “Go see to the balancing pan.”

“Yes, Mrs. C.” Theo gave me a pert look, and threaded her way, hips swaying, to the door at the back of the shop.

Undistorted by the mirror, the gentleman appeared slightly familiar, though I couldn’t quite place him. Perhaps from church? A carriage moved on the street outside, and a shaft of sunlight gilded his face, revealing a few delicate lines of age around the eyes and mouth. He put up a hand to shield his gaze, signet ring flashing.

I poured a syrup of rosewater over one of the goblets of ice, adding a scatter of dried rose petals and ground Turkey pistachios. The gentleman handed over the coins and while I weighed them, he plunged in with his spoon.

“Your girl wasn’t wrong,” he said, after a moment. “That’s perfection right there.”

I inclined my head at the compliment. “Most find the flavors too exotic.”

He grinned. “Round here they still say that about a peppercorn.”

He’d get no warm words from me, a widow of nearly thirty. Yet I was still pondering the mystery of where I had seen him before. Once I’d secreted the coins in my money-drawer, my curiosity got the better of me. “Do I know you, sir?”

His smile faded. “We’ve not been introduced, but I attended your husband’s memorial service. William Devereux is my name. My condolences, Mrs. Cole. Jonas was a general, a true force. I can hardly believe that he’s gone.”

People think it’s what you want to hear. To know that the man you loved mattered. That his qualities were recognized, that he is remembered. How could they know that every morning when I awoke, I put my shoulder to the grindstone of forgetting? Here in the shop, I could pretend that none of it had happened. That Jonas was out on parish business, or had popped upstairs to fetch a spool of ribbon or a clean apron. It brought me a measure of peace, just for an hour or two, until some well-meaning customer like Mr. Devereux brought it all back. The punch in the gut, the sick wave of fear for my own future.

Mr. Devereux was watching me with evident concern. “I have something for you,” he said, holding out a folded piece of paper. I found myself gazing at an official-looking document with a stamp and a seal.

“I advise gentlemen on the prudent investment of their money,” he explained. “Jonas was a client of mine. Acting upon my counsel, your husband placed ten pounds with the Culross Iron and Coal Company. I am pleased to say that this is the dividend from the first quarter.” He smiled and handed me a silver crown.

“Ten pounds?” I said, knowing nothing of this investment, trying to keep the eagerness from my tone. “Is it possible to redeem that money now?”

“Not for the moment, I’m afraid. But all being well, you can expect to see around five or six shillings every quarter, with the stock becoming redeemable in nine months’ time.”

Five shillings was still five shillings. Every penny mattered now. Since reopening the shop after Jonas’s murder, everything had proved a struggle. Summer was always the worst time of our year—the nobility and gentry having fled the swelter of the city for Bath and Tunbridge Wells—and widowhood had brought new challenges to my trade.

“I’d only known Jonas a few months,” Devereux went on. “We met by chance in the bank and got to talking. It led to a fledgling friendship. We drank together sometimes—at the Running Horse or the

Star and Garter.” He sighed. “Are they any closer to finding the villains responsible?”

I shook my head rather bleakly, and Devereux had the good grace to look away, rattling his spoon against his glass to scrape up the last of the syrup. “Delicious,” he pronounced. “Though it’s iced cream that I truly dream of in this weather.”

Grateful for this rather clumsy effort to change the subject, I studied him quizzically. “Iced cream, sir?”

“My mother used to make it when I was a boy. She was raised in Italy, and it is a great delicacy over there. Mother used to flavor the cream with peach or elderflower and then it was frozen almost solid. I used to think it was like biting into a snowball—though snow never tasted so good.”

His words intrigued me. Even before Jonas’s death, I’d been convinced that our shop required innovation if we were to stand out from our competitors. Now my need to entice new customers through the door was rather more pressing.

“Do you know how it is done?” I asked. “Freezing cream, I mean?” I had never seen, nor heard of frozen liquids other than water.

“I am afraid I only ever enjoyed the end result,” Devereux said. “Many years later I tried it again, on the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. But it was sold from a pail, so I saw none of the preparation.”

A woman in a wide yellow hat approached the counter and I noticed her steal a second glance at Mr. Devereux. “What is that?” she asked, pointing.

“A simple pound cake, madam,” I said, “but filled with a Seville orange cream. It’s like a burst of sunshine in your mouth.”

Her lip quivered. “I’ll take six of those almond wafers.”

I turned to box up her purchase, and Devereux met my eye in the mirror. “Too exotic,” he mouthed.

I was still frowning at his presumption when Theo returned. “Mr. Brunsdon is come to settle his bill.” She set down a tray of lemon jellies and smiled at Mr. Devereux.

Restraining a sigh, I excused myself. As I passed through the shop, my little jewel box of gilt-edged mirrors and pistachio paneling, I ex-

changed a few words with my regular customers. Entering the hot, sweet hell of my kitchen, I found Oscar sweating over the pastry table, stamping out almond hearts. Not quite trusting Theo with the shop's money yet, I told Oscar to watch the counter and to send in Felix to take the goods down to the cellar. Then I smoothed my apron, and walked out into the yard.

Roger Brunsdon was resting upon his cane in the shade of the old vine that had colonized my back wall and those of the neighboring yards. His boys trooped in and out of the alley, grunting under the weight of sacks of flour and salt, sugar loaves wrapped in blue paper, boxes of dried figs and currants.

He greeted me with an elaborate bow, then handed me his bill. "That time again, I am afraid, Mrs. Cole."

Brunsdon had the manners of a marquis and the accent of a Thameside stevedore. Sweat crawled from beneath his periwig, staining his cravat yellow with some kind of scalp oil. His pink, piggish eyes, fringed by bristling white lashes, traveled over my purple gown.

"Black was rather too somber for my customers," I said, regretting it immediately. I didn't owe Roger Brunsdon or anyone else an explanation.

"Not for me to judge," he replied, unsmiling.

I studied his bill. "But this is more than a usual month," I cried. "We only reopened two weeks ago."

"The price of sugar isn't what it was," he said. "Nor the price of wheat."

I didn't believe his excuses, not for a moment. He just didn't like women in trade—and was seeking to take advantage of my lack of experience with the books. Nor was he the only one. Between him, the fruiterer, and the egg man, I'd be lucky to break even that month. "Give me five minutes with a paring knife," I'd exclaimed to Oscar in frustration, "and I'll pit their stony hearts like Morello cherries!"

Reluctantly, I parted with my coins and returned to the shop. Mr. Devereux had gone, and Oscar glanced pointedly at a gentleman of middling years who was sitting in his place at my counter. Fearing he'd also come to collect on a bill, I slowed my pace.

His broad shoulders were hunched, his giant body contorted awkwardly upon the stool, one tree trunk of a leg stuck out to the side as

if it was injured. His clothes were very fine—burgundy silk, a good French lace—but rather disheveled in the wearing, his cravat and wig askew, his coat misbuttoned. The intensity of his gaze suggested a fierce curiosity about the world, whilst the imperious jut of his long chin (which nearly met his long, curved nose) and the curl of one great fist upon the counter implied a determination to leave his stamp upon it.

He turned as I approached. “Mrs. Hannah Cole?” he said. “My name is Henry Fielding, the chief magistrate of Westminster. I’d like to talk to you about your husband’s murder.”

## CHAPTER TWO

WE SAT IN my parlor, Mr. Fielding taking Jonas's elbow chair. Theo brought up a tray of refreshments from the shop and I poured myself a bowl of tea, trying to still the rattle of the pot. Why was Fielding here and not the constable who'd come before? What had he learned?

His eyes traveled over my furnishings—the imitation Persian carpet, the mahogany card table with its silver-plated tea caddy, the japanned cabinet of our best China—coming to a rest on the shelf of books next to his chair. “I commend your taste, madam.”

“I have always admired your novels, sir,” I said, feeling my cheeks color. “*Tom Jones* is my favorite one yet.”

“Alas,” he said, “my new calling as Bow Street magistrate leaves me little time to write at present. But on the rare occasions that I do pick up my pen, I find I have plentiful inspiration for human wickedness. And all good stories start from there, do they not?”

I nodded uncertainly. “Please, tell me why you are here. Have you caught the villains who killed Jonas?”

He smiled sympathetically at the catch in my voice. “I'm afraid not, madam. But I am here to tell you that I intend to redouble Bow Street's efforts. To that end, I am taking personal charge of the case.”

A pulse throbbed in my temple and I took a moment to compose myself. “I am glad of it, sir.”

He paused to take a bite of his Piccadilly Puff, washing it down with a generous gulp of green walnut wine. It is a favorite choice of

the sybarite: the silken sweetness of the custard, the crunching layers of puff paste, the dusky depths of the spices mingling with the sourness of lemon. I might have guessed that Mr. Fielding was a man who struggled to keep his appetites in check, even if I hadn't read the more unkind stories about him in the newspapers. His appearance bespoke his pleasures: his prominent belly, his beveined cheeks, and his gouty foot. A magistrate was not so very different from a novelist, I reflected. They both held the fate of the principal characters in their hands.

Fielding dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. "If you feel able to, Mrs. Cole, I would like to revisit the events surrounding your husband's murder. I want to make certain that I have all the details correct." From his coat pocket, he produced a bundle of documents.

I sighed. The story was simple enough and I had told it many times. "On the night of the twenty-sixth of March, Jonas went to meet some friends at the Running Horse in Mayfair. I am told he left the tavern at around ten o'clock, but he never returned home. I reported him missing the following morning. My apprentices and I spent two days scouring the streets and visiting the hospitals. Then your constable called at the shop." I drew a breath. "He said that Jonas's body had washed up on a Wapping beach. That he'd been attacked and robbed in the street, beaten severely about the head, and probably died of his injuries before he was thrown into the river."

"It says here that Jonas told you he was intending to visit a friend later that night, after the tavern?"

"That's right," I said. "The constable thought it might have been someone who lived near Whitehall or the abbey—because of their proximity to the river. Jonas had a lot of friends in that part of town, but I don't know all of their names. He was often out late."

Mr. Fielding adopted a grimace of compassion. "It passes, madam," he said. "The first time my memories of my late wife brought me more consolation than despair, that was the moment I knew I would endure."

He gazed at the portrait hanging over the fireplace: Mr. and Mrs. Jonas Cole, dressed in their best. My husband had found the artist at a little studio in Leicester Fields. It was the new thing, someone had told him, for a rising man to have his portrait painted. The artist had

captured his prominent jaw and nose, his heavy dark brows. But not the energetic light in his eyes, nor the force of his will. I had protested the entire endeavor, for I'd feared we'd look ridiculous and I'd had a fondness for the Dutch oil that had hung there since my grandfather's day. It had depicted a platter of oysters, a bowl of olives, and a peeled lemon. Two flies crawled along the edge of the platter, and Jonas had said they made him feel sick.

"It's supposed to look real," I'd told him. "Life has flies, Jonas."

Now they swarmed.

"Your children must have also brought you consolation," I said. *And your money*, but I didn't say that.

Fielding inclined his head. "But you are still young, madam. In time—"

"No," I said, rather too fiercely. "I will never marry again."

He smiled. "Perhaps one day you will feel differently. I know I did." He leafed through his documents. "I understand several items were missing from your husband's body? Hence the presumption of a robbery?"

*Presumption.* What did he mean by that? "That's right. Jonas's purse strings were cut, and his watch and ring were missing."

"The watch was engraved with a double-headed eagle. Is that right?"

"The Russian imperial crest," I said. "Tsar Peter gave it to my grandfather during his Great Embassy to London."

Fielding raised an eyebrow. "It is a sad truth that due to Bow Street's limited resources, not all crimes receive the diligence they deserve—especially where there are no witnesses to the act in question. But due to your husband's prominent position on the parish committee, and the consequent interest of the newspapers in his murder, my constables gave this matter their utmost attention. Given the distinctive appearance of your husband's pocket watch, they circulated a description to various jewelers, pawnshops, and other places where stolen goods are sold—as well as to our informants in the thieving gangs. Despite Bow Street's offer of a substantial reward, nobody credible has come forward to claim it."

"Does the noise bother you, sir?" I asked, springing up from the sofa,

pointing to the three large windows that overlooked Piccadilly. "I don't like to leave them open, but it gets so hot."

"Not in the least, Mrs. Cole. Please sit down. Now, my visit to you today has been prompted by a curious matter that has lately come to light."

I frowned. "A curious matter, sir?"

"As is required by probate, your husband's executor recently submitted a preliminary valuation of his estate to the Prerogative Court."

"His cousin, Daniel," I said.

"Quite so. I was surprised to learn that as well as this property and its contents, your husband had over fifteen hundred pounds deposited with Messrs. Campbell & Bruce, a banking house on the Strand."

I stared at him. "That cannot be true. Our life savings amount to less than two hundred pounds."

"So you did not know?"

Wondering why Daniel had said nothing of this to me, I shook my head mutely.

"Could the money have come from your shop?"

"No," I replied, faintly. "Our takings are ten pounds a week at most. Less in the summer. After the shop and household expenses, only a pound or two is left."

I confess my heart had soared at the thought of all that money. As his nearest male relative, Daniel was Jonas's principal heir, but under the terms of his will and my marriage contract, I was entitled to a third of his estate, as well as this house and shop, which had belonged to my father. All my financial problems solved. My debts cleared. The business safe. But where *had* it come from? What else had Jonas been hiding from me?

Mr. Fielding was silent, perhaps waiting for me to come up with an explanation. When none was forthcoming, he pressed on: "Our fruitless endeavors to find the watch, combined with this large and unexplained fortune, have led me to consider the possibility that your husband's murder might not have been the result of a street robbery after all. That the watch and his other possessions might have been taken to give that appearance, when the motive was something else entirely."

Again, I stared. "I don't understand."

"I have to consider the possibility that Jonas was killed by someone he knew." Fielding paused to take another bite of his pastry.

"Surely not," I said, struggling for words in that horrible moment. "Jonas was well liked. Respected."

"Even the best of men can inspire resentment. Upon which subject I must ask . . ." Fielding paused again to lick his fingers—"did Jonas have any enemies that you know of?"

I was trying to think. "He could be hard in his business dealings," I offered at last. "Sometimes he was late paying our suppliers. And sometimes he would be accosted by a ratepayer unhappy about a decision of the parish committee. The amount of their poor rate or an order to improve their pavement. But I never knew of any serious falling out." I studied Fielding's face. "Do you have a theory, sir? About this money?"

"Just supposition at the present time. Can I ask if one of your husband's friends owns a midnight-blue carriage with brass trim?"

I was convinced he did have a theory and I wanted to know it. Why was he asking me this? I forced myself to breathe.

"His friends are—were—shopkeepers and tradesmen for the most part. None that I know owns a carriage, except for the Smithsons and theirs is brown. But Jonas knew a lot of prominent gentlemen from the parish committee. Perhaps one of them?"

He nodded. "I ask because on the night your husband disappeared, just before he left the Running Horse, he requested that the landlord look outside for such a vehicle. He said it belonged to friends who might be waiting to give him a ride home. The man remembered it because Jonas had made a similar request just two nights earlier. Also, because he thought it an odd arrangement. The carriage just dropping by like that, when Jonas was so close to home, and on the latter night in very inclement weather. Both times, there was no vehicle waiting there and Jonas left the tavern alone."

Fielding was right. It did seem odd. Jonas had always extolled the virtue of a walk, whatever the weather. There was still so much about his final days that I didn't understand. I'd tried to push it all to the back of my mind, but how could I now?

“One possibility is that Jonas was afraid he was being watched,” Fielding went on. “And that’s why he asked the landlord to look out for that carriage. Some of the men he was drinking with that night say he seemed tense and rather snappish in the weeks preceding his death. Was that your impression too?”

I paused, uncertain what to say. “Perhaps a little—but Jonas could get like that sometimes. Curt with the apprentices. Even with me. I put it down to overwork. Between the shop and the parish committee, his responsibilities put quite a strain on him.”

“You have three apprentices, is that right?”

I nodded. “Oscar is our trade apprentice. He has been with us for five years, learning the art of confectionary. Felix and Theodora are pauper apprentices from the workhouse. We took them on in September last year.”

“You are to be commended, madam.”

“We had room. This big house. All those abandoned children. I only wish we could have done more.” I put my hands in my lap to stop them tugging at the lace of my cuffs. “We had a maidservant too, but she left about three months ago, not long before Jonas died, and we never got around to finding a replacement. Times are a little difficult right now, or I should have seen to it.” Aware that I was talking too much, I smiled apologetically.

“I may need to speak to your apprentices at some point,” he said, “but I have an appointment to get to now. Perhaps in the meantime you could ask them if they ever remember seeing such a carriage in the vicinity of this house? You can write to me at my residence on Bow Street.”

“Of course.”

“Then that is everything for the time being.”

As we rose, my head swam, as if my life was spiraling away from me. Fielding bowed, and then gazed at me solicitously. “Be assured, Mrs. Cole, that I shall not rest until your husband’s murderer is hanging from a rope.”

## CHAPTER THREE

I HAD TO see Daniel. Had to find out what he knew about this money. My emotions were a wave. Up and down. Fielding's appearance in the shop. The news that he was no nearer to catching the killer. Him taking personal charge of the inquiry. His revelation about the money. His theory that Jonas was killed by someone he knew . . . I hurried downstairs and grabbed my hat from a peg in the cloakroom.

Leaving Oscar in charge of the shop, I strode along Piccadilly, the street choked with shoppers and servants and delivery carts. When Parliament was sitting, grand carriages were a familiar sight, but now there were only one or two open-top chaises heading in the direction of Hyde Park. I turned onto St. James's Street, a sloped avenue of shops with curved windows: the finest cobblers, tailors, vintners, and tobacconists in all of London—and the little post office receiving house above which Daniel lived and worked.

I waited impatiently while the postmaster served a customer from his booth lined with pigeonholes stuffed with mail. Once I had his attention, I asked him to fetch Mr. Cole. When Daniel came down and caught sight of me, his face lit up with a broad smile. "Hannah, dearest," he said, in his plummy Ulster brogue. "What fortuitous timing! I was going to call by the shop later on."

"I need to talk to you," I said.

Hearing the urgency in my tone, he suggested we take a turn about the park. On the street outside, he raised his hat to a party of gentlemen leaving White's chocolate house. Jonas had used to say that half

the cabinet met there to plot against the other half, but he would have sold his eyeteeth to become a member. In much the same spirit, he'd taken great pride in having a cousin who had been raised as a gentleman on an Irish plantation and educated at Cambridge—though if you'd seen him and Daniel together, you'd never have thought they were related. Where Jonas was tall, lean, and dark, Daniel was stocky and fair. Where Jonas spoke with a quiet authority, Daniel had an expansive charm surely destined for the bar or the pulpit. Yet despite a spell at one of the inns of court, he'd found the law to be “duller than Dorset,” and thought the church an unambitious calling for a man of his talents. The idea of high government office was much more to his liking, and so Jonas had used his connections in the parish to obtain him a sinecure overseeing the Westminster post offices, which we'd all hoped would lead to better things.

“Do I take it Henry Fielding has been to see you?” he said. “I spoke to him this morning and he said he was coming to you next.”

“He told me Jonas had over fifteen hundred pounds in the bank. Is that true?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Why didn't you tell me?”

“Because I didn't want you doing anything rash like telling Henry Fielding. Regrettably, he has found out of his own accord.”

“I don't understand.” A familiar phrase of late. Curse all these men for keeping things from me.

“The wretched man has ordered a stay on the passage of probate. I'd been hoping it would all be wrapped up by the end of next week.”

That wave again, crashing down upon my little world. “All of the money is delayed? Even the savings from our shop?”

“I'm afraid so.”

“Why would he do that?”

Daniel hesitated. “He suspects that Jonas came by that money through nefarious means. He says if it rightfully belongs to somebody else, then they'd have a claim to it. It's possible he will try to confiscate the lot.”

“Oh, Daniel.” I couldn't afford this. The court had advanced me a

small amount to live on in the weeks after Jonas's murder, but it wasn't nearly enough. With the shop closed and a mounting pile of bills, wages to pay, mourning clothes to buy, I'd been forced to borrow more. Only nobody wanted to lend to a woman unproven in business, except at extortionate rates, secured against the house and shop. Then the alembic I used to make the shop's distillations had cracked. The cost of a new one had added greatly to my debt, the lender only too happy to let the interest mount. I'd been counting the days until probate was granted, when I could use my third share of our savings to clear that debt.

I shook my head. "Why didn't Fielding tell me any of this?"

"I presume he didn't want to upset you—not until he has evidence of his suspicions. I have spoken to my lawyer, and he says all we can do is wait. If Fielding wants our money, then he has to prove wrongdoing."

"How can he hope to prove it? Jonas is dead."

"He intimated to me that villains usually have accomplices. Men they trust, who are privy to their secrets. One theory he has is that Jonas might have fallen out with someone he knew within the criminal fraternity. But Jonas wasn't a thief, he was a respectable tradesman. I told Mr. Fielding that in no uncertain terms."

Villains. Accomplices. Secrets. I felt sick. "So where did that money come from?" I asked.

"I haven't the first idea. All they could tell me at the bank was that it had been deposited over the course of the last two years in small amounts. Fielding seemed to think that was significant. I hear he has an appointment at the vestry hall this afternoon."

"Then he must think the money came from the parish?"

"I would think so. The newspapers are always full of stories about corrupt committeemen fiddling the poor fund." Daniel gave me a comforting smile. "Try not to worry, Hannah. What else can we do?"

I knew Daniel had debts too, presumably on better terms than mine. But a gentleman always had ways and means of obtaining more credit. Beg a loan from one of his rich friends, or his wealthy relatives on his mother's side. I tried not to resent the cheerful insouciance with which he greeted life's adversities. Hadn't I depended upon that same steadiness after Jonas's murder? While I'd been numb with shock, Daniel

had dealt with everything: the funeral, the constables, the court, the memorial service. And unlike everybody else, he'd supported my decision to reopen the Punchbowl and Pineapple, declaring that the worst thing a person could do after a bereavement was wallow.

We were walking in the direction of the park, past a little crowd gathered outside the red-brick gatehouse of St. James's Palace. The royal standard proclaimed that King George the Second was in residence, having chosen for once to summer in London rather than Hanover. Theo liked to come down here on Sunday afternoons to try to catch sight of the king and his mistress, the Countess of Yarmouth. We turned into the narrow alley between the palace and the Lutheran church, raising our voices over the stamp of guardsmen's feet.

"I heard Fielding is trying to get a bill through Parliament to establish a *police* like they have in France," Daniel said. "The little despot wants a private army at his disposal, made up of paid constables, able to arrest anyone in London across parish boundaries. He put it to the Duke of Newcastle, who asked why he should support a measure so manifestly unpopular, when Fielding couldn't even find the murderer of one confectioner. The cabinet read all about Jonas's death in the newspapers, you see. A hardworking shopkeeper, backbone of the nation, a dedicated servant of his parish, cut down in his prime. Some of them knew him too, from the parish committee. I imagine Fielding thinks that if he can find the murderer, and at the same time prove that Jonas had been tempted away from the path of righteousness by villainy and corruption, it will be the perfect advertisement for his *police*." He smiled thinly. "And it will give the newspapers something to write about other than Fielding's antics with his maid."

"She is his wife now," I said distantly, still trying to make sense of it all.

"Fielding had little choice in the matter, not once she was carrying his child," Daniel went on. "All those plays he wrote casting philanthropists like himself as the villain of the piece. Abandon her, and the world would have called him a hypocrite. Doesn't mean he has to like it though. I heard he tried to pack her off to the country, but she refused to go any further than Twickenham."

“The poor woman,” I murmured. Some of my neighbors had advised me to sell up and retire to the country. Marry again in time, to a kindly widower with a few acres. Except the shop was my home, the only one I’d ever known, and it was much more to me than my livelihood, it was Father’s legacy.

We crossed into the park, weaving our way between the avenues of lime trees and a rather boisterous game of pell-mell, onto the parched yellow lawns. Jonas had always encouraged me to walk in the Green Park, where the people of quality strolled, but I preferred St. James’s, where nobody judged what you wore. The world seemed to be enjoying the weather: little boys flying kites, tradesmen’s wives gossiping in pairs, soldiers on leave flirting with maidservants dawdling on errands. We walked along the ornamental canal in the direction of the parade ground.

“Jonas had an investment that I didn’t know about,” I said. “A gentleman came into the shop this morning and gave me five shillings. Two thirds of it is yours. I assume the relevant papers went astray.”

I tried to keep the resentment from my tone. At least Daniel hadn’t tried to challenge my right to a third of the money and the shop. The newspapers were full of stories about male heirs who’d done just that.

“Do you think Jonas could have had other investments?” I asked. “Maybe that’s how he came by the money?”

Daniel looked skeptical. “Surely we would have found a record? Contracts? Stock certificates? They can’t all have gone astray.”

“I don’t know. But I could ask Mr. Devereux—if he comes into the shop again? Or we could seek him out?”

“Devereux? Who’s he?”

“The gentleman who gave me the money. He said he was a friend of Jonas’s.”

“Never heard of him. But I suppose it’s worth a try.”

“Can you think of anyone else we could talk to? Someone Jonas might have confided in?”

Daniel frowned. “Let’s not get carried away. Do Fielding’s job for him.”

“Why not? He talked about how few resources he has. If we could

prove that Jonas acquired that money honestly, then Fielding would have to lift the stay on probate. And it might affect his thinking on the murder?”

“Well, for one thing it might be dangerous,” Daniel said. “These accomplices Fielding talked about. Villains.” He shuddered.

“I thought you said there was no truth in any of that.”

When Daniel didn’t at first reply, I wondered if he was quite so convinced by Jonas’s innocence as he’d claimed. I certainly wasn’t under any illusions about my husband. Respectable he might have seemed, but Jonas had never scrupled overly about trifles like taxes and the letter of the law. I found it hard to imagine him risking everything by turning thief, but it wasn’t completely beyond the realm of possibility.

“What matters is finding the devils who killed him,” Daniel said firmly. “However Jonas came by that money, a street robbery still seems to me the most likely explanation for his murder. And even if Fielding is right and Jonas was killed by someone he knew, there are plenty of other places he might look. That’s what I told him.”

“What other places?” I asked, turning sharply.

He waved a hand. “Jonas was fearless. Always locking horns. Who knows what enemies he might have made over the years.”

I studied his face, thinking it bland and rather evasive. It made me wonder if he was keeping something else from me.

“All I’m saying is that we need to think of our future,” Daniel went on. “It’s what Jonas would have wanted. Best to leave everything else to Mr. Fielding.”

By “our future” he meant the money, I supposed. His lion’s share of the fifteen hundred pounds. Perhaps he was afraid of what we might find if we looked too hard.

“I hate this,” I exclaimed. “Not knowing what’s going on when it concerns our lives.”

“It’s all very vexing,” Daniel agreed. “When I found out about the money, I had my name put down for White’s. Am I a suspect, do you think? I suppose we all are now.”

“Oh, Daniel, don’t say that. Of course you’re not a suspect.”

Frustrated by his levity—and his refusal to act—I thought of Jonas: