

Virgin and the Crab

*Sketches, Fables and Mysteries from the Early Life of
John Dee and Elizabeth Tudor*



ROBERT STEPHEN PARRY

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to Ruby

Also by the same author:

‘The Testament of Sophie Dawes’ 2016

‘The Hours Before’ 2015

‘Elizabeth’ 2014

‘Wildish’ 2013

‘The Arrow Chest’ 2011

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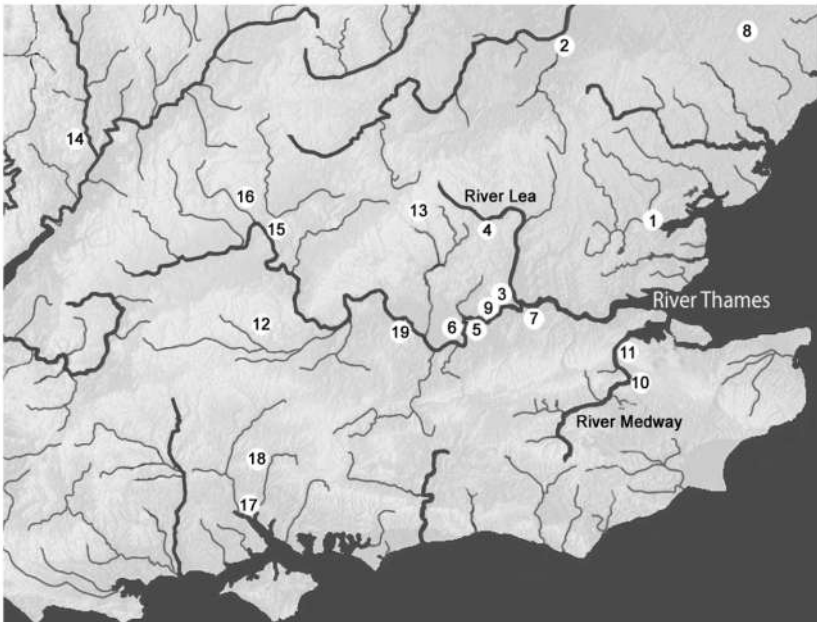
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Map of Main Places

For a printable online version of this map, [click here](#)

LOCATION OF THE MAIN PLACES MENTIONED IN THE STORY, ALONG WITH MAJOR RIVERS

1. Woodham Walter and Maldon, Essex
2. Cambridge
3. The City of London, The Tower of London,
plus Cheapside, Ludgate Hill, Fleet Street and Holborn
4. Hatfield House,
5. The area of Richmond, Kingston, Mortlake and Sheen
6. The area of Sion (Syon) House and Hampton Court
7. Greenwich Palace and Blackheath
8. Framlingham Castle, Suffolk.
Kenninghall (not on this map) lies a little to the north
9. Westminster Abbey and the palaces of Westminster,
Whitehall and St.James. Also Charing Cross
10. Maidstone, Kent
11. Rochester, Kent
12. Donnington Castle
13. Ashridge
14. Upton upon Severn
15. Oxford
16. Woodstock
17. Southampton
18. Winchester
19. Windsor Castle



List of Players

ASCHAM, Roger. Cambridge academic and tutor at the Royal Court.

ASHLEY, Katherine or Kat. Governess, confidant and friend to the Princess Elizabeth.

CECIL, William. Member of Parliament, lawyer and secretary.

CHARLES V. Holy Roman Emperor and head of the Habsburg dynasty.

CHEKE, John. Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and tutor at Royal Court of Edward VI.

COOKE, Sir Anthony: Academic and tutor at the Royal Court of Edward VI.

COURTENAY, Edward. Earl of Devonshire. Descended from the Plantagenet kings of England and France.

CRANMER, Thomas. Principal mover in the English Reformation under the reign of Henry VIII.

DEE, John. Philosopher, Astrologer and Mystic

DEVONSHIRE. See Courtenay, Edward.

DUBOIS, Jehan. Secretary to the Imperial Ambassador.

DUDLEY, John. Earl of Warwick, later Duke of Northumberland.

DUDLEY, Guildford. Son to John Dudley.

DUDLEY, Robert. Son to John Dudley.

EDWARD VI. King of England and son of Henry VIII and his third wife, Jane Seymour.

ELIZABETH TUDOR. Princess and daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn.

GARDINER, Stephen. Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor.

GREY, Frances. Duchess of Suffolk and niece of Henry VIII.

GREY, Jane. Daughter of Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk and Frances Grey, niece of Henry VIII.

GREY, Henry. Duke of Suffolk.

MARY TUDOR. Princess and daughter of Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

NORTHUMBERLAND - see Dudley, John.

PAGET, Sir William. Leading Statesman.

PARR, Katherine. Queen Dowager, last wife of Henry VIII.

PARRY, Blanche. Companion and Maid of Honour to the Princess Elizabeth.

PARRY, Thomas. Controller of the Princess Elizabeth's household.

PAULET, William. Marquess of Winchester and prominent Privy Councillor. Lord High Treasurer.

PHILIP OF SPAIN. Prince and heir to the great Holy Roman Empire of the Habsburg dynasty.

POLE, Reginald. Exiled Papal Legate.

RENAUD, Simon. Imperial Ambassador to England.

ROCHESTER, Robert. Controller of the Princess Mary's Household.

SEYMOUR, Edward or 'Ned. Duke of Somerset, uncle and Lord Protector to the young King Edward VI.

SEYMOUR, Thomas. Lord Admiral during the reign of Edward VI. Brother to Protector Somerset.

SOMERSET - see Seymour, Edward.

SUFFOLK - see Grey, Henry.

WARWICK, Earl – See Dudley, John

WINCHESTER - See Paulet, William

WYATT, Sir Thomas. Knight, soldier. Son of the famous poet of that name.

Prologue

Extract from the private Diary of Dr. John Dee:

April 5th. The Lady Russell robbed a little after midnight of perles, diamonds &c. One John Smyth is suspected, a young man of thirty years old, very ingenious in many handyworkes, melancholek.

You reproach me unjustly, sir. Melancholic indeed! And anyway, what if I am guilty of a little knavery, a little sleight of hand. What of you, Dee - you who deceived the whole world and got away? Fair Albion's golden age was strange in the making, was it not - the heads that rolled, the kingdoms that fell along the way, that secret and devious path of yours. And what then of Master Smyth in such a light? What then of the Lady Russell and her handful of jewels? What are these in comparison to *your handyworkes*, Dee?

Picture with me now, witness with me a typical day in the life of this gentleman, John Dee, conjurer and sorcerer most cunning. Behold the magician at work - not dressed in flowing robes of jewelled ostentation, not evoking spirits or conjuring demons, but clad in oilskins, and out at sea. Here he stands, at dusk upon the rough timbers of the deck, hurled this way and that aboard the tiny vessel, gazing out through the biting spray, his weary eyes searching for the shores of Essex. His information is correct: there are at least half a dozen imperial warships out here; anchored away to starboard and with a good number of fighting men on board, no doubt - just far enough from land not to be conspicuous and not a light showing from any of them. An impressive escort for someone important and perhaps of greatness - one might even say majesty. This, however, is not an escort for somebody arriving but for a purpose quite different. This is for somebody escaping.

It is the first day of July in the year of our Lord 1550, which when added according to the laws of the Cabala provides us with the number one. And, as all scholars of the mysteries well know, a One means the beginning of things. And for things to begin, something

must first end. Something must first die.

The great King Henry *has* died - a little over three years ago - hard upon the last of his many marriages. His only son, Edward, a child of just twelve years, now endeavours with much support and persuasion to govern the country and its people. Considered legitimate or illegitimate by turns according to your Church's point of view, for we have two Churches in our land these days, the young boy enjoys a legacy of debt, confusion and financial chaos - oh yes, and also the inconvenience of two elder sisters, of which one, the Princess Mary, remains by far the greater inconvenience because she clings still to the old religion of Rome and the Holy Empire. A constant threat.

It is to the isolated manor house, just a mile inland, where Mary resides at present with a mere handful of servants that our hero is to journey this evening, though how exactly he is to gain access to the illustrious lady or to those who are to assist her in her enterprise of treachery remains something of a dilemma. The glittering young professor of mathematics and geometry, famed already at the age of twenty-three throughout all the universities and courts of Europe, must become, for the time being, secretive and unseen. No longer a master of arts and experiment but a master of disguise and *vanishment* - and urgently too. For if the unmarried Mary were to take flight, what then? Within a year she will have formed an alliance with a suitable Habsburg prince and be at the head of an invading army. Then, indeed, the waves will crash like never before upon the shores of our tiny island, and with a vengeance too horrible to contemplate.

And so my prologue is complete, or nearly complete. For I have yet to tell you about a young woman called Elizabeth, the second of those inconvenient sisters. She is of little consequence at the moment - apart, that is, from being very much on the mind of our friend John Dee. He curses himself, angry for losing concentration, but with the rain driving into his face and the squalls threatening to push his boat back into the North Sea again, such visions do offer a certain comfort, as will now be told.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

All of ten years ago it must have been, but as fresh in his mind now as if it had been yesterday. He was just a boy, in his final year at Chelmsford Grammar School but already preparing for Cambridge. He had been called to the royal court to visit his sick father, a gentleman server to the King. Dressed on this day in his very best

doublet, with a penny whistle in his pocket and a buckle on each shoe as large as an ostrich egg, he had been taking a stroll along the sumptuous corridors and stairways of the palace and was reflecting with dismay upon the awful atmosphere that seemed to pervade the whole building, a disconcerting mixture of sadness and fear.

It was late in the afternoon, almost dark. The snow was frozen upon the window sills, adhering to the margins of the small diamond-shaped panes of glass, and there was hardly a murmur to be detected in the whole gigantic building when he heard, from behind a door, what sounded like the sobbing of a child. Curious, he pushed the door open and there he discovered, kneeling on the ground, a young girl of about eight years of age. Her red hair, which covered her face and shoulders, hung down to the floor, and from beneath this resplendent shroud her tiny body sobbed and shook miserably.

‘Why are you crying?’ he asked from the doorway - a touch of ice to his voice, since this curious scene seemed to sum up the whole gloomy state of the building and its dreary inhabitants. Didn’t they realise, these people, what an absolutely stupendous, extraordinary place the world was: full of discovery, full of ships and cannons, maps and compasses, mechanical toys and inventions of every kind - not to mention Pythagoras and Plato? What on earth was there to be sad about!

But then the little girl in the green dress threw back her hair and looked up at him; not just sorrowful - well, he had expected that - but angry, too, perhaps at being discovered in such a wretched state. Although her skin was very pale, her tiny lips and cheeks were red, and so too were the borders of her eyes, while the rosy light from the fire illuminated her and seemed to make her shine and glow with passion. She was, he thought, quite the loveliest thing he had seen in all his fourteen years on earth.

‘I’m sorry - but really, why are you crying?’ he repeated, now with a voice of some tenderness, a voice that he never realised he possessed until then.

‘Don’t you know?’ she asked, her throat rasping and hoarse with tears.

Young John shrugged his shoulders. There was always something horrible going on at Court - his father had told him that, and warned him, too, not to meddle. And the little girl’s next words left him in no doubt his father had been right.

‘They cut off her head yesterday morning - poor Katherine

Howard. Haven't you heard? It's horrible. Just like when they murdered my mother.'

'They murdered your mother!' the young Dee exclaimed, shocked. 'Who - when?'

'He did - my father. The King.'

'Heavens! You're the lady Elizabeth, aren't you?' he gasped, almost in horror.

The little girl looked most displeased. 'The *Princess* Elizabeth,' she corrected him, indignant now and referring to the title she was not supposed to use. 'They stopped calling me Princess when my mother was executed,' she continued, drying her eyes with an already very wet handkerchief. 'I don't remember much about it because I was a baby. Only I suppose I must be able to remember somehow - because it seems to be happening all over again now. She was my cousin, Katherine. And she looked after me. She was my very best friend - and now she's dead as well!'

And the child burst into tears again, great heaving sobs that shook her whole body.

'But why?' he breathed, feeling such a fool for not having realised who she was - and aware, too, of all those stories about her mother, the disgraced Boleyn woman and the dubious charges brought against her at the time of her downfall. Approaching, he placed an uncertain hand upon the little shoulders. If only she would stop crying!

'They say she was wicked, Katherine - just like they said about my mother, and that she was a witch.'

'Hush, there's no such thing,' the boy urged her, wanting now so much to help. 'Look - look there!'

And when Elizabeth lifted her head she saw upon the wall - and it had not been there a moment ago - the shadow of an enormous bird, its wings flapping. She saw it all in perfect detail: its beak, its tail feathers all fanned out. It flew up and down, back and forth. And then she knew it was him, making shadows with his hands. The light of the fire was behind them, and the bird was a shadow cast upon the wall. She giggled, and her smile seemed to illuminate the room even more.

'Well - and now look!' he added and opened his hands, so that the bird was gone. 'That's all there is to superstition - and to witches too: just shadows.'

To which he turned her by her shoulders towards the hearth with its big stone mantelpiece carved with vines and Tudor roses, and added, 'Look - quick! There are salamanders in the fire. Can you see

them jumping?’

And they both laughed and gazed at the dancing flames.

‘Earth and Water, Air and Fire contend. And so the Elements in order doth ascend,’ she announced, as if reciting a lesson, only to add, ‘Then we are honoured, indeed, for salamanders are the creatures nearest to God.’

The young boy agreed: honoured indeed. Also, he was fast coming to the conclusion that this was no ordinary little girl. Even had she not been a princess, she would still have been, with that astonishing pale skin that should not really have belonged to anyone living, and those dark, almost black eyes that seemed to be constantly questioning, examining everything around her, one of the most extraordinary people he had ever encountered. How could he compete with that! And yet he would try.

‘One day I’m going to understand all the secrets of nature,’ he announced, in a voice of great self-importance.

‘How?’ she asked, and again her eyes regarded him for a moment with intense curiosity.

‘Through study and experimentation. Like the alchemists.’

‘You must be awfully clever, then?’ she observed, and suitably impressed, he felt, at last. Then he realised he was holding her hands and looking into her eyes

‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I promise always to look after you and to protect you. No matter where you are or where I am, if you need me ever at all then you must ... well, just think of me, very hard.’

‘Really? Do you believe that will be enough?’ she inquired, sceptical.

‘If God wills it, yes. He will let me help you. He will tell me how, and I shall obey.’

To which, in a moment of inspiration, he took out a tiny pearl button he had in his purse and handed it to her.

‘A pearl!’ she exclaimed, not sure whether to take it. ‘Those are for tears.’

‘Um - yes,’ he admitted, recalling the arcane symbolism of pearls just a moment too late, ‘but only that you may never cry again,’ he added, extricating himself rather well, he thought.

In a very simple and unaffected way, then, she leaned over and embraced him, stating that she would give him a lock of her hair in return - which she promptly forgot to do.

‘Will you look into the stars and discover my destiny?’ she

inquired, quite business-like, as though the idea had just occurred to her.

He agreed, of course. And from that day forth, they decided he was to become her ‘noble intelligencer.’

A little later he heard they had sent her from Court, to live in the country. She was gone from him, but never forgotten - until after several years, and while he was away at Cambridge, a special delivery was made by one of his masters, Roger Ascham who at that time had become the lady Elizabeth’s private tutor at her home in Chelsea. It was only a small package and there was no letter contained inside, only a small silver locket in which there rested, curled into a little salamander shape that had been carved into its base, a small lock of red hair.

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‘The Devil only knows if we’ll get in on this tide!’ a voice cries in anger.

It feels very cold. And with a shudder against the biting wind, John Dee awakes from his dreaming and is left again where we first encountered him - with no longer the smooth checkerboard floors of a royal palace beneath his feet, but the rough timbers of a boat at sea; with no more the fragrance of sweet herbs and wood-smoke filling his nostrils, but now the smells of briny rain and seaweed. He wipes the moisture from his beard and gazes out once again through the spray and gathering darkness. The shore seems as far away as ever, and the great ships are still there, huge and menacing. If Mary is taken this night all will be lost. Of that there can be no doubt. And that, dear reader, is also the state of our kingdom at present, and of our story. The storms are gathering, the people frightened. The Ship of State is like the little ship we see now. In a moment, all could be swept away. Though this is perhaps to anticipate events that might not come to pass. Our hero is a resourceful man and, as you shall discover, has set his course against it. The little boat struggles on, therefore, its distinguished passenger with a mission of destiny. We shall follow its progress, and his.

End of Sample