

Brother Stephen was the first to admit he was terrified by Ireland, Dublin and Dubliners. He was terrified by the gangs of gallóglai; too young, too dirty, and too barefoot to be armed with the war ready bills that they clutched to their shoulders whilst they menaced the dock looking for sea passage to the wars of England. He quaked at the ruddy faced Irish monks of St Patrick, with their hob nailed walking staves, and turned positively ashen when he encountered the long bearded, serpent eyed monk in a watery blue habit that strode past him on the muddy track beside the River Poole.

“Quit gawping like a jackdaw” murmured de Grey. “I’ll thank you not to draw the eye of every footpad and lack-luck mercenary in this fair town. I seem to remember some oath we both swore to protect our cause with our lives, and if that must happen, I’d prefer it on the field of battle with Walter Savage’s heart pricked neatly with my poniard and not in a side ally with a stolen relic in my bollock pouch.”

“But... that monk... a blue habit... I’ve never seen such a thing...” Stephen’s mind was not where it should have been; a Londoner, with his soul dedicated to pray for the Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers from the age of 11, it was poorly suited to spycraft and subterfuge. The furthest he had travelled before his current adventure being the stump end of the Winchester road.

“He’s from the Isle of Man, Stephen” replied de Grey with more patience than the comment deserved, “I forget the name of their saint, but they say he has three legs. No doubt he arrived here on whatever ill stinking wind blew the McSweeney and his wretched litter of pups to this shit hole of a town.”

“when will we get to the castle, my Lord?”

De Grey laughed.

“we already have Stephen.”

“what. *That?*” Stephen gawped again, despite his master’s command. “I thought it a levey yard or a bonded house”

“It’s both Stephen, but it is also what passes for a castle on this island. And we must reach into the chamber pot to fish out a turd, with fine words and smiling faces. Duke Edmund is in need of men in harness and a mercenary who is already a bloody foe of Lady Anne’s new allies will be less likely to change sides...”