

**AN EXTRACT FROM...**  
**AND THEN MINE ENEMY**

**Chapter 1**

**England**  
**July 1642**

A shudder of rain slewed across the sodden countryside, sending its cold fingers cutting through Adam's already saturated cloak. He huffed out a misty breath and straightened his aching shoulders. Not for the first time he cursed his brother for summoning him to a meeting Adam knew would inevitably end in grief and recrimination.

The remote inn loomed out of the gloaming and led on by the cheerful light spilling through the front windows, Adam urged his weary horse forward. The miserable beast, the mud dragging at its every step, plodded forward.

A young boy ran from the stable, a sack over his head and shoulders. Adam threw him the reins and, taking a deep breath, strode into the inn. He tossed his hat and gloves to the innkeeper, his numbed fingers fumbled at the ties of his cloak

'His Lordship's in the private parlour.' The innkeeper scowled as he held the dripping garb at arm's length.

Adam pushed open the door the man indicated. The two men seated beside a cheerful fire that burned in the wide hearth rose to their feet. His half-brothers schooled their faces to a neutrality that Adam knew would not last. As they faced him across the room, a growing sense of despondency gripped him as he stood before them. Once more the cuckoo in the nest, always the acknowledged baseborn son but not even given the protection of his father's name.

Denzil Marchant, just as Adam remembered him, tall and powerful, with a mane of tawny hair like his father, and his younger brother Robin, as tall but of a slighter, elegant build, his hair more auburn and sleekly curling.

'Denzil, Robin,' Adam acknowledged them as he stepped into the room. 'I wish I could say, well met, but I would be lying.'

'Adam Coulter.' The deliberate use of his full name jarred, as Denzil no doubt intended. 'I would scarcely have recognized you. Hardly the darling of the court now, are you?'

'I found lovelocks and pearl earrings something of a hindrance to the life of a soldier.' Without waiting to be invited, Adam poured himself a full measure from the bottle of wine that stood on the table, hoping that they would not mark that his hand shook.

'Foul weather,' he remarked, raising his cup. 'Is there space beside the fire for me?'

Denzil stood aside and Adam took his place beside the fire. Water dripped on to the hearthstone and steam rose from his damp clothing.

Adam took a mouthful of wine. It was surprisingly good for such an isolated inn.

'How is your beautiful wife, Denzil?' Even after all these years he could not hide the note of derision in his voice.

Denzil's already high colour, deepened and his brows drew together at the mention of Louise. 'Louise is with the queen in France,' he said curtly.

So, that particular wound still bled, Adam thought.

'So much has happened in the last years, Denzil. I believe I should now call you Lord Marchant. When did Father die?'

'Some eighteen months' past. Even on his deathbed he refused to call you his son,' Denzil responded with narrowed eyes as he watched the barb go home.

As intended, the cruel words cut like a sword thrust to Adam's heart.

'Why did you come back to England?' Robin spoke for the first time, his tone light and conciliatory.

Adam turned his attention to his youngest brother. How old would Robin be now, twenty-one, twenty-two?

'Because I'm tired of fighting other people's wars and thought I should come home and find a peaceful occupation. Instead I have returned to a country that talks of war as if it is an inevitability.' Adam turned back to look at Denzil from over the top of his wine cup. 'Is this why you sent for me?'

'I had heard you'd returned and we have need of men like you, Coulter,' Denzil said.

'What do you mean, men like me?' Adam set the empty wine cup down on a nearby table and turned to face the fire, casually rearranging the smouldering logs with a poker.

'Hardened soldiers. Men who know what they're doing. England is about to go to war led by a bunch of country squires whose only idea of warfare is what they have read in a book.'

Adam glanced at him. 'Men like you, Denzil?'

His brother's moustache twitched and his eyes narrowed.

'Tell me what has happened to England in the six years I have been away? What have I come back to? Because it is not the country I left.'

Denzil's brow furrowed. 'It is indeed a sad country where a King cannot govern without being hindered at every turn by the machinations of his so-called Parliament.'

'It seems to me,' Adam straightened. and kept his voice low and even, 'that we have a King who believes he can rule contrary to the will of the people.'

'The King's greatest enemy is his own Parliament,' Robin said.

'The King's greatest enemy is himself.' Adam turned his gaze on Robin.

'What do you mean?' Robin came around to stand beside Denzil.

'I served the king, Robin. I know the character of the man. He has a firm and unshakable belief in what he sees as his divine right to rule. Parliament may have forced him to hand over his powers of taxation and his courts but I cannot see him ever agreeing to surrender his right to choose his own counsellors or to control his army. Nor will he agree to abolish the bishops and the Prayer Book. Isn't that what parliament has asked of him?'

The colour rose higher in Denzil's florid cheeks. 'All that and more, Coulter. They are saying that the king can no longer be trusted to make his own judgments about the men best able to advise him or to control his army. They have driven him from London.'

Adam thrust away from the fireplace and paced the room, running his hand through his hair. 'God's death, do these people who talk of war have any idea what damage a civil war can wreak? I've seen civil war at first hand and I've no wish to see the likes of it in this country. He turned to face Denzil. Whatever you want of me, Denzil, I'll have no part of it. I've come home with enough in my purse for a small estate and I intend to turn my hand to the till, not the sword.'

Denzil snorted. 'You'll be bored of that within a month, or you're not the man I remember. Coulter.' His tone softened, almost wheedling, 'Let's put the past behind us. You were young. I can forgive you your indiscretion.'

*Indiscretion? Was that the price of a man's life?*

Adam's shoulders tensed in the old, familiar way. 'What do you want of me, Denzil?'  
'I'm offering you a commission in my regiment of horse.'

Adam raised an eyebrow. 'You have a regiment of horse?'

Denzil raised his chin. 'I've raised the militia.'

'Before the king has even raised his standard? No thank you. I want no part of this accursed affair.'

'Is that your final answer, Coulter?'

'It is. I would be pleased to do as you ask and put the past behind us, but I cannot in all conscience join this venture at your side.'

Denzil's jaw tightened and Adam braced himself for an explosion. Instead his brother threw up his hands and sighed. 'What will you do?'

'I will do as I said. Continue my journey to Shropshire where I intend to inspect a property and God willing, that is where I shall stay.'

Denzil glanced at Robin. 'You think Shropshire far enough away to escape our troubles?'

'No. I have lived through civil war, Denzil. It is insidious. It will seek out even the most remote corners of this poor, benighted country.'

Robin cleared his throat. 'We have been wondering about Aunt Joan.'

This shift in the conversation took Adam by surprise. 'Aunt Joan?'

'Yes. She was recently widowed,' Robin looked up at Denzil. 'Denzil?'

'I am now head of this family and I am naturally concerned for her welfare in the coming conflict.'

'That's very touching but like myself Joan has hardly been your concern since her marriage.' Adam could hear the sarcasm in his voice.

Denzil's jaw tightened again and he blew out a breath. 'What Robin is trying to say is I am prepared to put her enmity with father aside and offer her the protection of her former home at Marchants, should she wish it.'

Adam laughed. 'Why, in God's sweet name, would she want to go to Marchants? She hated the place as much as I did.'

'Damn it, Coulter.' Denzil brought a powerful fist down on the table. 'You are trying my patience. As head of the family I believe it my place to try and heal the wounds that have divided us for too long. If you are passing Preswood, can you at least take her my message.' Adam paused. 'Preswood is near Stratford from memory and it would be good to see her again. Very well, I will take her your message.' At the door, Adam turned to face his brothers. 'I suppose I should thank you for the olive branch Denzil, but it's too late. We were family divided, long before this became a country divided.' He inclined his head and walked out of the room, resisting the temptation to slam the door behind him.

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