

"In those days," Lox said, "you'd've started your apprenticeship at the age of seven, working as a page in His Lordship's house, learning cleanliness, courtesy and comportment until the ripe old age of fourteen when you'd've become a squire. Only then would you have started instruction in the use of weaponry."

"I take your point, Lox, but this is not a lance, and I'm not about to joust on milady's behalf." Gary with the shotgun on his lap, impervious to the rain, now peering over the side into a high running Tweed choked with the weed and algae cut away from upstream beats. In the last hour they'd passed only four rods, two of them fishing doubtful lies up by Monksford—undercover cops, Lox reckoned, rather than inexperienced or syndicated anglers.

"Jesus—!"

"Don't piss your panties, Lox, the safety's on."

"You want to hold it, keep it aimed at the water. That's where Fin will be."

"You think he'll show?"

"The fly is cast. All we do now is wait."

Lox at the oars, dabbing at the speckled canvas with minimalist strokes, a brushstroke here and there to control their glide, maintain the perfect line as they drifted from the shadows below Dryburgh, the Abbey glimpsed like some reclusive celebrity through the pressing throng of trees.

"Where should I aim if I see Fin?"

"You asking me the refraction ratio of shot fired into water? No, I didn't think so. What you have there is a sawn-off, Gary, filed down for maximum spread at minimum range. In other words, just point and fire, okay?"

Lox with only one eye on the fishfinder now as Tweed opened out between gravel beds and sapling-studded banks, the golf-course on their right deserted but for a few hardy souls practicing putts beneath the seeping slate of sky. Here in the comparative shallows there were no deep-cut sandstone banks to offer Fin the safety of an overhang. Lower down, perhaps, once they were past the cauld at Mertoun Bridge and heading for the hallowed beats of Mertoun, Craikmuir, Kentigern and Rutherford.

Gary said, "See those chivalric oaths I'm supposed to take?"

The kid still worried about the extent of obedience, poverty, and chastity required by a candidate for knighthood. Taking it all so seriously. Lox said, "Let me set your mind at ease, Gary. In true Templar spirit, the oath of obedience is to your own conscience, the oath of poverty refers to poverty of spirit, and the oath of chastity does not mean celibacy, so much as freedom from our most ignoble and bestial urges."

"Shagging."

"In a nutshell."