

A Case of
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AND
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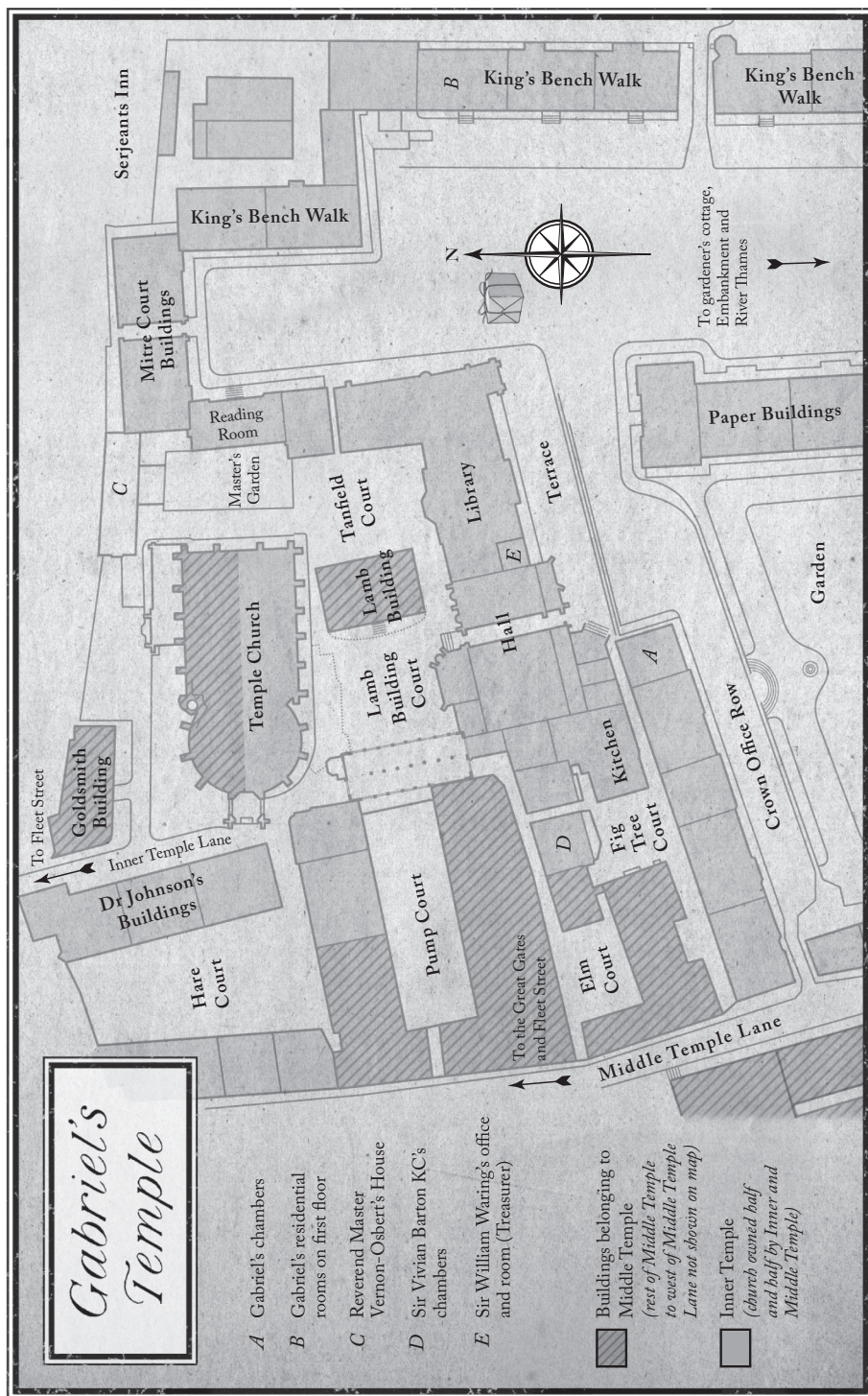
For Roger

Gabriel's Temple

- A* Gabriel's chambers
- B* Gabriel's residential rooms on first floor
- C* Reverend Master Vernon-Osbert's House
- D* Sir Vivian Barton KC's chambers
- E* Sir William Waring's office and room (Treasurer)

Buildings belonging to Middle Temple (rest of Middle Temple to west of Middle Temple Lane not shown on map)

Inner Temple (church owned half and half by Inner and Middle Temple)



I

No hint of the horror to come was discernible in the pure snow. It lay pristine on every ledge and roof of the ancient buildings and drifted into the doorways and around the old gas lamps and water pumps. No whiff of corruption in the perfect scarlet berries that hung from the holly bushes in the gardens. No discordance in the robins' song. Through the windows, the soft glow of oil lamps illuminated desks, their occupants deep in studious concentration. Smoke drifted peacefully from the crooked chimneys.

It was Christmas Eve. The Michaelmas term of 1901 had recently concluded. The Temple, that cloistered little area of London in which the lawyers live, huddled together in the ancient chambers that line the passageways and squares around the Temple Church, was slowly emptying. Save for the residents and for the industrious few who faced big trials in the New Year, barristers were leaving for Christmas at home.

The whole scene, thought Sir Gabriel Ward KC, as he picked his way across Inner Temple Terrace, was the very embodiment of a three-dimensional Christmas card. It needed only a few choirboys. As if on cue came that unmistakable sound, the ringing yet muffled swell of joy that is children liberated into snow. A group of small boys, in the innocence of red gowns and white ruffs and the determination of stout boots, tumbled from their rehearsal onto the smooth white lawn of Inner Temple garden and within seconds defaced it with frantic feet and scrabbling hands.

The smallest of the pack hung back and watched the snowballs flying with trepidation. On impulse Gabriel crossed the Terrace and, heedless of his immaculate black kid gloves, scooped up a very soft bundle of snow and shied it gently through the railings at the child's back. He started and turned, and Gabriel removed his top hat and bowed.

'I fear,' he said in his precise way, 'that I have assaulted you. I beg your pardon.'

The little boy smiled, fairly sure this was a joke, and at the sight of that characteristic wide smile that seemed to link ear to ear, Gabriel made a discovery. 'Are you one of Sir Vivian Barton's sons?' he asked.

'Yes, sir; Bertie, sir. The third one, sir.'

'In that case, Master Barton Tertius, as the son of an eminent lawyer, you know that if you are assaulted, you are entitled to damages.'

And Gabriel extracted sixpence from his inner waistcoat pocket and handed it through the railings. The other boys had kept their distance. Gentlemen barristers walking along the Terrace between the Dining Hall, the library and the Temple Church were an unpredictable bunch. It might be a penny and a pat on the head, but equally it might be a telling-off and a demand to know where your papa's chambers were. But now they gathered round, neck ruffs askew and mittens caked in snow. Sixpence!

'It is for you all to buy toffee,' said Gabriel. 'But remember, Master Barton is in charge of it.'

They tore off in a breathless chorus of thanks; Gabriel noted with satisfaction that Barton was now in the lead.

From his elegantly curtained study window, Sir William Waring, Master Treasurer, head of the Inner Temple, watched the scene with strong disapproval and a complete lack of appreciation of its subtlety.

Really, he thought to himself disagreeably, sometimes I do wonder about Sir Gabriel Ward KC. Throwing snowballs! A lawyer of his seniority and distinction. One of our King's Counsel! In public! I shall speak to him.

He looked at his pocket watch. Time was getting on. Gertrude had visited earlier in the afternoon, heavily veiled for a quick Christmas assignation, and now he was soon to go home to his beautiful house in Chelsea, a testament throughout to Lady Waring's immaculate taste and efficient management of the servants. And Christmas Eve dinner with the family. Dear Amelia and Harriet... both as pretty as pictures, thank God, and their futures thus assured. Indeed, Amelia was to announce her engagement that very evening, and as for Raymond, the Bar was beckoning: a real chip off the old block. A credit to Sir William. None of the nonsense that other men had with their sons. But there, he'd been brought up from an early age to understand his duty to his parents. Waring looked at himself in the mirror above his chimneypiece, smoothed back his already smooth hair and straightened his already straight shoulders. Getting on a bit now, but not bad; Gertrude had no complaints anyway. He sighed with deep complacency.

There was a knock at the door.

'Come,' Sir William barked peremptorily. A maid entered holding a Christmas box of the most attractive kind. Exactly a foot square in all dimensions, it was immaculately wrapped in thick green paper and tied across both ways with a shining red ribbon that finished in a glossy bow.

'This was left on the doorstep for you, Sir William,' she said.

Sir William looked gratified. He would take it home to adorn the top of the already towering pile under the family tree. But even as he resolved this, a doubt entered his mind; it was a rather feminine-looking present. Gertrude was a long-standing feature of his domestic life, with a family of her own and a mania for

discretion. She had made no mention of sending him a present earlier and he knew she would not expose him to the embarrassment of taking home something more suitably opened alone. All the same, perhaps...

Nodding dismissal to the maid, he put the parcel on the table, pulled the bow with a satisfying slither, and tore off the paper. Inside was a plain brown cardboard box. When he lifted off the lid, he found enticing layers of tissue paper. Sir William unwrapped them to reveal the contents.

So great had been the expectation of something expensive and good to look upon, that his mind seemed for a moment unable to adjust to what it was seeing. He stared as though paralysed. Then a wave of panic rolled over him. A sharp reflex action caused him to slam back the lid, and he staggered to his chair with a shudder of horror.