

Alice,

You have managed it very neatly.

I do not know whether to be angry with you or to admire it. The fact that I cannot decide is answer enough.

You will be in Calais. Every day, at the same table, in the same garrison. You knew exactly what you were doing, and I knew it the moment I was told. I said nothing because what could I have said? I could not have refused without explaining why, and I have no intention of doing that.

Since St Albans I have put three men before you. Three different men, chosen carefully. You refused each one before he had properly asked. I heard about it each time, pressed no further, and have been careful not to examine it too closely until now.

For two years I have kept myself occupied enough not to think about it. The garrison debts alone have taken months. The French press at the walls. Margaret has found her footing and she will not rest until every Neville in England is ruined or dead. It is easier to know what is right when you are not in the room.

But you will be in Calais.

*At Baynard's Castle I kissed your forehead. A careless gesture, the kind a man makes without thought. I am a competent liar in most things but I find I cannot sustain that particular fiction.*

*You know exactly what you want and you have always known it, and when you look at me with that knowledge I find, in my weaker moments, that certainty is harder to maintain than it should be.*

*I have held Calais against worse odds than this.*

*I love you. I will not write it again and this letter will be ash before morning, but there it is. I will not act on it. You are unmarried.*

*If this were discovered, everything my mother built in you would be destroyed, and you would have nothing. I refuse to be the man who does that to you.*

*But if you look at me in Calais the way you looked at me in that yard, I do not know what I will do.*

*I think you know that.*

*I think that is why you arranged it.*

*R.*

