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JEFFREY ARCHER

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ENTERTAINER."

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THE SINS OF THE FATHER

A NOVEL



THE SINS OF THE FATHER

ALSO BY JEFFREY ARCHER

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JEFFREY ARCHER

THE CLIFTON CHRONICLES
VOLUME TWO

THE SINS OF THE FATHER

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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www.stmartins.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Archer, Jeffrey, 1940–

The sins of the father / Jeffrey Archer.—1st ed.

p. cm.—(The Clifton chronicles ; v. 2)

ISBN 978-1-250-00097-2 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4299-4903-3 (e-book)

1. Families—England—History—20th century—Fiction. 2. World War, 1939–1945—Fiction. 3. Family secrets—Fiction. 4. British—United States—History—20th century—Fiction. I. Title.

PR6051.R285S56 2012

823'.914—dc23

2011046558

First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Macmillan, an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited.

First U.S. Edition: May 2012

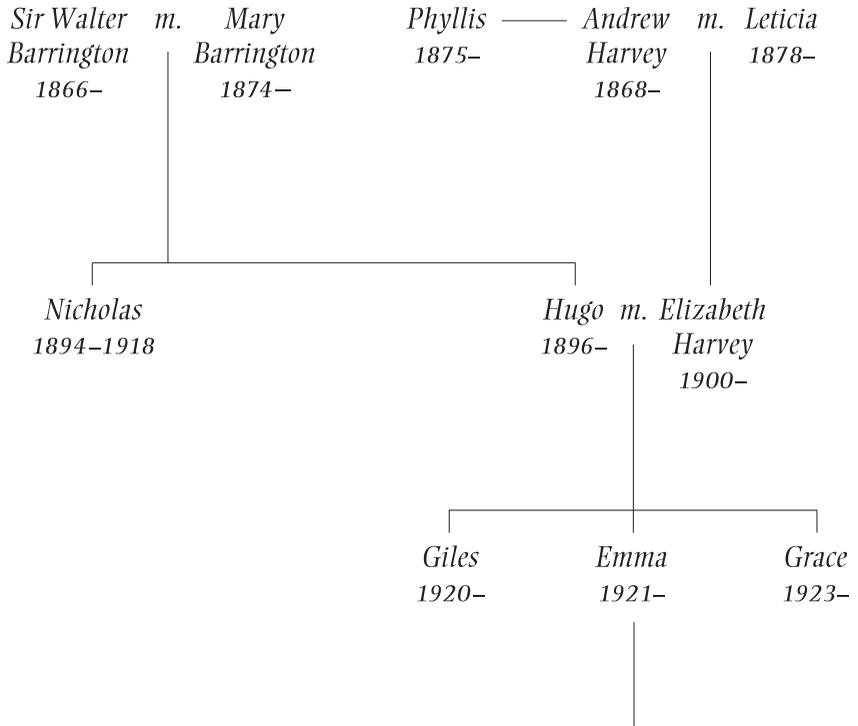
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Tom Guinzburg
1926–2010

My thanks go to the following people for their invaluable
advice and research:

Simon Bainbridge, Eleanor Dryden, Dr. Robert Lyman FRHistS,
Alison Prince, Mari Roberts and Susan Watt

THE BARRINGTONS



THE CLIFTONS

Harold m. Vera
Tancock Prescott
1871- 1876-

Ray Albert Stanley Maisie m. Arthur Elsie
1895-1917 1896-1917 1898- 1901- 1898-1921
Clifton 1908-1910

Harry
1920-

Sebastian
1940-

“For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation . . .”

Book of Common Prayer

HARRY CLIFTON

1939-1941

1

“MY NAME IS Harry Clifton.”

“Sure, and I’m Babe Ruth,” said Detective Kolowski as he lit a cigarette.

“No,” said Harry, “you don’t understand, there’s been a terrible mistake. I’m Harry Clifton, an Englishman from Bristol. I served on the same ship as Tom Bradshaw.”

“Save it for your lawyer,” said the detective, exhaling deeply and filling the small cell with a cloud of smoke.

“I don’t have a lawyer,” protested Harry.

“If I was in the trouble you’re in, kid, I’d consider having Sefton Jelks on my side to be about my only hope.”

“Who’s Sefton Jelks?”

“You may not have heard of the sharpest lawyer in New York,” said the detective as he blew out another plume of smoke, “but he has an appointment to see you at nine o’clock tomorrow morning, and Jelks don’t leave his office unless his bill has been paid in advance.”

“But—” began Harry, as Kolowski banged the palm of his hand on the cell door.

“So when Jelks turns up tomorrow morning,” Kolowski continued, ignoring Harry’s interruption, “you’d better come up with a more convincing story than we’ve arrested the wrong man. You told the immigration officer that you were Tom Bradshaw, and if it was good enough for him, it’s going to be good enough for the judge.”

The cell door swung open, but not before the detective had exhaled another plume of smoke that made Harry cough. Kolowski

stepped out into the corridor without another word and slammed the door behind him. Harry collapsed on to a bunk that was attached to the wall and rested his head on a brick-hard pillow. He looked up at the ceiling and began to think about how he'd ended up in a police cell on the other side of the world on a murder charge.



The door opened long before the morning light could creep through the bars of the window and into the cell. Despite the early hour, Harry was wide awake.

A warder strolled in carrying a tray of food that the Salvation Army wouldn't have considered offering a penniless hobo. Once he'd placed the tray on the little wooden table, he left without a word.

Harry took one look at the food before beginning to pace up and down. With each step, he grew more confident that once he explained to Mr. Jelks the reason he'd exchanged his name with Tom Bradshaw, the matter would quickly be sorted out. Surely the worst punishment they could exact would be to deport him, and as he'd always intended to return to England and join the navy, it all fitted in with his original plan.

At 8:55 a.m., Harry was sitting on the end of the bunk, impatient for Mr. Jelks to appear. The massive iron door didn't swing open until twelve minutes past nine. Harry leaped up as a prison guard stood to one side and allowed a tall, elegant man with silver gray hair to enter. Harry thought he must have been about the same age as Grandpa. Mr. Jelks wore a dark blue pinstripe, double-breasted suit, a white shirt, and a striped tie. The weary look on his face suggested that little would surprise him.

"Good morning," he said, giving Harry a faint smile. "My name is Sefton Jelks. I am the senior partner of Jelks, Myers and Abernathy, and my clients, Mr. and Mrs. Bradshaw, have asked me to represent you in your upcoming trial."

Harry offered Jelks the only chair in his cell, as if he was an old friend who had dropped in to his study at Oxford for a cup of tea. He perched on the bunk and watched the lawyer as he opened his briefcase, extracted a yellow pad and placed it on the table.

Jelks took a pen from an inside pocket and said, “Perhaps you might begin by telling me who you are, as we both know you’re not Lieutenant Bradshaw.”

If the lawyer was surprised by Harry’s story he showed no sign of it. Head bowed, he wrote copious notes on his yellow pad while Harry explained how he’d ended up spending the night in jail. Once he’d finished, Harry assumed his problems must surely be over, as he had such a senior lawyer on his side—that was, until he heard Jelks’s first question.

“You say that you wrote a letter to your mother while you were on board the *Kansas Star*, explaining why you had assumed Tom Bradshaw’s identity?”

“That’s correct, sir. I didn’t want my mother to suffer unnecessarily, but at the same time I needed her to understand why I’d made such a drastic decision.”

“Yes, I can understand why you might have considered that changing your identity would solve all your immediate problems, while not appreciating that it could involve you in a series of even more complicated ones,” said Jelks. His next question surprised Harry even more. “Do you recall the contents of that letter?”

“Of course. I wrote and rewrote it so many times I could reproduce it almost verbatim.”

“Then allow me to test your memory,” Jelks said and, without another word, tore off a sheet from his yellow pad and handed it and his fountain pen to Harry.

Harry spent some time recalling the exact words, before he set about rewriting the letter.

My dearest mother,

I have done everything in my power to make sure you receive this letter before anyone can tell you that I died at sea. As the date on this letter shows, I did not perish when the Devonian was sunk on September 4th. In fact, I was plucked out of the sea by a sailor from an American ship and thanks to him, I’m still very much alive. However, an unexpected opportunity arose for me to assume another man’s identity, and I did so

THE SINS OF THE FATHER

willingly, in the hope it would release Emma from the many problems I seem to have unwittingly caused her and her family over the years.

It is important that you realize my love for Emma has in no way diminished; far from it. I cannot believe I shall ever experience such love again. But I do not feel I have the right to expect her to spend the rest of her life clinging on to the vain hope that at some time in the future I might be able to prove that Hugo Barrington is not my father, and that I am, in fact, the son of Arthur Clifton. At least this way, she can consider a future with someone else. I envy that man.

I plan to return to England on the first available ship, so should you receive any communication from a Tom Bradshaw, you can assume it's me. I'll be in touch with you the moment I set foot in Bristol, but in the meantime, I must beg you to keep my secret as steadfastly as you kept your own for so many years.

Your loving son,

Harry

When Jelks had finished reading the letter, he once again took Harry by surprise. "Did you post the letter yourself, Mr. Clifton," he asked, "or did you give that responsibility to someone else?"

For the first time Harry felt suspicious, and decided not to mention that he'd asked Dr. Wallace to deliver the letter to his mother when he returned to Bristol in a fortnight's time. He feared that Jelks might persuade Dr. Wallace to hand over the letter and then his mother would have no way of knowing he was still alive.

"I posted the letter when I came ashore," he said.

The elderly lawyer took his time before he responded. "Do you have any proof that you are Harry Clifton, and not Thomas Bradshaw?"

"No, sir, I do not," said Harry without hesitation, painfully aware that no one on board the *Kansas Star* had any reason to believe he wasn't Tom Bradshaw, and the only people who could verify his story were on the other side of the ocean, more than three thousand

miles away, and it would not be long before they were all informed that Harry Clifton had been buried at sea.

“Then I may be able to assist you, Mr. Clifton. That’s assuming you still wish Miss Emma Barrington to believe you are dead. If you do,” said Jelks, an insincere smile on his face, “I may be able to offer a solution to your problem.”

“A solution?” said Harry, looking hopeful for the first time.

“But only if you felt able to retain the persona of Thomas Bradshaw.”

Harry remained silent.

“The district attorney’s office has accepted that the charge against Bradshaw is at best circumstantial, and the only real evidence they are clinging on to is that he left the country the day after the murder had been committed. Aware of the weakness of their case, they have agreed to drop the charge of murder if you felt able to plead guilty to the lesser charge of desertion while serving in the armed forces.”

“But why would I agree to that?” asked Harry.

“I can think of three good reasons,” replied Jelks. “Firstly, if you don’t, you’re likely to end up spending six years in prison for entering the United States on false pretenses. Secondly, you would retain your anonymity, so the Barrington family would have no reason to believe you are still alive. And thirdly, the Bradshaws are willing to pay you ten thousand dollars if you take their son’s place.”

Harry realized immediately that this would be an opportunity to repay his mother for all the sacrifices she’d made for him over the years. Such a large sum of money would transform her life, making it possible for her to escape the two-up-two-down in Still House Lane, along with the weekly knock on the door from the rent collector. She might even consider giving up her job as a waitress at the Grand Hotel and start living an easier life, although Harry thought that was unlikely. But before he agreed to fall in with Jelks’s plans, he had some questions of his own.

“Why would the Bradshaws be willing to go through with such a deception, when they must now know that their son was killed at sea?”

“Mrs. Bradshaw is desperate to have Thomas’s name cleared.

She will never accept that one of her sons might have killed the other.”

“So is that what Tom is accused of—murdering his brother?”

“Yes, but as I said, the evidence is flimsy and circumstantial, and certainly wouldn’t stand up in court, which is why the DA’s office is willing to drop the charge, but only if we agree to plead guilty to the lesser charge of desertion.”

“And how long might my sentence be, if I agreed to that?”

“The DA has agreed to recommend to the judge that you’re sentenced to one year, so with good behavior you could be free in six months; quite an improvement on the six years you can expect if you go on insisting that you’re Harry Clifton.”

“But the moment I walk into the courtroom, someone’s bound to realize that I’m not Bradshaw.”

“Unlikely,” said Jelks. “The Bradshaws hail from Seattle, on the west coast, and although they’re well off, they rarely visit New York. Thomas joined the navy when he was seventeen, and as you know to your cost, he hasn’t set foot in America for the past four years. And if you plead guilty, you’ll only be in the courtroom for twenty minutes.”

“But when I open my mouth, won’t everyone know I’m not an American?”

“That’s why you won’t be opening your mouth, Mr. Clifton.” The urbane lawyer seemed to have an answer for everything. Harry tried another ploy.

“In England, murder trials are always packed with journalists, and the public queue up outside the courtroom from the early hours in the hope of getting a glimpse of the defendant.”

“Mr. Clifton, there are fourteen murder trials currently taking place in New York, including the notorious ‘scissors stabber.’ I doubt if even a cub reporter will be assigned to this case.”

“I need some time to think about it.”

Jelks glanced at his watch. “We’re due in front of Judge Atkins at noon, so you have just over an hour to make up your mind, Mr. Clifton.” He called for a guard to open the cell door. “Should you decide not to avail yourself of my services I wish you luck, because we will not be meeting again,” he added before he left the cell.

Harry sat on the end of the bunk, considering Sefton Jelks's offer. Although he didn't doubt that the silver-haired counsel had his own agenda, six months sounded a lot more palatable than six years, and who else could he turn to, other than this seasoned lawyer? Harry wished he could drop into Sir Walter Barrington's office for a few moments and seek his advice.



An hour later, Harry, dressed in a dark blue suit, cream shirt, starched collar and a striped tie, was handcuffed, marched from his cell to a prison vehicle and driven to the courthouse under armed guard.

"No one must believe you're capable of murder," Jelks had pronounced after a tailor had visited Harry's cell with half a dozen suits, shirts and a selection of ties for him to consider.

"I'm not," Harry reminded him.

Harry was reunited with Jelks in the corridor. The lawyer gave him that same smile before pushing his way through the swing doors and walking down the center aisle, not stopping until he reached the two vacant seats at counsel's table.

Once Harry had settled into his place and his handcuffs had been removed, he looked around the almost empty courtroom. Jelks had been right about that. Few members of the public, and certainly no press, seemed interested in the case. For them, it must have been just another domestic murder, where the defendant was likely to be acquitted; no "Cain and Abel" headlines while there was no possibility of the electric chair in court number four.

As the first chime rang out to announce midday, a door opened on the far side of the room and Judge Atkins appeared. He walked slowly across the court, climbed the steps and took his place behind a desk on the raised dais. He then nodded in the direction of the DA, as if he knew exactly what he was about to say.

A young lawyer rose from behind the prosecutor's desk and explained that the state would be dropping the murder charge, but would be pursuing Thomas Bradshaw on a charge of desertion from the U.S. Navy. The judge nodded, and turned his attention to Mr. Jelks, who rose on cue.

“And on the second charge, of desertion, how does your client plead?”

“Guilty,” said Jelks. “I hope your honor will be lenient with my client on this occasion, as I don’t need to remind you, sir, that this is his first offense, and before this uncharacteristic lapse he had an unblemished record.”

Judge Atkins scowled. “Mr. Jelks,” he said, “some may consider that for an officer to desert his post while serving his country is a crime every bit as heinous as murder. I’m sure I don’t have to remind *you* that until recently such an offense would have resulted in your client facing a firing squad.”

Harry felt sick as he looked up at Jelks, who didn’t take his eyes off the judge.

“With that in mind,” continued Atkins, “I sentence Lieutenant Thomas Bradshaw to six years in jail.” He banged his gavel and said, “Next case,” before Harry had a chance to protest.

“You told me—” began Harry, but Jelks had already turned his back on his former client and was walking away. Harry was about to chase after him, when the two guards grabbed him by the arms, thrust them behind his back and quickly handcuffed the convicted criminal, before marching him across the courtroom toward a door Harry hadn’t noticed before.

He looked back to see Sefton Jelks shaking hands with a middle-aged man who was clearly congratulating him on a job well done. Where had Harry seen that face before? And then he realized—it had to be Tom Bradshaw’s father.