

Diana paused in the cathedral porch to look at the sun going down. Her husband came up beside her, and they stood still for a moment, in the quiet of a summer Sunday evening. In this spot, with the grey majesty of the cathedral behind her and the town spread out below, she always felt calm and thoughtful.

'Why the big sigh?' said her husband.

'Did I sigh?' she said, surprised. 'I was thinking about the past.'

Ten years ago, when Nick Portez walked into her life, Diana had been sitting in her chic attic studio with absolutely nothing to do but worry. Six months earlier she had left her job with a London firm of architects to start her own practice in Kingsbridge.

It was not a success. Today she had fired her cleaning woman, and soon she would be unable to pay the rent.

Nick was a man of about her own age, who had made a lot of money out of real estate, and liked everyone to know it. His plan was to demolish a whole stretch of Market Street, and build a hotel for the tourists who came to see the cathedral, a shopping centre to replace the existing ramshackle shops, some offices and a few apartments. He wanted Diana to be the architect. He felt they would make a good team, because she was young and ambitious and he was young and impatient. Diana tried not to show how excited she was. Nick explained that the Church owned the land, but if the cathedral clergy liked her drawings, he would form a partnership with them and apply for planning permission. She had no other work and she agreed to do some designs.

He also asked her to have dinner with him. She might have been tempted, but she already had a date with John Borman, a young lawyer she had known since schooldays, and who was crazy about her. When he kissed her goodnight, he said he wanted to make love to her. Afterwards she wondered why she had said no. He was good-looking, she liked him, and he would be gentle and kind.

Two weeks later, she went to see Charles Boyd, the Dean of Kingsbridge, carrying a portfolio of drawings that she thought was the best work she had ever done. Even so, she felt apprehensive as she walked through the rain to her rendezvous. The plan could not go ahead without the support of the Church, and clergymen were dismally conservative. She rang the bell of the Deanery. Once the drawings were finished, she had been desperate to show them to someone, and Nick was away until the evening. Nervously she wondered what kind of man Charles Boyd was.

He opened the door himself. He was much younger than she had expected - tall, thin and angular, with thick dark hair and soft brown eyes. He smelled of soap and woodsmoke, and sure enough there was a log fire in his study. He certainly was not married, there was no feminine influence in this room - no

curtains, no flowers, no ornaments. He gave her tea in a chipped mug.

Diana was too impatient for small talk, and spread her drawings out on the table. She took him through the scheme quickly, emphasizing the way it would enhance the cathedral's surroundings. To her astonishment, he was full of enthusiasm.

'This is a marvellous scheme,' he said, waving his long arms.

'You mean you're in favour of it?'

'Of course! Think what we could do - for homeless people, for handicapped children - with the profit from this!'

Diana smiled happily.

That evening, she met Nick for dinner. It was supposed to be a business meeting, but he had chosen an intimate bistro with candles on the tables and views over the moonlit river. She told him triumphantly that the dean was on their side. He gave her a congratulatory kiss, and hugged her a little longer than necessary for mere congratulation. She could not help thinking he was a good deal better-looking than John.

'So long as he's on our side. Now, our next problem is getting planning permission from the Council. Isn't your boyfriend on the planning committee?'

Diana began to feel uncomfortable. She was already faintly guilty about being with Nick in a romantic restaurant, and thinking how attractive he was in the candlelight.

'Have a word with old John ... make sure he sees the advantages.' 'I'll think about it,' she said.

However, she did speak to 'old John' about it, the following Sunday, strolling beside the river that wound through the centre of the city.

'I'll vote for you,' he said, 'even though it means your spending more time with the handsome Nick.' He smiled sadly. 'There'll be lots of opposition. A shopping centre will take business away from the High Street. The Mayor owns half of it, and his friends the other half.'

'I never thought of that,' Diana said reflectively. She felt a sudden surge of affection for him, but he failed to pick up on her mood, and the moment passed.

On the evening the planning committee met, Nick was away again, so Diana sat in the lobby with Charles Boyd, the dean. He talked passionately about all the causes in which he was involved. She thought how nice it would be to have an intelligent man friend who did not want to go to bed with her. Then John appeared, his face glum.

'Bad news, I'm afraid,' he said. 'Your application was rejected.' Diana's heart sank. 'And all because the Mayor owns shops in the High Street,' she said bitterly.

'How disappointing,' said the dean. 'Still, we did our best.'

Diana looked at him curiously. 'You get so angry about injustices to

others. How can you be so calm about this?'

He shrugged. 'Human greed is normal. It's human cruelty that makes me cross.' He held out his hand. 'I'm sorry it's come to nothing.' 'What a nice man,' said Diana, as he walked away.

'Maybe, but he didn't drive you home ... so I will.'

Diana had a flat in a big old house north of the cathedral. John wanted to be invited in, but Diana felt too dispirited.

'I'll have to get another job,' she said.

'There's another way, you know, if we were together. I love you, Diana, please marry me.'

Diana saw true love in his eyes and it was that that decided her.

'I can't, John. You deserve someone who loves you as much as you love her. You're a dear man, but I'm not in love with you.'

'Think it over,' he pleaded.

'I'm sorry,' she said and kissed his cheek. She opened the gate and walked quickly up the garden path. As his car pulled away, she fumbled in her bag for her key. A figure emerged from the shadows. It was Nick.

'You scared me,' she said crossly.

'I just got back,' he said. 'What happened?'

'We lost.'

He swore. 'All that work I put in,' he said.

'What about all the work I put in?' Diana said indignantly.

'Yes, yours too.' He held up a bottle of champagne. 'Why don't we drown our sorrows?'

'No, thanks, Nick. Good-night.'

But he held the door, preventing her from closing it. 'Come on,' he said. 'Don't you think you owe me? I gave you a break.'

It was outrageous. She had done weeks of work for no pay and he wanted her to be grateful! Suddenly he grabbed her and kissed her lips. She stood dead still for a moment, then stamped hard on his toe. He let out a yelp of pain and backed off, cursing.

Diana slammed the door of the flat behind her. She had just been propositioned by the two of the most eligible men in the city. Why is there no one in Kingsbridge whom I would like to spend the night with? Then she realized there was. She recalled the smell of soap and wood smoke, the bare study with its plain floorboards. Of course, he had never shown the least sign of being interested in her...

It was almost ten o'clock, when she stood under the walls of the great cathedral. At half past ten she knocked on the door of the deanery. I may regret this for the rest of my life, she thought. The dean came to the door.

'I wanted to see you,' Diana said.

'Come inside,' he said. He closed the door behind her.

She said, 'The thing is, I've fallen in love with you.' He stared at her.

'Oh, thank God for that,' he said. Then he took her in his arms.

Ten years and two children later, Diana said, 'I think the council was right. Market Street is better left as it is.'

'What about the other decisions made that year? Were they right, too?' He was still the Dean of Kingsbridge, and Diana worked for the Church.

'I must have been mad - knocking on the door of the deanery like that.'

'But you haven't answered my question.'

She looked into his eyes again. 'It was the best decision I ever made, dear, and I've never regretted it for a minute.'

His expression told her he felt the same. She slipped her arm through his, and they walked across the close to their home.