

Metal of a Different Sort

The Tudor Queen's Glassmaker

Book 3 of the Series



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PETER COOKE

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Petan Publishing

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First Edition Published in Great Britain in 2015

by

Petan Publishing
64 Skipton Road
Ilkley West Yorkshire
LS29 9HA

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website: <http://www.booksbypetercooke.com/>

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ebook ISBN 978-0-9564710-5-5

Metal Of A Different Sort

1578

Boredom leads to desperate times!

Jacob Bell and his partner Roberto Rosso were bored. Because of this, Lord Burghley, Chief Minister to Queen Elizabeth I, persuaded them to become Queen's Commissioners and investigate a murder at a foundry making decorative ironwork. This apparently simple case, turns into an intriguing mystery, as they both narrowly escape attempts to kill them. The plot they uncover, threatens the life, not only of the Tudor Queen, Elizabeth, but her ministers as well. As the Queen's progress winds its way into East Anglia, staying at a new house nearly every night, the intrepid pair race to save them all from a fiendishly clever foe.

About the author

I was born and raised in Derbyshire and matured in Yorkshire, England, where I spent a lot of my working life as a Chief Colourist, a Senior Manager in both the Textile and Chemical industries, a Science Teacher and a University Lecturer among other things.

A well-known speaker on the Elizabethan Era and the History of English Glassmaking, I spend my time writing Tudor Historical novels, of which I have to date, written four books in a series about the Tudor Queen's Glassmaker. The books are fast paced, adventure stories, with a strong love interest. A key element is the setting in Venice and London, during the 16th century, which are brought to life, in sights and sounds, keeping as accurately as possible, to the historical facts, around which the story is woven.

Recently, inspired by my background in textiles, I began a new series about the Industrial Revolution in the Cotton Spinning Mills,. These were the first spinning mills in the World and were built in the Derwent Valley in Derbyshire. The importance of the mills is reflected in their World Heritage status. Belper Mill rebuilt in 1803-4, by William Strutt, is the earliest example of a fire proof construction.

The fictional series will be called Amber Mills, which is an Arkwright style mill on the River Amber, a tributary of the River Derwent. The first book, scheduled to be published next year, is provisionally titled Amber Mills Revolution, The First Generation.

New to the Tudor Queen's Glassmaker Series? Sign up to the authors Readers List and get a FREE book and other special

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The Tudor Queen's Glassmaker

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The Glass Dagger

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Chapter One

London, Monday 8th May, 1578

Jacob Bell, Glassmaker to Queen Elizabeth, rode into the courtyard of Crutched Friar Glass-Works and dismounted from his horse. After tying the reins to the large ring on the hitching post, he entered the Glass-works and smiled as a regular thudding noise came from the direction of the wood store. His guess was accurate - Roberto, his partner and friend, was practising throwing his knives, as he often did when he was bored.

'Good morning, Roberto. You're up and about early.'

Roberto continued to pull his knives out of the target, not without some difficulty because of the violence of the throws. 'I had to do something. I wasn't needed for glass blowing, as they're right up to date with the orders. I seem to be surplus to requirements at the moment.'

'I know what you mean,' agreed Jacob. 'I'm feeling a bit like that too.' He took a letter out of his doublet and indicated the seal of Lord Burghley, the Queen's Chief Minister. 'Perhaps this will cheer you up. His Lordship says he has a commission for us and requests that we attend him at eleven o'clock this morning at Westminster Palace.'

'Requests!' exclaimed Roberto with a wary smile. 'He usually just tells us to be there. It must be a very knotty problem if he's being polite.'

'There is that,' agreed Jacob, 'so shall I tell him you aren't interested in finding out what it is?'

Of course Roberto was interested and shortly after eleven o'clock they were shown in to see Lord Burghley, who studied them intently for a few moments before leaning forward and

pulling a document from a large pile in front of him. Placing his elbows on the desk, he laced his fingers and cleared his throat.

'I have a favour to ask of you,' he began regarding them earnestly, then pausing to see if there was any reaction to his statement. Lord Burghley had never asked for a favour before, so there was an exchange of looks between them.

Since there was no comments, he continued. 'I want you to act as my Commissioners and investigate a murder that occurred last night in a former government gun foundry in Houndsditch.'

He leaned back again and waited.

Jacob was the first to reply. 'A murder? On a Sunday? Surely that is a matter for the local Justice of the Peace and his constables.'

'Ordinarily that would be the case, but there are some – er – special circumstances in this case.'

'And what might those be?' enquired Jacob.

Burghley explained that until 1571 the Houndsditch Foundry had been the main government gun foundry. It had been responsible, under Thomas Owen, the Royal Gun-Founder, for providing bronze cannon for Navy warships. His elder brother had died in an accident and Thomas carried on for eight years before retiring. Following this, the foundry was closed until reopened a year ago for the casting of decorative iron goods, by another set of brothers, William and Henry Fogg.

'I have to say, my Lord,' said Jacob. 'we have no experience relating to the casting of iron, or bronze.'

Roberto gave a broad smile. 'Well, perhaps not, but after all glass is only a metal of a different sort!' It was a tradition in glassmaking to call molten glass 'the metal'.

Jacob laughed. 'I suppose you're right, Roberto. So let us not worry about that and concentrate on the murder.' He turned to Lord Burghley.

'Who was the person killed? And why the haste to investigate

a murder at a foundry making decorative ironwork?' he asked.

'Ah,' said Burghley grimly, 'I was just about to explain that very point and its significance. The murdered man, Terence Hall, was an occasional employee of Walsingham's. He mostly worked as a freelance agent and only came to Walsingham when he had something of interest for him.'

'You think the Queen's spy-master is mixed up in this business?' remarked Jacob. 'I take it then that he was there on Walsingham's instructions?'

'Apparently not, according to Walsingham,' said Burghley. 'That is the puzzle. But since Hall was on the premises of a former Royal gun foundry, an investigation must be carried out by people we trust.'

At that moment there was a discreet knock at the door and Burghley's secretary entered. Summoned forward, he whispered in Burghley's ear and then left, closing the door behind him.

Burghley regarded them seriously. 'I have been summoned to a Privy Council meeting. Gentlemen, I need to be sure that this murder has no implications for national security. Will you take my Commission?'

Jacob looked at Roberto, who nodded. Turning to Burghley, Jacob confirmed they would.

'Excellent,' said Burghley. 'My secretary will give you all the relevant papers.' He retrieved a document from his desk and handed it to Jacob. 'Here is your Commission, duly signed by myself, giving you full powers to investigate.'

He gave a bleak smile. 'And yes, I did rather anticipate that you would accept.' With that he bustled out of the room.

Returning to the house and showroom in Harte Street, Jacob and Roberto settled down in the upstairs parlour, to check the documents and the Commission, in the sitting room upstairs.

Jacob read out the brief explanation of the main facts. The body had been found by the foundry man at about a half hour after six o'clock, when he came to light the furnace. He went to

fetch the Foggs, who lived nearby and they called the constable.

On his arrival, the constable ordered the foundry to be closed. Because it had been a gun foundry, Lord Burghley had been notified and he had instructed the Foggs to let no one else in until the commissioners arrived.

He then passed it to Roberto. Jacob, began to study the full details of the Commission. When he read the full text, he was very surprised.

'Listen to this, Roberto: *I call on all aldermen, justices of the peace and constables, to give the forenamed commissioners every help and assistance in their investigation into the recent murder of Terence Hall at Houndsditch and the circumstances surrounding said demise. The commissioners have full powers to question, arrest and detain any person they feel may assist in their investigation.*'

Roberto was astonished. 'He certainly doesn't do things by half, Those are very wide powers.'

'They certainly are,' agreed Jacob.

He was thoughtful for a moment. 'What was your impression of Lord Burghley's account?'

'It was not what he said,' said Roberto, 'rather a matter of what he didn't. The fortuitous arrival of his secretary was a very convenient way of cutting short any questions we might have had. Surely he would have known there was a Privy Council meeting before he set the time of our meeting.'

'Exactly so,' agreed Jacob. 'Spy or no spy, I can't see that a death at a foundry now making decorative iron work justifies a Commissioners' investigation with such wide powers as these.'

He regarded Roberto with a serious expression.

'We must study the information we have received and approach the investigation with open minds. We cannot assume anything we have been, or will be, told is true or false. There is probably much we have not been privy to, so we must keep our wits about us.'

'And keep our weapons handy,' exclaimed Roberto.

Chapter Two

Houndsditch, London,
Tuesday, 9th May, 1578

Soon after the midday meal the two stalwarts headed for Aldgate on foot. Passing through the gate, which was their usual exit from the city, they strolled past St Botolph's and walked along Houndsditch, a busy thoroughfare with all manner of carts, coaches and riders heading both in and out of the city. Lumbering carts laden with produce from country areas surrounding the city threatened life and limbs of passers-by, particularly in the confined areas on both sides of the city gates.

They knew from the map provided in the notes that the foundry was the third building on the right along Houndsditch from St Botolph's Church. The foundry was a two-storey building with a gable at the far end. Above the first door was a badly faded, almost indecipherable sign. It was only the fact that they knew what the building was that they could recognise the words 'Houndsditch Foundry'.

Hurrying across the busy road during a lull in the traffic, they found the door was locked. After a bout of insistent banging, it was eventually opened by a surly individual in filthy working clothes.

'We're closed,' he muttered and attempted to shut the door, but Roberto was too quick for him and put his foot over the threshold.

'Open to the Queen's Commissioners, my man, and be quick about it,' ordered Jacob in an authoritarian voice.

'You heard the Commissioner. Open this door at once,'

instructed Roberto and, as the man hesitated, used his shoulder to hasten the process.

Reluctantly the man stepped back muttering to himself and Jacob, taking out his Commission, pointed to the seal.

'That is Lord Burghley's seal. Now fetch Master William Fogg at once.'

The seal did the trick and the man touched his forelock respectfully. 'If tha'll wait 'ere, sirs, ahl fetch 'im directly.'

When William Fogg arrived, he was most apologetic. 'I'm sorry my man didn't let you in at once. He was ordered not to let anyone in today. We were expecting you, but not until tomorrow.' He was flustered and ill-at-ease. 'The constables have not allowed us to do anything. We've only been back in the building less than a quarter hour. The body has only just been removed.'

'That's quite all right, Master Fogg,' Jacob assured him. 'We just wanted to get our bearings as soon as possible. It's a pity the body has been removed. Please show us where it was found and then perhaps we could have a tour of your premises.'

'By all means. In fact you'll have to go through the foundry to reach the office, where the body was found and the store room beyond. It's still as it was left when the murder was discovered. Please follow me.'

'Keep your eyes peeled,' whispered Jacob to Roberto, 'and we'll compare notes later.'

The furnace occupied much of that end of the foundry. It was very different to a glass furnace, although Jacob could see similarities. It was considerably larger for one thing, being seven paces along each side of the square construction and about twice the height of an average man.

The walls Fogg explained were very thick to contain the heat, being lined with clay bricks, with a thick wall of ordinary bricks and cement, on the outside. Of course, Jacob had expected that as he could see they were similar to those used in the glass furnace. The door to the unlit furnace, was extremely

heavy. William demonstrated how a long lever and a man's weight was needed to lift it, for feeding in the fuel.

'Do you use wood?' asked Jacob.

'No. Until recently, we used charcoal, but now we use a form of coal, called anthracite. It gives us a high temperature in the furnace.'

At the side of the furnace, was a massive wooden scaffold that surrounded a pit. The moulds for casting were lowered into it, using a hoist attached to the scaffold. Once the iron scraps and ingots had reached the right consistency for pouring, the outlets were opened and the molten iron ran into a channel and then in to the mould.

The moulds, explained Fogg, were very heavy, being strengthened with iron bands, to ensure the baked horsehair and clay of the inner mould, did not crack under the weight of the iron. The quality of the product depended on the quality of the mould.

As they passed the furnace Jacob saw that there were three different moulds as well as the one already in the moulding pit. Stacked against the wall nearby, where some finished decorative railings that looked of very good quality. Beyond this, they reached a small open space leading to a door that Fogg stated, lead into the office. He indicated a small pool of dried blood on the floor about ten feet from the door.

'The body was found here. The head was in a pool of blood and he was lying face down with his feet about there,' he stated, indicating a spot nearer the office door.

'Were you and your brother present when the body was found?' asked Jacob, although he knew from the notes that they were not.

'No, We don't usually come in until seven o'clock. The foundry man told us what had happened and I sent for the constable.'

'Was the office door locked?' enquired Roberto.

'No. In fact I'm not even sure where the key is at the moment.

Probably in the desk drawer.'

They looked around the office, which was in a dishevelled state. 'Is it always like this?' queried Jacob.

'Not at all. These papers are usually in the desk drawer.' Fogg began to collect up the papers and technical drawings lying on the desk and on the floor. 'May I put these away? They are just invoices and some sketches for ornamental work.'

'Roberto will give you a hand,' Jacob agreed. His instincts told him that Fogg was trying to conceal something and Roberto did not miss the significant look in his direction.

Jacob began to examine the door lock and Roberto helped Fogg to collect and straighten the papers. One that he caught a glimpse of, didn't look a bit like decorative iron work, more like a sketch for a cannon. Fogg hurriedly covered it with some other sketches, picked them all up together and put them in the desk drawer. The invoices he put in a tray.

Roberto, feigning disinterest, walked towards a door that led out of the other side of the office. Out of the corner of his eye, he did not miss Fogg's relieved exhalation. He tried the door, but it was locked.

'Where does this lead?' he asked and Jacob looked at Fogg in anticipation.

'I'm afraid that is not a part we rent. As far as I know, it's just empty buildings. We only use these buildings as they are plenty big enough for our iron work.'

'And the landlord is?'

'I assume the same as ours. Thomas Owen, the former gun founder.'

Jacob made a note of this and then looked at Fogg enquiringly. 'So, Master Fogg, we come to the nub of it. Did you know the victim, who murdered him and why?'

Fogg looked at him with a bland expression. 'I never met him before in my life and I haven't the faintest idea on either of the other questions. It's a complete mystery.'

'Was the body touched?'

'Not by us. The constable turned him over to search for his identity.'

'What do you think caused his death?'

'Oh, that couldn't be plainer. He'd been struck on the back of the head and his throat was cut from ear to ear.'

'When the constable turned him over, are you sure he wasn't familiar?'

'I'm afraid not. Nor was he to my younger brother Henry. Unfortunately, he is away this morning delivering and erecting some ornamental railings at Leicester House in the Strand.'

Jacob was impressed. 'You have some influential customers.'

Fogg nodded. 'We were very fortunate to get the order for the Earl.' He made a face. 'Unfortunately, he is not well known for paying his dues promptly.'

'Indeed not,' agreed Jacob. 'I have some experience of that. As for your brother, we will need to speak with him. Here on the morrow will be convenient, shall we say, nine o'clock.'

'I will make sure he is here to wait on you.'

'In that case we will take our leave of you.'

Fogg escorted them to the door and they said their farewells, but just as Jacob was about to leave he turned around suddenly and asked ingenuously, 'Oh, I quite forgot.' Which he hadn't of course. 'Was anything taken?'

Fogg was taken aback by the sudden question. His face flushed and he stammered, 'Er – nothing, as far as we know.'

As Roberto said to Jacob later when they were discussing the visit, 'Not a convincing liar, is he! He was looking through those papers as if he was hunting for something that he hoped was still there. He tried to cover over one of them rather hurriedly. However, I'm certain that it was a drawing of a cannon, which stretches the definition of decorative ironwork, rather a long way!'

Chapter Three

Harte Street & Houndsditch, London,
Wednesday, 10th May, 1578

The question that was occupying Jacob's mind was not the fact that William Fogg was lying, but what was he lying about? It seemed obvious that something was missing, but the reaction when asked was far more than for just a missing paper. Also, there was the drawing of a cannon he tried to hide.

It was certainly a mystery, but the answer would have to wait, since they had not obtained enough information to make a judgement. Nevertheless, so far two persons central to the case, Lord Burghley, who had avoided any questions on the commission and William Fogg, were either lying, or not telling the whole truth.

Accordingly, on his return to Harte Street, Jacob arranged a meeting for the following morning with Quiff, the leader of the Apprentice Ring set up by Jacob for an earlier investigation concerning the Queen and his major source of information gathering.

Quiff was intrigued. 'I'll send the message out today. It might be a little difficult to find out about these Fogg brothers, since they don't employ apprentices, but the landlord Owen is a different case. Anyway I'll see what the Ring can find out.' He gave a typical lopsided grin. 'No doubt you want the information yesterday!'

Jacob set his face in a stern look. 'If that was some sort of a complaint, I can get someone else to do the job.' He completely spoiled the effect by bursting out laughing as Quiff, feigning a sad contrite expression, walked towards the door, with

shoulders slumped, heaving great sighs. On reaching the door he turned, straightened up and chirped, 'Very good, Master Jacob, yesterday it is,' and then, with a cheery wave, he was gone.

After the meeting, Jacob and Roberto went to speak to the constable who was based at the small Aldgate prison, a little way from Aldgate on the street of that name.

'What has happened to the body of the deceased, Terence Hall?' asked Jacob.

'It's in the back room, in the parish coffin.'

St Botolph's Parish, he explained, had a reusable coffin so that even a pauper could be buried with a little dignity.

'Has the coroner convened a jury yet, do you know?'

The constable shook his head. 'He had a letter from the Privy Council, instructing him to delay the inquest until he had the Commissioners' report.' Jacob was surprised, because this was news to him too. There was no reference to this in the papers supplied by Burghley.

Jacob and Roberto, went to see the body and began the gruesome task of examining it. There was the obvious gaping slash across his throat and a bloody wound on the back of the head. However, it was the bruises around wrists and ankles and elsewhere on the body that convinced them he was probably tortured before being killed.

When they had finished, they thanked the constable and went to sit on a bench provided in a small nearby park.

'What are your thoughts, Jacob?' asked Roberto.

There was a short pause as he gathered his thoughts and then he said that two things leaped out at him. Firstly, that the place where the body had been found was not where the murder had been committed. Secondly, that from his injuries, he had been tortured.

He gave a shrug, 'Why and who by, I haven't a clue at the moment. And did whoever murdered Hall remove something from the foundry?' A lot of questions still to be answered.

However, I have an idea that the brothers Fogg were not just making decorative iron work, but cannons too.'

'I agree about the murder,' said Roberto. 'There was far too little blood where the body was found. There would have been a very large amount, judging from his wounds.'

'What about this cannon?' asked Jacob curiously. 'How much did you see?'

Roberto explained about the drawing that Fogg had hurriedly moved from the desk to the drawer.

'I only got a quick look before he covered it up,' he explained, 'but I'm sure it was a mould design for a large cannon.'

They both agreed that, if that was the case, the cannon was certainly not being made in the foundry they had inspected. This led to the conclusion that the gun foundry must be in the building that William Fogg said was empty.

Jacob checked his notes. 'Fogg said that "as far as I know, it's just empty buildings. We only use these buildings as they are plenty big enough for our iron work."' It seems to me that the murder probably took place in there and that they are making cannons in secret!

'Now all we have to do is prove it!' said Roberto.

'Well, that would be good, but I'm afraid it would only be a start. There are a lot more questions that need answering. Not least, why Hall was in a secret gun foundry, who was he working for and who killed him.' Jacob grimaced. 'And that's just for a start.' Taking out his pocket watch, he checked the time. 'We'd better get over to Houndsditch, it's almost nine o'clock.'

A few minutes later they were opposite the foundry and waiting to cross the busy street. Seeing a gap, Jacob set off briskly and had only gone a few steps when Roberto, following, cried out a warning. A black coach that had been driving slowly towards them, suddenly shot forward as the horses were whipped up by the coachman. It was bearing down on Jacob, who was slow to react to Roberto's warning and only

at the last moment did he realise his danger. All would have been lost if Roberto had not dragged him violently backwards.

They finished in a tangled heap and as they both tried to stand up, Jacob's leg appeared to give way and he staggered and fell again. 'Are you all right, Jacob?' cried Roberto anxiously, inspecting his leg for a serious wound.

Jacob gave an embarrassed laugh. 'I'm fine, Roberto,' he said, indicating his shoe, 'thanks to you. The coach wheel nipped the back of my shoe and flattened it. It made me lose my balance.' He adjusted his shoe, stood up and looked enquiringly at Roberto. 'Did you have chance to see who was in the coach, or see the coachman?'

Roberto shook his head. 'The coach curtains were closed, I'm afraid. I did get a glimpse of the coachman, he had his hat brim pulled down, but he had a prominent scar running down the left side of his face.

Jacob stood up and brushed himself down. Turning to Roberto he clapped him on the shoulder. 'Yet another debt I owe you, Roberto. And I'm sure you think, like me, that this was no accident.'

'Yes, it was definitely deliberate. And you owe me no debt. You would, and have, done the same for me.'

'Very well, let's away to see the Fogg brothers, but say nothing about this accident, nor about the cannon. We'll play the game their way and see where it takes us.'

They had no problem getting into the Foundry this time and both brothers were waiting in the office which was considerably tidier than before. A couple of chairs had been set out for them.

Henry Fogg was no more forthcoming than his brother, professing to know nothing about the murder nor why it had been carried out. He also had nothing to offer in the way of an explanation for the ill-fated Hall's presence in their foundry, nor had he any knowledge of anything that was missing. While Jacob questioned them both carefully about their movements

over the weekend and on the Monday, Roberto made detailed notes. Jacob also found out that Thomas Owen, the landlord, lived in a large house a little lower down Houndsditch, next to St Botolph's Church.

'Have you anything to add,' Jacob asked the brothers, 'anything at all, that is relevant to our enquiries? Should we find out at a later time that you have been less than truthful in your answers, we have extensive powers to arrest and imprison you.'

Henry Fogg looked a little apprehensively at his brother, who immediately denied that there was any more to tell the Commissioners. Once more, he did not convince Jacob that he was telling the truth, but until more was known, there was little point in pursuing the matter. Having warned the Foggs not to leave London without their permission, Jacob and Roberto strolled towards St Botolph's. In the entrance of an alleyway going towards the rear of what was obviously Thomas Owen's property, a young man was lounging against the wall, watching them. As Jacob and Roberto approached, he turned and walked up the alley.

'Let's follow him, Roberto, and keep your knives handy.'

'Always do,' said Roberto grimly and together they turned into the alley. When the youth saw they were following him, he was away like a whippet chasing a hare. At the end of the alley, he turned right. Roberto, who because of his youth and fitness, had left Jacob struggling in his wake, was still some distance behind. By the time he reached the end, the lad was nowhere in sight. Yet another question. Who was the lad working for? They really did need some answers.

In view of this, Jacob decided they should go back to see if Quiff had anything to tell them

'This case is proving to be a bit of a mare's nest,' remarked Jacob. 'The more we find out, the less we know. I hope Quiff can come up with something, otherwise I may have to go back to Lord Burghley and try to bluff him we know more than we

do.'

'I wish you much joy with that,' retorted Roberto, pulling a face.

Chapter Four

Houndsditch, London,
Thursday, 11th May, 1578

Having returned to his home in Mark Street, Jacob spent some time with his family. Shortly after the evening meal, Roberto joined Jacob and soon afterwards Quiff returned with some news that clarified the reticence of the Foggs and the missing information from Lord Burghley. An apprentice with a company that supplied raw materials to the foundry industry had informed Quiff that, despite the stated closing of the Houndsditch Gun Foundry, the Fogg brothers were buying similar amounts of raw materials to the previous gun foundry. They were also buying iron scrap, in quantities far in excess of the requirements of a small decorative iron foundry.

Jacob went very quiet as he added this new information to what they knew. The drawing of a cannon Roberto had seen and the reason for the excess quantities of raw materials and iron for their current business suddenly made sense.

His face lit. 'So that's what they're up to,' he cried in satisfaction. 'They're secretly making iron cannon.'

'It does seem likely,' agreed Roberto.

Jacob also had an inkling that this information might have a bearing on the murder of Terence Hall. Maybe Hall had got wind of the secret gun foundry and thought Walsingham might pay for this information. Hmm, Jacob thought, it's pure speculation on my part, but at least it's a theory that fits what we know. How we're going to prove it is another matter entirely.

Two further thoughts struck him. The draconian powers of

the commissioners indicated that Burghley knew about the secret cannon making. That's why he wanted it investigating. Additionally, surely if they were official gun founders, the cannons were probably for the Navy and Admiral John Hawkins would surely know about them. After all, he had been Treasurer of the Navy since the beginning of the year. It was unlikely that he would be kept in the dark.

Hawkins and Jacob had become close friends during their involvement in foiling the Ridolfi plot against the Queen and Hawkins was now based at Deptford Dockyard. A visit to his friend was indicated.

Realising that Quiff was still waiting patiently, Jacob asked if there was anything else he had to report.

'You mentioned Terence Hall, the man who was killed. I've found out where he was lodging and it's not far from Aldgate. There's a regular warren of streets and alleys at the back of St Botolph's and he rented a room in a tenement in the middle of it.' He handed over a piece of paper with the address written on it.

Jacob thanked him and asked if there was anything else.

'Not at present. It's unusual to get something quite so soon. Perhaps I'll have more in a day or two.'

'Thank you, Quiff. This has been most helpful.'

After Quiff had left, Jacob and Roberto spent some time mulling over the possible implications of what Quiff had found out.

'What do you think Lord Burghley's motives might be for not telling us the whole story?' asked Roberto.

'Possibly the involvement of Hall, Walsingham's agent,' mused Jacob. 'Burghley might have a suspicion that Walsingham is following his own agenda.'

One thing Jacob and Roberto had learned from past experience: Be very careful not to get in the middle of a battle between the Queen's leading ministers. Walsingham was a protestant zealot, and met trouble head on, whereas Burghley

was more pragmatic and preferred the subtle approach. They are not always in accord on the best way to serve Her Majesty.

In the light of this new information, Jacob and Roberto needed to arrange for a search of Hall's lodgings and find out what Admiral Hawkins knew about the Houndsditch foundry.

With several lines of enquiry to follow, they would have to split up the work between them. Together, they discussed how this would be divided. Finally, it was agreed that Jacob would go to Deptford to see Admiral Hawkins, while Roberto said he would find out what he could about Terence Hall.

'It's best if I do that,' suggested Roberto. 'In my working clothes, I will not be so conspicuous in the working class area where Hall had been lodging.' He gave a laugh. 'And before you say it, I will be careful.'

Jacob did not have any real fears that Roberto would be in much danger. So long as he was alert, anyone who tried to attack him was likely to find himself with a knife stuck in a painful place, like the late unlamented Adrian Ragazoni, the man who's evil schemes had led to Jacob's downfall in Venice. Roberto did not practice his throwing knives for fun!

'What should I look out for in Hall's room?' asked Roberto.

'Try and find out as much as you can about Hall and any friends or acquaintances he might have. Obviously, any letters might throw some light on things, but you will need to search carefully, as they'll probably be well hidden.'

'I'll have a word with the landlord first. He's probably owed money, so a little palm greasing could well pay dividends.'

'And good luck with the Admiral. If he doesn't co-operate, you can always use your commissioner's powers and send him to the Tower!

Chapter Five

Deptford Dockyard and Houndsditch, London,
Friday, 12th May, 1578

In view of the number of people waiting to see him, Jacob was very surprised to be shown into Hawkins's office almost as soon as he had arrived.

The Admiral was standing by the window and invited Jacob to join him. 'A stirring sight, is it not?' he said, in place of a greeting, waving a hand across the bustling scene in front of them.

Looking out across the dockyard at all the completed and part-completed ships, Jacob agreed that it was, indeed, a stimulating vista.

The Admiral indicated a chair and then sat at his desk. With an enigmatic smile, he greeted Jacob with the words, 'I was wondering when you would arrive!'

'You were expecting me?'

Hawkins simply passed across a letter and indicated the postscript. 'Read that.'

The letter was signed by Lord Burghley and the postscript read, *'Expect an imminent visit from Jacob Bell in his role as my Commissioner.'*

He handed the letter back to Hawkins. 'And did he say what he expected me to ask you?'

'No, but it doesn't take a genius to work it out,' said Hawkins with a cheery smile. 'You want to know about the Houndsditch Foundry, of course.' He paused and shook his head in disapproval. 'But I really shouldn't tell you.'

After a short period of careful scrutiny at Jacob's deliberately

neutral face, Hawkins sighed.

'Oh, very well,' he exclaimed and went on to explain that William and Henry Fogg were working for the Navy to develop standardised sizes of iron cannons. The Foggs had invented a process that made their guns more capable of prolonged fire than existing bronze guns. Iron was also cheaper and far more available than bronze, an alloy of expensive copper and tin.

The iron cannon were also capable of withstanding a much higher charge of powder without bursting, than even the best bronze guns.

'You will, of course, realise the implication of that, Jacob.'

Of course he did. With a ship of his own, Jacob knew that the higher the charge of gunpowder, the greater the range of the cannon.

'Can you tell me how much more effective these new iron cannons are?'

'I trust you implicitly, so I *will* tell you what we have achieved so far. The prototype, firing a four-pound ball, will penetrate four inches of oak from a distance of one hundred yards, two inches of oak at five hundred yards and has a maximum range of over a mile and a quarter.'

'That's very impressive,' marvelled Jacob.

'And that's only the start,' enthused the Admiral. 'The Foggs are working with a new type of gunpowder they're trying out at the Tower of London. It burns slower and more evenly, which will improve the power of the cannon even more. Together with the new ships built to the Racing line, like Jacob's ship, *The Crystal*, these new guns will make our ships the best in the world.'

The Crystal was the forerunner of Hawkins's plan to make English ships the greatest in the world. He had this vision of fast, manoeuvrable ships that did not fight in the conventional way. Instead of being floating castles, which came together, boarded and fought a battle between naval soldiers, they became floating gun platforms.

Conventional guns would be fired once just before boarding. English gunners were trained to fire a broadside and reload in two to three minutes. With stronger and more powerful guns, they could blast the enemy ships from a distance with little danger to their own ship.

There was silence for a while and then Jacob spoke up. 'What can you tell me about the murder of Hall at the foundry?'

'All I can tell you on that score is that Hall was was not killed by the Foggs. They deny it most vehemently and say they have no idea how, or why he got into the foundry. They did however, admit to moving the body out of the gun foundry. They also told me that from the mess in the office, he seemed to have been searching through the records and drawings.'

'Have the Foggs reported anything missing?'

'No. Why do you ask?'

'Because when I implied that something had been stolen, William Fogg did not convince me when he said nothing was missing.'

'I sincerely hope you are wrong, but I leave it to you to find out. I wish you luck with your investigation.'

The landlord of Terence Hall's lodging in Portosoken Ward, just outside the city wall, began to perk up the moment Roberto suggested he was willing to pay for the right information. He told Roberto he had cleared out all of Hall's few possessions and put them into a large leather bag belonging to Hall and was planning to sell them to pay of rent arrears. He'd probably sold most of them already thought Roberto.

When Roberto asked to see the room, the landlord whined that he hadn't had time to clean it up. When Roberto insisted, he reluctantly obliged. When he had left, Roberto began a systematic examination of the room.

Hall must have fallen on hard times to live in filthy squalor like this, thought Roberto. The one cupboard yielded nothing, but underneath the filthy palliasse on the corded bed, he found

three letters. Putting these in his doublet, he searched all around. Despite shifting the bed and the cupboard to look for any other hiding places, he found nothing.

It was only when he was dragging the cupboard back into place that one of the floorboards sagged under his weight and, on careful examination, he saw it had been cut across its width and dirt rubbed into the cut to disguise it.

Taking out his heaviest knife, he inserted it into the crack and levered the board up. There was an old tin box hidden inside and Roberto was just about to open it when a slight creak from the doorway alerted him. Instinctively, he ducked and jumped to one side.

A crossbow bolt sliced through the space he had just vacated and buried itself in the wall. Roberto sent his heavy throwing knife spinning through the gap in the door and was rewarded by a cry and then a strange gurgling sound. Drawing another knife, Roberto yanked open the door, ready for anything. His caution was not needed. The body of a swarthy-faced man Roberto had never seen before, was slumped against the corridor wall, with Roberto's knife buried in his throat. The crossbow, which was similar to the folding ones used by Venetian assassins, had slipped from his lifeless fingers.

At first the Parish constable, called by the landlord, was all for arresting Roberto, but the sight of the Queen's Commission soon cleared up the matter. Roberto arranged that the body should be taken away and that the constables would try to discover his identity. A search of his person yielded nothing significant except a well-stuffed purse and a piece of paper with an address written on it. The man was not known to the constable.

Having paid him a few shillings for Hall's possessions, the landlord gave Roberto the names of a few of Hall's acquaintances. Satisfied he had done all he could for now, Roberto returned to Jacob's house with everything belonging to Hall in the leather bag, to examine later, with Jacob.

When Jacob arrived back from Deptford, Roberto was waiting for him. Having brought each other up to date on their respective visits, they searched through Hall's possessions, which were few. A poor quality woollen doublet, an old cotton shirt, a linen smock, assorted hose, a nightcap, a badly worn cut throat razor, a strop, and a battered hairbrush. The letters and the tin box that had nearly cost Roberto his life, were left to the last.

The box contained a sizeable sum of money. There were fifty-two gold sovereigns and a couple of gold doubloons.

'For someone living in a hovel, that is a considerable amount of money,' commented Roberto.

'Indeed it is and I doubt that Walsingham is the source of this largesse. He doesn't pay out this sort of money to part-time agents.' Jacob frowned. 'And what about the doubloons? Not the most common currency in London.'

'We just seem to get more questions,' said Roberto, with a resigned note in his voice. 'Perhaps the man I killed had heard about the money and had robbery in mind.' He shrugged. 'More theories. It would be nice to get a few answers.'

'Let's have a look at these letters and see if they shed any light,' suggested Jacob. 'They must be important to have been hidden away.'

The first and second letters were from a solicitor in Plymouth relating to the estate of a distant relative of Hall's. Essentially, as the only surviving relative, Terence Hall had inherited the estate which largely consisted of a house on the outskirts of Plymouth and a small park, but no money. There were some debts and taxes owing and the house was in a run-down state. The solicitor advised that about eighty pounds would be enough to put the estate into good order and the income from it would be enough to ensure Hall a decent living. Failure to clear off these debts by the end of June would result in the estate being sold off.

Ever able to get to the heart of a problem, Roberto's only

comment was, 'So he was desperate to get his hands on eighty pounds or more.'

'He was well on the way to that sum with the gold he had saved up, replied Jacob. 'The question is, who was paying him and what for?'

After examining the other letter, Roberto said, 'This might throw a little light on the who.'

The letter was only a short note. '*Meet me at the sign of the Moor, at noon the day after the morrow.*' It was simply signed with the initial 'M'.

Jacob sighed. 'It's rather cryptic to say the least. 'M' could be almost anyone. It's obvious that Hall knew who he was. As for the meeting place '*at the sign of the Moor*', what on earth does that mean?'

Chapter Six

London, Friday, 13th May, 1578

It was Quiff who came up with the answer to the puzzling note. The landlord of the Swan had suggested The Saracen's Head Tavern, in Aldgate, as the likeliest meeting place, since Moor is another name for Saracen and gave him a note for the landlord at the Saracen's Head, who was well known to him. For a small consideration, of course.

The landlord of the Saracen's Head, told Quiff that a well-dressed gentleman, possibly Spanish, had arranged a private booth at the back of the Tavern and had met with Terence Hall, a regular customer. Interestingly, the landlord had been paid a gold doubloon to ensure they were not disturbed and the Spaniard's companion, a swarthy hard-faced man had stood guard to ensure that this was the case. As far as he could remember, this meeting took place a few days before the end of March. A sovereign from Quiff, also prompted the information that two days later, on the Monday, Hall had met with an expensively-dressed Englishman, who arrived in a black coach driven by a large, dark haired man with a scar on his face. Although the landlord was unable to put a name to the gentleman, he thought that he had been addressed by Hall as 'my Lord'.

'It seems too much of a coincidence that my near accident was also with a black coach, driven by a scarred man, said Jacob. 'What do you think Roberto?'

'Well,' replied Roberto, 'there are a lot of black coaches in London, but it seems that this Lord, could be our man.'

They needed a name and Quiff promised that he would do his utmost to get one.

Just as Quiff was leaving, a message arrived from the coroner at Portosoken Ward. Because all aliens in London had to register their details with the authorities, it was this Register that led to a breakthrough. The message informed Jacob that the swarthy gentleman, killed by Roberto in self defence, was called Emanuel Sardeo and was listed at the address found in his purse, as a servant of the new Spanish Ambassador, Bernadino de Mendoza.

'What about that, Roberto, Could we have found our 'M'?'

'Why would he meet Hall?' said Roberto, clearly puzzled.

'Why indeed, Roberto. Perhaps Mendoza is after information about English naval cannon.'

'That is not too unlikely a reason,' agreed Roberto, 'but why in that case would Hall meet with this 'Lord'?'

'And why would either of them kill Hall?'

'Unless, of course,' speculated Roberto, 'Mendoza had found out that Hall was also providing this information to another source. Conversely, maybe this 'Lord', whoever he was, had killed Hall because he was dealing with the Spanish.

Jacob sighed. He was beginning to wish he hadn't got involved with this case. After all, it was more in Walsingham's line to handle espionage cases. It was a pity that Burghley had not just handed the case straight over to the spy-master. And there was the rub! Why hadn't he done so?

'More questions!' said Jacob loudly, in exasperation.

Roberto was baffled. 'I never said a word, Jacob.'

'Oh, it was nothing to do with you, Roberto, I was just thinking aloud.'

'I know what you mean, Jacob. We seem to go one step forward and two back.'

'Indeed,' agreed Jacob. 'However, in fairness, we have achieved quite a lot in a short time.' He was quiet for a moment, considering their next move and then suggested it was time they revisited the Fogg brothers at Houndsditch.

At first, William Fogg denied any knowledge of the gun

foundry, but when Jacob told him of his visit to Admiral Hawkins, he caved in completely.

Leading them through the gun foundry, which was much more extensive than the decorative work area they had already seen, he showed them into the office. The desk had a long drawer which had obviously been forced open as around the lock the wood was badly splintered and the drawer jammed open.

'What happened to the contents?' enquired Jacob.

William led him to a table at the side of the office where there was a thick sheaf of drawings. Roberto, meanwhile, continued to examine the damaged drawer.

As Jacob idly leafed through the drawings, Roberto suddenly held up a scrap of parchment that he had extracted from the damaged drawer. 'Are any of those drawings missing a top right hand corner?'

Closer inspection found that all the drawings were intact. Roberto smoothed out the parchment which was badly crumpled where it had been torn off, presumably by Hall as he'd hurriedly pulled the sheets out of the drawer. It was this piece of screwed-up parchment that had prevented the closure of the drawer.

'Where is the drawing that this corner belongs to?' asked Jacob.

William just looked at them in consternation and his face turned a bright red. 'I —er... It —er... I don't know,' he finally got out and sat down in the chair with his head in his hands.

Meanwhile, Jacob was examining the scrap carefully. There were three lines of writing, none of which were complete.

..tiple cylinders
..nade shells
..en bullets.

Jacob decided that the time had come for sterner measures. 'Come, Master Fogg. I order you to explain this fragment in the

name of Lord Burghley. Any hesitation on your part and I will have you sent to the Tower for interrogation.'

Fogg sat up and looked at Jacob with a beaten expression. 'It is a fragment from a speculative design for a new sort of swivel gun, Owen called it a rapid fire gun. The complete sentence for which you have the fragment is:- "The machine has multiple cylinders that can discharge grenade shells as well as cartridges of sixteen bullets."'

'How speculative?'

'Very. There is only the drawing.'

'And who is aware of this design?'

'Only my brother and I,' said Fogg, with a heavy sigh. 'And Thomas Owen, of course, who dreamed up the original design. We didn't even know the drawing was missing until after your visit, when you enquired what was missing. It was only then that we went through all the drawings and found the rough sketch of the rapid fire gun had vanished.'

'So am I right in thinking that Lord Burghley is not aware of its existence?'

Fogg nodded. 'We predict that it will fire ten cartridges a minute, each having sixteen bullets, or ten grenade shells, and it is mounted on a swivel for maximum arc of fire. But when we costed it out, it is far too expensive to compete with existing swivel guns.'

'Was there any other information on this new machine?' Roberto asked.

'None. We decided we would concentrate on improving the iron cannon as the best way to go forward. But I must tell you,' Fogg continued hastily, 'that there is another drawing missing. It is not for the rapid fire gun, but an early design for a cannon made from iron.'

'Another one missing!' exclaimed Jacob angrily.

'I'm sorry,' said Fogg. 'It's an early prototype that was only partly successful. It never occurred to either of us to check for that drawing. The prototype burst on its test firing, so it's totally

useless.'

Roberto registered disbelief. 'I thought this investigation was strange, but now it's just got bizarre!'

Chapter Seven

London, Saturday, 14th May, 1578

The following morning, shortly after he had broken fast, Jacob received a visit from Thomas Pepper, his lawyer. The letters from the solicitor in Plymouth about Hall's inheritance had been sent to Pepper to investigate.

'What have you found out, Thomas?'

'Quite a lot, I'm pleased to say.' Pepper explained that Hall had accepted his inheritance and, acting on his instructions and a promissory note sent in the same letter, the Plymouth solicitor had paid off the taxes owed on the house and arranged for work to begin on making it habitable.

'Do you know when this was?'

'The fifth of May.'

That was very interesting. Shortly after his two meetings at the Saracen's Head, Hall had sent a promissory note to his solicitor in Plymouth for seventy pounds and still had sufficient funds in his tin to pay off the rest that owed, to live the life of a gentleman. Three days after this, he was dead.

After Thomas had left, Jacob wrote out all the dates and approximate times of the relevant information they had so far discovered.

Time line of Hall's movements up to 14th May.

April, 29th (Sat) - Hall meets Mendoza at The Saracen's Head

May, 1st. (Mon) - Hall meets with Lord X at the same place.

May, 2nd (Tue) - Hall sends £70 promissory note to Plymouth.

May, 3rd (Wed) - unknown.

May, 4th (Thu) - unknown.

May, 5th (Fri) - Plymouth solicitor receives Promissory note.

May, 6th. (Sat) – unknown.

May, 7th. (Sun) – unknown.

May, 8th. (Mon) - Hall's body discovered at Houndsditch.

Jacob's immediate reaction on seeing the full list was to realise that the time scale did not agree with the earlier assumption that Hall was killed on his first visit to the foundry and that the killer had removed whatever was taken.

Hall must have made a previous visit and removed the drawing, since he had the money no later than the second of May, in order for it to be received in Plymouth by the fifth.

This led to the conclusion that Hall had been paid either by Mendoza, or Lord X. Probably, in view of the total sums involved, by both.

Hall's body was not discovered until the eighth and, according to William Fogg, he was not at the foundry on the fifth.

When Roberto arrived, Jacob, having given him the gist of Thomas Pepper's information, showed him the list.

'Hall either made more than one visit to the foundry,' said Roberto, 'or someone else, who had access to the foundry, passed on information that was worth a lot of money.'

'That's a good point,' said Jacob, also deep in thought. 'We had not thought of an accomplice.'

'It has to be someone who knew what was valuable. That makes the Fogg brothers the prime suspects,' Roberto replied.

'Or possibly their landlord, Thomas Owen. He was a former gun founder.'

'That's right.' Roberto was quiet for a time and then gave a lopsided smile. 'It's just like one of Walsingham's convoluted plots, isn't it?'

Jacob stared at him with a strange expression on his face. 'Do you know, Roberto, you just might be right.'

'Really!' Roberto said in some surprise, 'I was making a joke.'

'I know, but think about it.' He ticked off the points:

One. Terence Hall was Walsingham's agent.

Two. Hall wants a considerable sum of money so he can pay of the debts on the family estate and retire.

Three. The information Hall has is a drawing for the construction of a cannon that bursts on firing. And, a totally speculative rapid fire gun that is ahead of its time, but prohibitively expensive to make.

Four. Mendoza, the new Spanish Ambassador, is probably only interested in naval cannons.

Are you with me so far?"

Roberto nodded.

'So,' Jacob continued, 'lets look at the first meeting at the Saracen's Head with Mendoza. How would Hall know that the new Spanish Ambassador might be interested in paying for information?'

'Because Walsingham told him,' said Roberto.

'Exactly. So he sells him the obsolete cannon drawing and confirms that Mendoza is a spy.'

Roberto shook his head and gave an incredulous laugh. 'It sounds exactly right for a Walsingham plot. Except for one thing.'

'What have I forgotten?'

'His second meeting with this Lord X.'

They were both quiet for some time, while they considered this point. It was Jacob who broke the silence. 'It seems we may have two separate things going on here. One: a Walsingham plot to discover if the Spanish Ambassador is a spy and Two: a plot by Hall and probably an accomplice with knowledge of the gun foundry, to make money for themselves.'

'That sounds more than likely to me,' said Roberto.

'Therefore, it is probable the drawing for the rapid fire gun has been sold to Lord X for a considerable sum of money.'

'I do believe we may be getting somewhere at last,' said a relieved Roberto, 'but we need to identify Hall's accomplice and Lord X.'

'Lord X must have gun foundry connections and hopes to

develop the rapid fire gun for himself. We might be able to obtain some information on him through Quiff and his apprentice ring.' Jacob smiled. 'At least we now have a working theory. We must plan our next moves carefully.'

Chapter Eight

London, Monday, 16th May, 1578

No word had been received from Quiff and there had been no sign of Roberto who had been at his home in Tottenham, since Saturday. Jacob decided that a break from the investigation might allow him to mull over their present state of knowledge. Accordingly, he went to his workshop at the Crutched Friars Glass-works, to work on a new goblet design that had been put on hold since the murder investigation began.

Some while later, just as he was putting the finishing touches to his latest drawing, there was a clatter of hooves in the yard. Shortly afterwards, Roberto walked briskly into the workshop with a smug expression on his face.

'I can see you're about to tell me something I don't know,' said Jacob drily, 'so you'd better get on with it.'

Not a whit put out by Jacob's apparent disinterest, Roberto beamed. 'The second man at The Saracen's Head isn't Lord anything. His name is Arthur Lord, an extremely wealthy gun founder, who owns a foundry at Chelsea.'

'How did you come by that information?'

'I went to see William Fogg this morning, on my way here from Tottenham. I asked him if there had been any rivals for the Naval contract when he took over from Owen.'

William had replied that Arthur Lord was his main competitor and had invested a lot of effort, time and money into trying to win the Houndsditch contract. However, Lord's Chelsea foundry was making cannon in bronze and exporting them to various countries, including France. The new contract was exclusively for the Navy and iron cannon were wanted.

After protracted negotiations, Hawkins eventually awarded

the contract to the Houndsditch foundry.

William went on to say that Arthur Lord had made them a very attractive offer for the Houndsditch business and promised they could continue to work for him on the Navy contract, at a very good salary.

The brothers had no desire to work for Arthur Lord, having been warned that he had a bad reputation as an employer. Furthermore, William said that when they turned him down, Lord had threatened to ruin their business.

'That's very interesting,' said Jacob. 'You've done well, Roberto. We must get Quiff to find out all he can about this Arthur Lord. No doubt the apprentices will have a lot to say if he's as bad an employer as Fogg says he is.'

Roberto nodded and Jacob hesitated for several minutes before making up his mind on the next step. He could not make up his mind whether it was Mendoza, or Arthur Lord who was behind Terence Hall's murder. They both had a motive if they had found out they had been betrayed. Whichever of them was responsible, it still came to the same thing, Who killed Hall and why?

'I think the key to this riddle is the murder of Terence Hall,' he said. 'The method used to kill him is not consistent with that employed by Mendoza's servant who tried to kill you with a crossbow.'

'According to the Parish constable, a bang on the head and a slit throat are quite common methods in that area,' said Roberto. 'He was of the opinion it was a local man who'd committed the crime, probably while robbing the place. There had even been persistent rumours that the Fogg brothers had killed him.'

'Or made to look like that,' said Jacob thoughtfully.

After some discussion, they became even more convinced that there were two completely separate strands to the investigation, with Terence Hall as the common link. The first was possibly an attempt by Walsingham to find out if the

Spanish Ambassador was a spy; and the second, an enterprise by Hall and an accomplice to make money out of the stolen design for a rapid fire gun. Hall would not have known about the obsolete cannon and the rapid fire gun. It had to be someone with the right knowledge.

'We are getting into very muddy waters here,' exclaimed Jacob. 'Walsingham will not thank us for getting mixed up in his plotting.'

'Neither will Lord Burghley if we don't solve this riddle.'

'I agree, Roberto. On balance, I suggest we leave the business of the Spanish Ambassador for now and concentrate on finding out who was helping Hall to sell the design to Arthur Lord, assuming we are right that he was working with an accomplice.'

'What about Walsingham?'

'To be honest, I'm surprised we have not been summoned already to explain why we are involved in his investigation.'

'Especially me,' said Roberto with a loud sigh. 'I live in hope that for once he hasn't heard about me killing Mendoza's servant, even if it was in self-defence.'

Of course that was a forlorn hope. Less than an hour later, Colonel Paul Young, an old acquaintance of Jacob's, turned up with a request from Walsingham. The colonel, with his seasoned troopers, carried out any military actions needed by his master.

'What have you two been up to this time?' he asked with a sardonic smile. 'Walsingham is rather displeased that you have killed off one of his suspects before he has had chance to find out what he and his master were up to. He wants a report from you immediately.'

'Is that all?' replied Jacob with a small laugh. 'I haven't even had chance to report back to Lord Burghley yet.'

'Lord Burghley?' enquired the colonel with a frown. 'What has he to do with it?'

'It was he who appointed Roberto and myself as his Commissioners to investigate the murder.'

'What murder?' The furrows on the colonel's brow were getting deeper by the second.

'Are you telling me that Walsingham is not aware that one of his agents has been killed?'

'Which agent would that be?'

'Why, Terence Hall, of course.'

'Terence Hall is dead?'

'For the last eight days.'

The colonel shook his head in bewilderment.

'That's not possible. Walsingham received Hall's latest report only yesterday. He's had two since last week.'

It was Jacob's turn to look puzzled. 'I can assure you that Terence Hall is very much deceased and has been so, officially, from the time his body was found in the early morning of the eighth of May.'

'So who has been sending Hall's reports?' said the colonel. 'It doesn't make sense.'

'It depends what's in them. They wouldn't by any chance absolve Mendoza from the slightest taint of treason against Her Majesty?'

Chapter Nine

London, Tuesday, 17th May, 1578

Following his meeting with Colonel Young, Jacob sent an urgent report to Lord Burghley explaining the current situation and asking for guidance. This was the reason he and Roberto were now waiting in the ante-room outside Burghley's office at the Palace of Westminster. When they were shown in, they were unsurprised to find both Walsingham and Colonel Young present.

They listened in silence while Jacob explained in detail what he and Roberto had discovered, and his thoughts on what he believed the facts implied about the murder of Terence Hall and why he was dealing with both Mendoza and Arthur Lord.

When Jacob had finished there was an awkward silence for some time, until Lord Burghley finally turned to Walsingham and asked if he had anything further to add.

'Only that Thomas Phelippes has examined the reports purporting to come from Terence Hall. He is of the opinion that they are forgeries,' Walsingham announced, with a very long face. 'Good ones, according to Phelippes, who as you know is an expert in these matters. It appears that Mendoza is a man to watch most carefully, if indeed he is the architect of these letters, as I suspect.'

'I agree entirely,' retorted Burghley, 'but we need to get to grips with this situation.' He regarded Walsingham quizzically. 'It seems to me that my Commissioners have made a good start and I suggest that they should act for both of us in this matter?'

Walsingham nodded. 'I agree. I have asked Colonel Young and his men to hold themselves on standby, to assist the Commissioners at a moment's notice. After all, both Bell and

Rosso have survived attempts against their lives already, so we are dealing with ruthless men.'

Colonel Young made a small bow in acknowledgement and, turning to Jacob, told him he would be happy to help in any way he could.

Acknowledging the colonel with a smile of thanks, Jacob turned to Lord Burghley. 'Is it your wish that we discuss the next steps, or are you content to let us work out with the colonel how we shall proceed?'

'Providing Walsingham has no objections,' Burghley said, and on receiving a confirmation there were none, told Jacob to send him regular reports which would be copied to Walsingham.

By late morning, it was decided that there was safety in numbers and that, in future, Jacob and Roberto would not work separately and that wherever they went they would have an escort of three troopers. The colonel and the rest of his men would be nearby in case they were needed.

Early in the afternoon, the Commissioners, together with their escort, visited Thomas Owen. As they exited Aldgate, Jacob saw that the colonel and his troopers were watering their horses at the trough adjacent to St Botolph's Church.

Just as they reached the corner of Houndsditch, Roberto, who was slightly in front, put out a restraining arm and drew Jacob back towards the corner. A young man who had just crossed the road from the Minories was passing the horse trough.

'It's the lad we chased, Jacob,' said Roberto excitedly, 'I'm sure of it. And he hasn't seen us.'

'Excellent. Let's follow him and see where he goes.' Turning to the three troopers, he told them to follow at a discreet distance and then, together with Roberto, set off along Houndsditch following the young man on the opposite side of the road. A little way along, the lad stopped at the first house and, having knocked on the door, was admitted.

'That's a surprise,' Jacob remarked ironically. 'This lad must know Thomas Owen very well, seeing as he spends a lot of

time in the vicinity.' He indicated the house to one of the escort and instructed him to ask the colonel to send some men to cover the rear, while he and the other two troopers covered the front door and the alleyway at the side.

Once they were in position, Jacob marched up to the door and knocked loudly. When the maid answered the door, he asked to see Thomas Owen.

'Who shall I say is calling?'

'The Queen's Commissioners,' retorted Jacob, 'and tell Master Owen we don't expect to be kept waiting!'

The maid hurried off and shortly afterwards Thomas Owen appeared looking quite flustered.

He immediately went on the attack. 'I can't think why you want to see me,' he blustered. 'I'm retired now, I have nothing to do with the foundry, nor do I have anything to do with the murder of the man whose body was found there.'

Jacob regarded him mildly, but said nothing, while Roberto looked out of the window that overlooked the street.

Meanwhile, Owen continued to protest about their intrusion and, still receiving no word from Jacob, eventually tailed off into silence. He sat down with a sullen expression on his face. At the same time, Roberto turned away from the window and nodded to Jacob, who turned to Owen with a sardonic smile.

'Master Owen, I do not know why you are making such a fuss about our visit. We merely require some information relating to the foundry of which you are, I believe, still the landlord, are you not?'

Brightening up a little, Owen said, 'What would you like to know?'

Smiling benignly at Owen, Jacob asked how many keys were in circulation for the foundry.

'There are three sets for the whole of the foundry. William and Henry Fogg have one each and I have the other.'

'And where do you keep your set?'

Owen indicated a bunch of keys attached to his belt. 'I keep

them on me at all times.'

'Has anyone borrowed the keys from you recently?' Jacob said, continuing to smile at Owen.

'No, not at all. Why would they?'

'Indeed,' said Jacob and then leaned forward with a stern expression. 'So tell me, Master Owen, who was the young man who came to see you just now? I would like to have a word with him.'

The question completely surprised Owen and he looked at Jacob with his mouth open and stuttered a denial that there was any young man in the house.

'Oh, we are fully aware of that, Master Owen,' said Roberto, moving towards Owen. 'He is just about to be brought in now. He was caught trying to sneak out of your premises, by the back alley.'

When the youth was brought in between two burly troopers, all Owen's bluster deserted him.

'Please, Commissioner, don't hurt him, he is my nephew.'

'I have no intention of hurting him, providing you answer my questions truthfully. However, if you do not...' Jacob trailed off, leaving Owen to imagine the worst.

By the time he finished talking, he had admitted that he had helped Terence Hall to get into the foundry and told him which drawings to take.

Jacob and Roberto were very surprised having both been expecting that it would be the Foggs that had helped him. As Roberto remarked as they left the Owen's house. 'The fog seems to have cleared a little!'

Chapter Ten

London, Wednesday, 18th May, 1578

The following morning Roberto and Quiff joined Jacob in the main living room at Harte Street. Quiff had quite a lot of information about Arthur Lord, very little of it good. Apparently he treated his apprentices very badly, often dismissing them for minor faults, and was universally disliked for his maltreatment of the younger apprentices who were beaten on the slightest excuse. The person who carried out these punishments was usually Sykes, his sadistic coachman. The same scarred coachman that had attempted to run Jacob down!

Quiff had also learned that Lord possessed a large house close by his foundry in Chelsea, the grounds of which included an extensive forest. In the middle of this was a secluded and well-guarded area that few people were allowed to visit. His informant, the apprentice, believed it was used as a testing ground for cannon, and one was presently being tested.

'How does he know this?' asked Jacob.

'Well,' said Quiff a little hesitantly, 'I had to promise that you would find him a new apprenticeship. He would not tell me for money alone, he's too frightened of the consequences if he's found out.'

'Is he worth it?'

'I believe so, Master Jacob,' Quiff replied. 'Nicolas Lupton works as an assistant to Lord's Master gun founder.' Nicolas had explained that it was common knowledge among the apprentices about the testing ground, because they are forbidden to go there. As to the new test-firing, he had to pass on instructions from the master to have the cannon ready.

'I will honour your promise, Quiff,,' said Jacob, 'you made a good decision. I hope you rewarded him as well. This is just what we need.'

Jacob turned to Roberto. 'This confirms what Owen has already admitted. He and Hall were working together to make money out of both Mendoza and Lord.'

Thomas Owen had told them the whole story. He had been approached by Terence Hall, who had confided that Walsingham was keeping an eye on the Spanish Ambassador and had instructed Hall to find out if Mendoza was a spy for the Spanish court.

Hall, who wanted money to take up his inheritance and knowing that Owen had recently retired from the gun foundry, asked him if he possessed some designs of an obsolete cannon, good enough to persuade Mendoza to pay a reasonable sum of money for them, whilst not betraying useful information to the Spaniards.

At the same time, he asked if Owen had any designs for a new cannon that could be sold to Arthur Lord, who was furious that the Fogs had obtained the Navy contract. Owen had left all the drawings at the Houndsditch foundry when he sold up, but had provided Terence Hall with detailed instructions where to find them, together with his set of keys.

The obsolete iron cannon, Jacob remembered from his meeting with William Fogg, was a project that was unsuccessful and had been abandoned, as the prototype had exploded when fired for the first time.

The other drawing was of the rapid fire gun, invented by Owen and discarded because it was too expensive to make. The cylinders that housed the cartridges were the stumbling block. They needed to be precisely crafted, requiring many hours of work and making it twenty times more expensive than an ordinary swivel gun.

Admiral Hawkins, having examined the proposal, thought it well ahead of its time, but believed at the projected cost it

would never be viable. He estimated that five ordinary swivel guns could maintain the same rate of fire at a quarter of the cost. Lord is unaware that Hawkins has turned down this radical design.

Owen insisted he did not meet Lord and Hall had sworn he would not tell either Mendoza, or Lord, of Owen's part in the trade. Owen insists that Hall did not betray him, or tell Lord about Hawkins' objections and rejection of the design.

'Lord may not have been told about the problems,' said Roberto, 'but, if he has half decent men in his foundry, they would surely soon have found out.'

'You would think so,' agreed Jacob and then as an afterthought added, 'Maybe he did! He would then have a very good reason to torture and kill Hall.'

At that point Quiff chimed in. 'It seems to me that we need more information on what Lord is making at his factory. Is he making this rapid fire gun, or has he found it too expensive.'

'Do you think your informant would risk trying to find out?' asked Jacob. 'I don't want to have his death on our conscience.'

'I can try to get a message to him, but it won't be easy. Perhaps an incentive might help.'

'What do you suggest?' asked Jacob.

'As Chairman, you could guarantee him an apprenticeship with the Glass-Sellers Guild and he could leave immediately. Assuming of course he finds what we want to know.'

'I can and will do that,' promised Jacob. He paused. 'However,' he continued, 'he *must* be told he is not to put his life at risk. Should he succeed, he should leave immediately and come to Harte Street. There is room at the house for him.'

As Quiff had nothing more to contribute, he left to set the plan in motion. In the meanwhile, Jacob discussed with Roberto what action they could take to find out if Lord was testing the rapid fire gun.

'One thing is for sure,' he said. 'We are going to need the help of Colonel Young and his men in order to infiltrate Lord's test

site. I think we should talk to him and see what he suggests. I will send a message to him directly.'

Chapter Eleven

London, Friday, 20th May, 1578

Having spoken to Colonel Young on the previous Wednesday, Jacob had heard nothing from him by late morning on the Friday. Left in somewhat of a limbo, Jacob and Roberto had spent their time at the Glass-works. Sales had been very steady for a long time, but in the last few months there had been a definite slackening.

This did not come as too much of a surprise to Jacob, as the traditional market in England was, in his view, becoming saturated. Despite having lower prices than imported goods, glass was still a luxury that only the rich could afford.

Because of the emphasis placed on building up manufacturing in England by Queen Elizabeth and her chief minister Lord Burghley, there was a rising middle class in England which was now rivalling the purchasing power of the nobility. It was these potential new clients who were bringing about a change in the design of tableware, as they spent less money and had simpler tastes.

Jacob was hoping that his new, simpler designs would tempt the rising middle class to invest in glass. Because the cost of making this plainer glassware was substantially lower, it was cheaper than the elaborate designs much favoured by the nobility.

Having completed the first trial successfully, Jacob had left it in the annealing tray to cool. Taking it out, he examined it carefully. With a sigh of satisfaction, he placed it carefully on his work bench and began to go through the cost figures.

When Roberto came to see if he was ready for the midday meal, he found Jacob relaxed in his chair, his fingers laced

behind his head and looking very pleased with himself.

'I take it the new design has worked well,' Roberto said, examining the sample.

'Better than I could have hoped,' Jacob agreed with immense satisfaction. 'It gives us a real chance to develop our sales in what will be a new market for us.'

He went across and took the glass from Roberto and, holding it up to the light, said, 'We won't make as much profit on individual glasses, but providing we achieve the total sales we estimated, it will make the Glasshouse extremely profitable.'

Any further conversation was interrupted by the sound of horses coming into the yard outside. Colonel Young was just dismounting as Quiff arrived and the four of them went into Jacob's office.

The colonel described how he and his men had reconnoitred Lord's Chelsea foundry and the estate beyond. Access on the south side was not feasible, as it could only be approached by a gate at the rear of the foundry. The west and north sides of the estate were far too open for any approach to go unnoticed. On the east side, which was largely marshland, they had the good fortune to catch a poacher, who had just come from the estate. In exchange for the colonel turning a blind eye to his illegal activities, the poacher, Walter Burton, had shown them how to get into the woods, unseen, via a creek that led from the tidal marsh.

Although there were patrols, from the foundry, they steered clear of the treacherous marsh. Walter Burton who knew the marsh like the back of his hand, had found that, with care, he could avoid Lord's patrols and move through the woods fairly freely.

On questioning, he confessed that he had been to the testing area and, well hidden in some dense undergrowth, had watched a cannon being fired. The colonel had put him in custody for now, in case they needed him in a hurry.

When the colonel had finished his account, Quiff piped up.

'We're going to have to get a move on then. They're planning to test the rapid fire gun on the morrow.'

'What time?' the colonel demanded.

'According to Nicolas, our informant, who is now at the house in Harte Street, they're planning to test the gun today, after the foundry has closed at six o'clock. Sunset is at about eight o'clock, so it will be sometime between those times.'

The colonel insisted on organising the reconnaissance party. His main worry was if his troops were discovered, the rapid fire gun might be used against them.

Meanwhile, Jacob was thinking furiously. They needed more information about the rapid fire gun. Who better than its inventor.

'Can you send one of your men to fetch Thomas Owen. He'll be able to tell us more about the capabilities of the gun.' The colonel nodded and sent one of his troopers immediately.

They had no way of knowing if Lord's Chelsea foundry had made a fully capable gun, or were just test-firing a barrel. Quiff's informant was sure only that the foundry was working on a gun which used a multi-shot cylinder.

When Thomas Owen arrived, he told them about the gun. 'It has a one inch calibre and has a cylinder behind the breech that has nine chambers. The cylinder, revolves on a spindle and a lever under the barrel, forces the cartridge into the breech. After firing, the lever is used to pull the spent cartridge back into the cylinder, the spindle is turned and another cartridge inserted.'

'What about these cartridges? What do they contain?'

'Each cartridge either has sixteen musket balls, or a single explosive shell, similar to those currently used in the navy.'

'What is its rate of fire and range,' said the colonel. In truth he was becoming worried by the implication's of the gun.

Thomas Owen looked concerned. 'That is more difficult to answer, since the gun presents a lot of difficulties in manufacture. However, my best guess would be six cylinders in ten minutes. Fifty-four cartridges.'

This had obviously taken the colonel aback. 'That's a very formidable weapon. Troops in a confined space would be decimated.'

Owen nodded. 'Except for the fact that the cylinders are very difficult to make and use, as the clearance between the the cylinder, breech and lever, required an accuracy that only the best workers could attain. It would also take a very long time to get them right.' He went on to say that he had always feared that the gun would be prone to jamming if the cylinders were not perfect, which with the present state of metal working would be difficult to achieve.

After careful consideration of this information, the colonel decided to send out a small scouting party consisting of himself, two of his most experienced troopers who were both excellent marksmen, and Jacob and Roberto. The soldiers would carry carbines, two pistols and a sword. Jacob preferred pistols as well as his sword, whilst, as always, Roberto preferred to use his knives, but decided to also take along the folding crossbow and several crossbow bolts. They would also take along the poacher.

The remaining troopers, led by a sergeant, would wait on the far side of the marsh with two boats in case urgent reinforcements were needed.

Having expressed his satisfaction with these arrangements, Jacob suggested they got some rest. The following day was likely to be very demanding.

Chapter Twelve

Chelsea, Saturday, 21st May, 1578

The trip through the marsh had been much more tiring than Jacob had expected. Thanks to Walter Burton, the poacher, the path through the treacherous marsh had been clearly marked by stakes. They had to keep to the right of them on the way in and were warned to keep to the left coming back, otherwise they would be in serious danger of being sucked down into the deep mud.

The colonel had issued clear instructions as to what they must do in the event of being discovered and pursued. 'The last man must pull out the stakes as he goes,' he instructed. 'We don't want our pursuers to know the correct path and an unmarked route will slow them down, or discourage them from pursuit entirely.'

He turned to the sergeant in charge of the remaining troopers. 'Should you hear firing or sounds of a fight, it will be your decision as to whether to send reinforcements, or enter the marsh and give covering fire. The poacher will stay with you.'

'Very good, sir.'

That settled, they set off through the woods, keeping a careful eye out for the patrols. They arrived at the vantage point almost an hour before the expected test time, having seen no patrols at all up to this point. However, the colonel knew that there was bound to be a greater chance of discovery now they were close to the firing site.

Their main hiding place was at the top of a slope that led into the woods. The undergrowth was very thick at this point and prickly bramble shoots were intricately laced throughout the thicket of elderberry and the tall, dense spikes of dead nettle

stalks.

Walter Burton had discovered a badger run that led deep into the undergrowth and had widened it for his own use. The beginning of this path was cunningly screened from all but the most observant of prying eyes and even if you knew where to look, it was still difficult to find.

Overlooking the whole of the test area in front was a space in the middle of the undergrowth. It was barely big enough for two people, but well hidden from watching eyes, by a nettle stalk screen. Walter, the poacher, had set it up as a bolt hole, in case he became trapped by a patrol.

The colonel insisted that Jacob and Roberto should use this space while his two troopers took up defensive positions on both sides and behind, but higher up the slope, so they had an overall view.

Hardly had they settled than a patrol of eight heavily-armed men appeared, moving across the open area towards them. Keeping his pistols at the ready, Jacob watched them intently, while Roberto fingered a throwing knife. They could see the patrol quite clearly through the small gaps in the screen and it seemed inevitable that they would be discovered. However, the patrol passed them by with only a cursory inspection and passed deeper into the wood. Fortunately, although the weather was dull and cloudy, at least it was not raining.

Nothing happened until about a half hour later when the same patrol emerged from the woods much lower down to the right and headed towards the foundry. About ten minutes later they returned, escorting a horse drawn cart and several riders.

The cart, carrying a shrouded object, proceeded to the test area where it stopped about thirty yards from where Jacob was hiding. There was a flurry of activity and the object was lifted down, placed on the level ground and the cover removed.

Jacob looked at the gun now mounted on a tripod stand. The legs of the tripod had long spikes on them and these were pushed into the ground to form a steady platform. The cannon

had a relatively slim barrel that appeared to be made of bronze. However, it was the mechanism attached to the back that intrigued him. Training his naval telescope on it, he could see the cylinder with nine circular holes and a turning handle attached to the rear of the barrel

A tall thickly-set man with a black beard, who had been driving the cart, lifted a box down from the cart and took it over to the gun.

'I bet that's Sykes, Arthur Lord's coachman,' whispered Jacob and passed the telescope to Roberto.

Roberto had a quick look and nodded. 'I recognise the scar on his face. I won't forget him in a hurry!'

Meanwhile another man opened the box, took out some cartridges and a cylinder and began to feed the cartridges into the nine holes of the cylinder.

Meanwhile, the cart went down the range about two hundred paces and three men erected what looked like a large oak panel with feet attached. This was then anchored with some ropes and, to complete this target, eight man-shaped dummies were placed around it.

The man on horseback, who had been directing operations, dismounted and the horses were led off to the side, well away from the gun. One of the men, probably the gunner was doing trying to turn the cylinder and then spoke to the well-dressed man beside him. The man, whom Jacob assumed was Arthur Lord, began to check the gun's cylinder. He was striking the back of the cylinder with the heel of his hand and shouting angrily at the gunner. Although his words were too indistinct to make out his meaning was clear. The cylinder must have come loose, as he began to turn the handle of the cylinder and then pushed the lever forward so that a cartridge was forced into the breech.

He stood up and motioned the gunner to take his place. Checking that everything was ready with the target, he ordered the gunner to fire. Carefully training the gun on the target, he

fired.

Despite knowing what was about to happen, the loud bang and gout of fire that issued from the cannon still made Jacob jump. Fortunately, this did not interrupt his scrutiny of the target. There appeared to be little damage to the wood panel except a few splinters flying from the top rail and as far as Jacob could tell there was only a slight swaying from two or three of the dummies.

Lord, who had been watching the target through a telescope, strode off to examine the target and the dummies. He gestured at the dummies and inspected the damage on the wood panel and began to shout orders at the nearby men. It was obvious from his actions he was far from satisfied.

When he returned to the gun he began shouting and gesticulating at the gunner. Jacob caught the words, 'What will my French customers make of this fiasco?'

So, he thought, he is proposing to sell the gun to the French. Walsingham will be interested in that information.

Having vented his feelings at the gunner, Lord had the target moved forty paces nearer. Once it was ready, he gestured for the gunner to fire twice more at the dummies.

The result was very impressive; especially as the two shots were little more than a count of ten apart. This time the dummies shook under the onslaught and three of them were knocked over.

'It's certainly effective at that range,' whispered Jacob. Lord obviously thought so, since he was looking very happy.

'At that rate, it could fire all nine cartridges in under two minutes,' replied Roberto, obviously impressed. 'I would not like to be on the receiving end.'

'Keep your voice down,' instructed Jacob, 'or we might be.'

Lord, now issued another set of instructions to the gunner, who began to replace the spent cartridges. As soon as he was ready, Lord, seeing the dummies had been reinstated, ordered the range to be cleared and shouted, 'Begin!'

Jacob, who had been studying Lord intently through the telescope, cursed as the setting sun, unexpectedly burst through the clouds and shone directly into the lens, blinding him.

Then the silence of the evening was shattered by four shots from the gun in very quick succession and then the gun stopped and the silence was broken by a curse and an angry cry from Lord.

"What the hell's wrong now?"

Jacob too was cursing under his breath and rubbing his right eye.

Roberto, who had been studying the scene intently stiffened as he noticed two of the outlying armed men, pointing in their general direction. One of them shouted something to Lord, who spun round sweeping his telescope over the undergrowth at the edge of the wood.

'Jacob,' Roberto hissed urgently, 'I think one of the guards might have seen something. We must get out of here!'

Chapter Thirteen

Palace of Westminster, London,
Saturday, 21st May, 1578.

Queen Elizabeth regarded her two main ministers with a solemn expression. 'Are you seriously advising me to send the Spanish Ambassador back home, before he's even presented his credentials?' She shuddered theatrically. 'I will need far more proof than this,' she said, waving the papers that they had given her. 'If I reject his new ambassador it will provoke a huge reaction from Philip of Spain. It might even start a war.'

'Oh, I scarcely think so, Your Majesty,' replied Walsingham. 'He will probably be grateful that such an inept spy has been discovered before he can do too much damage.'

'Damn you, Walsingham,' said the Queen, stamping her foot in temper. 'Why do you always have to cause a storm, just when the ship of state seems to be steering into calmer waters?'

Walsingham bowed his head contritely and Lord Burghley leapt to his defence. 'It is hardly Walsingham's fault that Mendoza has proved to be so clumsy.'

'Humph,' retorted the Queen, 'be that as it may, but it is damned inconvenient.' She sat down and thought for a moment and then her face brightened. 'You are quite right, Lord Burghley. The man is incompetent, which is exactly why we will accept his credentials. Forewarned is forearmed, as you are wont to say, Walsingham. You will keep the strictest eye on Spain's new Ambassador and let us hope his master will have cause to regret his appointment.'

Both of her ministers knew full well that when the Queen made a definite statement such as this, no further argument

would prevail. Hiding his dismay well, Walsingham bowed and said, 'Yes indeed, Your Majesty. I will put my best people on it.'

The Queen gave a little smile. 'I thought you already had. From your reports, Jacob Bell and his knife-throwing assistant Rosso have done remarkably well in exposing this matter.'

'Indeed,' agreed Burghley. 'Even as we speak, they are checking out the second part of this affair.'

'Ah, yes! Master Arthur Lord. We gather that he has been supplying weapons to the Catholic League in France. We trust not men who do business with those who would be our enemies. Today it is the Huguenots who have the King's ear, but should the Duc de Guise become the power behind the French throne, as well he might...!' She paused dramatically and made a gesture of disdain before turning to look searchingly at Walsingham.

'It seems that Master Lord has slipped through your net, Walsingham. We trust that he will be thoroughly investigated now that Master Bell has exposed what is afoot.'

With a bow of acknowledgement, Walsingham said that the matter was in hand. 'However, my resources are stretched fairly thin, due to the threat of more plots against Your Majesty. The Scots Queen is an ever-present danger to your throne, as the Ridolfi plot showed. I dare not slacken my efforts to thwart any further plots against Your Majesty.'

'Indeed not,' agreed Burghley. 'With de Guise increasing his power by the day, we must be even more aware of active plotting. He is already influencing King Henry III, of France to take stricter action against the Huguenots and it is well known he favours the Scots Queen as the best chance to restore the Catholic faith in England.'

'We concur,' agreed the Queen. 'We must try to increase the funds at Walsingham's disposal, although I know that you, Burghley, will argue that our commitments in the Low Countries are putting a strain on our finances.'

'In truth, they are,' said Burghley, 'but not so much that we

cannot take steps to protect our great Queen.'

'Thank you, my spirit,' the Queen said, laying her hand on his arm in a fond gesture. 'You are ever my wise friend. We know we cause you much trouble at times, but we do value your advice and loyalty.' She turned to Walsingham. 'You must let Burghley know what you need and we are sure he will, as ever, do his best to provide it.'

With that she bade them farewell and then swept regally out of the reception room.

Returning to Burghley's state office, Walsingham informed Burghley that he had recently received some disturbing news from his agents in France. There had been a meeting between Alençon and Arthur Lord at Rouen, before Alençon left for England. Without any word on the content of this meeting, it raised another question mark against the Queen's French suitor.

Before they could discuss this further, a messenger arrived with an urgent dispatch for Walsingham. Having read the note, Walsingham turned to Burghley, looking very serious. 'It would seem that Bell and Colonel Young have run into trouble at Lord's Chelsea testing ground. Bell is injured and two of the colonel's men have been killed.'

Chapter Fourteen

Chelsea, London,
Saturday, 21st May, 1578

Earlier, at Arthur Lord's testing ground at Chelsea, everything was chaotic. As Jacob and Roberto emerged from the undergrowth, several of Lord's guards opened fire. They both ducked, but none of the shots came near them. Evidently, the guards were firing indiscriminately into their former hiding place, or the undergrowth, on either side. However, they were spotted as they ran into the woods and at least two shots came close. The colonel's men gave them covering fire and at least one of the attackers fell, cursing.

As Jacob and Roberto entered the wood, they saw the colonel gesturing to them from behind a large tree. 'Head for the boat and try to keep the trees between you and the shots. My sharp shooters and I will keep them at bay.'

'Be careful,' advised Jacob, squinting at him through his left eye. His right eye was still giving him trouble. 'Should they manage to clear that cannon, it will give your men a bad time.'

Hardly had he said this than there was the sound of repeated shots from the cannon and then silence. 'We must leave. My men know what to do if they've survived,' said the colonel and they raced for the marsh. As they waded towards the boat the colonel, bringing up the rear, carefully removed the markers that bordered the safe path through the treacherous mud.

They were well into the marsh before the first of their pursuers reached its edge. He fired a pistol, but his shot went well wide. He then began to follow them. He had barely gone twenty paces when he cried out and began to sink into the

cloying mud. There were some reed beds ahead and the safe path skirted round the right-hand side. The colonel pulled up the last of the visible markers and threw it towards the left-hand side.

Meanwhile the pursuer had sunk up to his waist and was desperately looking around for something to help him get free, but to no avail. He was shouting for help. Two more guards emerged from the woods, one of them holding a long branch. Carefully poking the end into the mud, he used it to test the depth, as he inched his way towards the other man who had continued to sink lower.

By now Jacob and Roberto had reached the boat and were waiting for Colonel Young to reach them. Just then, the sergeant and three troopers arrived in the other boat and as they came together, Colonel Young joined them.

Seeing that the fugitives were getting away, one of the guards at the edge of the marsh, drew his pistols. Before he could fire, there was a volley of shots from the sergeant and his troopers in the boat and the two guards slumped into the mud. As they fell, the tree branch fell short of the trapped man. He gave a despairing cry and lunged desperately to reach the branch. As his mud-encrusted hands scrabbled for a grip, it slipped through his fingers and his hopeless cry was cut off abruptly, as he sank from sight beneath the mud.

'Where are the other two troopers, colonel?' asked the sergeant anxiously, searching the woods for any sign of them.

'I'm not sure,' said the colonel. His voice was sad as he turned to face the sergeant. 'I fear they are dead, or badly injured. Lord had the cannon open fire and there has been no return of fire for some time.'

'Damn his eyes,' raged the sergeant. 'We must get back and find them.'

'We're going back anyway,' agreed the colonel 'I intent to make sure that Lord and his thugs pay for their crimes. We need the poacher to show us the path.'

Once Walter Burton had marked the path again, the whole troop made their way through the woods back to the testing ground. Jacob, despite his bad eye, insisted on accompanying them, ignoring pressure from the colonel to stay behind.

Unfortunately, both of the troopers were dead. One had been riddled with bullets, but the other had survived two bullet wounds, only to have his throat slit.

'Barbaric,' raged the colonel. 'Somebody will pay for this.'

'My bet is on Sykes the coachman,' interposed Roberto. 'It fits in well with what we know of him and it's exactly the same wound that we saw on Terence Hall.'

'Colonel,' said Jacob. 'I want you to go straight to the gun foundry?'

'What had you in mind?'

'To issue a warrant for the arrest of Arthur Lord and John Sykes. 'I don't have to provide proof, *'The commissioners have full powers to question, arrest and detain any person they feel may assist in their investigation'*, is how the wording of the commission goes.' Jacob's face took on a grim look. 'I am no supporter of torture, as God is my witness, but in their case I would be happy to make an exception.'

Colonel Young snapped to attention. 'Ready to carry out your instructions, Commissioner.'

'Very well, colonel. Detain Arthur Lord and John Sykes, and transport them to the Tower for interrogation.'

Turning to his men, the colonel instructed them to form a line of skirmish and they set off for the gun foundry, with Jacob and Roberto taking up the rear.

Their arrival at the foundry was somewhat of an anticlimax. There was no sign of Lord, Sykes or the rapid fire gun. While the colonel collected the rest of his men and the horses, Jacob went to the local Justice of the Peace and issued a warrant for the arrest of Arthur Lord and John Sykes, on two charges: the murder of Terence Hall, and high treason. Late that evening the colonel reported back to confirm that, despite extensive efforts,

no trace of the fugitives had been found.

'Word has been spread to constables in London and every surrounding town. Tomorrow, with your permission, we will search Lord's house.'

Chapter Fifteen

London and The English Channel Monday, 23rd May, 1578

By late morning, there had been no word on the whereabouts of Arthur Lord either from Colonel Young or any of the London constables. Roberto had elected to go with the Colonel to search Lord's house in Chelsea. Having sent a detailed report to Burghley on the events at the testing ground and Lord's subsequent actions, Jacob was pondering what else they could do when Quiff came to see him at the Crutched Friars Glass-works.

When Quiff saw the patch Jacob was wearing over his right eye, he smiled, but wisely refrained from making a facetious comment. In response to his polite query, Jacob explained about the telescope and that the apothecary had recommended he should wear the patch until his eye, which was still red and weeping, had fully recovered.

Quiff then informed Jacob that he had received several pieces of additional information about Arthur Lord's activities. What interested Jacob most was the fact that Lord owned a large schooner, named *L'étoile Montante*, which when in London, was usually moored at his warehouse and wharf, just downriver from the Deptford Naval Dockyard.

'Quiff, do you know if Captain Roberts has *The Crystal* refitted and ready for sea?' On its recent return from Venice, Jacob's ship had run into bad storms in the Bay of Biscay, sustaining considerable damage to its cordage and sheets which had needed replacing before it could set off for France, its next destination.

'I'm not sure, Master Jacob. The last I heard, it was to be ready by Friday last, but were still awaiting some stores to complete the victualling.' Quiff looked enquiringly at Jacob. 'Do you wish me to find out?'

'As fast as you can please, Quiff. So long as it is seaworthy, ask Captain Roberts to make ready to leave immediately, or as soon as the tide allows.'

Shortly before he left for Somers Key, Jacob received a message from the colonel to say that the search of Lord's house and foundry had not revealed the fugitives. However, it was evident from the lack of clothes and personal effects that Lord intended to make a long trip. Possibly a permanent move.

Thanks to Nicholas Lupton, Lord's former apprentice, at the Chelsea foundry, the colonel and his men had located the locked area where the cannon had been made. Breaking down the door, they found a rapid fire gun, with a hopelessly jammed cylinder. Most likely the one they had seen test fired.

During questioning, the master gun founder informed them that another gun barrel had been made in bronze and two cylinders as well. The gun founder told them that the cylinders were not finished.

The Colonel advised Jacob that he and Roberto were continuing to examine all the papers they had found to see if they threw any light on Lord's destination, or his intentions.

From this, Jacob was certain that Arthur Lord, knowing that there would be a hue and cry, would see his schooner at Deptford as his best means of escape. Two hours later, after sending a message to Roberto to inform him of his decision, Jacob was on board *The Crystal*, making its way downstream.

At Jacob's insistence, all the cannons, including the deck swivel guns, had been loaded, ready to be fired, but the gun ports remained closed. As the ship approached the Deptford shipyard, they crew kept a strict lookout for the schooner, but there was no sign of her at the wharf at Lord's warehouse.

'Head downriver with all speed, Captain, and we will see if

we can intercept the schooner before it disappears.'

'Very well, Jacob, but have you any idea where she will be heading?'

'To be honest, I am not even sure if the schooner was in London during the last few days. Let alone if Lord is on board with his rapid fire gun.'

'Rapid fire gun!' asked Captain Roberts, a little nervously. 'Are we in for a fight?'

'I have no idea,' said Jacob, with a hesitant smile. 'This is a complete shot in the dark. Lord has disappeared and my instincts tell me that since we know he has a ship, which is no longer at his wharf in Deptford, he could be aboard. I would guess that France is his likeliest destination.'

'Very well then,' said Captain Roberts briskly. 'France it is.' Turning to his sailing master he said, 'Set course for France, by the Black Deep channel. I want all possible sail and once we are out in the channel, I want full lookouts posted. The helm is yours, sailing master.'

Turning to Jacob, he said, 'Now let's go down to my cabin and you can tell me all you know about this rapid fire gun. How powerful is it?'

Having explained about the rapid fire gun and its probably limited range, Jacob regarded Captain Roberts quizzically. 'We need to prevent this gun falling into the wrong hands. Although I hold the Queen's Commission that gives me wide powers, it does not give me the power to stop ships in international waters.'

The captain gave a mischievous grin. 'Well,' he drawled, 'if we intend to commit an act of piracy, at least your eye patch will be very appropriate! How is your eye?'

'It is much better, but still more comfortable with the eye patch over it. As for piracy,' Jacob said seriously, 'should we catch up with Lord's ship, we must not fire the first shot.'

With a shrug of resignation, the captain replied, 'So, let me understand what you are telling me. Should we find this ship,

which may or may not be on its way to France, you want me to provoke it into firing at us, so we can return fire.'

'That sounds about what I had in mind,' Jacob replied, keeping his face neutral.

The captain smiled wryly. 'The things I do for my country! Ah well, at least this rapid fire gun is not likely to cause us too much damage at two hundred yards or more. I'd better go and inform the sailing master what we have in mind for later.'

Jacob accompanied the captain to the sailing master, who when told of the schooner's name, *L'étoile Montante*, the sailing master grinned. 'I'd bet a year's rum ration she's heading for Le Havre.'

'Oh! Why so?' asked Jacob.

'Because she's registered there. I occasionally have a drink with the bosun when we are both in London. He told me one time that the owner goes to Rouen regularly. The Seine is navigable all the way to Rouen, almost seventy miles inland, and then it's little more than a half-day journey to Paris.'

The captain looked at Jacob who nodded his confirmation. 'Set course for Le Havre, sailing master,' ordered Roberts and then, turning to the bosun, instructed him to make sure that all lookouts kept a sharp eye out for *L'étoile Montante*.

Chapter Sixteen

Chelsea, Monday, 23rd May, 1578

In the main study of Arthur Lord's Chelsea home, Roberto was searching for anything that would give a clue to Lord's intentions. The foundry had been all but torn apart in their search, but aside from scraps of information about the bronze version of the rapid fire gun, he had found nothing incriminating. There were details of sales of muskets and small cannon to several countries.

When Roberto had entered the study, it looked as though it had been hit by a hurricane, indicating the haste in which Lord had fled. As Roberto searched through the scattered documents, his hope was that, in his hurry, Lord had missed something important. Now his hopes were completely dashed. Nothing that would help the investigation had been found.

'Any luck?' asked Colonel Young hopefully, striding into the study.

'Nothing!' retorted Roberto forcefully. 'Absolutely nothing, I'm afraid.' He sat down in the chair behind the desk and looked gloomily at the colonel. 'I take it that neither have you?'

'Unfortunately you're right. So what now?'

'There must be something!' Roberto was desperately looking around to see if there was anything he had missed. 'Lord left in such a hurry that surely he must have left something of use to us. I can't find anything about his special transactions, like sales to the French navy, or any personal letters.'

'Unless they're so carefully hidden he believes no one will find them.'

The same thought had been running through Roberto's mind, but he was sure that he'd looked everywhere for a hiding place.

Unusually for a quite large business, there were no records for the business at the foundry.

Looking for an explanation, it occurred to Roberto that the room was rather small for the size of the house and there were no bookshelves that he would normally expect to find in a study.

Going out into the corridor, Roberto looked both ways. To his left, the corridor turned to the right, leading to another room. Having paced the distance to the corner, he went back into the study and paced to the back wall in the same direction. The number of paces corresponded exactly.

Going back into the corridor he paced from the door along the other wall. There was a room in the corridor to the right and, going inside, he paced from the door to the wall that backed on to the study. This time, there was a difference of three paces.

The colonel, who had been looking on with a puzzled expression, saw the look of enlightenment in Roberto's face. 'What are you thinking, Roberto?'

'That there's a room between these two. All we have to do is to find out how to get into it!' Assuming that the entrance would be in Lord's study, Roberto concentrated on that room while the colonel and one of his men searched the larger room to the right.

Despite detailed scrutiny and repeated tapping on the oak panelling, Roberto had found nothing unusual. While he was checking the last panel, he heard a loud metallic click, but nothing he could have seen.

Just then, the trooper came in. 'Begging your pardon, sir, but the colonel would like to know if you just heard, or saw anything.'

'A loud metallic click, but nothing else. Has the colonel found something?'

'Yes, sir. A lever hidden in the wainscoting, but nothing happened when he pulled it, other than a faint noise behind the

wall.'

'Where was the lever?'

'About half way down the wall.'

Moving back along the wall, Roberto saw there was now a vertical crack in the panelling that had not been there before. Taking a deep breath, he pushed on the nearest side of the crack. Nothing happened. Holding his breath, he pushed on the other side of the crack and when the panel moved inwards a couple of inches, he let his breath out noisily.

The panel would not move further, so he ran his hand down the widened crack and encountered a lever. Pulling this down, there was another click and the whole panel swivelled round to reveal a darkened space beyond. Instinctively, as if by magic, a knife appeared in his hand and he tensed, ready to repulse any attack. His eyes were now adjusting to the darkness and he saw there was a shelf just inside the opening, on which stood a candle and flint.

'Fetch the colonel,' he ordered and the trooper shot out of the room. When the colonel entered, the trooper following behind, Roberto had lit the candle from the shelf and also another, which had been in the study.

Passing one to the colonel, he congratulated him on finding the lever. 'It was clever of Lord to hide the lever in the other room.'

'Indeed it was,' agreed the colonel. 'We would never have discovered this door if we hadn't been searching both rooms at the same time.'

He gestured for Roberto to take the lead and they cautiously entered the hidden room. It was empty and bore none of the traces of hurried flight evident in the outer study. Along the long back wall were shelves housing, so the colonel informed Roberto, a fine collection of rare books. Stacks of business documents and correspondence filled most of the shelves on the short end wall, behind a desk.

'Hmm,' muttered the colonel. 'Lord obviously didn't expect us

to find this room.' He glanced idly at some of the papers. 'It's going to take some time to go through all of these.'

'In that case, the sooner we start...'

Chapter Seventeen

The English Channel & Le Havre Monday, 23rd May, 1578

Shortly after The Crystal had entered the Channel and turned for Le Havre, the weather took a distinct turn for the worse, with near gale force winds, heavy seas and driving rain. It became too dangerous to have lookouts and the ship was running downwind with bare masts except for a storm sail. Despite this, it was now creaming along and the sailing master had ordered the log line to be used. This was a weighted log attached to a long cord line that had knots in it. The speed of the ship in nautical miles in one hour, was the number of knots past a point on the side of the ship in twenty-eight seconds, measured by a sand glass.

When he heard the count was ten knots, Captain Roberts immediately ordered a canvas drone to be deployed over the stern. This had the effect of slowing the ship's speed to about six knots.

'Why have we used a drone?' asked Jacob.

'We need about six knots to keep the ship steering, straight, in following seas,' explained Roberts. 'At about twelve knots there is a danger that the ship would begin to broach, or swing sideways to the wind. In seas like these, we would capsize with disastrous results.'

All the usual running lights were now in use as, with the clouds and driving rain, visibility was very restricted. Although Jacob was a good sailor, he was beginning to feel quite nauseous from the violent rolling motion.

'You're looking a bit green around the gills, Jacob,' the

captain said with a smirk. 'Don't worry, though, the sailing master says it will blow itself out in another hour or so. Meanwhile, I suggest you stay in your cabin. It's dangerous on deck. We've a lot of green water sweeping across the deck at times. We don't want anyone overboard in these seas.'

'What's green water?

'It's when the water is not broken up into foam as it sweeps across the deck in foul weather,' chimed in the sailing master.

'What about *L'étoile Montante*, sailing master?'

'If he's out here and has any sense, he'll be doing the same as us. In any case, there's little chance of spotting him. Visibility is down to about fifty paces at most.'

'What's the chance of making for Le Havre, captain?'

'None at all until these winds abate. It would be total madness to try to gybe in this wind.' Roberts gave a short laugh. 'It's not as if we know for sure he's out here. We could be chasing shadows.'

Jacob had to acknowledge the sense in this argument. They were only here because he had a gut feeling that Arthur Lord would have used his schooner to get away.

In the event, it was more than four hours before the winds abated enough for them to consider making for Le Havre. As they eventually turned in towards the mouth of the Seine, the sailing master suggested they put into Honfleur instead of Le Havre.

'Should the schooner be lying at Le Havre,' he argued, 'we are bound to be seen when we enter the port. It would be easy to cross from Honfleur on the ferry without anyone being aware we have a ship nearby.'

'A very good point, Jacob,' agreed Captain Roberts. 'You could go in with the sailing master who knows the schooner captain and he can make enquiries as to Lord's possible whereabouts without arousing any suspicions.'

At the main quayside tavern, the sailing master learned from the landlord that *L'étoile Montante* had not been in port for a

couple of weeks, but that the captain had said he was coming back around the end of the month. He also told them that Lord frequently used a local man to ship goods up the Seine from Le Havre to Rouen. The offer of a gold sovereign also elicited the information that *L'étoile Montante* often called at Calais, as the owner had regular contacts there.

On their return to *The Crystal*, Jacob had a discussion with Captain Roberts and the sailing master. Essentially they needed to decide their next move. After some debate, Jacob decided that they would stay overnight at Honfleur and sail on the morning tide for Calais, keeping a weather eye out for *L'étoile Montante*. Should *L'étoile Montante* not be at Calais, *The Crystal*, would head back to London. Although the schooner *L'étoile Montante* had indeed called in at Calais, it had, they were informed, by the harbour master, returned to London as soon as the storm had abated.

On enquiring further, they were told that apart from a gig that came on shore to fill up the water barrels at the quay, nobody had left the schooner. Cursing under his breath, Jacob boarded *The Crystal* and ordered Captain Roberts to return to London.

It was with an acute sense of annoyance that when they passed through Deptford, they discovered that *L'étoile Montante* was moored at Lord's Deptford quay. Stopping briefly to drop off Jacob at the Navy yard, *The Crystal* returned to Somers Key with a message to Roberto at Chelsea, informing him of their failure to find Lord and that the schooner was back at Deptford. Jacob then went to see Admiral Hawkins to arrange for *L'étoile Montante* to be searched.

Having been briefed, Hawkins sent two of his men to scout out the schooner for any signs of Lord. A short while later, as they took some refreshment in Hawkins's office, Jacob and Hawkins were surprised when Lord Burghley arrived. He had been brought up to date by Jacob's reports, but was anxious to know if Arthur Lord had been apprehended.

When he was told he had not, Lord Burghley turned to

Hawkins. 'I want Lord's schooner boarded and searched and the captain brought here if Lord is not discovered.'

The Admiral issued the orders and in half an hour the anxious captain of *L'étoile Montante* was brought before them. At first he denied any knowledge of Lord's whereabouts, but when he was threatened with being sent to the Tower, quickly changed his tune. He told them that Lord had slipped ashore at Calais, dressed as one of the crew sent out to fill the water bottles. No one would notice that one less crewman had returned to the schooner. As to his whereabouts, the captain said he had no knowledge of them.

'What did he do with the rapid fire gun ?' asked Jacob.

The captain looked baffled. 'Rapid fire gun? What is that?' It was plain he genuinely had no idea.

Jacob had an idea. 'Was John Sykes, Lord's coachman, with him on board?'

'No, he wasn't, which was unusual. Where Lord goes, John Sykes usually goes too.'

'And yet on this occasion Sykes didn't accompany Arthur Lord, nor did Lord bring the rapid fire gun on board?'

'No,' replied the captain, 'nothing remotely like a gun of that sort. Just a lot of personal possessions.'

As there were no further questions, the captain was allowed to return to the schooner, but with a squad of soldiers stationed on board in case Lord returned to his ship.

'Sykes,' he told Burghley and Hawkins, 'must be the key to what has happened here. Find him and we will almost certainly find the rapid fire gun too.'

Chapter Eighteen

Chelsea, London
Monday, 23rd May, 1578

Roberto sat back in Arthur Lord's chair in the hidden room at Chelsea, rubbing his neck and straightening his aching back. Standing up, he began to prowling about the room doing stretching exercises.

Colonel Young looked at him with amusement.

'It's not the most interesting of work, is it?'

With a snorting laugh, Roberto said it was the most boring job he had ever done.

'Well, look at this,' said the colonel, waving a paper, 'it's a letter from a solicitor saying that Lord's bid for a property in Southwark has been rejected. Why on earth he would want a property there, I can't imagine!'

'Neither can I, but since he didn't buy it, I'm don't see that it's of too much interest. Where is this property anyway?'

'The house is described as being about a mile outside Southwark, on the Deptford road.'

'Sounds pretty isolated.' Roberto frowned as a thought crossed his mind. 'Wasn't there something at the foundry about goods being stored at a warehouse in Deptford?'

'That's right,' agreed the colonel. 'The finished arms could well be shipped from there. It's not so far downriver and the naval yard is nearby.'

'Of course. Still, as he didn't buy the property, we'd better put it on one side for now and see what else we can find. Maybe we'll find something else about it later. I would like to try to find more details of where and to whom the armaments

are shipped.'

With a sigh he sat down again and began to look through more of the papers. After a short while he held up an invoice. 'This one is about him selling arms to Henry III of France.'

'Leave it for now, but start a new pile. Walsingham will be interested who has bought arms.'

About an hour later, the colonel asked Roberto to come and look at the sheaf of invoices he had set on one side. He indicated one dated about two weeks earlier.

'Here's a name Walsingham knows well.' The invoice was addressed to the Duke of Alençon in Nantes.

Roberto laughed. 'Ah! The Queen's suitor! Poor fellow, she's been dangling him on a string for a while now!'

'Careful, Roberto,' warned the colonel. 'or I might have to arrest you for making treasonous remarks. Roberto was not in the least put out. It was obvious the colonel was joking.

'The duke,' the colonel explained, 'supported the Huguenots, but was estranged from his brother, King Henry III of France, who supported the Catholics. Rumour had it that there could be civil war in France unless the king stopped favouring the Catholic cause.'

'It's obvious,' said the colonel after a thoughtful pause, 'that Alençon has been buying muskets and small portable cannon from Arthur Lord, presumably to further the Huguenot cause. However, there is no indication where they were delivered, although Nantes seems the likeliest port of disembarkation, since he Alençon has his main base there.'

Roberto was intrigued and began to search through the documents again. 'What did I do with the other one? Ah! Here it is,' he said, flourishing it. 'These arms are the ones that were delivered to Paris for the king. So that means ...'

'That Lord has been selling arms to both sides,' completed the colonel, taking the statement from Roberto and putting the invoices all together.

'Walsingham will definitely be interested in those.'

After another hour's work, they had finally looked through all of the papers, both personal and business, without finding anything that helped with Lord's whereabouts. They did find several more sales to both Alençon and his brother and two letters from the King's treasurer, enquiring about heavier weaponry.

Bored with the tedious job, the colonel wandered along the shelves taking down a few books and examining them.

'Anything interesting?' enquired Roberto, as he stretched his back against the chair.

'Only if you're a connoisseur of rare books.' Colonel Young showed Roberto the illustrations in an atlas he was studying. 'These really are superb.'

Placing the book reverently back on the shelf, he moved along towards the middle of the room. Suddenly he gave an exclamation and began to examine the spine of one of the books more carefully. 'Hello, what have we here?' Taking down a large book, he saw that the clasps that held it closed were secured by a lock.

'Well, well, well!' he exclaimed and brought it across to show Roberto.

'Hmm,' said Roberto, 'I haven't seen any keys lying around, but I have something else.' From a concealed sheath in the arm of his doublet he produced a thin stiletto blade. Inserting it into the lock, he began to twist. After a short time of probing, he gave a grunt of satisfaction and, with a final twist, the lock gave.

When the clasps were opened, the book proved to be just a shell inside which were a number of letters, bound in a ribbon such as those used by lawyers. When Roberto untied it, he examined the first letter and then with a wide grin handed it to the colonel. After a quick glance through it, the colonel also smiled.

'So he did buy the property in Deptford!' he announced in satisfaction. This letter from his lawyer confirming the sale was

completed earlier this year.'

As they began to pack away the invoices and letters to show to Lord Burghley and Walsingham, a trooper came into the outer room. The colonel went to see what he wanted and came back with a letter.

'It's for you, Roberto. It's a note from Jacob. A messenger brought it from Captain Roberts at Somers Key.'

Reading the note with interest, Roberto showed it to the colonel. 'Jacob says they haven't found the rapid fire gun and Lord has gone to Calais without it. I think the house in Deptford might be a good place to look for Sykes, don't you?'

Chapter Nineteen

Deptford, Tuesday, 24th May, 1578

At first light, the Commissioners, the colonel's troopers and a detachment of soldiers from the Royal East Kent Regiment, under a Major Rhodes, began their attempt to capture John Sykes. The troopers were all in their respective positions awaiting the signal to enter the Deptford house, while the soldiers surrounded the immediate area including a squad at the end of the drive commanded by Major Rhodes.

Since late the previous afternoon the house, which was set back from the road, had been carefully observed and all means of escape covered. The main road was cordoned off in both directions and the trooper sharpshooters were keeping a careful watch for any signs of John Sykes trying to leave. They did not however, enter the grounds, for fear of alerting Sykes.

There had been a sighting of a man at one of the windows, but the curtains had been kept closed most of the time.

Colonel Young turned to Jacob and looked enquiringly at him. Jacob nodded and, at a signal from the colonel, the troopers began to move forward at both the front and the back of the house, which was still in darkness. Once at the front door, two troopers came forward carrying a battering ram. At the door, they made themselves ready and waited for the signal, while the attack party drew their weapons.

'On three,' whispered the colonel and held up a closed fist. He held up one finger and mouthed 'One, two...' and at the third count the two men gave the battering ram a mighty swing and the door burst open with a reverberating crash.

The troopers poured into the house and began to search the rooms on the ground floor, while the colonel, Jacob and

Roberto kept watch on the stairs leading to the upper floor. When the search found no sign of the rapid fire gun or Sykes, the three of them began to mount the stairs with pistols at the ready, backed up by four troopers.

As they knew from the property details found at Chelsea, there were three bedrooms and two box rooms in the attic, presumably used by the servants in the days when the house was occupied. Outside the main bedroom, on the first floor, at the front of the house, Jacob and Roberto flattened themselves against the wall on each side of the door as the colonel made ready. On the count of three, he gave the door a hefty kick and as it flew open, he dived to one side.

Two pistols were discharged one at each side of the door and the second shot drew a curse from the colonel as it hit him in the upper arm and he slumped against the door jamb. Meanwhile Roberto, a knife in each hand, performed a forward roll into the room and came back on to his feet, tensed to throw. As Jacob followed, sidling into the room to the right, there was a crack of a whip and the knife was wrenched out of Roberto's right hand. Without hesitation, he threw the one held in his left. There was a loud curse as Sykes, whom Jacob had recognised from Chelsea, dropped the whip and wrenched out the knife, from where it had lodged in his side. He threw it at Roberto, who dived to the floor. Catlike, Roberto recovered quickly and sprang to his feet again. Unfortunately, he was in between Jacob and Sykes who had rushed to the open window, preventing Jacob from firing. However, Roberto sent another knife winging on its way towards Sykes.

In desperation, Sykes swung himself out on to the ivy that covered the back of the house and the knife buried itself harmlessly in the widow frame. By the time Jacob and Roberto reached the window, Sykes was already on the ground, running towards the barn where the horses were stabled. It was very long range, but Jacob took a snap shot, but missed, since Sykes continued towards the barn unchecked.

Alerted by the shot, the group of soldiers at the back of the house came running around the side. Two of them fired at the running figure and Sykes staggered, but steadied and disappeared into the barn.

Meanwhile, in the corridor outside, two of the troopers had helped the colonel to his feet and when Jacob, halted his rush downstairs for a moment to see how he was. The colonel waved Jacob and Roberto on, insisting he was all right.

When Jacob reached the front of the house, he was just in time to see Sykes astride one of the carriage horses riding hell for leather up the drive towards the gate.

When Jacob, with Roberto in close pursuit, reached the drive, they were just in time to see the final act of the drama. The soldiers, had formed a double rank of riflemen across the entrance. The front rank was kneeling and the rear rank was standing. Major Rhodes raised his sword and shouted at the oncoming horseman to stop, or be shot.

The only response from Sykes was to crouch lower in the saddle and, levelling his pistol, he spurred the horse towards the soldiers, firing at the major as he did so. The man next to the officer collapsed and immediately, the major swept his sword downwards.

The drive was enveloped in a cloud of smoke as a volley of fire shattered the early morning quiet. As the smoke drifted away, less than five yards in front of them, the rider was lying still in a pool of blood, his horse thrashing about severely injured.

Jacob was the first to reach Sykes and one glance was enough to confirm he was dead. The horse was in terrible agony. Realising there was nothing he could do to save it, Jacob put it out of its misery with a single shot to the head.

Roberto, who had joined Jacob, looked at the scene in bewilderment. 'Why didn't he surrender, Jacob? He must have known he'd be killed.'

'We will never know, Roberto,' Jacob replied, 'but I can't feel

sorry about it. I can only surmise that he preferred a quick death to the alternative.' He put a friendly arm around Roberto's shoulders. 'Let's leave the marines to sort this out. I want to find out if the rapid fire gun is in the stable.'

As they reached the stable door, they were joined by a pale-faced Colonel Young, his arm in an improvised sling. 'It's just a scratch,' he said dismissively, 'now let's get on and find this damnation rapid fire gun.'

Flinging back the barn doors, Roberto went up to the wagon that was just inside and lowered the tailgate. Springing nimbly on to the back, he undid the tarpaulin that covered the load, to reveal the sinister mouth of the gun. When he took off the tarpaulin completely, it was apparent that the cannon was far from complete. The cylinders that facilitated the reloading of the breach were in a separate box.

Colonel Young checked it out with Jacob's help. When they tried to fit the first cylinder under the breech, it was obviously too big and quite roughly cast. The second was smooth, smaller and fitted neatly into the breech. However, when they tried to turn the cylinder with the handle, it did not line up the cartridge correctly.

'At least we've found the gun,' said Colonel Young. 'All we need to do now is to transport the gun and any records and drawings of it, to the Tower of London for safe keeping and examination and find Lord.'

'I thought it was going to be destroyed, colonel' said Jacob.

'It was originally, but Walsingham has changed his mind.'

'Ah well, it's not the first time,' said Roberto in a resigned tone. 'I'd better go and retrieve my knives. It sounds as though I still might have need of them.'

Chapter Twenty

London, Thursday, 26th May, 1578

After breaking his fast, Jacob was relaxing in his study, having enjoyed his first day off from the investigation since it started. He had spent the previous day at his home in Mark Street relaxing with his wife and children. Unfortunately this peace didn't last, as barely half an hour later Colonel Young came to see him.

Seeing Jacob's pained expression, the colonel smiled. 'The price of fame, I'm afraid, Master Bell.'

'What now, colonel?'

'A meeting with Lord Burghley and Walsingham, in two hours, at Hampton Palace. I'm to collect Roberto Rosso as well.'

'What's it about, colonel?'

'I'm not sure, but I'd hazard a guess that it's something to do with the papers we found at Chelsea. Neither Roberto nor I had the time to read through them, but Walsingham has had Phelippes scouring through them for anything useful.'

When the meeting started, to Jacob's surprise it was Walsingham who took the lead. However, the reason for that became evident when he explained that Phelippes had discovered something very worrying in the papers.

'Lord Burghley and I have discussed the situation and we have decided to take you fully into our confidence.' He gave a bleak smile. 'What you are about to hear is not to be spoken of outside these walls. Have I your word on this?'

Having received assurances, he continued. 'This year, the Queen's progress will be to East Anglia. The details are far from decided, but it appears from the papers that Arthur Lord is

already privy to that information.'

Jacob could tell that this had been a shocking revelation to both Burghley and Walsingham, but he did not interrupt Walsingham, who now imparted the reason why they were so worried.

'We have discovered, both from the evidence found and by questioning the household, that Lord has family connections in Norfolk.'

He paused as a messenger arrived for Lord Burghley. Having checked the message, Burghley waved for Walsingham to continue.

'In fact, it was not common knowledge, but Arthur Lord is the bastard son of the Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk. His father was executed for treason six years ago for his part in the Ridolfi plot.'

A cold chill swept over Jacob as he remembered the events concerning Count Ridolfi. He had been left crippled when he became involved with the Count and his manservant. Fortunately his paralysis had only been temporary, but it had been a most difficult few months.

Lord Burghley now took up the story. 'There are, of course, many relatives of the Duke living in Norfolk and they are strongly linked with the Catholic cause. There is, however, a strong Protestant and Puritan element in both the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. The Privy Council hopes that the Queen's presence during her progress will help to reconcile the various factions and prevent the area from again becoming a powder keg for rebellion.'

Burghley explained that Thomas Phelippes had discovered encrypted messages in Lord's correspondences. He says, 'there are hints of a plot to assassinate the Queen during her visit to East Anglia. Unfortunately, there were no letters dated later than the nineteenth of May. However, one thing was clear from the last letter. The plotters were very interested in the development of the rapid fire gun and the possibility of using it

when the Queen and her ministers were in a crowded space'.'

Having listened patiently to these revelations, Roberto asked a pertinent question. 'How would Lord get a rapid fire gun to Norfolk? I assume he is still in France.'

'My agent's latest information,' Walsingham replied, 'is that Lord is in Nantes. More to the point, he owns an iron foundry in that city.'

'It seems to me,' commented Jacob, 'that this raises three main questions. Firstly, how long would it take Lord to make a new gun? Secondly, how would he get it to Norfolk? And thirdly, how could he arrange to place the cannon exactly where the Queen will be located? And surely he would need assistance to do this?'

Colonel Young now made a suggestion. 'Having been on several of Her Majesty's progresses, the places where I had the most problems in ensuring her safety were at the inevitable banquets, theatre plays and pageants. She attends these events specifically to be seen and there are not as many crowds surrounding her, making her an easy target.'

After some considerable discussion, it was agreed that Walsingham would use his network of agents to discover how a gun could be transported to Norfolk from France. Jacob was to establish how long Lord would need to make at least one rapid fire gun. Lord Burghley was to obtain the dates the Queen would proceed to places where there would be staged entertainment, and where a special seat for Her Majesty would be erected in full view of her subjects.

Lord Burghley had one final thing to add. 'The Queen is aware of the perils and is adamant that she will not cancel her main sojourns in Norfolk, although there is more flexibility over those in Suffolk.' He stood up, indicating that the meeting was over, but left them with one parting warning. 'I must stress to you all that this matter is of the utmost urgency.'

Chapter Twenty-One

London

Thursday & Friday, 25th & 26th May, 1578

Following this meeting, Jacob and Roberto made their way to see the Fogg brothers at the Houndsditch foundry. The answer to Jacob's question as to how long it would take Arthur Lord to make another rapid fire gun from scratch was less precise than Jacob had hoped.

'It is difficult to be accurate, because I have no way of knowing how skilled his foundry workers are in Nantes,' said William.

'Let us assume he is able to employ a very skilled man,' replied Jacob. 'How long then? And let's assume he will use bronze, as he has little experience of iron.'

'Working in bronze, hmm....' William paused, sat down at his desk and did some rapid calculations on a scrap of paper. He 'hmm'd again, sat back in his chair and rubbed a finger across his lips thoughtfully. 'My best estimate would be five to six weeks.'

'What about transporting it? The one we saw at Deptford was fully functional, but would have made a very conspicuous load.'

'That's true, but it is not a difficult or time-consuming job to assemble the cannon, once all the parts are made. It could be shipped in separate parts, which could easily be hidden under, say, agricultural implements or even foodstuffs.'

When Jacob communicated this information to Lord Burghley later that day, the Queen's Chief Minister looked thoughtful.

'Assuming that is correct and allowing, say, two weeks to

smuggle the gun from France into England, it seems more than likely the earliest date this could be achieved would be the middle of July.'

'I assume the Queen will be well on her way to East Anglia by then,' remarked Jacob.

'Indeed so,' replied Burghley. 'If my memory serves me aright, she will probably be at Havering Palace, on her way to Mark Hall, at Standon, or possibly to Audley End House, in Essex. As you may know timings may vary, often at the whim of the Queen.'

Jacob was certainly aware of the Queen's whims, having witnessed them at first hand. Normally a cautious, calculating and organised woman, she had inherited her father's red hair and temper. At times, this made her very volatile and likely to change her mind as the mood took her. Especially when she was suffering from toothache, as she had been over the past few months.

'Which of these houses the Queen will stay at have connections to Arthur Lord.?' asked Jacob.

Burghley indicated the map hanging on the wall. He pointed out Standon and Audley End and then the nearest port, Hyde, which served Colchester.

'Taking into account the time it would take to transport the gun to Audley and set it up, Lord would have a very small period of time to carry out an attack.' He thought a moment. 'Lord does have family connections to Audley, inasmuch as the estate was formerly owned by his father, but Walsingham has found no evidence that Lord was ever there.'

'In that case,' said Jacob, 'I would think it unlikely that Audley would be chosen. Lord will have to plan the attack very carefully and detailed knowledge of the area would, in my view, be an absolute prerequisite.'

Burghley nodded. 'I agree. That is why I have asked Walsingham to produce a detailed report on Lord's early life.' He shook his head. 'Unfortunately, I, too, will be in danger if

Lord succeeds in his purpose, God forbid. I will have joined the progress by then.'

There was little more to add, so Jacob took his leave and returned to his house in Mark Street.

The following afternoon, Jacob was at the Crutched Friars talking to Roberto, when he had an unexpected visitor.

'Admiral Hawkins!' he exclaimed in surprise. 'To what do I owe this honour?'

'I was hoping to see Lord Burghley or Walsingham, but they are both at a Council meeting at Greenwich. Since I was not far away, I decided to have a word with you, since you are both Commissioners.'

'Is this to do with the missing Arthur Lord?'

'Indirectly,' agreed the Admiral. 'I was asked to find out about ports in East Anglia and the possible shipment of this fancy gun to various points in Norfolk and Suffolk.'

'What did you conclude?'

The Admiral expressed the opinion that there were three possibilities: Hyde, Lowestoft and Yarmouth - of which Yarmouth, in his view, offered the greater prospect of success. He explained that Yarmouth was a busy port that served many parts of Norfolk, particularly Norwich, the second largest city in England.

Although the River Yare was not navigable to large seagoing ships, there was continual traffic of commercial sailing wherries travelling up the Yare, finishing right in the centre of Norwich. The River Wensum, flowing north beyond Norwich, was also navigable, although to much smaller craft. Additionally, the timescale for the Queen's visit to the city was mid to late August, with at least four days being spent there. This provided a significantly longer period for Lord to smuggle the gun into England and set it up in Norwich by the time the Queen and her court arrived.

'Assuming you are correct, what can we do to stop Lord from getting the gun through?' asked Jacob.

'It will be difficult,' Hawkins said. 'I am sure Lord will realise that we will be on high alert because of the Queen's progress. Particularly into the heartland of the Catholic recusants.'

Jacob nodded. 'We need to get this information to Walsingham as soon as possible. He will need to put measures in place to prevent the success Lord's treasonous plan.'

Chapter Twenty-Two

London, July, 1578

Almost two months passed before news about the rapid fire gun reached Jacob. Arthur Lord had made an attempt to smuggle his gun into Lowestoft and it had been discovered by Walsingham's agents at the docks. Had it not been for a fortunate accident, the gun might never have been found.

The gun barrel had been sealed into a false compartment in one of a series of crates of farming implements. These had been shipped from Antwerp to Lowestoft for delivery to a warehouse in Diss, Norfolk. During the unloading of the ship, the crate in question had slipped from the crane net and burst open on the quayside. Alerted by the frenzied response of the crew to gather its contents up, Walsingham's agents and the Customs men had examined the crate and discovered the barrel. Examination of the other crates led to finding a quantity of cartridges and a cylinder.

Colonel Young, who passed on these details, informed Jacob that this had occurred on the fourteenth of July and the parts shipped to the Tower. They would arrive in three days' time, when Jacob would be able to examine them.

'Was there any sign of Arthur Lord?'

'None at all,' the colonel replied. 'The captain of the Dutch ship only knew that the crates had been loaded at Antwerp for delivery to a warehouse at Lowestoft, to be forwarded to Diss by local carriers. He was unable to shed any light as to who had shipped them.'

'Was this the first time he had made such a delivery?'

'According to the Customs men, they had been shipping in farm implements for some months. Despite questioning

everyone on board, they could find out nothing else.' He went on to say that a search of the warehouse at Diss had located several other crates which contained nothing more than various farm implements. The earlier crates were traced to a genuine supplier of farm tools who could shed no light on the matter either. The premises had been searched and their customers contacted without anything suspicious being uncovered. It was a dead end.

On Jacob's enquiry, the colonel admitted that Walsingham was worried. The Queen's progress into Norfolk would be stopping at Kenninghall Palace for several days, a little more than fifteen miles from Diss. The Queen would not arrive there until eleventh of August, which left plenty of time to organise an assassination attempt.

'Since Kenninghall was once the property of Lord's father, but it was confiscated by the Crown and now belongs to the Queen. Her Majesty know it well. She stayed there when she was a young princess during Edward V I's reign, as did her sister Princess Mary. It's possible that Lord might knows the house and surrounding area and where an attempt against the Queen could be attempted.'

'Do we know for sure that Lord ever lived there?'

The colonel shook his head. 'Walsingham has put out enquiries, but nothing has surfaced so far. I believe that agents will be questioning the staff to see if any connection can be made.'

When the colonel had left, Jacob decided to have a word with Lord's former apprentice who was now happily working at the Glass-Sellers' main office. To Jacob's query about Kenninghall Palace, the apprentice had never heard any reference to the place. He did, however, remember overhearing Lord talking to his coachman about a place near Norwich where he had lived as a boy.

'Did he mention where exactly?'

'I'm sorry, Master Jacob,' said the apprentice nervously. 'I'm

not sure. I think it was something like Cossfield, or maybe Cossley Hall, but that's the best I can tell you. It was some months ago now.'

On his return to Mark Street, Jacob went into his study and thought about what the apprentice had told him. Taking out the list of the Queen's probable sojourns in Norfolk provided by Burghley, Jacob examined it carefully.

Sure enough, there was a two-night stay mentioned for Kenninghall Palace. Looking at the remainder of the visits, Norwich was by far the longest stop but there was no mention of a Cossfield or Cossley Hall, either in Norwich or later in the progress.

Although this should have been reassuring, Jacob still had the feeling that he was missing something. However, he could do nothing further at present, until the parts of the gun discovered at Lowestoft had been examined at the Tower.

Since Thomas Owen had invented the rapid fire gun, he had been invited to examine the parts. His initial reaction was that they were indeed parts of a rapid fire gun. However, when he tried to assemble the cylinder, he discovered that it would not fit the barrel. There was no chance that this was a working gun. He further concluded that the barrel was probably an early prototype that had been discarded as useless.

'What do you make of it, Commissioners?' asked Walsingham gloomily, turning to look at them.

It was Jacob who spoke first. 'I believe it's a ruse, to put us off the scent while the real gun is smuggled in elsewhere.'

'I'm afraid I have to agree with Jacob,' said Roberto.

'It seems to me,' Jacob said, 'that the most likely place is Yarmouth, which has direct connection to Norwich and beyond by river.'

'But where?' asked Walsingham. 'We haven't a clue as to where he might strike. It could still be Kenninghall Palace.' He turned to speak to Owen again along with Colonel Young, leaving Jacob to his thoughts.

The feeling that he was missing something would not go away from Jacob's mind and he went through the information that Lord's apprentice had given him. Cossfield or Cossley Hall? He shook his head in annoyance. It was another dead end as there was nowhere on the list of the Queen's visits that resembled those places.

Striding across to Walsingham he interrupted the conversation. 'Sir Francis! When the Queen leaves one stopping place for the next, I expect that in some cases she will stop for a meal at midday.'

For a moment Walsingham was nonplussed. 'Her midday meals? What about them?'

'Does she stop at a place anywhere in Norfolk that has a name like Cossfield or Cossley Hall?'

'No, there isn't.' He went through some papers on the desk and produced a list. See for yourself.' As Jacob took the list Walsingham asked why he wanted to know.

'Because one of my informants overheard him saying he spent a lot of his childhood there!' Jacob scrutinised the list and Jacob could see that there was nothing resembling the name.'

Having examined the lists again, Jacob enquired why the progress through Suffolk after Norwich, was very sketchily filled in. There was a list of overnight stays, but no dates or further details.

'For the simple reason,' explained wearily, 'we cannot get the Queen to make up her mind. It's always like this. That's why trying to decide where the attack might take place is such a nightmare.' He turned to Walsingham. 'We must try and persuade the Queen that for her own safety, we must know where she will visit during he stay at Norwich and afterwards.'

Chapter Twenty-Three

Norfolk, July, 1578

Having been on the Queen's progress for some time now, Jacob found the constant checks and fruitless worry, very wearing. Every new place they visited there was the same routine of searching every possible hiding place where Lord might site the rapid fire gun. They still had no positive idea where the attack might take place, but Jacob, thought Kenninghall Palace was the most likely because of the time needed for Lord to get the weapon in place.

Jacob was becoming accustomed to the lavish meals and entertainment that had been prepared. However, he was unprepared for the splendour that greeted the Queen, when the Royal Progress crossed into Norfolk, en route for Kenninghall Palace.

She was met at the boundary by the Sheriff of Norfolk accompanied by over two thousand horsemen, including six hundred gentlemen, *all bravely attired and mounted*, as the official chronicler reported.

The greeting was tumultuous and even Jacob felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise at the outpouring of affection for the Queen. She, of course, was at her most gracious and received this dutiful welcome with a touching little speech before the whole train moved on towards Kenninghall, which they expected to reach in the early evening.

So far, there had been nothing to cause Colonel Young and his troopers a moment's qualm as they surreptitiously kept the Queen under observation.

There had of course been quite a number of opportunities for people to get close to her person, but the palace guards who

travelled with her were always alert for such an attack, now even more so.

While the speeches were still being delivered, Jacob and Roberto accompanied Colonel Young and his troops to Kenninghall. Despite inspecting the route on all sides, they located nothing suspicious and arrived at the palace in the late afternoon, where they were greeted by Anthony Wingfield, comptroller of the Queen's household. He had spent seven days at Kenninghall preparing for the Queen's visit.

Anthony Wingfield showed the colonel, Jacob and Roberto the preparations for her visit. The Queen's apartments as well as the public rooms were swarming with footmen, maids, equerries and, Jacob suspected, Walsingham's agents, so he had no doubts about agreeing to the colonel's opinion that no assassin, let alone a cannon, could be smuggled inside. Wingfield informed them that a standing house, a shooting platform, had been built, in the forest, which the Queen would use, when shooting her crossbow at the deer driven across in front of her

'Is the use of a standing house for the Queen and her entourage a common feature of the hunts?' Jacob asked Wingfield.

'In the case of deer hunting they are,' he replied. 'However, like her father, the Queen is particularly fond of falconry and a platform is not needed for that.'

Colonel Young immediately demanded to inspect it the standing platform. Having located the foresters responsible for driving the deer out of the forest towards the standing house where the Queen would be waiting. the colonel learned that the deer would be driven across the front of the platform, no more than twenty to thirty paces away from her. An relatively easy target for a crossbow, even though the Queen excelled in its use.

Using their knowledge of the gun trials, Jacob, Roberto and the colonel's men began to search the forest at a distance of

seventy to a hundred paces out from the platform. They located two places where a rapid fire gun might be concealed in dense undergrowth with a clear line of sight of the platform.

After a quick discussion Jacob and Roberto, the colonel instructed the foresters to make sure that the undergrowth in both places was cleared and that men would be stationed to ensure the gun could not be erected without them knowing about it.

Shortly afterwards, the Queen arrived with her court and received the welcome from the Earl of Surrey, Philip Howard, whose title had been restored to him after the execution of his father, the fourth Duke of Norfolk, for treason.

Now restored by Wingfield and his men, the Great Chamber and Dining Chamber looked splendid.

The following morning, after a discussion with Burghley, it was agreed that the colonel and his men be deployed around the standing house to make sure that Lord was unable to get near with his weapon.

Despite their fears, the Queen's visit passed without incident and the whole entourage set off for Norwich. With the colonel and his men riding on ahead, scouting out any possible ambush sites. When the progress stopped at Brackenashe for dinner, Jacob and Roberto took the opportunity to discuss the situation.

'You look very worried, Jacob.'

'I am, Roberto. I am,' he replied. 'I was certain the attempt would be made here. Something is very wrong.' He frowned in concentration as he went through the facts again. 'I can't shake off the feeling that this Coss-something Hall is the key. There is nothing to link Lord to any of the other places except Kenninghall Palace, but only because it was once owned by his real father. We must see if Walsingham has any news, He is due to meet us at Norwich.'

When the Queen and her court approached the city, the mayor and his procession came riding towards her. It was a noble sight as the mayor was preceded by sixty bachelors, the cream of the

city's young men, dressed in black taffeta doublets, black hose, black taffeta hats with yellow bands and purple taffeta jackets decorated with silver lace.

This colourful sight was followed by a large number of gentlemen and wealthy merchants dressed in velvet coats. Next came the city sword-bearer, the Mayor, twenty-four aldermen, the Recorder in scarlet and finally, former city sheriffs in violet gowns and satin stoles.

All around, ordinary citizens thronged at every vantage point. Noise smote the ears like a physical blow. It was impossible for any of the speeches to begin until eventually the tumult died down. Throughout it all, the Queen had patiently acknowledged all her audience with a graceful wave of her hand, as she drank in the adulation of her people.

As Lord Burghley remarked to Jacob later in the evening, 'This progress has been a triumph for the Queen so far. With no crisis to curtail it or distract from its impact on the populace, Her Majesty has enjoyed herself, because it has achieved what she set out to do.'

Despite his cheerful words, his face betrayed his fears for what was yet to come. 'Let's hope Walsingham has some news. He is due later today.'

Laying a friendly hand on Jacob's shoulder, he said intently, 'And nothing must occur that will destroy this wonderful achievement. Promise me, Jacob, you will strain every tissue to ensure it does not.'

Chapter TwentyFour

Norwich, August, 1578

The meeting with Walsingham took place after the evening meal in Burghley's apartment. When he arrived, Jacob immediately asked Walsingham if he had managed to locate where Lord had spent his childhood. 'It has to be the most likely place for an attempt after Kenninghall.'

Walsingham looked a little annoyed at Jacob's intervention, but answered him civilly nevertheless. 'Richard Lord, Arthur's stepfather, was employed at Costessey Hall, near Norwich, as a blacksmith and farrier, and the young Arthur worked with him.'

He consulted some notes. 'Apparently, Arthur was an indiscretion of the young Thomas Howard, the 4th Duke of Norfolk and the mother, who had just produced a son, was married off to the blacksmith. The duke's father, arranged for the blacksmith and his wife to work for the Jerninghams at Costessey and gave the couple an annuity of one hundred pounds for a year. They were not to make any further contact, or claim on the duke.'

'That has to be where Lord will strike,' Jacob burst out excitedly.

'I believe you are right, Master Bell,' said Walsingham solemnly. 'Especially given Arthur Lord's detailed knowledge of the area. I have been going through the Queen's schedules and she plans to hunt at the deer park at Costessey Hall on Monday or Tuesday and have lunch with Lady Jerningham afterwards. The Queen is not particularly fond of the Lady, who was a Lady-in-waiting to Queen Mary and pays at best, only lip service to the Protestant faith. However, this progress is about reconciliation and showing the people of East Anglia that she

does not shun former Catholics.'

He looked at Colonel Young. 'How many men will you need if we are convinced that the deer park is where an attack will take place?'

'The full troop I command comprises of a hundred men,' Young replied. 'I usually use an elite squad of a dozen troopers and a sergeant for special missions. On balance I believe we should take the whole troop. The elite squad would be close at hand to guard Her Majesty, with the others patrolling around the area on search and destroy forays.'

'I agree,' said Walsingham, 'but we must do what we can not to cause too much alarm among the local populace. We must not dissipate the goodwill shown towards the Queen. So no heavy handed tactics, please.'

He passed a hand wearily over his forehead. He had travelled many miles to get to Norwich for the meeting. 'However, I will arrange for extra security at all the Queen's public appearances and visits around the city. It is still just possible that he might try something in the here.'

Lord Burghley who was looking most anxious at the disclosures, turned to Colonel Young. 'Take your full troop to Costessey as soon as possible. I want watchers at every road or track that Lord might use coming from Norwich. We know,' he said in explanation, 'that if the gun is brought to Norwich by the River Yare, it must be unloaded somewhere before they reach the city. The Yare is not navigable beyond Norwich. Have you any questions, colonel?'

'None, my Lord. I will carry out your instructions as soon as I leave this meeting. My troops are already on standby to leave immediately on my order.'

'Excellent, colonel. I wish you good hunting.'

'Amen to that,' said the colonel.

'What do you wish the two of us to do, my Lord?' asked Jacob, when the colonel had left.

He stared hard at them. 'You have shown yourselves to be a

very formidable team. I rely on you to foil this evil plot and help me protect our Queen and this realm.'

Chapter Twenty-Five

Norwich, August, 1578

In the ensuing days, there were many pageants and visits to prominent places around Norwich. The crowds at every event were enormous and the Queen received a rapturous welcome wherever she went. Many of the events were spectacular, but neither Roberto nor Jacob found any pleasure in them. They were too busy checking and examining the crowds in case Lord made a move. By Saturday night, after the Queen had retired, the two of them went to their shared room and sank into an exhausted sleep.

Sunday, was a rest day, with time to attend church in the morning and then a large dinner. Jacob and Roberto's lodgings housed several other members of the court and it was not possible to talk with being overheard. On leaving the building, they managed to find a quiet spot on the bank of the River Yare that was close by. Jacob was quiet and sat slumped forward with his elbows on his knees with his hands supporting his head. He was staring fixedly at the gently flowing river.

'I thought you wanted to talk, Jacob?'

With a start, Jacob sat up. 'I'm sorry, Roberto. What did you say?'

When Roberto repeated his question, Jacob explained. 'There is something not right. Lord is no fool. He must know we will find out about his connection to Costessey and put patrols and watchers on every road. There are few roads into Costessey.'

Roberto nodded. 'I did wonder about that.'

'I think.' said Jacob thoughtfully. 'there must be another way to get into Costessey. One we don't know about.'

'How are we to find it?' asked Roberto.

'That's what I have been studying. We need someone with good local knowledge of the area. There are a lot of local landowners here for the Queen's visit and they need to eat. We are to join one of the official dinners and many of the local wealthy tradesmen and landowners will be present.'

Jacob and Roberto were early at the house where the dinner was to be given. On their arrival, Jacob sought out the steward who was in charge of preparations. When Jacob gave their names, the steward checked his list and informed Jacob that as Queen's commissioners, they would be seated near the head of the table.

Jacob then asked him if he knew if any of the attending landowners knew the area around Costessey.

'I would say the best man to speak to would be Thomas Walgrave, sir. He has a large estate near Costessey and I believe he is a distant relative of the Jerninghams of Costessey.'

'I would like to sit beside him at dinner,' stated Jacob forcefully.

'I can't move him up to your left, sir. He is four places below you in precedence.' Jacob shook his head in frustration. Etiquette at these events was so strict. Everyone was aware of where they should be sitting and would make a fuss if they were not in the right place.

'Move me down to sit next to him,' instructed Jacob. 'The other four do not know my precedence as a commissioner and if I don't complain, they will be none the wiser.'

Thomas Walgrave, informed Jacob that he was a local landowner, who owned an estate about three miles north of Norwich. As they relaxed while the first course of meats was cleared away, Walgrave mentioned the Queen was going hunting at the deer park at Costessey.

'How did you hear about that?' asked Jacob suspiciously.

'As a relative of Lady Jerningham, I've been asked by her, to provide some beaters to drive the deer in front of Her Majesty.' He took a drink. 'I must say, I was surprised that the standing

platform had been erected for the Queen, near the banks of the River Tud.'

'Why is that?' asked Jacob, pricking up his ears.

Walgrave swallowed noisily, wiped his mouth and then continued. 'Yes, I was saying. The standing house. Well, it's difficult to explain if you don't know the area.'

Putting a friendly hand on his arm, Jacob smiled and assured Walgrave he was most interested.

'In that case, let me explain,' said Walgrave. 'to reach that part of the Costessey deer park, from Norwich, without going through the village, you must travel towards the village of Easton, cross the River Tud north of Costessey, before travelling back south along the river bank into the deer park. It can be done, but it is a difficult ride.'

I take it that there is an easier way?' said Jacob.

Walgrave agreed. 'The usual way by road, is to head towards Costessey village and from there, enter the estate and cross the deer park to the river.'

'Why would they put the standing platform across that side of the park?'

'Because the deer naturally tend to congregate near to the river. However, since we're going to drive the deer anyway, it's easier to drive them towards the village side of the park.'

'I suppose the River Tud is quite shallow,' asked Jacob. 'Is it easy to travel up along its bank?'

'Not at all,' replied Walgrave, 'it runs through a wild, secluded, wooded valley, with only a few narrow footpaths unsuitable for horses. Even the pack-horses do not use them. When you get to Costessey, the river became a little wider, with many overhanging trees. Entering that part of the deer park through the Tud valley could only be done by travelling upriver.'

'I've been told the rivers are not navigable above Norwich,' said Jacob.

'That's correct as far as wherries, or other large boats are

concerned. There is no commercial travel along the River Tud, nor the River Wensum, although the latter is navigable by small boat.' He gave a smile. 'However, to anyone who knows the area well, like myself, it is possible to travel all the way from Norwich to Costessey by a local type of shallow draught boat, rather like a punt. It was considerably easier to do on the Wensum, but just about possible on the Tud. I've done it myself.' He smiled a little sadly. 'When I was much younger, of course.'

'I take it, from your description,' said Jacob ingenuously, 'that anyone travelling on the Tud would be difficult to spot, whereas the Wensum is more open to view.'

'Indeed so,' replied Walgrave, 'but to choose the Tud, you would need to be desperate. It's a treacherous route, even on the flood tide.'

Needing to think about this information, Jacob passed another serving dish to Walgrave and they ate in silence for a while. This new insight into the terrain around Costessey made Jacob all the more certain that Arthur Lord would make his attempt there. Having lived at Costessey for many years, he would be aware of the River Tud and how to navigate it. Also, the rapid fire gun was easy to dismantle, thus making a punt a viable form of transport.

Lord would surely assume that his pursuers would be aware of his connections to Costessey. The gun found at Lowestoft had obviously been a decoy to make them think he was choosing one of the Queen's sojourns on her way to Norwich as the site of his assassination attempt. Lord, Jacob was sure, would think no one would imagine the Tud a likely route into Costessey.

In a pause between courses, Jacob enquired when Walgrave was planning to return home to his estate.

'This very afternoon,' he replied. 'I must organise the beaters for the Queen's hunt.'

'Perhaps some friends and I could accompany you? We will

be going on to Costessey.'

'By all means. Since you are interested, I could point out the Tud valley to you.'

From his tone, Jacob realised that Walgrave guessed there was much more to his interest in the Tud than mere conversation. He thanked him for his kindness and arranged a time and place to meet, before striding off to pass on this troubling news to Roberto.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Costessey, Norwich, August, 1578

Later that afternoon, having taken Jacob's party to a vantage point overlooking part of the Tud valley, Walgrave took his leave of them. One thing was perfectly obvious: despite their good vantage point, anyone travelling on the river would be difficult to observe.

'This is a nightmare,' extolled the sergeant, who with three troopers had been left to protect the commissioners. 'Even now we know about this river, it will still be easy for someone to get to the deer park without being seen.'

'But it does give us an advantage we did not possess before,' Jacob observed.

The sergeant looked at him quizzically.

'Before, we did not have any idea as to where an attack might take place. Only vague suspicions.' Jacob sighed. 'Now, given Lord's connections to Costessey, we have a strong lead as to how he could get to the standing house and which direction an attack could come from. Any thoughts, sergeant?'

'Only that we might be able to find some evidence that someone has passed upriver in recent days,' he replied. 'It rained a few days ago and there might be recent footmarks on the bank, or broken branches on overhanging trees. I could take a detail through the valley on foot, to meet up at the bivouac at Costessey.'

'That's a good thought, sergeant.'

It was agreed that the sergeant and two men would travel up the valley on foot. Their orders were to keep a wary eye out for anyone hiding there and look for any signs that someone had travelled up the river recently. The remainder of the party was

to make its way to Costessey and join up with the colonel's troop bivouacked there.

When they met up with the colonel and his troop, the colonel called a meeting with Jacob, Roberto and the lieutenant who had been left in charge of the main troop.

'We need to plan what we intend to do,' said the colonel. 'The Queen's safety is paramount. I believe we should try to apprehend Lord today, before he can make an attack, rather than wait until tomorrow when the Queen is here. Although most of the day is gone.'

There was general agreement and Jacob asked the colonel to put himself in Lord's shoes and say how he would carry out the attack, using all that they knew about the terrain and the rapid fire gun.

The colonel asked for their indulgence for a few minutes while he put his thoughts in order. When he was ready, he looked seriously at them all and then began.

'My first thought was, why use the rapid fire gun at all? Getting it here was always going to involve considerable risk of discovery. Similarly, given the security that was bound to be in place, siting the gun beforehand increased the risks of discovery before an attack could be carried out.'

He looked around and then, since there were no comments, continued. 'This led me to the conclusion that the Queen was not the only target. The standing platform will contain not only the Queen but many leading members of her court and senior ministers. The rapid fire gun is the perfect weapon for attacking a large number of people in a confined space.'

'I agree,' said Jacob, 'firing sixteen musket balls with very shot, he could potentially fire nine times if the cylinder doesn't jam. He could wipe out the Queen and her government in one fell swoop?'

The colonel nodded solemnly. 'It's the only conclusion that justifies the whole business of getting the rapid fire gun here and finding a way of using it without being discovered.'

'Do you think he's acting alone?' asked Roberto.

The colonel nodded. 'Probably. I think Sykes would have helped him if he was still alive, but I doubt Lord would trust anyone else.' He shrugged. 'Besides, more assassins would increase the chance of discovery.'

'What about how he will use the gun, sir?' queried the lieutenant.

'I was coming to that point.' Young went on to explain that the most effective range of the gun was about one hundred paces. However, they should not rule out a distance of up to two hundred paces, since this gave Lord a better chance of being undiscovered. Furthermore, he might have improved the gun's range in its latest version.

Having listened carefully to the colonel's summation Jacob spoke up. 'I'm sorry, colonel, but it doesn't add up.'

'What do you mean?' queried the colonel.

'The whole business of using the rapid fire gun,' Jacob said matter-of-factly. 'Assuming he's as clever as we think, he must know that the using it will mean his own chances of success or survival are very small.'

'He obviously doesn't know that we are expecting him here at Costessey,' argued the lieutenant. 'There are so many other places he could attack

Before anyone could comment, they were interrupted by the arrival of the sergeant reporting what they had found in the Tud valley.

'As ordered, colonel, we followed the course of the river to the standing platform and beyond.' He went on to say that they could see marks at various places that someone had passed upriver very recently. There was no indication that anyone had gone ashore until several hundred yards above the standing platform.

Judging by the deep footprints on the ground and broken branches of trees and bushes, something heavy had recently been dragged from the river into the thick undergrowth.

However, a diligent search had revealed no gun or boat.

'Is that all?' queried the colonel in a very disappointed tone. 'I had hoped for more than that!'

The sergeant gave a little smile. 'We did, however, find a sort of hide a little deeper in the forest, on the side opposite the platform.'

'Did it have line of sight and how far away from the platform was this hide?' queried the colonel.

'About one hundred and twenty paces from the river bank, so about one hundred and seventy paces in all from the platform, with a clear line of sight.'

There was a brief lull and then Jacob asked, 'Did you look inside the hide?'

'We did,' replied the sergeant. 'There was no sign of anyone, but there were three holes in the earth in the shape of a triangle.'

When they went to inspect this, Jacob could see that the marks were similar to those left by the gun tripod at Lord's testing ground in Chelsea.

'And you saw no sign of anyone nearby?' asked the lieutenant.

'One of the troopers thought he'd seen something moving in the forest over there,' the sergeant pointed away from the river, 'but when we searched, there was nothing. It was probably a deer. We saw lots on our way to the bivouac.'

'Hmm,' said Jacob thoughtfully. 'It all seems a bit too obvious to me.' He couldn't get over the feeling that they were missing some vital piece of information.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Costessey, Norwich, August, 1578

Despite intensive searches throughout the last few hours before darkness fell that evening, and all of the following day, Monday, neither the gun nor the punt had been discovered. By the time the two weary commissioners retired to the room allocated to them in one of the forestry yeomen's cottages, they were tired and despondent.

As they sat with a final drink before retiring, Jacob compared notes with Roberto. 'What do you make of it, Roberto?'

'There is something not right,' said that worthy in a puzzled tone. 'I can't get my head round it, but something is bothering me.'

'Me too,' agreed Jacob. 'I really thought we had something when we found that heavily-disguised platform in the tall oak tree about three hours ago.' He shook his head in disgust. 'Yet again it was another empty vantage point.'

Downing the last of his drink, Roberto wished Jacob a good night. 'We'll need to be up at dawn, since the Queen is leaving Norwich early in the morning, so we must get some sleep. Maybe then, we'll be able to solve this conundrum, when we have fresh minds.'

That's true,' agreed Jacob. 'I've asked the steward to assemble the huntsmen and beaters straight after we've broken fast. We must check them to see that Lord has not infiltrated them.'

The senior huntsman had assembled them all and touched his forelock respectfully when Jacob and Roberto appeared. Having asked them to remove their caps, Jacob walked around and checked them all. Lord was not present.

'Please explain what will happen when the hunt begins,'

Jacob instructed the senior huntsman.

The huntsman told him that because of the siting of the platform, they had already driven some deer into a holding area only a short distance from the platform. When I give the signal, the beaters will drive them across the front of the platform.

'When will you know to give the signal?' queried Roberto.

The huntsman now explained about the little ceremony that happened before the hunt began.

'My role is to present for the Queen's approval, a pile of the deer's fewmets, or droppings, to show what a fine beast it is. The Queen praises the quality of the deer loudly, I back away, bow, turn and give the signal to begin.'

'Did any of you know the son of the blacksmith, when he was here at Costessey?'

Only the senior huntsman said he did. 'I met him a few times when I first started here, some twenty years ago. He left Costessey about six months later, when his parents died, within a month of each other.'

'Have you seen him lately?'

'He's not been in these parts since his parents died,' said the huntsman.

Having left the huntsman to get on with organising the beaters, Jacob and Roberto set off for the standing platform. On the way, they racked their brains for a solution to where Lord might strike. Unfortunately, by the time they were in their allotted places by the platform awaiting the imminent arrival of the Queen's entourage, neither of them had had any further ideas.

The colonel had deployed his troops in a protective ring, with special attention being given to the two hides they had found and other cover within range of the rapid fire gun. He himself was stationed on the river side of the platform, with Jacob on the right and Roberto on the left of the central steps leading up to the platform.

Jacob's sense of uneasiness was enhanced further when the

colonel came back to report that, despite checks on all the sites they had identified where the rapid fire gun might be deployed, there was still no sign of it, or of Lord.

'I will do the rounds again,' he informed Jacob, 'but meanwhile, all my troops are on high alert. Perhaps we have frightened Lord off attempting any villainous intent.' With that parting thought, he strode off.

Jacob hoped he was right, but was distracted by the nagging thought at the back of his mind from the previous day that he was missing something. Try as he might, the answer would not come.

Just before the Queen arrived, he went through the different positions they had found for the potential deployment of the gun. Only the one on the opposite bank had the tripod marks, but how was Lord to get the gun there, with troops guarding the approaches?

The tripod marks. He kept coming back to the tripod marks, as though they were trying to tell him something. What was it about the tripod marks? They matched the marks at the testing ground. Two at the front and one at the back. And then the thought which had been nagging at him suddenly became clear and he gave a groan of frustration and struck his forehead with the heel of his right hand.

'Oh, we are idiots,' he shouted. 'Two at the front and one at the back. Of course! The marks are facing the wrong way! The gun would be aiming away from the platform!'

Roberto had heard Jacob's cry and, ducking under the steps, came across to him. 'What is it Jacob?'

'Roberto. Lord isn't going to use a rapid fire gun, this whole charade with the rapid fire gun was a deception, to put us off the scent. Presumably, he couldn't get the gun to work properly. The tripod marks were another ploy to make us think he had the rapid fire gun, but they were the wrong way round. He's going to get close enough to shoot the Queen at point-blank range, so he can't miss!'

'How's he going to do that? No one is allowed near the platform.'

Although originally Burghley had wanted several armed troopers on the platform, to closely guard the Queen, she would have none of it. Instead the best musket troopers were sited about twenty-five paces away around three sides of the platform, with orders that that anyone rushing towards the Queen with a weapon, would be shot.

There has to be someone, thought Jacob. Before he could think any more, the Queen's party came in sight and Roberto resumed his place at the other side of the steps. They both bowed low as the Queen passed and then as Lady Jerningham mounted the stairs to the platform, followed by Leicester, Burghley, Surrey and several other Privy Council members, Roberto and Jacob carefully checked them all.

Once they were assembled, there was an expectant babble of conversation, as everyone awaited the arrival of the huntsman and the herders. The Queen and several others had their crossbows ready, but before the hunt began the lead huntsman would carry out the usual custom of presenting, for the Queen's approval, a pile of the deer's fewmets, or droppings, to show what a fine beast it was.

'Of course,' screamed the thought in Jacob's head, 'the huntsman!' He called urgently to Roberto, 'Watch the huntsman. It could be Arthur Lord. Kill him if he goes for a weapon.' Roberto stiffened and drew a knife, which he held out of sight close to his side.

As the huntsman approached, Jacob could not tell if he was Lord. The clothing and hat were right as was the general build. As expected, the huntsman stopped about forty paces from the platform and bowed and then raising his hands in front of his face, he showed the large leaves with deer droppings. At a wave from the Queen, he bowed again and then moving forward to within five paces of the platform and doffed his hat. Because of the steps, Jacob had to move forward to get a good

view. As he did so, instead of kneeling and holding up the fewmets, Lord, because in that instant Jacob had recognised him, dropped them and his hand went swiftly inside his doublet.

Arthur Lord's hand emerged from his doublet clutching a pistol and raised it to fire at the Queen. Jacob fired and a look of surprise crossed Lord's face, as a pistol ball hit him in the chest and simultaneously, a heavy throwing knife lodged itself in the socket of his left eye.

Lord dropped his pistol and sank to his knees. Jacob was just about to shoot him again for good measure with his other pistol, when a crossbow bolt slammed into Lord's heart and he slumped backwards, to lie spread-eagled.

'So die all traitors of this realm,' cried the Queen in ringing tones, holding her crossbow aloft, to huge applause from her courtiers.

Not for the first time, Jacob marvelled at the Queen's calmness in a crisis. This monarch that he chose to serve, never missed an opportunity to enhance her own image. This story would echo round the land and no doubt improve with every subsequent retelling, as these stories tended to do.

Epilogue

Costessey, Norwich, August, 1578

Lunch had been lively to say the least, with the Queen at her most ebullient. Of course there was only one topic of conversation, the demise of the unlamented Arthur Lord. Even Lady Jerningham had been virulent in her condemnation of his assassination attempt, or so Lord Burghley commented when he met with Jacob and Roberto after dinner.

'How did you know Lord had replaced the huntsman?' was Burghley's first question.

Jacob was about to answer, when he saw the Queen had entered the room and both he and Roberto made a deep bow.

'Yes, indeed, Master Bell,' repeated the Queen and with a wave of her hand bade them rise. 'Pray enlighten us how you came to unmask the traitor.'

Jacob explained how he had worked out that the whole rapid fire gun plot was an elaborate hoax, intended to divert the Queen's security measures away from a single attacker. The huntsman was the only person who could approach the platform, so he was already sure that this was the only time Lord *could* make his move.

'We found the real huntsman trussed up, gagged and hidden in the undergrowth near his hut,' he told them. 'Lord's build is very similar to that of the huntsman and with his hat pulled well down, none of the herders noticed the difference. By the time I recognised him for sure, he was already reaching for his pistol.'

'That was extremely well done, Master Bell.' The Queen smiled gratefully at him and then turned to face Roberto. Her face took on a stern look as she addressed him. 'And what have

you to say for yourself, Master Rosso? I hope you are aware that it is a serious offence to brandish weapons in the presence of the Queen. I could have you sent to the Tower.'

Fortunately, Roberto was aware of the Queen's penchant for teasing and saw the hint of a smile on her face. He dropped to one knee, and replied in kind.

'Forgive me, Your Majesty,' he said solemnly, with a contrite expression. 'I did rather hope Your Majesty would prefer I try to stop him from shooting you.'

The Queen stood with her hands on her hips and looked sternly at Roberto for a few long seconds and then threw her head back and roared with laughter. 'Get up, Rosso, you cheeky knave. You are quite right, I certainly did prefer it.'

Roberto smiled. 'And may I congratulate you on an excellent shot with the crossbow.'

'Ah yes,' said Elizabeth, with a slight smile. 'A piece of theatre for the benefit of the locals. Jacob's pistol ball and your knife did a rather adequate job in the first place.'

'They did indeed, Master Rosso,' said Burghley, 'and Her Majesty has decided that for your service to the Crown you will be awarded a 'collar of the Queen's Livery', a gold chain to wear around the neck and the sum of five hundred pounds.'

Before the astounded Roberto could stammer his thanks, Burghley turned to Jacob and informed him that he too was to be rewarded for his services to the Crown: a grant of two thousand pounds from the seized assets of the recently deceased traitor, Arthur Lord.

The Queen held up her hand for silence. 'And now we must leave you to return to Norwich. We grant you these tokens as a sign of our appreciation and esteem.'

With a look at Burghley she summoned him to follow her and, as Jacob and Roberto bowed deeply, swept regally from the room.

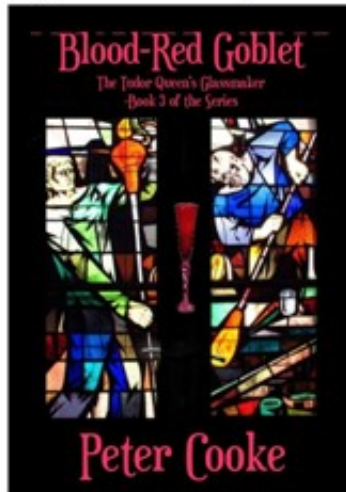
'Well, Roberto,' Jacob remarked, rising to his feet, 'a most satisfactory conclusion to this extremely puzzling affair.'

Putting a friendly arm around Roberto's shoulder he said, 'Let's away to Harte Street and set about our proper jobs of making glass.'

He paused a moment as a thought struck him and then he smiled. 'As you said at the beginning of this affair, Roberto. That's a metal of a different sort, indeed!'

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