

# Of the Plantagenet Chronicles

## Part 4

### THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

- **Ben Jaffa** - Theatrical smokes and curtains.
- **Ned Culpable** - Apothecary's 'Apprentice' and Spirit Visionary.
- **'Sandy Bell'** - Borderland Reeve and Close Personal Protector.
- **Thomas Blitheman** - Poet. Playwright. Dabbler. Gentleman. Enquirer.
- **Valentine Plymmyswoode** - Scholar of Arcane learnings. Man of Mystery.
- **William Cecil, Lord Burghley** - Chief Advisor to the Queen, Lord of the Treasury.
- **'Petrov'** - Well connected Apothecary, alleged Alchemist and Russian Intelligencer.
- **'Kapra'** and **'Alaki'** - *'Grigori'*'s agents in London.

### Act 1 Scene 1 - The Pants.

**S**o then to the search for Petrov. After the discovery of men's undergarments (well used) in the tarts (now) lodgings that were Petrov's (then) lodgings, it was Valentine Plymmyswoode who wrests them from the clutches of Thomas Blitheman, and took them home to undertake rituals strange and arcane to locate their owner. Hopefully Petrov.

It was not unusual for Valentine Plymmyswoode to work in the darkness of midnight, in a cellar without windows and unobserved by anyone in his place of art. On this particular occasion he double barred the doors, doused the candles and hung out the 'Not Home - Go Away' sign on the door, and gave his good friend and personal protector 'Sandy Bell' the night off, such was his concern.

'Concern?' I hear you ask oh goodly members of the audience. Fore such, concern indeed, for Valentine Plymmyswoode had a reputation to uphold, and a Patron to satisfy. As he placed the (as you may recall, *'well used'*) undergarments within the arcane scratchings of a pentagram, and that in the arcane circle, and even that that amongst the arcane glyphs, symbols and Enochian writings all about, with tongs, he could be heard to mutter

"Not writing this one up - divination with *pants*, how did I get here? I used to have professional standards, a good reputation, I remember when I thought toe nail clippings were gross, but *pants....eugh.*"

However, with a resigned sigh and after carefully wiping his tongs in a ragged cloth he kept for just such purposes, Valentine lit the candles and incense, opened his 'Divination Chants' Tome at Chapter I, and lightly stabbed his own thumb to bleed carefully into the crucible he had set aside for just such a purpose. The map of London sketched lay to one side, and a pendulum inscribed with Enochian symbols and glyphs to the other ready to dangle at the culmination of his ritual, a mere few hours away.

'Oh ... *Pants.*' He caught himself, and managed not to stumble over the chant...

Scant hours later the ritual was done, and the bloody pendulum hovered momentarily to the west of London proper, near The Charing Cross, and slight north up Martin's Lane, to a church marked there as that of St Volkov.. But also it swung, it circled to the Western reach of the South Bank, beyond St Mary's and over Battle Bridge it drifted, slowly, slowly west at a snail's pace upon the map, perhaps as a man walked upon a road.

## Scene 2: Docks & Jetties

While all the chanting and arm waving was undertaken elsewhere, and after the guidance from those about his shop and lodgings who had known Petrov suggesting he knew those Sea Captains as might bring exotic items for him docked in the Thames, it was Ben Jaffa next who heads down to the jetties and wharfs of the north bank and enquired of ships from Muscovy in origin, or those that trade direct to and from the Baltic Seas. First come, those about the river side identified the Muscovy Company ship moored off into the Thames a little east of the London Bridge, the *Poltava*. Recently arrived it awaited deeper water to offload some of its cargo, and a shallowing of its draft from offloading other parts by small boat even as Ben watched. Yet further enquiries for the price of a couple of tankards of ale suggested the independent *Akula* might also be moored near, still east of the bridge but nearer the south bank and somewhat further down stream, opposite the Tower itself. Noted as not a usual place to moor for a trading ship, especially for a fast schooner, where value and speed are the key trade benefits. Only just arrived, no-one had seen it offload.

## Scene 3: Williams & Sons

Meanwhile Ned returned to his Master's shop to ask Old Man Mustard about the glass flask he filched from Petrov's burned-out business. Mustard examined the flask, commented upon its delicacy and lightness, the unusually coloured patina upon the surface when it caught the light just so, almost as a frozen soap bubble. Who might make such, Ned asked Mustard, for we buy-in our glassware? Mustard suggested to ask Williams (& Sons) where he gets their glassware, or the Romany's, for there were those amongst them of sufficient skill.

Ned took a trip to Williams & Sons and talked with the Elder Williams. Williams agrees it was not something he could do, but would go to *Duriken Winkle*, a Romany man. The Romany visited the South Bank and the Horse Downs usually to over-winter, or for Horse Fairs, and it was unlikely he/they were there then. Sometimes Winkle travelled alone, sometimes with other Romany groups.

## Scene 4: The River Bank

Ben Jaffa returned from the river with his news of Russian ships, and Ned Culpable from Williams & Sons. It is decided it's best to watch the *Akula* schooner from the south bank just down stream from the Beere House, amongst the reeds and scrubland there. After refreshing beer from the Beere House tap room the afternoon drew on towards evening, the watchers spied two men lowering a boat from the *Akura* who then rowed up stream, moored the boat and headed towards the Bear Baiting pits.

It was some time before their behaviour and carefree attitude suggested they were not clandestinely meeting anyone or passing messages at dead-drops, but just a couple of men from the schooner having a fine time of ale and betting on the bears and dogs. Eventually they attracted the attention of the girls, and are accompanied away towards the brothels of the Paris Garden.

### Scene 5: St Volkov's and Troubled Spirits

**F**rustrated at having drawn blanks in most immediate places to search for Petrov, everyone decided to check on St Volkov's before other moves, assuming it was perhaps Petrov's hideout or lodgings, presumably the church of his own people.

As dusk passed briskly they waited while Sandy Bell entered the church itself, simply by trying the main door, and when it opened walking in to light a candle and spend a few moments in a pew contemplating. There was but one other person in the dimly lit church, a woman he thought, silhouetted against the candles a few pews away with head bowed in private prayer. As she made no move and there was no sign of the local Reverend or Muscovy equivalent, Sandy left.

As the night settled in and the temperature fell only as clear sky and full moon would allow it was agreed to check out the graveyard, a couple of lean too's, a gate beyond, and then the small cottage beside the church that was perhaps a Petrov hiding place.

Led by Sandy Bell they circumnavigated the churchyard quietly in the moon light. It is Blitheman's excellent eyesight that identified fresh-dug earth across the other side of the graveyard, and suggested it was a fresh dug grave.

It was but yards within the graveyard before Ned was struck by the sudden cold of night, shivers as his breath frosted the air. But a moment later that Ben Jaffa glanced at the moonlit pond and saw a woman kneeling over it sobbing, and the words faintly heard "My boy... my boy".

Both Ned and Ben approached with great caution and tried to speak to the woman but she ignored them as if she had not heard. Her tears fell from between her fingers that covered her face to splash into the pond. Then, in a moment, she was not and it was simply a trick of the moonlight, a shadow, perhaps an animal or bird. Others wondered at what the Ben and Ned were doing as they disturbed a fox, or whatever it was, drinking at the pond for they had seen nothing.

To outbuildings, and there Sandy heard the slightest noise in one, but it turned out to be a stray dog that ran from the door. A quick peer through the nearby gate through the wall suggested a well tended vegetable garden with rows that neatly waited to be harvested by the Reverend through the autumn and winter.

When he turned back from the gate Ned again saw the woman's apparition at the pond and approached, offering assistance, but again she vanished as he shivered in the cold moonlight. Finally far enough around the graveyard they identified fresh dug earth in the size and shape of a grave. The timeliness suggested Petrov although it did not explain the other suggestion from Plymmyswoode's spell. However, whispered the suspicions were of coincidence or decoy.

Sandy Bell peered through the cottage shutters. He saw a hint of flames from a fire within through a shutter ajar, and legs before the hearth. At the side of the cottage tools of the graveyard trade were stored in chests. To raise and approach hate clergyman or Petrov if it was he within the cottage Sandy knocked upon the door, but there was no answer. Fearing the fireside legs were yet a body Sandy deftly lifted the latch and bar within with a slip of his shim, and everyone crept

within. Over the shoulder of an arm chair they spied a fire, the legs stretched towards the flames as a snore echoed, and a dark shape curled up on the floor between feet and fire that woke and barked. The chair, flustered, ejected a man that staggered to his feet: the Reverend. He demanded to know of them, at this time, and that he had no money to rob.

It was explained that they had knocked and feared for him when he did not answer and was unmoving before the fire, but they really came to ask of Petrov. The clergyman laughed for he knew Petrov, a very occasional church attendee but now dead and buried outside those last few days. Died of burns from a fire most terrible with only his feet untouched. In passing he mentioned others had come seeking Petrov, most recently Lettice and Tilberry both tarts at the Crossed-Keys brothel on the South Bank, for Petrov had been a regular there and they had missed him so.

Before leaving Ned asked about the sobbing woman vision both he and Ben saw at the pond. The Reverend quickly tried to cover his surprise that others had seen her and first denied any such spirit, but under Ned's skilled sceptical gaze admitted to seeing it too, some half-dozen times over the last year each at a full moon. Despite his tending the church for some years previous he had never seen such before. He admitted that he had talked with other churchman, albeit of other denominations, and he was not alone for others struggled with spirits and ghosts just this last year, too. Fearful of such portents he had prayed for guidance, and continued to do so.

As they departed Sandy again opened the door to the church proper, and in the flickering candle light could see the silhouette of the woman in the same pew as he had seen when he entered earlier in the evening. He entered the church to get a closer look, but when he reached the place she sat, she was not there. The others who remained at the doorway confirmed no-one passed them to leave.

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Early the next day Ned ensured he attended Church and committed his name to the Book of Names. It was after the others of the congregation had departed from a particularly dull service that Ned approached his own Reverend about a private matter. He asked for guidance for he had seen ghosts and spirits. Pressing the Reverend he asked if he himself has ever seen such. It was obvious to Ned he had despite initial denial. When pressed he recounted how he had watched the foot prints across the frosty grass as they were formed in the moon light. And other times, when there was no frost he had seen the frozen blades in the shape of footprints. He too admitted 'other churchmen' about London had indicated 'disturbing' matters the last year but never (or only apocryphally) before.

## Scene 6: Troubled Tarts

Well after lunch, for common knowledge was that whores have busy nights and like to rest in of a morning while honest Protestants are up with the dawn and a-toil, folks visited the Crossed-Keys tavern and brothel upon the South Bank, rowed there by a thoroughly non-judgemental ferry man. After drinks they persuaded Madame to let them talk with Lettice and Tilberry.

Alas, while Lettice was affable, she confided that Tilberry has not been back several nights. She was perhaps at another brothel, or working the north river bank, but Lettice did not seem very convinced. However she recounted how Tilberry saw Petrov from behind at the bear pits one day, swearing it was he for he was a most distinctive man. Alas, despite calling out and waving, he did

not turn, and in the press and flow of the crowd she lost sight of him. When she looked again he was gone. But Tilberry had said she was certain it was him, despite the rumour of his death.

## **Act 2: Scene 1: The Bear Baiting Pits**

**I**t was decided that a watch should be put upon the bear pits, for there was scant else to go on other than hints of Petrov upon the South Bank. The bear pits for the day might see Petrov return although it was a long odd. Such saw them in the press of the screaming crowd of the late afternoon when Ben spotted hair that he recalled, black and bushy, and a hint of similar beard, but sight of face obscured.

He waved to Ben Jaffa and Sandy to move forward to confirm. Alas it was also then that Ben spotted someone looking a lot like the larger, more unpleasant version or the brother of Alexi. Petrov, for it was truly he, spotted 'brother' Alexi a moment later and ran, barging through the crowd towards the bank of the Thames and the road there running. Ben too barged from the crowd and ran after, hoping that Ned and Sandy will be able to delay Alexi enough to allow him to catch up with Petrov before Alexi did.

Sandy and Ned confronted the pumped up Alexi, catching him as he ran after Petrov with their knives trying to stab and disable him to delay. Together they attacked from behind, and both landed blows to calf and back that should have been disabling but there was no visible blood! While Alexi did stop, for they were now also in the way of his pursuit, he did not seem perturbed by the blows. It was then that they spotted a similar version of Karl, also now a bigger, tattooed man, who approached quickly from another part of the pits. Outmatched Sandy and Ned abandoned their delaying tactics and scattered, sure they were no match for one let alone two of these strange men.

Meanwhile Petrov panted along the Quay road of the Southbank towards Southwark and St Mary's Church. Alas, years spent over a hot alchemist's crucible had not left him the fittest of men, and it was little time before Ben Jaffa caught him as he gasped his last steps. Near to London Bridge, Ben suggested he was not the enemy and would help Petrov, who saw he had little choice when in the distance Karl and Alex emerged onto the Quay from the bear pits.

Ben and Petrov took a boat from steps near London Bridge, for Petrov suggested flowing salt water would delay their two pursuers. As they crossed, they talked. Petrov explained it would take some time for Kapra and Alaki (as he referred to Karl and Alexi) to get far enough up stream to cross, for it was unlikely they would cross at London Bridge under such unfavourable conditions, and a small boat crossing was even less likely.

Ben convinced Petrov to come to Cecil, for he had little choice with the Book that Cecil demanded he return. On the north bank they hired horses and rode to find Blyth first (Ben having realised the likelihood of being able to reach Cecil, Lord Burghley, as minimal without assistance) in Whitehall.

## **Scene 2: TBA**

**B**lythe accepted their request for attendance, and explanation for need to talk with Lord Burghley thereafter, and indeed made request that Cecil might grant them all three a moment of his time on the matter about which they had previous discussion.

They were escorted to another more opulent part of Whitehall, and into a richly furnished work room before Lord Burghley. Cecil, surprised, was pleased they had managed to round up Petrov.

Various points come out in discussion.


Petrov identifies Kapra and Alaki (previously Karl and Alexi) as either being , or touched by 'Vila', that which was Fae in his understanding of those English's understanding of such things, and they were specifically things of Grigori the Muscovy Magickian; perhaps under his command, perhaps in his debt, perhaps something else.

He also explained who Ivan Terrible and Ivan Ivanovich were, father and (allegedly) murdered son. Blythe and Cecil were surprised, thinking Ivanovich was dead.

Petrov posits that the cypher book is all that keeps him alive, with both Ivan's and indeed Cecil.

Cecil and Petrov agree for the handover of the book to be out at the schooner Akula, and accept Ben will be Petrov's actor in this. Time agreed, the turning of the tide.

### Scene 3: 'The Bell' and Plans.

 ater, the group reunited in The Bell, there is concern about 'Karl' and 'Alexi' (or Kapra and Alaki as Petrov refers to them), for the knives of Ned and Ben had not harmed when used. Messrs Plymmyswoode and Blitheman suggested that the blades of the knives they used were steel not pure iron, and better yet not the rare 'star iron' that came from falling stars and was regarded as the purest form by those in alchemy. Such was said to have special properties not least being troublesome to Fae. Ned asked Old Man Mustard about 'star iron' and was met with a shrug: they do not have any - he could ask around, but there was no time to find or source.

Ned asked Petrov about the glassware that Petrov had in his shop. He confirmed he got it from the Romany Duriken Winkle. The glassware that is. The patina came from his own process to harden the glass for it was so thin to make it more robust for the work he needed. It became clear in discussion with Ned that Petrov's process was that involving the purest Iron, and as such shards and fragments of the glass might damage Karl and Alexi.

Ned recalled there were additional glassware flasks of similar design last seen in the drawer of Petrov's burned shop, from where he filched the first. Petrov advised Ned there was a trap set on the drawer below those of the flasks in the back room that he should disarm from a catch at the back of the drawer before pulling it out.

Ned and others visited the shop. As fortune would have it the shop has remained much the same over the last few weeks, with little to loot from the burned appearance. The drawer of glassware was undisturbed and it was hastily packed into bags after Ned has slipped out the bottom drawer to find the catch, metal pin and fragile flask to be broken by the opening of the drawer below. He removed it most carefully and packed it in layers of straw and cloth in his own bag.

Petrov explained he had possessions and other items he must remove from store on Kent Street, and also at the Beere House where he has been staying, all to the schooner Akula. It was agreed to find a cart and horse to collect and transport, while Petrov traveled separately to meet them at the those location on the south bank. Ben agreed to accompany and escort Petrov in case of trouble.

#### Scene 4: Fights, Flees, and ...

A cart was hired and ferrymen paid. The cart made its way across London Bridge in the skilled hands of Sandy and with the payment of suitable tolls in reasonable time, as did the boat men with Be Jaffa and Petrov. They instructed their hired boat to meet them further downstream at the Beere House steps to load goods for the Akula.

All met near Battle Bridge they approached Kent St with trepidation, and as they turned on to the street a lone figure was walking up - Karl or Alexi, but it was unclear which. Everyone spread out to approach, and prepared to fire salt loads and those of Petrov's broken glass from fowling pieces.

Ned threw the flask from Petrov's shop. While it landed a little long it shattered on the rocky street and a cloud of darkness billowed out, drifted with the light air from the south until it enveloped Karl as the others had blasted him with salt and iron imbued glass. In the confusion Blitheman was enveloped by the darkness also. Others retreated before it as it slowly drifted, or evaded to the sides as best they could in the narrowing gap between dark and street house. In time it started to disperse, but not before...

...another figure approached from the rear - the Alexi. Now with confidence he was greeted by rounds of fowling pieces full of blinding salt and shredding Petrov glass. Petrov feared them both, and despite having been surprised and knocked down, tore off his doublet to reveal strange tattoos all about his torso. He was about to charge Alexi when a final blast from a fowling piece brought it down.

As the darkness cleared Blitheman is prised from the road, having become firmly glued by the darkness; Of Karl engulfed by the darkness there is no sight.

Petrov's store was cleared onto the cart, and they proceeded quickly to the Beere House. Petrov handed a couple of books in strange script to others from a stack within the Beere House as his goods were loaded. The boat to the schooner, and his gear was loaded and he handed over the cypher book to Ben, and recommended the other books he has handed out be destroyed by fire or tossed in the Thames, for they were in Russian. He climbed aboard, and the schooner turned with the tide soon there after as Ben reached the bank in the row boat. Unbeknown to Petrov one of the books he had handed out in distraction was kept, although allegedly written in Russian it was unreadable by any there

Blythe met them riding up the road near Battle Bridge and took the Book of cyphers from Ben. He declared Cecil would be pleased.