

TONI MOUNT

THE

OXLEY

ETTERS

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The Foxley Letters

A Sebastian Foxley Medieval Mystery
FREE BOOK
(updated May 2019)

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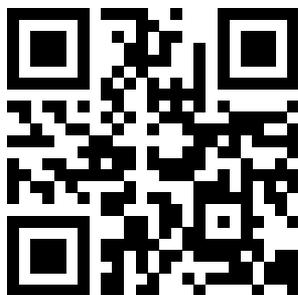
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Dedication

To all of my loyal readers ...
thank you so much!



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life and times?
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From Sebastian Foxley, Stationer and Citizen of London

Most esteemed Reader and fellow Citizen I greet you well.

I have been told, reliably but unaccountably, that you may wish to know my likeness. This seems strange indeed to me for I am a humble man of little standing within the city but it may be that, having acquainted yourself with tales of my adventures - both wondrous and woeful - you would take pleasure in exchanging the time of day and a smile, if we should chance to meet amidst the bustle and busyness of London's streets. In truth, I am not a man to relish such notice but, if you would have it so, I will oblige.

Of all the faces in our boisterous city, of course the one I see least is my own. We be of insufficient wealth to have the needless luxury of a fine polished mirror of the kind my esteemed patron, his grace the Duke of Gloucester, Lord Richard, most likely provides for his good lady. My wife, Emily, makes do with an upturned pewter platter when she would see how best to wear her new cap, or wishes to pin in place more elaborate pleats in her veil for a special occasion.

However, of a morn when I rise from my bed and go to bathe my face in the laver bowl, afore the scented waters are disturbed, an image stares back at me -

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mine own. Never at my best at such a time, my hair bed-tousled, my shirt donned in haste against the chill, nevertheless, I have used my humble skills with pen and charcoal to capture that likeness. Emily was aghast when she saw it, to think I would show myself all uncombed and improperly attired but my brother Jude laughed and said, to use his very words 'It's a bloody good likeness and shows your true humoral temperament, Seb: unkempt and uncaring what impression you make'.

So this is as I am, afore Emily has taken stock of my appearance and commanded that I take a blade to my chin, a comb to my hair and dress correctly for the day's affairs - I do make more effort with such matters when I am required to attend upon Lord Richard at Crosby Place. However, if you were expecting to see the image of a prince among men, I misdoubt that you be greatly disappointed. In which case, I pray you, look upon the portrait of Lord Richard that he has commissioned me to paint, when 'tis finished, of course, for he is a prince in every aspect, even though he always seems to me to wear a weighted cloak of sadness, I know not why.

I shall write again, if you wish it of me, when time allows. Or perchance you may hear word from Emily or Jude or some other of my family and acquaintances. In the meantime, I ask that God's blessings be upon you and yours. I remain your most humble servant and friend. Written this day of January at Paternoster Row in the City of London.

*From Mistress Emily Foxley,
née Appleyard, wife of
Sebastian Foxley*

Most worthy reader, greetings.

Fear not, I have my husband's agreement that I may write to you. He even offered to pen it for me at my dictation, if it would cause me great labour otherwise. As if I cannot do it for myself. Besides, what I write is not for his eyes, though I would not tell him so. I wished to explain my side of the matter to you. No doubt he has told you how he is the best of husbands, attentive, appreciative and loving? But I would have you know the truth of it. Sebastian is, indeed, all those things when a fine manuscript is set before him. Only last week, he was enraptured by a painted butterfly in a margin and the well-executed initials on the pages of a book. The gleam in his eye as he gazed upon a splodge of pigment and a few lines of ink is rarely there when he looks at me these days.

Oh, he is gentle, industrious, charitable and godly, I grant, but his heart lies in his work, not with me. And his thoughts are ever elsewhere. I think he believes that wholesome food and drink appear upon the table by magick alone; that clothing is laundered and repaired by some miraculous means. He arrives

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late for every meal, hardly appreciating the dishes I have prepared at great effort. He treats his finely stitched shirts that I sewed myself as if they are but old rags, forever getting ink and pigment stains upon them and ruining them.

The few occasions when he does notice me and has a loving look in his eye are always spoiled. Either some matter of work will intervene, or more likely that detestable brother of his. Is it any wonder that in my lovelorn state, I have found consolation elsewhere? Oh no, I would never go so far but there is a man who makes my heart beat faster.

Gabriel, our journeyman, cannot be accounted handsome by any means, what with his mismatched eyes and lopsided mouth but there is something about him. The other day, the yard was icy and I slipped whilst carrying logs for the fire. Gabriel was coming by and caught me up, such that I did not fall. Even through my clothes, I felt his hands hot upon me. His touch set the blood tingling in my veins and sent shivers down my spine that had naught to do with the cold. I did not want him to let go and I am sure he felt the same for he was slow indeed to loosen his hold. And there was no mistaking the way he looked at me. If only Seb looked at me so but do not tell him what I write. Promise upon your oath?

But there, I ramble on when I have food to prepare for dinner, linen to soak, pots to wash and endless other chores awaiting. Farewell for the present, worthy reader.

Written in haste this February day in my kitchen at Paternoster Row.

From Jude Foxley, Master Scrivener and Citizen of London

I give you greetings.

Well, friend, if ever you visit our fair city, first and foremost, you will be in need of a drink after your journey. I am the man to ask on that score, as my little brother Seb will tell you. Of course, he is 'little' no longer but a man grown, yet old habits die hard.

Talking of habits - we were, weren't we - my usual drinking den is this one, the Panyer Inn, being most handy, close to our workshop. The ale is good and wine often available, if you prefer, though not always of the best. Food is edible except of a Friday when, without fail, they serve stockfish. Even I know that the stone-hard dried codfish has to be soaked overnight before you can get your bloody teeth into it but the cook here doesn't bother, I'm sure. It's as if Friday arrives all unexpected for him every week and he can but serve up what looks and tastes like grey pot shards in grubby water and calls it 'fish stew'.

So Fridays I suggest you go elsewhere. If your purse weighs heavy enough, I advise

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the Green Man by St Mary le Bow - where wealthy goldsmiths merrily rub shoulders with middling folk - and the food is excellent. I can recommend the pig's trotter with pease pudding but on fish days the eel and oysters in a coffin is to be favoured above all. If you have sufficient coin, my brother - who rarely frequents such places anyway - tells me that Widow Fletcher at the Hart's Horn by Smithfield, which lies too close to Newgate Gaol for my liking, is a fine cook also and her ale sweet and golden, if somewhat expensive. No wonder Seb has only ever been there with his friend Sir Robert Percy. Wait while I order another jug of ale...

That's better. Now where was I - Ah, yes. And so to less expensive places. The Cardinal's Hat Inn in Cornhill isn't bad, though the innkeeper is a crusty old bugger. I've seen him spit into the ale before serving a customer who'd crossed him. His dog is just as surly and like to take a lump out of your leg if he has a mind to, so beware that one. The Fleece Tavern in Poultry is honest enough, despite its name, but the ale is often poor stuff indeed. The same goes for the Red Dog Alehouse though it has the advantage of a buxom serving wench Alice Holdgood - and she lives up to her name. The Pewter Pot in Garlickhill is better though the customers can be a rough lot, seamen from Queenhithe and Hansa sailors - you know the sort. If you are the gambling kind, I advise you visit the Stag in Bucklersbury. Whether dice, cards or

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cock-fighting, it all goes on at the Stag. Watch your money though for the local cut-purses have a fine time there too. Another word of warning – avoid the Key in Soper Lane off Cheapside. There you may get more than you bargained for, from the pox to counterfeit coin, from a knife in the gizzard to being wrongfully arrested. It's a real den of thieves.

Well. I think I've given you enough wise counsel, my friend, should you visit the city. Besides, I have my jug to finish before I face another afternoon in the workshop. Another tedious Latin primer to copy out for some young scholar to loathe as much in studying as I do in penning it.

Written this day, whenever it is, at the Panyer Inn in Paternoster Row, London.

From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed Reader I greet you well.

Snow is falling as I write this and I am glad of the merry fire in the parlour hearth and have much sympathy for any that need to be out upon the street this day.

I recall to mind a day such as this a few years since, when I was still apprenticed to Master Richard Collop, a stationer of great talent who taught me all I know of scrivening and the illumination of manuscripts. The ways were slippery then and hazardous and Mistress Collop - we apprentices called her Mistress Bess - was afear'd for us youngsters that, lacking caution, we might come to grief. In truth, she was most concerned for me with my lame leg, as it then was. But I took care at every step, using my staff to aid me, and my master kindly spared me from running errands in such weather.

It was one of my fellows who suffered a mishap. He and others had made a slide in the snow on the steep slope of Garlickhill and went down at such speed, faster than a horse may gallop, so they bragged to me afterwards. It was not a matter for puffery and boastfulness - though his friends were gleeful enough - when the lad collided with a foraging pig, got bitten for his trouble and his course ended up redirected into the midst of a particularly noisome midden heap. He

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bore the stink for days after, despite Mistress Bess's best efforts with soap and lavender water. For that while, none of us wanted him our close companion but the tale gave us youngsters much merriment. And I, for once, was not the butt of their unkind jests.

After that, Master Collop forbade such antics. I thought that wise; my fellows declared he was a killjoy, spoiling their games. But of what use is an apprentice with a broken limb? Rather a cost to his master in surgeon's bills and wasted time. So I have likewise instructed my apprentices, Tom Bowen and Kate Verney – and also Jack Tabor (who likely will not heed me for an instant) – not to indulge in similar activities for fear of hurt. Jude shakes his head, saying I'm as over-cautious as a mother with her first-born and youngsters should play as they wish, as he used to do. But it is in my nature to be wary of injury to those I care for. I cannot be otherwise.

In the meantime, I trust that you also will give due vigilance as you make your way in such weather. God's blessings be upon you and yours and keep you in safety.

Written this February day at Paternoster Row in the City of London.

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most worthy reader, greetings to you

Such a busy week has passed I had barely time to draw breath betwixt one task and the next. My housewifely duties are onerous enough. In a household such as ours, keeping the linen fresh laundered, dried, aired, folded and pressed takes all week and the weather being so bad meant it all had to be dried in the kitchen. What a to-do it is, trying to prepare and cook meals with towels, sheets, shirts and nether garments draped everywhere, over stools and benches and hung from rods around the kitchen. And then my clean shifts smell of onions and cabbages. I pray springtime will hasten and make my tasks easier.

Then the pig escaped. I told my husband the wall of her sty was in poor repair, but did he listen? Of course not. A new psalter book for the church was far more important, wasn't it? Talking of St Michael's, our parish church, it was our turn to provide the pax bread this Sunday. As you know, every household takes turns to provide the parish with little loaves each week, to be blessed and shared out at the end of High Mass, since we only receive the Eucharist bread once a year at Easter. That's two weeks in a row that I've done the bread-making because last

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time it was my father's turn and, as a man living alone, he cannot be expected to do it, can he? So my fellow parishioners have been spoilt of late. Twice they have shared my special dough receipt made with egg, milk, honey and poppy seeds. Delicious it is too. I hope they appreciate it.

Now, what was I telling you? Oh, aye, about the pig. Well, those forceful winds we suffered the other day brought down the ancient elder tree beside the pig's byre and it broke a gap in the stones of the wall. The pig was startled and set up such a squealing that, fortunately, caught my notice. In the blink of an eye, the creature was through the broken wall and charging down the alley, into Paternoster Row as if King Edward's army was at her heels. I called to everyone to give chase – Gabriel, Nessie, Tom and Jack all came running. Of course my husband was elsewhere when most needed. That pig led us a merry dance, I can tell you. Up Ivy Lane she ran, left along Newgate Market, left down Old Dean's Lane, then crossing Paternoster Row again, she bolted past the Bishop's Palace, turned left along Bowyer Row and ended up at Ludgate. There, God be praised for his mercy, the gate-keeper trapped her in St Martin's porch close by. Gabriel managed to get a tether upon her and we all came home. We had to shut the pig in the privy overnight. Every one of us was exhausted, mud-spattered and dishevelled. Upon his belated return, did my husband even notice? I'm sure, worthy reader, you know the answer to that.

Written, as always, in haste, this February day in my kitchen at Paternoster Row.

Jack's story part 1

Master Seb says I can tell you fings about me - so long as Tom checks wot I spelt. But I don't wont him seeing stuff wot I ain't never telled nobody, do I? So this is wot appened.

I wos little when plague comed to our village. Don't know wot it wos called but our nearest town was Lester. (Tom says it's spelt L E I C E S T E R - spellin's daft, ain't it?) Anyways, Pa died first which weren't no loss, him bein' always drunk an bashin' Mam about. Then me older bruvvers, Will an Arry, then the babe, then Mam. So it was just me an big sis, Maudie wot wos left. No buggers wonted us, did they, so we comed to London by a roundabout way. We knowed bout London cos we'd eard tales.

On the road we joined up wiv a band of ackribats, doin' tricks, balancin' an jugglin' an singin' - stuff like that. They used t' make 'emselves into a tower o' people an I'd clime up, bein' little an good at climin', an balance at the very top. Then folk'd clap an cheer. I liked that, didn't I? An Maudie could sing an look sweet an pretty - tho'

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she weren't always sweet t' me - but everybody liked Maudie. She used t' kilt up er skirts an dance a merry jig an folks'd throw money like it wos rainin' pennies. Ailfred wot wos our - wot wos it 'e called it? mannijer, that's it - wos pleased wiv Maudie an she got the best bits o' meat, when there wos any, an a new dress so's she looked fine. At Camebrig where sckolers comed t' see us, a fat merchant wiv a fur cap takes a likin' t' Maudie an Ailfred - that bugger - goes an sells Maudie t' the fat deval. We cried lots a tears but she went all the same, didn't she. An only I wos left outta all our fam'ly. I wunder wot Maudie's doin' now? Rich prob'ly an fat.

I stayed wiv them ackribats and learned t' play a little drum wots called a tabor - that's 'ow comed I got called Jack Tabor see - an t' juggle an do summysorts - wotever they're called. But I never liked Ailfred much an I knowed 'e never liked me neever so when we comed t' London I was gonna run away from 'em, wasn't I. But I 'ate penwork, don't I, an I telled you some o' me tale but me arm akes now so I'll tell you more a nuvver day.

Is me spellin' too bad? Ope not. JACK

Master Seb drawed me dog Little Beggar fer me t' show you. Beggar's me bestist friend and a rite scamp, master says.

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From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed Reader, I greet you well.

How the weather has improved since last I wrote. The days grow longer, there is warmth in the sun at last and I pray we have done with winter.

This morn, I went out early to my favourite spot beside the Horse Pool at Smithfield, just beyond the city walls, to do some drawing afore I began my day's work. The signs of spring were all around me, even though some were needful of a sharp eye to see them. Most clear were the snowy blossoms of the blackthorn bushes, already promising a crop of sloes next harvest time. They spread a carpet of petals beneath my feet and clung to my boots at every step, like a sugar coating. The hazel catkins flaunted themselves and danced to every breath of wind, showering gold dust on the breeze. A bee, still drunk with winter sleep, buzzed and hummed to himself, no doubt delighted as I to espy a clump of pale primroses, half hidden beneath the hedgerow, holding their virgin faces to the first rays of sun. Sweet-scented violets were there also, though I had to part their heart-shaped leaves to find the tiny flowers of royal purple velvet, fine as a king's robes. It is true: God sees the flowers of the field dress in as fine array as any noble lord.

The birds were singing joyfully as the sun warmed them. A chaffinch, rosy as the dawn sky, hopped

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along the path before me, quite unafraid. He seemed content to pose whilst I sketched him and only flew off to continue his quest for a mate when my drawing was done. By the Horse Pool, the first green spears of the water irises are just showing and black-eyed frog spawn clusters in the shallows. That stuff has always intrigued me. I know 'tis put there by the frogs yet the hatchlings are wriggling black worms, not frogs at all. I suppose it is another of God's miracles of Creation that I do not understand.

But I certainly understood the bleating of newborn lambs on the common land and the gilded glint of celandines beneath the still-bare oak tree. Spring is here and I thank God for such wonders at winter's close.

May the Almighty, likewise, shine His blessed light upon you.

Penned this bright March day at Paternoster Row in the City of London.

Jack's story part 2

Like I telled you last time, I ain't much of a one fer ritin' stuff but I promised t' tell you wot I did after me an' them ackribats comed t' London.

Ailfred beat me sommat terable when we wos in London an' I'd 'ad enuff o' that so, when them uvvers went on, down t' Rochester, I made meself scarce so they couldn't find me. After they wos gone, I needed t' find a way t' get fed. Thievin' was easy fer me, too quick t' catch, weren't I? I made friends wiv street wenches - yer knows the sort I mean - an' fishwives an' uvver poor women. They wos always willin' t' share a bite o' pie or a cup o' cheap ale wiv me. Ol' Scally by Billingsgate wos kind, let me sleep by 'er fire if the wevver wos bad, if I could get a space betwixt 'er cats by the embers, that wos.

Then I got a job o' sorts, working for a cooper wot made ale barrels, runnin' errands and deliverin' barrels t' the brewers. He made out t' be me uncle but he weren't. Didn't treat me much better than wot Ailfred done but winter wos cummin' an' I needed somewhere warm t' sleep didn't I? So I stayed tho I wos on'y allowed t' sleep in the kennel

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wiv the dogs. At least it wos warm an' I liked them dogs better'n Scally's cats. I still 'ad t' do a bit o' thievin' cos there weren't never much food cummin' my way, wos there? I made too friends: a boy called Mark wot wos in much the same straits as me an' a scruffy little dog wot I called Little Beggar cos wotever food we got, the dog begged fer a share, didn't he? I still got Beggar tho I ain't seen Mark fer a twelvemonth. Reckon the sheriff got him - he wos never fast at runnin' like I wos.

Course in the end I wos got by Master Jude, weren't I? He court me callin' his crippled bruvver names. Made us appelejise. It wos worf it tho cos Master Seb terned out kind and now I lives wiv 'em, don't I? Master Jude an' Mistress Em take a berch rod t' me bum sometimes but Master Seb never does tho I vex 'im often wiv me terable penmanship an' Beggar don't help when he pisses on the floor - or worser.

So this is me Jack Tabor at yer service best I can. An' Beggar sends you a tail-wag. Ope you can read me spellin'. Blame Tom if you can't cos he wos s'posed t' 'elp.

JACK

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most worthy reader, greetings.

I am in haste, as always, but I have to tell you the latest gossip that I overheard at the Conduit in Cheapside where we fetch our water.

Nessie was with me as usual and neither of us could believe our ears. King Edward has a new mistress! And is she some high born lady? No. Nothing like it. She is Alderman Lambert's wife! You remember him? The elderly goldsmith from Walbrook who was widowed three years since. Well, not so long ago, though just after his time of mourning ended with his deceased wife Margaret's year's-mind – and a fine do that was; St Stephen's church was packed to bursting with those who would pay their respects and remember Margaret, Alderman Lambert married again.

His new wife, Elizabeth Shore, was a third of his age and such a one for playing the fine lady. She never gave a fig for the Sumptuary laws, dressing in velvets, silks and pearls far above her station. She must have near paupered her husband in a few weeks.

Well, apparently, so Dame Ellen Langton said and she's rarely mistaken, Mistress Lambert's gorgeous attire attracted notice in the highest places. Lord

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Hastings espied her first but he stood no chance of forming relations, not once the king saw her. Edward took a fancy to her straightway. Even gave her a new name, calling her His Dearest Jane. I suppose that was to avoid confusion with the queen, also Elizabeth.

Now Jane, that hussy, reverting to her maiden name, Shore, divides her time betwixt King Edward's bedchamber and a fine new house, provided by the king for her and her poor cuckold husband, in Bishopsgate Street. You should see her, decked in expensive furs, bejewelled and – to our minds – bedamned, processing along Cheapside with her nose in the air. These days she's far too high and mighty to give good day even to Dame Ellen, who knew her when she still wore tail-clouts. The king calls her 'his merry harlot'. We who meet at the Conduit have another name for her that I won't repeat. She'll get her just reward one day, mark me.

No time for more now but I had to share such scandalous news with you. Is it not a fine carry-on?

Written this morning in March in my bedchamber at Paternoster Row. I pray you, don't tell Sebastian. He so disapproves of gossip.

From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed reader I greet you well

It is long since I wrote last – forgive my tardiness I pray you – and the year is turning, God be thanked. The chills of winter and the cold days of spring are in retreat as the sun gains strength and the days lengthen. We feared that the joyous celebration of May Day might come and go without the blossoms that bear its name having opened their pale flowers but the sun shone and the buds burst timely.

I welcome the warmth that soothes my very bones. The fresh hedgerows lift my spirits, verdant with more hues and shades of green than even my artist's skill can put a name to, every bush and tree clad in its finest summer livery. This morn I sat beneath my favoured oak tree by the Horse Pool at Smithfield and drew the flower-dappled mead before me, birdsong delighting my ears and the perfume of a clump of bluebells heady on the air. I plucked the first wild rose of the year from the briar, delicate as a virgin's blush, butterfly petalled, golden hearted, and drew it in fine detail, how the centre is like a dainty crown, honey-jewelled. A bee came to share my pleasure in the flower, examining it yet more closely than I in his quest for nectar and I thought how wondrously well God had made his Creation, that insect and blossom can live in such beautiful harmony.

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Matters are not always so harmonious in the world of men – a sadness indeed – and in our own household, Tom Bowen and Jack Tabor are become a source of conflict of late. Jack has grown apace since Christmas last, his voice breaking, his clothes and shoes continuously outgrown. By our best reckoning – since the year of his birth be uncertain – he is aged around fourteen but by his looks, I now wonder if he has not two or even three years more than that. Whatever the case, he and Tom – whom we used to believe was by far the elder – behave like a pair of well matched fighting cocks, forever sizing each other up and venting their aggressive temperaments on the least excuse. Jude says we should beat the pair of them, knock their ill-humours out of them but I suspect he be jesting. He was so like them just a few years since and beating made no difference to him. Em has a better means of cooling their tempers. Every wise stationer, with so much flammable paper in his shop, keeps a full water bucket to hand in case of fire. Em uses ours regularly these days to douse the flames of anger betwixt the lads. A cascade of cold water poured upon their hot heads works well indeed and no welts nor bruises need tending after.

As I write this in the parlour – when I had intended to do the Accounts, my weekly trial – I hear raised voices coming from the workshop. Did I refill the bucket after their last spat? I hope so. Young Kate’s footsteps approach in haste and she will knock upon the parlour door. There. I knew it. Fear not, lass, I am coming to separate those sparring alley cats. Such is life.

I bid you farewell in haste. God’s blessings be upon you this fine Saturday in May. Written at Paternoster Row.

From Jude Foxley, Master Scrivener and Citizen of London

I give you greetings

This morn I had to box their ears: those two rascals, Tom and Jack. They were come to blows again and this time at the shop door where passers-by could see. They will get the Foxleys a bad name and there's no point in waiting for that brother of mine to correct them as he ought. He's far too soft. So I clouted the pair of them around their heads, set their ears ringing, just as Matthew Bowen, my old master – may God rot his bones – used to do to me.

I can but think Seb's master, Richard Collop, must have been so lenient upon my brother that he treats Tom and Jack in a likewise over-kindly manner. But then our father – God rest his soul – had to pay Master Collop exceeding well, to take on Seb as his apprentice and perhaps he paid for more gentle treatment of my brother also. I do not know, friend, whether you were aware that in those days Seb was badly lame and with his shoulder all askew, such that they called him a three-legged toad – because he walked using a staff and his back looked

somewhat hunched. That's when I learned my proficiency at boxing ears, in defending my little brother from those who tormented him, throwing stones and dung at him as well as insults. Seb was pitiful in his youth but markedly improved these days, after that 'miracle' which came to pass in a warehouse fire. Of that, I have never quite learned the whole truth for he refuses to speak of it.

Anyhow. Apprentices. Oh, aye, as I was saying, Seb served his term of indenture with Richard Collop and the old man certainly had the best of the deal for, even without training, my brother had a prodigious talent for drawing and illumination, as well as being the most accurate of scribes. (Don't tell him I said these things, else his bloody head will no longer fit his cap.) Seb never attended song-school, as I did, since they wouldn't take a cripple for fear his disability was a sign that the Devil had his soul. That was their loss as Seb has the voice of an angel. (Don't tell him I told you that either.) So father tutored him at home before he was apprenticed, and I think our parent must have been an excellent teacher for Seb's Latin, knowledge of English and the world around are all better than mine.

Also, I suppose he put all his strength into learning; effort that I put into drinking, wenching, cock-fighting and football, as all other apprentices do. I remember, one winter, a crowd of us was playing rough-and-tumble in the snow over at Smithfield

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and what was Seb doing, you ask? He sat beneath a tree and divided his time betwixt drawing us at our antics, until his fingers became too cold to hold his silver point, then he sat reading his notes on Aristotle, like a bloody Cambridge scholar. All that beautiful snow, waiting to be enjoyed to the full and my brother preferred to study! But that's my little brother's way. I suppose it has paid off, all that effort, now the Duke of Gloucester is his patron.

Not that I be in the least envious, you understand. Seb still has his crosses to bear: that moody mare of a wife, for one. And those unruly lads are ultimately his bloody responsibility, not mine. I am content with my life, I tell you. I have friends aplenty – more than my brother – and we share good times. Which calls to mind my appointment with them at the Panyer Inn, so fare you well, friend.

Written at the Foxley workshop in Paternoster Row, London.

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most obliging reader, greetings

I am hoping that you may assist me, as a friend, for I am in need of your sound advice.

I fear I have got myself in such a tangle, my heart-strings tied in so many knots, that I know not which way to turn. You see, I am in love. But the man upon whom I would pin my devotion is not my husband.

There. I have said the worst.

I know everyone thinks Seb is the finest of men and, aye, there's no denying he is a respectable, upright citizen and a gentle soul. But he is so dull, dull, dull. Worse than ditchwater. And he cares more for his work than he does for me; feels greater concern for his customers' hopes than he does for mine. Is it any wonder I take pleasure in knowing another man loves me?

Gabriel Widdowson. Just writing his name sends tingles down my spine.

He is our journeyman so we needs be careful or Seb might find out. Our love consists of a brush of fingertips here, a smile there and, rarely, a stolen kiss. How I wish it could be more –so much more. But I am a married woman, wed to a husband who excites me less than washing linen. What can I do? My heart cannot be shackled and chained when it would fly –

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fly into the manly, welcoming embrace of my lover. If only he was my lover. I can wish it, can't I? Surely, wishing is no sin. It's not as if we have lain together, is it? No chance of that.

I simply want your advice, my friend: how can I spare my poor heart the misery of knowing Gabriel lies beneath the same roof as I do every night, yet we may not touch? How can I live with the man I married who disappoints me so and not pine for a real man's kisses? I have not betrayed my husband but, in truth, I wonder if he would even notice, if I did so. Probably not, being so much wrapped up in his work, he never knows whether I am here or elsewhere. He loves me no longer so what harm would it cause if Gabriel and I...

Best not write more. I pray you, keep my secret. Say naught to anyone for rumour travels faster than fire through this city. Destroy this letter when you have read it but send me word, if you can advise me, to Dame Ellen's house in Cheapside and she will keep it safe until I visit her next. God bless you for harkening to my plea.

Written this perplexing and anguished day in my kitchen at Paternoster Row.

Jack's story part 3

I don't like wot's going on much these days, do I? Sometimes I wish I wos still roaming the streets like wot I use to, just me and Beggar. Food's good tho an a warm bed but I fink I might not stay much longerer wiv Master Seb. It's Tom see. Me an him don't get on no more. He finks he's betterer than wot I am just cos he's a proper 'prentice wiv bits o' paper t' say so an I ain't.

He's always making trouble wiv me, 'noving me an fings, ain't he? I fink he hates it cos I'm getting biggerer than wot he is tho he's s'posed to be olderer than wot I am. P'raps he ain't. P'raps I'm olderer than wot I fink. Anyway, he picks fights wiv me all the time. You'd fink he'd learn tho, cos I always beat him. I can't count how many times I gived him a bloody nose an a fick lip. He's slowerer than a mouldy cabbage an fights like a little maid, kicking an scratching, not like a man wiv fists, like wot I does.

Trouble is, it don't matter that Tom always starts it, we boff get a beating from Mistress Em's broom, or Master Jude's belt. Never from Master Seb tho. I fink he's soft. He's the on'y one wot don't kick Beggar about neever. An'

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Mistress Rose is kindly an' all. She's good to look at too, ain't she? Tom oggles at her every chance he gets. I know he as filthy dreams bout her, the dirty bugger. I fink I might tell Master Jude an then he'll get a good beating fer sure. If Tom dropped down dead t'morrow I'd be so happy but he won't, will he? Orribal folks never do. I just ope when his 'prentiship's done he'll clear orf an I won't never see him agen. I ope Master Seb don't keep him on as a journeyman but nowing my luck he prob'ly will.

There. I've done enuff riting fer now and made meself mis'rabal finking bout Tom. Don't be s'prised if you get word I've runned away cos I've ad enuff o' bloody Tom, ain't I? Me an Beggar boff. Don't tell Master Seb wot I telled yer cos it's secret. Scuse me spelling, yer now I ain't no good at it.

JACK

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most worthy reader, greetings to you.

I know I can trust to your discretion that you will not tell my husband what I write here. In truth, I am becoming concerned upon an important matter. I have mentioned before how Sebastian seems more enamoured of a well-written manuscript than of me but I must point out that he does perform his marital duties – if rarely – as holy Church requires. Yet I fail to get with child. My monthly flowers returned once more this morning, dashing my hopes yet again. We have been wed for more than two years and there is no sign. Does the fault lay with me or him? Of course, the law assumes the fault is mine but I do wonder if that is the case.

Dame Ellen and Nell Warren know much about such matters and tell me not to worry. 'These things take time, being in God's hands,' they say, urging patience. But I am worried. From what she has said, my good friend Rose conceived a child upon an instant, even though the outcome was not intended, so why is it taking Seb and me so long? I wonder if it will ever come to pass.

Could it be that God, in His wisdom, does not think we would be worthy parents so does not grant us this blessing. It does seem likely that Seb would fail

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as a father in correcting and disciplining a child as he should – Tom and Jack are evidence enough of his shortcomings in such matters – but it would be harsh indeed to deny me the chance of motherhood because Seb cannot bring himself to beat the young ones as the Bible says he ought. After all, I can fulfil that office readily enough, just as I have often shown with my trusty broom.

Or could it be that God is sparing us the sorrow of babes who do not live to make old bones? Rose's little boy, Edward she named him, died at a few months of age and she says she wept for days and weeks after and still thinks of him with great fondness and misses him. She tells me she prays daily for his little soul, taken so untimely. And I never knew 'til now that Dame Ellen also lost two children. I had thought her son Dick – he who lives at Deptford with his wife, Bella, and their little daughter, Janey – was an only child but no. Dame Ellen had other babes after Dick: Audrey and Elizabeth, known as Bessie. Audrey took sick of the measles when she was five years old and passed the ailment to tiny Bessie who was not yet three. Both little maids died of it within the week. Such sadness these women have had to bear. Perhaps barrenness is a lesser sorrow after all. But I pray my womb shall quicken soon, even so. Your prayers, if you grant them, may aid us, both me and Seb.

I beg you, say naught of these matters to my husband as it is not a fitting subject for a man to learn of.

Written in disappointment upon this Lord's Day in my bedchamber at Paternoster Row.

From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed Reader, I greet you well and with such news as you will find a matter of the greatest wonderment.

I find it hard indeed to believe it be true at all, that my brother Jude – the most certain bachelor in the City of London – has proposed marriage to a woman. He who swore that the married state was only ever for fools and lackwits has done the unthinkable and broken his own vow of eternal bachelorhood.

Mind you, my friend, the beauteous Rose Glover might put the hardest of hearts to the test, so charming and lovesome is her nature. Jude will be the most fortunate of men in taking so sweet a woman to wife. I am delighted at the news as, no doubt, are you?

For certain, my brother will now mend his ways and be less of a drunkard and a gambler. If anyone can entice him away from the taverns and those dissolute companions of his, Rose surely can. We all raised a cup to their future happiness together when Jude proposed all unexpectedly. I held my breath, wondering if Rose would accept an offer from a man she had known such a brief while and who, outwardly at least, has little to recommend him but good looks and pair of fine red boots that he won at dice. Perhaps the boots tilted the balance? Who can say? For myself, the hearts of women remain forever a mystery. Whatever my

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reservations, Rose said aye, and they sealed their betrothal with a kiss.

That they will be happy, I feel certain, for Rose makes any man glad just to gaze upon her. She has suffered hardship but seems to bear no lasting scars, rather a loving, open heart is hers. How pleased I am that my brother has been especially singled out as the recipient of her devotions. I pray that he will rightly deserve them in time. She is a fine woman indeed. I pray God that Jude will not fail her. He must be forever kindly and gentle with her, else I shall ne'er forgive myself that I brought them together. At least sweet Rose will ever have a loving brother-by-marriage to turn to, if need be. I ask God's blessings upon them and upon your good self.

Written in bewilderment at Paternoster Row upon St Stephen's feast day.

From Gabriel Widowson, late of
London, now biding upon the ST
BARTHOLOMEW in Bristol.

To Master Sebastian Foxley,
Master Jude and Mistress Emily at
Paternoster Row in London.

Greetings my dearest friends and
well-wishers.

I wanted to assure you of my safe departure
from London with your great assistance, for
which mercy I shall be forever in your debt.
I have joined my brother Raphael's crew,
as you will realise, and have voyaged to
Bruges in Burgundy, to Lubeck of the Hanse
merchants and to Bergen in Norway. From
this last port of call I enclose a token of my
esteem which I trust will be acceptable: an
amber pendant for Mistress Emily.

Our ship is now moored at Bristol – or
Bristow as they call it here – and come
springtime we will be setting out for the
northern seas. We found in Bergen their tax
on dried codfish was raised so high that it
was hardly possible to make a profit thereby

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so the Bristol merchants would have us sail to Iceland instead to buy the fish. As of last year's end, it was said the Hanse merchants were trying to prevent the Icelanders selling to us, forcing them to deal only with themselves. If this proves true, we may have to learn to catch our own fish.

I am eager to sail to this distant land. Raff has been there before and he tells me the sun never sets in Iceland in the summer and I would see this wonder for myself. Others of the crew say, conversely, the sun never rises in midwinter. What a strange place it must be. There are tales of fire-breathing mountains, great rivers of ice that never melt, boiling, sulphurous mud pools and spouts of steam straight from hell's mouth. It sounds terrible but I am sure God will protect us as His Known Men from anything the devil may conjure to frighten us.

I am learning the ways of the seas and how to know where we are by observing the stars, the winds and currents. Raff says I am an apt pupil and will make a good navigator. The crew are rough fellows of many nations: Genoese, Norwegians, Irish and Icelanders, as well as many good Englishmen. We even have a man who hails from Abyssinia whose skin is blacker than the best oak-gall inks which you use. We call him 'Rook' because of his colour and because we cannot pronounce his true name as he would wish it. He says 'Rook' is a good name and he

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is content with it. I think he is a fine God-fearing fellow.

I trust your business prospers, masters, and that my letter finds you all in good health. If you would reply to me, any carrier to Bristol will know Master Richard Ameryk under whose colours we sail and trade. He will keep the correspondence for me until my return, if the BARTHOLOMEW is at sea but, if you write in haste, I may not yet have sailed for Iceland. The seas freeze over in winter and we must await the thawing of the ice.

I am sad that all our exchange of news can only be in writing these days. It would cheer me so to see you and share your company once more. Who can say? One day it may be possible. Please send me a word or two when you may. Trusting in the Lord God.

Your servant and ever indebted friend, Gabriel.

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most worthy reader, greetings to you.

I had to write to you, since you are away from London at present, to be certain you had heard the latest news. How shocked we all are to learn that King Edward has condemned his own brother. No, not my lord Richard, Duke of Gloucester – he that is my husband's patron – but the Duke of Clarence! Clarence has been imprisoned in the Tower of London since last summer for some crime or other – in truth, the gossips are confused as to the true reason – but it was thought the king intended to keep him there for some while, to teach him a stern lesson concerning the past trouble he has caused. Rumour said that Clarence had been dabbling in necromancy and the Black Arts, attempting to foresee his brother's death. I don't know if it is true but, if it is, Clarence is hardly the first person of royal blood to tamper with such things.

Do you recall when the queen's mother, the lady Jaquetta, was accused of witchcraft a few years ago? Of course, she denied it. Who would do otherwise in the face of such an accusation? And she was let off for want of any definite evidence against her but some of us had our suspicions. Dame Ellen Langton, who was my mistress as you will remember,

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was convinced that the woman was guilty and she should know. Dame Ellen, as the finest silkwoman in the city – if not in all England – made girdles, woven of silk and gold thread, for the lady, as well as fringing for a coverlet of tapestry work and various other exquisite embellishments. Dame Ellen met the lady on two occasions: once before her daughter became queen and again since. She told me the woman had an evil air about her, a miasma that was unmistakable and made Dame Ellen's blood run chill.

Lady Jaquetta has been dead some years now but Dame Ellen says she could never trust her daughter, our queen, for she has the same look about her. I have never met the queen and if Dame Ellen has such an opinion of her, then I do not wish to although, as a silkwoman, I would never turn down a royal commission if it was offered to me. In the meantime, we all wonder if the queen has a hand in this matter concerning Clarence. How pleasing to a witch it would be to turn brother against brother.

But I expect it will all come right in the end. Either the king will see sense or the Duke of Gloucester will convince him to release their brother of Clarence. I cannot see it ending otherwise, unless you know more of this matter than we do here in London.

May God's blessings be upon you and all those you hold dear.

Written this chill January day at Paternoster Row in the City of London

Post scriptum. Recalling my previous letter to you, I believe your kind prayers and mine may have borne fruit. For the present though, I have confided in no

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one, not even Rose and certainly not my husband, but I believe I may be with child at last, praise God and thanks be given to the holy Virgin Mother. I beg you, speak not of this until I am certain.

From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed Reader, I greet you well and with the most pleasing tidings to tell.

I have been granted the most singular opportunity and unaccountable honour of painting the likeness of my lord Richard, Duke of Gloucester. He has returned from the North to attend Parliament and deal with other weighty matters, yet he took the time to summon me to his residence at Crosby Place, to enquire as to whether I might make a portrait of him.

Have you heard of this latest fashion of portraiture? In Burgundy, so I learned, it is becoming the mark of affluence and the symbol of power for a man to have his image preserved in paint for posterity, such that his descendants may know and reverence his likeness in times to come. Lord Richard said that he would have his portrait done for by in these troubled times, a man may never know the hour of his death, and he wishes his children to have some memory of him, should the worst come to pass afore they be of age to remember him properly. Is that not a fine and thoughtful gesture?

As to whether my poor skills be sufficient to execute such a commission, only time and my efforts will tell. I have an ability to draw a good likeness but I question whether I can convey a man's true worth, his nature – his very soul, if you will – with naught but pigments and brushwork as my tools to achieve it.

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Can a man's integrity be rendered in paint? I know not but I shall try my utmost not to fail in my commission and disappoint the duke with some lifeless-looking image that may bear some resemblance to him but lack all vital spirit. To fail would also be to disappoint Emily – who is ever eager that I should improve my reputation and standing within the guild – and Jude – whose concern for the fattening of our purse goes without saying.

God has seen fit to grant me this benevolence, a chance to serve Lord Richard once more, and I thank Him for this marvellous opportunity, if only I may fulfil it. In the meantime, I crave pardon if I seem too immodest and self-important but my delight in realising Lord Richard's great faith in my abilities has quite given me airs. A sin, I know, and I shall duly make confession of my conceit.

In the meantime, I ask God's blessings upon you, dear Reader.

Written in the workshop at Paternoster Row – when I ought to have been concentrating my efforts on the work in hand.

From Jude Foxley, Master Scrivener and Citizen of London

I give you greetings, friend

Have you ever wished you could have been born wealthy? No doubt you have, as have I – too many times and particularly of late. I have such money troubles as would make your hair stand upon its end. Bloody dice: do they ever fall in my favour? Of course they don't. It's damned unfair.

Take my brother Seb for instance. Here we are, born to the same parents with just two years betwixt us, yet I work my fingers to the very bone, scribbling frantically every day of my life to earn a pittance, and probably shall do until my eyes go blind and my hands seize up with the rheumaticks of old age. And there he is, consorting with nobility, eating at their board and guzzling their wine and all the while being paid a bloody great purseful of money for the privilege. How is that fair when I work just as hard – and harder – as he does?

I tell you, friend, life is never fair. Two nights ago, I laid my wager on a certainty. Bare knuckles, it was, over the river in

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Bankside. This fellow – a blackamoor, black as bloody seacoal, he was and built like a barbican – he'd already knocked three hefty buggers, stevedores from the Steelyard, on their backsides. One lay senseless, another bleeding from a broken snout and lost teeth and the third was howling with a broken arm. So when this skin-and-bone slip of a lad steps up to take on the blackamoor, I laid my bet, as did we all. A sure thing, you would say, and so it should have been. Now I realise it was all a fraud, a bloody cheat. One tap on the nose as wouldn't upset a child and the blackamoor falls down; doesn't so much as twitch. We all made complaint but our money was already gone, disappeared like mist into the night, along with the blackamoor, the weedy lad and the bugger who'd accepted our wagers – all gone the instant we looked away.

I bid farewell to five bloody marks. Five! As if I could afford to lose such a sum. Now, if I was rich, I should not have to worry so much but in all likelihood, if I was rich, I'd have bloody won the wager, not lost it. Isn't that how life goes? The rich get ever wealthier and poor buggers like me get a slap in the face, as you might say. So now, on this Tuesday eve, my purse is as empty as a bottomless bucket and money will not be forthcoming until my brother hands out the wages on Saturday. With his fat purse from the duke for his new commission – a painting of some sort – he could be more generous

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but you know Seb: always wanting to put money by 'just in case'. In case of what, who can say? All I know is that I need coins in my purse – now! If you might lend me a few shillings, just until Saturday, I would be so much obliged unto you, dear friend.

Written in desperation at the Panyer Inn in Paternoster Row

From Rose Glover

Greetings unto you, dear reader

I am putting my thoughts in writing that I might have clearer sight concerning my feelings which are quite muddled at present. I have consented to wed Master Jude when he asked me. That a respectable citizen should want to marry the likes of me, who once earned her bread by offering herself for sale and bore a child out of wedlock, seemed to set a whole new life before me. I like Master Jude very much, though at times he plays the rogue, and am determined to be a worthy wife to him. And yet...

To be truthful, he is not the man I love but the object of my deepest affections is already wed to another. At least being married to Master Jude will keep me close to him. You know of whom I write, do you not? Am I tormenting myself, wanting ever to be near him yet unable to have him? Perhaps. Maybe in my inmost heart I think there might still be a chance for me, even though he made plain from our first meeting, when he promised to teach me to read so I might better myself, that he will never be an unfaithful husband. Could that situation ever change, I wonder?

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Strange as it seems, despite my envy of her, I have a firm friendship with his wife, Mistress Emily. I cannot betray her trust so I bury my feelings deep but sometimes it is so hard, watching him attempting to please her and she so cold towards him. Then I long to put my arms about him and tell him of my love.

Does he love her? It is difficult to know for certain. That he is fond of her and has the greatest respect for her is not in doubt but sometimes – just occasionally – he looks at me and I see in his eyes what might have been, if we had met before he wed her. Am I imagining it? Is it wishful thinking on my part? I do not know.

I shall wed Master Jude as I have promised. In my body and person I shall be a true and loyal wife to him. But I cannot give him my heart for it belongs to another forever.

I pray you, speak not of this but hold it in confidence for me as I shall ever be a confidant to you, if you should ask it of me. May God keep you in His loving care and bless you always.

From Thomas Bowen, stationer's apprentice but almost journeyman of London.

Greetings to you.

At last I am nearing the end of my time as an apprentice and it cannot come soon enough. Do not be misled. I have no quarrel with my master, Sebastian Foxley. He once saved me from near death when my previous master's place blew up – which is no lie – and I owe him everything. He has taught me well, treated me fairly and even made me known to the Duke of Gloucester, so I cannot complain of that.

But all my anguish comes from but one source. Jack Tabor. A menace indeed. I hate him and his disgusting habits. He is the bane of my life. Every time he speaks it is but to argue and contradict every word I say. He cannot open his mouth but to lie and curse – usually about me. And when he loses the arguments, I suffer buffets from his fists. He broke my nose last month, the devil. I also have to share our garret space in the loft with him and he is the worst of bed-fellows, farting and snoring and grunting in

his sleep. That mangy cur of his is no better, the flea-bitten wretch. I wish they both would die.

You know Jack has taken a liking to our new apprentice, Kate Verney – she whose father is a wealthy mercer and her uncle was once Lord Mayor – more than a liking, the dirty toad. I’ve seen the way he looks at her. Aye, and he eyes Mistress Rose much the same way, as if he can hardly keep from tearing off her clothes. Not that he ever will in either case. He’s too cowardly to do any more than leer.

Now me, I’m ten times the man he is. I’ve lost count of the Bankside doxies I’ve tumbled. To their great delight, I might add. Pay for it? Indeed I do not. What need when they crowd at my door and fight each other to gain my attentions? If you see me there, over the river, it will be with the prettiest harlots swarming around me so I have to push them away. Man that I am, I have not the time to pleasure them all.

Forgive the shortness of my letter. Master Jude has ordered me to rule more pages for him and I’ll be feeling his belt across my backside if they’re not done before dinner. Jack makes out that he’s too stupid and clumsy to do it properly, so I have to do it. I’ll thrash the idle rascalion later and have my revenge.

Therefore, written in haste in the Foxley workshop.

From Kate verney, Master Foxley's apprentice
Greetings Dear Reader

I know we haven't met but the others here at Paternoster Row write to you and trust you, so I hope you do not mind if I do too. My name is Katherine verney and I am fourteen summers old, so my father, Edmund verney, has apprenticed me to Master Sebastian, that I may learn the arts of scribing and illumination. Papa did well by me to choose such a gentle and skilful Master and I am so happy here in my new home. Also, since Papa lives but a few streets away in walbrook, Master Seb takes me to visit him quite often on a Saturday, when we only work in the morning, so I don't get homesick.

Mistress Emily - Master's wife - is strict with me but Master isn't. She's always telling him he's too soft hearted with us apprentices. Tom is the eldest and nearly finished his apprenticeship. He's not a very pleasant lad, always getting Jack - the next apprentice, sort of - into trouble. I don't think they like each other very much. Tom is forever boasting about the women he's bedded - doxies he calls them - but me and Jack don't think he's ever done it. Jack helps out in the workshop but isn't a proper apprentice, as Tom's always reminding everyone, since he used to be a street urchin until the Foxleys gave him a home. Me and Jack and his dog, Little Beggar, are all good friends. The

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other day, me and Jack kissed behind the pig sty. Not a kiss of greeting but a proper one. I know we shouldn't and we nearly got caught by Mistress Rose, who lives here too. I don't know if she would tell Mistress Em, if she did see us. I pray not, else Mistress Em would take her broom to the pair of us and, worse yet, Master Seb might send me back to Papa in disgrace, as would be his right. I know Jack was of a mind to do more than just kiss me but I didn't allow it. I don't know if I ever will. He's sweet but I have to keep myself pure for the husband Papa will choose for me one day. I wonder who it will be? I hope he will be as kindly as Master Seb.

The other day, Master Seb took me and Tom along to the Stocks Market with our drawing stuff. We had to sketch the creatures and people we saw, whatever caught our fancy. I drew a fine palfrey that was tethered there, taking care to get his legs to look as they should - not as Tom's likeness of the poor creature that looked to have trestles for legs. (I don't think Tom's much good at drawing really). I also drew the man who was selling hot pies from his tray. He had such a merry face and didn't mind standing still while I drew him, so long as Master Seb bought a pie from him - which he did. I don't think he minded the expense as we all shared the pie and it warmed us and tasted very well - apple and quince, it was. I hope I may

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show my drawings to Papa next time we visit, so he can see how much my work is improving with Master's guidance and teaching. I'll never be as good as Master, though, he is so clever. If he draws a horse it looks like it might leap right off the page and nuzzle your hand. And have you heard? Duke Richard wants him to paint his portrait. I'm not sure what that is but it sounds very important and Master Seb is so pleased about it. So is Master Jude because, he says, the duke always pays well.

written with Master Seb's permission upon this Friday before supper.

From Dame Ellen Langton, widow
of John Langton, citizen and
tailor of London

Greetings to you

I have news and must tell you, though as yet it isn't common knowledge, but a young acquaintance of mine is with child at last, I suspect. And high time she should be too. I know not what that husband of hers had been about: remiss in his marital duties, that's what. Of course, I warned her it was a likely consequence of marrying such a one as he, always with his nose in a book and his head in the clouds. Anyway, naturally it's always the woman who gets blamed if she fails to conceive but in this case we all know who's truly at fault for this long wait for a babe. But it's done now, God be praised.

On other matters, have you heard the latest about the new Lord Mayor, Humphrey Hayford by name and a goldsmith by trade? Well, such goings-on. His daughter has run off with a baker's lad, or so they say. The disgrace of it! If you ask my opinion, Master Hayford should resign as mayor forthwith. After all, if he can't keep his own house in order, what right has

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he to tell us good citizens how to conduct ourselves? And as for his wife, I saw her in Cheapside the other day and, lordy, such airs and graces! You should have seen her: far too high and mighty to give me 'good day' even though I've seen her squatting on the birthing stool, cursing like a fishwife, to bring that very same absconding daughter into this world. There's nothing refined and elegant about a woman in the labours of childbirth, I can tell you.

And what of my neighbour, the widow Joan Dawson? She only tells me she's about to wed her fourth husband – at her age! It's quite unseemly. She's as old as me – if not older – and her new man is but three and thirty! It's shameful. Mind you, when she introduced him to me, I could understand the appeal. He is comely indeed and has such a pair of thighs upon him – if you take my meaning – I'd take him on myself, given half a chance. Not that I said so to her. I give it six months before she drops dead of fatigue and he inherits all her property. That's all it is: he's marrying her for her money though foolish Joan claims they're in love. As if pigs might fly to the moon and back.

One last piece of news before I close. Have you heard about King Edward imprisoning his brother? Well now, the brother is going to stand trial for treason! His own brother! What a to-do and they say the queen is behind it, which I can well believe,

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knowing her sort. Must close now. Wishing you good health and a prosperous year ahead.

Written at my place in Cheapside in the City

From Mistress Emily Foxley

Most worthy reader, I give you greetings.

This week past has been such a whirl of activity – some good, some bad.

Afore St Bartholomew's Fayre commenced, Dame Ellen Langton named me as her successor in her silk-working business. Is that not marvellous tidings? Of course, I shall now have to become a femme sole. This means Seb will have naught to do with how I conduct the work and a good thing too. I have no need of his help. He knows less of running a business than a newborn. Which reminds me by the way, have you seen my babe? Is he not a wonder? And such a fine little fellow as ever was born. I have hopes that he will outshine his father in every way.

Another most excellent occurrence was the unexpected return of Gabriel Widowson. Do you recall him? He has to go by the name of Gideon Waterman these days and wear an eye patch to conceal the mismatched colour of his eyes that so marks him out but underneath the subterfuge is my Gabriel as of old. I feared – needlessly – that he might have forgotten how it was betwixt us but he has not. In truth, the long absence we have suffered has made the flames of love burn ever brighter.

I will not dwell upon the circumstances of it but it became a matter of urgency that I be bedded by a lusty man. I knew not whether Gabriel's religious beliefs would allow it yet either they are no bar to love or else his love for me is too strong to be denied. I hope the latter but it matters not. All I shall say is that an hour in Gabriel's arms was more lovesome and exciting than a lifetime with my lacklustre husband. I shall cherish the memory forever, to warm me through chill nights and cold days without my lover. And if – as I hope – I am with child by him, that child shall be the dearest thing to me.

Of the bad happenings, I was nigh arrested and my friends, Beattie and Pen were taken in custody. I had no alternative but to pass a night in sanctuary at St Martin's – a den of thieves and felons, as you no doubt have heard. A terrifying thing, I tell you.

But no more of that. St Bart's fayre may prove a turning point in my life as an independent woman of business and one who has known true love, if only for a few fleeting moments. For the present though, I must behave as a respectable wife, much as my heart rebels against it.

Swear that you will never speak of these confidences I impart to you. Seb must not learn of this, at least, not until I have need of him no longer. Once my silk-business is successful, I will not care if he sees fit to banish me from bed-and-board at the Court of Arches. Our marriage is meaningless to me. It was a fearful error that I ever wed him – a man more suited to life as a monk than a husband. He touches me as if I am a holy relic, not a woman.

He holds more passion for a saint's image than for me and I'm tired of hearing, endlessly, that Holy Church forbids this, that and everything that should be betwixt man and wife. Gabriel did not refuse me because I still suckle the babe, but then he despises Church rulings anyhow – and wisely so. I hold less and less with them myself. Mayhap, if Gabriel returns, I shall join him in his religious beliefs which are more of good sense, it seems to me. That, of course, would be another impairment to our life together, if Seb thought I had heretical leanings. He would probably find it easier to overlook my love for another man than my contempt for his precious Holy Church.

Burn this letter when you have read it, worthy reader, I beg you. I have told no other of these matters but can no longer keep them to myself alone.

Written in utter confidence this September day at Paternoster Row in the City of London.

From Sebastian Foxley

Most esteemed Reader, I greet you well but with sorrowful tidings.

My dearest brother Jude has determined to leave London, giving no likely time for his return to us. It wrenches my heart to see him depart but he will have it so and elsewhere in England be insufficient distance for him. He would have the seas betwixt us. I know not why. I construe a number of possible reasons for his going.

It may be that I should not have brought our nephew Adam Armitage with me from Norfolk. I wonder if Jude feels I be attempting to displace him in the workshop or – worse yet – in my affections with a relative previously unknown to us. Mayhap, I should have written to Jude to discuss Adam joining us but I learned he was coming barely a matter of hours afore we left Foxley village.

You may have heard, dear Reader, something of our recent enforced sojourn in the village of my birth. Not only did we acquire Adam as a member of our household but Em – my dearest Em – bore us a son, may God be praised. We named him Richard after my gracious patron but we call him Dickon. Richard be a grand name that he may grow in to as years pass, God willing.

Little Dickon be a sweet-natured babe in the main. At first, I knew not what to do with so tiny a creature but I learned right swiftly how to hold him, although changing his tail-clouts remains beyond my skills, in truth. I love him to distraction and he brings a smile upon my lips at every turn. Naught gives me greater pleasure than to dandle him upon my knee and sing to him, or show him the beauties of God's Creation. Aye, he be too young to understand, you say, but I see his eyes shine as he beholds a bright flower or watches leaves dance in the breeze and 'tis ne'er too soon to appreciate such marvels.

But to return to Jude's leaving. If jealousy of Adam be not the cause, it may be the loss of respect he has suffered of late on two counts. For one, his marriage to Rose did not come to pass as intended, for most unfortunate reasons best not mentioned, but it must be a cause of sorrow for him. Rose would have made him a fine wife and a joyous. And then, resultant upon those reasons, our names were struck from the rolls of the Stationers' Guild. I returned from Norfolk to find the workshop shut up and my apprentices leading the most disreputable existence, frequenting gambling dens, ale-houses and – to my great disquiet and distress – bawdy houses in Bankside. Our reputation lay in the mire indeed. Whether Jude felt shame at what had come to pass, he has not divulged but that could be a third reason why he would leave London.

Yet I may forgive him any and all transgressions, if he would only stay. I have tried my hardest to persuade him but he listens not. He insists he would seek adventure; that he feels stifled by the city. He does not speak of jealousy or sorrow or shame as causes for departing. I can but wish him well and pray the

Lord God will have my brother ever in His care. In the meantime, my heart feels that a piece of it will be torn asunder by his distance from me and only Jude's safe return can ever mend its hurt.

I apologise for this sad missive and hope it does not dishearten you, esteemed Reader, when my hopes remain for a happier future. I beg God grant you every blessing.

Written in the parlour at Paternoster Row this Wednesday eve – with a heavy heart and moist eye.

From Adam Armitage late of Norfolk.

To a valued Reader.

Forgive my presumption in writing to you since I am but newly come to this great city of London and following the lead of my relation, Master Sebastian Foxley, who writes to you on occasion as a good friend, I trust you will not be offended if I do likewise.

I find London to be a startling place – so many people and such sights as I never saw in Norwich. It was there that I trained as a scrivener and came here in the hope of new and better prospects. Thus far, those hopes have not been disappointed. Seb's workshop appears well stocked and likely to make a profit once he has reasserted our position with the guild and custom resumes fully after St Bartholomew's Fayre ends. The fayre seems to rob the tradesmen in town every year and I wonder that they do not protest against its continuance for an entire week, to their detriment. Still, it has been the custom for centuries, so I'm told. At least Seb's wife, Emily, and her fellow silk-workers are making a profit from it.

However, my prospects as a scrivener look to be good, though Seb – may God bless him – is far too lenient a master. If I had behaved in Norwich as do the apprentices here, I should have been whipped soundly and every privilege withdrawn. Seb, a man of words, not actions, believes a verbal scolding will suffice to reprimand them for their scandalous misdeeds. Eventually, I might take it upon myself, once settled, to beat the young devils as they deserve.

Meantime, I have had the great good fortune to become acquainted with a woman, charming and generous as she is beautiful. You may know of her: Rose Glover, who lives beneath this very same roof. You may imagine my shock upon hearing that Seb's brother was supposed to marry her a few months ago but has not done so. I cannot believe any man would be either

foolish or heartless enough to abandon such a fine woman at the church door. But that is what he did! Can you credit it? I cannot. In the few days since we met, I have realised I would happily make good his error and wed her myself. The very sight of her pretty face lifts my heart and spirit – and other parts, if I be honest. Could she learn to love me?

Aye, well, that may not be so readily achieved. It does not take some university-educated scholar to understand the look in her eye whenever she sees Seb. Nor to read the truth behind her smiles for him; the way her hand rests lightly upon his whenever chance allows. Seb remains oblivious and, even if that was not so, he would remain steadfast in faithfulness to Emily, whether she deserves him or not. I could love Rose with my whole heart; yet she loves Seb who is blind to her feelings for him. How may this tangle resolve itself? I do not know but I had to tell someone of it. Valued Reader, I unburden my heart to you and trust you will not tell Seb or Rose of what I write here.

Wishing you well and grateful for your time.

Written at the Foxley place in London this August morn without, as yet, any custom in the shop. You would have our fullest attention, if you visited this day.

Yer nose I don't like riting but I must tells yer bout wot I seen at St Barts fagre. There wos them ackribats wot does tricks an fings an I wos wachin weren't I an I seen er. There she wos, me sista Maudie wot I ain't seen fer years an I tride to talk wiv er but she wos off to do a dance fing, all fancy like. I couldn't blieve it wos Maudie lookin like a lady wiv tits an all.

Then there wos Arry, weren't there. I didn't like im strait off cos e kept puttin is arm round er like e wos er bruvver or wurse - er man. An e played them bagpipe fings. Orrable noise it wos. I put me fingers in me lugholes, didn't I. But Maudie wos ~~butful~~ ~~bootful~~ - yer nose wot I mean. She wos luvly lookin, weren't she. I fink she needs me to prectect er from devils like Arry wot lusts after er wiv their filly ands grabbin at er.

Anyway I'm finkin of leavin Master Seb an joinin them ackribats cos we used to do balancin an stuff like that wen me an Maudie wos tegever for I comed to Lundun. I'm good at it an its betterer than sittin on me arse all day at a desk, ain't it. Anyfinks betterer than that. An I wouldn't ave to put up wiv Tom neever cos I ate im.

So now yer nose wot I'm finkin but don't tell nobody til I telled Master Seb I'm goin. I wonder if e will miss us. Probly not now e's got a new babe to fuss wiv.

I've rote a lot, ain't I but no more ritin fer me never.
Scuse me spellin like yusual.

JACK

**AND NOW TO THE REAL WORLD...
'ADVENTURES IN HISTORY'**

by
Toni Mount

**A Career as an Author of Historical
Fact & Fiction**

I've always been an avid believer in life-long learning – you're never too old to learn something new. In 2009, I'd finished my 'Master's' and wanted a new challenge. I'd just been asked to become a library volunteer here to run the Creative Writing Group that met once a month. I was already a member of the group and thought, if I was going to run it, I ought to know more about writing fiction, poetry, magazine articles and other literary forms. I'd done my first degree with the Open University on all things historical, so my new challenge became the completion of a two-year course with the OU, working towards a diploma in Literature and Creative Writing. In the second year, one of the modules involved planning a novel, creating characters and developing a plot and the final assignment had to be the first three chapters of your novel. I decided on a medieval whodunit; my hero Sebastian Foxley was born and my novel, *The Colour of Poison*, began to take shape.

The genre I chose made use of my love of history and my fondness for a good crime mystery. That was an easy decision. With my fellow OU students, we shared ideas and a few first paragraphs on the on-line forum – something which continued for a year after the course ended. There were some great stories coming along; everything from sci-fi and fantasy to WW2 spies and a romance in a pie factory. I only hope others have got into print as well. The course tutor was a harsh critic – which was good – but his biggest complaint was the name I chose for my hero: Sebastian Foxley. 'Sebastian is such a limp-wristed name.

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And as for Foxley; you can't use that. Readers will associate it with sneaky slyness. Not suitable at all for a hero', he wrote on my preliminary planning assignment. To me 'fox' implied cleverness and ingenuity but, just to please the tutor, for those first three chapters he became Seb Hartley – a local lad. But as soon as the course finished, he reverted to his original name – with the approval of the on-line forum group.

So how do you start writing a novel? There are probably as many ways as there are writers. Do you begin with an idea for the plot? Or do the characters come first? It's hard to say. My plot was so vague to begin with and couldn't really start to evolve until there were a couple of characters for the events to happen to. Seb and his elder brother Jude materialised quite quickly but I only got to know them as events unfolded. Somehow, I had to put myself into their world of 500 odd years ago. This wasn't as hard as it sounds: in the past, people were still the same – worrying about the family, work problems, their health, but still going to the pub, enjoying a bit of entertainment, finding romance. I just had to remember there was no technology. No one could travel faster than a galloping horse; letters took time to arrive and not everyone could read and write anyway. This meant solving the crime was going to have to be done without forensics, CSI, DNA, psychological profiling and all that. On the plus side, Seb was an artist who was used to noticing fine detail in the world around him, things others would miss.

So, with a few ideas about how the plot might go, I'm getting to know my characters. How should I plan my novel? By the time I reach chapter seventeen, will I remember the layout of the brothers' lodging house? If I described it as having a single, small high window, the size of a book in chapter two, I can't have the baddies charging through it en masse in chapter twelve. And what colour were the heroine's eyes? I read a great novel once, *The Physician* by Noah Gordon, based in Anglo-Saxon times. On page one, the hero had bright blue eyes but, by mid-story, the love interest was gazing, longingly, into the depths

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of his deep brown eyes – centuries before tinted contact lenses were invented. You might not think it matters but readers will notice, I promise you.

I read dozens of ‘how to’ books on the best ways of crafting a novel. James McCreet is of the opinion that before you write the first sentence, you should know every detail, every twist and turn of the plot and exactly how it will end. He recommends lists and charts and a filing system of index cards for every character. I tried that but the writing stalled, the story ideas just didn’t flow. However, I’m in good company. Stephen King, obviously a very successful novelist, says ‘careful planning ... and the spontaneity of real creation aren’t compatible. Plot is the good writer’s last resort’. I agree. I tried both methods and prefer King’s ‘seat-of-the-pants’ method; put your characters into a situation and let them go, see what they do with it. I know when my writing is going well because things happen that I didn’t plan; my characters do something unexpected that surprises or even shocks me. James McCreet warns against letting the characters ‘take over’ but I know that’s when the story really takes off. After all, the author is god and can always tone down the character’s dialogue or rearrange events afterwards. I’ve killed characters off, then changed my mind and resurrected them. They fall in love because I say so. They spread rumours I make up and fall foul of obstacles I put in their way. Unlike writing factual history, novels grant the author a licence to put words in mouths, thoughts in heads and emotions in hearts. Writing is fun. Here’s an excerpt from *Poison* that I wasn’t expecting:

‘Did you get the notes?’ Lord Lovell gave Gilbert Eastleigh’s apprentice a good shaking, though he already knew the answer from the apothecary himself. The little still-room was stifling; both were sweating.

‘N-no, my lord... there wasn’t time... folk came for vespers.’ Tom Bowen felt like a cat caught by a skinner, so scared he could barely control his limbs. His legs seemed to fold beneath him, knees jerking

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as one suffering a fit. In this light, the ferocious baron looked more wolf than man, teeth bared in a snarl. The lad doubted he would see another dawn.

'So you never asked him?' Tom shook his head. 'Did you search him?'

'I tried... I meant to... but...'

'But what?' Lord Lovell stood so close, Tom was sprayed with spittle every time the man spoke. 'Don't tell me the feeble cripple beat you off.'

'No, but...'

'But, but, but! Is that all you can say?' Lord Lovell shook him 'til his bones rattled in their sockets.

'I-I think...' Tom swallowed convulsively three or four times before he could get the words out. *'The knife you gave m-me... I m-might have k-killed him with it, my lord.'*

'What! I told you to threaten him with it; not to...' The man took a pace back, standing hands on hips, like a school master. *'Oh, that was very well done, wasn't it? And how will we retrieve the notes now, you stupid little fool? How can we ask him, if he's dead? Tell me that.'*

'I don't know, sir. I'm so sorry... I never meant to kill him... the knife... slipped. I meant to threaten him with it... make him tell me... but... my hand just...'

'And now he's dead!'

'I don't know. My master says he may live, my lord.'

'Then you'd best start praying that he does!'

Lord Lovell picked up his cloak from the stool; seemed about to leave. 'Eastleigh!'

The apothecary came hurrying in, looking panicky.

'You send a whimpering pup to do a man's job; what do you expect? I told you to do

it yourself, damn you. How dare you disobey me?'

The apothecary quivered visibly, wanting to say that was what an apprentice was for: to do the tasks he didn't want to do himself.

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Besides, it was the apprentice's fault the notes were lost in the first place, but he held his peace.

'You have a birch rod?'

Eastleigh nodded, fearing it would be applied to his own ageing body. God knows, Lovell looked capable of it; if he would soil his hands on so menial a task. 'Use it.'

The lord indicated Tom with an imperious gesture as the lad tried to shrink to invisibility in the corner.

Eastleigh sighed with relief.

'Then do what you can to ensure the damned cripple survives long enough to tell us where he's hidden the notes. See to it!'

I never planned for Lord Lovell, Gilbert Eastleigh, the apothecary, or Tom the apprentice to do or say these things but it fitted the story perfectly. However, one bit of paperwork I do keep is a chapter summary – a good idea so I don't get lost, going off track. *After* I've completed a chapter, I note down what went on, time, date and place, who was involved and anything important for later on. It makes it easy to check 'facts' I've invented and avoids inconsistencies – like those blue eyes that turned brown. My summaries also include notes for future chapters. As an example, in my new novel, *The Colour of Cold Blood*, Jude disappears in chapter 3 and doesn't return until chapter 10. I had to make sure he wasn't involved in any action in the intervening chapters [I did make a mistake on this and had to rewrite]

People's lives are complicated and readers like to have more than one story thread. *The Colour of Poison* focussed on Seb's efforts to save Jude from the gallows, to prove him innocent of their master's murder – that was the basic plot and the story could have been told in twenty pages or so. But Seb has a disability. How did medieval people react to this? He is also an artist, so what was it like to work at this craft? Through his work, he becomes involved with the Duke of Gloucester and a whole new storyline is born, involving a bit of dirty dealing and alchemy and there has to be some love interest. We meet

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the king, there is theft, arson and kidnapping – these last two incidents took me by surprise. You might think there aren't many ideas left for my subsequent novels. But don't worry.

So how do you make a character real for the reader? Each one should evolve and develop and your readers like to get to know them. Include little foibles because nobody's perfect. Seb likes using big words, head in the clouds except where his art is concerned and tries to please everyone which always upsets someone, usually the main female character, Emily. Jude swears and drinks too much. Let's look at young Jack. He's a snotty little street urchin when we first meet him in *Poison*. I introduced him because he could go to the worst and filthiest corners of London where Seb never could, but which needed to be investigated, so Jack does that for him. The lad and that scruffy little dog of his also provide a bit of light relief as the occasional contrast to dire events. I gave Jack a distinctive mode of speech too, in that he ends most of his dialogue with a question: 'Didn't I? Ain't I? Wasn't I?' etc. The youngster is dyslexic – not that the term was known then – so he'll never make a scribe and even Seb's saintly patience is stretched in trying to teach him his letters. And Jack's always eager for every mouthful of food on offer, having had a hard childhood when starvation was often a possibility. Jack, being ignorant, gives Seb the opportunity to explain stuff to him – sometimes just snippets that might interest the reader but also things the reader needs to know. Think of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, how dull and short those stories would be if Watson wasn't there to ask Sherlock to explain how he knew the doctor was an army medic, recently returned from Afghanistan, who wanted to share his flat – all within seconds of first meeting him. There's a reason why TV detectives have to have a side-kick.

Dame Ellen Langton, the Foxley brothers' landlady, was a real person named Dame Ellen Langwith. She was the widow of a tailor who ran her own business as both a tailoress and a silkwoman. She wrote her will in 1480, leaving almost

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everything to her apprentice tailor, John Brown. From the will, you really get a sense of the elderly woman, her belongings and circumstances. Some of her fellow gossips in the novels are friends to whom she made bequests in the will – Mary Jakes the draper’s wife is mentioned exactly in those words in both the will and the novels. From other documents of the time, I learned that Dame Ellen also had girl servant-apprentices, training to be silkwomen, though none are named. But one was John Brown’s sister. She became Emily Appleyard although I gave them a new surname because ‘Brown’ was too much like ‘Bowen’ [the murder victim and his family] and I try to avoid confusing names for the benefit of my readers. At the time, there were so many Edwards, Thomases and Johns but I keep them to a minimum – hence Sebastian, Jude, Gabriel, etc.

My next Seb Foxley mystery, *The Colour of Gold*, came about by accident, almost. I was already nearing the end of writing *The Colour of Cold Blood* when Glenn, who’d read *Poison*, asked me if Seb and Emily got married in the new book. I told him, no, they sort of had the wedding ‘off stage’ between novels. He said that was a waste of a great event that readers were bound to want to know about and experience: a medieval marriage. So I wrote *Gold*. It was only intended as an on-line, electronic 99p download. But my publisher wanted to treat it like a novel, even though it was so short. This story features a bequeathed gold livery collar to be worn by bridegrooms also came from a will of 1486 that I transcribed, though there is no evidence in this case that it was ever tampered with.

In *The Colour of Cold Blood*, the Foxleys return, now running their own business. The workshop employs a journeyman – someone who’s paid a daily wage – Gabriel Widowson. He becomes a central character. Of course, there have to be a few murders, otherwise it wouldn’t be a whodunit but there are other storylines: Seb’s relationship with a prostitute – shock horror! Jude’s disappearance – what is he up to? The archbishop’s spy

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network, heretics, smuggling, a devious prison-break, etc. etc. But here is a quiet passage as a taster:

Dawn was breaking in the east, the rosy light shimmering on frosted roofs and walls, turning dirty old London to a place of magick and faery. Armed with his drawing implements and swathed in a grey woollen mantle, Sebastian Foxley stepped carefully along the frozen rutted ways of Panyer Alley and along the Shambles. There were few folk about so early. Greeted by the gatekeeper, still rubbing sleep from his eyes, Seb was the first to pass through Newgate as it opened for the day. He turned right up Giltspur Street towards Smithfield, inhaling the essence of the still-dormant city as it slumbered like a great beast, ready to awaken as the sun rose. ...

The water of the Horse Pool held a wafer of ice around the rim, freezing the faded reeds in place, upright as sentinels. Not a whisper of wind disturbed the unfrozen water further out where a lone swan sat, serene upon her perfect reflection, the feathers of her folded wings gilt-edged by the strengthening light. Seb drew what he saw but only in his mind's eye could he lock away the memories, the nuances of colour, light and shadow. He spent time, capturing the swan in her glory, but the light was changing, becoming brazen, revealing the less than lovely. A broken bucket lay discarded in the hedge; the bones of a fox's kill strewn in the grass like white pot shards and a lost shoe, split at the heel. Frost on the oak tree began to thaw, an icy drip finding a gap betwixt his cap and mantle, shivering down his neck. The spell was broken and Seb made his way home. Chimneys were now smoking, window shutters opening as his neighbours roused themselves to the day's labours; yawning and stretching and nodding a greeting as he passed by.

How I came to write

At school, I loved history, especially the really ancient stuff: Babylon, the Egyptian Pharaohs, Troy, etc – until we got to O level, then it became boring. The Franco-Prussian War was definitely not for me. I admit – I failed my History O level! However, when I began working for Wellcome in Dartford,

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in the research labs, the other girls were reading Jean Plaidy's historical novels during tea breaks and we passed the books around. I got hooked on her Plantagenet sagas and have loved the medieval period ever since. As I read her wonderful novels, I wondered how much of what she wrote about really happened, so I started reading factual history books and the more I learned, the more I realised how fascinating life was all those centuries ago. I soon discovered that although daily life was very different from today, people weren't much changed and I felt I could relate to these people such that I wanted to know them better.

When my sons were babies, I got to know other young mums which was lovely but their discussions seem to be all about teething, potty training and trips to Mothercare. I could feel my brain slowly turning to mush. So I decided to write a novel. At first, I wrote it all down longhand in an A4 notebook but my ideas always moved faster than the pencil, so our state of the art Atari computer came in very handy. Richard III's lifetime had caught my imagination and I'd read a lovely fat novel by Sharon Penman called *The Sunne in Splendour*. I enjoyed every page – except the last one, where the hero was killed at the battle of Bosworth. I thought 'what if history had turned out differently?' and so the remote possibility that Richard had survived the battle became the premise for my novel. I joined the Richard III Society just so I could borrow books from their library to research the background thoroughly and signed up for a local Creative Writing Class. The novel grew and became a trilogy. It was a labour of love and kept my brain active. The novel still exists, lying safely on the shelf but the discovery of the King in the Car Park means it's unlikely ever to go public now.

Writing factual books

I always wanted to teach and I've taught every age group from nursery children to mature students. Life-long learning is very important to me. The last group is the most rewarding

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because they aren't being forced into it; they *want* to learn. As a teacher, you discover how to put ideas across – don't use a word like 'obfuscate' when a more common word like 'confuse' will do. If you have to use a long or unusual word then explain it. You might think fancy words show you know your stuff but that's what it is – showing off – and it may well put off readers. I've read and had to write theses. Some are so wordy, I lost the plot and they were hard work to slog through. As Cardinal Wolsey said 'learning should be a pleasure, not toil.' I had battled with my supervisor over the style I was told to use in writing my MA thesis – she wanted it to sound so pompous but I refused to write like that – so I was chuffed to bits when the second marker for my work on a medieval medical manuscript wrote that it had been pleasurable to read the thesis as well as very informative. That was the idea, so even academic writing doesn't have to be a strain to read.

My factual books are written as popular history in style though academically referenced for those who want to go further. People love anecdotes, little stories of events that really happened to ordinary folk. My most popular factual book *Everyday Life in Medieval London* is full of snippets that give glimpses of past lives. Dame Ellen Langwith is in there and there are other characters and incidents that you may discover adapted in my novels. A Blue-Badge Guide who gives conducted tours of the City of London recently emailed me to say how much he'd learned from *Medieval London* and 'borrowed' from it to improve his talks, especially the chapters on Anglo-Saxon London about which he previously had few anecdotes to liven up the dates, places and lists of kings. For example, the names of two Anglo-Saxons living in Lundenwic c.500 AD are known to us: Tatberht and Oethilward, only because being bored one day after a good mutton dinner, they carved their names on the sheep's bones, not only recording their existence for posterity but proving they could write.

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You may be surprised that of all the sources for my research, I find legal documents are often the most rewarding. Wills, Mayor's Court Rolls, Plea and Memoranda Rolls and Coroners' Rolls all contain stories. Sounds dry, I know, but you have to read behind what's noted down. As an example, in 1483, in the parish of St Martin's in Micklegate in York, the Borough Court heard the case of Margery Grey, alias Cherrylips, who was accused of inviting men to her house, including priests, and 'entertaining' them, much to the annoyance of her neighbours. In response, Cherrylips had told her neighbours to mind their own business and was, therefore, also accused of being a 'scold'. I'm sure this snippet could spark a short story at the very least.

How my novels got published

I was putting together a course for one of my weekly classes, looking at the lives of medieval people. Lessons had titles like *The Farmer's Wife's Tale*, *The Grocer's Tale*, and I wondered if they could be put together into a book. A friend of mine in the Richard III Society had written books for Amberley Publishing and suggested I write to them about the idea. I sent a synopsis and three sample chapters and heard nothing for four months so I forgot about it. Then I received a letter: Amberley didn't want my idea but they liked my style and would I write a book entitled *Everyday Life in Medieval London, AD 500-1500*. Wow! A thousand years in one volume. And I knew very little about Anglo-Saxon London. Research was fun though, particularly visits to the Museum of London, Herne Common near Canterbury and West Stow in Suffolk, where there are recreated Anglo-Saxon villages. I learned so much. Other books followed: *Medieval Medicine*, based around my MA study of a medieval medical handbook kept at the Wellcome Library in

THE FOXLEY LETTERS

London, and *The Medieval Housewife*, a little students' book I had self-published which Amberley republished in full colour.

Then I had requests for magazine articles and, as a result, MadeGlobal Publishing enquired whether I might like to write some on-line courses for them. They happily took the *Farmer's Wife's Tale*, *The Grocer's Tale* and the other eighteen lessons that made up *Everyday Lives of Medieval Folk* – that which Amberley hadn't wanted. *Richard III & The Wars of the Roses* soon followed and went 'live' online. During a lull in production, Tim and Clare Ridgway, founders of MadeGlobal, asked if I'd written anything else. Cheekily, I said no other suitable courses were quite ready but there was a medieval whodunit novel sitting, waiting. 'Send us a synopsis and the first few chapters and we'll think about it,' they said. I emailed what was requested on a Friday night. Saturday morning they emailed: 'Send us the rest of it.' By Sunday, they'd read it all, Monday I received a contract. Seb Foxley was going into print! Unbelievable. That was in October 2015 and *The Colour of Poison* came out just two years ago.

When it was due to go live on Amazon as a Kindle book, apparently, the publisher has to say if it is one of a series. With only a few hours to go, Tim phoned: was this the first of a series? I had about ten seconds to decide if I was going to write more novels. Yes, I said, wondering what on earth I'd just let myself in for. But I'd always loved writing fiction.

But there are pitfalls in creating historical fiction. There are words to avoid. My personal *bête noir* is 'OK' – used in the recent BBC drama *Taboo* which was set in the early 19th century. 'OK' is a USA WW 2 invention. 'Punch' is another no-no – a hole-punch, yes, but a punch on the nose, definitely not. In this case, it comes from the Hindi work for '5', as in 'a bunch of fives' or an alcoholic drink with five ingredients and came over from India in the 18th century. 'Pinky-mauve' is a colour described by Paul Doherty in his whodunit *The Straw Men*, set in the 14th century but in medieval times 'pink' wasn't a colour

but a verb. To pink meant making a jagged edge to stop cloth fraying, using pinking shears. ‘Mauve’ was a colour dreamed up by the French fashion houses and created by Englishman William Perkin in 1860. Other words have also changed meaning since medieval times – amazing means bewildered as one lost in a maze; astounded: seeing stars after a blow to the head; naughty: less than human; silly: innocent; nice: foolish. Does it matter? Some say not but a book set in 1500 loses all credibility for me if the protagonist asks ‘Are you OK?’ Cuff-buttons, zips and Velcro are also out.

Another thing to avoid is hindsight – what we know but a character couldn’t. For example, Seb cannot know that Edward IV will die unexpectedly, that Duke Richard of Gloucester will one day be king and be slain at Bosworth. And what about historical reality – how much animal cruelty, domestic violence or child abuse could a modern reader put up with in the hero? It’s a fact that Richard III wrote a note to his son’s tutor, telling him not to beat the boy but to encourage him, which shows some medieval people were bothered, so Seb is the voice of moderation. Jude is the more normal guy, willing to thrash children, dogs and even his brother’s wife. Thank goodness Seb is there to save readers from such nastiness. We know such things still happen today, despite the best efforts of legislation and society but I want my readers to enjoy the stories so only the baddies are really cruel – just as you would expect them to be.

My short novel *The Colour of Betrayal* is already finished, and by the time you’re reading this, will most likely be on the shelves. It’s another murder, based on a true event, but set against a background of medieval Christmas celebrations. I’m hoping that will be published in the autumn to keep readers amused while they await the next full-length novel *The Colour of Murder*. This story is partly written, partly still in my head. It will see the return of the old favourites from *Poison*, Duke Richard and Sir Robert Percy. This time, Seb becomes involved

in a murderous plot against royalty at the Tower of London, is shocked to learn Emily is pregnant and receives a letter from the dead that shatters our hero. I can't tell you any more because I'm also waiting to discover what happens to my characters, myself, what they will do as the plot thickens, the scrapes they'll get into and the problems they'll solve. Hopefully, they'll all live to fight another day. Who knows? I certainly don't.



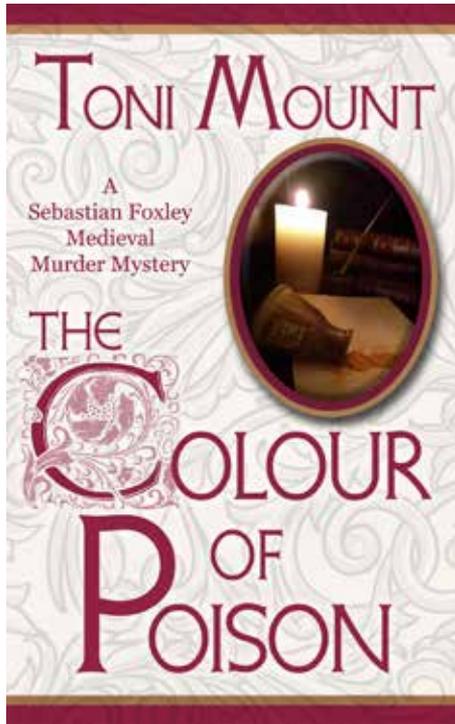
Toni Mount

Toni Mount earned her research Masters degree from the University of Kent in 2009 through study of a medieval medical manuscript held at the Wellcome Library in London. Recently she also completed a Diploma in Literature and Creative Writing with the Open University.

Toni has published many non-fiction books, but always wanted to write a medieval thriller, and her novels “*The Colour of Poison*”, “*The Colour of Gold*” and now “*The Colour of Cold Blood*” are the result.

Toni regularly speaks at venues throughout the UK and is the author of several online courses available at www.medievalcourses.com.

978-84-944893-3-4



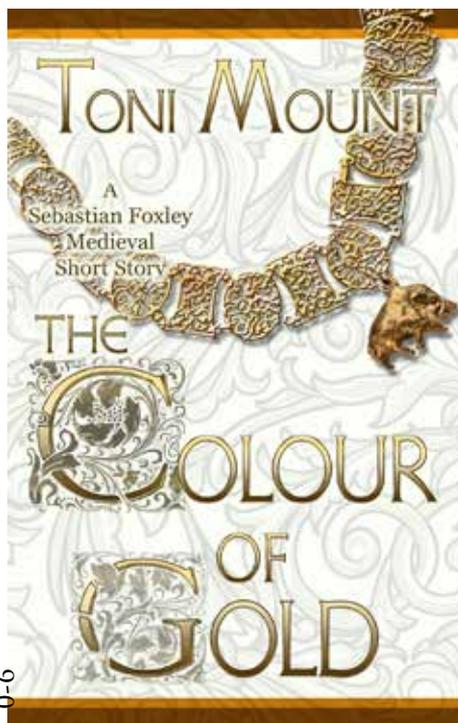
**The first Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.**

The narrow, stinking streets of medieval London can sometimes be a dark place. Burglary, arson, kidnapping and murder are every-day events. The streets even echo with rumours of the mysterious art of alchemy being used to make gold for the King.

Join Seb, a talented but crippled artist, as he is drawn into a web of lies to save his handsome brother from the hangman's rope. Will he find an inner strength in these, the darkest of times, or will events outside his control overwhelm him?

Only one thing is certain - if Seb can't save his brother, nobody can.

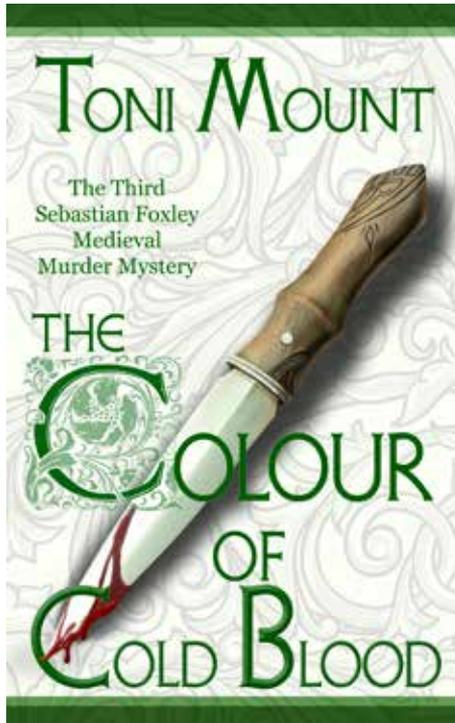
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**The second Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.
A short story**

A wedding in medieval London should be a splendid occasion, especially when a royal guest will be attending the nuptial feast. Yet for the bridegroom, the talented young artist, Sebastian Foxley, his marriage day begins with disaster when the valuable gold livery collar he should wear has gone missing. From the lowliest street urchin to the highest nobility, who could be the thief? Can Seb wed his sweetheart, Emily Appleyard, and save the day despite that young rascal, Jack Tabor, and his dog causing chaos?

978-84-946498-1-3



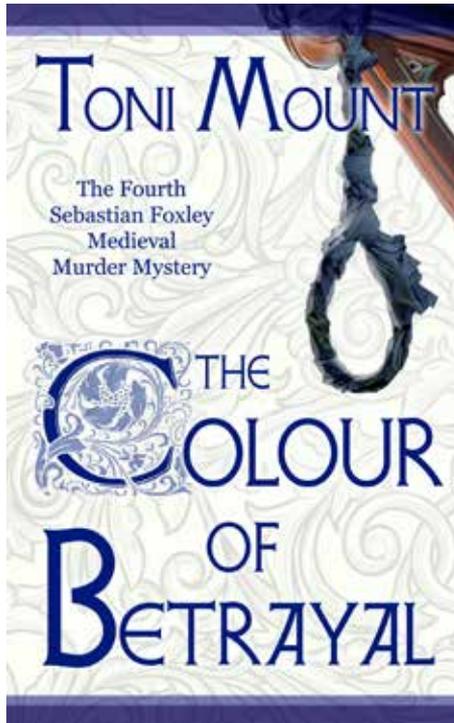
**The third Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.**

A devilish miasma of murder and heresy lurks in the winter streets of medieval London - someone is slaying women of the night. For Seb Foxley and his brother, Jude, evil and the threat of death come close to home when Gabriel, their well-liked journeyman, is arrested as a heretic and condemned to be burned at the stake.

Amid a tangle of betrayal and deception, Seb tries to uncover the murderer before more women die – will he also defy the church and devise a plan to save Gabriel?

These are dangerous times for the young artist and those he holds dear. Treachery is everywhere, even at his own fireside...

978-84-947298-1-2



**The fourth Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.
A short story**

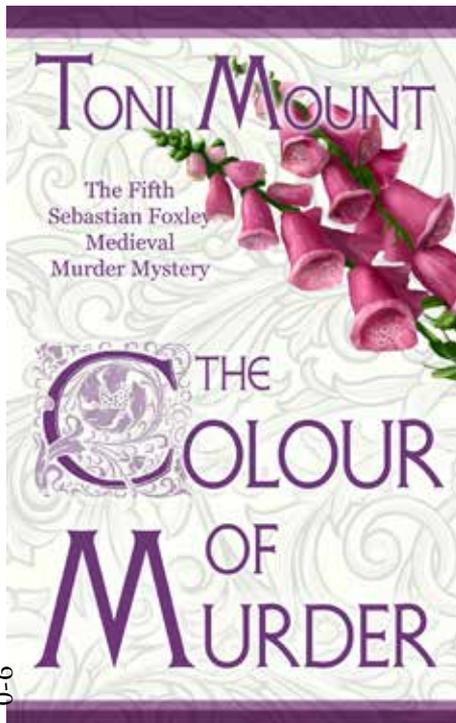
Suicide or murder?

As medieval Londoners joyously prepare for the Christmas celebrations, goldsmith Lawrence Ducket is involved in a street brawl. Fearful that his opponent is dying from his injuries, Lawrence seeks sanctuary in a church nearby.

When Ducket is found hanging from the rafters, people assume it's suicide. Yet, Sebastian Foxley is unconvinced. Why is his young apprentice, Jack Tabor, so terrified that he takes to his bed?

Amidst feasting and merriment, Seb is determined to solve the mystery of his friend's death and to ease Jack's fears.

978-84-946498-
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**The fifth Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.**

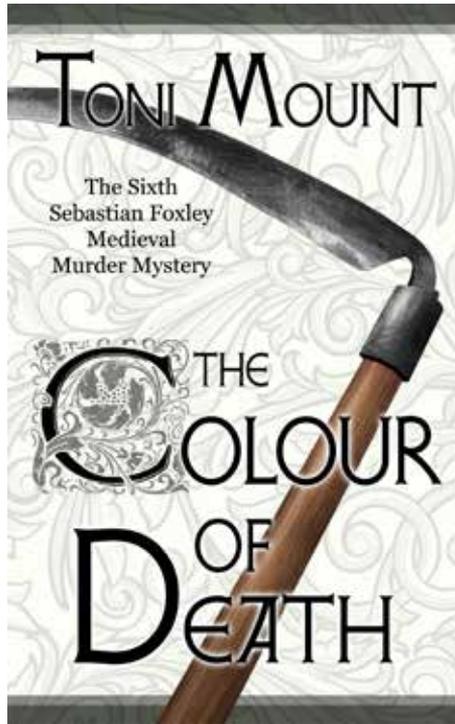
London is not safe for princes or commoners.

In February 1478, a wealthy merchant is killed by an intruder and a royal duke dies at the Tower. Neither case is quite as simple as it seems.

Seb Foxley, an intrepid young artist, finds himself in the darkest of places, fleeing for his life. With foul deeds afoot at the king's court, his wife Emily pregnant and his brother Jude's hope of marrying Rose thwarted, can Seb unearth the secrets which others would prefer to keep hidden?

Join Seb and Jude, their lives in jeopardy in the dangerous streets of the city, as they struggle to solve crimes and keep their business flourishing.

978-84-948539-1-3

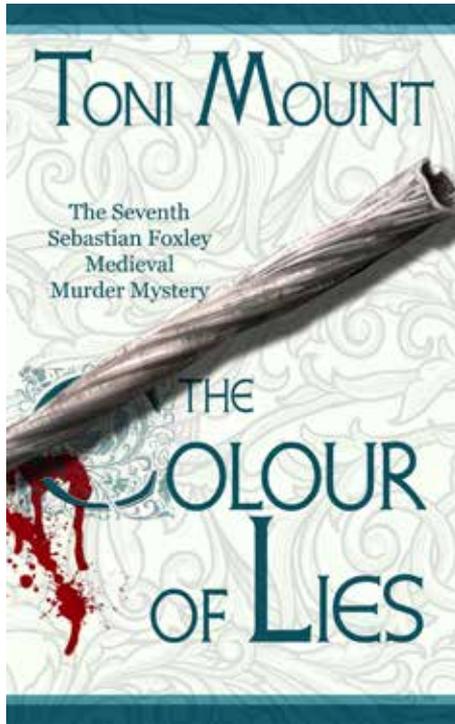


**The sixth Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.
A short story**

Seb Foxley and his wife, Emily, have been forced to flee medieval London to escape their enemies. They find a safe haven in the isolated Norfolk village where Seb was born. Yet this idyllic rural setting has its own murderous secrets and a terrible crime requires our hero to play the sleuth once more.

Even away from London, Seb and Emily are not as safe as they believe - their enemies are closer than they know and danger lurks at every twist and turn.

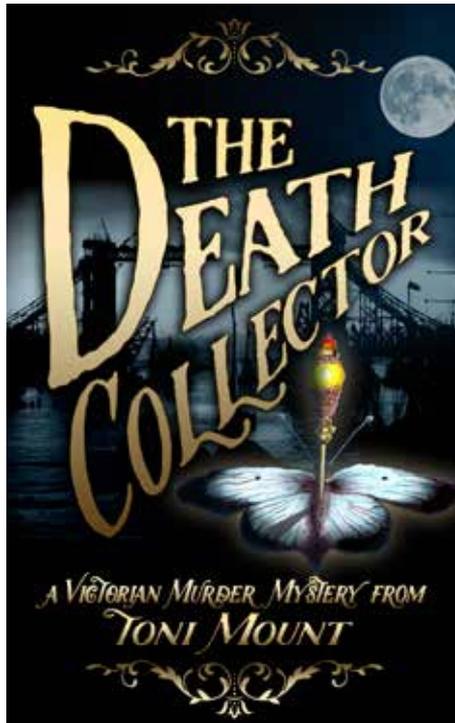
978-84-948539-2-0



**The seventh Sebastian Foxley
Medieval Mystery by Toni Mount.**

It is late summer and London is all a-bustle for St Bartholomew's Fayre, with merchants arriving from faraway lands. When an old friend returns with fabulous items for sale, it can only mean one thing: trouble. As thievery, revenge and murder stalk the fayre, Sebastian Foxley – artist and sometime-sleuth – has mysteries to solve. In uncovering the answers, he becomes enmeshed in a web of lies and falsehoods. His greatest dilemma means having to choose between upholding honour and justice or saving those dearest to him. How can a truly honest citizen of London practise deceit and yet live with his conscience?

978-84-948539-4-4



**A Victorian Murder mystery
from Toni Mount**

More dastardly than Jack the Ripper; more vile than a London Particular, an arch-fiend prowls the Victorian city streets. Nobody is safe from his experiments, whether peer or prostitute, preacher or policeman in this murderous melodrama. Will Inspector Albert Sutton, aided by his wife Nell and her cat, be able to unmask and apprehend the heartless killer, or will they become the next novelty specimens of the Death Collector?

In this riveting novella, Toni Mount explores the darker side of Victorian London, creating a gripping thriller packed with shocking murders, unexpected twists and chilling suspense.

Read it if you dare ...

Historical Fiction

The Sebastian Foxley Series - **Toni Mount**
The Death Collector - **Toni Mount**
Falling Pomegranate Seeds - **Wendy J. Dunn**
Struck With the Dart of Love - **Sandra Vasoli**
Truth Endures - **Sandra Vasoli**
Cor Rotto - **Adrienne Dillard**
The Raven's Widow - **Adrienne Dillard**
The Claimant - **Simon Anderson**

Historical Colouring Books

The Mary, Queen of Scots Colouring Book - **Roland Hui**
The Life of Anne Boleyn Colouring Book - **Claire Ridgway**
The Wars of the Roses Colouring Book - **Debra Bayani**
The Tudor Colouring Book - **Ainhoa Modenes**

Non Fiction History

The Turbulent Crown - **Roland Hui**
Anne Boleyn's Letter from the Tower - **Sandra Vasoli**
Jasper Tudor - **Debra Bayani**
Tudor Places of Great Britain - **Claire Ridgway**
Illustrated Kings and Queens of England - **Claire Ridgway**
A History of the English Monarchy - **Gareth Russell**
The Fall of Anne Boleyn - **Claire Ridgway**
George Boleyn: Tudor Poet, Courtier & Diplomat - **Ridgway & Cherry**
The Anne Boleyn Collection I, II & III - **Claire Ridgway**
Two Gentleman Poets at the Court of Henry VIII - **Edmond Bapst**

Children's Books

All about Richard III - **Amy Licence**
All about Henry VII - **Amy Licence**
All about Henry VIII - **Amy Licence**
Tudor Tales William at Hampton Court - **Alan Wybrow**

PLEASE LEAVE A REVIEW

If you enjoyed this book, *please*
remember that Toni would LOVE
you to read her other books which
are all available on Amazon and
other bookshops.

Thank you in advance.