



POOJA PURI

Pooja first tasted publishing success with her short story Chess and later graduated from King's College London with a first class degree in English language and literature. Whilst at university she read for a publishing house and has since worked in the education sector. In 2014 she was chosen as a winner of the Ideas Tap Writers' Centre Norwich Inspires competition. Her debut novel, *The Jungle*, was published as the lead title by Black and White's new YA imprint, Ink Road, in March 2017.

About Hattie No-Name and the Queen's Pelican

Hattie, a gutsy pickpocket, lives by her wits on the grimy streets of Tudor London. Everything changes when her best friend, Thomas, is accused of stealing the Queen's Pelican, a most treasured and priceless necklace. Determined to save him from the noose, she soon finds herself amidst an eccentric band of travelling performers. But terrible secrets lurk in the shadows. When Hattie stumbles upon a deadly conspiracy, she must race to save not only her friend, but Queen Elizabeth I herself. The fate of the nation depends on it.

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HATTIE NO-NAME AND THE QUEEN'S PELICAN

Chapter One

Execution Days were good days. As Hattie stood admiring the gathering at Chelmsford Square, she knew that she would have a fine haul of purses. Enough to keep her belly full for the next week. She licked her lips, her palms tingling with a familiar excitement. There was nothing like a death to bring out the crowds and the square was heaving. A knot of hawkers had set up stalls around the edge of the gallows, their voices rising and falling over the din of the crowd.

'Pies! Gooseberry pies!'

'Lucky shillings! Win the love of yer life!'

'Holy stones! Protect yerself from the curse of a witch! Holy stones for a ha-penny!'

'Ale! Sixpence a tankard!'

A group of urchins ran past, a dog yapping at their heels. Street sweepers mingled with gentlemen; butchers with bone-pickers; beggars with merchants; fishwives with ladies. No matter how fine their tastes, even the rich couldn't keep away from a good death.

Hattie threaded her gaze through the crowd, picking out the high from the low. The gentleman strutting in tight-fitting doublets; the women flouncing in skirts which swished across the ground as they walked. They stood out from the common folk like sovereigns on a dung heap. A smile twitched at the corners of her mouth. She wondered how many of their girdles she could lighten before the drums began their death song.

She drew out a horn sheath from the pouch on her belt and slipped it on to her thumb. Then she pulled out a small blade and nestled it safely in her

palm. Cutting purses was easy once you knew how. All you needed was a quick hand.

The audience were growing impatient. Boots stamped against the cobbles. Bodies jostled and shoved, fighting for a better view of the scaffold. Nobody noticed her, a thin, clumsy girl, as she tripped or fell between them. No one saw her hand move to their girdles nor did they feel the touch of her blade as it sliced their purse strings. She caught each pouch without a sound, palming its contents to her own before moving on.

A sudden roar erupted from the gathering. Hattie stopped to watch as the accused was brought on to the gallows. She looked young, perhaps only a year or two older than her. Pretty, too.

‘Witch.’

The word started as a low hiss then grew louder, filling the air like a flock of ravens.

‘Witch. Witch. Witch.’

A stone was thrown into the air, narrowly missing the girl’s head. Her eyes widened in panic. For a second, Hattie almost felt sorry for her. Then the girl’s face shifted into an expression of pure hatred.

‘Ye poisonous swag-bellied minnows!’ she screeched. ‘Ye will know no rest! Ye will have no peace!’

A cold finger of fear ran up Hattie’s spine as the curses rained down upon them. She had seen witches executed before. She had watched the mad twitching of their bodies, their limbs shuddering still. But never had she witnessed a spectacle like this. There was a madness about the girl’s look. As if she was possessed by the devil himself.

Almost without thinking, Hattie touched the coins in her pouch. Superstitions were like a web. Once trapped, you’d be left spinning for the rest of your days. Better to trust in something real. Like silver.

‘Death be to yer mammering hasty-witted hearts!’ shrieked the girl, struggling against the executioner as she was dragged to the noose. ‘A plague upon yer black lily-livered souls!’

‘Katherine Teedon.’ The yeoman had to shout to make himself heard. ‘Eighteen years of age. Hereby found guilty of plotting to kill Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth I, through the arts of black magic. May your punishment serve as a warning to all.’

He nodded to the executioner who forced the mask over the girl's face. Hattie could still see her lips moving. As the drums began, the girl twisted her head from side to side. The movement reminded Hattie of the fish writhing when they were brought out of pails on market day. Right before their heads were chopped off.

The executioner placed the noose around the girl's neck. The drumbeat grew faster, the chanting of the spectators rising alongside it.

'Death to the witch! Death to the witch!'

With a last look at the scaffold, Hattie slipped back into the rabble. The moments before an execution were the best time to nip purses; all eyes were on the noose, everybody desperate to remember each horrid detail so that they could share it later.

Around her, the drumbeat swelled. Hattie moved faster, pushing and shoving between the audience. She didn't have long left. Once the spectacle was over, everyone would scatter. It would take only a few minutes before some of them realised they'd been robbed. By then, she would have to be away.

'Scuse me, sir,' said Hattie, stumbling against a well-dressed gentleman. Her blade kissed his purse strings. Before she could tug it clear, the man's hand clamped down across her wrist.

The drumbeat stopped in the same instant. A hush fell across the audience and Hattie knew the witch was dead.

The man looked down at her with an unpleasant smile.

'Stealing, are we?' he hissed. Hattie cried out in pain as he twisted her hand. Her blade fell to the stones and was lost amongst the shuffling of feet. 'You filthy little –'

Hattie didn't wait to hear any more. She tugged her hand free and hurtled through the crowd. Already, the frenzy had started to claim the corpse from the scaffold. Witch or not, the dead girl would fetch a pretty price with the barber-surgeons.

'THIEF!' shouted a voice behind her. 'Alert the watch!'

'Out of my way!' cried Hattie, shoving past the spectators. Her heart thudded in her chest, her breath quick with panic. The punishment for thieving wasn't just a spell in the stocks. She'd lose her hands for sure. Fear gave her speed and she flew out of the audience, coming out on the edge of the square.

'You, there! Girl!'

She glanced back in time to see a plump, red-faced constable struggling through the crowd towards her. Smirking, she bobbed a curtsey in his direction and sprinted away. Into the warm stink of an alley, where leather-workers sat hunched over belts and shoes, a sharp left into Fish Lane, then out the other side into the teeming huddle of Bow Market.

She looked over her shoulder, but there was no sign of the constable. She grinned in satisfaction. There wasn't a single officer in London who could keep up with her.

Checking that her pouch was safely secured, she ploughed through the squabble of merchants, ducking between horse-drawn carts and stalls laden with corn and wool.

She moved fast until she'd left the square far behind. At the end of Craggs Street, she paused momentarily to filch a couple of pies. She ate the first as she walked, nibbling at the hot crust, the vegetable filling burning her tongue. The second she stuffed into her pouch for Thomas. He'd be on duty at the Tower and she'd promised to tell him about the execution.

Thomas was an apprentice guardsman. Hattie had known him for years; when her father had been alive, they'd lived next door to each other. It was Thomas who had taught her to whistle with two fingers, Thomas who had shown her the best way to eat a honey cake (from the bottom upwards so you could save the honey till last). In return, she'd taught him how to pick a lock and how to jump across a pile of horse manure so that he could splatter anyone walking past.

Those had been the best times. Hattie's father had worked as a locksmith; though he'd never brought in much money, it had been enough for the both of them. When he'd died, she'd been forced on to the streets. Thomas's family had looked after her for a while, then Thomas had become an apprentice at the Tower and they'd moved to a better part of London. Still, the two of them had remained good friends.

Hattie couldn't help smiling as she thought of her narrow escape with the constable. She could already see Thomas's eyes growing wide in shock.

'You need to be careful, Hattie,' he'd say, tutting like an old woman. 'One of these days, they'll bring you to the Tower, and what then, eh?'

She polished off the last of her pie and crossed into Dunn Street. It was a

fine, sunny afternoon and, in the distance, she could hear the church bell tolling the hour. She'd visit Thomas then head down to Southwark. There were always a few drunken folk milling around the bear pit and she was keen to nip a dozen more purses before—

Out of nowhere, something, a sack maybe, was thrown over her head. A moment later, she felt herself lifted into the air.

'Get off me!' shouted Hattie. She lashed out with her hand and hit something soft. There was a grunt, followed by the creak of wheels.

'For heaven's sake,' said an impatient voice. 'I told you to leave the sack.'