

Marlowe

A Quantime Adventure



Chris Deggs

This is a work of fiction apart from the bits which aren't.

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Dedication

To my loving friend Lyn, without whom preparing this story for publishing would be a tedious task.

Foreword

England 1593

The young dramatist arrived at the home of Nicholas Skeres in the dead of night. He knocked in a particular fashion at the solid oak door. When challenged he gave the correct password and was admitted inside. The man who let him in stood dark in the shadows holding a lantern to illuminate their way. Upon entering Skeres' study the rebellious young man with long wild hair and an immature moustache, asked, "Master Skeres, what is so important that I must be here tonight?"

Nicholas, placing the lantern on the table, replied, "To warn you, Master Kit."

"To warn me about what?" the young man queried, somewhat perplexed.

Skeres moved closer. "For your sake, you must keep quiet about Essex's plot against Raleigh."

Christopher Marlowe argued, "Why, the man is an utter scoundrel. Ever since Walter beat him in that damned duel, Essex has had it in for him."

Skere's corrected, "Even before that, Master Kit. But that isn't the point. Since Walter's last voyage he has been out of royal favour. Essex is the Queen's favourite now, and you would do well to step carefully."

"That may well be the case Master Skeres, but Walter is one of us. We need to watch his back."

Skeres tutted, "Kit, you are young in the ways of the world. Please heed my counsel on this."

Kit shook his head. "Master Skeres, I refuse to be silenced on this matter."

"Young Kit, before you expose yourself to such risk there are things I need to impart to you."

"To what do you refer?"

"Things you may not know about Sir Walter."

"Of what things do you speak?"

"A year ago, the queen discovered Raleigh's secret marriage to Elizabeth Throckmorton. Her Majesty became enraged and had both Raleigh and his wife imprisoned in the Tower."

"I remember the troubling event very clearly. However, Walter and his bride were later released, so what is the problem?"

In the dimly lit study, Skere's stared into Kit's eyes. "It's rumoured that Essex, Elizabeth's current favourite, told her about Raleigh. If you go against Essex, you go against your Queen. So are you prepared to risk dying for that scoundrel Raleigh?"

Marlowe stared at Skeres, "Do I detect a threat in your words?"

Skeres shook his head. "I am not your enemy. But that scoundrel Essex most certainly will be if you warn Raleigh. He is obsessed with destroying Walter, and if you step in his way, woe betides you, young Kit."

Marlowe responded, "I need to seek further counsel on this troubling matter before I follow my conscience."

“Then I would suggest you speak with Walsingham. He has the Queen's ear, yet moves to the beat of his own drum.”

As principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham was well placed to hear whispers around the royal court. Essex hung around the Queen like a loyal but sometimes annoying little dog. His daughter had married Robert Devereux the Second Earl of Essex and Walsingham, having no liking for the man, kept a discreet distance whenever possible.

He received a petition from the young playwright Kit Marlowe and received him in his office. There was some tension in the room and an elephant that stayed well concealed. As the subject matter concerned Sir Walter, with whom they had both had private engagements, they both carefully skirted that particular issue.

Marlowe said, “I am here on a delicate matter that must not go beyond these four walls.”

Walsingham stroked his full beard. “Do you think I don't know the reason for this meeting?” He added, “Don't just stand there, take a seat.”

Kit sat down, then he said, “Then Master Skeres must have informed you of my intention to seek your counsel.”

“Indeed. And from what Skeres told me it is just as well that he did so.”

“Really! Why is that?”

“Because the Earl of Essex won't let anybody spoil his plans.”

“Is he aware of my intention to warn Sir Walter?” Kit asked, his brow knotted.

“I know you love Sir Walter dearly. However, for your sake you must not get involved, Master Marlowe. To do so will be your undoing.”

“But I cannot just stand by while...”

Walsingham got close to Marlowe's ear. “...I shouldn't be telling you this, but the Privy Council has issued a royal warrant against you. They will come for you on the 18th of May.”

Marlowe, his face a question mark, said, “With what am I charged?”

“Essex didn't specify. Although there is speculation that there are allegations of blasphemy.”

“Blasphemy! Where have I blasphemed?”

“A manuscript believed to have been written by you is said to contain 'vile heretical concepts'.

To which of my many manuscripts do you refer?”

“I don't know about any particular writing, but the Star Chamber will find any evidence it needs to make a case.”

“Then what should I do?”

Walsingham fixed the young playwright in his gaze. “You must either distance yourself from Walter or disappear for a while. Until this whole thing blows over.”

“Pray, how am I supposed to disappear?”

“You will have to leave that to me.”

Chapter 1

It's funny how some things happen, how some seemingly insignificant event can lead to something huge. As it turned out, this was one of those times. It all started very innocently with me, Oswald Doyle, following up a left message on my phone. Someone called Jerrod Moors needed my professional help and wanted me to call by the Putney Arts Theatre, which had been set up in a former 19th-century church. I parked my Subaru in a place provided, near the church's main entrance. I entered the church and heard some singing coming from inside. Then I noticed a sign on an 'A' frame:

Please be quiet. Rehearsal in progress

At this point, I became aware just how difficult it is to walk silently on a stone floor, with my footfalls reverberating around the walls. The singing stopped, and a man with a shock of ginger hair surrounding a large bald patch looked in my direction. I figured he was the person who left me the message. Acknowledging my presence he approached me, saying "Hello, can I help you?"

"I'm here to help you, Mr Moors." I smiled.

"You are?" he said, reaching me.

"Oswald Doyle. I believe you left a message for me."

"Jerrod Moors," he smiled. "Yes, I do need your help with a little matter."

That much was evident, but I didn't say so. Some clients don't know how to deal with us PIs. That's private investigator for the uninformed. Jerrod was fiddling with the buttons of his cardigan, a sure sign he felt nervous. I said, "So what seems to be the problem?"

"One of our Thespians is missing."

I wanted him to feel comfortable. So I asked, "Is there somewhere we can sit down and have some tea?" Well, it's a relaxing thing to do.

He turned to his crew. "Angela, can you organise some tea for us. There's love."

Apart from Jerrod eight rehearsing members were present. "Mr Moors, can you ask your group to remain here until I have asked them some questions?"

"Oh, we haven't finished our rehearsal yet. Mind you it's going to be a waste of time unless we find Celine."

"Celine?" I queried, taking a seat in one of the pews.

"Celine Yeldon, our missing Thespian and our leading lady in our upcoming Buckingham Players production of 'The other Marlowe'."

The tea duly arrived, and I asked him, "When did you last see Ms Yeldon?"

He pushed his spectacles up to the bridge of his nose. "Let me see. Yes, it was at our last rehearsal, a week ago."

"So you have weekly rehearsals?"

“Usually, yes.”

“Do you make contact with your actors between rehearsals?”

“Only if necessary.”

“Did she say she wasn't coming today, Mr Moors?”

“No.”

“Then how come you left a message for me last night?”

“Well, you see there's something I haven't yet told you.”

“I'm all ears.”

“Celine is an excellent actress - an actor we're supposed to say these days - but she can be a prima donna at times. She has been known to throw hissy fits and storm off the stage, but she always returns to the fold.”

I still couldn't understand why he needed me. “So Celine could turn up at any time?”

He hesitated, “Yees. In theory.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like I said, I haven't contacted her, but it wasn't through lack of trying. She left me a message. I sent her one back, but she never replied.”

I sighed heavily. “What exactly are you trying to tell me. Mr Moors?”

He took out his phone and tapped his audio recorder app. A clipped female voice said, “The Buckingham Players are going nowhere. I'm joining another group to help boost my career.”

I shrugged, “Well there you have it. Celine's told you what she's doing. So I don't see how I can help you.”

“We have a contract for another two plays. It's legally binding.”

“Okay, Mr Moors, I'll look into it. Have you any idea at all about where she could have gone.”

“None whatsoever I'm afraid. But we do need to find my star player very soon.”

“Why the urgency?”

“We have to open in thirteen days.”

There's one thing worse than looking for missing people, and that's looking for missing individuals who aren't missing. Ms Yeldon fell in this category. If she was sabotaging Jerrod's play, staying out of his way was probably a good option. Still, he was paying me to find her so I figured I'd better earn my dough. My phone told me it was getting on for noon, and I had another pressing engagement, a lunch date with Jennifer Smethurst. She's the genius who invented the Quantime, often referred to as simply the 'Q'. I hadn't seen her for a few months since the French adventure. Although the term 'French experience' is putting it mildly, particularly since it took place around 90 years before I was born. As the months have rolled by since my knowledge of it all seems a bit unreal, or is that surreal? Anyhow, she wanted to see about something, and I sure wanted to see her.

By the time I arrived at St James' Restaurant, I was twenty minutes late. I picked Jennifer out from the other diners. She was the one wearing a scowl. I put on a brave face. "Hi Jen, it's been a while."

"Yes, twenty-one minutes longer than it needed to be." she said, with sharpened claws and a tongue to match.

"I'm sorry Jen. Roadworks on the way here were something shocking."

"Well, you'd better sit down and get me some wine."

I clicked my fingers at a passing waitress and got no response. "Excuse me. Miss," I said.

"Someone will be with you shortly," she snapped, laden with empty dishes.

"So how are you?" Jennifer asked, a semblance of a smile playing on her lips.

I picked up a menu, which left the diner spoiled for choices. "I'm doing okay. So what did you want to see me about?"

"I want you to check on somebody for me."

I raised an eyebrow, "Oh, who are you checking on?"

"Declan Merrick."

"Who's he, Jen?"

"Someone who wants to invest in the 'QSA'."

I looked at her. "How did this Merrick character find out about it?"

She shrugged. "Declan just rang me out of the blue. We had lunch, and he said he was interested in investing in the 'Q'. He seems genuine."

"I looked the Beautiful Jen in the eye. "How much have you told him?"

"He knows it's about QSA, quantum space assimilation, a new science and he wants in on the ground floor."

"What sort of investment is involved."

"Gerard is dealing with that," she said, sternly.

I acted hurt. "Oh, I get it. You don't want to tell me."

"It hasn't been decided yet. But it could run into a number followed by lots of noughts."

I sighed, "Okay, Jen, send me the details."

Lunch was well presented and with excellent cooking. Wine flowed and the dessert, chocolate cheesecake was the best. Afterwards, I said, "It's good to see you again, Jen."

She smiled, her face lighting up. "You too, Ossie."

My mind went back to the wild sexy times we'd had together. I wondered if we could recapture what we had. But she hadn't invited me back to her place, so I didn't push it. I got up to leave and said, "I've missed you, Jen."

“When you have your report ready come round for dinner. Then Jennifer said, “I’ve missed you too.”

My mind screamed 'YES!'

Chapter 2

The other Marlowe, I discovered, was a new play based on a book by Wilber Gleason Zeigler. I don't know why it interested me, as I'd never before taken any particular interest in the subject. But it was central to the missing Thespian case, particularly when Jerrod Moors was concerned. I phoned Ms Yeldon's number, but it was disconnected. People don't just change phone numbers on a whim. I wondered if Jerrod had phoned her more than he'd let on? If and when I caught up with her I'd try to find out why she'd taken such measures. But first I had to find her. I figured she'd have an agent to look after her career, but that wasn't much help. The London A - D phone book listed hundreds of them. Next, I checked to see if she had a Facebook page. She did and had 127 friends listed. But how many of them were close enough for her to confide in. Most Facebook friends tend to be people we have never met on the 'Outernet' - my name for the real world. I reckon that when you have to rely on the social media to locate someone, things are getting bad. For the next half hour, I trolled through a few friend profiles and one turned out to be an actors agent. It was a long shot, but it was all I had. I got a contact number from a community web page. I rang that number and got an appointment. There was only one thing. I had to make out I was an actor.

I arrived in Golden Square, just east of Regent Street and north of Piccadilly Circus. I had to park four blocks away, near the famous Broad Street pump, a common source of cholera in the 1850's. Adrian Jenkinson, the agent I'd come to see, occupied an office three floors up above the street level shops in Golden Square. A sign on his door read:

A J means talent, and that's what we're all about.

Judy, his secretary, a fiftyish bottle blonde, all perfume and pedicure, welcomed me and handed me a form.

"What's this for, I asked."

She looked at me as though I had just stepped out of a saucer from Mars. "For you to fill in, Mr Doyle. We need some CV details from you.

I stared at the form, then at her. "What all of it?"

"The more info you give us, the better your prospect of finding work."

It was time to baffle her with bullshit. "I never got treated like some amateur, in the states."

The puzzled look on her face said she couldn't figure me out. I was either a raw beginner with no acting experience or a professional with an attitude. She tutted, "Just fill in your contact details."

Adrian Jenkinson, a large, loud man with a suit to match, looked at the form I hadn't filled in. He said, "Dear me, there's nothing here about your acting career."

"Yes, well, I'd have to get the details from my New York agency."

"Oh! Which agency would that be?"

Things were getting tricky. I noticed a couple of magazines on Adrian's desk: Spotlight and Stardom. The old Doyle brain notched into gear. "Starlight."

"Can't say I've heard of them."

“They're very new.” I stared at the effusive Adrian. “But I haven't come here about acting jobs. I'm here about an actor.”

He leant back in his padded office chair and folded his massive arms. “What are you talking about?”

“It's more a case of who I'm seeking. A Celine Yeldon to be precise.”

He stared at me, not quite knowing how to proceed.

I added, “There could be a role for her in New York. I phoned her number, but it appears to be disconnected. I have spoken with Jerrod Moors, but he has no idea as to her whereabouts.”

“And what makes you think I would know this person?”

I could hardly say you're Facebook friends. “I'm desperate to find her, and I had to start somewhere.”

He thought it over. “What's this play you're talking about?”

“Zeigler's 'The other Marlowe',” I said quickly, remembering my Internet search.

He checked his client details on his computer. Then he looked up from the screen. “That's Jerrod's production, and she's playing a leading role.”

“That's why they want her in the Big Apple.”

“And you say she's missing.”

“Jerrod does. And he's quite concerned.”

“Yes, I imagine he is.” Then he said If she gets this role I want my 15 percent.”

I grinned, “So you are her agent.”

“Yes, but I don't have a new number for her.”

“How about an address?”

He checked through her profile details. “Ah, here we are. Jefferson House, 11 Basil St, Knightsbridge.”

I stored this info in my navigator app and left the somewhat bemused Adrian to ponder what had happened.

I figured Ms Yeldon could wait till later in the day. It was time to find out about Mr Declan Merrick. The sooner I dug up his shit, the sooner I got to hang out with the delectable Jen. Now there's an incentive to get me motivated.

It turned out that Declan Merrick founded Boogle, now an American multinational technology company specialising in related services and products. These included online advertising technologies, search, cloud storage and associated software.

I could certainly see why someone like that would want a part of the 'Q'.

Declan Merrick embarked on Boogle as a PhD Student at Stanford University. He owns around 28 percent of its shares. He incorporated Boogle as a privately held company on September 8, 1999. It initially became a public entity on July 18, 2003. Boogle's mission statement has always been 'to organise global info data to make it universally accessible'.

Declan Merrick was loaded. However, now I had to dig a little deeper. Hoover's website gave me more juice on this guy.

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<http://www.bugle.com/intl/en/about/index.html>

Boogle Inc. Rankings

#45 in FORTUNE 500 (June 2015)

Dow Jones Global Titans

#6 in FT Global 500 (June 2015)

#42 in FORTUNE 1000 (June 2015)

The company profile lists Boogle as a leading Internet search engine. Taking its name from 'Bugle' the musical instrument that acts as a clarion wake-up call. Boogle offers results from billions of searched for Website pages. Boogle uses SiteRank, a special algorithm Through which it achieves its results. The company sells advertising, delivering relevant ads targeted to searches or Internet content, as its key revenue-generating source.

Next, I downloaded the company report, industry and technology reports. Jen could go over them at her leisure. I must admit I didn't like the idea of such a business heavyweight getting a large slice of the 'Q' I've gotten attached to it since my jaunt into 19th Century France. To tell you the truth I wouldn't mind 'not' going anywhere and arriving somewhere different, again.

Jefferson House, one of those huge red-brick town houses converted into units, sported massive bay windows and wrought iron fencing. There was a bell option for each unit. I learned they are called studios; units are a bit standard for this end of town. Luckily one of them, studio 7 had Yeldon written on it. The word was somewhat faded but just legible enough for me to chance it. Right, so what was I going to say. As I pressed the button, it had just begun to rain, and my car was parked 300 or so metres away, A refined English voice responded to the bell "Yes, what do you want?"

"Are you Ms Yeldon?"

"One of them. Why do you want to know?"

"Look, can I come up so I can speak with you?"

"What do you want to speak about?"

Jesus, this was getting nowhere. So I went for the Big Apple ploy. "I represent the Starlight talent agency in New York. We want to speak with Celine Yeldon about a part."

There was a pause, then, "Very well, come on up."

The main door buzzed, then opened.

A very well turned out, perfectly permed sixty-ish matronly type opened the door but stood squarely in the portal, backed up by her toy Chihuahua, which stared at me threateningly from the crook of her 'mother's' arm. "Hello, I'm Fortense Yeldon. Celine is my younger sister."

"Oh, do you know where she is?"

"I'm afraid not, young man. You ought to try the ghastly little queen, Moors. He seems to keep tabs on her."

"Not this time. Jerrod's looking for Celine as well."

"Oh, so he's the one getting you to track her down."

Sensing a trap, I stuck to the lie. "I have to let Starlight know if she's interested, today. So you can understand my urgency." I could see that she was thinking about it by the way her eyes turned heavenward, as though she weighed up some huge decision.

"Eventually she said, "Personally I believe that this Thespian lark takes time that my sister could put to better productive use. The last I heard is that she was staying with our brother. From time to time Celine suffers from terrible migraines and has to have peace and quiet. When she gets an attack, she goes off to our brother, who has a delightful house in the country where she can have peace and quiet."

"What's his phone number?"

That wouldn't be much use. My brother spends a lot of time in the city, and Celine won't answer the phone."

"And your brother's contact details?"

"Oh, he's a very private man. I'll ring him and ask for you if you like."

"Great! Can you do it now?"

"That wouldn't do any good. My brother's a barrister and never uses the phone for private calls until after he finishes work. Leave your number, and I'll let you know what he says."

So that was as far as I was going to get at present. I duly handed Fortense one of my business cards.

She stared at me as if I had two heads. "It says you're a private detective. I thought you said ..."

Anticipating this reaction, I lied, "Starlight has employed me to find her." That seemed to satisfy her, so I left Jefferson House with my dishonour intact.

It had been months since I'd been out to Jen's farmhouse in Bushey. It was close to 7 pm the time she was expecting me. I was clutching the single stem of the red rose to my chest when she opened the door.

Smiling sweetly she teased, "Mr Doyle do you always bring flowers with you to business meetings?"

"Seeing the sexy dress, showing a generous amount of cleavage, she was almost wearing, I retorted, "Do you always wear clothes like that to business meetings?"

“Touche. You'd better bring it in then. Pity it isn't Matteus Rose, though.”

Jen had made some of her speciality vegetable soup, which we shared with a bottle of Cabernet.

“So how's it going with the 'Q' project?”

“Where's the report on Declan Merrick?”

I handed her a memory stick. “This guy is mega rich and a cyberspace guru with an enormous amount of clout. I can see why he would want in on the 'Q' but maybe not for the purest of reasons.”

She stared at Ossie. “How often do we bump into billionaires. Look this guy is my best chance of getting the 'QSA' out there. And I think it's time to take the plunge.”

“As long as you're jumping into something pleasant.” I added, “He's the sort of guy who'll probably want to have a go in the 'Q'.”

“So, what's wrong with that?”

She took a sip of wine and reached over to touch Ossie's hand. “You're the bravest person I know. You pioneered the 'QSA'. You were the first man in quantum space, and I shall always admire you for having faith in me and my technology. But it's time for the second phase and, As long as Declan has a clean legal bill of health I'm inclined to take him up on his offer.”

I looked at this beautiful lady. Hey, thank you for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime. You know, Jen. “I've never felt so alive as I did when I was back in France investigating Vincent's death. I yearn for that excitement, that risk, that adrenalin rush, again.”

Jennifer, knowing she couldn't promise him that experience again, changed the subject. “So what sleuthing have you been up to?”

I finished my wine. My vanishing actress case is probably the most challenging assignment I have on the books.”

“I'm intrigued. Tell me about it?”

She listened while I made the tedious tale as interesting as I could. Then she said, “Marlowe was a bit of a bad boy, wasn't he?”

“A man of many talents, by all accounts,” I said while sidling up to her on her couch. “Apart from being a playwright genius, he was allegedly also a government spy.”

Nestling up to Ossie, she said, “Didn't he have a reputation for heavy drinking and womanising?”

Sliding my arm around her shoulder, I responded, “A contemporary author, Francis Meres, has it that Marlowe was 'stabbed to death by a bawdy serving-man, a rival of his in his lewd love' as punishment for his 'Epicurism and atheism.’”

“Is that what happened?” she asked, snuggling into Ossie.

“It's listed as such in the Dictionary of National Biography and is still often stated as fact today.”

“Do you believe it happened that way,”

Then the proverbial light bulb flashed above my head. I sat up straight! “Wouldn't it be great If I could witness it as a Quantime experience?”

Jennifer backed away, saying, “No, I don't think it's a good idea. Besides, we'd need the quantum camera up and running to record the moment.”

She was right about that. Just imagine getting a photo of someone killing Christopher Marlowe. “So how is the Qcam project going, Jen.”

“Nathan has to keep dragging that idiot genius back from the brink.”

“I thought Dimmock was enthusiastic about have a share in the 'Q'.”

“Yes, he has his good days, but he keeps falling into the abyss. Mind you he'll have to come good soon. The Qcam is part of the Declan deal.”

“So why isn't he, with all his techno resources, designing his own?”

“He thinks I already have one.”

“Shit! I see what you mean.”

Chapter 3

Jen was rushing around trying to make everything perfect. I made her a cup of chamomile tea. “Relax Jen, It's not the Queen coming to dinner.”

Jennifer took the herbal tea from Ossie. “He's more important than the queen. She's not about to invest big bucks in the QSA.”

I laughed, “Exactly. Mr Merrick's not coming here to check out your suitability for a housemaid position.”

Jennifer sipped her tea. Then our ears pricked as we heard the throaty roar of a car coming up the drive.

Jen opened the front door as Declan untangled his long legs as he climbed out of a beautifully restored E-Type Jag.

“At least he doesn't have a chauffeur,” I quipped. Jennifer shot me a look that said, 'no American jokes'. I appraised him as gave Jen a hug. He was a bit younger and a helluva lot richer than me. His visage and shock of black slightly curly hair put me in the mind of a young Elliot Gould. As I got to know him better, I guess he wasn't a bad bloke - as Yanks go. I had thought he would be a know all but, to my surprise, he showed a willingness to learn. Jennifer wanted me on hand to explain what the weird 'Q' experience felt like for me. She was getting on like a house on fire with him when it came to the hi-tech stuff. But only I could convey the weirdness and wonderfulness of actual quantum travelling. Sorry, quantum space assimilation. As Jennifer went to pains to point out, there is no actual travelling involved, in the real sense of the word. It's more a case of 'space exchange' a concept not even known to quantum science.

As we sat rambling on about stuff going on in the world, Declan announced, “Jennifer, I want a go on your machine.”

Neither of us was particularly surprised at this, and now the Jumbo had trumpeted its presence we couldn't ignore it any longer. Jennifer said, "Anywhere in particular?"

I piped up. "What about Elizabethan England?"

"Why?" They both chorused.

"To find out about Marlowe."

"What, Christopher Marlowe, the playwright?" Declan asked.

"Well, there's a lot of intriguing mystery in his life," I reasoned.

Declan said, "Hey man, that's an excellent idea. Let's go for it."

"Hang on a moment," Jennifer intercepted, "It's not as easy as all that. A lot of preparation is involved. I have to programme as many relevant facts as I can into the 'Q' so you can blend into Elizabethan society."

I explained, "When in 19th Century France it amazed me how many things automatically happened when I stepped out of the 'Q'. I was dressed appropriately for the time, climate and geography. And I could speak French fluently, including the dialect."

Declan rubbed his jaw. "I see what you mean, Jennifer. Guess I was getting a bit ahead of myself."

"I think we all are," she replied. "Now, if that's what you want to experience I'll start on the programming."

"Hey, I'd be real honoured to watch you do that," Declan said.

She shook her head. "That's not going to work. I have to do it alone."

"Can you show me the software you designed to deal with data collection," Declan pressed.

Jennifer smiled knowingly. "It doesn't work like that." Before he had a chance to respond, she said, "And it's too complicated for me to explain."

Declan wore a puzzled frown but said nothing.

Jennifer rose from her seat. "Okay, while I get it set up ask Ossie about his quantime experiences."

I made coffee while Declan jotted down some questions to ask. As we sipped our brew, feeling like the expert I wasn't, I said, "So hit me with it."

The American grinned, "You were the first guy to experience the 'Q machine', right?"

"I am the only person to have done it," I proudly boasted.

"So what did you feel when you first stepped in that thing?"

"It's difficult to describe. I suppose I was too overwhelmed actually to feel anything I could define. Being in the lap of the gods comes to mind. It's like surrendering to an unknown force."

Declan nodded. "Jen talked about you trusting her and her technology. Were you conscious of that when you entered the machine?"

I sipped my coffee, partly to play for time. “To be honest, I was shit scared and couldn't make up my mind about doing it. But there was another guy who was ready to take my place. I guess the thought of missing out on the adventure of a lifetime was the primary motivator, not trust.”

“Yeah, I understand the power of competing. So are you saying you didn't trust Jennifer?”

“It's not that. It's just that the concept of trust brings with it a sense of insecurity and that's something I didn't want to cope with.”

“You said you were overwhelmed, and that overrode any other feelings you had deep down.”

“As soon as I stepped into Jen's Pumpkin, as we affectionately called it, it was very odd. There were no seatbelts, no controls; not even an engine! I guess my brain was in 'can not compute' mode. The best way I can explain it is there was a particular mind numbing about it. In some way, such an odd experience seemed to override the reptilian fight or flight instinct.”

“So what you're saying is that the weird things you experienced overrode your survival instinct, so it didn't become an issue.”

“It's not a full explanation, but it'll have to do for now.”

Declan got up. “Thanks, Ossie. I'll just go and check to see if Jennifer is ready for me.”

Declan said, “Knock, knock,” before he entered Jennifer's domain.

“Oh, come on in.”

He took a seat. Getting the scientist's attention, he said, “So how does 'Q' travel work?”

Starting at Quantum Biology kindergarten level, she began. “Let's start with the concept of the wave function. It is said to describe the state of a physical system completely. The shape of the wave function encodes the probabilities for the outcomes of any measurements an observer might perform. But wave function belongs to nature, as an objective description of an objective reality.”

Declan, already struggling in the deep end, said, “So how does that relate to quantum travel?”

She smiled, “Okay, first off I programme data into the 'QSA' which it turns into a wave that contains all that information in a photonic bank of energy. This photonic energy synchronises with the subject's consciousness, which describes the state of the physical system in, say, the Elizabethan world.”

Responding, he said, “I think I get it. The info data, in a waveform, becomes the subject's conscious experience.”

Impressed, she continued, “The shape of this wave function encodes all the probabilities for the outcomes of any measurements an observer might perform on it. It also overrides our prejudices, likes and dislikes, etc. But, once you're out of the 'QSA', it heightens your sense of fight or flight.”

“That's interesting because Ossie was just saying how the experience of the 'Q' nullified signals from the reptilian brain.”

“That would only be the initial 'no' response. Declan, the human mind is amazing in that it can adapt to stressful situations very quickly. Now that Ossie has a few 'QSA' experiences under his belt he can approach quantum assimilation with confidence.”

Declan, amazed by this brilliant woman's grasp of quantum reality, said, “So, Jennifer, how do you gather all the info you need for a particular quantum experience. I mean how do you know you have all bases covered?”

She smiled knowingly at him. “I don't gather any particular data. If anything I ungather it.”

“Ungather it!” he uttered, thrown by her statement.

She explained, “The thing about 'quantum reality' is that everything in the universe exists simultaneously. The general idea with quantum mechanics is that a standing wave represents 'potential', in that, in its quantum state, it can collapse into the form of particle reality, as an act of consciousness. What the CPU of the 'QSA' does is change that potential into the reality of a chosen target, e.g. the Elizabethan era.”

“Wow! That's amazing.”

She looked at him. “No more amazing than your Boogle search engine. Doesn't it work in the same way?”

“What do you mean?”

“The Internet is nothing more than stored digital data. As long as the data exists, we can search for anything. For that to be the case, every bit and byte of info have to exist simultaneously. What the Enquirer has to do is de-clutter the Internet to find that which they seek.”

Declan laughed, “I've never heard it put quite that way before.”

“However, The QSA doesn't work that way.”

“Oh!” he responded, eyes widening.

“That was acceptable quantum thinking when I was at Uni. But none of my experiments in 'space travel', as I saw quantum travel to be, worked. Then, one day, I was watching a documentary that went some way to explaining the Australian Aboriginal concept of 'walkabout' The narrator told the viewer that the nomadic tribes followed invisible magnetic routes they call 'song lines'. A singer in the group sang the journey into existence as they walked the deserts and bushland.”

“How did that help you in your experiments, Jen?”

“I came to realise something profound about this. I realised that for the 'Q' to function in real time it had to manifest that reality, by, not so much decluttering the universe of infinite possibility, but by making the target reality the only one that existed. In other words, the reality of, say the Elizabethan age only exists when it is entangled with the 'QSA' experience and human consciousness.”

“My god, Jen, That breakthrough has to be worthy of a Nobel Prize.”

She grinned, “I don't know about that, but it was certainly worthy of getting me fired from my lecturer's job at Uni.”

Chapter 4

Don't get me wrong. I quite like the bloke. But now that Declan Merrick is on the scene the dynamic between Jennifer and I has changed. She seems to be spending more time with him. His understanding of this quantum weirdness is far more advanced than mine. They talk in a kind of secret language together. Well, that's how it seems. It's not that I'm jealous of him. I mean, apart from an off-the-chart IQ and a few billion in the bank what's he got that I haven't. Okay, so I am jealous of the prick. And, to top it off, I have to work with him. Well, I don't have to but if I want another 'Q' experience I do have to if you know what I mean. The only positive in this for me is that, although the big investor is my boss, when it came to the quantime he had to defer to my greater experience. So I had to button my lip and spend time with Declan, researching into the life and times of Christopher Marlowe.

His life, it turned out, was a real box of tricks. There's not much at all about his birth and childhood. We know he was born around the same time as William Shakespeare and, like the more famous bard, came from humble beginnings. That's about it until we come to his academic life. Somehow young Kit Marlowe managed to get into Cambridge University, where he excelled as a bright young scholar, intoxicated on ideas - the more outrageous, the better. He bathed luxuriously in the splendour of language. Words became more important to him than his mundane reality. He was bisexual and a free thinker. Marlowe was both too bright for his own good and conspicuous, a dangerous combination during Elizabethan era paranoia. Not only was the pen mightier than the sword, but it could also easily have become the weapon of his undoing.

All this stuff was pretty basic and readily available through Boogle and other search engines. But it helped put me in the 'zone' so to speak. It was important for us to be armed with some background knowledge while we carried out our investigations in Elizabethan England. As we know, The Theatre drew Marlowe like a moth to a flame. As a dramatist, he became acquainted with both noblemen and scoundrels (the two not mutually exclusive). However, a casual meeting (no useful details) lead him into the service of spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham, and the seedy, violent world of espionage ('Duty' with discretion). But young Kit drank and partied to excess and was anything but discrete.

As we compared notes on the Marlowe enigma, Declan said. "What a paradox the guy was. Although he admired Machiavelli's theories, he was sickened by the reality of Machiavellian 'statecraft' employed to engineer the death of Mary, Queen of Scots."

I added, "Which was why he retreated to the world of drama and playwriting."

"Yes, Ossie but the guy has been warned 'nobody leaves the service'."

"Yet, as a bit of a provocateur, Marlowe provided biting commentary on political morality, state repression of individual freedoms and the justification of dubious meanings in the names religion and patriotism."

Declan grinned, "Jeez, this guy sure set himself up as a target."

I said, “He declared, about Parliament, 'They love the pain of others, for, in it, their power is manifest. Men don't want knowledge or virtue. They seek power above all else.’”

“like I said he might just as well have painted a target on his own back.”

I wanted to put this knowledge to practical use and started to compile a list of people I'd like to investigate about Marlowe's death. Thomas Kyd was right at the top of the list. History has it that he, a prominent playwright, was served with an edict to appear before the Privy Council in May 1593. He told them he had lived with Marlowe for two years as a 'chamber fellow' (Elizabethan term for homosexual) an indictable offence, between men of different classes, during that time. Kyd, the author of 'The Spanish Tragedy' along with other acclaimed works, was the second most prominent English playwright of that era. After that disclosure, Marlowe left Kyd and shacked up with Sir Thomas Walsingham, a courtier to Queen Elizabeth.

Jennifer phoned me to say the 'QSA' was programmed and ready. I was to meet Her and Declan at the farmhouse for a briefing.

At the prospect of having another 'Q' experience adrenalin was already pumping in my veins, by the time I got to Bushey. I was also feeling apprehensive at having Declan with me. For a start, it had only been me in the 'Q' before, and we had no idea what the effect of two people quantised simultaneously in the same space would have on us. This uncertainty presented a whole new ballgame, one that had me concerned.

As soon as I arrived at Jen's, I picked up nervous tension around the place. That in itself wasn't surprising, considering Declan and I was about to venture into the twilight world. Jen was talking with Declan as I walked in. She looked up at me. “Well, this is it, Ossie. Are you primed to step into the pumpkin again?”

“Yes, but I have a few questions first.”

She laughed, “You always do.”

As they sat close to each other, on the sofa, I had to take my seat in an old armchair. Then I said, “We've never assimilated back to the 1500's before. So how do we know it's going to work?”

Jennifer smiled, “Ossie, before you assimilated to 19th Century France, you had the same question. Let me explain. The concept of time in a quantum reality is entirely different to that in this so – called real experience.”

“I'm sure you've told me this before, but it's still difficult for me to get my head around.”

“Okay, Ossie, think of quantum reality as a movie on a DVD. The whole movie exists all at once. Quantum reality is like a film of the entire universal experience. So it doesn't matter where you assimilate in history the effect is the same.”

Feeling satisfied with her answer I then said, “Okay, now let's come to the aspect of Declan coming with me. I haven't had a co-pilot before so how is that going to affect things?”

Jen frowned, “This is a trickier question because, as you point out, were breaking new ground here. However, as the 'QSA' is merely a vehicle of quantisation transition for space assimilation purposes, I don't see it being a problem.”

Declan piped up, “What Jen is trying to say, is that quantisation is the way the Internet works, in that tiny packets of light information (quanta), assimilate on your computer screen as images. So while we are in transition, we are pretty much in a state of light quanta.”

Jen interceded, “Thanks, Declan, a good analogy.” Turning to me, she added, “Just as you can open up multiple web pages on your computer; I believe there can be multiple quantised entities in the pumpkin at any one time, without any deleterious effects.”

“Sounds good in theory,” I muttered, knowing it was the best answer I was likely to get.

Jennifer briefed the pair of 'quantanauts' on some things. “you each have your personal pendants to recall the QSA any time you need to. You just press on the centre of the pendant in the same way you unlock your car door, electronically. As soon as you do so the QSA appears before you.

“How the heck does that happen?” Declan asked.

“The holographic replication of the QSA remains in a quantised state, which is why people cannot see it or experience it in any way. When you press your pendant, the device appears temporarily in your reality. You can either summon the device independently or together; it doesn't matter.”

Declan asked, “After being quantised do we have any particular powers outside of the QSA?”

“No, you're just as vulnerable as you are here in this reality.” Then Jennifer said, “It's critical that you do not do anything to influence history in any way. You must never divulge who you are. You can ask people questions, but you must never say anything that's likely to influence the way anybody thinks. To do so may well cause them to act differently to the journey mapped out for them. This rule is crucial.”

The Boogle man asked, “What would happen if we died while in another historical assimilation. Would we cease to exist in this here and now.”

Jennifer sighed, “That's something I don't want to find out. But I will say this. In the event of any life threatening situation you can instantly summon the QSA.” Then she added, “Each of you has an ancestry, your historical timeline. So if in the unlikely case, you did die while on the mission, I don't see how that would alter your natural ascendancy.”

I'd been thinking about that from time to time as well. So I said, “Well it's the old conundrum, isn't it? If I went back in time and killed my great grandfather I, wouldn't be here now, to go back in time to carry out the act.”

Jennifer corrected, “That's to do with time travel. This experience is space travel, concerning quantised states. In such a scenario there are almost identical copies of you simultaneously existing in every possible historical event you can envisage. The job of the QSA is to entangle your consciousness physically with any of those events, provided I have decluttered them from the quantised universe.”

Feeling information overload, I suggested, “That's enough theory for me. Let's get on with the practice.”

Declan said, “Yeah, let's do it.”

Jennifer nodded, saying, “Are you both sure, you're ready?”

Declan looked at me, the frown on his face saying, “What am I letting myself in for?”

“Me, radiating a picture of confidence, said, “No problems Jen. Let her rip.” Inside I was churning. The moment of truth had come. Taking the lead, I boldly stepped into the pumpkin and took a seat. Declan climbed in beside me. We sat there waiting, staring into space, as Professor Smethurst, went to her control centre, pressed some numbers on a keypad and switched on the machine. I looked at the American's taut features, saying, “Don't worry mate. The first assimilation is the worst. It gets easier after that.”

“Shit, is this happening?” he mumbled, as the copper coil shot off the blue tendrils of light.

Chapter 5

Declan and I stared at each other. The clothing we wore was the first big surprise. We stood there attired in short trouser-like garments over tights and tight fitting doublets. Over this we wore jerkins. We stood there laughing at each other. The ubiquitous ruff, so redolent of Tudor Times, always appeared to me as some cake decoration. The 'muffin' hats we wore put our station in the professional class, say that of a doctor or banker. As we soon discovered, Elizabethan men weren't allowed to wear whatever took their fancy. It didn't matter how wealthy they might be, colours, fabrics and even the materials dictated rank, status and position in society. I looked at the bemused expression on Declan's face.

He said, "Oswald, pray tell me what just happened."

"If I'm not mistaken, these oddly separated sleeves we are wearing means we have arrived in Tudor England."

"How is that even possible?"

I grinned, "Are you ready for the adventure of a lifetime?"

"Certainly Master Doyle, but where do we go from here?" Declan asked.

"Let's just get a sense of the place and take it from there."

He nodded in affirmation. So we left the field we'd arrived in, looked around, and saw a signpost. One arm, with 2 miles painted on it, was pointing to London.

We didn't just get a sense of the place. All five senses were on full alert, especially that of smell. Walking down narrow, cobbled streets, slippery with the slime of refuse, proved a challenge in itself. Pedestrians, of which there were many, mostly from the lower classes, stepped with great care as they navigated their way along these treacherous walkways. It was a cold, cloudy day and I was very thankful for the warm clothes the 'Q' had thoughtfully provided. Passing along streets filled with timber houses, crammed together like proverbial sardines, I got a sense of the dire poverty suffered by a large proportion of the city's population.

As we entered London city, we passed by some sturdily built 'half-timbered' houses, set back from the streets. Middle-Class Tudors lived in these, while most of the 200,000 people residing in London at the time, were used to living in more basic buildings, with timber frames filled in with wattle and daub. Although the evidence showed that, new wealth, resulting from mining meant some men could afford to have new houses built or rebuilt with bricks, instead of wickerwork and plaster, inside the timber frames. I also noticed that irrespective of wealth and class, all homes in the city, instead of having the usually thatched roof, had tiled ones, for fear of fire.

My first impression of London was that of a 'chaotic nightmare' I'd never experienced anything like it. Carts and coaches were thundering along as the world ran on wheels. At every corner people meeting in shoals, jostled each other. On top of this, hammers beating here, Coopers hooping there and water tankards running at a tilt. London was deafening, congested, bawdy, bustling and busy. Trades of every kind and description: churches, inns, houses, workshops, stalls, stables and theatres. The place looked like a chaotic zoo, with cats, dogs, pigs, horses and sheep all over the place. I was

horrified by the awful bear baiting and cruel cockfighting. London, it appeared, was a city of inns, alehouses and bawdy houses, all used by actors, courtiers, churchmen, merchants, shoppers, apprentices, money lenders, bawds, beggars and thieves.

Declan yelled “LOOK OUT!” as the contents of a chamber pot hit the stinking ground, just feet from where I was walking.

The culprits gave no warning, or if they did, it could not be heard above the incessant din. Nobody seemed to care, just taking it in their stride. I said, “Thank you, Sire. I am in your debt.” It seemed strange talking like that, but I'd soon get used to it. We quickly came to realise that being hit with faeces or urine, hurled from an upper storey window was no rare occurrence. Chamber pots and Jordans were summarily emptied out of windows onto the dirty streets below. And, to make things even worse, there was no drainage.

We reached Fleet Ditch, which stank so much we nearly threw up our gorge.

Declan said, “Forsooth, we must away from this foul place.”

I wholeheartedly agreed, but we were nearing my goal, a Theatre in Blackfriars, where Thomas Kyd was airing his play 'The Spanish Tragedy'. Strangely, the closer we got to the heart of the city, the less we noticed the putridity. We discovered that this was mainly due to London's natural cleansers, the kites, graceful birds that made their nests from rags and refused, in the forks of trees. They scavenged continually, eating rotting produce and anything else they could lay the beaks on. Countering these Ghastly bad, human-made odours, the smells of the countryside floated in, as rosy milkmaids sold their dairy wares in the early morning streets.

“So this is the city,” Declan said, unimpressed.

“It's what we mean by the City of London.

“It's more like - a cramped commercial huddle with a reeking river running through it.”

“The Thames is everybody's thoroughfare. Ever since the time of Chaucer, Londoners have had great difficulty bridging it; even now the Elizabethans have achieved only London Bridge. Most crossings still take place by boat.”

The awful smell became worse as we approached the river. Crowds were building by the jetty as a boatman yelled. “Eastward-ho, Eastward-ho.”

“What's that about?” the American said.

“It's a water taxi, and we have to get aboard.”

Luckily there was coinage in my purse. One penny got us a ride across to Blackfriars. The ferryman crammed as many of us in as was possible, making the long row boat ride low in the water. I saw some commercial barges on the river, as well as a gilded vessel carrying noblemen up the river to the royal court. There were people chained to the river bank. I ventured to speak to a passenger next to me. “Pray Sire, What has befallen those wretched souls?”

He turned to me and saw my garb indicated I was a professional man he deigned to say, “Those criminals have to abide the washing of three tides or more, as punishment for their transgressions.”

I wondered what they had done for them to suffer such a cruel fate, but didn't venture to push the stranger further. I guess I just wanted to try out my 'Elizabethan speak' on one of the locals.

Discovering where to find Thomas Kyd turned out to be much easier than I imagined. Gossiping was one of the favourite past times of Elizabethan folk. London was still small enough to make the practice thoroughly useful, and Thomas Kyd's sexual proclivities was a good subject for speculation, especially him being something of a public figure. Gossiping usually started in barber shops but soon spread to tavern tables. It was in such a bar I learned of master Kyd's whereabouts.

The playwright wasn't that easy to spot among the other theatre folk, conversing with him. They all wore neatly trimmed beards and longish hair, hidden by muffin caps or toque hats, sporting beautiful feathers. We approached the group of thespians, and I said, "Excuse us, but we are looking for Thomas Kyd."

A man with a narrow face made even more so by his dark pointy beard turned to the strangers in his midst. "And pray, who are you sire?"

Using our real names, I said, "Oswald Doyle and Declan Merrick at your service," while sweeping my hat from my head."

"And what is your business here, Master Doyle?"

"We are here to seek knowledge of Master Kit Marlowe."

Thomas looked at the pair. "Have you not heard. He was murdered a year past."

"Yes – a tragedy for the world of theatre. But what we seek are the more intimate details of the playwright's short life."

A worried frown creased Kyd's handsome face. Turning to the small group engaging him, he said, "Excuse me gentlemen, but I need to speak with these people privately."

He took us to the makeshift stage, to what turned out to be the cast's shared dressing room. Once they were inside, Kyd asked, "Why are you interested in Kit?"

I answered, "Because he was a genius and knowledge of his art needs to be known far and wide."

"How did you become aware of my whereabouts, Master Doyle?"

I grinned, "Tongues loosened by ale in the tavern. You are indeed a topic of considerable import, Master Kyd."

"Ah, gossip spreads faster than the accursed plague and leads to frequent quarrelling. Many arguments result in violent clashes using sword and dagger. So we need to carry side arms on all occasions." Kyd added, "Alas, that is what led to the death of Kit."

Declan, who had remained silent till this time, said, "We wish to know of his life, not so much the manner of his death."

Still suspicious, Kyd said, "What will you do with any knowledge I may impart to you?"

I replied, "I assure you, Sire, that our wish is to preserve his genius for posterity. And yours along with it as part of his journey."

Kyd brightened, "You will promote my work?"

I smiled, "Tell us what you know, and your considerable genius will ring through history for generations to come."

Kyd smiled, "Sit down gentlemen, and I will say what I know."

"Do you have ink and quill?"

"I am a playwright. Of course, I have such things."

Supplied with the recording tools of the time, I sat and listened, quill at the ready.

Thomas Kyd began, "In early May 1593, The Sheriff had bills posted about London threatening Protestant refugees from France and the Netherlands who had settled in the city. The 'Dutch church libel', was one such poster. It was couched in rhymed iambic pentameter and, signed Tamburlaine; it contained allusions to several of Kit's plays."

"Did Marlowe write them?" I asked.

"Whether he did or not, he was blamed for them. And I, being closely associated with him was arrested the very next day. They ransacked my lodgings and claimed to have found incriminating evidence – a mere fragment of a heretical tract. As heresy attracted the executioner's axe, I was deeply affeared and, although shameful of my act, I asserted that it belonged to Kit."

"You betrayed your good friend!"

"Alas, yes."

"Why didn't you just claim no knowledge of it?" Declan asked.

"It was known at court that we had been writing 'in one chamber' some two years earlier. I crumbled under their questioning."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"At the time we had both been working for Ferdinando Stanley, our aristocratic patron. When he heard of the incident, to distance himself from us, he claimed that Kit was a trouble-making rebel. As a result of our testimony, the Star Chamber issued a warrant for Marlowe's arrest on May 18."

"Was he arrested?" I asked.

"It was awkward for the Privy Council to swear a warrant. In searching for Kit, they discovered he was chambering with Thomas Walsingham, whose father was a first cousin of the late Sir Francis Walsingham."

"Who was?" I asked.

"Oh, Elizabeth's principal secretary, during the last decade. He was a man more deeply involved in state espionage than any other member of the Privy Council."

"Did Marlowe get caught?" Declan asked.

“No, but he duly presented himself on 20 May. Apparently, there being no Privy Council meeting on that day, he was instructed to 'give his daily attendance on their Lordships, until they licensed him to the contrary'.”

“Did he get to attend?” I asked.

“Alas no. On Wednesday, May 30, Kit was murdered.”

“In a drunken brawl?”

“That's what I heard. I wasn't there.”

“A bit convenient, don't you think?” Declan said.

“What do you mean?” Thomas queried.

I had to step in. “We're only interested in facts, not opinions,” I stated firmly, looking at my offside.

Declan shot me a black look.

I said, “We don't want to initiate even more rumours.” I turned to the playwright. “Thank you, Master Kyd. We may want to speak with you again.”

He smiled, “You know where to find me.” Then he handed me a flyer. “We open in ten days. Please come as my guests.”

“Picking up the scribbled notes I'd made, we rose, and we left the master playwright to his work.

Outside the theatre, the putrid river pong assailed my nostrils.

“Why did you stop me in there?” Declan said, grabbing my arm.

“Because you were about to offer an opinion. One that Kyd may not have considered. Declan, it's forbidden for us to influence anybody in any way.”

“It's a difficult rule to follow.”

“Not if you only ask questions.” Then I grinned, “But I'd like to hear your theory.”

“Thomas Walsingham may have organised Marlowe's murder, to stop him from exposing anything scandalous concerning their relationship.”

“That's if someone did kill Marlowe.”

“Come again my man?”

“We have to find any and all witnesses to the assault and question them on the matter.”

“Do you have a list, Oswald?”

“I couldn't bring my note taker with me.”

“How are you going to take the notes you just made back into our time?”

I grinned, “I guess I'll soon find out.”

“Are you planning on going back already?”

“Jen will be waiting for a report.”

“Come on Oswald, let's do a little sightseeing first.”

“You must be getting used to the smell.”

As we walked and compared notes, I noticed how passers-by nearly always offered a friendly greeting. It was surprising to me that Elizabethan London seemed to abound in cheerful types willing to share greetings with friend and stranger alike, despite the difference in classes. Apparently, It was no rare thing to see the elegant women of the time jostling with the rudest peasants in both the pit of the bull-ring and the theatre.

We came across a gathering of people engaged in some celebration. Different classes mixed, drinking ale and raising toasts. Being the curious creature that I am, I sought out a gentleman wearing a tall hat. “Excuse me Sire, but I am new to this city and wish to know the reason for such exuberance.”

“The passing of dear Edward Freer.”

“He offered no more than that so I didn't press him for more information. By merely providing a name it would seem that the dear departed Mr Freer was well known, But concerning which sphere of business he was permanently retired from I had no idea. As stallholders were selling their wares amid games and dancing, it became apparent that wakes and carnival went hand in hand here. I'd read while researching Elizabethan times, which during the yuletide festivities all distinctions of class were temporarily non-existent. Elizabeth showed herself so often and so intimately to the ordinary people that they considered the acquaintance almost personal. Such was the happy-go-lucky spirit that characterised the era.

I beckoned Declan away from the crowd. “It's time we reported back to Jennifer.”

“Just when it was getting interesting.”

Out of sight we simultaneously pressed our pendants. In a flash, we were both back in the 'Q', and another nano-second had us back in Jen's lab. Being a quantime veteran, I quickly acclimatised to my current reality. Declan just sat there in the device, disoriented, unsure where he was. I knew that sensation, and it wasn't at all pleasant. I turned to him. “Just sit there until you're ready to step back into this world.”

Chapter 6

“So how was it?” Jennifer asked, as Declan entered the kitchen.”

He still looked a bit spaced out (very appropriate word that considering what he's just been through).

I can't believe it, The American uttered, bewildered. “It was totally unreal. We were actually back there in Elizabethan London. The craziest part was it felt so natural, like I was part of that society.”

Jennifer smiled, “How about I make us some coffee?”

Once we were sitting down together with our freshly brewed caffeine hit, Jennifer said, “Okay, Declan, explain what you mean by unreal, when it was probably the most real experience of your life.”

“It was incredible: The people, their clothes, customs, The crowded buildings, narrow streets, the obnoxious stink that permeated the city.”

Jen was totally fixated on Declan and his report. I must admit I was feeling overlooked. It was as though I had served my purpose and the American billionaire was the flavour of the month. Okay, I understand that she was trying to reel him in as a major shareholder in her QSA and that it was all an act to get him on board. But that still didn't make me feel any better. So, with nose firmly out of joint I left them to it and slunk back to my tiny bed-sit above my office in East Acton.

After a fortifying dram of JW I scrutinised my case load. One assignment stuck out from the pile. The disappearing diva. To be truthful the pile wasn't that big. Apart from looking for Celine Yeldon, A Mrs Scott had me following her errant husband around and the Royal Insurance Company wanted to catch a Rupert Glass walking without a stick to support his allegedly damaged knee. There was an art fraud case coming up, but I didn't yet have the go ahead on that one. To tell the truth they all seemed mundane and boring after having the 'Q' experience. Still, the bills don't pay for themselves and I had to get myself into gear. I got Celine's mobile contact number and rang it. She wasn't answering her phone. I rang her home number. Luckily Fortence was home. “Hello, Oswald from the Starlight Agency. You said you'd contact your brother for me.”

“Oh yes, you're the man who's trying to contact Celine.”

“That's right. Have you heard from her?”

“No, I'm afraid not.”

“Has your brother seen her?”

“You'll have to ask him about that.”

I sighed, “Yes, so what's his contact number?”

“Oh, I can't give you that!”

“Then how am I supposed to speak with him?”

“I will have to contact him and let you know.”

I suppressed an ear piercing scream. “This Starlight offer is only on the table for two more days, I lied. Please phone your brother and get back to me straight away.”

“Oh, yes. Alright then.”

I was beginning to think that Celine Yeldon was another Lord Lucan, when my phone rang. “Hello, Oswald Doyle speaking.”

“Mr Doyle I'd appreciate it if you didn't harass my sister again.”

It was obviously the brother on the other end. “I assure you that wasn't my intention, Mr Yeldon. But I urgently need to locate Celine and she seems to have left the planet.”

“What's the nature of your 'urgent' business?”

“I represent the Starlight Agency in New York and they want Celine for a role in a Broadway play.”

“Yes, Fortence told me that. I checked with a New York talent scout. He's a good friend and He's never heard of this 'Starlight Agency'.”

Shit! I had to brazen it out. “It's a new agency, which is why he hasn't heard of it.”

“I just told you that. Are you sure you're not lying, Mr Doyle.”

I just remembered that Fortence mentioned something about her brother being a barrister. “Now, why would I do that?”

“Perhaps because your client is actually Jerrod Moors and he's lost his leading lady.”

How the hell did he know that? “She has to fulfil her contract with him.”

“Theatre types can be very flighty. If you'd have told me what you wanted instead of that pathetic subterfuge, we wouldn't be wasting each other's time.”

I wished the floor would open and swallow me up. “Yes, you're right. Now do you know where Celine is?”

“Of course I do. I'm Celine's brother.”

“So, can you please tell me?”

“She gets migraines you know. Very nasty ones and has to be confined to darkened rooms days at a time.”

“Yes, I understand that, Mr Yeldon. However, I still need to contact her.”

“Give me your number, and I'll get her to call you.”

Oh no! Not again! My mind screamed. “I would prefer to call her myself.”

“Mr Doyle, it's the best offer you're going to get.”

That was as far as I was going to get with that case at present. So it was back on the trail of Mr Scott. He worked for Andrews Accountancy and Auditing, in Kilburn. It was Tuesday afternoon so he'd be out of the office visiting clients. Except he wasn't. Well, he was out of the office, with Barbara Melbury, from Barclays Bank. Instead of working out balance sheets, they were balancing

in the sheets of room nine of the Last Minute Hotel, where they'd carried on their love tryst for the last six weeks. Of course, they could have been working out adjustments and dealing with deposits and discharges for all I knew. But the moment of truth had come, and I had to earn my fee.

Charlie Brown (Yes that is his real name) was standing around smoking a fag, out the back of the hotel. I approached him, handing him a tenner.

“What's this for Mr Doyle.”

I looked at the middle-aged porter. We'd helped each other before. “To get me into room nine, mate.”

He grinned and inhaled more smoke. “So this is it?”

I nodded. This part of the operation was always the tricky bit. Timing had to be spot-on. I had to be in, take some rapid shots and be away before the couple had a chance to react. I had nothing to say to them, and I certainly didn't want to hear what they might want to say to me. Besides, I'd heard all the accolades before: slime, lowlife, sneak, insect. Etc. But hey, I'm only doing my job.

Charlie knocked at number 9. “Room service. There's somebody here to see you,” he said, while unlocking the door. I stood ready with trusty Canon EOS at the ready. Multiple clicks and flashes and I'm out of there. They'd be no complaints to management, especially as the couple had gone under false names. How do I know that? They always do. Back in the car, I checked the evidence. They weren't the hottest shots I'd taken. Mr Scott and Mrs Melbury were under a sheet, but one or two shots showed who they were, despite the rabbit caught in headlights look on their faces. It would probably be enough. It would have to be because I wouldn't get another shot. I phoned Mrs Scott to say I had what she wanted.

Jerrold Moors called, but I had nothing new to tell him.

Jennifer rang and said she wanted to see me. I punched the air, “YES.”

Before going over to her place I came across something interesting on the 'net:

Since 1999, Boogle had become an essential part of web infrastructure. It became necessary in the daily lives of millions, offering it's search engine technology, video hosting, blogs and productivity services. Each day users provide Boogle willingly and candidly, with personal information, independent data and files. Boogle justifies this claiming it's for commercial purposes, the selling of targeted ads and the enhancement of its mostly free services.

There was nothing particularly new there. But it was the next bit that got my attention:

These terabytes of user data and user generated content, which would be of use to any intelligence services, has been exposed by a former director of the CIA and the NSA. He asked “Who covers your text messages, your web history, your searches, etc. In this case, it's Boogle – not the CIA.”

I figured this would be a good topic for conversation at Jen's place that evening.

When I arrived at the farmhouse in Bushey, Jen seemed bright and in good spirits. I hated to burst her bubble but that could wait till later. Her hug was warm and lingering, as I hung on to red plonk behind her back. We kissed lightly on the mouth, and I entered her cosy abode. She had dressed most appropriately, for a casual evening, yet I noticed her seductive look, as she turned towards me, greeting me again with another good hug.

As we sat eating her hot chicken and veg broth, she said, “Declan was very impressed.”

“So he should be,” I shot back. “He's just been back to Elizabethan England.”

She grabbed my arm, excitedly. “Declan's in! He's a major shareholder in the QSA.”

“I'm pleased for you Jen. You deserve it – but...”

“But what?”

“I guess this is as good-a-time as any to tell you this.”

“tell me what exactly?”

“Boogle sells intelligence.”

She looked at him, wide-eyed. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“Boogle gains access to confidential information, that goes beyond open source information, and sells it to interested third parties.”

Jennifer smirked, “Oh come on Ossie. Do you think even Boogle has the resources, data and technical capabilities to harvest all sources intelligence like, say the CIA?”

“I don't know but what if Boogle goes against its own motto 'Do no evil' and does use its collected information as an intelligence agency would. What if intelligence professionals did have access to Boogle's vast resources? You'd have to be careful you're not caught up in that.”

Jen thought about it, “Are you sure this isn't personal.”

I put on my mock surprised look. I don't know what you mean.”

“You see Declan as a competitor in the QSA stakes, don't you.”

“Jen, this is getting off the subject, but as you've brought it up, I'll tell you what I think.”

“Alright, tell me.’

“The man is voracious when it comes to controlling new technology. The 'Q' is the most amazingly mind-blowing hi-tech to date. Nothing else is anywhere near its league let alone in its class. I'm concerned that he is going to treat you like any other hi-tech genius he's got involved with.”

“Which is?” Jennifer pressed.

“He takes their genius, calls it his own and pushes them into the background.”

Jennifer smiled. “Your concern is touching, Ossie, But he's a businessman, a very successful businessman. It's time the QSA came out of the closet. And Boogle is the perfect vehicle to make that happen, under my guidance.”

Not wanting to get into arguments that would spoil the tone of a, what looked like a promising night, Ossie pushed the issue aside.

Jennifer wanted to carry on the topic, so I Had to go along with it. For a while anyhow. “You could well be right Jen,” I said, “It's just that after all your hard work I don't want to see some con artist ripping you off.”

She smiled, "That's Foxy's job. He's writing up the contract."

All of a sudden Ossie felt entranced by Jen's beauty. But his head went from heart to hard-on. She was still talking, but he didn't hear a thing she was saying. He said, "Jen, I have this overwhelming desire to kiss you."

She grinned, "Well, I suppose you'll have to do it then."

"I hope I get the same response to all of my requests," I grinned, cheekily.

Jennifer pressed her body against Ossie, embracing him in a deep kiss. She stopped the embrace and straightened out her clothes. With rapid breaths, she said, "I don't want you getting the wrong idea."

"Wrong idea about what?" I queried, genuinely puzzled.

"The idea that I'm some desperate mad scientist woman living alone out in the sticks waiting to jump on the first man who comes along."

"As long as I'm the first man I don't care."

She burst out laughing. "Only you would come up with a pathetic line like that."

She grabbed me and began taking off my clothes, saying, mockingly, "I'm so desperate for a man even you will do."

Although I am capable of undressing my self, on sober occasions anyway, I do enjoy the feminine touch. And boy, could she touch.

Then it was my turn to do the honours, As she paid lip service. I generously helped her out of her dress and any other constricting garments.

She grabbed me by my appendage and walked me into the living room, where she lay down on a hearth rug near on open fire. There, all the necessary parts of the anatomy came together to make for a wild and wonderful experience. I found myself mouthing "I love you, Jen" as she rose up to meet my thrusts.

Chapter 7

By morning I was a wreck and desperately need some fortifying strong coffee to get some of my synapses firing. Jennifer came into the kitchen with wildly tousled hair, eyes half closed. "Coffee," I offered.

She tried working up a smile but failed miserably. Then she announced, "Declan's coming over today. He wants to follow up the Christopher Marlowe mystery."

I looked up from making the fire. "In what way?"

"The QSA way of course."

"What solo?" I blurted feeling my heart rate going up.

"Would that be a problem?"

"I don't think he's ready."

Jennifer laughed, "You certainly weren't, the first time, but you soon picked it up."

"True, but I was a quick learner."

"And you think a man who runs a multi-billion dollar empire isn't smart?"

Of course, I didn't believe that. The bloke's IQ probably shoots right off the chart. But I was the original 'quantanaut', and I wanted in on this Marlowe caper. But I had to come up with a better reason for being involved than that. Right now I couldn't think of one. I looked at Jen, sheepishly. "I believe that you've turned me into a quantime junkie."

Genuinely surprised, she said, "Please explain."

"Don't know if I can. I guess it's a bit like returning from a long and bloody war and feeling dead inside. It's as if nothing can compare with the 'Q' experience. I need my quantum travel fix to feel alive."

"You felt quite alive to me last night." she said, smiling lasciviously.

I grinned, "You know what I mean?"

"You need to attend QA meetings?"

"I'd be pretty lonely, being the only member."

Jennifer sighed, "It makes no difference to me if you go, but you'll have to ask Declan. He's running this assignment."

I nudged her gently on the arm, "I sure if you suggest it he'll go along with it."

"Damn it, Ossie! You'll have to give me a better reason than needing a fix."

So that was it. I felt like I had a sign around my neck 'not wanted on voyage'. I needed a legitimate reason for going with Declan, and I couldn't think of one. True, I had a greater knowledge of London, but he had Boogle maps. Of course, he couldn't take his phone with him. There again, if it

was possible to fit a quantum camera to the 'Q' why not a phone – a quantum phone. I could call Jen from anywhere in history. Now there's a concept to get your head around.

Then it hit me. How was Dimmock getting on with the Qcam? We hadn't heard anything from Nathan Goodfellow for a while. I phoned his number at the LSE. Nathan came online. "Hi, Nathan, Ossie here."

"Hello, What's happening?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing, about the camera project."

"Dimmock's in control of that."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"I spoke to him a couple of weeks ago, and he was fighting the black dog. It's no good talking to him when he's like that."

"Is this Qcam for real mate?"

"The last time I spoke to him it was. He said he'd nearly got it to work."

"It'll need to be tested in the field, right?"

"Sure. Dimmock said he wants to test it in the field."

"Shit man, the 'Q' is becoming crowded suddenly."

"What do you mean?"

"Declan Merrick wants to take it for a joyride."

"The Boogle guru!"

"Yeah. Mr Boogle's just become Jen's partner 'in business'."

"Fuck man! That's huge."

"Isn't he a bit of a con man."

"He's a fucking genius. That's what he is. With the Quantime and the camera he'll be able to film any point in history in his Boogle Earth History programme."

I hadn't thought of the ramifications of what Declan Merrick could do with such an excellent asset.

Nathan said, is that all because I have to get back to work."

"One thing. I need to know how the Qcam technology works and be able to operate it."

"Sounds like you're up to something."

"I just need an edge to get back into the 'Q'."

Shortly afterwards I received another call. It was a woman's voice. "Hello, Oswald Doyle here."

"You want to know where that actress is, right?"

"Do you mean Celine Yelgun?"

“Yes, that's her. Stuck up cow thinks she better than the rest of us.”

“Are you a member of the caste?”

“Yes. Do you want to know, or not?”

“Who am I speaking to?”

“Never mind about that.”

“Okay, so where is she?”

“Shacked up with a dyke called Carla Romano.”

“Where can I find her?”

Romano lives near the Columbia Hotel, in Lancaster Gate.”

“She must be loaded to live there.”

“That's all I know.”

There was something that puzzled me about all this. “Why didn't you just tell Jerrod?”

“He has no control over her. She might take more notice of a private detective.”

I felt better after that call. The caller didn't tell me who she was and I still didn't know the actual address. Many of the grand old townhouses in Lancaster Gate were subdivided into luxury apartments - sorry, studios. And there were a lot of those. I checked the phone book, but Carla Romano must be unlisted. All I was left with was foot slogging and knocking on doors.

The two long terraces of houses, overlooking Kensington Park, divided by a wide gap opening onto a square containing a church, roughly described Lancaster Gate to me. It's wide roads, and pavements lined with Plane trees fronted the various classical style buildings that featured English Baroque details mixed with flamboyant French touches. As the Columbia Hotel was on the corner of Lancaster Gate and Bayswater Road and Ms Romano lived somewhere nearby, it made life a little easier for yours truly. I walked to the apartment block adjacent to the hotel and approached the main entrance to some 50 studio flats. Each of the five floors had a row of bell pushes. Much to my delight, there was a listing for a Romano at C5. I rang the bell, waiting with baited breath. Then a voice said, “Yes, can I help you at all?”

I braced myself. “I'm looking for Ms Celine Yeldon.” There was a pause, then, “Well, you'd better come up.”

It was as simple as that. I couldn't believe my luck. I went to number 5 on floor C and pressed the bell. A woman of indeterminate age, wearing a multi-coloured Kimono styled garment and with a bobbed hairstyle beckoned me into her beautiful apartment, with its Art Deco style nick-nacks.

“So you're looking for our Celine.”

I said, “Actually it's Jerrod who's looking for her.”

“I'd worked that out, Mr?...”

“Doyle. Most people call me Ossie.” I scanned the room, taking in the framed theatre posters and acting accolades. “You tread the boards yourself then?”

“Used to, Mr Doyle. I direct productions these days.”

“Then you would understand Mr Moor's concern about having his leading lady for his opening.”

Indicating an elegant Art Deco armchair, she said, “Do sit down.”

I did so, sinking into comfortable repose.

Carla said, “She works for me now.”

It was time to turn the carrot into a stick. “There's the question of Celine's obligation to the Buckingham Players and her contract with Mr Moors.”

“There always is, dear. But if Celine is sick and can't perform she is indemnified against any lawsuit Jerrod might want to throw at her.”

“Hence the headaches.”

“Oh, she does suffer the most horrendous migraines. Thankfully she's over them for now.”

Surprised how open this woman was with me, I asked, “Is Ms Yeldon here?”

“Oh no. Celine went out to take part in the dress rehearsal.”

I did a double take. “You mean, The Other Marlowe production?”

“Of course. Celine is a professional. She wouldn't let any company down. Not even Jerrod's amateurish productions. Once she's committed, she's solid.”

“Then, if he knew that, why did he hire me to find her?”

“Jerrod's an old worry wart. The closer to the opening the more jittery he becomes.”

I rose up from my seat. “Well, that's that then.” Then she said something that had me intrigued.”

“Do you know much about, 'The Other Marlowe' Mr Doyle?”

“That's the play Celine is in.”

“Marlowe was one of the most controversial and mysterious artists in dramatic history.

“Yes, I have heard that.”

“Well, Celine will be working in my production, called only 'Marlowe'.”

Then she said something that nearly floored me.

“Oh, what I'd pay to go back and see what happened to Kit.”

A virtual light bulb flickered above my head. “So, hypothetically speaking, if there was a way to find that out from history, what would you be willing to pay?”

“Hypothetically?”

“Yes, Ms Romano.”

“Depending on the quality of information, say a million pounds.” She laughed, “Of course, as it's impossible, this is a useless conversation.” She added, laughing, “Unless you've got a time machine hidden somewhere.”

I grinned, “No time machine, I'm afraid.” (Well, technically it's the truth.) “So what's your theory?”

“That William Shakespeare was born from the ashes of Christopher Marlowe.”

“How do you figure that out, Ms Romano?” I asked, genuinely interested.

“First off both bards were almost the same age. Secondly, Shakespeare only came into his own after Marlowe's alleged death. Thirdly, they both came from similar working-class backgrounds.”

“But that's just a theory, right?”

“Of course. How can it be anything else?”

I was tempted to push the envelope a bit further but resisted it. Best to leave it there. But it would be a way to get me back in the 'Q'. I looked her in the eye. “Let's say, hypothetically, that a document existed, outlining the plot of Marlowe's disappearance. We'd no longer be talking theory, right?”

“If only such a document existed.”

“Yes. If only. What would you pay for it?”

Carla stared at Ossie. Her brows furrowed. “Are you saying you know of such a document?”

I just smiled, knowingly.

“You're a detective, aren't you?”

“Yes.” I think I knew where this was going. I waited with baited breath.

“Then I'll hire you to find out for me.”

YES!. “I'll get my secretary to eMail you my fee schedule.”

“Make it your priority Mr Doyle, and I'll triple whatever you charge.”

I looked heavenward, thinking, God's in a good mood today and is looking kindly upon yours truly.

Chapter 8

I made an arrangement to see Jen at her place. She'd wanted to know why I'd called, but it was not wise to tell her over the phone. She'd already said she reckoned somebody had tapped her phone, so I wasn't willing to take any chances. I drove out to Bushey that evening and put a proposition to her. Jen was amenable to my visit, and as we sat drinking a nice little red wine, I'd brought I explained, "I met a woman playwright yesterday. She's writing a play about Marlowe."

Jen, wondering where this was leading, smiled, "There seems to be a lot of it around these days."

"Yes, well she's eccentric and stinking rich. And she's hired me to find a document that explains what happened to the dramatist."

Jennifer perked up, "What document?"

Ossie grinned, "I don't know yet but if it exists it's worth a million quid to her."

She fixed him with her gaze. "So what does this have to do with me?" Then it clicked. "Oh no, Ossie! Have you completely taken leave of your senses? You want to go to Elizabethan England to find a document that may or may not exist, that may or may not provide proof of Marlowe's fate."

"I admit it sounds crazy if you put it that way."

"What other way is there to put it?"

"But if such a document exists just imagine how much it'd be worth."

"Ossie, I'm not interested."

I tried, "I bet Declan Merrick would jump at the chance."

"I thought you said he was a con man and would use me for his personal ends."

"Come on Jen, we both know his financial involvement can take the Quantime to the next stage."

"Yes, well the camera is another stumbling block. I curse Nathan for guiding me in Dimmock's direction. I knew I'd be courting disaster, but I let Nathan talk me into trusting him."

It was time to lighten the load. "I could probably get you a photo of Queen Elizabeth 1, for your mantelpiece."

"Even if such a thing were possible I doubt people would believe it. Photoshop has a lot to answer for."

As they drank aromatic coffee, Jen asked, "What's the big deal with Marlowe?"

"Are you kidding!? He's a pivotal figure in Elizabethan London. And he had an intriguing dark side. He lived a double life; he was a drunk, a rebel rouser and he died mysteriously."

"Okay, so he's an intriguing character. But that's no reason for you to go chasing a mythological manuscript in the 16th century."

I decided it was best to change the subject. After a short pause, I ventured, "So, are you going into business with Merrick?"

"It's more a case of whether he still wants to go into business with me." She nibbled her bottom lip, a cute affectation indicating her pensiveness. She said, "Mind you it does concern me a little that he will become an almost equal partner. Especially if he bought Dimmock's shares from him."

"Is that likely to happen?" The question remained unanswered. Then the proverbial bulb lit up. "Hey, what if I become a third partner in this venture. Together we'd own two-thirds."

"Thanks, Ossie but do you have any idea what sort of money Declan is talking about."

"No, you haven't said."

"Declan wants to buy 49 percent for 100 million pounds."

I whistled through my teeth, gob-smacked. "Even if I did get a million quid for finding an authentic document about Marlowe, it wouldn't stack up against Declan's bid. "That means he'd have an equal say in how to capitalise on the 'Q'."

"Of course."

I sat there silent, unaware of the coffee mug in my hand. Of course, the guy would want to get the most out of his investment, but it never occurred to me that his investment would affect me. I said, "Will I still be able to carry out investigations in the Q?"

She looked Ossie in the eye. "Things are going to be different once I take on other shareholders. I will have to consult them before any QSA activity takes place. On top of that, the government and the military are nosing around. So I'll need sound financial backing to stand up to them."

Declan Merrick was late getting to Jennifer Smethurst's place – six hours late. His carefully worked out schedule had fallen at the first fence when the chairperson of 'Pears' had been unavoidably detained. That put him behind for the rest of the day. By way of recompense, he had booked a table at Galvin at Windows for that evening. London Limousines picked Jennifer up at 6 pm and took her to Mayfair, where Declan greeted her with a dozen white roses. They took the lift to the Hilton's 28th floor, where they stepped out into a spectacular restaurant affording magnificent views of the teeming metropolis below. Pierre Murfet, the head waiter, showed them to a table that gave the best view in the house.

Seated, Jennifer looked across the table at the billionaire, "You certainly know how to sweep a girl off her feet."

"It's by way of an apology, Jennifer. That and a chance for us to talk about our next QSA adventure in private."

The wine waiter hovered at their table.

Declan said, "I was thinking Sauvignon Blanc and Le Bocce Chianti Classico. What do you say?"

"Sounds good to me."

As the waiter went away, The entrepreneur said, "I was wondering when I can see the Qcam."

Jennifer mentally kicked herself. She should have been on Nathan's back about it. In a moment of weakness and desperation, Nathan had persuaded her to leave the 'Qcam project in Dr Dummick's hands. That was a huge mistake, one for which she now paid dearly. True, the detestable man was a

quantum genius, but he was also a drunkard pill popper, who spent significant amounts of time in deep, dark, abject despair. Jennifer had left the project in Nathan's hands who promised to keep tabs on the deeply depressed scientist. But she hadn't heard from him in weeks.

She looked sheepishly at Declan. She could hardly tell him that the quantum genius creating the Qcam was probably in an alcoholic stupor or high as a kite on whatever chemicals were flooding his brain, or he was experiencing one of his black, suicidal states. Such information was hardly likely to inspire Declan to trust her judgement. And the contract was yet to be agreed upon and signed. Looking at the handsome American, she said, "As I mentioned, We have to keep the Qcam project very hush, hush. My dear friend who has been collaborating with this quantum genius informs me that he is nearing completion," she lied, keeping her fingers crossed.

"With respect, Jennifer, I need to know who this 'genius' is and speak with him myself."

"Declan, the agreement we had to make with him is that he would be off limits and remain as such to anybody but our mutual friend the mathematician. He has made it abundantly clear that if anyone else tried to approach him, he'd scrap the project. Things are now at such a crucial stage I cannot risk going against his wishes."

The wine arrived, and the head waiter took their orders: a combination platter for two, followed by Oven roasted duck for him and marsala for her.

As they sipped Sauvignon Blanc, Declan said, "Jennifer, The QSA is no use to me without the Qcam. You do understand that don't you?"

Feeling this golden opportunity begin to slip out of her grasp, she had to pull a bunny from the proverbial hat. "I'll arrange a meeting with my mathematician friend. He'll be able to fill you in on the Qcam progress."

"It has to be soon."

"I'll contact him tomorrow and let you know when."

"He smiled, "Thank's Jennifer. I knew you'd understand."

Nathan Goodfellow, although sparkling with confidence when it came to complex numbers calculations and free flowing fractal algorithms, was sadly at a loss when it came to relationships with people. Mathematics was predictable, human emotions were not. Even strange attractors were more reliable than human mood swings and irrational behaviour. It had taken Nathan five years to declare his feelings for Professor Smethurst and that had ended in disaster. To make things worse, he was handsome and charming. He had no problem in starting relationships with smart, attractive women, but once the first bloom of romance was over, he saw his paramour as some alien species who's unpredictable emotional surges drove him away. Whenever Nathan heard Jen's voice, he melted. Worse still, he couldn't say no to her. As was the case right now. As soon as he saw her name come up on his phone, his heart skipped a beat.

"Nathan, I need a huge favour from you."

The Goodfellow alarm bells rang loudly. "Oh!"

Declan wants us to meet so you can tell him about the Qcam."

Professionally, he was in awe of actually meeting with the 'Boogle' guru. But he had no wish to discuss the Qcam with him. "But Jennifer, Dimmock is the one to whom he should be talking."

"Yes, well that's not going to happen, is it?"

"Afraid Dimmick's having one of his deep downers."

"Damn it, Nathan! If that bastard is mucking me around..."

"That's not it. Gordon assured me, before this latest slump, he nearly had the project completed."

"You'll have to tell Declan what you know."

"Fuck, Jen, you're putting me on the spot."

"Can you meet us at the LSE Garrick at 1 pm?"

"Today!"

"It is rather pressing, yes."

"Jen, you're going to owe big time for this."

"Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou, thankyou."

"At least I get to meet him."

"And I thought it was me you wanted to see."

Totally oblivious to Jennifer's plans that day, I rang her with my plan in mind. "Hi Jen, I have a valid reason for going in the 'Q'"

"Oh, and what is that?"

Carla Romano confirmed that she wants to hire me to find a document that proves Marlowe faked his own death."

"Ossie, we've been over this before. It's too frivolous for all the effort it takes to set it up."

"But if his death was a hoax ..."

"Oh! And was it faked?"

"I don't know until I find such a document."

"And where is this document?"

"If it exists, back in Elizabethan England."

"So you don't know if it does exist and even if it does you don't know where to find it."

"It's probably got something to do with Francis Walsingham."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because Marlowe went to see him about sorting out his problem. Walsingham was going to help get him to disappear."

“Walsingham was the Queen's spymaster, so he would have been well placed to help Marlowe. But he's hardly going to commit anything to writing.”

“Well, I'll never know unless I can search his study.”

“And just how do you propose to do that,”

“Hop into the 'Q' for a start.”

“And if you did happen upon such a document, how are you going to bring it back to the Twenty-first Century?”

“Well, once we've got the Qcam working.”

“Yes, about that. Declan and I are meeting with Nathan to be brought up to date. I'll let you know if Dimmock has made any more progress.”

“I could come with you,” I ventured, wanting to be involved.

“No Ossie. It'll get too complicated. I'll contact you later.”

“Oh! Before you go, can you ask Declan about a return trip to Elizabethan England.”

“Ossie, you're pushing your luck.”

“Please, Jen. A million quid is riding on it.”

The LSE Garrick, Jennifer found out, was much bigger than she assumed. It took up two whole floors, part of which was a thriving ground floor cafe. Jennifer wished she'd given more specific directions. With over a hundred customers eating the Garrick's delicious home-cooked food it took her a while to locate her two men. She phoned Nathan's number. “Where are you?” she asked.”

“Sorry Jen, I got tied up. Be there in ten.”

“It's bigger than I thought. Where's the best place for us to meet?”

“I'll meet you near the Houghton Street entrance.”

Then she phoned Declan. But he wasn't answering. She had a few minutes up her sleeve so she looked around the restaurant. She spotted him among the diners, sitting at a table by himself.

Declan felt relieved when he saw Professor Smethurst making her way to his table. He stood up in a polite manner. “Hi, Jennifer. Where's the maths, wiz?”

“I have to meet him at the entrance. Be back in five.”

“Cool.”

“I won't keep you waiting long,”

He smiled, indicating the mug of coffee in front of him. I'll just savour this fantastic coffee. It's the best I've tasted outside the States.”

Jennifer smiled, then left to find Nathan.

United with her two men and with introductions made, the trio sat down to a delicious home-cooked style lunch.

During the meal, Declan said to Nathan. Okay, Nat, tell me how this Qcam works.”

Nobody called him Nat. He hated it but this was the 'guru' of Boogle, so he let it slide. “Oh, the Qcam!”

“That is what we're here for, I believe, Nat.” he added, “That and this great triple certified coffee.”

“Oh yes. Well, as you probably know, digital cameras take snaps of objects not directly visible to its lens.”

“Yeah, so what about quantum photography?”

“Declan, physicists have known for more than a decade that ghost imaging is possible. But, so far, experiments have only imaged the holes in stencil-like masks, which limits its application potential.”

“Okay Nat, so has your guy taken it further?”

Nathan smiled, “Our Doctor 'X', we'll call him, has managed to take the first ghost images of an opaque object – a toy soldier.” He handed Declan a photograph. He continued, Ghost imaging works something like taking flash-lit photos of objects using an ordinary digicam, in that the image forms from photons coming from the flash, bouncing off an object into the lens.”

“So what's the difference between the digicam and the Qcam?”

“I'm glad you asked me that,” Nathan said, not happy at all. “Dr 'X' also uses a light source to illuminate an object but in his model, the Qcam collects photons that haven't hit the object, but are paired, through quantum entanglement with others that did.”

“So how does that work?” Declan asked, stirring his third coffee.

“As I understand it, Dr 'X' placed his toy soldier 45 centimetres away from a light source, which he split into two beams. He pointed one of the beams at the toy and the other at a digicam. A photon detector put near the soldier, only recorded photons bouncing off.”

“So then what happened?” Declan asked, excitedly.

“Photons from the light source kept going along both paths made by the splitter, either to the soldier and the photon detector or towards the camera. Both sensor and camera record a constant stream of photons, occasionally recording detector and camera photons simultaneously.” Nathan looked straight at his hero. “This is the surprising bit. When this happens, a direct relationship between where a photon hits the soldier, and another hits the camera sensor, creates the 'two-photon interference' effect.”

“Nat, you'll have to explain that more clearly,” Declan said, his face a question mark.

Nathan was getting out of his own depth but tried to look confident. “Look, If the first photon stops at one point on the object plane, we can only observe the second photon at the corresponding point on the image plane.”

Declan brightened, “I get it. It's like that weird quantum thing about only being able to observe a photon's location or direction, but not both at the same time.”

Nathan smiled, “Yes, Declan, only in the Qcam case it's about not being able to record both the object and image at the same time.” Watching the American nod his head, he continued, “So, we create a 'ghost image' of the object when the camera records only the pixels from photons that collide simultaneously with another reaching the detector. Dr 'X' achieved this effect after he'd recorded around 1000 coincidental photons.”

Jennifer, who had been listening intently, said, “I'm hugely impressed, both with your explanation and Dimmock's research.”

The Boogle guru said, “I understand the principle concerned with taking ghost pictures in this time frame but how does that allow us to make images in a different time frame?”

“Well, since Nathan's brilliant explanation, I can see how it might work.”

“Please tell me, Jen.”

“I can see how particles of light can assimilate in a quantum state.” Seeing the question mark expressions on the men's faces, she explained, “To grasp this you have to give up all notions of past, present and future. They don't fit in a quantum mindset. Therefore, any theories about time travel are null and void. Science has to move on from Einstein's general relativity and quantum mechanics. Einstein's theory, which suggests the possibility of moving backwards in time by following a space-time path that returns to a starting point in space – but at an earlier time, cannot work because it's still based on the past, present and future assumption. Space-time is not fixed and has to be in a state of quantum flux to allow the QSA to work.”

Declan said, “Okay, Jen, I kind of get that, but it still doesn't tell me how the Qcam would work in this quantum flux state.”

She smiled, “Well, not state.” She continued, “You have to stop thinking of the Qcam as a solid state object. It is when outside the QSA, as is everything else. But once inside it obeys a whole lot of different physics rules. Taking pictures of, say, Ancient Rome in real space-time, can work, in theory, by applying quantum ghost imaging simply because, with quantum space assimilation there is no differentiation between our illusion of present time and, the then, Roman illusion of present time.”

Declan rubbed his chin. “Okay, according to time travel rules, we're not allowed to take modern technology with us because it will cause some weird ripple in space-time that will affect us now. Right?” Declan stated.

Jennifer corrected, “If you talking about the impossible thing called time-travel – yes. But you'll have to get into your head that the QSA has nothing to do with such outmoded concepts. Having said that it's best to play it safe and abide by the same rules. Except that the Qcam is not going to be a digital camera hanging around your neck. It's simply a device that uses photon pairs to produce images on my quantum computer screen. You won't see the pictures until you assimilate back here.”

“You have a quantum computer!” Declan said, surprised.”

“How do you think I can operate the QSA without one?”

“I guess I just never considered it. But I still don't understand how we can use the Qcam to take the images if it's not a physical device we carry with us.”

Nathan grinned, saying, "We'll be taking a non-quantised model with us, just like taking a digital camera. How else could we be taking pictures?"

Declan, still puzzled, said, "But I thought ..."

"Are you wearing clothes when you step from the QSA?" Jennifer asked.

"Yes but they're different to ..."

Jennifer laughed, "There isn't a 16th-century version of the Qcam, so it remains the same."

The American finished his coffee. Looking at the pair, he said, "But this is still a theory, right?"

"Until we can put it to the test," Jennifer said.

Declan slowly shook his head. "Nathan get this professor X to come up with the goods, quickly."

The mathematician sighed, "I'll do my best."

Before Declan left, Jennifer took him aside. "Ossie wants to go back to Elizabethan London."

The Boogle boss grinned. "Funny you should say that. I was thinking about going back there. We still haven't yet found out what happened to Marlowe."

Chapter 9

As it happened, Declan didn't mind me co-piloting him to Elizabethan England. At our briefing, Jen kept reiterating the differences between the concept of time travel and the reality of 'quantum space assimilation'.

Declan, much calmer this time, said, "Jen, how does your quantum computer work?"

Jennifer gave a knowing smile. "It's not that much different to our regular computer. It's just that it uses Qubits instead of just, bits."

"Okay, so bits operate by being constantly changing from the off state to the on state. So how do Qubits operate?"

My 'Qputer' harnesses the power of atoms and molecules to perform its memory and processing tasks." She turned to Declan. "Have you any idea how much data is required for you to assimilate flawlessly in the middle of Elizabethan London."

We both shook our heads.

"I would need a massive network of thousands of computers to hold that assimilation in memory to do the job of this Qputer." She paused, then continued, "My Qputer has to record every sight, sound, smell, taste and touch."

"What would happen if anything was missed out?" I asked.

"Hm, that's an interesting question, Ossie. Is it a case of all or nothing? Or could it still work if the data was incomplete?"

Declan suggested, "I wonder if it's like the Internet. Websites are being created and taken down all the time, but the 'net still functions."

Jennifer said, "But it's always complete." Seeing the puzzled look, she added, "A URL has to be complete and accurate for the link to work. Try seeing the QSA here, in my lab, and the QSA you step out of wherever you are, as a URL link. That means the address at which you find yourself has to be complete in every aspect or the link won't work." She added, nodding, "Yes I think that must be it."

"Jen's amazing brain never fails to surprise me," I said. Then I asked, "Jen, how do you know you have programmed in the complete data?"

"By information overload. Too much will work but too little won't."

I argued, "But won't too much data be the same as adding extraneous data to the URL?"

She laughed, "You would think so, but I don't believe it works quite like that." Seeing the total incomprehension written all over our faces, she said, "Bearing in mind that in quantum processing, Qubits, which can exist in superposition, represent atoms, ions, photons and electrons that all work together to act as Qputer memory. Now imagine, where you step out the QSA, it accounts for a remote 'cloud' on the web. Remember that before you 'assimilate' all the data that allows you to do so, I programme the QSA from the Qputer." Looking at the two men, she continued; Now this is

the weird bit. “The information uploaded to the QSA has to match the data downloaded from the remote 'cloud' site.”

“What if it doesn't match, Declan asked.”

“Then it won't have happened.” The blank expressions were back. She sighed, “That's the best I can do, I'm afraid. I get a sense that it works this way, but I have no proof,” she said, opening her hands in a hopeless gesture.”

“Wait a minute!” Declan exploded, “I think I get it.”

“Really! Please explain,” Jennifer said.

“In quantum reality, we're here and there simultaneously, wherever there happens to be. This quantum entanglement process means the data is also here and there at the same time. So while you're uploading data to the QSA it's simultaneously downloading the data from 'there' - there being whatever destination you've programmed into the quantime. So if the data doesn't match, it cancels itself out, collapsing the quantum wave function, which means the data was neither uploaded nor downloaded.”

Jennifer, blown out by the American's erudite explanation, added, “So, the fact of the QSA working proves the data matches up, and the assimilation can take place.”

I scratched my head. “Let me see if I've got this. “It's got nothing to do with how much data is transferred each way. It's about some weird data entangling process between here and there.”

Jennifer said, “It has everything to do with the accuracy of the data. If the upload is incomplete, it can't match with the download.

Declan said, “So where does the data come from that you programme into your Qputer?”

“From the destination, of course.”

I scratched my head again. “So it's the old chicken and egg scenario, in which there is no coming first because both states exist at the same time, all the time.”

“Or don't exist at all, if I get it wrong.”

“But you can't get it wrong,” Declan said.

“Now you've got it.” She added, “And so have I. A perfect example of what we're talking about.”

I said, “My brain hurts.”

Chapter 10

This time Declan and I alighted from the 'Q' concealed by the old London wall, a small section that had somehow survived the ravages of history. The fact that we decked out in muffin cap, doublet and hose, showed we were back in Tudor England. The other side of the wall gave us a view looking down on the city. The wall, having served its purpose for centuries repelling invaders was now being used for other purposes. As we made our way down into the city, we noticed that some of the wall that had encompassed the city had been knocked down to accommodate homes for the wealthy. Many of these select homes were built in the Strand, joining London to Westminster. Despite the continuous assaults on the wall to make space for new buildings or for building materials to be used elsewhere, most of it was still standing. I'd learnt that this state of affairs was the result of Henry VIII's decision to confiscate Catholic Church lands for new buildings. Elizabeth I, the then current Queen, continued the legacy of this Act.

As we further explored the city, the spectacle over Newgate turned our stomachs. I could see birds pecking ferociously at something. At first, I couldn't make out what it was. But it soon became apparent that we were looking at body parts of traitors that, hung, drawn and quartered were displayed over the gate as a warning. Several gates punctuated the remaining remnants of the wall, but thankfully, only Newgate and Ludgate, both used as prisons, exhibited such gruesome apparitions.

Elizabethan London wasn't just incredibly smelly it was hellishly loud as well. What with the clomping of a thousand horses hooves on cobbled streets; the incessant yelling of street traders spruiking their wares; and the general hubbub of busy city life. I needed ear plugs, as well as a face mask. However, as neither existed at this time, I had to tough it out. As we approached the Strand, Declan was trying to tell me something, but I was having difficulty hearing him. I pulled him away from the madding crowd, into a side alley. "What are you saying?" I asked.

"Now we're here what's your plan of action?"

"I have to find out where Francis Walsingham worked and got into his office."

"What for?"

"To retrieve a document concerning his instructions to Marlowe about organising the playwright's death and disappearance." Noticing the look of puzzlement on Declan's face, I said, "It's a job I've been hired to do."

"It sounds risky."

I smiled, "So what's your plan?"

"To catch up with Ingram Frizer. But I thought we would be working together."

I hadn't collaborated with a partner before but it might not be a bad idea. "I have no objection to that, providing we look for Walsingham's papers first."

"How do you propose to do that?"

By checking out his residence in Seething Lane."

“Pray, where is that?”

“By the Tower of London.”

“How do we gain entrance?”

“By all accounts, nobody has resided there since Francis' death.”

“So do you plan to break in?”

I shrugged, “Maybe, but I'll try knocking first.”

“Declan nodded, then said, “How do you know this document exists and if it does, how do you know it will be at Francis' home?”

“I don't, but it's where Walsingham carried out a great deal of his business.”

“Wasn't he the Queen's private secretary?”

“Yes.”

So, didn't he have an office at the Royal Court?”

I grinned, “Do you fancy breaking into the 'palace'. Or maybe you can get us an invitation.”

Declan miffed, argued, “All I'm saying is that he'd most likely have his records kept at his office in the palace.”

I reasoned, “Spies never trust anybody. Besides Walsingham had his rivals there. Nobles jealous of his close connection to Her Majesty.”

The American said, “Okay, I'll help you, but we mustn't lose track of Frizer.”

“I believe he was in Walsingham's employ. We may find some evidence to that end in Francis' papers.”

“If we can find them?”

The mansion at 35 Seething-lane looked unoccupied. But just in case it wasn't I had a story ready. The Privy Council had instructed me to gather papers about Francis' secret service activities. With my flimsy cover story in place, we approached the front door and knocked. We heard footsteps, slow and measured, approaching. Then the sounds of sliding bolts. A man of advanced years opened the door. He was crisply attired in a finely woven Jerkin over a cotton shirt. Before he had a chance to say something, I declared, “We're from the court. The Privy Council has charged us with the task of going through Francis Walsingham's papers.”

The gentleman looked askance at the callers. “Sire, any papers of any import would have been filed at the Royal Court. I doubt you'll find anything here of any help.”

I smiled, “I'm sure you are right, Sire, but the Privy Council has decreed it, so we have to go through the motions.”

Still unsure, the elderly man let them in. Once they were inside, he said, May I inquire as to your names?”

I said, “indeed. But first, perhaps you will be kind enough to tell furnish us with yours.”

“Why do you need to know that?” he asked.

“So that when we report back to the Privy Council we can inform the court how helpful you have been.”

“Oh, I see. Robert Salvy. I am, was, Francis' secretary.”

“Excellent, Mr Salvy,” I enthused, “Then you will be able to show us to his study.”

Once Robert Salvy had shown the pair of gentlemen to Walsingham's study, he shuffled off to do his work, leaving the bogus court agents to their own devices.

“That was easier than I thought it would be,” Declan said.

I smiled, “I hope we find what we're looking for with such ease, but I somehow doubt it.”

As they searched the office, Declan said, “I don't get it. Why do we go all through this when we can go straight to the heart of the matter.”

“What do you mean?”

“We know the date, time and location of Marlowe's death. So why not get Jennifer to program the QSA to take us straight there.”

I looked at him. “I asked the same question when I was in France. I'll let Jen answer that one for you.” I went back to searching. It wasn't easy as we had no idea what we were searching for, or whether it existed. And, even if we found some proof, I didn't even know if we could quantise it here and re-assimilate it once we returned to our time and space.

Declan was searching some draws when he looked at me, with a cat got the cream expression.

“What have you found?” I asked, excitedly.”

“A draw with a false bottom.”

I was over to him in a flash. I could see that the drawer looked deeper from the outside. But how to get to whatever it concealed was the problem. It looked, to all intents and purposes to have a drawer bottom the same as the others. So I took the draw out and turned it over. Lo, and behold it had a hinge on one side and catch on the other. I undid the snap and flipped up the real drawer bottom. Inside was a leather bound book, I reached forward and took it out of the drawer.

Declan, a gawk, looked at the volume. “Let's see what he's been writing about.”

“Yes, but not here. We may not have fooled our Mr Salvy, and he could be reporting us, as we speak.”

“Reporting us to whom,”

“I don't know. Maybe he's gone off to tell the sheriff.”

“Thank God they don't have phones,” I grinned, pocketing the book in my doublet. I then replaced the drawer. There was a knock at the door.

We froze.

It was only Salvy, who looked a bit rattled. “Yes, Mr Salvy.

“Gentlemen, I was wondering how long you'll be. It's just that I have to go out.”

Yes, I bet you do, I thought. “We're just about through. Thank you for your help.”

“Did you find anything you were looking for?”

I shook my head. “It's like you said, Mr Salvy. But we had to go through the motions.”

“You could try his Barn Elms home.”

“Yes, we may well do that. Good day to you, Mr Salvy.”

Once we were outside, being deafened by the cacophony of noises and assaulted by a cocktail of foul smells, I turned to Declan. So what now?”

“We look for Ingram Frizer.”

“Okay, but I'm a bit concerned about somebody stealing the journal.”

“What, the fact that you stole it?”

“Very funny. No, I think I ought to take it back to the lab. I'll come back afterwards.”

“Please yourself, Oswald. I'm happy just following up some enquiries. I've never played at being a detective before.”

If he wanted to stay in stinky London, that's his business. Besides, I'm not his keeper. I was more concerned with how the journal would fare in its quantum assimilation. Finding a quiet spot behind some houses, I pressed my pendant. The Quantime instantly appeared. I hopped inside, and I was gone.

Chapter 11

“Where's Declan?” Jen asked as only I emerged from the Quantime.

“I said, he decided to stay behind.”

“You let him stay there on his own!”

“It was his decision. I can go back there, but I had to deliver this first.”

Jen stared at the leather-bound volume in Ossie's hand. “What have you got there?”

I grinned, “It's better than the mythological manuscript. This baby is Francis Walsingham's private diary - and I 'mean' private.”

“Where on Earth did you find it?”

“Hidden under the false bottom of a drawer in his desk.”

The full impact hit Jennifer, “You have a diary from the sixteenth century,”

I nodded, grinning like the proverbial Cheshire pussy. “This,” I said, waving the book, may well tell us what happened to Christopher Marlowe.” Noticing Jen's worried expression, “I laughed, “Come on Jen, this is good news,”

“No, it's not. You may well have changed history. What if someone else was supposed to find that diary. You have no idea the harm you may have done.”

“It was concealed in a secret compartment. I doubt that anyone else ever knew about it.”

“Nevertheless, you know the rules about taking things from other spaces.” Then she brightened a little. “Mind you it does show that even items not part of the programming can re-assimilate in this space frame.”

“Well I had no idea it would work, but it does.”

“Which means, once we have the Qcam, it can quantum assimilate wherever the QSA happens to be.”

Getting impatient, I said, “Well let's look at this diary.”

The journal comprised of short entries referring to various people with whom FW had dealings. Names were only referenced regarding initials. As an example, one entry from 1553 read:

Since M on the throne must be vigilant. Urge JF and JC to leave with me.

I said to Jen “I have no idea who JF and JC were, but I would guess that Queen M was Bloody Mary, as she was known by Protestants.”

“So JF and JC would probably be fellow Protestants running from the royal purge,” Jen said.

I read further:

1558, M dead, praise the Lord. Protestant half-sister E 1 on Throne. FR E of B useful parliamentarian.

Jen looked at me. “This is boring. Are there any references to Marlowe. That's what I want to know.

I flicked through the well-bound pages. “Ah, here we have something:

1584, Meeting with CM. He is well placed, in France. With what I have on him, he'll do my bidding.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“Well Jen, Marlowe was a bit of a bugger in more than one sense of the word. Chamber Companions, that's how they referred to homosexual relationships in the Elizabethan Era, was a serious crime, punishable by death if the lovers came from different classes. And Francis would have been well aware that his kinsman, Thomas Walsingham, was in such a relationship with Marlowe.”

“So Marlowe and Francis Walsingham weren't exactly friends, Ossie.”

“No, but Marlowe knew that by hanging onto Francis' shirt tails, as so to speak, he came under the great man's protection.”

“What do you mean 'great man?’”

“It says here:

Protestants lauded me as 'a sound pillar of our commonwealth and chief patron of virtue, learning and chivalry'. As a member of the Protestant intelligentsia, I was honoured to be in such company as PS, ES, and JD. Together we promoted an expansionist and nationalist English Renaissance.

“Who are PS, ES and JD?”

I, having done my Boogle homework, I proudly said, “ES is probably referring to Edmund Spenser and JD is most likely John Dee. I don't know who ES refers to,” I added. Then, finding a more relevant entry, read excitedly:

April 1593, NS came to my notice when called before the Court of Star Chamber as a witness in the case in which the accused had obtained money under false pretences. NS had lured the defendant into the plaintiff's clutches, a role he admitted to having undertaken many times before over the past ten or twelve years.

Jen said, “NS would be Nicholas Skeres, I'm guessing.”

“Yes, and it seems Francis used Skeres as his personal spy.”

“He must have had something on Skeres.”

“Well, let me read on:

“NS is known to be a 'companion' of TW, France 1581. He helped my status with E1. TW and RP helped me expose B plot.”

Jennifer, puzzled, asked. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“The B plot refers to the Babington Plot, in which Mary's supporters attempted to assassinate Queen Elizabeth. TW apparently refers to Thomas Walsingham. RP is most likely Robert Poley.”

“Poley! Wasn't he involved in Marlowe's murder?”

“Well it reads here:

“RP cover as Papist agent blown. Move him into an administrative role in my service. Ill health precludes me from active involvement.”

I glanced at the next entry. Unable to contain my excitement, I gushed:

“RP to witness the false death of CM.”

Jennifer stared at Ossie. “My God! Here is written plainly for all to see.”

“Except no one was supposed to see it.”

“But Francis Walsingham died April 6, 1590, three years before Marlowe alleged murder.”

“Which means Walsingham planned the whole thing in advance.”

“But why?”

“If Marlowe were still a useful agent to him, he would hardly have had the dramatist killed.”

Jennifer, puzzled, said, “I still don't see why they had the fake Marlowe's death.”

“Because if his enemies at court knew he was alive they would have had him arrested and, most likely, executed.” I thumbed through more pages. Looking up at Jen, I said, “This bit may shed some light. I read:

CM is playing dangerous game protecting SWR. NS to speak with him – make him see reason. Get him to keep silent about E of E plot against SWR.

“Who's SWR?”

“It would have to be Sir Walter Raleigh. Rumour has it that they were also chambered companions and that Marlowe's love for the bombastic adventurer superseded his self-preservation. It goes on to read:

“NS failed and sent CM to me for protection. For his own safety, CM has to disappear.”

Jennifer said, “To fake his death, you mean?”

“Look, Jen, it makes perfect sense. The whole murder scene was an incredible bit of theatre.”

“How come?”

I'd been thinking a lot about this. Now, the journal helped it all make sense. “It's all contrived. Both Marlowe and Skeres spied for Walsingham. Robert Poley, English double agent, government messenger and agent provocateur, was a convenient witness to the fight between Ingram Frizer and Marlowe. Skeres was also present.”

“So Frizer was part of the plot?”

“He was employed by Thomas Walsingham, who we know had been controlled by Francis Walsingham, owing to his sexual proclivity. They were the perfect players in this well-choreographed drama.”

“But how could it have been stage-managed by Francis Walsingham, after he died.”

“My guess is that he confided in a close colleague, possibly Skeres, and he carried out the plot.”

“It does seem logical, I suppose.” Jen then focused back on Declan. “Are you ready to go and find Declan?”

I wrapped up the journal. “First I have to see a dyke about a book.”

Jennifer frowned, “But this is his first assimilation experience alone.”

“I didn't have anybody there to hold my hand, in France. Besides, if he runs into trouble, he has his pendant.”

“Ossie, apart from anything else he is my meal ticket to promoting the QSA. And the contract has not been signed yet.”

I sighed, “If he's not back in 24 hours I'll go and find him.”

It was a cloudy but dry Sunday morning, a very good time for wandering around the well-tended, Kensington Gardens. With some time to spare, I smelled the scents of the roses, camellias and other fragrant blooms. Enchanting birdsong mixed with the happy squeals of children playing chase in the park. The sun emerged from behind billowy clouds, as though celebrating my luck in finding the journal, my million pound nest egg; the reason for my Bon Homme. After the little taste I'd given her over the phone, I knew she would be waiting by the enigmatic statue of Peter Pan. The forever young little boy didn't have access to the 'Q', but he still had some pretty amazing adventures.

Carla was easy to spot. She was wearing a black and white dress emblazoned with an art deco pattern, reminiscent of squared off Celtic knots. She wore a tight fitting cap the shape of that worn by female swimmers. Approaching her, I beamed, “Ms Romano, isn't it just a glorious day.”

“So, Mr Doyle, what do you have for me?” she said, getting straight down to business.

I handed her a Manila folder with a single page copied from the Journal.

“Are you sure this is authentic, Mr Doyle.”

“Call me Ossie, please. And the answer is yes.”

“How on Earth did you come across it?”

I grinned, “I followed a hunch, and it paid off.”

“And where is this manuscript now?”

“In a very safe place.”

“So you're not going to tell me.”

“I can't say. You'll have to show my client that you're serious.”

“I could be. What's your client asking?”

“We're talking about a private journal written by Francis Walsingham. It's priceless.”

“But your client is interested in a private sale, yes?”

“He needs at least a million for it.”

Carla smiled, “Needs not wants. So your Client has financial issues.”

“I shouldn't tell you this but he does have a severe gambling addiction and lady luck hasn't been showing up in his corner lately.”

Carla took another look at the copy, then she said, “If the journal holds up to forensic scrutiny tell your client I am very interested.”

I had her on the hook. “I will pass on your interest, and we'll go from there.”

“Very well, Mr Doyle.”

I was about to walk away when something came to me. I turned back to face her. “There's one thing, your forensic expert has to be very discreet.”

“That goes without saying, Mr Doyle. The person I have lined up doesn't ask any unnecessary questions.”

On the way back to East Acton I received a phone call – from Jennifer. She seemed upset.

I pulled over to answer the phone. “What's up Jen?”

“I haven't heard anything from Declan.”

“It's only been two days.”

“That's not the point.”

“It's not like he's stranded or anything. He can come back any time he chooses.”

“No, he can't!”

“What do you mean, Jen?”

“He left his pendant behind.”

Bull shit! He wouldn't do that.”

“Then how come I'm holding it in my hand?”

I felt a cold chill run down my spine.

Chapter 12

Having arrived in Deptford, Declan soon realised it, like much of London, was a violent place in Marlowe's time. The urban rioters, mostly poor apprentices who picked on 'foreigners, prostitutes, and gentlemen's serving men, were rife. Being dressed as a professional person worked well in places like the Strand but not so Deptford, which was largely a Naval town full of drunkards where, if you showed any sign of wealth you could easily become a victim of verbal abuse or much worse. Declan, feeling out of depth in the alien environment decided it was time to get back to the safety of his time and space. He had already had a harrowing experience during the horse-drawn carriage ride from the city. While crossing London Bridge, thugs leapt out from a dark passage between two buildings and held up his carriage for coin and jewellery. Luckily for Declan thief-takers were chasing an urchin when the hold-up occurred. Seeing the Sheriff's men, the robbers disappeared into a filthy alley as quickly as they had appeared.

Declan felt under his ruff to press the pendant. But it wasn't there! He checked again but, horror of horrors, his necklace had disappeared! He froze, thinking it had fallen off, somewhere. His nervous excitement about being in Tudor London instantly dissipated, His exuberance immediately changed to a morbid fear of being trapped in Elizabethan England! Without the pendant, he had no access to modern technology. With no means of sending an SOS to Jennifer, he felt scared and helpless. Totally at a loss as to what to do, Declan thought he'd better backtrack to look for the precious talisman. But what if it had fallen off in the carriage. How would he ever find the driver again?

The importance of his quest instantly took a back seat as the terror of his situation put his reptilian brain on full alert. Abandoned in an alien world with its rules for survival, Declan felt totally lost. He had no support system and no means with which to provide shelter, food and warmth. His primary attribute to help him survive was his usually positive attitude to life, without which he would never have become a huge business success in the cyber world of the 21st Century. Mentally switching to 'glass half full' mode he had some pennies in his purse, a sword and dagger at his side and warm clothes.

Another great attribute for his survival was his courage. It had taken balls to compete with mega computer technology corporations like Google and Facebook and not only survive, but thrive. Communication was what it was all about in any place or historical era. He just had to find what was lacking, regarding networking, in Elizabethan London and find a way to provide a service.

Declan's brain switched into positive mode. Instead of seeing obstacles, he looked for stepping stones; instead of feeling lost he looked for opportunities; instead of feeling beaten he rose to the challenge. Rather than bewailing what he didn't have, Declan counted his blessings for his good health, strength and vibrant mind. Shrugging off the impossibility of his situation, Declan turned around and walked back into Deptford. Deciding to continue his quest where Marlowe had died he got back on the trail.

Deptford, Declan discovered, used to be a small fishing village. That was before Henry VIII had it turned into the first Royal Dockyard, which became famed throughout the world for its shipbuilding prowess. This maritime development resulted in a town full of drunken sailors, all too ready to sink their sorrows in a tot of rum. Declan followed in the steps of Marlowe, who came to Deptford in

1593. In Deptford Strand, he inquired as to the whereabouts of widow Dame Eleanor Bull. At his third inquiry, a man directed him to her place of abode. Since the death of her husband to the plague, she had run a boarding house as a means of survival. As Declan approached her front door, he noticed a sign advertising a room for rent. At tuppence a week with breakfast and laundry included, Declan rented the place. After paying Dame Bull his tuppence he only had five pence left in his purse. He had to find a source of income.

Along the corridor he came across the room Marlowe had allegedly died in, on the 30th of May. Declan, well aware of several different versions of how the playwright had died, still didn't know which one was true.

Mrs Bull, seeing her new lodger in the room said. "What do you want in here?"

Declan turned to face her. "So this is where he died."

Pointing to a settee, she nodded, "That's Right. Over there."

"It must have been a terrible shock."

"It weren't the first fight here."

Declan hadn't considered the casual violence of the time. "Were you in here when one of the men stabbed Marlowe?"

Eleanor, becoming suspicious, said, "What do you want to know for?"

The American shrugged, "Just curious."

"Yes well like I told them in court, I heard them fighting, and came in here to see what was going on, Mr Marlowe was on the floor, with blood streaming from his eye."

"Who else was in here?"

"A Master Skeres; a Master Poley; and a Master Frizer."

"And Ingram Frizer was the one who stabbed him?"

Eleanor crossed her arms. "Are you a thief-taker?"

Figuring that was what passed for police in those times, he said, "No. I'm just writing about him."

"So you're one of them, scholars." She added, "So you're going to write about me then, seeing as 'e was murdered 'ere?"

"That depends on how much you can tell me."

"What do you want to know then?"

"Where I can find Ingram Frizer for a start."

"I don't know that. You could try the tavern."

"Thank you Madam Bull, and good day to you," Declan said, heading for the door.

Having alighted from the 'Q', I found myself back in the cobbled streets of Sixteenth-Century London to look for the missing Boogle guru. But where was I to start? I remember him saying he

was going to find Ingram Frizer but that was all I knew. As I walked gingerly along narrow, crooked streets, dodging rushing people and the contents of chamber pots I tried working out where Declan had gone. Putting myself in his place, as a detective, I would probably start at the scene of the crime. So I headed off towards Deptford. After nearly slipping up on some horrible gunge on the street, I put the mission behind me and concentrated entirely on avoiding the slippery slime from the refuse of people; that polluted most walkways.

Passers-by seemed friendly enough and were only too happy to point me in the direction of the Royal Navy yards, the central landmark in Deptford. Occasionally there was a shrill whistle as people stood aside to make way for fleeing urchins, hotly pursued by angry thief-takers. All in all, it was utter mayhem, as hustling and bustling pedestrians impeded my progress. Then the rain came, getting most of the folk off the streets. I soon discovered why this was so. The rain washed the slime down the streets, making the already suffocating stench even worse. Gagging, even with a silk handkerchief over mouth and nose, I headed to the Thames, which strangely enough gave me respite from the noxious odours. The Kites, in huge numbers, were doing an excellent cleaning job, which went some way to making the air breathable.

Once I arrived at the dockyards, I turned away from the Thames and headed into town. Shortly after, I saw the St Nicholas Church. I seemed to recall that Marlowe's alleged burial site was an unmarked grave in the cemetery next door. The rain had eased and the smell of wet grass around the graves, helped me breathe more easily. I wondered if it was possible to get used to the putrefaction in the streets, or whether anybody ever cleaned them. Rather than attending to their hygiene people tended to douse themselves with cheap perfume, in an attempt ward off the London stench. Or, in the case of women, carry posies of fragrant flowers around with them. I didn't know which was worse, the putrid walkways or the nauseous cloying perfumes covering up the rank smell of unclean bodies. Most Europeans of the time thought that taking baths would wash away the body's protective covering and upset the humours. As a result, a person was lucky to bathe more than once a year. Outbreaks of plague, including the Black Death, and other diseases were common due to the public's uncleanliness and unhygienic living conditions.

I walked into the churchyard and found the cemetery deserted, except for one man, standing reverently with head bowed, at one of the graves. That he wore a cape, putting him in the professional class.

I approached him quietly, so as not to disturb his meditations. As I got nearer to the man, I recognised him as Thomas Kyd, the playwright I'd spoken to during my previous visit to Elizabethan London.

The man turned around. "Oh, hello, you startled me."

His pointy beard made his face look triangular. I looked into his sad eyes. "My apologies but I wonder if you could help me."

"In what way?"

"I seek the grave of Christopher Marlowe. I believe it is here about."

"You have come to the right place Master?"

“Doyle. And if I'm not mistaking you would be Master Kyd, the renowned playwright.”

“Thomas Kyd, at your service,” he said with a sweep of his hat. Then, staring at Ossie, he asked, “Have we met?”

I smiled. “Indeed we have, sire, outside a tavern in Blackfriars.”

Thomas stroked his beard. “Forgive me sire, but I do not recollect.”

Then I realised my mistake. In Kyd's timeframe, he hadn't yet met me. I quickly diverted him from that conundrum and turned my attention to the makeshift grave. “Is this where the great man rests?”

Thomas sighed, “His burial may have been simple, but his life certainly wasn't.” After a long pause, he said, “Kit was an extraordinary soul, Master Doyle. Did you know him well?”

“Alas, no. Do you know why Christopher Marlowe came to Deptford?”

Thomas slowly shook his head. “You'll have to ask Nicholas Skeres about that. He was much closer to Kit when it happened.”

“Quite literally, him being conveniently in the room at the time of the murder.”

“Indeed, Mr Doyle.” Leaving flowers on the grave, Thomas said, “Now, I must away. It's been good speaking with you.”

Getting his attention, I said, “One other thing. Do you know the whereabouts of Ingram Frizer?”

“Kit's murderer! What dealings would you have with him?”

“I have been hired to look into the affairs of Christopher Marlowe. My client believes Robert Poley and Nicholas Skeres may have lied to save the life of Ingram Frizer. I need to find out if it is true.”

“That is intriguing, Master Doyle, but I cannot help you in your quest.” Then, as an afterthought, he said, “But you might try one Edward Alleyn. He played the lead in some of Kit's plays.

“Where will I find him?”

“He practices his craft in an inn yard in Thames Street, just across the river.”

Declan discovered that during Queen Elizabeth I's reign, taverns, apart from being wine drinking establishments, were good places to socialise and share gossip. They also provided men with musical or poetic entertainment, as well as that of a more personal nature. Socially superior to the rougher ale houses, they were the favourite gathering places for writers and actors, including the late Kit Marlowe.

The tavern Declan entered was full of men drinking wine and smoking tobacco. Inns were considered the most respectable of drinking establishments because they offered food and lodging. Alehouses were considered the lowest rung on the drinking ladder, attracting the dregs of society. Taverns came in between. Many, like the one run by Eleanor Bull, were unlicensed, operating in private houses. Declan listened to fiddle music and nearly gagged on the swirling tobacco smoke that filled the establishment. Christopher Marlowe, who was known by many at the tavern, seemed to be the main topic of the day. Many of the patrons were only too willing to share their ideas and

their sweet wine, recounting their version of how Marlowe died and why. Declan found it all very mysterious. Theories involved plots about religion, heresy and all sorts of jiggery-pokery. Some reckoned it happened at an inn with a dispute over a bill; others said it occurred in a house where he was meeting some royal spies. Others proclaimed it was an Elizabethan 'hit-man' disposing of Marlowe before he could testify against others. One of the theorists, Albert, an open man Declan sat and took wine with, said, "Whatever the reason, Frizer stabbed 'im, and 'e died. Rumour 'as it that 'e's buried in an unmarked grave in the St Nicholas' churchyard.

"He was a famous playwright, so why an unmarked grave."

The drinking companion leant in close, "The word is that 'e was an Athiest. 'E was buried there late at night without the priest knowing." Albert raised his glass, "God rest 'is soul."

"Amen to that," Declan replied, raising his glass. Then he said, "I'm looking for Ingram Frizer. Any idea where I might find him?"

His drinking companion said, "The one that killed Marlowe."

"The very same."

The tipsy companion, beckoning with his finger, drew the stranger closer. In a conspiratorial voice, whispered, "I know someone who knows. Come with me."

Declan stared at the stranger. Could he trust the man? Sure he'd been generous with both his wine and his conversation. Shrugging off his paranoia The American decided to take the chance and left the tavern with the man. Outside the tavern, the stranger beckoned Declan to follow him down a dark, narrow alley. Declan senses, dulled by too much sweet wine, weren't on high alert. Another man was lounging against a brick wall. The drinking companion indicated Declan to remain where he was, while he spoke with the other man.

After a short while, the man leaning against the wall approached Declan. "I hear you want to know the whereabouts of Ingram Frizer."

"That's right. Do you know where I can find Marlowe's killer."

The man grinned, displaying rotten teeth, "Reckon I just might," he said putting out his hand to receive a coin."

Declan smiled, apologetically. "I'm afraid I don't have much with me."

"Well, we'll have to see about that," bad teeth said, brandishing a belaying pin.

Declan saw two other men emerge from the shadows. It wasn't looking good.

"Look, there's no need for violence. I'm sure we can sort this out amicably."

The thugs weren't so sure, and none of them knew what amicably meant; They laid him out with clubs, then they stole his purse, sword and dagger, before running down the alleyway. Declan, lying bruised, bleeding and semi-conscious in the vomit and detritus, around him, had his first taste of what Elizabethan London was really like.

The housing in Deptford comprised mainly apartment buildings, all crammed together in unusual arrangements, on the Strand. With hardly any planning and vast expansion, the architecture was a

real hotch potch. Ossie pushed through the constant flow of people as they continually migrated in and out of various buildings and shops. Desperate to locate the Boogie guru, Ossie stopped passers-by, asking them if they'd seen a tall man with longish dark curly hair, the best way he could think of describing Declan. Most just shrugged and carried on their way. Then he got an idea. Maybe Declan had visited the scene of the crime? He changed his tack and inquired as to the address of Eleanor Bull. This time, he was successful.

Eleanor Bull's place doubled as a tavern and when she got behind with her rent, a private brothel. So when the smart looking gentleman approached her door, she welcomed him inside, saying, "What's your pleasure, sir?"

She must have been fifty if she was a day. But she still had a certain attractiveness about her. I can imagine her still being able to entice gentlemen who were worse for her wine. I smiled, "I'm here to locate a friend."

She looked at him with suspicion. "And who might this friend be?"

"His name is Declan Merrick."

"The scholar?"

Ossie went along with Declan's subterfuge. "Yes, the student. Do you know where I might find him."

"Might be at the tavern down the road."

"Did he say he was going there?"

"He was asking about young Marlowe, the man what got killed 'ere. I told 'im someone might help 'im at the tavern."

I smiled, "Thank you, Mrs Bull. I will try there directly."

The people in the smoky tavern weren't any help. Most seemed too drunk to offer any useful suggestions. The tavern keeper just brushed me off, saying, "I just serve drinks. I don't know who comes in here." Other customers stayed close-mouthed, only interested in sharing the latest bit of gossip.

As I went to leave, an urchin followed me. I turned to the scruffy little tyke. "What do you want?"

Cringing, he said, "Don't mean no trouble, sir. Just that I 'eard you askin' about your friend."

I grabbed him by his skinny shoulders. "Do you know something?"

"I 'eard 'im talkin' to Albert Grise. Then 'e left wiv 'im."

"Who's he?"

"A cutpurse. You don't want to get mixed up wiv 'im."

"Did you see where they went?"

The waif held out his skinny hand.

I tossed him a farthing, but he wouldn't settle for less than a halfpenny

The boy tested the coin with his teeth, then pointed. "They went down that alley."

I don't know what I expected to find, but it certainly wasn't the groaning mass on the stinking ground. Instinct told me to leave it alone. Compassion told me to see if I could help the sad soul. I went tentatively to the victim's aid, all too aware that I could easily be setting myself up for a mugging, waylaying they called it back then. The injured man turned his face towards me. I couldn't believe it. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I was looking at Declan! He looked in a bad way. I looked down at his bleeding, bruised face. "Dec, it's me, Ossie. I've come to take you away from all this."

Declan looked up, grinning painfully, "Sounds like a bizarre marriage proposal."

I retorted, "I don't know, I can't leave you alone for five minutes."

"Over two bloody days, you mean!"

Putting a handkerchief to my mouth and nose, I said, "Can you get up?"

He groaned as I helped him to his feet. "We need to get you to a doctor."

"I don't want to get leeches."

"I think Twenty-first Century medicine can do better than that."

"You mean...?"

"You're being shipped out." I gave him his pendant.

"What about you?"

"I think I'll stay a while."

Declan said, "I'm not hurt badly. Just a few bruises. Nothing's broken, so I'll be okay."

"You need x-rays, and that's not going to happen here. Just press the button, and you're home and dry."

"I haven't done this before," Declan said, nervously. "Will you stay here while I do it?"

I remembered the first time I'd pressed the button. I guess I was a bit anxious about what would happen. "Sure, I'll stand by while you get in. It was pretty simple really. The Q wasn't there, then it was, then it wasn't, and neither was Declan. And I was alone some five hundred years before I was born. Now it was time to get busy."

Chapter 13

It's amazing how our brains adapt to new circumstances. Once my grey matter worked out that the clashing of hooves on stone and the deafening racket produced by the iron-rimmed wheels of horse-drawn carts did not pose a threat to me, the noise faded into the background. I remember living near Kings Cross Station and having to put up with loudspeaker announcements all hours of the night. After a couple of weeks, I hardly noticed them.

As London had no drainage or sewage, what I stepped in was most likely what someone had once eaten or discarded because it had become inedible. Thankfully, I was becoming an expert at avoiding being hit by chamber pot faeces and piss tossed out windows, to spatter over unwary souls below. Many people, getting rid of their waste this way, did yell warnings, but they were hard to hear above the general street noise. One trick was to walk close to the buildings, As most of the chamber pot contents landed in the middle of the narrow streets, keeping near the walls the safest of options. Most people tended to do this, and only those in a hurry chanced their luck in the middle of the streets. I was walking over London Bridge, on my way to the city, when the wind blew up, mercifully blowing away some of the thick, foul stench in the air. However, it also kept the scavenging birds away.

As I approached the city, by way of Bishopsgate, the noise of clacking hooves and wooden wheels became much louder. Apprentices, of which there were many, yelled loudly at each other. They laughed raucously, showing no common courtesy to us citizens. Many traditional street festivities were taking place in public. These consisted of getting drunk at alehouses, bear baiting, gambling dens, and brothels. All of which were accepted societal pursuits.

All this walking made me thirsty, but nobody drank the water. We had to quench ourselves with wine or ale. The wine was only for the wealthy Adults and even some of their kids. People were always drinking some alcohol, so getting tipsy was an everyday occurrence. In a city of 130,000 - 150,000, with most individuals in some stage of inebriation, London city was most definitely not a sober place.

My research revealed that the early days of commercial theatre involved performances in public spaces such as town squares. As acting troupes, travelling the country, sought lodgings at inns or taverns, the natural progression for these bands of actors was to negotiate with the bar owner, or vintner, to stage a performance at the hotel. All parties would therefore benefit. The larger the audience at the inn, the more profit for the landlord. Also, in the Elizabethan days, the usual form of transport was on horseback, so, as all the traditional inns had large cobblestone yards, they proved useful spaces for Thespians to show their dramatic arts. It was to such a place that I came to find Edward Alleyn.

Upon entering the inn yard, the raucousness of the city streets gave way to the lyrical voice, of somebody rehearsing their lines. I ventured forth and saw a very tall, full-bearded man, wearing a tall broad-brimmed hat, reading from a script. Waiting till he came to a pause, I enquired, "Are you Master Edward Alleyn?"

The actor eyed the stranger, suspiciously. "Who wants to know?"

“Doyle. Oswald Doyle. I am enquiring about the death of Christopher Marlowe.”

“He was murdered by that thug, Frizer. What else is there to know?”

“Is that what actually happened? Didn't Marlowe attack Frizer first?”

The actor wasn't sure, but he wasn't letting on. The stranger could be anybody. Even a spy for The Earl of Essex. “That was the finding of the court. Who am I to argue with that?”

Ossie knew Alleyn was holding back. “Let me explain myself. I am working at the behest of Catherine Marlowe.”

“His mother!”

“Yes,” I lied, “She believes there is more to what happened in Deptford than is known. You were very close to the man. Tell me about him.”

“Kit was the great dramatic tragedian. He was loyal to what he believed in.”

“What did he believe in, Master Alleyn?”

“He was a complex genius. He was a liberated spirit who believed in free speech. Openly atheistic, he criticised both Catholics and Protestants and made many-an-enemy. He lived on a knife's edge, Mr Doyle. He may have died young, but he was a firebrand who lived life to the full.”

I had to push the envelope. Edward would either open up or clam up. I had to take the chance. “Is it not possible that Marlowe's professed atheism, as with his supposed Catholicism, may have been no more than an elaborate and sustained pretence adopted to further his work as a government spy.”

“He never wanted to be a spy.”

“Was he forced into that role?”

“He was persuaded to spy for Francis Walsingham.”

“But he was an atheist?”

“He didn't believe in restrictive institutionalised religion, Mr Doyle.”

“And his outspoken views had him out of favour with the Royal Court.”

Alleyn wondered how to answer. At length, he said, “Some critics believe that Kit sought to disseminate these views in his work and that he identified with his rebellious and iconoclastic protagonists.”

“Such as Sir Walter Raleigh?”

“Once Sir Walter lost favour with Her Majesty, the Queen, his support for the adventurer made his situation involved.”

“Did the content of his plays attract the Queen's displeasure?”

Alleyn shook his head. “All plays have to be approved by the Master of the Revels before they can be performed. Also, the censorship of publications is under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“So they didn't consider any of Marlowe's works to be unacceptable.”

“Apart from the Amores.

“Amores?”

“Sexuality.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “Surely, proclaiming himself an atheist would have gotten him the Church's ire and, by extension that of the Monarchy.”

“Such a declaration did hold the dangerous implication of being an enemy of God and, by association, the state.”

“Wasn't he a member of the School of night, Edward?”

“Publicly it's known as the School of Atheism and it is considered to be disloyal to our Protestant monarchy.”

“So there were many reasons why Marlowe could have been a marked man.”

“Yes, Master Doyle, and now he is dead and buried in an unmarked grave near St. Nicholas' Church.”

I ventured, “There were those who didn't even want him to be buried in hallowed ground.”

Edward said, “I must get back to my rehearsal.”

I smiled, “Thank you for your help. Now where can I find Ingram Frizer?”

Alleyne shrugged, “I don't know.” Then, as an afterthought, he said, “You could try Sir Thomas Walsingham. I've heard the nobleman employs him in some measure.”

When Declan arrived in the 'Q', he was alone. His vague idea that the quantisation effect would heal his wounds was unfounded. If anything he felt cuts and bruises even more. He sat immobile while his mind re-associated him with his Twenty-first Century sense of reality. Eventually, only a matter of minutes really, he walked into Jennifer's lounge room.

Taking one startled look at him, she said, “Declan, you're back! Then, as he came closer to her, “My God! What happened to you?”

He grinned, “Not many people alive today can claim to have been mugged in Elizabethan England.”

“Unless they were Elizabethans,” she said. “Where's Ossie? She added.

“He stayed behind.”

“Why on Earth can't you two stay together.”

“He thought I needed to see a doctor.”

“Are you hurt badly?”

“I don't think so.”

Going for her first aid kit, she said, “I'd better check you out anyhow. So get out of those smelly clothes.”

Stripping, he laughed, “Does bringing back Elizabethan pong, constitute a violation of time travel?”

She ignored the remark and started looking at his wounds. “You've got some nasty bruises and lacerations, but there doesn't seem to be anything broken.” She smiled, “I get you a spare tracksuit to wear; then we'll wash those disgusting clothes.”

Declan spent a couple of days recuperating at Jennifer's home. He noticed a concerned look on her face and asked what was troubling her. She brushed it off as being of no account.

He said, "How is the Qcam progressing?"

She sighed, “I've left messages for Nathan, but he hasn't got back to me.”

“Dammit Jen! We need to get this Dimmock character to wake up his ideas. Don't you have his number?”

“I promised Nathan I wouldn't interfere.”

“Jeez, I met guys like that before. They promise the Earth and deliver nothing. Give me his number, and I'll ring him. Then you haven't broken your trust.”

“Declan, just give me one more crack at Nathan.”

“I'm sorry Jen, but Nathan knows shit. I want to talk to Dimmick.”

She hesitated.

He got up. “Right I'll go to the university.”

Giving him the number, she said, “Alright, but I know this prick. Dimmick will probably have nothing to do with you.”

“Then we drop him like a hot fucking potato. We go elsewhere for our Qcam.”

“But where?”

“That creep probably got his ideas from someone else. I'll bet you there are other people out there developing this stuff.”

Jen looked at him. “You could go back and help Ossie. It might take your mind of this Qcam stuff.

He looked her in the eye. “The next time I get into the Q will be with the Qcam.”

“That could take a while.”

“Jen, I need to spend some time stateside. I've got a great team working for me, but Boogle is a huge corporation and doesn't run itself.”

“And our partnership?”

He looked her in the eye. “The Qcam is part of the deal. I can't commit myself fully until it becomes real.”

Jen, feeling she was losing him, said, “Declan, I want you on board, but if you haven't signed the papers in the next thirty days I may have to offer the deal to somebody else.”

“Anyone in mind with a spare \$100 million?” he grinned widely.

He could be a smug bastard at times, she thought. “You just never know,” she responded, holding herself in check.

After Declan had taken his leave, Jennifer looked at the letter. It had the British Government Crown Seal on it. It was from the Patents Office. Somebody would be visiting her regarding her quantum device. To protect her intellectual property she'd had to take out a patent on it. The patent had been granted, but now somebody from the Government was coming to see her invention. She desperately needed the power and influence of Boogle behind her, but she couldn't tell Declan that. If he knew, the Government was getting involved he would probably drop the QSA like a red hot potato. She had to deal with it quietly and with no fuss.

I headed back to Deptford and the Widow Bull. I needed to get some more details, but I was exhausted by the time I got to her place. With no street lamps to guide me through the blackness of night, my journey had been even more arduous. Thankfully the streets were mostly empty, and chamber pots were kept securely indoors, being filled again to be thrown out over the unexpected the next day. The scary part was that those abroad were mostly vagabonds and other ner-do-wells. My fingers hovered over the pendant, ready for a quick getaway, should the need have arisen.

Eventually, and without incident, I stood, weary and wasted, back at the house of Eleanor Bull.

In response to my knock, a blustery, unshaven man said, “What do you want?”

“I need to see Mrs Bull.”

“And you are?”

“Oswald Doyle. I spoke with the lady earlier today and...”

“Well she's busy, so piss off.”

Ossie delved into his purse and took out a penny. “Just need a few minutes.”

The lout took the coin, turned around and yelled, “ELEANOR, THERE'S A BLOKE WANTS TO SEE YA.”

Vaguely recognising him, in her half drunken state, she said, “You were the one that was looking for that scholar.”

“Thanks to your help I found him.”

“Oh! Why ain't he back here then.”

“Why would he come back here?” I queried, puzzled.

“Cause 'e paid a week's rent to stay 'ere.”

Fatigued, I saw a chance to rest my weary body. “He had to go somewhere and said I could stay here in his stead.”

Eleanor studied the stranger, then said, “You'd better come in then. But you have to pay me for extras.”

Looking at the worse for wear middle-aged woman Ossie hated to think what she meant by that remark. All he wanted was sleep.

The next morning he found Mrs Bull pottering around in her parlour. “Good morning to you.”

She looked at Ossie. “Mr Doyle, is you friend coming back?”

“He's too involved researching into the life and death of Christopher Marlowe.”

Folding her arms over her ample breasts, she said, “He told me that.”

“Well I'm helping him, and we need some details about the playwright's last hours on Earth.”

“I told 'im all I know.”

“Were you present when he got stabbed?”

“No. I 'eard screamin' and rushed in to find what was 'appening.”

I nodded. “Had Marlowe been here all the day?”

“Drinking and playing cards?”

“With his friends?”

“That's right, 'e was with them other three.”

I smiled, “That would be Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley.”

“That's right.” Then, looking him suspiciously, she said, “Why are you askin' me that when it's all on the public record?”

“Because you were there.”

“Yes, well I can't keep chattin' all day.”

I wasn't going to get any more out of her, so I left her to her chores. I found it more than interesting that all the four men involved had been in the employ of the Walsinghams and I didn't think it was by mere coincidence. My detective's nose said something stank about the whole affair. And it wasn't just the stench coming from the river. I had some more questions for Eleanor Bull, but they would have to wait till later. Right now I needed a reason for my investigation. To have that reason I needed to travel to Canterbury, Marlowe's birthplace. By coach, it would be a long and arduous journey fraught with danger from road agents. So it was time re-engage with the 'Q'.

Chapter 14

It took me a minute to reorientate myself before leaving the 'Q'. I stepped out of the machine in the laboratory and pressed the bell Jen had installed so she would know when I'd arrived. I met her in the lounge room where we stood and hugged. "It's good to be back, Jen. But I have to go back soon."

"What do you mean, Ossie, you've only just got here."

"I know that, but I need you to get me to Canterbury, in the same time frame."

"Why?"

I have to get the Marlowes to hire me to look into their son's death."

Jen looked at him quizzically. "Again, why?"

"It'll give me a legitimate reason to question those witnesses to the stabbing."

She sighed, "Well at least stay the night. I have some exciting things to tell you."

"I hope it's show and tell," I said, with a wicked wink."

"You might not get either, cheeky," she said, playing along.

"Declan's gone back to the states without fully committing himself," Jen mentioned as they ate their Chinese takeaway that evening.

"I think the mugging he got in the 16th century shook him up a bit."

Jennifer, shaking her head, said, "If only it were that simple."

I asked, "What do you mean?" while balancing some chow mein on my chopsticks.

"He won't come on board until I've got the Qcam business sorted."

"Shit!"

"My sentiments entirely. I had to give Declan an ultimatum."

I grinned, "I bet Mr Boogie loved that."

"I think I might have pushed him too far."

"Why did you lay the pressure on him then?"

"I had to, Ossie. I've got the fucking patent office pushing to come here and see the QSA. What the hell do I tell them? I need some heavyweight investors on side, and I need them now."

"Like Declan, you mean."

"Investors like that are as rare as hen's teeth." She looked at Ossie, "I just wondered if you could do some detective work in that direction."

"What, investigating potential investors?"

“I'm desperate Ossie. I don't know what else to do.”

I saw red. Once the pen pushers from Whitehall stuck their beaks in we might lose the 'Q'. “Okay Jen, I'll look into it first thing tomorrow.”

“And there's something else.”

I sighed, “What's that?”

“I need you to go and see Nathan and get him to give that Dimmock 'waste of space' a good swift kick up the arse.”

I said, “And if he won't do it I bloody well will!”

Jennifer laughed, “I don't know if that's a good idea.”

I shrugged, “What have we got to lose?” Then I added, “While I'm doing that you can programme the QSA to get me to Canterbury.”

Nathan Goodfellow, also frustrated with the Qcam holdup, phoned Douglas Dimmock's number. The man needed shaking up! There was no answer, and Nathan was invited to leave a message. He did so:

“Douglas, Nathan here. Where are we with the Qcam? If you don't respond, we may have to go elsewhere.”

It was a bluff, but it might just be enough to wake the scientist up and get a response. Nathan sighed heavily. Well, he'd done all he could for now. Thinking it over he realised his bluff was pathetic, and Dimmock would only scoff at the suggestion. This 'going elsewhere' got Nathan thinking. Maybe there was somebody else in the vast academic world working on quantum photography. As it turned out, quite a few universities were looking at quantum photography. One in particular caught his eye:

Scientists at the Institute for Quantum Optics and Quantum Information in Vienna, Austria, used a device called a 'Quantum Entanglement Camera' to capture the image of an object which never interacted with the light that detected it.

Nathan became interested. This 'quantum entanglement' was what he sought. He read on:

Specifically, scientists stencilled out of a piece of silicon in the image of a cat. Two 'entangled' light beams of different colours were produced using lasers, with the red beams passing through the stencilled cat cut-out and the yellow beams allowed to continue on their way, never interacting with the object. The red beams got discarded while the yellow rays continued onward towards the camera and recorded a cat image.

Nathan wondered if the same principle could apply to quantum assimilation.

Unaware of the mathematician's research, I phoned the LSE and asked to be put through to Dr Nathan Goodfellow. As soon as I heard his voice, I said, “Ossie here. We have to meet.”

Nathan, surprised at getting a call from the detective said, “Why?”

“Because Jennifer is becoming frustrated about this quantum camera business.”

Quantum Camera Sheds Light on 'Spooky' Physics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/936604-quantum-camera-sheds-light-on-spooky-phys>

“Her and me both. I've been leaving messages for Doug, but he's not responding.”

“Not good enough Nathan. Now we need to meet today.”

“But I've told you all I know.”

“But I haven't told you what I know, so when can you give me ten minutes this morning?”

“Meet me in the Garrick at 10.”

I ate a hearty breakfast while waiting for Nathan to show. He was running late, and I was getting pissed off. Then he walks up to my table, bold a brass, and sits down opposite – no apology for being late – nothing. “I said, Nathan, I know you're dealing with an unstable genius but if Jennifer can't rely on him ...”

Nathan interrupted, “You told me you had something to tell me.”

“Okay, I'm laying it on the line. Mr Boogle won't get involved with the QSA until the Qcam is up and running. On top of that, The fucking patent office police are demanding to see the QSA and what it can do. Without the Boogle investment, they may well take the QSA away and use in in some military bullshit research.” I added, “Bottom line, Get fucking Dimmock to pull his finger out and finish the job.”

Nathan stared at Ossie, “That's what I have been trying to do!”

“What, by leaving him fucking messages. Well that hasn't worked has it, so either you go and see him today and kick his arse into gear, or I will.”

The mathematician glared at the detective. “Oh yeah, threats are going to help. If Dimmick's in one of his dark states you may very well push him over the edge and get him to top himself.”

“If he's not up to the task then we drop the bastard and go to another university.”

“Do you think I haven't looked into alternatives?” Nathan sighed.

“No excuses, Nathan. He gets the job finished in the next month, or he doesn't get paid.”

“You can't do that. Dimmick's not repairing a fucking clock! The genius is inventing new science.”

“Try telling Mr Boogle that.” I fixed him with my gaze. “Look, Nathan, this is a business venture, not just something that Dimmock does at his pleasure.”

“So what am I supposed to do about it?” Nathan said, spreading his hands in a helpless gesture.

“Phone him right now and tell him we are coming round to find out where he's at.”

“That won't work!”

“Give me his fucking number, and I'll phone him.”

Nathan grabbed his phone, “All right I'll ring him.” He muttered, “For all the good it'll do.”

Douglas Dimmock lived in a High-rise flat in Blemundsbury, Old Holborn. He was on the 12th floor, and the lift wasn't working. To say he wasn't pleased to see us would have been an understatement.

Seeing the man with Nathan, Douglas said, "Who's he?"

Nathan said, "This is Oswald Doyle. He's a private detective."

"What's he doing here?"

I jumped in. "I'm looking after Professor Smethurst's investment, and she wants an update on the Qcam project."

Nathan said, "Can we come in?"

Dimmock stood aside for us to enter his dark, dingy domain. The stench of garbage and rotten vegetables assailed my nostrils. The dump was strewn with half-eaten takeaways, unwashed, greasy dishes and empty booze bottles. It was like being back in Elizabethan London, except in this case the shit was inside the house. I could see that Nathan was gagging. Being an ex-cop and having been assailed by the gut-wrenching stench of London town, I thought I was impervious to bad smells, but it wasn't the case. Holding my breath, I aimed for the closed windows and managed to open one when Douglas descended on me.

"What do you think you're doing?" Dimmick ranted.

"Trying to breathe, if that's okay with you," I said.

Nathan turned to Dimmock. "We need to talk but not here. Let's find a cafe where we can relax."

Dimmick horrified, said, "I'm not going out there."

Puzzled, Nathan asked, "How do you get your food and booze?"

"A neighbour gets it for me."

"Now, what in London passed for fresh air, got in through the open window, I could breathe a little easier. I turned to the computer genius. "So where are we with the Qcam?"

Dimmock stared at Ossie. "I need a clear head to deal with that."

"And the alcohol helps with that," I retorted.

Nathan jumped in, "that kind of remark is not helpful. Leave me to speak with Dr Dimmock alone."

I shrugged, "Knock yourself out. I'm going outside for a smoke."

Outside the flat, I stood on the balcony breathing in nicotine and other noxious chemicals, watching the human ants go about their business below. Then I remembered Carla Romano. It was time to see if she'd had a graphology expert look at the page I'd given her. Mind you the whole concept of time is a very weird proposition when you experience 'Q' stuff. I had no idea how long it was since I'd seen her. Having reached her by phone, I said, "Carla, Oswald Doyle here. Any update on your interest in the journal?"

“I have shown the photocopy to my expert, who needs to see the complete journal.”

“Did he get anything from the photocopy?”

“He compared the writing with authentic samples in the British Museum Library. On the face of it, the journal page could be genuine, but he needs the original article to work with.”

I was expecting as much. Very well, I'll see if my client is agreeable to that and get back to you.”

That dealt with I phoned my offices for any messages left in my absence, I discovered a couple of cases from Royal Insurance but nothing pressing. Another 30 minutes went by before Nathan emerged from the flat. A worried look played on his face.

Nathan said, “I'm worried about Doug. He needs professional help but won't go there.”

“Never mind about that. What about the Qcam?”

“You can't just brush his medical problems off like that, Ossie. The two things are intimately related.”

“Are you telling me this has all been a waste of time?”

“I did tell you it would be.”

I stared at him. I wanted to grab him and do the sanctimonious prick some damage. “You're piss weak Nathan. I left you alone with him to sort this shit out, and you did nothing. Well, let's see if my method works any better.”

“What are you planning to do?”

I stormed over to the door and knocked loudly.

Nathan grabbed Ossie. “Just what the fuck do you expect me to do?”

“Give him a fucking ultimatum. We want to test the Qcam in one month or the deal's off, and he gets nothing, no shares and no fee. Got it?”

“I can't...”

“Then I will, even if I have to break the fucking door down to do it.”

Nathan stared darkly at the detective. “All Right, I'll tell him.”

Chapter 15

In early Medieval times, a continual procession of pilgrims made their way through Canterbury to visit Becket's shrine. By the time of my arrival Protestants had destroyed the Catholic Memorial, plunging the town into financial and spiritual decline. I stepped from the 'Q' and set out on my quest to find the Marlowes. On the way, I passed a memorial for Protestant victims, in Martyrs Field Road. Queen Mary's short-lived Counter-Reformation in the 1550's saw over 40 Protestants burnt at the stake, another black mark in Canterbury history. A kind gentleman directed me to Marlowe's home, a small house in Maynard Road in the Wincheap district, south of the city walls. Part of the building was given over to the cobbler's shop run by John Marlowe. As I entered, I heard the tap, tap, tap of a small hammer on leather. The cobbler crouched over his last, looked up at my arrival.

"Would you be Master John Marlowe?"

John, thinking he had another customer, said, "How can I help you, sir?"

"I'm here to find out about your son, Christopher."

Now on the alert, he snarled, "And what business is that of yours?"

I wasn't surprised at the grieving father's brusqueness. "I'm Oswald Doyle. What happened to your son was a tragedy and a huge loss to the Tudor stage."

John looked at Oswald, his face showing suspicion. "He mixed with sinners. That was his undoing."

"He was a sophisticated soul. That's for sure, and I need to chronicle his extraordinary full but short life."

"So why have you come to see me?"

"Because, Master Marlowe, he was your son."

John shook his head. "Once he got swallowed up by the sins and corruption in London, I no longer claimed him as my son."

I nodded, "It's a terrible thing when we have reason to turn our backs on our children. I'm not saying you weren't justified in what you did. But what if you didn't know the full story?"

John stared at Oswald, clenching his fists "I was present at the court case. I heard what they had to say about him. It was filth, utter filth."

Puzzled, I responded, "But he was the victim. It was Frizer who was on trial."

"You wouldn't think so. The judge spoke more about my son's sinful habits than he did about his killer."

I looked straight at the confused father. "Was justice served that day?"

John shook his head. "I'm a simple cobbler. I know nothing of courts and laws. All I know is 'His' holy laws," he said, his eyes looking heavenward."

Now it was time for the punch line. I said “Master Marlowe all I want to do is find out the truth of your son's death. Will you permit to investigate what happened.”

The cobbler looked straight at Doyle. “Why are you so interested in what happened to Christopher?”

My answer had to be the clincher. “As you say Christopher was a man of questionable habits. I can't deny that, but he was also a man of high intellect and genius and that cannot be forgotten.”

John studied Oswald. “Master Doyle I don't know who you are but that you have come here to ask my permission tells me you are a just man. And I would rather have a just man tell my son's story. Sir, you have my blessing. Now go with God.”

I felt pretty good about the way that turned out. I preferred, to speak honestly whenever possible, although it is not always that simple. However, I could now at least hold my head high when I tell Ingram Frizer, and Nicholas Skere's I'm working on behalf of Master John Marlowe.

Alone again, I pressed the stone on my pendant, and found myself back inside the pumpkin, as I sometimes jokingly called the 'Q'. Jennifer had upgraded the device so that 'Quantanauts' namely me, can direct the machine where to go providing Jen had already programmed the destination into her extraordinary quantum assimilation device. This new feature worked much like the current Sat Nav, which having been programmed, can guide us to any destination stored in its map registry. As the 'Q' could already assimilate 16th century London, all I had to do was press the appropriate buttons on a small navigation pad and I was instantly there.

The Sun was slipping below the horizon in the red sky as I stepped out into the field in which Declan and I had first arrived. This location meant it was a bit of a foot slog into the city. I managed to hitch a ride in the back of a waggon filled with potatoes, thanks to the Spanish Conquistadors since 1536. The kind driver dropped me off near an inn. I was starving, not having eaten all day. The hotel offered a range of wines and a food menu to go with them. I chose a beef roast with carrots and potatoes. I sated my appetite and set out on a long, dark walk to the residence of Madam Bull.

The next day, after a refreshing sleep I decided to go to Scadbury to find Sir Thomas Walsingham. Apart from being a courtier to the Queen, he was also the literary patron of many famous poets and dramatists, including Christopher Marlowe. He was also related to the late Francis Walsingham, which certainly made him a person of interest. However, more importantly, and the thing that interested me most, was that he employed Ingram Frizer, Marlowe's alleged murderer. But, as a commoner, how was I to get an audience with someone who had 'Sir' in front of his name?

Local gossip in the Inn had furnished me with the fact that Thomas Walsingham lived in Scadbury. He'd inherited the Manor of Scadbury upon the death of his older brother Edmund. So where was Scadbury? And how was I to get there? I could, of course, use the 'Q' but that would mean returning to the 21st century and having Jen re-programme the device, which she may well have refused to do to accommodate my frivolous use of her invention.

Scadbury, I was informed, by old Charlie, a local inebriate, was in the borough of Bromley, some ten miles away. When I asked about transportation an old codger, the worse for wine, said the

gentry rode in Hackney carriages. I usually associated them with Victorian times and Sherlock Holmes and was fairly surprised to discover that they were around in Tudor times. Apparently Hackney had just two major roads during Elizabethan times: Ermine Street and Old Street. The Romans had built them as thoroughfares into and out of Londinium. Old Charlie, went to great length to give me his story. Apparently, he was one of the parishioners responsible for maintaining the roads, which he said had become more difficult with the increase in traffic, especially the Hackney carriages. Wanting to be on my way to Scadbury Manor I had to extricate myself from the Inn conversation as gently as possible, so as not offend the man. But not before he told me the hooves and iron wheels tended to wear down the cobble stones and break up pavements, giving him and his fellow parishioners, even more, work.

I like to think I'm reasonably fit so that a ten-mile walk wouldn't kill me. But the indescribable stench, drunken brawls and footpads may well have done so. Besides, by arriving in a carriage, I had a far greater chance of being able to speak with Sir Thomas Walsingham. The journey was noisy, uncomfortable, and, once we left the cobbled streets, seemingly endless. Once the horses were given their head, there were a couple of times I thought the carriage would topple over on the curves. I shared the coach with three other passengers, a stern looking priest and a middle-aged couple who were visiting their son in Bromley. None of them seemed perturbed as the carriage rolled on.

I was the only remaining passenger when Scadbury Manor came into view. As we passed under the gatehouse and proceeded along the gravel driveway, the 13th century palatial home revealed itself to be moated and, castle-like. Although, the moat, being an ornamental fish pond, served to keep fish in rather than keep intruders out. The main door had a bell pull which alerted those inside the house. In response to my ring, a rather stern looking man of advanced years opened the door. I took him to be master of the house help, a sort of Elizabethan butler. I smiled, "Good day to you. "I'm Master Doyle, and I'm here to call upon Sir Thomas."

The old retainer looked at the caller with some suspicion. "What is your business with Sir Thomas?"

"It's a personal and delicate matter."

"I'm afraid you can't see him, sire. He has gone to attend his business in the city."

Unperturbed, I went straight on to plan 'B' "Perhaps I could speak with Ingram Frizer if he's available."

The old man thought about it, then he said, "Follow me Sire, and I'll inform the gentleman that you are here."

I was left in a parlour, surrounded by Walsingham family portraits and military regalia, while the Master of the house fetched Ingram Frizer.

The man wasn't at all what I expected. I suppose I expected a pathetic drunk doing odd jobs around the place. But I was confronted by a neatly bearded man in elegant attire. As he and the retainer approached, I put out my hand, "Mr Frizer?"

"Yes. Who are you and what do you want?" Sir Thomas' assistant asked, brusquely.

“Is there somewhere we can talk more privately?”

His eyes narrowed. “Talk about what, Master?”

“Oswald Doyle,” I smiled. “I need your assistance on a delicate matter, concerning the late Christopher Marlowe.” The look on his face showed the subject concerned him. I had to put his mind at ease. “I’m just tidying up a few loose ends for John Marlowe.”

Frizer stroked his beard. “I see. Well, why don't we carry on this fascinating conversation in the garden? He turned to the retainer. “Master Biggins have refreshments brought out into the garden.”

As we sat at a wrought iron table by one of the ornamental fish ponds, Frizer said, “The Marlowes heard the evidence and the court's judgement. So I fail to see what else a can I can offer about the case.”

“But the court is so cold and factual. A mechanical description of events does nothing for the grieving mother's feelings.

Frizer snapped, "I had to endure 28 days in a stinking gaol cell to await the Queen's pardon and a verdict of not guilty of murder. And that did nothing for my feelings."

Getting back on track, I ventured, "What was it like in that room having to strike out at Marlowe, a man with whom you were well acquainted?"

“We were drinking and playing cards.”

“That's yourself, Kit Marlowe, and Masters Skeres and Poley.”

“That's right.”

“And you were all somehow connected with the late Francis Walsingham?”

“As far as I know, Kit and the others had some connection with him, but not I.”

“Except through Sir Thomas Walsingham, his nephew, and your employer.”

“I do some administrative work for Sir Thomas as his business agent, but I am also a businessman in my right.”

I smiled, “Master Frizer I do appreciate the time you have taken to furnish me with these details.”

Just then a serving wench arrived with wine and cakes.

As he poured wine, I continued, “Do you know of a William Shakespeare?”

Thinking it a strange question, he answered, “Isn't he one of the playwrights?”

“He's making a name for himself in the dramatic arts.”

“I don't see what bearing Master Shakespeare has on what happened at Widow Bull's.”

I chuckled, “Well there's the crazy rumour going around that Marlowe and Shakespeare are one and the same.” I looked for a change in his expression, even a subtle one, but noticed nothing.

Frizer responded, "There's no shortage of crazy rumours. But what do you expect with drunks?"

"Precisely," I said in agreement. I sipped the rich ruby wine and said, "Why did the fight between Kit and you take place?"

"He owed me gambling debts. Now, I liked Kit, but when he got into his dark moods, nothing would console him."

"So he owed you money, yet he was the one who attacked you."

"He came at me with a dagger."

"And you retaliated by stabbing him in the eye."

Frizer looked at Marlowe. "I'm not proud of it but what else could I do?"

I said, "And there was only the three of you present when Kit Marlowe died?"

"Well, there was Mistress Bull."

"Did she see the stabbing?"

"No, she came into the room afterwards."

"How far from Kit was she?"

Frizer thought it an odd question. "I don't know."

"What I mean is did she just stand at the doorway or did she come in and check him?"

"It was horrible, Master Doyle. The knife had gone right through into his brain. There was blood everywhere."

"I'm sure it was, Master Frizer. But that doesn't answer my question."

He stroked his beard. "As I recall, she took a couple of steps into the room, then froze and came no further."

I nodded and sipped more wine. Having had a big breakfast, I passed on the cakes. I smiled, "Thank you for your assistance, Master Frizer. Now there's just one more thing. Where can I find Master Skeres?"

"He lives with his brother and sister in the parish of All-Hallows-the-Less."

"Where's that?"

"Somewhere near London Bridge. But why do you want to see him? He'll say what I've just told you."

"I have no doubt that he will, but I told Mistress Marlowe I would speak with all concerned." I got up to leave. "Well, I have to be going. Where's the nearest place I can hire a carriage?"

"Chislehurst town I would think."

"How do I get there?"

“Once you leave the manor you'll see a sign. It will show you which way to go.”

As the stranger left, Frizer made a mental note. Sir Robert would be very interested in the man just leaving his home.

Chapter 16

When I inquired about Nicholas Skere's domicile, many people warned me, "Be wary of that one. He's a conman and deceiver. You can't trust him." It wasn't exactly a glowing report of Walsingham's right-hand man. Nicholas Skeres had a reputation around town of being a first class scoundrel, a cut-purse and thief. This opinion was only rumour of course, but one held, it would seem, by diverse peoples, usually in ale houses at the time. I did manage to get his address, which, as Frizer said, was not far from London Bridge. It was on the South side of the river, not far from the Globe Theatre. Although not exactly a mansion it was a large townhouse situated in well-tended grounds.

I passed through a large garden, a continuous arbour of 200 feet square, surrounded by honeysuckle. A thick woven alley of intertwined trees and vines led to the front door. The cool shade and fragrant scents felt like heaven to me after the hot, sweaty walk from the carriage. In response to my knock, a woman with greying hair opened the door. Her Dress billowed out over her farthingale.

"Yes, Sir. Can I help you?"

"I wish to converse with Nicholas Skeres."

"And you are you?"

"Oswald Doyle. Is Master Skeres home?"

"Is he expecting you?"

Not unless Frizer had sent an SMS, I thought. "No, but I have been looking for him."

"For what reason, Master Doyle."

A very good question. I smiled at the matronly woman, "Mistress, I'm here to find out the facts of Master Marlowe's untimely death."

Mrs Skeres folded her arms. "That matter has been settled in court."

"Indeed it has. But I am not making enquiries from a legal perspective. My interest is purely literary, from a historical viewpoint."

"Then you're recording what happened."

"Indeed. And your son is a key witness so he must have a story to tell."

She wasn't sure what to think. But she couldn't stand around gasbagging all day. She said, "You'd better come in Master Doyle, and I will get my son."

Nicholas Skeres had a wary look about him. I had the feeling that his mind was plotting two moves ahead all the time. There was a darkness about him and not just his beard and hair. Did ale house gossip taint my judgement? I tried to remain objective. I bowed slightly, "Oswald Doyle. I take it you are Master Nicholas Skeres."

Skere's said, Master Doyle, My mother tells me you want to know about the death of Kit Marlowe."

"Yes, Master Skeres. As an eyewitness to the events that unfolded that fateful night, your input would be invaluable in my written account."

"Invaluable Sir. But everything has a value."

"Indeed it does. But it is not necessarily measured in coin. Christopher Marlowe will become famous to history and, as an associate of his your story will also be told. The question is, Master Skeres, how do you want your part in his death to read?"

Nicholas, puzzled, said, "You will write about me?"

I nodded, "So how would you be drafted? As a man of honour or one who's life is driven by the coin?"

Skere's grinned, then his smile turned into a laugh.

"Let us sit, and I will explain."

Skere's picked up a small bell, which he rang. A plain-faced, skinny young servant girl entered the room.

Skere's said, "Bring us ale, girl." Then, turning to the writer, he said, "So what do you want to know?"

"Just what happened that day – in your words."

"I was one of the three gentlemen present when Master Marlowe attacked Master Frizer. Master Frizer got the better of him and killed Kit in self-defense by stabbing him in his right eye. It was a fearsome sight."

"Who else was present?"

Skere's watched the servant girl as she poured the wine. Then he said, "Robert Poley."

"You knew this Poley?"

Nicholas sipped his wine. "Yes, he worked with me on exposing the Babington plot."

"Under Francis Walsingham?"

"I worked for him from time to time."

"As did Master Poley."

"As a government agent, yes."

"So, what caused the fight to take place?"

"A dispute over payment of the bill. Young Kit went at Ingram, nicking him a couple of times with a dagger."

"Did Frizer try to take flight."

"He couldn't, Master Poley and I sat on either side of him."

"So he was forced to defend himself?"

"There was a struggle and Kit got stabbed and died. Frizer didn't mean to kill him It just happened that way."

"Is that what came out at the inquest?"

Skere's retorted, "That's what happened."

I nodded, "So who presided over the inquest?"

The Coroner of the Queen's Household, William Danby. Where have you been? It's been bandied all over the city for weeks."

"Where would I find him."

"He has chambers in Lincoln's Inn. But why are you interested in him?"

I changed the subject. "Did the argument build up or did Master Marlowe simply strike out at Frizer?"

"It increased over the period of an hour or so."

I nodded but didn't even bother to ask if they were drunk. That was a forgone conclusion. But it may well have played a part in Marlowe's death. That's assuming he was dead. I took more wine to quench my thirst. Looking at Skeres, I said, "Do you consider yourself an honourable man?"

"What do you mean?" Nicholas responded, standing abruptly.

"A question, not a judgement I assure you," I said smiling. But I had my answer. Pushing my luck, I ventured, "Master Skeres were you called before the Court of the Star Chamber as a witness in the case of Smith vs. Wolfall."

"The Skinner Wolfall was accused of obtaining money under false pretences."

Nicholas Skeres - Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_Skeres

"Yes, and did you not lure Smith into Wolfall's clutches, a role he admitted to having undertaken many times before over the past ten or twelve years."

"Yes but only I did it under duress."

"Who forced you to carry out such despicable acts?"

"The Spymaster."

"The late Francis Walsingham."

"The very same. The keeper of secrets."

I chanced my luck. "What secret did Walsingham have over you, Master Skeres?"

Ingram stared at Oswald. “Mr Doyle I think you have overstayed your welcome.”

As I rose, I said, “It must have been a dark one to get you act with such dishonour.”

Skeres said, “You have said quite enough. Now begone, or you will taste my blade.”

Preferring flight over fight I hastily departed the Skeres home and walked back towards the bridge. My head was full of thoughts which I needed to write down. How I longed for the notepad on my phone. How I yearned for my mobile phone. I had no quill and ink with me. Even if I had, I doubt I would have gotten beyond blots and scratches. Luckily Elizabethans had pencils. A Renaissance invention to make writing easier, they were obtainable from many shops. For tuppence, I had my pencil and paper. It seemed an excessive price to pay, and the shopkeeper probably cheated me. But I had what I needed.

Noting many of the things that people seemed to agree on, I wrote:

Skere's heard Frizer and Kit arguing over payment of a bill. The drunken pair hurled hateful words at each other. At this stage Frizer was sitting at a table between the other two and Marlowe was lying behind him on a couch. (lying down?)

Marlowe snatched Frizer's dagger and wounded him in the head. (How bad was this injury?) (Why did he grab Frizer's dagger? Why did he not use his own?"

In the ensuing struggle, according to the coroner's report, Marlowe was stabbed above the right eye, killing him instantly. (William Danby Coroner of the Queen's household. Must speak with him.)

Could Marlowe's death have been faked, I wondered? And if so to what end? Probably the most credible witness, Eleanor Bull, said he was stabbed in the right eye, and there was blood everywhere. But was it Marlowe's blood and was the stabbing staged? Then the thing about him lying on a bed while having a serious argument didn't ring true to me. And two people stabbed in the head with the

same dagger just didn't make sense. The only ones who witnessed the stabbing were both liars and deceivers. So How could I take their word for what happened? Perhaps Dr Danby could shed more light.

Deptford - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deptford_Strand

The day had been long, and it was time to return to Mistress Bull's and a good night's sleep. The walk to Deptford from London Bridge had me pass armourers and gunsmiths. Other industries set up along the River Thames included glass blowing, textiles and specialised luxury crafts like jewellery making, printing and clock making. Strangely enough, this seemed to be the least dangerous and malodorous part of the city or at least the smells were of a more industrial nature, and smoke from factories and the waste generated by them tended to mask the putridity of the surrounding residential areas.

Nathan, excited by the news, rang Jennifer. “Dr Dimmock informs me he is ready to carry out the initial trials with the Qcam.”

Jennifer, feeling concerned about Ossie's well-being and Declan's non-commitment, welcomed Nathan's call. “That's fantastic news. When can I see the camera?”

“I've set up a meeting with Douglas in his laboratory tomorrow evening at 7 o'clock. I'll text you the details.” Then he asked, “Will Ossie be there?”

“If I can contact him.”

“Where is he then?”

“That's classified, Nathan.”

“Oh no! He's off on one of his quantum jaunts.”

“I'll see you tomorrow.”

“Where to this time? Surely you can at least tell that.”

“All will be revealed, but not yet.”

Douglas Dimmock felt he could tolerate the world, which was a significant improvement on the previous two weeks. When his 'Dark Lord' had him under its control he felt as though he was stuck in a deep, dark well with the floor sinking deeper at his feet, sucking him down. Even the promise of One million pounds for the Qcam couldn't shake him from his slough of despair. But now the money was relevant again, and he was back on board.

Jennifer, wary but excited, found it difficult to sleep that night. She had both Ossie and the Qcam on her mind. Would they be able to take pictures of ancient times? She drifted back to sleep, and dreamt Beefeaters were marching Ossie to the Tower of London. She woke in a cold sweat, her heart pumping like crazy. Jennifer calmed herself with chamomile tea. Then she got the urge to phone Declan, to tell him about the Qcam development. Common sense told her not to do so until she'd seen the camera. But the scientist felt she was losing his support and went ahead anyhow. She heard his voice and said, “Hi Declan. Good news! Dr Dimmock is giving a demo of the Qcam tomorrow night, in his lab at uni.”

“Hey, that is good news. Let me know how it goes.”

“I'll send you some pictures and data.”

“I'll look forward to seeing them.”

Jennifer thought he'd show more enthusiasm. She inquired, “Is everything okay?”

“Sure, why do you ask?”

“You just seem a little under-whelmed with my news.”

“Some of the key directors are sceptical about investing in your venture.”

“My God! You've been telling them about your experience.”

“I had to, Jennifer. Boogle is not a dictatorship. You get me some images from a famous historical event, and I'll get them on board.”

“But you know what the QSA can do? You know it's unique and amazing.”

“my words mean nothing, Jennifer. Get me pictures of, say, Prince John sealing the Magna Carta, and we're in business.”

“How long have I got?”

“Boogle budgeting for the next financial year has to be ready in one month.”

“But I don't see how?...”

“That's not my problem. Best of luck with the viewing.”

Jennifer slumped into an armchair, her legs weak like jelly. Lifting her eyes to the heavens, she prayed like never before that the camera would be ready. Then she thought about her nightmare and wondered if it was a portent?

Chapter 17

William Danby turned to John Chalkhill. "Ingram Frizer is my last case."

Chalkhill, the County Coroner at the Marlowe Inquest, raised an eyebrow. "You're not going to grass, are you?"

Danby looked at his colleague, frowning. "I haven't told anybody this, but Sir Thomas had a discrete word in my ear before the Marlowe Inquest."

"Oh! What did he say?"

"He suggested there could be a knighthood in the offing if I, well to put it in theatre parlance, stayed on the script in my report."

"What did you take that to mean?" Chalkhill said, taking a pinch of snuff.

"Far be it from me to suggest there was any impropriety involved in the case. However, it has occurred to me that all the key players in Marlowe's death were in the employ of or associated with Sir Thomas. It's the only story we had to work with."

What about that witness who said he saw them on a boat, sailing away from behind Dame Bull's place, the day after Marlowe's death?"

"That's just one of a thousand rumours spread by alehouse drunks."

"I spoke to Dame Bull. She told me a stranger took Frizer, Skeres and Foley to a boat, which took them and the body away from her place."

William looked at his colleague. "What exactly are you suggesting, John?"

"That we don't know for sure if it the deceased was Marlowe."

Danby, taken aback, countered, "So who do you think it was then?"

"That Puritan extremist Penry was executed that day, not more than two miles from Dame Bull's place."

"But he was already dead."

"So nobody's going to ask any questions. The hanged man was Marlowe's build and around his age. I must say I thought the eye was an unusual place for a knife wound. However, if the corpse wasn't Marlowe his bloodied face may well have disguised him face when Dame Bull saw him."

William said, "best not to muddy the waters. Sir Thomas wouldn't like it."

"And that's why you're retiring?"

William donned his tall, wide-brimmed hat. "We can continue our conversation later. Right now I have something pressing to attend to."

William Danby greeted Oswald Doyle in the outer office, where Master Travers, his clerk had been entertaining the investigator. The clerk had had strict instructions to do so. William didn't want Mr

Doyle to leave before they had spoken together. He had to make out Doyle's visit was a surprise, and, to some extent, he was intrigued. The messenger had said to expect a Mr Doyle and to have everything in place for his visit. Dandy had complied, particularly since the missive had Sir Robert Walsingham's seal upon it.

Danby invited Doyle into his office, and he asked, "So, Master Doyle, what is this about?"

"The inquest into the death of Christopher Marlowe."

"And why does that case interest you, Master Doyle?"

"Because, Master Danby, I am chronicling his life."

"And you think I can assist you, how?"

"Who told you to carry out the inquest?"

"The order came by way of Sir Thomas Walsingham."

"Was that before or after you saw Master Marlowe's body?"

William paused, then said, "I never viewed his body."

Ossie, trying not to sound surprised, responded, "Who arrested Ingram Frizer?"

William looked at him askance. "The Watch of course."

"Realising such was common knowledge, "What I meant was who alerted the Watch to the crime?"

"Dame Eleanor Bull, as the incident took place in her establishment."

"Was the crime scene report tabled in court."

Again, Danby looked strangely at Oswald. "Who would make such a story. Most Watch members are illiterate."

Feeling like a fish out of water, I ventured, "What did they say in court about Marlowe's body?"

William shrugged, "There was not mention of that. They never saw Marlowe's body."

Another stifled surprise from me. Then it hit me. Mistress Bull couldn't just ring 999 and report a murder. It could've taken days for the Sheriff to have Frizer arrested. I made a mental note to speak with Nicholas Skere's again.

But that wasn't going to happen! I very soon experienced what it was like to be arrested by the Watch, as four of them burst into William Danby's chambers and surrounded me.

"What the fuck?" was all I could manage as they clapped me in irons and dragged me away. I couldn't reach the pendant. I was completely at their mercy.

Chapter 18

Douglas Dimmock cursed his obsession with the 5th-dimensional camera experiments. The project, very hush, hush, was developed in the Physics Lab in a Cambridge University. Only he and a few other quantum physicists knew of its existence. While testing the camera, Dimmock became obsessed with the possibilities. After the initial experiments to test, by chance, the vast range of possible outcomes captured by the camera, Dr Dimmick began testing it out on horse racing results. He thought he had it made. But what he didn't realise was that a weird fractal/quantum property kicked in, and every possible outcome created its versions of reality. Even Dr Dimmick's massive intellect couldn't cope with the nightmare. Soon his world fell apart, and he lost everything, including his sanity.

After seeking professional treatment, a requisite by the university for him to keep his tenured position, he was assessed and prescribed the necessary medication that allowed him to function in 'normal' society, providing he kept popping the Paroxetine pills. Random headaches and bouts of blurred vision were a nuisance side effect but, he considered, a small price to pay for him to function normally in society. In his tutoring, he stuck to standard physics and avoided anybody from the quantum science faculty. So he wanted nothing to do with Nathan's interest in quantum cameras. That was until he knew Professor Jennifer Smethurst was involved and a million pounds was on offer for a fully functioning quantum camera. Douglas Dimmick waited nervously, at the Physics Department, for Nathan and Jennifer to arrive.

“Are you sure he's going to keep up his end?” Jennifer asked, as Nathan and she walked from her car to the entrance of the university science faculty.”

“All I can say is he used the phone to contact me.”

“So?”

“He never touches the phone when in one of his black moods.”

Douglas Dimmock shook hands with Nathan and took the pair to the Quantum Physics lab, saying, “Be silent and don't interrupt while I explain things.”

“Why the need for silence?” Jennifer queried.

Giving her a dark look, he said, “because any noises and security will be sniffing around.”

“Then you're not supposed to be here,” Jennifer said.

Looking daggers at her, he said, “Any more interruptions and this meeting is over.”

Jennifer kept quiet.

Douglas presented his baby to the scientists. Jennifer thought it looked like a regular digital camera attached to a clamp like base.

Dimmock said, “Obviously we can't see with our eyes shut or otherwise covered. But this camera,” he said, indicating the device, “can see without the usual interaction between matter, light and photosensitive surfaces. As you know, photography is the practice of capturing light. For a fraction

of a second, a photosensitive element becomes exposed to a facet of the world, a slice flooded by photons, which crash into things and eject their photons at different wavelengths.”

He paused to drink some water. He continued, “We can see and photograph aspects of our world because it radiates energy via these photons. So what if we skip a step.”

The pair looked at him blankly but said nothing.

Dimmock grinned, “I don't mean by plugging into neurones in our brains. Instead, an image transmitted from object to eye, without the need for a photonic courier. This breakthrough is now possible thanks to a peculiar quirk of quantum physics that allows, in a limited sense, transmission of information between distinct elements of the same physical system.”

Checking to see if the pair were following, he said, “Now this is where your project comes in. This entanglement is exploitable in that it's possible to derive information from a photon that's never interacted with the object to be imaged, as long it is in an entangled state with one that has. So, in theory, at least, there is a strong case that it's possible to record images directly from their place in history, using my camera.”

Nathan uttered, “When can we put it to the test?”

“We can carry out a basic test right now.”

“let's do it!” Jennifer said, excited.

Dimmock pressed a button on the camera, and it switched on, emitting a green LED light. Pointing at the device he explained, “Now the camera emits two laser beams of entangled photons with different wavelengths.”

The pair watched as yellow and red beams lanced out from the camera, with one passing through the object – a cat image – while the other did not. Dimmock explained, “ In the first path, only one photon in the pair passes through the object to be imaged. It's then recombined with its other 'possible' self. The photon that didn't go through the picture gets discarded, while the remaining photon from the second path also gets reunited with itself from the first path.”

Jennifer said, “Can we see the image?”

Dimmock connected the camera to a printer and lo and behold cat outline etchings, generally invisible to the wavelength of light that made the pictures showed on the paper.

Dr Dimmock turned to Nathan and Jennifer, doing a good Cheshire cat imitation, “Now knowledge can be extracted by, and about, a photon that is never detected.”

“It's quite amazing,” jennifer commented.

Dimmock said, “All sorts of bizarre things are possible.” Indicating his invention, he added, “This isn't just some theorised possibility. This Qcam is the actual prototype.”

Nathan asked, “Why the cat image?”

Douglas smiled, “In homage to Schrodinger of course.”

“How will quantisation affect the camera.”

“We will need the Quantime machine to find that out.”

Jennifer asked, “How soon can we test it.”

“As soon as the money shows up in my bank account.”

The sheriff did not want to get on the wrong side of Sir Thomas Walsingham, so he asked no questions of the man while swearing out the warrant for Master Doyle's arrest. Having pocketed the money Sheriff Jacob Harrison sent four members of the Watch to capture the spy. He would decide on the charges later. He went by the belief that everybody was guilty of something so he just had to choose a charge that at least loosely fitted the crime.

What passed for police in Elizabethan times manacled my hands and feet together. Then these thugs pushed me roughly onto a cart that stank of rotten vegetables and manure, a heady combination. There were two guards in the back with me. The other two rode up front, one driving the pair of horses. However, it was puzzling to me that the two men who sat guarding me, had shrouded themselves in canvas sheets.

“Where are you taking me?” I asked, receiving a boot in the ribs for my trouble. Groaning, I decided it wasn't the time for questions. My hands were restrained behind my back in a shack bold, an early version of handcuffs, making it impossible for me to press my pendant. Maybe it was possible to manoeuvre myself in such a fashion that my chest would be able to apply pressure on it. But even if I could perform such a trick it was a definite no, no, to summon the 'Q' with anyone else around. I just had to wait for an opportunity when my hands were free.

On the trip to wherever I was being taken people along the way threw rotten tomatoes, rotten eggs and other rancid vegetable missiles at me. Some of them hit the two canvas-covered guards and me. It was like a mobile version of the old stocks. Apparently, anybody riding in the 'Watch Wagon' was considered fair game for a pelting. So that was why the cart smelt of vegetable garbage.

Eventually, the hellish journey ended I was dragged before the sheriff and pushed back onto a seat. I asked, “Why have I been brought here?” For which I received a swipe around my head, leaving my ears ringing.

The sheriff said, “Master Doyle it seems you've been making a nuisance of yourself. We can't have the likes of you going around pestering people.”

I wondered who reported me but didn't chance to ask that question.

Jacob said, “So my question is, why are you so interested in Master Marlowe's death?”

“I can answer that question if you wish me to.”

As no strike was forthcoming, I said, “He was a great dramatist. I think his story is worth recording.”

The sheriff appraised his prisoner. “Who are you, Master Doyle?”

“What do you mean?”

“There is no record of your baptism. That makes me very suspicious of your motives.”

“What are you suggesting, sheriff?”

“That you are a foreign spy. Probably a Papist spy from Ireland.”

“That's nonsense. I'm not even a Catholic.”

Jacob thought that was as good a charge as any. “You are being accused of being a Papist spy.” He turned to his Gaoler. “Take him away.”

The good news was that he removed my shackles. The bad news, I was shoved into a dingy cell already occupied by four other prisoners. So I still couldn't press the button to be free. My mind went back, or was it forward, to my incarceration in the Nineteenth Century French Gaol. This predicament was much worse. I seemed to be some holding cell. I figured the next step would be a visit to the magistrate's court.

One of the prisoners, a scruffy fellow, with rotten teeth, cackled, “So they sent us a gent.”

The turnkey said, “'E's no bleedin' gent. 'E' be a stinking Papist spy.”

He at least got the 'stinking' bit right.

Four pairs of eyes stared darkly in my direction. A tall man dressed in rags, with a bulbous veined nose, said, “So you're a Popish spy.”

“No, I'm not!” I vehemently protested. But it did no good. They were surrounding me, closing in!

It had been three days and still Ossie hadn't shown up. Jennifer wondered what to do. Most likely he was so caught up in his investigation he'd forgotten all about reporting his progress. But she remembered what had happened in France. What if the dream was real and the Star Chamber had him incarcerated in the Tower? The vision was not entirely accurate, but the gist of it was on the mark. Intuitively, Jennifer knew something had gone wrong. She toyed with the idea of bringing him back forcibly, but that could cause all manner of problems including messing with space/time. What if he was talking to somebody and suddenly he disappeared into thin air? What if he was injured and the QSA proved too much of a shock to the system. In the end, she decided to give him another day before hauling him in.

She phoned Declan Merrick, wanting to bring him up-to-date on the Qcam, but had to leave a message for him to call. She missed Ossie being around. He could be fun but was also quite intelligent. However, he was also a right royal pain in the rear end at times, this being one of them. Life was becoming very complicated for her. Jennifer had to pay Dimmock his money before he'd give her the camera. However, to be able to do so she needed a commitment from Declan and one million pounds up front. That in itself proved a big problem because Boogle would not release the funds until they had the Qcam. On top of all that she'd received a summons from the Patents Office

telling her somebody would soon be in touch to organise a visit. Life was becoming impossible. “FUCK!” she shouted at the empty farmhouse.

The four prisoners were closing in on me from all directions. All I had to do was press the button, and I was free. A moment's indecision and I felt the arm snake around my neck, blocking my windpipe, cutting off my air supply.

Then, before I could move, my arms were grabbed from behind. The two in front landed blows to my head and stomach. I had to do something quickly before the bastards killed me. Thrusting backwards I brought my feet up hard, kicking out at my assailants as best I could. My backwards momentum loosened the choke lock and thrust the two men against the bars. The one gripping my arms hit his head hard against the wall and went down as though pole-axed.

The few seconds respite gave me the chance to regain my balance. But not before a pile driver fist hit me in the gut. The thought occurred, that if I stayed down, they might leave me alone. But these were helpless, angry men with nobody to hit out at, except me. Doubled up in pain I instinctively covered my head with my arms. Summoning what strength I had left I thrust upward, catching one of the thugs under his jaw, making him bite down on his tongue. He screamed in pain, backing away from the fight.

That left two and one of them was big. The prisoners circled me like sharks playing with its prey.

“FUCKIN' PAPIST SPY!” the smaller, wirier thug spat, launching a haymaker in my general direction. I managed to block the punch but copped another painful blow in the gut, severely winding me, expelling vast gouts of food and wine I'd partaken of that day.

“Ya filthy fucker,” The larger prisoner spat, wearing most of my vomit.

The two assailants, distracted by projectile spew, gave me the moment I needed. “Fuck you!” I snarled launching a massive kick to the bigger man's codpiece, making his eyes water as he crumpled to the floor, holding his damaged privates. The remaining thug slunk back to a corner of the cell.

Breathing rapidly, I looked at the turnkey, who had been salivating at the whole spectacle. “These men need a physician.”

The guard smirked, “You goin' to pay 'is fee then?”

Ossie, aching and bruised, said, “Can you put me in another cell?”

“Special treatment costs,” the guard smiled, crookedly.

“How much?”

“Reckon a crown would do it.”

Ossie heard a gruff voice behind him. “Don't you like our company, Papist pig.”

“I'll have your crown for you when you return my belongings to me.”

“Why should I trust you - a filthy Catholic spy.”

“For God's sake, I'm neither a Catholic nor a spy.”

“A blasphemer too,” the turnkey chuckled. Looking at Ossie, he said, “All right but if you cross me I'll 'ave your gizzard. He took his heavy keyring off his belt, unlocked the cell and let me out. Then, at dagger point, he took me to another, much smaller cell and pushed me inside, where I collapsed onto a bed of straw, aching and exhausted. Alone, with the turnkey gone, my hand reached for the pendant. No one was around. I'd soon be safe.

But it wasn't there!

Instantly alert I hunted for it. “But couldn't find it.”

“FUCK!” I exploded. “This can't be happening.”

“Calm down,” I told myself. Taking a few deep breaths, which hurt my bruised, constricted throat, I tried to think. Where was it that I last knew I had the pendant? I remembered trying to reach it at the beginning of the brawl. Then the truth and the horror hit me! I'd lost it during the fight. I couldn't believe it. I had to get back in that cell. But how? Even if I did manage to get inside it would be like Daniel entering the lion's den. And I was stiff and bruised with no fight left in me. What if one of the prisoners had found it? “Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!”

Chapter 19

Jennifer Smethurst, drying her dishes, stopped when she heard the doorbell. Quickly wiping her hands on a towel, she opened the door and found herself face to face with a man, whose thinning hair comb-over and thick lenses put her in mind of Woody Allen. But instead of the actor's nervous bumbling, the strange visitor was clear and precise.

He said, "I'm looking for a Jennifer Smethurst."

"Professor Smethurst. Who are you?"

He smiled thinly, "Edgar Murphy, from the Crown Office. I'm here about the patent for your invention."

Bluffing, Jennifer said, "Oh, what about it?"

"May I come inside, where we can talk privately?"

It had been raining off and on all day, so he shook out his umbrella and left it making a small pool of water in the porch. Then he followed her inside. She took his raincoat and hung it up. Turning to him, she said, "There's not a problem with my application, is there?"

He sat in one of her armchairs while holding onto his leather briefcase. As she sat down, he said, "There's no problem with your application for a patent. However, before it can be accepted it has to be investigated by my office."

Jennifer had been expecting a visit and had envisaged all sorts of scenarios, include a tactical forces team of heavily armed men in dark uniforms, ripping her house apart and confiscating the QSA. She never, in her wildest fantasies, thought it would be a mouse of a man in a Savile Row suit. She said, "Does your office investigate all new patents?"

Edgar dealt with people like her all the time. They try to control the situation by asking stupid questions. "It's yours that has raised some concerns and has had you red-flagged for investigation."

"What concerns?" she asked.

"Professor this interview will be over much more quickly if you do not continue to interrupt." He opened his briefcase and withdrew a copy of her application. Scanning it with his eyes, he said, "You describe your invention as a 'quantum space assimilator'. Can you tell me what you mean by that?"

"I can, but I doubt you'd be able to understand it."

Remaining calm, ignoring the insult, Edgar said, "What is it for?"

She had been dreading this. She could play the mad scientist card and say it was a time machine. But it wasn't a time machine. She said, "It has no defined function but has the potential to have many useful applications."

Edgar wiped his glasses with a handkerchief, then, replacing them said: "Name one application."

Jennifer, playing for time, responded, "You say you're from the Crown Office, so show me some ID."

He stared at her. "Professor Smethurst let me tell you how this works. You answer my questions. If you refuse, I have the police come and arrest you. Then you are subjected to a much more formal interrogation."

Seeing red, Jennifer, snapped, "What right do you have coming into my house and threatening me. Have I woken up into a fucking police state?"

Still calm, he said, "Is your invention on these premises?"

She could hold him up by lying but what good would that do? They'd just come in and take her home apart. "Yes."

He smiled thinly, "Then show it to me."

"I want to see your ID first."

He showed her proof of who he was. "Now let us get on with it."

She unlocked her lab, and they went inside.

Edgar had seen some strange inventions in all the years he'd worked for the patents office, but this one beat them all. There was a round orange contraption connected to a bank of computers. It told him nothing. He turned to her. "Explain how it works."

"What do you know about quantum science, Mr Murphy?"

"Explain it in simple terms."

She sighed, "Okay, I'll give it a go. Quantum science allows particles to be in two places at once. We now know they can instantly communicate with each other no matter the distance between them." Seeing the blank look on Edgar's face, she said, "Quantum physics is a field of study that defies common sense at every turn, and quantum entanglement might lead the way in the defying common sense department."

"What do you mean by 'entanglement'?"

"Entanglement is the unusual behaviour of elementary particles where they become linked so that when something happens to one, its twin responds in like manner, no matter how far apart they are." She added, "Even the great Einstein didn't understand it, so you have no chance. Just think of it, in Einstein's words, as 'spooky action at a distance'."

"So how is this spooky action to be used?"

Then she got a bright idea. "You asked what a Quantum Space Assimilator is?"

"Yes."

"It's a wireless quantum computer network."

Edgar felt relieved, "Well why didn't you say so. Now we can just put your patent with all the other quantum computer ideas."

"So are we done?" she smiled, as they went back to her lounge.

"For now," he said.

"What do you mean?"

He retrieved his briefcase, took out a brochure and handed it to her. "This should help you understand the process."

Jennifer took the booklet 'Crown Rights and Acquisitions' and showed Mr Murphy to the door.

As he left, he handed her a contact card.

With him gone, Jennifer grabbed a bottle of brandy, poured a large shot and slumped in an armchair. She took a slug, and the warmth seeped through her. Fortified, she picked up the brochure. Murphy had highlighted the bit he wanted her to read:

26. *Crown Use and Acquisition - ALRC. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/26-crown-use-and-acquisition/crown-use>*

She sighed heavily and resigned herself to read it:

Crown use provisions were introduced into English patents legislation in 1883. Earlier case law had held that the Crown might retain rights to exploit inventions for which a patent was granted, although this depended on the terms of the particular 'letters patent' issued under the Statute of Monopolies 1623.

The Crown Office has the right to investigate any questionable patents that may constitute a threat to public safety.

She couldn't see how the QSA could constitute such a threat, so why were they on her case? She picked up her phone and called Gerard Fox. He was at her place within two hours.

Gerard Fox, a long term friend of Jennifer, was also her legal representative. He was aware of the QSA and the letters she had received from the patents office. Now they had made their move it was time for him to make his. The prematurely balding solicitor parked his Range Rover out front. He gave Jennifer a huge hug. Then, stepping back, he said, "Let's go inside and you can tell me what happened."

"He just turned up out of the blue. I didn't know what to do."

He turned to her. "Didn't you receive any warning letters?"

"Yes, but he didn't make any appointment."

Gerard smiled, "They never do." Let us sit down, and tell me calmly what aspired."

Feeling more relaxed now Gerard was there she said, "I never expected anyone like him. He was mild mannered and reminded me of Woody Allen."

"I was expecting this."

"What do you mean?"

"They usually send in some polite, seemingly timid, type to put you off guard. Then, before you know it, a bunch of jack-booted armed police are over you like a rash."

"Jesus, Gerard, I thought you were trying to calm me down."

The lawyer smiled, "Tell me what he said."

"He said he was from the Crown Office and that he had the right to investigate me and find out about the QSA."

"Did he give a reason for the investigation?"

Jennifer, feeling more relaxed, tucked her legs under her. "He said that it could have public safety issues."

"That's a pretty broad brush."

"Then he got me to show him the QSA."

“What did he say when he saw it.”

She grinned, “He didn't know what to make of it.” He asked me what it was.”

“And you said? ...”

“This is where I panicked. I told Murphy it was a quantum computer network.”

“You what?” Gerard chuckled.

“It's all I could think of that vaguely resembled what I'm doing.”

“Did he buy it?”

“Oh yes. Our Mr Murphy was thrilled he could put it in a box and label it.”

“If he's contented why the frown?”

“Because that's just the first step.” She handed Gerard the brochure.

The lawyer got up and put his arm around Jennifer's shoulder. “I wouldn't worry about it. The department will go through the motions. They investigate any patents involving weird energy stuff,” he smiled.

“But what if they send someone around who knows about quantum computers?”

“tell them you want your legal advisor present.” He thought for a moment. “Did Murphy give you his calling card?”

She handed him a white business card embossed with the Crown Office logo and black type.

He took the card. “I'll contact Mr Murphy and tell him I will be present to represent you at any further meetings, legally. So he contacts me, and I let you know.”

Jennifer gave Gerard another huge hug and kissed him on the cheek. “You're a darling. I feel so much better now.”

I was at my wit's end. In my mind, I'd gone through every possible way to get out of the cell and back into the 'lions' den. Screaming for assistance and, when he was close enough, overpowering the guard was one scenario. But seriously that only worked in movies. Another idea was to elicit the guard's help by offering a monetary reward. It had been employed once but, even if the turnkey was interested, how was I to explain why I wanted to get into a cell where four thugs wanted to kill me? There was one other slim possibility. The Sheriff had accused me of being a Papist spy, so maybe, just maybe I could make it work to my advantage. The plan was hazardous, but it was the only chance I had. I prayed that my knowledge of Elizabethan history would stand the test. First I had to get the guards attention. “I yelled, “COME OVER HERE. I HAVE VALUABLE INFORMATION.” I had to yell it a few times before the guard came to my cell, with a lantern in one hand.

“What do you want?” he asked, brandishing a pistol in the other.

“I have information about a threat to Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam and the British in Ireland.”

The guard, a simple soul and worse for ale, said, “You keep quiet, or you'll get the cat.”

I tried, “I want to speak with the Sheriff. There's an Irish plot against Lord Deputy Fitzwilliam's army.”

“I won't warn you again,” the guard threatened.

“There'll be a big reward for whoever uncovers a treasonous plot.”

A big bonus. Those words registered in the turnkey's slow brain. “What do you know then?”

I looked at the befuddled drunkard holding the pistol. “I want a pardon for my help.”

The gaoler thought, only the Lord Chancellor could pardon a prisoner. But the stupid Irish spy wouldn't know that. He stared at the detective. “Reckon I can get you your pardon if you tell me about the plot.”

“Okay, I'll tell you, but you have to write things down.”

The illiterate turnkey said, “You write it down and give it to me.”

He'd taken the bait, but could I reel in the turnkey? Everything hung on how convincing I could be. I took a deep breath. “Before I write it down I need to get something out of the cell with the four prisoners.”

The man's pickled brain struggled to comprehend. “What're you talkin' about?”

“I was attacked by those men earlier today. During the attack, I lost something. Without it, no one will believe the plot against the British, and you'll get no reward.” I watched as the last words registered in his brain.

“Tell me what it is and I'll get it for you.”

He wasn't as dumb as I thought. “I can find it faster than you. Just let me in there.”

The guard, unsure about the strange request, said, “Tell me about this plot, first.”

“Hugh O'Neill is planning a rebellion against the British in Ireland. I know the details. Now are you going to get the reward or not?”

The guard had heard gossip about the Irish chieftain. Even in the drunk's inebriated state, he knew such information would be of great interest to people high up in the government. He stared at the prisoner. “One wrong move an' I'll shoot you.”

I nodded, “Just let me get what I need, and I'll write it all down for you.”

The guard unlocked my cell door and let me in the other cell. Heavy snoring told me the prisoners were all asleep. I turned to the turnkey. “Hold the light as close to the bars as you can and keep the pistol trained on them.”

In the cell I moved furtively on hands and knees, looking for the pendant. The lantern light wasn't that efficient, but it was the only illumination I had. Then I saw it. The pendant was around the big prisoner's neck. I moved tentatively towards the sleeping man, praying the prisoner wouldn't wake up. He was laying on his side. I could feel the clasp at the back of the necklace. Trying to keep my hands steady I reached out to undo it. To my horror, he stirred in his sleep and turned on his back. The necklace chain was caught up under him, but one end was free. As though diffusing a bomb I carefully slid the pendant, until it came off the chain. Then I had it. I had never felt so relieved, except perhaps when I got out of that cell.

Back in the other cell, I told the guard, I needed pencil and paper and would let him know when I'd written the plot information down. He did as I said, and placed a lantern by the door of the cell so I could see to write. As soon as he was gone, I pressed the pendant.

Chapter 20

“You told him what?” Jennifer spluttered.

“About Hugh O'Neill's plans to stem the advance of the English state in Ireland.”

“Ossie, you know there are rules about changing the outcome of history.”

“Jesus Jen, I'd lost the pendant during the fight. It was the only way I could get it back.”

“Nevertheless...”

“Come on Jen; they wouldn't have believed him anyhow. He was drunk, and he let a prisoner escape under his watch. Do you think the Sheriff would have listened to his ramblings?”

“I hope not for your sake.”

I looked at her. She seemed harried, and my news hadn't helped. I said, “Jen, it's your brilliant science that gets me there but once I'm there cold hard logic doesn't cut it. Random things happen. I have to think on my feet and sometimes bend the space/time rules to survive. I could well have been stuck in that predicament until my beheading for being a Catholic spy. Do you really think being concerned about a ripple in space/time is going to be my top priority?”

We had this conversation, once I'd arrived bruised and battered like I'd just come back from a war zone. After Jen's initial surprise she administered to my wounds with her delectable healing touch. It had all gone downhill from there.

Later, when Jennifer had softened a bit towards me, we sat having coffee and she told me what had been going on in her life.

Jennifer said, “Gerard's a real sweetie. He's going to deal with the patent office for me.”

“But if this Murphy believes your invention is a quantum computer network why's he still on your case?”

Jennifer sighed, “Never mind about that, do you want to hear my splendid news?”

My ears pricked up. “Pleasant news would make a change.”

“Dimmock eventually came good. We have our quantum camera.”

I brightened, “Really! Where is it?”

“Dimmock has it,”

“Why?”

“Have you got a spare million quid to give him?”

“What about your Yankee money bags?”

She sighed, “Things aren't so good on that front.”

“Oh! Have Anglo-American relations broken down?”

She sipped her coffee. “Boogle won't commit themselves until they get some historical pictorial evidence.”

Shit!

“And if they're not signed up before the end of the month all their budget allocations will be used up for this financial year.”

“Double shit!” Then I said, “There might be a way out of this impasse.”

Jennifer stared at Ossie. “Then please tell me.”

“Well, I wasn't going to say until the deal was sealed.”

“What deal?” What are you talking about?”

“The Journal. The book I got from Francis Walsingham's drawer. I might have a buyer.”

“A buyer! Who?”

“A playwright who's obsessed with Marlowe and, best of all, she's loaded.”

Jennifer, unable to restrain herself, leapt into Ossie's arms. “Oh, you beautiful, beautiful man!”

She took me by surprise and knocked the wind out of me. “Hold onto your horses, Jen. It's not a done deal yet.”

She got up, a wicked grin on her face. “Then you will have to wait for your reward, mister.”

I got up and grabbed her to me. “How about a little something on account?”

Chapter 21

From above, the British Museum Reading Room reminded Ossie of a massive mandala. The detective pondered this as he waited for Carla Romano to show up. She'd been very excited about the prospect of seeing the journal and had organised for Dr Chris Chesterton, an expert in ancient manuscripts and historical writings, to determine its authenticity. Casting my eyes in the direction of the library entrance I saw Carla pushing her way through the milling museum visitors to get to me.

She said, "Sorry I'm a bit late. I phoned Chris Chesterton. If we go through now, he'll give the journal a quick appraisal."

"So where are we going?"

"Follow me. I have a map."

I followed her through various departments, off limits to mere mortals. Eventually, we came to the research department. There we met Dr Chris Chesterton, Tall, thinning hair and horn-rimmed glasses. After quick greetings, he invited us into his office. He pulled on a pair of thin plastic gloves and placed a square of velvet on his desk.

"Let me see it," he said, extending his hand towards me.

"I retrieved the Journal from my to and handed it to him."

Carla, excited, craned her neck to see the prize.

Dr Chesterton took out a magnifying glass, muttering, "fascinating." He picked up a pair of fine tweezers and gently opened the first page. He looked up at me. "You say this is Francis Walsingham's personal diary."

"That's correct."

"What makes you think it's authentic, Mr Doyle?"

I could hardly say I got it out of his secret drawer. I had to be very careful what I said, "I think it's worth finding out."

"Indeed, but what made you think it's Francis Walsingham's Journal. It bears neither his name nor signature."

The bastard had got me. What could I say? I ventured. "I was under the impression that you were going to test the journal, not me."

He smiled, "Just curious. That's all." He paused then said, "Leave it with me, and I will inform you when I have completed the tests."

I said, "I'm not letting this journal out of my sight. I'll just stay quiet in the background while you do what you do."

"Preposterous! I've never heard anything like it," he snapped.

Carla, wide-eyed said, "It will be perfectly safe with Chris. You've nothing to worry about." She added, "I'm paying the fee so I decide how things get done ."

She had a point and, perhaps I was getting a touch paranoid. "How long will the authentication take?"

Chris said, "I'll probably know in a couple of days."

Dr Chesterton, one of the foremost writing analysis people in Britain knew it was virtually impossible to pinpoint the age of an undated document. The journal had dates noted against sets of initials. First, he had to deal with the historical analysis. He started with checking the materials and techniques used in place and time. This was Chris' first test to see if the book was a forgery. He couldn't find any examples of Francis Walsingham's writing in the library, but he compared the journal with other written material from the same period.

Next came his scientific analysis. This was more time consuming because he had to carry out a detailed paper analysis, so as to detect every shred of physical evidence concealed in the document.

He took a powerful magnifying glass and looked at every page of the document, Satisfied there were no anomalies he progressed to Molecular Spectroscopy, to determine more precisely the property of the paper used. This test usually sorted out the scams from the genuine item. This book was looking more like the latter.

The following morning, Dr Chesterton turned his attention to the ink. He carried out a qualitative analysis concerning paper type, fibre and ink. Following a chemical analysis to evaluate the pH factor, the graphologist did an environmental analysis to measure the gloss strength and colour of the ink. He concluded his tests with an organic analysis to determine carbon based traces of plants and organisms and a chemical analysis to identify mineral evidence in the pigment and ink.

Then he fed all the data into his computer and waited for the results.

“Are you seriously suggesting that Marlowe and Shakespeare were one and the same person, Ossie?” Jennifer asked, incredulous.

“I know it sounds crazy, but the evidence is stacking up,” I pointed out, as Jen and I were enjoying an early morning stroll on Bushey Heath.

“But what about Marlowe's body? Surely...”

“Precisely. As far as I can ascertain the only people who claimed that Marlowe had been fatally stabbed were: Frizer, who allegedly killed him, Skere's and Poley, all of whom were connected to Sir Thomas Walsingham, who was a royal courtier and literary patron to many poets, including Marlowe. He was also related to Elizabeth's spymaster, Francis Walsingham.”

Jen stopped and turned to Ossie, saying, “Which reminds me, how are we going with your journal?”

“I haven't heard anything yet. I'll phone Carla today.”

She put her arm around him. “You could become the first shareholder.”

“Yes, once Carla pays me.”

Then, going back to the original topic, Jennifer said, “Wait a minute. The police must have seen Marlowe's body when they attended the crime scene.”

“I thought so too until I found out that 'A' the police, as such didn't exist – just armed citizens called the 'Watch'. And 'B' they didn't see anybody because they didn't arrest Frizer until three days later. I also learned, from William Danby, the royal coroner who presided over the inquest, that he hadn't seen anybody either.”

“But that's crazy.” She paused then said, “But what about the landlady. She saw the body, didn't she?”

“Madam Bull. She saw Marlowe lying on the floor, covered in blood. She didn't see him die.”

“So what happened to Marlowe's body?”

“It was allegedly quickly disposed of in an unmarked grave, witnessed only by Frizer, Skeres and Poley. Who, incidentally, had all been involved in spying for Francis Walsingham.”

Jen stopped to pick up a feather. “It does all seem rather strange.”

“Not, when you consider that Francis Walsingham was planning to help Marlowe disappear because The Privy Council was going to be charged with Atheism, a crime that attracts the executioner's axe.”

“But Walsingham had died three years before, so how could he have helped Marlowe 'disappear'?”

“Jen, Marlowe was also supposed to appear before the Privy Council—he may or may not have done so—on 20 May 1593, ten days before his death. The charges he was supposed to answer for included blasphemy (Atheism was considered blasphemy). Someone may well have been carrying on Francis' legacy, in protecting Marlowe by giving him a new identity.”

“Namely, Shakespeare, I suppose.”

I turned to her. “I need to go back to question the Bard himself.”

Jen turned on him. “It's too dangerous, Ossie. If you start nosing around, again you'll be beheaded as a Catholic spy.”

“What makes you think that?”

She looked him in the eye. “I saw it in a dream.”

Ossie said, “Just imagine it, Jen. Once we have the Qcam, we can get a pictorial recording of me speaking with William Shakespeare. Wouldn't that be mind blowing?”

Sometimes, with all this weird quantum assimilation stuff, I forget I have a life in this timeline, and I end up with neglecting my mundane detective assignments. Not that a lot is going on. A couple of insurance claims that needed to be dealt with and an errant husband. Back in my shoebox-sized office, I sift through my inbox until I come across the Jerry Powell case notes. He'd reported a break-in and made a claim from Westlands Insurance to the tune of £300,000, for stolen art and jewellery. Apparently, Westlands was contesting the claim, and I had to meet with Arnold Sinclair, the company's assessor, that morning. I thought I'd better do a spot of housekeeping before he turned up.

Arnold Sinclair proved to be an affable fellow, cracking a few jokes and regaling me with some of the outrageous claims that crossed his desk. I managed to scare up some instant coffee, which we drank as we worked.

Coming to the Jerry Powell claim, Arnold said, “We firstly red-flagged Powell because he had made similar claims with three different insurance providers over the last 15 years. Of course, he may very well just be unlucky, or lucky, as he was adequately insured.”

“But you don't think so?”

Arnold smiled, “The chances of burglars breaking the same place on four different occasions with four different insurance providers has to be extremely rare. We believe this is a case of insurance art fraud and we want you to prove it for us.”

“Are there any other red-flags I need to take into consideration?”

“There are other patterns, such as the mix of sculpture paintings and jewellery.”

“Such as?”

“The size of the items. They're always small pieces the thief could easily carry. Apart from jewellery, all the other art objects were on display. Household security is adequate but not state of the art.”

“And the timeline on this?”

“No real panic, but don't sit on it. “This guy knows his consumer rights. We don't want him complaining that we're dragging our heels.” He handed me a Manila folder, saying, “Photos of the stolen items and their market value.”

“What's this for?” I asked.

“Descriptions on the schedule. But some of the artworks' dimensions are missing, and some works are just called a “painting” without describing the medium (oil on canvas, acrylic on board, etc.). Nor are there photos for some of them.”

I smiled, “Right Arnold, I'll get onto it.”

Just then my phone rang. It was Carla. She wanted us to meet with Dr Chesterton. He had the results.

Chapter 22

“And you say it's authentic?” Neil McClean questioned, looking at the journal.

Dr Chesterton said, “It certainly seems to be from the 16th Century.”

“Is it Francis Walsingham's private diary?”

“Hm, I'm not entirely convinced about that. The spy master's name doesn't appear in it, and he only initialises the other names. But the initials seem to be those of prominent people during Elizabeth I's reign.” Indicating a particular entry, he said, “Take for example reference to SWR. It apparently refers to Sir Walter Raleigh. STW, Sir Thomas Walsingham, NS, Nicholas Skeres, and so on. On this basis, it may well have belonged to Francis Walsingham.”

The British Museum director rubbed his chin. “How did you come by it?”

“A client is interested in purchasing it so she wanted it authenticated.”

“Purchase it from whom?”

“His name is Oswald Doyle.”

“Is he a known entity?”

Chris shrugged “Never heard of him before.”

“I wonder where he got it from.”

“I don't know.”

Neil shook his head. “I don't like it. Maybe we should get art fraud involved.”

“As far as I can ascertain it's not a scam.”

“Then we need to know it's provenance. There has to be a trail. Dammit man, 400-year-old items don't just appear in the 21st century without leaving a history. I need to speak with the owner.”

Chris said, “Well he'll be here soon. So if you want to question him go for it.”

I wasn't sure why Carla couldn't just tell me the results over the phone unless she had to wait to find out as well. This situation being the case it seemed as though this Dr Chesterton was playing some power game. Or was something else holding up the process and, more important, holding up my payment.

When I arrived at the Museum, Dr Chesterton was in the entrance area to greet me. “I said, it seems you were expecting me.”

The graphology expert half smiled, “Ms Romano told me she'd contact you.”

“So what conclusions have you come to about the diary?”

“Let's wait until Ms Romano shows up; then I can explain it to both of you together.”

Agitated, I said, “What's there to explain. It's authentic, or it's a fake.”

Just then Carla Romano swanned up to the steps, wearing a multicoloured 1920's style outfit.

She said, "So Christopher, is it the genuine article?"

Dr Chesterton said, "Follow me please."

We followed, like sheep, along corridors, past various departments, into the research centre and finally his office. Once inside, Carla only said, "So?"

Christopher handed Carla a printout. It had all the different kinds of analysis listed, with each section having a percentage number against it. The final figure read 98 per cent."

Carla turned to Dr Chesterton. "That's good, isn't it."

"Good! It's bloody fantastic."

"Then, it is the genuine article," she said, excitedly.

I said, "I'm glad you've determined that, Dr Chesterton. Now if I can have my journal back." I extended my hand to pick it up.

Dr Chesterton blocked Ossie's hand. "Not so fast, Mr Doyle. While the book is indeed from the Elizabethan period, there is no mention that it belonged to Francis Walsingham."

I argued, "You can tell by the initialled names referred to that they are the very people Francis Walsingham dealt with."

"Granted that appears to be the case in that the initials certainly fit the names of key people in his life. But that's not enough proof."

I was getting fed up with this jerk. "Just give me my property, and I'll be off."

Just then a man knocked on a half glassed door and entered.

Chesterton said, "Oh, Mr Doyle, this is Neil McClean, the museum director. He has some questions to ask you."

"No offence, but I'm not in the mood for twenty questions. So, if you'll excuse me, I'll take my property and go."

McClean said, "Where did you come by the diary, Mr Doyle?"

I stared at him. "Why, are you interested in purchasing it?"

"Mr Doyle, I would rather deal with this without getting the Art Fraud people involved."

I wasn't going to let this arrogant sod push me around. "Get me my property, or I'll be charging you with theft."

Carla stared at Oswald, "Your property? You told me you were an agent for some reclusive antique collector."

Ignoring her, I turned to McClean. "For your information, I found it in an old desk."

"Where is the desk?"

"At the bottom of tonnes of landfill, I shouldn't wonder."

McClean went beetroot. He stammered, "It could have been precious!"

“No, It was full of woodworm.”

“McClellan looked at him askance. He didn't believe a word of it, but he couldn't prove Ossie was lying.”

I fixed Chesterton with my gaze, and demanded, “This is your last chance to give me my property.”

The scientist slouched off and came back with the journal.

I turned to Carla. “If you're interested in the journal, let me know soon because I have another two prospective buyers in the wings. Oh, and I want a copy of your report, Dr Chesterton.”

Jen was waiting with the bubbly when I got back to her place. I couldn't wait to tell her the good news and had phoned her while I was on the way to Bushey. She threw open her arms and gave me a huge hug, saying, “Congratulations, Ossie, you're the first shareholder.”

“Does that give me special privileges?” I said, kissing her full on the lips.

“Come and have some champers and tell me all about it,” she smiled, patting the cushion next to her.

I went to grab her to me.

She wagged her finger. “News first, naughties afterwards.”

“Spoilsport,” I retorted, grinning widely, thinking of what was to come. Then, becoming serious, I reported, “Carla rang me on the way home. I was expecting more than 500 grand, but it's better than nothing.”

“Better than nothing! Ossie, it's a life saver for the QSA.”

“I have to take the journal over to her place, and she'll transfer the funds.”

“How soon?”

“I'm meeting her in a couple of hours.”

Jennifer hugged Ossie close. “Oh, this is wonderful. We'll soon have the camera.”

I took her hand in mine. “You mean Dimmock has agreed to the terms?”

She beamed, “Nathan just got back to me. Dimmock has decided on half up front and the other half once we have secured a commitment by Boogle. Isn't that just fantastic?”

I sipped my bubbly. “Who would have thought Dimmock would be so reasonable?”

“I know. Anyhow, Dimmick's going to hand over the camera to Nathan, once the money shows up in his bank account.”

“That's fantastic. Get me Douglas' bank details, and I'll have it transferred.” Then I grinned, “Now business and bubbly have been dealt with, there's the other business in hand I want to attend to.”

Jen let him go. “Down boy, you don't want to be late for Carla.”

“It'll only take me an hour to get to Bayswater. That leaves a whole hour,” I said smiling lasciviously.”

“You're only going to give me an hour.” she pouted, sexily.

Carla was also waiting with bubbly. And I must say she looked very sexy, despite wearing one of those shapeless shift dresses from the Roaring Twenties. I nearly forgot she batted for the other team. The mysterious Celine Yeldon was also present.

“So where's my prize?” she said, handing me a flute of sparkling liquid.

“I presented her with the journal, which I had wrapped in velvet.”

“Darling, let me see it,” Celine said, having heard about it from her lover.

Carla said, “A toast to Christopher Marlowe, an extraordinary brilliant playwright.”

“To Christopher Marlowe,” we all said.

I suggested, “Maybe we should toast Francis Walsingham as well?”

We did so, and it was a joyous occasion all round. Especially when I had the money safely tucked away in my bank account,

Later that day, as Jen and I drank a little too much vino in front of the open fire, I ran my hand down the crease of Jen's dress, between her thighs.

“Oh, so it's time to pay the piper,” she grinned.

“Yes, by playing my pipe,” I whispered into her ear.

I slipped my hand up her dress, inching it closer to its goal, as we kissed long and deeply.

Jennifer, feeling warm and relaxed slid her strapless bra out through the arm of her dress, giving Ossie a sweet, naughty smile.

He reached through the open fold, cupping her breast and kissed her again.

“How about we adjourn to my boudoir, for further business,” she simpered.

“Good Idea. I can already feel new matters arising.”

Chapter 23

Not much had changed, apart from the fact I had the Qcam with me. London was still hellishly loud, a cacophony of deafening noises - hooves and raw coach wheels on cobbled streets, competing with yelling street traders spruiking their wares. I managed to avoid brawling apprentices, of which there were many. They kept their scuffles close to the alehouses where the fighting arose, so as not to be thrown into the garbage oozing streets. Loud and drunk seemed to describe people most of the time. The stagnant water was undrinkable, and, as tea hadn't been imported, ale, the traditional tippie, was considered an excellent beverage for starting the day, and, it would seem, continuing it in the same vein. The upper classes preferred wine, too much of which led to sword fights. In short, London was not what you would call a sober, peaceful city.

Anyhow, this intrepid Quantanaut is back in stinky London to seek out the bard himself. After carrying out some research, I discovered there was hardly anything known about William Shakespeare between his baptism on April 26, 1564, and 1594 when he became a prominent member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men company of theatrical players. The company played at the Curtain Theatre. So it seemed a good place to start my inquiries. Knowing this, Jen had programmed the 'Q' for me to step out in 1596 near Curtain Close, in Shoreditch.

The Curtain Theatre, built in an 'L' shape looked bland and basic. There wasn't anything to suggest what went on inside. As I approached, a man with a pointy dark beard and tall hat came out of the building. It was Thomas Kyd. I went over to him. "Excuse me sire but is William Shakespeare about?"

The actor looked at the Irish fellow. "No sire, the place is empty." Then he said, "Have we met before?"

"Indeed we have, Master Kyd. "I'm Oswald Doyle, the historian. We met the first time at Kit Marlowe's grave. We spoke together shortly after his burial."

"Oh yes, now I recall. So why do you want to see Master Shakespeare?"

"Never mind about that. Were you present at the burial?"

He shook his head. "No, I wasn't."

"He was buried in an unmarked grave so how did you know of its location?"

Thomas Kyd stared at the investigator. "I was told."

"Who told you?"

"Nicholas Skeres."

"How do you know him. He's hardly the Thespian type?"

"I didn't. I met Master Skeres by chance, in an Inn. We got talking about Kit, and he showed me the grave."

Puzzled, I asked, "Why would he tell you that?"

"Because I gave him a coin to take me there."

"And the grave was unmarked?"

"Yes."

It was time to up the ante. "So you only had this stranger's word that Kit was buried there."

Thomas stared at the man. "Yes, but why would he lie about such a thing?"

"Listen to me, Master Kyd. Nicholas Skeres is a cutpurse and deceiver, and you take his word on such an important matter."

"If he is not buried there, where is his body?" the actor asked, feeling very uncomfortable.

"Indeed."

"What are you suggesting?"

"That Nicholas Skeres didn't meet you by chance. He wanted you to visit the unmarked grave so that you would tell your actor friends about it."

Thomas frowned, "But why. What is there in it for him?"

I said, "A good question. But be assured that, for a man like Skeres, it would have been much more than the coin you gave him."

The thespian eye-balled Ossie. "You are an intriguing man, sir. But now I must be going."

"Before you go, can you tell me where Master Shakespeare is staying?"

"All I know is that he was living in the Parish of St Helens, with his family."

Perhaps I'd said too much to Master Kyd. But I just left him with a bit of a mystery. He may well have thought me crazy but was too polite to say so. I guess I was just using him to ask myself the same questions. If everything was kosher about Marlowe's death, why the subterfuge, why the unmarked grave and why weren't all the theatre lovers at his funeral. Sure, the man may have been an atheist, but the Star Chamber had not charged him with such a crime. No, it just didn't add up, unless he was still alive and the rest had been outrageous theatre.

Bishopsgate, I learned from a local, came about as the entry point into London from the northeastern shires, or the exit for travellers coming through the city across London Bridge. Within Bishopsgate is the parish of St Helens and the domicile of William Shakespeare. Having located his address, I knocked at his door. A Lady, whom I took to be Anne Hathaway, came to the door. She wore her light brown hair in a tight bun, redolent of the period. I enquired, "Is Master Shakespeare home?"

"Who shall I say is calling?" she asked

"Oswald Doyle."

She looked at him blankly.

"Oh, I'm a historian. I'm interested in the London theatre."

She appraised the well-dressed man. "Very well, I'll see if he's available."

Seeing the great bard standing at the door gave me quite a thrill. Trying to stay calm, I said, “Master Shakespeare, In my research into the London players there is something that vexes me greatly. Something you may be able to shed light upon for me.”

Shakespeare looked suspiciously at the stranger. “What is this business for which you seek my help?”

“Perhaps we could speak privately, inside.”

“Very well, Master Doyle, we can repair to my study.”

I kept thinking; I'm actually talking to the great William Shakespeare! I noted a draft of work with the title, Merchant of Venice, was on his desk.

The playwright indicated for the historian to take a seat. “Pray sir, tell me why you are here.”

“Sir, in your great works, Henry VI and Romeo and Juliet you employ the theme of faked deaths. And it is about a faked death that I impose upon you today.”

“I'm intrigued, Master Doyle. Pray, continue.”

“Well, it seems that faking death is an entirely plausible action for a person in a serious fix.”

“Whose faked death are you talking about?”

“Christopher Marlowe.”

There was stunned silence in the study.

At length, Shakespeare said, “What makes you think someone faked his death?”

Let me premise this by pointing out that despite Marlowe being a prominent dramatist, few people knew what he looked like, including the Deptford-based jury.”

“It makes sense, but what has it to do with his murder?”

“Master Shakespeare, his alleged murder occurred not in a tavern, as we are led to believe, but in a boarding house, run by Eleanor Bull. Master Marlowe worked for the Queen's intelligence service, and all three men who witnessed the fight were either, also, intelligence colleagues or servants of Marlowe's patron, Thomas Walsingham, himself a former spy.”

The dramatist looked at Oswald, quizzically. “Why would Marlow want to fake his death?”

“I'm coming to that,” I smiled. “But first let me point out other irregularities.”

“Very well.”

“Ingram Frizer, the alleged killer, a former spy, is in business with Thomas Walsingham. The Queens coroner, William Danby, conducted the inquest alone when he should have carried it out jointly with the county coroner. The chief witness, intelligence agent Robert Poley, was described by his well-respected contemporary William Camden as an “expert dissembler.” The records paying him for the period covering both Marlowe’s inquest and apparent demise reveal—uniquely—that he was “in the Queen’s service at that previous time.”

Did Christopher Marlowe Fake His Death? | Huffington Post. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ros-barber/did-christopher-marlowe-f_b_4723165.htm

“Intriguing.”

“Indeed, Master Shakespeare. But there is one more curiosity you may be able to help me with.”

“Oh, and what is that?”

“Two weeks after Marlowe’s inquest, the first piece of writing to appear under your name was published. Your early works are very reminiscent of Marlowe. So did you know Christopher Marlowe?”

Shakespeare, becoming defensive, snapped “Sir, just what are you inferring?”

“Nothing. I’m just asking a question.”

“Master Doyle, the theatrical world is a small one, so yes, we were acquaintances in a business sense. Our private worlds were poles apart. It was only through our shared art that I got to know him at all.” Shakespeare looked at Doyle. “You still haven’t explained why you think Marlowe faked his death.”

“Ah, yes. Well in 1593 amidst plague, poor harvests, invasion threats and high unemployment, Marlowe became a target of State conspiracy theorists who saw plots by religious extremists around every corner. Thomas Kyd, Marlowe’s chamber companion, was savagely interrogated and tortured over literature found in their home. The Star Chamber incriminated Marlowe as a source for these alleged blasphemous materials. After finding out about what happened to Kyd and the fact he had to face the privy council to answer these serious charges, is it no wonder that he would fake his death?”

“Master Doyle, you put forward an interesting case, but I fail to see why you need my help.”

I said, “If I may be so bold as to ask is your writing style influenced by that of Marlowe.”

Shakespeare stared at Doyle. “Are you suggesting plagiarism?”

“On the contrary, Master Shakespeare. I am boldly inquiring if he was a mentor for you?”

“Then my answer would have to be no.”

It was time to get to the meat of the matter. “Then it puzzles me, sir, that there are duplicate lines in your work taken from Marlowe’s writings. How do you explain this?”

Shakespeare had had enough. He said, “Sire, I think you should take your leave. I can be no more help to you.”

What could I say? Then I remembered I hadn’t used the Qcam. My God, what a lost opportunity! But how could I take a photo of the Bard without him knowing something odd was happening. On the other hand, because it would be another 300 years before the first photographs were taken, he’d have no idea what I was doing. But he would ask me and what plausible explanation could I give? I responded, “Thank you for your time. You have been most helpful.”

As William walked me to his front door, I glimpsed, a teenage girl playing with a younger girl. I turned to him, "Sir, are they your daughters?"

The Bard proudly answered, "Yes, Susanna and Judith."

"Sir, you are indeed blessed, with such talent and a beautiful family."

The dramatist softened, "Thank you, Master Doyle. Now good evening to you."

I paused on his doorstep and said, "May I speak with you again if I have any more queries?"

"As long as there are no personal questions."

Now I'd met the great man and seen his family I became very confused. How could Marlowe and Shakespeare be the same person if William married the farmer's daughter, Anne, when she was pregnant with Susanna, in 1582. I'd convinced myself it was so, but now my theory about them being one and the same was blown out of the water, I felt lost concerning Marlowe's fate. It was necessary for me to take a step back and rethink the facts as they presented themselves. First, I was not even being paid for my trouble, because I had become my own client; that's just plain crazy. Maybe I had read too much into the whole business; maybe Marlowe did die at the hand of Ingram Frizer. Maybe he was buried in the unmarked grave.

But when I looked at the evidence or lack of, there were too many things that didn't make sense:

The Privy Council had a warrant out for Marlowe mere days before his alleged murder. Was there really an argument between Marlowe and Frizer? We only have Skeres' and Poley's word on that, and neither of them were to be trusted. The positions of the men at the time of the fatal assault also puzzled me. In their court testimony, both witnesses stated that Marlowe was laying on a bed and Frizer sat on a settee with Skere's and Poley on either side - all with their backs to Marlowe. I had never heard of anybody arguing in the supine position. Then the story goes that a fight ensued when Marley go up off the bed, grabbed Frizer's dagger and stabbed at him. Frizer was obviously at a huge disadvantage, yet Marlowe only manages to scratch him a couple of times. Then, according to court evidence Frizer turns and somehow manages to wrest the knife off Marlowe and stab him in the eye with such force the blade penetrates his brain. How could he achieve this while being hemmed in by Skeres and Poley? And what were they doing while this was going on?

Frizer would have been off balance, the bench in front of his legs and the settee against the back of his legs. Court testimony also informed me that Skere's and Poley, no strangers to violence, just stood there motionless during the last moments of Marlowe's life. They even step aside to allow Frizer to get away. They're close enough to impede him, but they don't intervene. Why?

I just couldn't buy it. What actually happened must have been very different indeed. It's much more likely, if Frizer did stab him, that Marlowe was lying on the bed and all three men moved towards him. Frizer attacked the playwright, with his dagger, while Marlowe slashed out at the man looming over him. Skere's and Poley held the playwright down while Frizer plunged the knife into his eye. If Marlowe died that night, the killing was not carried out in self-defence. It was a planned assassination. But why would they go to the bother of killing him when he was soon to be arrested and charged with being an atheist, a crime punishable by death.

No. It made much more sense that they faked his death so he could take on a new identity and escape the executioner's axe. But who did he become if it wasn't Shakespeare?

To answer this, I had to take a closer look at the three men involved in Marlowe's alleged death. Frizer was in service to Thomas Walsingham, Marlowe's patron. Frizer, a loan shark and most likely, a spy was also Sir Thomas' business advisor. He also ran some spies, employed by Francis Walsingham. Skeres, an accomplice to Frizer was, being even shadier than his partner, certainly not a person to be trusted. Skeres also showed up as a government plant in the 'Babington plot'. He was also doing spy work for the Duke of Essex for which he received payment under a warrant signed by Francis Walsingham.

Of the three witnesses, to whatever went down in Deptford, Poley was the most complicated and sinister. He'd been spying for over twenty years. He was notorious among Catholics as a two-timer, informer, agent provocateur and poisoner. On the day Marlowe allegedly died Poley returned from an undercover mission to the Netherlands. Poley was Robert Cecil's man.

I was just about to jump back into the 'Q' when I realised my mission was to try out the Qcam, and I'd missed a golden opportunity. But all was not lost. I could practise using the camera by taking shots of London Bridge, The Globe Theatre, and the Deptford Royal Dockyards. Standing by the Thames, with a good view of the bridge, I looked through the viewfinder. I took a deep breath, not a wise thing to do in London, and pressed the red button. I thought I saw a momentary lance of light, well two actually. But it happened so fast I could have been imagining it. I didn't believe the camera had worked, but when I pressed the images button, there it was, listed as No 1 in the photo gallery storage folder. While on my way to Dame Bull's establishment I stopped and took more photos. Then I thought, fuck it! Why should I stay at her place, with all the noise and drunkenness, when I could be snuggled up to the delectable Jen. There was no one around except me. I pressed the pendant. Then there wasn't even me.

Chapter 24

“So, is Dec on deck,” I asked Jen, as we connected the camera cable to the computer.

“Ha, ha, amusing. So what have you got for me, Jennifer said,”

“That's a bit personal, isn't it?” I chortled.

The Qcam folder came up on her monitor. Jennifer clicked the folder. It opened showing a few images as tiny thumbnails. She clicked on the first one and a large picture, slightly resembling London Bridge, appeared. The image was blurred and had black and white lines running horizontally through part of it. We checked the others. They were all the same.

“Fuck!” I expounded.

She put her arm around Ossie's shoulder. “I don't know what you were expecting, but these are incredible. You took these shots in 1596, Ossie! You have photographed Elizabethan London! My God, Ossie, can't you feel the thrill of it all.”

I laughed loud and long. What the hell was I thinking? I had taken snapshots of London over four hundred years ago, and they survived the quantisation effect.

“Ossie, there was nothing in the world like this. I'm going to send them to Declan straight away.” Jennifer said, excitedly.

“Is that wise? What if someone else at Boogle sees them?”

“Relax Ossie; it'll be just fine. I expect he'll call very soon.”

Changing the subject, I said, “It's a pity that I couldn't get a picture of Shakespeare.”

Jennifer's eyes widened, “You saw William Shakespeare?”

“We had a cosy little chat, yes.”

“And you didn't take a photo?”

“I could hardly do it without him knowing. And, how could I explain what I was doing?”

“Yes, I guess that could be tricky. We'll have to work out some way to disguise it.” Sidling up to him, she said, “What was he like?”

“Like he had something to hide.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don't know. It's just that Shakespeare was so defensive about his work. He wouldn't admit being influenced by Marlowe, yet it's obvious he copied his style, in his earlier works.”

Jennifer suggested, “Perhaps he didn't want to say anything that would expose him as being Marlowe.

I shook my head, “Afraid that theory's gone right out of the window.”

“Why?”

“Because I saw 15-year-old Susanna, their first born. Anne was pregnant with her when she and William got married in 1582 and Marlowe allegedly died in 1593.”

“But you still think there's a question mark over his death.”

I looked straight at her. “Sweetheart, there's many doubts over his death.”

Just then her phone rang. It was Declan?

“Hey Declan, Have you seen the images I sent you?”

“Why do you think I'm phoning. The images are incredible Jen. I'll present them and the Boogle Earth History app concept at a director's meeting tomorrow.”

“Do you think you can win them over?”

“No problem Jen. They won't want the opposition getting hold of it.”

“Great, look forward to hearing from you soon.”

“Hearing from me! You'll be seeing me as soon as I get my flight organised. We Are going to have a huge celebration.”

Jennifer's face was beaming, as she put down the phone. She and Ossie stood staring at each other for a few moments. Then they hugged each other, jumping up and down. She said, “We did it Ossie, you beautiful man. We did it. We've got Boogle!”

“Fuck, that great Jen. You deserve it.”

“We deserve it, Ossie.” Then she sighed, “I feel tingly all over.”

I grabbed Jen and pulled her close. “I know a great cure for beautiful tingly women.”

Gerard Fox had been boning up on patent law in readiness for the meeting with the Crown Office man. He knew how to deal with people like Mr Edgar Murphy. The lawyer had confronted many of his kind in court. He just had to out-nice them. They were usually wimps hiding behind rules and statutes. People who had no personal authority, no charisma and no balls. Gerard's calm confidence could go some way to disarm Mr Murphy, but he knew that ultimately the Crown Office existed to advise the police and other investigative agencies, such as the Patents Office, during criminal investigations. Which meant that Edgar Murphy was treating Professor Smethurst, his client, as such. Gerard was excellent at playing the 'wolf in sheep clothing'. He had an infectious smile he'd cultivated over the years, as a defence attorney that even seduced many opposition witnesses. So he was ready for whatever Mr Murphy would throw at his client.

Murphy turned up alighted from the Tube at Mornington Crescent and made his way to Greater London House, and the legal firm of Scott, Baines and Fox. The law firm occupied a large chunk of the second floor. Edgar Murphy introduced himself to the friendly blond lady at the reception desk. After waiting for 10 minutes, Gerard emerged from his lair, a huge smile on his face. He invited Murphy into his office, and they both sat down on comfortable recliner chairs with chrome, glass- topped tables between them. He found the casual approach helped to put clients at their ease. Looking at Murphy, he smiled, “So Mr Murphy how can I assist the Crown Office?”

“We need to discuss patent 222567, which concerns a device invented by Jennifer Anne Smethurst.”

“Professor Jennifer Anne Smethurst,” Gerard corrected. Then he said, “As I understand it the Crown Office becomes involved during criminal investigations. Does this mean that the Patents Office is conducting such an investigation against my client?”

Murphy looked straight at Gerard. “Your client, Professor Smethurst, is obligated to conform to Crown Office provisions, introduced into English patents legislation in 1883. These rules state that the Crown Office becomes involved with any license which, under the law, comes under Patent Office scrutiny.”

Gerard smiled, “Mr Murphy I understand that but why is the Patents Office interested in this particular patent?”

Mr Fox, under subclause 177, under the act that covers the 1883 legislation, we have the legal right to exploit any inventions that come under the said law for which we have granted a patent.”

Gerard said, “Perhaps you would like some refreshment, Mr Murphy.”

“Yes, I am feeling a little parched.”

“Tea or coffee.”

“Tea please, milk and one sugar.”

Gerard spoke his request into his intercom and continued. “Mr Murphy, I understand what you are saying, but surely it all depends on the terms of the particular ‘letters patent’ issued under the Statute of Monopolies of 1623.”

Murphy cracked a slight smile. “Ah, but Crown use provisions cover that with the enactment of the act in 1883, in which the Crown agrees to be bound by patents, but obtains the protection of these rules when using patented inventions. Dr Smethurst's device falls into this category.” He sighed, “So now that's out the way perhaps we can get down to the reason why I am here.”

“Which is?”

“To organise an inspection of the invention by experts in the field about said patent 222567.”

“Why is this deemed necessary?”

An intern arrived with refreshments and placed them on mats to protect the glass table top.

Gerard sipped his coffee.

Murphy, feeling a little uncomfortable, experiencing the snarl of the wolf from within the soft coat, said, “The Patents Office has the right to exercise its acquisition provisions in respect of any invention deemed to fall under the Public Health and Safety Act.”

“Mr Murphy, you still haven't answered my original question, Why this particular patent? What are the Crown's reasons for exercising its acquisition provisions in respect of my client's invention.” Gerard took a bite from a chocolate digestive, then asked, “Have you any evidence of health care issues used in Professor Smethurst's scientific research.”

Exasperated, Murphy said, “We don't know until we investigate it.” He stared at the lawyer. “Mr Fox, I'm fed up with your stalling tactics. You and I both know the inspection is going to happen so the best thing for you to do is work with us so we can make this as painless as possible.”

“Mr Murphy, you still haven't explained to me why patent 222567 has been red-flagged.”

Murphy, feeling very uncomfortable answered, “The Patent Office is concerned because they have no idea how to categorise the invention. As such they called us in to investigate.”

Gerard flashed one of his disarming smiles. “So the Patent Office has patented an invention that they now want to investigate to see if it qualifies for a license.”

“Yes, now if we can proceed.”

“Mr Murphy, my client has shown you the device and has informed you of its function. So why do you still have a problem with it?”

Mopping his brow with a kerchief, Murphy said, “We won't know if there is a problem until we have thoroughly inspected the device.”

Gerard sipped his coffee. “Thank you for explaining the somewhat fuzzy logic behind the legislation. However, I feel it my duty to warn you that Professor Smethurst is no longer the sole owner of the device now known as QSA. Boogle Holdings Limited now owns a forty-nine percent share.

Murphy's eyes nearly popped out of his head. “When did this happen?”

“Negotiations have been in place for some time.”

“Does your client realise it is an offence under the Crown Act for a device to be sold wholly or partially thereof, while under investigation?”

Gerard smiled again. “Not under the 1883 legislation page 226 clause 78b, which states that it is not an offence under the Act if negotiations for such a purchase, in which there is a penalty clause for indemnity under provisional contract against either party, takes place before any investigation by the Crown Office commences.”

Murphy looked at him, perplexed. “This rather complicates things. I want to see a copy of any and all contracts about patent 222567.”

Gerald, smiling, said, “I will inform my client.”

Chapter 25

Jennifer scrutinised the contract, as she and Gerard Fox sat in her lounge. Everything seemed to be in order. She looked up at Gerard. "I'll be relieved when this is signed and sealed."

The lawyer smiled, "Declan will take it to his legal people, then key board members. They may want some minor changes. Then we decide if we are happy with them. It can become a bit of a ping pong match if we're not careful."

"But they've only got another three weeks to fit it into this year's budget."

"Jennifer, that's their business, not ours. Our penalty clause says they have 30 days to seal this contract else they will incur a payment of £10 million."

Jennifer got up and took the lawyer into her office, where she brought up the London images on her computer. She turned to Gerard, grinning. "I don't think Boogle will quibble. When they get to publish these, they'll go viral."

"What are they?" Gerard asked.

Handing prints to the lawyer, she said, "Ossie took these photos in London in 1596."

"My God! Your kidding, right?"

She shook her head. "These are the first shots taken with our Quantum camera."

"They're fantastic of course, but it's a pity they're not a bit clearer."

"You're not asking for much," Jennifer softly laughed. Then she said, "Our quantum photography genius is working on that. Once we have Boogle's investment, we'll have research funds to work with."

Jennifer made them some coffee, then brought up the subject of the Crown Office investigation.

Gerard said, "I've stalled them for now. But they will come back with bigger guns. But leave that to me. Once Boogle is signed up and maintains the QSA is an educational project they are going to have to wade through American red tape. They'll do it, of course, but it will slow them down."

"So, what do we tell Declan?"

Gerard smiled, "Nothing."

"But if we don't declare the government investigation into the Quantime, and they find out about it..."

"Jennifer, don't worry about that. Boogle will demand all disclosures on anything that could affect their use of the technology. But we'll deal with that when we come to it. We just tell them it's the usual government red-tape. We give them reports on the dealings we've had with the Crown Office."

Jennifer frowned. "I don't know, Gerard. I'd rather mention it to Declan up front."

"Well, I can't stop you doing that. But it could, well, muddy the waters. My professional advice to you is don't say anything."

I was waiting for Jen and Declan to turn up, at her place. She'd gone to Heathrow Airport to pick him up. I wasn't quite sure Jen had summoned me to her home, but she'd said it was important, so who was I to argue. Gerard Fox had arrived before Jen got back. I didn't usually get on with legal eagles, but Gerard seemed like a decent bloke. We'd met through Jen on a previous occasion. "They shouldn't be too long," I said, uselessly.

Gerard said, "You're the bloke who's been time travelling?"

I grinned, "Don't let Jen hear you say that. It's space assimilation, not time travel."

The lawyer said, "You were investigating Vincent van Gogh's death, in real time?"

"The was my first experience, yes."

"And recently, you've been to Tudor London. What's that like?"

"Noisy, smelly and crowded, to put it in a nutshell."

"Why were you there?"

Just then I heard Jen's Jeep pull up. "They're here!" I said, glad to escape Gerard's probing.

I went out and helped Declan with his luggage. So he was staying at Jen's place. I tried not to read too much into it. Had to keep that little green monster at bay. Another surprise was that she was having a small dinner party and Nathan was coming over to join us. Oh what joy.

Jennifer introduced Declan to Gerard.

Declan, in a cheeky mood, said, "So you're the one who looks after Jennifer's interests."

"I am her legal advisor and contractual agent."

"Speaking of which I need a copy of the contract."

Gerard smiled, "I only have a draft copy. The polished contract should be ready tomorrow."

Declan said, "A draft copy will do just fine, so I can familiarise myself before the signing."

"Certainly Declan. I'll go and get you a copy."

The American came over to where Jen and I were having a private conversation. I turned to him, "Yes, can I help you?"

"I'd like to speak with Jennifer about something – private."

She turned to Ossie. "Just excuse us for a minute."

Declan said, "Jennifer, before Boogle signs up I have a favour to ask."

"Oh! What's that?"

"It would clinch it with my board if I showed them a picture of the signing of the Declaration of Independence."

She looked at him. "You mean using the QSA and the Qcam."

"How the hell else am I going to do it?" he grinned.

“How long are you here for?”

“What's that got to do with anything.”

“I do have to programme it you know.”

“One other thing. I want Ossie with me. He knows how to use the camera.”

Jennifer sighed, “I've got no problem with that. You'll have to ask him, though.”

I was taken aback. “You want me to photograph the signing of the Declaration of Independence?”

“Come on, Ossie; It'll be a grand adventure.”

I shook my head. “I don't know. I've got enough on my plate with the Marlowe mystery.”

“I thought we'd dealt with that,” Declan said.

“We still don't what became of him after his faked death.”

“Are you sure that they faked his death?”

“The evidence, or lack thereof, certainly points in that direction.”

Declan looked at Ossie. “Tell you what; you help me, and I'll give you support with your project.”

I wasn't too sure about this. “When do you want to do it, Declan?”

“As soon as Jen programmes the data.”

So, on July 4, 1776, With the Quantime safely parked - if you can park something in its quantum state - Declan and I entered Pennsylvania State House, while the Second Continental Congress was in session.

The Boogle man whispered to me, “I can't believe I'm actually in this building on the day of the signing.”

“So what have the colonies worked out so far?” I asked. After all, it was his history. Then I saw a few easily recognisable faces from American history. I turned to Declan 'Isn't that Benjamin Franklin, talking to John Hancock, over there.”

Declan grinned, “Yes, and George Washington just went into that room with Alexander Hamilton, I do believe.”

I stopped one of the delegates, asking, “What's the vote so far?”

“Twelve colonies for, one against,” he said, hurrying off.

Then I heard the Liberty bell pealing away, calling the delegates to the hall for voting. Dressed in the style of the day we tagged along behind the delegates and entered the building with them. It seemed quite a casual and light-hearted affair. Representatives stood around chatting until it was their turn to go and vote.

John Hancock, President of the Congress, resplendent in a purple, tailed, jacket, oversaw the voting.

The tricky bit for me, as the photographer, was that the Declaration was on a table at one end of the hall and, as Delegates sat around or stood to converse, it was nigh impossible for yours truly to sneak up with the quantum camera. I turned to Declan, who was goggled eyed as American statesmen took their turn at signing. "How are we going to do this?"

"You'll have to get closer."

"Thanks. That's a lot of help I must say." I hope he picked up my sarcasm. Jen had thought to secrete the Qcam under my hat, but everybody in the hall was hatless, I would stand out like a sore thumb. Then, even if I overcame that conundrum, there was the problem of getting close enough to the action for the delegates to be recognisable in the photos. Looking at Declan, I said, "I don't see how this is going to work."

Declan pulled Ossie aside. "What do you mean?"

"I can't get close enough to get a decent picture."

Declan looked around. Grabbing Ossie, he said, "Come with me."

I followed him outside to where there was a large window, with a clear view of the people signing the document. I said, "We're still too far away."

"Do the best you can," Declan said, offering no useful help.

I took the camera from my hat and pointed the lens through the window. Another delegate was about to sign, Benjamin Franklin. What a coup. I lined up the shot. Looked through the viewfinder. Benjamin Franklin stood there with quill poised. I pressed the button. For a split second two tiny beams of coloured light arced in the direction of the subject. I took other shots. Then I heard someone shout, "OY YOU! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

Damn it! Declan was supposed to be watching my back. I quickly put the camera in my bag and stepped back, as the Philadelphia cop, well that's what I took him for, approached. I apologised, saying, "It's such a momentous occasion I wanted to see the great men carry out such a noble act. I meant no harm, sir." The cop sent me off with a flea in my ear. To my chagrin, I couldn't see Declan anywhere nearby. Where the hell was the man?

Quite a crowd had built up outside the State House, but I couldn't see Declan. Then it occurred to me that he may saw the cop approaching and decided to hop it. He may be back in Jen's lab as I speak, well think. So I could be hanging around her for nothing. But what If I take the 'Q' and piss off back to Jen's and he's still here looking for me. Shit! I hate riding tandem on these jaunts. At least he had his pendant with him this time so he should be okay. Finding a private space away from the assembly, I checked what I'd captured with the Qcam. The images weren't bad, a little blurred with a few dark lines, but no pixelation. I silently prayed they'd survive the quantisation effect which automatically occurred a soon as I set foot on Jen's marvellous, magic, machine.

Having arrived in the lab the first thing I did was check the images. They had the black and white horizontal lines, as before. I Don't know why I thought they might be better as Douglas hadn't made any improvements to the camera since my previous attempt. They weren't bad, though. I could still make out someone in Eighteenth-century gear signing something. But there wasn't enough

definition to pick out Benjamin Franklin. Still, it was quite a coup. Being a veteran at the QSA game, I did not need any orientation time to acclimatise to the 21st century. Jen was in the kitchen when I emerged from her secret lair.

Jennifer, seeing just Ossie, felt a cold chill. "Where's Declan?"

"I thought he was here?"

"Why did you think that, Ossie?"

"Because I couldn't find him. For all, I know he came back by himself."

Jennifer tutted, "I don't know? Is it really that difficult for you two to arrive together?"

"I was taking snapshots, and when I looked around, he'd disappeared." I shrugged, "What the hell was I supposed to do?"

"Look for him, of course."

"And what if he'd activated the 'Q' for himself? How long am I supposed to hang about looking for him?"

Jennifer chewed her lip, thoughtfully. "Yes, I see your point."

I suggested, "Now if you could come up with something that somehow triggered something in the pendant if someone else was using the 'Q'..."

"Come on Ossie; you'll be wanting me to walk on water next."

"Yeah, well He's the one who didn't stick with me. He probably scampered when that cop challenged me."

"What happened?"

"Nothing." I put my arm around her waist. "Don't worry Jen, he's a big boy, and he's got his pendant this time." Now I'm starving, so what have you got for me to eat?"

Declan arrived soon after. He sat in the QSA feeling a bit out of sorts but elated. Gradually the American jigsaw in his mind morphed into more familiar territory. Feeling coordinated enough he stepped out of the 'Q'. Hearing voices in the house, he followed them to their source. Seeing Ossie, he said, "So you're here. I was looking all over for you."

I rejoined, "Well I didn't know that, did I?"

Jen said, "You're both here safe and sound. That's all that matters."

"That and the photo images," I grinned, producing the camera.

"Let's see what you managed to get," Declan said, excited.

Declan's excitement muted into a slight frown. "These images have the same problem."

Jennifer said, "Who's that signing the Declaration in the photo?"

I said, "Ben Franklin, but you can't recognise him from this."

"Well, it's all we've got," Jennifer stated.

Declan shrugged, "So I'll have to use it." Turning to the inventor, he said, "Can you fix this?"

She sighed, "First we have to find out what's causing it."

I volunteered, "It's probably a fault with the camera. I'll contact Nathan if you like."

Declan said, "Don't show him any images. At least until I've posted them on Boogle History."

I said, "This is ridiculous. "How can Dimmick figure out what's wrong if he doesn't see what the camera is doing?"

Jen, acting as referee, said. "Okay, here's an idea. Declan, you post the Benjamin Franklin images, and Ossie shows Nathan the London shots."

The woman in my office had shiny, long, black, hair worn in a ponytail; a sweet smile and inquisitive, hazel pupils, She wore a dark 'power' trouser suit and had an attitude that says, I mean business. And here she was. In my shoebox office. And I had no idea who she was or why she'd come to see me. Until she gave me her card, which showed the Westlands Insurance logo.

She extended her hand, "Delia Francine, I'm here to offer you advice on the Powell case."

"Oh, do I need it."

"Arnold Sinclair seems to think so." She added, "So, bring me up to date."

It was on the back burner, but I couldn't tell her that. "Oh, I've been doing some background work on Jerry Powell."

Delia, having dealt with PIs for many years knew they dragged their heels to accrue more expenses. She took a seat. "Mr Doyle, art fraud may seem a joke to you but dealing in stolen, fraudulent and misrepresented works of art is the world's third most lucrative criminal enterprise today."

I wasn't letting her get away that. "I don't consider anything that pays the bills a joke. But I must admit I had no idea it's that big."

"People like Jerry Powell can easily net hundreds of thousands in resale on open and black markets. They stage false robberies, then lodge bogus claims. They do so on the basis that we will only give the allegation glancing priority because we're too busy processing more serious applications."

"So how do you go about catching them out, Ms Francine?"

"Our Mr Powell is a high-net-worth person living in an affluent community. He owns three automobiles, including a Ferrari Dino. He has a vacation property in Hawaii and an art collection he values at £500,000."

"If he's that well-heeled why does he risk it all by committing art fraud."

"He sees himself as a very lucky and smart person. He has already duped three insurance providers and is now going for us. For him, having it over insurance companies gives him a greater sense of personal satisfaction than what he gets from the fraudulent payout."

I shuffled some papers around, and, retrieving his file, said, "So what do we do now?"

"Have you been to his home yet?"

“No.”

“Then that's where we're going, Mr Doyle.”

Having emerged from the Tube at Euston Station Ossie and Ms Francine caught a cab to Montague Street, behind the British Museum. Jerry Powell lived on the third floor of an apartment complex. Francine turned to Ossie, “Let me do the talking. Learn what you can from my approach. Never accuse the suspect of fraud.”

I nodded.

She knocked at the door. An agitated woman opened it.

Delia smiled, “Mrs Powell?”

“Yes. What do you want?”

“We're from Westlands Insurance. It's about your art theft claim.”

“Yes, well you need to speak with my husband about that,” The woman almost spat.

“Rest assured we'll be doing just that. But we need to see the location of the theft.”

The woman barred entry into her domain. “This isn't a good time for me. I have to be somewhere.”

Delia put on her sympathetic smile. “Oh dear, and your husband did say he wanted this claim dealt with as soon as possible.”

“Well, you'll just have to come back when he's here,” the woman huffed.

Delia held her ground. “The thing is that I won't be able to get back for a couple of months. And it will only take a few minutes. Then we can tick that box and progress with your claim. How does that sound?”

The woman relented, “Okay, come in and get it over with.”

As we walked through to what looked like a gallery sans exhibits, I noticed stunning pieces of object-de-art. Throughout the apartment.

Delia took photos, while Mrs Powell hung around in the background. The assessor turned to her, “And thieves only took objects from this room?”

“Yes, that's right.”

“So you didn't lose any of your other art and craft pieces in the robbery?”

“No. We've only claimed for what we lost.”

Delia had a look around the large room and said, “Now I just need to check your security system.”

The woman reluctantly showed her the burglar alarm.

The assessor reviewed her notes. The systems matched up. She smiled, “Thank you, Mrs Powell.” She handed the woman a card. “Get Mr Powell to ring the office for an interview.”

The woman showed them out and closed the door.

Ossie said, “You handled that well.”

“It usually works with challenging people when they realise it's in their best interest to cooperate.”

“So did you learn anything that makes you think it's fraud?”

Delia quite liked the Irishman. He seemed quite intelligent and wasn't at all pushy. “How about I fill you in over lunch. Westland's shout.”

I grinned, “Sounds good to me.”

Delia chose Spaghetti House in Sicilian Avenue, not far from Bloomsbury Square. She said it was a fantastic restaurant and strongly recommended it. I'm a bit partial to the old spaghetti bolognese, so I thought why not?

As we enjoyed the excellent service, I asked Delia the question again.

She answered, “Ossie, Jerry Marlowe lodged his claim one week after the alleged robbery. Why did he wait that long?”

“Yes, why not contact your people the next day?”

“Because he and his wife were vacationing in Hawaii when the alleged thief stole the artworks.”

“How many pieces?”

“Some 33 artworks were purportedly stolen.”

I paused to eat some more top quality Italian food, which also came in generous sized portions.

“Did you discover anything by checking the alarm?”

“At the time it appears that the alarm system had either malfunctioned or was physically disabled. Jerry filed a police report, and he produces a list of the artworks, whose recorded value is £500,000.”

“Yes, a similar amount to the claims on the previous three occasions.”

“I would have thought it would trigger a red flag alert.”

“Yes, but that, by itself, isn't enough to warrant a full investigation.”

Mario, our friendly waiter, cleared the dishes and brought us excellent coffee.

Delia passed over a Manila folder with a Westland's sticker on it. “To help you with your investigation,” she smiled.

I was beginning to realise this art fraud caper could be tricky. “Assuming I'm not going to get lucky and catch him with his paintings in the back of a van, how do I know where to search for them.”

Delia finished her coffee. “Have you dealt with art fraud before, Ossie?”

I had to be careful. I'd told Arnold I had experience in the area. Now I was feeling lost at sea. “Of course,” I chuckled, “I just wondered, you being my mentor, how you'd go about it?”

Pointing to the folder, she answered, “I'd read that thoroughly. “It lists London art dealers, galleries and auctions.”

“Of course,” I grinned.

Delia got up, leaving £60 under her saucer. “Right, now it's down to you. We know it could take a while, so send in weekly reports.”

Ossie rose too. “And there's me thinking I'd have you as my partner,” he grinned widely.

“You're a big boy. You're on your own now. Happy hunting.”

Now I had some valuable leads; it was time for me to make some progress in the art fraud case. But first I had another appointment with the 'Q'.

Chapter 26

Back in the Sixteenth Century Cambridge was little more than a small country town with around 6000 people. As I walked to Corpus Christi College, I noticed that merchants tended to live and work in the same street. The town butcher and the slaughterhouses were set together in the street called the Shambles. Despite being much smaller, Cambridge was dirty, smelly and crowded, like London. There were no sewers and no drains. Rubbish such as rotting vegetables, offal and dirty water were thrown summarily into the streets. There was a parish ruling in Cambridge, as in many other Elizabethan towns, that every man was supposed to clean the street in front of his house once a week. But, from the putrid evidence it seemed that very few people bothered, and there was no law enforcement in this respect. Rats and other vermin ruled.

Let me explain why I'm in Cambridge in 1594. I'm here, primarily, to speak with a Newton Gallagher, Dean of Corpus Christi College, about young Marlowe's academic years. I'm here by myself because Declan took his images of Benjamin Franklin signing the Declaration and hurried back to America. To be honest, it was something of a relief because, although he promised to support me, I feel much better working alone.

Visiting Corpus Christi College, with its old stripy lawn in the middle of a fourteenth-century enclosed court, was my current goal. Or to be more precise, speaking with Newton Gallagher, the then current 'Master', about Marlowe's academic days. So why would the Dean deem to talk to the likes of me about this? The fifteen-year-old Marlowe was among the brightest school boys of his time. He got a place at Corpus Christi in Cambridge University through a scholarship. I was writing about his life, which meant depending upon how much the Dean was able to help me would determine the amount of immortality I would afford him in my book.

A couple of students heading towards me gave directions to the Dean's office. It was at the end a long corridor, gabled with Black Oak beams supporting the roof. I knocked at the unsuspecting Master's door and received, "Come in then, Chizzelwaite. I haven't got all day."

I opened the thick timber door and entered. The surprised look on the Dean's face had asked the question before he verbalised it.

"Who are you?" he said, rising from his chair.

I proffered my hand and went straight for it. "Oswald Doyle, at your service, Sir."

"And pray, Mr Doyle, why are you here in my study?"

"I need information on one of you more successful students,"

"Oh! To whom do you refer?"

"Master Marlowe, Sir." I added, "Let me explain. Since his death, many people are interested in the young genius. I sir am writing a book of his life."

The Dean clasped his hands behind his back and puffed out his chest. "That, sir, still does not explain why you are here."

It was time to lay it on with a trowel. "Sir, as Dean of this great establishment, this centre of learning, this hallowed hall, you would no doubt have nurtured the likes of young Master Marlowe. And as such, be able to furnish me with details of his academic life."

The Dean, despite being shorter than Oswald, still stood his ground. "Why would I want to do such a thing?"

"Sir, like I said, I'm writing about Master Marlowe, and as he studied here for seven years, you would know a great deal about him. If you like, I can document the help you are giving me in my book."

The Dean rubbed his chin. "Very well, please take a seat, and I will tell you what I know."

I did as he requested, and took out pad and pencil, hoping it would survive the trip back.

"Let me see. Yes, young Kit went to King's School in Canterbury. While he attended Kings we awarded young Marlowe a scholarship that enabled him to study here from late 1580 until 1587."

"What was he like?"

"He studied hard and got his bachelor of arts degree in 1584 - I think it was."

"But in 1587 you hesitated in awarding him his master's degree. Why was that?"

"The church committee that oversees this college suggested to me that he hadn't earned his masters. They cited his frequent absences and speculation about what he did during the times he was away."

"What were these speculations, Dean?"

"The committee believed Master Marlowe had gone abroad to the Netherlands and converted to Roman Catholicism. They couldn't prove the charge, else I fear they would have had him executed as a traitor."

"Did you find out what he was doing during those absences?"

No, and we all set to stop him getting his masters when we received a letter from the Privy Council, signed by Francis Walsingham, declaring that Marlowe was working on matters to benefit this country. And he was awarded his masters degree on schedule."

I looked at the Dean. His face wasn't hiding anything. I said, "Studying for his master's degree, writing plays and doing covert work for the Queen. How on earth did he find the time?"

The Dean shook his head. It vexes me also. "Especially as he was a genial fellow and liked to drink and I don't know what else, with other students. He was certainly one of the most prestigious students here during my tenure." The academic rose to his feet. "That's all I can offer you. I hope it has been helpful."

"Oh, indeed it has, Dean Gallagher. Just one more thing, though, When young Marlowe returned from his absences did he appear any different to you?"

"Well he seemed to slip back into his study easily, but I did notice a tenseness about him,"

"A tenseness. Can you elaborate?"

"He seemed more withdrawn, didn't socialise as much."

“And he was only like that when he came back from whatever adventure he'd been on.”

“That's the only time I saw him like that. Why do you ask?”

I got up to leave. “Perhaps, whatever Marlowe was involved in wasn't to his taste.”

“Do you mean coercion, Master Doyle.”

I moved close to him. “Between you and me I have heard that Francis Walsingham uses nefarious methods to get people to work for him.”

Nathan Goodfellow grumbled to himself as he put down the phone. So Jennifer was having a problem with the quantum camera. Well, it wasn't his job to contact Douglas about it. The chances were that the troubled genius wouldn't even answer the phone. If he did, there was no telling the kind of mood he'd be in. Besides, what was he to say to Douglas? The Qcam isn't producing perfect res images from 500 years ago. As for as, Dimmock knew the camera was only designed to work in this space/time scenario. Still, Jennifer, who only ever showed interest in him when she wanted something, had insisted on sending him the images for his scrutiny. Nathan took one look at the pictures and saw the interference patterns marring the photos. Immediately he saw the problem was 'white noise', a mathematical term for a random signal with a constant power spectral often specified in mathematical models of systems. However, with quantum photography, Nathan was looking at the effect of 'quantum noise' Being a master mathematician Nathan could check it out to a degree. But he feared he would need Douglas' expertise to tweak the camera function. But first, he had to ascertain the cause of the problem.

Nathan knew that quantum noise referred to the uncertainty of a physical quantity – in this case, the quantum camera. This phenomenon was due to its quantum origin. As the images of London had been photographed in an earlier space-time the optical communication between then and now had been corrupted by an interference that affected the entanglement process between the ghost images, during the quantisation process. Yes, Nathan was pretty sure it was the problem, but he had no clue about how to fix it. He sighed deeply. There was nothing else the mathematician could do. He'd have to talk with Douglas.

Chapter 27

“Can you explain that in plain English?” I asked as Nathan told me about the problem with the camera. We were sitting, drinking coffee at the Garrick; he was between lectures.

Nathan smiled widely. “I’ll try, but it like trying to teach Shakespeare’s sonnets to a chimpanzee.”

“Thanks a lot, mate. Come on; there must be a simpler explanation.”

“Okay, the lines across the image are caused by interference that occurs during the quantisation process. We refer to this effect as quantum noise.”

“So why does it happen?”

“It’s caused by the quantum structure of an x-ray beam.” Nathan added, “We have to look at the quantum nature of radiation to see how it produces image noise.”

My brain was having trouble putting it together. So I asked, “Okay, So why does the noise only affect it when the camera is un-quantised.”

Nathan got out a notebook and, moving his coffee cup aside, drew a simple diagram. He explained, “Here we have part of an x-ray beam that forms the exposure to one small section of the image. Now, bear in mind that the x-ray beam is a shower of individual photons.”

My brain was beginning to get a grip. So I said, “Right, got that.”

“Now, because photons are independent, they get randomly distributed within an image area. It’s a bit like a few drops of rain falling on the ground. Because of the randomness, there could be clusters of many photons at some points as well as areas where only a few photons get collected. It’s this uneven distribution that shows up in the image as interference, or noise.”

He’d explained it well. Then I got an idea. “Nathan, does that mean there is a difference in the distribution of photons at the source to the apportionment in this space/time reality.”

Nathan gave a huge grin. “We’ll make a quantum physicist out of you yet. That’s what’s happening.”

“Brilliant! So how can you fix it?” I asked excitedly.

Nathan shook his head. “I can’t. I don’t know if it’s possible to fix it. After all, Ossie, nobody but you has used a quantum camera in such a way before.”

“What about Dimmock. He built the camera after all.”

Nathan sighed deeply. “Okay, I’ll put it to him, but I do not promise anything. Besides, he may not have the solution.”

I sighed, “Well Nathan, old mate, thanks for explaining it.”

I was back at the farm, enjoying a bowl of Jen’s tasty chicken and vegetable soup with crusty dark rye bread. I’d showed her Nathan’s rough diagram and explained what he told me, well to the best of my ability. She had hoped for more, but that’s the way things were. Looking at Jen, I changed the subject. “I want to continue my Elizabethan search for answers about Marlowe’s life after death.”

Jennifer asked, “Why is it so important to you? After all, you’re not even being paid to pursue it.”

I looked up from my second helping of soup. “Jen, there's a lot of people willing to go along with the official version of Marlowe's alleged death, but I'm not one of them.”

“I already know that. And I know what you're like when you get a bit between your teeth.”

“But many of them only subscribe to it far enough to agree that Frizer murdered him. And, even those who accepted the given version think Marlowe's drinking buddies, on that fateful day, were a bit shonky; the timing of his death seems just a little bit convenient.”

“In what way?”

Spooning up more soup, I savoured the taste, then explained, “ Marlowe was out on bail, with serious charges levelled against him by the Star Chamber; you don't mess with those guys.”

“What was he being charged with?”

“It was unspecified. But bear in mind Thomas Kyd, Kit's ex-chamber chum, had been arrested and, under torture ratted on Marlowe, leading to his detention.”

“Why was he allowed out on bail then?”

“So he could go through the fake murder plot.”

Jennifer shook her head, making her blond hair fan out. “It still doesn't make sense.”

I explained, “The dirt Marlowe would have had on various prominent political figures, while working for Francis Walsingham, made him a dangerous and marked man. In which case, the murder may well have been kosher.”

“But you were saying nobody killed Marlowe.”

“It's quite likely that Nicholas Skere's had to carry out the late Francis Walsingham's wish that Marlowe was to disappear.”

“So you're saying his death was faked for this disappearance to take place.”

“Yes, and to get the Privy Council off his back.”

Jennifer gently chewed her lip, an affectation while she was in thought. “So, what happened to him?”

“I don't know, which is why I need to go back to Tudor London and rattle a few cages.”

Jennifer, clearing away the dishes, said, “What makes you think you will get them to talk to you?”

“I'll start with Kyd. I've already spoken with him on three occasions. Besides, he'll be feeling guilty about dobbing in his chamber chum.”

Jennifer's brow creased in a frown. “Don't forget, you're a wanted Catholic spy and escaped felon, so watch your back.”

Ossie nodded, then said. Let's set the clock for early 1594.”

Leadenhall Market was thriving when I arrived. Long trestles supported displays of produce and other excellent products. Chickens had their necks broken on site; customers were filling containers from huge sacks of grain. Spruikers loudly promoting their eggs butter and cheese, screamed

themselves hoarse over the din of the market. The pungent aroma of sage, thyme and rosemary competed pathetically against the cocktail of putrid waste slime in the thoroughfare. Other merchants sold wool, leather, cutlery and perfumes. Servants from the big houses did most of the purchasing. Most of the poor were too far down the food chain to be able to afford such luxuries.

I was passing through the market on my way to Langbourn Ward to find Thomas Kyd, who lived in Lombard St. As an aside Langbourn was an old word meaning the marketplace where traders set out their goods on long boards. Lombard Street, named after the Italian financiers from Lombardy. They were granted land in London to establish gold and silver smithing shops positioned, as the crafts suggest, at the high end of town. Following a few helpful directions, I eventually found myself, over a drapers shop, at the door of Thomas Kyd. He didn't look as bright and breezy as the time I saw him outside the theatre. But a session with the Star Chamber torturers can put a crimp in a man's style.

Thomas stared at Oswald Doyle, as he opened his door. Then he said, "Master Doyle, what do you want now?"

I smiled, "Thomas, I just have a few questions to put to you."

"I've told you all I know," the dramatist said, about to close the door.

"When we met outside the Curtain Theatre, you were in a hurry. So can you give me a few minutes of your time?"

"What do you want to know then?" Thomas asked, a little testily.

"May we talk inside?"

Thomas stepped aside.

"So what do you want to know?" Kyd said, closing his glass-paned window, to dull down the outside noise. Then he offered Ossie a glass of cheap red wine, as they sat in a cramped but tidy study.

I said, "Let me start by posing a question."

Thomas looked at the visitor, quizzically.

"How do you know Master Marlowe was in the unmarked grave?"

"You asked me that three years back, and my answer is still the same. Nicholas Skere's showed me the grave."

"So you take the word of a footpad, cutpurse and deceiver."

"If not there, where is he buried?"

"Maybe he wasn't."

Thomas, shaking his head vehemently, said, "No he had to be buried, else the kites would have eaten him."

"Not if he wasn't dead."

"Didn't die! Sir. If you came here to mock me and the passing of my friend, I'd run you through."

“I'm not mocking. Very few people got to see Marlowe after Frizer allegedly killed him, and they were the only ones who witnessed what went on.”

Master Kyd fidgeted nervously, his eyes downcast. “Master Doyle, my father was a scrivener. He expected me to follow in his footsteps. I did at first but soon found that copying other people's work wasn't for me. I got enrolled at Merchant Taylors' School, where, apart from the usual Latin and Greek, the curriculum included music, drama and physical education.”

I was getting bored, “As fascinating as all this is, Master Kyd, what does it have to do with Marlowe's possible resurrection?”

“I'm coming to that. Kit and I met after my 'Spanish Tragedy' was played. We companioned under the same roof for a time. We became the best of friends, but the torturer's irons forced me to betray him. For me to suggest he may not be dead would be to betray him all over again.”

Thomas Kyd was scared and feeling guilty. I sensed he knew something and I had to know what it was. I studied his face. “Master Kyd, I'm not a Star Chamber lackey. I'm not trying to trick you. I'm only trying to get to the truth.”

He was on the ropes. It was time for my killer punch. “Master Kyd, you know more than you're telling me. How did it feel to betray Kit to the Star Chamber?”

“The torture was excruciating. I couldn't bear any more pain.”

“So you implicated Kit, fully knowing he could be in for the same torture,”

“I knew that wouldn't happen.”

“What do you mean?”

“Kit came to see me, while I was recovering. He told me not to worry because the Star Chamber would never try him.”

“What did you take him to mean by that remark?”

“I asked him that very question, Master Doyle. He said that when I hear of his death, to go and pray by his empty grave.”

“He said empty grave?”

“I queried that also. Kit said that Master Nicholas Skeres has everything in hand.”

“What did he mean by that?”

Skeres told Kit he had a directive from the late Francis Walsingham to make the dramatist disappear and escape the axe. He said he shouldn't be telling me these things, but he wanted to assuage my self-guilt.”

I looked Thomas in the eye, “Have you told anyone else this?”

Thomas shook his head. “He made me promise never to mention this to anyone.”

“Yet you have told me, Master Kyd.”

Thomas said. “Now that I have my life is in your hands.”

“Thomas, your life is in your hands for I shall not breathe a word to anybody in this realm. But tell me just one more thing. What happened to Kit after his alleged murder?”

“That I do not know, Master Doyle. If you find out, please come and tell me.”

I sensed that Kyd knew more but was afraid to say. “Thomas, where do you think Marlowe might have gone?”

Kyd wanted to say what he knew but hesitated. He had to be careful of his words. At length, he said, “There are those who believe he is in Spain.”

“A Catholic heartland! It makes good sense.”

“It's just a rumour, mind.”

“Do these rumours say where in Spain?”

“Madrid. That's all the rumours say. Of course, I don't believe it.”

“Do the rumours say who is helping him there?”

Kyd looked straight at Doyle. “That's all the rumour says.”

I needed more to go on. “Did Marlowe know anybody in Spain?”

Kyd hesitated. He thought about it, Then took a quill and penned a short message on a small sheet of parchment.

He handed it to me. It read:

Christopher Marlowe met Miguel Cervantes in Lisbon, 1587. Scouting for Drake, who wanted to hit the Armada before it got under sail, Marlowe sought out Cervantes, who worked for the Armada supply commissioner, Antonio Guevara.

Armed with this huge revelation and knowing I wouldn't get any further with him. I thanked the Thespian and made my exit.

Chapter 28

You may be wondering why yours truly didn't just turn up and speak with Christopher Marlowe before his alleged death. Get straight to the heart of the matter, so to speak. I'd certainly considered it and came to the conclusion it wouldn't give me many brownie points. But to be able to talk to the master after his death, that would certainly be a coup. But first I had to return to the 21st century.

Nathan Goodfellow met with Douglas Dimmock at the famous Indigo Cafe. Situated in a period terraced house the Indigo was famous for its wide choice of bagels. The cafe was pretty small, which meant it was easy for eavesdroppers to listen. Although it wasn't exactly an MI6 operation references to a quantum camera could prick a few scientific ears. It took a while for their filled bagels to arrive but when they did they were fresh and delicious. Nathan said, "The thing is, Professor Smethurst is getting quantum noise with the 'Qcam'."

Douglas gave Nathan a pained look, "So why are you telling me?"

"It's got something to do with photon distribution difference between when Doyle took the photos and how they turned out in the modern day."

Douglas leant towards the mathematician, "And when were they taken?"

Nathan slid a couple of images over to the quantum physicist, whispering, "1596, I believe."

"Don't you mean 1996?"

Nathan grinned, "No. 1596.

"But that's not possible!"

"I know. It's amazing, isn't it."

Dimmock sat staring at the pictures. "This looks like London Bridge, with buildings on it."

"It is, but the interference mars it somewhat. Is there anything you can do to improve things."

"Where's the Qcam?"

"Professor Smethurst has it."

"How soon can you get it to me."

"She wants you to work on it at her place."

Dimmock spluttered, "Unacceptable. If I help Professor Smethurst, it will be at my university."

"So do you think you can help?"

Douglas, finishing his second bagel, said, "If the problem is as you say, then no. But if it is as I suspect, then possibly."

Nathan brightened. "What do you suspect?"

Dimmock wouldn't comment further. He said, "Get me the camera, and I'll find out."

The usually relaxing municipal park had its calm marred by the power tool racket caused by the Watford Council builders. Jen and I had to raise our voices to hear each other's comments. We got away from the jackhammering and found an unoccupied seat by the lake, where we sipped our takeaway coffee.

"How do you know the rumour is true?" Jennifer asked.

"Because I caught a wink when he said it," I answered.

"Maybe it was just a nervous tic."

"Jen, Thomas Kyd loved Marlowe. He would have made it his business to know what happened to him. Besides, you've seen what he wrote."

Jennifer placed her coffee on the arm of the seat. "Ossie, it still doesn't prove that he went back there."

"Which is why I need to go and find out. Just imagine if Kyd did, see Marlowe again, I could meet with the playwright after the date of his fake death. And we would have the proof we need."

"Possibly, but wait till I get the Qcam back from Dimmock."

"Oh, you let him have it then?"

"Only on the proviso that Nathan kept an eye on it."

"Why would he do that for you?"

Jennifer, sensing the green-eyed monster was showing, said, "We're still good friends and care about each other. That and I'm inviting him out to dinner."

"Oh," was all I managed, trying not to be concerned.

"So she doesn't trust me with the camera," Dimmock commented, as he tested the Qcam.

Nathan, diplomatic as usual, said, "Well it is the only one."

Dimmock spoke without looking at his friend. "Who says it is?"

Startled, Nathan uttered, "You made another one?"

"Yes, there could be quite a market for them."

"Does Jennifer know?"

"Why should she. It's got nothing to do with her?"

Nathan knew that quantum photography, though in its infancy, wasn't exactly new. In ten years or so chain stores would probably be selling Chinese versions for a £100. So it made sense that Dimmock wanted to get into the business on the ground floor. "Well, it was her idea that got you working on it."

This time, the quantum physicist look up at his colleague. "I signed no exclusion rights. It's my patent and my big chance to get away from all this. Nathan, it's dragging me down. I can't breathe here."

Nathan nodded, "Yes, I'm sick of the LSE as well, so I know how stifling it can be, having your research controlled by the big dollars paid by huge corporations." Then he brightened, "Maybe we could go into business together." Adding weight to his suggestion, Nathan said, "I can hold it together when you hit the dark times."

Dimmock rubbed his chin. He knew what Nathan said made sense. Although the quantum scientist currently felt motivated his deep depression could hit him at any time, like a black cloud engulfing him. At length, he said, "It could work, I guess. We need to speak more about this." Then handing his friend the Qcam, he said, "You better give Jennifer her expensive camera. But no mention of our conversation, okay."

"My lips are sealed on that. But have you fixed the noise problem?"

Dimmock faintly smiled, "No, I couldn't fix that. So it's lucky that wasn't the problem."

"Then, what was the problem?"

"The more signal the camera collects, the better the images will be. So I used a sensor that has a higher quantum efficiency. This refinement should avoid the problems of clipping and excessive thermal noise."

Nathan patted Douglas on the back. "You are a genius."

Back in the mundane world, I was on the trail of missing artworks. Mostly it was boring foot slog work, calling on galleries and auction houses to see if anyone had approached them to sell the pieces, on the 'stolen' list. I didn't hold out much hope, but I had to go through the motions to satisfy my client. It was much more likely that Jerry had stashed the artwork in a lock-up somewhere. If, as the insurance people suspected, Jerry Powell had pulled this stunt before he wasn't likely to make stupid mistakes. There again his previous successes in fooling insurance companies could make him overconfident, but I couldn't rely on that. One thing I did know was that he was greedy, and that could be his undoing. A plan was beginning to form in my devious mind.

There's a common myth that PIs like me can access third party records like phone logs and bank statements, in our investigations. In reality, we have no more powers than any other member of the public. We aren't privileged to any information not legally obtainable by the public. Neither are we required to undertake professional development or show any real evidence of our competency. We just hang up our shingle and hope clients will come traipsing into our office. In fact, for around £500 you could become a licensed private investigator in a couple of days. Just complete a short course, take your certificate to the police and receive your licence.

Insurance companies, on the other hand, do have access to private records, because your agreement to allow them to delve into your private affairs is written in the small print of your policy. By signing the policy, you have sealed a legal document giving the insurance company permission to get hold of your bank accounts, phone logs and medical records.

I phoned Westlands Insurance and asked for Delia Francine.

"Yes, Mr Doyle, how can I help you?" she asked, upon hearing his voice.

"It's about the Powell case. I need you to send me records of his phone logs and bank accounts."

“You know I can't do that.”

“Do you have those records?”

“We can legally obtain them if we deem it necessary.”

“As a private investigator working for you doesn't that give me some leeway.”

“That's a moot point. We'll have to meet.”

We made an arrangement to meet, and I get to see the delectable Delia again. So looking for scammers is not all bad.

Nathan and Jennifer both felt a little uneasy being alone together for the first time after many months apart. They hadn't met since the awkward moment Nathan had declared his undying love for her. He found it difficult dealing with women at the best of times and this wasn't one of them. His boyish good looks attracted women to him, but Nathan had always been a lone wolf and wasn't very good at personal relationships with the opposite sex. Jennifer's rejection, albeit a gentle put down, had only served to shatter what confidence he had built up. Now here they were, alone together again.

After a quick hug at her door, he handed her the Qcam and was ready to bolt, his heart beating like a base drum.

“Hi Nathan, It's good to see you,” she smiled sweetly.

Before he knew it, he was in her lounge room, fumbling for something to say. “I thought Ossie might be here.”

She gave him a look. “Why would he be here?”

With his foot firmly lodged in his mouth, he said, “I just thought you and him...”

“Well, you just thought wrong!”

Gagging on his foot, he said, “This isn't exactly a good start. Maybe I should be going.”

Jennifer, wondering how their deep friendship had deteriorated to such a level, said, “No, you don't Nate! I'm not having Duck a l'Orange and an excellent Pinot Noir alone. Besides, we need to sort a few things out.”

Nathan half-smiled, “You haven't called me Nate for quite a while.”

Jennifer served dinner, slightly concerned that she'd put too much orange salt in the blood orange sauce. But it turned out well, and they toasted each other with the Burgundy grew wine, which went down a treat, complementing the slight gaminess of the duck. The wine notably softened the mood, and soon Nathan was telling Jennifer how Dimmock had fixed the Qcam.

She said, “He charged me a £1,000 pounds for that.”

“I'm afraid; our Douglas is becoming a bit of a capitalist since he's had the sniff of real money.”

“I hope he's spent some of it on improving his hygiene and lifestyle.” Then Jennifer said, “So how are things for you?”

He avoided mentioning the potential business arrangement with Douglas. “Same old, same old.”

“And the computer games?”

“I would certainly like more time to spend on that, but when I'm not teaching, I'm too buggered to get the creative juices flowing.”

Jennifer ate more duck, then said, “Have you thought about working for one of the major search engines. With your analytical mind, they would fall over themselves to employ you.”

He looked up from his plate. “I suppose you mean Boogle.”

“Don't knock it. I could have a quiet word in Declan's ear. It'd be more exciting and a lot more lucrative than the LSE.”

Two business opportunities in one day. That had never happened to Nathan before. “Well, it can't do any harm.”

She laughed, “With such unbridled enthusiasm I'll get onto him right away.”

They both laughed.

The evening was going to be okay after all.

I didn't want to go traipsing over to Westlands Insurance, and I didn't want Delia to see the pathetic hovel I worked from, so we settled on a peaceful café amidst the hustle and bustle of Camden Lock, called Ruby Lock. I'd been there a couple of times so I knew the coffee was top notch.

Delia, all boobs and business, handed him a Manilla envelope, saying “Don't look at it now.”

I got her drift. I grabbed a passing waitress, figuratively speaking, and we ordered cappuccinos and this heavenly chocolate Guinness cake they do at Ruby Lock.

Delia said, “We don't like to prosecute clients if we can help it. We want you to encourage Mr Powell to see sense and withdraw the claim. Then we won't press charges.”

“That's easier said than done.”

Pointing to the folder, she said, “That might help you persuade him.”

I smiled, “Then I'll do what I can. But aren't you ethically bound to bring fraud matters to the police?”

“It does bring into question our ethics, your values and those of the claimant. If the complainant has committed a crime, we should prosecute them. However, if we take the matter to court, we may lose, forfeiting the whole amount and end up having to pay expenses. So you need to convince him that should he pursue his fraudulent claim we will level charges against him.”

I had to be sure of my footing. “So by acting on behalf of your company am, I considered a person of authority and would any confession was given by the claimant stand up in a court of law. I mean I could be skating on thin ice here.”

Delia finished coffee. “So what are you saying, Mr Doyle?”

“I'm saying I need one of you guys with me when I interview him.”

She nodded. "You read that and when you're ready to make your move contact me."

Chapter 29

I stepped out of the 'Q' near Valladolid, a city in Castile, in the year 1600. It was 93 years since Christopher Columbus had died there. Now I was on a quest to find his elusive namesake. The city had substantially deteriorated in the last 30 years when Philip II made Madrid the Spanish capital. Valladolid, having lost its position of importance, no longer enjoyed the influence it once had. The city streets were overflowing with garbage, but there wasn't that disgusting cocktail of rotting plants and animal entrails that stank out a much wetter London. I was wearing a tight fitting Jerkin over loose pantaloons and tights. I also wore a weird looking velvet beanie. It seemed to be appropriate for where I was because nobody gave me a second glance. I also knew I would be fluent in the Spanish dialect for this space and time. A big open waggon, pulled by four horses, coming towards me, grabbed my attention. I waved at the sullen looking driver. Then my mouth dropped. His cargo was human bodies wrapped in white shrouds. It seemed as though I'd arrived in the middle of a plague. People witnessing the death cart, crossed themselves and uttered prayers, and just got on with their day-to-day business. Maybe it wasn't infectious, or maybe these people were so stoic they just took what came without complaint. I noticed some celebratory flags and banners showing the Valladolid arms. Apparently, the city had been returned to Capital of Castile status in this year, 1600.

I knew Miguel de Cervantes lived around here somewhere, and he was my link to Marlowe. I knew he had been born in Alcalá de Henares in the old kingdom of Toledo. My Spanish was holding up, and an aged man on a mule pointed me in the right direction.

Miguel de Cervantes lived in a small house in Valladolid. He'd hit hard times and looked tired and worn. His repaired clothes indicated his poor financial state of affairs. He looked physically damaged and held his left hand at an awkward angle. But his intense eyes still burned with a fire of passion. I said, "Are you Senor Cervantes?"

"Who wants to know?"

"My name is Oswald Doyle. I am here to find Christopher Marlowe. I believe you know him."

Miguel looked at the well-dressed stranger with suspicion. "Are you from the Exchequer's office, Senor Doyle?"

So Cervantes was in trouble with his taxes. That could prove useful. "No, I'm only trying to track down Senor Marlowe."

Still unsure, the Spaniard asked, "Are you working for the English?"

I smiled, "No, I'm a historian, and I'm writing about the playwright. I heard you, and Kit were good friends."

He stood aside. "Please come in Senor and I will tell you what I know."

We walked through to his small but fragrant garden with a high wall for his privacy and protection. Cervantes was a proud and brave man who had served his country well and paid a high price, with no recognition by Castille for his service to king and country.

The Spanish writer indicated for Oswald to sit on a wooden seat, while he provided refreshment for his guest. Miguel came back with black coffee, which the playwright pronounced qahwah. "Have you tried this new Arabian drink, Senor?" he asked.

I shook my head and asked, "When did you first meet Christopher Marlowe?"

He looked at the Irishman. "In Lisbon, early April in 1587 as I recall."

"What was Senor Marlowe doing in Lisbon?"

"I did not know it at the time, but I later learned he was scouting for your Senor Drake."

Surprised, I said, "Yet you remained friends."

Miguel smiled, "Life is full of ironies. But let me explain a little of myself to help you understand my position."

I sipped the strong coffee and listened.

I joined the regular army thirty years ago and served under Miguel de Moncada. We sailed from Messina on board the 'Marquesa' which was part of the armada under Don John of Austria. I was sick with a fever when the battle of Lepanto started, but I wanted my share of the fighting. So I dragged myself out of bed and was posted with twelve men under me, in a boat by the side of our galley. I received three gunshot wounds, two in my chest, and this one," he said, showing his maimed left hand."

I realised Miguel was a very brave man, who had suffered much while carrying out heroic deeds for his country. I said, "Now I am even more puzzled."

Cervantes smiled and topped up my coffee cup. "I was hospitalised when our fleet returned to Messina. The Army gave me grants in aid amounting to eighty-two ducats. Following further naval engagements, I became unfit for active service and spent the remainder of my military career in garrisons in Palermo and Naples. Then I was allowed to return here."

I drank my coffee. "What did Marlowe tell you he was doing in Lisbon?"

"He said he was writing a play. I became interested because I too am a poet and playwright."

"Did you tell him what you were doing there?"

"We drank more coffee, which, strong, black and bitter, made me restless and a bit jittery.

Cervantes explained, "We drank too much wine, and I inadvertently told him I was in town working for the Armada supply commissioner from whom I hoped to win a contract requisitioning supplies out of Seville. He became very interested."

I bet he did. "And Senor Marlowe relayed that information to Sir Walter."

"Si Senor, but I did not know that at the time."

"So he got to know the location of the fleet. How did you feel about being betrayed like that once you found out?"

Cervantes smiled, "As a young man, I served my country without question. But after so many battles I was tired of war and cared not about honour and victory. I turned to my literary pursuits. I

signed a contract with Rodrigo Osorio to write six plays at fifty ducats each. Osorio wouldn't pay me for my work unless he considered these dramas to be the best produced in Spain."

"Did he think so?"

Miguel shrugged, "I will never know, Senor. Before I had a chance to write them, The Inquisition imprisoned me at Castro del Rio."

Puzzled, I asked, "Why?"

Another shrug. "It was puzzling to me. The Church agents quickly released me without explanation. But my home was ransacked on that day and other occasions."

"What were the authorities looking for?"

"I don't know. But I did find out that Rodrigo Osorio was a member of the Council of State of Spain and the Supreme Council of the Spanish Inquisition."

Spanish Inquisition. Those two words always make me shudder. "Was there any content in the plays he commissioned that went against the teachings of the Catholic Church?"

Miguel laughed lightly. "They arrested me before I could write anything down but couldn't find anything to charge me with." The Spaniard paused for coffee. "Still my literary ambitions were not dead."

The detective in me couldn't let it go. "Why did they come after you in the first place?"

"Because Kit and I scouted for Essex's Cadiz raid, although I didn't realise that was what I was doing."

Essex's raid! I thought, Sir Walter commanded the fleet."

"No, it was your Second Duke of Essex."

"So when did you twig that something bad was afoot?"

"When we boarded the boats at night and Kit began mixing up the cannonballs, moving them around to different stations so the big guns didn't fire properly."

"How did you feel about that?"

Senor Doyle, I returned from Algiers, thinking I would be getting a hero's welcome and secure employment at court since my war wounds finished my military career."

So what happened?"

"I was just given minor jobs for the king." Cervantes looked at his guest. As I have already mentioned, In 1587 I ended up with the unenviable task of travelling through Andalusia organising supplies for the Great Armada and subsequent naval expeditions. I became disillusioned with my country. I didn't care who won the war, but I did care about my friend, Senor Marlowe."

"So you became a target for the inquisition."

Cervantes smiled thinly, "After the attack on the Spanish fleet in Cadiz harbour, they were looking for Senor Marlowe, but he'd escaped back to England. They questioned me about him, but I knew nothing at the time. It was later that I realised Kit had been using me."

"Yet, even after the way he'd tricked you, you still maintained your friendship with him."

"I never saw him again, Senor."

"Until recently."

Miguel stared at Oswald, wondering how much the historian knew. "Until recently."

"Where is he now?"

"Senor, I have to explain something. Christopher Marlowe did not give Walter Raleigh the Armada coordinates out of love for his country. He did it out of love for Raleigh. Kit thought such a victory would get Sir Walter back in the Queen's favour. Senor Marlowe did not want to be a spy. Like me, he was a victim of circumstances."

"So where can I find him?" I asked, becoming irritated.

"Senor, I have to be very careful with my friend. I know what happened to him in England and of his miraculous escape. There are those who are after him, even in Valladolid. For all, I know you could be one of them."

It made sense. Miguel was protecting a friend. I said, "If that were so, Senor Cervantes, you would be back in prison, being tortured, until you gave Marlowe up."

Miguel said, "You are probably right, Senor Doyle, so I will speak with Kit the next time I see him. He can decide if he wants to see you."

This protectiveness was very frustrating. I had to see the man for myself. Miguel Cervantes was my only link, so I mustn't pressure him. "Senor Cervantes, I will call on you tomorrow to let you know where I am staying."

Gerard Fox quickened his step as he entered the High Court, which had granted special leave application to the UK Patent Office to argue for the confiscation of patent number 222567. Jennifer had dreaded this day coming. But now it had arrived she put on a brave face. The case was to be held in camera. Gerard caught up with Jennifer in the waiting area. They hugged, and he said, "Hi Jennifer, how are you feeling?"

She'd taken his advice and dressed as though it was a business meeting, but underneath she was feeling helpless. "Do we have much of a chance?"

He looked her in the eye. "Our argument is that the invention is educational in nature."

"Is it a strong enough argument for us to win the case?"

"That my dear Jennie is an unknown factor. If we can get the judge on our side, we might just swing it. We have Justice Morton. He is somewhat more liberal in his views concerning government interference than most, so fingers crossed."

Jennifer thought, fingers crossed! If it's that much of a lottery, Goliath would probably win. She felt a shiver shoot up her spine.

The Crown Office, fronted by Louise Crowden QC made its case. Then Gerard got up and argued, "Patent 222567 falls under the educational category and, as such, poses no threat to the public, Your Honour."

Louise got up, "Your honour, the Crown argues that at any time after a design application disclosing a plan has been filed or a design has been registered, the Commonwealth or a State, or a person authorised in writing by the Commonwealth or a State, may use the design for the services of the said Commonwealth or State."

Gerard, consulting his notes, got to his feet. "Your Honour, it seems that the Patent Office is becoming more paranoid than that of our cousins in the United States. UK patents are being declared state secrets more than three times as often as those filed in the US. Your Honour, an average of nine secrecy orders were imposed for every 10,000 patents filed in the UK since 2003, compared with less than three per 10,000 lodged in the US."

Louise countered, "The defence is getting away from the point, your Honour. This case is specifically about patent 222567, not Crown Office policy."

Gerard objected, "But it is precisely because of Crown Office policy that my client is being subjected to this 'witch hunt' today. Your Honour last year the Ministry of Defence spent £2.4 billion (0.56 percent of GDP), or 9 percent of overall UK R&D funding. None of which was used in quantum research. Your Honour, patent 222567 uses quantum technology. So why would the MOD show interest in it? This whole business is a Big Brother scam."

Louise stood up. "Your Honour, a secrecy order has been applied for this patent, and all this showcasing by the defence is irrelevant."

The Judge asked, "What is a secrecy order, council?"

"Your Honour, a secrecy order is applied to a patent if the Patent Office staff and their military advisers think the idea could be used to threaten national security. A patent cannot then be published until the technology is no longer considered to be a threat."

Gerard sneered, "Your Honour, how can patent number 222567 be considered a threat. It's not a weapon. It's an educational tool."

"To help pupils learn about quantum science?" The judge queried.

"No, Your Honour. Quantum science is the vehicle for helping students learn about history."

Louise, said, "Perhaps the inventor of patent 222567 would like to come forward and tell us how it works, Your Honour."

Gerard stood, saying, "Your Honour, the function of this invention is described in the patent application form, exhibit 1a in your bundle."

The justice thumbed through the folder, then he said, "What is meant by 'quantum space assimilation' Professor Smethurst?"

Surprised at being addressed by the judge, she stood up, but Gerard beat her to it. “Your honour I request a 30-minute recess to confer with my client about this.”

Louise jumped up. “I strongly object, your Honour, These are just delaying tactics to cook up some story to make their case.”

“Objection overruled. Council, I'll grant you 10 minutes. The court is adjourned.”

Following the recess, Justice Morton looked straight at Jennifer. “Professor Smethurst, are you ready to explain quantum space assimilation?”

Jennifer came forward and faced the bench. “It's very complex your Honour, but I will do my best.”

“Very well, go ahead.”

“The latest research into quantum science has it that quantum wave function when it collapses, has to with consciousness. Our knowledge determines what we experience as our reality. Your Honour, My 'Quantime' – the name I give to my invention – uses quantum wave function to allow a subject to experience a different reality.”

Justice Morton scratched his chin. “I have to confess I don't understand your reference to reality. Surely if something is real, then it's real. How can a reality possibly be changed?”

Jennifer answered, “I told you it was complex, your Honour. Only quantum scientists can grasp this, and most of those are still stumbling around in the quantum mechanics dark ages.”

Gerard stood up. “If I may, Your Honour. Professor Smethurst is the only scientist to have achieved this technology. Just imagine, if you will, your Honour, experiencing a historical reality different to the one you are having now. Patent 222567 is possibly the greatest tool to help us know our history for real.”

Louise objected, “Your Honour, this is just a clever ploy to cover up the real use of this invention. Quantum consciousness changing indeed! What a joke.”

“It's not a joke!” Jennifer exploded.

Louise Crowden stated, “Any Inventions related to cryptography, uranium enrichment and biological and chemical weapons are often made secret. Governments won't confirm it, but seemingly good designs can also be made secret if they could have a 'dual-use'. For example, an airborne crop duster that might be used to spread bioweapons.”

Gerard Fox objected, “That's all very well, but this invention isn't related to any of those things, your Honour.”

“Edgar Murphy stood up. “If I might comment, your Honour.”

“Who might you be?” the justice asked, startled by the interjection.

“Edgar Murphy, from the Crown Office.”

“Do you wish to give testimony?”

“Yes, your Honour.”

“Very well, you may take the stand.”

Louise addressed the witness. “Mr Murphy, what is your role where patent 222567 is concerned?”

“I represent the Crown Office in cases of questionable patents.”

“And do you consider that patent 222567 comes under that category?”

Edgar smirked, “We wouldn't be here otherwise.” He added, “Your Honour, many technical patents come under our scrutiny. Most of these, having been checked by MoD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, Wiltshire, are deemed acceptable. If Professor Smethurst claims that her invention is not a national security risk, then she should have no problem with MoD looking into it.”

Gerard was on his feet. “Mr Murphy, who in the Crown Office, decided to classify patent 222567 as a possible security risk?”

Edgar hesitated, “I don't know exactly. Whoever it was followed MoD procedure.”

Facing the justice, Gerard said, “I would like to question whoever made that decision, your Honour.”

“To what end, may I ask?”

“To see what qualification they had to judge the risk factor of this technology.”

Louise jumped up. “This is ridiculous, your Honour. it's just more delaying tactics by the defence.”

Gerard countered, “It's an entirely reasonable request, your Honour. My client has the right to know of the competence of the person who has questioned her patent.”

Justice Morton considered himself a fair man. He rubbed his chin then said, “Request granted. Mr Murphy, make sure you have this employee ready to answer to this court tomorrow. Court adjourned for the day.”

Chapter 30

I discovered that Valladolid, although smaller than Madrid, was primarily as advanced as London in the 1500s but with a much smaller population, especially, as mentioned, after Phillip moved his court from there to Madrid in 1561. Madrid saw a massive increase in population, which resulted in a shortage of living space and proper sewage. Madrid was deemed the filthiest city in Europe at that time. For this reason, I opted to stay at an Inn in Valladolid.

Following a reasonably comfortable night, I dressed and breakfasted and prepared myself to meet with Cervantes again. I only had the clothes I stood up in, and after wearing them for one day in Spain's hot climate, they already smelled of stale sweat. I didn't have enough ducats in the piggy bank to buy a new outfit so what I wore would have to do. Getting into the bloody things was a nightmare. I just wasn't used to tights and pantaloons. And the tight jacket constricted my chest. And Spaniards actually fought in this getup!

The day was already warming up as I walked to Miguel's house. I got the sense he didn't want me to speak with Marlowe and, as he held the cards, I would have to be more convincing.

It was the modern day equivalent of rush hour, with horses, donkeys and other beasts of burden pulling carriages, carts and waggons along dusty, detritus-laden streets. Sticking to the shadows so my clothes weren't sticking to me, I found my way back to Cervantes' house.

The drink helped the Spanish dramatist forget, but some memories refused to go away, no matter how drunk he became. A warrant still existed (dated September 15, 1569) for the arrest of one Miguel de Cervantes, who had wounded Antonio de Sigura. They had condemned him, in his absence, to have his right hand cut off and exile from the capital for ten years. He felt safe in Rome in the household of Cardinal Acquaviva and had no wish to return to Spain and suffer the loss of his writing hand. He smiled wryly; there was a certain irony in that he lost the use of his left hand during the sea battles. He studied the half empty wine bottle. It had been full two hours previously. Then he heard the knock at his door.

I sensed Miguel was slightly the worse for the drink, as he stood swaying in the doorway. "Hello Miguel, are you well today."

The Spaniard made a so, so gesture and invited the historian through to his garden, As they sat down he said, "I couldn't find the inspiration to write my play, but Senor Marlowe has helped me regain my creative flow." He meandered on, as though talking to himself. "I am writing again, but Don Quixote needs the master's input. You see how valuable Christopher is to me, Senor Doyle. He is my right hand."

I could see that Cervantes had been beaten down and looked old and grey beyond his years. But the sparkle in the eyes was still there. He needed Marlowe to himself; caged liked a bird. If it were not so nobody would be able to enjoy the story of the old knight tilting at windmills. I accepted the glass of red wine he offered me, and said, "I am no threat to Senor Marlowe. I merely want to speak with him to get his story for my book."

Miguel stared at Ossie. "Did anybody follow you here?"

"It's difficult to tell."

“They are agents of the Inquisition. They usually have black cloaks and hide in the shadows.”

As Ossie had walked in the shade where possible, he said, “I never noticed anybody.”

“If they have followed you here they will arrest you and throw you into prison. The Church spies want nothing better than to throw me in gaol again, but they can't get anything on me.”

“Then you're safe.”

“For now, Senor, for now.”

Richard Bilden stared out at the court from the witness stand.

Back in Twenty-First Century London, Gerard asked, “Mr Bilden, you dealt with patent 222567. What was it about this patent that alerted you to red flag it?”

“I'd need to look at the application to tell you that, your Honour.”

Gerard smiled, “It's in front of you, Mr Bilden.” Turning to Justice Morton, he said, “It's exhibit one in your bundle, your Honour.”

Richard scrutinised the form. Looking across to the judge, he said, “It didn't seem to fit in with any category we had listed.”

Gerard said, “Don't you have a category for quantum science?”

“We have a category for inventions to do with quantum mechanics, but the word mechanics wasn't mentioned anywhere on the application.”

Jennifer interjected, “That's because it has nothing to do with quantum mechanics.”

Justice Morton said, “Mr Fox, please control your client.”

Richard continued, “Anything we can't categorise gets put in the investigation basket. It just follows a procedure.”

Gerard said, “Then it's a flawed system, especially in the age of new technology.” He turned to the justice. “Your Honour, who at MoD's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, understands the workings of quantum biology?”

The Justice, said, “Perhaps you would like to address that, Mr Murphy.”

“Murphy got to his feet. “We have some competent scientists dealing with the aspect of quantum mechanics.”

Gerard said, “You haven't been listening, Mr Murphy. I'm talking about quantum biology, not quantum mechanics.”

“I wasn't aware they were different,” Murphy said.

“As different as chalk and cheese,” Gerard snapped.

Justice Morton said, “This is not a school playground. Behave yourselves.” He added, “I have a question, Ms Crowden. If nobody knew what this invention is about, why was it summarily red-flagged?”

Louise joined the fray. “Your Honour, We can’t say why this is the case. We try to downgrade patent classifications to maximise patent exploitability as much as possible.”

The judge asked, “Ms Crowden, have you seen patent 222567 for yourself.”

“I have,” Murphy piped up. “Professor Smethurst tried to pass it off as a quantum computer network.” Becoming officious, he said, “Lying about your patent can have serious consequences.”

Louise said, “When it comes to sensitive designs we look for indications that would put it in the category of Black projects.”

“Explain 'Black Projects'.” Justice Morton ordered.

“Black projects include such things as stealth technology. Cryptographic and nuclear systems, Louise responded.

“So how does this patent fit the black projects category?” Gerard challenged.

Justice Morton banged his gavel. “This isn't some free for all. You will address any comments through this bench. It appears, Ms Crown, that nobody seems to know why this case has gone to court. So I will put the question to you, Ms Crowden. How does this invention, that the Crown Office seem to know nothing about, fit into the black projects category?”

Louise smiled, “Your Honour, We categorised it such because we deemed it as military technology, prejudicial to national security or public safety.”

“Fox argued, “The patent isn't a weapon, so why is it deemed such, your Honour?”

Louise explained, “Your Honour it comes under the Patents Act of 1977. It deals with details of the military technology, included in a list of such technologies redacted for reasons of national security under section 24(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and that the Information Commissioner has upheld this redaction.”

Fox objected strongly, “So you can simply make a bold statement about something you know nothing about and not have to back it up. That's totally unacceptable. If you want to broker some deal with my client, you'll have to do better than that.”

Murphy scowled, “Your Honour HM government doesn't make deals with rogue inventors. We can walk into her place tomorrow and confiscate everything if we like.”

“Then why haven't you done so, Mr Murphy?” Gerard retorted. “I'll tell you why. It's because only Professor Smethurst understands how her patent works. You need her to teach others how to use it.”

Louise said, “I haven't seen this patent work. Nor has anyone else. But if Professor Smethurst claims patent 222567 to be some time machine based on some bizarre theory of 'quantum' travel then we need a demonstration.”

Gerard said, “Your Honour if Ms Crowden hasn't seen this ' quantum time machine' actually working how does she know it works?”

“Until expert military personnel have studied it we won't know. for sure, your Honour,” she rebutted.

Fox said, "So, if you don't know if or how it works how can you confiscate this device under Patents Act 1977?" He paused for effect, then explained. "Patented military technology consists of a set of inventions which nature, uses or/and applications that have made for defensive or offensive purposes. Even if it does do what the inventor purports, which is highly unlikely, it, in no way, comes under such a listing. Your Honour, the government's petition to confiscate this patent should be withdrawn."

Murphy, sensing Louise was losing ground, stood and said, "Your Honour, our objective is to identify if the knowledge embedded in this military technology diffuses into other patented technologies. The Patents Act 1977 has a provision for including future technologies that are not entirely understood to come under the scrutiny of the military for reasons of national defence. Until such a time as we know this patent is not a threat to national security it is too dangerous to be left in the inventor's hands; we have the right to confiscate it."

Fox had the wind taken out of his sails. He had to rebut but what could he say. He stood up. "Under this provision how long can the examiners take to make their decision?"

Murphy said, "As long as it takes for them to satisfy there is no national threat involved."

Justice Morton interrupted, "So let's say this technology goes way beyond current knowledge to do with 'time travel' and the Crown Commissioner has the right to confiscate the patent indefinitely, nobody benefits."

Gerard conferred with a shaken Jennifer. He then rose, "Your Honour, my client is willing to work in close cooperation with the investigation team to show them how it works. If it is deemed a national threat and not a national asset, my client is willing to relinquish the patent. Surely this outcome should meet with Crown Office approval as it provides a win, win situation all round."

The adjudicator said, "I have heard vague arguments from both sides on this somewhat vexing matter, and I will deliberate on this issue based on the evidence provided. I will let both sides know my decision in due course."

Cervantes poured more wine, which Ossie accepted. The Spaniard drifted back into aspects of his life story. As they clinked glasses, spilling some of the ruby content, Miguel reminisced, "It was in May, five years back, I won the first prize -- three silver spoons - at a poetical tourney held in honour of St. Hyacinth, in Saragossa. My creative juices had returned. I put my troubles behind me, Senor. I was primed and ready to work on Don Quixote. Then my world crashed in on me again."

His waxing on about creative juices returning had me yawning. But know I was interested. "What happened, Miguel?"

I found myself in difficulties with the exchequer officials. I had entrusted a sum of 7400 reals to a merchant named Simón Freire de Lima with instructions to pay the amount into the Treasury in

Miguel de Cervantes - NNDB. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.nndb.com/people/069/000084814/>

Madrid; the agent became bankrupt and absconded, leaving me responsible for the deficit. By some means, I raised the money, and liquidated the debt."

“By some means?”

“On the 21st of January 1597, I received the amount from an anonymous source.”

“Did you ever find out your benefactor's identity?”

“It had to be Marlowe, through Raleigh probably. But Christopher has never mentioned it.”

“You were fortunate indeed.”

Miguel slowly shook his drooping head. “I was still shaken by the cheating agent. My un-business like habits lent themselves to misinterpretation. On the 6th of September 1597, I was ordered to find sureties that I would present myself in Madrid within twenty days, and there submit to the exchequer vouchers for all official money collected by him in Granada and elsewhere. No such sureties being available, Once again I was committed to Seville jail, but they released me on the 1st of December on condition that I complied with the original order of the court within thirty days.”

I finished the wine. A combination of The heat and the alcohol made me feel drowsy. “Did you comply?” I yawned.

“Alas, I was unable to find bail, and I sank into extreme poverty. I fear the Inquisition will come for me again, and I may not survive prison next time.”

“So the anonymous benefactor didn't come to your aid this time.”

“Miguel smiled thinly. I have served my purpose with the English secret service.”

I didn't know how Cervantes, who had drunk far more wine than I that morning, managed to hold it together but he remained relatively coherent. I brought the subject back to Marlowe. “What made Senor Marlowe think you would make a good spy for him?”

“Senor Doyle, I left home with no money. I joined the Spanish secret service. Christopher knew this.” Miguel chuckled, recollecting an old memory. “He referred to me as Manco and used the nickname in cybers between us.”

“Why Manco?”

Cervantes laughed, “Because I lost the use of my left hand, at Lepanto.”

Changing the subject, I said, “When can I see Marlowe?”

“When he contacts me I will ask him, Senor.”

I could see Miguel was a broken man. His difficult life was crushing him. He was hanging onto Marlowe as a drowning man clutches at a life belt. He'd fallen asleep slumped back in his seat. I took a couple of snapshots without him knowing. As I left his humble home, I noticed two dark-clad men hiding in the shadows. It was time to leave Spain. Disappointed about not seeing Marlow I found a remote spot and pressed the pendant.

“Is that Miguel Cervantes?” Jennifer queried, looking at the slumped figure in the photograph.

Eyeing the near perfect image from the new improved Qcam, I proudly said, “It sure is.”

She looked at the other images Ossie had taken. Turning to him, she said, "Still no pictures of Marlowe."

"Cervantes won't let me near him. I'm breaking him down, but I'll have to go back there."

"Why didn't you stay longer and finish the job?"

"Because some inquisition spooks were taking an interest in me."

"And you want to go back!"

"Jen, I'm so close to getting the proof I need."

She looked at Ossie. The experience had taken a lot out of him. "You need some rest."

He yawned, "You're probably right."

Then I'll bring you up to speed with the court case."

"What court case?"

"Smethurst v HM government."

I couldn't wait. "Tell me, Jen."

"Rest, then we'll talk."

"Oh come on! I can't sleep until I know."

"The judge has yet to make his ruling."

"Bloody hell Jen! How can you remain so calm?"

"Just go to bed, Ossie."

Chapter 31

“OPEN UP, POLICE!” Jennifer, scared, froze.

Again, “OPEN THIS DOOR NOW!”

Heading for the front door, she said, “What do you want?”

“Just open the door, Professor Smethurst.”

Hastily throwing on a tracksuit, Jennifer staggered to the door.

Nervous fingers fumbled with the lock. Then the door was opened. Staring at the man at the head of the police tactical response team, she uttered, “What are you doing here, Mr Murphy?”

Thrusting a piece of paper at the trembling blonde woman, he said, “This is a possession order. Now let us in.”

Confused, she got pushed aside as Murphy and six heavily armed men entered her home.

As the armed police searched the farmhouse room by room, Jennifer stared at the piece of paper with the Crown Office seal. Looking at the government man, she said, “You can't do this. The judge hasn't made his decision yet.”

Murphy said, “Read the order. Justice Morton ruled in our favour. Your invention is now the property of the Crown Office.”

“No! This ruling can't be right!”

“Professor Smethurst, Take me to your machine, now.”

“Not before I phone my lawyer.”

Murphy smirked, “He can't help you now. There will be no more delaying tactics.”

Woken, by the racket of heavy footsteps and slamming doors, I sat bolt upright as two, armed police officers burst into my room. “What the Fuck!”

Without a word they grabbed me, pulling me out of bed.

“What the hell is ...”

“Come with us, sir.”

“Why? What's this about?” I demanded as they forced me down the stairs. Then I saw Jennifer, talking to a guy who looked something like Woody Allen. She looked terrible, pale and very anxious. “Jen, are you okay.”

Murphy looked at the restrained man standing there in just his jockey shorts. “And who are you?”

“More to the point, who the fuck are you? Did this fucking country turn into a police state while I was napping?”

Jennifer answered, “This is Mr Murphy from the Crown Office. He's here to take away the 'Q'.”

“Fuck! No!”

The heavies pushed me into a chair. One of them said, "Answer the question."

"Doyle. Oswald Doyle." I snarled, "You bastards have got no right to ..."

"On the contrary, we have every right. Ask Professor Smethurst," Murphy said, smugly. Turning to Jennifer he ordered, "Take Sergeant Matthison to your machine and get it ready for transportation."

Jennifer froze. "It's not that easy."

"Give me the keys to your laboratory, or the sergeant will kick the door in."

I felt helpless with these thugs looming over me. Frustrated and thoroughly pissed off, I said, "Listen to the professor, you fool. It's not just like unplugging a fucking computer, you moron."

Jennifer turned to Ossie, "You're not helping. Just stay calm. I'll deal with this." She turned back to Murphy, "All right, I'll start dismantling it, but first I need to phone my lawyer."

Murphy sneered, "I already told you, he can't help you. Now take me to the lab."

With the government man and the police sergeant in tow, she opened up her lab. Doing so, Jennifer turned to Murphy. "This is very complex and could take quite a while."

"Just get on with it," the Crown Office man ordered.

"Don't hurry me. This device is very delicate. If you don't want it damaged, I'll need time to take it apart."

It made sense. Murphy wanted the device in perfect working order. "All right, but if you drag your feet, these gentlemen will dismantle it for you. Do you understand?"

Jennifer, horrified at the thought of some moron ripping it to pieces, said, "Mr Murphy, you win, so I'm going to cooperate with you. There is no need to hurt anyone or damage anything. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll attend to dismantling the 'QSA.'"

"Get on with it then."

"All right, Now give me some space."

Seeing the officious little prick enter the room, I asked, "Where are you taking the 'Q'?"

Murphy said, "What's your part in this, Mr Doyle?"

"Jennifer is my friend, and she's a scientific genius. You need to treat her with more respect."

"As long as she cooperates, there'll be no problems."

"You haven't answered my question, Mr Murphy, I pressed."

Murphy smiled thinly, "That's because I don't have to tell you anything."

As Jennifer set about her task, it became apparent to her that she couldn't disassemble her invention in one piece. The Quantime had been constructed in the laboratory and had stayed there. The quantum scientist had created it piece by piece as a fixed entity, and she wasn't sure how to go about dismantling it. She turned to Sergeant Matthison, "Get me, Murphy; I have to speak with him."

The police officer talked to his radio, and the government man entered the lab.

“What do you want, professor?”

“The QSA was constructed in this room. I will have to transport it in pieces.”

“So, what's the problem?”

“The problem is rebuilding it. Look, I have only constructed it once and...”

“Professor. Just get on with it.”

“Mr Murphy, It could take days to complete the job. May I suggest that your scientists come here, where I can show them how everything works.”

“My orders are to transport this thing to the Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. And I always carry out my orders.”

Exasperated Jennifer, at the end of her tether, exploded, “JESUS MURPHY, DO YOU WANT TO WASTE TIME WHILE I SPEND DAYS, EVEN WEEKS, PUTTING THIS TOGETHER AGAIN?”

Blasted by her outburst, Murphy, taken aback, saw merit in her suggestion. He stood back, took out his phone, and asked to speak with the director.

I saw Jen enter the lounge, with two heavies in tow. “I said, Jen, what's going on?”

Before she had a chance to answer, The Crown Office man took her to one side. “Okay, we agree to your suggestion with certain conditions. “This property now comes under the possession order and is now officially part of Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. Secondly, you will move out while our investigation takes place. Thirdly, you will make yourself available if and when we need your advice. Do you agree to these conditions?”

“Now I do need my lawyer.”

“Very well, you can have your call.”

Surprised at his change of heart, she rang Gerard.

Groggy from his interrupted sleep; hearing the panic in Jennifer's voice, he said, “What's happening?”

“Murphy has turned up with armed cops to take the QSA.”

“Don't do a thing. I'll be there in 20 minutes.”

Jennifer went over to Murphy. “He'll be here in 20 minutes.”

“In the meantime, you can start packing the things you'll need.”

“For how long?”

Murphy shrugged, “I have no idea.”

“Not good enough. And I want the government to foot the bill for my expenses while I'm away.”

Murphy undid his briefcase and extracted a bound file. From it, he took a form. Handing it to Jennifer, he said, "This is highly unusual, Professor Smethurst but this form tells you how to apply for expenses."

Jennifer crossed her arms. "I'll wait for my legal representative before I do anything."

"As you wish," Murphy said.

"Also I need to let my shareholders know what's going on."

Murphy smiled, "Go ahead and phone them."

She pressed Declan's contact.

Declan, speaking into his hands-free phone said, "Hi Jennifer, how are you?"

"I've had better days. The Gestapo are here to take over the QSA."

"What the hell do you mean?"

"I hear road noises. Are you driving at the moment."

"Yes, but that's okay."

"I think you should pull over."

Declan slowed down and stopped on the hard shoulder. "Now, what the hell is this all about?"

"The government has decided to investigate my invention. I won't have access to it for a while."

"Is that going to be a problem?"

"I don't think so. But I might need the influence of Boogle a bit down the track."

"Okay, Jennifer, keep me informed."

The government toady's friendly attitude made me suspicious. Murphy had something up his Savile Row sleeve, and I wanted to know what it was. I was also concerned that I wouldn't get to see Marlowe in Spain. I know such a thought was selfish of me, but the idea of never going in the Quantime again freaked me. It's impossible to describe quantime realities to anybody, as nobody but Declan and myself have ever experienced such a phenomenon. I had to have my 'Q' assimilation fix. Even more important I had to finish the case, even if I was my client.

While we waited for Gerard Fox to turn up, Jennifer made us coffee.

Murphy said, "What about my people. They could probably do with a cup."

Jennifer ignored him.

I said, "You've got a bloody nerve. It's not your place yet." My heart was pumping hard; my mind was in a spin. I had to do something. Then I was doing it! The atmosphere had become relaxed. Everything seemed cordial. Too bloody friendly. I snuck out of the room and rushed to the lab. The door was open. I went in, grabbed the Qcam, which was on Jen's desk, and got into the 'Q'. Activating a small control panel I scanned through some options and pressed the previous assimilation.

The Crown Office man didn't miss a trick. He followed Ossie out of the room and watched him enter the lab. What happened next had Murphy rooted to the spot. It wasn't possible. His mind was playing tricks. One second the man was in the machine. Then he'd disappeared. He moved closer to the remote orange device and was about to step inside when he heard her shout. "DON'T DO IT. YOU'RE NOT TRAINED FOR IT!"

Murphy stopped dead still. He turned to face Jennifer. "What do you mean?"

Her mind was screaming, Ossie you idiot, what the fuck have you done now?

Chapter 32

The young man blended in with the market crowd. He looked younger than his years. His looks and boyish charm beguiled both males and females. As he sat quietly alone, drinking wine outside, near the entrance of the cantina, Marlowe reminisced the events that had taken him to that point. Since escaping England under somewhat of a cloud, he'd found his feet with Miguel's help. In return for food and shelter, Kit Marlowe helped Cervantes find his muse by throwing in ideas for Don Quixote. Marlowe's influence was the reason many of the English playwright's life happenings turned up in the story. Kit's courtship of his first wife in 'Candaya' was described by the Afflicted Matron in section 38 of Part II. Marlowe persuaded Cervantes to leave out the end of the romance, which was too personal and uncomfortable for him to use.

Then, while staying in Padua, Rita came into his life. Their marriage, though short, left him with many warm memories. So overjoyed was Kit when he learned of her pregnancy. So devastated was he when she passed away during childbirth. Lost with no sense of direction Kit turned to Miguel Cervantes, his only real friend in Spain. Marlowe, in the depths of despair, felt he wouldn't have been able to cope were it not for Cervantes' generosity. Manco, hearing of his friend's grief, invited him to bring the infant and stay with him in Seville.

As he sipped the wine, sitting at a table out the front of the Cantina, oblivious to looks cast his way by passers-by, Kit thought about the arduous journey to Seville and his friend's protection. Leaving Padua in the spring of 1595, using a cow as a pack animal for his meagre belongings, he took his baby girl and her nanny to Spain. Marlowe could not forget the painful, hot slog over the rugged Spanish mountains, where they came across the almost-dead Cardenio lying unconscious on the trail. The nanny, who had nursing skills, revived him, and the troubled youth man told Marlowe he wanted to die for his lost love. They fed him and took him back to his family home. Marlowe recalled how later both Cervantes and he had written the young man into their work. He had written 'Cardenio', which got played at Phillip's Royal Court, while Manco put part of the story into several parts of Don Quixote I. Marlowe finished his wine and set off to see Miguel.

I arrived in Spain – but which Spain? The thing with quantum assimilation is that, if you're not careful, you can end up in a different version of reality to the one you are expecting. As soon as I stepped out of the pod, I felt nauseous, and reality kept changing from the 17th century to the 21st century. One moment the view was that of a peaceful rural scene, the next a motorway teeming with traffic. What the hell was happening to me? I bent double in pain and vomited on the ground. I thought about getting back in the 'Q', but I decided against it. At last, my mind settled on one reality, the Seventeenth Century, thankfully. And nausea seemed to be passing. My heart was still beating twenty to the dozen. I took some deep breaths while trying to figure out what was happening to me. I put it down to the fact that I'd leapt into the 'Q' stressed and panicking. Usually, I'm relaxed, except for that first time.

Back in Valladolid, I sought out Cervantes, at his home. When I got there, the house seemed to be empty, except for a couple of dark-clad men with broad-brimmed hats. One of them brandished a flintlock pistol.

I said, "No need for violence, Senor. I just came here to visit Miguel."

The taller of the two, the one pointing his gun at the visitor, spat, "So where is he?"

"I don't know, Senor. Perhaps he has gone shopping."

The Spaniard demanded, "What is your name?"

"Oswald Doyle,"

"Are you Irish Catholic?"

"Yes. Why else would I come here?"

He eyed the stranger up and down. "Do you know the whereabouts of Christopher Marlowe?"

I nearly said, I wish, but I didn't. Instead, I acted surprised. "In a grave in London. Why?"

The shorter one whipped out a dagger and held it to the Irishman's throat. "Do not take us for fools. Senor.

"I wouldn't dream of it. I saw the grave myself."

The taller one turned to his companion, "This is a waste of time. This idiot knows nothing."

The pair exited the house leaving me to wonder about my next move. Cervantes had packed up and left but where had he gone? And why had he left in such a hurry?

Cervantes, about to turn in for the night, had heard a knock at his door. Thinking it might be agents of the Inquisition, He armed himself with a pistol. Miguel couldn't stand another sentence in prison. Who is it?" he asked, nervously.

"Kit. Let me in."

Miguel attended to the locks and let his friend inside his home.

Marlowe embraced his friend. "Manco, I've heard the word that Cardinal Acquaviva is to have you hauled before the Inquisition. I have come to warn you."

"Then I must leave here, quickly."

"I will help you but where will you go?"

"I have been thinking of travelling through Andalusia. I haven't been there for a while. Now seems a good time to go."

Kit thought about how his family had lived with Cervantes in Seville for over a year, and how, when he had to return to England, Miguel cared for little Isabella and became very fond of the child. Manco, I can't thank you enough for the way you have looked after us. If there is any way I can help."

"Your inspiration and belief in my work is more than enough, my friend. Besides, little Isabella has brought great joy to my life. I am even working on 'The Spanish-English Girl' a play about her."

"Let me help you load the cart and I will travel with you part of the way."

I checked with a neighbour. The man said He'd heard noises during the night and saw Miguel and another man loading a donkey cart. He couldn't make out who the second man was. My heart

skipped a beat. Was it Marlowe helping Cervantes to pack his things? The neighbour couldn't offer any more information, and I was none-the-wiser. What was I to do? The sensible thing would have been to hop aboard the 'Q'. But to do so would blow my one chance of meeting Marlowe. Was I kidding myself? I hadn't a clue where either of them was, and I had no one to ask. The only people who might know Miguel's whereabouts worked for the Inquisition, and I could hardly go there and ask. Things were looking very shaky Then I got an idea. I spent a tedious and tiring day calling on people who lived on routes out of the city. Of those at home, nobody had taken any notice of two men with a donkey cart. Why would they? Donkey carts were a common site. But playwrights aren't! If Cervantes were going away, he would need to stock up on paper and ink. Ink he could make in the usual way, with soot, gum and water. But he'd get his paper from the printers. It was late in the day and by the time I located the printers were they were closed. I was tired and hungry, and I needed somewhere to stay. Then it struck me. Cervantes' house was vacant.

As Cervantes and Marlowe travelled south on the donkey cart, Miguel asked, "What happened to little Isabella after you took her away?"

Marlowe said, "After Essex's raid, we sailed for England, aboard the third admiral's flagship. I told Admiral Thomas Howard I wanted her brought up by a kind, generous, English family. Much to my pleasant surprise, he offered to take care of her."

"That was very fortunate, my friend."

"Indeed it was, Manco because he was Lord Howard de Walden, who became Earl of Suffolk, and he had a big family home at Audley End."

Miguel said, "Kit, why don't you come travelling with me. We can have some great adventures together."

Kit shook his head. "Alas, I have other commitments that need my attention. Write and let me know what you are doing."

Looking up at the darkening sky as the red tendrils of the setting sun spread across the horizon, Manco said, "Stay with me one night before you carry out what you have to do."

Marlowe smiled, "Then we'd better build a fire."

Murphy speaking privately, stared at Jennifer. "He disappeared before my eyes."

Jennifer smiled, "And you're going to put that in your report?"

"Yes. No. Well maybe. Now tell me what happened."

"How do I know. I wasn't there."

Murphy scowled, "You've made a machine that makes people disappear And want to know what happened and why."

"He didn't disappear."

"Yes, he did."

“He appeared somewhere else.”

“So where did he go?”

“Wherever the device had been programmed to work. Though strictly speaking Mr Doyle didn't go anywhere. He just arrived somewhere different to here.”

Frustrated, angry, bewildered, Murphy said, “If you're misleading me you could end up in prison.”

Jennifer said, I'm not misleading you, but only a handful of advanced scientists can make any sense of it so how can you possibly grasp what I'm saying. I've made it as simple and as clear as I can.”

Murphy pressed, "Professor Smethurst, how is it possible for somebody to simply disappear, not go anywhere, but arrive somewhere?”

“It's possible because the technology is possible, Mr Murphy.”

Murphy, stuck for words, eventually said, “Has Mr Doyle done that before?”

“Yes.”

“So he will be back.”

“I don't know, this time. But I would imagine so, yes.”

“So where has he been?”

Before she could answer, a knock at the door was followed by, “A lawyer is here to see the professor.”

Murphy said, “You can talk with him, but I want to be present.”

Jennifer said, “Give me ten minutes with him alone; then you can join us.”

Begrudgingly he agreed and nodded at Gerard as they passed in the doorway.

“Looks like you've had some fun and games, Jennifer,” Gerard grinned.

“I persuaded him to carry out his investigation here, but now I have to move out while they unleash their scientists on the QSA.”

“And how do you feel about that?” Gerard asked, taking a seat.

“I'm not happy about it.”

“Then don't agree to it.”

“Then I'll have to dismantle it so they can test it at Porta down. And I don't know if I can. I've never had to dismantle it before now.”

Gerard thought about it. Then he said, “They only need access to your laboratory. Do you mind not using it while they are testing the QSA?”

“I don't see that I have any choice in the matter.”

“Then there's no reason why you can't use the rest of your house.” Seeing a hint of doubt in Jennifer's expression, he said, “There's something else, isn't there?”

“Doyle was desperate to arrive back in Seventeenth-Century Spain. Before I had chance to stop Ossie, he'd got in the QSA,”

“Oh!”

“That's not the worst bit, Gerry.” She paused, then said, “Murphy saw him disappear. His freaking out about it.”

“Oh, that's probably not good.” He asked, did you say he was imagining things or did you explain what had happened.”

“He demanded an explanation.”

“And you gave him one.”

“Yes.”

“Damn, that's not good either. You might as well have been speaking Swahili. As far as he's concerned, you've invented something that makes people disappear. That makes it a dangerous weapon.”

“Good lord! I hadn't thought of it like that,” Jennifer muttered, looking as though she'd just seen a ghost.”

Murphy joined the pair and listened to Gerard's proposals. He added for emphasis, “You do have a right to investigate the QSA, but you have no legal right to turn Professor Smethurst out of her home.”

Murphy responded, “I admit it would be simpler all round to agree to your request, on the proviso Professor Smethurst doesn't go anywhere near the laboratory while the investigation continues.”

“I think we can live with that.”

“Also that she doesn't talk to any of the scientists about their work and that they have access to the kitchen and the bathroom as needed.”

“Very well, I agree, Jennifer said.”

“One other thing, Mr Murphy, None of your personnel will sleep on the premises. They will only be here during their regular working hours.”

“Agreed, but there will always be at least one armed police officer guarding the entrance to the laboratory.”

“Very well. I think we can agree to that.”

“Good,” Murphy said, a semblance of a smile playing on his lips. Now there's one more thing. I witnessed something that made me re-assess the category of the professor's device. The Patents Act 1977 has a provision for including future technologies that are not entirely understood to come under the scrutiny of the military for reasons of national defence. What I experienced today deems this invention to be a threat to national security. As such it has now been confiscated.”

Jennifer jumped up. “No, you can't take it away from me.”

Murphy smiled, “Oh but I can, and I have.”

Gerard said, “Jennifer told me what you thought you saw, Mr Murphy. That in itself is going to take some explaining. However, should you try to confiscate this invention it will cause a lot of embarrassment to H M Government.”

Murphy, nonplussed, said, “What are you talking about.”

“A major diplomatic incident between the Crown Office and the American Government.”

“What's it got to do with...”

“Boogle Holdings, An American company, owns 49 percent of the QSA shares. How are you going to explain to their legal people that you have confiscated their property.”

Murphy, out of his depth, said, “I'll have to take advice on that.”

“So. at present the Crown has no longer confiscated the QSA?”

Murphy scowled, “Until I get this sorted out, no.” He got up, shaking his head.

Once the government man had left the room, Jennifer gave Gerard a huge hug and kiss, “Oh you wonderful, wonderful man. How can I ever repay you?”

“Take me and my wife to dinner sometime.”

Jennifer said, “I'll have to find a date then.”

“What about your bad boy detective?”

“Ossie. Shit!” She froze on the spot.

“What's up, Jennifer?” Gerard asked.

“I have to get him back before the scientists start doing god knows what to the QSA.”

“Where the hell is he?”

Jennifer went to her control panel. “That doesn't matter. I have to activate the 'auto return' function.”

“It's as simple as that.”

“Yes and no. Getting Ossie back is easy, Not leaving a mess behind, that's something else.”

“What do you mean?”

Well, supposing he's talking to some famous person from history. As soon as I activate auto return he disappears before their eyes. Now that could put a kink in space/time.” She added, “I had to do it once before, and he wasn't very happy.”

Gerard, seeing the deep frown on Jen's face said, “So, what's the alternative?”

“Hope he decides to return before the boffins spoil our fun.”

“And if he doesn't?”

She stared at Gerald. “He's trapped in that period of history.”

Chapter 33

Normally, a cup of chamomile tea calmed Jennifer's active mind affording her sound sleep. But that night she tossed and turned, worried about Ossie and the future of her QSA. Eventually she drifted into sleep, only to be awoken, two hours later, by noises downstairs. First the noise of a vehicle stopping in her driveway, then hushed voices and footsteps below. What the hell! She looked at her bedside clock. 2.30 am. At first she thought they could be amateur burglars. Then it hit her. The scientists from Porta Down had arrived early. She grabbed a robe, hastily wrapped it around her and ran downstairs. "What the hell's going on?" she asked the armed cop.

"Sorry to disturb you, madam. It's the scientists from the government research centre."

"What, at 2:30 in the bloody morning." Then it hit her like an icy shower in the Arctic. She had to get Ossie back. She tried pushing past the police officer to get in the lab.

"Sorry Madam, but you can't go in there."

Seeing a couple of men enter her sacred domain, she cried, "But you don't understand, I have to. A man's life is at risk!"

The cop shook his head. "Sorry, I have orders not to let you through."

"I have to get him back." She tried forcing her way past him.

"Get back, or I will have to restrain you."

"For God sake, you moron. If he dies, I'll hold you responsible!" Then she said, "Get me Murphy. This is an emergency."

"Sorry, I can't do that?"

She yelled out to the scientists, "DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING. A MAN HAS BEEN QUANTISED AND I HAVE TO GET HIM BACK!"

One of the scientists looked at another. "What's she yelling about?"

Putting down some equipment, his colleague said, "Poor woman. She might have flipped."

Abigail Trent, who headed the team, said, "What is she talking about? As far as I know nobody has been able to return a physical system from its quantised state."

"One of her team said, "Like I said, it's probably the ramblings of a mad scientist."

I'm sitting on Conchita heading along the road to Andalusia. Why? Because I had located a printer who knew Senor Cervantes and remembered selling him good quality writing paper the previous morning. It stuck in his mind because the playwright was waiting for him to open his business that day. The printer had never seen him so agitated before. At my prompting he mentioned that Miguel said he was heading south, to Andalusia and he had another man with him. The other man, could that be Marlowe?" I'd wondered. That was enough for me to go after him.

The only time I'd ever been on a donkey was when I was a kid at the fair. It was fun then but it's not now. The guy I hired Conchita from Pedro, at the livery stable. Looking at my smart clothes, he'd asked if I'd ever ridden a mule. I managed to convince the peasant that I had. He gave me a 'you mad gringo' look, took my money and handed me the reins. And was on my way. Or rather on Conchita's way. I'd lied. I'd never ridden a mule in my life. And I wasn't riding one now. I was sitting on it and it was moving, but very slowly at its own pace. The word 'stubborn' came to mind. I gave Conchita a dig in the ribs with my heels, but it made no difference. Well it did make some difference. She stopped, turned her head towards me, giving me a look that I interpreted as, 'do you really think that's going to work'. After that she walked at a pace that suited her.

After travelling for three arse numbing days, I finally reached the medieval walls, comprising some 80 semi-circular towers, surrounding Avila, where I hoped to catch up with Marlowe and Cervantes. It was a welcome sight after sleeping rough and scavenging for food. For the first time in my life, I knew what it was like to be homeless. I found a livery stable for Conchita and left her in the tender care of an elderly man called Santo. After a simple lunch, I began looking for Cervantes and Marlowe. Just imagine a photograph of those two together. Avila impressed me immensely. Its defensive structures were pure genius and its architecture, with its original detail, was quite beautiful. I climbed steps to the battlement walkway, which afforded stunning views. As I walked along the mediaeval pathway, I spotted Miguel about 20 metres from me. I couldn't believe my luck. Approaching him, I said, "Miguel, I was hoping to catch up with you here. And here you are."

Cervantes couldn't believe his eyes. "Senor Doyle, what are you doing here?"

Looking for you and Christopher Marlowe. He is the other man with you, isn't he?"

"He was, Senor. But he left to go back."

I couldn't believe it. I'd missed him again. "Did you tell him I was looking for him?"

Cervantes fixed Oswald with his gaze. "Did you go to my home?"

"Yes, and two of the Cardinal's men were there, looking for you."

"I feared as much. Which means the Inquisitor's agents will come looking for me here."

"That's if they found out where you'd gone."

"Senor Doyle if you found me, the inquisition, with their methods of persuasion, would have no trouble. They may have people looking for me as we speak."

It was then that I noticed two soldiers, with drawn swords, walking towards us. We turned to walk away when I saw two more of them coming from the opposite direction.

Miguel, summing up their situation, said, "Come, we must make for the steps before they catch us.

My fingers hovered over the pendant around my neck. One simple press and I was out of there. But I couldn't do it, not with Miguel there. I raced with him, for the steps. We reached them just before the soldier's pincer movement had us trapped. We took the steps two at a time and reached the bottom a few steps ahead of our pursuers. Renaissance buildings, including palaces and stately homes were built against the wall. We ran past them, looking for somewhere to hide.

Miguel said, "Our best chance is to get lost in the crowds. Follow me."

I did, and we ran into the city, through the Puerta del Alcazar to the Mercado Grande, a market square swamped with traders and customers. We hustled our way through the crowd of shoppers and came out in a side street minus the soldiers chasing us.

“What was all that about?” I asked as we got our breath.

Miguel said, “You must leave and get out of here.”

“But...”

“It is for your safety. Cardinal Acquaviva has a longer reach than I thought.”

“So, what will you do?”

“I shall get swallowed up in Andalusia for a while. He can't touch me there.”

“How will I find Christopher Marlowe?”

Miguel shook his head. “You probably won't, Senor.”

“Where has he gone?” I asked, dejected.

“To see Isabella, in England.”

I watched as Miguel Cervantes walked away. There would be no photographs of him and Marlowe. This Spanish trip seemed like a waste of time. I sighed deeply. I had no actual proof that Marlowe had been to Spain. Oh, I believed what Miguel told me. He had no reason to lie. But I had no factual evidence to back up the story. Oh well, I thought, I might as well call it a day. Nobody was around so I pressed the pendant. Nothing! I was still in 17th century Spain. I pressed the crystal again. Still no 'Q'. That's when panic began to set in.

Chapter 34

Jennifer approached the cop guarding the laboratory. "I have to speak to the head scientist."

"What about?"

"rescuing my friend."

Standing to attention, he said, "Can't let you do that."

"Damn you. It's my invention, my laboratory and my friend. Now let me pass."

"You know the rules, professor. You're not to fraternise with the scientists."

Jennifer saw red. "A person's life is at risk, and you go on about fucking rules."

He stared at her. "Professor, leave this area now."

Back in her kitchen, away from anybody else, Jennifer Phoned the number Murphy had given her. She heard a voice and said, in an authoritative tone, "Get me Mr Murphy."

"Who shall I say wants him?"

"Professor Smethurst and this is very urgent, a matter of life or death."

Murphy, rattled, said, "Why are you phoning me?"

"The man you saw disappear. I have to get him back."

"That's your problem, not mine."

"Not if your people prevent me from doing so, Mr Murphy."

"You're to have nothing to do with the investigation."

"The disappearance of Mr Doyle took place before your investigation began. You're witness to that. I have to get him back." She added, "I would have thought you'd be interested to hear, from him, where he's been."

Murphy certainly was, but it was personal, not for public consumption. "If I intercede on your behalf, I want to speak with Mr Doyle in private."

"Get your scientists out of my lab, so I can do what I have to get him back. Then I'll agree with your request."

Murphy said, "I'll give you 30 minutes, and I want to be in there with you, professor."

I'd always assumed the 'Q' would be there when I needed it. This time, it wasn't. I was cut off from my world, without any means at my disposal to return there. Being stranded some 400 years before I was born filled me with dread. But here's the weird thing. If I'm stuck in 1600's Spain, how could I have been born in the 20th century? If I hadn't been born in the 20th century, how could I be here now? It reminded me of the kitty in the box conundrum, in which it was both dead and alive in quantum space, providing the box remained closed. What it seemed to come down to is that I would be able to return to my time and space but only if I could. And I had no power over that.

I took stock of my situation. With no home, no job, little money and just the clothes I stood up in, I'd probably end up a beggar on the street. The prospect was daunting indeed. I pressed the button again but still nothing happened. Not that I expected it to but I had to press it every now and again, just in case. Then it struck me. What if the problem was with the pendant itself? In which case, there was no chance I'd be able to return. Unless Jennifer used the auto return override. I suddenly brightened. Yes, that's how I'd get back. But with the government scientists taking over her lab, how could she gain access to force my return? I couldn't just stand there, staring at the city wall, which had now become my prison. I still had a life to live and, although the prospects weren't good, I was a Doyle. And us Doyle's don't just give up at the first hurdle.

Jennifer stared at the QSA, then at Murphy. "Bloody philistines!" she expounded, looking at the loose cables and wires.

"They're just doing their job," Murphy defended.

"Doing their job! My God, it's like telling chimps to fix the space shuttle. Have any of them got a clue about quantum biology?"

"As far as I know they're all experts in quantum mechanics."

"Quantum mechanics may be. Quantum biology, definitely not!"

Murphy ventured, "What's the difference?"

"Quantum mechanics is Einstein's 'weird stuff at a distance'. Quantum biology is about knowing how the weird stuff works." She added, "Now if you don't mind I have to try and fix this mess. And I'm going to need more than your allotted half hour."

"Let me know when you're ready to bring him back," Murphy said, leaving the lab.

I decided to go back to Valladolid. I figured Miguel wouldn't mind me crashing at his place while he was away. So, with this in mind, I collected Conchita, topped up with bread and water and headed north. I took a few photos of the walls around Avila, then climbed back on the mule, who decided it was too warm to hurry. I decided to let her choose the pace. Not that it made any difference either way.

Chapter 35

Valladolid was a very welcome site. Saddle sore, I was relieved to reunite Conchita with her owner. Actually, I was mule back sore, seeing as there was no saddle. I dug deep in my purse for some realls, thanked Pedro, and headed over to Miguel's vacant house. Footsore and completely exhausted from the arduous journey I crashed as soon as I got to his bed.

The next thing I became aware of was a cock crowing somewhere nearby. I needed coffee to help me think. Miguel had a stew stove up against a wall in the kitchen. First, I had to find combustible material to light the fire below the metal plate. I foraged in his yard and found an old lean-to with a pile of logs inside. I soon had a smoky fire going. It was like setting up an indoor barbecue. Next, I had to go to a well for water, fill an iron pot and put it on the hotplate. I discovered the coffee beans in a metal container in the cupboard. I hunted around for a grinder. I had to be kidding. The best I came up with was a grinding stone. After around 30 minutes I'd ground enough beans for one cup of coffee. There wasn't any milk so I had to have it black. I will never take instant coffee for granted again.

Then it hit me. This struggle to survive is how it would be from now on. All standard tasks would be much more complicated, and I would have to learn to cope. As I sipped the strong black liquid, I realised cappuccinos were a thing of the future. Now I had to work out a plan of survival.

Jennifer, busy trying to get the programme to work, cursed whichever, scientists had mucked around with her computer code that activated the auto return mode. Someone had changed the quantum algorithms without understanding how quantum computers work. Now Jennifer had to find out how to repair the QCL (imperative quantum programming language) code.

Murphy, fed up with waiting, entered the lab. "Are you going to be much longer, professor?"

She turned to him starring daggers in his direction. "One of your idiot scientists has corrupted the language code. God knows how long it's going to take to fix."

"Can you fix it?"

She sighed, "I have to find the glitch, which means trolling through every part of the algorithm." She added, "Once I get this sorted, I want to oversee what they're doing unless you want them to completely fuck things up while trying to find out how it works."

"You being in here with them is against regulations."

"Murphy, you can be the one to let Boogle know that their \$100 million investment has gone down the drain."

Murphy flustered replied, "I'll contact head office for advice. Meanwhile, hurry up with this thing."

After the second cup of strong coffee, I decided to try making some money as a private investigator. A system of private commercial policing already existed here, so people already used the service. Potential clients ranged from business people having financial difficulties dealing with wars and colonisation to protecting businesses after hours. A cross between detecting and protecting. Then my bubble got burst as two armed agents in black attire burst in upon me.

"What do you want?" I asked, attempting to be assertive.

The lead agent said, "You will come with us. We have some questions to ask you."

This development was not good. "Questions about what. I can help you right here."

"No Senor, we have better methods of persuasion at headquarters."

I didn't like the sound of that, and the fact he had a pistol poked in my chest.

The Inquisition agents frog-marched me out of the house and bundled me, unceremoniously, into a donkey cart.

Busily repairing the programme, Jennifer, completely focusing on the task, forgot about Ossie. It was just as well because she was still seething inside about his reckless behaviour. If truth is known, Jennifer was much more worried about him than she let on. The scientist was quite fond of the crazy fool. Focusing back on the job, she was nearly ready to test out the QSA.

I was manacled and pushed into a cold, windowless stone room. I seemed to be in an underground dungeon, designed to induce a sense of horror, dread and despair. And it was working. The room had a musty smell about it and aroma of a dead rat. Desperately, I pressed the crystal. Still nothing! There was some straw on the stone floor but no bed and no bucket. Nobody had bothered to clean up the faeces left behind by the last occupant.

After what seemed an eternity I was collected and taken to face a tall man in rich red robes and a skull cap to fit his ensemble. I figured this thin-faced, bony-handed, cleric was the infamous Cardinal Acquaviva. He turned to another cleric beside him. "You can interrogate the prisoner." Turning to the prisoner in chains, he said, "Where is Miguel Cervantes."

I answered, honestly, "I don't know."

"You will have to do better than that, Senor Doyle."

"I can't tell you what I don't know."

"You met with him in Avila. Where did he go from there?"

So they were Acquaviva's soldiers who chased us. "I don't know where he went after that."

The cleric turned to the cardinal, who nodded. I soon found out what that nod meant. They took me to another room, which looked like a cross between some mediaeval gym and a primitive operating theatre. I saw a broad range of metal tools and machines, all manufactured for the sole purpose of generating pain, excruciating pain. I'd heard that all crimes and vices were covered by one word 'Inquisition'. I wondered which crime I'd committed. Whatever it was got me to have a go on the 'strappado'. With my hands tied firmly behind my back, I got hoisted to the ceiling. Suspended 6 feet above the floor this way put extreme strain on my arms and shoulders. But they weren't satisfied with that. Heavy iron weights were attached to my feet, and my body was screaming, as my joints got wretched from each other. I gritted my teeth but couldn't hold back the scream, as I felt my bones almost reach dislocation point. My torturer was pulling on the rope, causing me more searing pain. Almost losing consciousness, I vaguely remember the line going slack. Then I hit the stone floor, breathless, bruised but not broken. The abrupt halt bewildered every joint and nerve in my system. I was dragged to my feet and had to be supported by two guards.

The Inquisitor looked his prisoner in the face. "Where is Miguel Cervantes?"

Hanging limp between the two guards I tried speaking but couldn't find my voice.

The interrogator grinned evilly, "Tomorrow we add more weight." Then we will see if you are ready to cooperate."

Back in my cell, I took stock of my injuries. Every joint ached, and I could hardly move. The bastards weren't at all careful as they dragged me back to my cell. I didn't think I'd survive another torture session like that.

Murphy watched as Jennifer tested the QSA with a mouse. He saw it disappear and reappear a minute later. He was speechless.

Jennifer was ready. She programmed in the Valladolid space/time coordinates, then pressed auto return.

I got roughly awoken as rattling keys alerted me to people coming to my cell. "No! My mind screamed. I was a wreck and couldn't take any more punishment. "Please work! Please work! For God's sake, please work! I enjoined, frantically pressing the crystal.

Murphy's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw the man appear in the device.

Jennifer yelled, "IT WORKED, OSSIE. YOU CAME BACK!"

When I saw that wonderful woman's face, I loved her dearly. I think I grinned, though even that was painful. Then I noticed Murphy standing there, his eyes on stalks. Somehow I managed to get my limbs to work, as I jerkily alighted from the 'Q' for probably the last time, or is that last space?

Jennifer hugged Ossie to her. "You stupid fool, we nearly lost you." Seeing his physical discomfort, she said, "Ossie, what on earth happened to you?"

I said, "I just did a stretch in the Spanish Inquisitor's torture chamber."

THE END

Epilogue

I'm alive and back in the 21st century and, quite frankly, I don't care if I stay here for the rest of my days. That's how I feel now, anyhow. It's taken quite a lot of physio to get my body back in some working order. Jennifer called me reckless, irresponsible and cavalier; apart from her joy at my prompt arrival, she wouldn't speak to me for a few days. Of course, it could have been because she had to keep an eye on the Porta Down science team, to see they respected the QSA.

All these things went through my mind as I downloaded the pictures I had taken. They took me back to Avilla, and last time I saw Miguel. I never did get to see the enigmatic Marlowe. I believe what Cervantes told me, but there was no way I could prove it.

Murphy asked me a bunch of questions, like where I went. This pen pusher was a G-man, so I told him the truth. I don't know if he believed me or not. I didn't care. But he did try to wrap up the Crown Office investigation. It seemed as he was only going through the motions, especially when Boogle Holdings threatened to bring a suit against The government for its loss of profits. But I think what influenced Mr Murphy's report was he's rapport with Jennifer. He had seen, first hand, what the QSA could do. He didn't know what it did, or why, but it was enough for a kind of bond to existing between Professor Smethurst and himself.

I think the main reason Jen's invention got classified as an educational device was that he didn't want to have to explain a disappearing and re-appearing man to the high court.

So that's it I guess. Back to art fraud, errant marriage partners and lost dogs. At least they were safe. My experience of the Inquisition had made me realise how fragile life can be.

Or as Christopher Marlowe said:

“Till swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting, Heavens conspired his overthrow.”

Other books by Chris Deggs

Amenti – a quantum tarot journey

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 1 -gods, gold and genes

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 2 - challenge, change and conquest

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 3 – prophesy, power and politics

Black Pope – secrets of the vatican

Democracy on Trial – the verdict

Hack – world bank in crisis

Investigation – the nunnery murders

Millennium – countdown to chaos

Nanofuture – the small things in life

Termination – the eugenics agenda

Vincent – a quantime experience

Ziggurat – the real agenda in iraq

About Chris Deggs

Chris Deggs was born in 1948 in Bury St. Edmunds, England. For many years he has lived in Australia. He is now happily retired and lives in the Tweed Valley in Northern New South Wales, Australia. He is a colleague of the Science-Art Cancer Research Institute of Australia where he is actively involved as a visual artist and author, He has written many contemporary works of fiction: history, mysteries, adventure, crime, ethics, conspiracy, global domination etc., as well as reference books for the betterment of the human condition. He has published a number of articles on the Academia Website reflecting this. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

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I hope you enjoyed this story.

Here is an excerpt from 'Vincent' - Oswald Doyle's first Quantime adventure

Forward

I looked at the handsome guy opposite me. He put me in mind of Jack Kennedy, as a young naval officer. “So, how can I help you, Mr Goodfellow?”

“I need you to carry out an investigation for me.”

I had already figured that much seeing as I had Oswald Doyle Private Investigator painted on my door. “Okay, give me the details,” I said, reaching for pen and pad. Then he came right out with it and you could have knocked me for six.

“I want you to investigate the death of Vincent Van Gogh.”

I almost quipped I do not do cold cases but resisted it. I needed to find out if this guy was for real. “Vincent Van Gogh the famous artist?”

“Yes,” he grinned sheepishly.

“The one who shot himself, if my basic art history serves me?”

“That is the official line - yes.”

“And that happened when?”

“July 1890.”

I tossed the pen onto the desk, and sat back looking at him. “Well, unless you have access to a time machine it's going to be pretty bloody impossible.”

He laughed. “Oh no, I don't expect you to carry out an actual investigation. I need your expert advice in carrying out a virtual one.”

I'm a pretty tolerant bloke usually and, being an ex copper, I have met some nut jobs in my time. But this was a first. “Virtual stuff, that's got something to do with computer games, hasn't it?”

He looked at me. “I know you might think this is crazy but all I want to do is give you the case and see what you come up with. I will pay you your usual rates and you don't even have to leave your office.”

Well, how hard could it be? And I certainly needed the readies. But first I would have to do a background check on Mr Goodfellow. As it happened it wasn't so much how hard could it be, more a case of how weird it could be. I had no idea, when accepting this case, just where it would lead me, which turned out to be Nineteenth Century France.

I came to meet Nathan Goodfellow through a series of seemingly random events. It all began with me spying on a bloke on compo. Martin Skopes didn't mean anything to me, except my being able to pay the bills for another week. I parked outside 21 Chaldon Rd, a nondescript semi-detached, three up three down and watched from my Ford Fiesta as I took photos of the man filling a wheel barrow with sand. I was bored off my tits but it's what I had to do to earn my fee. I certainly admired Skopes' stamina as he loaded the barrow for the twentieth time that day. Having got my photographic evidence of the man, without his back brace, I put my Canon away. Another fraud case closed, I thought, as I started up my vehicle. I had nothing personal against Martin Skopes. Down the pub I would probably pat him on his injured back and say, "Good on you. It's about time we got something back from those thieving insurance companies." But dobbing people in is how I make a living these days.

When I took the plunge and left the Metropolitan police to reinvent myself as Oswald Doyle Private Investigator, I hadn't envisaged spending my time working for big insurance companies, by spying on small-time fraudsters. But that's the current reality of my life. Now I had to go back to my office and write up yet another boring report.

Back in my rented, one room and compact kitchenette office, in East Acton, I glanced at the framed photograph on my cluttered desk. At moments like these I wondered if I had made the right decision. Being a private investigator was not all it was cracked up to be. Feeling somewhat melancholic, I reached for my bottle of Johnny Walker and sat staring at the image of Bill Munter and myself, taken on the day of our passing out ceremony at Hendon Police College. Having passed our exams and become fully fledged probationary members of the London constabulary Bill and I were itching to start pounding the beat. It was a very exciting time for me, with great potential for advancement. But after fifteen years in the job the gloss had somewhat dulled. Long hours, poor pay and an avalanche of red tape finally took their toll. So I gave all that up to become a private detective. I had been a detective sergeant for five years; the job had become less appealing and promotions harder to come by. But those weren't the main reasons I had left the force to start up on my own in civvy street. Being able to work to my own schedule appealed to me most.

Pushing these nostalgic thoughts from my mind, I shuffled papers around on my desk, to reveal a folder marked 'Insurance Fraud Reports'. More bloody paperwork, I thought, as I searched for a pen. Then I changed my mind and grabbed the phone. There were one or two coppers I still kept in touch with. One was my old partner, Tommy Creane, who had left a couple of messages for me to contact him for a drink. This seemed like a good time, if he was free.

The Wishing Well, an enjoyable drinking hole not far from the East Acton tube, had a very pleasant garden area, which is where I found Tommy, nursing a glass. I joined him, armed with refills. I hadn't seen old Creanie - now detective sergeant Creane - since his promotion. So this was an auspicious occasion.

Creane wiped beer froth off his moustache, and asked me, "So, how's it going? I heard the divorce rate sky-rocketed since you became a sleuth."

"Cheeky bastard. I do get some interesting cases as well you know."

"Oh yeah! name one." he demanded, cockily.

I grinned, "The Royal Unity Assurance Company for one."

"What, spying on compo cases?"

"Don't knock it. It pays the bills."

"Yeah, but does it have the thrills of Willesden nick?" he teased, nudging me in the ribs.

“Sometimes I wish I had the security and camaraderie of the job, but other times it's good to be independent.”

He swallowed a mouthful of beer. “You can't have it both ways, mate.”

“I know that, but an interesting case would make all the difference.”

“So what do you consider to be an interesting case?” he asked me, gathering up our glasses for another round.

I had to think about that one. When he got back with the drinks, I said, “In answer to your question, I guess something that posed a challenge to the old grey cells.”

“What like discovering what happened to Lord Lucan?” he smirked.

“Smart arse.”

“Seriously though mate I have a friend who tries solving historical mysteries. He's a computer programmer and he makes computer games about unsolved murders from the past.”

“And that's suppose to interest me?”

“Maybe. Let me explain. This nerd - Nathan is his name - is looking for someone with investigative skills to help him build a case.”

“Sounds a bit wacky.”

“Maybe, but I reckon you ought to talk to him. It could be a nice simple little earner. Dr Goodfellow, I think he is called.”

I can never be sure when Tommy is being serious and it's always a good idea to check. I looked at him. “Are you taking the piss?”

“What me, Ossie old mate?” He put on a hurt look that got him out of a lot of trouble, especially with women. “Look, I got talking to him while on a case. The bloke is obsessed with mysterious deaths in the past. I just thought you might be able to give him some of your Sherlock Holmes expertise.”

I was mildly interested. “Do you have a contact for him?”

He jotted down some details on a beer mat. “He's a maths lecturer at the London School of Economics.” He checked his mobile contact list, then added the contact number to the other details. He handed me the beer mat. And that's how I got to meet Dr Nathan Goodfellow.

2

Since that first brief meeting in my office, set up by Creanie, I hadn't heard from Nathan Goodfellow for a while. Yet I couldn't stop thinking about his crazy idea. I started imagining being in Nineteenth Century France carrying out my investigation. Knowing what I had learned about the subject, if I took on Nathan's case, I had a virtual six months to solve an imaginary murder, if one had been committed, that is. I must admit, in my research, I did come across some anomalies and the people who may have wanted to harm Vincent were piling up. Fellow artists he may have pissed off with his erratic behaviour; prostitutes who did not enjoy receiving his body ; and landlords trying to protect their young daughters from being enticed by the crazy genius.

Perhaps, because it was an unusual assignment it stuck with me and I played with it in my mind. Theo Van Gogh, my imaginary client, Vincent's doting brother was terminally sick but he had no idea he only had six months left to live. I had an advantage over him knowing, from history, this to be the case. So my task was to find out how his brother died, within this narrow time-frame.

I'd been intrigued by mysteries since my early childhood days. The stories in Boys Own magazine had me rapt but the intriguing subject of 'time', the biggest mystery of all, gained most of my attention. I mean we don't really understand it, do we? We measure time by calendars and clocks but I don't think that's what time is really about. I mean we can't see it, touch it or hear it, can we? We only know of it by us getting older. I reckon that for all our success in measuring the smallest parts of time, it still remains one of the great mysteries. Now, I'm no scientist but even I know that going back in time is considered impossible because we would have to travel faster than light, which of course can't happen. So I took Nathan's crazy idea with a pinch of salt. Who was I to question scientists about such matters?"

Since our first meeting in, what passed for, my office, I had checked out this Nathan Goodfellow. It turned out he was a maths lecturer at the LSE. His Linked-in profile showed his discipline to be in complex numbers math, a subject that would leave most people preferring to watch the wet paint dry on a park bench. His youthful, Jack Kennedy type visage, in his profile photo, made him look more like a male model than a numbers cruncher. He didn't fit the usual mould of balding, chain-smoking bores with chalk dust all over their tweed jackets. But, apparently, he, like most anally retentive mathematicians, found algorithms to be intriguing and he spent most of his working day delving into the unpredictable, or is it predictable, properties of what he called fractal logic. So why was he interested in the death of a nineteenth century artist? Oh well, it takes all sorts, I thought, mentally shrugging my shoulders. And the case would be a nice little earner for very little effort.

Then I received his Email. It contained various links to websites concerned with the life and death of Vincent Van Gogh. I was more interested in all things pertaining to his death. The trouble with these websites is that they all virtually say the same thing. But every now and again there's someone putting forward a different view, another angle, an added clue. So far though it all pointed towards a mad genius taking his own life. I conveyed as much in my Email reply. Nathan didn't Email me back – he phoned, and put forward his game concept, which posed the question, did Vincent kill himself or was he murdered? The official line, history tells us, is he had taken his own life while in an inescapable depression. It certainly seemed to be the case. But, in his computer game idea Vincent's brother wasn't convinced. He ardently believed foul play was involved. So, he hired the game's detective character, to be modelled on yours truly, to find out if the artist was murdered and, if so, who had committed this terrible crime? We arranged to meet in a pub, near the LSE to discuss this.

Drury Lane, which led to the university, in its modern incarnation was a far cry from its early design. Back in the Eighteenth Century it was one of London's worst slums. You wouldn't think so now, what with the major developments that have taken place. Kingsway and Aldwych now reflect the affluence and style of patrons of the Royal Theatre, the Lane's most famous landmark. As I alighted from the cab in front of the Coach and Horses, in Wellington Street, I readied myself for another encounter with Nathan. The pub, a four storey building, squeezed between two others, seemed typical of many of the City's taverns, noisy and crowded. Nathan was seated back in a corner, away from the live music. I jostled my way past drinkers, to join him. I sat down. "Okay, I'm here. Hit me with it."

"It gets very busy in here around this time so I took the initiative to get you a beer," Nathan said, grinning widely.

I certainly wasn't looking forward to fighting my way to the bar. "That's great. Now why are we here?"

"I felt we had to meet again in person. I don't know why but I keep thinking about this case and I wonder if we have missed something."

I took a swig from the pint mug. "You mean have I missed something." I fixed him in my gaze. "Nathan, save your dough. I can't find anything to suggest any foul play."

He looked downhearted. "I know we are lacking something. What about the missing gun?"

"That can be explained any number of ways."

"What about his dying words to his brother?"

"With his state of mind it could have been nonsense."

He took a sip of beer. "Wouldn't it be amazing if we could actually witness what happened?"

Jesus, now he was getting into wishes. "Let it drop and save your money. That's my professional advice to you."

"Okay Mr Doyle, I bow to your greater wisdom in this matter. But if I come up with any evidence suggesting murder, will you help me?"

As I was pretty sure he was pissing against a hurricane, I said, "Sure, if it's solid."