

# PIKE

## A Quantime Experience 3



Chris Deggs

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils, one is to disbelieve in their existence the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them they are equally pleased by both errors."

C S Lewis

### Foreword

August 1871

"In conscience and sincerely, I believe that the Masonic Order is, if not the greatest, one of the greatest moral and political evils that weigh on the whole Union."

John Quincy Adams, Vice President of the United States Letters on Freemasonry "Letters on Freemasonry", 1833

A secret meeting that would change and shape the world took place at the Solomon Masonic Lodge in Charleston, South Carolina in 1871. Phileas Walder, Albert Pike's right-hand man, organised the invitation only gathering which comprised some of the most influential people in Europe. Walder, a former Lutheran Minister in Switzerland, an educated, well-informed man, became a Masonic leader, occultist, and spiritualist. He worked closely with Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian Prime Minister, who also attended the meeting. Mazzini, a 33rd degree Freemason, was responsible for founding the notorious Mafia in 1860. Also present was Lord Henry Palmerston, one of Queen Victoria's most successful Prime Ministers. Another special guest was Otto Von Bismarck, the first chancellor of a united Germany. The French occultist Eliphas Levi, born Alphonse Louis Constant, also had a place at the table.

Last but not least, Albert Pike, an American author, poet, orator, jurist and prominent member of the Freemasons. He also served as a senior Confederate officer and commanded an Indian Territory district in the Trans-Mississippi Theatre of the American Civil War. Pike got Walder to organise this historic meeting of the most powerful and influential people in Europe.

Pike presided over the discussion and swore them all to secrecy, after which he outlined his grand plan. He announced his intention to use the Palladium Rite to create a Luciferian umbrella group that would tie all Masonic groups together. That was his first step. After some discussion, each

member knew the role they were to play to ensure stage one of the 'Grand Plan' would be played out literally to the letter. Pike emphasised that nothing must be left to chance.

The letter Pike referred to had been read and endorsed by Giuseppe Mazzini that afternoon before the meeting and was the reason for the clandestine gathering at Magnolia Plantation. Pike claimed to have written the letter after he received a message from his "spirit guide". But it also could have been a demonic vision that graphically outlined plans for three world wars. He considered these conflicts necessary to bring about the One World Order. He described this plan in a letter he shared with Mazzini, on that fateful day, August 15, 1871.

*Know Your Adversary - Greg Laurie Daily Devotion ....*

<https://www.oneplace.com/devotionals/greg-laurie-daily-devotions/know-your-adversary-greg-laurie-daily-devotion-february-23-2018-11787981.html>

*Freemasonry and Satanism: The History of Albert Pike ....*

<https://www.veteranstoday.com/2019/03/30/freemasonry-and-satanism-the-history-of-albert-pike/>

## Chapter 1

Let me introduce myself. I'm Oswald Doyle, and I'm a private investigator. I live in my small office in East Acton, from where, apart from bread and butter work, I specialise in cases with actual exciting content. I am referring here to my jaunts into the past - more about this aspect later on. I am intrigued about how misunderstood aspects of history impinge on the lives we lead today. I don't talk to anybody about my real-time historical adventures, apart from Jennifer, Nathan and, of late, Declan, an American guy who seems to have earned Jen's affection. But we won't go into that. Not yet, anyway. I suppose my historical investigations could loosely be called "time travel" experiences. And I admit having become a time-travelling junkie if such an addiction exists.

Jennie would be mad at me for calling these experiences time travel. I know it's really quantum travel, which has nothing to do with the concept of time, but people have a hard enough job getting their minds around HG Wells' time machine concept, let alone get a grasp of quantum behaviour. Jennie or Professor Jennifer Smethurst is the genius behind the "Quantime" the device in which I have been transported back in time on many occasions. It's a while since I've seen the delectable Jen and her Quantime which we affectionately refer to as the "Q." I must admit I'm hanging out for both, but sadly, for me, I don't have access to either.

Ever since the British Home Office took over the running of the machine, I'm out of the loop. Apart from being Jennifer's Quantanaut (my term for Quantime passenger), we are also good friends and confidants. We occasionally hook up for a drink or two, and the rare dinner date. Try as I might probe her to find out what's happening with the Q, Jen never talks shop. The last thing Jen told me about the Quantime was when she explained she'd had to sign the Official Secrets Act, so she could not inform me about anything that went on in her lab.

Being stuck in the present day and all the shit that goes with it churned me up inside. As much as it scared me, I had to come to terms with the horrible truth, I would probably never quantum travel again. And I didn't know how to handle that.

Then I got an idea. The proverbial light bulb illuminated above the Doyle brainbox. Why not specialise in cases concerning the past? After all, I helped clear up that stuff about Vincent's death. I also tracked down Marlowe after his alleged murder.

Meanwhile, I doxed in people for fraudulent insurance claims and followed errant husbands around. I waited for the case that would make history. Some juicy evidential historical mystery that would get me back inside the "pumpkin" the nickname for the Quantime. But that was all fantasy. My real world was stacking up in my in-tray.

I was just skimming through an insurance fraud report when my phone rang. I retrieved it from my jacket pocket and found myself speaking with Professor Adrian Bennet, who worked at the British Museum. I said, 'OK, professor, how can I help you?'

'I want you to find some stolen property that belongs to me.'

'What stolen property?'

'A precious letter. Come to the Reading Room at the British Museum around 4 pm, and I will explain. But I can't speak about it over the phone.'

It sounded interesting. Certainly, more so than wading through insurance red tape. I caught the Tube to Russell Square. A pleasant five-minute walk took me to the gold and black railings of the British Museum. After the crowded, stifling tube journey, it felt good to be above ground in the fresh air. Or what passed for clean air in the centre of London. It began to rain just as I passed beneath the massive pillars of the Parthenon style building that housed extensive collections of artefacts from the four corners of the globe. Except planets don't have edges. But let's not get too pedantic.

Professor Bennet curated the vast Reading Room. I followed his directions and arriving at his office, I rapped on his door and was invited in. Professor Bennet looked to be around fifty with a greying beard and hair to match. As I removed a pile of books from the spare seat, I said, 'What's this about, Professor?'

Not one to bandy his professorial title around, Bennet said, 'Please call me Adrian.'

'Very well, Adrian, why am I here?'

The professor gently clasped his hands together in a way suggesting he was protecting a small, vulnerable creature. He said, 'Have you heard of Albert Pike?'

'In a word, no. Who is Pike?'

Adrian smiled, 'Ah, where to start. Albert Pike was many things, and he excelled at them all. He was an educator, a statesman, a military tactician, a visionary, an author, a philanthropist, an adventurer and much more.'

'He sounds too good to be true.'

'Some said he was an angel and others a demon. I suspect the truth lies somewhere between the two. But he is most famous for the letter he wrote to Mazzini. That letter has been stolen from my home.'

I said, 'Tell me more about this letter.'

Adrian launched into, 'Pike's Letter as it is known, predicted three world wars. Two have already been played out since his death.'

My raised eyebrows showed my surprise.

Adrian continued. 'Pike's plan was simple and effective. A small elite group of Master Freemasons manipulated the political forces of Communism, Nazism, Political Zionism, and other International movements to bring about three global wars and three major revolutions. The first two world wars were literally carried out to the letter.'

I'd never heard of this conspiracy theory before. I looked at Adrian. 'Are you suggesting the thing was planned?'

Bennet said, 'I know it's awful to think all that death and destruction resulted from a meticulous, cold-blooded, sinister plot, but the letter Pike wrote in 1871 was either a prophecy or a cold calculated plan.'

'And what of this third world war?'

Adrian gave a cross between a smile and a grimace. 'I would say it's shaping up nicely, wouldn't you?'

'What's the aim of this third world war?' I asked uneasily.

'Complete world domination and all it entails.'

'That doesn't bear thinking about.'

'Precisely,' Adrian agreed. Then he said, 'That aside we can still marvel at how accurately he predicted events that have already taken place.'

'I can see that. How did Pike receive such information?'

'He claimed it was a spirit guide. But I don't believe it was because even the devil has powers of prophecy, and his agents undertook to manipulate political events to closely follow his designs.'

'You're saying by adhering to this plan, his minions and their descendants manipulated political and martial strategies and decisions.'

'Mr Doyle, I'm just trying to give you a sense of how important this letter is.'

'Right tell me what happened.'

Adrian sighed, 'I bought the letter at a private auction for three hundred thousand pounds.'

My jaw dropped, and my eyebrows shot up, leaving me open-mouthed like one of those ball-catching clowns at the fairground.

Adrian Bennet, startled by my surprise, asked, 'Are you OK, Mr Doyle?'

'Yes,' I answered, intrigued, 'Do carry on.'

'I kept the letter in a safe, but somebody broke in and stole it. The safe is state of the art with an electronic lock. The burglar knew what he was doing.' Adrian added, 'The thief knew what he was looking for because nothing else was touched.'

I nodded intelligently. 'Do you have any idea who would want to rob you?'

'I have an excellent idea. One of the three people also bidding for the letter.'

'Do you know who they are?'

'I only know them by their first names.'

'Which are?'

'Egan, Cameron and Olivia.'

I made a note on my phone. 'I'll need to speak with the auctioneer.'

'Yes, I suppose you will,' Adrian said, 'But I doubt he will want to talk to you.'

I sat staring at him. 'And why is that?'

'The auctions are very private. Only invited punters and the auctioneer knows about them.'

'Then I will need a letter of introduction from you.'

'I don't think it would be of much help. I only attended once, and that was to get the letter.'

I said, 'I guess I'll have to take my chances. What's this auctioneer's name?'

Adrian said, 'Afton Westbury,' writing it on the back of a business card.

*Albert Pike's 3 World Wars Letter Hoax | WideShut.co.uk. <https://wideshut.co.uk/albert-pikes-3-world-wars-letter-hoax-wideshut-webcast/>*

## Chapter 2

I got up early after around 5 hours of sleep. It was 3:55, and I was raring to find out about this Albert Pike character. I brewed some coffee and woke up Boogle. No, it's not a typo. Boogle is a super hi-tech company with a mega search engine, like Google, but owned by Declan Merrick a dot com American billionaire. He also holds a part share in the Quantime and has a close relationship with the gorgeous Jennifer Smethurst. Mostly it's a long-distance relationship, but when he does come over this side of the pond, he showers her with expensive gifts and takes her to top-notch restaurants and super trendy nightclubs.

I can't compete with all that shit! I hate the bastard! Oh, I forgot to mention Declan and I went on a jaunt in the Quantime back to Elizabethan London. He wanted to try the Quantime experience before he bought into the project. I wasn't happy with him tagging along, but I sucked it up, put on a brave face, and went along with it. Well, I didn't really have much choice, did I? Sometimes I wished I'd left the bastard there, back in stinking, diseased, and crime-ridden London.

Anyway, that's enough reminiscing about the bad old days. It was time I found out about our Mr Pike.

It turned out our Albert was a larger than life character with many strings to his bow. He was a leading Freemason; an Army general who fought for the Confederacy during the American Civil War; a prolific author; a visionary; a Luciferian; and, allegedly the founder of the Ku Klux Klan. Well, that gave me enough to be going on with. Now, anyone who knows me sees me as a cynical sceptic. But I was convinced Albert did indeed exist and he was very knowledgeable about affairs of state.

At around 8:30, on what promised to be a warm sunny day, I keyed in Afton Westbury's location to get GPS directions, fired up the old Ford Escort, and headed off to find the fabled letter. As Carmina's sexy voice helped me navigate through Islington, where the "Cally" as Caledonian Road is locally known, stretched for about a mile from Camden Road to Pentonville Road. Westbury's shop of collectables - more of a huge tin shed - was near the Texaco service station, opposite Twyford street.

Afton Westbury, the auctioneer had a slouch and the rounded shoulders of somebody who had worked behind a desk for many years. He wore a trilby and one of those old Harris tweed jackets with the elbow patches, worn by aristocratic shooters on their country estates. Westbury also had a cravat, further displaying his eccentricity. Whether his affectations were mere showmanship or genuinely him was questionable. But, either way, it was hard to imagine him as the clandestine auctioneer selling very expensive artefacts and relics.

Westbury looked at me and my shabbiness up and down, trying to work out if communicating with me was worth his time.

Afton had learned over many years in the antique business not to judge a book by its cover. He put on his salesman's face, smiled and said, 'Can I help you, sir?'

I smiled back at him. 'Mr Westbury, I presume?'

'Yes, sir. Now, are you looking for something in particular?'

I handed him one of my cards. 'Yes. Information.'

Westbury looked at the card, which read "Doyle Detective Agency". The only other info was my name, phone number and email address. 'Information about what?' Westbury asked, puzzled.

'About the Pike Letter, Mr Westbury. Let me explain.'

'Yes. I wish you would.'

'A Mr Bennet recently purchased the letter from you at one of your auctions.'

'I don't recall. But do carry on.'

'Somebody burgled his home and stole the document.' I watched as Westbury's demeanour instantly changed from calm control to one exhibiting signs of anxiety. No longer the affable antique dealer anticipating a sale, Afton had quickly donned a mask of non-comprehension. But in the few moments between the changes, I noticed Westbury avoid his gaze. There were more subtle signs the antique dealer was not straight with me, such as his defensive stance.

Afton said, 'I'm sorry to hear it, but it has nothing to do with me.'

'Oh, I'm not suggesting you had anything to do with it. But I need to find the other three people bidding for the Pike Letter.' I paused, waiting for a response, but he said nothing. Prompting him, looking him in the eye, I said, 'Don't give me that old bollocks about you not remembering my client because you would have made a fair old commission out of the sale. And you wouldn't have forgotten that.'

He stared at me, trembling slightly. 'I don't know what you are talking about. Now, please leave my shop.' His eyes were already on the couple who had just walked in.

But I wasn't about to let him off the hook. 'Perhaps a visit from the Fair Trading people might jog your memory?'

Westbury, now quite agitated said, 'Just who the hell do you think you are?'

'I'm just a private investigator trying to find my client's stolen property. But I also know your secret auctions contravene elements of the Property, Stock and Business Agents Act 2002. So just tell me who the other three bidders are, and I'll get out of your hair.' I could see Westbury struggling with that one. I said, 'My client has already given me their first names, so nobody will know this came from you.'

Westbury went to his computer and brought up a client file. He highlighted three names, addresses and phone numbers, pasted them in a new folder and printed them out.

Grabbing the printout, I grinned, 'See, it wasn't that difficult, was it?'

'This did not come from me,' he said nervously.

Pocketing the printout, I winked, 'Don't worry Mr Westbury, your secret is safe with me.'

Once the detective had left, Afton, forgetting about hard selling to the couple in his shop, picked up the private detective's card and dialled a phone number. He waited for a response, then he said, 'Adrian has put a private dick on the trail of the letter. I just thought you needed to know before he

knocks on your door.' There was a pause, then Afton said, 'I'm telling you this because he will be calling on you and you need to be ready.'

## Chapter 3

I was excited about the Pike case but, as soon as I returned to my snug home, come office, reality set in. I still had bills to pay, and that meant I had to follow Mr Trumpshaw, to his love nest, room 202 at the Avalon Motel. There were also a couple of jobs for the Royal Assurance Company I needed to clear up. I found a few calls in the message bank. One was from the delicious Jennifer, my unrequited love interest. But I had to love her from a distance. I phoned her back, and my heart leapt when I heard her voice. 'Hi Jen, what's up?'

'Hi, Ozzie. Look, have you seen Nathan lately?'

So, this call was about Nathan Goodfellow, not me. 'No, I haven't heard from him for over three months. Why?'

'I'm getting concerned about him.'

'He's a big boy. I'm sure he can look after himself.'

'Ordinarily, I'd agree. But I haven't heard from Nate since he went looking for Douglas.'

'Why was he looking for Dimmock?'

'There was a glitch with the Q-cam and Dimmock was going to look at it. But that was over 3 months ago.'

I rubbed my stubbly chin. It wasn't that I was slovenly about shaving, but I'd set my electric razor to number 3. Designed stubble was considered trendy these days. Now I'm not saying I'm a guru of fashion or anything like that. But it gives me a bit of a rugged look, a rough and ready style adopted by the new wave of TV's private detectives. I said, 'Have you tried contacting him?'

'You know what he's like when the black dog comes calling.'

'Yeah, Dimmock goes off the radar. Can't your government friends track him down?'

'They don't know about the Q-cam.'

I was surprised about that. 'How did you manage to keep it from Murphy's people?'

'They are only interested in the Q.'

'But that's only because they don't know about the other thing.'

'Ozzie, I want you to track down Dimmock.'

'I would, but I'm pretty busy at the moment. It's quite exciting, really ...'

'Please Ozzie. I wouldn't be asking you, but I'm getting desperate.'

'Well, I want to tell you about this case I'm...'

'Oz, I'll even buy you a meal. Are you free for Wednesday, around lunchtime?'

I know it sounds pathetic, but for Jen, I'd be free any time. 'Sure, Jen. When and where?'

'How about lunch at the Bushey Golf Club, say, 1 o'clock?'

'Sounds good to me.'

'In the meantime, see if you can contact Nate.'

'Sure, Jen. See you Wednesday.'

I had enough stuff to deal with in my life. What with insurance fraudsters, errant spouses, not to mention the Pike Letter case. Now Jen wanted me to go chasing after a missing mathematician. To find him, I had to search for the unpredictable, unsociable, quantum technology genius, Douglas Dimmock. It was all becoming a bit too overwhelming, and I needed to consult my spirit guide. No, I'm not getting all touchy-feely. I'm talking about JW. Johnny Walker to the uninitiated.

After a couple of shots to help me think clearly, I was able to put things in perspective. I had to contact the suspects in the Pike case.

Cameron Weldon wasn't home, so I left him a message. I didn't want to give too much away over the phone, but enough to gain his attention. I mentioned that I wanted to speak to him about an item purchased at a private auction recently. The article was now for sale if he was still interested.

Having gotten as far as I could with him for now, I turned to the second person on my suspect list - Olivia Quinn. She was home and answered the phone. 'I opened with, 'Hi, I'm working on behalf of Adrian Bennet. He bought the Pike Letter at the auction you attended.'

Olivia, completely taken aback, said, 'Who are you and what are you talking about?'

I thought I detected an Australian twang to her voice. 'I'm Oswald Doyle. And like I said ...'

Olivia had learnt, while working for the New South Wales Police Service, to take control of any uncomfortable conversation. 'What do you want, Mr Doyle?'

'It's more to do with what my client wants.'

'Will you get to the bloody point?' Olivia snapped, agitated.

'Mr Bennet wants to sell the letter. He thought you might be interested.'

The line went silent. I didn't want to interrupt, so I kept schtum, waiting for Olivia's response, with bated breath.

Finally, Olivia said, 'I might be interested. Perhaps we should meet.'

It looked as though this was going to be easier than I thought. 'Yes.'

'How about the Macchiato Bar, Brent Cross shopping centre, 2 pm?'

I checked the time. Two hours should be more than enough time to get there, providing there are no major traffic holdups. But this is London we're talking about. 'Sure, I'll see you there. MMS me a selfie to recognise you, and I'll do the same.'

'Why?'

'It beats wearing a funny hat or carrying a copy of The Times.'

## **Chapter 4**

Owen Bradley was not the brightest of souls, but he was sure of two things. He was not in charge and, if anything went wrong, he would be blamed. This put undue pressure on his psyche and caused him to stutter. Mostly he was fine, but added anxiety triggered his speech impediment, making it difficult for Owen to express certain words. Although he was quite competent in his job, nobody took him seriously. This made things particularly challenging, as Owen was a stand-over merchant, who worked for Cameron Weldon. Which was why he always had Abel Thompson with him. They had worked together for years and had become a double act like Eric and Ernie,



Laurel and Hardy, Little and Large etc. Except Owen and Abel were not funny, and they were criminals.

Both Owen and Abel worked for Cameron Weldon, and their job was to make sure people who stood in their boss' way saw the error of their ways. This dangerous duo knew very little about Alfred Pike and his famous letter. In fact, they knew very little about most things. But they were aware that some bloke called Oswald Doyle was going around asking questions about the 'Letter' and their job was to stop him. The other thing they knew about Mr Doyle was he worked out of a rented, one room and compact kitchenette cum office, in East Acton. And Owen did like rearranging people's personal belongings.

Brent Cross, known mainly for its mega shopping centre, is situated near the Brent Cross flyover, over the North Circular road. Let me say from the off, I do not like shopping malls. The sensory overload is too much for my poor brain. A promo sign near the main entrance boasts Brent Cross is North West London's premier shopping destination and home to over 2,000 leading and designer brands and 120 stylish stores including Fenwick and John Lewis. That message alone was enough to put me right off. I would put a sign up saying "Beware all ye who pass these portals. Enter at your own peril".

If it weren't for the fact that I was there to meet the intriguing Ms Olivia Quinn, I would have heeded my warning and escaped the bright lights and noise before I got swallowed up in the commercial chaos. Instead, fool that I am, I fought my way tooth and nail to the full range of restaurants and coffee shops until I came to the Macchiato Bar. I checked my messages and saw a woman in the crowd who resembled the picture on my phone. I raised my hand to get her attention as I shunted my way through the sea of lunchtime patrons, making slow progress towards her table. I looked at the long queue waiting to be served and decided I was not so hungry after all. God knows why the beautiful woman with long black hair way past her shoulders and with a perfect fringe, had chosen this hell hole for lunch.

I sat down opposite her. 'Hi, I'm Ozzie.'

She laughed and said, 'Hi, I'm an Aussie.' Then she said, 'You haven't ordered?'

I indicated the queue, saying, 'Even if I was foolhardy enough to get mixed up in that lot, I couldn't stand the pressure of trying to look at all the choices while those still queuing fired psychic daggers at my back.'

Olivia smiled, 'I guess we could go somewhere quieter where we can talk in private.'

'That would be good,' I sighed, relieved.

I followed Olivia's late-model red Mercedes sedan to Brent Park, down by the lake which was teeming with wildlife. We sat at one of the wooden picnic tables on the manicured lawn. Other people eating got my tummy rumbling, but I tried to ignore it.

Olivia said, 'What's the deal with the letter?'

Her question snapped me back to reality. She was referring to the letter I did not have and therefore, couldn't sell. I hadn't figured it out beyond using it as bait to get Olivia's attention. I think it's called "being hoist by your own petard". I'm not sure what it actually means, but it sounds very unpleasant.

'We have to be very careful how we do this because of unscrupulous people who will stop at nothing to get the letter. Therefore, I will give you specific instructions that you must follow to the letter.'

Olivia giggled. 'Follow to the letter. That's very funny.'

It's not often I miss my own puns, and I laughed at what I had said, too.

Olivia wore a frown. 'I don't get it. If I have to deal with this Professor Bennet, why isn't he here instead of you?'

Because I'm better at making up stories, I thought. I answered, 'The Professor wants to keep a low profile until I locate a serious buyer.'

'OK, I guess that makes sense.' Olivia paused, then said, 'What happens next?'

'I give him your phone number, and he will contact you.'

She nodded, 'OK, Ozzie, I can't wait to have that letter in my hand.'

I needed to know more about Pike and his message to Mazzini. This would be my only chance to pick her brain. 'What makes this letter so important?' I asked.

'Are you kidding? The Pike Letter graphically outlined plans for the three world wars that were seen as necessary to bring about the One World Order.'

'I know that, Olivia. But there has to be more to it than that.'

'What do you mean?' she asked.

I didn't know what I meant. 'You're the expert on the subject. I was hoping you would tell me.'

Olivia hesitated, then said, 'This is just a theory of mine. But I figured the same as you. I believe it's a powerful rallying symbol that points to the architects of the project. People who were so powerful and influential they could shape governments.'

'I thought Albert Pike was the planner. After all, he did write the letter.'

'That's undisputed, but the letter's message was discussed at a secret meeting in a house belonging to a Phileas Walder.'

'That kind of makes sense. But all those people at the meeting are pushing up daisies, now.'

Olivia stared at me. 'But their descendants will be alive. And the kind of world shapers I'm talking about pass their powerful legacy on to their heirs.'

'These descendants are here to keep Pike's plan on track?'

Olivia met my stare. 'If we can track down these influential people and expose their devious plot, maybe we can ...'

This was all too much for me. I did not want to be caught up in this crazy conspiracy theory. 'Look, Olivia, even if you do track down Pike and Co's descendants to find out who is running the Pike show today, you're dealing the high rollers in pursuit of world domination. Besides, do you really think the people who matter are going to believe you? They'll either have you written off as a nut job or have you written off period!'

Olivia retorted. 'And if we just sit around and do nothing the third part of Pike's plan will come to be and the human race will be enslaved.'

I could see Olivia was earnest about her theory, so who was I to shoot it down in flames? But I didn't want any part of it. By now, I was feeling guilty about tricking her into opening up to me. My ploy had worked beautifully, and now I was feeling like a rat for misleading her. I had eliminated her from my enquiries, but I hated the fact she'd be waiting for a phone call from Bennet she would not receive. 'Well, I wish you the very best with that', I said, feebly.

Olivia had a tear forming in her eye. 'My great, great grandfather, Silas Pearce knew Albert Pike, and he said the General was a dangerous man.'

I stared at her. 'How do you know that?'

Olivia answered, 'Great, great grandfather was a close friend of Albert Pike for many years. My grandfather Edward showed me a journal his granddad kept. Apparently, Silas loved to record everything. Anyway, he wrote a lot about Albert Pike. They had been friends since they worked together as schoolteachers in Gloucester. But as the years progressed, their strong bond of friendship weakened.'

'Why?'

'Difference of opinions. Silas said, in his journal, he did not recognise his friend anymore. Albert began to present another side of himself. One that Silas saw as bigoted and unholy mission-driven.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' I asked, showing genuine interest.'

'Silas, a Christian, confronted Albert and accused him of being a Satanist.'

'How did he respond to that?'

'He corrected Silas saying he was a Luciferian, not a Satanist.'

'Aren't they just two words for the same thing?'

'Not According to Pike. My great-great-grandfather must have thought Lucifer and the Devil were one and the same because Pike went to great lengths to correct him. Silas wrote in his journal that Lucifer was not a name for the devil, but an emblem of the illuminating force of reason. Translated from Latin, the designation actually means "light-bringer". When written on its own, the quote could certainly seem diabolical. However, as Pike went on to state, Lucifer represents free will, which was "created for good, but which may serve for evil".'

I could see some merit in Pike's argument. But there again he was a smart bugger who could easily twist things to suit his own agenda. But wasn't I doing just the same by manipulating Olivia? I hated myself for doing it, but I did it anyway.

Shopping Centre in Hendon, London - Ask for free quotes. <https://london.cylex-uk.co.uk/hendon/shopping%20centre.html>

Albert Pike: Masonic Leader, Or Devil-Worshipping Prophet?

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/albert-pike>

Pike's Amazing Predictions of Three World Wars. <https://renew.com/general80/pike.htm>

## Chapter 5

I returned to my East Acton office to find it ransacked. I stood in the doorway, open-mouthed as the effect of the break-in hit me. A stranger had rifled through my personal stuff and left the place in a right old mess. The laptop and other electronic devices hadn't been stolen, but they had been swiped off my desk, onto the floor. My filing cabinet was on its side with its drawers open, with files and folders spilling out. The kitchenette, or kitchen in a cupboard, as I call it, was in a mess with food contents from the closet and small fridge mixed together all over the floor. My compact bedroom looked like an explosion in a charity shop; my clothes were in a heap on the rug mixed up with strewn bedclothes. FUCK!!!!

After locating JW and knocking back a couple of shots, the initial horror subsided. I wondered who had wrecked my domain? Even more puzzling, was why? After all, I lived simply, and I didn't have anything of great value for the intruder to steal. But that's the odd thing. Everything was messed up, but nothing was missing. I was insured against property theft, so most items could be replaced.

It crossed my mind the trashing may have had something to do with this Pike business. I brushed the thought aside. I figured I was just jumping to conclusions.

Then my phone rang. It was Jen.

She asked me if I'd contacted Nathan yet.

No, I hadn't. Shit! I could have lied and said I'd been trying, but I'd had enough lies for one day. 'Sorry, Jen. There's been a lot happening and ...'

'You've been too busy to make a lousy phone call.'

Then I blurted it out. 'I came back to my office and found it done over.'

'Jen, shocked, said, 'Are you OK, Oz?'

'Yeah, I'm kind of getting used to the new arrangement now. Actually, it could be an improvement.'

Jen giggled. 'Oz that's one of the things I like about you, you crazy Irishman. You can make light of challenging situations.'

I added, 'Now my interior decorator has been a bit radical, I might grow to like it this way.'

'Please, Oz, all joking aside, will you give Nate a ring?'

'Now I have found my phone -yes.'

With good relations restored between Jen and me, it was time to have more than a nodding acquaintance with Mr JW and then find my bed. But first, I tried Nathan's number. There was still no answer, so I left a message. There was nothing else I could do.

I tried to sleep, but it did not come easily. I kept wondering why somebody wanted to send me a strong warning. I eliminated upset, cheating spouses I'd been following because only my clients knew who I am, and they weren't likely to let on. I had a couple of clients with lost pets, who thought I was dragging my heels. But even then, trashing my drum would only slow down the process. No matter how I shuffled the cards, the Pike Letter kept coming out on top. Then I started eliminating suspects from this case. Adrian Bennet is my client, so that lets him off the hook - for now, anyway.

Afton Westbury, the auctioneer, was in the frame as a suspect. I had leant on him a bit, and he would have been pissed off about that. I hadn't yet made contact with Egan Harris, so he was a wild card at present. The only other suspect was the beautiful Olivia. I tried being objective about her. My place could well have been given a makeover while I was with her. What if she was one of the bad guys and had engineered it that way? But she seemed genuine and forthcoming about her reasons for wanting the letter. Besides, I was the one not being straight with her. Not the other way around. Westbury was at the top of my suspect list, and I needed to revisit him.

Afton Westbury was brought up with all the advantages his daddy could provide. After leaving a minor public school, he got a scholarship to study late medieval archaeology. Young Afton got his degree and had worked on several Eastern European digs run by Dr Adrian Bennet. While he was part of a team excavating in Belarus he met and fell in love with Valeria Duzyny. They got married and set up an antique business in the big shed on Caledonian Road. Valeria was the brains of the operation while Afton was the antiques expert. It seemed like the perfect business partnership. He looked after the artefacts and her, the profits. The business ran along smoothly until Valeria became ill. Afton had not taken any interest in running the market, so when his wife got diagnosed with fourth stage cancer, he was at a loss and had trouble keeping the business afloat.

Afton's wife died and left him bereft. He sank into a well of despair. If it were not for Adrian Bennet's practical support during those trying times, Afton might never have climbed out of his black hole. To help Afton back on his feet, Adrian told his friend about private auctions, and Afton decided to give it a go. He had not looked back since. That was until that troublemaking Irish investigator got on his case. But he'd dealt with that problem and never expected Oswald Doyle to darken his doors again. When the private investigator walked into his shop and strolled up to the counter, he took Afton by surprise

'What do you want?' he snapped.

'Who put the Pike Letter up for auction?'

Westbury gave a shrug. 'I don't know the client's name.'

'And you expect me to believe that,' I scoffed.

'It's the truth. People list items online, using an avatar.'

'What's that?' I said, thinking of the movie with the same name.

'It's an icon people use instead of their name.'

Undeterred I said, 'What was the owner's avatar?'

Westbury said, 'It won't do you any good, Clients change them regularly.'

'Humour me. Tell me, anyway.'

'I will have to check it, and it could take a while.'

I smiled, 'That's OK, Mr Westbury. I'm in no hurry.' I saw the man grimace as he went to his computer.

Westbury asked, 'Why do you want to know the seller's name. What good will knowing that do you?'

I said, 'Because I smell a scam behind this, and I intend to find out what it is.'

'Mr Doyle, let me give you some good advice. Leave this whole Pike business alone. You are way out of your league, and it could get you into big trouble.'

'It's touching you care so much about my well-being, Mr Westbury. But just give me the avatar, and I'll be on my way.'

Afton turned back to his screen. 'Ah, here it is. 'He goes by the name, Sandman.'

'See, it wasn't that hard, 'I grinned, before turning tail and leaving the shop.

As I got in my car, my phone rang. It was Nathan returning my call. I silently thanked the stars for that. 'Nathan, how are you, mate?'

'Hi Ozzie, I just got your messages.'

'Don't you check your phone?'

'I've been out of range.'

'Where? On Mars?'

'Not quite. The Yorkshire Moors.'

'What the hell are you doing up there?'

'Don't ask. it's been a bloody nightmare.'

Trying to Nathan to get to the point was like pulling hens' teeth. 'You'd better tell me because I'm meeting up with Jen today and she needs to know what's happened to the camera.'

'That's why I was up in Buxton.'

'Jesus Nate, in simple terms just tell me what's going on.'

'Dimmock has the camera in Buxton, and I'm trying to locate him.'

'What the hell is he doing up there?'

'He has a brother there.'

I did not want to go too far down this particular rabbit hole. 'Does Dimmock's brother know where Douglas has gone?'

'No. Apparently, Dimmock got hit with one of his black moods and disappeared.'

'With a fucking million quid camera!'

'I will track it down.'

'Jen is not going to be well pleased.'

'Ozzie, just make up some plausible story showing I'm on top of things.'

I couldn't do that. But Jen would ask me about Nathan, and I would have to tell her the truth. And that would fuck up our peaceful catch-up lunch. Unless I didn't say anything about talking to Nate. 'Alright, I haven't spoken to you. But for fuck sake sort out this mess. And let me know as soon as you locate Dimmock and the Q-cam.'

## Chapter 6

Directions to Bushey Golf club were straight forward enough but which golf club did she mean? There were several nearby, within just a few miles of each other. To clarify with Jen, I texted her. She sent me an SMS, apologising and saying she meant the Bushey Country Club. Having sorted that out, I drove out of North London and took a right turn to Bushey, just before reaching Watford. I saw Jen sitting out on the terrace overlooking the golf course. She looked stunning in a tight-fitting dress showing her magnificent cleavage off to good advantage. Her long blonde hair was held off her face by a wide elasticated headband, accentuating her high cheekbones. I instantly fell in love with her all over again.

Jennifer looked me up as I approached. She smiled, 'You look like something the cat dragged in.'

'Charmed I'm sure. And it's great to see you again, Jen.'

'Didn't you get much sleep last night.'

'I had to find my bed first.'

Then Jennifer remembered about his break-in. 'Oh, yes. How is your place?'

'Apart from looking like a tornado has gone through it -great.'

'And have you heard anything from Nathan?'

'No. Still trying, though.' I lied, hating myself for it.

Lunch went relatively smoothly, and we did the catch-up chat. I asked, 'How's it going at MI7?'

'Bloody boring most of the time.'

'Have they used the Q?'

'Not to my knowledge. Mind you, I don't know. I'm locked out most of the time.'

'How do you feel about that, Jen?'

'The whole thing sucks. Declan needs access for Boogle Earth History projects. He's coming over with a legal team to sort this business out.'

'I'd love to be a fly on the wall there.'

Jen frowned. 'It's such a bloody waste when it could be put to great use.'

It was time for the Quantanaut to step in. 'While we're on the subject of history, I'm working on an amazing case.'

Jennifer brightened. 'Oh! What case?'

'I've been hired to find a stolen document. A letter Albert Pike wrote to Giuseppe Mazzini.'

Jennifer smirked slightly. 'The Pike Letter is an elaborate hoax.'

Her response took me aback. 'And on what authority do you base such a bold statement?' I said, displaying a sense of superiority.'

Jennifer sipped her coffee. 'Sorry if my remark was a bit harsh, Oz. But really ...'

'Jen, my client bought the letter at a private auction. Since then it has been stolen.'

'You've never set eyes on this fabled message, then?'

'No, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.' I looked straight at Jen and blurted it out. 'There's one sure fired way to find out.'

Jennifer knew where that conversation was going. 'NO! No Oz. Even if I thought it would be useful to know if Pike's letter was authentic, which I don't, I don't have the authority to send you back in time. Don't even go there.'

I flashed a cheeky grin, 'Without your Q I can't go there.'

'Oh. you know what I mean.'

I tried one more ploy. 'I was speaking to one of the people who bid for the letter at the auction. She has a journal written by her great, great grandfather who was a close associate of Pike.'

Jennifer became slightly interested. 'And have you seen this journal?'

'Er no. Not exactly.'

'You've either seen it, or you haven't.'

I was already regretting bringing up Olivia and her journal. I'd burnt my bridges where she was concerned. Once she realised that I had been using her, I couldn't darken her doorstep again. 'I haven't actually seen the journal yet, but ...'

'You're looking for a journal that may or may not exist to explain a letter that doesn't exist?'

This lunch get-together was taking a sharp downward decline. Jen was mocking me, and it made me angry. It's not about the letter!'

'Oh, what is it about then?'

'What and who was behind it. Albert Pike wrote a blueprint for orchestrating three world wars, two of which have already played themselves out just as he predicted. And the third is shaping up the way he said it would. Many influential, open-minded, people are still following this blueprint today. If we can find out who made up Pike's secret enclave, we can track down their descendants.'

'And what good will that do?'

I tried to sound dramatic. 'We will know who is trying to lead us into the second crusades and why.'

Jennifer said, 'This all hinges on you getting that journal, if it exists and if it is genuine. You get that, and we might have some clout to go on a Q mission.'

After lunch, Jen and I went for a gentle stroll around the perimeter of the course. A light wind was stirring so, being the perfect gentleman, I put my jacket around her shoulders. I needed to earn some brownie points after our argument.

Jennifer smiled sweetly. 'Well, thank you, kind sir.'

This seemed like the right moment. And I said, 'You must feel safe at home with all those macho guards watching over you.'

'They don't watch over me, thank God. They are only interested in watching the Q.'

'So, you can sneak in gentlemen callers, without them knowing.' I grinned.

'I don't have to sneak in anybody. It's my bloody house, and I invite anybody I want.'

This was her perfect opportunity to invite me. But it didn't happen. At least I could retreat quietly without making a complete fool of myself.

For her part, Jennifer was expecting him to put himself forward. But, much to her surprise and disappointment, Oz had not done so. Perhaps he was no longer interested in her romantically. She was enamoured of Ozzie's schoolboy awkwardness when it came to women he liked. But it seemed that he had moved on and she left it at that.

As we parted, I gave Jen the biggest hug and felt her press against me. I whispered into her ear, 'I miss you, Jen. Maybe I can be a gentleman caller.'

Jen kissed me on the cheek, 'Only as long as you're not too much of a gentleman.' Then she gave me my jacket.

I was over the moon. 'I'll ring as soon as I speak to Nate. Thanks for lunch, Jen.'

We kissed chastely and went our separate ways. Now I had to find a way to see the journal.

## Chapter 7

Olivia Quinn busied herself around her flat while waiting for Bennet's phone call. Another 30 minutes went by, and she still had not heard from the professor. By now, disappointment had turned to anger. She felt helpless because she had no control over events, and that put her in a weakened position. She remembered what Sergeant Charlene McCoy had told her when she worked as a police officer in Dubbo. 'Controlling your anger keeps you in control.'

Then her phone rang. She grabbed her mobile, but it was not Adrian Bennet. It was the Irish private dick. Well, he was the next best thing. 'Ozzie, I haven't heard from Bennet yet.'

Olivia sounded stressed as I said, 'Well I've done my job, but I'll give him a ring if you like.'



'No. Give me his number, and I'll do it.'

'Sure, Olivia. But first, can you show me the journal?'

'Why do you want to see it?'

'Because it sounds amazing and could be more important than the letter itself.'

Olivia had not seen it that way. To her, it was a family heirloom, not something to be sold. 'I suppose I could show it to you. But why?'

I didn't know how to answer that question honestly, without mentioning my secret life. If I told Olivia about Jennifer and the Q, she would think me mad. Even if she did believe quantum travel was possible - and that's a big if - I have no further access to it so I couldn't prove anything. I said, 'It's really complicated, and I'd rather explain it face-to-face.'

Olivia sighed. 'OK, I'll show you the journal, but I want Bennet's number.'

Olivia resided in Park Rd, Chipping Barnet. Her Class A Mercedes parked in the driveway suggested she was home. It was becoming dark as I arrived. The house sensor lights lit my way to the front door. I spoke into an intercom and Olivia buzzed me in. She wore her dark hair in a ponytail and was dressed more for comfort than style. Although the raven-haired beauty would have looked sexy in a suit of armour. But she was all business and had the journal ready for my scrutiny. I picked up the leather-bound diary and said, 'Is there any reference in here to the letter?'

She took the book off me and skimmed through it until she came to the entry she was looking for. 'There, read that,' she urged.

I took the book and read, 'I had not heard from Albert since our overheated argument over a year ago. Then, out of the blue, I received a message from him. He said he had sent his letter to Giuseppe Mazzini. In it, he told the Italian Prime Minister how things must come to be.'

This was amazing stuff. With the right persuasion, it could just be enough to get me back into the Q. But first I had to get the journal authenticated. My mind did cartwheels. 'Olivia, this is gold!'

'Yes, I know. And when I get the letter, I will have all the proof I need to show there is a plot afoot for a handful of people to rule the world.'

'But first we have to get it authenticated,' I stated.

'What will that involve?' Olivia asked, cautiously.

'I know someone at the British museum who can run the ink and paper tests to tell it's age. I will have to show the curator the journal to get his quote for services rendered.'

Jennifer froze. 'No, I can't let you take it away.'

'But it's the only way we will ...'

'No, Ozzie. They will destroy it. I can't risk it.'

'Who will destroy it?'

'Come on, wake up. How do you think this Luciferian enclave had manipulated human history so far? Anyone who poses a threat to their devilish agenda disappears or becomes an accident victim.'

She certainly had a point. But, in my Christopher Marlow assignment, I had trusted this archivist with Sir Francis Walsingham's journal, and he not betrayed my trust. But I could not tell Olivia that. 'I understand what you are saying, Olivia, but unless we use the journal, it will not serve any useful purpose.'

'What do you mean?'

'You want to use the diary to find out who the key players were who worked with Pike to play the world domination game, Right?'

'Yes.'

'Then you want to track down their descendants to see who is taking Pike's agenda into the end game.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'And you need the journal to convince certain people that the Pike letter is real and is a clear and present threat to human society.'

'Yes.'

'At some stage, you're going to have to reveal your journal. I can arrange a meeting, and you can come with me to see Dr Chris Chesterton, an expert in ancient manuscripts and historical writings.'

Olivia looked straight at me 'Give me Bennet's number.'

I knew I couldn't put her off any longer and I only had one card left to play. 'With this journal, you don't even need the letter to prove what Pike wrote was true.'

Olivia thought about it. Then she said, 'What about your fee for finding a buyer.'

'Oh that. I still have two other people after the letter and, because you've done such a good job looking after the journal, nobody else knows about it.'

Having won Olivia over with Doyle charm and my Irish logic, I told her I would contact her once I'd arranged a meeting with Dr Chesterton. Then I took my leave and drove back home.

I had just parked the old car on Norbroke Street, where I lived. Then I spotted them. A couple of men standing just outside my office. I was puzzled as to what they were doing there waiting outside my gaff around 9 pm. Their presence put me on my guard.

Owen Bradley stamped out his cigarette, saying, 'Th...that must b...b...be him, Abel.'

Abel Thompson said, 'Some people never learn, Owen,' as he hefted the weighted sap in his pocket.

Owen favoured the good old knuckle dusters. He could really do some real physical damage with them.

I approached these two cautiously. 'Can I help you guys?' I said and stopped a few feet from them. My eye caught a glimpse of the dusters. 'Just tell me what this is about, and we can deal with this in a civilised manner.'

Abel turned to his offsider, 'Some people are too thick to heed a warning.'

I figured these were the bastards who broke in and did over my place. 'You must be my interior designers.'

Owen scowled, 'T... time for another lesson.'

I sized up the situation. I could probably deal with one of the thugs, but the other one would probably get me. This was real life, not movie crap where the hero takes on any number of attackers and wins. The question was, which would do the most damage - the dusters or the sap. There was no time to contemplate the choices. Brass knuckles lunged at me. I sidestepped, blocking the severity of his blow, and used my momentary advantage to kick him hard in the ribs. Then the sap

descended. Instinctively I flinched away from the leaden weight, catching a glancing blow to the side of my skull, instead of the full impact. But even that had me reeling. The bastard came in hard, swinging his sap. I saw knuckles out the corner of my eye. I yelled, 'FOR FUCK SAKE AT LEAST TELL ME WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT!'

Able had been told to scare the detective, not kill him. He turned to his accomplice, 'I think he's had enough.'

Knuckles, disappointed said, 'Just hold him up so I can get in one good shot.'

I felt myself being dragged to my feet. The sap held my arms while Knuckles punched me hard in the belly. I'm no softy, but that blow left me in agonising pain. I became dead weight and collapsed on the pavement. When I got my breath back, I gasped, 'Why the fuck are you doing this?'

Knuckles said, 'F...f...forget about the f...f fucking letter.'

As I lay there in the dark, I felt some blood trickling down the side of my head. The punch in the solar plexus had knocked the air out of me. But I didn't think there was any permanent damage. As I stood up on shaky legs, the attack told me two things. One, somebody was very serious about the Pike letter. And two, it was dangerous territory for me to get involved in. I had a sneaking suspicion that Alton Westbury had something to do with it. I made a mental note to have another word with him.

I unlocked the door and walked into the office. It was still in the same mess as when I left it. Well, of course, it was, and it would have to stay that way until morning.

## Chapter 8

A small sentry station and a boom gate had replaced the sagging farm gate that led onto Jennifer's property. The guards wore plain clothes and were armed with lightweight sub-machine guns. One of them checked the list while another sentry checked Declan and his entourage's IDs. Satisfied, the arrivals were genuine, the guard gave each person a visitor's badge with instructions to wear it at all times. Then Declan and his people were waved through.

Jennifer was overjoyed to see Declan and gave the 35-year-old billionaire the most enormous hug. 'It's great to see you here again. But it's a pity it's under such trying circumstances.'

Declan flashed a boyish grin. 'Don't worry Jen. We're here to kick some stuffed shirt British ass.'

She smiled wanly and invited him inside the farmhouse.

As they sat drinking Lady Grey tea, Declan said, 'How's our baby?'

'I don't get much access to it these days. I get so angry and frustrated at times. I keep complaining, but that insufferable Murphy keeps quoting national security to me. Honestly, I could kill the obsequious little royalist lapdog at times.'

'Declan grinned, 'Don't you go worrying your pretty little head about that. The cavalry is here.'

Jennifer, feeling more secure and relaxed in his aura of confidence, sidled up to the devilishly handsome, wealthy American and gave him a kiss.

'What's that for?' he asked, smirking.

'It's on account if you play your cards right, Mr Boogle.'

Later that night Jennifer straddled Declan's lap, wrapping her arms around his neck. She hadn't seen Declan in months, and she could not resist kissing him. Seeing him after even the shortest absence triggered this response. Jennifer confessed, 'Dec, I hate to be apart from you and ...'

He silenced her with a deep kiss. As he slowly undid her blouse one button at a time, he stood up and pulled Jen to her feet. With his arms still around her back their tongues entwined as she returned his passionate kiss, the lovers started a clumsy dance and fell on the bed. It was awkward undressing when they did not stop kissing.

Eventually, naked Declan broke the embrace to focus on Jennie's ample breasts and aroused nipples.

Jennifer, blissed-out, sighed loudly as his light kisses trailed down her soft belly until his tongue reached the holy of holies. As his fingers and tongue played between her legs, Jen felt that old familiar intensity she had not felt in her loins since the last time they spent time together. Another wordless exchange passed between them as she laid back on the bed, her ankles resting on his shoulders as Declan hastily entered her. There was no need for him to take his time. Jen felt her vaginal muscles squeezing his hard penis and could do nothing in that position but cry out his name as she approached her climax.

'What brought that on?' Declan grinned widely, as Jen brushed some blonde hair back out of her eyes.

'I missed you,' she said simply. 'I just missed you.'

Cameron Weldon seldom called on Afton Westbury whom he saw to be a person of wasted potential and lacking in drive. The man was a walking encyclopedia when it came to antiques yet, instead of running a major auction house, he potted around in a shed amongst all the bric-a-brac and junk shops in Caledonian road. If it weren't for the private auctions, the slacker would probably go bankrupt. And even those were organised by Cameron Weldon. This was one of the rare occasions when Cameron stepped over the threshold into Afton's shop, and that was only because he needed a favour.

Smiling and shaking Afton's hand effusively Cameron said, 'My, my, what a great job you have made of this place.'

Westbury knew Cameron's hail-fellow-well-met act hid what the man was really thinking. But he played the game, all the while distrusting the fellow. Weldon had a history of cheating to make his mark in life. He was from a rough working-class neighbourhood in London's East End, but he'd learnt to hide it over the years, and he came across as a respectable businessman. Yet, Afton, from a public-school background - albeit a minor one - who abhorred the old school tie brigade, saw Cameron for what he really was, a cheap loan shark. The pair had very little in common, except rare antiques, and even in this Cameron assumed the dominant role. He replied, 'How are you, Mr Weldon?'

'Fair to middling.' Then he said, 'I want to involve you in a great opportunity.'

With Cameron that usually meant something very dodgy and most likely illegal. 'Oh!'

'I need you to run another auction. This time with something exceptional indeed.'

'Oh, what would that be?'

Cameron smiled, 'A journal written by a Silas Pearce.'

Afton wore a puzzled frown. 'Who's he and why is it important?'

'He was a close friend of Albert Pike.'

Afton's stood there, open-mouthed. Then he uttered, 'And you have possession of this journal?'

'Not yet. But soon.'

## Chapter 9

I had been to the British Museum many times. Dedicated to human history, art and culture, it comprised a permanent collection of some eight million works, which had been widely sourced during the era of the British Empire. I was very impressed by the way the institution documented the story of human culture from its beginnings to the present. The museum had been going and growing since 1763. I felt some national pride that it was established by an Irish physician and scientist, Sir Hans Sloane. He started it off with his extensive private collection which was first on display in Montague House.

I regaled Olivia Quinn with such trivia as we navigated our way to the library's substantial iconic round reading room.

Scholars sat at tables radiating out from a catalogue desk, which acted as the hub of a spoked wheel. Olivia and I passed by where Karl Marx spent long days working on *Das Kapital* and Virginia Woolf went to find out the truth about women.

In due course, we came to Dr Chesterton's office. I knocked, and the archivist invited us in.

Dr Chesterton had been expecting me. We had met during his testing of the Francis Walsingham diary. Now I had something else to show him.

'What have you got this time, Mr Doyle?' Chris Chesterton asked.

Indicating Olivia, I introduced her, saying, 'Miss Quinn has the item, not I.'

Chris smiled at her. 'Well, let's see what you've got.'

Before Olivia handed over the journal, she said, 'This journal has been in my family for at least four generations. It was written by my great great grandfather, Silas Pearce.'

Chris looked straight at Olivia. 'And who, pray, is he?'

'A colleague of Albert Pike,' she answered, watching his eyebrows raise.

The Albert Pike of Mazzini letter fame?'

'Yes.'

'My word!' he said, surprised. 'The letter that was allegedly on display in this very reading room.'

I stared at the academic. 'It was on display here! When?'

Chris said, 'The Pike Letter to Giuseppe Mazzini was allegedly on display in the British Museum Library in London until 1977. But it was before my time here. I'm afraid I have never set eyes on it. However, the letter features heavily in the book *Satan, Prince of this World*, by former naval officer William Guy Carr, who allegedly copied the letter while it was on public display.'

'That's very interesting,' I said. 'So, we need to authenticate the journal.'

Olivia gingerly handed over the leather-bound book. 'Nobody else must know about this,' She stated emphatically.

Chris looked at her. 'Have no fear, Ms Quinn. Nobody will know about this from me. I will contact you as soon as I have examined it thoroughly.'

Edgar Murphy wiped his pallid brow as he faced the lawyers across the table in a private room at the Bushey Country Club. Declan Merrick's legal team comprised six of the most robust, smartest,

meanest legal representatives, who were there to challenge the British Crown Office. Declan was present, as was Jennifer Smethurst and Gerard Fox. But they were there as silent witnesses as the legal battle commenced.

Gerard Fox had fought long and hard to help Jennifer keep her Quantime out of government hands. However, the legal wrangle had reached such proportions that Gerard was out of his depth. He was relieved to step back and let the New York firm of Carlton, Harris and Associates do their work.

Edgar Murphy and the Crown's solicitors sat opposite the Americans, dwarfed by their indomitable presence. Unlike Gerard Fox, Edgar could not take a back seat. He had to defend the Crown Office's stand regarding the use of the Quantime. He began, 'Regulations clearly state that once a design application is filed or registered, the Government can, at any time, use that design for its own purpose.'

The spokesman for the American law firm said, 'I don't see a problem. Simply get authorisation for my client to use the device.'

'I'm afraid it's not that simple. For a person to have such authorisation, they need National Security clearance. Your client has not and cannot have that clearance.'

The spokesman said, 'Then our defence is that we do not recognise your rules and will sue the British Government for \$500 million.'

'That's utterly preposterous, and you know it.'

'My client has a strong case against your government because he became part owner of the Quantime machine before the British Home Office took control of the device. and as such has a right to use it.'

'This machine now comes under the remit of the DOD. As such, it nullifies all prior agreements, including that with your client.'

The spokesperson said, 'Your Defence Ministry lists three times as many British patents under your national security act than those filed in the US. The UK Intellectual Property Office reported that an average of nine secrecy orders was imposed for every 10,000 patents filed in the UK since 2003, compared with less than three per 10,000 recorded in the US. The difference is surprising because the US government spends far more of its overall R&D budget on military research than does the UK. In 2009, the Pentagon spent \$80 billion (0.16 per cent of GDP), or 57 per cent of the US public research budget, on defence R&D – against the Ministry of Defence's \$3.4 billion (0.56 per cent of GDP), or 9 per cent of overall UK R&D funding.

Edgar Murphy rebutted, 'Impressive statistics indeed. But as you colonials say. 'It ain't worth a hill of beans' because a secrecy order has been placed on this Quantime device. A secrecy order is applied to a patent if 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.'

Declan Merrick's leading lawyer said, 'How can this Quantime be considered a threat to your national security when it's not a weapon?'

Murphy stood firm. 'For your information, any inventions related to cryptography, uranium enrichment and biological and chemical weapons are often made secret. Even seemingly benign inventions that have a "dual-use" can be deemed top secret. For example, an airborne crop duster that might be used to spread bioweapons.'

'That's all very well, Mr Murphy, but this invention isn't related to any of those things.'

Louise Crowden, a spokesperson for the MOD, and a senior scientist at the Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, Wiltshire, said, 'Our analysts, who decide when to classify UK-filed patents try to downgrade patent classifications to maximise patent exploitability as much as possible.'

The legal head for Merrick asked, 'Ms Crowden, have you seen this Quantime machine?'

'Yes, I have taken the opportunity to examine it.'

'And what is your professional opinion about it?'

She answered, 'When it comes to sensitive patents, we look for indications that would put it in the category of "Black Projects".'

'Please explain what you mean by Black Projects.'

'Black projects include such things as stealth technology, cryptographic and nuclear systems.'

'How does this patent fit the black projects category?'

'Because we deemed it as military technology, prejudicial to national security or public safety.'

'But the Quantime has never once been deemed a weapon so why is it off-limits, even to its inventor?'

Ms Crowden sighed, 'It comes under section 22 of the Patents Act 1977, which determines the definition of military technology. Such technologies are redacted for reasons of national security, under section 24(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This redaction is upheld by the Information Commissioner.'

Merrick's head lawyer objected strongly, 'So, you can make a bold statement 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, 'HM government doesn't make deals with rogue inventors. We can walk into her place tomorrow and confiscate everything if we like. But we have allowed her to keep it on her property.'

'Yes, but only because Professor Smethurst is the only person who understands how her patent works. You need her to teach others how to use it. He addressed Ms Crowden. 'Have you actually seen this device in action?'

Louise said, 'I have seen this patent, but I haven't actually seen it work. The reason for this is that Professor Smethurst claims it to be some sort of time machine based on some theory of quantum travel.'

'Okay, as you haven't seen this "time machine" working, how do you know it does what Professor Smethurst claims? She could just be some mad scientist for all you know.'

'Until expert military personnel have studied it, we won't know for sure.'

The lawyer pressed, 'If you don't know if or how this device works, how can you confiscate it under the 1997 Patents Act?' He paused for effect, then continued, 'Patented military technology consists of a set of inventions which nature, uses or/and applications that have defensive or offensive purposes. This patent, in no way, comes under this category. And, even if it does what the inventor purports, which is highly unlikely, it still does not come under such a category. Your government's petition to confiscate this patent should be withdrawn.'

Murphy countered, 'Our objective is to identify if the knowledge embedded in this military technology diffuses into other patented technologies. The Patents Act 1997 has a provision for including future technologies that are not fully 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, it is too dangerous to be left in the inventor's hands.'

The lawyer stared at Murphy. He had to rebut but what could he say. He asked, 'Under this provision, how long can the examiners take to make their decision?'

Murphy said, 'As long as it takes for them to satisfy that there is no national threat involved.'

'That is unacceptable to my client. Just because this technology goes way beyond current knowledge to do with "time travel" your Crown Commissioner has no right to confiscate the patent indefinitely. That is totally unfair to my client who invested a large sum of money in this project before your government stole it. Both the inventor and my client are willing to work closely with your 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 provides a win, win situation all round.'

Murphy had been told to find a solution to the impasse, so he had to compromise a little. He stood up. 'Well, I think we all know where we stand. I will send my report to the Home Office, and I will let you know their decision in due course.'

*British Museum to bring back Reading Room as part of ....*

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/jul/04/british-museum-to-bring-back-reading-room-as-part-of-revamp>

*UK keeps three times as many patents secret as the US ....*

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn18691-uk-keeps-three-times-as-many-patents-secret-as-the-us/>

*Patents Grab Disappearance Murder | nextexx. <https://nextexx.com/patents-grab-disappearance-murder/>*

## **Chapter 10**

A week had passed and still no word from Murphy. Declan was spitting chips. He turned to Jennifer, as they lay in bed together, 'I have to fly back stateside soon, and I need to give my board some good news about the Q.'

'If they're adamant about this national threat thing I don't see what anyone can do about it.'

'If I don't hear from them before I leave, my legal team will hit them with a massive lawsuit. Maybe that will put a rocket under Murphy's ass.'

'And what if he comes back with the same story. What will ...'

'I will sue their asses until they come around to my way of thinking.'

Jennifer shook her head, 'I don't think even you are a match for the British Government.'

'With the power of Boogle behind me, they won't know what hit them.'

Jennifer, fed up with Declan's bravado, said, 'And have you got Boogle behind you? Didn't you say some major shareholders thought investing in the Q was a big mistake?'

'Yes, but we got the vote carried.'



'I know Dec, but will they back you in this lawsuit?'

'I'm hoping the Brits will see sense before it gets to that.'

'And what if they don't? What if they still deny us access to the Q?'

'Fuck stuffed shirts like Murphy,' Declan growled.

Then Jennifer said, 'Oh by the way. Ozzie wants to talk to you about something.'

'What?'

'It's best if he explains it.'

'If it's to do with the Q I don't want to know until this shit is sorted.'

I hadn't received a call from Declan, so I called Jennifer. She wasn't available, so I left a message. Then I returned to the business of sorting out my office and home, as it doubled as both. The intruders who rearranged my office, Knuckles and Cosh, I call them, scattered my files around but did not destroy them. I was able to find my folders of unfinished cases. These generally comprised insurance claim work, lost animals, missing people, and surveillance on cheating spouses. I knew I should have been concentrating on those and not trying to find out who had set Cosh and Knuckles on me. Afton Westbury was my main suspect, so I decided to focus on him. Then I remembered, Cameron Weldon, the third person bidding for the Pike Letter at the auction, had not returned my call. Which could either mean he knew I wasn't genuine because he already had the letter, having stolen it from Dr Bennet, or he was no longer interested in attaining it. Either way, he was the suspect who stood out. As I could not concentrate on my bread and butter work, I caught the Piccadilly line tube to Caledonian Rd and then took a cab to Westbury Antiques.

Afton Westbury was with a customer when I walked into his shop. He tried ignoring me at first and concentrated on selling the Queen Anne table the client had her eye on. But I kept moving around the shop touching and picking up objects, some of them breakable and valuable items.

Mrs Barnbridge, seeing that Afton was distracted, said, 'I can see you're busy. Hold onto the table. I may be back later.'

'No, not at all, my dear. I'm sure we can come to an arrangement now.'

'Nonsense. No need to rush things, Mr Westbury. Indicating the browser, Mrs Barnbridge smiled, 'It's OK. I think that man over there wants your attention.'

After the lady had left, Westbury came over to me. 'You just cost me a sale!'

'Then you'd better answer my questions, or I'll stick around and make your customers uneasy until you do.'

Westbury glared at me, He snapped, 'What the hell do you want to know?'

'I want to know about Cameron Weldon.'

'I don't know who you're talking about,' Afton responded much too quickly.'

'To refresh your mind, he was one of the people bidding for the Pike Letter.'

'Well I know nothing about him, Afton said, wondering how much the pushy private investigator knew?'

'Mr Westbury, I'm going to stay here and upset your day until you tell me what I want to know.'

Afton snapped, 'All I know is that he sometimes attends the auctions.'

I eye-balled the man, 'Are you sure that's all you know, Mr Westbury?'

'I just told you.'

'Does he use thugs to beat people up?'

'I know nothing about that, Afton said, his eyes slightly downcast.

I am good at picking up on body language, so I figured Westbury was lying. 'Does he use thieves and vandals to break into buildings?'

Afton was feeling hot under the collar. He loosened his gold colour cravat. 'I don't know what you're on about. Now please leave before I call the police.'

I chuckled. 'Are you sure you want to go down that road, Mr Westbury?'

'I just want you to go.'

'Then give me Weldon's address, and I'll bother him instead.'

Afton slowly shook his head. 'You have no idea who or what you are dealing with.'

'What am I dealing with? Enlighten me.'

Afton thought about it. No, it would be too risky. But why would he want to help the nosey Irishman anyway? 'I've already told you too much. Besides, I don't know where he lives.'

'Did Weldon steal the letter from Adrian Bennet's place?'

Afton looked at me as though I had grown another head. 'My God! How can you suggest such a thing?'

'Because it's my job to get the letter back to the legal owner.'

Afton Westbury looked about him as though someone might be listening. 'It's best that you forget about Mr Weldon all together.'

I was fed up with the wimpish Westbury, and threatened, 'I will find out about him, and when I do, I will tell him you gave me his details.'

Afton went ghostly white. 'You can't do that! He'll kill me!'

'Then stop pissing me about, and you tell me what I want to know.'

Afton, whimpering, uttered, 'But you'll still be able to drop me in it.'

I retorted. 'Yes, but I won't. It's Weldon I'm after, not you.'

I sat in the beer garden of the Wishing Well, enjoying a pint while waiting for Detective Sergeant Creane to join me. I had met there with him a few times since I left the Metropolitan police. Creanie, as the DS is known to his friends, had proved very helpful to me on occasion, when I needed access to the vast resources of the law. It was a two-way street, though. Dealing with the criminal classes, I was useful to Creanie on occasion as well. Thinking back, it was Creanie who introduced me to the mathematician Nathan Goodfellow. And that led to my first Quantime experience. Here I was again, waiting for my good mate who phoned to report what he had found out about our Cameron Weldon.

Sergeant Creane groaned when he first received the phone call from Ozzie. Passing on intelligence from police files to a civilian was a sackable offence, so he had to be very circumspect in his dealings with the private dick. Having copied down the name Oz had given him he promised to contact the private investigator if he found out something about any criminal history.

Keeping to his word, after a couple of days, Creane got back to me with some news. Which was how we came to meet again at the Wishing Well, a pleasant watering hole not far from the East Acton tube. He sat down at my table and signalled cheers by raising the glass of beer I had bought for him. Creane wiped beer froth off his moustache, and asked me, 'Why are you interested in this Weldon character?' while passing a memory stick to me. 'Is he one of your errant husbands?'

'No he isn't, you cheeky bastard, I don't just follow unfaithful spouses you know. Weldon interests me as a suspect in a home break-in.'

'A break-in. Did the victim report it to the police?'

'No, he chose to hire me to find the culprit instead. You get your own cases,' I grinned.

'Until you need my help. But, to be honest mate, Weldon doesn't strike me as the cat burglar type.'

'I haven't met him so you might be right. But I've met some of his not-so-nice friends.'

'Oh, what happened then?'

'It's not important, they want me to drop the investigation. But I can't do that.'

'Have they threatened you?'

'What the fuck do you think, mate?' I said, drinking some beer.

'If you've been threatened in any way you should let us professionals deal with it.'

Changing the subject, I said, 'What did you find out about Weldon?'

'It's all on the stick, mate.'

'Come on, mate. In a nutshell.'

'Not a great deal.' Creanie paused to drink some beer. Wiping his moustache, he said, 'He's a loan shark who sails pretty close to the wind. But he's never been charged with anything illegal.'

'That you know of.'

'Yeah, that we know of.'

7 So, what do you know?' I pressed

'He's been involved with some shonky real estate and could be considered a slum landlord. But he still operates inside the law. He's been charged with assault on late payers, but his solicitor always manages to get him off. He's never been convicted; that's about it.'

I grinned, 'Thanks, mate. At least I know more about the bastard now.'

Creanie frowned, 'This is the last time I can do this, mate.'

I smiled, 'Sure. Just go and get us refills.'

## Chapter 11

Olivia Quinn had not heard from Dr Chesterton since she gave him her precious journal to authenticate. In her mind, there was no need for an expert evaluation of the document. It had been

in her family since her great-great-grandfather Silas Pearce had penned it. Another thing that irked her was Dr Bennet had not contacted her about the sale of the letter. For her to own both documents about the Pike prophecy would be a huge coup. But she just acted as a middle person for her client. In any case, it was purely academic unless Bennet sold her the letter.

Just then, her phone rang. She believed in serendipity and thought, maybe she was picking up that Dr Bennet was going to call her. 'Olivia speaking.'

'Olivia Quinn?'

'Yes. Who's speaking?' Olivia said, becoming a bit wary.

'The Olivia Quinn with the Silas Pearce diary for sale?'

It was a man's voice, disguising a German accent. Olivia's heart missed a beat. 'Who are you, and what do you want?' she demanded, trembling.

'Ms Quinn, you know exactly what I want - the Silas Pearce diary, of course.'

She heard him chuckling. She took a deep breath. 'I have no idea what you are on about. If you bother me again, I'll...'

'Do not hang up, Olivia. That would be very rude of you. What on Earth would your mum in Australia think, Olivia?'

She felt as though she was trapped in a nightmare. How did the menacing caller know about the diary? And how did he know about her mother in Australia? 'I don't know who you are or what it is you're looking for. Fuck off and leave me alone.'

'Language, Language.' What would your father Reg think of your obscenity's; him being a God-fearing man and all? Now, deliver the diary tomorrow. I'll send you directions. If you don't show up my friend down under will tell your parents what a bad girl you have been.'

The phone went dead. Olivia sat frozen in shock, unable to move.

I was having quite an eventful evening. I was home alone tidying up my tip of an office with the help of saluting JW a time or three when Nathan rang.

'Hi, Nate, how's tricks?'

'I just phoned Jennifer with the good news I'd tracked down Dimmick and the QC.'

'What do you want with a Queen's Counsel,' I quipped. But it was wasted on Nathan, who seemed to have a humour bypass in his genes.

Douglas had his demons under control once more, and I got him to fix the Q-cam. I was pleased that Nathan had been a good bloodhound, but I'd told him to phone me, and I would tell Jen personally. Now I had to find another excuse to invite myself to her place. But that would have to wait until tomorrow. The whiskey, work and worry had made me tired. Exhausted, I collapsed on my camp bed and slept like a baby. Except I didn't wake up for a nappy change.

Sometime during the night, my mobile lit up, its ringtone piercing my brain. Olivia's name came up on the screen, but I was mostly unconscious and could not look at the bright screen. 'Hello. Who is this?' I growled.

Olivia said, 'I'm sorry to trouble you, Ozzie, but I've received a threat over the phone, and I didn't know who else to speak to.'

'A threat! What do you mean?'

'He knows about my journal. But even more troubling is that he knows about my parents in Australia,' She garbled nervously.

'Just slow down and tell me the whole story.' I said, trying to sound professional, as my brain realised this was not a drill, and it had to stay awake.

'I'm scared Ozzie. I need you here.'

'What, now?'

'Please Ozzie, I need your help.'

I didn't get it. Olivia came from a military background and had served as a cop in New South Wales, so she was no wimp. But something the caller said had seriously rocked her boat, and I've always been a sucker for damsels in distress. 'OK, I'll be right over,' I sighed.

Olivia had clearly been getting all worked up as she waited for me to arrive. So much so that as soon as she opened her door to invite me in, she burst out, 'That bastard Chesterton must have told the person who threatened me about the journal. Now he's demanding ...'

'Whoa, Olivia. Just back up a bit. How about we have a nice cup of coffee and you can tell me all about the call.'

Olivia put the kettle on and organised the beverages. Then she invited me to sit down. As we sipped our coffee, Olivia explained, 'The person who phoned me said they wanted my diary. I received a message telling me to bring the journal to the Serpentine in Hyde Park, at 1 pm, where I have to leave the book at Speakers Corner, in a rubbish bin, with a red arrow painted on it.'

'What are you going to do?'

Olivia couldn't answer this question. She looked as though her mind was in turmoil. She shook her head, 'How could they possibly know about my journal when I have kept it secret for most of my life? I have only told you and that Dr Chesterton. One of us three leaked that information, and I know it wasn't me.'

I looked at the troubled young woman. 'Well, it obviously wasn't me because I know you don't have it at present.'

'Which only leaves your expert.'

I sipped more coffee. 'Well, with what we have to work with here I can't fault your logic. But sometimes things are not as they seem.'

Olivia stared at me. 'What do you mean?'

'OK, what if your caller also worked at the museum and he somehow got to look at the journal.'

'Ozzie, why can't you accept that Chris Chesterton told the person who threatened me about Silas' diary?'

'Why would he do that?'

'For money. What else?'

I looked sympathetically at her. 'It makes no sense. If your terroriser knew Chris had the diary, why would he need to phone you for it.'

'But how else could he know about it?' Olivia said, puzzled.

'Let's concentrate on the who, not the how.'

'Olivia wore a puzzled frown. 'How can we find out who?'

'Did he phone you on your mobile?'

'Yes.'

I put my hand out. 'Let me see it.'

'I know what you're getting at, but no name came up, just anonymous caller.'

'But there will still be a number.'

She stared at Ozzie. 'Do you think I'm stupid. I tried ringing the number but just got a no connection message.' She paused, then added, 'Besides the caller wouldn't be stupid enough to let me trace his number.'

I grinned, 'Just because a person is a criminal does not mean they don't make mistakes. Otherwise, they would never get caught.' I caught her hint of a smile. 'I have a friend in the force who might be able to trace the caller. But I need your phone to trace the number.'

Olivia yawned and stretched. The way she thrust out her breasts caused a stirring in my nether regions. She said, 'I don't know about you, Ozzie, but I need something stronger than coffee.'

I laughed lightly. 'Now you're talking my language, darlin'.'

'How does whiskey sound?'

'I didn't know it made a noise,' I quipped, lightening the mood.

She laughed and produced a bottle of single malt and two crystal tumblers. Olivia poured out two decent measures. We clinked glasses, and I said, 'To the mystery of Silas' diary.'

Olivia put down her drink and looked me in the eye. 'You're a good man Oswald Doyle.' She leant over to me and planted a kiss on my cheek.

I knew I wasn't a good man. I had tricked her, and I may well have led the bad guys to her door. But now was not a good time to bring up the subject. I reached out to this beautiful, vulnerable woman, and gently drew her to her feet. I enfolded her in my arms and said quietly. 'Don't worry Olivia, 'Well get to the bottom of this threat. But first I need to go and get some sleep.' I yawned.

Olivia looked at me with imploring eyes. 'Do you have to go? I don't want to be alone tonight.'

I couldn't think of anything more enjoyable than cuddling up in bed and protecting this delightful lady, but before I put my big foot in it, she saved me making a fool of myself by adding, 'I like you Ozzie, but don't get me wrong. Do you mind sleeping on the couch? I'd feel so much better just knowing you are out here.'

I grinned, 'No, the couch will do me fine.'

## **Chapter 12**

The night did not go as I thought it might - hoped it would, I suppose. But I felt noble being there to support Olivia. I didn't get much sleep though. In a few hours, Olivia was to take the journal to Speakers Corner in Hyde Park. If she did not do so, the terroriser threatened to harm her parents. And, as she did not have the diary, she could not follow the caller's directions. What the hell was she supposed to do? We could get Dr Chesterton to give her back the journal. But first, I needed Sergeant Creane's help. I know I said I wouldn't trouble him for police assistance again, but I didn't know where else to turn.

I'd been to the toilet to urinate when I bumped into Olivia, who looked very fetching, bra-less and wearing an oversized tee-shirt. I tried keeping focussed on her face, but this was the time of the day I was most susceptible to female charms.

She said, 'Morning, Ozzie. Did you sleep, OK?'

I answered, 'Oh, yes. I slept like a baby.'

That's good then,' Olivia smiled.

'Actually, I wasn't exactly truthful. I had a shit night, but I didn't want you to feel bad about it.'

'That's OK, I don't feel bad about it.'

'Tossing and turning all night, I was, trying to figure out how to help you.'

'You shouldn't have bothered,' she said, 'I've made my decision.'

'Which is?'

'I'll explain it over coffee.'

As we had our caffeine kick-starter, I sat quietly while Olivia outlined her decision. I agreed with the first part, which was to get the journal back off Dr Chesterton. But the rest I was not at all happy about. I said, 'If you give into that bastard and do as he demands, you've lost the diary forever.'

Olivia bewailed, 'What else can I do. He threatened to harm my parents.'

'That's the way these bastards work. But he's more interested in the journal than he is hurting your parents.'

Olivia stared at me. She retorted, 'Well they're my parents, and I'm not prepared to take that chance.'

I must admit I was a tad selfish. I needed that diary as an excuse to use the Q. I said, 'I have an idea who is behind this, and I need to make a phone call.'

Creane was at his desk when he received the call. Seeing Ozzie's name come up, he groaned. 'What do you want now?'

I said, 'Good morning to you too. What makes you think I'm after something?'

'Because you only ever contact me when you want something.'

'Ouch! That cuts me to the quick, mate.'

'Are you saying you're phoning just to pass the time of day, then?'

'Well, there is a little thing I thought you might ...'

'Fuck off, Ozzie. I told you the last time was the last time.'

'I know mate. But there's this girl, and she's being threatened by ...'

'I knew there would be a skirt involved.'

'Look, mate, I just need to you to trace an anonymous number.'

'Oh! Is that all,' Creane said, dripping sarcasm.

'I wouldn't ask you but...'

'Just give me the fucking number.'

'Thanks, mate. I owe you.'

'Yeah, fucking big time. And I won't let you forget it.'

I returned to Olivia. 'I have a pretty good idea who is terrorising you.'

'Who is it?' she asked.

'A man called Cameron Weldon.'

Olivia looked at me. 'Who's he?'

It was time for me to come clean. I looked into Olivia's dark eyes. 'I haven't been entirely straight with you.'

'What are you talking about?' She asked with suspicion.

'Cameron Weldon was at the auction bidding for the Pike Letter. As you know, he was unsuccessful because Adrian Bennet got the prize.'

'Yes, I was there, you know.'

'But what you don't know is somebody broke into Bennet's place and stole the letter.'

Olivia stared at me, a mixture of puzzlement and anger, showing on her face. 'So, when you said he had the letter for sale, you were lying!'

'He hired me to find out who stole his letter. I had to find a way to speak with you to ...'

Looking enraged, Olivia snapped, 'Get out of my house, you lying bastard!'

I anticipated a fiery response but nothing this volatile. 'I'm sorry I tricked you, but I needed to find out if ...'

'If I was the thief. **GET OUT OF MY HOUSE RIGHT NOW!**'

'But I really want to help you,' I pleaded, grabbing my jacket.

'I know what I'm doing, and I don't need help from liars.'

As I walked to my car, my phone rang. It was my mate, the dependable Creanie. 'Have you got anything for me?'

'This is the very last time I'm getting involved.'

'What did you manage to find out?'

'We traced the phone number to an Abel Thompson. He's a nice piece of work.'

'He's known to the police, then?'

'Not half, mate. Petty theft, burglary, assault with a deadly weapon. And that's just for starters.'

I put the thug's name into my phone. 'Any mention of this Thompson character in association with a Cameron Weldon?'

'You know more than you're letting on, Ozzie.'

'What do you mean?'



'Apparently, Thompson does odd jobs for Weldon. We've tried tying Weldon into some of Thompson's crimes, but the bastard is very clever and slippery as a fucking eel. We've never been able to pin anything on him and make it stick.'

This info made me very excited. It was apparent to me now that Abel Thompson was one of the assailants that attacked me. I said, 'Maybe this is where I can return the favour?'

'What do you mean?'

How would you like a watertight case, against Weldon? One he can't wriggle away from.'

'Just how the fuck are you going to do that?'

'Are you interested?'

'Fuck, yes!'

'Right, Be at Speakers' Corner at 1 pm.'

'Why?' What's going to happen?'

'If my calculations are correct Thompson is going to be carrying out one of Weldon's odd jobs. And Cameron Weldon is going to make a big mistake.'

'And if they're not correct?'

'Trust me. This will happen.'

'You better be fucking right.'

Creanie was right about that. It looked like I'd burnt my bridges with Olivia. 'Well, Oswald Doyle you well and truly fucked that up!' I berated myself. But more importantly, she was about to make a colossal mistake - giving into her menacing caller. It was a good bet that Weldon stole the Pike Letter from Adrian and he would soon have the journal as well. And there was nothing I could do to stop him. Or was there?

I rang Chris' number and heard his voice before the ring tone rang out. 'Chris, Olivia Quinn is going to ask you for her diary. Find some way of stalling her.'

'I was going to ring you anyway. You'll be overjoyed to know my test proved the paper and ink are from the 18th Century.'

'Yes, well tell her you haven't finished carrying out the tests, or something, but don't let her take the journal.'

'Well, Mr Doyle, I wasn't expecting that response. Ms Quinn has a precious document in her possession, and I expected ...'

'She won't have it in her possession much longer if you give it back to her.'

'Mr Doyle, it's Ms Quinn's property. I can't stop her from taking it.'

If I couldn't stop Olivia making the biggest mistake of her life, there was only one thing I could do. I phoned Sergeant Creane but got his answering service instead. 'Creanie, abort the mission. I repeat, do not go to Speakers' Corner.' I stared at the phone. Could my day go any more to shit?

## Chapter 13

Edgar Murphy had worked as a solicitor for the Crown Office for some 25 years. During that time, nobody had successfully challenged the laws about patents. He felt secure in the knowledge that in

court, he just had to quote any of the rules and regulations laid down by the Crown Office, and it was taken as gospel. It made Edgar Murphy feel secure in his legal work.

But now that had all changed! The arrogant American businessman had challenged the Crown Office commandments - and had won. And, to make matters worse, Edgar was the one to tell him. Well, Professor Smethurst actually, as Declan Merrick was back in America.

Jennifer listened gleefully as Edgar Murphy outlined the new provisions in the contract between the DOD and herself. She could tell by his nervous brow patting with his handkerchief, that he was feeling uncomfortable. But that was not her problem. Her main concern with the new clauses is that she would have to put in a request to Commander Uphart the CO at Quantime base camp, namely Jennifer's farm. His role, where the Q was concerned, was not so much to allow or deny the Professor's request as it was about the timing of it. The MOD quantum scientists were carrying out various experiments according to a schedule. None of them had actually travelled in the Q. After many months their testing was still only theoretical.

Professor Smethurst said, 'This new contract requires us to give one month's notice to use my invention.'

'So?'

'With the Q, it's sometimes challenging to be that exact. Declan may need more flexibility.'

Edgar shook his head, 'So you already want to break these new rules.'

'It's not a case of breaking the rules.' Then, reading the contract, she said. 'It states here that only Mr Merrick and I have access to the Q. Yet the most experienced Quantime traveller is Mr Oswald Doyle. I need to include him in our experiments.'

Murphy felt a sense of power return. 'He is not mentioned in the contract.'

'I'm fully aware of that, Mr Murphy, which is why I have brought it to your notice.'

Murphy puffed out his chest. 'We can't have just anybody coming here, Professor. He may well be a national security risk for all we know. He is Irish, after all.'

Jennifer glared at Murphy. 'So, all the Irish are IRA sympathisers?'

'No, of course not. It's just that we cannot take any chances.'

Jennifer shoved the contract back at Murphy. 'Then, this is not acceptable, and you need to get it changed. I want it noted that I am allowed to use my discretion in choosing assistants.'

'Well, that is not going to happen!'

Jennifer squared up to Murphy. 'Damn it! It's my invention in my home, so make it happen, or we're back to square one with the lawsuit.'

Edgar put the contract back into his leather briefcase. 'I will convey your wishes to the Department, but I don't think they will take kindly to it.'

'I'm sure you will do your best, Mr Murphy.'

## **Chapter 14**

Olivia phoned Dr Chesterton and asked, 'Have you shown my journal to anybody else?'

Chris wondered why she was asking such a question? 'No, of course not,' he huffed.

Olivia detected genuine surprise in his voice. 'Could anybody else have access to the diary?'

Chris wondered where this was going. 'No. I kept it locked up when not working on it. Why do you ask?'

'It's been a closely guarded secret in my family for generations. Now, since leaving it with you, somebody else knows about it. I'm here to pick it up.'

'Yes, of course. Anyway, I have completed the tests, and I'm pleased to report it seems to be genuine.'

'Of course, it is.' Olivia snapped. 'I shall be there within the hour.'

As she got ready Olivia's phone rang. The caller was the Irish private detective. She ignored it.

He rang three more times. Annoyed, she barked, 'What do you want?'

'I'm sorry, Olivia, but I just have to warn you about something.'

'What?' She snapped.

The police are going to be at Speakers' Corner at 1 o'clock.'

'What? What the fuck have you done now?'

'Nothing. well, I did phone a police colleague about your anonymous caller's phone number, and it turns out they are after Weldon too.'

Olivia could not believe the arrogance of the man. 'You had no fucking right to tell them!'

'I'm trying to contact him to abort the mission. But just so you don't get any surprises I had to tell you.'

'Ozzie, just stay out of my fucking life!'

I hadn't realised just how angry she was with me. How had it all gone so wrong when I'm such a likeable guy? All I could do now was get to Hyde Park before Creanie and his team arrived and tell him I got it wrong. I realised I shouldn't have got the police involved. I'm a bloody detective, and I needed to follow it up myself. Without Olivia knowing, of course. Making decisions that concerned Olivia without her knowing was treading a perilous path, but I didn't know what else I could do to protect her.

Declan Merrick had worked hard to convince his board of directors that Boogle History was an excellent investment. Some had argued that computer graphics made it difficult for viewers to determine if it is virtual reality or the real thing. Even if the Quantime were genuine and could transport travellers to another time and space, it would seem like just another special effect. Declan needed a project that would kick off Boogle history. But first, his legal team had to work out a workable contract with the British Government. This delay put more doubt into the board's mind. But now he was able to present them with some good news. Jennifer had a new contract with the Brits that allowed Declan limited access to the Q but under strict conditions. Very soon, the world would learn about history in a way never conceived of before. But to do so, the historical event has to be recorded on video.

To this end, Boogle bought up QIS a Silicon Valley start-up company specialising in Quantum Image Sensors. Declan was very excited being the major shareholder in QIS because quantum imaging was already attracting some of the world's biggest tech giants. For Declan, after his jaunt to

Elizabethan times in the Q, the future was bright. Humans were only a few technological breakthroughs away from a quantum future.

I couldn't get in touch with Detective Sergeant Creane, so I arrived at Speakers' Corner around noon. I sat on the nearest seat to the marked rubbish bin and waited. I wore shades, trackies and a dark hoodie hiding part of my face to help me remain anonymous. I couldn't see any sign of the cops, so maybe he had listened to my message and called off the raid. Or perhaps they hadn't yet arrived at the scene? Somebody spouting what was wrong with the world had captured the attention of six listeners, braving the chilly breeze to listen to his words of questionable wisdom.

Then I saw her - tall and captivating, as she strolled with a purpose to the marked rubbish bin. Into which she deposited a small package wrapped in brown paper. I was horrified by her action. Very soon some piece of shit is going to turn up, take the parcel, and disappear into thin air. Then it struck me. I could be that someone. I'm disguised enough to pull it off.

But then what happens to the overt threat against Olivia's parents?' I thought it was all a bluff and that Weldon was putting fear into Olivia, so she gave him what he was after. Then another thought hit me. I could be Weldon's delivery boy. That would get me up close and personal to the bastard, and Olivia would be off the hook. The time read 12:40. It was now or never. Making sure no one was looking I walked towards the bin, my hoodie cowl pulled down to my shades. I casually walked to the refuse container and stealthily retrieved the package. So far, so good. Then I heard the shout, 'STOP, POLICE!

Fuck, I couldn't let Olivia see me there. I've often wondered why a lot of cops announce themselves before they are within grabbing range of the suspect they are following. Maybe they enjoy the chase. Whoever shouted at me was a good forty metres away. I couldn't run far before they'd catch me. But it would be far enough for Olivia to not see me. I took flight with my prize and belted away from Speakers' Corner. I hadn't run more than a hundred metres when a copper caught me in a rugby tackle that took me down hard, knocking the breath out of me. I looked up at the uniformed officer. 'It's a fair cop,' I said, grinning.

The copper hauled me to my feet and spoke into his shoulder radio. 'I've got him, Guvnor.'

I stood with eyes downcast, still trying to affect a disguise. Then I saw Creanie, er, Detective Sergeant Creane.

Creane took one look at me, 'Take off the hood.' He then said, 'And get rid of those shades' and got the shock of his life.

'What the fuck are you doing here?'

'It's a long story, Sergeant,' I grinned.'

He glared at me. 'I don't know what sort of fucking game you're playing, but you are going to tell me.'

'It's kind of complicated, but I'll do my best.'

Creane turned to one of his team. 'Book him and take him to the nick. I'll get to the bottom of this, there.' He added, 'Take this package back to the girl.'

I listened horrified, 'No, you can't do that! Please just hang onto it for now, and I'll tell you why back at the nick.'

Creanie got into Ozzie's face, 'Why is that important to you?'

'Because if Weldon doesn't get the package, she's in big trouble. I was taking the package to him when your officer jumped me.'

Back at the Willesden police station, Sergeant Creane shook his head in disbelief. 'Are you fucking crazy? You interfered with a police operation and stole evidence from the crime scene. What the hell am I supposed to do with that?'

The mitigating circumstances were not looking too good for me. 'Technically, I prevented theft of the journal.'

'What the hell do you mean by that? No, don't bother to explain. You're doing my head in.'

I sighed, 'Look, it's simple, really.'

'It's anything but fucking simple. I can charge you here and now with several offences, any one of which will have your PI license revoked.'

I stared at Creanie. 'If Weldon doesn't get the journal, he's planning nasty things for Olivia's parents. I just need to phone him to let him know I'm on my way. Then when I hand it over you lot stand by and arrest him.'

'Arrest him for what?'

'Weldon and a creep called Afton Westbury have been running dodgy private auctions to scam genuine punters.'

Creanie retorted, 'If that's true it comes under the Fraud Squad. They'll have to interview you.'

'Jesus man, we haven't got time for that. Look, Weldon sent a couple of heavies to wreck my joint and beat me up.'

'Why would he do that?'

'Because I was after something he'd thieved from my client.'

'Do you actually have evidence of these alleged crimes, Doyle?'

'OK, I have been hired to retrieve stolen property my client bought it at one of those secret auctions.'

'And you're saying Weldon is behind the robbery.'

'He's the most likely suspect. If you go and pick up Westbury it won't take much for him to crack. I bet that Weldon has been using Westbury as an auctioneer to run the illegal auctions and, with a little pressure, he'll spill the beans.'

Creanie shook his head. 'It's all too iffy for me. Jesus, we've had much stronger cases against Weldon, but he's always managed to wriggle his way out of trouble.'

'Just let me set up the meet with Weldon.'

'What if he sends his thugs to collect?'

I looked at Creanie. 'Oh, I think he'll want to meet me.'

## **Chapter 15**

'I d...d...don't know what the fuck happened,' Owen told Cameron Weldon, over the phone. 'I was there like you said. B... b... but before I could pick up the package, someone else got there first.'

Cameron did not like what he was hearing. 'Who picked it up?'

'I d...don't know. The thief wore one of them hoodies. H... he just grabbed the packet and ran off. The n...next thing I know is the pigs were chasing him.'

'The cops were there?'

'Yeah, Mr Weldon. It's a g...good job I didn't pick up the parcel, or they would have b...been chasing me.'

'Fuck it!' Weldon thought about what to do for a moment. 'Did the cops catch him?'

'I d...don't know. I was, t...too far away.'

'Jesus, this one almighty cock-up, Owen. You'd better make yourself scarce, and I'll contact you later.'

'Right, boss.'

Who the hell had taken the package? Cameron wondered. Cameron, a can-do sort of guy, always looked on the bright side. His positive persona had always stood him in good stead. But he could not find any silver lining to the dark cloud descending on him. Whoever had beaten him to the journal must have watched the woman deposit it in the bin. But how did the intruder know what was in the packet? Cameron did not have to wonder about it for long because he soon received a phone call from Oswald Doyle.

'I asked, 'Am I speaking to Cameron Weldon?'

'Yes. What do you want?'

'I think it's more a case of what you want, Mr Weldon.'

'Do you have my package?'

I countered, 'Technically it's not yours. You stole it off a friend of mine, but let's not get too pedantic. What are you willing to give me for it?'

'I'm sure we could come to a suitable arrangement, but first I need proof that you have it.'

'Of course. Your place or mine? On second thoughts, it had better be your home. Mine has had the cleaners from hell sorting out the joint. But you'd know all about that, wouldn't you, Mr Weldon.'

'I don't know what you mean, Mr Doyle?'

'Whatever. Now I'll be over there with the prize in one hour then we'll negotiate terms of exchange.'

'I'll send you directions.'

'No need, Mr Weldon. I've got your address.'

Afton Westbury received the shock of his life when the four men crossed his threshold and marched into his shop. He tried to ignore them and concentrated on serving a customer.

Inspector Mullinar wasted no time. Approaching the startled Westbury and the equally perplexed customer, he announced, 'I'm Inspector Mullinar of the Metropolitan Fraud Squad, and I'd like a minute of your time.'

The customer made a hasty retreat, saying he'd come back for the item later.

Afton complained, 'Thanks a lot. You've probably lost me a customer, coming in here like that.'

'That could be the least of your worries, Mr Westbury,' Mullinar said. He continued, 'Now, down to business. 'You're an auctioneer, aren't you?'

Westbury looked at the officer. 'Do you want to see my license?'

'There's no need to go to that trouble. We already have your details. But it only covers authorised auctions, Mr Westbury.'

Afton smiled weakly. 'Well, I haven't wielded a gavel at auctions for many years.'

Mullinar looked straight at the nervous antique shop owner. 'What about the private ones you run?'

Afton's jaw dropped. How the hell did they know? 'I don't know what you mean.'

Mullinar sensed his suspect's anxiety. It gave the detective a cruel satisfaction to see the scared little man dangling like a fish on a hook. 'Oh, I think you do, Mr Westbury. I think you hold illegal auctions and you'd better come clean about it because we have witnesses who attended them, like Cameron Weldon for example. We're already questioning him.'

Afton went deathly white. He knew the way Weldon worked. He knew that to save his miserable skin, Weldon would quite readily drop him right in it. 'It was Weldon who organised the auctions - not me.'

Mullinar had already figured out that was the case, but he needed Westbury to say it for the record. 'Right, we'll take you to the station where you can write a statement to that effect.'

'But I can't leave my business.'

'Oh, but you can, and you will.'

In the end, Creanie agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to let me meet Weldon, but only if I was wired. I agreed, rather unwillingly, to his conditions. I hate having a microphone taped to my ribs. But it was the only way the surveillance people could record the conversation. Wires are usually reliable, and if you don't get searched by the bad guys, you can get away with it. But if they discover you're spying on them, you're fucked. Also, the transceiver sometimes malfunctions, which makes the whole exercise somewhat useless. Or they can get hot and burn your skin. But I had to wear the mike while negotiating with Weldon.

Creanie had doubts it was the correct decision. But this was the best chance yet of catching the suspect red-handed. He turned to Oz, saying, 'If he smells a rat or something goes wrong you must get the fuck out of there.'

'Your concern is very touching, DS Creane,' I grinned. Then, putting on a brave face, I quipped, 'Wire me up, Scottie.'

Weldon lived in a three-bedroom split-level apartment in Haverstock Hill, close to Chalk Farm. A gleaming late model Audi A8 sat in the driveway. I'd wanted to meet the bastard, but I had no idea what sort of reception awaited me. I approached the front door and rang the bell. I was surprised when Weldon opened the door himself. I was even more surprised to see him smoking a pipe, wearing a satin smoker's jacket. For all intents and purposes, Cameron Weldon looked the part of a stereotypical lord of the manor - not like I'd expected at all. He was welcoming, and all smiles as he stood aside to invite me into a powder blue painted lounge filled with leather seats. It felt very comforting while disconcerting at the same time.

Cameron smiled, 'Come on in, Mr Doyle, and take a seat.'

I did so. It was all extraordinary - no threats, no animosity. What the fuck is going on? I wondered.

'Can I get you anything? A drink, maybe?'

I looked at Weldon. 'What, are we all fucking buddy-buddy now?'

Weldon, feeling in control of the situation, said to me, 'We may have our differences, but that doesn't mean we can't deal with this business civilly.'

'Like the civil way your goons did me and my place over?'

'Yes, sorry about having to do that. But I needed to get your attention, Mr Doyle.'

'And I need to retrieve Adrian Bennet's property.'

'What are you talking about?' Weldon poured himself a scotch. 'Are you sure you won't join me?'

'Nice little scam you've got going.' I taunted, wondering if I was pushing things too far.

'Oh, and what scam would that be?'

'You set up dodgy auctions with Westbury with valuable stolen property. Then you steal it from the punter who bought it. They don't report the theft to the police, and you add another item to sell at legitimate auctions.'

Weldon smiled, 'Mr Doyle, you're not as dumb as you look.'

I retorted, 'And you're not as smart as you think you are,'

'Neither are you,' Weldon said, inviting his two associates, knuckles and cosh into the room.'

'I believe you have met these gentlemen, Mr Doyle.' Weldon eyeballed me. 'Where is my journal?'

'Do you mean the diary that belongs to Ms Quinn, the woman you threatened with menaces?'

'The two heavies began moving in on me. I said, OK, it's out in my car. I'll go and get it for you.'

Weldon shook his head. 'I don't think that's a good idea. Give my man here your keys, and you wait here until he brings it to me.'

I was losing control of the situation, and I was literally feeling a bit hot under the collar. Where the hell had Creanie, and his team got to? To get the police to move in and save my arse I had to get Weldon to incriminate himself. I had to play my ace card. 'In return for getting you the journal I want the Pike Letter you stole from Dr Bennet.'

Weldon smirked, 'You are joking. That letter is worth a hell of a lot more than you get as a finder's fee, Mr Doyle.'

I shrugged, 'Well, it was worth a try. I guess you get to keep both.'

Weldon, feeling supremely smug, said, 'I guess I do. They'll be worth much more as a pair when I sell them at auction.'

Then I heard the sweetest words in the whole universe.

'OPEN UP, POLICE!'

## **Chapter 16**

As Weldon and his accomplices were taken away for questioning, I approached Creanie. 'Where's the journal?'



'I'm hanging onto it as evidence.'

I stared at him. 'Evidence for what? It has nothing to do with the other stuff you lot found.' I was referring to the stolen items that had been recovered, including the Pike Letter.

'If what you say is correct, Weldon wanted the diary and was prepared to use threats to get it. That makes it part of the evidence.'

'Come on, Creanie. I need to give it back to Olivia. If anyone committed a crime, it was me when I stole it from the bin, and I only did that from the purest of motives.'

Creane stared at Ozzie, 'Don't tempt me, mate, because I'm this close to arresting you.'

'Look, technically, I didn't steal the package because I was going to return it to its rightful owner. And Wheldon's thugs didn't take it because I got there first. You don't have to enter the diary into evidence because it's not linked directly to Weldon's arrest.' I picked up signs of doubt showing on Creanie's face. But he seemed to be thinking about it.

Sergeant Creane wondered why Ozzie always managed to get his way with him. But he couldn't fault the PI's logic about the journal. It probably should be saved as evidence, but it was a bit of a grey area because the suspect had not even laid eyes on it.

He sighed deeply, handing over the package to me. 'You owe me fucking big time, you bastard.'

As I watched Weldon and his cronies get taken away, I felt a bit chuffed with the part I played in their arrest. But pride wasn't going to pay the rent. I needed clients for that. Then I remembered Adrian Bennet. I needed to let him know what was going on. I pressed his contact on my phone and waited. I soon heard his voice. And I said, 'The good news is I've tracked down the Pike Letter. The not so good news is that the police are keeping it as evidence.'

Adrian, a bit taken aback said, 'You know who stole it from me then?'

'Cameron Weldon. He was one of the punters at the private auction. Except he wasn't genuine. That is, he was generally interested in acquiring the letter but without paying for it. It seems that Westbury and Weldon were pulling a nice little scam.'

Adrian said, 'Very well done, Mr Doyle. As soon as I find out about my letter, from the police, I will transfer the outstanding fee to your account.'

Thinking about it, my day had turned out well. I reckoned returning the journal to Olivia might get me into her good books, although, if I'm truthful, I'm more interested in getting into her bed, preferably with her in it.

I must admit I felt a little bit smug when I got to Olivia's place. I hadn't told her I was coming because I wanted to be her conquering champion. That and the fact she wanted nothing to do with me. I had to transform myself from zero to hero. And the only way I could do that was to take her by surprise.

Armed with the journal, I approached her door with a spring in my step. I had been practising the old blarney to get over her threshold, but the sour look on her beautiful face stopped me in my tracks.

She snapped at me. 'How dare you have the effrontery to turn up here?'

My silver tongue was stuck for words. I simply handed her the package, saying, 'The bad guys are all in gaol.'

Olivia said, 'Just what the hell were you playing at?'

'Let me come inside, and I'll explain everything.'

She looked at me, 'Because of your reckless stunt, I've been sick with worry about what they would do to my parents. Now you just turn up here thinking that returning the journal makes everything alright. Because it most certainly does not.'

'But I got the bad guys arrested to stop them hurting your folks.'

'But I didn't fucking know, did I? All I know is that you grabbed the package and ran off with it, with cops in hot pursuit.'

'Yes, Olivia, but all for the right reasons.'

She must have seen something good in my eyes. A subtle glimpse into my soul, maybe. She knew I was telling the truth. She sighed heavily and indicated for me to enter her home.

Over coffee, I regaled Olivia with my day's events. She seemed suitably impressed, realising I had not only retrieved her property but had also got rid of the threat against her parents down under.

'Now you have the journal back, and we know it is authentic, what now?'

Olivia said, 'I always knew it was genuine, Ozzie, but I don't understand your question.'

I didn't know how much to tell her about my Q adventures, but I needed the diary, or at least a copy of it to investigate the matter further. I said, 'I need a copy of the diary.'

Olivia stared at me, perplexed. 'Why?'

'The more I learn about the Pike Letter, the more I see it as a rallying symbol for the Globalists who want to fulfil the Pike prophecy.'

'You see it as prophesy?' Olivia said,

'No, I think it is a carefully worked out plan for world domination by a handful of powerful people - very wealthy, influential, people. And I think your diary may well shed some light on who rules the world from the shadows. If we can name and shame them in the public arena and show the Pike Letter for the plot in underlines, we may be able to ...'

'Whoa, Ozzie. Aren't you getting a bit ahead of yourself? First, you have to prove the Pike Letter exists. And there's a lot of scepticism about that.'

I came back with, 'It does exist, and it's currently held as evidence to help convict Cameron Weldon.'

Olivia sat there, wide-eyed. 'The police have the actual letter?'

'Yes. It's stolen property.'

'I don't think it will ever be used in a court of law.'

'You're probably right. But a word in the right ear could be even more effective in bringing it out into the open.'

'You mean the media?'

I grinned, 'I have a contact or two in Fleet Street.'

Olivia said, 'You're a smart bastard when you want to be.' She leant over and planted a kiss on my cheek.

I put my arm around her shoulders and drew her in closer. Smiling gently, I grinned, 'You can do better than that. We fell into an embrace as one of my hands strayed to Olivia's breast. I could feel her nipple hardening under my touch.'

Olivia felt strangely attracted to this devious, idealistic, but endearing Irishman and didn't want to wait any longer. She wrapped her arms around his neck and invited his kiss.

My lips caressed her as she pressed her delightful body against my hardness. We shuffled to her bedroom without breaking the embrace. Our caressing took on an urgency that could only lead to us satisfying our lust. Half undressed, she fell back on her bed, with me on top. I slipped down one strap of her bra. Without breaking our kiss, she lifted her hips, and I peeled her tights down her legs, while she worked on the zip of my jeans.

I slipped my arm underneath, pulling Olivia on top as I rolled over. I stroked her back from her shoulders down along her small buttocks and the back of her thighs.

Then, Olivia took control and straddled me. She moaned softly at my warm touch and ground her body against mine. Olivia shut her eyes and moaned softly as I guided my fully erect penis into her. Moving her arms, she leant back on my chest. I thrust hard into her, my hands lifting her buttocks, heightening her desire even more.

Olivia could no longer stifle her moans. With her climax nearing she saw red flashing stars, urging him on, her body trembled uncontrollably as her orgasm hit. Olivia collapsed on her back as her consciousness drifted into a void.

I smiled at her when she regained enough control to open her eyes. 'I think you really enjoyed that.' She grinned and panted. 'Not bad for a beginner.'

Pointing at my still erect penis, I said, 'Ms Quinn, what are you going to do about this?'

I woke the next morning in Olivia's bed. But she was not there. I dragged myself out of bed and looked around the apartment. I found her working at her laptop. She had earphones on and didn't hear me approach. Olivia had a mug of coffee sitting on a coaster, going cold. I needed one too, so I backed off without looking over her shoulder at her screen. There was enough left in her fancy coffee maker to fill another mug. As it reheated, I thought about my next move. Spending the night with Olivia had been delightful, but I wasn't expecting a repeat performance. I needed a copy of the journal, which meant I had to find a photocopier. But there was another problem. I needed to borrow the original and Olivia would not let it out of her sight.

Olivia entered her kitchen and found me there. 'Good morning.'

I grinned at the dark-haired beauty in a terry towel bathrobe. 'The coffee's great', I said. I followed up this inane comment with, 'You were busy on your computer, so I didn't want to disturb you.'

Olivia smiled, 'Oh, how thoughtful of you.'

I thought I detected cynicism in her voice. 'I know you don't like the idea of me borrowing the journal so I thought maybe we could go through it together.'

Olivia turned to me. 'That's what I was doing on the computer.' She sighed, 'I've been over it many times, and I can't read anything between the lines.'

'You copied it out?'

'I did that months ago.'

'Then there's no problem. You can put it on a stick for me.'

'What do you intend to do with it?'

What could I say without mentioning the Q? 'Does your ancestor Silas Pearce mention a secret meeting that took place at the home of Phileas Walder, in August 1871?'

'Yes, but I don't see what that ...'

'I need to find out all those who attended that meeting.'

'And just how do you propose to do that. The only record we have of that meeting is Silas's reference to Pike's Swiss contact, in the journal.'

'I have a friend who may be able to help.'

Olivia, puzzled, looked straight at me. 'I thought you were just a private dick retrieving stolen property. You never told me you had a personal interest in the Pike Letter.'

I answered truthfully, 'I thought it was just another conspiracy theory until I got involved with this stuff. But now I believe there is a conspiracy. One that has gone on for at least 160 years. One that will impact on the whole world if it's not stopped.'

'And you intend to stop it, Ozzie. Well, good luck with that.'

'Give me a copy of the journal, and I'll leave you alone.'

Olivia had clearly enjoyed my company. Looking me in the eye, she smiled, 'And what if I don't want you to leave me alone?'

She could have knocked me down with a feather. 'I wasn't expecting that,' I grinned.

Olivia retorted, 'Oh, I'm a girl full of surprises. I'll email you the file.'

## **Chapter 17**

Jennifer Smethurst entered her lab. The three government scientists there looked up as she entered the room.

One of them referred to her by her title. 'Professor Smethurst, how are you today?'

Ignoring his pleasantries, Jennifer said, 'Things are going to be a bit different around here now, so I hope you got the memo.'

'I received a message saying you now have limited access to the machine.'

'Good. I will let you know in advance so you can all clear out. The only people in here with me will be those I invite.'

Feeling more empowered, she left the lab and walked over to her private quarters. "Quarters" was an accurate term as the secret service personnel, and sleepover scientists had commandeered most of her space. As Jennifer went about her usual chores, her phone rang. Nathan's name came up on the screen. She pressed the phone icon. 'Nathan, it's good to hear from you. How is everything?'

'Dimmock gave me the run-around, but I managed to sniff him out.'

'With his poor personal hygiene that would not be pleasant,' Jen quipped. Then, becoming business-like, she said, 'Did he fix the QC?'

'Yes, eventually, when I finally caught up with him,' Nathan moaned.

'Well done. Now, can you bring it to me?'

He was dying to see the attractive scientist, so he jumped at the chance. 'Sure thing. I can pop around later today if you like.'

'I'll tell the sentry at the gate to put you on the list.'

'Oh! Security there seems pretty full-on.'

'You don't know the half of it, Nate. But at least we do have access to the Q now, albeit limited.'

'Have you got any Q projects planned?'

'Not so far. Any suggestions?'

Nate said, 'None that come to mind.' He paused, then added, 'I'll see you soon then.'

Nathan Goodfellow found it hard to express his emotions and kept them buried deep inside. Expressing his feelings tended to leave him feeling hurt and unsure. Mathematics was his only real love, and it never let him down. It was reliable, rational and realistic, could always be relied upon and seldom sprang surprises. Nathan loved Jennifer deeply and distantly. Their one encounter in which he poured out his soul about his true feelings toward her ended in unmitigated disaster - a dangerous path never to be retaken. It nearly wrecked their enduring friendship. Now he was going to see her again. He already began feeling awkward and odd, just thinking about it. It is just about returning the Q-cam to Jennifer. That's what he told himself.

I checked my emails. There was one from Olivia with an attached file. I clicked on it and, yes, it was the journal. She explained that she felt uneasy about me keeping it on my computer in case it was hacked. She gave me permission to print out a copy of the journal, with the proviso that I would delete the file from my computer. I mentally thanked the beautiful Olivia for keeping to her word.

Now, I have my copy I have something substantial to show Jennifer. Something that might just get me a ride in the Q. My mind quickly segued to my steamy nights with Jennifer. Sex had been good, very good, on a few occasions, it had occurred. But that was quite a while back. I hadn't seen her for months, so I had no idea how to interpret her invitation. I have always been broad-minded and seldom judged the actions of others unless they were close and personal. There was also an email from Dr Bennet informing Mr Doyle that the police confirmed they had his Pike Letter as evidence. As per the arrangement, he had transferred the remaining fee to my bank account. This meant I could pay my rent and all other outstanding bills and concentrate on finding the letter.

It was the first time Nathan had visited Jennifer since they fell out. Although they had patched things up, Nathan still felt awkward there. The place looked the same as Nate had remembered it, except the front gate, which now had a red and white striped barrier guarded by two soldiers on sentry duty. Nathan assumed they were military although they were not wearing military fatigues. Dressed in black with matching berets, they also wore sidearms and carried sub-machine guns. One of them halted Nathan's car and asked for his ID. Satisfied he was on the list one of the guards lifted the boom gate and waved Nathan on through.

He parked behind Jennifer's car and walked to her front door. There was a message attached with an arrow pointing to a side gate. Following directions, he went through the side gate and up to the door. An inside light was on. He knocked on the door and got a surprise when he saw Declan standing there. 'Declan, I didn't expect to see you here.'

Declan stared at Nathan. 'Jennie will be here shortly.'

'Where is she? She said she'd be here.'

'Relax man, she's just taking a shower.'

'Are you here on business?' Nathan asked.

Declan wondered if Nathan was just making polite conversation or if he was fishing? 'Now that we have a new contract with your Home Office, we're working on the next Q mission.'

'Which is?'

'We don't know yet.'

As Declan and Nathan sat drinking coffee, Jennifer came into the room. She was wearing red lipstick to match her pretty dress. Was she dressed sexily for Declan or him? Nate wondered as he automatically got up and gave her a hug. 'It's great to see you, Jen.'

'Don't you just look gorgeous, babe?' Declan grinned.

Babe! The affront of the crass Yank, Nathan thought. 'I've brought the Q-cam with me.'

'I hope so,' Jen commented, 'It's the reason, er one of the reasons you're here.'

She tried to cover up her faux pas, but not successfully, Nathan thought, feeling slighted.

He reached into his shoulder bag and produced the Q-cam. Nate handed it to Jennifer. 'It was a sensor problem. Dimmock didn't give me the details.'

Jennifer said, 'Thanks, Nathan. I know the trouble you went through to get this,' she said, indicating the unique camera. 'It's a pity we have to rely on Dimmock to maintain the thing.'

Declan said, 'You don't have to Jen. I have people who understand this quantum technology. In fact, they're creating a quantum video camera as I speak.'

Jennifer stared at Declan, disbelieving, 'A quantum video camera?'

'Yes, Jen. It's the next logical step.'

She couldn't believe it. Her Q-cam was already old technology.

Declan qualified, 'It's not ready yet. We'll have to run with your quantum camera at present.'

I arrived at Jen's place around 8-ish. She didn't know I was coming. But I figured the expensive bubbly, courtesy of Adrian Bennet, would more than make up for my impromptu visit. When I say her place, I meant the front gate, which now looked a bit like Checkpoint Charlie. Two blokes who looked like a cross between security guards and Commandos operated the wooden boom gate. One of the darkly attired military types tapped on my window. I wound it down. I smiled 'Good evening. I'm here to see the professor.'

The special services soldier said, 'Name?'

'Doyle. Why?'

The second soldier scanned a clipboard with a small torch.

He turned to the driver. 'No Doyle listed. Piss off.'

I got out of the car and followed the soldier to his guard post. 'Hey, you don't understand. Ms Smethurst is a personal friend. Ring her and say Ozzie wants to see her.'

The soldier with the clipboard scowled, 'I'm not your fucking secretary, mate. Sling your hook, before we place you under arrest.'

By this time, I was livid. I spat, 'You must be fucking joking!'

The first guard went into a sort of sentry box. I heard him communicating with somebody and caught the words 'Troublemaker at the front gate. Send someone to pick him up.'

When he came out of his little office, I said, 'What's that about?'

The soldier ignored me and turned to his colleague. 'Jim's coming down to pick him up,' he said, indicating the troublemaker.'

I decided to try another tack. 'Why all the security around my friend's place?'

'There's some top-secret science shit going on.'

I turned to him, 'I know that. And I know more about the "science shit" you refer to than any man alive, so I'm not a fucking security risk, am I?'

The soldier with the list had had enough. 'I don't care if your fucking name is Einstein. You're not on the list, so you don't get in. Right?'

This was not going well. I saw a pair of headlight beams heading towards us. I figured it must be Jim. I went to my car and took out the bubbly. Returning to the guards, I said, 'Look I'm going. Tell Jim to take this to the professor. Tell her it's from Ozzie.' With that, I went back to my car and drove away.

I was about a mile away when my phone rang. It was Jen. I pulled over onto a grassy verge. 'Jen! What a coincidence. I was just at your front gate, but two Bolshie guards wouldn't let me in.'

Jennifer said, 'That's because you weren't on the list.'

'That was made abundantly clear.'

'Well, thanks for the champers that Jimmy delivered. You can come and get reunited with it if you like.'

'I like Jen. I like very much.' I was on cloud nine. I was going to spend a delightful night with my wonder, woman. And she can lasso me any time she wants.

## **Chapter 18**

This time, when I got to the barrier, the guards didn't stop me. Well, only momentarily to check my ID. It seems I was now on the list and I soon got waved through, with instructions to only use the side door. I didn't care which door as long as I got reunited with Jen, the lust of my life. I drove along the driveway, guided by automatic sensor lights and parked next to Jen's car. I pressed the bell, fully expecting Jen to open the door and us falling into a hot embrace when I found myself facing Declan Merrick. My mind screamed, What the fuck!

Declan responded to my look of surprise, with 'Doyle, it's Declan. Don't you remember me?'

Of course, I remembered him! I just didn't expect him to be there, cramping my style. But then, what the fuck did I know. I could be cramping his. I mean, I could hardly lock Jen in a tower

making her wait there until I deigned to show myself once more. 'Declan, what brings you this side of the pond?'

Without answering, Declan invited me in. Then I saw Nathan Goodfellow, sitting and sipping my champers, having a tete-a-tete with Jennifer. All the suitors were present. What were we supposed to do - have a three-way duel at dawn?

I saw Jen's eyes sparkle as I entered her lounge room. Or maybe it was the sparkly making her baby blue eyes glow. She got up, and we hugged. Then she got me some champers. I put on a brave face. 'Well, well, the gang's all here.'

To keep everything cordial, we all shook hands and greeted each other like long-lost friends and toasted the liberation of the Q with the remainder of the champagne. Jennifer said, 'Now we have limited access to my invention we have to work out the best way to put it to good use.'

Declan said, 'Well if I don't get the Boogle History channel up and running the board of directors is going to lose faith in our investment.' He added. 'The problem is which project to start with.'

This was my chance. 'I have an idea,' I grinned.

'Where to this time?' Nathan asked.

'It's more a what than a where.'

Jennifer looked at me. 'Is this what you were talking about?'

'If you mean the Pike Letter, yes.'

Declan's ears pricked. 'Are you referring to the Albert Pike letter to Mazzini?'

'Yes.' I answered.

Declan sneered, 'That's just some fucking conspiracy theory that's been debunked.'

I responded, 'But what if it isn't bunk? And what if I can prove it?'

Declan said, 'And just how you propose to do that?'

I grinned. 'That's where the pumpkin comes in.'

'Why doesn't that surprise me. Ozzie?' Jennifer said, a hint of cynicism in her voice.

Nathan said, 'Have you actually seen this letter?'

'No, but I know where it is.'

'Where?' Nate asked.

'In the Willesden nick, to be used as evidence in an upcoming trial.'

'Nick! What's that?' Declan queried.

'Oh, you'd call it a jail,' Jennifer explained.

'OK.' Nate said, 'But you haven't seen it personally, have you?'

'Oh, I've seen something much more important than that,' I smirked.

Jennifer beamed, 'What do you mean, Oz?'

'I have a copy of a diary, written by a close friend and colleague of Albert Pike.'

Declan, intrigued, said, 'Does it mention the fabled letter?'



'Oh, it's much better than that. It convinced me that the letter is indeed real and that it had nothing to do with Pike's alleged vision. It was a cleverly contrived plot for world domination.'

Declan huffed, 'This is another spin on the New World Order conspiracy theory.'

Jennifer said, 'OK, let's say you know this letter exists because it's mentioned in this diary. And let's say the diary is authentic, what difference is it going to make?'

I took a deep breath. 'Jen, I need to use the Q to go back to a meeting that took place in Switzerland in 1871.'

'What's so special about it?' Declan asked.

'It took place at the home of Phileas Walder, an ex-Lutheran minister. He was ideologically closely connected to Pike. Walder became a Masonic leader, occultist and spiritualist. He also worked very closely with Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian Prime Minister, a 33rd degree Mason and founder of the Sicilian Mafiosa in 1860.'

'Shit, man! He was responsible for all the Mafia crime back home?' Declan commented, becoming interested.

Jennifer said, 'OK, so why is this meeting important?'

'The diary states that other notables including Lord Henry Palmerston, Otto Von Bismarck the French occultist Eliphas Levi and, of course, Albert Pike, attended.'

Nathan whistled through his teeth. 'The most powerful leaders in Europe. What the hell were they cooking up?'

I was getting their attention at last. 'This meeting took place just after Mazzini read Pike's Letter.' I eye-balled Declan. 'If there had been no letter, why this secret meeting between the most powerful men in Europe?' I waited for my logic to sink in, then I said, 'I want to be present at that meeting.'

Jennifer said, 'If this secret meeting did take place, how will you get an invite?'

'I'll get Albert to invite me.'

Jen looked at me wide-eyed. 'And just how do you propose to pull that one off?'

'Ah, well before I attend the meeting, I have to get chummy with Silas Pearce, the author of the diary and get him to introduce me to Albert.'

They all sat there staring at me. My colleagues didn't know how to respond to that bombshell.

Eventually, Jen said, 'What makes you think that will work, Oz?'

I grinned mischievously, 'It's a work in progress.' I added, 'I'll need to bone up on funny handshakes.'

'I know you are making light of it, Oz, but you are embarking on a perilous path,' Jen said, frowning.

'The Q will be there if I need to make a quick getaway.'

'That's if you can make a getaway,' Jen corrected.

Declan said, 'It all sounds very fascinating but even if you do pull it off what will you gain from it?'

I smiled, 'I will know who attends and why. That should do for starters.'

Jennifer said, 'We have to give the Home Office a month's notice before we can use the Q.'

'That gives me a month to prepare myself, 'I said excitedly.

Declan said, 'Whoa, we haven't decided on the project yet.'

Jennifer said, 'If we send you off to the secret meeting, how will that help our situation today?'

Now that was an excellent question. One I had given a lot of thought to. 'I looked at the others. Pike wrote that the First Great War must be brought about for the Illuminati to destroy the Russian Czars; to make Russia a fortress of atheistic Communism. He wrote that the Second World War must be engineered to enflame the ideological differences between the Fascists and the political Zionists. Pike said The Second Great War will be set up to destroy Nazism, allowing political Zionism to bring about a sovereign state of Israel in Palestine. Those two wars have come to pass precisely as planned,' I said.

Declan said, 'If, as you say, the letter does exist, Ozzie, then there must be a plan for a third world war?'

'Yes, of course, and we can see it happening right now. But it's just a conspiracy theory - right? If we can prove the letter exists and we can name names of the current shadow players, we may just be able to force them into the open where we can see them for what they are. That will make this project very worthwhile.'

Declan said. 'Ozzie, I see what you're saying, so count me in.'

I said, 'Thanks for your support, mate.'

Declan said, 'It's more than support. I want to go with you.'

I did not want Declan as a passenger again. He got stuck in Elizabethan London, and I had to go and rescue him. He lost a pendant that, when pressed, summoned the Quantime. Mine had gotten me out of many sticky situations. This mission was going to be tricky enough without me having to look after amateur Quantanauts. But I couldn't say no to his decision. To be truthful, Declan had more right to use the Q than me. I hadn't pumped \$100,000,000 investment in the Q, as he had. If he wanted, Declan could have claimed the mission just for himself. I gave a huge sigh. 'OK, I'm going to have to bring you up to speed.'

Jen looked at Oz. 'Before you do, so I have yet to decide if it's a viable mission.'

Of course, she was right. Deciding as to whether the project was a goer or not was down to her. She had to do a great deal of programming behind the scenes before we could arrive anywhere.

'Of course, Jen, but there's no harm in preparation while you make your decision. But to help you do so, the people involved with the Pike plot, "The Great Brain Robbery" commonly known as the Illuminati families have passed on their zealously guarded, secret plans to their descendants. If we can find out who was at Phileas Walder's home when they held the clandestine meeting in which they initiated the plot for Illuminati global domination, we can learn who is bringing the Pike plot to fruition.'

Jennifer loved Ozzie's passion and resolve once he got his teeth firmly embedded in a challenging mystery. But she had to weigh that against her task of preparing her brave Quantanauts for any and every eventuality. Sending people back into history was not a simple task. 'OK, Ozzie, you've made your case. Now I have to deliberate on it.'

I felt as though Jennifer was ready to pass judgement on me and decide on my sentence. I knew it was time to shut up. As a friend of mine who sold insurance told me, 'Sell, don't oversell.' I had closed the deal and remained silent. I sat back, allowing the fruits of my labours or the sins of my past to reveal themselves.

## Chapter 19

OK, assuming I, er we, get the Pike gig I have to get chummy with Silas Pearce. And it's harder done than said. How am I supposed to meet this diarist in the 1800s, quickly gain his trust and get him to introduce me to Albert Pike? I needed to speak with my co-pilot about this. I'm not sure if co-pilot is an accurate term for Declan Merrick, especially as the Q doesn't need a pilot. Perhaps co-Quantanaut is better.

'So, why do you want to go?' I asked, Declan, as we sat in Jen's kitchen

Dec looked at me. 'Are you kidding. What miss out on seeing Albert Pike in the flesh?'

'You're a fan?' I said, pouring a coffee for each of us.

'Love him or hate him, he was a fascinating individual.'

I understood that. The Confederate General was intriguing in many respects and certainly larger than life. 'Well, we don't just go up to him and say, hi, General, we're from your future.' We will need an introduction. And the only person to provide us with that is Silas Pearce.'

Declan, having read my copy of the journal, said, 'And this is definitely authentic?'

'If you knew what I've been through to get this you wouldn't be asking such a dumb question. Of course, it's genuine.'

Dec grabbed a slice of toast just ejected by the toaster. 'How do you propose to gain Silas' confidence?'

I shrugged, 'That's the \$64,000 question.'

'Well, Ozzie, if we don't come up with a plausible answer the mission's a no-go.'

'Don't you think I'm aware of that?'

Dec buttered his toast and spread honey on it. 'The journal points out that both Silas and Pike were anti-Mormonists. They believed Joseph Smith was in touch with a superhuman source of revelation and power. However, according to their post rationalist theory, the superhuman source was not God, but Lucifer.'

I spread honey on my toast and sipped my strong black coffee. 'I have read the diary.'

'Yes, but maybe the answer to gaining Pearce's confidence is based in their Luciferian spiritualism.'

'Oh, and how does that work?' I asked.

'They're were both into miracles and mysteries, you play on that.'

'How do you mean?' I said, intrigued.

Declan stared at me. 'Using the journal, you know stuff that Silas did not yet know. '

I could see where Dec was coming from, but it wasn't as simple as that. I pointed out, 'The fundamental creed of quantum travel - or more accurately "quantum reality transference" is that we mustn't do anything to change history.'

Declan tried making his idea clearer. He picked up the journal and flicked through until he came to what he was looking for. 'OK, here's an entry in which Silas writes that Albert turned up out of the blue to speak about their differences. We turn up in Little Rock the day before, and you meet Silas and say you have a message for him. Tell him Albert Pike is going to turn up the next day, and he needed a strong argument to combat the General's mighty intellect.'

I could see where Declan was coming from. There was no need for me to change anything. I didn't need to prophesy beyond the next entry in the journal. I just needed to stay one or two steps ahead and using Silas' next entry before he wrote it. Yes, I think this could work. I can baffle Silas with a few simple predictions, and he introduces me to the big man. Simple.

'Declan, it might work, but we have to make sure we have everything covered.' I added 'I would be a hell of a lot happier about this if it were just me.'

Declan responded, 'Boogle has a lot riding on this venture. And I need to be along to get some runs on the board.'

'What will you do there while I'm getting to know Silas?'

'Be with you, of course.'

'That doesn't work for me. It doubles the risk factor.'

Declan smiled, 'Fine, I'll carry out the mission by myself.'

I wasn't expecting that response. But Declan was right. In a way, I'd be the co-Quantanaut, not him. I picked up the journal copy and stood up. 'True, Declan, but how far are you going to get without this. Besides, you'll need my honed detective instincts to navigate any pitfalls along the way.'

Declan grinned, 'You get access to the Q, and I get to work with the diary. OK?'

I thought about it. Then I said, 'I get to talk with Silas alone. I tell him about your part in this and get him to take us to Pike. OK?'

'I have no objection to that. I'll ring Jen for her decision.'

'Sure. You do that. Now I've got to get going, so let me know what Jennifer decides.'

I read somewhere that certain historical events are so incredible and unexpected as to announce the end of an era, if not the end of the world. I wondered if the Pike plot or prophecy, depending on where you stand, was the herald of such an incredible event. And would it be made better or worse by our involvement in it? Perhaps it's our quantum journey back to Silas' time that will lead to the Pike Letter being written. I know this kind of thinking can drive me nuts, but what if our involvement in Silas' life really does get Pike to write the letter? What if it had already happened the way we were planning it? What if, by doing nothing and having no part in the Pearce journal Pike never wrote the letter.

But Pikes message was far more than a mere letter. The document became a blueprint that rallied the shadow world government to bring about the worst inhumanities and suffering this world has ever known. What if our interference with historical events had already happened? Further intervention would play right into the bad guys' hands. Why don't we just forget the whole thing and maybe, because of our non-response, Pike would not have written the letter to Mazzini in the first place?'

Fuck! It was doing my brain in. I needed to think of more pleasant things. Such as the beautiful Olivia.

## Chapter 20

Valery Richhoffen von Bismarck drove to the 44-year-old Count's luxury apartment in Chelsea, in record time. But she still got to the flat too late. The police were already there. She could not enter because it was now a crime scene. 'What's going on?' Valery asked, in a panic.

The constable guarding the entrance said, 'Please step back beyond the tape.'

'But my brother lives here. What's happened? She uttered, fearful of the answer.

The constable on duty said, 'You will have to speak with Inspector Grace. He's in charge.'

'Where can I find him?' Valery asked, her anxiety increasing.

The constable spoke into the radio attached to his shoulder. 'Sir, I have a woman here who claims to be the sister of the deceased.'

Deceased! So Alex was dead! It did not entirely surprise her, though. Alexander von Bismarck was always wasting his wealth on debauched partying. She knew he would come to a sticky end. But even so, Valery was shocked, the pain would come later.

Inspector Grace looked at the victim, laying on the thick pile rug. The Count was lying on his back, wearing fishnet stockings and lederhosen. The bib of his tight leather shorts was spattered with his vomit. 'What do you reckon, Dr Matthews?' Richard Grace asked, looking at the grey-haired woman attired in a white plastic over-suit.

'Looks like an OD to me. As usual, I'll know more once I get him to the morgue.'

'No foul play?'

Janet Matthews had worked as a police scientist with Richard for over 20 years. 'You ought to know me by now. Richard. I don't make guesses.'

Richard looked at the bizarre scene before him. A glass-topped, tubular framed coffee table held an assortment of sex toys, a butane gas canister and a box containing dozens of syringes.

Richard's radio alerted him. It was the constable on duty outside the flat.

The forensic scientist heard him say, 'All right, I'll speak to her shortly.' She said, 'It rather looks like they had a gay orgy going on.'

Richard said, 'I'll be back in a minute. The deceased's sister is here, and I need to talk to her.'

Janet shrugged, 'My problems are with the dead, not the living.'

Outside the building, Inspector Grace lit a cigarette and offered Valery one.

She took it with a slightly shaky hand, saying, 'What happened?'

'Your brother's body was discovered this morning by paramedics.'

'What were the paramedics doing here?'

'A real estate agent who had the keys to sell the property received a call from Gottfried von Bismarck, who was concerned that his brother, Alexander, had not answered his phone for several days. Gottfried asked a neighbour to check. The front door was ajar; the neighbour checked and found the Count on the floor, not breathing. The neighbour called the emergency services.'

'How did he die?' Valery asked, already guessing the answer.

'It looks like a drug overdose. But we can't be sure until the Coroner has an autopsy carried out.'

Valery inhaled cigarette smoke. 'What was he wearing, inspector?'

Grace felt uncomfortable now. 'It looks as though he had been at a fancy-dress party,' Richard said, diplomatically.

Oh my God! fishnets and lederhosen, she thought. The media would have a fucking field day! 'Inspector, can we keep that detail out of the news?'

'It depends on how relevant it is to the case.'

Valery nodded. 'Inspector, I came here to get business papers. Can I go in and get them?'

The Inspector cast a look at Valery. 'What business papers?'

'As my brother's power of attorney, I cannot divulge the details.'

'Then I'm afraid I cannot allow you in there, while the flat is a crime scene.'

She turned on him. 'Exactly what crime has been committed?'

She was sharp. There was no arguing with that. 'It remains a crime scene until we are convinced there hasn't been a crime.'

Valery, having had enough, said, 'Very well. I can see you do not have the authority to let me in, so give me the number of your most senior officer.'

Inspector Grace gave her a dark look. 'My refusal has nothing to do with my rank. It has to do with crime scene protocol.'

'Inspector, do you know who my brother is?'

'Alexander Franklin von Bismarck, I believe.'

'Count Alexander Franklin von Bismarck. And I am Countess Valery Richoffen Bismarck. We are the great-grandchildren of the famous Otto von Bismarck. Does that make things clearer for you, Inspector?'

It did. Very clear. Valery was descended from Prussian nobility. He was a lowly cop. If he didn't bend the rules for her, others, higher in the pecking order would. 'I'll have one of my officers go with you.' He added, 'Your brother is still up there. He is dressed somewhat ...'

Valery laughed, 'Inspector, there's no need to be coy. Don't you think I'm aware of my brother's eccentric proclivities?'

Valery Richthofen von Bismarck had graduated from the London School of Economics and now ran a very successful public relations firm in New York. There were some documents in the safe that must not under any circumstances, become general knowledge. If Inspector Grace had refused her request, a summons by her would have had a team of family lawyers descend on the crime scene in a flash. Luckily for the Inspector, she did not have to unleash them. Valery told the detective watching her, 'Turn around,' while she keyed in the code to open the small wall safe in the lounge room.

Having taken what she needed, Valery stashed the documents in her handbag and left the building. Her brother's death could not have come at a more difficult time. There would have to be modifications to the plan. She would have to confer with her peers to work that out. Valery's dead brother, an eccentric German aristocrat with a penchant for fishnet stockings and lederhosen, whose debauched parties had twice ended in death, was nevertheless the head of the Bismarck dynasty. As such, he represented his family in matters of the closing scene of Albert Pike's plot to bring about global war. Now he was gone, it fell to Valery to look after the family's interests at the top-secret meetings.

Olivia Quinn rinsed off her lovely long thick hair, then spent the next twenty minutes using her hairdryer, adding a product to bring out the sheen. As she was finishing, her phone rang. The call came up as unknown, but she recognised the voice. The caller only contacted her when there was a change to the programme. 'Hello,' she said timorously.

'Have you been able to get the uncle's present yet?'

'Not yet. The shop is closed. W and W have been arrested. Uncle's present is held as evidence.'

It was worse than Valery thought. Olivia was way out of her depth. 'Stay at home. Somebody will be with you soon.'

'Who?'

'His name is Hubert. He will give the password. Then he will tell you what to do.'

Before Olivia had a chance to ask any more questions, Valery had terminated the call.

Olivia made a call herself. She phoned Ozzie's number and got his recorded message. After the beep, she said, 'I have to cancel our lunch date today. Will ring later. Then she had to get herself ready to receive Hubert.'

## Chapter 21

Jennifer held back on making her decision. It wasn't that she questioned the project. The problem was Ozzie and Declan working together. Observing their public communication, the night before she could not ignore the unspoken alpha male undertones. Both Declan and Ozzie wanted to spend time with her alone. After Nathan went home, Ozzie and Declan hung around silently, wishing the other one would also leave. In the end, Jennifer had to tell them both to go. Jennifer loved the Irishman's sense of fun. To tell the truth, she still found him sexy. She was also fond of Declan, who, having stayed with her before, showed surprise when she asked him to leave too. On the one hand, there was the handsome American billionaire with the California dream lifestyle and a significant share in her Quantime technology. On the other hand, there was the down-at-heel, rakish private investigator who, she had to admit, stirred her juices.

Jennifer sighed. Although it was true that Ozzie had taken Declan on a previous quantum adventure, it had nearly ended disastrously with Declan being trapped in Elizabethan London. On that occasion, Ozzie had to go back to the filthy, stinking streets of London to rescue his co-Quantanaut.

So, what to do? She mused. A great deal of programming was required, so she needed to decide and rang Ozzie.

When the phone rang, and Jen's number came up, I answered at once, ever hopeful of an invitation back to her bed.

However, she launched in without preliminaries and said abruptly, 'If you use the Q you have to be completely truthful with me.'

I was surprised by her remark. 'That goes without saying, Jen.'

'No, it doesn't. Answer me this. Can you work with Declan on this mission without any emotional entanglements?'

'What do you mean?'

'Come on, Oz. It's a simple enough question if your answer is yes.'

I had a feeling that this was more to do with Jen than with Declan and me. 'What are we really talking about here?'

Jennifer sighed. 'OK, I'm now with Declan. What you and I had was fun, but it was never going to develop into anything serious. But I'm not telling you anything new, am I?'

'I sensed something was going on with you two, but I wasn't sure what.'

Jennifer stared at me. She demanded, 'What's your answer?'

I thought about it before answering. 'I still have feelings for you, Jen, and I have to admit I'm jealous of Mr fucking Boogle. But I have no claim over you. The mission is more important than anything to me, and I'm big enough to suck up my personal shit and get on with the job.'

I watched Jen sigh and hoped she felt relieved. Then she said, 'OK, I'd better get on with the programming then. Send me your copy of the diary.'

I wondered if it was possible to be elated and deflated at the same time? But that's how I felt.

Hubert's job was a trouble-shooter for the Sovereign Council of Wisdom. He was an architect of sorts who assessed cracks in the structure. But the structure in question was not a building. It was more of a hierarchical pyramid. He was alerted when a break appeared in the pyramid structure. He was told only what he needed to know to get the job done. Unrepairable cracks could lead to fissures in what had to be, a perfect plan. A plan to which Hubert was not privy. Hubert took his work very seriously, and his job took him to Olivia Quinn's door, where Olivia nervously awaited his arrival.

Olivia responded to the knock on her door and found herself facing a large man with a full ginger beard and a broad cheery face. Give him the red suit, and he'd pass for a younger version of Santa, Olivia, thought amused. Hubert glanced at Olivia and walked past her into the apartment.

'She said, I'm Olivia, and I guess you're Hubert?'

He said, 'Please sit down and tell me how the police got hold of our prize?'

Olivia did so and said. 'Why did you send Weldon to threaten me?'

He shrugged, 'I know nothing about that. I'm here to find out about the letter.'

Olivia did not trust the tall German, but she kept that to herself. She replied, nervously, 'I think the police took it away when they arrested Weldon.' Olivia saw Hubert's moustache move. For all she knew, he could have been expressing a smile or a snarl under his facial hair. It was disconcerting to her, not being able to read his expression.

He said, 'Who else knows the whereabouts of the letter?'

She did not want to mention Ozzie. It would complicate things, especially for the crazy Irishman. Besides she wanted to keep that part of her life separate. 'Only the police.'

Hubert said, 'How did you find out?'

Olivia felt she was being backed into a corner. One lie had to lead to another. 'I know a policeman. He told me.'

'And who is this police officer, Olivia?'

'I can't tell you that. my police contact can only help me if he remains anonymous.'

Hubert stared at the young woman. 'Well, Olivia, we need the prize back. You will contact this mysterious friend of yours, and you will use whatever means you have at your disposal to get him to give you the letter.'

Olivia stared at him, her eyes on stalks. 'Just how the hell am I supposed to do that?'

'That's your problem. And make sure you deal with it very soon because I will be back, and you had better have our prize.'



I was mentally doing cartwheels at the thought of going for a ride in the Quantime. I still had misgivings about Declan going with me, but I would just have to live with it. With that decided, my thoughts turned to the gorgeous Olivia. I had rung her many times, but with no response. Concerned about her wellbeing, I decided to drive over to her home in Park Road, Chipping Barnet. I parked my car behind Olivia's. At least she was home, I smiled to myself. I was just about to knock on her door when it opened.

'Were you expecting me?' I asked grinning.

'No, but I was going to call you.' Olivia said.

I was intrigued and waited for more.

'Yes, I need your help with something. Come on inside, and I'll tell you about it.'

She looked concerned, so I figured it must be serious.

As we sat in her lounge room, Olivia looked straight me. 'I need the Pike Letter.'

'You'll have to talk to Dr Bennet about that when he gets it back from the police.'

She shook her head. 'No, you don't understand, I need it now.'

I looked at her, very puzzled. 'Why are you telling me this?'

'Because I need you to get it for me.'

I thought she must be crazy. 'Even if I entertained such a notion, how the hell am I supposed to walk into a police station, break into the evidence room, steal the letter and leave without being spotted?'

'You used to be a policeman, didn't you?'

'So did you.'

'Don't you still have a uniform?'

'I can't just waltz into my old nick in my wooden top suit and not get challenged.'

Olivia knew she hadn't thought it through. With tears in her eyes, she said, 'Ozzie, I know I'm asking a lot, but you're my only hope.'

I didn't understand what was going on and I didn't particularly want to know. To make further enquiries into this madness would ensnare me even more. I looked into Olivia's beseeching eyes. 'Why do you need the Pike Letter?'

'Ozzie, I haven't exactly been totally straight with you. Have you heard of the Sovereign Council of Wisdom?'

I shrugged, 'No. Who are they?'

'They paid me to bid for the Pike Letter at the auction. I didn't buy it because Dr Bennet's bid went over my budget. Now the people who paid me are demanding the letter.'

I looked at her and could see how worried she was, so did not press her further. I had never heard of them but would check them out later. 'My first question is, who paid you?'

'I am not allowed to name names.'

That didn't surprise me, but I needed to know more. 'Was it Weldon or even Westbury?' I asked her.

Olivia sighed deeply. 'No. These people paid Weldon to steal the letter, which he did.'

'Which was where I came into the picture,' I replied.

'Yes, and I wouldn't be in this mess now if you hadn't gotten Weldon arrested.'

'Oh, I'm the bad guy now,' I said with a mock hurt expression.

'Ozzie you went off half-cocked, without telling me your plan.'

'As I recall you had a half-baked plan yourself.'

'Ozzie,' Olivia retorted, 'You owe me for your blunder. My client would have turned up and got the letter off Weldon, and I wouldn't be in this mess.'

I stared at the distraught Olivia. 'Would that be the blunder in which I retrieved your diary by any chance?'

Olivia broke down and cried.

Being the sucker for damsels in distress, I hugged her and let her sob into my shoulder.

After a couple of minutes, Olivia came up for air. She sniffled, then said, 'Ozzie, I'm in big trouble if I don't hand over the letter.'

I looked her in the eye. 'Well, there's no way I can get it from the police station.' I let that sink in, then my mouth betrayed me. The words came tumbling out before I could stop them. 'But there might be away to get it before the police raid.' Jesus! What a stupid thing for me to say. Her eyes had widened like saucers. How the fuck was I to explain what I'd just said. If I was lucky, Olivia might not have picked it up.

But I wasn't lucky.

She said, 'What did you mean by that, it makes no sense?'

'What?' I asked, playing for time.

'What you said about getting the Pike letter before the raid.'

'No, you've got it wrong,' I lied. 'I said, 'If only I could get the letter before the raid.'

'I know what you said. There's no such thing as a bloody time machine, so it's time to stop dumping your crazy fantasies on me. This is no joke you fucking wanker!'

I didn't know what to say. All that came to mind was, 'Leave it with me.'

'What the fuck is that supposed to mean?' Olivia snapped.

'It means, if you want my help, just back the fuck off!' I got up to go. 'I have to check out something. I'll ring you later.'

As I backed out of Olivia's drive and headed home, I couldn't help but notice a black SUV three cars behind, seemed to be following me. It could just have been a coincidence, but I did not think so. There was one way to put it to the test. I turned off the A41 in Edgeware and took a detour. I checked my rear-view mirror, and there it was - the black Toyota Prado, behind me but holding back.

Now I was pretty sure that somebody was tailing me I got back on route to East Acton. Now the traffic was heavier the Toyota stayed two cars back and kept in that position when I turned off the A41 at Brent Cross. The Prado haunted me all the way to Wembley. It was very intimidating. I had no idea who was in the Prado, or why they were following me. But I had more than an inkling it had something to do with the Pike Letter.

As I pulled up near my office in East Acton, the Toyota pulled up alongside. A heavily tinted window wound down, and a man using his fingers like a handgun pointed at me. Then, without a word, the car drove away. I sat there for a moment, my heart beating like a bass drum. Just who the fuck were those guys?

Olivia mentioned something about a group called the Sovereign Council of Wisdom. I'd not heard of them but realised I urgently needed to find out more. That would have to wait, though. Right now, I needed to see Jen. I rang her, but she wasn't answering. I grabbed Mr JW and poured a shot to steady my nerves.

Feeling calmer, I booted my computer to see what I could find out about the Sovereign Council of Wisdom.

There was quite a lot of general information available, as with most popular subjects but I wanted to delve deeper. Then I found a page that provided further insight. The Sovereign Council of Wisdom was a cover name for the Palladium Rite, which was cooked up by none other than Albert Pike and Mazzini in, 1870. They completed a commitment to creating a supreme, universal rite of Masonry, one that would over-arch all the other rites. It centralised all high Masonic bodies under one head. And the Palladium Rite was initiated as the pinnacle of the Masonic pyramidal hierarchy.

From this power base, Mazzini and Pike orchestrated their design for Three World Wars, two of which had already been carried out as planned. This was heavy-duty stuff, and I need some more JW elixir. I wondered, was it really possible for these two men to have engineered a plot that led to all the terrible carnage of the Twentieth Century? If so, I was way out of my league.

## Chapter 22

I realised it was time for action, so I rang Jen.

I heard her voice. 'I need to see you, urgently, Jen.'

'Why?' She replied, 'What's up now?'

'I can't say over the phone. Can you meet me at the Bushey Country Club at say 12:30 today?'

'OK, 12:30 it is. See you there.'

I met Jen as arranged and we sat eating lunch.

She looked up at me. 'What's the urgency about, Ozzie?'

I waited until I'd finished chewing. 'I need to use the Q.'

Jen looked at me, puzzled. 'That's already being organised.'

'No. I mean before that. I just need to go back a few days, to Haverstock Hill, close to Chalk Farm, actually.'

Jennifer shook her head. 'Sorry, Oz, I can't do that.'

I pled, 'It could save a girl's life.'

'Look, even if I agreed to send you it has to be sanctioned by the Home Office.' She then said, 'I know you're itching to tell me the story, so get on with it.'

I watched her sit back in her seat and cross her arms. It was a hard sell. 'OK, have you heard of the Sovereign Council of Wisdom?'

'Can't say that I have. What is it?'

'It's a cover for something much more sinister.'

Jennifer sipped her house white. 'Will you please get to the point?'

'It's a front for something called the Palladium Rite.'

'Which is?'

I craned my neck forward to get closer to Jen. Then I spoke quietly. 'It's a supreme, Universal Rite of Masonry that overrules all others, even the different national ones. It centralises all high Masonic bodies in the world under one head.'

Jen looked at me, a puzzled frown furrowing her brow. 'What does this have to with me?'

I grinned, 'That single head was no other than Albert Pike.'

Jen expressed some surprise. 'Oh!'

Then she said to me, 'Why do you need the Q to help this woman?'

I tried to keep it simple, but it wasn't easy. 'The Pike Letter was up for auction and Olivia was supposed to secure it for her client. But somebody else got it instead. The people who paid Olivia to get it are demanding the letter. But she doesn't have it.'

Jennifer sighed, 'I presume this is the letter you say is locked up in a police evidence room.'

'Yes.'

Jennifer stared at me. 'And you want to break it out.'

'No. That's not possible. I want to steal the letter before the police got it.'

'And that's why you want to use the Q?'

'Yes. It's the only way I can protect, Olivia.'

'And have you told this "Olivia" about the Q?'

'Do you think I'm an idiot? No don't answer that,' I said before she had a chance to respond.

'No, but you're too smart for your own good, sometimes.'

I met Jen's gaze. 'No, I haven't told her. But I feel kind of responsible for her plight.'

Jen looked Ozzie in the eye, 'If you're going to help her, you'll have to find another way.'

I was really pissed. Jen got me to tell the story with no intention of acquiescing to my wishes. 'Oh, come on, Jennifer. There's hardly any programming involved, and I'll be back before the spooks find out.'

'That's not the point. You intend to go back in time to change history. Not only is it not on it could cause all sorts of chaos in the present.'

'I sneered, 'What, a little alteration like that?'

Jennifer stuck to her guns, 'There's a lot about quantum travel we don't know yet, and I'm not going to spoil everything I have achieved up to now by taking any chances.'

Deep down, I knew Jen was right, and I was a selfish ass. But I only admitted this to myself when I felt more relaxed. I realised it's difficult to apply physics logic to quantum exchange. I left gracefully and thought about what I could do, as I drove home. OK, so the Q was out of the question and the only other option, which wasn't really an option, was stealing the letter from the

evidence room at Willesden Nick. I could always try Creanie to see if he could help. All that remained of that bridge was the ashes. Creanie had made it very clear that he wasn't doing me any more favours, and this was a biggie. But what other option did I actually have?

I was surprised when Creanie agreed to meet me at the Wishing Well. As we supped our beer I explained my dilemma.

When Detective Sergeant Creane finally stopped laughing, he said, 'You've finally blown a brain gasket.'

I said, 'Go on, mate. Have a good laugh at my expense. But I'm deadly serious about this. Besides, you owe me one.'

'That's good coming from you, Ozzie. Why do you need the letter?'

'It's probably best if I don't tell you. Let's just say that a friend of mine will be in serious trouble if she can't hand over the letter.'

'And what happens when it's discovered missing?'

'Creanie, you could just take it home for the night. I'll get it copied and return the original in the morning. Nobody else will be any the wiser.'

Creane couldn't believe Ozzie's audacity. 'And what possible reason would I have for taking out the letter?'

I couldn't believe Creanie's rigid thinking at times. 'Just smuggle it out with something you need to work on at home.'

Creane thought about it. 'This isn't a fucking favour. I want ten grand for my trouble.'

I stared at him. 'Ten fucking grand. Where the hell am I supposed to get my hands on that sort of dough?'

Creane shrugged, 'Take it or leave it, Ozzie.'

Bejesus, it's hard enough to keep up with the rent. But my pride wouldn't let me tell Creanie about my impoverished state.

I flashed a false smile. 'I'll have to pass it by my client.'

Creane said, 'I don't care how you get the money, but I want half of my fee upfront.'

My smile soon turned upside-down. 'Half up front! I don't think he'll come to that party.'

## Chapter 23

It was coming up to 'Q' day. That's the day we would be off on our Quantime adventure. I had to tidy up a few loose ends. In the end, it only cost me a few beers to get Creanie's help. The bastard was just winding me up about the ten thousand pounds. I thought it out of character for Creanie to suggest such a thing. He was not a corrupt cop. A pain in the arse at times, but definitely not unethical. The upshot was Creanie came good. Olivia got the Pike letter, and a copy was back in the Willesden nick evidence cupboard. All in all, I think I handled the whole thing pretty well.

The big day came, and I was sitting beside Declan in the "Pumpkin" (our nickname for the Quantime), while Jennifer double checked that everything was running smoothly in the control centre. In the spirit of sharing and good relations, Jennifer allowed a couple of observers from the Government, Doctor Barnabas, the chief quantum scientist and Edgar Murphy, to witness the process. This was the first time they experienced the Quantime in action. From their perspective, as

soon as Professor Smethurst activated the launch button, a shrill noise came from the bright orange device in the middle of the room. They all wore hearing protection as the high pitch frequency spectrum could easily damage the inner ear nerve endings.

As the sound became more intense tendrils of snaking blue light arced around the Quantime. Then, as the high-frequency noise reached its peak, the machine suddenly became silent, and the pair of Quantanauts were no longer there. Despite the fact the observers knew what was supposed to happen in theory, the actuality of the Quantime working left them feeling shocked, with their eyes on stalks.

For the Quantanauts, it was an entirely different experience.

## Part 2

### Chapter 24

#### Little Rock, Arkansas 1833

How can I explain the Quantime effect? Jennifer had taught the difference between time travel and quantum travel. It goes something like this. With time travel we travel in time. Simple so far. But with quantum travel, we travel in space. Well, to be accurate, and this is the spooky bit, we exchange our space (reality) for a different one. We don't actually go anywhere, and time is not involved. With quantum travel, which does not really include any travelling, we simply arrive in a different reality - the one that the beautiful genius, Jennifer Smethurst has programmed for us. It became a bit clearer to me each time I experienced the thrill of the quantum exchange.

Another odd thing is that the Quantime runs on autopilot. Us Quantanauts don't have to do anything except sit down, belt up and relax.

The next thing I knew is that we have arrived. At first, I'm in no hurry to step outside and leave the safety of the womb-like Pumpkin. Then the excitement of being part of an exciting new adventure motivates me, and I can't wait to experience it.

'How do we know this is our destination,' Declan queried as we stepped out of the Q.

I wasn't in any state to stress my brain. The Q experience always left me a bit disoriented for a short while. Instinctively, I was in no hurry to step outside into the unknown. Stepping outside the Quantime is a bit like being reborn. While we're entangled with the Quantime, our usual particle reality becomes quantum wave reality. Then, as we leave the Pumpkin, we take on another particle reality, this one in Little Rock, well near the town anyway. It's not a good idea to start by freaking out the locals. The big pumpkin-shaped thing materialising in front of them would do just that. It's best if Declan and I keep low profiles, which means we have to arrive secretly.

The Q landed behind an old barn. Once we stepped out onto the sun-baked Arkansas soil, the Q disappeared. It does that. It's another of its quirks. To make it appear again, we each have a pendant, Jen made, that when pressed in the centre activates the Q. She really is a genius. We are also automatically outfitted appropriately for a settler of that period. We wore broad-brimmed hats, long-sleeved cotton shirts and leather vests. Jen had thoughtfully given us each a leather valise, which held our more formal clothes. We also wore Colt 45 side-arms. I turned to Declan. 'Well, shall we venture forth?'

As we walked towards the Arkansas River, which we had to cross to reach the township, I asked 'Declan do you know What Little Rock is known for?'

Declan, who, since the planned trip to 1830s Arkansas, had studied the local history, answered, 'There's a small rock formation, a landmark used by travellers on the Arkansas River. It's known by the locals as la Petite Roche, French for "the little rock".'

Declan and I soon came to the small rock formation on the south bank of the Arkansas River, where the ferry crossed. Declan said, 'That rocky outcrop showed travellers where it was safe to cross.'

I said, cynically, 'Thanks, I'll store that in my brain for next time I take part in a pub quiz.'

'To fit in here we need to know local stuff like that,' Declan retorted.

The Colonel Hogan ferry seemed to take an age to arrive. It was flat and raft-like; joined to a cable that kept it moving in a straight line as it crossed the river. It cost each passenger 50 cents. It was just as well that Jennifer had had the foresight to provide us with \$500 each in small denominations in leather billfolds.

Having crossed the water, we had to decide whether to head south-west to Red River country or Northwest on the Military Road to Fort Smith. I asked the ferryman, finding my voice in the local lingo, 'Which route is better for getting to Little Rock sir?'

The ferryman studied the pair of greenhorns. 'Military Road is your best bet, young fellas.'

The Little Rock settlement was little more than a cluster of rough timber buildings each side of a dirt street. There was a place for drinking, a place for worship and a trading post of sorts.

Declan said, 'When the Indian Removal Act was passed three years back, the Indians were kicked off their ancestral lands to make way for prospecting by the whites. During the next twelve years, execution of the Act will see thousands of Choctaws, Muscogees, Florida Indians, Chickasaws, and Cherokees removed from their ancestral lands east of the Mississippi to new areas west of Arkansas. It's going to be a dark chapter in American history called, collectively, "The Trail of Tears".'

I could already see it happening as natives, herded like animals, trudged dejectedly through Little Rock. I could see by the look in Declan's eye, he was also troubled by this event. The settlers seemed to pay it no heed though.

Nobody seemed to take any notice of us as we walked down the street, except when Declan tried to adjust the position of his gun.

A kindly man sitting on a seat near the saloon offered the strangers some sage advice. He said, 'Young fellas, touching your gun will make folks around here mighty nervous, and nervous folk can be dangerous.'

I said, 'How are we making people nervous.'

The stranger said, 'A man around here only touches his gun when he's going to use it.'

I said, 'That's mighty neighbourly of you mister, and I thank you for your advice.'

'It might just keep you, greenhorns, alive a bit longer,' the old man chortled.

The Little Rock settlement seemed crude and makeshift, with the typical facilities and amenities you would expect to find in a frontier town. Apart from the saloon, hotel, brothel, smithy and trading post, there was also a school. The one at which Albert Pike taught. Pike was still a young man.

Declan had heard much about The General's exploits, and he wanted to see Pike in the flesh. As they walked past the school to the hotel, Declan said, 'Man, I would so love to go in there and meet the man.'

I said, 'We don't want to play our hand so soon.' 'We'll get booked in at the hotel. Then we'll go looking for Silas Pearce.'

Declan nodded. It made the most sense.

We reached the saloon, which had the usual batwing doors, swung them inwards and entered.

The Little Rock Hotel was really just a saloon with upstairs accommodation. The rooms were mostly hired by prostitutes to service their clients. But by paying a week in advance, the barkeeper managed to find us a couple of places. A barmaid showed us to our rooms. As she unlocked the door and gave me the key, I asked, 'Have you heard of a Silas Pearce?'

The middle-aged woman, overdone in the make-up department, said, 'Yeah. Nice gent.'

'Do you know where I can find him?' I ventured.

'Yeah. Silas is an overseer working on the new State House construction.'

I gave the maid a dollar bill, then said, 'Where is this State House?'

She pointed through the wall, saying, 'Go down the street. You can't miss it.'

The barmaid was right about that. Just down from the hotel, builders were constructing a huge building, the Arkansas State House, which would not be completed until 1842. I had to stay out of sight so Declan could do his thing. He approached the building site and strolled up to one of the workers, who was busy with a hand saw. Working his way through a piece of 4 x 2. The noise of the saw made him impervious to the stranger's yell. As the saw teeth finished cutting through the timber, Declan tapped the worker on the shoulder and immediately stepped back.

The carpenter swung around. Seeing the stranger, he demanded, 'What do you want?'

'I'm looking for Silas Pearce.'

The carpenter put down his saw. 'Why?'

'I'm looking for work,' Declan said, getting into his role-play.

The carpenter eyed Declan up and down. He pointed to a small shed on the site. 'He's in his office over there.'

Declan Merrick walked to the shed and knocked on the door. After hearing 'Come in,' he entered and came face to face with Silas Pearce. Although he had prepared for this moment, Declan still could not believe he was meeting with the man who kept the meticulous journal. 'Hello, my name is Declan Merrick.'

'Mr Merrick, how may I help you?' Then he added, 'If it's employment you are after I have a full complement of carpenters for this job.'

Declan looked at the foreman. He sported a waxed moustache and wore gentlemen's attire. His shirt sleeves were rolled up and held in position by elasticated supports. 'Are you Silas Pearce?'

Pearce nodded.

'Sir, I am here with a message for you from one Oswald Doyle.'

'I don't know the man,' Silas said, suspiciously.'



Declan said, 'Mr Pearce, I know it is an odd request, but Mr Doyle feels he must meet with you.'

Silas, usually a patient man by nature, hated it when others would not get to the point. 'What does your mister Doyle want with me?' Silas asked abruptly.

'He has insights about things that will happen. One of his visions involved you.'

Silas sat up straight. 'Me! What do you mean?'

'Alas, I don't have Mr Doyle's gift. Only he can explain that.'

Declan knew that Silas Pearce was predisposed to spiritualism and the occult, so all he had to do was plant a seed of curiosity in the foreman's mind. But seeing the look of suspicion in Silas' eyes, Declan knew he had to give it a bit of a nudge. 'I'm sorry to intrude on you in this way, Mr Pearce. I have done as Mr Doyle asked and will convey to him that you have no interest in his insight. Good day to you sir,' Declan said, turning to leave.

Silas said, 'Don't leave. I must admit I am somewhat intrigued and I'm sure it will do no harm to hear what your Mr Doyle has to say.'

I was pleasantly surprised when Declan came back with the news. He is obviously a super salesman, but I wasn't going to tell him that. His ego was big enough already. Now, all I had to do was work out the details of my insight. I knew Albert Pike was born on December 29, 1809, in Boston. That made him 24 years old. I didn't know if he was a Freemason at that time, so I had to steer clear of that aspect. Besides, his involvement with the Rite was too far ahead for my insight. It had to be about something that would include Albert Pike in the next few days. Albert was a fast learning, self-educated genius who had taught in several schools. His current teaching position was in Little Rock, where he kept his pupils enthralled with his wild west adventures.

I took out my copy of Silas' journal and looked for an entry for the next few days that involved Albert.

Then I had it. Silas had written, "I got a pleasant surprise when Albert turned up at my home with a copy of The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry".

I was pretty pleased with myself. Not only did I have my insight worked out, but it showed that even back then, Albert and Silas, were interested in Freemasonry.

I'd never played the role of a psychic before. But from what I can recall, you have to be vague but accurate. Declan had made an arrangement for us to visit Silas Pearce at 6 o'clock that evening.

Silas and his wife lived in a modest timber home on the outskirts of town. Declan and I arrived there at the agreed to time. A young woman, who I took to be Silas' wife opened the door.

Dolores Pearce knew her husband was expecting two visitors. She said, 'Good evening. Can I help you?'

I had to be the mysterious one, so Declan spoke for both of us. 'Good evening to you Ma'am. I believe your husband is expecting us.'

The woman turned and announced in a strident voice, 'Silas, your gentlemen friends have arrived.'

Silas came to the door. Seeing Declan, he smiled, 'Gentlemen come this way to my den.'

We followed the young man to a small office at the back of the house. There was only room for a small desk and Silas's chair. Most of the cramped space comprised a set of shelves holding many books and stored files. Declan and I had to stand.

Declan touched the surface of the desk. 'A fine piece of craftsmanship, if I may say so.'

'Thank you, Mr Merrick,' Silas replied.'

'Your work, no doubt?' Declan added.

'Indeed,' Silas said, 'Thank you for your praise.' Then he said, 'Can I get you, gentlemen, some refreshment?'

Declan said, 'Do not trouble yourself, Mr Pearce. We have just dined.' Then Declan said, 'Let me introduce you to Mr Doyle.'

Silas turned to me. 'A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr Doyle. But I am curious about the message you have for me.'

This was my cue. 'Mr Pearce, I sense you are a man who has a curiosity about the unknown?'

'Yes, but you would know that by my inviting you to my home tonight.'

'Indeed, sir,' I answered. 'I had an intuition that told me a close friend will visit you in the next few days.'

Silas said, 'That may well be so. This is a small town, and most of us locals know each other. It would not be surprising.'

'Ah, yes, I'm getting a name beginning with P. Does that mean anything to you?'

'I'm not sure. Could be but I need more details.'

'This friend is coming with a gift. I'm getting an S. Does that mean anything?'

'I'm not sure. But why are you telling me this?'

I said, 'I am simply the messenger. One other thing. This present is important to you and your friend. It will have great significance later in life, especially for your friend.'

Silas shook his head. 'Well, this is a strange thing, indeed.'

I smiled, 'I have delivered the message so make of it what you will, Mr Pearce. But I have taken up too much of your time, so I bid you goodnight, Sir.'

'It has given me much to think about, Mr Doyle.'

I will call by your office in three days, and you can tell me what transpired.'

## Chapter 25

Albert Pike was the oldest of six children born to Benjamin and Sarah Andrews Pike. His colonial ancestors included Reverend John Pike, the founder of Woodbridge, New Jersey. The township was settled in the early autumn of 1664 and was granted a charter on June 1, 1669, by King Charles III of England. Albert, a bright pupil, attended school in Newburyport and Framingham, the former being classified a city in 1851. Young Albert enjoyed spending time with his father fishing in the Merrimack River. Albert, always an adventurer at heart spent a lot of his spare time watching ships coming into and leaving the port.

Many vessels were privateers that were involved in the Revolutionary War of 1812, against British domination. Newburyport became a hive of activity for privateering. Albert often fantasised about them sailing to exotic places. He was also fascinated, watching the construction of whaling and Clipper ships, one of Newbury's most essential industries.

At age fifteen in 1825, Albert passed his entrance exams and was accepted at Harvard University. But when the college requested payment of tuition fees for the first two years, he decided not to attend. Besides he'd gotten the wanderlust bug and did not want to be stuck in stuffy lecture halls.

In 1831, Pike left Massachusetts to travel west, and his grand adventure began. However, any romantic notions he had about being free and carefree dissipated and his reality set in. The American west was a hard place for a Massachusetts greenhorn, and his adventure became about survival. In St. Louis, Pike's first port of call, he was quite taken by the bustling cosmopolitan city, which thrived on the fur and riverboat trade. But he moved on to Independence, Missouri.

Independence, Pike learned, was a point of departure for California, Oregon, and the Santa Fe Trails. Known of as "Queen City of the Trails" Independence became a centre for horse-trading, covered wagon sales and smithy shops. Many folks took a break there before heading off into the prairies with the wagon trains. Many of the wagon masters knew the trails quite well. Pike listened raptly as they recounted their wild adventures battling Indians and the elements. Pike got on well with a Wiley, grizzled wagon master called Bill Krassen who agreed to let Albert join his expedition to Taos, New Mexico.

Pike survived by hunting and trading but did not make it to New Mexico with the wagon train. Halfway through Kansas, Pike, while away from the wagon train, got thrown when his horse shied at a rattler. The horse broke and galloped off with his rifle and other belongings. Pike chased after it, and the horse galloped away, catching its hoof in a prairie dog hole. A horse with a broken leg was useless. Pike put it out of its misery, grabbed his saddle and headed off. With only his Remington repeating rifle, Bowie knife and colt 45 sidearm, Pike had to walk the remaining 500 miles to Taos, a feat that would have killed a lesser mortal. Wagon trains seldom stopped for stragglers and never turned back to find a lost settler. Bill Krassen didn't discover Pike missing for two days, and by that time his wagon train was too far ahead to go looking for him.

Pike, young and fit, kept going focusing on planting one foot in front of the other. Whereas many a traveller had perished in such a wilderness, Pike saw it as a challenge and he just kept on going. But the weight of the saddle was slowing him down. In the end, he just kept the saddlebags and his rifle. With only the shadows made by the sun to guide him, Pike continued on his journey. He beat the elements and the odds and was able to replenish his water supplies from a lake near La Junta. He filled his water bottle and anything else he had that could store the precious liquid. Pike had already travelled 300 miles on foot and still had another 200 to go before reaching Taos.

Having crossed the Kansas prairie, Pike reached the lower incline of the Rockies. The incessant heat and dry flat land of the intolerable prairie had nearly been Pike's undoing. But somehow, he kept going and was rewarded by the stunning scenery of the Rocky Mountains. It allowed him to get back in tune with nature and relax for the first time in weeks. The area was teeming with wildlife, and the mountain streams had the most refreshing, purest water Pike had ever tasted. Pike was fascinated by the beaver dams, which were scattered throughout the valley. Elk herds were plentiful and killing one for food was no problem to a hunter with Albert's skills.

As Pike made his way over the Rocky Mountains foothills, he kept his eyes peeled and enjoyed the wilderness. He blessed his luck. If he had stayed with the wagon train, he would never have experienced such wonders of nature.

Recharged and replenished physically and spiritually Pike finally arrived at Taos Alpine village, in New Mexico. There, he learned to ski. Having mastered the skill, Pike joined up with a trapping expedition, this time to Llano Estacado in New Mexico and Texas. Trapping was minimal and, after travelling about 1300 miles (650 on foot), Pike finally arrived at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Settling there in 1833, he taught school and wrote a series of articles for the Little Rock Arkansas Advocate under the pen name of "Casca." His articles proved popular enough, and he was invited to join the staff of the newspaper. Pike settled down, married Mary Ann Hamilton, and purchased a share of

the paper from Charles Pierre Bertrand, with the dowry. By 1835, he was the Advocate's sole owner.

Under Pike's administration, the Advocate promoted the viewpoint of the Whig Party (Conservatives) in a politically volatile and divided Arkansas, in December 1832.

*ALBERT PIKE IN ARKANSAS - arkansasroadstories.com.*

*<https://www.arkansasroadstories.com/history/pike.html>*

*Albert Pike Letter to Mazzini - The Illuminati Plan for ....*

*[https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/sociopol\\_masonsknightstemplar15.htm](https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/sociopol_masonsknightstemplar15.htm)*

## Chapter 26

Silas was pondering over construction plans when Albert walked into his office. Although a big man Albert walked softly. It was a skill he had learned as a hunter. He tapped on the glass of Silas' office door to attract the foreman's attention. Although they both worked in the same small town, their busy workloads, kept them from socialising together.

The foreman looked up from his plans, a smile spreading across his face. 'Albert, how nice to see you.'

Pike grinned, 'I thought I'd surprise you.'

'It's good to see you, but it was not unexpected.'

Pike wore a puzzled frown. 'You were expecting me?'

'Take a seat, and I will explain.'

'Please do,' Albert said, planting his bulk on the vacant chair.

'Two days ago, a man came to me and told me another man had a message for me. This stranger, called Merrick spoke of his friend, a Mr Doyle, whom he said had a peculiar gift - that of prophecy.'

Albert raised an eyebrow. 'Prophecy, my friend, unless it is the word of God, is not to be trusted.'

Silas said, 'Curiosity drove me to give this Mr Doyle an audience. He told me you would arrive at my door in a few days. He knew you not by your full name. Only by the letter 'P.'

'If this Mr Doyle has the gift of prophecy, why waste it on something as trivial as us meeting together?'

Silas responded, 'I also thought it absurd. But there was something else.'

Pike said, 'It's a shallow scoff to say that prophecy is absurd because it is not possible for us, employing it, to persuade God to change His plans. He produces foreknown and fore-intended effects, by the instrumentality of the forces of nature, all of which are His forces.'

Silas listened to his friend's wise words, then said, 'He said you would come with a gift.'

Pike stared at Silas. 'Did he say more about this gift?'

'Only that it began with an "S."

Pike uttered, 'Well, bless my soul,' and handed over a copy of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry.

It was time for Declan and me to visit Silas. His entry about Pike's visit and the gift was written the previous day. If, as I assumed, he was impressed by the accuracy of my "insight", we could gain his confidence and, possibly, get an introduction to Pike.

The Little Rock Saloon, which turned into a restaurant for breakfasts, had only a minimal menu -bacon and beans with toast on the side and black coffee so thick you could almost stand a spoon up in it.

Declan was looking a bit morose. I said, 'Cheer up. Once we've seen Silas, we'll be on our way home.'

'It's not that. It's just something that's been puzzling me.'

'Oh!'

'There's no entry in Silas' journal about your prophecy.'

Puzzled, I said, 'Of course not. Because in Silas' world he never really met us.'

Declan retorted, 'I know that. But how can we leave a lasting impression so that when we meet him again in the future past, he will be able to remember us?'

I realised Dec had a point. Something I had overlooked. I planned to meet Silas again, in a few decades, when he had fallen out with Pike. But he was hardly going to confide in me if he couldn't remember who I was. I looked at Declan. 'Fuck! The flaw in our plan.'

Declan stared at me. 'What's the point of seeing Silas today. We may as well forget the whole thing and go home.'

He was right. But I was not one to give up so easily. The plan had gone so well I had to see things through. 'You may well be right, Dec, but let's see Silas anyway.'

'OK, but I don't see how that will help us,' Declan moaned.

'Put on a brave face, because you're the mouthpiece.'

Silas was pleased to see us, and I knew why. But I didn't let on.

Silas turned to me. 'Mr Doyle, it happened just as you forecast. Albert Pike, a good friend of mine, arrived and gave me a gift like you said.'

I went for the humble act. 'I am pleased for you, Mr Pearce, but I am merely the messenger.'

'Never-the-less God has given you a wondrous gift.'

'Indeed, Mr Pearce,' I said. I added, 'Now that the insight has proven true, we must be on our way.'

Silas said, 'Another insight, perhaps Mr Doyle.'

'There are always messages to deliver,' I replied.

'It is a pity, though,' Silas bemoaned. 'My good friend Albert Pike was amazed at your prophecy and would love to meet you.'

I turned to Declan, 'Do we have time?'

Declan, playing his part, said, 'Perhaps you have a message for this Mr Pike? If so, I'm sure we could leave tomorrow.'

I shook my head. 'Not that I know of, but he sounds like an interesting person.'

Silas grinned, 'You have no idea. Once you meet him, you will never forget it.'

I had seen pictures of Albert Pike on the Internet. He was a bull of a man. Larger than life with a commanding presence. Even when young, he had a stout heart and firm convictions. His long beard hung over his barrel chest, which later in life sported rows of medals. His long, dark hair hung loose past his shoulders. The look on Declan's face showed he was also suitably impressed.

We met at his school after the children had left for the day. Silas made the introductions. I couldn't help but ask, 'Mr Pike, how come a businessman like yourself, is here teaching little children?'

Pike smiled. Or at least I think he did, as there was some movement of his mouth under his moustache. 'Mr Doyle, I will answer your question, but first I wish to ask one of you. Silas apprised me of your prediction, one that proved correct.' Pike paused then said, 'Do you have such a message for me?'

I wasn't expecting such directness. This guy really got straight to the point. 'No. Not so far.'

Pike asked, 'How does it work? Do you hear a voice?'

'It's a bit like an internal voice. Sometimes the message is complete, and sometimes it reveals itself a little at a time,' I said, getting into my role play.

Pike nodded, then said, 'Do you have to be close to the message recipient, Mr Doyle?'

'No. Not at all. I came to Little Rock to deliver Silas' message.'

Pike looked straight at me. 'Then you must be a wide-ranging traveller, like me.'

I, of course, knew of Pike's early adventures, but I had to remain ignorant of the fact.

Declan said, 'Mr Pike, where are you from then?'

'I started life in Massachusetts, but I was blessed with an adventurous spirit, Mr Merrick. I have experienced the wide-open Kansas plains and the snow-capped Rockies in New Mexico. But I was somehow drawn here, though I really don't know why.'

Declan said, 'Then you too are a sensitive man like Mr Doyle.'

Pike responded. 'Mr Merrick, I do not possess Mr Doyle's power of intuition. I am but a magnet drawn to the unknown. For me, the unknown is an ocean, of which conscience is the compass. Thought, meditation, prayer, are the great mysteries to which the needle points. It is a spiritual magnetism that thus connects the human soul with the Deity. These majestic irradiations of the soul pierce through the shadow toward the light.'

It was time for my insight to start kicking in. I put up my hand to draw the other's attention. 'I am receiving something.'

They looked at me in anticipation of my next words. 'I see words, pages of words. A story perhaps. No, not a story - a poem.'

'A poem,' Pike uttered. I do write poetry.'

I hesitated, as though waiting for more, but said nothing more.'

Pike, intrigued, said, 'Do you know the title of the poem?'

'I shook my head. Nothing more, I'm afraid, Mr Pike.'

I sat down awkwardly on a child's chair in quiet repose. It was time to bait the hook. 'The poem is a form of worship. I'm getting an "H".'

Pike exclaimed, 'Well bless my soul. I have written a poem called 'Hymns to the God,'

I continued, 'There's something else.'

Pike, excited said, 'Pray what would that be, Mr Doyle?'

'I see people reading the poem.'

Pike turned to Silas. 'You know what this means.'

Silas beamed, 'The publisher has selected it for his next collection.'

Pike turned to me and shook my hand. 'Thank you, Mr Doyle. Your message fills me with rapturous joy.'

I was happy with the result. Our visit to 19th-century Arkansas had gone smoothly, and we had achieved what we set out to do. With the first part of "Operation Pike" completed it was time to return to our time. One of the many odd things about the Q is that it can appear anywhere. All we had to do was press one of the pendants we wore around our neck and, "hey presto" our chariot appears. This strange phenomenon has something to do with the Q always being in a quantum state until we summon it. But as we did not think its appearance in Little Rock main street a good idea, we walked out of town before pressing the button.

As we left Little Rock behind, Declan said, 'It's been fun, but it still does not answer our problem.'

'Oh, what problem would that be?'

'Once we leave here because they are part of a different timeline, they will forget us.'

I grinned, 'Yes, but we won't forget them.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

I said, 'I can fill them in with all the things they have been doing in the next thirty years.'

*Albert Pike Quotes | Freemason Information. <http://freemasoninformation.com/2012/04/albert-pike-quotes/>*

*Freemasonry And The Lodge Within The Lodge. <https://masonicenlightenment.com/freemasonry-and-the-lodge-within-the-lodge/>*

## **Chapter 27**

Declan and I arrived back in our time. Despite me being a veteran at this quantum caper, the Q experience still took it out of me leaving me as weak as a kitten for a while, until I acclimatised. It had something to do with the change from a quantum field reality back to having a three-dimensional physical body. We stayed in the Q until the odd sensations had passed, and we regained our strength. As I had more experience with the Q than Declan, I became reoriented first. I waited for Declan to finish acclimatising before I stepped out of the pumpkin and pressed the red button near the lab door.

The door opened, and I saw Jennifer, Edgar Murphy and another guy I didn't know. I guessed they were waiting for us to emerge. Usually, Jen and I would embrace each other with open arms, but this time it was much more business-like. 'Jen said, it's great to see you both again. When you're ready, we will start the debrief.'

Usually, we would kick back in Jen's living room, sup wine and talk casually about the mission. But this time was different. The government had placed transportable buildings on Jen's farm. We sat in one of the portable rooms converted from a container, while Jennifer asked us some stock questions

about our experience. Murphy and the other man, who wore a smart suit, shades and introduced himself just as Mike, listened. As we answered questions about the culture, the politics, the geography and the social structure of 19th century American pioneering society, I could see the doubt etched into Mike's dour expression. This line of questioning was clinical and avoided anything of a personal nature.

Jennifer couldn't wait to hear about the Quantanauts' adventure, But that would have to wait till later.

Murphy said, 'The Quantanauts will need to make themselves available for tests to assess the effects of quantum travel.'

Declan said, 'Sorry, Murphy. I'm flying back to California tomorrow.'

I said, 'Are these tests compulsory?'

'No, but it would be a great help with our research,' Mike said.

'Tell me the criteria of these tests, and I'll let you know.'

After Jennifer had finished making notes, Murphy asked me, 'Mr Doyle, what were you doing in Little Rock, Arkansas?'

Declan spoke up. 'Mr Murphy, the mission was funded by the Boogle Corporation. As such information about it is subject to non-disclosure.'

Jennifer pointed out, 'Mr Murphy, it's written in your contract.'

Murphy fiddled with a pen and stayed silent.

Mike said, 'How do we know that you went anywhere?'

Declan said, 'We know but we don't have to prove it to anybody, Mike.'

Mike's expression soured. He turned to Murphy. 'Get your people to approve the practical application of the device.' He then turned to Declan. 'One of my people will accompany you on your next trip.'

Declan stared at Mike. 'Absolutely not. I do not have any passengers with me. Especially those from your Limey government.'

Mike said, 'We'll see about that!'

Jennifer turned to Murphy. 'We are here for the debrief, not for Mike to start throwing threats around.' Then to Mike. 'If you want to see if my Q is real, try it out for yourself. I'll give you the necessary training, and you experience the Quantime firsthand.'

Mike knew when to back off. He needed a word with Murphy, in private.

I stood up. 'Well, if that's all, I have to get going.' I turned to Jen. 'I'll contact you later.'

Murphy said, 'It will be much better for all concerned if you cooperate with us.'

I didn't bother to respond. Olivia had left four messages on my phone, and that was much more important to me. As I walked to the car, I had the ominous feeling that Olivia was in trouble. I had only read the first message, and that put me on red alert. It read; Pike Letter copy. Pls, contact me.

She had written the text in a hurry. I couldn't figure out why she wanted a copy when she had the real McCoy. I tried ringing but just got her message bank. There was nothing else for it. I had to drive to her place and pray she was at home. I started the car and drove up to the barrier, which a



guardsman raised and let me through. It was 8.5 miles on the A11 and roughly 20 minutes from Bushey to Barnet, but it seemed much longer, as it always does when you're in a hurry. I put my phone on hands-free and listened to the other three messages.

Oz I have a problem with the letter. Pls, contact.

Oz they think I'm holding out on them. Pls, pls, pls, call me

I'm in big trouble. I need your help. For God's sake, call me.

I tried ringing her again but still got her message bank.

The fastest route was the A411 that went through Elstree. The rush hour was over, and I was in Chipping Barnet in 22 minutes. Olivia's car was in the drive, but there were no lights on inside her home. I knocked on the door, and it opened at my touch. This did not bode well. I called out Olivia's name, but there was no response. In desperation, I called her number. There was a responsive tune from somewhere in the apartment. Shit, she didn't have her phone with her!

I looked around her apartment, but she was not home. As her car was there, it meant she had probably left with someone else. The state of her flat told me she had not gone with them willingly. Who would have taken her, and where was she? In desperation, I listened to her messages again. Pike Letter copy. Surely if she wanted me to get a copy, the text would have read "copy Pike letter." Then it hit me. What if Olivia meant her Pike Letter was a forgery? An icy chill shot up my spine. Shit, had I got them mixed up? Was the genuine article back in police custody?

Even if the answer to both questions was yes, I could not do anything until I found Olivia. To find Olivia, I had to work out who had taken her. Maybe it was Cameron Weldon taking his revenge? It was unlikely that he would risk it while out on bail. Besides, he was a small fry in the larger picture.

Then I noticed her laptop on a desk. A quick mouse-over brought the screen to life, suggesting she didn't have enough time to secure it. The Google search page showed Olivia had been looking up the "Sovereign Council of Wisdom". I smacked my head. Of course! That was the name of the people harassing her for the Pike Letter. Then icy fingers grabbed my spine. What if they had discovered the letter was a copy? Oh, fuck! I continued searching for Olivia, looking for some clue as to where they may have taken her. Who would have taken her, and where was she? In desperation, I listened to her messages again.

She may have left her phone behind so that whoever had taken her did not have access to it. But why leave it in the open where her kidnapper could easily have seen it? It was only apparent to me once I rang her number and got her message bank. What if she wanted me to find it unlocked? I searched recent calls and at the top of the list was an unknown number. I phoned it. Hearing a man's guttural voice, I took a deep breath and uttered one word – 'Pike.'

## Chapter 28

Valery Richhoffen von Bismarck did not get involved in the everyday affairs of SCoW. As the leader, she had to keep her eye on the larger picture. She delegated tasks to her minions, one of whom was Hubert Meisinger. He was not the sharpest knife in the drawer. But he was far enough up the management ladder to have lesser minions carry out the more unsavoury stuff. Valery was staying at Alexander's place, sorting through his belongings. She did not need the Chelsea flat, which would soon be up for sale, along with her brother's fleet of luxury cars and his yacht. What she did need was the letter. It was symbolic to SCoW, and not for financial gain. It may well be

worth a few million to a collector like Dr Bennet, but for Valery, it was more like the eagle staff carried by Roman legionaries. It was a symbol of united purpose. A rallying cry for all factions of the Palladium Rite.

Sergeant Creane could breathe again. He had managed to return the Pike Letter to the evidence locker undetected. He cursed Ozzie under his breath. Never again would he let that maverick put his career in jeopardy. If he received any more calls from Doyle, he would simply ignore them. But there was a problem. Ozzie had treated Creane to a slap up meal for his help. It was innocent enough but it could just as easily be construed as payment for favours done. Removing evidence without permission was a serious crime that, if revealed, could cost the DS Creanedetective his police career. When his phone rang, and Oswald's name came up, Sergeant Creane's heart began palpitating. His instinct was to answer automatically, but this time he stopped before speaking and ignored it.

Creanie wasn't answering, so Ozzie tried again. Still no response. Ozzie left a message.

'Urgent. Pls, call me.'

No, that wouldn't get his friend's attention. Creanie had made it perfectly clear that he was not going to risk his job to extract Ozzie's balls from the fire, anymore. Ozzie hated to do it, but he only had one card left to play. He left another message.

'Big fuck up! The client has paid us and only received a copy of the letter not original. Need original, urgent!'

Creane could not believe it. He slammed down the phone, muttering, 'Ozzie is like fucking albatross around my neck. 'Fuck you! Ozzie,' he cursed, pouring himself his third shot of Jack Daniels that day.

I tried ringing again. This time Creane answered, saying 'Fuck off, Oz.' and cut off the call.

Shit! This was not good. I phoned again. This time he said, 'What the fuck do you want?'

'We have to talk.'

'Not a good idea, Oz. Every time we talk, I end up embroiled in one of your dodgy plots. The last one was the last time!'

'I hear what you're saying, Creanie. But this is part of last time. Someone fucked up and put the original Pike Letter back in the evidence locker.'

'Well, it wasn't me!'

'Hey, I'm not phoning to play the blame game. We have a situation that has to be dealt with.'

'We don't have a situation, Ozzie. You have a situation, and you deal with it.'

'Jeez man, I can't just go waltzing into your nick and break into the evidence lock-up.'

'Neither can I. I only got away with it by the skin of my teeth last time. I can't risk it again.'

I was running out of options. All I had left was pleading on my hands and knees. 'OK, I know I'm a fuck-up, and I don't blame you for turning your back on me. But Olivia's life is at stake and ...'

'Ozzie, how do you manage to get yourself into such shit?'

'It's a talent, mate. Look. I haven't been entirely straight with you. What say we have a beer and I'll tell you the whole story?'

## Chapter 29

Declan was flying back to the United States the next day to attend to Boogle business, and he wanted to give Jen a treat she would never forget. He booked them a luxury suite at the London Hilton. Jennifer thoroughly enjoyed spending time with Dec. After dining a la carte, they went to the bar for drinks. Declan thought Jennifer looked absolutely fabulous. Her dark red dress, black tights and heeled shoes contrasted perfectly with her shoulder-length blond hair. Her tight-fitting outfit showed off her figure to perfection. Declan felt a stirring of sexual excitement and could not wait to get back to their boudoir.

Jen wanted to know about the Quantime adventure. 'What was it like in pioneer America?'

Declan sipped his champagne. 'It went very well. Ozzie played the psychic with messages for Silas and Pike.'

'How did that work then?'

Declan grinned. 'We just went a couple of days ahead in Silas' diary, and Oz told him what was going to happen.'

Jen laughed, 'That's real genius. Now I know why you needed the Journal.' She sipped her champers. 'Did Pike fall for the subterfuge too?'

'Both Pike and Silas were into supernatural stuff, so it wasn't difficult to suck them in with Ozzie's act.'

'What did he tell Pike?'

'He told Pike he'd become a lawyer because we knew it would happen a few years hence.'

'Quick nightcap?' Declan said in the lift as they headed back to their suite at the London Hilton.

'I don't know,' she replied, 'I'm a bit wiped out.'

'Strong coffee then. That should help liven you up.'

Jen flashed Dec a look, 'Liven me up! Just what do you have in mind, mister?'

'Just a coffee.' he suggested. 'Just to round off the evening.'

'OK, but that's all you're getting,' she replied, without letting him see her cheeky smile.'

Declan had booked a suite on the tenth floor, and the view over London was breathtaking. As Jennifer lingered there silhouetted by soft mood lighting, Declan stood admiring her shapely body from behind. He said, 'I'm enjoying the view from here.'

Jen turned around and smiled suggestively. 'So you like what you see?'

Thoroughly,' he winked back with a devilish smile.

They hugged fervently, their bodies fusing into one. Jen put her arms around his neck. Dec's kisses sent a delicious tingle throughout her body. They kissed long and hard til their lips were swollen red. Dec stared at her, all the while running his hands along her curves. Jen felt him grow harder against her. It turned her non even more, if that was possible. Dec lowered his head and placed a soft, sensual kiss on her neck, eliciting a low moan from her. She weaved her fingers through the mess of his hair, as he kissed her soft throat.

'Ah ...' Jen half moaned, half sighed. 'Damn, I missed this,' she whispered.

I Me too,' he breathed into her skin, as they half stumbled onto the bed.

Dec pulled the zipper down in one move; Jen's dress coming undone around her. Jen kicked the dress away and straddled Dec to take off his shirt. She stretched back, playfully displaying herself. He smirked and dived onto her, kissing every inch of Jen's skin, worshiping her breasts with his tongue and lips, biting and nibbling his way south.

Jen moaned, Q Ohh...yes,' arching her back, becoming even more aroused. It was the opening act to a night of excessive carnal delights.

Creanie and I met at the Wishing Well for a drink. It was a mid-afternoon with few patrons around. The rain that had been chucking down off and on all day kept some of the regulars away. It was too wet to sit out in the garden area, so and Creanie and I sat at a table in the corner.'

Creane grumbled, 'I'm here against my better judgement and should probably have my head tested.'

I said, 'If I don't come up with the original Pike Letter, the people who kidnapped Olivia will ...'

'Who the fuck is this, Olivia? And why would anybody take her captive?' Creane asked, leaning in closer to me to keep the conversation more private.

'OK, Olivia Quinn was commissioned by her client to purchase the Pike Letter at an auction. But an Adrian Bennet put in the highest bid. Weldon burgled Bennet's place and stole the letter. That's where I come into the story. Bennet hired me to retrieve his prize.'

Creane took a mouthful of beer. 'How did you come to meet this, Olivia?'

'The auction was small and by invitation only. All four bidders present were after the letter. The ones who missed out were obviously my main suspects. I met Olivia and made out the letter was up for sale.'

Creane sensing he was being sucked into a tangled web, sighed deeply. 'OK, why tell this Olivia a lie?'

I thought that was apparent. 'To test Olivia's response, of course.'

Creane drank more beer. 'And your conclusion?'

'She wasn't the thief. As we now know, that was Weldon.'

Creane stroked his moustache. 'Who was your Ms Quinn's client?'

'Ah, that's where it gets interesting. Olivia's client was really a group of people who worshipped Albert Pike and wanted the letter for his shrine, or something like that.'

'Does this group have a name?' Creane ventured, tentatively, looking concerned he was being drawn down my latest rabbit hole.

'They call themselves the Sovereign Council of Wisdom or SCoW'.

'That sounds very grand and quite spooky,' Creane responded.

'Yeah, and they are not nice people. They have Olivia, and I need the genuine letter to get her back.'

Creane downed the rest of his beer. He shook his head. 'Far too risky, mate.'

I stared at him. 'No is not an option, mate. I have to get another copy of the letter. You have to get the original for me.'

Creane stood up. He'd had enough of this. 'Sorry mate. You're on your own.'

I stood up and followed him to the door. Outside in the street, I said, 'You're the only person who can help me. And you've helped me before.' I knew I'd gone too far, but I couldn't retract the words.

Creane turned on me. He snapped, 'You bastard! Are you resorting to blackmail now?'

I glared at him, 'I'll stoop lower than a snake to get Olivia back from the clutches of those bastards.'

'Yeah. Well, fuck you!'

I rounded on him. 'Creane, I'm fucking desperate here. I'll turn myself in and tell your mates the whole story if I have to.'

Creane stared at me. 'You bastard, Oz. OK, I'll put my balls on the line for you one more time. But never contact me again. Got it?'

'Thanks, mate, you're a fucking saviour.'

'I'm not your fucking mate, mate.'

## Chapter 30

Declan began to wake up and found himself cuddled up to Jen's naked backside. He felt his penis becoming erect, and as much as he wanted to act on it, he had a plane to catch. He turned on his back. Jen, half-asleep rolled over and snuggled up to him.

Declan said, 'Sorry honey, but I have to rise and shine.'

She languidly reached down and found his penis. 'I don't know if it's shining, but it's undoubtedly risen.'

Declan grinned. He loved Jen's sexy sense of humour. He kissed her cheek, 'I'm gonna miss you.'

'I'll miss you too,' Jen half-smiled. 'But right now, I'm missing sleep more.' Jennifer was captivated by his mixture of brash Yank and genteel politeness. Arrogance mixed with puritan morality, a peculiar trait of many Americans. 'Do you have to go back today, Dec?' she muttered half asleep.

He got out of bed and turned to her. 'Come with me. Stay for a few days.'

'What, just like that?'

'Sure, take a chance.'

'What, getting through US customs without a visa.'

He frowned, 'Yeah, that could be a problem.' Then he brightened. 'OK, get your visitor's visa and then come over.'

Jen smiled, 'I might just do that.'

'Let me know when you're ready, and I'll send you the ticket.'

Constable Barry Tope had been in charge of the small office, called the Evidence Locker, for over five years. It suited his temperament and gave him a sense of authority in his little domain. Nobody took away evidence without Barry's say-so. When DS Creane asked to go into the cage for the second time for the same thing, Barry became a little bit suspicious. But, as Creane outranked him, he had to be circumspect in his response.

Creane had his story ready. The original Pike Letter was too valuable to take into court. He needed a copy. It was a good, plausible story - the first time he had used it. Barry looked up at Sergeant Creane, 'Yes, Sergeant?'

'I need to get a copy of a piece of evidence from the Weldon file.'

'What evidence would that be?'

'The Pike Letter.'

Barry looked at his computer screen, 'Ah yes. You took it away and had it copied three days ago.'

He eye-balled Creane, 'Why do you want it again?'

'Oh, you know how it is with a cluttered desk.'

Barry, who was virtually OCD about his workspace, showed puzzlement. 'No. Explain.'

'It somehow got lost. And the guvnor will have my balls in a blender if he finds out. Do me a favour mate. I'll have it back within the hour.'

Barry looked at him, dubiously. 'I don't believe you lost the copy. Why do you really need it?'

'Come on, Barry. Don't give me a hard time.'

Barry looked at Creane. 'I'll help you if you help me.'

'Help you do what?' Creane said, perplexed.

Barry pointed to a pile of files on his desk. 'The boss was ferreting around here yesterday and left this lot unfiled. Sort it out, and you can have the evidence you want.'

Creane stared at him, infuriated. 'I'm not a fucking filing clerk!'

Barry shrugged, 'Suit yourself, Sergeant Creane. Would you prefer me to tell the Inspector that you have mislaid evidence?'

Creane stared daggers at Barry. 'He sighed deeply, 'All right, let me in and I'll do your work for you.'

When Creane arrived at the Wishing Well, he didn't look at all happy. I said, 'Thanks, mate. You're a lifesaver, literally.'

Creane handed over a big padded envelope. 'You have no fucking idea what I had to do to get this,' he said, grudgingly.

'Sorry mate, but without this - I tapped the package protecting the letter - I can't bargain for Olivia's release.'

Creane stood up abruptly. 'Right, we're done. Don't contact me again for anything.' With that, he left the pub.

I was sad to see him go. We had been good mates since our Hendon days and friends like that are hard to come by. Especially useful ones. I sighed and downed the rest of my beer. Then I found Hubert's number and phoned him. I heard a guttural German accent and said, 'Are you, Hubert?'

'Hubert speaking.'

'I want to speak to Olivia.'

'She is not here.'

'Where is she?'

'Do you have the genuine item?'

'Yes?'

'Good. I will ring you back with a time and a place for the exchange.'

Meanwhile, I had to find a quality digital printer, get the letter copied again, and back to Creanie. With the first part of the job completed, I rolled up the copy and placed it in one of those cardboard mailing tubes. I phoned Creanie and met him outside Willesden police station, where I handed over the print. Creanie was both angry and relieved at the same time. I never mentioned the Pike Letter was connected to a kidnapping. It was far better that I dealt with it myself, without involving the cops.

Having sorted that I waited nervously for Hubert's call. I should really refer to him as the kidnapper. Hubert sounded much too kind, like a genial uncle.

With a bit of time up my sleeves, I carried out some research about Palladism.

Boogle, the search engine I had been using of late, explained that Palladism had been brought to Greece from Egypt by Pythagoras in the 5th century, BCE. This cult was introduced to the inner circle of the Masonic lodges. The name, Palladium, was taken from a Masonic order founded in 1720 which died out, only to re-emerge in Charleston under Pike. The Order of the Palladium, or Sovereign Council of Wisdom, which was constituted in France in 1737, was the same as the legendary Palladium of the Templars, better known by the name of Baphomet.

In 1801 a Jew, named Isaac Long, was said to have carried the "original image" of Baphomet to Charleston, in the United States, where he founded the highest lodge of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. Albert Pike, who succeeded him, extended the Scottish Rite and shared the anti-Catholic Masonic chieftainship with the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini. This new directory, established as the new Reformed Palladium Rite, became an occult fraternity with global powers.

In 1870 Pike and Mazzini completed an agreement to create a supreme, Universal Rite of Masonry. It centralised all high Masonic bodies in the world under one head. To this end, the Palladium Rite was created as the pinnacle of the pyramid of power. Albert Pike re-wrote the degrees of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry and instituted the Rite of the Palladium to dominate all lodges. The highest of the high was the Palladium: an international alliance to bring in the Grand Lodges, the Grand Orient, 33 degrees of The Ancient and Accepted Rite (Scottish Rite) and the 99 degrees of the Ancient and Primitive Rite (Memphis and Mizraim).

Palladism took the fuel from Adam Weishaupt's vision for humanity and connected the energy to the pistons of Freemasonry. Pistons, driven in rhythm by the Palladium. It was all too much. I needed a break.

Later in the day, I received the call from the kidnapper. He gave me the details of the exchange. I said, 'Before I follow your instructions, I need proof that Olivia is alive and well.'

Hubert had his orders and would not deviate from them. He said, 'I can't do that. But if you mess me about you will never see her again.'

'Then you will never see the letter again,' I retorted.

'How do I know you have the genuine article?' he shot back.

'I guess you'll have to trust me on that.'

Hubert said, 'We just want the letter. We have no wish to hurt the girl, but we will do so if you play any games.'

Realising we were getting into a "mine is bigger than yours scenario", I thought it best to comply with his orders. Then followed the usual bollocks about not involving the police - not that I was going to anyway.

*Is Shirley Manson from Garbage a natural redhead? | What ....*

*<https://whatcanilearntoday.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/is-shirley-manson-from-garbage-a-natural-redhead/>*

*Father John Crowley photos on Flickr | Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/Father%20John%20Crowley/>*

## **Chapter 31**

I could see why Hubert had picked the abandoned factory. There was nobody but us around, and if things went sour, it could be weeks or even months before somebody walking their dog found our bodies.

I followed the kidnapper's directions, which is why I was waiting outside the disused factory in Dock Road, Brentford. Five minutes later, a Hyundai SUV pulled up, facing me, some 30 feet from my car. A big fellow, with a flowing red beard, whom I took to be the kidnapper, Hubert, unfolded his bulk and stepped from his vehicle.

He was at least 6 foot 4 and with the girth to carry it off. As he approached, I said, 'Where's Olivia?'

Hubert looked me up and down. 'Where's the letter?'

I had to play my hand just right but not push it too far. 'Bring Olivia out here.'

Hubert weighed up the situation. Olivia, who wore a blindfold, was guided by a man on either side.

I said, 'Lose the blindfold.'

Hubert stared at me. 'You are not in a position to make demands. Now, hand over the item.'

This was the moment of reckoning. I said, 'I have to get it out of the car.'

'Be quick about it - and no tricks or she gets it.'

I retrieved my bargaining chip and walked towards him. I stopped about 15 feet away. 'Take off the blindfold and send Olivia over here.'

Hubert, so close to getting his prize gestured for his men to release the girl.

Timing had to be perfect. I handed over the original letter.

Hubert unwrapped it. Satisfied he had the genuine item, he let Olivia go.

I said to Olivia, 'Keep walking towards me.' I kept reinforcing, 'Keep walking towards me. It will be all right.' I silently prayed it would be so.

Hubert approached me, saying, 'If you've got any sense, you'll forget all about this.'



Well, I wasn't about to yell it from the rooftops. I smiled, 'Forget about what?' I thought I saw his beard ripple hiding what could have been a smile. I turned to Olivia. She looked pretty shaken, 'How are you?' I asked.

She smiled wanly. 'OK, I guess.'

'Right, get in the car.' I said, holding the door for her.

Hubert was armed as were his sidekicks. Left to him, he would probably have shot both Doyle and Olivia. But he had been told by Valery von Bismarck to spare their lives. Hubert questioned her order but did not push it too far. Valery, after all, was the new head of SCoW.

Hubert hesitated, saying, 'Don't forget Mr Doyle, I can find you any time I please.'

I watched as the big guy squeezed back into his SUV and the car reversed up the road to a point where it could turn.

I climbed into my driver's seat, then turned to Olivia. 'Did they hurt you at all?'

'Kidnappers are not usually known for their gentility.' Then she said, 'Where were you when I needed you?'

Oh, I was having a chat with your great-great-grand daddy, I thought, rather than saying it. She might think I was a crazy person. 'Dealing with another case.' I improvised, (Well it was sort of truthful) 'As soon as I got your message, I acted on it.'

Olivia was quiet as we drove to her place in Barnet. She was in serious contemplation throughout the journey.

I put it down to her being imprisoned by the kidnappers. She seemed more at ease once we got to her place. I made coffee for us both and said, 'How did you come to get involved with the Sovereign Council of Wisdom in the first place?'

Olivia looked me in the eye. 'She said, 'Thank you for rescuing me, but I don't want to talk about it now.'

'I appreciate that, but I want to know what I'm involved with.'

Olivia sighed, 'It's best to forget about them. They have what they want.'

'What they have is a stolen manuscript. A document I have helped SCoW steal,' I pointed out.

Olivia said, 'Oh, dear! I hadn't realised that aspect of it.'

'And I have to somehow get the letter back to its legal owner, who thinks it is in the evidence room at Willesden Nick.'

'Yes, it is a bit of a conundrum.'

I looked at her. 'Conundrum! It's more than a challenging puzzle. I have to somehow get the letter back from SCoW and get it back to the nick before Adrian Bennet goes looking for it. Which is why I need to know all about SCoW, before walking into the fucking lion's den.'

'I don't know much, really,' Olivia said.

I took her hand. 'Please tell me what you do know. How did you get involved with them?'

Olivia frowned, 'Somebody, contacted me and told me they wanted me to bid for them at an upcoming auction.'

'Who contacted you?'

They didn't give a name.'

'OK, how did the conversation go?'

'I can't remember.'

'Let's say I'm the caller. Hello, am I speaking with Olivia Quinn?'

Olivia, getting into the role play, said, 'Yes, who's speaking?'

I said, 'That's not important. We want to pay you to put in the highest bid for an item at a private auction.'

Olivia remembered saying something like, 'Is this some sort of prank?'

Does ten thousand pounds commission sound like a joke?'

Olivier took her hand back. 'I'm getting a clearer picture now of the conversation.' I needed that ten grand and I asked what I had to do. The person had an electronically disguised voice. I was given instructions about the auction.'

I butted in. 'Had you placed bids at auctions before?'

'Yes, quite a few times but never for anything as valuable as the Pike Letter.'

'How did this person know you are comfortable at auctions?'

Olivia shrugged, 'I don't know.'

I was perplexed, so I said, 'Are you saying a stranger rang you and wanted you to spend their money on an item in a private auction?'

She looked me in the eye. 'That's what happened, Ozzie.'

'Don't you find that a little bit odd?'

Olivia, fed up with all the questions, said, 'This feels like an interrogation.'

I grinned, 'Sorry, cop's disease. You'd know about that, wouldn't you?'

She yawned. 'Yes, and you're exhausting me with all your questions. Now I need to rest.'

Of course, she did after all she'd been through. 'Right, I'll leave you to it then. But later I need to talk to you about where they held you captive.'

I left Olivia and went home. Maybe the story she gave me about someone ringing her out of the blue to get her to bid for the Pike Letter on their behalf may well have been true. But I doubted it. In a way, I wanted it to be correct, but it seemed implausible. There was something she was not telling me, and I had to find out what it was. Right now, I had to focus on how to get my hands on the letter. But before that, I needed some background on SCoW.

## **Chapter 32**

It was a pleasantly warm day. The sky was mostly pale blue with a scattering of wispy clouds. What made the day even better was the delectable Jennifer. We had arranged to meet at the Bushey Country Club for coffee and cake. As we waited for our drinks, I apprised Jen of the Pike Letter saga. I concluded with, 'I need to find somebody who knows about Palladism and its practice today.'

Jen listened to me, then she offered, 'Well, Nate is a Freemason. He might know something about it.'

'I stared at her, somewhat bemused. 'Do you mean, Nathan?'

'Yes. Why?'

'Jeez, Jen, life is full of surprises. I never took Nathan for the funny handshake type.'

Jennifer smiled, 'Oh, yes. And he takes it very seriously.'

'And probably keeps it close to his chest.'

'He's told me a few things about it.' In fact, only last week he happened to mention he is writing a book about it, called Freemasonry by Numbers.'

'Yeah, well being a mathematician he would be interested in that. But do numbers play a big role in Lodge rituals?'

'You'll have to ask him about that.' Jennifer smiled.

Nathan Goodfellow was the bloke who got me involved in Jen's Quantime caper. I was her first human guinea pig. Nathan is one of those typically refined well-spoken English blokes. He's got a brilliant mathematical mind; a photographic memory; and he is blessed with a gentle, handsome face that attracts the fairer sex like bees around a honeypot. Unfortunately for him, he is also chronically shy, especially around attractive women.

Nathan, a maths lecturer at the LSE, taught complex numbers math, a subject that, in terms of discomfort and boredom, ranked with having teeth pulled. But each to their own is my motto.

We agreed to meet just down the road from the LSE at Wright's Bar, Nathan said it was a regular haunt of his because the staff was courteous and friendly, and the food was well cooked and very reasonably priced. Nathan was always punctual, so I knew I would not be waiting long.

Sure enough, he turned up on the dot.

Nathan sat down opposite me. He smiled and asked me, 'What do you think of this place?'

'I haven't tried the food yet.'

Right then, a young waitress appeared at our table. We ordered egg and bacon ciabattas and strong espressos. Once she'd flitted off to the kitchen, I said, 'What do you know about the Palladium Rite?'

Nathan stared at me. 'What makes you think I know anything about it?'

'Jen told me you are writing a book about Freemasonry and numbers. I thought ...'

'As it happens, I have carried out some basic research.'

'Oh. And what do you make of it?'

'By the late 19th century Freemasonry had sprung off in all different directions. It had become bloated and unmanageable. The divisions, rites and sects meant it had lost its unification and direction. In an attempt to centralise Universal Freemasonry authority, a new ultra-secret governing body, established in 1870, took control. At the centre, we have Albert Pike.' Nathan looked at me. 'You've possibly heard of him?'

I couldn't resist it. 'Heard of Pike! I met him in Little Rock when he was a young man.'

'Oh, so you've been mucking around in the Quantime,' Nathan said, trying to play it down. He felt a tinge of envy but would not admit it to himself. Had he been offered the Quantime experience, he was not sure if he would have taken Jen up on it. Nathan asked, 'What was the great man like?'

'He was a schoolteacher and a newspaper proprietor when I met him. He had a friend called Silas Pearce. Silas kept a journal in which he wrote a lot about Pike.'

Nathan's eyes lit up. 'A personal perspective of the man. Boy, what I wouldn't give to have a copy of that.'

I grinned, 'What if I told you I know Pearce's great-great-granddaughter, and she inherited the journal.'

Nathan's eyes looked as they would burst out of his head. 'Please get me an introduction to this girl, Oz.'

'We might be able to help each other.' I dangled the words like a carrot.

'In what way?' Nathan said, suddenly becoming suspicious.

'Before we get into that I need to know more about Palladism.'

Our breakfasts arrived. I was hungry, so I tucked in while Nathan provided me with some background on the mysterious and troubling Palladium sect.

Nathan explained, 'Albert Pike wrote "Morals and Dogma". It became the Masonic benchmark for acceptable behaviour in Freemasonry. At the beginning of his book, he wrote:

*The blind Force of the people is a Force that must be economised, and also managed . . . It must be regulated by Intellect. When all these Forces are combined, and guided by the Intellect, and regulated by the RULE of Right, and Justice... the great revolution prepared for by the ages will begin to march. It is because Force is ill regulated that revolutions prove failures." (Morals and Dogma, p.1-2).*

I nodded between bites. 'Economised and managed by Pike and an anonymous but very influential inner corps.'

'Well, they had a big plan to work out.'

'Pike's three world wars,' I ventured.

Nathan frowned, 'Two down and one to go.'

'Then, the Palladiums come out of their dark hole and take over.'

He nodded, adding nothing.

I added, 'Apart from Pike, who else was at the meeting in Switzerland?'

Nathan bit into his ciabatta. After chewing, he sipped the coffee. He looked at Oz me. 'What Swiss meeting?'

'Oh! You don't know about it.'

'Nathan grinned, 'You seem to know more about this than me.'

'From what I can gather, a secret meeting took place at Phileas Walder's house. They were there to discuss the letter Pike gave to Mazzini.'

'Boy, I'd love to have been a fly on that wall,' Nathan said.

'I'm booking the next Q ride there,' I said, boastfully.

Nathan eye-balled me. 'Now that's one Quantime ride I wouldn't mind going on,'

'Sorry mate, Declan has already bought his ticket.'

Nathan felt deflated but tried not to show it. He said, 'I seriously doubt you'll get an RSVP from the Palladium Rite.'

'I reckon you're right there. But servants flit around picking up all sorts of snippets.'

He seemed happy with my answer, so I did not need to go into my psychic act with him.

Nathan looked me in the eye. He frowned, 'I don't know why you're interested in the Palladium Rite, but you're in way over your head.'

I shrugged. 'I'm already in the shit. The only way for me to extricate myself is by getting hold of the Pike Letter.'

Nathan, who knew more about the Palladium Rite than he was letting on, said, 'Do you know how important that letter is to them?'

'As a symbol, I'd say critical.'

Nathan stared at Oz. 'It's much more significant than that.'

I got the sense that Nate wanted to tell me something but was afraid to. But he was feeding me breadcrumbs to keep my interest. 'What do you mean?'

Nathan backed off. 'I have told you too much. My advice to you is to leave it alone.'

I stared at Nate. 'How come you know so much about it?'

Nathan said, 'I keep up with the news.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

Nathan sighed, 'OK, I'll tell you something, but that's it. No more questions - right?'

I grinned, 'That depends on what you have to tell me.'

Nathan responded. 'This is no fucking joke. Once I tell you this, both our lives are at risk. So, do you want to know or not?'

I nodded, 'If it's going to help.'

'I guess you've heard about Alexander von Bismarck killing himself.'

'It was on the news.'

'Yes, well, Valery Von Bismarck, his socialite sister, picked up the family reins. But Leopold and Gottfried, her brothers, are already plotting together to take control.'

I shrugged, 'Fascinating, but what does it have to do with the Palladium Rite?'

Nathan hesitated, looked about him, nervously, and leant in towards me. 'The Bismarck family are the great-great-grandchildren of Otto Von Bismarck.'

I was getting a little irritated. 'So?'

'He was a close friend of Albert Pike and helped him set up the Palladium Rite.'

Then the penny dropped, 'You're saying the great-great-grandkids run the Palladiums? I said, incredulous.

Nathan corrected, 'I don't know about the Rite, but they do run SCoW.'

'How come you know that?'

'I told you the deal. No more questions or our lives will be even more at risk.'

## Chapter 33

I left Nathan and tried to work out my next move. I thought Nat knew more than he was letting on. I must say I was surprised that he knew so much about the Palladium family tree. It seemed much more than just casual interest. Maybe there was more to him than I'd previously thought. Now that I knew a little about who was running SCoW, I had a human face to put to the Palladium Rite. But that was all I had. I figured the members of the Rite had to meet at a lodge or some sort of temple. But the question was "where?" I mean it could be anywhere at all. The meetings would be held in secret, so I needed to find someone who knew about it.

Olivia had been very cagey. Perhaps it was the result of her recent ordeal. But her story did not add up. Why would someone from the Palladium Rite contact her and pay her to bid for the Letter? Surely it would have made much more sense to get one of the Rite's low rent minions to bid on their behalf. Cameron Weldon was well placed for the job, so why did they use Olivia, who was out of the loop?

Or was she? In truth, I knew very little about her. Olivia's home was upmarket, and she had all the expensive mod cons. She had a late model Mercedes sports car in her driveway. Why did she get involved in the Rite's shady business when she was obviously well-heeled? But was she? Was the Palladium Rite providing her with this lifestyle? Was it all a front for something much more sinister?'

I was in mental anguish and no closer to finding any answers. I had to speak with Olivia Quinn again. This time I would not be taken in by her fluttering eyelids. She agreed to meet me, but not at her place. We caught up the next morning at 8:30am, where we met before - Brent Park, down by the lake. There were not many people around at that time of day, just a couple of kayakers and children throwing bread to the ducks that seemed to magically appear in the vicinity of the scattered food. I zipped up my hooded fleece-lined jacket against the morning chill. A weak sun climbed into the sky, but it was no match for the stiff breeze which had a penetrating bite to it. Olivia wrapped up in warm Nike jogging gear, said to me, 'Thanks for backing off and leaving me to rest.'

'Well, you had been through a terrible ordeal. But I do have a few questions to ask you.'

Olivia smiled, 'I didn't think you'd invited me here to look at the ducks.'

I looked her in the eye and launched into.' Something has been troubling me.'

'Oh, what?'

'Why would these Palladium Rite people use SCoW to get you, a perfect stranger to them, to bid on their behalf, when one of their lesser people was already in place to do the job?'

Olivia stared at me. She queried, 'Who?'

'Cameron Weldon. Wasn't he also bidding for the letter?'

'Yes, but what makes you think he has anything to do with them?'

'Because, after you had failed, and Dr Bennet gained possession of the letter, the SCoW people got Weldon to steal it for them.'

Olivia looked at me, expressing signs of concern. 'Interesting theory, but what evidence do you have to back it up?'

She was right about that because I had no substantial evidence. I had to up the ante.' Olivia, you didn't receive a random call from the SCoW people, did you?'

'What do you mean?'

'The reason they used you was that you approached them and offered your services.'

Olivia shuffled on the bench. She chuckled nervously, 'That's preposterous. How could you even think such a thing, Ozzie?'

'It's the only explanation that makes any sense. What is your relationship with SCoW?'

Olivia sat silently for a moment. She sighed deeply, 'I did receive a call like I said. But I'd previously offered my services.'

I smiled, 'OK, take me through what happened.'

'I had bought a few items from Afton Westbury. After we got to know each other better, he told me about the secret auctions. I was intrigued and attended a couple. It was exciting. Then he explained about wealthy collectors who like to put in anonymous bids through proxies.'

'You became a proxy for whom - SCoW?'

She rolled her eyes, 'Come on, Oz. Which part of anonymous do you not understand?'

This version of her story made more sense to me and seemed plausible. But it still got me no closer to retrieving the letter. I changed tack. Looking at Olivia, I said, 'So, this Valery von Bismarck now runs the Palladium show, but her brothers are ganging up on her to wrest control?'

'Yes, I've already told you that.'

'I'm just trying to get a clear picture.'

'The only way you can have a clear picture of how SCoW works is by gaining access to a meeting of the Palladium Rite inner circle.'

'And how do I get access?' I said, quickly realising it was a useless question.' Then I said, 'I don't suppose you happen to know where they meet?'

Olivia brightened and smiled, 'The London Palladium, of course.'

I remembered my mother taking me there to see a live show when I was a kid. It was London's star theatre at the time. To date, it has hosted the Royal Command Performance forty-two times. I remembered that from Wikipedia. 'Where do they meet? Obviously not in the theatre itself?'

Olivia met my gaze. 'There must be a secret chamber. But why are you interested?'

'Because I guess the Pike Letter would be displayed at their meetings?'

'And why would that be of interest to you, Oz?'

I sighed deeply. 'Because I have to get the letter back into evidence at the nick.'

Olivia wore a horrified expression. 'You want to steal it from the Palladium Rite?'

'I don't want to. I have to!'

Olivia grabbed my arm. She said, 'Look if you do find out where the meetings are held. And even if you are right about the letter being displayed, how the hell do you plan to steal it?'

Smiling thinly, 'I said, as my old mum used to say, where there's a will there's a way.'

Olivia pleaded, 'Do not get involved with these people. It's not worth it.'

With that advice, I left Olivia. I needed to get back to my office and work out my next move if I had any left. Once I was back in my Acton office, I got to work on my whiteboard. This case was becoming more complicated with every twist and turn. I polished off the last two inches of Johnny Walker to lubricate my brain cells and mapped out what I knew, which wasn't a great deal. Central to this whole business was, of course, the Pike Letter. Now I added members of the Bismarck family, with Valery at the head - for now anyway. As I made links between the players, I agonised about how to get the official letter back to Willesden nick. Then a tiny light bulb went on above my head. Or it would have done if I had been a cartoon character. 'What if?' I muttered to myself. It was a crazy idea, but I rang Creanie anyway.

DS Creane busied himself checking the evidence for the upcoming Cameron Weldon hearing. Then his private phone rang. Ozzie's number showed on the screen. Creanie growled, 'What the fuck do you want?'

'Hello to you too.'

Creanie gritted his teeth. 'Where the fuck is the genuine letter?'

'That's what I'm phoning about.'

The detective groaned. He just knew Doyle had screwed things up again.' Have you got it yet?'

'No. But that could be a good thing.'

Creane, exasperated, snapped, 'How the fuck could not returning the evidence be a good thing?'

I asked him, 'Has anybody verified the authenticity of the item?'

'I fucking hope not. Otherwise, it would be declared a fake.'

'OK, then it doesn't matter.'

'What the fuck do you mean, it doesn't fucking matter?'

'It just means that Weldon had a copy and that's what you bagged and tagged.'

Creanie nearly screamed, 'But he had the fucking original you dim wit. How's that going to solve anything?'

'How do you know that? Are you some fucking art expert?'

Creanie said, 'Are you suggesting we took a fake copy of the letter from Weldon's home?'

'Now you're getting it.'

'I don't know if that'll fly.'

'Don't worry about it, mate. Let the art experts deal with that in court.'

## Chapter 34

With the business of the letter dealt with, for now anyway, I tried ringing Jennifer, but she wasn't answering. She'd left a message that said, 'I'm out of the country for a few days, so I can't take your calls' What did she mean by out of the country? That's a dumb question. Of course, I knew what she



said, but where the hell had she gone - and why? I left an equally useless message because she wouldn't read it until she returned, at which point it would be irrelevant. The upshot was it meant I had to put the Q adventure on hold. I sat there staring at the wall of my compact office. There was not much I could do about it at present. I looked at the empty whiskey bottle and decided I needed a nip or two to lube up my brain cells and work out my next move.

It was raining, but the off-licence was only 200 yards away. It was cold drizzly rain typical of the average English grey day. I think Declan Merrick's comment that London would be a pleasant place once we put a roof on it had some merit. Thinking of the stinking rich Yank, I needed to work out some stuff about our next Quantanaut trip together. Back in the office, after JW revival, I checked over some jobs I had been neglecting, having put too much time into the Pike matter.

Three cases were outstanding. By outstanding, I didn't mean it in the exciting assignment sort of way. It was only outstanding in the sense of Ozzie, get your arse into gear and start earning some money, detecting. I lined the three files up on my desk.

Mr Lawrence wouldn't be screwing his secretary for another two days. His secret tryst always took place on a Wednesday afternoon. I had a few kissy shots, but that wasn't enough for Mrs Lawrence who wanted me to catch her errant hubby in flagrante. And that's not as easy as it seems. I had to get one of the hotel staff to let me into the room, which meant greasing his palm. I always got a male employee to help me, not because I'm sexist, but because I felt embarrassed standing outside the door listening to the grunts, groans and religious endearments, with a woman beside me. When things reached a crescendo, my accomplice opened the door, and I was in and out in a flash, literally, leaving Mr Lawrence and his consort in a state of naked shock.

The next overdue job was looking for Danny Bevis, a runaway teenager. I hate these cases because kids who run away from home don't want to be found and usually disappear into the black hole of one city or another. It's tedious and often a waste of time. If you do luck out and find the little bugger, you can't force them to come back with you. But, on the upside, Danny is a serial absconder. It's the third time I had to track him down, and his parents have got more money than sense. Also, Danny was a creature of habit, so I knew the kind of haunts where I'd most likely catch up with him.

The third case was insurance fraud. The target was a serial claimant. Mr Benton had made six previous claims for property damaged or destroyed. He was either a really unlucky guy or a fraudster. Globe Assurance decided it was the latter and called me in to investigate.

It was time to put the Palladium stuff on the back burner to deal with mundane cases that paid for food and a roof over my head.

## **Chapter 35**

Jennifer could see why Declan said Kerry Park was one of the most popular spots in Seattle. She wanted photographic memories to take home. The sunny day with a cloudless blue sky provided her with great shots of Puget Sound and Elliot Bay. Jennifer was charmed by Declan's childlike enthusiasm as he praised his hometown. As they stood looking at the panoramic views of Seattle, Declan said, 'This is quite a modest park - in terms of real estate - but I think it's a hidden gem.' He indicated, what looked to Jennifer like a modernist expression of the Eiffel Tower with a UFO perched on top. 'What's that?' She asked.

Dec put his arm around her. 'That's our Space Needle, and this is the best place to view it from.'

Jennifer, suitably impressed, said, 'The view from the top must be stunning.'

Declan grinned, 'You'll soon find out. We're booked there for lunch.'

Jen smiled at him. 'You really are amazing.'

'I just want you to have the best time, Jen.'

It was an exciting adventure for Jen, but also a bit overwhelming. From the moment Dec had picked her up at the airport in the stretch limo and whisked her off to the Hyatt Regency, where they spent the night, her visit to Seattle had been a magical roller coaster ride. Jen's feet hadn't touched the ground. Declan, brimming with enthusiasm, treated her like royalty as they sampled the very best that Seattle could offer. Declan was building up to ask Jen something, but the mood and timing had to be perfect.

The Sky City Restaurant atop the Space Needle was so much fun for Dec and Jen. She just loved the views, as they waited for their lunch - broiled king salmon for her and space noodle pasta for him. Amazed at the rotating dining room with a view over the city, Jen quickly fell in love with the place. After only twenty minutes, a friendly waiter served their meals. The food was sumptuous, but the rotating floor made her feel a bit queasy because it was jerky at times. But overall it was a magical experience, one she would never forget. Throughout the delicious meal, Declan kept business out of their conversation. At one point during lunch, Jen said, 'You're spoiling me rotten, Dec. but when are you going to take me to your home.'

He surprised her by saying, 'It's rented out at present. I prefer a hotel with great service. Besides, I spend most of my time at Boogle.'

'You live at the Hyatt!' she said, her eyes wide open.'

'Does that surprise you, Jen?'

'Frankly yes.' She added, 'I much prefer living in my own home, even if it is overrun by government types.'

I needed to contact Jen, but she was not answering. Instead, I got a message saying she wouldn't be available for a couple of weeks. There was no further explanation. It was unusual for her to go away on a whim, leaving her invention to the tender mercies of the government scientists. I had to find out what had happened to her. The three cases would have to wait for another day. Instead of spying on Mr Lawrence, chasing down master Bevis, and catching Benton the fraudster, I was leaving behind the London traffic congestion for the peaceful country road leading to Bushey.

I arrived at the barrier, the only way to drive onto Jen's property, and found, as usual, there were two guards whose job it was to stop any vehicle entering or leaving the park, a disused dairy farm.

The closest guard approached. He wore jungle camouflage fatigues, unlike the old sentries who looked like security guards. I said, 'I'm Oswald Doyle, and I'm here to see Mr Edgar Murphy.'

The guard sneered at me, 'He's on the list, but you're not.'

'Well, no. I won't be on your list because I did not make an appointment.'

Guard 2, an older man, with a stern expression that said, 'I've seen it all and done it all so don't try bullshitting me'. He eye-balled me and said, 'You only get in by appointment.'

'I only just found out that Murphy wanted to see me. I didn't have time to make an appointment.'

The guard adjusted the MP5 submachine gun he cradled. 'No appointment. No entry. Which part of that don't you get, Mr Doyle?'

It wasn't a good idea to lose it against heavily armed guards, but I was close. 'And which part of I need to see Murphy don't you understand?'

The older man grunted, 'Don't play fucking games, Mr Doyle.'

Angry and frustrated, I said, 'I am the most experienced person around here where the Q device is concerned, so tell Edgar Murphy that I'm here.'

The two guards looked at me with blank expressions. They obviously had no idea what they were guarding.

I repeated, 'Look, I'm here to see Murphy. Check it out.'

The younger of the guards spoke into his radio. 'There's an unauthorised man here. He claims to know Murphy.'

I waited while some kind of interchange went on between the sentry and whoever he was speaking to. Then he approached me. 'OK, someone will pick you up shortly.'

Having finally got through to the guards, I smiled, 'No need. I have my own wheels.'

'You don't bring it past here.'

'OK.' I conceded that one and went to lock my car.

A covered Land Rover duly arrived. I got in, and the driver took me to the main entrance, where another guard left me in, an almost empty room furnished with just a small table and two chairs.

After a while, Edgar Murphy turned up. He didn't look much like a commander, more like some minion pen pusher, which is what he really was. We hadn't really had much to do with each other since I freaked him out that time by disappearing in front of him.

He stepped into the stark office and smiled. 'It's good to see you again, Mr Doyle.'

It surprised me that he was so accommodating.

Murphy said, 'Professor Smethurst got in touch with you then.'

I didn't know what he meant. 'No, I came here looking for Jennifer.'

'Oh, she said she'd contact you before she went.'

'Went where?'

Edgar looked at Ozzie, dubiously, wondering whether to tell him or not. Then he said, 'She's gone to America to see that Merrick fellow.'

I must have looked stunned but tried to hide it. 'Oh, yes, that's right. I remember now,' I lied.

Murphy looked straight at Doyle. 'Are you ready?'

Ready for what.'

'She didn't tell you?'

'Tell me what, Murphy?'

You're here to train my officers for their first Quantime mission.'

I looked at him, aghast, 'And Jennifer is OK with that?'

Edgar, one of those unflappable stiff upper lip types, said, 'It was her idea. She said you were the most experienced, what did she call it, "Quantanaut".'

I stared at the man. 'You're planning on using the Q?'

'Of course. Why does that surprise you? That's why we're here. You will be paid for your services, of course.'

I rubbed my unshaven jaw. 'I'll have to first run it by Jennifer.'

'There's is no need to. But if you feel more comfortable that way, go ahead.'

Declan was the consummate host, and the suite at the Hyatt Regency was beyond Jen's wildest imaginings. The genuinely excellent hotel was not far from all the best areas of town. Their suite was spotless, the staff was friendly and attentive; there were plenty of ways to stay occupied: exercise, food, and of course the sex!

It was not the first time they had slept together, but, in their luxury love nest, Declan seemed to have difficulty meeting her gaze. Jennifer sensed something was troubling him. But, damn it, he was so fucking sexy, and she wasn't averse to a challenge. Jen remembered the first time she looked into his light blue eyes she was smitten.

He wasn't making any move on her, so Jen had to take the initiative. She grabbed him by the lapels of his dark blue Rodeo Drive suit and pulled Dec towards her. Kissing him on his lips, Jen, worked his mouth open with her probing tongue. She was busy slipping his jacket off his shoulders and undoing his shirt. Jen knew she was very forward, but to be fair, she was quite tipsy.

Declan, feeling nervous about stuffing up his perfect proposal, decided that could wait till later. Responding to his lover's sexual come-on, he tugged her blouse over her head and, reaching behind her, deftly undid her bra. The skirt went next, and there was no holding back.

Declan, Jen had discovered, was a gentle, sensitive lover, with no fetishes involving rough sex or bondage. Jen didn't mind a bit of erotic adventure in sex, but for now, his genteel approach would do just fine.

Their lovemaking had been good but not great. Declan had the proposal on his mind but could not let on what troubled him. As Jen and he lay in bed, feeling the warm afterglow, he psyched himself up. Turning to her, he said, 'Are you enjoying yourself here with me, babe?'

She snuggled up to him. 'Oh, yes. I'm having a lovely time.'

'We get on well together, don't we?'

Wondering where the conversation was headed, Jen frowned, 'Dec, what are you fishing for?'

It was now or never. 'I love you, Jen and a want us to be ...'

Then her phone rang. Ozzie was phoning her on What's App.

She said, 'Ozzie, this is not a good time.'

'Well, I'm sorry about that. But are you aware that Murphy is going to use the Quantime to carry out some experiments with his people?'

Jennifer shot up in bed. 'What? He told me he'd wait until I got back!'

'Well, that's not what he told me. And I'm supposed to train his people!'

Declan, annoyed and alarmed, said, 'Jen, can you talk to him later?'

Jen turned to him, her face as white as a ghost. 'Sorry, Dec but I have to go back before Edgar Murphy fucks everything up!'

He stared at her. 'Fuck! Where does that leave me?'

She sighed, 'Well I can do with some Boogie clout.'

Oz, who was still hanging in there, said, 'Where does that leave me?'

'You work it out with Murphy. But do not let anyone play with the Q.'

'And just how am I supposed to stop them. Murphy's lot treat me like an enemy and have real guns.'

*THE 10 BEST Parks & Nature Attractions in Seattle .... [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g60878-Activities-c57-Seattle\\_Washington.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g60878-Activities-c57-Seattle_Washington.html)*

## **Chapter 36**

Murphy hadn't been straight with me, but how could I confront him about it without putting myself at risk? He must have seen Jennifer's departure as the opportunity he had been waiting for.

I stayed overnight, in Jen's bed, with dark thoughts weighing on my mind. Eventually, I lapsed into sleep and awoke fresh and ready for the day at 6am, when my phone alarm went off. I grabbed a coffee in the kitchen and took it outside with me. The hot liquid warmed my hands through the ceramic mug as I walked around the farmhouse. Then I saw Murphy. He was at the back of the house, smoking near the disused dairy. He was puffing away, enjoying his habit when I approached. 'Mr Murphy,' I said, 'What exactly do you expect of me?'

The government administrator turned to look at me, 'To get my people ready for Quantum travel, Mr Doyle. I thought you knew that.'

'I can only get them so far with it. Without precise programming, many things could go very wrong.'

'Dr Lanmore has been working closely with Professor Smethurst for months. He is more than capable to programme the Quantum device in readiness for the mission.'

'What mission?' I asked, not really expecting to be told.

'Just a simple test to see if it works.' Murphy said matter of factly.

'It has to have a time and a destination,' I told Murphy, who really had no idea.

'Dr Lanmore will decide that.'

'When is the test scheduled for?' I pressed.

'In two days. Or as soon as you prepare our guys for what is to come.'

Two days. Jen wouldn't be home by then. 'It would be much safer if you wait until Professor Smethurst comes back,' I stated.

Murphy shook his head. 'That's not necessary. Besides, this has to be a military intelligence operation.' He curtailed the conversation with, 'Meet the subjects in the briefing room in 30 minutes.'

The briefing room was really Jen's lounge room. Six people were waiting for me. As I entered the room, they were sitting casually around a low coffee table. Edgar was there organising them into a row so that I could address them all at once. He had thoughtfully provided me with a standing whiteboard and markers, should I need them.

I looked at, my students, thinking you haven't a clue about what's going on. I began, 'When I first stepped into the Quantime, I had no idea what was going to happen. I was the first human to experience Quantum travel, even before I knew what it was. I was kinda like the Neil Armstrong of Quantime experience,' I grinned

My class chuckled, and an arm shot up.

'I'll take questions after I've explained what it was like for me that first time.' I paused for some water, then said, 'Nobody, not even Professor Smethurst knew what would happen once I stepped into the Quantime. Apart from the fact it was orange and shaped like a pumpkin, I knew nothing about the device. From what little knowledge I'd gleaned about it from Professor Smethurst, it seemed as though my atoms were going to get a bit of a shakeup.

I sat on the seat and waited. Then I heard a whirring noise that got increasingly louder. Next, I could see tendrils of blue light arcing around the machine. The Professor saw that I was agitated, and she told me to relax. That was easier said than done. I just sat there wondering what the fuck was going on?'

The students hung onto my every word.

I continued, 'Then the noise and light show stopped. I just sat there, wondering what would happen when I took my first steps outside my weird cocoon? I appeared to be OK with all my faculties working. I did feel a little queasy as if I'd been on a scary ride in an amusement park. Girding my loins, I stepped out of the Q, which was no longer there, and found myself in 19th century France, dressed for the occasion.'

Then the questions began to fly.

One of the students asked me, 'What do you mean when you say the Quantime was no longer there?'

'Exactly that. Once you step from the quantum reality to the natural world, the quantum experience is no longer there.'

The student sat there with a question mark expression, which didn't surprise me as I'm no expert on this weird quantum stuff.

Another student said to me, 'If you can't see this Quantime once you step out of it, how are you able to return here?'

Now that is a good question. I said, 'You use one of these,' holding my pendant out for all to see. 'When you wish to return to this spacetime, you press the middle of the necklace, and the Quantime appears. You step in, and the return programme gets you home.'

After a further barrage of questions, I said, 'Well that's enough for you to go on for now.'

As I went to leave, Edgar got my attention. 'Where can we get those pendants?' He asked.

I smiled, 'From Professor Smethurst.'

'But she's not here.'

'Yes, that's a bit of a bummer, isn't it?'

Edgar said, 'Oh dear, that's going to delay the experiment.' Then Murphy brightened, 'I was hoping to send a pair of my people but if you lend me your pendant at least one of them can try it out.'

I know I was mean, but I enjoyed seeing the government toadie squirm 'If only it were that easy, but each one has to be programmed for its user,' I lied, enjoying every moment.

Murphy had a hangdog look. 'Then I suppose we'll have to wait until she returns.'

'I grinned, 'Cheer up, Edgar. She'll be back in a couple of days.'

## Chapter 37

Albert Pike met with Giuseppe Mazzini in February 1868, at the office of The Sovereign Executive Directory of High Masonry, which was established by Mazzini himself. The two champions of the new Rite worked with a small select group of individuals to take over Freemasonry. It had to be carried out covertly so as not to alert the lodges before the time was right. The meeting which took place in Charleston's Solomon Lodge bristled with anticipation.

The gathering of national leaders listened with bated breath as Pike gave his reasons for the necessity of the new Rite. He stated, 'Freemasonry has become an unwieldy beast. It is bloated, inefficient and too hard to handle.'

Mazzini listened, then said, 'I am in agreement with you, Albert. We must save Freemasonry from itself. And the only way we can do that is to centralise universal Freemasonry authority under a new Rite that encompasses and controls all lodges worldwide.'

'How can we go about this without raising any alarms in the Brotherhood?' Bismarck, one of the inner circle asked.

'We must form a new secret governing body, unknown even to the lodge grand Masters,' Pike explained. He looked at each member of the elite membership and continued, 'Once we have every detail worked out, we will involve certain key lodge masters and present the new management plan to them as a fait accompli.'

Phileas Walder looked at the formidable General Pike. 'How can we achieve such a coup?'

'Phileas, we need to use your people to sow seeds of anxiety and discontent among the brothers. Do not let on what we plan to do. We must get them to believe Freemasonry has become unstable, and there is the need for a thorough examination of its processes and protocols. Then, when the time is right, we draw our trusted friends into this web of our making. That way, we will cover the main lodges. The others will follow suit.'

Palmerston piped up. 'Albert are we big enough to pull this off?'

Pike eyeballed the British Foreign Secretary. 'We have to succeed if Freemasonry is to be saved.' He added, 'My friend, by restructuring illumined Freemasonry the raw energy of the people can be shaped and managed.'

Eliphas Levi one of the chosen inner circle, trying to keep up with the master of reason, said, 'I am honoured to be part of this massive step for humanity, but can we really shape the future?'

Pike smiled, 'We cannot do this, but the universal forces can.'

'What do you mean, Albert?' Bismarck queried.

'Once these forces combine, they will be guided by the intellect and regulated by the rule of right and justice.' Pike waited for Otto to catch up intellectually. Then he said, 'The great revolution that has been a long time coming will now begin its march to global domination.'

'But can we manage such a force for the good, Albert?' Walder asked.

Pike looked straight at the ex-Lutheran Pastor. 'We have to, Phileas. Because force that is ill-regulated brings about failed revolutions.'

Mazzini looked at his friend in awe. 'What is our next step?'

'You must help me get elected to the position of Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Supreme Council. Then I can establish our power base.'

Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary leader, who was also worldwide director of Illumined Freemasonry, knew he was best placed to get Pike elevated.

The rest of the powerful enclave agreed, and the meeting was formally closed.

It only took another two years and finally, on September 20, 1870, Pike's constitution creating a new super Rite was signed into effect by Pike and Mazzini. The two founders of the Palladium Rite divided their powers so that Pike had dogmatic authority and the title of Sovereign Pontiff of Universal Freemasonry while Mazzini held the executive authority with the title of Sovereign Chief of Political Action. One year later Pike had his plan worked out, and wrote his notorious letter, claiming it came to him in a spiritual trance. From that moment on the world stage was set, and humanity found itself in a perilous path beyond its control.

When Albert Pike died on April 2nd, 1891, his eldest son Luther Hamilton Pike, inherited his father's position in the Palladium Rite. The Rite members were mostly excessively wealthy, powerful men who backed Walter Gibbons financially in building the London Palladium in 1910. A premier venue for variety performances, the Palladium held a deep dark secret. Below the famous theatre, a hidden chamber was used by the members of the Palladium Rite. The throngs of theatregoers watching pantomimes and other performances were totally oblivious to the machinations going on below. The Palladium was the perfect venue for the Rite to carry out Pike's global plan. It is not surprising that this theatre has hosted some 43 Royal Command performances, especially as more than one royal personage has been and is involved with the Palladium Rite.

The Current Grand Master was a Grand Mistress - Valery von Bismarck, and she was the first female Grand Master of the Rite. As such, she was also the Grand Dame of SCoW, the seemingly respectable face of the Rite. SCoW, the Sovereign Council of Wisdom, was only known to the Illuminati and even then, only to its inner core.

That was until recently when, through social media, members of the general public began taking an interest in secret societies and the new World Order. One of these curious people was Olivia Anne Quinn, who had been guarding a family secret, her great-great-grand father's diary. Now, with her mother dying, she had to raise funds to get back home. Jobless in London, Olivia only had one thing of inestimable value - Silas Pearce's journal, which showed beyond any doubt the connection Silas had with Albert Pike.

When Olivia first received the email from her Uncle Bill, about her mother's decline in health, she felt she had to get back to Australia. But since Afton Westbury was arrested, she had lost her contact with the auctioneering world. As Olivia did not have a working visa, her earnings had to come from other sources. She had always enjoyed the excitement of auctions and learned that some wealthy clients liked to bid by proxy. Getting paid commissions on successful bids proved an excellent way to earn money. This was how Olivia became associated with Afton Westbury and The Sovereign Council of Wisdom. Although she did not know what it entailed until she got involved with the Pike Letter saga and Ozzie Doyle, the charming Irish private investigator.



Olivia had Hubert's number, so she gave him a ring.

Hubert Meisinger tended to intimidate people without trying. His height and fiery long hair and beard made him look pretty scary even when he was not threatening. Also his grey/green penetrating eyes that sometimes had a manic look about them. Despite his devotion to SCoW, he would never become a member. Only the elite of civilised society had the right to join and even then, only at the apprentice level. Hubert responded to his phone. Seeing Olivia's name, he said, 'You enjoyed our hospitality so much you contact me again.'

Olivia was not amused. 'I have something valuable to sell. I think SCoW will be interested.'

Hubert sneered, 'What could you possibly have that would interest the Sovereign Council, Ms Quinn?'

'More evidence about Albert Pike.'

Hubert laughed derisively. 'You know nothing about Pike.'

'True, Hubert, but Silas Pearce, my great great-granddad was a close friend.'

'And you know this, how?'

'My great-great-grandfather kept a diary, which I now have for sale.'

'If this is a trick you will be very sorry.'

'It's no trick. I need the money.'

Hubert thought about how to handle it. 'You will show me this diary. Then we will decide if we are interested or not.'

Olivia's heart was beating fast. 'When I have the money, you will have the diary.'

'What is your price?'

'Ten million euros.' There was silence then she heard Hubert laugh. 'You are fucking joking!'

'If I don't hear from you in the next six hours, I will put it up for public auction immediately.'

Before he had a chance to respond, the phone went dead.

*Masonic Origins - biblebelievers.org.au. <https://www.biblebelievers.org.au/masonic.htm>*

## **Chapter 38**

Valery von Bismarck met up with Gottfried in their dead brother's apartment. Gottfried was the more approachable of her two remaining siblings. She said, 'Thank you for coming to meet me here.'

Gottfried gave her a quizzical look. 'Why am I here?'

She turned to her brother. 'I have to go to New York. I need to know that everything will be OK while I'm away.'

Gottfried hated being caught in the middle of his sibling's fights. 'I don't see what I can do, Leopold is already gathering his forces. He is earnest about staging a coup. If that happens while you're gone, what am I supposed to do?'

'Just hold the fort for me.'

'My dear sister, most of the members think you are dragging your heels. They are anxious to see the plan go into the next phase.'

'And it will. But I have to sort out some public relations stuff in N Y first.'

Gottfried sighed heavily. 'Sorting out P R stuff here is much more important.'

Leopold von Bismarck was busy with the British Prime Minister in a private meeting in a safe environment at number ten Downing Street. 'Can I rely on your support, Prime Minister?'

'Leo, are you sure there is no other way to do this?'

'Valery means well, but she does not have the stomach to do what must be done.'

'What must be done, Leo?'

'I must have your lodge's support for my leadership in the Rite?'

The politician, wary of committing himself too soon, paused.

Leopold stated, 'I am the rightful heir, so I will be mounting a leadership challenge.'

The Prime Minister nodded, 'The last thing we need right now is competing factions in the Rite.'

'I totally agree. But we have reached a crucial point in fulfilling the plan. Personal differences have to be put aside. The next phase requires the steadiest hand at the tiller.' Leopold fixed the Prime Minister with his gaze. 'And I am that steady hand.'

'After all this time, are we ready for the final phase?'

Leopold answered, 'The process has been in place for a very long time. It has generated its own momentum and cannot be stopped.'

The PM sighed deeply. 'This one is a totally different can of worms to the other two world wars, Leo. Do we know what we are unleashing?'

The Palladium Rite grandmaster looked at the nation's leader. For now, we let the IZs think they are calling the shots.'

'IZs?'

'Illuminati Zionists. The Prophecy states that the third world war would start with the IZs fighting Islam. Our job now is to light the Middle East powder keg and watch it blow up.'

The Prime Minister went ghostly white. 'The Golden Dome?'

Leopold shook his head. 'Further south.'

'You don't mean!'

Leopold nodded, 'The Great Mosque of Mecca and the Kaaba.'

'But that is Islam's most sacred Mosque.'

Leopold smiled, 'We will make sure that Israel is blamed. Then we stand back and watch the fireworks.'

A chill shot up the PM's spine. 'After this, there is no turning back.'

The British Prime Minister was well aware of the theory behind Pike's letter to Mazzini. But he was now facing the reality of that outcome resulting from Pike's forecast.

Leopold emphasised 'After Islam, and Political Zionism mutually destroy each other, the rest of the Western world will take sides and nations will fight each other to the point of complete physical, moral, spiritual and economical exhaustion, their wills shattered.'

The Prime Minister stared at Leopold. 'This is not new to me. Why are you telling me this now?'

'Because, Prime Minister, it is time. We have set this up over many years. We created a massive refugee problem in the Middle East, so there would be a mass exodus of Muslims into Europe.'

'If it ever got out that the chaos resulting from the migrant influx into European cities is orchestrated, there's no telling how the people will respond.'

Leopold fixed the Prime Minister with a cold stare. 'It does not bear thinking about. But I will say this. Europe needs to be destabilised to the point of chaos for the plan to work. You know what you now have to do to play your part.'

The political leader cast his eyes downward. 'Am I to be the one to sacrifice our nationhood?'

Leopold left that question hanging. Changing the subject, he said, 'Are you up to this sacred task?'

The Prime Minister knew it was a question he did not need to answer.'

Gottfried von Bismarck met with his German legal team at the Friedrichsruh Castle, near Hamburg, which his family still owned. Kaiser Wilhelm had been given the castle to Bismarck following his success in defeating France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. It had undergone extensive renovation after being bombed by the RAF in 1945. Gottfried said, 'First we had to weather the scandal of my brother and his gay orgies. Now we have this to contend with this,' he snapped, throwing the newspaper onto the table.

A senior partner of Christian Hannulf Associates did most of the talking. He turned to Gottfried, who was heir to one of Europe's most prominent aristocratic dynasties; a direct descendant of the man who founded modern Germany. 'My advice is to ignore it, Gottfried.'

'But my ex-wife is suing me for 3.2 million euros for unpaid child support. It's all nonsense, of course.'

'Gottfried, the last thing you want is for this to play out in court. Come to a settlement, and it will soon be old news.'

Christian Hannulf's associates nodded in unison.

Gottfried's mind went back to happier days. They had met on the Caribbean island of St Barth and enjoyed a globe-trotting courtship – flittering between St Moritz, London and New York. They married in a Jewish ceremony in the Hamptons in 2004.

'Did you hear what I said?' Kurt Christian asked.

'We had some happy times here,' Gottfried sighed his mind going down memory lane. Gottfried remembered the letter. Nadine had threatened to divorce him many times before, but this time it was real. The message was from Lionel Bottomley, a Manhattan judge, from the family court. The judge had issued Gottfried a subpoena giving him a month to provide proof of his assets and income. Now he knew there was no turning back. 'Happier times indeed.'

Kurt saw the tears in Gottfried's eyes.

'But no longer, alas,' Kurt responded.

Gottfried saw red. His sadness gave way to anger. 'Mien Gott, she has already put her stamp on my Moroccan hand-carved coffee tables and chairs, vast finjans (coffee cups) from Dubai and handmade Tibetan silk-rugs. Now she wants to rob me blind as well.'

Kurt, well aware that Gottfried was having a hard time. Not just with his failed marriage though. He had been forced to resign as an MP for Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic party in 2005, after being deemed "Germany's laziest deputy" for regularly failing to turn up to meetings. That disgrace had hit him hard. Now there was this business with his ex-wife.

Kurt had to get his client's mind back on track. 'Gottfried, there are more important things at stake, and you have to stay focused. Give Nadine what she wants, and both of you move on.'

'How can I get on with my life when the divorce settlement has granted her exclusive access to the residential rooms in this castle.'

Kurt said, 'Isn't her main residence in New York?'

'That is unclear. But I do not want to move out from here.'

One of the other lawyers, Helmut Bayer, a severe-looking man, said, 'We are more concerned from a security angle.' Addressing Gottfried, he said, 'We have to know what your ex-wife knows about certain "Rite Business."

All eyes were on Gottfried.

He stated, 'She is not a threat.'

Helmut said, 'You are not the best-placed person to judge that. We need to know about everything you discussed concerning the Pike plan.'

Gottfried went silent. He looked to Kurt for support. 'Nadine believes in what we are doing. She is no threat.'

Kurt opened his arms, embracing air. 'Give her all she wants without question. Then she will have no reason to use what she knows as a tool of revenge.'

'She would never do that.'

Ignoring Gottfried's plea, Helmut said, 'We will meet in two days. bring any records with you for the debrief.'

After the meeting closed and Gottfried was left to his devices, he reread the letter from the family court. Recovering from his initial shock, Gottfried tried contacting his wife, but the number had been disconnected. There was a contact number for the Judge provided in the letter. Gottfried used it to speak with him. 'It's Gottfried Bismarck here.'

'Yes, Mr Bismarck, how may I help you?'

'I received your letter subpoenaing me to provide the family court with certain financial details.'

'Good. I hope you will comply. But I don't understand why you are calling me?'

'I need to speak with my wife, but she has changed her number.'

'Sorry I can't help you there.'

'Are you refusing to give me her number, Mr Bottomley?'

'Not at all. But Ms Reichler refused to give us her contact details.'

'Why would she do that?'

'She said she refused, citing fears for her physical safety.'

Bismarck heir sued in New York for \$2.5m in child support ....

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/12160202/Bismarck-heir-sued-in-New-York-for-2.5m-in-child-support.html>

## Chapter 39

Nadine Rebecca Reichschler was to play a more significant role in the Pike plan than she could ever have imagined, and that was after her death. Nadine was found dead by her personal trainer in the Friedrichsruh Castle gym. Since her divorce, Nadine got back on the dating treadmill. To help her in this highly competitive game against many young women half her age, Nadine hired a personal trainer to set her a fitness program and help her stick to it. Weight training was part of her new fitness regime, and it was not long before she had shed a few kilos and toned up. Her trainer, a fit young handsome man by the name of Hermann Kess, reported Nadine's death to the German police. The chief forensic scientist said his preliminary findings suggested Nadine had died in a weightlifting accident. Gottfried did not believe his ex-wife's death was an accident. He thought she had been strangled to death but could not prove it. Nadine was found dead on a bench press, with a barbell across her neck.

Handing down her finding, State Coroner Susanne Bunchley said she was satisfied that Ms Reichschler's death was the result of homicide by "manual strangulation". Gottfried was taken in for questioning, but his lawyer soon had him released. Hermann Kess became the prime suspect for his client's murder but, with no proof of his culpability, the police also had to let him go. Hamburg Homicide questioned members of the family until Leopold threatened to sue for harassment. The cops backed off, but Gottfried didn't. As nobody was charged with Gottfried's ex-wife's murder, the police case got shelved. Gottfried hired a private detective called Erik Hueller to investigate on his behalf.

Just when Leopold thought he had the media under control, another shock rocked the House of Bismarck. Unbeknown to the siblings Count Alexander had given an interview to the BBC in 2014. At the time the Beeb thought it was too risky to air. Although the national broadcaster's legal people could not see any problem in airing the interview, the Director of Current Affairs programming erred on the side of caution. Now, with a new director, after a lot of legal wrangling, following the death of Alexander von Bismarck, the Beeb decided to air it in primetime on Panorama. In the interview amongst many shock announcements that had BBC rating hitting the stratosphere, Alexander revealed his mother, Princess Elisabeth, was an anti-Semite with an alcohol habit; his brother Leopold was conspiring to disinherit him. Another brother, Gottfried, who lived in London, covered up the death of his deceased brother's mistress, a Swiss heiress called Greta Pascal. Alexander claimed she had died of a heroin and cocaine overdose at his penthouse in Sloane Square. He admitted to being arrested for drunk driving and visited by bailiffs over unpaid debts.

In retrospect, it was Alexander's confession, shortly before he overdosed on a cocktail of drugs. When questioned about this, Leopold played things down, saying the interview made him question his late brother's sanity.

Coroner Susanne Bunchley thought an indictable offence had been committed and as the law required, directed the court's principal registrar to refer the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Public prosecutor told the director of Hamburg Homicide that there was not enough evidence to find Gottfried Von Bismarck and Leopold guilty of killing Nadine Reichschler

Valery did not think her brothers were involved. She and Nadine had been good friends, and Valery was shocked at her death. Nadine had confided in Valery shortly before her death. She told Nadine that her brothers had a plan to knock her off her Palladium pedestal throne.

Evidence indicated that Nadine Reichschler and her personal trainer Herman Kess were the only two people near the gym at the time of her death. The police hauled Herman Kess in again to help them with their enquiries.

## Chapter 40

Teaching people to become Quantanauts was a bit like showing monkeys how to become human. My biggest challenge was to get the point over that the Quantime experience was a whole new reality for them. There were no textbooks to draw on. And, quite frankly, I only know how I experience the transformation. I have no idea what it will do to them. Murphy was getting antsy. He just wanted to get on with the job. I emphasised strongly to my recruits that the quantum experience had nothing to do with the concept of time travel, as there was no time or travel involved. Murphy looked at me with an expression of scepticism. But he could not challenge what I was saying. He seemed very uncomfortable, and periodically left the room, maybe to go outside and check if the world was still as he remembered it.

One of my students, Major Wallace, said, 'Explain this whole exchange thing again.'

I'd only mentioned it - not explained it before. Hell. I'm no scientist. How the hell was I supposed to explain it? All I could offer was a quantum mechanics for dummies explanation. I said, 'In classical mechanics, objects exist in a specific place at a specific time. However, in quantum mechanics, objects instead exist in a haze of probability; they have a certain chance of being at point A, another chance of being at point B and so on.'

Wallace scratched his head. 'I kind of get it, but ...'

'Don't try,' I advised. 'You'll drive yourself mad. Just trust that Professor Smethurst knows what she's doing.'

Lieutenant Frayne, my other trainee Quantanaut said, 'I understand that since the discovery of the electron science's evidence that all matter existed in the form of particles was slowly building. But there was still the question whether matter only acted as particles.'

I said, 'Stop!' He was confusing me, and that wasn't difficult. I said, 'Whatever notions you have about force and matter, forget it. What we are dealing with here is quantum biology, which is a quantum leap from quantum mechanics. We are not looking at waves and particles. We are dealing with both waves and particles simultaneously popping in and out of existence.'

Frayne, feeling challenged, said, 'But, as Heisenberg discovered the more precisely an electron's position is known, the less precisely its speed can be known, and vice versa.'

These guys just weren't getting it. And I wasn't surprised. I silently prayed that Jennifer would turn up soon. 'Forget Heisenberg and concentrate on Shroedinger's pussy. The cat was both dead and alive at the same time until the door was opened. When you are in the Quantime, you are both here and there. Once you step out of the Quantime, you are only there.' I gave myself an imaginary pat on the back. Well, that was a pretty cool explanation.'

Then, I heard, the cavalry had turned up.

Jennifer entered her home with Declan in tow.

Murphy pounced on her as soon as she entered. 'Thank goodness you're here. I'm behind with the schedule, and I need those pendants things.'

Jennifer smiled, 'It's lucky for you that Oswald was here. Otherwise, you would have gone off half-cocked, with no way of getting your people back.'

Murphy, resenting being talked down to, said, 'Don't toy with me, Professor. I can have this thing shut down just like that.' He emphasised his last three words with a click of his fingers.

Declan, who did not like the pompous officious little man, said, 'You do that, and I'll sue the Brit Government for billions'

Murphy stared at the abrasive Yank. 'Well, let's hope we can get things back on track. How soon can you have those transponder things made?'

Jennifer smiled, 'As soon as I have the psych test results.'

'Psych test results, Murphy spluttered. 'How long will that take?'

'As long as it takes for you to obtain them.'

Murphy stared daggers at Jennifer, who was hugely enjoying herself. 'You expect me to get them?'

'Yes, I need psyche evaluation reports for all trainees in the programme. Then I can programme their transponder pendants accordingly.'

Jennifer left a very troubled and puzzled Crown Office administrator and went off to find Oz.

I'd left my trainees, to look for Jen. I went to her quarters, where I saw Declan in the kitchen making coffee. 'Hi, Declan. I'm surprised to see you back here.'

Declan put two scoops of ground Brazilian in the plunger. Seeing me, he grinned, 'One for you?'

'Sure, but what are you doing back here?' Declan added another scoop and poured in the boiling water. 'Someone has to keep Murphy in his place,' he smiled.

'Well, seeing as you're here, we ought to work out our strategy for the next trip.'

Declan plunged the coffee and poured it into three mugs. 'Looks like we might have to queue up for the Q, now that Murphy wants it for his people.'

Just then Jen entered the kitchen, 'That coffee smells good.' She came up to me and gave me a hug. Jen said, 'Thanks for standing in. The pendant thing was a clever ploy on your part.'

I said, 'Yes, but now you're back there'll be no stopping him.'

Jen gave a cheeky smile. 'Oh, it'll take a while for him to collect the psych reports.'

Dec laughed, 'You're an evil woman, Professor Smethurst.'

As we drank our coffee, I said, 'We need to book the Q for the next part of the adventure.'

'Are you ready?' Jen asked.'

'We will be in a month,' I replied.

*Quantum Physics Explained - YouTube.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xj0MC2IuDU>

*Majority Of Americans Don't Believe In The Big Bang Theory.* <https://www.outsidethebeltway.com/majority-of-americans-dont-believe-in-the-big-bang-theory/>

*Chemistry Chapters 3&4 Flashcards | Quizlet.* <https://quizlet.com/212870786/chemistry-chapters-34-flash-cards/>

*What Is Quantum Mechanics? Quantum Physics Defined, Explained.*  
<https://www.livescience.com/33816-quantum-mechanics-explanation.html>

## Chapter 41

The Crown Office had been Murphy's bastion of authority for all the years he had worked there as a civil servant. It was small comfort, but the only big stick he had left was the Professor's application to use the Q which had to pass his scrutiny.

He took his time reading through the submission in front of him. At length, he removed his reading glasses and said, 'You state here that Declan Merrick and Oswald Doyle will be going back to 19th century Switzerland, but you don't say when or why exactly?'

Jennifer pointed out, 'I have run this submission past Mr Merrick's lawyers and according to Crown Office requirements, this ticks all the boxes.'

Murphy cringed at the mention of the New York legal firm. Pointing to a blank space on the form, Murphy felt a frisson of satisfaction. 'You haven't written down the reason for this trip.'

'That's correct, Mr Murphy.' And she left it at that.

'Why do you want to go to Switzerland in the 19th century, Professor?'

'My client wishes those details to remain confidential.'

'Who is your client?'

'Jennifer smiled sweetly. 'My client wishes to remain anonymous. It comes under the clause entitled Commercial in Confidence.'

Murphy had that written into the contract to allow his people to use the Q for secret missions. But that was before the Professor had access to her quantum device. 'He couldn't go against his own ruling. 'Very well. leave it with me, and I will see if we can accommodate you.'

Jennifer stared at Murphy. 'I appreciate that you like to be thorough as am I when signing off on your spook projects using my Quantime.'

Murphy caught the inference. If he made life difficult for her, she had the power to hold up his projects. Sighing heavily, he reached for his pen and approved the Swiss plan with his signature and the Crown Office stamp.

## Chapter 42

Now that "Project Pike" was happening I needed to study the Pearce journal. I rifled through my files, trying to find my copy but couldn't find it anywhere. Having honoured Olivia's wishes, I had deleted the file she sent to me. The printed version was all I had to work with. Where the hell could it be? Without it, there was no point in following through with the Quantime project. Then I remembered Declan had a copy. He was back in the United States. I phoned him using What's App, a free VOIP server. I heard some piped music and waited for a human voice.

Declan saw Ozzie's name come up on his phone. 'Oz, this is a surprise.'

'Yeah, for me too.'

'How can I help you?'

'I need your copy of the Pearce diary.'

'What's wrong with yours?'



'I can't find it.'

'Fuck man!'

'Precisely. Can you make a copy and send it to me?'

'If I can remember where I put my copy.'

That was something I did not want to hear. 'Are you saying you don't know where it is?'

'Why can't you get a copy from Olivia's diary?'

'Because she's sold the fucking thing to SCoW.'

'Jesus!'

'Yeah. Precisely. And we need that diary for the next phase of the Pike project.'

There was a call waiting buzz from Olivia. I terminated the call to Declan and pressed the green phone icon. 'Oz, I desperately need you.'

Being a man, my dirty mind went to one thing even though my rational brain said, she needed me for something more serious. With the faint hope that my first fantasy was right, I said, 'I'll come right over.'

'Don't come to my place,' she said to me. 'I'll meet you at the lake in Whalebone Park.'

'Where the hell is that?' I muttered, typing the name in the search line of my phone's GPS. It was not far from where Olivia lived. Why not meet at her place? I wondered. Figuring she must have had her reasons, I left it at that.

I drove to Chipping Barnet and met up with her at Whalebone Park, - a local historical landmark with a whale jawbone serving as the entrance to a parcel of meadows, fields and a disused farm. There was another residence with mature trees along the perimeter and the driveway. We were to meet at the lake near Well House Lane, which marked the site of the former physic well, a chalybeate spring famous in the 17th century. Samuel Pepys was among its pilgrims, returning for second helpings despite being feverish after drinking five glasses on his initial visit.

While I waited for Olivia, I boogled Barnet and discovered its name from the Old English bænet – 'the burning' – referring to the clearance of the land by fire. Chipping or chepe was the Old English term for a marketplace. King John granted the abbey of St Albans a formal market charter in 1199 although unofficial trading had already been carried on there for the previous hundred years. The town developed around this weekly trade, by providing services to travellers at the junction of the Great North Road and St Albans Road.

Olivia duly arrived. She looked worried about something. 'What's troubling you?' I asked out of genuine concern.

'Let's sit down,' She said to me, positioning herself on a bench facing the lake.

'You haven't sold the diary yet -have you?'

Olivia's silent stare said it all.

'Now I'm really fucked.' I muttered.

'I had to do it.'

Dumbstruck I eye-balled her. After I found my voice, I said, 'Now I'm really fucked.'

'What do you mean?'

I said, 'I need another copy of the diary,'

'What's happened to the one you had?'

Feeling like an idiot, I admitted, 'I've mislaid it.'

'There's nothing I can do about that,' Olivia shrugged. 'I'm here to warn you.'

'Warn me about what?'

'Hubert asked me if anyone had a copy.'

'And you said no, of course,'

'I find it difficult to tell lies,' Olivia replied, woefully.

'And you said, Oh, my good friend Ozzie has a copy.'

Olivia began to cry. She said, 'I need a fresh start back home in Australia, Oz, I couldn't begin my new life with a lie.'

'So, it doesn't matter about my old life, once good old Hubert comes knocking.'

Then I had one of those crazy moments when I burst out laughing. In retrospect, it was the contradiction. I said, between bouts of laughter, 'This is fucking priceless because I don't have a copy of the diary. The irony is you could have said no and still be telling the truth. Of course, Hubert's not going to believe me and will probably knock seven shades of shit out of me.'

Olivia stared at Oz, 'What's happened to your copy?'

'If I knew that I'd have the fucking thing, wouldn't I?'

'Well, Hubert has the diary now. You will have to talk to him about it.'

'Oh yeah, I can see that working well.'

'Why is it so important to you?'

'I can't tell you that.'

Olivia fixed me in her gaze. 'Forget about SCoW. They are not friendly people to deal with.'

I changed the subject. 'Why do you suddenly have to pop off to Australia?'

'It's personal. Family business.'

'What will they think about you selling the Pearce Diary?'

'I had to sell it to raise the money to get set up in Dubbo.'

I looked at her, incredulous. But you live in a luxury apartment with a late model Merc in the driveway. 'Why do you need to sell a rare and precious family heirloom to raise funds?'

She looked me in the eye. For a detective you're not very smart, are you?'

'What do you mean?'

'It's all a front. I didn't have any money.'

Then it hit me. 'You know more about SCoW than you're letting on.'

'They paid for the apartment and leased the car. I've been helping them at many auctions, and I had to look like a successful businesswoman, to gain the bidders' confidence.'

I was putting the pieces together. 'You bid on behalf of clients on items in auctions then you pull out after jacking up the price. Later Weldon's little friends relieved the buyer of their prize. Weldon then sells it on at a profit.'

'Weldon is just a small fish. You don't want to meet those higher up the ladder.'

She was probably right about that. But I had the Quantime in my corner. Although I could not tell her that. 'Just drop it, Ozzie,' she urged. 'You're way out of your league.'

I knew she was right. Why should I worry about her selling the diary to the bad guys? Olivia's not my client. I'm not even being paid to stick my neck out. I should take Olivia's advice and walk away while I still could. But without a copy, my plan to get into the secret meeting was dead in the water.

I had to ask. 'Did you know Weldon was stealing the items after they were bought?'

'No, of course not.'

'And SCoW kept paying you commissions to not put in the winning bid?'

'If you put it that way - yes.'

'And you didn't think it odd?'

I knew something shonky was going on, but my part was perfectly legal, so I didn't question it.

I figured SCoW had the role of night club bouncer stopping the unwashed from gaining access to the Palladium Rite of Freemasonry. As much as I wanted to track the bad guys to their lair, there was not much I could do until I'd been on the Project Pike Q adventure. I'd be better occupied working out how to get hold of the diary. First, I had to figure out where Hubert had it stashed.

Just when I thought the things couldn't get any more complicated, I received a call from Dr Bennet.

He'd got the Pike Letter back from the police and discovered it was fake and demanded an explanation. SHIT!

*Chipping Barnet | Hidden London. <https://hidden-london.com/gazetteer/chipping-barnet/>*

## **Chapter 43**

Erik Hueller went over the records again. In his statement to the police, Peiter Hausbaum said he was in the potting shed at the time the fitness instructor found Nadine's body. But Helga Brauer said she saw Hausbaum in her kitchen getting a glass of water when Herman Kells approached her and announced Nadine Reichschler's death. Kells had left the castle and gone back to Hamburg, where he worked in the Eso gym on Hindenburg Strasse. Erik drove to Hamburg, entered the gym and asked for Herman Kells.

Thinking Erik was a potential client Kells approached him and smiled. 'How can I help you today?'

Erik smiled back, 'By answering a few questions about Nadine Reichschler's death.'

'Just who the hell are you? Herman snapped, his demeanour changing rapidly.'

'Erik Hueller. I'm a private detective working for Gottfried von Bismarck.'

Herman, realising the man wasn't a potential client, didn't want to waste any more time with him. 'Do I have to answer your questions?'

'Well, I can't force you to, but ...'

'Just as I thought. The cops have my statement. take it up with them.'

Erik got in a bit closer and quietly said, 'I could do that, but then I will have to tell them about the barbell tampering.' Now Erik had Kell's full attention.

'What do you mean by that?'

'The barbell had no collars to secure the 20-kilogram weights. Tilting the bar by only a few millimetres would have caused the weights to come off. The bar could have crushed her throat, making the tragedy an accident owing to your lack of attention.'

Herman said, 'The murderer must have tampered with the weights.'

Erik said, 'She must have known her murderer.'

'How do you know that?'

Erik smiled, 'I'm a detective. It's my job to know such things. But to make it perfectly clear to me, where were you while Nadine was attacked?'

Herman answered, 'I had to go to the toilet.'

'Was that the one near the gym?'

'Yes.'

'And you never heard any cries for help?'

'No. Had I heard anything I would have gone to Nadine's aid.'

'So, while you were absent, the murderer snuck into the gym, killed Nadine and got away before you discovered her?'

'It would appear so - yes.'

Erik nodded, then said, 'Who was in the kitchen when you informed Herren Brauer about Nadine's death?'

Herman relieved that was all the detective wanted to know, said, 'Just Mrs Brauer and Hausbaum, the gardener.'

Erik had got what he wanted and left.

Now he had to go back to Friedrichsrub Castle to speak with the gardener. He also had to bring Gottfried up to date about the case.

Back at the castle, Gustav greeted Erik at the front door. The detective asked him, 'Gustav how long have you worked for the Bismarck family?'

Gustav said proudly '50 years.'

'Then you knew Ferdinand von Bismarck, the children's father.'

Gustav looked at the detective. 'Oh no, he wasn't their father.'

'What do you mean?' Erik asked, intrigued.

'Archibald Otto von Bismarck was their father.'

Erik was shocked. 'Then his children are not the direct descendants of Otto von Bismarck!'

'No Herr Hueller.'

Erik wondered why the subterfuge? And more to the point what happened to the Otto von Bismarck family line? He also wondered why the old manservant had been so open with him. He was about to ask more questions when Gottfried approached and suggested they take a walk in the garden.

'How is the case going?' Gottfried asked as they passed by colourful flower beds.

Erik, getting into his detective role, replied, 'New evidence indicates that Mrs Brauer and Herman Kells were not the only people present at the time of your ex-wife's death. Peiter Hausbaum was in the kitchen at the time.'

'Our gardener?'

'Yes.'

Gottfried, puzzled, said, 'What's the problem. he often comes into the main building.'

Erik nodded. 'Yes. He was in the kitchen for a glass of water.'

'That's not unusual.'

'Why did he tell the police he was in the potting shed at the time of the murder?' Erik looked at the blank expression on Gottfried's face, then he added, 'Why did he give a false alibi unless he had something to hide?'

Gottfried shrugged, 'I don't understand. Peiter has looked after our gardens for a very long time. Are you suggesting he had something to do with Nadine's murder?'

'Can you think of any reason why he would want to harm her?'

'No! Of course not. The whole idea is preposterous.'

Erik threw up his hands. 'Yet he gave a false alibi.' The detective paused, then said. 'I am going to question him now. Do you want to be present?'

Gottfried shook his head.

Erik looked at the Gottfried. 'I can only help you with this case if you are completely honest with me.'

'What do you mean? Of course, I'm honest about what happened.'

'Who was your father?'

Gottfried stared at Erik, shocked but trying not to show it. 'Ferdinand Otto von Bismarck, of course. Why?'

'So, you are a direct descendant of Otto von Bismarck?'

'Of course. Why wouldn't it be so?'

Erik wondered who was lying. He changed the subject. 'The police took you in for questioning because they thought you had killed your ex-wife, so you wouldn't have to pay out a huge divorce settlement. But I don't believe you did it.'

'I would never dream of doing such a terrible thing.'

'There had to be another motive.'

'What motive?' Gottfried asked, with trepidation.

'Perhaps your ex-wife was murdered so she would not expose a family secret.'

'Secret! What secret?' Gottfried replied nervously.

Erik smiled, 'I think you know very well. Do you really want me to spell it out?'

Gottfried stared at Erik, no words forthcoming.

'For me to spell it out puts both of us in a very vulnerable position. Yet the outcome hinges on this family secret. What am I to do? I am not a gambling man. But if I were, I could only solve this murder if I'm playing with a full deck of cards.'

Gottfried nodded, 'We are on dangerous ground. I think it best if we take this case no further.'

Erik turned to leave. 'I can let it go, Gottfried. Can you?'

As Gustav escorted Erik out, the detective turned to him. 'Thank you, Gustav.'

'You're welcome, Herr Hueller,' he replied casually.

Erik said, 'No, I really mean it. What you told me has helped me tread cautiously.'

'That is why I told you.'

## **Chapter 44**

I was in an awkward situation. Nothing unusual about that but now I was dealing with unknown forces. I had to get in touch with Hubert Meisinger. He was my only connection to SCoW. However, Olivia told me Hubert was after me. One of us had to stand still to let the other one find him. I didn't want him to see me, so I phoned his number and left a message to say we needed to meet. I knew it was a risky move because there was only one of me and God knows how many SCoW minions working for the von Bismarcks.

I felt a bit like the king on the chessboard with no other pieces to rally to its defence. I had a slight advantage in that Olivia had forewarned me that Hubert was after my lost copy of the journal. This at least gave me a little time to store my valuables and files in the boot of my car, in case Hubert's people wanted to redesign my office again. Now all I could do is wait for Hubert's call.

I was working out my strategy to handle Hubert when my phone rang. It was Jen. 'Hi. This is an unexpected call.'

'Declan told me you rang him.'

'Did he tell you, why?'

'Yes. About your lost copy of Silas Pearce's journal.'

'It's OK, Jen. I have it under control.'

'Now, that does worry me.' She paused, then said, 'Can you get another copy off your girlfriend?'

I smiled. 'That sounds much too formal for the life I lead. But to answer your question, Olivia's gone back to the land down under.' Before Jen had a chance to respond, my phone switched to call waiting. 'Look, I have to take another call.'

Then I heard Hubert's voice. 'I wish to speak to Mr Doyle.'

'Speaking. Is that Hubert Meisinger?'

'Ja. I believe you have something for me.'

I had to play him along. 'And what would that be?'

'I believe you have a copy of the Pearce Diary.'

'I don't know what you are talking about.' It was a weak bluff, but the only move I had.

'I think we need to discuss this further.'

'I'm free tomorrow morning around 10 if that's good for you.'

Hubert, seething, kept his temper under control. 'Now, at your place is good for me.'

'Well, yes, OK, then. I don't have any other appointments this late at night.'

Hubert said, 'How are your teeth, Mr Doyle?'

His question sounded ominous. 'Fine, thank you.' I said nervously.

'I'm bringing my dentist with me. He will give you a free check-up.'

I came over in a cold sweat. Mustering all the bravado I could, I said, 'It will be a wasted journey. I don't have what you want.'

The phone went dead. I was desperate. I rang the only person who could possibly help. 'Jen, I'm in big trouble and need refuge.'

'Oh, Ozzie, what the hell have you done now?'

'SCoW is after me to rearrange my teeth. I need sanctuary.'

'Ozzie, you're not making a lot of sense. What's happening?'

'I don't have time for this chat right now. SCoW heavies will soon be knocking on my door, and then it will be too late. Make sure I'm on the list.'

'Ozzie, you're scaring me. what's going on?'

'I'm coming over right now!'

Erik Hueller felt like he'd dodged a bullet. He had to give up on the case, but at least he was still alive. But he wasn't out of the woods yet.

Gottfried now knew that the detective knew something about the family subterfuge, but he did not know to what extent. He should have warned his siblings, telling them to be on the lookout for anything in the media. Hueller would have to be silenced, of course. Gottfried opened a drawer in his desk and retrieved a folder. It was entitled Coroner's Report. He opened it to a bookmarked page. It read:

Six witnesses gave evidence during a three-day inquest into Ms Reichschler's death.

Pathologist Martin Hoffmann told the inquest the pattern of extensive bruising around her neck did not fit with the story offered by her husband, that she had died due to a weightlifting accident. The bruising pattern around the victim's neck suggested somebody had crushed her larynx by forcing her neck up against the bar. Her death was not caused by barbell entrapment. The pattern fitted manual neck compression. Strangulation.

Gottfried sat back and rubbed his eyes and got up. He picked up his phone and pressed his brother's contact.

Leopold, seeing his brother's name, turned to Louis Bolofski, who he was meeting privately at the Chelsea apartment. 'Sorry, but I have to take this.'

'Gottfried, it's good to hear from you,' Leopold said.

'We need to meet.'

'Well, I'm in London, so where do you suggest?'

'I'll fly over there today.'

'Don't rush. I'm busy today. Let's say tomorrow at the Theatre at noon.'

'I can do that.'

'Why are you in such a rush to see me?'

'I'll tell you tomorrow.'

Leopold turned back to Louis.

'He did leave a will, then?'

Bolofski pushed the document over to Leopold. He was not only surprised Alexander had left a will, which had only just come to light, but Leopold was also totally amazed that his deceased brother had left everything to a Jesuit Mission in Africa. His estate was to be managed by a Friar Ibinsen.

'Who is this power of Attorney, Friar Ibinsen?'

'A Jesuit teacher, and we suspect, Alexander's last lover.'

'How do we deal with this?'

Bolofski said, 'What do you mean? This will is a legal document.'

Leopold got up and walked over to a window overlooking Sloane Square. Without turning, he said. 'I don't care how you do it but fix this. That gold-digging queer is not going to get one penny.'

Bolofski said, 'There was the extraordinary BBC interview in which your brother spilt the beans.'

'Yes, he must have been having a breakdown. That's when the family realised he had mental health problems, and we doubted his sanity.'

Louis said, 'Because his rave on the Beeb happened before he made out his will, gives us a chance to contest the will on incompetence grounds. But tell me was he seeing a psychiatrist?'

'I've no idea. But Alex was always high on some designer drug concoction.'

'Unfortunately, only a professional assessment will hold any sway in court. But first, we need to speak with this Friar Ibinsen. As far as I know, homosexuality is still considered a scandal in Jesuit circles.'

Leopold said, 'Do we have any proof that this priest was having a sexual affair with Alex?'

'Not yet. But I'm working on it.'

'Well, get onto it quickly.'

'Probate cases can take a long time. Besides, we will be asked at the reading of the will if there are any challenges. That's in a week from now. We'll gather what dirt we can in the meantime.'



Leopold shook Louis' hand. Let me know of any developments, and only me, mind.'

## Chapter 45

I rifled through my files trying to find my copy of the Pearce journal but couldn't find it anywhere. I needed the journal to carry out my research for the upcoming Quantime trip. Without it, I'm stuffed. Then I remembered Declan had a copy. I had him in my contacts, and I phoned him using What's App, a free VOIP server. I heard some piped music and waited for a human voice.

Declan saw Ozzie's name come up on his phone. 'Oz, this is a surprise.'

'Yeah, for me too.'

So, how can I help you?'

'I need your copy of the Pearce diary.'

'What's wrong with yours?'

'I can't find it.'

'Fuck man!'

'Precisely. So can you make a copy and send it to me?'

'If I can remember where I put my copy.'

That was something I did not want to hear. 'Are you saying you don't know where it is?'

'Why can't you get a copy from Olivia's diary?'

'Because she's sold the fucking thing to SCoW.'

'Jesus!'

'Yeah. Precisely. And we need that diary for the next phase of the Pike project.'

There was a call waiting buzz from Olivia. Oz terminated the call to Declan and pressed the green phone icon. 'Oz, I desperately need you.'

Being a man, my dirty mind went to one thing. Although my rational brain said, she needed me for something more serious. With the faint hope that my dirty mind was right, I said, 'I'll come right over.'

'Don't come to my place. I'll meet you at the lake in Whalebone Park.'

'Where the hell is that? I muttered, typing the name in the search line of my phone's GPS. It was not far from where Olivia lived. So why not meet at her place? I wondered.

So I drove to Chipping Barnet and met up with her at Whalebone Park, - a local historical landmark with a Whale jawbone serving as the entrance to a parcel of meadows, fields and a disused farm. There was another residence with mature trees along the perimeter and the driveway. We were to meet at the lake near Well House lane, which marked the site of the former physic well, a chalybeate spring popular in the 17th century. Samuel Pepys was among its pilgrims, returning for second helpings despite being feverish after drinking five glasses on his initial visit.

While I waited for Olivia, I boogled Barnet and discovered it to its name from the Old English bænet – 'the burning' – referring to the clearance of the land by fire. Chipping or chepe was the Old English term for a marketplace. King John granted the abbey of St Albans a formal market charter in 1199 although unofficial trading had already been carried on there for the previous hundred

years. The town developed around this weekly trade, by providing services to travellers at the junction of the Great North Road and the St Albans Road.

Olivia duly arrived. She looked worried about something. 'What's troubling you?' I asked out of genuine concern.

'Let's sit down,' She said, positioning herself on a bench facing the lake.

'You haven't sold the diary yet -have you?'

Olivia's silent stare said it all.

'Now I'm really fucked.' I muttered.

'I had to do it, Oz. I sold it to SCoW.'

Dumbstruck I eye-balled her. After I found my voice, I said, 'You're fucking kidding me.'

No, I have to go to Australia, and I needed the money. But I had to see you, to warn you first.'

'Warn me about what?'

'Hubert asked me if anyone had a copy.'

'And you said no, of course,'

'I find it difficult to tell lies,' Olivia replied, woefully.

'So you said, Oh, my good friend Ozzie has a copy.'

Olivia began to cry. She said, 'I need a fresh start in Australia, Oz, I couldn't begin my new life with a lie.'

'So it doesn't matter about my old life, once good old Hubert comes knocking.'

Then I had one of those crazy moments when I burst out laughing. In retrospect, it was the contradiction. 'I said, between bouts of laughter, 'This is fucking priceless because I don't have a copy of the diary. So you could have said no and still be telling the truth. Of course, Hubert's not going to believe me and will probably knock seven shades of shit out of me.'

Olivia stared at Oz, 'What's happened to your copy?'

'If I knew that I'd have the fucking thing, wouldn't I?'

'Well, Hubert has the diary now. So you will have to talk to him about it.'

'Oh yeah, I can see that working well.'

'Why is it so important to you?'

'I can't tell you that.'

Olivia fixed Ozzie in her gaze. 'Forget about SCoW. They are not friendly people to deal with.'

I changed the subject. 'Why do you suddenly have to pop off to Australia?'

'It's personal. Family business.'

'What will they think about you selling the Pearce diary?'

'I had to sell it to raise the money.'

I looked at her, incredulous. But you live in a luxury apartment with a late model Merc in the driveway. So, why do you need to sell a rare and precious family heirloom to raise the airfare.'

She looked at Ozzie. For a detective you're not very smart, are you?

'What do you mean?

It's all a front. I don't have any money.

Then it hit me. 'You know more about SCoW than you're letting on.'

'They paid for the apartment and leased the car. I've been helping them at many auctions, and I have to look at the successful businesswoman, to gain the bidders' confidence.'

I was putting the pieces together.' So you bid on behalf of clients on items in auctions then you pull out after jacking up the price. Later Weldon's little friends relieved the buyer of their prize. Weldon then sells it on at a profit.'

'Weldon is just a small fish. You don't want to meet those higher up the ladder.'

She was probably right about that. But I had the Quantime in my corner. Although I could not tell her that. 'I don't think it will take more than one guess as to the identity of your prospective buyer.'

"Just drop it, Ozzie, please. You're way out of your league.

I knew she was right. Why should I worry about her selling the diary to the bad guys? Olivia's not my client. I'm not even being paid to stick my neck out. So I should take Olivia's advice and walk away while I still could. But without a copy, my plan to get into the secret Swiss meeting was dead in the water.

I had to ask. 'Did you know Weldon was stealing the items after they were bought?

'No, of course not.'

'So this SCoW kept paying you commissions to not put in the winning bid?'

'If you put it that way - yes.'

'And you didn't think it odd.'

I knew something shonky was going on, but my part was perfectly legal so I didn't question it.'

I figured SCoW had the role of night club bouncer stopping the unwashed from from gaining access to the Palladium Rite of Freemasonry. As much as I wanted to track the bad guys to their lair, there was not much I could do until I'd been on the Project Pike Q adventure. So I'd be better-occupied working out how to get hold of the diary. First, I had to figure out where Hubert had it stashed.

Just when I thought the thing couldn't get any more complicated, I received a call from Dr Bennet. He'd got the Pike letter back from the police and discovered it was fake and demanded an explanation. SHIT!

*Tragic party host von Bismarck found dead in London flat ....  
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/04/germany.world>*

## **Chapter 46**

Time was running out for me. Hubert and his dentist could arrive at any time. I had to get away somewhere safe. But where? The only safe harbour that sprang to mind was Olivia's. It was risky,

as it was owned by SCoW. But, now that Olivia had gone it would be empty, and Hubert would have no reason to go there. I grabbed my laptop and connection accessories, donned my fleece-lined coat got in my car and drove away into the night. There wasn't much traffic around, so it was easy to see the vehicle that kept two places back. It had been following me since I turned onto the North Circular Road.

I couldn't make out the model or colour of the vehicle tailing me, but I had to find a way to lose it before I got to Olivia's. I stopped for fuel at Brent Cross. As I pushed the bowser nozzle into my petrol tank, I noted the mystery car had parked across the road. Now, I knew it was them, and a cold chill crept up my spine. They were playing cat and mouse with me.

Fuelled up, I entered the Brent Cross interchange and took the first exit onto the A41 heading east.

There was no opportunity to lose my tail until I took the exit ramp on to Western Avenue. I didn't know the area very well, and that made things even more tricky. In desperation, I turned left.

Turned right.

Turned left again.

'Fuck!' They were still in my rear-view mirror.

I jumped a red light and spun a right onto Steyne Road and continued onward to Horn Lane. Much to my surprise, they were no longer in my rear-view mirror. I pulled over to the kerb, my heart beating rapidly. How the fuck had I managed to lose them? Or had I? Were they still playing their game? I waited for a good ten minutes, and they didn't show. Thanking my lucky stars, the angels or a jolly leprechaun, or whoever the fuck had got me out of my dental appointment, I phoned Jen. She seemed to take ages to answer before I heard her sweet voice.

'Hi Jen. I'm not coming over after all.'

'Ozzie, are you OK?'

'At the moment, yes. But you know those dreams where a dentist is chasing you?'

Jennifer, puzzled, said, 'No.'

'Well, they're not nice. The thing is I've just been chased by a real one.'

'A real what? Oz, you're not making a whole lot of sense.'

'Olivia has gone back to Australia. She sold the diary to SCoW, and now they're after me for the copy, which I no longer have.'

Jennifer said, 'Slow down Oz, and stay off the booze.'

'I'm not fucking drunk, Jen. I'm fucking scared!'

'Get some sleep. We'll talk tomorrow.'

I found it difficult to sleep. I kept dreaming about a mad dentist chasing me down the street. I awoke with a start when his pliers invaded my mouth. I lay there sweating, trying to figure out where I was. My brain took a few moments to figure out I was in Olivia's bed, sans the raven-haired beauty. The place looked as it did when she lived there. Everything was in place except the personal items she'd taken with her. I took a shower and brewed some coffee and figured out my next move.

Well, that was obvious, really. I had to find a way to get into the Palladium meeting hall. But first I had to go home.

I wasn't prepared for the sight that awaited me. Knowing of SCoW's methods of persuasion, I should have seen it coming. Now I knew why Hubert had ended the chase through London. He and his people had been having fun redesigning my work and living space again. My office was a shambles, with overturned chairs and desk, ransacked filing cabinet and a trashed cupboard that served as a kind of pantry. My living and sleeping quarters had fared no better. And my bottle of JW lay in fragments on the floor. But I still had all my teeth, and that was a big plus.

As I waded through the wreckage of my flat something caught my eye. There was the corner of something that looked familiar sticking out from under a canvas painting of Blarney Castle, which had been knocked off the wall and had fallen painting side down on my office floor. I couldn't believe it. Then I remembered I'd tucked the diary into the back of the painting to keep it safe. It was ironic. The thugs who turned over my place had somehow missed the very thing they were hunting for, and I had found my copy of the Pearce Diary. I looked heavenward and thanked the gods for my good fortune.

## Chapter 47

Erik Hueller, no longer employed by Gottfried von Bismarck, couldn't put the case down despite the fact nobody was paying him to continue the investigation. Looking up the press report, he noted there were three significant incidents concerning Alexander von Bismarck and his Chelsea apartment.

The first incident took place at Cambridge University in 1986 when the daughter of a Conservative minister overdosed in Alexander's bed. The second was last year when a man plunged 60ft to the ground from the roof terrace of the 46-year-old count's luxury apartment in Chelsea, west London. The third tragedy struck Alexander, whose body was discovered by paramedics at his flat. The great-great-grandson of the Iron Chancellor, who united 19th century Germany, had apparently died of one too many designer drug cocktails.

But that was not the reason Erik could not let the case go. The report left the private detective with two questions. How did Alexander become the president of SCoW when he was such a liability? And was Alexander von Bismarck really the great-great-grandson of Otto von Bismarck? It seemed to Erik that the von Bismarcks were decoys to stop the world learning about the Palladium Rite and its nefarious plan for humanity. It was as though the scandals that beset the von Bismarcks were of little consequence to the Palladium Rite and, may even have been welcomed. After all, there is nothing like the scandals of a noble family to get the media juices flowing.

Erik's speculation raised the third question. If Leopold and his siblings were not the Iron Duke's great-great-grandchildren, who was? Erik's sharply honed instinct warned him to leave it alone. Whatever reason the Bismarck's - the genuine ones - had for using Alexander and his ilk as a distraction, it must have been essential for them to have gone to all the trouble. But, despite heeding the warning message of the giant billboard in his mind that screamed "DON'T GO THERE!" Erik found it far too tantalising to let it go. He just had to see for himself, and Erik took his first tentative steps on his journey of no return. Erik Hueller used the company's Hamburg branch as his centre of operations. As a senior partner in A1 Detektiv Agency, nobody in the sub-branch was going to question him about the case he was working on. He rearranged some photos on his corkboard and pinned a newspaper snippet under Alexander's photo. It read:

*The life of the flamboyant count - full name Alexander Leopold Graf von Bismarck-Schonhausen - was marked by the highest highs and the lowest lows, often one directly following the other. At Oxford, he was notorious for wild parties at which severed pigs' heads were served and guests toasted each other in blood, while he played host dressed in fishnet stockings or lederhosen. In 1986, at a party in the student count's rooms at Christ Church College to celebrate the end of exams, Angela Quinton, daughter of the millionaire conservative minister Paul Quinton, was found dead in Alexander's bed. She had died due to respiratory failure caused by an overdose of heroin*

*and drink. Alexander von Bismarck had not seen Angela Quinton "chasing the dragon" (heating heroin on silver foil and inhaling the fumes). But he was implicated in his girlfriend's death for providing the drugs.*

Then Erik remembered something Gottfried said. He had just hired A1 Detektiv, and Gottfried was talking about the fall-out from Alexander's BBC interview when he mentioned that there are still people who would not speak to his parents because of it. He was considered a bad son who had disgraced the name of Bismarck. Who were Alexander's parents, and where were they? Alexander was in his late 40s when he died. That would put his parents in their 70s or 80s. Erik mentally kicked himself for not asking about his parents at the time. But it was too late to go back down that road. Erik Googled the name, Bismarck.

A Bismarck website offered up some basics:

*Archibald Otto von Bismarck, a German landowner and lawyer, was succeeded by his eldest son, Alexander von Bismarck following letters patent of 1871. Alexander, addicted to class 'A' drugs and alcohol went into rehab. After detoxing, he heard his father had taken a back seat in SCoW for health reasons, and he had to pick up the reins. Family responsibility never suited him, and Alexander spent time in Germany working as an actor. Then he got a job helping firms in the former GDR on the road to privatisation after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He settled in Chelsea, London, several years ago.*

It seemed to Erik that the Bismarck family was analogous to a train diverted onto a sideline, while still on the mainline. At some point in history, the train parted company with itself. If he could find out when it would probably reveal the why. An educated guess suggested the split took place during the reign of Otto von Bismarck and had something to do with his role in the Palladium Rite. Otto loved food and drink and was a famed raconteur at parties. It seemed that Hedonism ran in the von Bismarck family. Erik continued reading the article:

Otto was made the Prime Minister of Prussia in 1862 and was credited with engineering modern Germany by defeating France in 1870-71. He was also credited with uniting the various German states into a mighty empire.

This research was all very well, but it wasn't getting Erik any further with his investigation. He needed to talk with Gustav, but he didn't know the old retainer's surname or his phone number. Erik thought about phoning the castle, but there was no telling who would answer the phone - probably one of the servants. Well, it was worth a try.

Gottfried picked up the receiver, 'Who's speaking?'

Erik had to make a quick decision. 'I would like to speak to Gustav.'

'Who shall I say is calling?'

It was truth or lie time and no turning back. Erik went for facts. 'Erik Hueller. Is Gustav there?'

'Why do you wish to speak with my butler, Herr Hueller?' Gottfried said, suspicious of the private detective's motives.

'It's of a personal nature.'

Gottfried chuckled derisively. 'You may as well tell me because Gustav certainly will. He has been a trusted servant for 50 years. He tells me everything.'

Erik didn't doubt Gottfried for one minute. Maybe it would be better to find another source and steer clear of the Bismarcks altogether.'

Gottfried knew Erik Hueller had talked to Gustav, but he didn't know what it was about. Why would the detective want to speak with his butler?' Whatever Gustav had told Hueller, the snoop wanted to know more. And that made him a nuisance that had to be dealt with.

For Gottfried, it was time to address the elephant hiding in the room. Facing Leopold, he said, 'Did you have a hand in my wife's murder?' There, it was out in the open.

Leopold, not expecting such directness from his brother, answered, "Why would I do a thing like that?'

'Not you personally. Somebody, you got to kill Nadine for you?'

Leopold leant across the desk that separated them. 'My question still remains.'

Gottfried stared at his brother. 'You didn't trust her. You think she knew something that could have further embarrassed our family if that were at all possible.' Gottfried paused, then said, 'I understand why you would have done it, brother. I'm not after revenge. I just want to know the truth.'

'She had many enemies.'

'She didn't deserve to die,' Gottfried stated.

'And you think I had something to do with it?' Leopold retorted.

Gottfried stared at his brother. 'I'm not accusing you I'm asking you.'

'It amounts to the same thing,' Leopold replied sharply, without giving an answer.

Seeing as he was getting nowhere, Gottfried changed tack. 'I fired the private detective I hired to look into Nadine's case.'

'I didn't know you had hired anybody, Gottfried.'

'Do you want to know why I fired him?'

Leopold shrugged, 'Laziness, uselessness, I don't know.'

'He's found out something about our family's past.'

'What do you mean?' Leopold snapped.

'Oh, I think you know what I'm talking about. And we certainly don't want anyone else talking about it.'

## Part Three

### Charleston, South Carolina

## Chapter 48

It was time, or to be more precise, Quantime. The big day had arrived, and I was ready. Jennifer and I sat in her control centre, waiting for Declan to arrive. Jen received a call that Murphy was on his way, as was Dr Barnabas, the head Quantum scientist from Porter Down.

While we waited for Murphy and his scientist to arrive, Jennifer looked at me. 'What do you plan to do once the Q reaches its destination?'

'We get into the meeting at Walder's place.'

'And they just let you in, like a long-lost brother?'

'Don't worry, Jen, I do have a plan.'

'And what plan is that?'

I winked, 'We know the outcome of the two world wars Pike predicted - they don't. That will be enough to get my foot in the door.'

Jennifer's brow furrowed. 'And what if they think you're a spy who has seen the letter?'

'That's not likely to happen, Jen. Pike wrote the letter and showed it to Mazzini. And Mazzini presented it to those present at the meeting in Walder's home.' I paused, then said, 'Pike had a huge ego. He's not going to question the results of the wars he predicted with such startling accuracy, is he?'

'And what if he asks you about the outcome of his third prediction?'

Just then there was a knock on her door and Murphy entered with Dr Barnabas in tow.

Murphy looked around the room. 'Where's the Yank?'

Jennifer ignored his derogatory reference. 'He just phoned to say he's about twenty minutes away.'

Murphy said, 'Right, Professor Smethurst, let us know when he arrives.' He and the scientist left and closed her door behind them.'

Jen turned to me. 'OK. Now you can tell me how you are going to explain the outcome of the third prediction.'

I stared at Jennifer. 'That hasn't happened yet.'

'But they don't know that.'

Ozzie, I grinned, 'Precisely, my love. But that's a biggie. Only for Pike's ears. And he'll love that.'

Jennifer frowned, 'You must not tell him anything he has not predicted. For to do so could change history.'

'But we have to change history if we are to gain any useful hints about surviving his Armageddon. If we can't somehow divert his plan for a third world war, what the hell am I doing at the meeting?'

Jennifer looked Ozzie me in the eye. 'You know the rules. You must not make any changes to history.'

'But I'm not making any changes to the past, I just tinkering with the future.'

Jen frowned heavily. 'I'm sorry, but I cannot play any part in this project if you can't guarantee that you'll leave everything as you found it.'

This is an argument we had debated on many occasions. Jennifer's stand was any changes we made to history could upset the space-time continuum and affect events to come. My smart-arse argument was her theory was all very well for the Wellsian time machine. Still, with a quantum exchange, we just inhabit a reality that is only one of the infinite possibilities. But there was no time for us to debate this excellent point, so I said, 'OK, Jen. I'll find a way to change things without changing them. Now, how's that for a quantum concept?'

Much to my surprise, Jennifer seemed happy with my answer. Any further discussion got shelved, as Declan walked into the office.

Seeing the severe expressions on Jen's and my faces, he joked, 'Has someone died and is this their wake?'



Jen got up and gave Declan a big hug.

'Now the gang is all here We can get on with the job,' I said, brightening.

'I'll just contact Murphy,' Jen said.

'Do we have to invite the party pooper to our party?' I said, half-joking.

Jen straightened her face. 'I'm afraid so, boys.'

'What a shame. It'll be so much more fun without Murphy here putting the dampener on things.'

But Murphy and Barnabas turned up again.

Jennifer turned to her Quantanauts. 'You can enter the Q, now.'

Murphy interrupted, 'Before they do that I have to know where they are going.'

Jennifer stared at the administrator. 'I thought we'd been through all that. This trip comes under commercial in confidence. Our client, Boogle, wants to keep this project under wraps. Especially before they are ready to stun the world with their revelations.'

Murphy said, 'I accept that, but our Government does not. We have to know where the Quantime device is at all times.'

Jennifer responded, 'That's easy. It stays right here.'

Murphy, hard to rattle, said, 'And where is this version taking Doyle and Merrick?'

Declan, annoyed at the delay, snapped, Jen, for God's sake tell the Government stoolie and get this show on the road.'

'Jennifer sighed heavily. 'They are going to Switzerland.'

'When?' Murphy pressed.

'1870.'

'For what reason?'

Jennifer glared at Murphy and Barnabas. 'To attend a special meeting. And that's all I'm saying.'

Murphy flashed a smug smile. 'This is to do with Albert Pike - right?'

I said, 'And what makes you think that?'

'You'd be surprised at what we know.'

Jen turned to Barnabas, 'You've been hacking into my computer!'

We had to get out of this fucking impasse. I said, 'Well, Mr smart arse Murphy you've got it all wrong. Every quote and prophecy attributed to Pike that has helped create his dark legend is just plain made-up.'

Barnabas turned to Jennifer. 'But it's all plain as day on your computer.'

Jen, picking up on my lead, answered, 'Of course it is. But that's not the real story.'

Declan came in with the big guns. 'Mr Murphy, if you delay us any longer you will be in breach of our contract. And you know what that means.'

Murphy did, and he was unsure of where he stood legally. Turning to Jennifer, he said, 'OK, you can go.'

## Chapter 49

In no time at all Declan and I find ourselves at our destination. I looked at him. 'Well, we're here so let's go and explore.' I got up and stepped into a new reality. The Q disappeared right behind me. I felt a bit like a tiny bird just kicked out of the nest. Then I saw Declan magically appear at my side.

Declan stood stock still surprise showing on his face. Instead of seeing snow-capped mountains, he saw miles of flat, sandy scrub. Feeling the hot sun on his face, he stared at Oz. 'I'm guessing we're not in Switzerland.'

I grinned, 'That was just a ruse to keep Murphy chasing his tail.'

'Where the hell are we?'

'Just outside Charleston, the home of Universal Freemasonry.'

'Why Charleston?'

As we walked, I explained what little I knew. 'Because Pike set up his New and Reformed Palladian Rite headquarters in Charleston, that's where we will find him.'

'What makes you think he will want to see us?'

I turned to Declan. 'Because we know something he does not.'

'Which is?'

I wasn't ready to tell him yet. Mainly because I wasn't sure, it would work. 'I'll give you a clue. It's something he wouldn't be able to begin to comprehend.'

The journey was uncomfortable, the hot, humid weather and the heavy suits we wore soon had us sweating buckets.

As we trudged onward towards the township, I was left with my thoughts about Pike. I had to be very careful about what I thought he might or might not know. I know that Pike headed up his new Rite in the west while Mazzini managed it in the east. I had read through his mighty tome *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*. Well, I hadn't actually read it from cover to cover, but I'd picked up a few thoughts about Pike's thinking. There is one bit in which he explained that the "blind force" of the people is a force that must be economised, and also managed. It must be regulated by the intellect. Pike believed that all institutions, religion, despotisms and prejudices had to be knocked down, the force must have a brain and a law. The laws of the Illuminati. Then its deeds of daring produce permanence resulting in real progress.

Declan, breaking into my meditation, demonstrated his superior knowledge of the area. He said 'Charleston's story started in the year 1670, and it has, over the past century, grown by leaps and bounds. Charleston prides itself on being South Carolina's oldest city. And it has seen all kinds of trials, including loud gunshots and cannon fire during the Civil War.'

I was not particularly interested in Declan's history trivia. I acknowledged him briefly. 'How does that help us in the matter of our mission?'

'I just want to get out of these uncomfortable clothes,' Declan complained.

I knew what he meant. It was a hot day and, although we were suitably attired for place and time we were overdressed for a lengthy walk in the hot sun. To make things even more challenging, we were hampered by the leather valise we each carried.

'Where does the secret meeting take place?' Declan asked.

'Never mind about that. First, we have to establish ourselves.'

'And do you have a plan for that, Oswald?'

Did I have a plan? Now that was a good question. To some extent, I was flying by the seat of my pants. But I did have one move that could set the whole thing in motion. 'First, we need to find Phileas Walder.'

I saw Declan's surprised expression. 'But first, we have to get to Charleston.'

Declan, shielding his eyes from the sun by pulling down his broad-brimmed felt hat, responded, 'I wish the Q would get us closer to our destination.'

I nodded in agreement. 'I'll talk to Jennifer when we get back, but for now, we have to find the whereabouts of Phileas Walder.'

'Is he in Charleston?'

'According to history - yes.'

'And does your intel indicate where he might be?'

I did not reply as I had no clue.

After a five-mile walk with the sun beating down on us, we reached the outskirts of Charleston. Exhausted, we sat down on our valises. A kindly buggy driver came to our rescue and gave us a lift into town. He even went out of his way to deposit us outside the Andrew Pinkney Inn, which our good Samaritan proudly said, was built in 1840, making it the oldest hotel in South Carolina.

We booked into the Andrew Pinkney Inn, which, the proprietor enthusiastically informed us commenced as a business in 1840. He had a waitress show us to our rooms, and we collapsed on our beds, exhausted. We needed to be well-rested before heading out to find Phileas Walder.

I knew the main centres of operation for the Supreme or Palladian Rite were located in Charleston, Rome, and Berlin. This town boasted many Masonic lodges, the original one being the Solomon's Lodge, the eldest in South Carolina. This seemed to me to be the best place to track down our master mason.

We approached the grand red brick building and walked past a fountain with a concrete lion water feature and entered the portals of Solomon's Lodge of the Ancient Order of Freemasons and walked through the arched doorway into the great hall. I got a sense of quiet reverence as I took in the grandeur of the place. The lodge seemed to be empty, but as the door was open, I figured there had to be someone around. I was right.

An elegantly attired man of middle years, wearing spectacles approached the visitors. 'Can I help you, gentlemen?'

The polite gentleman really meant was, what right do you people have to enter this sacred place?

I smiled and answered, 'We are trying to locate Phileas Walder. Do you know where we might find him?'

The curator looked at us. 'What is your business with Mr Walder?'

Declan said, 'Our business is of a personal nature. My friend needs to speak with him privately.'

The curator said, 'It's not my job to furnish strangers with our brethren's details. Tell me what you want with him, and I will determine how to deal with your request.'

Declan felt as though he was banging his head against a wall. 'My friend is a spiritual seer. God has bestowed upon him a special gift. An amazing skill that helps him guide others.'

The curator looked suspiciously at the pair.

'What's the message?'

'He can only receive great wisdom from God when the time is right to dispense it.'

The curator shook his head. 'It sounds very suspect to me.'

I had to come to the rescue. 'Sir, I appreciate your concern for the privacy of your membership and your courageous stand in taking responsibility for stopping from me conveying my message from spirit. I do hope that Mr Walder takes the same view.'

The curator, unsure of his ground looked at us. 'Such matters of the spirit are beyond me. I don't suppose it will do any harm to tell you he is staying at the Magnolia Plantation.'

Like all other farming properties owned by whites, Magnolia House was burnt down by Union troops at the end of the Civil War. It had now been reconstructed and restored, based on the original design. I learned that the oldest section was built near Summerville, before the Revolutionary War. It was transported down the Ashley River after the Civil War and added to the house during its rebuilding.

Magnolia Plantation, I discovered, was situated on Ashley River Road just north of Charleston. The sun was going down as we entered the plantation, which had drastically shrunk in size to around 25 acres. Much of the land had been sold off to fund the rebuilding program. As we made our way to the main building, I saw black people working in the fields. I turned to Declan, 'Do they still use slaves?'

'Declan looked at me. 'What do you mean?'

'I thought the 13th Amendment prohibited slavery.'

Declan answered me, 'Although the Union army's victory over the south brought about the emancipation of slaves once the 13th Amendment was written into the Constitution, there was a loophole left in the amendment.'

'What loophole?'

Declan explained to me, 'Convicted criminals can be used for unpaid servitude toiling in the fields. Most of these tend to be former slaves.'

I stopped Declan and looked him in the eye. 'So, the black slaves didn't gain anything from the 13th Amendment.'

Declan sighed, 'Some of the southern states got their free labour through 'Black Codes.'

'Black Codes! What do you mean?'

'Restrictive laws designed to limit the freedom of African Americans and ensure their availability as a cheap labour force after slavery was officially abolished after the Civil War'

So, slavery continued legally under another name.'

Declan nodded, 'Pretty much so.'

My attention was drawn to activity further down the track.

It was still light enough to see the slave workers coming back from their long, torturous day in the cotton fields. The exhausted working gangs trudged wearily to their crude settlement, a collection of basic looking huts away from the main buildings.

Before we reached the portico of the grand Magnolia home, we were confronted by a moustachioed man wearing high leather boots tucked into serge pants. He cradled a rifle, a Remington repeater if I'm not mistaken. We stopped a few feet from the man, whom we took to be a plantation hand, probably an overseer.

'Who are you, and what's your business here?' the man growled.

I answered, 'We are here to see Mr Phileas Walder.'

'Who are you, and what's your reason for seeing him?' he pressed.

'It was time to put this man in his place. I wore my best-affronted expression. 'My man, is this the outrageous way you treat all your master's guests?' I could almost see the man's brain ticking over he was probably thinking something like. If these people do have a genuine appointment with Phileas Walder, I need to tread carefully or risk losing my job.

The overseer called a young offender over. The young man ran, barefoot over to his boss and silently awaited instructions. The boss snapped, 'Take these people to the big house and get Isaac to look after them.' The young slave nodded his eyes downcast. 'Yes, Massa boss.' He then walked off with us in tow.

As we walked, Declan said to me, 'That was impressive, Oswald.'

I guessed he referred to the way I handled the overseer. I said, 'The overseer is just a servant of a higher order. Once I put him in his place, he just defaulted to taking orders.'

As we neared the main house, I got my first good look at the palatial building. Architecturally it was a mixture of classic colonial style with a bit of American Gothic influence thrown in for good measure. A long full set of steps led up to the main entrance, which, oddly, was on the second level. We mounted the steps behind our guide and waited at the front door, while the young black man spoke to the maid who opened it. I heard him say, 'Bossman Wilkie said for him to get Isaac. Shortly after, a smartly dressed black man of middle years came to the door. After a brief exchange between them, Isaac turned his attention on us.

Isaac said, 'How can I help you, gentlemen?'

Declan said, 'We wish to speak with Mr Walder.'

The man who could have been the butler, smiled, 'Stay here, and I'll see if I can locate him.' Then as an aside, he said, 'Who shall I say is calling.'

As we had never met Phileas Walder, I said, 'Doyle and Merrick,' in such a way to make him think I had every right to be there.

Isaac returned, with another man, whom I took to be Phileas Walder. Walder did not look pleased, but that wasn't my problem.

Walder dismissed Isaac and faced the visitors. 'Who are you, and what do you want?' He snapped brusquely.

I said, 'May we enter and talk in private?'

'First, tell me what this is about.'

Declan took over. 'It's about your colleague, Albert Pike.'

Walder's expression instantly changed from anger to shock. 'What is your business with him?'

I said, 'I have a message for him.'

'Then give it to me, and I will see that he gets it.'

'It's not that sort of message,' I said. 'The message I have for Mr Pike comes from the realm of spirits. I believe he understands such things.'

Walder stood there, gawking. He also understood such things. But he would not be taken in by a pair of charlatans. 'Do you take me for a fool? Begone from here before I have the dogs set on you.'

It was not going well. In all likelihood, this would be our only chance to speak with Pike, before the meeting. I could not let Walder stand in my way. I looked him in the eye. 'Mr Walder, you may well do that but having us torn from limb to limb will not help Albert Pike in the upcoming Palladian Rite meeting to determine the way of world politics to come.'

Phileas stood rooted to the spot. Nobody, apart from Pike, Mazzini and he knew about the vital summit soon to take place. He tried bluffing. 'I have no idea what you mean.'

I noted he did not repeat his threat. I said, 'May we continue this conversation inside?'

Walder changed his mind. With what they purportedly knew, rather than evicting them from the plantation, he had to keep them close at hand. Walder was also out of his depth. He showed the pair through to the parlour and told them to wait but did not say what for.

Declan turned to me. 'Ever thought of entering politics. You'd make a good politician.'

I brushed off his comment. I was much more concerned about Pike brushing me off. If I couldn't pull a rabbit out of the proverbial top hat, the mission was dead in the water. I was trying to come up with a plausible story when Walder appeared with Albert Pike. Now, I'd seen Pike as a young man, so I knew he was an imposing figure, but the man who stood before me took my breath away. He was even taller and broader than when I last saw him some 40 years before. Apart from his physical size, which overawed me, his energy seemed to fill the room. He radiated dominance without having to utter one word.

We stood as he entered the parlour.

Pike looked at me. 'Mr Walder tells me you have a message for me.'

I said, 'That is correct, Mr Pike.'

'What is it then?'

Declan said, 'Excuse me, but Mr Doyle has to sit quietly and compose himself for messages from the spirit realm.'

Pike snapped, 'I don't have time for this. Tell me what it is about right now or leave.'

I said, 'It has to be for your ears only.' I knew I was pushing my luck, but I needed to speak to him alone.

Pike stared at me. 'Give me one good reason why I should not have you thrown out, Mr Doyle.'

I ventured, 'Do you remember a time in Little Rock when a seer called on you and had a special message for you?'

Pike had some recollection. 'Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?'

'Do you remember the name of the clairvoyant?'

Pike twigged. 'Yes, I believe his name was also Doyle.' He stared at Doyle. 'But that couldn't possibly have been you. He was around thirty at the time.'

I smiled, 'I'm his son. I have also been blessed, or is that cursed, with seeing things in the future.' I paused, then asked, 'Now Sir, when you like me to convey my message?'

Pike, pensive, stroked his beard and looked me in the eye. 'Very well Mr Doyle Jr.' He turned to Walder, 'Take the other gentleman and leave us.'

With Walder and Declan gone, I sat down and made out I was going into a trance.

After a minute or two, I said, 'I see a document. It seems to be some sort of letter. I'm getting the initials of a name. I can see a G and an M. Does that mean anything to you?'

Pike answered, 'Yes, I have a colleague with those initials.'

I continued, 'I see you writing this letter. It has to do with the future. It's a kind of prophecy.'

Pike said, 'It's quite extraordinary, for I have drafted such a letter but I'm unsure as to who the recipient should be.'

On a roll, I said, 'I cannot advise you. But perhaps the G and the M are a clue in this.'

Pike said, 'I think you could be right, Mr Doyle. What an extraordinary gift you have.' He continued, 'Can you tell me more about the letter?'

Now, I had to be careful. I couldn't be too specific. I said, 'The letter will cause quite a stir, especially as it focuses on major conflicts, that have not yet occurred, between nations.'

Pike said, 'Can you tell me if my prophecy comes true?'

I went into another bogus trance. 'The first two major conflicts will go as planned. But there is something not quite right about the third one.'

Pike stared at me. 'What do you mean, Mr Doyle?'

I put on my best-pained expression. 'The images in my mind are too horrific for me to dwell upon them. And now I am feeling quite exhausted.'

Yes, of course, Mr Doyle. I will not push you any further.'

I said, 'Where can I contact you if the message becomes clearer to me?'

Pike thought about it. Then he said, 'Solomon's Lodge of the Ancient Order of Freemasons. I use an office there during the day.'

Talk about the luck of the Irish. I didn't know it was going to be that easy.

Pike said, 'Now, Mr Doyle, I have things to attend to. I will get Isaac to organise transportation for you to take you back to town.'

Once the two strangers had left, Pike called in Walder.

Phileas saw an anxious look on Pike's face. 'You look troubled Albert.'

Pike said, 'I don't trust those two. Get two of our people to follow them and report back to you.'

*History - db0nus869y26v.cloudfront.net.*

*[https://db0nus869y26v.cloudfront.net/en/Magnolia\\_Plantation\\_and\\_Gardens\\_\(Charleston,\\_South\\_Carolina\)](https://db0nus869y26v.cloudfront.net/en/Magnolia_Plantation_and_Gardens_(Charleston,_South_Carolina))*

## Chapter 50

'How did it go?' Declan asked me as soon as we had alighted from the cart outside our hotel.

'Better than I expected. Pike's interested in the message, and I can call on him if the spirits furnish me with more detail.'

'What did you tell him about the letter?'

'Nothing much. I merely alluded to it.' Then I said, 'I'm famished. Let's go to a restaurant.'

The Andrew Pinkney Inn offered fair prices and wholesome, simple fare.

As he ate the homemade meatloaf with vegetables, Declan looked up at me. 'What do you mean, you only alluded to the letter? I thought that was what the meeting was all about.'

Between mouthfuls of fried catfish with vegetables, I leant in towards Declan in a conspiratorial manner. 'He's already written a draft, but I helped him decide what to do with it.'

Declan drank some beer. 'Was that wise, Oswald?'

'What do you mean?'

'I think you went a bit far. It might blow up in our faces.'

I didn't think so. 'I think we played it well. Pike is on our hook.'

'That's all very well, but can't you see what you've done?'

'I've done what I set out to do,' I said, puzzled at Declan's concern.

'By advising Pike, you are influencing history.'

'That's a moot point. I only nudged Pike in the direction of what happened.'

'You know rule one of quantum travel for idiots. By advising Pike, you may well have influenced past events in the future.'

'But I didn't change anything, Dec. Don't be a worrywart. Everything is going to turn out just fine.'

Major Webster and a younger man by the name of Martin Deville sat two tables over from the Yankee and the Irishman. Although the north-south conflict was officially over, many rebels took affront at Yankees coming into their town. Webster, apart from being a Major in the Confederate army, was also a Freemason from the Solomon Lodge.

Not only had a Yankee come to Charleston, his friend and he was asking awkward questions. Webster had instructions to follow the men and see what they were up to. Webster waited for the pair to leave the restaurant then followed them discretely to their rooms. Having done that, he met up with young Deville. Satisfied the Yankee and his accomplice had bedded down for the night, he decided to pick up their trail in the morning.

I had a sleepless night. Declan's warning haunted my sleep. It was pretty much impossible to get a stable grip on the quantum phenomena. I had argued with Jennifer on more than one occasion that it didn't matter if I did something that changed history while engaged in Quantime projects because it just created another version, like with parallel earth theories. Jennifer contested that saying that my argument only stood up if the change to history was made while in quantum mode. As soon as we arrived somewhere and left the Q, we were no longer in a quantum state and the rules of time travel applied. It was a moot point that could not be proved one way or the other.



Another reason I found it challenging to sleep was the raucous downstairs noise from the bar as patrons got drunker and less inhibited. There was also the occasional gunshot that temporarily silenced the noise from time to time.

After managing a couple of hours of sleep, I awoke to the noise of life in the street below. I got dressed and went out onto the balcony. Charleston had come to life as the local folk went about their daily business. Then there was a knock on my door. I opened it, and Declan strolled in as bright as all get up.

Declan said 'Man, what a beautiful day.'

I scowled at him. 'How come you're so full of beans? Did you get a soundproofed room?'

Declan grinned, 'No, but I do have these. He handed me earplugs.'

I stared at him. Did you bring these with you?'

No. I found the ear protection in my luggage.'

'Jen must have provided them.'

'Yep. Jennifer thinks of everything.'

'Doesn't that contravene the rules of quantum travel?' I queried.

Declan grinned, 'I don't think so. Not if we keep it to ourselves.'

He had a point. 'What's on for today?' Declan asked me.

'Breakfast. Then we go and visit Albert Pike.'

'Be very careful about what you tell him,' Declan warned.

As we sat eating a hot breakfast of bacon, eggs and beans, followed by strong black coffee, I looked at Declan, 'I've been thinking about what you said regarding stepping perilously close to altering historical events.'

'And what conclusion have you come to?'

'This is a very tricky one because if Pike writes the letter as it stands nothing will change in the future. And if nothing changes, then everything goes to Pike's plan, and there is no point to us being here.'

Declan nodded as he ate. 'OK, so what can we do?'

I shrugged, 'Damned if I know. Unless ...'

'Unless what?'

'What if I told him about something that could put a spanner in the works of his plan for a third world war? Something that he could not share with anybody, even Mazzini.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

I answered, 'I haven't worked it out yet. But it's the only way we can successfully complete our mission.'

Declan drained his coffee mug. 'Oswald, if you get Pike to change anything in his letter it could trigger all kinds of unknown effects.'

'I have to tell him something he won't add to his letter. And I think I have it!'

'Have what?'

'The key to this whole business.'

'Well, don't keep me in suspense.'

I grinned at Declan. 'Think of something that we know about in our present that Pike could never have conceived of now.'

Declan frowned, his brow furrowed. 'I don't like the sound of this. It's too much of a gamble.'

I smiled at the struggling American. 'We can't change what has happened, but we can tinker with what might happen.'

'I'm not following you.'

'You will do, once you've figured out the one thing going on in our time that is having a profound effect on humanity that Pike has no comprehension of?'

Declan shrugged. 'Just tell me what you mean.'

'You're the fucking genius. You work it out.' With that I stood up, saying, 'OK Declan, we'll meet here for lunch, so enjoy your morning.'

'Doing what?'

'You figure it out. Although you could try and find out more about Walder's part in this.'

Wester and Deville, while drinking coffee, kept an eye on the strangers as they conversed in, what Webster saw to be, conspiratorial fashion.

Webster and Deville reported to Phileas Walder. Although they had nothing of any significance to report, Walder still mistrusted the pair and said to his men, 'Those interlopers need to be given a strong warning to show they were not welcome in Charleston.'

Doyle left Merrick and went to the Solomon's Lodge to meet up with Pike again.

Pike saw me and said, 'Do you have something else for me?'

'I have received another message.'

'Impart it to me then,' Pike said.

'Let us go somewhere quiet, where we can talk privately.'

'Of course. Follow me?' Pike said.

I did so and followed him into a library in which we found the curator. The curator snapped to attention as soon as he saw the Worshipful Master Mason enter his domain.

Pike said, 'I will be working with Mr Doyle. See to it that we are not disturbed.'

The curator said, 'Of course, Sir,' and retreated shutting the library doors behind him.

As they sat down, Pike said, 'Now tell me what you know.'

I took on my trance-like pose. 'I am seeing millions of people slaughtered, many in cruel and creative ways.' I made my eyes roll up in my head. 'There are trenches stretching hundreds of miles with defence walls comprising mounds of corpses. It's strange, but I see water canteens hanging from protruded ankles.'

I came out of the trance. 'It's too horrific for me to take it for too long.'

Pike looked at Doyle me, his face expressionless. 'Do you see the outcome of the conflict?'

What was I expecting - tears? This was a man with a mission, whether justified or not. 'I see a symbol in my mind - a hammer and sickle. The colour red is everywhere.'

'Then it is as I thought. The Bolsheviks shall be victorious, and Russia will become a Communist state.'

'Indeed, Mr Pike, it will be so.'

Pike kept his neutral expression. 'What do you see of the next global conflict, Mr Doyle?'

I took up my meditative pose, sitting straight-backed in my seat. In my pseudo trance, I closed my eyes and said, 'There is something. Another symbol. This time it is a star - a six-pointed star. A yellow hexagram. It is a symbol of genocide. It is horrible - just horrible,' I said, coming out of my trance state.

Pike showed no emotion whatsoever. He simply said, 'Can you see the outcome of this war?'

I faked fatigue. 'The horror of it drains me of spiritual energy, Mr Pike. But I will try again. Resuming my quiet concentration, I said, 'Ah, the hexagon has changed colour. It is now blue on white.'

Pike said, 'As I thought. The homeless Jews shall have their place and build in it a great and powerful nation.'

I smiled, 'If that is how you interpret my message, so be it.'

Pike, still maintaining his poker face, said, 'Now what of the third major conflict?'

This was what I was waiting for. 'As the Third World War had not officially happened yet I had some leeway. I went back to my trance pose. 'I see more symbols. There is a red cross in conflict with a green crescent moon. It is a clash of two religious beliefs.' I paused, then said, 'But there is another threat looming. Religious and political opponents are uniting against a common enemy that threatens humanity.'

Pike stared at Doyle. 'What on Earth do you mean?'

'It's not that clear. But it seems that man will make a mechanical servant that turns against him. These mechanical servants will take over and make humans its slaves.'

'How is that possible? What does it mean?'

I said, 'I see what I see. I don't ask questions or answer them.'

'Tell me more about this mechanical servant.'

'That's all I can see. If I have more, I will let you know.'

Pike looked Doyle me in the eye. 'How can we prevent this from happening?'

I shrugged again. 'I have no idea. You may not be able to change anything as it's already written in the future.'

Pike snapped, 'We must find a way to prevent these machines from taking over. Otherwise, my plans will amount to nothing.'

I looked at Pike. 'If I receive more about this, do I have your permission to call on you day or night?'

Pike said, 'Of course. As soon as you learn more, let me know.'

## Chapter 51

The morning had gotten away from me, and I realised it was time for lunch. The Andrew Pinkney Inn, where we were staying seemed as good a place as any to get another feed. As I entered the saloon, through the ubiquitous batwing doors, I saw Declan standing up at the bar. He was by himself, which wasn't surprising. I glanced around the saloon and noticed a couple of men whom I thought I'd seen before but couldn't remember where. I walked up to Declan and said, 'It's been thirsty work. Can you get me a beer?'

Declan looked at me. 'Oh, you finally got here.'

'Yes. Let's take our drinks through to the dining room where we'll have some privacy.' As I reached for the glass of beer, I whispered, 'Don't look now but that guy with the moustache and the younger one with him are following us around.'

Declan quietly replied, 'What makes you think that?'

I grinned, 'I'm a detective, mate. I notice these things. Anyway, if you don't believe me, let's go to the dining area, and I bet they'll follow us in there.'

Sure enough, after about ten minutes had elapsed, the man with the moustache and his sidekick took a table back in the corner.

After we'd ordered some food, Declan said, 'How did it go?'

I smiled, 'Have you worked out the answer yet?'

'What answer?'

'You must keep focused, Mr Merrick. Think of something that we know about in our present that Pike could never have conceived of now.'

'Oh that. Well, there's a hell of a lot of things it could be - electric power for one.'

'No, that's not it. What's humanity's greatest and worst achievement?'

'Again, there are many possible answers for ...'

I leant in close so the eavesdroppers in the corner wouldn't hear. 'AI - intelligent machines that could make us all redundant.'

Declan looked at Doyle, horrified. 'Don't tell me you told Pike that!'

'It's OK mate. I handled it well.'

'It's not fucking OK. If Pike factors that into the letter, it could change ...'

Relax. I just hinted at it, to give Pike something to think about before the Palladium Rite meeting.'

'Well, I don't like it.' Declan stated, getting up to leave.

I followed him, trying to get him to understand why I told Pike about the robots. Then something else became a more significant concern. Out the corner of my eye, I saw the two snoops following us a few paces back. I grabbed Declan's arm. 'We're being followed by the two men I told you about, and I think it could get nasty.'

Declan nodded, 'OK, we'll keep to the main street. Just keep walking normally and don't stop.'

It was good advice, so we walked along Pinkney Street just ahead of the pair tailing us.

We turned into Church Street, and they were still following us but keeping their distance. Then I saw a prominent marketplace with a lot of people milling around. Pointing, I said, 'Let's go in there. We can lose ourselves among the shoppers.' We walked a little bit faster and entered the market just ahead of our pursuers. The market was noisy as merchants spruiking their wares shouted loudly to be heard over the voices of others. As we pushed our way through the throng of customers, we hid around the corner of a shadowy alleyway and waited for our pursuers to show themselves.

Declan whispered, 'What if they don't come this way?'

'I think we have more of a problem if they do.'

As my eyes adjusted to the dimness, I noted the ground was slippery with mud. It was probably a leaky water pipe causing the problem. There was rubbish scattered around. We had to be careful not to slip on any garbage in our path. Then, as we waited, I said, 'If they come this way, run to the end of the alleyway.'

Declan said, 'You don't have to tell me that. But what do we do when we get there?'

'We'll escape from the market,' I said, not feeling the confidence I expressed.

"Why the hell are they following us around?" Declan asked.

I said, 'If they spot us you can ask them yourself.'

Major Webster and Deville, being local, knew the market well. Webster's keen eye picked out the fugitives slipping into the alleyway. He whistled to get the younger man's attention. Then he pointed to the narrow passageway, which he knew ended at a locked gate. The troublemakers were trapped.

I saw our pursuers enter the narrow alleyway. Grabbing Declan's arm, I said, 'Run!'

We raced along the path with our pursuers just a few feet behind. Before we reached the end, I saw a gate, but it was locked, and we were hemmed in. With our backs to the locked barrier, a violent confrontation was imminent. I can handle a punch or two in a good cause, but this pair wielded pickaxe handles and meant business. I had no idea why these guys had it in for us, but it was no time for questions - only action. As a young fellow in Ireland, I had to do a bit of ducking and diving at chuck out time in the pub. But this was much more serious. The older guy came at me, swinging. I managed to duck his first blow, as the club whistled past my head, missing my head by bare inches. Before he had a second chance to cave in my skull, I propelled myself forwards, using my arms to block any further blows. My opponent was heavier built than me, but he lost his balance and ended up sitting in the mud, amid scattered garbage. I stamped on his hand, holding the cudgel. He grunted in pain as I prised the vicious weapon from his fingers. Then I turned my attention to Declan, who it seemed, hadn't been in real bar fights and was taking a right battering from the younger guy.

Quickly grabbing the older guy's handle, I used it like a sword and thrust it as hard as I could into the thug's back, in the area of his kidneys. That got his attention, and he yelled in agony as my blow struck home. This gave Declan a chance to land a few decent punches. Then I felt the older man's arm around my throat cutting off my air supply. Instinctively I thrust back my elbow as hard as I could. I heard the air whoosh out of his lungs as I connected with his solar plexus. This loosened his grip on my throat, allowing me to get out of harm's way. But he came at me in a fury and landed a haymaker on my jaw, which had me seeing stars. Once they cleared away, I realised I was staring down the muzzle of a revolver.

Major Webster ordered us, 'Get up and stand against the gate.'

I helped Declan back on his feet. Then I asked, 'What the hell is all this about?'

The Major pressed the barrel of the gun against my temple. 'You and the damned Yankee have been snooping around, sticking your noses where they are not wanted. You are going to pack up and get the hell out of Charleston.' He added, 'This is your first and final warning.'

I stared back at him. 'Who's paying you to threaten us?'

'If you know what is good for you, you'll just concentrate on getting your asses out of town, pronto,' the Major snarled.

I figured it was pointless saying anything else to these minions. I needed to know who was behind this, but I wasn't going to find out from them.

Declan sported a few cuts and bruises but nothing serious. As we gathered ourselves, I said, 'I'd like to know who's running those goons.'

Declan rubbed his swollen jaw. 'I'd like to get hold of the bastard.'

'Well, it's not Pike.'

'How do you know that?' Declan asked.

'Because he's hardly likely to get thugs to beat the shite out of his oracle. But Phileas Walder, now he's a different story entirely.'

As we emerged battered but unbeaten from the shadowy alleyway, Declan said to me, 'I guess we go and pack our gear.'

I turned to him. 'You can if you like. But I have a job to finish.'

## Chapter 52

Back at the Inn, the barman gave me a letter. It was from Phileas Walder. He wanted to meet me privately at Castle Pinckney, a small masonry fortification constructed by the United States government in, Charleston Harbour. There was a plaque explaining it was used very briefly as a prisoner-of-war camp (six weeks) and artillery position during the "War Between the States", the Southerner's term for the Civil War.

I met Mr Walder at the stone fortification as per his request, and asked, 'Why did you want to see me?'

'Why are you here, Mr Doyle?'

'I have already told you that. I'm here to give Mr Pike a message.'

'From the spirit realm,' Walder scoffed.

I didn't rise to the bait.

Walder said, 'General Pike told me what you said.'

That wasn't supposed to happen. 'What did the General tell you?'

'Some nonsense about machines controlling humans.' Walder watched for a reaction from Doyle - but got none. 'So, what are you after?'

'I have no personal agenda in this matter.'

'Well, the General does not wish to see you anymore.'

I was really getting pissed off with the little prick. I stared at Walder. 'That wasn't the impression I got when I left the General this morning. Why should I trust your word on the matter? And while on the subject, did you send two thugs to attack my colleague and me?'

Walder sneered, 'Two strangers arrive in town and start asking questions about the General and myself. Of course, I'm going to find out about the pair of you.'

'You set your thugs on us.'

Walder looked straight at me. 'Do you expect me to apologise for protecting all we have worked for?'

I rebutted, 'Mr Pike understands what I am doing. You may think you know, but you don't. And your ignorance is in danger of threatening your Rite.'

Walder glared at me, 'How dare you presume such? I suggest you heed Major Webster's warning while you still can.'

I fronted up to the little toad. 'And I suggest you mind your own business and let me conclude what I have to do here, Mr Walder, without your thugs involvement in the matter.'

Having fired my final shot across Walder's bows -metaphorically speaking- I walked away.

What did I know about Walder? He was Pike's right-hand man who worshipped the General and wanted to protect him. He was a Swiss Lutheran minister who became an occultist and Luciferian. He was a close friend of French occultist Éliphas Lévi. So, if he was a spiritualist like Pike, why did he scoff at what I was doing? Walder was a loose cannon which went off half-cocked. And he was the biggest threat to my plan. Somehow, I had to get Walder on side. To do so, I needed another approach.

When I got back to the Andrew Pinkney Inn, Declan was sitting on his bed next to a half-packed valise. Because of our disagreement in dealing with Pike, I'd expected him to have gone, but he was still there.

Declan looked up as I entered his room. 'Did you speak with Walder?'

'He set those thugs on us.'

Declan said, 'Does that surprise you?'

'No. But I have to get Walder onside.'

Declan, having experienced Pike's right hand, man, said, 'Good luck with that.'

'Never mind the cynicism, we have to find something on him that's not in Wikipedia.'

'How do you propose to do that?'

Thinking out loud, I muttered, 'It has to be something that happens in the next few days.'

I foraged around in my bag and came up with my copy of Silas Pearce's diary. 'Maybe there's something in here.'

There was an entry about Pike sharing his letter with Mazzini. In it, Silas said he was becoming increasingly worried about Albert. He was concerned that his friend was showing megalomaniacal tendencies coupled with a saviour complex. The latest clue was when Albert had told him he had a super plan for world domination.

I found this exciting, but it made no mention of Phileas Walder. I read on and came to something promising. Silas shared his concerns with Pike's greatest advocate, a Lutheran minister, turned Luciferian. Well, that had to be Walder. I shared this little nugget with Declan.

He said, 'When did Pearce send the telegram?'

'Damn! It doesn't say exactly, but the nearest entry to it came under yesterday's date.'

'You have to find out when he sent it.'

'That would help, but it's not that important. Walder just has to know that I see him receiving the telegraph. In some respects, it will be better if he had not received Pearce's message yet.' I looked Declan in the eye. 'Are you staying or going?'

'Declan shrugged, 'There doesn't seem a hell of a lot for me to do here. As you take no notice of my warnings, I may as well return home in the Q and let you get on with it.'

'You could go and see Walder and tell him I have a message for him. I'll hang about in the background until you persuade him to listen to me.'

'He probably won't believe me.'

'Then make him believe you. To get his attention, you will have to get straight to the point.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Just say Silas Pearce wants to contact him. Tell him I have a message for him if he wants to hear it.'

Declan sounding unconvinced, responded, 'And you really think he'll fall for it?'

I fixed Declan with my gaze. 'Listen to me. If we don't get Walder on our side before the big meeting, He's going to fuck it up for us. Make sure he does fall for it.'

Declan stood up and took out his fob watch. 'Well, it's probably too late to visit the plantation now.'

'Relax. We'll go out there tomorrow morning.'

Then I realised we had not reported back to Jen. If we did not return soon, she would pull us back by activating the auto return. Only one of us was needed to communicate. I turned to Declan.

'Before we go and see Walder I want you to return to our time and report to Jen.'

Declan nodded. He was missing Jen terribly and did not need to be asked twice. 'When?'

'The sooner, the better. Tonight would be good.'

Declan had concern written on his face. 'I've not returned alone before.'

'You know what to do, so what's the problem?'

'Sure. I press the crystal, and the Q appears. Then I get in. I know that.'

'That's all there is to it. You don't have to do anything else.'

Declan frowned, 'It's not that. It's the debrief. What do I report about the mission?'

'Murphy will be there. He will hit you with a list of questions. Simply answer them. Once Murphy has his Q report, he will leave. Then you can tell Jen what's going on.'

'Which is?'

'The mission is going according to plan, and you need to come back and help me.'



'Is it?'

'Is it what?'

'Going to plan. I thought you were working it out as you went along?'

I grinned. 'We're still alive. That's going to plan.'

Declan said, 'What would happen if we were killed on a mission? Would we still have been born in our time?'

I groaned, 'Best not to go there. It'll just do your head in, mate. It just goes around in circles and drives you mad.'

## Chapter 53

Because Jennifer could not monitor the Q chamber 24/7 she made an App for her phone that set off an alarm as soon as the Quantanauts activated the Q for the return home. She expected to find both her Quantanauts in the chamber when she arrived and felt a chill run up her spine when only Declan emerged from the device. 'What's happened to Ozzie?' she asked, nervously.

'It's great to see you too,' Declan smiled.

His response lightened her a little. 'I was expecting to see both of you.'

'Ozzie's following up something with Pike.'

Jennifer noticed Declan's bruised face. 'Oh, my God! What happened to you?'

He grinned, 'Nothing to worry about. I was in the wild east, you know.'

'What was the fight about?'

'Someone didn't want us talking to Pike.'

'Yet, you left Ozzie to fend for himself?'

Declan shrugged, 'Someone had to come back and report, and Ozzie needed to speak with Pike again.'

Just then, Murphy entered the room. He looked at Declan. 'So, you're back. What was it like in Switzerland?'

Jennifer interrupted. 'Is that one of the questions on your debriefing form?'

'What do you mean?' Murphy responded,

'Mr Merrick is exhausted by the experience. Just ask the official questions then let him rest.'

Murphy looked at her. 'Oh, of course.' He then searched for his form.

Once Murphy had what he wanted, he left Jennifer and Declan.

She handed Declan the Quantum Camera. 'Seeing as you're back here, I can give you this.'

Declan beamed, 'That's great, Jen. Historical shots of Charleston will really crank up Boogle ratings.'

Jen said, 'OK, now tell me what happened.'

Declan regaled her with the bones of their adventure.

Jen listened attentively. She responded, 'Now we know the Pike letter is authentic, why is Ozzie still in Charleston?'

Declan stared at Jen, not sure what to say. 'I wasn't privy to the meeting Oswald had with Pike in the Solomon Lodge library, but he told me Pike was overjoyed at the Palladium Rite's success in manipulating two world wars.'

Jen said, 'Ozzie told Albert Pike what happened!'

'I was concerned about that. I thought Ozzie was sailing much too close to the wind. But he assured me it was all part of his plan.'

'What plan, Declan?'

'He said he believed he could put a spanner in the works regarding the Third World War.'

'Oh, my God! This just gets better and better. What exactly is this spanner?'

'He wouldn't tell me. But it had to do with something Pike had not figured into his three-world war equation. Something missing that Pike could not have comprehended.'

'Jesus, Dec. I have to send you back to stop him! If he makes any changes to Pike's predictions, there is no telling what will happen.'

'Why can't you just use the auto-return before he does irreparable damage to history?'

'Because it's far better if I return you to the point where you left him. That way, we know that what he has planned, never happened.'

Declan frowned deeply, 'You want me to go back right now?'

'Yes, but after you've had a sleep.'

At some point during the night, Declan felt Jen climb into his bed and snuggle up to him. He had no idea what time it was. The room was completely dark, lit only by the bluish glow of the full moon rising above the silhouetted trees beyond the open windows. The room was still, but for the sheer drapes swaying in the crisp late autumn breeze and the bedspread moving slowly up and down. Declan crossed his arms behind his head and closed his eyes again, thoroughly enjoying the feel of his manhood being sucked to full hardness as Jen, now hidden beneath the covers, tended enthusiastically to her task. She had woken before him and had slipped down under the covers to nestle quietly between his legs. It wasn't long before Declan had reached full erection.

Jen spoke huskily from under the covers, 'I'm going to make you nearly burst with pleasure and then put you inside me.' Declan thrust his pelvis forward a little as she drew her head up, letting her know that he was now fully awake.

'Mmmm, you like this, don't you, Dec?' she smiled, emerging from under his duvet.'

His grin would have put a Cheshire cat to shame. 'Oh, boy. What a way to wake up!'

Another hour disappeared as the couple made love. Afterwards, Dec said, 'Boy, I needed that.'

'I thought cathouses were all the go in the old west.' Jen teased.

Declan replied, 'More like catch houses. The best places to pick up any number of STDs. Besides, paying for it is not my style.'

'Oh, so you think this is for free,' Jen remarked, with a gleam in her eye.

Dec laughed as he got up. 'I'll leave you to fire up the Q then.'

'I have to fire myself up first,' Jen joked.

'I thought I'd already done that.' Dec said, suggestively.

'No, that was firing up the G, not the Q.

Declan flashed a wicked grin. 'I think I can help you with that.'

## Chapter 54

Declan went outside for a smoke. A weak sun rose in the sky, trying to generate enough warmth to thaw out the white frost blanket that covered the ground. He couldn't wait to get back to the warmer South Carolina climate. Declan saw Murphy, who was also outside enjoying a smoke. He had no wish to engage with the Q project director, but his ingrained politeness had him saying, 'Good morning Mr Murphy,' before his brain registered what he was doing.

Murphy, on the other hand, was pleased to see the American. It gave him a chance to quiz Declan without Professor Smethurst around. 'Are you using the Q again today?'

'Yes. I have to liaise with Ozzie.'

'In Switzerland?'

Declan had to keep to the story. 'Yes.'

'In 1870?'

'That's right. Why are you asking me this?'

'What was the name of the Swiss railway system that opened that year?' Murphy pressed.

'I wasn't there for train spotting,' Declan declared abruptly.

'Ah yes, the Wil–Ebnat-Kappel railway. The Swiss were very excited about it. But, of course, you were there, so you already know that, Mr Merrick.' Murphy flashed a knowing smile. He stubbed out his cigarette and turned to leave. Then he turned around to face Declan. 'If we're not straight with each other, this is not going to work.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Declan responded. He added, 'If you have a problem, take it up with Jennifer.'

'With Professor Smethurst,' Murphy corrected, keeping his relationship with her on a professional basis.

I woke up, got dressed and knocked on Declan's door. There was no answer, which meant he was either in a deep sleep, or he had not yet arrived from the future. One other possibility was a glitch with the Q, although that was highly unlikely. All I knew is that I'd feel a lot easier when he showed up.

He did, but it was the night before. I refused to try and work out the quantum physics of such a conundrum. But how was it that we were each in different time warps and could still sync together? It was no good me looking for Declan; he was the one in quantum space - not I. He would have to find me.

Declan did just that. At the point, he had parted company with me, when he responded to my frustration about understanding quantum reality. 'Yeah, we can't get our heads around it in 3D space, and it simply "is" in quantum space.' He looked straight at me. 'Which is why we have to be so careful in this reality.'

With more critical Pike issues on my mind, I just nodded.

Declan, who had been to modern-day and back to America in the 1900s in the flash of an eye, said to me, 'Jen is concerned about you changing anything in Pike's life.'

I stared at him. 'What have you been telling, Jen?'

'She asked me how things were progressing here. I told her it was going just fine. But she's a smart lady and Jen sensed something was troubling me.'

I glared at him, 'Just what the fuck did you say to her?'

'I mentioned your plan to tinker with Pike's letter. She was horrified at the prospects of such a rash action. She told me to tell you she'd pull the plug on the mission if she had to.'

I saw red, 'Jesus man, why the hell did you tell her?'

'Because she asked. And because I agree with her.'

'Then you might as well fuck off back to her. Because you're no use to me.'

Declan turned on me. 'I'm not here to be of use to you. I'm here to keep an eye on you. To make sure you don't fuck up the world!'

I took a deep breath. 'Why the hell are we here?'

'To find out about Pike's letter. And we've done that.'

'No, we fucking haven't,' I snapped. 'The only reason I am here is to show Pike his ultimate plan will not work.'

'Why so?'

'Because, in all likelihood, Artificial Intelligence will have taken over before Pike's third world war raises its ugly head.'

'And that's what you are going to tell him?'

'Yes, Declan. That's what I'm going to tell him. I'm not changing fucking history! I'm correcting Pike's misguided view of it! So go back and tell Jennifer that!'

'But it still, means him making changes to the letter.'

'Well, it didn't. And do you know why, Declan?'

'No.'

'Because he will not be able to comprehend what I'm saying.'

Declan scratched his head. 'What's the point of telling him, then?'

'He will know but not be able to act on it.'

'What if he thinks you're mad and doesn't believe you?'

I chuckled, 'It doesn't matter. Curiosity will haunt Pike and drive him mad. And he won't be able to tell his mates. But the thing that will gall him more than anything is the fact that he won't be around to see if it's true.'

Declan nodded, 'I guess stirring up his curiosity will be OK.'

I changed the subject. 'You have to go and pacify Mr Walder.'

'And what will you be doing?'

'Seeing Pike, of course.'

'How do you know he'll see you?'

'Declan, he'll see me all right. You just concentrate on Walder. Keep him off my back.'

Declan saw this as an excellent opportunity to record images for his Boogle History channel. At the time photography was in its infancy and required complicated equipment and a lot of patience from the sitter having their picture taken. By contrast, the tiny Q cam could be discretely concealed under Declan's hat which had a small hole in it for the lens to see through. Declan operated the device by a little remote control. Jennifer had explained that using the camera back in time did not compromise any universal spacetime laws as long as no one else around at the time knew of its existence.

I left Declan to his happy snaps and turned my mind to meeting up with Pike again. I wish I were as confident as I sounded. I had to be convincing to Pike, or it would all backfire in my face.

I had to find examples of labour-saving machines Pike recognised. Reaping machines, for example. The stock ticker was another example. It was invented three years before, to transmit up-to-the-minute share prices over telegraph lines. It was a great boon to the stock exchange.

Feeling a bit more relaxed, I left Declan to his devices and made my way to Solomon's Lodge.

I was surprised to discover that the curator was expecting me and showed me to a room that displayed several portraits of worshipful masters, while he went to inform the General that Mr Doyle was here to see him. One painting, in particular, caught my interest, a portrait of Charles C. Pinckney (1746-1825). The hotel where Declan and I were staying was named after his grandson, Andrew.

The curator returned and took me to the library where Albert Pike awaited me.

Pike greeted me and, indicating a much smaller man, said, 'Do you remember Phileas Walder?'

I couldn't believe it. What game was Pike playing? I turned to him. 'What I have for you is for your ears only.'

Pike's beard fluttered a little which could have meant a smile played on his lips. 'Oh, Mr Walder is interested to hear what you have to say.'

This was not good. This was like high stakes poker, and I had to play a bluff. I stared at Pike and said, 'It matters not to me if he is the king of England. I can only convey my message to you and you alone, Mr Pike. But if you are not ready to receive it, my message shall remain unspoken. And I shall bid you a good day.'

Walder fired mental daggers at me. 'How dare you speak to the great General in such an insulting manner.'

Just then the curator arrived with Declan in tow. Both Declan and I were surprised to see each other. I said, 'What are you doing here, Mr Merrick?'

Declan said, 'I was looking for Mr Walder and the trail led here.'

'Why do you wish to see me?' Walder asked.

I said, 'Whatever it is I suggest you take Mr Walder and speak with him in private.'

Pike, seeing my suggestion as a way to save face in an awkward situation, agreed, 'Phileas take Mr Merrick away and carry out your business with him.'

Walder cast a dark look in my direction. 'But I don't have any business with this man. And I don't think it wise for you to be alone with this charlatan,' he snapped, stabbing a finger in my direction.

Pike glared at him. 'Are you questioning my decision?'

'Er, no. It's just that ...'

'Then do as I say.'

Walder left with Declan, and I was alone with the great man.

'Now, tell me what you have for me,' Pike demanded.

I took a seat and practised my best vacant look. 'I see farmers happy and contented because reaping machines make their lives easier. These and other mechanical devices remove much of the toil of farming.'

Pike said, 'Yes, I can understand that. But what does it have to do with my predictions?'

I ignored the question and continued, 'I see a curious device. It is a stock ticker, and it helps with buying and selling on the stock exchange, using the telegraph system.'

Pike said, 'Yes, but these machines still obey mans' orders. Man is still in control of them.'

I continued in my fake trance. 'People become complacent as more and more machines make their lives easier. Now the people become reliant on their machine helpers and begin to find it difficult to do without them.' I took a deep breath. 'I see the military making war machines to fight on the ground, in the water and in the air. These are terrible weapons inflicting mass deaths on both sides of the battle. The weapons are conceived by man but made by machines in factories.'

Pike looked at me incredulously. 'Machines making machines - preposterous!'

I paused, then said, 'I see it now.'

'What do you see?' Pike asked, impatiently.

Two global wars are passed. The cause and effect were as you predicted, but humanity learned nothing from this costly madness.

Pike interrupted, 'My predictions have nothing to do with Man becoming illumined by Luciferian light. They are about Man blindly obeying the dictates of the Palladium Rite.'

I resisted making any unnecessary comments and continued with my story. 'I see weapons so overpowering, that if unleashed, will devastate humanity and leave a dangerously poisonous world in which only machines can survive. Yet people still smile and think these machines are still their servants to do their bidding.'

Pike, now entranced by the vision I painted, asked, 'How does your vision affect my prediction for a third global war?'

Still in my mock meditative state, after a few deep breaths, I said, 'I see an intelligent machine called a robot. It follows simple instructions that are programmed into it. These robots are there to serve human needs. Now I see robots with perception and problem-solving capabilities moving by themselves.'

Pike said, 'But humans are still in control?'

I continued, 'Humans have instilled in robots three rules they must adhere to.'

'What rules?' Pike pressed.

'A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human to come to harm. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.' These robots function by using artificial intelligence. Now I see these smart machines communicating with each other without human participation. Yet humans still see themselves to be in control, while intelligent machines lull them into a false sense of security.'

Pike said, 'I still don't see how this affects my plan.'

'I see experts in the robotics field becoming alarmed, seeing them as a threat to human life. I see humans dominated by smart machines all over the world, Religious and political ideologies no longer matter as humanity faces this much more serious threat.'

Pike stared at me, awed and scared. 'No! This cannot be. I will not be thwarted by machines!'

Feeling much more in control. I responded, 'It is up to you whether you believe my vision or not. There's nothing You or I can do about this rise of the machines.'

Pike shook his head, 'No! I will not allow this aberration to spoil my plans. We will look for any signs of labour-saving machines and destroy them.'

'I'm afraid it's not that easy. First, who is going to believe you? If you make a stand, you will be deemed insane. Secondly, you will need such machines to play out the first and second world wars. But you will not ultimately succeed because humans will be too busy trying to save humanity from the smart robots to fit in with your plans.'

Pike fixed me with his hard gaze. 'Who else knows about this?'

'Just you and I.'

'How do I know you can be trusted to keep quiet?'

'First off, I am merely the messenger. Once I have delivered the vision, I have nothing more to do with it. Secondly, like you, I would be branded a madman if I told anybody else.'

Pike looked at me, then nodded, 'OK, I accept that. Now you can go.'

'What if I have another message for you?'

'About what?'

'I have no idea, General. I cannot know before it is revealed to me.'

Walder was not happy with being pushed around. He should have been in there with the General, not stuck outside with the obnoxious Yankee. He glared at Merrick. 'You and your friend are messing with the wrong people. You have no idea who you are dealing with.'

Declan responded, 'You're right about that. Who the hell are we dealing with?'

Walder changed the subject. 'What was so important that you interrupted a crucial meeting?'

'I got beaten up yesterday, and I want to know why?'

'You're a troublemaker. I noticed that when I first saw you.'

Declan wanted to reach out and throttle the Swiss Freemason but stilled himself. Such an action would impinge on history. Instead, he said, 'I know you just don't get it, Mr Walder. Mr Doyle and I have no personal agenda here, except that of helping the General. We are not your enemy.'

Walder backed away. 'If you say so. Now we are finished and if you know what is best for the pair of you, leave Charleston immediately.'

With the charlatans gone, Walder went back to Albert Pike and found him alone. The superior Master Mason seemed in deep contemplation. Noticing Walder's presence, he said, 'Merrick and Doyle could endanger my plans. See to it that they do not leave this town.'

## Chapter 55

Erik Mueller thought the phone ringing was part of his dream. It was not. The call was from Gustav Engels. Realising the ringtone was not in his dream. Erik reached out and pressed the green phone icon on his screen just before his phone rang out. 'Hello. Who's speaking?'

'It is Gustav Engels. I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour, but we need to meet.'

Erik, only half-conscious, said, 'Are you the Gustav who works for Gottfried von Bismarck?'

'Ya, that is so.'

'Why do we need to meet?'

'I cannot tell you over the phone.'

'You expect me to jump up in the middle of the night and ...'

'I would not be troubling you if your life was not in danger.'

Erik froze. 'Under threat! By whom?'

'Gottfried is afraid you are going to cause trouble.'

Erik paused. He felt the key to the Bismarck family secret had to do with Otto von Bismarck.

Something had caused his descendants to branch off in two separate directions. But what was it?

'What are you talking about?'

'All I can say is that I heard Gottfried and Leopold determining your fate.' Gustav paused, then added, 'If you are interested meet me at the Symphony Hall at 9 am.'

Erik was interested and also wanted to see the Elbphilharmonie, the newest addition to the largest warehouse district in the world. Erik walked along the canal network of the old red-brick warehouses and came out at the port not far from the Elbphilharmonie, which was designed by Herzog and de Meuron. Erik, a little early, waited for the old servant to show.

Gustav arrived at the appointed time. He greeted Erik, then took him to an observation platform, overlooking the river. As they stood together, taking in the view, Erik said, 'What have you got to tell me?'

Gustav looked straight at the private detective. 'In 1870, Mazzini, Lord Henry Palmerston of England, Otto von Bismarck and Albert Pike, all of them thirty-third degree Scottish Rite Masons, completed an agreement to create a supreme universal rite of Masonry.'

Erik rebutted, 'I'm interested in what's happening now - not history.'

'Mr Hueller, everything that happens is because of history, including the mystery of Otto von Bismarck's descendants. Now, if you will allow me to continue.'

Erik nodded, 'OK.'



'This new Rite was to arch over all the other rites, even the different national rites. It centralised all high Masonic bodies in the world under one head. Pike and Mazzini created the Palladium Rite as the pinnacle of the pyramid of power: an international alliance to bring all the Grand Lodges together.'

Erik said, 'Where do the von Bismarck's come into this story?'

Gustav said, 'Please concentrate, then you will know.' He paused then continued, 'Lord Palmerston, Queen Victoria's Foreign Secretary, was also Prime Minister during Britain's Opium Wars against China. This began a policy of narcotics exploitation that later characterised the Illuminati's strategy for trafficking in the twentieth century.'

'Are the Bismarck's involved in the illegal drug trade?'

Gustav stared at Erik. 'It's not that simple. Opium was first exploited by the Portuguese royal family in the sixteenth century, followed by the Dutch royals, before attracting the British royals. The British East India Company established a monopoly on the production of Indian opium, and transported it to China to barter for silk, tea and porcelain.'

Erik, incredulous, said, 'Are you suggesting these royal houses were behind the drug running?'

Gustav turned to Erik. 'Of course. How else did they have the power to have the Royal Navy protect the opium ships?'

Erik had never conceived such an outrageous idea. Yet it sort of made sense.

Gustav said, 'The drug trade flourished, and by 1830, opium was the largest commodity in world trade. In China, local criminal gangs, known as Triads, were selected by the British trading companies to distribute their opium. When the Chinese rulers acted to stop the supply of opium, Britain used its military and naval might to defeat them.'

Erik had learnt a little about the opium wars, but for him, it was just a footnote in history. 'How do the Bismarck's fit into this?' Erik asked Gustav, now genuinely interested.

Gustav explained. 'In his Chancellor role, Otto was eager to establish German footholds in China to balance British dominance. But in his Palladium Rite role, he helped Palmerston in subduing the Chinese. Albert Pike knew that if China remained unchecked, it would prove to be the biggest threat against future Palladium global domination.'

Erik smiled, 'Well, he was certainly right about that. But how did he know? China was no world power back then.'

Gustav replied, 'Even the Illuminati could take lessons in secrecy from the Chinese Dragons. The Chinese lost face and never forgave the West for forcing them to into a peace treaty that gave the British guaranteed right to increase the flow of opium. Britain also demanded compensation for opium the Chinese rulers had confiscated. To add insult to the proud Chinese, the British took control over strategic ports and offshore islands. This is how Hong Kong came under British rule. Hong Kong has since been used as a centre for Far East drug trafficking, run by the Triads crime syndicate, who continue to operate within the Illuminati today. The Chinese have long memories and have just been biding their time.'

Erik whistled as he exhaled air. 'I'm guessing that Leopold and Gottfried are tied up in this drug market.'

Gustav shook his head. 'You wanted to know about the Bismarck family secret. Leopold and his remaining siblings rule SCoW, a front for the powerful Palladium Rite. They are led to believe they and other 33rd degree masons run the Rite itself. But it is not the case.'

Erik brightened. 'The real power comes from Otto's direct family line, who keeps a very low profile while controlling events from behind the scenes.'

Gustav smiled thinly. 'Now, you have it. It takes more than power and wealth to take over the world. It takes huge resources and profiteering from gold, oil and drugs to make it happen.' He stared at Erik. 'Somehow you have stumbled upon this great conspiracy. As the person who sent you on this trail, I felt compelled to let you know what you are up against. Now I have said my bit, I will leave you and we will never meet again.'

## Chapter 56

Erik wondered how Gustav knew so much about the secret Bismarck family business. Gustav had worked for the Bismarcks for half a century as a faithful retainer. Why would he be so willing to expose their secrets to a private detective he had just met? The big question was, could Erik trust a man who had always been a loyal servant to the aristocratic German family. Was Gustav leading him into the trap he warned him about? It was all very troubling and puzzling. Especially the part about Leopold and Gottfried hiring someone to silence him.

Erik thought about these things while he jogged along by the Elbe River, as the sun appeared to rise like an enormous red balloon. He jogged along the quayside until he reached the Port of Hamburg, the busiest in Europe. He could see the massive container ships and tankers loading and unloading their cargo. Erik, concerned about his welfare, only went to public places. His logic being that whoever was out to kill him would prefer somewhere more private to carry out their assignment. He was protected at home by the two bodyguards he hired.

Although Erik knew things about the Bismarcks that could be damaging to them, he had no idea about what to do with the information. He either had to back off and keep a low profile or look for more clues to see what was going on. As Gustav had slipped off Erik's screen, he had to look to someone else he could trust for answers. Only one person came to mind.

As we went about packing our stuff, I perused my copy of Silas Pearce's diary. I had been so focussed on speaking with Pike about his letter, I had glossed over significant entries. I got Declan's attention. 'It says here that Silas was concerned about Pike as both a freemason and a friend. At their last meeting in Little Rock, they had a heated argument about the direction of the Scottish and Misraim rites of Freemasonry. Pike had inferred significant changes were afoot. When Pearce questioned him about this, he said, Exciting changes were about to happen, and Silas had a chance to be part of the challenge to streamline the brotherhood.'

'He's talking about the Palladium Rite takeover,' Declan said.

I was already reading another entry - an alarming one.

Declan saw the shocked look on my face, 'What does it say?'

'Albert is out of control. I have to do something. Somebody has to stop this madman from wrecking the brotherhood of Masons. I must go to Charleston where he is now living. I thought about involving other members of our brethren, but I decided it was something I had to do alone.'

'What's he talking about?' Declan asked.

I didn't respond. I was reading another brief entry. It was for the 26th, and it read:

'Going to Charleston to see AP.'

Declan exclaimed, 'That's tomorrow!'

'We'd better find him before he finds Pike.'

Declan looked at me. 'Why do we want to save Pike?'

'Because Pike survived for a few more years.'

'That means someone, or something will prevent Silas harming him. We don't have to get involved.'

Declan had a point, but I still felt compelled to stop him from getting close to Pike. But I couldn't say why. And, I'm not usually a person to get compelled. 'If we don't attempt to stop Silas going after Pike something is going to go wrong.'

Declan irritated, snapped, 'What's going to go wrong, Oswald? It is as history has written it.'

'I can't explain it. I just feel we have to intercept Silas.'

Declan sighed. 'What time does the stage get in?'

I said, 'You go and check that out, and I'll go and check the harbour in case he travels here on a riverboat.'

'And what am I supposed to say to him if he turns up?' Declan asked.

'I don't know. Maybe let Pearce know you know who he is.'

'But I don't do I. How am I supposed to recognise him?'

I threw up my hands. 'How the hell do I know? Look for a man around 70.'

Declan turned on me. 'Whatever Silas does is happening now. If we intervene, we are changing history.'

He was right, of course. But I wasn't happy to leave it to fate. I said, 'What if we changed history by doing nothing?'

Declan wore a puzzled frown. He turned to me. 'How can we change history by not changing it?'

I tried explaining the inexplicable. 'What if we were here before and by stopping Silas Pearce from killing Pike, we kept history on track.'

Declan, exasperated, groaned, 'This is doing my fucking head in. You do what the fuck you like. I'm going home.'

I couldn't blame Declan for his stance. It was a tricky business with no right choices. Although it was difficult for me to accept Silas Pearce's fate, it was not our business. I closed my valise and looked at Declan, who still wore a worried frown. 'Ok, I guess we should stay out of it.'

Declan's frown disappeared. 'Then let's get the hell out of here.'

I hadn't eaten all day. I said, 'How about we get something to eat first.'

Declan agreed, and we went down to the dining room. To do so, we had to pass through the saloon.

Major Webster stared at us as we passed by. Then he, and three other men blocked our path.

Surprised, I said, 'Is there a problem, Major?'

Webster pointed at Declan. 'You've been warned twice now, to get out of town, Yankee. And you have ignored me. Therefore, it's pistols at 20 paces outside at sunup tomorrow.'

Declan muttered, 'What the hell are you on about?'

Webster poked Declan in the chest. 'When a man says that to another man, hereabouts, he's challenging that man to a duel.'

I had to intervene. 'There's no need for that, Major, my colleague and I were about to leave town.'

'Too late for that, Doyle. Around here if a man is too chicken shit to accept the challenge, He gets strung up. Mr Merrick, do you accept my challenge?'

With all eyes on him, Declan uttered, 'Yes,' in a shaky voice.

The Major and his followers moved aside and let us through to the dining room. Mind you I'd lost my appetite and Declan was looking like he'd seen a ghost. We slumped down on wooden chairs, as weak as newborn kittens. It was as though I had all the air squeezed out of me.

The cook, about to shut up his kitchen for the day, approached his customers. 'Gentlemen, I'm about to close. All I can do is bacon and beans and coffee.'

I said, 'Just coffee, thanks.'

He left to get the coffee.

I stared at Declan. 'Can you shoot straight?'

'I guess I'll find out if all those years I spent playing shoot-'em - up, knock 'em down computer games has paid off.'

I sighed, 'What the major has planned for you is no fucking game. This is real with real guns that can kill you.'

'What other choice do I have?'

'We grab our bags and leave right now.'

'Don't you think us carrying our luggage through the saloon is going to look a bit suspicious?' Declan argued.

I said, 'I wonder if there's a way out that avoids the saloon.'

Declan snapped, 'Wondering is no fucking use. We need a plan that's going to get us out of this shit.'

'Ok, Declan, let's remain calm. You go and get packed, and I'll go and check out the lay of the land.'

Declan agreed and left me to look around the building. As I rose to go, the cook came out with the black coffees. I said, 'We've changed our mind.'

The cook said, 'You ordered them. You pay for them.'

That seemed fair enough. I gave the cook more than enough and said, 'Is there a way to get out of here without going through the saloon?'

'Yes, but hotel guests can't use it.'

'Look, my friend and I need an escape route. I give you ten bucks if you help us to leave without anyone in the saloon knowing about it.'

The cook rubbed his stubbly chin. 'Ten bucks each and I'll do it.'

I acted surprised. 'Twenty bucks! That's daylight robbery.'

The cook shrugged, 'Take it or leave it.'

I took it and went upstairs to see Declan. He was laying on the bed.' I said, 'Get up. We're getting out of here right now.'

'You found a way out,' Declan said to me, excited, swinging his legs off the bed. 'Pack your gear, mate, we're going home.'

Five minutes later, I was back in Declan's room, my gear packed. I urged Declan, 'Get a move on. The cook isn't going to wait all night.'

Declan grabbed his stuff and followed me downstairs to the kitchen.

The cook waited impatiently. As we approached, he unbolted and opened a door that led out into the yard. The door closed as soon as we were outside. The night was as black as pitch with just a couple of mounted oil lamps bracketed to a wall to see by. Declan and I stood still for a couple of minutes while our eyes adjusted to the darkness. My sight sharpened, and I just caught a flash of something in the background. I froze and grabbed Declan's arm. 'I think we have company.'

'What do you mean?'

'Just follow my lead. Now run!'

As soon as I moved, bullets started flying. Declan was just behind as the sound of gunfire rang out in the yard. Then I heard Declan yelling in pain. I stopped and turned. Major Webster and his gunmen were catching up fast. Declan was hit and collapsed in agony. There was only one thing I could do. I reached for the pendant and pressed the centre. The Q instantly materialised. It stopped Webster and his people in their tracks. Giving me just enough time to haul Declan into the Quantime. I then grabbed our bags and leapt into the Q.

## Chapter 57

There is no time to spare. No time for orientation. I pressed the alert button in the control centre many times in quick succession. And banged on the door. Then a siren went off, and I heard the rush of footsteps outside the door. I turned to Declan who looked deathly white and had lost a lot of blood, most of which was in the Quantime. As soon as I saw Jen enter the room, I yelled, 'GET AN AMBULANCE!'

Jennifer took one look at Declan and grabbed her phone. Murphy came running, 'What's happened here?' He asked.

Jen barked at him, 'Declan's been shot. We have to get him help immediately.'

Murphy grabbed his phone. He said, 'Medical emergency in the laboratory. get over here now!'

I took Declan's hand. His eyes were fluttering, and he seemed to be slipping into unconsciousness. I said, 'Stay with me, Declan. Help is on its way.'

Jen said, 'The ambulance is 15 minutes away. How's he doing?'

'I said, 'Not good. Dec's still bleeding badly. We have to staunch the blood.'

Just then, a medical team arrived and took over.

They quickly hooked up a plasma drip and went to work, exposing the wound to inhibit bleeding and dress the wound. The leader of the paramedics spoke into a radio fitted to the collar of his tunic. He ordered the ambulance here now.

I said, 'Wouldn't it be quicker by chopper?'

Murphy said, 'We don't have a helicopter.'

As the paramedics put Declan on a stretcher, Jennifer said, 'I'm coming with you.'

Murphy said, 'What about the debrief. We need to know what happened in Switzerland.'

'That can wait,' Jennifer snapped, following the trauma team outside to where the ambulance stood waiting.

I said, 'Wait for me. I'm coming too.'

Recent redevelopment of LSE left many visitors confused as they tried negotiating their way to the central building. Eric Mueller, one of the puzzled people consulted his map to get directions to Lincoln Inn Fields, where he was to hook up with Nathan Goodfellow. Erik, punctual to the point of obsession, still arrived at the chosen meeting place before Nathan. Seeing his old friend approaching, Erik pocketed his map. He had not seen his English friend for many years, but he saw they had treated his friend well. Nathan still had his Hollywood good looks and seemed to have barely aged.

He said, 'Hi Erik, I hope you haven't been waiting long.'

Erik responded, 'No, not long. It gave me a chance to read about this development.'

'Yes, it will be useful once it's finished.' The place was bustling and not very private. Nathan said, 'Let's go to Lincoln Inn Fields, where we can sit and talk privately'.

Lincoln Inn Fields, Erik soon discovered, was a large square park with people walking, jogging, sitting or playing tennis. The pair entered through a gateway, which took them to a cafe in the middle of the park. They ordered coffee and sat down to wait.

As they waited, Erik explained. 'I manage a branch of the A1 Detektiv Agency. We mostly work for high profile clients. One of them is the Bismarck family.'

Nathan looked at Erik with mild interest. 'And this affects me, how?'

Erik leant in closer and spoke quietly. 'The Bismarcks supposedly run the Palladium Rite. Or at least SCoW - Sovereign Council of Wisdom.'

'I am aware of that.'

'Yes, and I imagine you are well aware of the Bismarck scandals splashed all over the tabloids?'

'I'm a Times man myself, Erik. But yes, I have heard of Alexander's disclosures on the news.'

'Well, I got to thinking, how can such a dysfunctional family run the Rite?'

'And what conclusion have you come to, Erik?'

The coffee arrived.

Before Erik answered, he took a couple of sips. 'I haven't concluded anything yet. That's why I'm here to see you. I need your help with this.'

Nathan gave a slight shrug. 'I don't know how I can help you. 'Tell me why are you so fired up about this?'

'The Bismarcks are after me. I need to know what is going on. As you're such an expert on Palladium Rite matters, I thought ...'

'No back up there. I have some interest in the subject, but that doesn't make me an expert.'

'No, but in your research, have you come across this?'

'This what? I don't know what you are driving at.'

Erik felt Nathan was very cagey. 'Gustav, The Bismarck's butler, told me something exciting. He said that Gottfried's descendants did not come directly from Otto von Bismarck's family line. He inferred that Otto's lineage is in control of the Palladium Rite - not Leopold and his siblings.'

Nathan stared at Erik. 'I have come across some references to this, but I put it down to stories cooked up by conspiracy theorists.'

'What did you find out, Nathan?'

Nathan drank some coffee. 'In 1871 Otto, Prince von Bismarck became German Chancellor. After him came Countess Marie von Bismarck-Schönhausen. she died in 1926 leaving ...'

'To simplify my enquiry, do the names Alexander, Valery, Gottfried and Leopold crop up in the genuine family tree after Otto's time?'

Nathan replied, 'There is a mention of Gottfried von Bismarck, but he died in 1928.'

'Well, the one I worked for was only in his 40s. So, it wasn't him.'

'There is another Count Gottfried von Bismarck-Schönhausen, but he died in 2007.'

Erik shook his head. 'Well, it wasn't him, either.'

Nathan continued, 'I seem to remember there was a Count Alexander von Bismarck-Schönhausen, but he died in 1992.'

'That was a good ten years before my Alexander overdosed.'

Nathan said, 'A Count Alexander von Bismarck-Schönhausen was born in 1989.'

Erik said, 'But he is still alive.'

'Now, as I recall a Count Leopold von Bismarck-Schönhausen was born in 1951.'

Erik sighed, 'No. The one I have met is in his early 50s.'

Nathan spread his hands in a hopeless gesture. 'I'm sorry, Erik, but I can't help you.'

Erik smiled. 'You have been a great help. I'm now pretty sure the power behind the Palladium Rite lies with an entirely different branch of the Bismarck- Schönhausen family. My Bismarcks are there as a distraction. All these family scandals are set up to feed the media, while the real Rite work is carried out by Otto's direct lineage, in the shadows.'

Nathan wore a puzzled frown. 'Even if you're right, Erik, to what end?'

I waited with Jennifer at the hospital. Declan had been rushed into emergency an hour before, and we hadn't heard of his condition. The wound looked severe, and Jennifer remained silent, fearing for her boyfriend's life. At length, she turned to me. 'Just what the hell happened?'

'It was late at night, and we were about to leave the 19th Century when we were set upon by a Major Webster and some rebel townsmen. They started shooting at us. We returned fire and retreated into an unlit stable. I noticed Declan staggering. Then he collapsed. Webster and his men were still firing at us. I summoned the Q, got Declan safely inside and the rest you know.'

Jennifer stared at me. 'Did any of the shooters see the Q?'

'I don't know, but I guess it stood out pretty well in the dark.'

Jennifer already worried by Declan getting wounded said sharply, 'Are you seriously telling me that some townsfolk in 1870 Charleston saw the Q?' She looked straight at me, 'Just one person seeing the Q and watching it disappear is enough to cause an out of phase ripple in space-time, the effect of which could manifest in all manner of ways. And you let a gang of angry men experience this phenomenon? I hate to think of the possible ramifications.'

I turned to her. 'I'm sorry I might have upset the universal flow, but I didn't have a lot of choices. Not if I was to get Declan back alive.'

She said, 'It must have been a difficult choice, but ...'

I was angry. I retorted, 'What about me bringing the 19th-century bullet into the modern-day. I didn't have much choice about that either.'

I saw a doctor heading in our direction.

Jennifer said, 'We'll discuss this further at a later time.'

The Doctor approached. 'I'm Dr Samuels.'

'How is Mr Merrick?' Jennifer asked cautiously.

'He's survived the operation. The bullet barely missed his kidney and his spinal column, so he's a fortunate man.'

Jennifer beamed, 'That's great news, Doctor. Can we go in and see him?'

'Blood loss and trauma have weakened him. He is heavily sedated and needs rest. Come back in the morning. We have your contact number, so if he takes a turn for the worse, we will contact you.'

## **Chapter 58**

Back at Jennifer's, after leaving Declan in safe medical hands, we sat sharing a nice Chardonnay when I said, 'Jen I have to go back.'

Jennifer sat there wide-eyed; she hadn't been expecting that. She said tome, 'You can't. I have to give Murphy a month's notice.'

'Fuck that! I need to go back now.'

'Even if I could send you back, I will not. Not until you go through a thorough reorientation about Quantum universal rules.'

'That's bullshit, Jen. I have to return and meet with Silas Pearce before he confronts Pike.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

'The last entry in Pearce's journal is about him going to Charleston to confront Pike.'

'About what?'

'Pearce was also a Master Mason, but he did not agree with what Pike was trying to do.' Seeing the blank look on Jen's face, I explained, 'Pike and Mazzini were plotting to take over all the world's

Freemason Lodges.'

Jen slowly shook her head. 'But Pike did achieve his aim, so why does it matter what Pearce thought about it?'



'Because we don't know if the meeting took place. Or if it did what was the outcome?'

I saw a puzzled expression spread across Jennifer's face. She said 'What does it matter. You can't do anything about it.'

I sighed, 'If they did meet what did Pike say to talk Pearce out of stopping him?'

Jennifer, now feeling exasperated, said, 'You're not making any sense.'

I fixed her with my gaze. 'I told Pike about AI, robot machines.'

Jennifer's eyes were like saucers. 'You did what?'

'I had to.'

'Why?'

'Because the third part of his plan has not yet reached fulfilment. There's a chance to stop it, but ...'

'And you thought telling him about AI is going to achieve that?'

'I showed him he was not in control. Have you any idea what that does to psychopathic megalomaniac?'

'But it didn't change anything, did it?'

'It may have changed his thinking. He was excited that my psychic vision of the first and second world wars happened as he planned. But the idea of robot machines taking over before the third and final part of the Palladium Rite plan became fulfilled freaked him out because he would never know if I was right or not. And, he couldn't go telling his colleagues because it would make him look crazy. Instead of giving me a hard time, pat me on the back for being a fucking genius.'

'OK, I grant you it was clever. But is it going to make any difference?'

'Maybe he told Pearce about it. Maybe that's what made Pearce back off.'

'Come on, Oz. Why would that stop Pearce after he'd come all the way from Little Rock to Charleston to stop Pike taking control of Freemasonry.'

I smiled, 'Pearce knew that Pike would never fulfil his ultimate plan.'

Jennifer sighed deeply, 'But this is all supposition because you don't know if they did meet that day.'

'Precisely. I have to go back to find out one way or the other.'

Jennifer shook her head. 'It's too risky, Oz?'

I grinned, 'I've got an idea. If you're afraid I'm going to fuck things, come with me. Supervise me.'

She stared at him. 'I can't do that. Who's going to ...'

'Programme the Q. Look, it's mostly set up from the last exchange. Surely one of the boffins you've been working with knows how to programme it.'

Jennifer said, 'I guess I can tell Murphy I need to have first-hand experience.'

I smiled, 'Fuck what Murphy says. Tell him you're going to do it.'

I flashed a huge grin. 'You do realise that back there it's a macho world. You'll have to give the impression I'm in charge.'

Jen flashed me a dark look.

'Only pretending,' I grinned again.

Jennifer ran the proposition through her mind. At length, she said, 'I'll give it some thought and let you know.'

There was just me and the beautiful Jen at her place. Although we were talking shop, I still found her very sexy. Well, I thought, in for a penny in for a pound. I wondered if the luck of the Irish would hold out. Turning to Jen, I said, 'Remember the wild, rampant sex we used to have?'

I didn't have to spell it out any clearer for Jen. She gave me a stern look. "Ozzie, it's not going to happen.'

'Pity. I was just wondering If I could still manage it.'

Jennifer did not laugh. 'Well, you'll have to find out with someone else. I'm strictly a one-man kind of girl.'

I retorted, 'Yeah, one wealthy American man, I'm guessing.'

She snapped at, 'Ozzie, don't be so bloody childish. The man you are mocking is lying in a hospital bed severely wounded. Just grow up!'

I was still mentally kicking myself for being a dumb smartarse, as I drove back to Acton and my cold lonely flat. Feeling miserable, I reached for my JW, but the bottle was empty. 'Fuck!'

Then, just as I thought things couldn't get worse - they did. I had a recorded message from Dr Bennet who said he would sue me if I did not return the original Pike Letter to him. I was too tired. It would have to wait till morning.

Morning came, and I listened to the messages again, over coffee. I knew I couldn't put off contacting Adrian Bennet any longer. But I couldn't think of a good enough excuse. The best option seemed to be to plead ignorance. I could blame the stuff up on the police. But that was likely to unravel terribly. Girding my loins, I rang Bennet's number. Hearing the professor's voice, I said, 'Sorry I didn't get back to you. I've been out of the country, and I have only just returned. Now, what's this business about suing me?'

Adrian responded, 'How do you explain the fact that my genuine Pike Letter was stolen and I get a fake copy back?'

'What are you talking about?' I said, feigning ignorance.

'You know very well, Mr Doyle. You told me the police had seized the Pike Letter as evidence and would return it to me after the court case.'

'Yes, I remember that.'

'Where is the genuine article?'

'I have absolutely no idea, Mr Bennet. But I will look into it for you - at no extra cost.'

Bennet, a man who prided himself on self-control and restraint, felt himself losing it. Clenching his fists while curbing his tongue, he said in measured words, 'Doyle, I'll give you one week If I haven't received my letter by then, I will sue you. Do you understand?'

'Well, we're both speaking English.'

'See to it! Or I'll take you for every penny you have.'

The phone went dead. That didn't go too badly, I thought. But it was the next bit that worried me. Getting into the SCoW's Palladium Rite secret sanctum.

I wasn't sure if I'd achieved anything, other than confusing Pike. But nobody would ever know about that. Declan was in recovery, so I visited him in hospital. We talked about what had happened. during our conversation, Declan said 'I wonder what happened to Silas Pearce.'

I had wondered that too. I noted that the day Silas was going to confront Pike was the last entry in the journal. Did he die on that day? And if so, what happened?

There was only one person I knew who could possibly shed some light on the subject. I didn't have her number, so I phoned the Dubbo police. I got the front desk and a Sergeant Stanley.'

I said, 'I'm trying to contact Olivia Quinn. She said she used to work at your station.'

'And who are you?' The officer asked.

'Oswald Doyle. I used to be a copper in England.'

'Olivia Quinn, you say.'

'Yes, do you know her?'

'From what I remember, she left and went overseas.'

'Yes, well now she's back to see her ailing mother, and I need a number for her.'

'The Sergeant said, 'Hang on a minute, mate. I'll see if I can find it.'

The Sergeant had her parents number, and I was able to contact her.

Olivia, pleasantly surprised to hear from me, said, 'How are you, Ozzie?'

'I'm good, but I need your help with something. How did Silas die?'

'As far as I know, he died naturally from old age.'

I said, 'I'm relieved to hear that.'

'I'm not a hundred per cent sure, though. But why do you want to know?'

It was a reasonable question. I said, 'In Silas' final entry he was going to have a confrontation with Pike. I don't know what happened and it's driving me nuts.'

'I don't know exactly how he died, but it was in 1895 in Little Rock.'

I said, 'Thanks for your help. now I can stop thinking about it.'

'You're welcome, Ozzie. Keep clear of the SCoW crowd.'

My phone played a call-waiting tone, which meant someone was trying to phone me. Damn it! Back to Olivia, 'I said, I'll have to put you on hold for a minute while I deal with another call.'

Olivia said, 'Don't worry. Ring when you have more time.'

I didn't recognise the caller's name. I said, 'Oswald Doyle here. How can I help you?'

'My name is Erik Hueller. Nathan Goodfellow suggested I call.'

Thank you very much, Nathan, I thought 'What do you want?'

'Nathan said you may be able to help me.'

'In what way, Mr Hueller?'

'Nathan said you were interested in SCoW.'

I sighed, 'I'm interested in returning a rare artefact to its owner.' I added, 'To do so I need info on SCoW.'

Erik said, 'Perhaps we should meet.'

I sighed, 'Very well. Come to my office. Give me your number, and I will send you instructions.'

'I look forward to meeting you, Mr Doyle.'

'How do you know Nathan?' I enquired shortly after Erik Hueller arrived at my office.

Erik looked around the cramped workspace. He smiled, 'This takes me back to when I worked alone. Now we have agencies in all the major German Cities.'

'Are you avoiding my question, Mr Hueller?'

Erik laughed, 'Not at all. I knew Nathan at university. We caught up again after many years; he helped me unravel the Bismarck bloodline. He told me you are also interested in the Bismarcks.'

'Only as far as their connection to SCoW.'

Erik nodded, 'And it has something to do with a stolen artefact.'

I knew the German was fishing. 'Tell me about this mystery Bismarck business.'

Erik looked straight at me. 'Tell me about the missing artefact.'

'It's the Pike Letter.'

Erik stared at me. 'Is it real?'

'Yes, and SCoW has stolen it.'

Erik asked me, 'Do you know its whereabouts?'

I believe the Palladium Rite has it on display at its meetings.'

Erik, showing interest, asked me, 'Do you know where they hold their meetings?'

I said, 'From what I can gather the Rite hold their meetings in a secret Chamber under the Palladium theatre.'

Erik said, 'It's a bit obvious, isn't it?'

I said, 'Where the best place to hide a tree?'

Erik shrugged.

I grinned, 'In a forest. Sometimes it's the obvious we need to look for.'

## **Chapter 59**

Major Webster had to report back to Walder. But what could he say? He couldn't explain what happened because it could not have occurred. The Major experienced strange things during his military career, but nothing like what happened in the stable that night. Unsure of himself, he decided to wait till morning to give Walder the news.

Major Webster didn't get much sleep that night. Giant pumpkins kept appearing and disappearing in his troubled dreams. He got up early and rode out to Magnolia Plantation to meet with Phileas Walder. It was sunup by the time Webster reached the big house. He saw Walder smoking and

drinking coffee on the porch. Webster approached him, 'Good morning, Mr Walder, and what a grand day it is.'

Walder looked up at the Major, 'Have you dealt with our problem?'

'Yes, er and no.'

'Now just what the hell is that supposed to mean?'

'Well we wounded the Yankee, but Doyle dragged him away.'

Walder stared at Webster. 'Away where?'

'Well, that's just it. I don't know.'

'What do you mean, Major?' Walder pressed, unable to make sense of what Webster was saying.

'Well, Mr Walder, the craziest thing happened. Just as we were about to get Doyle, the Irishman dragged The Yankee inside ...' He paused.

'Inside what?' the Major snapped.

Webster shrugged, 'I don't know. It looked like a huge orange ball. It just appeared.'

Walder looked at Webster, dubiously. 'How much drink have you had?'

'It ain't the drink. Something happened that could not possibly have happened.'

'What happened, Major?' Walder asked exasperated.

'Doyle, the Yankee and the ball just disappeared right in front of our eyes.'

Walder didn't know what to make of it. He told Pike.

Pike said, 'Just who the hell were those guys? If I didn't know better, I'd say they seemed like they came from the future.' Thinking out loud, Pike muttered, 'That would account for that stuff about - what did Doyle call them - robots.'

'Robots. What the hell are they?' Walder said.

Pike, in his own space, said, 'No matter how well we make plans we can never know what the future holds in store for our kin.'

'We still have the letter?'

Pike sighed, 'Yes. But the predictions only pan out for the first two global wars.'

Walder, who had read Pike's letter, said, 'And the third conflict?'

'That will have to be worked out by our descendants, Phileas.'

Hubert Meisinger took a call. Speaking into his phone, he said, 'Abel Thompson, I hope you have something useful to report.'

'Oswald Doyle is back. Owen Bradley spotted him this morning entering his office.'

That was good news for Hubert. Their target had disappeared for a few days. Now he had returned. 'I think it is time for us to meet personally.' Hubert said, 'Is he there now?'

'Yes. Shall I keep a man posted there?'

Hubert lifted his eyes heavenward. 'Of course. And let me know if he leaves.'

'And if he does?'

'Follow him. Do I have to spell everything out for you?'

'No, Mr Meisinger.' Then Abel Thompson asked, 'What about the other job?'

'Tell me when you have the van, and I will tell you where to pick up the target.'

Ozzie was trying to get his house in order. He had to sort those outstanding cases. But before that, he phoned Erik Hueller's number.

Erik answered, 'Yes, can I help you?'

'Oswald Doyle here. Are you free to meet at the Argyll Arms?'

Erik asked me, 'Where is it?'

'Near Oxford Circus.'

'Why there?'

'I'll tell you when I see you.'

'What time?'

'I can meet you there at 1 pm.'

The Argyll Arms public house was situated at 18 Argyll Street, just off Oxford Circus. It was a very convenient hostelry close to the London Palladium.

Erik, punctual, as usual, arrived at one o'clock on the dot. I think Germans must be born with an efficiency gene. I greeted him and said, 'Let's get a drink, and I'll tell you why we're here.'

Erik nodded in agreement and followed me past lots of cut-glass mirrors and dark red plasterwork. We had to push our way through to the busy bar. The pub was bustling and noisy, even that early in the afternoon. A fair number of punters who had already had quite a few drinks talked and laughed loudly, as their inhibitions weakened.

We decided it was too noisy and opted for the dining room upstairs, which was quiet and pleasant. The carpet was well-worn and, like everywhere else, it needed a good clean. The dining room filled up in the pre-theatre period. The menu was minimal, and the star attraction, the ribeye steak was sold out. We had fish and chips... they were good... but not exceptional. I bought some cheap house plonk to finish off lunch.

Erik, who had been very patient, asked me, 'Why are we here?'

I answered, 'This pub dates right back to 1868. It was named after the second Duke of Argyll who lived in a mansion where the Palladium now stands.'

Erik looked at me. 'Fascinating, but I didn't come here for a history lesson.'

I grinned, 'Then get this, the Duke had a secret tunnel linking this boozer with the famous theatre. And I bet somewhere along that tunnel there is a concealed door leading to the secret meeting place of the Palladium Rite.'

Erik stared at me, 'If what you say is true, how does that help me understand the mystery of the Bismarcks?'

'I don't know about that, Erik, but I bet the Pike Letter will have pride of place.'

'Do you know how to get into the tunnel?'

'No, but this place will have a cellar. It's the most likely place for the entrance to the tunnel.'

Erik smiled, 'You could be right. But what has it to do with me?'

'I need a lookout, someone to watch my back.'

'If there is a tunnel entrance in the cellar, how are you going to look for it?'

'I'm working on that.'

'Well, you'd better come up with a plan soon because I fly back to Germany the day after tomorrow.'

I sighed heavily. It wasn't going to be easy. I could break in after closing time, but I need to read "Cat burglary for Dummies," for starters. There was possibly another way. It was a long shot, but I'd run out of options. I dialled Nathan's number.

Erik Hueller took his leave of the Irishman and walked towards the Palladium Theatre to check out the lay of the land. As he did so, a white van pulled up to the kerb near him. A sliding door opened, and a man got out. He said, 'Are you Erik Hueller?'

'Yes. What do you want?' Erik responded, eye-balling the man.

'I want you to come with us,' The man said, now brandishing a handgun.

Before the German had a chance to respond, another abductor dragged him into the vehicle, which took off and blended into the heavy London traffic. This little piece of street drama took place in the space of thirty seconds, too quick for Erik's security detail to stop them.

One of the bodyguards spoke into his radio, 'EH has been taken! I repeat, EH has been taken.'

## **Chapter 60**

It was time for me to go and visit Declan. I heard he was recovering well and could receive visitors. When I got to Shopwick Surgery, which occupied part of the site of the old Bushey and District Hospital, A man unknown to me was sitting beside Declan's bed. They were deep in conversation, so I didn't want to interrupt them.

Declan saw me. He said, 'Hi Oswald, meet Clarrie Boston. He's the head of new projects at Boogle.'

I shook hands with the man. 'Hi. Ozzie Doyle.'

I pulled up a chair and sat down. Addressing Dec, I asked, 'How are you feeling, mate?'

'I survived. Look, I need your help.'

'Help. In what way?'

'The Q cam. Get it for Mr Boston. He needs the shots I took for a board presentation.'

I nodded, 'I'll have to get it off, Jen.' Then I said, 'There must be some sort of memory card. We can get the images off that.'

'Whatever. As long as you don't damage the images.'

I needed to get rid of the software hotshot. Turning to face him, I said, 'Mr Boston, I need to speak with Declan alone.'

Boston shot a look at Declan, who said, 'That's OK, Clarrie.'

Boston stared at me, 'Are you a lawyer?'

'Strange question, but no.'

'Where do you fit in this scenario, Mr Doyle?'

'Right beside Declan,' I grinned. 'I'm his fellow quantanaut.'

Boston wasn't expecting that. 'Oh, I see. Well, I'll wait outside then.'

Now that we were alone, I said, 'I think I've discovered the location of the Palladium Rite's secret meeting place.'

Declan pressed down to manoeuvre himself into a more comfortable seating position. 'Where do you think it is?'

'In a tunnel between the Duke of Argyll and the London Palladium Theatre. Thought you might like to come and check it out with me.'

Declan stared at me, 'If you hadn't noticed I have a serious bullet wound!'

Playing the game, I said, 'Oh, yeah. Silly me.' I paused then said, 'But what a story to tell your grandkids.' I put on an old person's voice. 'I was shot way back there in 1870, and the bullet was removed in 2018.'

Declan smiled, 'Shit! I never thought of it like that.'

I smiled, 'Anyway, I've got a German detective helping me. You're let off the hook.'

'What's his interest in it?' Declan asked.

'Some big Bismarck family secret. But I don't want to go there. I'm just interested in getting the Pike letter back to its rightful owner.'

Declan looked straight at me. 'I would love to see that.'

'First, I have to find the meeting place.'

Erik, a bit worse for wear had his wrists taped to the arms of a chair. His left eye was partially closed, and his jaw ached from the blows Able and Owen delivered.

Just then, a large, full-bearded man entered the room. He approached Erik. 'Herr Hueller, what is your reason for being in London?'

Erik stared at him. 'I've always wanted to see the Queen.'

He received more blows for his cheek.

Hubert looked down at the detective.

'Who did you come here to meet?'

If Erik wanted to remain conscious, it was time to be truthful. 'I came to meet Mr Doyle.'

'Ah, Oswald Doyle. We have crossed swords.' Hubert asked, 'And what did you discuss with Doyle?'

'England's wonderful climate.'



Another smack in the face from Abel

Erik looked at Hubert, defiance burning in his eyes. 'The company I work for has vast resources and branches all over western Europe, even here in London. I have two bodyguards with me and ...'

Hubert chuckled, 'I'd fire them if I were you.'

'The alert will have gone out, and they will be looking for you and your goons as we speak.'

Erik thought he detected a look of concern on the thug's faces. Hubert kicked Erik's chair, knocking him backwards. The impact with the floor jarred his spine.

'Pick him up,' Hubert ordered Abel.

When Erik was sitting upright again, the big German said, 'What did you and Doyle discuss in the upstairs dining room at the Duke of Argyll?'

Erik knew he could not mention that they knew about the tunnel, but he had to tell the big German something to stop more blows. He said, 'We talked about Leopold and Gottfried Bismarck.'

The surprised - fish out of water - look on Hubert's face told the detective he had hit a raw nerve. 'And what about them?'

'Gottfried hired our firm to look into his ex-wife, Nadine's, death.'

Hubert was unsure how to respond. He had received orders from Leopold von Bismarck to deal with the troublesome German private detective. Hubert didn't ask why. But now he wondered why Leopold wanted to get rid of the detective his brother had hired? he tried, 'Didn't the coroner's findings suggest it was most likely an accident?'

Erik said, 'I don't discuss my client's business with the hired help.'

Hubert, unsure of his footing, decided it was prudent to tread carefully. 'But you discussed this with Doyle, a person you had just met for the first time.'

Erik sighed, 'He was a lead I needed to follow up. But sadly, he had nothing new to offer.'

'What did he have to tell you?' Hubert pressed.'

'Nothing I did not already know.'

'Know about what?' Hubert snarled.

'About the secret side of the Bismarck family.'

Hubert expressed puzzlement. He excused his two henchmen so that only he was privy to what the detective had to say. Once they were alone, he asked, 'What secret side?'

As Hubert's perplexity seemed genuine, Erik explained. 'After Otto von Bismarck died, there were two Bismarck lines of descendants. The Schonhausen line and the Bismarck Schonhausen line.'

Hubert snapped. 'They are one and the same!'

'No, they are not. And Gottfried's wife was murdered because she knew the secret.'

'What secret?'

'That her husband, ex-husband, Valery and Leopold were just a front for the Palladium Rite. They were set up to be scandalised and held up to ridicule while the real power was wielded by Otto von Bismarck's genuine descendants.'

Hubert stared at Erik, his eyes on stalks. 'Lies! All lies!'

Erik said, 'What would I have to gain by making it up. Face it, Hubert, the family that you have faithfully served for decades, is no more than an elaborate sham. The real family don't even know you exist.'

Hubert vigorously shook his head in disbelief. 'It cannot be!'

'Hubert, I have checked the genuine Bismarck genealogy. Leopold and his siblings don't even get a mention. After all the scandals the family had to weather recently don't you see that this false family exposure on the news would be the ultimate insult. After Nadine and Gottfried publicly aired their acrimonious divorce, those pulling strings could not risk her telling the media.'

Hubert stared at Erik but remained silent.

Erik said, 'You have played your part well, Hubert, but you are no longer needed. Let me go, and I will use our resources to help you disappear before you become a loose end.'

It was all very confusing to Hubert. The world in which he had his part to play was shattered. His orderly life became suddenly chaotic. He reached for a boxcutter and released Erik from his bonds.

Erik's left eye socket was bruised and swollen, and his jaw ached. He said, 'I'll help you, but I need you to do something for me.'

## Chapter 61

It was early evening, and I was waiting outside the Argyll Arms for Erik Hueller to turn up. I'd been trying to contact him all afternoon, but he wasn't answering. Then I saw him walking towards me, but I couldn't believe it. He had Hubert Meisinger with him. Had Erik been sent by SCoW to trick me? Had they ganged up to get me?

Erik looked like he's done ten rounds in the ring, but he was still smiling.

Puzzled, I said, 'Are you working for SCoW, Erik?'

Eric answered. 'No Mr Doyle. But Hubert knows the whereabouts of the secret chamber.'

The last time I'd seen Hubert was when I exchanged the Pike Letter for Olivia. Had Erik used some sort of hypnotic trick on the large German? I turned to Hubert. 'Is your plan to get us to walk into a trap?'

Hubert spoke for the first time. Looking straight at me, he said, 'Herr Mueller explained everything to me. I now know SCoW used me as a pawn on a chessboard.'

'That's quite a change of heart.' And it requires a change of plan. I turned to Erik, 'I don't trust him.'

Erik said, 'I'm an expert judge of character. Hubert can take us to the tunnel and the secret chamber.'

Hubert said, 'Mr Doyle, "I now understand you are not my enemy. Like Herr Mueller, you are here to expose the von Bismarck family secret.'

I turned on Hubert. 'I'm here to retrieve a stolen item and return it to the rightful owner. That's all.'

Hubert said to me, 'I can help you. I know where they put the letter.'

Fuck! Is there anything Erik had not told this guy about my plans?

I thought about this bizarre situation, and then I thought, 'What the hell? I needed help wherever I could find it. But I still had my reservations. I turned to Erik. 'You'd better be right about bringing him along.'

It was just after 7 pm and the pub was bustling. I turned to Erik. How can we get to the cellar without anyone noticing?'

Erik looked at Hubert, who, wonder -of -wonders produced a key. Looking at us he said, 'This should help.'

Surprised, I said, 'How come you have a key to the pub?'

He stared at me and sneered. 'For a detective, you're not very sharp.'

'What do you mean?' I snapped.

Hubert's moustache curved upwards slightly suggesting a smile. 'The Argyll Arms is run by SCoW.'

It made sense, I guess.

Hubert took us to the tradesman entrance that led directly to the cellar. Using his key Hubert opened the door, and we were inside. He switched on a light, and I saw we were in the pub storage area. It stank of stale beer. Crates of unwashed empties were stacked up high.

Hubert said, 'We have to move some of these. The tunnel entrance is behind them.'

As we pulled out the crates, as quietly as we could, I couldn't help feeling I was walking into a trap. I mean, it was all too easy. And when things work out so well, my pessimistic self told me, it would all go pear-shaped when we got into the tunnel. But I was committed now and would just have to wait to see how things unfolded.

With the last of the crates moved aside, the door leading to the tunnel, was revealed.

It just had a slide bolt held in a place with a sturdy padlock. As it turned out, Hubert also had the key to the padlock.

We moved into the hewn rock tunnel with Hubert taking the lead. With only his torchlight to guide us, we proceeded along an uneven path strewn with loose pieces of stone. Much to my disgust, it was also inhabited by rats and mice. We'd walked about fifty yards, by my reckoning, when Hubert said, 'Here we are.'

We stopped, but all I could see was the smooth stone wall of the tunnel. Hubert shone his torch on a particular section of the wall where a fine line indicated a secret door. And the next thing I knew a stone door, making a horrendous scraping noise, slid slowly inwards. I couldn't believe it. Had I been transported to a scene in an Indiana Jones Movie?

We followed Hubert into the torch beam, pierced darkness.

Hubert switched on the lights, and we found ourselves in a smallish chamber. There was an arrangement of 12 throne-like seats set in a semi-circle.

Then I saw my prize. The Pike Letter took pride of place on the wall, above what looked like an altar on which was an odd assortment of Masonic artefacts. Erik's and my eyes were riveted on the framed letter, so-much-so we didn't notice Hubert had disappeared until we heard his voice on the tunnel side of the door.

He yelled at Erik. 'YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD FOOL ME WITH YOUR LIES, HERR MUELLER.'

Erik turned to the door, which was now locked from the outside. 'HUBERT, THEY'RE NOT LIES. YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR PURPOSE, AND THE BISMARCKS DO NOT LEAVE LOOSE ENDS.'

'Hubert, proud of his achievement, shouted, 'YOU ARE NOW THE LOOSE ENDS! ONCE LEOPOLD SEES WHAT I HAVE ACHIEVED HE WILL REALISE MY IMPORTANCE TO SCOW.'

I shouted back, 'YOU'RE NOT AS SMART AS YOU THINK!'

'WHAT DO YOU MEAN? MR. DOYLE.'

'IF YOU DO NOT LET US OUT, I WILL DESTROY THE LETTER AND THE OTHER ARTEFACTS. WHAT WILL YOUR LEOPOLD THINK OF YOU THEN?'

Hubert had a sinking feeling in his stomach. He took a short pause to gather his thoughts. At length, he bellowed, 'IF YOU DO THAT YOU WILL BOTH DIE!'

I retorted, 'THAT'S NOT MUCH OF A THREAT TO A CONDEMNED MAN.'

Hubert got closer to the door. 'Why do you want the letter?'

'To return it to the rightful owner.'

'What do you mean. It belongs here,' Hubert stated.

'It's stolen property, and my job is to retrieve it. What's it going to be Hubert? Do I destroy it or give it back to my client? Your choice.'

Hubert thought about his dilemma. Reporting the Pike letter stolen was preferable to explaining why it was destroyed.

I heard the bolt shifting, and the door gradually opened.

Erik, confounded by the experience, was amazed at Doyle's strategy and even more so that it actually worked.

I walked out into the tunnel with my prize under my arm. Hubert gave me a thunderous look.

'Keep your distance, or I'll destroy it,' I warned, gambling that he couldn't afford to risk it.

Looking at us, Hubert snarled, 'You will both be very sorry for this.' Then he turned and walked back along the tunnel to the kitchen of the pub. We followed a few feet behind.

Erik stared daggers at me. 'I should never have gotten involved in your crazy scheme.'

'As long as I have this letter Hubert won't touch us. Once we get back to the Argyll Arms, you go your way, and I will return this to the rightful owner.'

Erik said, 'SCoW are not nice people to piss off. You may have won this battle, Mr Doyle. But you will not win the war.'

'My motto is one battle at a time, Hubert.'

Hubert undid the door to the pub cellar and slipped inside. Then, before we could follow, slammed it shut in our faces.

I couldn't believe it. The bastard had locked us out.

Erik said, 'I guess Hubert needed a little victory for himself.'

Now, the only way out was to find the entrance to the Palladium Theatre. As we trudged back along the tunnel with only my phone light to show the way I was worried that Hubert had phoned for back up and a SCoW reception party would be waiting for us at the theatre. That's what I would have done in his situation. That's if I had any back-up. SCoW did and, if I weren't mistaken, they would

be on their way to get us. I said to Erik, 'We have to hurry. We have to reach the end of this tunnel before the bad guys turn up.'

I ran with my digital torchlight showing the way. Erik was a little way behind but keeping up. The tunnel floor was uneven, so we ran with the torch beam raking the surface. I had no idea what we would find when we reached the end. Perhaps a locked door. In which case we'd have to get the attention of someone on the outside. But hopefully not SCoW members with guns.

I was gambling that SCoW wouldn't give a show of force with theatregoers around. But what if the theatre wasn't open to the public that night. It didn't bear thinking about. Clutching the framed Pike Letter, we ran onward in what seemed an endless shaft. But all tunnels come to an end and straight ahead was a closed door.

Erik said, 'They could be out there, waiting for us.'

'Well, we're not going to find out waiting here,' I said, stating the obvious.

Erik said 'This feels like an Erwin Shroedinger cat moment.'

'Except in our case, we are inside the box,' I corrected.

I sighed, 'Well, this is the moment when we are either dead or alive.'

I shone my phone light on the door. It had a smooth metal surface with no knobs or handles. It had to open inwards from the outside. Which meant we had to get the attention of someone on the other side.

'If we yell for help, the SCoW people could be waiting,' Erik pointed out.

'Yes, but I still have the letter as a bargaining tool.'

Erik shook his head, 'I don't know, Herr Doyle. It's very risky.'

'Have you got any better ideas?' I grinned.

'HELLO, IS ANYONE OUT THERE?' I yelled.

No response.

'HELP! WE'RE TRAPPED IN THE TUNNEL'

I heard someone who happened to be standing by the door, say, 'Is this a joke?'

'No, it's not a bloody joke. Can you open this door?'

'No. It appears to be locked.'

'Can you find someone with a key?'

'Look, I'd like to help, but it's time for us to take our seats.'

'Tell the ticket collector that two men are trapped in the secret tunnel.'

The theatre patron laughed nervously. 'This is a wind-up, isn't it?'

'No, we are really trapped!'

'Oh, dear. Well, stay there, and I'll see what I can do?'

Great advice. As if we had a choice.

The door eventually opened. The caretaker tried different keys and finally found the correct one and Erik and I were free.

'I thought the tunnel was a myth', he said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Erik and I left the theatre. I was surprised there was no SCoW welcoming committee waiting outside.

I left Erik to carry on with his Bismarck family quest and went back to my office. It had been a tough day, and a JW libation or three was in order. Next, I rang Adrian, who was delighted that I had the original Pike letter.

I congratulated myself on a job well done when I received a phone call. A distorted gruff voice said, 'Mr Doyle, you are becoming a thorn in our side. This is what you will do ...'

I was ropable. I responded, 'Get fucked!'

'No Mr Doyle. You are the one who is fucked.'

More fucking threats. 'Well, it's too late. I have returned the letter to its owner,' I bluffed.

The voice said, 'I'm sending you a video. Then you will do as I say.'

My heart was beating like a bass drum as I opened up a movie file in messages. It was a short video featuring Olivia Quinn.

She looked frightened as she sat with a hand on her shoulder. Olivia said, 'Ozzie, you must give SCoW the letter. If you don't, they are going to kill me.'

A male voice said. 'You had better do as Ms Quinn says, Mr Doyle. Take the item to the Palladium Theatre. Once we receive the item, Ms Quinn will be set free. Failure to comply will end in her death. Do you get it?'

'You bastard.'

FUCK, FUCK, FUCK! What was I to do now? I mean, I knew what to do but not how to do it.

The sensible thing to do would be to comply with SCoW's demands. But if I didn't deliver the letter back to Adrian Bennet, he'll sue my arse for everything I own, which isn't much. But more importantly, he'll destroy my credibility as a private detective. I needed to consult Jennifer. She had a clear, concise mind and could help me put my conundrum in perspective.

I rang her and, upon hearing her voice, I said, 'Jen, I need your help with something.'

'Oh, what have you done now?' Jen asked, not really wanting to get involved.

'This is urgent. Can I come and see you now?'

'What, tonight? Can't it wait until tomorrow?'

'It's a matter of life and death. I need your input now!'

Jennifer sighed deeply, 'Oh, very well. I'll tell the guards to expect you.' She added for good measure, 'And it had better be good.'

We sat on Jen's sofa as I gave her a brief rundown of the SCoW saga so far.

At length, Jen said, 'Let me see if I have this right. You are employed by Adrian Bennet to retrieve his stolen property. You took the Pike Letter from SCoW, a particularly nasty group of people fronting for the Palladium Rite. They want the letter back and are threatening your girlfriend in Australia if you don't meet their demands.'

'That about sums it up.'

'And how long have you got to give SCoW the Letter?'

'I have to wait for instructions. But I don't know how long it will take.'

Jen furrowed her brow. 'I can see it's a problem for you, Oz, but I don't see how I can help?'

'I need to take a little trip to the Q.'

Jennifer stared at him. 'Absolutely not!'

I was expecting this response. 'Jen, if you'll just let me explain.'

'OK, explain away, but the answer will still be no.'

'I've been working with Erik Mueller who's been digging up dirt on the Bismarck family.'

Jennifer chuckled derisively, 'He wouldn't have to dig very far. The Bismarck scandals are all over the tabloids.'

'Yes, well this one is about Nadine Rebecca Reichschler.'

'Who's she?'

'Gottfried von Bismarck's wife. Well, his ex-wife. Or to be more precise, his ex- ex-wife.'

'What do you mean, Oz?'

'She was murdered, and Gottfried hired Erik to find out what happened.'

'So?' Jennifer shrugged.

'I need to use the Q to see who the murderer is.'

'Why?'

'Because I need leverage.'

Jennifer shook her head, 'Even if I did think it's a good idea you know as well as I we have to give a month's notice to use the Q. And the SCoW people are hardly likely to wait that long.'

'Which is why I need to go now!' I pressed, 'How hard can it be. I have the location, the date and approximate time of the murder.'

Jennifer responded, 'It might seem simple to you, but I'll be up all night creating an algorithm to do the job.'

'Is that a yes then?'

'Much against my better judgement.'

I got up and gave Jen a great big hug. 'I owe you big time.'

'Yes, and I won't forget it.'

'Because, if as I suspect, she was killed to stop her from spilling the beans on the Palladium Rite, the murderer may well be a member of SCoW.'

'And if you're wrong?'

'Then, I'm fucked!'

## Chapter 62

It was a simple operation. I arrive at the Bismarck home; go to the gymnasium, hide and wait. The first part was accomplished. I stepped out of the Quantime and looked at the imposing building in the distance. The Q set me down about 500 metres from the Friedrichsruh Castle, the scene of the crime. Jen had done her magic; I could speak German. All I needed now was a way in without arousing suspicion. I figured the gym, although makeshift, would have a shower unit, so I was dressed in overalls and a hi-viz vest and had a toolbox with me.

Jen told me taking the toolbox was OK because it belonged to the current timeline and didn't contravene the laws of quantum exchange.

With the Q, invisible, I walked over to the castle. As I approached the enormous white building, it occurred to me that I didn't know the location of the gym. Erik told me about Gustav, the old retainer, and how he'd been helpful. But it wasn't the former butler who met me at the castle threshold. A smartly dressed man, in his forties, stood ramrod straight with a look of suspicion in his eye.

I indicated my metal toolbox. 'I'm here to fix a leak in the shower near the gym.'

'I have no report of such a leak, Herr?' the butler stated. 'Who are you?'

'William Connelly,' I lied. 'A man called Gustav told me about the leaking tap. Just check with him,' I said, knowing if the old man was still around my plan was dead in the water.

The man replied, 'Gustav is no longer in the Bismarck's employ.'

Hugely relieved, I said, 'I'm sure a man of your importance around here hasn't got time to be involved in something as menial as a leaking tap, just get someone to show me the way, and I can have it fixed in no time.'

The ploy worked, and I was taken to the home gym. The servant left me to my business. I checked the time, and I only had ten minutes before Nadine entered the gym for the last time. I had to find a hiding place with a good line of sight with the homemade bench press. The only useful place of concealment was an old table with cardboard boxes stacked on and under it. I moved some of the boxes around and squeezed in under the table, then moved some of the cartons to conceal me. I put my phone camera in no-flash mode and waited.

Ten minutes later Nadine and a guy I took to be Hermann Kess, her fitness trainer, approached the makeshift bench press. The trainer set the weights to suit Nadine's upper body strength and watched while she carried out half a dozen lifts. Then the young man said something to Nadine in German I didn't get. My German was adequate, but I wasn't exactly fluent in the language. Hess left Nadine to her own devices.

She continued with her lifts when another person entered the room. I couldn't see who it was from my angle. He got behind her with his back to me. Then he took the barbells off her and returned them to the rack. She must have known who it was because she was not alarmed by his presence or his actions. He then took another set of barbells off the rack and placed them over her chest. They had much bigger weights. This amused Nadine. She laughed, saying, 'I don't think I'm ready for these weights yet.'

The man said nothing. Still, with his back to me, he slid his hands under the back of her head and violently thrust her neck up into the bar holding the weights, crushing her windpipe, cutting off her air supply. I lay under the table, helpless, as Nadine gasped her last breath. I was filming the crime when the murderer turned around, and I found myself looking at Leopold von Bismarck.

I waited until Leopold left then, as William Connelly the plumber, I made my way to the front



entrance, whistling as I went.

The butler stopped me at the front door and asked me, 'Have you fixed the leak?'

'Of course, It's all fine now.'

I could see by his stand-offish look the butler had his suspicions. 'None of the staff I have asked know anything about a leak.'

I had to give the officious creep something else to think about. Staring at him, I said, 'While I was working up there, I heard gasping noises coming from the gym. It could have been somebody overexerting themselves, but it sounded odd. You might want to check that out?'

'Didn't you go and investigate, Herr Connelly?'

I shook my head. 'It's got nothing to do with me. I'm a plumber, not an investigator.' I said, 'Well, I must be on my way.'

Back in London, I received SCoW's instructions about returning the Pike Letter. Feeling confident, I phoned Hubert's number. When he answered, I said, 'I know who murdered Nadine Reichschler, so there's a change in the plan.'

I heard Hubert's angry voice. 'If you do not comply, we will kill Olivia Quinn.'

Equally aggressive, I retorted, 'Did you not hear what I just said, 'If you don't release Olivia, Video evidence of Leopold von Bismarck, strangling his brother's ex-wife will be all over the media,'

Hubert stopped in his tracks. 'You're bluffing Mr Doyle, and you are playing with Ms Quinn's life.'

I'd had it with this fucking German. 'Listen, you Nazi prick, I'll send you the video if that's what it takes to convince you I'm not pissing around.'

I ended the call and sent him the file.

Shortly after I received a call from Hubert. 'Have you seen my little film?' I asked, smugly.

There was a short pause before the German answered. 'Yes, but how ...?'

I was ready for him. 'Never mind how. Tell your bosses this. If any harm comes to Olivia at any time, I will release this film. You goons had better make sure she's well looked after.' Feeling overly smug I added, 'And you're not getting the fucking letter.'

## The End

### Epilogue

It wasn't the huge success story I'd expected. Visions of exposing SCoW and the Palladium Rite and avoid a Third World War. That was asking a bit much, though. The culprits are of such high standing in society that even if I revealed their identities, they're too high up the power ladder to be touched. But on the positive side, I did manage to return the Pike Letter to Adrian Bennet, and my credibility as a private investigator is still intact, as are my teeth.

To tell the truth, I didn't really know what to expect from my meetings with Pike. I mean they didn't exactly change anything, and as things are going, it looks as though either artificial intelligence or the Pike plot is going to win in the world domination stakes. It sounds a bit like a horse race. Which, in a way, it is, with only four jockeys who come from the apocalypse.

To be fair to yours truly, under Quantum exchange rules of engagement, I wasn't allowed to change anything. The only satisfaction I can glean from those meetings is that Pike would have nightmares

of mechanical humanoids chasing after him. I can only wish. Okay, that's petty. I guess I would like to think I'd made a difference, without making a difference.

I was driving myself nuts and not making a whole lot of sense. I think it has something to do with the anti-climax that life is for me when I'm not playing at being a Quantanaut. Another reason for my ennui is that I don't have any cases at the moment. That doesn't worry me because my Pike Letter fee has given me time for a little R and R. Oh, I've been offered cases, but it's the same old, same old. Relationship problems, Business wrangles, lost dogs; you know the sort of thing. In any case, I only want history-related assignments. Most other jobs are too tedious to keep me awake.

Talking of outstanding jobs, Mr Lawrence has found out the cost of having a bit on the side. Danny was reunited with his long-suffering parents, and I'd managed to get a result for Globe Assurance by getting Mr Benton charged with insurance fraud.

Having cleared the books on that, I decided to call Jen. This time I'd shout her a meal. We met at the Sunrise Cafe, in East Acton, my manor, for a change. I came across this family-run restaurant one day and popped in for a takeaway breakfast, which I didn't realise they did! The food was really delicious, all hot and tasty. There were quite a few customers, mostly tourists eating mega breakfasts to set them up for a day of running around London.

As we waited for the friendly staff to bring us our meals I said, 'How's it going, Jen?'

She smiled at me, 'Murphy thought something was up, but he couldn't prove anything.'

'He didn't find the algorithm on your computer?'

'After they hacked into it last time It's triple encrypted now, Let's see if they can break that code.'

I reached across the table and took hold of Jen's hand. 'I can't thank you enough. You literally saved my life, and Olivia's.'

Jen said, 'How is she going in Australia?'

I grinned, 'I'll be finding out soon.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, I have an invite.'

'And you're going?'

'Why the hell not. I don't suppose ...'

'Definitely not. You can't use the Q for your vacations'

'I suppose I'll have to fly then.'

Jennifer beamed, 'I've got some news as well.'

'Oh!'

'Dec has proposed, and I accepted. We're going to live in Seattle.'

'Fuck me!' I uttered wide-eyed.

Jennifer smiled, 'I think the word you're groping for is 'congratulations.'"

We both laughed raucously.

Then our food arrived.

## **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 writes contemporary works of fiction: 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 ethics and Human Survival. Chris has written 24 books to date. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

## **Books by Chris Deggs**

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

Entropicus book 1 – the mastery of alchemy

Entropicus book 2 – the mystery of Atlantis

Entropicus book 3 – the madness of androids

Grey Area – the truth is down there'll

Green Alert – saving the future.

Hack – world bank in crisis

Investigation – the nunnery murders

London Lies - the terror agenda

Marlowe – a quantime experience 2

Millennium – countdown to chaos

Nanofuture – the small things in life

Plane Truth – what happened on 9/11

Stealth book 1 – the silent invaders

Stealth book 2 – the enemy within

Termination – the eugenics agenda

Vincent – a quantime experience 1

## **Connect With Chris Deggs**

### **Internet**

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<https://www.feedaread.com/search/books.aspx?keywords=chris%20deggs>

## **Outernet**

If you are in the area you can catch up with Chris and say G'day at local art and craft markets in Tweed Shire, New south Wales, Australia.

First Sunday of month Tweed Heads Men's Shed Markets

Second Sunday Chillingham Markets

Third Sunday Uki Buttery Markets

Fourth Sunday Murwillumbah Showground Markets

