

Marlowe

A Quantime Adventure



Chris Deggs

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

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Dedication

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

Foreword

England 1593

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"To what do you refer?"

"Things you may not know about Sir Walter."

"Of what things do you speak?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Really! Why is that?"

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

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

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

"But I cannot just stand by while..."

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

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

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

"Blasphemy! Where have I blasphemed?"

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

To which of my many manuscripts do you refer?"

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

"Then what should I do?"

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

"Pray, how am I supposed to disappear?"

"You will have to leave that to me."

Chapter 1

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

Please be quiet. Rehearsal in progress

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

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

"You are?" he said, reaching me.

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

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

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

"One of our Thespians is missing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So you have weekly rehearsals?"

"Usually, yes."

"Do you make contact with your actors between rehearsals?"

"Only if necessary."

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

"No."

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

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

"I'm all ears."

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

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

He hesitated, "Yees. In theory."

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why the urgency?"

"We have to open in thirteen days."

There's one thing worse than looking for missing people, and that's looking for missing individuals who aren't missing. Ms Yeldon fell in this category. If she was sabotaging Jerrod's play, staying out of his way was probably a good option. Still, he was paying me to find her so I figured I'd better earn my dough. My phone told me it was getting on for noon, and I had another pressing engagement, a lunch date with Jennifer Smethurst. She's the genius who invented the Quantime,

often referred to as simply the 'Q'. I hadn't seen her for a few months since the French adventure. Although the term 'French experience' is putting it mildly, particularly since it took place around 90 years before I was born. As the months have rolled by since my knowledge of it all seems a bit unreal, or is that surreal? Anyhow, she wanted to see about something, and I sure wanted to see her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Declan Merrick."

"Who's he, Jen?"

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

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

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

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

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

"What sort of investment is involved."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When you have your report ready come round for dinner. Then Jennifer said, "I've missed you too."

My mind screamed 'YES!'

Chapter 2

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

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

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

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

"What's this for, I asked."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh! Which agency would that be?”

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

“Can't say I've heard of them.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And you say she's missing.”

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

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

I grinned, “So you are her agent.”

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

“How about an address?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Boogle Inc. Rankings

#45 in FORTUNE 500 (June 2015)

Dow Jones Global Titans

#6 in FT Global 500 (June 2015)

#42 in FORTUNE 1000 (June 2015)

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

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

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

"Are you Ms Yeldon?"

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

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

“What do you want to speak about?”

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

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

The main door buzzed, then opened.

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

“Oh, do you know where she is?”

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

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

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

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

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

“What's his phone number?”

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

“And your brother's contact details?”

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

“Great! Can you do it now?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Touche. You'd better bring it in then. Pity it isn't Mattheus Rose, though."

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

"So how's it going with the 'Q' project?"

"Where's the report on Declan Merrick?"

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

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

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

"So, what's wrong with that?"

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

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

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

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

"I'm intrigued. Tell me about it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you believe it happened that way,"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He thinks I already have one."

"Shit! I see what you mean."

Chapter 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I piped up. "What about Elizabethan England?"

"Why?" They both chorused.

"To find out about Marlowe."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Declan wore a puzzled frown but said nothing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“As soon as I stepped into Jen's Pumpkin, as we affectionately called it, it was very odd. There were no seatbelts, no controls; not even an engine! I guess my brain was in 'can not compute' mode. The

best way I can explain it is there was a particular mind numbing about it. In some way, such an odd experience seemed to override the reptilian fight or flight instinct.”

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

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

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

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

“Oh, come on in.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She explained, “The thing about 'quantum reality' is that everything in the universe exists simultaneously. The general idea with quantum mechanics is that a standing wave represents 'potential', in that, in its quantum state, it can collapse into the form of particle reality, as an act of

consciousness. What the CPU of the 'QSA' does is change that potential into the reality of a chosen target, e.g. the Elizabethan era.”

“Wow! That's amazing.”

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

“What do you mean?”

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

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

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

“Oh!” he responded, eyes widening.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4

Don't get me wrong. I quite like the bloke. But now that Declan Merrick is on the scene the dynamic between Jennifer and I has changed. She seems to be spending more time with him. His understanding of this quantum weirdness is far more advanced than mine. They talk in a kind of secret language together. Well, that's how it seems. It's not that I'm jealous of him. I mean, apart

from an off-the-chart IQ and a few billion in the bank what's he got that I haven't. Okay, so I am jealous of the prick. And, to top it off, I have to work with him. Well, I don't have to but if I want another 'Q' experience I do have to if you know what I mean. The only positive in this for me is that, although the big investor is my boss, when it came to the quantime he had to defer to my greater experience. So I had to button my lip and spend time with Declan, researching into the life and times of Christopher Marlowe.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I wanted to put this knowledge to practical use and started to compile a list of people I'd like to investigate about Marlowe's death. Thomas Kyd was right at the top of the list. History has it that he, a prominent playwright, was served with an edict to appear before the Privy Council in May 1593. He told them he had lived with Marlowe for two years as a 'chamber fellow' (Elizabethan

term for homosexual) an indictable offence, between men of different classes, during that time. Kyd, the author of 'The Spanish Tragedy' along with other acclaimed works, was the second most prominent English playwright of that era. After that disclosure, Marlowe left Kyd and shacked up with Sir Thomas Walsingham, a courtier to Queen Elizabeth.

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

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

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

"Yes, but I have a few questions first."

She laughed, "You always do."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How the heck does that happen?" Declan asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Declan said, "Yeah, let's do it."

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

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

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

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

Chapter 5

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

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

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

"How is that even possible?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

My first impression of London was that of a 'chaotic nightmare' I'd never experienced anything like it. Carts and coaches were thundering along as the world ran on wheels. At every corner people

meeting in shoals, jostled each other. On top of this, hammers beating here, Coopers hooping there and water tankards running at a tilt. London was deafening, congested, bawdy, bustling and busy. Trades of every kind and description: churches, inns, houses, workshops, stalls, stables and theatres. The place looked like a chaotic zoo, with cats, dogs, pigs, horses and sheep all over the place. I was horrified by the awful bear baiting and cruel cockfighting. London, it appeared, was a city of inns, alehouses and bawdy houses, all used by actors, courtiers, churchmen, merchants, shoppers, apprentices, money lenders, bawds, beggars and thieves.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Luckily there was coinage in my purse. One penny got us a ride across to Blackfriars. The ferryman crammed as many of us in as was possible, making the long row boat ride low in the water. I saw some commercial barges on the river, as well as a gilded vessel carrying noblemen up the river to

the royal court. There were people chained to the river bank. I ventured to speak to a passenger next to me. “Pray Sire, What has befallen those wretched souls?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And what is your business here, Master Doyle?”

“We are here to seek knowledge of Master Kit Marlowe.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kyd brightened, “You will promote my work?”

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

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

“Do you have ink and quill?”

“I am a playwright. Of course, I have such things.”

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

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

“Did Marlowe write them?” I asked.

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

“You betrayed your good friend!”

“Alas, yes.”

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

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

“Then what happened?” I asked.

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

“Was he arrested?” I asked.

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

“Who was?” I asked.

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

“Did Marlowe get caught?” Declan asked.

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

“Did he get to attend?” I asked.

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

“In a drunken brawl?”

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

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

“What do you mean?” Thomas queried.

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

Declan shot me a black look.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It's a difficult rule to follow.”

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

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

“That's if someone did kill Marlowe.”

“Come again my man?”

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

“Do you have a list, Oswald.”

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

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

I grinned, "I guess I'll soon find out."

"Are you planning on going back already?"

"Jen will be waiting for a report."

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

"You must be getting used to the smell."

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

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

"The passing of dear Edward Freer."

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

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

"Just when it was getting interesting."

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

Chapter 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No, I'm afraid not.”

“Has your brother seen her?”

“You'll have to ask him about that.”

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

“Oh, I can't give you that!”

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

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

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

“Oh, yes. Alright then.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So, can you please tell me?”

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

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

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

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

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

That was as far as I was going to get with that case at present. So it was back on the trail of Mr Scott. He worked for Andrews Accountancy and Auditing, in Kilburn. It was Tuesday afternoon so he'd be out of the office visiting clients. Except he wasn't. Well, he was out of the office, with Barbara Melbury, from Barclays Bank. Instead of working out balance sheets, they were balancing in the sheets of room nine of the Last Minute Hotel, where they'd carried on their love tryst for the last six weeks. Of course, they could have been working out adjustments and dealing with deposits and discharges for all I knew. But the moment of truth had come, and I had to earn my fee.

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

“What's this for Mr Doyle.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“But what?”

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

“tell me what exactly?”

“Boogle sells intelligence.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Alright, tell me.’

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

“Which is?” Jennifer pressed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Wrong idea about what?” I queried, genuinely puzzled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 7

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

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

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

"The QSA way of course."

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

"Would that be a problem?"

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

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

"True, but I was a quick learner."

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

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

Genuinely surprised, she said, "Please explain."

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

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

I grinned, "You know what I mean?"

"You need to attend QA meetings?"

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

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

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

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

So that was it. I felt like I had a sign around my neck 'not wanted on voyage'. I needed a legitimate reason for going with Declan, and I couldn't think of one. True, I had a greater knowledge of London, but he had Boogle maps. Of course, he couldn't take his phone with him. There again, if it was possible to fit a quantum camera to the 'Q' why not a phone – a quantum phone. I could call Jen from anywhere in history. Now there's a concept to get your head around.

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

"Hello, What's happening?"

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

"Dimmock's in control of that."

"That doesn't answer my question."

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

"Is this Qcam for real mate?"

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean?"

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

"The Boogle guru!"

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

"Fuck man! That's huge."

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

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

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

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

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

"Sounds like you're up to something."

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

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

“You want to know where that actress is, right?”

“Do you mean Celine Yelgun?”

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

“Are you a member of the caste?”

“Yes. Do you want to know, or not?”

“Who am I speaking to?”

“Never mind about that.”

“Okay, so where is she?”

“Shacked up with a dyke called Carla Romano.”

“Where can I find her?”

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

“She must be loaded to live there.”

“That's all I know.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So you're looking for our Celine.”

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

"I'd worked that out, Mr?..."

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

"Used to, Mr Doyle. I direct productions these days."

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

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

I did so, sinking into comfortable repose.

Carla said, "She works for me now."

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

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

"Hence the headaches."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's the play Celine is in."

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

"Yes, I have heard that."

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

Then she said something that nearly floored me.

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

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

"Hypothetically?"

“Yes, Ms Romano.”

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

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

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

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

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

“But that's just a theory, right?”

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

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

“If only such a document existed.”

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

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

I just smiled, knowingly.

“You're a detective, aren't you?”

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 8

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

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

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

Jennifer perked up, "What document?"

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

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

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

"What other way is there to put it?"

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

"Ossie, I'm not interested."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No, you haven't said.”

“Declan wants to buy 49 percent for 100 million pounds.”

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

“Of course.”

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

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

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

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

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

The wine waiter hovered at their table.

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

“Sounds good to me.”

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

Jennifer mentally kicked herself. She should have been on Nathan's back about it. In a moment of weakness and desperation, Nathan had persuaded her to leave the 'Qcam project in Dr Dummick's hands. That was a huge mistake, one for which she now paid dearly. True, the detestable man was a quantum genius, but he was also a drunkard pill popper, who spent significant amounts of time in deep, dark, abject despair. Jennifer had left the project in Nathan's hands who promised to keep tabs on the deeply depressed scientist. But she hadn't heard from him in weeks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It has to be soon."

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

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

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

“Nathan, I need a huge favour from you.”

The Goodfellow alarm bells rang loudly. “Oh!”

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

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

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

“Afraid Dimmick's having one of his deep downers.”

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

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

“You'll have to tell Declan what you know.”

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

“Can you meet us at the LSE Garrick at 1 pm?”

“Today!”

“It is rather pressing, yes.”

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

“Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou, thankyou.”

“At least I get to meet him.”

“And I thought it was me you wanted to see.”

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

“Oh, and what is that?”

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

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

“But if his death was a hoax ...”

“Oh! And was it faked?”

“I don't know until I find such a document.”

“And where is this document?”

“If it exists, back in Elizabethan England.”

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

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

“What makes you think that?”

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

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

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

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

“Hop into the 'Q' for a start.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Ossie, you're pushing your luck.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Cool.”

“I won't keep you waiting long,”

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

Jennifer smiled, then left to find Nathan.

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

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

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

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

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

“Yeah, so what about quantum photography?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Please tell me, Jen.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Declan, still puzzled, said, “But I thought ...”

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

“Yes but they're different to ...”

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

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

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

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

The mathematician sighed, “I'll do my best.”

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

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

Chapter 9

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

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

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

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

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

We both shook our heads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She laughed, "You would think so, but I don't believe it works quite like that." Seeing the total incomprehension written all over our faces, she said, "Bearing in mind that in quantum processing,

Qbits, which can exist in superposition, represent atoms, ions, photons and electrons that all work together to act as Qputer memory. Now imagine, where you step out the QSA, it accounts for a remote 'cloud' on the web. Remember that before you 'assimilate' all the data that allows you to do so, I programme the QSA from the Qputer." Looking at the two men, she continued; Now this is the weird bit. "The information uploaded to the QSA has to match the data downloaded from the remote 'cloud' site."

"What if it doesn't match, Declan asked."

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

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

"Really! Please explain," Jennifer said.

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

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

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

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

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

"From the destination, of course."

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

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

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

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

I said, "My brain hurts."

Chapter 10

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

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

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

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

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

"What for?"

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

"It sounds risky."

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

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

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

"How do you propose to do that?"

By checking out his residence in Seething Lane."

"Pray, where is that?"

"By the Tower of London."

"How do we gain entrance?"

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

"So do you plan to break in?"

I shrugged, "Maybe, but I'll try knocking first."

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

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

"Wasn't he the Queen's private secretary?"

"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If we can find them?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Why do you need to know that?" he asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

"What have you found?" I asked, excitedly.

"A draw with a false bottom."

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

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

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

"Reporting us to whom,"

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

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

We froze.

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

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

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

"Did you find anything you were looking for?"

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

"You could try his Barn Elms home."

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

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

"We look for Ingram Frizer."

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

"What, the fact that you stole it?"

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

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

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