

Act 1: Scene One

"Out, out brief candle! life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his time upon the stage and then is heard no more."

Macbeth

18th December 2009, 5.00 am

Sunbeams slid through the bare branches of the trees of Hyde Park and settled on the cold stone of a small, delicate statue of Peter Pan. The stone figure had been carved to look full of life and youth and seemed exuberant, ready to leap off its plinth and fly through the air to welcome in the cold dawn. Sitting on the harsh concrete, with his back propped up against the base of the statue, was an English prince. He was stripped to the waist. His arms hung loosely at his side, and it was with a huge effort the young man lifted his head up, forcing himself to try to take in the beauty of the morning. The sun rose, cutting through the branches of the wizened oak trees and into his eyes. The scent of damp grass was tainted with a faint sourness. Blood.

He tilted his head and look down. Matted blood highlighted the horrific cuts in his chest, a dozen or so deep slashes made by a cruel hand armed with a lethal blade. Blood dripped rhythmically onto the concrete floor around the statue, a slow tattoo beating out the last moments of his life. The cuts formed two words. He tried to think, what could they mean? But constant waves of pain made it impossible to hold any thoughts for more than a few fractured seconds. He gave up on the words, knowing he was dying, and tried to think back on his brief life, had he done what was expected of him? What were the thoughts he wanted to treasure? His mother, dressed in white, the joy in her eyes all those years ago... flashing multicoloured lights and his kid brother's wild dancing at last night's party... that text from his girlfriend, her funny tan lines after that first holiday in Belize at the Bella Maya Resort in Placencia... his father's voice last week as he tried to persuade him to come up with the family for a stag hunt at Balmoral...

But then another image surfaced in his mind. The face of his attacker. There had been such burning hatred in the man's eyes as the knife had bitten into his skin.

After it was finally over the man had leant in close, hot breath brushing his cheek. "You have no right to be here. No right to your life. I'm taking it all away from you. And when you die, a new destiny will be born."

As the sun rose, the city of London emerged from its sleep and stretched into life; unaware that the future king of England, His Royal Highness Prince William, had died alone.

Act 1: Scene Two

"Now is the winter of our discontent."

Richard III

Jonny, the Head of Client Services, was in full flow and his regulation shaved bald head bobbed up and down inside his regulation black shirt.

"Car parking is an exciting business. It's full of challenges, rewards and passion. How about this?" As he spoke he lifted his hands in front of his face as if forming the words in the air. "We don't just like what we do. We love what we do. We're passionate about car parks."

Dan watched his boss, trying not to laugh. The remorseless marketing double talk pinned the three clients from Heathrow Airport Car Parking Services into their chairs. Jonny had used the same basic pitch last week to Cadbury on the launch of their new range of organic premiere milk chocolate and the week before to the glorified burger bar TGI Friday's. Next week's meetings with Victoria's Secret and the Ministry of Trade would no doubt unveil the same miraculous conclusion.

Although there were aspects of his job Dan loved, such as being asked to dream up ground breaking ideas for advertising campaigns, he hated all the hot air and spin. But, he was good at it, and it was a fair living.

They were sitting in a glass walled meeting room. On the other side of the office a goggle eyed lump was gawping at him. It was the star of the show, a catfish called Eric who lived in the huge aquarium at the centre of the busy marketing agency Big Fish Branding. Dan felt a peculiar affinity with Eric. They were both foreigners trying to adapt to the English way of life. In Dan's case, he was an American working as a creative director in London; in Eric's case he had been scooped out of an African river before ending up in London via three months on a ship and a pet shop.

As Jonny talked, Dan's mind wandered from the meeting, contemplating instead why Eric was flapping about in such a listless manner. He guessed that having Deep Dish Doughnuts as a client and an account team always dropping crumbs into Eric's tank might be part of the problem. Dan's reflection stared back at him from the meeting room windows and he wondered whether he was in better or worse condition than Eric. His dark hair, grey eyes and high cheekbones looked good from a distance.

Yet up close it was a different matter. His pale skin and black rings under his eyes signalled too many hours working late at the computer. It had been a demanding few months.

"I've got it," continued Jonny. "We need a position-ing statement for the car parks, something positive so that people can see that you're not just converting that meadow at Terminal 2 into a car park for no reason. It's there to provide a better service to your customers who want the convenience of a nine minute bus ride to the terminal and cost effective parking solutions. How

about this for a strap line?" He held up his arms as if visualising a biblical scene in front of the clients. "Space to grow." He paused for dramatic effect. "More spaces for parking, and with some of the meadow preserved, plants can still grow."

"But the central part of our business projections is to optimise the land use. Err... we... we don't see the need to keep any of the meadows. Each space we don't exploit costs us significant revenues." The perspiring rotund face of the senior client Derek leaned forward across the faux Formica table. His profile cut into the beam from the projector and created shadows on top of the PowerPoint presentation that looked like a hippo sitting on a toilet. Derek's tie strayed dangerously close to his glass of sparkling water and came to rest on the plate of melting chocolate biscuits.

Marnie the Kiwi girl was the other member of the Big Fish branding team in the room. Derek, in his usual cold bullying way, pointed at her. "You've been v-very quiet, what do you think the key issue is for us here?" Dan could see Marnie jump, there was no way that she would know anything about this presentation. She was even fresher off the boat than him in London and had only been drafted in to the meeting to make up numbers. Her face turned crimson.

"Aaaah well, I er..." she mumbled.

Dan cut in. "Funny you should ask. Marnie was saying only yesterday it would be great PR if you could preserve some of the meadows in the new parking lots. The green lobby would love you. Who knows, they might even park their electric cars there when they're going on holiday." Dan leaned forward and clicked the mouse button on the Apple laptop, launching a hypnotic animation and the next part of the presentation:

Additional Revenues from Airport Car Parking Perceptions of Profit.

"Letting people park up is just the start," said Dan. "We want to talk about what happens next, when people are in the airport and on the plane. We've put together an in-depth proposal on how you can increase income with extra services and keep a section of the meadow to satisfy the environmentalists."

Jonny winked slyly at him and took over. "We're talking mobile dry cleaning services. How handy would that be when you've parked your car? We're talking advertising revenues inside car parks. We're talking about weevils. A colony inside a section of meadow we'll preserve, right in the middle of the world's first ecologically sound, carbon neutral, solar powered, pro-green and highly profitable car park."

Jonny was interrupted by a delicate knock on the door and Heidi the office manager came in bearing cups of coffee, pain au chocolat and doughnuts. It was all going terribly well and everyone took a ten minute break. Dan stood up to stretch his legs, and leaving the clients chatting headed back to his desk to check his email.

Heathrow Airport wasn't Dan's only regular client. On average he had to deal with about eight or ten, all of whom thought they were the most important people in his life. Every spare moment to catch up was essential. There were three new emails from Heathrow, all making last minute additions to the meeting agenda. Predictably the clients had forgotten all about them. Dan raced over his other emails, clicking on one from his mom in San Diego. She was asking what he wanted for Christmas, which was still a couple of weeks away, so off his radar. He dashed off a reply to her, explaining that yes, everything was okay and yes, he could look after himself in London. After all he was in his mid-thirties. Then another email caught his eye.

Subject: Destiny Sent: 18 December 2009 09:46:21

To: Dan Knight (CD) (dan@bigfishbranding.co.uk)

Dan Knight of San Diego - your destiny waits.

<http://www.nextkingofengland.com>

His finger hovered over the delete button, but some-thing stopped him. The email didn't look like ordinary spam. This was different. The sender knew his name. That wasn't unusual in itself, but the fact they also knew his home town seemed strange. Dan read the email address; it was a No reply. He knew the virus paranoid IT director Marco would hate the idea, but Dan decided to break the rules.

He clicked through to the website. It linked to the video website YouTube and a window popped up on his screen. There was a low quality blurry image of a street late at night. To Dan it looked like security camera footage. The date stamp showed it was from last night. The video showed trees, streetlights and a couple of parked cars. A black cab passed by. Dan kept watching and after perhaps a minute, a man with his arm flopped over the shoulder of his girlfriend flickered over the screen. Then a limousine drove past. Another thirty seconds passed and another man appeared on the screen. He was tall, reasonably young and well dressed. He walked with his back to camera but just for a split second he turned and looked up at the camera. Dan had to stop himself gasping out loud.

The image that flashed in the camera lens was blurry but he was sure that just for the briefest moment he was looking at his own face. The video still had another six minutes to run but Dan's mind was spinning.

It wasn't him. He had been at home all night.

Suddenly strong hands grabbed him from behind and span him round in his chair.

"Those weevils are waiting," said Jonny, "don't disappoint them. Get back to the meeting."

Act 1: Scene Three

"The evil that men do lives after them."

Julius Caesar

"You're a fucking disgrace to this family. What sort of attitude do you call that? Call yourself a Fletcher? Consider yourself my worthy daughter? You're a fool." The old man's thin, long face had been thrust forward, his whole body twisted in rage.

It had been months ago but the words echoed in her mind.

Fiona was in the main lecture auditorium at University College London when the unwelcome memory had surfaced. Today was a big day for her, an introductory lecture to a new course that she had designed. She had hoped that a few minutes of quiet contemplation before her students arrived would focus her mind on the upcoming lecture. Instead she found herself huddled in the deafening silence, paralysed by the ghosts of the past.

It had been early September and she had been at her parent's house for the weekend. Throughout the visit her father had followed her and her mother everywhere, talking incessantly but vaguely about his new research. Every hour or two, Fiona had asked him to sit with her and talk through what he had uncovered. Every time he had refused, telling her it wasn't a safe enough place to reveal his secrets.

Then on the Sunday afternoon, as she was wheeling her Triumph Bonneville motorbike out from the garage to head back to London, he had appeared in front of her. It was then, just as she was leaving, that he insisted she listen to his discoveries. She told him she didn't have the time, she was late. His response was to explode with anger. "How dare you treat my work like that? You would be nothing without me. Do you hear me? Nothing. How can you claim Shakespeare's of no interest? Who the hell do you think you are? Why don't you go back to London, to your pathetic ignorant runts, your chattering classes students? You're not wanted here. And look at the way you dress, Fiona. It's a disgrace," he had screamed. "You're no daughter of mine, why can't you be more like your brother? You don't see him coming up here in dirty jeans looking like a ghastly hippy." "You don't see him here at all," she muttered.

"What was that? Don't you answer me back girl. Don't you damn dare talk back to me."

Three of his front teeth were missing and he hadn't shaven properly for days. Tufts of wiry grey hair were massing under his chin and the veins stood out on his neck. In hindsight Fiona knew that was the moment she should have realised how bad things were. But as it was, on that day, she had wanted nothing more than to escape.

Yet within minutes of being on the road through the beautiful Cotswold countryside, she had pulled over and burst into tears. She beat her thighs with her gloved fists and threw her helmet onto the

grass verge in frustration. She was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt at leaving her mother on her own, but the desire to run away and get back to her own life had won out.

But just one week later, when Fiona was back in London, something had changed in her father's brain. His fragile hold on reality had finally shattered, he had lost control and as a result her mother had nearly died. Months later, Fiona was still plagued by guilt. She knew her father's violence had been a result of his illness, but all the books in the world about psychosis and schizophrenia couldn't stop her hating him for what he had done and herself for not being there.

Fiona's mobile phone buzzed in her bag, dragging her back to reality. There was a message from her best friend Nicky, a mature student at the University.

Good luck honey! Coffee later? Nx

There was a sudden commotion as the main doors to the auditorium were pushed open and her students flooded in. She made her way up to the lectern and waited for the students to settle down. On the lectern was a heavy medieval book she had chosen for this introductory lecture, and her laptop. She carefully opened the book at the page she had marked. The musty pages offered a familiar comfort.

She composed herself for a moment, looking out over the crowd. She leant forward into the microphone.

"Hello everyone, my name is Fiona." She paused, waiting for the students to fall silent. "Welcome to this introductory lecture titled, 'Secret Histories, the Science of Secrecy'. I'd like to thank you guys for showing up and hope you'll get enough of a buzz out of my lecture to sign up to this history module. To kick things off I'm going to read you a quote." She leant over and began to read. "Suppose that a famous weaver of magnificent cloth always presented to the world designs that people recognised as his own. Then, suppose if you were to examine in more detail the very weave of the cloth, and in truth saw it revealed a different design, from a different weaver."

She closed the book and looked up. "Now I doubt anyone here can tell me who said that, but you might have an idea what they were talking about?" As she expected there was total silence. She continued.

"That quote was from a guy called Sir Francis Bacon. To those of you who don't know, Sir Francis Bacon was nothing to do with an English breakfast." There was a snigger from the crowd. "He was known to his friends as the 'jewelled mind', because of his intellect. He's been dead for quite some time now; he lived at the same time as Queen Elizabeth the first, so over 400 years ago. As well as being a spy and politician, he was a world expert at the art and science of secrecy, developing many new techniques, some of which we'll be checking out. That quote is from a book he wrote explaining something fundamental about how secret communications work." She walked over to her laptop and pressed play on the video player.

"If you can get your heads around this next bit you'll understand what the course is all about."

A giant screen behind Fiona flashed into life showing a montage of images from the modern world: mobile phones, fax machines, television, postmen, radio, satellites. She talked over the top of it.

"Imagine life in the sixteenth century. There was no television, no internet or computers, cars, trains, planes, faxes, post offices or even a police service. You couldn't pick up the phone and you certainly couldn't send an e-mail. If you had information that was important, the only way to get it anywhere was with someone on a horse, unless you wanted to walk. Think how long it would have taken to get from one end of the country to the other on a horse. Hundreds of years ago, it was as difficult and time consuming to get from London to Manchester as flying round the world is today. Mind you, in those days most of them thought the earth was flat."

"You what? You mean it isn't?" The voice came from the audience, followed by a burst of laughter. Fiona followed the sound, spotting a smart looking British Pakistani boy sat amongst a group of similar students who had enough hair gel between them to be classified as an industrial accident. Fiona suspected he was the leader of the group.

"So what's your name?" Fiona asked.

"Mohammed. Mo to my mates."

"Okay Mo. Let's imagine you're in Elizabethan times. You've got some secret information you need to get to somebody, the problem is that he's a week's journey away by horse. How would you hide the information so it didn't get intercepted on the way?"

"You could shove it up the horse's arse?" Everyone laughed.

"Nice idea Mo, but I'm not sure you would ever get it back, let alone be able to read it. No, think a bit more laterally. In the ideal world, the courier doesn't even know they are carrying secrets in the first place." A look of confusion flashed over Mo's face, but Fiona could see one of his crew smiling. He was a stocky youth in a Bolton Wanderers football shirt. She turned to him. "Yes. You. Go on, what do you think?"

"I'm thinking, like that guy said in that book, if you can hide the stuff inside something else, like another message that look innocent, no-one gonna know it there in the first place."

Fiona was impressed. "Yes, spot on. That's exactly what we're going to learn about; ciphers, the technique of hiding a message within another message. This wasn't just something that aristocrats used to send their mistresses sordid love notes. It's been a vital tool used by governments and royalty for hundreds of years. Who's heard of the Enigma machines?" This time there were more nods. "Enigma was a German cipher machine that the Nazis used in World War Two to tell their U-boat submarines where our naval fleet was operating. Ciphers and codes at one point controlled the future of the world. If we hadn't been able to crack those codes, Hitler would probably have won the Second World War and we would all be goose stepping down Oxford Street. Internet security works essentially the same way, but that's the tip of the iceberg. There are hidden codes and meanings in almost everything from the designs on banknotes, great works of art, barcodes and..."

Fiona stopped abruptly. There was a commotion at the back of the room. A student had run in and was

talking excitedly to the students on the back benches. A Mexican wave of chatter cascaded through the

students. Fiona called the newcomer down to the front. "What's going on? Why'd you interrupt my class?" The student who arrived was red-faced and perspiring, her eyes wild with excitement.

"Haven't you heard?" The girl's voice was shrill, almost a scream. "No, of course. I'm sorry, I'm sure you haven't. It's Prince William. He's dead. It's on the internet. A video. It's horrible. It's like a horror movie. If it's true, if he's dead, then he must have been murdered."

Act 1: Scene Four

"Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

Hamlet

The two men faced the row of oversized steel drawers that covered the wall of the cold room. The constant hum of industrial refrigeration units was broken by occasional clicks from harsh strip lighting and the frigid air had an acidic aroma that lingered in the memory of the room's visitors for days afterwards.

Inspector Brian Sawyer, a squat and heavysset man with curly black receding hair and small dark eyes, leant forward and pulled at one of handles on the wall. The drawer slid open easily, revealing the form of a body covered in a white sheet. Waves of chemically refrigerated air flowed into the room. Sawyer rolled back the sleeve of his dull brown suit and pulled the sheet back to reveal the cold naked body of Prince William.

The two men looked down at the corpse. Neither spoke. The taller man was middle aged, blond haired and blue-eyed with a naturally warm expression. He was dressed immaculately in an understated navy blue suit. On seeing the body he staggered forward, catching the metal tray with one hand to steady himself. He dragged his eyes away from the face and sighed deeply.

"I can positively identify the deceased as His Royal Highness. Now I trust with that unpleasant formality out of the way you will allow me to take possession of the body and make arrangements?" Inspector Sawyer looked over at his companion. He didn't quite know what to make of the Major. He was the head of Royal Security at Buckingham Palace and by all accounts a very close friend of the Royal Family. Inspector Sawyer had been told by his bosses, in voices reedy with panic, that this man had total authority in this case. He, a mere Inspector in Special Branch of the London Metropolitan Police, was simply there to do this man's bidding. This annoyed the hell out of Sawyer.

"Major Barnes-Jones this is a murder investigation. We're going to perform an autopsy."

The Major had seemed lost in thought as he stared at the body, but snapped upright as Sawyer spoke.

"There will be no police autopsy. This is the body of the man who should have become King of England. For God's sake do you have no respect?" The flash of anger on the Major's face disappeared. "Now that I have made a positive identification of the body, from this point forward this investigation is to be under the jurisdiction of Royal Security."

Sawyer looked down at the body with a sense of wonder. Despite all of his security and protection, the most privileged and important young man in the country lay dead in front of him. He couldn't begin to imagine the fallout.

The murder of the heir to the throne was going to be the most scandalous event in living memory, perhaps outweighing the death of his mother in the public conscience. The Inspector felt that he had only just recovered from the ordeal of the London 7/7 terror bombings, but here it was starting all

over again - sixteen hour days, constant stress and the inevitable arguments with his wife.

Sawyer's eyes flicked over the Prince's body, making a mental note of the visible wounds. The face had been left untouched. Instead the attacker had concentrated on the torso. Deep gouges ran across the whole of the rib cage and stomach. Black blood had congealed at the edges of the wounds adding a macabre outline to the cuts, making them stand out against the pale skin.

At first glance the cuts had seemed random. But once he had seen past the dried blood which covered the Prince's chest, Sawyer realised there was nothing random about it.

The cuts formed crude words.

SHALL DISSOLVE

"Shall dissolve? You can see that too?"

"Yes." The Major had been watching Inspector Sawyer closely, trying to work out exactly what sort of man he was dealing with. He trusted his instincts, they had saved his life on more than one occasion. At first glance the police officer portrayed the image of being nothing more than a gorilla in a cheap suit. Having spent time with him, the Major was sure Sawyer was a capable, professional and experienced man. "Have you had any time to speculate as to what it may mean?"

"If you mean why did the nut who did this decide to use the Prince's chest as his notepad? No, I haven't had time to speculate. Not that I would ever speculate. In fact at this point, as this is under the Official Secrets Act and your authority is denying me any opportunity to officially examine the body, it's not going to be easy to speculate." Sawyer could feel his anger starting to come out and forced himself to calm. "In any case there was the matter this morning of taking down that video."

"Yes. Thank you for your actions. Scotland Yard's internet security team is to be complimented on acting so promptly and with such efficiency."

"I'll pass that on."

"This is no longer a police investigation. I need your assurance that no copies of the video exist."

"None of us have one," replied Sawyer honestly. "Can I ask you a question, Major?"

"If it's relevant."

"How did you let this happen? How did Prince William end up on this slab?"

"Inspector Sawyer, you'll be advised in due course of the role that the police will play. Now, we must go up to your office and sign over ownership of the Prince. The Royal household is taking this matter extremely personally and it is my duty to begin to seek resolution as soon as possible."

Act 1 : Scene Five

"Something wicked this way comes."

Macbeth

A crash reverberated through the building and Dan woke up, startled, staring into the semi darkness. He glanced at his alarm clock. The green figures showed 5 am. He groaned.

When he had first arrived in London and looked at the map, Shepherd's Bush had seemed to make sense as somewhere to live. The Georgian style building had appealed with its stucco fronted exterior, retro art deco interior and polished wooden floors. However, that was before he had realised that away from upmarket areas like Chelsea and Mayfair, London was a sea of police sirens at night. Directly below him in a flat designed for two people lived six Australians. Three or four nights a week he was convinced that his floor was about to disintegrate into dust as the vibrations from the jackhammer sound system started up once again and the Australian party animals set about destroying their cage. This was in stark contrast to the Manhattan flat he had left. It had been higher up, in a more exclusive area and much quieter. Perhaps if he hadn't been in such a rush to get over here and get away from his old life, he might have done some more research. He sighed. This place was a crushing reality check compared to his old haven overlooking the East River. Had he been right to leave? Why did he always feel the need to head off into the sunset and never settle anywhere?

As he lay awake in the darkness, his mind turned back to the brief flash of what could have been his face in the video he had been emailed. He had wanted to go back to it, but work had been so insane he hadn't had time to draw breath. Jonny had insisted on sending out the proposal to the clients that night, resulting in the team working until midnight. He'd got back home exhausted.

But now he was awake, the video started praying on his mind. Dan rolled out of bed, slipped on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt and staggered through to the living room. He sat down in front of his laptop and turned it on. While the system booted up, he looked out of the small metal framed windows and tried to admire the view of Shepherd's Bush Road. His eyes flicked along the motley collection of newsagents, Halal butchers and expensive convenience stores crowding the busy street. At this hour their ugliness was masked by the fluorescent glow from the street lights. The computer finally booted into life. Dan opened the e-mail.

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To: Dan Knight (CD) (dan@bigfishbranding.co.uk)

Dan Knight of San Diego - your destiny waits.

<http://www.nextkingofengland.com>

Dan could feel pricks of sweat breaking out under his arms as he clicked on the link. The email software launched his Firefox web browser and he felt his pulse rising as the software searched for the video. He hunched forward in anticipation, but an error message flashed onto the screen, informing him that the page no longer existed. He slumped back, feeling a mixture of relief and anticlimax. He stood up and started to walk over to the kitchen to get some water. As he moved across the room, he focused on something pushed under the front door. He frowned and walked over to have a closer look. He stooped down. It looked like some sort of thin black tube. The object was metal and had a thick glass end, like a lens. He put out a hand to touch it.

It shot backwards, disappearing under the door.

In the same instant there was a deafening crash and the door's lock splintered in the frame as a huge weight forced it inwards at tremendous speed. The door crunched into Dan's forehead, throwing him backwards onto the floor. Before he could react, three figures dressed in black and wearing balaclavas glided into the room. The largest of the invaders instantly landed a savage kick in Dan's ribs. The breath was blasted from Dan's body and he collapsed onto his knees. Blood oozed into his eyes from the wound on his forehead, his vision blurred as an intense pain shot through his head. He thought he was going to vomit. He tried to get to his feet, flailing his arms around for support. Another precise kick, this time across his head. Dan collapsed back onto the floor as the man who had delivered the two kicks grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back. "Finish it," the man said.

Dan opened his mouth to scream but a white cloth was clamped over his face. He could feel resistance melting away as a chemical vapour flooded into his nose and throat. His mind was slipping into darkness. Within a few seconds he was unconscious.

Act 2: Scene One

"Cry 'havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war."

Julius Caesar

19th December

It wasn't until lunchtime the day after the rumour had broken that Fiona and her friend Nicky were finally able to see the video for themselves. Together with eight of Fiona's students, they had gathered in a bedroom in the halls of residence. The small room smelt of stale bodies. The computer was being operated by a nervous first-year student. He was perched on a stool in front of his desk, hemmed in by the crowd.

"Look, take it easy you lot. I'm starting to get sick of this. You're absolutely the last bunch, okay? I'm starting to feel like some kind of bloody rubbernecker. I've only still got it because I haven't left the web page. Everyone else who closed down their browser will have lost it. Someone's done a sweet number getting rid of it. I can't copy it, there are some really sweet codecs flashed in that make all the usual download tools useless, but I've taken screenshots and I'm going to Facebook those. But this whole thing is freaking me out. Do you think the government might come after me if I do that?"

At last the student stopped complaining, fumbled with the computer mouse and the video started playing. Fiona's first impression was of a montage of clips, taken from security cameras all pointing at the same tree lined street. In each shot there was either a vehicle going past or somebody walking. It was dark and there wasn't much to see. Then the picture suddenly changed. It was still late at night but now the camera was no longer in the street, instead it was pointing at a small statue.

"Shit, I recognise that. It's the Peter Pan statue in Hyde Park! Shit, my mum lives near there in Notting Hill," cried one of the students. As the group watched, the picture suddenly shook then settled.

"I reckon that's one of the cameras being positioned somewhere," babbled their host. "It zooms in and out. It changes in a minute to another camera. It's a hand held one, like a mobile, a small wireless unit probably. I'm guessing one or two megapixel resolution."

"Shut up Martin, you tool," said one of the other boys. "This isn't an episode of 24. Jack Bauer isn't about to roll out from under the bed and whack you off. Just let us watch the bloody thing."

For a minute or so nothing happened. The camera just pointed at the statue. Then from the corner of the screen, a shape slowly emerged into view. It was a man, dressed in a dark red robe, a hood covering his face. The man was moving slowly. He was dragging something heavy. A small distinctive design was printed on the front of the robe. Fiona's heart jumped. She recognised it immediately. Then her hand flew to her mouth as the figure's burden came into view. It was the lifeless body of a young man, naked

from the waist up. The man in the robe grabbed the limp body by the shoulders and heaved it into a sitting position against the Peter Pan statue.

The view switched to the hand held camera, the image was distorted and blurred as it swung wildly about. Abruptly, the image cut so the face of the young man could be clearly seen. The cramped room erupted with screams. It was Prince William.

The camera froze briefly on the Prince's face, then jumped and cut back to the other view which was now focused on the chest. It was red, covered with flowing blood running down his arms and torso, before dripping onto the ground. Fiona saw a pattern of cuts underneath the blood.

"Oh my God!" shouted one of the girls. "It says... what does it say... Shall something?"

"Jesus, you're right! What was it? I missed it?" said another girl.

"It says 'shall dissolve' I think," said the boy using the computer.

"What does it mean?"

"Crap knows. I've Googled it, but there are thousands of possibles."

Fiona gasped. She had seen the words before. A very long time ago.

The camera jumped back once again to the Prince's face. There was no movement. Suddenly, as they watched, his eyes flicked open and the room erupted in more screams. He was still alive! She felt a body moving close to her. It was Nicky. Fiona instinctively reached out and hugged her crying friend.

Act 2: Scene Two

"And thus I clothe my naked villany, with odd old ends stol'n out of holy writ, And seem a saint, when most I play the devil."

Richard III

Inspector Sawyer leaned back in his office chair in Scotland Yard and started jotting down notes, recalling as much of the content of the video as he could before the details faded. He wondered what the Major was going to do about it. Explain it away somehow or come out in the open and admit Prince William had been murdered? For the hundredth time he wished he hadn't listened to the bigwigs upstairs and had been smart enough to keep an illegal copy of the video.

The Inspector's mobile had been ringing constantly since the video had been removed from the internet. Several journalists from the more sensationalist papers had heard rumours or seen the video and Sawyer's 'no comment' reply was starting to wear thin, even to him. The Major was too busy to speak to him directly and a Brigadier Peters was acting as official liaison between the Major's Royal Security teams and Scotland Yard.

Sawyer's mobile phone beeped as a new text arrived. He glanced at the display and immediately thrust the small phone into his pocket, ignoring the journalist's message. He stood up and walked out into the busy main office. The harsh lights, ringing phones and the bustle of the station flooded over him. He checked his watch. He still had ten minutes before he needed to give his team their weekly briefing in the main incident room. Everyone knew something extraordinary had happened, but nobody knew quite what. Sawyer was still unsure what he was going to say in the briefing. He could feel his mobile vibrating again. He sighed, pulling the damn thing from his pocket. It was Brigadier Peters.

"Can you keep it brief Brigadier?"

"I'm advising you that the Royal Press Office has decided to go public on the death of the Prince. The news embargo will be lifted at 6 pm." The clipped military tones on the other end of the line showed no signs of wanting to be anything but brief.

"What about the video? Is there going to be any mention of that? What's the official cause of death? Shouldn't you be consulting with Scotland Yard on the best strategy for releasing the news?"

"Calm yourself, Inspector. The two police officers who discovered the body have been interviewed and we're satisfied they will not compromise the cover story. However, I need your assurance that there is nobody else there that knows about the video or has any other information."

"I am calm." Sawyer could feel his voice rising. "I told the Major the officers had the sense to call it in as an unidentified body. When you say that you've come up with a cover story, what exactly do you mean?"

"The second point that I would like to raise is in relation to the online dissemination of the video. This situation is not entirely under control."

"What do you mean? My men performed miracles getting that video offline."

"I'm afraid it's a little more complicated than that. International websites have been publishing rumours."

It's become the bloggers' hot topic of the day. You may have managed to prevent the video from redistribution on YouTube, but screenshots of His Royal Highness are appearing everywhere. I myself have received two e-mails with the same image, a close-up of the face accompanied by a lurid description of the video. The blogosphere is getting obsessed with this phrase 'shall dissolve'. It's in danger of getting out of control."

"I get the picture. We'll get on it."

"We feel your assurances that you could control the material online were extremely naive. As a result, we have had to develop an emergency strategy." Brigadier Peters' voice had taken on an acid edge.

"Look, I'm an old-fashioned policeman. I don't know the details of all this techno stuff." Sawyer cursed to himself. Why was he apologising to this prick?

"No matter. From this point forward you need no longer concern yourself with this issue. Our technology teams have assumed control of the online threat."

"So you've cut us out of that too?"

"Now back to the strategy. There will be a statement tonight from the Royal Household announcing the tragic death of His Royal Highness. The existence of the video will not yet be commented on. We will make it plain to any news organisation that raises the issue that it is not to be mentioned out of sensitivity to the family. We will explain later that the video is clearly a malicious fake."

"What are you going to say?"

"The official position we will be taking is that the Prince was a victim in a catastrophic road accident. We will say that he was returning from a public function with his bodyguard when he was hit by an out of control speeding driver in the vicinity of Hyde Park. He died almost instantly."

"An RTA? Are you crazy? That's going to create even more questions. This isn't a bloody soap opera."

"Given the circumstances, there are very few ways in which a young man can die accidentally in London that would lead to the police being involved, roads being closed and a major park being cordoned off."

The Brigadier paused briefly. "The most important aspect of the situation is to minimise any possible public aggravation. The one impossible course of action would be to publicly state the Prince was brutally murdered and mutilated. I am sure you can see the veracity of that."

"You want to minimise public aggravation with something as weak as that?"

"Yes, and that leads us on quite conveniently to the final part of our discussion. It is absolutely essential to give the appearance to the public that the culprit will soon be brought to justice. As a result, the role of the London Metropolitan Police has been reassigned. Your team at Special Branch will be leading an investigation to apprehend the, as yet unknown, hit and run driver. You are not now or at any point to comment in any way on the video. The Prince died in an accident. Public safety depends upon this perception. Do I make myself understood?" The phone fell silent.

"Inspector, are you still there? It is essential that you comply."

"I understand," said Sawyer. "The Palace doesn't want the world to know that the future King of England was murdered. Yet you expect people to believe that a fake video of him dying from someone cutting words into his chest, around the same time he was supposed to be hit by a car, is just a fucking coincidence?"

"Congratulations, Inspector. You appear to have hit the nail on the head. I am sure you will see there is a certain poetic irony to the situation. Of course this won't be the first time that the Palace has had to adapt a story of a Royal death in a road accident."

"You're talking about the boy's mother."

"The video will be explained, if required, as the work of a sick minded individual looking to dramatise a sad occurrence for his own perverted pleasure. Please cancel your briefing and inform your team that new orders are to be posted. Develop a brief for this investigation and send it over to me for approval."

"So do you have a fall guy lined up for us? How do we go about looking for someone for a crime that didn't happen?"

"Put plans in place as you would do normally to find a hit-and-run driver. We'll provide you with all the evidence you need to create a convincing story. I'm sure you'll flush out some interesting characters and as is usual I believe, plenty of people will come forward with bogus stories saying that they are the guilty party."

"That's just great. Meanwhile you continue with the real investigation into the murder? And leave us out in the cold." Sawyer replied bitterly.

"This is a private matter. From this point forward, it is to be handled internally by the Royal Family. This has been cleared as a course of action by all relevant parties, including the Prime Minister. Believe it or not, Inspector, the British Royal Family does have quite a history of resolving such matters without external help. You may have noticed that we do have access to military and security personnel and involve the police purely at our own discretion. Much as we appreciate your efforts to date, they are no longer required." There was a click and the line went dead.

Act 2: Scene three

"O! it is excellent to have a giant's strength. But it is tyrannous to use it like a giant."

Measure for Measure

The first thing he was aware of was a constant rumbling noise, occasional hissing, and a stench of oil. Dan opened his eyes. Slowly, as his eyes got used to the low light, he could start to take in his surroundings. He was in a long thin room, about twelve feet wide, a small rectangular window high above let in meagre shafts of light. The room was almost unbearably hot. Two huge pipes ran the length of one wall. They were bolted down at intervals. It was obvious they were the source of the noise and the stifling heat.

He was sitting in an old wooden chair. He tried to lift his hands but it was impossible. He strained his neck to look down and saw that his wrists and feet were tied to the chair. He tried leaning forwards but a wave of nausea shot through him.

As the feeling of sickness began to subside, it was replaced by a sensation of rising panic. His mind kept returning to the email and video link; it was the only connection he could make, but it made no sense. If only he had had time to watch it.

"Calm down. You've got to stay calm. It's just a mistake. Everything will be alright," Dan mumbled to himself, trying to keep a lid on the panic.

As his eyes became accustomed to the low light he became aware that there was someone else in the room with him. He could distinguish the outline of a body tied up and slumped in a chair at the far end, near another door.

"Hello." Dan's voice was cracked and dry. "Hello. Can you hear me? Who are you? Hey! Can you hear me?" There was no response. "Hey!" He shouted louder.

The exertion made him feel dizzy and he stopped to draw breath. As he steadied himself, the figure opposite slowly began to raise its head. Strip lights on the ceiling flickered into life. With a flash, the whole room filled with a brilliant white light and at the same time a deafening orchestral crescendo crashed in from speakers.

Dan snapped his head back in astonishment, sending a fresh bolt of pain through his body. It only took him a few seconds for the familiar tune to register - God Save The Queen.

Looking over at his companion Dan was shocked to see an elderly lady, dressed in country clothes: jodhpurs, Wellington boots and a heavy green coat. Silver tape had been placed over her mouth. Dan stared at her. He looked on in incredulity as he realised that sitting, bound to a chair, looking exhausted and older than he would have expected was Queen Elizabeth II of England.

As suddenly as it had started, the music cut off and the door behind Dan opened. He could see the Queen staring hard at whoever had entered the room. Three men came into Dan's view, walking

past him and positioning themselves behind the Queen. They stood facing Dan, dressed in black belted robes with blood red hoods covering the top halves of their faces. On their robes a badge could clearly be seen, a red rose set in a golden cross.

They were all armed with guns and one of the kidnappers had an ornate dagger hanging from his belt. Dan could see enough of their faces to realise that they were clean-shaven and of white European origin. The largest of the three men was directly behind the Queen. The man then slowly raised his grey pistol, pointing it directly at the Queen's head.

"Who are you? What do you want with us?" Dan's voice was on the edge of total panic.

The man's response was to move the gun closer to the Queen. Her head shook with rage. She was doing her best to talk, but all that could be heard were distorted mumbles from behind the tape. The man pushed the gun against her temple.

"Quiet, old bitch," he spat. "You're not recognised here."

He then lowered the gun and turned his attention to Dan. "You. American. Find Shakespeare's Truth. Follow your destiny or you both die."

Dan tried to control the panic but failed. "Help!" he screamed. "Help us!"

One of the men strode over to Dan and punched him hard in the side of the head. Coloured lights flashed before his eyes.

The tallest of the three men was smiling. "Keep your mouth shut and listen boy, otherwise she'll suffer and you'll take the blame." He swung the pistol around and cracked the Queen lightly on the side of the head. "You have been chosen to deliver us Shakespeare's Truth. It is your destiny." The man spoke with conviction. "If you do not wish to see this charlatan Queen, this thief of nobility die and then yourself blamed and killed, you will find it."

"What the... destiny? This is connected to that email isn't it? That's what it said. The video. I didn't see it. I don't know what it shows."

"The message was there, cut into the royal whelp before he died."

"The royal whelp? You mean somebody else? You've killed somebody else? You murdered a member of the Royal Family?"

The man holding the gun stepped around the Queen and walked forward and down the room, steel toecaps clicking on the worn oak floor. He was now directly in front of Dan. He was a big man, bulky but not fat and he towered over his captive. His hot breath stank of whisky.

"Yes, we killed her grandson, the pretty blond boy. He's dead and this sham queen will die too unless you accept your destiny."

Dan was stunned. "You killed Prince William?"

The man lazily raised the pistol, pointing it directly at Dan's head and smiled. "Remember, when death comes, nothing is left. You've disappeared into nothing, like the true English race." Dan could feel himself panicking as the barrel approached his fore-head. "When death is about to claim you, you'll wonder why you didn't spend more of your life following your true destiny." The man lowered the gun and moved closer, whispering. "If you go to the police, the army, your Embassy or any of the authorities, we will know. We will find you and skin you and feed you screaming to the pigs, but only after you have watched her die. We left the mark on William's chest when he died. This was the sign

left by the fra rosi crose that points the way. Accept your destiny. Tell me you're ready to find Shakespeare's Truth or I'll kill her right now in front of you. She'll die here and now and so will you." The man suddenly stood up, swinging the gun round so that it was pointing at the Queen. He gripped his gun with both hands and roared out, "Yea all which it Inherit, shall dissolve."

"What? Is that Shakespeare?" Dan spoke out loud, for a moment he was utterly disorientated. His mind raced, where had he heard that before? Was it from the play The Tempest?

Dan could see the man's arms shaking as his fingers tightened on the trigger. Then there was the explosive crash of a high calibre weapon being fired. The man with the gun looked down at his chest in surprise. A gaping hole had appeared in it. A red rose of blood was already staining the robe around the wound. From above, shards of window glass came falling to the floor. The man collapsed to his knees, knocking Dan's chair over and crumpling on top of him.

"Get behind her! They won't risk hitting her. Get her out of here!" one of the two remaining men screamed. Gunfire once again exploded into the room. Plaster puffed on the walls, as bullets sprayed in from the window. One of the kidnappers produced an Uzi from under his robes, crouched on one knee and raised the gun before returning fire up towards the window. The noise of the rattling machine gun was thunderous.

Dan was lying sideways on the floor, unable to move under the weight of the dead kidnapper. The remaining two men cut the ropes holding the Queen and one of them started to drag her down the room, heading towards the back door. Two more shots came in. One bullet glanced off the wall, the other splintered the door missing the kidnapper by a fraction. The shooting from the window stopped as the Queen and her captor disappeared.

The remaining man ran over to his dead companion. He bent down and picked up the dead man's pistol and straightened up, staring at Dan. For a moment he stood motionless, seemingly unsure what to do. Then suddenly he bent down and pushed the gun into Dan's cheek.

"You cannot escape from your destiny," the man hissed. There was a boom from behind Dan as the door was kicked in. The kidnapper rose, lifting his gun, screaming and shooting. The noise was astonishingly loud in the confined space. His wild shots were returned with accuracy. The man jerked backwards, a bullet blowing off the top of his head. Dan closed his eyes, his whole body was shaking as blood and brain rained down on him. For a few seconds all he could hear was a ringing sound in his ears.

He opened his eyes as he heard a voice speaking above him. "She's gone. Room clear, requesting clean up team. Blue team look for a trace on exits two and three." The voice crouched down beside him, and Dan saw a tall blond haired soldier in his late forties. He was holding a large pistol. The man's icy blue eyes studied him with interest.

"Who the hell are you?" said the Major.