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The Queen Alone

Written by

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Published by

Corvus an imprint of Atlantic Books

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K. A. S. QUINN

The Queen Alone

Chronicles of the Tempus



Published in paperback and e-book in Great Britain in 2014
by Corvus, an imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd.

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

Paperback ISBN: 978 1 84887 056 7
E-book ISBN: 978 1 78239 454 9

Printed in Great Britain.

Corvus
An imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd
Ormond House
26–27 Boswell Street
London
WC1N 3JZ

www.corvus-books.co.uk

The Cast of Characters: Where three worlds meet . . .

Modern Day New York City

Katie Berger-Jones-Burg: A typical New York kid, who just happens to be part of the Tempus Fugit.

Mimi: Her mother.

Dolores: The housekeeper, but much more.

Reilly O Jackson: A new friend.

The Victorians

Queen Victoria: She reigns from 1837 to 1901. The emblem of a powerful industrial nation and a great empire – though as a person, she has her flaws . . .

Prince Albert: Also known as the Prince Consort. Queen Victoria's husband.

Princess Alice: Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's second daughter, and Katie's best friend.

Bertie, Vicky, Louise, Leopold: Children of Queen Victoria.

Sir Brendan O'Reilly: Doctor O'Reilly, the Royal Household physician newly ennobled by Queen Victoria.

James O'Reilly: Sir Brendan's son and an important friend to Katie and Princess Alice.

Jack O'Reilly: Sir Brendan's eldest son and James's brother, killed in the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Grace O'Reilly, Riordan O'Reilly: Other children of Sir Brendan.

John Reillson: As Civil War rages in the United States of America, he comes to London to promote the cause of the Northern States and the abolition of slavery.

Florence Nightingale: A national heroine due to her nursing during the Crimean War.

Mary Seacole: A Jamaican Creole, she ran a hotel in the Crimea during the war and nursed the sick and wounded.

Those Who Live in No Time

Lucia: The Leader of the Verus. She must keep history in balance, and make certain our world moves forward, in order to harvest our communication skills for her own people.

Lord Belzen: The Leader of the Malum. He longs for war, greed and violence. He and his followers feed off brute force. He has a way with snakes.

The Little Angel: The child who brings peace. She understands Katie and the Tempus.

The Man of All Time

Bernardo DuQuelle: Prince Albert's Private Secretary, old flame of Lucia, tormentor and saviour of Katie. An enigma.



Prologue

Windsor Castle: 21 December 1860

'Thump!' Princess Alice looked up from her writing to the wintry window. A snowball, she decided, the work of her brother Bertie. She glanced towards her father, but he continued to toil at his desk, stopping only to adjust the green shade of his lamp.

Christmas was coming, and it was snowing. The battlements of Windsor Castle were cloaked in soft white flakes, its towers transformed into fairytale turrets. It was bleak midwinter; the shortest day of the year, yet the snow captured what light there was, bathing the gardens in a moon-like glow. Outside there was ice-skating on the

pond, sleigh rides and snowmen on the East Terrace. Inside, beech-log fires blazed in every room, adding to the cheer of the red carpets and damask curtains. There were whispery giggles as gifts were wrapped and shouts of joy as snowballs hit their targets. A dozen Christmas trees were hung with gifts and sweets. Down below in the kitchens, huge barons of beef were being prepared for the holiday feasts.

At Windsor Castle everyone was making merry – everyone except Princess Alice and her father, Prince Albert, the Prince Consort. Together they worked in the study facing the gardens. The Prince, at his desk, ploughed methodically through the papers filling a large red-leather box, embossed with the Royal Cypher of his wife, Queen Victoria. Occasionally he passed something to his daughter, murmuring 'Alice, if you would . . .' and she began the laborious task of copying, precisely and neatly. The day progressed; the snow still fell. At 4 p.m. the lamps were lit, yet their work went on, a stream of correspondence, memorandum, reports and petitions.

It was tedious work for a girl her age. But Alice needed to watch over her father. Prince Albert was not well. The handsome Prince the Queen had married at age twenty now looked older than his forty-one years. His face was puffy, his hair lank and receding. The Prince, once known for his fine figure and dignified carriage, stooped like a man of eighty. He had a noticeable paunch around the waist.

Dark rings surrounded his eyes. 'He is so tired,' Alice thought. 'He works much too hard.' And she redoubled her own efforts, writing as fast as neatness would permit, in an attempt to lighten her father's burden.

The red boxes with the work of the government never stopped arriving. Prince Albert was the Queen's husband, friend, guide, moral compass and Private Secretary. He was the king in everything but name. For many years the people of Britain had resented him, a foreigner from the German states, marrying their queen and influencing her decisions. But he had begun to win the public over and was rewarded for his toils with a new title, Prince Consort. Princess Alice was proud of her father; but was it worth the sacrifice of his health? She stared at the paper before her until the words blurred, wondering.

A shout of merriment outside was followed by a hail of snowballs. Princess Alice shook off her worries and, rising, peeped out the window. Most of her family were enjoying the unusually heavy snowfall. The Queen was seated on a bench, snug in her furs, with her youngest child, little Beatrice, on her lap. Prince Leopold was swathed in blankets, his invalid's bath chair under a tree. This was a rare treat. Leopold suffered from haemophilia, the bleeding disease, and was not usually allowed out in the cold.

But it was Bertie, Alice's oldest brother, who led the fun. He darted about, pelting their sister Louise with snowballs. He shouted with joy as he caught Louise in

the face, and she dashed up the steps of the East Terrace to hide behind a large snowman. As Bertie ran for more ammunition, he stumbled against the wheels of Leopold's bath chair, tipping him into the snow. The Queen leapt to her feet. Leopold was so fragile; with even the tiniest cut or scrape he could become seriously ill.

'Really, Bertie,' the Queen exclaimed, 'typical, typical, such immature, such unthinking behaviour . . .' Bertie's bright face clouded over. He was a constant disappointment to his mother.

'I d-d-didn't mean any harm,' he stuttered, trying to pick his brother up, but dropping Leopold in his agitation.

Alice was about to run outside to help, when she saw that James O'Reilly was with them. James, the son of the Royal Physician, was certain to make things right. Indeed, he set to work immediately, brushing the snow from Leopold, checking him for cuts and bruises, and settling him comfortably back into the bath chair.

James had been raised within the Royal Court and Princess Alice had known him from infancy, perhaps the only commoner she really knew. 'James is so competent, always quietly caring for others. I don't know another person like him,' Alice thought, not realizing she shared the same traits.

'There's no harm done, Mother.' Leopold said, pulling the blankets close. 'Please don't make me go inside; the snow is so much fun.' He begged until the Queen relented,

though the shadows lengthened on the East Terrace and the sky began to glow as red as little Beatrice's knitted cap.

Princess Alice pulled the heavy curtain shut and returned to her corner of the room. Her father heard no shouts of laughter. He had completely missed the crisis with Leopold. Wrapped up in his work, he had scant time for his wife and family. He'd forgotten Christmas, the decorated tree in his study, even his serious daughter working quietly in the corner – all forgotten, swept away in the onslaught of papers. Princess Alice was puzzled: was it just the work or was there something else? Was there some secret trouble that so absorbed her father?

Prince Albert sighed and rubbed his eyes. 'Mein Kopf schmerzt so . . . oh, but my head does ache . . . this pain will be the death of me.'

Princess Alice was not the only person to hear her father. Standing in the doorway was Bernardo DuQuelle. He hardly cut a Christmas figure, with his ashen white face and sombre black clothing, yet DuQuelle came into the room with a jaunty step and an exaggerated low bow. Prince Albert looked up from his work, and winced. Bernardo DuQuelle was a useful Private Secretary, a brilliant man. He knew all of society's secrets, every skeleton in every closet. The man was competent . . . eerily competent . . . and helpful . . . irritatingly helpful. He was not to be trusted.

How long had Bernardo DuQuelle been standing in the doorway? A Royal must never show weakness, and DuQuelle was certain to have heard Prince Albert's complaints in both German and English. Language was no barrier. Bernardo DuQuelle had an unnerving ability with languages – he conversed in German, as well as French, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto and Tagalog. He could read and write in Latin, ancient Greek and Sanskrit. He was considered the world's leading scholar on the ancient Hebrews. Prince Albert shuddered. There was something of the vampire in Bernardo DuQuelle's greed for communication.

Yet Prince Albert could not rid himself of this man. Bernardo DuQuelle's grasp of language and lack of morals meant he could flatter the Queen beyond every other courtier – and the Queen adored flattery. Prince Albert's head pounded. At times like these he was acutely aware that he was the Consort, the Prince and not the ruler. He loathed Bernardo DuQuelle and yet he needed him, particularly now.

Prince Albert spoke stiffly, 'DuQuelle, I wish to take you into my confidence.' Neither man seemed to notice Princess Alice in her corner. Bernardo DuQuelle's face was impassive, mask-like; yet Princess Alice could see a smile hovering at the corners of his mouth.

I wish to take you into my confidence the Prince had

said, but DuQuelle knew perfectly well there were few things Prince Albert wished for less. DuQuelle bowed in response. 'This is for me an honour.'

Prince Albert hesitated, growing more uncomfortable with each passing moment. He sometimes fancied that Bernardo DuQuelle could read his mind, that he understood his thoughts and feelings. Could DuQuelle see the mistrust, the uneasiness and the endless weariness? Prince Albert shook his head to dislodge this fancy. 'I am so tired,' he thought. 'It is making me paranoid. I am so very tired.'

'You are so very tired, Sir,' DuQuelle echoed. 'I am grateful for the opportunity to help.'

The Prince paused, and when he did speak, he knew he sounded defensive. 'You, DuQuelle, are unique. Foreign to the ways of the court and yet you understand everyone. You have a gift for motive.'

DuQuelle remained silent and bowed his head to acknowledge – not quite a compliment – a recognition of his skills.

Prince Albert continued. 'I have received a report from Sir Richard Mayne of the Metropolitan Police, which I would like you to consider. There has been a series of crimes. Ships set on fire at St Katharine Docks, burglaries in some of the foreign embassies and violence in the streets. They seem to be separate episodes, but Sir Richard is linking them to the United States of America.

He thinks the crimes relate to potential civil war in that country.'

Bernardo DuQuelle examined the tip of his walking stick, as if the answers might be found there. 'A civil war is the most terrible kind of war: the tearing of a country in two. Family will fight family, brother against brother. But the Northern States and the Southern States of America will not see eye to eye.'

Prince Albert rummaged through the red box and found a letter, embossed with the eagle and stars of the office of the President of the United States of America. 'I feel for this newly elected President, Abraham Lincoln,' he said. 'He was elected because of his opposition to slavery, yet this very issue just might destroy his nation.'

DuQuelle sighed. 'The enslavement of one man by another leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Yet without slaves, the American South could not produce cotton. Our own industry depends on this. Britain buys five million bales of cotton from the Southern States each year. Our textile mills in the North of England would grind to a standstill without the Southern Americans and their slaves.'

Prince Albert did not hesitate to reply. 'Then our textile mills must stand still. Britain will not support slavery. I am the President of the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade. I take this position seriously.'

'All right-thinking men abhor slavery,' DuQuelle

agreed. 'Yet the South believes we will join them in war. The Southern States call themselves King – King Cotton. They think that Britain's need for industry and love of money will force us to support them. You say you will not support the American South, but this does not mean you will support the American North.' It was useless to withhold information from DuQuelle.

'I am in favour of neutrality,' the Prince admitted. 'This coming war is not our war . . .'

'That is not the opinion of the Prime Minster, Lord Palmerston. He is always up for war . . . and decidedly backs the American South,' DuQuelle commented drily.

Prince Albert disliked the Prime Minister even more than he distrusted Bernardo DuQuelle. He had no desire to discuss one with the other.

'For now, let us address the problem before us – this particular one in Sir Richard Mayne's report,' the Prince cut across Bernado DuQuelle. 'I desire that you keep this as private as possible. The report is not pleasant reading.'

Prince Albert might have forgotten his daughter, but DuQuelle was all-seeing, all-knowing. He glanced towards her in the corner. She was pretending to write, but was listening with all her might. Bernardo DuQuelle admired Princess Alice as much as he could admire any human being. Best leave her quietly in the corner, without reminding the Prince.

Prince Albert flipped through the pages of the thick

document. 'Here is a most gruesome find, a body, floating in the Thames. The corpse was slit from chin to groin, the body filled with a toxic, tar-like substance. It took an age to identify; the doctors assigned to the corpse kept falling ill. The dead man turned out to be, like you DuQuelle, a Private Secretary – but to the American Ambassador. In his report, Sir Richard links this to a handful of crimes perpetuated against American ships, American residencies and American citizens. Some of them are quite distressing . . .'

Prince Albert's voice trailed off at the horror of the story, but DuQuelle listened quietly, as if to a weather report, or the cricket scores. Prince Albert continued, 'Maynes writes that he has seen this type of attack before.' DuQuelle's glance flickered to Princess Alice.

From her corner of the room, Princess Alice felt rising alarm. She knew what her father was talking about, and that no one would understand better than Bernardo DuQuelle. Yet DuQuelle feigned confusion, running his fingers through his black curls. 'Let me think . . . can I remember . . . oh yes . . . Fräulein Bauer . . . and perhaps . . . Sir Lindsey Dimblock . . . wasn't there a nasty incident on London Bridge? Hushed up, of course. I remember the tar like substance. It turned out to be quite toxic to the touch. Were there any witnesses?' he spoke casually, but Alice knew this was not a casual question.

Prince Albert looked again at the report. 'Maynes says

the few witnesses are useless to the case, babbling idiots – practically out of their minds. They talk of "visions of pure evil". They call it the "prelude to the end of the world".' He paused and glanced at the Christmas tree in his study, a golden angel crowning the top. 'If I didn't know better, I'd think there was some element to this that is beyond man . . . dare I say it . . . beyond God.'

Bernardo DuQuelle stood very still. The Prince Consort had hit the mark; these were not the crimes of man, but of someone, or something, far worse. DuQuelle again exchanged glances with Princess Alice, dread flickering deep in his green eyes. But only for a moment. Soon his face was its usual sphinx-like mask. It was best to underplay this situation, no matter how desperate it really was. The last thing anyone needed was panic.

'They are noxious cases, but they are nothing more than violence, the baser instincts of mankind,' DuQuelle finally answered. 'There is no mystery . . . and I would take Sir Richard's memorandum with a pinch of salt. This is, after all, the man who has just outlawed the throwing of snowballs by children in public areas.'

To DuQuelle's relief, Prince Albert laughed. 'I'd forgotten about the snowballs in public. Sir Richard can be a bit dramatic, and draconian, at times.'

A shrill squeal from outside caught the Prince's attention, and for the first time he looked out of the window to the drifts of snow, shot through with a bright

red sunset. 'Sir Richard's snowball laws,' he continued chuckling. 'I am afraid my own son will end up in prison. Bertie is pummelling Princess Louise at this very moment.'

He continued to watch his children in the snow. 'There is so much work to do,' he said to himself. 'I had almost forgotten it is Christmas. What I would give to be a child again, playing with my brother Ernst at our home in Coburg. I cannot be a child again, but I have children of my own. I see them from this window, and they are growing up quickly. Yet there is still time for us to play together. A vigorous snowball fight might do much to clear my head and raise my spirits.' Prince Albert's back became straighter, his eyes brighter as he pulled on his coat and wrapped a scarf around his neck. Soon he was outside, laughing, running and throwing snowballs like a child himself.

Bernardo DuQuelle looked out of the window, at the large happy family playing in the snow. He did not smile, but shivered. Only now did he address Princess Alice.

'You have heard,' he said.

She nodded and asked, 'Do you think my father knows?'

DuQuelle contined to watch as the Prince Albert ran across the terrace, sweeping his youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, into his arms. 'The Prince has a broad mind, but it does not extend to the more grotesque reaches of the imagination. He knows, but not enough – at least I hope that is the case.' DuQuelle turned from the window

and looked at Princess Alice. She had always seemed old for her age; she had such quiet purpose, such a sense of duty. Now he realized, with a pang of regret, that her childhood was almost over. 'And what do you think of that memorandum from Sir Richard Maynes?' he asked.

She countered with her own question. 'You will know, better than any of us, for you are one of them. The Malum, Lord Belzen – are they back?'

DuQuelle looked at the Princess, with her soft brown hair and gentle face. He looked at the cosy room with its roaring fire, red carpets and evergreen Christmas tree. He looked out of the window at the dazzling snow and the laughing family. He took it all in, as if to record this moment in his memory.

'Yes,' he said. 'Lord Belzen has returned. He leads the Malum. They are stronger than ever. We must talk and we must decide. You will find James O'Reilly outside with your family. If you please, bring him to me immediately. I fear we have little time.'