

Eaglechild

A novel by
VICTOR O'CONNELL



Eaglechild

Sample from 5 of 15 chapters

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Dear Reader:

Allow me to introduce you to excerpts from 5 of the 15 chapters of **Eaglechild**. It is a long novel of more than 700 pages because it is, essentially, two books in one.

In Book 1, four complex characters transport you into their quite different worlds. Through their eyes you learn about the attitudes of British and Spanish aristocrats to the indigenous people of the Americas – especially between the British and what they called the “Red Indians” of Canada. You also learn what the “Red Indians” think of the British.

In Book 2, the four worlds collide in Britain and Canada in the years 1982 to 1985.

The samples offered here are extracted mainly from Book 1. I cannot offer many samples from Book 2 because they would reveal key points in a plot that twists and turns right up to the last page.

If you are intrigued and would like to read all 15 chapters, please visit my website for advice on how to order the novel in its electronic-book or paperback formats. You will find some additional excerpts on my website: www.victoroconnell.com

Please feel to share these sample extracts with your friends and other contacts. I would very much appreciate word-of-mouth references and honest reviews in your publication or blog, your social media, my blog or on the websites where you can obtain the book. In so doing, please feel free to cite these excerpts.

Victor Mannion O’Connell – July 2015

Chapter 1

Extract 1

The Air Canada flight was on schedule to land in London early on a March morning in 1982. The pitch of the engines dropped a semitone as their power was reduced for the gradual descent over the North Sea. Most of the passengers were too frazzled to notice the subtle change in the aircraft's dynamics. It had been early evening when they left Calgary almost nine hours earlier. But the eighty-two year-old Clearvoice was fully alert. The flight had enraptured him from the moment it began.

The Boeing 767 had risen with a roar from Cavalry's sleek, new airport on the western edge of the prairies where his grandfather, Swift Hunter, used to hunt buffalo a hundred years before. As it turned its tail on the sun that was already beginning to set beyond the Rocky Mountains, it banked north-east above the canyons of the Alberta Badlands where shallow graves exposed the bleached bones of dinosaurs. The twilight was thickening as it crossed the border into Saskatchewan and continued to climb above snow-dusted hills, reaching cruising altitude above the frozen lakes and icy muskeg of Manitoba.

Far to the south of these three Prairie Provinces, and all across

Canada from the Pacific to the Atlantic, there was a string of lights representing the towns and cities that hugged the Medicine Line, which is what Swift Hunter used to call the border with the United States of America. To the north of that narrow urban corridor, the Canadian population was sparse. Vast northern territories were as dark at night as they were in prehistoric times. The occasional point of light below suggested to Clearvoice's imagination the camp fire of an Indian hunter or trapper alone in the wilderness, or the reflection of the moonlight in the upturned eyes of a watching wolf.

As expansive as the prairies were, Clearvoice knew them intimately. For sixty-five years he had criss-crossed them on foot, horseback, train and bus in his single-minded mission to remind the Indian tribes of their rights under their international treaties with Britain. Occasionally he travelled even further – to the Iroquois-speaking people on the east coast and the Athabaskan-speaking people beyond the Rockies on the west coast. He had been denounced by the parish priest of his local Catholic Church, who threatened him with excommunication and eternal damnation, harassed by provincial and city police forces, which were extra vigilant when it came to Indians, and closely monitored by the Indian Agents of the federal government, who exercised almost totalitarian powers over Indians. Sometimes, he was also opposed by his own people.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police would routinely arrest him and forcibly return him to his home at Buffalo Creek in Saskatchewan. The charges were usually travelling without a government permit or organizing an assembly – both offences against the regulations of the *Indian Act* passed by the Canadian Parliament

under the auspices of the British Crown. The authorities labelled him a troublemaker. They punished him by deducting the cost of the arrest from his annual payment of five dollars – one of his rights under his treaty with Britain. When his people acclaimed him Chief of their community at the age of twenty, the authorities declared the election invalid according to their *Indian Act*.

In 1982 they still considered him a troublemaker but, given his advanced age and the growing political emergence of the Indian nations, they were reluctant to get involved.

“May I see your passport?” the Air Canada check-in clerk asked him politely at Calgary.

“Treaty 6,” he answered in the husky accent of a man who was still more comfortable in his native Cree language than English. He spoke as though his declaration was a self-evident passport in itself. The airline clerk thought the federal authorities should decide. The officer at passport control was accompanied by a uniformed officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He explained that Clearvoice needed a passport to fly to Britain.

“Many times I have visited the Sioux, Dakota and Navaho nations in Montana and Wyoming. I didn’t need a passport, then,” he replied.

“Ah, yes,” the immigration officer replied. “You’re talking about the John Jay Treaty – 1794, I think it was. It allows you native people to cross the USA border freely, both ways.”

“And I have a treaty with Britain.” Clearvoice fumbled in his travelling bag and produced a creased and faded card which identified him by name and number as a descendent of those who had signed Treaty 6 with Queen Victoria in 1876.

The immigration officer sighed. He had his fingers burnt be-

fore on this issue. If he prevented Clearvoice from leaving it might spark protest from Indian political organisations. It could get messy. He had no desire to become entangled. “I’ll let you leave. But I cannot guarantee London will let you enter without a Canadian passport. They may send you back on the next plane. You travel at your own risk.”

“At least they didn’t arrest you this time,” his daughter whispered before he boarded. Rain was a Holy Woman in the Cree tradition. Clearvoice still felt the comfort of her traditional Cree blessing hours later when his biological clock was just past midnight but the approaching British horizon was already cheerfully lit by the pastel colours of dawn. He was engrossed by the speed with which a Calgary evening became a sub-Arctic night and then a Scottish morning. It seemed to defy the natural order. But he had seen it before – in his vision quest dream when he was sixteen years of age. In that dream his soul – *or ahtca-k*, sat between the shoulders of the *mikisiw*, which was the eagle-form assumed by his spirit guide – his *pawakan*. Like the Boeing 767, the eagle in his dream had flown eastwards into the night, and the moon and stars had moved along their cosmic paths quicker than they ought, and the sun had risen early, just as now. The next day he described the dream to Little Badger, a shaman, who told him the vision was a prophecy. It was about an important journey he would make beyond the horizon to fulfil the mission his spirit guide had given him to honour the treaty and bring back its stolen children.

As he grew old, images from the dream visited his memory less often. Perhaps he had not properly understood his mission, or had not been faithful to it. Lately, he had become resigned to

the possibility that it had failed. But here it was again – a night shortened by an early rising sun – and not a dream this time.

Extract 2

Clearvoice had listened to all points of view on priests but had not formed an opinion. The only member of his family who chose to use a Christian name was his mother, Theresa. She said that Jesus was a Whiteman who acted like a Cree brave and a medicine man. He had gone on a vision quest in the hot, parched prairies, fasting for forty days – a sacred number – and had undertaken the task of being whipped, crowned with brambles and nailed to a tree so that he could take upon himself all the faults of all men, White and Cree, and bring blessing upon them.

It was not too far removed from what the young Cree braves did in the Sundance, she said, when they pierced their flesh with hooks fastened to strings that were tied to a central tree or standing pole and then used the weight of their bodies to pull the strings taut as they danced in a circle, so that the hooks tugged at the flesh, intensifying the pain.

She was also impressed that Jesus had said that the meek would inherit the earth. This explained why the Whiteman got on better with those Cree who were cooperative and why he turned against those that were troublemakers. She liked that Christianity required children to honour their parents, not to be jealous of their neighbour's possessions and not to kill. It pleased her that Jesus wanted people to feed the hungry and give shelter to the homeless, to be peacemakers and to love each other. These were the kind of actions the Cree had always valued and they explained how they had survived.

Clearvoice asked his mother why it was necessary for her to be a Christian if what the Christians taught was the same as what the Cree already believed. She replied that the priest was a friend of the Indian Agent and the Mounties and the General in Manitoba and if the priest had the power to bring blessings or curses to her parents, husband and children then it was prudent for her to befriend him. Besides, as long as the priest did not find out, she could continue to practise Cree rituals and use the services of Cree medicine men and shamans.

Clearvoice's father never practised Christianity. But he believed that the Indian Agent had given the job of passing on the Whiteman's knowledge to the priests. That is why the Blackrobes had started schools.

Extract 3

As Clearvoice scrambled to accept the thin towel she offered, he heard a whimper from Swimmer who had been taken to the other end of the room, and when he looked he saw his young brother running towards him clutching his head with both hands. Clearvoice turned quickly to find his own reflection in a mirror. Staring back was the wide-eyed, distraught face of an "ears sticking out schooler" whose hair had been crudely cropped in the "bobbed ears" style of a Whiteman's boy.

All his life he had worn his thick, black hair long enough to cover his ears and hang to below his shoulder blades even when it was braided in a single central or two side plaits. For special dances he brushed it forward and tied it in an elaborate triple knotted plait standing high above his forehead, pierced by pheasant, crow or eagle feathers. But most of the time it hung straight,

covering his shoulders and splaying out in a circle when he moved his head quickly.

The abrupt cropping of his hair without his consent or explanation, followed by the intimate inspection and rough scrubbing by these strange, cackling women was profoundly disturbing. The humiliation was complete when one of nuns handed him a broom and gave Swimmer a dustpan and told them to sweep up their hair and deposit it in a paper bag so that it could be burnt in the furnace.

Extract 4

“I brought you and your bother to this school because your father had such a good reputation. If he sent his boys to school other families at Buffalo Creek would do the same. You and your brother were supposed to set a good example. I made a mistake. You are troublemakers, the pair of you. The time has come for you to go.”

Clearvoice was perversely pleased with these opening remarks. This was the first time Boo-Boo had addressed him directly. On the day he came to fetch them, and on the journey in the buggy, and for the whole school year so far, he had not greeted him once or spoken directly to him and he doubted their eyes had ever met for more than a fleeting moment apart from that one time in the cabin when Boo-Boo had sniffed him like a badger.

“The stigma of expulsion will stay with you for the rest of your life. It will bring shame on your parents and your community.”

Clearvoice waited until he was sure that Boo-Boo had finished. He remembered what his father said about speaking forthrightly with conviction and he remembered the confidence the elders had

shown in him when they called him Clearvoice. When he spoke he looked the *môniyâw* directly in the eye.

“I am entitled to be at school. My grandfather, Swift Hunter, said we paid for it when we let the Whiteman build a railway and come on our hunting grounds. My father did not send me here to hear bad things about my ancestors, and the prairie people, and to see my brother shamed. He sent me to learn to count and to read and to write English. I will tell the Inspector how you make us memorise the passage to make him think we are good readers. I will tell him how little you teach us: how much time you make us work on chores; how tired we get, and how hungry we are, and what bad food you feed us. You give us rotten meat and cook it in the same pot you boil the socks. You and the sisters eat butter and fresh meat and other fine things. I will tell him how long you leave us sick and with toothache before you bring a doctor. I will tell him how often you beat us and put us on rations of bread and water.”

He saw how startled the priest was. It was as if he had thrown rocks at him. Boo-Boo turned his head away, closing his eyes, folding his arms tightly, as though waiting for the echo of the words to fade.

Extract 5

“Still here?” the Indian Agent said testily when he emerged an hour later to see his red-haired guest off.

Clearvoice stood again. “I need to see the treaty and the laws before I know what questions to ask the band council.”

“Ah, a troublemaker, are we?” said the Indian Agent. He went to the back of his office and returned with the two male clerks

and they stood on either side of Clearvoice touching his elbows and guiding him out to the street and once there they told him not to come back. As he stood wondering what he should do, the red-haired Whiteman left the building and thrust his hand forward in greeting.

“Liam O’Hara! Pleased to meet you!” He opened his brief case, fished inside and withdrew a booklet. “Here you are!” He turned its cover towards Clearvoice with his thumb indicating its title, *The Indian Act 1876*. “Please take it – it’s an extra copy. I’m sorry I don’t have a copy of the treaty but if you would care to come to my office you could read it there.”

Within five minutes Clearvoice was sitting in O’Hara’s office with a leather bound book on the desk in front of him open at a chapter headed *Treaty No. 6*, and a mug of steaming, sweet tea to hand. Why had nobody told him that the Indian laws and the treaty could be found in Battleford?

He read slowly. Many of the words were beyond his comprehension. “Not to worry,” said O’Hara, “they are most peculiar words. Lawyers invent them for other lawyers to read. It helps if you can read Latin.”

Clearvoice was disheartened that even with three years of residential school English he could not read the treaty. O’Hara had thought of everything. He produced a pad of lined paper and a pen.

“Copy it out. It’s a good way of getting to know it.”

Clearvoice ran his eyes over the text of the treaty. It was not too long. At school he had memorised much longer passages as preparation for the inspector who came to test reading ability.

He had never seen anyone with eyes as green as O’Hara’s, or

with hair, eyelashes and moustache quite as red, or with so many little brown flecks over face and hands, or skin so transparent that all the blue veins showed through. When O'Hara told him he was from the country of Ireland, which was not even half the size as the area covered by Treaty 6, Clearvoice asked him if Ireland was where Queen Victoria got her idea about red children.

“Queen Victoria probably thought we Irish were black, just as the Americans think we are green, but the truth is that we are the palest of brown-freckled Whitemen you could ever hope to find, except when our skin turns pink and our noses purple under the Saskatchewan sun.”

The incongruity of O'Hara's reply took Clearvoice by surprise and he smiled. He thought Whitemen always expected their words to be taken seriously. O'Hara smiled back, and their smiles turned to laughter. Before he knew it Clearvoice was laughing tears as the tensions of the day were shaken out. From then onwards, he and O'Hara always spoke easily to each other.

Extract 6

In simple terms, O'Hara said, the Dominion of Canada was making Indians a proposition. To prosper like the immigrants, it said, give up your special legal status as Indians, and your aboriginal and treaty rights, and become Canadian citizens, like the immigrants. Live together on Indian lands as Indian nations, if you must, but live in poverty. He said it was like the proposition they had made to Big Bear – sign the treaty or starve.

* * *

“What is a subject?” Clearvoice was referring to the Queen's

phrase in the treaty “*my Indian subjects*”.

“The British Empire is ruled by a monarchy – countries ruled by Kings and Queens don’t have citizens they have subjects,” explained O’Hara.

“They talk like they are conquerors,” said Clearvoice, “but they never defeated us in a war. We won most of the battles.”

“I wish the Irish could say the same! But it’s true,” replied O’Hara, “you were never conquered and they never claimed you were.”

“And we never sold them our land.” Clearvoice was thinking aloud.

“As far as I’m aware they don’t claim you did. Nobody has ever produced an agreement of purchase and sale.” O’Hara was watching Clearvoice closely.

“The Queen came to us.”

“True!”

“Do Kings and Queens ask their subjects for permission?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“She asked us for permission to use our land.”

“Then you could not have been her subjects.” O’Hara spoke softly as though not to disturb Clearvoice’s train of thought.

Clearvoice had another idea. “Does a landlord pay the rent?”

“Not at all. He collects rents from tenants.”

“The Crown pays us a rent – five dollars each.”

“Then you cannot be the Crown’s tenant, that’s clear,” said O’Hara, “perhaps you are its landlord? And if you are, perhaps you should consider increasing the rent each year to keep up with the cost of living and the value of the additional resources the Crown uses since you first agreed to rent the land. In Britain they

have a term for it, they call it an economic rent.”

“We agreed to share some of our rights with the Queen.”

O’Hara nodded. “You spoke well when you said some, for surely you did not share all your rights, only those that were included in the treaty.”

“Who were we to her?”

“Who do you think?”

“In our language we call ourselves the first peoples.” He was translating from the Cree phrases used frequently by Swift Hunter. “We are the first nations here.”

“Exactly,” said O’Hara, “the Queen of a sovereign nation and the Empress of a grand empire does not make treaty with any old Tom, Dick and Harry. She makes it with the representative of other sovereign nations, which, in this case were the Indian nations.”

Extract 7

During the morning of the fourth day he was in despair – dirty and sore, weak, cold and faint. There was to be no vision. The spirit world had rejected him. He had deluded himself. It was not enough to be an imitation Indian, play-acting at being a traditionalist.

He felt an overwhelming desire to give up the pretence, slide from the tree, bathe in the creek and return home. It was only the memory of his father’s words urging him to stay the four days and nights that kept him there. For most of the morning his mind drifted in and out of troubled reveries.

Late in the afternoon he became aware that his pain and soreness was draining away and his body was becoming light and

easy. The branches of the tree had stopped swaying, the birds had stopped singing, the wind had died and all was quiet. The sky was filled with warm colours of rose and peach except at its apex where there was a perfect circle of blue. A dark spot moved slowly around the outer perimeter of the circle as though to keep it clear.

He thought the moving spot might be an eagle circling at the upper limit of its flying range. As he watched, it grew larger. It was moving downward in a spiral. Eventually it was low enough for him to be able to pick out the silhouette of its spreading tail feathers and the upturned tips of its wings. When it was no more than a hundred feet above him it suddenly slid away from the circular path it had been flying, falling in a straight, fast dive as though it had spotted prey in the valley below. As it was about to disappear over the edge of hill, it banked sharply and appeared to hover for a moment with its wing cupped forward in a controlled stall, then it turned back towards him and with a few powerful thrusts of its wings, it came in a fast rush, skimming the ground, and landing with a small run to steady itself on a grassy mound twenty feet from the tree.

It was a mature bald eagle, perhaps a female, given its very large size. Its head did not crane forward as it might if it were hunting and had mistaken his supine, naked body and slow movements as signs of distressed prey. Nor did it show any of the nervousness or preparation for flight that eagles usually display in the presence of humans. It was still and composed.

He noticed, too, how uprightly the eagle held its head. His heart stirred in appreciation of the dark yellow in the iris of its unblinking eyes, the lighter yellow of its curved beak, its wide

mouth and the scaly covering on its large claws.

He also admired the way the eagle slowly expanded from about three feet in height to ten feet, and how its breast became a piebald brown-and-white horse, and the ruffle of brilliant white feathers on its head became the headdress of its rider.

Chapter 2

Extract 8

The main emblem in the coat-of-arms of Charles Griffin, the 12th Earl of Arduin, was a Gryphon – that fabulous hybrid creature with the head, wings and talons of an eagle and the body of a lion. Two Gryphons carved in stone were perched like totems on the gateposts of the main drive at Arduin, his ancestral country estate in Oxfordshire. A more flamboyant version, with a very long tail, was the dominant figure in the stained glass fanlight above the door of his London town house in Chester Square, Belgravia. And a minimalist abstract was embossed on his personalised stationery at Brown's, the private bank in the City of London where he became Chairman in 1980.

Although he had lived in London all his adult life, he always thought of Arduin as home. He had maintained a set of rooms in the south wing of the house since he was a boy and helped his father manage the three thousand acres of the estate in preparation for the day when he would inherit the Earldom. He respected his father even though he judged him to be a lesser man than his grandfather who was known affectionately in the family and among his close friends as Hunter John. The nickname was first

given him by Buffalo Bill, the former colonel of the United States Cavalry whose real name was William Cody. Hunter John was in his early twenties at the time, on his first tour of the family's business investments in Canada. He had taken a side-trip to the American West to take part in his first bison hunt and he had hired Buffalo Bill as a guide.

Extract 9

As the threat of insolvency loomed, Charles became convinced that marriage was no longer merely a question of strengthening the family's assets, but of saving them. He could not afford another failure. But the fact that he had already married and divorced twice spoilt his reputation. Stories about his indiscreet promiscuity, the infertility of his two failed marriages, his gambling, and rumours about his failing finances meant he was less eligible in Britain than ever before. With a growing sense of dread he knew that he might have to look abroad again.

* * *

His search led him to Spain by way of the Caribbean. One of Brown's American clients from South Carolina had asked the bank to assist in financing the purchases of a sugar plantation in Trinidad and Tobago. As part of his due diligence enquiries, the Earl met with the vendor's agent at the old plantation house on Tobago.

Under the influence of the Earl's charm, the agent, who was a former commercial attaché at the Spanish Embassy in Venezuela, revealed that his client was a Spanish noblewoman from Andalucía – a Countess.

The two men were sipping rum on the veranda overlooking

gardens that were shielded by flowering Jacaranda trees. Green and scarlet humming birds probed the thicket of orchids in the garden. As the rum soaked his veins and the cool breeze softly soothed the prickly heat, the agent abandoned professional discretion and told the Earl all he knew about his client. Her name was Condesa María Concepción Giménez de Córdoba. She was intelligent, vivacious and classically beautiful, the agent said – his rolling eyes and expressive gestures conveying more even than his generous words. Strangely, she had never married or been romantically linked to anyone. This was thought to be due to her religious convictions. Although she had good relations with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, having a cousin a Cardinal in the Curia at the Vatican, no less, it was rumoured that she dabbled in strange and esoteric spiritual practices.

He had been given to understand from her financial advisors in Madrid that the sale of her Caribbean plantations was part of a grand plan to liquidate most of her family's businesses and landholdings in the Americas and throughout the world and convert their value to cash.

There had been some whispered debate in business and diplomatic circles in Spain about the reason for her plan. Some thought it was a shrewd strategic business decision to get out of the colonies before they achieved political independence. Newly independent states would nationalise segments of the private sector, especially those businesses, like hers, which were mainly based on land holdings and which had politically incorrect origins in the colonialism that followed on the Spanish Conquest of the New World. Others thought she had a bad conscience about the origins of her family's great wealth. Yet others thought she acted on an altruistic

impulse to raise cash for her charitable and religious activities.

The Earl asked Brown's to make discrete enquiries about the Countess through its correspondent bank in Madrid. The results excited him. Whatever her motivation, she was already well advanced in her plan. Brokers at the houses which handled her purchase of bonds estimated that her sale of real assets had already raised cash in excess of three quarters of a billion pounds sterling and there was much more to come.

A press clipping service on Fleet Street provided the Earl with a bundle of articles from Spanish newspapers and magazines. There was a photograph of her draped in black lace at the Vatican in audience with Pope John XXIII, and another of her wrapped in a white silk sari in Dharamsala, India with the Dalai Lama. Others showed her with the Chief Rabbi in Jerusalem and with Senior Mullah in Morocco, with a Shinto priest in Tokyo and with various other religious or spiritual persons including shamans and witch-doctors. The phrases, "ways of knowing" and "paths to knowledge" and "enlightened consciousness" appeared often enough in reference to the conferences and events she was attending to suggest what her preoccupations were.

There were also pictures of her in New York meeting with Dag Hammarskjold, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and at a reception in Stockholm for Lester Pearson when he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. That photograph was of special interest to the Earl because he was acquainted with Lester Pearson, who was the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, the current leader of the Liberal Party in Canada and, as such, probably the next Prime Minister.

Digging deeper in the Latin American press with the help of

the Bank's Spanish speakers, he read reports of her charitable projects in Mexico and Central American countries and in Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay and Chile. She had funded orphanages, children's hospitals, family clinics, leprosaria, schools, colleges and cultural centres.

From the press coverage, at least, it seemed that most of the projects were related to the children and families of the indigenous Indian populations of Mexico and Central and South America. In many of the projects she appeared to be supporting the initiatives of the local people; in others she seemed to be associated with the Catholic Church and, in particular, with the Society of Jesus – the Jesuits.

When he made further discreet enquiries through the Spanish Embassy in London, he was referred to the *Centro Para la Restitución*, a foundation in Seville. The Countess was its patron and main benefactor. Its stated mission was to promote “restitution to the indigenous peoples of the New World”. In his search, the only words he could find that were directly attributed to Doña María Concepción was the keynote speech she had delivered to a World Bank symposium in Washington DC. It was entitled *Restitution is an Obligation not a Choice*.

Extract 10

“It's remorseless, this bloody process” he concluded, “unless I stop it.”

An hour later he stepped outside and passed through the ornate Italian gardens that nestled up close to the west side of the house and up several ornate steps to a promontory. The western view revealed how high Ardun sat among the Cotswold Hills. There was

no sight of roads or buildings or fences or any man-made thing. The parkland pastures fell away in undulating slopes to the thick woodlands on either side and below. The sky was big and solemn.

He listened to the last of the birdsong as the sun descended towards the horizon. He heard a raucous cry and saw the shadowy outline of a large bird. For a brief moment he fancied it was an eagle, but it was a rook returning late from the fields. The air was still and heavy with the scent of the lavender and thyme and other sweet-smelling herbs as well as the night-blooming jasmine shrubs in the borders of the garden. He felt closer to Ardun than ever before.

It was time to make a decision. If the cost of saving Ardun was a restrictive marriage contract with a quirky woman from an alien culture, so be it. Duty before pleasure! Besides, he thought, if he did not act soon she would have no difficulty finding someone else to satisfy her urgent desire for an heir. "It's time for you to keep your own counsel, Old Boy," he said aloud as he scanned the dusk sky for the first stars. "Mortimer would never approve, but grandpa would."

* * *

The Countess prevailed upon the Archbishop of Seville to allow a Church marriage even though the Earl was twice divorced and not a Catholic. But the Archbishop would not allow it to take place in the Cathedral in Seville. To avoid the unfavourable public comment a marriage at a less prestigious location might attract, the Countess turned to her cousin, the Cardinal, to arrange and preside at a quiet wedding within the walls of the Vatican. There were few guests and both parties made simultaneous announce-

ments of the marriage in England and Spain.

While the failure of his first two marriages had clouded his prospects at Brown's, the Earl's marriage to the Countess transformed them. His relief was enormous. The financial arrangements satisfied the cash-flow needs of the family estates and his personal need for greater disposable income. Furthermore, the Countess entrusted Brown's with the banking arrangements for a substantial portion of her investments.

Following his marriage, Brown's created a new Americas Division under his direction and made him deputy chairman of the bank. The mission of the Americas Division was to revive and develop the bank's former merchant banking business in Canada as a platform for a similar revival in the United States and the Caribbean. Any new business he could generate in Latin America through the Countess's connections would be a welcome bonus.

To carry out this plan, he began a twelve-month tour of duty in the summer of 1962. He chose Montréal as his base because that is what the Countess wanted. But in justifying his choice to Brown's on business terms he argued that Montréal was still Canada's principal financial centre and the location of the head offices of many of its largest corporations and financial institutions, although Toronto was gaining fast. He could access Toronto and Ottawa – and New York, for that matter – by frequent trains from downtown Montréal and flights from Dorval airport.

For his own personal interest he also wanted to visit some of the Hudson's Bay Company's old fortified factories and stores in the far north and view the polar bears that trekked hundreds of miles to maraud the rubbish tips in the northern township of Churchill.

In Montréal he lived in Hunter John's former residence. It was on Pine Avenue close to McGill University and the Royal Victoria Hospital, low enough on the southern slopes of Mount Royal for him to be able look up at the large illuminated Cross near the summit, and high enough to look across the rooftops of the downtown. The house was a mock baronial manor built by a Scottish entrepreneurial engineer who helped build the railways in Québec and Ontario. It reminded the Earl of his family's hunting lodge south and east of Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, and it would not have looked out of place in Aberdeen, with its grey granite blocks, green copper roof, ornamental turrets and irregular shaped windows – some with stained, leaded glass.

Montréal still had some of the infrastructure developed in the old colonial era to help British expatriates feel at home. The St. James club in the business district cultivated the ambience of a London gentleman's club, and the Ritz on Rue Sherbrooke was a modest reminder of its Parisian namesake. The ballroom at the Windsor Hotel was a good place for galas on the feast days of St. George, St. Andrew, St. David and St Patrick. The officer's mess at the Canadian regiments of the Grenadier Guards and the Black Watch were always hospitable. As an English Lord, Charles Griffin could live a comfortable, privileged life in downtown Montréal without ever having to speak a word of French.

* * *

The Countess followed the Earl to Montréal in the fall when the humidity of summer had dissipated and the air had become dry again. She was enchanted by the red, russet and gold of the foliage still clinging tremulously to the trees or, having fallen, lying

scattered like a rustling duvet.

In London she had become accustomed to riding twice a week on Rotten Row in Hyde Park accompanied by the Earl or, in his absence, by Household Cavalry officers exercising their horses from the Knightsbridge barracks. When she joined the Earl in Montréal, he arranged for a stable to deliver horses twice a week to Beaver Lake at the top of Mount Royal from where she and her escort for the day would explore the mountain's roads, pathways and woods, searching for vantage points from where to look down on the city and across the island to the Saint Lawrence River.

Montréal's characteristic blue skies reminded her of Andalucía. And winter arrived gently enough. When the first snows fell they muted the noise of the city and purified it of its blemishes, unifying mountain, trees, streets and buildings in a seamless, shining, white shroud. However, other snowfalls followed remorselessly. Intermittent thaws turned each new crisp layer of white crystals to icy slush mixed with salted gravel, inches deep in street gutters. And when the bitter winds of winter funnelled along Rue Sherbrooke and Boulevard de Maisonneuve, cutting through layers of furs and wool to chill her flesh, the Countess pined for Seville.

She was unaccustomed to northern winters and felt no wifely obligation to accompany the Earl on his tour of duty. However, she thought Montréal would be an auspicious place for her child to be born. It was only ten miles from the Mohawk village of Khanawake where the slender bones of Kateri Tekakwitha, "the Lily of the Mohawks", could be viewed in the silk-lined casket in which the Jesuit priests had placed them.

Doña María Concepción's empathy with *los Indios* began early in her life – so early that she could not remember when or why. It may have been no more complicated than her childish fascination with the large 16th century oil painting that covered a wall in the dining room in the family hacienda in Andalucía. It showed Christopher Columbus returning from one of his voyages to the New World, parading a line of Indians through the streets of Seville on the way to the royal court.

When she was older she learned that they were probably the Taino from Cuba or from the island of Hispaniola, which later came to be known as the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Columbus had brought the Taino forcibly to Spain to be sold as slaves to fund his expeditions, and as curiosities for the entertainment of the royal court.

The painter had taken artistic licence to depict the Taino carrying parrots and toucans on their forearms and shoulders, and turtles and iguanas in wooden cages, and bundles of plants such as tobacco and cotton, and potatoes and exotic fruits. Their brown bodies were naked and painted. Where modesty required, the artist had contrived to give them a skimpy apron of small seeds threaded with cotton. A broad, woven headband held plumes of parrot feathers upright around the circumference of their heads in the shape of a crown, and other gaudy feathers drooped in clusters from bands around their arms, knees and ankles.

When, as a young woman, María Concepción became more informed about the history of the Spanish Conquest of the New World, she also became more critical of the artist for not showing the bewilderment the Taino must have felt, their fear, homesick-

ness and exhaustion, or their grieving for so many of their family and friends who died on the journey to Spain in the crowded holds of Columbus' small ships only to have their bodies thrown unceremoniously to the sharks. Perhaps the painter believed the Indians had no thoughts or emotions for he had given them identical impassive faces – like dolls.

As a very small girl, she would often go alone to the dining room, climb gingerly on a chair close to the painting, and gaze into the eyes of *los Indios* as a Russian girl might contemplate a religious icon of Christ or the Virgin. She saw in their faces the same beatific calm she had seen in the paintings and statues of Christian martyrs on their way to their deaths and the intense recollection in the eyes of the suffering Christ as he carried his cross through the streets of Jerusalem.

Extract 11

The Earl followed two weeks later, taking a commercial flight and arriving in Seville on the Saturday of Easter Week. The next day, María Concepción's cousin, the Cardinal, baptised the child over the very same font where she, her brothers, her father and generations of her family had been baptised.

Charles Griffin felt uneasy in the alien atmosphere of a Catholic Cathedral still stuffy with the incense that lingered from the Easter Sunday masses. He was relieved when the christening was over. Afterwards, there was a reception in his wife's home in Seville. Nobody from his family was there.

He did not appreciate the rasping, broken English of the Countess's effusive relatives and friends. After greeting the guests in a perfunctory manner, he secluded himself in the library of the

house and drank two double shots of single malt as he perused maps of the 16th and 17th century voyages to the New World funded by Doña María Concepción's ancestors. As the solitude and the whisky did its work he began to feel better. Before long he was congratulating himself on having delivered his side of a very good bargain. In one stroke, so to speak, he had produced an heir and secured his and Ardun's financial future.

His good humour restored, he left the library to mingle with the guests and to accept their compliments with his customary charm and grace. When the time came to leave to catch the early evening flight to London he was feeling expansive and went to the nursery for a last look at his son. A few minutes later, the Cardinal followed, gliding silently into the room to stand opposite him at the crib. For a minute or two, the Earl seemed oblivious to his presence, lost in his thoughts as he looked down at the small, crunched face of the sleeping child.

"And the Christian names you and the Condesa chose for him," the Cardinal said softly with only a slight Spanish accent, "Rupert and Carlos! They reflect so well his noble English and Spanish heritage." He looked at the Earl, inviting a reply. "It's perfectly proper that the father's choice of name should have precedence." When the Earl still did not respond, he continued. "But I confess that I would have preferred his Spanish name to be first."

He slipped his hand beneath his soutane and drew out a small, silk pouch from which he poured a string of rosary beads made from clear Mexican crystal, and he hooked them to the canopy of the crib so that the silver crucifix dangled above the infant's head. Straightening himself he said, "I understand that you will raise him in both cultures?"

The Earl looked up with a start as he became aware of the Cardinal's presence. "Both cultures?" He swayed slightly as he struggled to understand the question. When he did he turned his glazed eyes back to his son in the crib, taking time to adjust his focus.

"Ah yes," he said, "both cultures!" He nodded his head with exaggerated gravity. "Rupert is a true Gryphon – part lion, part eagle."

Chapter 3

Extract 12

By the time Rupert Carlos went up to Oxford in 1981, he was already a fastidious dresser. It was a symptom of unease rather than vanity – a scruple that had grown from an anxious desire to please his parents when he was a young child. The fact that his father was an English Earl and his mother a Spanish Countess complicated the task. They left much of Rupert’s early upbringing to his nanny, Rose, and it may have been Rose who unwittingly conveyed to Rupert that his parents’ approval was conditional on how he dressed.

“If only your mother and father could see you now,” she would gush when he was neat and tidy or especially “angelic”. She said the same thing, in a disapproving tone, when he was “mucky”. And he noticed that when she groomed him more obsessively than usual and dressed him in his more formal clothes, one of his parents would visit. To his young mind it looked a lot like cause and effect.

His mother’s visits confirmed the magical power of clothes. She might bring him something distinctively Spanish – an Andalusian ranching hat, an embroidered matador jacket or fla-

menco boots. When he wore them she would melt with emotion and smother him with kisses. The Spanish look, she said, set off his luminous brown eyes and shining black hair better than did the “dull smocks and swaddling clothes” of England.

Even his father seemed to be affected by dress. When Rupert was seven years old his mother gave him his first pony at Christmas. On Boxing Day the Heythrop Hunt assembled with horses and hounds to chase fox at Ardun. It was to be Rupert’s first meet – he was to follow the field at a distance with the other young riders.

Rose had dressed him in a perfect miniature of his family’s ancestral hunting costume – mustard yellow jacket with emerald lapels, black riding cap, cream jodhpurs and highly polished, black riding boots. A groom led him out to pay his respects to the Master of the Hunt. With a rare smile his father nudged his horse alongside Rupert’s pony and led it in a slow circle while the riders blew horns, whooped, hollered and cracked whips in appreciation of this iconic image of father and son. Rupert remembered the moment well. It was the first time since his christening in Seville that his father had publicly acknowledged him.

In August of the next year, when he was eight years of age, Rupert started at Summer Meadows – an exclusive, private preparatory boarding school for boys in Oxford. By then his working assumption was that for every role he was required to play in the drama of his life there was an appropriate costume and it was his duty to wear it well. If a boy dressed exactly right, he would be accepted, respected and even loved.

During the next five years at Summer Meadows he tried to observe the school dress code religiously. The results were inconclusive. He got on well enough with the house-matron and the

masters and boys – and Rose remained a constant – but he saw less of his parents than before. As his final year ended, he looked forward to doing better at Eton College, where the relationship between dress, status and approval was made very explicit.

His most vivid memory of his first day at Eton, when he was thirteen years of age, was the excitement of finding his made-to-measure college uniform laid out in his room on arrival – the lightly starched shirt with wing collar and white bow tie, pin-striped trousers, waistcoat, black jacket and tails. The next act of the drama was about to begin. The script had been honed over hundreds of years by generations of his ancestors who had come to Eton for their own rites of passage. For the next five years all he needed to do to win his father’s approval was to speak the ancient lines, observe the ritualised choreography and wear the authentic costume.

Extract 13

On the wall next to the picture was a reproduction of the entire text of the Royal Charter divided between four frames. Peering forward, the Earl traced his finger along the lines of the opening paragraphs, in which the King gave the Hudson’s Bay Company its name and listed its seventeen founding directors. Eleven were noblemen and knights-of-the-realm and six were esquires or commoners.

“Here we are,” he said triumphantly, “here’s our man, right here among the original Adventurers.” He steered Rupert forward by the shoulders to verify his discovery. Then he stood back, contemplating the document with satisfaction. “The King was right. What a Grand Adventure it was for England – and for us, Rupert –

the best investment the family ever made.”

He resumed his tour of the library stopping by a polished, oak table on which there were two scale-models of small 17th century sailing ships, each in their own glass display-case. As his eyes lingered over their details, his expression softened.

“Can you hear the sounds, Rupert?”

“Sounds, papa?”

“The sails, don’t you know – cracking and snapping? And the wind,” he cocked his head slightly as though listening. “Can you hear it shrieking through the rigging, whistling and moaning through the cracks?”

Rupert had never seen his father playing let’s pretend, even when he had been drinking whisky. How should he respond? “Yes, papa, I can, I think,” he replied, with an uncertain smile.

“And the timbers – the yaw and creaking, especially at night. The waves crashing on the top deck in heavy seas.” The Earl swayed slightly.

Was it the whisky again, Rupert wondered, or the swell of the imaginary seas?

“Imagine! You’re in the Arctic Straits, Rupert, near Hudson’s Bay. It’s night. You’re below deck shivering in your bunk. What’s that?” His eyes rolled melodramatically and he stretched his arms as though steadying himself between support timbers. “Did you feel that thud? God help us, we’ve been hit by an ice floe! It’s grinding against the hull, trying to rip it open. And what’s that ghostly noise?” He cupped his hand by his ear. “Ah, it’s whales calling to each other!”

He continued to listen for a few seconds entranced by the imaginary sound. Then he straightened himself and adopted a more

matter-of-fact tone. “Did you know a wooden ship is like a violin, Rupert? Its beams and posts reverberate to the songs of whales, sometimes for hours on end.”

“Really, papa?”

Rupert tried to imagine what it must be like to be inside a violin when it is reverberating. “It would give me a headache.”

His father seemed pleased to have impressed him. “There were no engines to make noises or vibrations, but there was the crew, God bless them. They were boys really, some not much older than you – urchins from the London docklands. You can imagine the din they made – the banter, the clatter of pans, singing, concertinas, drums and pipes...and the ship’s bells clanging...orders being yelled over the wind...” He appeared to have exhausted his list and for a moment seemed to have lost the thread of the conversation.

“It must have been fun,” said Rupert. He read aloud the names of the two ships. “The *Nonsuch* and the *Eaglet*. An eaglet is a young eagle, isn’t it, papa?”

Extract 14

His mother always called him Carlos, when she took him to Spain. She told him it was his proper Christian name because it was Spanish and Catholic. Rupert was nice, too, she said, but it was German and Protestant. It wasn’t that she disliked Germans or Protestants – she claimed to be “comprehensively ecumenical” – but Catholicism was part of the culture of her country and family. Besides, if you were going to be a Christian why not be faithful to the one, true Church founded by Christ?

Rupert quite liked the idea of being Carlos to his mother and Rupert to his father, of being Catholic with her and Anglican with

him: it was like having the secret code to each of their constellations. For the same reason he accepted her strict rule that in Spain he was to converse only in Spanish. He had learned his first Spanish words from her and from the age of four had taken tutorials at Ardun and continued at Summer Meadows. The Countess was fluent in English. He knew it had been her second language since she was an infant and she had refined her accent in Geneva, during the war, and at a finishing school in London's Chelsea, after.

As the aircraft at Heathrow prepared for take-off, Rupert was pleased that the steward addressed him as *Señor* and spoke in Spanish. Evidently the new clothes were working – his *Carlos persona* was credible.

From his window seat in the front row, Rupert watched the London suburbs and then the southern counties drop away, and he recalled what his mother had said to his headmaster earlier that day – that to travel from London to Seville in April was to change medium from watercolour to oil. She meant to contrast England's thin, white sunlight, so often filtered through low, grey clouds, with the golden light of Andalucía's arching blue skies. As the flight descended over southern Spain, he could see how the contrast also applied to the two landscapes.

Instead of England's patchwork of dull, green fields and crowded, redbrick towns there were Andalucía's wide, sweeping plains. Even at a height of two thousand feet he could see crowded crops of yellow sunflowers wrapped in bright green leaves trying to lift their faces to the sky, and clusters of scarlet poppies swaying and dancing in the grass. The orderly rows of olive and orange groves and the apple and cherry orchards in full blossom were part of a patchwork, fertile belt that enclosed villages of shimmering

white buildings, huddled beneath mansions and castles whose turrets and spires crowned the pinnacle of hills that stood above the plains like watchtowers.

Later that day, Rupert stood with his mother in the roof garden of her 17th century mansion in a narrow Calle near Calle Penueles in the centre of Seville taking in the sights and sounds of the city. As the bells from the several convents and churches of the district rang out, the evening light turned from gold to shades of peach and red, softening the architectural excesses of the city's monumental civic and religious buildings and the sharp edges of its rectangular, commercial shacks and factories.

The ambience of his mother's house was so different from Ar-dun's. It reminded Rupert of the property room he had seen at the Royal Opera House when his mother took him back-stage at Convent Garden after a charity performance of *Carmen*.

Extract 15

“How do you learn to be a natural priest, mama?”

“Ah, now you're asking the question I asked, Carlos. That's what I set out to discover – what techniques...what power switches can one use to focus and direct energy?”

“Yes,” said Rupert, as though agreeing that was the question.

“A power switch might be a form of words, like a spell or a prayer, or a song...it might be a dance. It could be a sacrifice, or a good deed, or a dream, a ritual or just a focussed thought. Usually, if a natural priest wants to switch on the power he or she would go to a special sacred location...a mountaintop, a riverbank, a tree, a rock formation, or a ring of stones. Then they might use an object to help focus their minds and emotions to channel

the power. That's what a sacred object is, actually – it's a power switch. The crucifix is a power switch, too.”

Rupert waited to see if she would continue. He could see how much it meant to her. Her eyes were burning bright.

“Did you find any power switches, mama?”

She nodded slowly. “Yes I did, Carlos.” In the tone of a person revealing a confidence, she said: “I looked everywhere for holy people who might be natural priests. Some were in the Church, but many were not. Some were tribal shamans and medicine men – or spiritual people of other religions. They all had their holy places and sacred objects. In most cases, their power switches had been passed on to them from other natural priests. It didn't matter that they could not explain how they worked – it was enough that they did.”

She rose, wrapped a shawl around her shoulders and led Rupert to her bedroom. It was spacious. In a corner was an octagonal table made from a mosaic of purple heart, green heart and other hard woods from the Venezuelan rain forests, lacquered to simulate a high polish.

“These are a few of my power switches.” She pointed out some of them – a large crystal from Mexico in the shape of a human skull; finger cymbals from Tibet; a miniature pyramid carved in ivory and engraved with hieroglyphics; a piece of amber from the Baltic which had formed naturally into the shape of a mother and child; a Moorish prayer mat; a statue of Buddha; a conch used by Siberian shamans to call the spirits; the sacred bundle of a Sioux Medicine Man. There were pebbles and rocks from different countries, tubular roots from the Australian desert, and from Oxfordshire a chip of weathered limestone that had broken off one of

the large megalithic standing stones at Rollright. Rupert had dug the chip from the ground the first time he visited the site with his mother.

Chapter 4

Extract 16

When the duty officer's telephone call came, Mackie was scanning the hockey scores on the overnight faxes from Ottawa as he sipped bitter, black coffee from a waxed, paper cup and munched one of the fresh blueberry muffins he had picked up at the new American-style coffee bar near the Hampstead Underground station on his way to the office an hour earlier.

“Hi Ray, how's it going? Here's one for you. A card-carrying Indian – calls himself Clearvoice – know him?”

Mackie smothered his surprise.

“What about him,” he asked laconically.

“He's detained at Heathrow. Immigration wants to know if we'll vouch for him. If not they'll put him on the next plane to Canada. He says he's here on treaty business – whatever that is. Trouble?”

Mackie hesitated. In his former career in the Department of Indian Affairs, he had learned to relish moments like this. Only a hypocrite would deny that the exercise of power by administrative dictate was pleasurable. It was a familiar scene – a supplicant Indian cap-in-hand, waiting in an anteroom for the “Indian Agent”

to decide his next move – in this case whether he was to continue his journey or be returned to his reserve, in shackles, so to speak. But Mackie knew that Clearvoice was no ordinary Indian.

Extract 17

The medical sergeant showed a short film made by a unit of the American infantry. It contained close-ups of suppurating sores on genitals, mouths and tongues, and eyes blinded by syphilis. Then he projected slides that showed feet with infected sores, followed by a line of simpering amputees on crutches and wheelchairs showing off their footless legs.

“An army marches on its stumps,” Mackie muttered from the side of his mouth to the pale recruit on his left who was shrinking under the impact of the images.

He was queasy, too. Like most of his contemporaries he was prudish about sex. He had never realised, until now, that its main product was flesh-eating sores, blindness and the loss of feet.

When the lights went up a Captain stepped forward. He was no more than twenty-four years of age. In contrast with the images that had just been shown, he looked virginal. He had the kind of creamy smooth skin, without blemish, that Mackie associated with the Co-op’s richer customers. His blue eyes were steady beneath a high, noble brow, framed by thick, brown hair that was parted with precision on one side and brushed across in the style of a choirboy.

His uniform, which was not Black Watch, was tailored to perfection. He spoke in a cultured accent clipping his words in short, decisive phrases. Mackie was embarrassed that such a fine young gentleman should be required to address such base subject-matter

for the benefit of such a motley crew.

“Not pretty, was it men?” the Captain said referring to the slides and film show. “Let’s talk about venereal disease – commonly known as VD.”

Using the esoteric euphemisms for sexual organs and bodily processes he had learned at his private boarding school, the Captain gave a series of short, sharp recommendations on sexual hygiene as though he was explaining how to clean the moving parts and adjust the gas chamber on a Bren light machine gun.

Then he turned his attention to trench foot. Mackie had never heard of it before – feet rotting from fungus. It sounded mysterious and terrifying. The Captain seemed to suggest that a soldier’s feet would start turning green and black unless he changed his socks at least twice a week. It was that or amputation.

Mackie was relieved when he turned his attention to the more straightforward and considerably cleaner subject of stealing. But his relief was not to last long. “If I had the choice between a man with venereal disease, or a thief, I would choose venereal disease,” the Captain said. “Give me a choice between a man with rotting feet, and a thief, and I would choose rotting feet. Syphilis and trench foot are self-inflicted – a man gets what he deserves. But dishonesty makes victims of us all. It is a black spot on the lungs of the entire regiment. It is a clot in its heart. It’s a cramp that paralyses its muscles.”

Extract 18

“You sound like an academic,” Mackie said.

“I wish! But you’re very perceptive. At MI5 we rely on academics. The essence of intelligence work is the analysis of in-

formation that is already in the public domain. But we still need shrewd people like your good self to cut through the academic gobbledegook and explain its practical significance to us.”

Mackie narrowed his eyes. “Why would MI5 be interested in a bunch of Indians giving press conferences?”

“Am I being interrogated, now?” Simpson chuckled. “No, it’s a fair question.”

Mackie’s confidence was rising. “So what’s the answer?”

“People don’t become subversives and terrorists overnight – there’s always a history and it’s usually documented somewhere. As an intelligence service we fail in our duty if we don’t spot developing situations, monitor them and nip them in the bud before they do harm.”

Mackie harrumphed. “I’m surprised, that you’re so concerned about Canada’s interests – why not let the Mounties protect us from the Indians, they’ve done a good job so far?”

“You’re right. Of course our primary interest is the security of the United Kingdom. If our work can also assist our Canadian cousins, so much the better! But let’s talk about you. You’re both British and Canadian. You were a British soldier, no less. Is it unreasonable of me to try to contract your professional services as a consultant in an area where you are, if, may I say, an international expert?”

“I didn’t know you were trying, Percy.” Mackie had come alive. He quite liked the flattery but he was more interested in the money. He knew he would accept before Simpson finished making his proposal. In fact, he had come to the meeting hoping for something like this.

Simpson was as business-like as Mackie. He stated the terms

of the contract succinctly. There was to be a retainer for Mackie’s “professional expertise” in educating MI5 on the subtleties of Indian politics including its source of funds and the background and motivation of the persons involved. The working relationship was not to be disclosed to any other party, even to the RCMP. Mackie could begin work there and then by commenting on Simpson concerns.

“I’m sure you can appreciate that London is an international cross-roads. Many extremist groups try to take advantage of our liberal democracy to hatch plots against us and our allies. Your Indians have no idea the interest their arrival here caused among some malcontents.”

“Like who?”

“The Provisional IRA, state-sponsored Libyan terrorists, recalcitrant elements from the Yemen and other itinerant Arabs up to no good.”

Extract 19

By the time the meeting adjourned, the participants seemed to have a renewed sense of purpose. Mackie saw the subtle changes in their demeanour. He had given them a glimpse of his experience, knowledge and skills. They were beginning to understand why he had been brought in. He saw respect in their eyes and deference in their body language and he heard it in their voices.

* * *

When he emerged from the High Commission it was approaching four o’clock. It was too late to return to Canada House. On his way to Marble Arch tube station he would call in at Selfridge’s

on Oxford Street. The day before, he had seen some inexpensive reproductions of Russian icons of the Virgin Mary. It wouldn't cost much to send one to his wife. She would like them.

It was good to be on top again in full possession of his powers. The Acorn Project was coming to final fruition. If he could have leapt in the air and clicked his heels he would have. "Don't I just love it when a plan comes together – Clearvoice in the morning, MI5 at noon and now Earl Griffin – my lord and former master, Captain Sausage. Yes!"

Chapter 5

Extract 20

Most of the riders accepted a glass of sherry from the silver tray held aloft by the innkeeper. They self-consciously followed the procedure they had agreed in advance, drinking with aplomb, avoiding eye contact with the protesters and talking about the weather and the horses. But their apparent *sang-froid* incensed their critics.

To avoid becoming embroiled in what might become an unseemly confrontation, the Earl arrived at the last minute. Two grooms from Ardun had gone ahead with the horses, saddling them and hitching them near a mounting block.

Rupert was the first of the party from Ardun to mount his horse and he went forward to pay his respect to the Master. After Sir Mortimer had settled in his saddle, the Earl donned Hunter John's top hat of brushed beaver pelt with the long ribbon trailing and he approached the mounting block. Meanwhile, two frail, elderly women had placed themselves both sides of his horse and tried to lead it away. In a tremulous but clear voice, and with refined diction, one of them looked the Earl in the eye and said: "Don't make this beautiful horse an accessory to murder, your worship."

“I shan’t,” said the Earl breezily, as he mounted with the help of a groom, “and thank you for your concern. Now if you would be so kind!” He was asking them to release their grip on the bit.

That is when five police officers moved together across the road to restore order. After much pained debate about the relevance of the *Doomsday Book*, *Magna Carta*, the *United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights*, *Mein Kampf*, and “the poor little dog that was sent up in the Sputnik”, the police ordered the protesters to fall back and keep their distance behind the hunt as it set off for open country.

Extract 21

While they quizzed each other, the single-mindedness of their curiosity kept the intimacy of the previous evening at a distance. But after two hours they had talked themselves out and with fewer words they retraced their steps up the hill to the edge of the wild-flower meadow west of the house, where they paused to catch their breath and look back and down at the surface of the lake.

Rupert was conscious of Morning Star’s laboured breathing and the heat from her body and he eased closer until he felt the pressure of her hip against his thigh and the heat radiating from her body. The breeze was stirring her hair, lifting and twisting it in a dancing plume over her forehead. He could not resist the impulse to catch it between his fingers, and smooth it with the palm of his hand and when she involuntarily responded by inclining her head to look up at him, his hand slid to her forehead and he found himself doing what he had imagined the previous evening – tracing his finger outwards along her eyebrows, down over her prominent cheekbones, along the bridge of her nose and across

her lips.

Her eyes were wide and serious as her gaze held his. But the quickening of his pulse and his bolting imagination were not enough to overcome his deeply rooted inhibitions. Was the severity of her look an admonition or emotional engagement? It occurred to him that the urgency of his own searching eyes might appear too intense. He softened his stare with a quick smile and lowered his face so that his cheek touched hers, and he whispered, “Thank you for coming to Ardun. I enjoyed our talk.”

Thank you for reading so far. You will find an overview of the entire novel on my website: www.victoroconnell.com