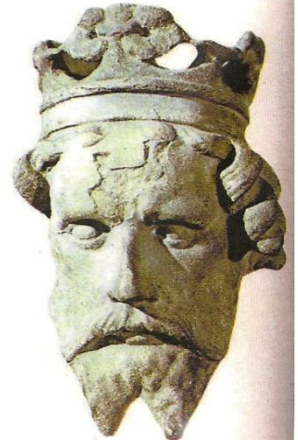


Chapter One

Prince Marcus is a very late arrival in the famed family of Windsor. He's certainly a surprise addition to the family, lobbing along a full seven years after the arrival of Prince Edward. He is thus not in the hunt in terms of accession to the throne of Great Britain, but there's also a good upside in that, although born to royalty, he should be easily able to lead a life of privilege, and of his own choosing. Or so it seems. Of course, the avalanche in the Swiss Alps that took the Prince of Wales out of this life and left Camilla ensconced in Clarence House, stoutly resisting all efforts to remove her, altered everything overnight. But at this stage, this is all way down the track.



Marcus's early life in his royal family homes is, to say the least, very comfortable. He is the last occupant of the Nursery Wing at Buckingham Palace and no one bothers him much. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip are big on cameo appearances, but don't give their family much of their real time. Holidays are different of course, but there are always mobs of people underfoot that are part of the warp and woof of the country. At one particular time at Balmoral, you couldn't seem to take a step without running into one or the other of the dreadful Blairs and similar public figures. However, royal life is much cosseted and protected and whether you want to hear it or not, just about everyone tells you what they want you to hear. All Marcus has to do is to paddle along in the footsteps of his earlier born siblings and he attends the same schools and follows established patterns until the day Prince Phillip tells him that it's time for him to go to Gordonstoun. This provokes the first real sense of rebellion in easy-going Marcus's life.

"Good god," he says, "that place in the frozen north where you rise before dawn in the frost and tolerate the decent kids treating you like stable manure and the not so decent ones hunting you like game? Never," he says, "never, ever."

Prince Phillip ignores the outburst.

"The Headmaster will be along Thursday morning to tell you about your induction," he says. The Head turns up as promised.

"Mr Head," Marcus says, "no way Jose."

"Ignore the young sprog and book him in, Headmaster," Phil the Greek says.

Marcus is the brightest of his bunch. He gets an old, mid-size Olivetti typewriter out of the storeroom. Types up his well rooted objections to this (to him) crazy scheme and gives this, on the qt, to the press via Felicity Fry, who is always at the Palace, concocting nice stories on the Queen Mother to appear under her by-line. She reads it, blanches and departs. The story appears in the popular press a few days later, but she sells it to the big media. Marcus never forgives her for this and when, years later, he takes over as Secretary to the Queen, he bans her from Buckingham Palace. He has a memory like an elephant and also harbours a deal of mean suspicion. Felicity has always brought him marvellous boxes of chocolate from Fortnum and Mason. He accepts these graciously and later tosses them into the rubbish bin. If he's ever poisoned, he thinks it won't be by a journo.

There's a fair bit of hub bub and Marcus's comments on Gordonstoun don't go down too well with a school that is losing numbers. Phillip relents.

“Very well, Mark,” (Marcus has seven names, but Mark or Marcus is the one most used) “you may continue your schooling here in London.”

They appoint a political minder to ride herd on him and this chap, who could have passed for David Frost at his peak, readily recognizes that Mark has every intention of doing his own thing and he realistically goes along this path, just guiding things a bit here and there. He’s an ex Royal Marine and is thus a well-trained psychopath who, in the long run, does have a beneficial effect on Marcus’s life.

Miles introduces Marcus to unarmed combat, knife fighting techniques, small arms shooting and so on. Most of this is taught at the Royal Marines establishments, where they have a plethora of opponents to put actual lessons to the test. Miles is not impressed with the defensive capacities of Special Branch that supposedly looks after the safety of the Royals. Although he’s not in any way a bodyguard, he carries, as a safeguard, a Chinese handgun. It’s an army type 67 much favoured by the chinks for clandestine type work. Marcus becomes very familiar with using this type of pistol; it has good range and hitting power, and most importantly, a built-in silencer. It’s around 7 inches long and an easy weapon to carry and conceal. Marcus is also thoroughly conversant with the use of a shotgun. The Royals do a lot of clay target shooting at Sandringham and Balmoral. Marcus is not interested in blood sports; perhaps he’s heard too many tales of how Prince Albert shot his deer. The story goes that, old Albert of Saxe Coburg Gotha background, used to have the Gillies run his deer into cattle yards and he shot them there at point blank.

Marcus spreads his wings as he goes along and gets to University age. He gives the London party scene a bit of a belt and is underwhelmed with what he sees there. The girls are full on; they sleep around willingly and pop every colour of pill seen, while the blokes seem to have ambitions to punch a prince. At a swinging Knightsbridge party, one young sprog of nobility tries it on with Marcus. He’s pissed out of his tiny mind. Marcus, however, has been well schooled by Miles – ‘go for the jugular,’ Miles says, ‘take no prisoners, if you don’t, the beggars will be back.’

Following what he has been taught, Marcus takes this fellow apart. His minders scoop him up quick, but he has had an invitation from the very young and very self-possessed Duchess of Buncan. Resisting all efforts to remove him from the scene, he invites her back to the Palace and they depart in the ducal Rolls. She has her very committed minders too and thus they are ambushed in the Mall by a carload of Paddies, intent on shooting Marcus, it seems. They run alongside the Rolls and blast out the windows with shot guns. Marcus luckily ducks the blast, but the Duchess cops a shoulder shot. She survives, but will never wear a sleeveless frock again. The Royal minders in the car behind run up at huge speed and without any lights on, rear end the Paddies. Not one gets away; dead or wounded is the order of the day. The head minder takes over. They roar into the Palace and drop Marcus with the guard and take the Duchess to Guy’s Hospital. Miles is not involved in the evening’s activities, but comes in next morning to commiserate with the young prince.

“Christ Milesy,” he says, “I come out of my protected zone for a bit of fun and frolic and half the Provisional IRA start shooting at me. I don’t think any half decent girl will consider a date with me when they are still picking splinters of glass and number 9 shot out of my last one.” Miles has a laugh.

“Outside is risky, Marcus,” he says, “everything you could want in that line is right here within the Palace.”

“Oh,” Marcus sarcastically says, “I should rape the housemaids.”

Miles chuckles, “The Queen’s Lady-in-Waiting has been worded up and stands ready to keep a supply up to you, just for the asking.”

“Hmmm,” says Marcus, “they are surely not that young.”

“Oh you callow fellow,” Miles says, “just read Somerset Maugham. He said in ‘The Razor’s Edge’, (big reading in the thirties) I prefer older women, they have run races, they know how to pace themselves.”

Lady Charlotte Winter-Willoughby calls on Marcus the next afternoon.

“It’s taken you a while, your Royal Highness. I have a young Duchess or three standing by.” She mentions names. “Who would you like to start with?”

This idea is growing on Marcus, it seems all too easy.

“I’d like to start with you, Lady Winter-Willoughby,” he suggests.

The lady runs a very considering eye over this confident young chap. She locks the door, starts to unbutton her magnificent frock.

“Call me, Bridie, Sir,” she says.

Chapter Two

University time rolls around for Marcus. They mumble about Oxford or perhaps Cambridge, but having tossed Phil the Greek and Mum Queen on Gordonstoun, he goes to the LSE and it’s not a bad choice as it turns out. One of the reasons he wants to stay palace based is, of course, Bridie Winter-Willoughby and the supply of damsels she seems to effortlessly tap and of course to move camp is a bit daunting, as his establishment is, of necessity, quite large. It’s better to just continue to live at the Palace and travel daily, but he nearly comes to a sticky end for all that, when a splinter group of the Provo’s think it’s a good idea to bump Marcus off. Thus, at the end of an in-service day in Oxford, he and his party decide to walk down High Street for tea and cakes before setting off back to London.

This particular day the tea room is crowded, but they got seated, luckily towards the rear of the room. The minute Marcus sits down he feels uneasy, though he can’t source the reason for this. As their scones and cream are set before them, a man pops up with a pistol. Miles, quick as a flash, gets out his Chinese pistol, but one of the minders gets shot in the head before Miles blasts the shooter away. Another man splits for the door; Miles callously shoots him in the back and down he goes. A third man sitting right away fires a square pistol at Miles, hitting him in the shoulder. Miles drops his pistol; Marcus scoops it up and as the man rushes out to a black car that just raced onto the scene, he lets fly, shooting the Paddies earlobe off. The chap is not quite in the door of the car and Marcus tosses in a stun grenade that he has carried in his pocket for some six months past. There’s a tremendous explosion and almost seconds later, several Panda cars block the now stationary getaway car. There’s huge confusion and the press, who are no fools, lob along. Hard on their heels, an ambulance arrives, cameras flash everywhere and a pushy pressman says,

“What are your comments, Prince Marcus?”

“Push off,” Marcus says, and skulks in the back of a Panda car until he can get away.

In the ensuing days, Miles gets patched up and Marcus speaks at the minder’s funeral. The Rector consults with him when he enters the church.

“Will you speak, Sir?” he asks.

“Of course,” Marcus replies, “What would you have me say?” The Vicar hesitates, “Perhaps, ‘better love hath no man than this’.”

“No,” says Marcus, “he knew the risks.”

Thus, when the time comes, pushing away the proffered bible, he quotes the words of the famous Roman lawyer, Minicius Felix when presenting a case for Christianity. Felix's words were 'Notice how the whole of nature brings us comfort by rehearsing our future resurrection. The sun sinks down and is reborn, the stars slip away and return, flowers fall and come to life again. In winter the trees are bare, yet in spring they blossom anew. So it is with those that have died. They lie in death as in winter, but still we hope for a life to come, still we look for the days of spring.' Flaring press headlines next day shout 'Prince Mark makes his Mark'.

The Paddies don't give up and after two more fairly spirited attempts that his increased Praetorian Guard skid him out of, Marcus decides enough is enough. He tells Miles to come along and they walk around to the Israeli Embassy to talk to Old Moyshe, the long serving ambassador.

"I have a problem," Marcus tells him. With a marked twinkle in his eye, the man says, "We know and you've been most lucky."

"Some advice, Mr Ambassador," Marcus says.

"Let me call in my aide," he says, and thus they get to meet the famous Mossad, who know everything. The attaché says,

"This is just a matter of fighting fire with fire. If you ask us, we will be pleased to bag up his beloved twin sister, who lives in Klondorkin and then you're in a strong position to bargain."

"Who with?" Miles asks.

"Gawd," says the Mossad man, "haven't MI5 told you? It's Sean Spargo, he's trying to oust Gerry Adams and you seem to be one of his ploys to do so."

"We don't talk to MI5," says Marcus, "the beggars leak."

Ten days later, Spargo's sister is back in her home and with a promise of no more harassment, Marcus and Miles board British Airways for Canberra.

They move into the British Consulate, both enrol at the ANU – Miles in Common Law, Marcus in Constitutional Law. It's not a bad life; clear sharp air, almost empty streets, great ski runs, plenty of bush walking, Polo in the summer, clay target shooting and golf in the winter. Bridie is a sport and ships Marcus out a personal assistant (a very personal assistant) on a 13 week rotation. They have good, separate quarters in the Embassy and the Australian Federal Police look after their safety. Miles has been out of school a while and they have to power coach him a bit and make sure he doesn't drown his sorrows when the pressure is on. He rallies and gets the lessons right under control. At the end of their degree courses, they duck being capped and thus disappoint half the world's paparazzi, who turn up with their cameras. They go bush walking and trout fishing in Tasmania.

Miles elects to go back to the old Dart; while Marcus fills in another year tutoring in Law and doing some Junior Council High Court work in Canberra. It's not at all a bad life and he's now been away for four years straight. He's half inclined to return for Christmas, when out of the blue, the recruiting man for the Sultan of Brunei's famous polo team, turns up at the Polo and makes him an offer he can't refuse. He becomes a permanent member of the team, makes a sterling contribution and they start each season in the Argentines and finish up playing in the world cup series at Las Vegas. The Sultan puts up the dosh for Marcus to entertain himself between seasons and he does this.

Chapter Three

Of course, for glitz and glamour and everything that totally typifies the high life, nothing can hold a candle to Polo. Marcus enjoys every minute of it. You play in different countries; ride the very best ponies that the Sultan's vast amount of money can buy. Also he's damn good at it, but he's always careful of his lifestyle and doesn't overindulge in the plenty that is on offer. He is lean and hard muscled and never the worse for wear for drink. His next rostered girl joins them in Brazil. Marcus is gobsmacked; it's the Duchess Davinia (Worth), the girl the Provo's shot gunned in the mall nearly five years ago. She has put on a surprising amount of weight and she has lost the ice maiden look that he remembers. They get along like a house on fire and before she is due to return to England, she says to Marcus,

"I'm not going. I'm having the time of my and hopefully our life."

Marcus squares Bridie off and the next girl is reluctantly placed on hold and things go swimmingly, until the Federoza Cup series played in Mexico City.

Mark wakes up to the sound of Davinia retching away noisily in the near en suite. He is very concerned, but she says,

"It's only altitude sickness, I get it at Aspen sometimes when I'm there to ski. The same thing happens for six mornings straight and at the end of that days play, (it's pretty active polo) Marcus arrives back at the hotel to find a note on the occasional table. Davinia has flown the coop – wants to go home for a while.

At the conclusion of the carnival, they move on to play in Virginia and while he's there enjoying this great country, Bridie turns up off the airport bus. Marcus is delighted, truly delighted.

"Whatever are you doing here, Bridie," he asks"

"Umm," she says, "old Sinead (her famous merchant banker husband) has been getting a bit tiresome and I have a few things to discuss with you and I'm lacking my oats, so here I am. The rest is up to you, old chap."

It is indeed and he accepts the casual challenge. A few evenings later, they are dining in a charming Inn in Olney, Maryland. It's everything that an old colonial inn can be – soft panelling, damask cloths, Paul Revere look-alike silver, liveried Negro servants. They are tucking into a Maryland delicacy; soft-shelled crab with Puerto Rican beer, a great combination.

"What did you want to talk to me about, Bridie?" Marcus asks, "We don't seem to have any time to discuss things." Bridie laughs.

"Well, firstly (she opens her bag) here is how the garden looks at Telfer's Mill."

Telfer's Mill is a property on the last slope of the Weald in Kent. The house looks down to a strong stream about a quarter mile below it, where for the last 150 years, a hoary old water wheel has been turning away in the Mill race producing a bit of power, that only the local Kentish Wood Turners Society uses for their huge wood turning lathes. They turn out the biggest, flattest wood bowls in the world. Marcus bought the place early in his youth and hasn't done more, than visit there to consult with the remarkable gardener that masterminds the annual crop of petunias that have made Bath world famous. He is on a retainer to make Telfer's Mill a real show place and Bridie liaises with him. They display in Britain's Open Garden Scheme every August. The pictures Bridie show him are marvellous and have been taken only a week back, at the annual open day. Marcus is chuffed, not that he's even seen the place for the past six and a bit years.

"Well Bridie," he says, "that's surely all good news. What's the bad?"

“Hmm Mark,” she says, “perhaps it’s time to give up this lotus eating life and come and give a hand to sort out England.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Bridie,” he says, “I don’t draw a cent from the national pocket or indeed from my parents. Why should I give up the sweet life for the foggy isles?”

“It’s like this,” Bridie says, “The Queen has a poor team in place. Her secretary is no William Heseltine and Charles’s secretary is beyond the pale. Edward is besotted with his theatre company, but at least it seems he’s not gay as suspected. Andrew is totally tied up in Canada with that Jewish heiress, who seems to be topping up his personal coffers that Fergie emptied out completely. The Paddies turned their attention on the Princess Royal when you went to Australia and under some sort of deal, probably like you, she seems to spend a lot of her time living quite comfortably on Malta, in a beautiful, beautiful villa, with of course, Tiger Tim in close attendance.”

“That leaves the Prince of Wales,” he says.

“Ah,” Bridie comes back with, “you mean the Prince of Wails. He thinks the world has turned on him and he seems to be persisting in staying with old Camilla. God knows, he may even plan to marry her.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Marcus asks.

“Well, he’s got to get around Balston, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, who’s a firebrand and appears to not favour the idea.” Marcus laughs.

“Oh, Bridie,” he says, “there’s no one easier to subvert to the wishes of royalty than the good old Church of England. That’s how they came into existence in the first place.”

“He’s a bit on the nasty side,” she says, “he’s even had the temerity to suggest it’s time for establishing some form of Regency.”

“But why?” Marcus asks.

“Hmm, the Queen Mum has lost interest it seems.”

Marcus is not enamoured of returning to England. Although it’s near seven years since he left, he catches up with his extended family on holidays in darkest English winter, at the sunny Bahamas. Besides, as the youngest member of the royal family, he doesn’t feel he should have to carry the Palace can. Bridie goes back to Sinead and her duties, Marcus’s polo’s on.

Things however, go pear shaped for him at the World Cup final, where the Sultan’s team is playing off with Germany. Things are pretty intense and the scores pretty even, when Marcus starts whanging the ball goal wards. The little Palomino mare, Estrella De Suer, bought by the Sultan’s agent from Orange in New South Wales, is giving of her best. Marcus’s eye is well in and he looks a certainty to goal, when he is involved in a pincer movement by two Germans. He’s pressuring the mare to get ahead of them when she slips on the grass and goes down hard. Marcus’s leg is pinned under and he gets kicked in the face by the starboard player’s horse. Play stops and the needed medics are speedily on the scene. Thus he gets to spend five weeks in an orthopaedic clinic in Baltimore, while the great and famous of this field work on him. After stabilising the knee, they plaster him up while the bone men work on raising the damaged face.

When they let him out, he goes down to Florida and recuperates at the Sultan’s estate there. It’s obvious that riding is out for the immediate future and the series is finished anyway, so he reluctantly elects to go home for a while. Thus a few weeks later an observer standing at the top of the elevator at Heathrow, could well have seen a tall, blonde, bearded man using crutches to get along and carrying a long bag on shoulder straps make his way across the crowded concourse. He is just off the Florida clipper and comes to a halt when a long-haired hood, English complexioned,

pulls him up by putting a flick knife against his stomach. Standing close, he softly says, "Your wallet, now please, Sir." The tall man smiles pleasantly and says, "Fine, fine, just hang on." He juggles his crutches and unzips the inside pocket of his corduroy jacket, while the hood surreptitiously extends his hand. This is a quiet heist and he doesn't want to attract attention to his crime.

"Here it is," the tall one says and produces something flattish from his pocket. It's a flat pack of some sort of spray and he gives his assailant a real face hosing.

"Arghh, arghh," yells the hood and falls onto the concourse floor. The tall one picks up the flick knife and pockets it. As the man cries out, the bearded man shoves the tip of his crutch in his mouth.

"Try sucking that," he dryly says. The Mounties, in the form of Airport Security now arrive. They survey the scene and politely say,

"Perhaps you would remove your crutch, Sir." The tall one grins.

"I'm actually tempted to push it through to the back of his useless neck."

"Not legal, Sir," comes the reply, "mores' the pity. Can you come to the office and tell us what happened?" He does, and the Metro Police arrive to cart off the crook, who has recovered a bit and vindictively says,

"I'll get you. I'll see you again. You'd better watch out." The tall man grabs him by the ear, twists it hard and says, very quietly and intently,

"You have much more cause to be worried about your own safety if I lamp you first, you lowlife."

"There, there, Sir," the cops say and drag the hood away.

In the course of all this, the cops have sighted his diplomatic passport; red covered, gilt lettering. It's in his ersatz name, not his proper one, but they immediately realise they are dealing with a real VIP, even if a somewhat lame and travel stained one. "Can we help further?" the security man asks.

"Well, a taxi would be nice and can I, perhaps, dodge the enormous line I can see through your windows there?" The security man hits his cell phone button and it's all set quickly. The taxi driver says,

"Where to, Cock?"

"Oh, Buckingham Palace," his passenger replies.

"Gawd," he says, "I've never had a fare for there."

He pulls up outside the palace.

"Go in the gate," the tall one says.

"Who are you, Sir?" the cabbie asks.

"Well, officially, I live here."

"Oh yairs," the cabbie says, "and I'm Winston S. Churchill." The tall one laughs.

"That's fine, Winston," he says, "but I still want to go through the gateway."

The cabbie gives it a tentative shot and is immediately, sharply stopped by the Guards. "Told you so," he says.

"Who are you, Sir?" the Palace Captain of the Guard asks.

"Prince Marcus," he replies, "perhaps more generally known as Lord Windsor. Here's my passport. I don't want to be delayed much longer, my bung knee is hurting." He gains entry quickly.

"Ooh, aah, you are important." the cabbie says, as they arrive in the main, centre courtyard.

As he gets out, Marcus gives the cabbie a decent size USA banknote.

"I don't particularly want it to be generally known that I'm back in London. Perhaps this will discourage you from rushing off to the Press."

It doesn't actually and the next day's papers trumpet, 'Prince Marcus, the Junior Royal, finally back in London after seven years away.' The cabbie has given them his cab video, so a grainy picture of a biggish, bearded man goes with the story.

Parkin, the butler, comes down the steps.

"Lord, Sir," he says, "it's grand to see you again."

"Likewise, Parkin," Marcus says, "how are you coping after the loss of your wife?"

"Holding up, Sir. I'm treated very well here. Thank you kindly for your letter from South America."

"I could hardly have done otherwise, Parkin," he says, "We owe you much. Now, who's in?"

"Not your parents," Parkin says, "haven't seen them in months. Prince Charles is in his office, I believe."

Chapter Four

Lord Windsor limps up the stairs and traverses the long corridor to catch up with his elder brother. As he enters the office area, a beautifully suited man comes along with Prince Charles. Charlie is hanging his head and the young sprog is really giving him a serve. Marcus sees red. He shoves his crutch between this chaps legs and tips him over on the carpet. Adding insult to injury, he sweeps up a tin waste paper bin, shoves it over the chaps head as he starts to get up and gives the bin a belt with the crutch. He's pleased to see the bin contains some half-drunk iced coffee cartons. The bedraggled chap gets to his feet.

"Who the eff are you?" he asks.

"Lord Windsor," Marcus replies, "and who are you?"

"Altrincham, secretary to HRH."

"Ah," says Marcus, "you were. I'm taking over now. On your bike."

Charles has now got his head up and is taking notice.

"Marky," he says, "you're back. You look a bit worse for wear." He gives Marcus a big hug. Charles is a great softie at heart, but he's also mean.

"What salary do you want?" he asks.

"Not a bean," says Marcus, "I'm here to clear out this mare's nest."

Altrincham thrusts a sheaf of papers into Charles's hand.

"That's for the dinner at the Guildhall in about (he looks at his watch) 90 minutes time." Charles cackles and gives the speech to Marcus.

"Good luck." he says, "Come out to Highgrove for a late supper and meet Camilla. She'll be chuffed to meet you."

Marcus speed reads the speech, shudders and tosses into the dented bin.

Old Jerry Hardinge (a descendant of the Hardinge that ruined the Duke of Windsor's kingly career in the late thirties) ambles over and shakes Marcus's hand,

"Prince Mark," he says, "trouble does seem to follow you still."

Jerry is an amusing fellow, late fifties, has never done a tap of physical work in his life, never married, but likes the company of women. He's a dead ringer for the long



suffering Richard, in the remarkable television series, 'Keeping Up Appearances', playing opposite Patricia Routledge as Mrs Bucket (Bouquet).

"What's going on, Jerry?" Marcus asks.

"Well, Mark," he says, "I'm the only one in, the rest are at early dinner, swilling the excellent palace wines and the thing you had in your hand, however badly written, has to be delivered to the very important City of London dinner this evening. Chas has said no, and that is the kerfuffle you just seem to have walked into unannounced and perhaps uninvited."

"How many work in the Prince's office, Jerry?"

"None, but about seventy come in. They plan this and plan that, none of it ever likely to happen."

"Hmmm," Marcus says, "is there a secure phone here (knowing the palace tendency to listen in to one another most of the time)?"

"Not a one, old boy," Jerry replies, "try the phone box across the road."

"Jerry," Mark says. Jerry puts his finger across his lips, grabs a piece of foolscap and writes on it – 'Careful your Highness, this place is surely bugged and with you back in town after years of nothing happening, someone, somewhere in this rabbit warren, will be turning up the volume any minute.'

Reversing the paper, Marcus takes the pen out of Jerry's hand and dashed off some firm instructions. It reads;

You're it for the evening, Jerry, now do this:

- 1) Get me a copy of the King's speech to the Guildhall in 1913. Mr Anstey will know where to find it.
- 2) Ring Bridie Winter-Willoughby and tell her to get her ass in here post haste.
- 3) Organise a car to take me to the Guildhall and make sure you have some minders on boards carrying significant hardware.
- 4) Lay on a car to take me to Highgrove after the dinner.
- 5) Get a runner around to the Guildhall to say that I'm speaking in Charlie's place, but I'll be there for dessert, not starters.

Jerry sketches a salute and moves off real fast. Marcus hunts around and finds a whiskey decanter, pours a stiff slug and carrying his glass, goes off to find a shower. He's halfway through, when a banging on the door indicates that Bridie has arrived.

"What do I do, Marcus?" she asks, as she puts her head in the door.

"Find me some evening weeds, love," he replies, "something suitable for the Guildhall dinner." She's back in minutes with four dinner suits.

"I raided Phil the Greek's wardrobe," she says. "Don't know if it'll work. You're a good deal taller." He finds a good fitting jacket, but the pants are half mast. Marcus digs in his pocket for the hood's flick knife and cuts the hems on a cuffless pair.

"Find me an iron and a stapler, Bridie," he says, "time is short."

He stands on a stool, while Bridie gets the length right and then stapled. The iron soon heats up and she flattens the old crease. He's ready to go. Jerry has a Rolls purring away in the courtyard and hands Marcus the 1913 Royal speech to run through as they head off.

He is well received at the Guildhall and cameras flash as he swings along on his crutches to the place of honour, where the crowd are on the home run with the dessert course. He is being introduced by the toastmaster, before he has even sat down. Marcus has never bothered with detailed acknowledgments of whom he is addressing. As ever, he says,

"Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen."

He spells out that the Royal Firm are thin on the ground at the moment and gains their instant attention when he says that his theme tonight is that, here in the great and vibrant city of London while everything seems to change, the underlying truths remain the same.

“I have before me, a speech given to this august body nearing 100 years ago here, by King George the Fifth.” Dropping down a gear and with reliable old Jerry organizing the dimming of the lights, he then, in the historic tones of King George, he starts, “My dear people.....”

It’s a sensational zinger and the standing ovation he deservedly gets is no more than his due. He doesn’t linger long, departs gracefully and the chauffeur is soon racing through the country roads to supper at Highgrove.

Marcus has never met Camilla of course. She is clearly nervous and this, Marcus thinks, does her credit. They enjoy a marvellous lobster supper and down a few drinks. Marcus is young and bouncy and his social polo experience soon has her put at ease and bubbly. Marcus puts down his glass finally and says to Charles,

“Instructions, Boss.”

“Do your own thing, Marky,” he says, “I’m going to take a spot of French leave and take Camilla off touring a bit before the Hunt season opens.”

Marcus tells Charles he will courier out his letter of appointment next day for Charles’s signature. Charles adds an afterthought.

“You know,” he says, “Adair (Sir Michael, secretary to the Queen), isn’t up to his job and would be, I think, glad to get out. Tell Mum (Queen) it might be a good idea of having you be secretary to us both. It must make for one direction and provide the cohesion that is currently lacking. The later-to-bed papers give Marcus’s speech block headlines next morning. Some say, ‘A chip off the old block’ and others, ‘the best speech given at the Guildhall in near 100 years’ and so on.

Marcus is a bit whacked next day, but a swim in the basement heated pool and a bit of work by a hastily rounded up Physio, leaves him ready for an English breakfast. Jerry arrives.

“Where to for an English brekky?” Marcus asks. Jerry pulls a face, scribbles on a note book page – Hendon’s on the Thames unbeatable. Thus they sit on a sunny terrace at Hendon’s and watch the river world go past on this sparkly Saturday morning.

“Now, about this bugging,” Marcus says, “shall we get MI5 in to check?”

“Hardly,” says Jerry, “it’s bound to have been done by them in the first place.

“But why?”

“Oh, it’s just the old Denizens of the palace who are pretty used to repelling boarders. They don’t want their sweet life of power and prestige disturbed and with a listen in capacity; they can head off trouble in advance if they want. It’s not vindictive stuff; it’s just an illustration that knowledge is power.”

“So what do you suggest, Jerry?” Marcus asks.

“Well, old boy, if you debug the place, quite easily done by the way, you’ll tip the beggars off. I’d suggest that you be very circumspect in what you say and the questions you ask, and leave the real business to be talked about in the bow window at Bracks or in pleasant strolls around the beautiful grounds at Telfer’s Mill. And of course, if you leave the devices intact inside Buck House, you have the perfect means to lay red herrings whenever you wish.”

“What’s the real problem there?” Marcus asks. Jerry ponders.

“The Queen’s still as sharp as,” he says, “but she seems to have become very dilatory, not in her readings, but in her signing of this and that, some of great

importance. Also, she has, for the past two years, given up on investitures. Don't ask me why old chap. Also, with this trouble with the Archbishop of Canterbury, two years back she would have beaten him into the ground with one arm to the rear. But now, he seems to perhaps bested her."

"Okay," says Marcus, "now, Jerry, let's get back to the Palace to get my letter of appointment typed up. I'll rely on you to get Charlie's signature on it today and I think you'd best suggest another venue for brekky Monday that is away from the palace. Oh, and I'll need a car for Windsor after that."

Mark arrives at Windsor Castle in time for a later morning cuppa. Prince Phillip is sitting in a sunny spot in the drawing room surrounded by the Saturday papers.

"Good work, Marcus," he says, "the best press attitude for a long time."

"Why did Charlie chicken out? Out at Highgrove with Camilla, I had supper with them after."

"Aah Camilla," Phil the Greek says, "she sure brings a whiff of the stables inside with her, eh?" Marcus had been thinking the same thing. He wonders what dinner guests think when seated next to Camilla in a sleeveless dress.

"You know," Phillip says, "old Chuck's a bit hard to work out. He marries a brain-dead twinkie, then discards her for a woman who looks like Robert Redford in drag." Marcus is surprised.

"Do you really think that, Sir?"

"Of course not," Phillip replies and gets up to get another scone, giving Mum (Queen) an affectionate pat on the shoulder as he does.

"Any man married to old Cabbage here, with her bad case of 'duck's disease', couldn't help being appreciative of Diana's classic, leggy beauty. However, as to her mind? No, I don't think that at all. I'm quoting what the newspaper writer Phillip Ruehl, said about her, in a widely read column."

Marcus suddenly realises that his mother (Mum Queen) is drinking her tea with a straw. He gets up and goes over to her.

"Maam," he says, "give me your hand." And she does. The curtain lifts in Marcus's brain; Mum Queen has the shakes, all the non-signing mystery is solved. Mum Queen is perfectly aware that Marcus is now aware. 'Early Parkinson's, without a doubt,' he thinks.

"Charles suggests that I embrace the dual role as your and his secretary."

"Bloody good idea," Phillip says.

"Agreed," the Queen says.

"Get your letter of appointment together today and we can be mercifully quit of that blasted Adair."

"I'll do it now," Marcus says and he long-hands it there and then on a yellow legal pad. The Queen signs, with great difficulty and she is badly embarrassed.

"Ease Adair out kindly, Marcus," she says, "I don't mind laying out a bit of money, although money lately worries me. I would like to run through our finances when you've had a look at things. Perhaps next Saturday, or the one after."

Marcus doesn't stay to lunch. They go back into the city and at Marcus's instructions, stop half a block back from the Israeli embassy. He gestures to his minders; one in front, one behind and walks up to the security guard who promptly admits him. He stands in the hall only minutes when old Moyshe comes out.

"Marcus," he says, "what a pleasure." Moyshe is limping a bit and is wearing an old-fashioned smoking jacket. "Gout," he says, "what a bugger, come in, come in."

"You're still here in London to state the obvious," Marcus says. Moyshe laughs.

“I’m here until I want out,” he says, “I know where the bodies are buried and no one at all is bothering me.”

The butler, a young man with a bulge under his armpit and the look of a Mossad man, pours them drinks and discreetly leaves.

“What do you want this time, Marcus?” Moyshe asks.

“Ah, I want a signature machine like Jack Kennedy used and I want a pocket detector of bugs of all natures.” Moyshe laughs and pulls the old-fashioned bell pull hanging near. The young chap comes back; Moyshe relays the instructions. The chap goes and then comes back.

“Tuesday morning, all set,” he says.

Monday morning, all manner of palace denizens descend on Marcus. He installs Jerry as his PA and they negotiate quarters (‘I’ll stay in the nursery wing,’ Marcus says) and cars (does he want a sports car like his brothers?).

“Good God no,” says Marcus, “go to a car yard and buy two of the most common cars on our roads and arrange a selection of plates that can be changed from time to time.” He thinks, and probably correctly, that blending in with the common herd is sure to be safer. Marcus has to be careful in what he is doing. His return to England has been well publicised and if in fact, Sean Spargo’s tussle with Jerry Adams for control of the Provo’s is coming to a head, a hit on Marcus may be under consideration in order to tip the scales in Spargo’s favour.

“Now about a valet,” the palace flack says.

‘Oh, gawd,’ Marcus thinks, ‘why would I want a Michael Fawcett in my life?’

“Oh,” Marcus says, “I’ll think about that.”

Actually, opting to stay in the nursery suite, Marcus is making an excellent choice. Firstly, the suite is at the end of a long passageway, is self-contained down to a laundry and kitchenette facilities and has a locking grille in the entry passageway (he mentally notes to get a locksmith in post haste to get a new and good safe lock on this). Also, the nursery suite has excellent views onto the palace grounds to the rear. Just as Marcus is off to the Israeli Embassy, a runner comes in. The Prime Minister and Prince Edward are downstairs and want to see him.

“Sorry fellows,” Marcus sends back, “make a time with Jerry and we’ll get together later. Today’s blocked out.” Both seem quite miffed.

‘Stiff bikkies,’ Marcus thinks to himself as he gets into his new transport; a non-new Ford Grenada. No one would look at it twice, which is what Marcus wants.

“What are you carrying, chaps?” he asks and the two minders reply,

“Oh, H&K pistols, Sir”. Marcus is underwhelmed.

“You chaps are not taking this seriously,” he says, “I’ll give you a few minutes to add a shotgun carrier to the team, preferably a pump Mossberg. Look sharp now.” They arrive at the Embassy. Two tanned security men are down the footpath a bit. Something’s up. Old Moyshe tells Marcus two things;

“I don’t know Spargo’s intention in your direction, Prince,” he says, “we have been considering bagging up his twin sister again, just to play it safe, but she’s disappeared from Klondorkin. You can bet your boots they are going to have another crack at you.”

This is indeed disquieting news, but the priority today is to pick up the gear he has ordered and also a Chinese Army-type pistol and holster. He wants a silenced P67. He’s used to these small, but effective hand-guns. They’re only about 7 inches long, complete with silencer. Moyshe has what he wants.

“Oh,” he says, “there’s a small charge for all this.” He hands Marcus a slip of paper, attached to a bit of a manuscript.

“Knighthoods for these three would obviate a debt the Israeli nation owes them,” Moyshe continues, “and they all live in England, or at least in Jersey, and all will fit your criteria.”

“Fine,” says Marcus, “and Spargo?”

“He’s a vicious sod,” Moyshe says, “we’ll attend to him despite him being a customer.” Marcus is rocked.

“Surely, Moyshe, you don’t sell those lunatics ordinance?”

Moyshe back foots a bit.

“Well, our manufacturers say that business is business. Old Jerry’s buying hard at the moment too.”

“But,” says Marcus, “they are disarming, surely?”

“Oh, Marky,” he says, “you are confusing disarming with getting rid of obsolete gear, to get smaller and more impactful stuff. Just don’t plan any holidays in Ireland, please.”

“Where’s the old gear going?” Marcus asks.

“Darkest Africa, so we hear.” Moyshe says.

Back at the Palace, they crank up the Queens Signature Machine. It has built-in variation factor, so they build her signature on the one she signed Marcus’s appointment letter with, but tidied up a bit. Thus the machine is no rubber stamp. They try out the anti-bug device and it soon tells them of the areas to beware of. Marcus now calls back the palace flack and says,

“Somewhere in this rabbit warren is a model English Pub, given to King Edward by Courage Breweries. Is it still intact? I’d like to have a look at it.

They go down the long unused corridors and the flack unlocks the door with a huge old-fashioned key.

“Here it is, Sir. It’s never been used since the palace went dry in 1914,”

“Or dusted either, by the look of it,” Marcus says.

It’s a beautiful little pub interior, all of solid English oak complete with hunting prints, hunting horns, horse brasses and a magnificent painting of Persimmon winning the Derby for the Prince of Wales.

“Clean it up real good.” Marcus says “Forget about the beer pumps and stock it up with grog, cheese and bikkies. Make sure the fireplace works without smoking and let me know when it’s ready.”

Marcus now sends around for some help from the Navy and from the speed readers that work for another department. Thus the billiard room at Windsor is turned into a sort out office, preparatory to a huge sign-up of Royal assent documents. They kick off Friday morning. The Queen, herself, comes along to see the start. She is impressed.

“Thank you, dear Marky,” she says, “it’s a huge load off me.”

Needless to say, the billiard room during this operation is well guarded and secure.

The Prime Minister and Prince Edward are still pressing for appointments. His message back to the PM is – Chequers, Sunday afternoon at 3pm and to Edward – be dressed for Church Parade and here ready to roll off at 10am, Sunday. Thus, Sunday morning for the first time in two years, a beautiful maroon coach is ready in the forecourt. A Bradley armoured car leads the procession and 12 Dragoon guards form the rear. Edward arrives on the dot.

“Where’re we headed?” he asks.

“Not St Paul’s,” Marcus says. Edward laughs,

“Ah, you’re going to get up Ralston’s nose, proper,” he says.

"I asked the armoured car people the same question," Edwards says, "and they just said 'Don't know yet'. Marcus laughs,

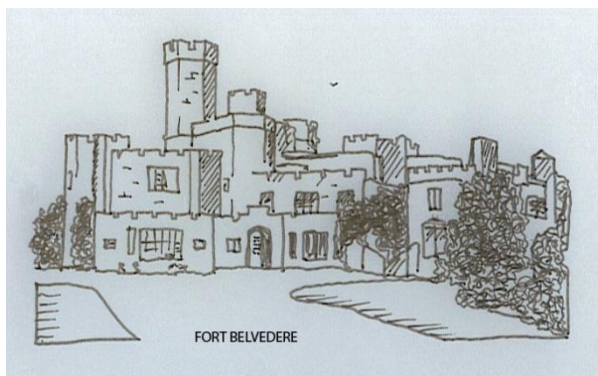
"Oh, we're a self-contained force. Actually we're going to St Mary Le Bow, be sure and wave at whoever we pass. Oh, and smile for the TV cameras, there's a heap of them just under the courtyard arch."

It's a huge success, Jerry has done the lead up work well and the astonished churchgoers have to run the gamut of TV cameras. Inside the church, they film Marcus reading one lesson and Edward, another. It's unusual vision that rockets around the world.

Marcus goes upmarket to Chequers. Just he and Jerry as passengers in the black Rolls, but with a motorcycle escort. The Prime Minister looks a bit askance at Jerry.

"Oh, Jerry's my PA," Marcus says, "he won't be joining our private discussion." Both the PM and Jerry look relieved. Jerry heads off in the direction of the drinks waiter. Old Jack is full of worries. He's like every PM ever. He sells honours in exchange for favours and for the past two years, he hasn't been able to deliver the honours. He's between a rock and a hard place. Also, the established Church are putting him under pressure, as so many church appointments are held up due to the Queen not signing off on things. He has other worries too. Marcus just tells him he will bear in mind the matters raised and goes off to the drinks trolley too.

Jerry has a few ideas, thus they rope in the Bowes-Lyon twins; descendants of Fergus Bowes-Lyon killed at the Battle of Loos in 1914. Both of these chaps are at university. They are not all that flush with dosh, so they are easy to rope in. Marcus signs them into the Peerage as Lord Bowes-Lyon and Lord May and they come on board at the Palace three days a week to handle the grunt work and for a bit of royal schooling. The Queen, herself, anoints them and taps them on the shoulder with the sword and in no time, they are flat tack anointing in the same way, all of those granted honours, but not yet in receipt of them. Things royal seem to run along smoothly under Marcus's guidance. He takes on stern duty as the man on the horse at the Trooping of the Colour. He, despite his bung knee, uses a big placid black gelding from the Household Guard. Not being a uniform wearer, Marcus fronts up in a long black riding coat and bowler hat; looks just fine. He attends major events in the musical world; last night of the Proms in the royal box, afternoon recitals in London and so on. He causes a few old polo sticks to be kept at the boxes and so as to not confuse the crowd as to who is in the royal box; they drape the polo stick on the box edge. This seems to be much appreciated by the crowd. Also, if the event is a daylight one, Marcus doesn't mind turning up in the Queen's light maroon coach. It's smart and stylish, but not over the top. By and large, the Royal Mews has become quite active in the coaching business again.



Chapter Five

He has an interesting project on the go at Fort Belvedere, out towards Windsor. This of late, has been a grace and favour residence for an old, but well regarded general. Since his wife's demise, the gardens have gone to hell. Mark sends old Jerry to charm him out of what is too much for him and they site him in a nice small

apartment at Hampden Court. They blitz the Fort. Repainting it in its original colours and by using archival workers at the Palace for facts, they bring in a bright small advertising firm to put together the tale of the King that briefly was; the Golden Edward the VIII. Whatever one may think of Edward quitting the throne to marry the infamous Wallis Simpson, Mark has always thought it was the love story of the last century. He's always thought that, the then king's famous country home should be turned into a museum or a living museum, commemorating this tragic, but colourful overture to World War Two. He thinks he would like to take the mickey out of the venomous war that the Queen Mother, a charming old viper if ever there was one, waged on the unlucky Windsors.



After the painters are out, the advertising firm bring along their story boards for Marcus's approval and they set up a display, with much help from the famous Madam Tassaud's in Baker Street, in the true to life wax figures set here and there in the Fort. They also source some of the original furniture from the Windsor Bois de Bologne, Paris home. The current owners are a bit money stressed, so Marcus himself goes over and buys the originals, on the understanding that suitable reproduction furniture quietly replaces them. Because Marcus is doing his own thing, he keeps the British Museum out of the picture and the advertising men negotiate with good video producers, to mix and match the archival footage with modern day movies, such as the famous 'I danced with the man, who danced with the girl, who danced with the Prince of Wales'. Edward Fox starred in this marvellous production. It's a real zinger, right down to the wax figures of Sir Walter Munckton and the Duke talking close in the study with wax Alexander Hardinge cupping his ear outside the door.



They also shower a bit of honour on Ernest Simpson, a worldly and very pleasant man who never said a word about the affair or ever sought to profit from it. They hang a greater than life size portrait of him, done by the best painter around, in the dining room. He was there dining many times in the early days of the affair.

When it's practically all together, Marcus takes a turn around the exhibition. He clicks his fingers, gives a laugh and says, "Let's get up Ralston's nose. I want a wax figure of the Reverend Douglas Jardine, who married them at Candide. Make him look good and make sure he's got a prayer book in his hand." So they do.

During the internal work on Fort Belvedere, Marcus, Bridie and Jerry meet up with the noted petunia grower, who, for years past, has turned Bath into a showcase of colour every summer. Not to mention his open garden efforts at Telfer's Mill. They are looking at planting nothing but petunias in the long neglected beds. The borders, stone, put in by the Golden Prince in the early thirties are still as sound as a bell. As they walk up the slope to the Fort, Marcus says,

"I suppose the only mistake King Edward VIII made here was to introduce Wallis Simpson to the place. He never seemed to recover from that error."

"Perhaps," Jerry drolly says, "perhaps not. She gave the best bj's in England; learnt the art in China, according to that girl who wrote the Palace Diaries. Perhaps she blew his brains out."

"Gawd, Jerry," Bridie says, "what a mouthful."

"Very likely," Jerry says, "or perhaps, anyway."

All of them, including the dour old gardener, burst into laughter at Bridie's gaffe.

With Christmas approaching, Marcus is pondering the logistics of the festive season, when the Queen's lady-in-waiting turns up unexpectedly in the nursery wing.

"You bastard," she says, "you've got me pregnant."

"Come off it, Bridie," Marcus says, "you're a long married woman."

"Yes and a long barren one. It's definitely your fault."

"Well Bridie," he says, "you had best hop into bed with your real husband."

"Oh," she replies, "I've done that. I've spiked up his morning porridge to get him up and going." She dimples and then says, "I don't mind. I just thought you should be the first to know." They both laugh and she goes away.

Marcus attends to all the in-Palace jobs; he runs as a self contained unit. Mornings see him cooking up porridge in the microwave and making toast. At the same time, he knocks up a ham roll for lunch. He sallies forth in jeans and a jumper to attend to this and that and at 1pm, sees him beautifully dressed, usually in a grey flannel suit and receiving the high and mighty of this world, who all hanker for afternoon tea or evening drinkies at the Palace (either formally or in Marcus's English pub room). He is a generous host and his press man sees a steady flow of press photos going out. The press grab these avidly and without having to expose himself to outside risk, Marcus gives the impression of being a very, very active Royal indeed.

Mid winter, of course, gets too much for anyone and he and Bridie (or her nominee) jet off to the Caribbean for a fun month. Royalty is very long lived and this tale of Royalty is similarly getting a tad too long. It is perhaps time to fast forward the story some years ahead.

A huge and tumultuous crowd are outside the palings at Buckingham Palace and there is a near full line up of the Royal Family on the famed Palace Balcony. The Queen is celebrating her 107th birthday. Time and tide has taken away many of the players who you would expect to be there. The avalanche of course, got old Charles at Klosters a goodly while back. Even William and Harry don't look so young; William's wife, indeed, is noticeably not aging so well. Camilla is there clutching her walking frame, she fell off her Hunter at a meet of the Pytchly a while back. Andrew is on a stick, the Queen, looking even smaller and wearing a much too big hat, stands upright, impressive and waving very steadily and sturdily.

Marcus, true to form, isn't there at all. He has, as ever organised the whole shooting match. However, just at the moment he is over in St James, sitting in the bow window at Bracks Club. He is pulling on his short Briar and sipping Bass out of a tankard. The Prime Minister; there is no part for him in today's festivities, is likewise skulking in the Club. He walks over to Marcus.

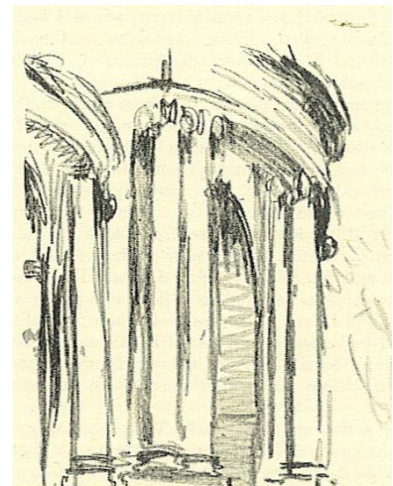
"May I join you, Lord Windsor?" he deferentially asks. Marcus gestures him to the next chair, traditionally held vacant when Marcus is clubbing. He pulls out what seems an endless sheet of paper. "I have a goodly number of things to liaise with you about," he says. Marcus raises his hand to bring over the steward.

"Not now," he says, "Two brandies," he says to the steward. The steward comes back with two brandy balloons on a silver tray.

"Hang in," Marcus says to him.

"As I was saying...." the PM starts to say. Marcus has run out of patience.

"PM," he says, "shove that list up your jumper." He stands, as does the PM. The waiter hands them their



brandies. Marcus stands at attention and says,
“The only business for today is this.....” he raises his brandy balloon and
intones,
“God Save Our Gracious Queen.”