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By Jilly Cooper

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Pandora  
*The Rutshire Chronicles:*  
Riders  
Rivals  
Polo  
The Man Who Made Husbands  
    Jealous  
Appassionata  
Score!

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Class  
How to Survive Christmas  
Hotfoot to Zabriskie Point (with  
    Patrick Lichfield)  
Intelligent and Loyal  
Jolly Marsupial  
Jolly Super  
Jolly Superlative  
Jolly Super Too  
Super Cooper  
Super Jilly  
Super Men and Super Women  
The Common Years  
Turn Right at the Spotted Dog  
Work and Wedlock  
Angels Rush In  
Araminta's Wedding

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Little Mabel's Great Escape  
Little Mabel Saves the Day  
Little Mabel Wins

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Bella  
Emily  
Harriet  
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Lisa & Co  
Octavia  
Prudence

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The British in Love  
Violets and Vinegar

# RIVALS

Jilly Cooper



**CORGI BOOKS**

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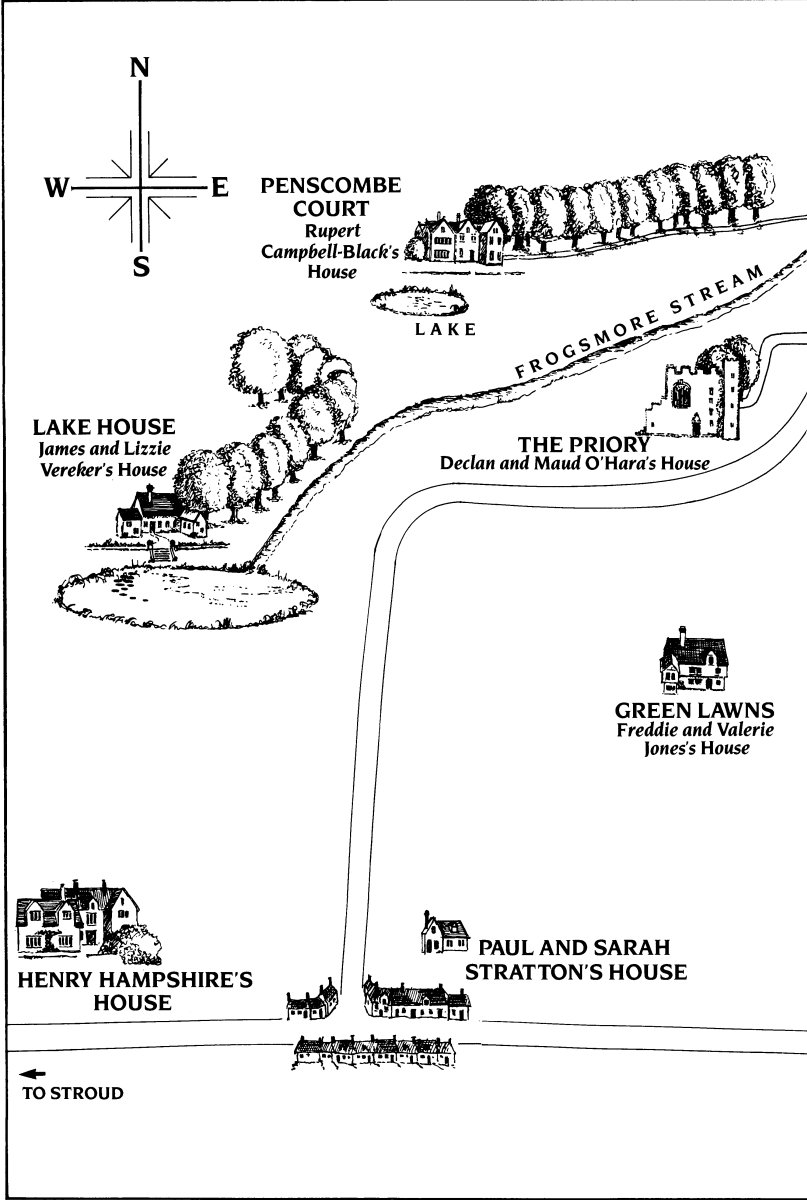
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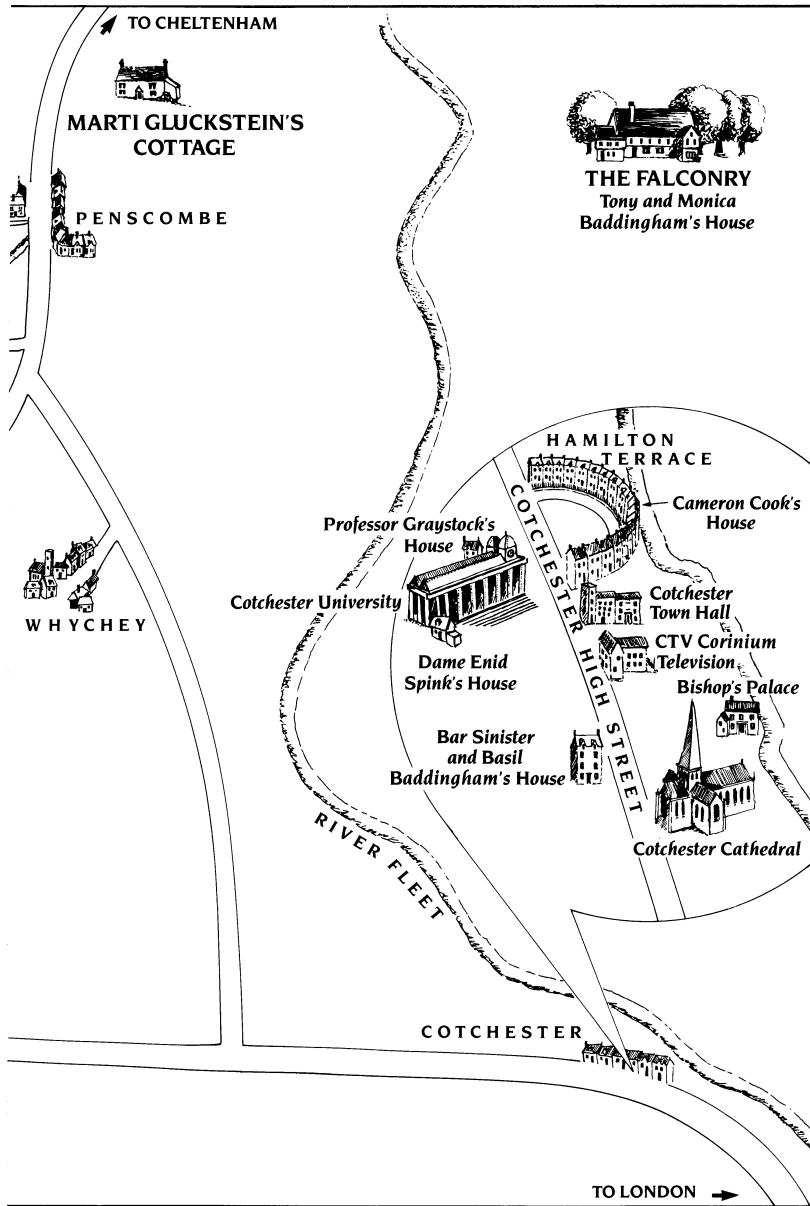
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DEDICATION

*To Annalise Kay  
who is as wise as she is  
good and beautiful*





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Bisley, Gloucestershire  
1987.

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## CHARACTERS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

<b>JOHNNY ABRAHAMS</b>	Head of News and Current Affairs, BBC.
<b>GEORGIE BAINES</b>	Sales Director, Corinium Television.
<b>LADY BARNESLEY</b>	A member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), late of the White Fish Authority.
<b>BIRGITTA</b>	A comely but bolshie nanny working for the Verekers.
<b>HARDY BISSETT</b>	A franchise expert. Late of the IBA.
<b>MR AND MRS BODKIN</b>	Rupert Campbell-Black's couple.
<b>SIR CEDRIC BONNINGTON</b>	Chairman of Mid-West Television.
<b>HUBERT BRENTON ANTHONY, SECOND</b>	Bishop of Cotchester.
<b>BARON BADDINGHAM</b>	Chairman and Managing Director, Corinium Television.
<b>MONICA BADDINGHAM</b>	His wife.
<b>ARCHIE BADDINGHAM</b>	His elder son.
<b>BASIL BADDINGHAM</b>	Tony's illegitimate brother, ace polo player, and owner of the Bar Sinister in Cotchester High Street.
<b>SEBASTIAN BURROWS</b>	A news reporter, Corinium Television.
<b>DAYSEE BUTLER</b>	A very beautiful, stupid PA, Corinium Television.

<b>RUPERT CAMPBELL-BLACK</b>	Minister for Sport. Tory MP for Chalford and Bisley. Ex-member of the British show-jumping team.
<b>MARCUS CAMPBELL-BLACK</b>	His son.
<b>TABITHA CAMPBELL-BLACK</b>	His daughter.
<b>CAMERON COOK</b>	Producer/Director, NBS, New York. Later Head of Drama, Corinium Television.
<b>CHARLES CRAWFORD</b>	Retiring Chairman of the IBA.
<b>JUDGE DAVEY</b>	A member of the IBA.
<b>OWEN DAVIES</b>	Leader of the Opposition.
<b>WESLEY EMERSON</b>	Gloucester and England bowler.
<b>SUZY ERIKSON</b>	An American ex-girlfriend of Rupert Campbell-Black.
<b>LADY EVESHAM</b>	An early feminist, and non-executive Director, Corinium Television.
<b>CHARLES FAIRBURN</b>	Head of Religious Broadcasting, Corinium Television.
<b>JOHNNY FRIEDLANDER</b>	American actor and megastar.
<b>MARTI GLUCKSTEIN</b>	A brilliant East End accountant.
<b>MALISE GORDON</b>	Ex- <i>chef d'équipe</i> of the British show-jumping team.
<b>HELEN GORDON</b>	His wife. Ex-wife of Rupert Campbell-Black and mother of Marcus and Tabitha.
<b>LADY GOSLING</b>	Chairman of the IBA.
<b>GRACE</b>	Declan O'Hara's housekeeper.
<b>CRISPIN GRAYSTOCK</b>	Professor of English at Cotchester University and a disgusting lecher.
<b>HENRY HAMPSHIRE</b>	Lord-Lieutenant of Gloucestershire – a much less disgusting lecher.
<b>SIMON HARRIS</b>	Controller of Programmes, Corinium Television.

<b>GEORGINA HARRISON</b>	An undergraduate.
<b>RONNIE HAVEGAL</b>	Head of Co-Productions, NBS, New York.
<b>HAZEL</b>	A BBC make-up girl.
<b>RALPHIE HENRIQUES</b>	An undergraduate at Trinity Dublin.
<b>IVOR HICKS</b>	Corporate Development Controller, Corinium Television.
<b>JILLY</b>	Yet another Vereker nanny, but for once a dependable boot.
<b>BEATTIE JOHNSON</b>	Fleet Street columnist, ghosting Rupert Campbell-Black's memoirs.
<b>GINGER JOHNSON</b>	Financial Director, Corinium Television. No relation to Beattie.
<b>FREDDIE JONES</b>	A multi-millionaire in electronics.
<b>VALERIE JONES</b>	His wife, a nightmare.
<b>SHARON JONES</b>	His overweight daughter.
<b>DEIRDRE KILPATRICK</b>	A researcher at Corinium Television.
<b>LAVINIA</b>	Patrick O'Hara's girlfriend.
<b>BILLY LLOYD-FOX</b>	Sports Presenter, BBC.
<b>JANEY LLOYD-FOX</b>	An author and national newspaper columnist.
<b>DERMOT MACBRIDE</b>	A playwright and Angry Not-So-Young man.
<b>JOYCE MADDEN</b>	Lord Baddingham's secretary, Corinium Television.
<b>MRS MAKEPIECE</b>	A 'treasure' who cleans for Valerie Jones and Lizzie Vereker.
<b>KEVIN MAKEPIECE</b>	Her son.
<b>TRACEY MAKEPIECE</b>	Her daughter.
<b>SALLY MAPLES</b>	Head of Children's Programmes, Yorkshire Television.
<b>MIKE MEADOWS</b>	Head of Sport, Corinium Television.
<b>MRS MENZIES-SCOTT</b>	Ex-head of the Women's Institute, a member of the IBA.

GERALD MIDDLETON	Parliamentary Private Secretary to Rupert Campbell-Black.
DECLAN O'HARA	A television megastar.
MAUD O'HARA	His ex-actress wife.
PATRICK O'HARA	His son, an undergraduate at Trinity Dublin.
AGATHA (TAGGIE) O'HARA	His elder daughter.
CAITLIN O'HARA	His younger daughter.
ORTRUD	Yet another of the Verekers' comely nannies.
CYRIL PEACOCK	Lord Baddingham's PA and sometime Press Officer, Corinium Television.
THE VERY REVEREND FERGUS PENNEY	An ex-Prebendary of the Church of England, and a member of the IBA.
PERCY PASCOE RAWLINGS	Lord Baddingham's chauffeur. The most powerful theatrical agent in London.
BARTON SINCLAIR SKIP	Director of <i>The Merry Widow</i> . A beautiful American lawyer.
LORD SMITH	An ex-Secretary of the TGWU.
DAME ENID SPINK	A distinguished composer and Professor of Music at Cotchester University.
PAUL STRATTON	Tory MP for Cotchester. An ex-Cabinet Minister.
SARAH STRATTON	His ravishing second wife and ex-secretary.
SYDNEY	Rupert's driver.
URSULA	Declan O'Hara's secretary.
JAMES VEREKER	Anchorman of 'Cotswold Round-Up', Corinium Television.
LIZZIE VEREKER	His wife, a novelist.
ELEANOR VEREKER	His daughter.
SEBASTIAN VEREKER	His son.
HAROLD WHITE	Director of Programmes, London Weekend Television.
MAURICE WOOTON	A bent Gloucestershire property millionaire.

## RIVALS

# 1

Sitting in the Concorde departure lounge at Heathrow on a perfect blue June morning, Anthony, second Baron Baddingham, Chairman and Managing Director of Corinium Television, should have been perfectly happy. He was blessed with great wealth, a title, a brilliant career, a beautiful flat in Kensington, houses in Gloucestershire and Tuscany, a loyal, much-admired wife, three charming children and a somewhat demanding mistress, to whom he had just bidden a long farewell on the free telephone beside him.

He was about to fly on his favourite aeroplane, Concorde, to his favourite city, New York, to indulge in his favourite pastime – selling Corinium’s programmes to American television and raising American money to make more programmes. Tony Baddingham was a great believer in using Other People’s Money, or OPM as he called it; then if a project bombed, someone else picked up the bill.

As a final bonus, neatly folded beside him were the morning papers, which he’d already read in the Post House Hotel, and which all contained glowing reports of Corinium’s past six months’ results, announced yesterday.

Just as he had been checking out of the Post House an hour earlier, however, Tony’s perfect pleasure had been ruined by the sight of his near neighbour and long-term rival, Rupert Campbell-Black, checking in. He was scribbling his signature with one hand and holding firmly on to a rather

grubby but none-the-less ravishing girl with the other.

The girl, who had chipped nail polish, wildly tangled blonde hair, mascara smudges under her eyes, and a deep suntan, had obviously just been pulled out of some other bed and was giggling hysterically.

'Ru-pert,' she wailed, 'there simply isn't time; you'll miss the plane.'

'It'll wait,' said Rupert, and, gathering up his keys, started to drag her towards the lift. As the doors closed, like curtains coming down on the first act of a play, Tony could see the two of them glued together in a passionate embrace.

A deeply competitive man, Tony had felt dizzy with jealousy. He had seldom, particularly since he had inherited the title and become Chief Executive of Corinium, had any difficulty attracting women, but he'd never attracted anything so wantonly desirable and desiring as that grubby, vaguely familiar blonde.

'More coffee, Lord Baddingham?' One of the beautiful attendants in the Concorde Lounge interrupted Tony's brooding. He shook his head, comforted by the obvious admiration in her voice.

'Shouldn't we be boarding?' he asked.

'We'll be a few minutes late. There was a slight engineering problem. They're just doing a last-minute check.'

Tony glanced round the departure lounge, filled with businessmen and American tourists, and noticed a pale, red-headed young man in a grey pinstripe suit, who had stopped his steady flow of writing notes on a foolscap pad and was looking apprehensively at his watch.

Boarding the plane twenty minutes later, Tony found himself sitting up at the front on an inside seat with a Jap immersed in a portable computer on his right. Across the gangway next to the window sat the young man in the pinstripe suit. He was even paler now and looking distinctly put out.

'Good morning, Lord Baddingham,' said a stewardess, handing Tony that day's newly-flown-in copy of the *Wall Street Journal*.



'Engineering fault sorted out?' asked Tony, as the engines started revving up.

Not quite meeting his eyes, the girl nodded brightly; then, looking out of the window, she seemed to relax as a black car raced across the tarmac. Next there was a commotion, as a light, flat, familiar drawl could be heard down the gangway:

'Frightfully sorry to hold you all up; traffic was diabolical.'

All the stewardesses seemed to converge on the new arrival, fighting to carry his newspaper and put his hand luggage up in the locker.

'Won't you be needing your briefcase, Minister?' asked a male steward, shimmying down the gangway.

Rupert Campbell-Black shook his head. 'No thanks, sweetheart.'

'Have a nice zizz then,' said the male steward, going crimson with pleasure at the endearment.

As the doors slammed shut, Rupert collapsed into the seat across the gangway from Tony. Wearing a crumpled cream suit, a blue striped shirt, dark glasses and with an eighth of an inch of stubble on his chin, he looked more like a rock star than one of Her Majesty's ministers.

'Terribly sorry, Gerald,' he murmured to the pale young man in the pinstripe suit. 'There was a terrible pile-up on the M4.'

Smiling thinly, Gerald removed a blonde hair from Rupert's lapel.

'I really must buy you an alarm clock for Christmas, Minister. If you'd missed that lunchtime speech, we'd have been in real stück. Good of them to hold the plane.'

'Thank Christ they did.' Looking round, Rupert saw Tony Baddingham and grinned. 'Why, it's the big Baddingham wolf.'

'Cutting it a bit fine, aren't you?' said Tony disapprovingly.

Both men required each other's goodwill. Rupert, as an MP within Tony's television company's territory, needed the coverage, whereas Tony needed Rupert's recommendation to the Government that he was running a respectable company. But it didn't make either like the other any better.

'Bloody good results you had this morning,' said Rupert, fastening his seat belt. 'I'd better buy some Corinium shares.'

Slightly mollified, Tony congratulated Rupert on his recent appointment as Tory Minister for Sport.

Rupert shrugged. 'The PM's shit-scared about football hooliganism – seems to think I can come up with some magic formula.'

'Setting a Yobbo to catch a Yobbo perhaps,' said Tony nastily, then regretted it.

'I was at Thames Television yesterday,' said Rupert icily, as the plane taxied towards the runway. 'After the programme I had a drink with the Home Secretary and the Chairman of the IBA. They were both saying that you'd better watch out. If you don't spend a bit more of that bloody fortune you're coining from advertising on making some decent programmes, you're going to lose your franchise.'

As Rupert leant forward so Tony could hear him over the engines, Tony caught a whiff of the scent the girl had been wearing in the Post House foyer earlier.

'And you ought to spend some time in the area. How the hell can you run a television company in the Cotswolds, if you spend all your time in London, hawking your ass round the advertising companies?'

'The shareholders wouldn't be very pleased if I didn't,' said Tony, thoroughly nettled. 'Look at our results.'

Rupert shrugged again. 'You're also supposed to make good programmes. As your local MP I'm just passing on what's being said.'

'As one of your more influential constituents,' said Tony, furiously, 'I don't think you should be checking into the Post House with bimbos half your age.'

Rupert laughed. 'That was no bimbo, that was Beattie Johnson.'

Of course! Instantly Tony remembered the girl. Beattie Johnson was one of the most scurrilous and successful women columnists – dubbed by *Private Eye* 'the First not-quite-a-lady of Fleet Street'.

'She's ghosting my memoirs,' added Rupert. 'We were doing research. I always believe in laying one's ghost.'

Below the blank stare of the dark glasses, his curved smiling mouth seemed even more insolent. As the plane revved up, both men turned to look out of the window, and Tony found himself trembling with rage. But not even the splendid, striped-silk-shirted bosom of the air hostess, which rose and fell as she showed passengers how to inflate their life jackets, could keep Rupert's eyes open. By the time they were airborne, he was asleep.

Tony accepted a glass of champagne and tried to concentrate on the *Wall Street Journal*. He didn't know which he resented most – Rupert's habitual contempt, his ability to sleep anywhere, his effortless acquisition of women, or the obvious devotion of the palely efficient Gerald, who was now sipping Perrier and polishing the speech Rupert was to deliver to the International Olympic Committee at lunchtime.

There had hardly been a husband in Gloucestershire, indeed in the world, Tony reflected, who hadn't cheered four years ago when Rupert's beautiful wife, Helen, had walked out on him in the middle of the Los Angeles Olympics, running off with another rider and causing Rupert the maximum humiliation.

But, infuriatingly, Rupert had appeared outwardly unaffected and had risen to the occasion by winning a show-jumping gold medal despite a trapped shoulder nerve, and going on two years later to win the World Championship, the only prize hitherto to elude him. Then, giving up show jumping at the pinnacle of his fame, he had moved effortlessly into politics, winning the Tory seat of Chalford and Bisley with ease. Even worse, he had turned out a surprisingly good MP, being very quick on his feet, totally unfazed by the Opposition or the Prime Minister, and prepared to fight very hard for his constituency.

Although scandal had threatened eighteen months ago, when Rupert's then mistress, Amanda Hamilton, wife of the Foreign Secretary, had withdrawn her patronage on finding out that Rupert was also sleeping with her teenage daughter,

by this time, in the eyes of a doting Prime Minister, Rupert could do no wrong. Now, as Minister for Sport, with Gerald Middleton as an exceptional private secretary to do all the donkey work, Rupert was free to roam round exuding glamour, raising money for the Olympic team here, defusing a riot against a South African athlete there. Responsibility, however, hadn't cleaned up his private life at all. Divorced from Helen, he could behave as he chose, hence his cavorting with Beattie Johnson in the Post House that morning.

Glancing at Rupert, sprawled out on the pale-grey leather seat, taking up most of Gerald's leg room, beautiful despite the emergent stubble, Tony felt a further stab of jealousy. He couldn't remember a time in his forty-four years when he hadn't envied the Campbell-Blacks. For all their outlandish behaviour, they had always been looked up to in Gloucestershire. They had lived in the same beautiful house in Penscombe for generations, while Tony was brought up behind net curtains in a boring semi in the suburbs of Cheltenham. Tony also had a chip because he only went to a grammar school, where he'd been teased for being fat and short, and because his conventional colourless father (although subsequently ennobled for his work in the war) had been considered far too valuable as a munitions manufacturer to be allowed to go off and fight, unlike Rupert's father, Eddie, who'd had a dazzling war in the Blues.

Even when Tony's father had been given his peerage, Eddie Campbell-Black and his cronies had laughed, always referring to him dismissively as Lord Pop-Pop, as they blasted away slaughtering wild life with one of his products on their large estates.

Growing up near the Campbell-Blacks, Tony had longed to be invited to Penscombe and drawn into that rackets, exciting set. But the privilege had been bestowed on his brother Basil, who was ten years younger and who, because Tony's father had made his pile by then, had been given a pony to ride and sent to Harrow instead of a grammar school, and had there become a friend of Rupert's.

As a result of such imagined early deprivation, Tony had

grown up indelibly competitive – not just at work, but also socially, sexually, and at all games. Spurning the family firm when he left school, he'd gone straight into advertising and specialized in buying television air time. Having learnt the form, from there he moved to the advertising side of television. A brilliant entrepreneur, who felt he was slipping unless he had a dozen calls from Tokyo and New York during Christmas dinner, by changing jobs repeatedly he had gained the plum post of Chief Executive at Corinium Television eight years ago.

Having shot up to five feet ten and lost his puppy fat in his twenties, Tony had in middle age grown very attractive in a brutal sort of way; although with his Roman nose, heavy-lidded charcoal-grey eyes, coarsely modelled mouth and springy close-cropped dark hair, he looked more like a Sicilian wide boy than an English peer. He chose to proclaim the latter, however, by wearing coronets on absolutely everything. And on the little finger on his left hand gleamed a massive gold signet ring, sporting the Baddingham crest of wrestling rams, above the motto chosen by Lord Pop-Pop: Peaceful is the country that is strongly armed.

Considerably adding to Tony's sex appeal was a hunky bull-necked body, kept in shape by self-control and ruthless exercise, and a voice deliberately deep and smooth to eradicate any trace of a Gloucestershire accent. This only slipped when he went into one of his terrifying rages, which flattened the Corinium Television staff against the cream-hessianed walls of his vast office.

In fact, it irritated the hell out of Tony that, despite his success, his fortune and his immense power, Rupert still refused to take him seriously. He would not have been so upset by Rupert's sniping if it had not echoed a warning last night from Charles Crawford, the rotund and retiring Chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (or IBA as they were known). The IBA's job was to grant franchises to the fifteen independent television companies every eight years or so, monitor their programmes and generally beat them with a big stick if they stepped out of line.

After his programme with Rupert and the Home Secretary at Thames Television yesterday, Charles Crawford had gone on to the Garrick to dine with Tony.

'As an old friend,' said Charles, greedily pouring the cream Tony had rejected together with his own supply over his strawberries, 'I don't see what else we can do but give you a stinking mid-term report. You promised us Corinium would provide at least ten hours' drama a year for the network, and all you've produced is one lousy cops-and-robbers two-parter, totally targeted at the American market. Why can't you provide some decent programmes, like Patrick Dromgoole does at HTV?'

For a second Tony gritted his teeth. He was fed up with having Patrick Dromgoole and HTV held up to him as models of perfection. Then pulling himself together he filled up Charles Crawford's glass with priceless Barsac.

'Things are going to change,' he said soothingly. 'I've just poached Simon Harris from the BBC as Programme Controller. He's very hot on drama, and has dreamed up a terrific idea for a thirteen-parter, a cross between James Herriot and "Animal House".'

'Well that's a start,' grumbled Charles, 'but your regional programmes are quite awful too. Your territory – which you conveniently seem to have forgotten – stretches from Oxford to Wales, and from Southampton to Stratford. And you're supposed to cover the whole area. That's why we gave you the franchise.'

'We also know you've been spending Corinium advertising profits, which should have been spent improving your programmes, buying up . . .' Charles ticked the list off with his fat fingers, 'a film production company, a publishing firm, a travel agency, a cinema chain, a film library, and a safari park, and what's this I hear about plans to buy an American distribution company? American, for Christ's sake.'

'That's fallen through,' lied Tony. 'It was only an idea.'

'Well, keep it that way. Finally you've got to spend more time in your area. Many of your staff have absolutely no idea what you look like. I could understand if you had to live in

the middle of Birmingham or even Manchester, but Cotchester must be the most delightfully civilized town in the country. We awarded you the franchise to reflect the region responsibly, and we've given you a very easy ride up till now.'

And I've given you some bloody good dinners, thought Tony sourly, as Charles sniffed appreciatively at a passing plate of welsh rarebit.

'But when Lady Gosling takes over from me in the autumn,' went on Charles, spooning up the last drop of pink cream, 'you're all going to feel the chill cloud of higher education across the industry. Lady G believes in quality programmes and lots of women at the helm. Go on producing your usual crap, and you'll be out on your ear.'

Having brooded on this conversation and on Rupert Campbell-Black's contumely the entire flight, the only thing that managed to cheer Tony up was when the limousine that met him at Kennedy turned out to be at least three feet longer than Rupert's and twice as plush.

## RIVALS

# 2

Tony's rule, once he got to America, was never to check what time it was in England. To compensate for such an unsatisfactory start to the day, he spent the next few hours in a heady spate of wheeling and dealing, selling the format of two sit-coms and a game show for such a large sum that it wouldn't matter even if they bombed. It was only when he got back to the Waldorf and found three messages to ring his very demanding mistress, Alicia, and, checking the time, realized that he couldn't because it was long after midnight and she'd be tucked up in bed with her husband, that he suddenly felt tired.

He kicked himself for agreeing to dine with Ronnie Havegal, Head of Co-Productions at NBS, particularly as Ronnie had asked if he could bring some producer called Cameron Cook.

'Cameron's a good friend of mine,' Ronnie had said in his Harvard drawl. 'Very bright, just done a documentary on debutantes, up for a Peabody award, real class; they like that sort of thing in England.'

With his royal-blue blazers, butterscotch tan, and streaked hair, Tony had often wondered about Ronnie's sexual preferences. He didn't want to spend an evening avoiding buying some lousy programme from one of Ronnie's fag friends. Yanks always got class wrong anyway.

Christ, he was tired. Unable to master the taps in the



shower, he shot boiling lava straight into his eyes. Then, forgetting to put the shower curtain inside the bath, he drenched the floor and his only pair of black shoes.

Tony spent a lot of money on his clothes and ever since he'd seen Marlon Brando in *Guys and Dolls* as a teenager tended to wear dark shirts with light ties. The new dark-blue silk shirt Alicia had given him for his birthday would be wasted on two fags. He would keep it for lunch with Ali MacGraw tomorrow. Dressed, he fortified himself with a large whisky and put the presentation booklet of 'Four Men went to Mow', Simon Harris's new idea for a thirteen-part series, on the glass table, together with a video of possible exteriors and interiors to give the Americans a taste of the ravishing Cotswold countryside.

He was woken by Ronnie ringing up from downstairs. But when Ronnie came through the door, Tony suddenly didn't feel tired any more, for with him was the sexiest, most truculent-looking girl Tony had ever seen. Around twenty-six, she was wearing a straight linen dress, the colour of a New York taxi, and earrings like mini satellite dishes. She had a lean, wonderfully rapacious body, long legs, very short dark hair sleeked back from her thin face, and a clear olive skin. With her straight black brows, angry, slightly protruding amber eyes, beaky nose and predatory mouth, she reminded him of a bird of prey – beautiful, intensely ferocious and tameable only by the few. She gave out an appalling sexual energy.

She was also so rude to Ronnie, who was very much her senior, that at first Tony assumed they must be sleeping together. He soon realized she was rude to everyone.

'This is Cameron Cook,' said Ronnie.

Nodding angrily in Tony's direction, Cameron set off prowling round the huge suite, looking at the large blue urn in the centre of the living-room holding agapanthus as big as footballs, the leather sofas and arm chairs, the vast double bed next door, and the six telephones (with one even in the shower).

'Shit!' Her voice was low and rasping. 'This place is bigger

than Buckingham Palace; no wonder you Brits need American co-production money.'

Tony, who was opening a bottle of Dom Perignon, ignored the jibe, and asked Cameron where she came from.

'Cincinnati.'

'City of the seven hills,' said Tony smoothly. 'But you must have bought those legs in New York.'

Cameron didn't smile.

'You don't look like a Lord, more like a Mafia hood. What do I call you: Your Grace, Sir, my Lord, Baron, Lord Ant?'

'You can call me Tony.' He handed her a glass.

Cameron picked up the presentation booklet of 'Four Men went to Mow'. Kicking off her flat black shoes, she curled up, looking very tiny on the huge pockmarked red leather sofa.

'What's this shit?'

'Cameron!' remonstrated Ronnie.

'Corinium's latest thirteen-parter,' explained Tony. 'We aim to start shooting in October.'

'If you get American finance,' said Cameron, sharply.

Tony nodded. 'We'll put it out early in the evening; should appeal to kids and adults.'

'Dumb title. What the shit does it mean?'

'It's the line of an English song,' said Tony evenly.

'Thought it was a series about back yards.'

'It's about four agricultural students living in a house.'

'I can read, thank you,' snapped Cameron, running her eyes down the page. 'And someone finds someone in bed with someone in the first episode. Jesus, and you're expecting this shit to go out as wholesome family entertainment in Middle America, where we haven't seen a nipple on the network for years.'

'Don't listen to Cameron,' said Ronnie. 'She needs a muzzle in the office to stop her savaging her colleagues.'

'Shut up and let me read it.'

Ronnie then proceeded to update Tony on the recent changes at NBS. 'They axed twenty people last week, good

people who've been there fifteen years. The new business guys are running the place like a supermarket.'

But Tony wasn't listening. He was watching this incredibly savage girl with her skirt rucked up round her thighs. Christ, he'd like to screw all that smouldering bad temper out of her.

As if aware of his scrutiny, she glanced up.

'There's too much air in this glass,' she said, holding it out for a refill.

'You're too old for TV at twenty-five these days,' Ronnie rattled on obsessively. 'I work with a guy of fifty. He lives in such constant fear of his age getting out, he keeps on having his face lifted.'

Ronnie looked desperately tired. Beneath the butterscotch tan, there were new lines round the eyes. Cameron chucked the presentation booklet back on the glass table.

'Well?' Tony raised his eyebrows.

'Schmaltz, schlock, shit, what d'you want me to say? It's utterly provincial, right, but the dialogue's far too sophisticated. If you're going to appeal to Alabama blacks, Mexican peasants and Russian Jews in the same programme, you can't have a vocab bigger than three hundred words. And I don't know any of the stars.'

'No one had heard of Tim Piggott-Smith, or Charles Dance, or Geraldine James before "Jewel".'

'They'd heard of Peggy Ashcroft. Your characters are so stereotyped. And you've got the wrong hero, Johnny's the guy the Americans will identify with. He's got drive, he comes from a poor home, he's going to make it. The Hon Will's got it already. What's an Hon anyway?'

'A peer's son,' said Tony.

'Well, make him a Lord. Americans understand Lords. And they're all far too wimpish. Americans are pissed off with wimps. We've seen too many guys crying in pinnies. You can't wear your sensitivity on your silk shirtsleeve any more.'

Tony, who'd never done any of these things, warmed to this girl.

'Go on,' he said.

'As a nation, we're getting behind the family and the strong patriarch again. There's a large part of the population that want men to reassert themselves, be more aggressive, more accountable, more heterosexual. And you've got a marvellous chance with four guys in a house together to explore friendship between men, I don't mean faggotry; I mean comradeship. It was a great Victorian virtue, but no one associated it with being gay. Today's man shoots first, then gets in touch with his feelings later.'

'Is that how you like your men?' said Tony, getting up to put the video into the machine.

'Shit no, I'm just talking about the viewers. You've got one of the guys ironing the girl's ball gown for her; yuk!'

Tony filled up her glass yet again.

'Have a look at this.'

Up on the screen came a honey-coloured Cotswold village, an ancient church, golden cornfields, then a particularly ravishing Queen Anne house.

'We plan to use this as Will's father's house,' said Tony.

'Bit arty-farty,' snapped Cameron, as the camera roved lasciviously over a lime-tree avenue, waterfalls of old roses, and a lake surrounded by yellow irises.

'Beautiful place,' said Ronnie in awe.

'Mine,' said Tony smugly.

'Don't you have a wife who owns it as well?' said Cameron, feminist hackles rising.

'Of course; she's a very good gardener.'

'Looks like fucking Disneyland,' said Cameron.

Switching off the video machine, Tony emptied the bottle into Cameron's glass and said, 'Corinium did make more than twelve million pounds last year selling programmes to America, so we're not quite amateurs. Some of the points you made are interesting, but we do have to appeal to a slightly more sophisticated audience at home.'

'We ought to eat soon,' said Ronnie. 'You must be exhausted.'

'Not at all,' said Tony, who was looking at Cameron, 'must just have a pee.'

Alone in the bathroom, he whipped out his red fountain pen and in the memo page of his diary listed every criticism Cameron had made. Then he brushed his hair and, smiling at his reflection, hastily removed a honey-roast peanut from between his teeth. Fortunately he hadn't been smiling much at that bitch.

Even in a packed restaurant swarming with celebrities Cameron turned heads. There was something about her combative unsmiling beauty, her refusal to look to left or right, that made even the vainest diners put on their spectacles to have a second glance.

Immediately they'd ordered, Ronnie went off table-hopping. 'Nice guy,' said Tony, fishing.

'Very social register,' said Cameron dismissively. 'Watch him work the room, he makes everyone feel they've had a meaningful intimate conversation in ten seconds flat.'

'Seems a bit flustered about the blood-letting at NBS.'

Cameron took a slug of Dom Perignon. 'He needs a big success. Both the series he set up last year have bombed.'

'Given him an ulcer too.'

Cameron looked at Tony speculatively.

'I guess you've never had an ulcer, Lord Ant.'

'No,' said Tony smoothly. 'I give them to other people. How do the NBS sackings affect you?'

Cameron shrugged. 'I don't mind the sackings or the rows, but now the money men have moved in, I figure I'll have less freedom to make the programmes I want.'

'How d'you get into television?'

'My mother walked out on my father at the height of the feminist revolution, came to New York hell-bent on growth. The only thing that grew was her overdraft. She was too proud to ask for money from my father, so I went to Barnard on a scholarship, and got a reporting job in the Vac to make ends meet. After graduation, I joined the *New York Times*, then moved to the NBS newsroom. Last year I switched over to documentaries, as a writer/producer. At the moment I'm directing drama.'

'Your mother must be proud of you.'

'She thinks I'm too goal-orientated,' said Cameron bitterly. 'She's never forgiven me for voting for Reagan. I don't understand my mother's generation. All that crap about going back to Nature, and open marriages, and communes and peace marches. Jesus.'

Tony laughed. 'I can't see you on a peace march. What are your generation into?'

'Physical beauty, money, power, fame.'

'You've certainly achieved the first.'

'Sure.' Cameron made no attempt to deny it.

'How d'you intend to achieve the rest?'

'I aim to be the first woman to run a Network Company.'

'What about marriage and children?'

Cameron shook her head so violently she nearly blacked her own eyes with her satellite dish earrings.

'Gets in the way of a career. I've seen too many women at NBS poised to close a deal, being interrupted by a phone call, and having to rush home because their kid's got a temperature of 104.'

The waiter arrived with their first course. Escargots for Cameron, gulls' eggs for Tony. Ronnie, who hadn't ordered anything, returned to the table, buttered a roll, but didn't eat it.

'Anyway,' went on Cameron angrily, 'what's the point of getting married? Look at the guys. New York is absolutely crammed with emotionally immature guys quite unable to make a commitment.'

'They're all gay,' said Tony. He peeled a gull's egg, dipped it in celery salt, and handed it to Cameron.

'Bullshit,' she said, accepting it without thanking him. 'There are loads of heterosexuals in New York. I know at least three. And what makes it worse, with the men being so dire, is that New York is absolutely crawling with prosperous, talented, beautiful women in a state of frenzy about getting laid.'

'Give me their telephone numbers,' said Tony lightly.

'Don't be fatuous,' snarled Cameron. 'Guys are turned off by achieving women; they make them feel inferior. What

beats me is why women are so dependent on men. You see them everywhere, with their leather briefcases, and their dressed-for-success business suits, rabbiting on about independence, yet clinging onto a thoroughly destructive relationship rather than be without a guy.'

Furiously she gouged the last of the garlic and parsley butter out of her snail shells. The lady, reflected Tony, is protesting too much.

Ronnie was off table-hopping again. The head waiter was now making a great song and dance about cooking Cameron's steak Diane at the table, throwing mushrooms and spring onions into the sizzling butter. The champagne having got to Cameron's tongue, she was also spitting away like the hot fat:

'TV people have no idea what's important. Ask them about their kids, they just tell you what private schools they're enrolled in. That's a very subtle way of telling you how well they're doing. What's the point of having kids? Just as a status symbol.'

'You're a bit of a puritan at heart.' Tony filled her glass yet again. 'Your ancestors didn't come over on the *Mayflower* by any chance?'

'No, but my father was British. I've got a British passport.'

Better and better, thought Tony.

The head waiter was pouring Napoleon brandy over the steak now and setting fire to it. The orange purple flames flared upwards, charring the ceiling, lighting up Cameron's hostile, predatory face. Another waiter served Tony's red snapper, which was surrounded by tiny courgettes, sweetcorn and carrots.

'They employ one guy here to sharpen the turnips,' said Cameron, pinching a courgette from Tony's plate. For a second, she looked at it. 'Tiny,' she added dismissively. 'Like the average New York cock.' And with one bite she devoured it.

Tony laughed, encouraging her in her scorn.

'Enjoy your meal,' said the head waiter, laying the steak in front of Cameron with a flourish.