

Jilly Cooper is a journalist, writer and media superstar. The author of many number one bestselling novels, including *Riders*, *Rivals*, *Polo*, *The Man Who Made Husbands Jealous*, *Appassionata*, *Score!*, *Pandora* and *Wicked!*, she lives in Gloucestershire with her husband, Leo, her rescue greyhound, Feather, and five cats. She was appointed OBE in the 2004 Queen's Birthday Honours List for her contribution to literature.

Find out more about Jilly Cooper and her novels by visiting her website: www.jillycooper.co.uk

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By Jilly Cooper

FICTION

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

NON-FICTION

Animals in War
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

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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

ROMANCE

Bella
Emily
Harriet
Imogen
Lisa & Co
Octavia
Prudence

ANTHOLOGIES

The British in Love
Violets and Vinegar

Appassionata
JILLY COOPER



CORGI BOOKS

TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA
a division of The Random House Group Ltd
www.booksattransworld.co.uk

APPASSIONATA
A CORGI BOOK : 9780552156387

First published in Great Britain
in 1996 by Bantam Press
a division of Transworld Publishers
Corgi edition published 1997
Corgi edition reissued 2007

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Typeset in 10/11pt New Baskerville by
Phoenix Typesetting, Burley-in-Wharfedale, West Yorkshire.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire.

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

To the Royal Scottish National Orchestra
because they make great music
and I love them all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



I felt desolate when I finished *Appassionata*, because I'd grown so fond of everyone who'd helped me. I was constantly touched and amazed that musicians who work such punishing hours often for totally inadequate reward should not only be the merriest and the funniest people in the world, but also the most generous with their time.

I must therefore start with a huge thank you to my guardian angels: benign bassoonist Chris Gale, his wife Jacoba, ace cook and viola player, and another viola player, Ian Pillow, who writes Classic FM magazine's wonderfully funny column 'Pillow Talk', all of whom are from the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra; fair Annie Tennant, Education Officer of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; Jack Rothstein, super violinist, soloist, leader and conductor, his wife Linn Hendry, another ace cook and a pianist who specializes in violin repertoire and, finally, brilliant violinist Marat Bisengaliev and his wife Steena, sublime first flute at the English Northern Philharmonia. These eight muses gave me inspiration, encouragement, endless introductions and marvellous hospitality. They never minded being bombarded with silly questions:

'Could you bonk a *small* woman on a Glockenspiel?' 'Would tearstains devalue a Strad?' in the middle of the night, and if they didn't know the answer, they always knew someone who did. I cannot thank them enough.

I would also like to thank two great orchestras. The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, whose managing director, Anthony Woodcock, very kindly allowed me to spend a fantastic week in Poole, talking to both musicians and management, sitting in on rehearsals, touring the South of England, listening to marvellous concerts. Everyone helped me, but I would like to say a special thank you to: Marion Aston, Kevin Banks, Andy Barclay, Nigel Beale, Philip Borg-Wheeler, Andrew Burn, Johnathan Carney, John Charles, Stuart Collins, David Gill, Stuart Green, Christopher Guy, Helen Harris, Anna Hawkins, Karen Jones, Edward Kay, Jayne Litton, Janet Male, Peter Rendle, Nick Simmonds, Verity Smith, Louise Wright and Peter Witham.

The red lion's share of my gratitude, however, must go to the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. In 1992 I wistfully asked my friend Ian Maclay, who now runs the BBC Concert Orchestra, if he knew a band brave enough to take me on tour abroad. Within twenty-four hours, he had elicited an invitation to tour Spain from Paul Hughes, who must be the nicest man in classical music, and who had just taken over the RSNO as managing director. Thus followed one of the best weeks of my life, as the orchestra roared through five cities bringing the very formal Spanish audiences yelling in delight to their feet. Walter Weller, darkly urbane and charismatic, was the conductor. John Lill, adored by musicians and public alike, was the soloist, reducing us to tears of joy by his piano playing and tears of laughter with his outrageous jokes at the parties afterwards. Jacqueline Noltingk ensured everything ran miraculously smoothly.

In May 1995, I joined the RSNO for a second tour, this

time of Switzerland. Once again they played gloriously to packed houses and their '*music in my heart I bore, Long after it was heard no more*'. Again everyone was sweet to me, but the following were of particular value to my story: Kenneth Blackwood, Helen Brew, Valerie Carlaw, William Chandler, John Clark, John Cushing, Pamela Dow, Morrison and Sally Dunbar, Claire Dunn, Jeremy Fletcher, Charles Floyd, Brian Forshaw, Martin Gibson, John Gracie, John Grant, David Hair, John Harrington, Philip Hore, Duncan Johnstone, Fiona McPherson, Evgeny Minkov, Angela Moore, Jacqueline Noltingk, Joseph Pacewicz, Edwin Paling, Miranda Phythian-Adams, Kevin Price, Stephane Rancourt, Michael Rigg, Alistair Sinclair, Ian Smith, Justine Watts, Stephen West.

One of my heroes in *Appassionata* is a young pianist, so I am deeply indebted for their advice to great soloists: Philip Fowke, Janina Fialkowska, Alan Kogosowsky. I am also grateful to Philip MacKenzie, conductor and moving force behind the west country Amadeus Chorus and Orchestra and his bassoonist wife, Charlotte, who suggested I play the narrator in *Peter and the Wolf* at the Colston Hall in 1992 so I could experience the utter terror of performing as a soloist with an orchestra.

My other more gilded hero is a brass player. Here again marvellous anecdotes and many ideas came from David McClenaghan and John Logan, first and third horn of the RSNO; Martin Hobbs, second horn of the BSO; Lance Green, first trombone, RSNO; Danny Longstaff, second trombone of the CBSO; and, above all, the legendary Tony Turnstall, former principal horn of the Royal Opera House Orchestra, Covent Garden.

My main heroine becomes a conductor, so I was immensely grateful for help from Sir Simon Rattle, Andrew Litton, Jean Paul Casadesus, Stephen Barlow, Ross Pople, Denys Darlow, Michael Burbidge, Olivier Dohnányi and, above all, André Previn. André, that most droll and beguiling of raconteurs and companions,

allowed me to sit in on rehearsals and recording sessions with the mighty London Symphony Orchestra, and talked to me for many hours about both conducting and playing the piano. I must especially thank dear Bill Holland and Harriet Capaldi of Warner Classics for producing the most beautiful CD, titled *Appassionata*, from a selection of the music featured in the book. On the recording side, I must also thank Erik Smith, Steve Long and Mike Hatch for patiently answering my questions, as did distinguished composers Orlando Gough and Geoffrey Burgon, my neighbour in Gloucestershire.

On the musical administration side, I'd like to thank Philippa Sherwood and Andrew Jowett of Symphony Hall, Birmingham, and Christopher Bishop, late of the RSNO, and the Philharmonia for all their help and wonderful hospitality; Ian Killik of the English Northern Philharmonia; Lynn Calvin of the Musicians' Union; Libby Macnamara of the Association of British Orchestras; Charles Beare, world expert on string instruments; Sonia Copeland; Chris Steward; Alison Taylor; Ellyn Kusman, Rosamund Leitch of the Wagner Society; Diggory Seacome, timpanist supremo and mover and shaker of the Cotswold Symphony Orchestra.

All the artists' agents in *Appassionata* are perfectly horrid, and bear absolutely no resemblance to darling Sir Ian Hunter, Chairman of Harold Holt or Trudy Wright of Harrison Parrott, both of whom advised and royally entertained me.

During my research I spent a lovely morning at the English National Ballet, where Amanda Gilliland and Jane Haworth were as beautiful as they were informative. I also spent fascinating days at the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, watching Professor Colin Metters and the venerable George Hurst assessing student conductors, practising their skills on respective college orchestras. One of the pieces was Bartók's *Violin Concerto*, which Mia Biakella, the soloist,

played quite beautifully. I am also grateful to Huw Humphreys, a young conductor, who, after his début at the Holywell Music Rooms in Oxford in 1994, gave me invaluable insight into pre-concert nerves and the problems of galvanizing musicians.

On a plane to Lapland in 1993, I sat next to a delightful bassoon teacher, who told me piano competitions were frightfully bent with large lady judges often receiving grand pianos as bribes. After that I naturally included a piano competition in the book.

I then spent a splendidly inspiring week at the Leeds Piano Competition, where I saw no sign of pianos changing hands, and must thank the competition's founder, Fanny Waterman, and Mary Bailey, from the sponsors, Harveys of Bristol; organizer Liz Arnold; Romilly Meagen of the BBC and Roisin Grimley from Ireland. It was also a great thrill to spend time with the brilliant young British contestant Leon Macaulay, who, immediately after the result, touchingly apologized for only coming second: 'It would have been so much better for your book if I had won.'

I also made friends with Mark Anderson, the handsome American contestant who came third, and he and his wife, beautiful pianist Tamriko Siprashvili, delighted us with piano duets when they came to stay in Gloucestershire.

In August 1994, I spent exciting days at the International World Power Competition. Sulamita Aronovsky was the indefatigable organizer, and I must thank Ann Fuller, Samantha Day, Irish judge John O'Connor and American judge Herbert Stessin for their marvellous observations. Joe Lewis looked after me backstage. Another brilliant British contestant, Paul Lewis, came second, and again spent many hours talking to me.

I must also thank Leonard Pearcey and Ruth Cubbin for twice inviting me to Radio 2's excellent Young Musician of the Year Award. Many musicians helped me

with the background material and stories for the book, they include Robin Brightman of the LSO; Richard Hewitt of the NEP; John Hill; Erich Gruenberg; Alberto Portugheis, Elizabeth Drew, Stuart Elsmore, Alistair Beattie, Alexa Butterworth, Mats Lidstrom, Angela Moore, Rodney Friend, former leader of the LSO; Norman Jones, former principal cellist to the Philharmonia; Raymond Cohen, former leader of the Royal Philharmonic and Hannah Roberts.

The music press were also fantastic. Malcolm Hayes of the *Daily Telegraph* and Mike Tumelty of the *Glasgow Herald* held my hand on the tour of Spain; David Fingleton looked after me at the Leeds and took me to endless lovely concerts, as did dear Lesley Garner, super columnist, and Mel Cooper, of Classic FM, who opened his great generous heart and his address book to me on endless occasions. John Julius Norwich invited me to a gorgeous lunch in the country. Norman Lebrecht of the *Daily Telegraph*, author of *The Maestro Myth*, nobly tracked down the legend of the chandelier in Buenos Aires Opera House. Keith Clarke, editor of *Classical Music* magazine and doughty fighter of musicians' causes; Nicholas Kenyon, controller of Radio 3; Professor George Pratt, Peter Barker, and Ron Hall all gave me wonderful support. My old friend and *Sunday Times* colleague, Peter Watson, wrote a terrific biography of Nureyev, which was a constant inspiration when I was inventing my explosive dancer, Alexei Nemerovsky.

All my friends in fact entered into the spirit of the book. Alan Titchmarsh thought up the title *Appassionata*. My piano tuner, Marcus Constance, dreamt up a devilish plot for sabotaging a grand piano in the middle of a competition. Lord Marchwood took me up in an air balloon over France with General Sir Peter de la Billière. Musicians have many ailments. Joanne Murphy advised me on physiotherapy, Dr Joe Cobbe, Dr Graham Hall and Staff Nurse Sue Workman on asthma. John Hunt

introduced me to Anthony Norcliffe who knew all about mending brass players' teeth.

On the non-musical front, Patrick Despard of Arcona was fiendishly imaginative about the splendours and skulduggeries of property developing. Toby Trustram-Eve was brilliant on computers, as were Andrew Parker-Bowles on racing; Peter Clarkson and Jean Alice Cook on nuns' names and practices; Susie Layton on decor; Sue Jacobs of Leicestershire Social Services and Deborah Fowler in her book, *A Guide to Adoption*, on adoption. Other friends who came up with ideas include: Susannah and Bill Franklyn; Anthony Rubinstein; George and Dang Humphreys; John Woods; Roger and Rowena and Harry Luard; Francis Willey; Mary and Anthony Abrahams, Graham Hamilton, Michael Leworthy and John Conway of the Archduke Wine Bar.

I'd like to thank Jack and Patricia Godsell for their beautiful Toadsmoor Lake which was a magical source of inspiration, and Dr Ueli Habegger who finally located the island on Lake Lucerne where the ghost horn player can sometimes be heard at dusk.

As well as Spain and Switzerland, my research took me in 1994 to Prague and on to Pardubice where British jockey, owner and trainer Charlie Mann exceeded all expectation by coming second in the Czech Grand National on It's a Snip, and, later in 1995, came first. I must particularly thank Lord Patrick Beresford and Baroness Dory Friesen for masterminding this brilliant trip for Abercrombie and Kent, and thank Sir Derek Hodgson, Queeks Carleton-Paget and Liza Butler for being such beguiling travelling companions.

Many people wrote offering advice and anecdotes. Many numbers went down in my telephone book. Sadly I never followed them up, as in the end I had to get down and write the book.

If researching *Appassionata* was a joy, writing it was an absolute nightmare, because an orchestra consists of so

many characters, and mine were continually getting out of control, particularly in their behaviour. In fact Paul Hughes, Ian Pillow and Linn Rothstein, who most heroically read through the manuscript for mistakes, said they had never come across an orchestra who behaved quite so badly as my Rutminster Symphony Orchestra. Nor in fact had I. The high jinks and bad behaviour in the book are totally invented and I would stress that *Appassionata* is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any living person or organization is wholly unintentional and purely coincidental.

I never got to Bogotá, where the first chapters are set, but Annie Senior and Peter Gibbs-Kennet gave me graphic descriptions and I was much indebted to both the *Lonely Planet Guide to Colombia* and *The Fruit Palace*, a stunning travel book by Charles Nicholl.

Nor would the book have probably been completed if Sharon Young of British Airways hadn't tracked down a folder of early notes I'd left at Glasgow Airport.

I am truly sorry if I've left people out, but if I'd listed everyone who'd helped me, these acknowledgements would be longer than the book.

While writing *Appassionata*, I was gently followed to Prague and Switzerland and all over England by a BBC2 crew from Bookmark, headed by Basil Comely. Occasionally I found it difficult to get to grips with brass players' love lives or seduction techniques in conductors' dressing-rooms with a BBC crew breathing down my neck, but otherwise they couldn't have been more tactful, kind and fun to work with.

My publishers, Paul Scherer, Mark Barty-King, Patrick Janson-Smith of Transworld, as usual, have been impeccable, constantly encouraging and reassuringly rock solid at a time of book trade turbulence. I have also had wonderful editorial help from the glorious Diane Pearson and from Broo Doherty, who grew cross-eyed as she ploughed through 1403 pages of manuscript, crammed with musical references. She was, however, so

charming and so enthusiastic about the book that I accepted (nearly) all the changes she suggested.

I am also eternally lucky in having the best, most delightfully insouciant agent in London, Desmond Elliott and his assistant Nathan Mayatt, who spent so much time photostatting and despatching.

For the first time, the huge manuscript was typed on computers. The real heroines of *Appassionata* are therefore my friends: Annette Xuereb-Brennan, Anna Gibbs-Kennet and Pippa Moores, who completed the job on new machines in an amazing five weeks. They worked long into the night, deciphering my deplorable handwriting, punctuating, correcting spelling and pointing out howlers. I cannot express sufficient gratitude to them nor to Ann Mills, my equally heroic cleaner, who somehow cleared up the mess while picking her way delicately through rising tower blocks of manuscript until the house looked rather like Hong Kong.

Sadly, my dear friend and PA, Jane Watts, who supervised so much of the photostatting and collation of the book, and who had given me so much love and support over the past six years, left in November. With huge luck, her place was soon taken by Pippa Moores, who arrived to oversee the move into computers, and stayed to become my new assistant.

My family, *comme toujours*, were staunchness personified. Leo, Felix and Emily hardly saw me for eighteen months, but gave endless cheer and comfort. So did my dogs Barbara and Hero, and four cats, Agnes, Sewage, Rattle and Tilson-Thomas, who provided sweet, silent companionship and protection in the gazebo, even at the dead of night.

Dear gallant Barbara (Gertrude the mongrel in my last four books) seemed determined to cling on to life if only to see me safely into port. She died a few days after I finished writing, leaving the world unbearably the poorer.

Finally, I would like to thank musicians everywhere for the joy they bring, and to beg the public, the Government and the local authorities to give them the support and funding they so desperately need, because a twenty-first century without orchestras would be very bleak indeed.

THE CAST

CANON AIRLIE	Non-executive director of the Rutminster Symphony Orchestra (RSO), a silly old fossil, constantly campaigning for better behaviour.
ALBERTO	The unsalubrious landlord of the Red Parrot Hotel, Bogotá.
AMBROSE	Principal guest conductor, RSO, known as the 'fat controller' – a bitchy old queen.
ANATOLE	A tempestuously talented Russian contestant in the Appleton Piano Competition.
SISTER ANGELICA	A beautiful nun.
ASTRID	Boris Levitsky's stunning Scandinavian au pair.
LADY BADDINGHAM	Much admired ex-wife of Tony Baddingham, the fiendish ex-chairman of Corinium Television.
BENNY BASANOVICH	A very tiresome Russian-French pianist who can only play fortissimo.
BARRY THE BASS	Principal Bass, RSO.
MRS BATESON	A music lover who befriends Marcus Campbell-Black.
JAMES BENSON	A very expensive private doctor.
BIANCA	An adorable Colombian orphan.
MRS BODKIN	Rupert Campbell-Black's ancient housekeeper.

ROSALIE BRANDON	A bossyboots attached to the London office of Shepherd Denston, the music agents.
MILES BRIAN-KNOWLES	Detested deputy-managing director of the RSO, a snake in furry caterpillar's clothing, who is after Mark Carling's job.
DAVIE BUCKLE	A beaming bruiser and RSO timpanist.
EDDIE CAMPBELL-BLACK	Rupert's father, an unreformed rake, just emerged from a fifth marriage and raring to go.
RUPERT CAMPBELL-BLACK	Ex-world show-jumping champion, now one of the world's leading owner-trainers. Still Mecca for most women.
TAGGIE CAMPBELL-BLACK	Rupert's wife – an angel and the apple of his once roving eye.
MARCUS CAMPBELL-BLACK	Rupert's son by his first marriage. A pianist whose path to the top is only impeded by asthma and nerves, both chiefly induced by his father.
TABITHA CAMPBELL-BLACK	A ravishing tearaway. Rupert's daughter, also by his first wife.
CANDY	A comely rank-and-file RSO viola player.
LINDY CARDEW	The mettlesome wife of Rutminster's planning officer.
MARK CARLING	Beleaguered managing director of the RSO.
HAN CHAI	A very young Korean contestant in the Appleton Piano Competition.

TONY CHARLTON	The indefatigable and perennially cheerful stage manager of the RSO. Known as 'Charlton Handsome'.
MISS CHATTERTON	Marcus Campbell-Black's piano teacher, known as 'Chatterbox'.
LADY CHISLEDON	A lusty old trout and member of the RSO board.
CHRISSIE	An obsequious Northern Television minion.
CLARE	Another very pretty RSO rank-and-file viola player, also the orchestra Sloane.
CLARISSA	Principal Cello, RSO.
CLIVE	Rannaldini's sinister black-leather-clad henchman.
THE BISHOP OF COTCHESTER	Another silly old fossil.
CRYSTELLE	A bullying beautician from Parker and Parker's department store.
OLD CYRIL	Fourth Horn, RSO. Heavy drinker. One-time great player.
HOWARD DENSTON	Wideboy partner in Shepherd Denston, the toughest music agents in New York.
HOWIE DENSTON	Howard's son, a mega-manipulator, who runs the London office.
NICHOLAS DIGBY	The harassed orchestra manager, or 'fixer' of the RSO, who has the unenviable task of getting the right number of players on and off the platform. Known as 'Knickers'.

MRS DIGGORY	Heroic cleaner of the Celtic Mafia's Bordello.
DIZZY	Rupert Campbell-Black's head groom.
DMITRI	A lyrical and lachrymose cellist, later Principal Cello of the RSO.
BLUE DONOVAN	Second Horn of the RSO – blue-eyed Irishman of great charm, who covers for Viking O'Neill, both on the platform and in life. Founder member of Viking's gang, known as the 'Celtic Mafia'.
DIXIE DOUGLAS	A Glaswegian hunk, whose light duties as an RSO trombone player leave him rather too much time to hell-raise and troublemake. Another member of the Celtic Mafia.
MRS EDWARDS	Helen Campbell-Black's underworked cleaner.
ELDRED	A beleaguered Principal Clarinet.
ERNESTO	A bribable Italian judge at the Appleton Piano Competition.
FRANCIS FAIRCHILD	Second Desk First Violin of the RSO nicknamed the 'Good Loser' because he's always mislaying his possessions.
LIONEL FIELDING	Leader of the RSO. A vainglorious narcissist.
HUGO DE GINÈSTRE	The charming, chivalrous, French-Canadian Co-leader of the RSO.
GISELA	Sir Rodney Macintosh's cherishing housekeeper.

ROWENA GODBOLD	Charismatic blonde First Horn of the Cotchester Chamber Orchestra (CCO), the RSO's deadly rivals.
PABLO GONZALES	An ancient Spanish pianist of great renown.
HELEN GORDON (formerly CAMPBELL-BLACK)	Rupert's first wife, now married to his old <i>chef d'équipe</i> , Malise Gordon. A legendary beauty and devoted mother of Marcus and less so of Tabitha.
GILBERT GREENFORD	A caring beard from the Arts Council. Mark Carling's cross.
GWYNNETH	A caftanned barrel from the Arts Council, Gilbert Greenford's 'partner' and another of Mark Carling's crosses.
RANDY HAMILTON	Third Trumpet from a brass-band and Army background. Another Celtic Mafia hell-raiser.
HERMIONE HAREFIELD	World-famous diva and Rannaldini's mistress, who brings out the Crippen in all of us.
DIRTY HARRY	A bass player who never washes.
LYSANDER HAWKLEY	Rupert Campbell-Black's jockey, the man who made husbands jealous.
HARVEY THE HEAVY	George Hungerford's chauffeur and minder.
OLD HENRY	Oldest member of the RSO, once auditioned successfully for Toscanini, now rank-and-file First Violin.
ANTHEA HISLOP	A pianist, mostly employed for her sex appeal.

GEORGE HUNGERFORD	An extremely successful property developer.
MOTHER MARIA IMMACULATA	A radiant Reverend Mother.
FAT ISOBEL	A very large viola player.
JISON	A dodgy local car dealer.
BRUCE KENNEDY	American pianist and judge at the Appleton Piano Competition.
KEVIN	A social worker.
MARIA KUSAK	A violin soloist, also employed for her sex appeal.
LORD LEATHERHEAD	Chairman of the RSO and crashing bore on the subject of bottled water.
BORIS LEVITSKY	A glamorous Russian conductor/composer. A bear with a very sore heart as a result of his wife Rachel's suicide.
LILI	A bribable German judge in the Appleton Piano Competition.
LINCOLN	Fifth Horn of the RSO.
HILARY LLOYD	Second Clarinet of the RSO. An utter bitch known as the 'Swan of Purley' because she's very refined and having an <i>affaire</i> with the leader. Hell-bent on becoming First Clarinet.
SIR RODNEY MACINTOSH	Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the RSO. Absolute sweetie and sly old fox, who lets others do the worrying.

GEORGIE MAGUIRE	World-famous singer and song writer.
CARL MATTHESON	Homespun American contestant in the Appleton Piano Competition.
JUNO MEADOWS	Second Flute of the RSO. Tiny and tantalizingly pretty, known as the 'Steel Elf'.
MARY MELVILLE	Principal Second Violin of the RSO. A doting mother known as 'Mary-the-Mother-of-Justin'.
SISTER MERCEDES	A very butch nun.
QUINTON MITCHELL	Third Horn of the RSO who wants to be First Horn.
SALVADOR MOLINARI	A naughty Colombian playboy.
MILITANT MOLL	A fiercely feminist rank-and-file viola player of the RSO.
ALEXEI NEMEROVSKY	Principal dancer of the Cossak Russe Ballet Company, known as 'The Treat from Moscow'.
NELLIE NICOLSON	Third Desk cellist of the RSO known as 'Nellic the Nympho'.
NINION	Second Oboe. Militant Moll's exceedingly hen-pecked boyfriend.
NORIKO	An adorably pretty Japanese; rank-and-file First Violin of the RSO.
DECLAN O'HARA	Irish television presenter and megastar. Managing director of Venturer Television.

DEIRDRE O'NEILL	Irish judge at the Appleton Piano Competition, fond of a drop, known as 'Deirdre of the Drowned Sorrows'.
VICTOR (VIKING) O'NEILL	First Horn and hero of the orchestra because of his great glamour, glorious sound and rebellious attitude. The Godfather of the Celtic Mafia.
SIMON PAINSHAW	First Oboe of the RSO. A walking <i>Grove's Dictionary</i> who spends his time brooding on his reeds.
PEGGY PARKER	Owner of Parker and Parker department store in Rutminster High Street. A bossy boots and overbearing member of the RSO board.
ROGER 'SONNY' PARKER	Her frightful son, a composer of even more frightful modern music.
MISS PARROTT	The rather heavenly RSO harpist.
JULIAN PELLAFACINI	The highly respected leader of the New World Symphony Orchestra.
LUISA PELLAFACINI	His lovely bosomy wife.
NATALIA PHILIPOVA	An apparently untalented Czechoslovak pianist.
PETER PLUMPTON	First Flute of the RSO.
MISS PRIDDOCK	Mark Carling's secretary, beloved of Old Cyril. An unfazed old trout.
ROBERTO RANNALDINI	Mega-Maestro and arch fiend, currently musical director of the New World Symphony Orchestra.
KITTY RANNALDINI	His third wife, in love with Lysander Hawkley.

JACK RODWAY	A randy receiver.
SISTER ROSE	A sympathetic nurse at Northladden General Hospital.
ABIGAIL ROSEN	American violinist, nicknamed 'L'Appassionata' whose dazzling talent and tigerish beauty have taken the world by storm.
THE RUTSHIRE BUTCHER	A very critical critic.
SANDRA	Christopher Shepherd's secretary.
FLORA SEYMOUR	Wild child, pilgrim soul and daughter of Georgie Maguire. Destroyed by a teenage <i>affaire</i> with Rannaldini, now concentrating on the viola.
CHRISTOPHER SHEPHERD	Abigail Rosen's agent, a control freak, who provides the respectable front of Shepherd Denston.
MISS SMALLWOOD	Secretary, Cotchester Music Club.
STEVE SMITHSON	Second Bassoon of the RSO and representative of the Musicians' Union. Muscular right arm from throwing the book at people.
DAME EDITH SPINK	A distinguished composer and Musical Director of the Cotchester Chamber Orchestra.
TOMMY STAINFORTH	Principal Percussion of the RSO.
MRS DICK STANDISH	A skittish sponsor's wife.
DENNIS STRICKLAND	Principal Viola of the RSO, known as 'El Creppo'.

BILL THACKERY	Second Desk, First Violin of the RSO. Better at cricket than the violin. Jolly good sort.
JAMES VEREKER	A television presenter.
WALTER	A benevolent bass.
SERENA WESTWARD	Head of Artists and Repertoire at Megagram Records.
CLAUDE 'CHERUB' WILSON	Third Percussion of the RSO. Very dumb blond and orchestra mascot.
XAVIER	A Colombian orphan.

THE ANIMALS

BOGOTÁ	A black labrador puppy.
JOHN DRUMMOND	Miss Priddock's cat, office mouser to the RSO.
GERTRUDE	Taggie Campbell-Black's mongrel.
JENNIFER	One of Lady Baddingham's yellow labradors.
NIMROD	Rupert Campbell-Black's lurcher.
MR NUGENT	Viking O'Neill's black collie.
PENSCOMBE PRIDE	Rupert Campbell-Black's favourite and finest horse.
SHOSTAKOVICH	Rodney Macintosh's grey Persian cat.
SIBELIUS AND SCRIABIN	Abigail Rosen's black-and-white kittens. Like magpies, the two of them bring joy.
TIPPETT	Dame Edith Spink's pug.
TREVOR	Flora Seymour's rescued mongrel.

THE RUT *Symphony*

FIRST VIOLINS

- 1 LIONEL FIELDING
- 2 HUGO DE GINESTRE
- 3 BILL THACKERY
- 4 FRANCIS 'THE GOOD LOSER'
- 11 OLD HENRY
- 12 NORIKO

SECOND VIOLINS

- 1 MARY-THE-MOTHER-OF-JUSTIN
- 12 LITTLE JENNY

VIOLAS

- 1 EL CREEPO
- 2 SALLY BRIGGS
- 7 MILITANT MOLL
- 8 FAT ISOBEL
- 9 CLARE
- 10 CANDY

CELLOS

- 1 CLARISSA
- 3 NELLIE THE NYMPHO

BASSES

- 1 BARRY THE BASS
- 5 DIRTY HARRY
- 6 EL SQUEAKO

FLUTES

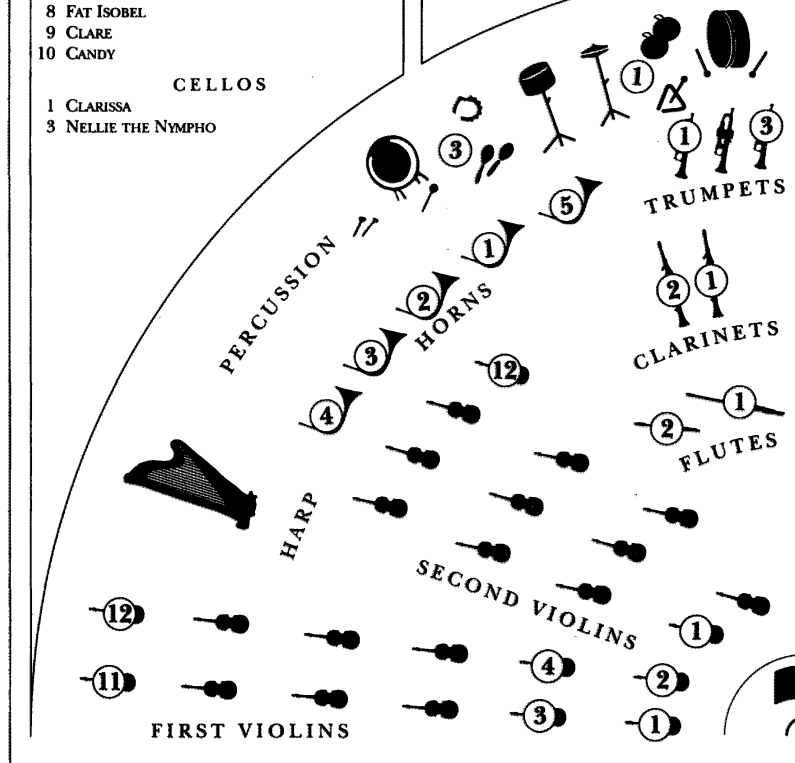
- 1 PETER PLUMPTON
- 2 JUNO THE STEEL ELF

OBOES

- 1 SIMON PAINSHAW
- 2 NINION

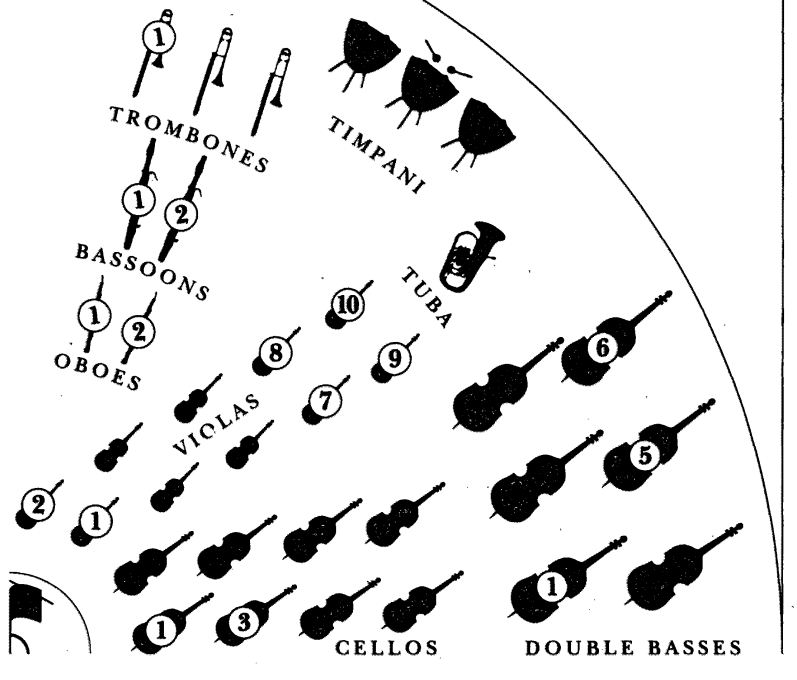
CLARINETS

- 1 ELDRED
- 2 HILARY LLOYD



MINSTER *Orchestra*

<p>BASSOON</p> <p>1 JERRY THE JOKER 2 STEVE SMITHSON</p> <p>HORNS</p> <p>1 VIKING O'NEILL 2 BLUE DONOVAN 3 QUINTON MITCHELL 4 OLD CYRIL 5 LINCOLN THE BUMPER</p> <p>TRUMPETS</p> <p>1 CARMINE JONES 3 RANDY HAMILTON</p>	<p>TROMBONES</p> <p>1 DIXIE DOUGLAS</p> <p>TIMPANI</p> <p>DAVIE BUCKLE</p> <p>PERCUSSION</p> <p>1 TOMMY STAINFORTH 3 CHERUB WILSON</p> <p>HARP</p> <p>MISS PARROTT</p> <hr/> <p><i>Managing Director</i> MARK CARLING <i>General Manager</i> MILES BRIAN-KNOWLES <i>Orchestra Manager</i> KNICKERS DIGBY <i>Stage Manager</i> CHARLTON HANDSOME</p>
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Appassionata
OVERTURE

ONE



In the second week of April, Taggie Campbell-Black crossed the world and fell head over heels in love for the second time in her life. The flight to Bogotá, delayed by engine trouble at Caracas, took fifteen hours. Taggie, who'd hardly eaten or slept since Rupert broke the news of their journey, could only manage half a glass of champagne. Nor, being very dyslexic, was she able to lose herself in Danielle Steel or Catherine Cookson, nor even concentrate on Robbie Coltrane camping it up as a nun on the in-flight movie. She could only clutch Rupert's hand, praying over and over again: Please God let it happen.

By contrast Rupert, concealing equal nerves behind his habitual deadpan langour, had drunk far too much as he sat thumbing through a glossary at the back of a Bogotá guide book.

'I now know the Colombian for stupid bugger, prick, jerk, double bed, air-conditioning, rum and cocaine, so we should be OK.'

At El Dorado Airport, the policemen fingered their guns. Seeing an affluent-looking gringo, the taxi-driver turned off his meter. As they drove past interminable

whore-houses and dives blaring forth music, past skyscrapers next to crumbling shacks, Rupert's hangover was assaulted as much by the shroud of black diesel fumes that blanketed the city as by the furiously honking almost static rush-hour traffic. There was rubbish everywhere. On every pavement, pimps with dead eyes, drug pushers carrying suitcases bulging with notes, tarts in tight dresses pushed aside beggars on crutches and stepped over grubby sloe-eyed children playing in the gutter. How could anything good come out of such a hell-hole?

As Taggie couldn't bear to wait a second longer, they drove straight to the convent. Now, quivering like a dog in a thunderstorm, she was panicking about her clothes.

'D'you think I should have stopped off at the hotel and changed into something more motherly?'

Rupert glanced sideways. No-one filled a body stocking like Taggie or had better, longer legs for a miniskirt.

'You look like a plain-clothes angel.'

'My skirt isn't too short?'

'Never, never.' Rupert put a hand on her thigh.

By the time they reached the convent, a sanctuary amid the squalor, appalling poverty and brutal crime of the slums, the fare cost almost more than the flight. The Angelus was ringing in the little bell-tower. The setting sun, finding a gap in the dark lowering mountains of the Andes, had turned the square white walls a flaming orange. A battered Virgin Mary looked down from a niche as Rupert knocked on the blistered bottle-green front door. But no-one answered.

'We should have rung first to check they were in,' said Taggie, who, despite the stifling heat of the evening, was trembling even more uncontrollably. She looked about to faint.

'I can't imagine they're out at some rave-up.' Gently Rupert smoothed the black circles beneath her terrified eyes. 'It'll be OK, sweetheart.'

He clouted the door again.

Now that he was in Cocaine City, Rupert had never more longed for a line to put him in carnival mood to carry him through the interview ahead. His longing increased a moment later when the door was unlocked and creaked open a few inches and he had a sudden vision that Robbie Coltrane had got in on the act again.

A massive nun, like a superannuated orang-utan, with tiny suspicious eyes disappearing in fat, a beard and hairy warts bristling disapproval, demanded what they wanted. She then insisted on seeing their passports, and looked as though she would infinitely rather have frisked Taggie than Rupert, before grudgingly allowing them in.

By contrast the Mother Superior, Maria Immaculata, was femininity and charm itself. She had a round, almost childish face, like a three-quarters moon, smiling, slanting brown eyes and a cherished olive complexion set off by a very white linen wimple. As she moved forward with a rustle of black silk, the pale hand she held out to Rupert and Taggie was soft and slightly greasy from a recent application of hand cream. Mother Maria Immaculata believed you brought more comfort to the poor and suffering if you looked attractive.

It was the same in her office. Crimson bougainvillea rioted round the windows outside. Frescoes and wood carvings decorated the white walls of her office. On her shiny dark desk, which seemed to breathe beeswax, beside a silver vase of blue hibiscus flowers, lay the report of Rupert's and Taggie's marriage drawn up by English social workers.

But Maria Immaculata did not set much store by gringo gobbledygook. More importantly, Rupert and Taggie had come with an excellent recommendation from the Cardinal, who was a friend of Declan O'Hara, Rupert's partner, whose television interviews were transmitted world-wide. Even the Pope, who was evidently writing a book, and might want to promote it on Declan's programme one day, had put in a good word.

Anyway, Maria Immaculata preferred to make up her own mind.

And then Sister Mercedes, who acted as the convent Rottweiler, had helped matters greatly by bringing in this beautiful couple – the man as blond, tall, handsome and proud as El Dorado himself, and his wife as deathly pale, slender and quivering as a eucalyptus tree in an earthquake, and whose eyes were as silver-grey as the eucalyptus leaves themselves.

Taggie was clutching a litre of duty-free brandy, a vast bottle of *Joy*, a British Airways teddy bear wearing goggles and a flying jacket, and a white silk tasselled shawl decorated with brilliantly coloured birds of paradise.

'For you,' she stammered, dropping them on Mother Immaculata's desk and nearly knocking over the vase of hibiscus, if Rupert with his lightning reflexes hadn't whisked it to the safety of a side table.

'I h-h-ho-pe you don't m-m-m-ind us barging in, straight from the airport, but we were so longing—' Taggie's voice faltered.

Timeo Danaeos, thought Sister Mercedes grimly. She spent her life pouring cold water on the romantic enthusiasts of Maria Immaculata, who was now lovingly fingering the white shawl.

'Dear child, you shouldn't have spoiled us.'

'They will do for a raffle,' said Sister Mercedes firmly.

Maria Immaculata sighed.

'Perhaps you could arrange some tea, Sister Mercedes. Sit down.' She smiled at Rupert and Taggie and pointed at two very hard straight-backed wooden chairs. 'You must be tired after such a journey.'

'Not when you've been travelling as long as we have,' said Rupert, thinking of the wretched years of miscarriages and painful tests and operations, the trailing from one specialist to another, not to mention the humiliation of the endless KGB-style interrogations by social workers.

'Are you capable of satisfying your young wife, Mr

Campbell-Black?’ or ‘Would you be prepared to take on an older child, one perhaps that was coloured, abused or mentally and physically handicapped?’

To which Rupert had snapped back: ‘No – Taggie’s got enough problem children with me.’

‘You’re too old at forty-four, Mr Campbell-Black. By the time he or she is a teenager, you’ll be nearly sixty. I’m afraid if you want a baby, you and Mrs Campbell-Black will have to go abroad.’

Rupert gritted his teeth at the memory.

Looking at the two of them, Maria Immaculata felt that beneath his cool, Rupert was the far more apprehensive. Probably because his background, which involved a disastrous first marriage, a string of *affaires*, one illegitimate daughter – the English social workers had hinted there might be others – was much more likely to scupper the adoption. He had, however, been an excellent father to his two teenage children and appeared to have a very happy marriage to this beautiful wife.

And who would not, thought Maria Immaculata, admiring Taggie’s sweet face, now that the sun curiously peering through the bougainvillaea had added a glow to her blanched cheeks.

The hand not clutching Rupert’s was now rammed between her slender thighs to stop them shaking. It was also noticeable how she winced every time the crying of a baby in the orphanage could be heard over the wistful chant of women’s voices coming from the chapel.

Over herbal tea so disgusting Rupert suspected it had been made from Sister Mercedes’ beard shavings, it was agreed Taggie should spend the next three weeks helping in the orphanage to indicate her suitability as a mother. Rupert would drop her off and collect her in the evenings. There was no way Sister Mercedes was going to let him loose among her novices.

As a rule, couples were never shown their prospective baby at a first interview. But Maria Immaculata was so

charmed by Taggie trying so heroically to hide her longing, that she reached for the telephone and gabbled a few sentences. Sister Mercedes pursed her thick lips – it was all going too fast. Rupert, who'd picked up some Spanish on the international show-jumping circuit, went very still. What if they produced a hideous baby, Taggie had such high expectations.

'You may find you cannot love the baby we have chosen for you,' said Maria Immaculata as though reading his thoughts. 'But our babies are like gold to us, and we, in turn, may decide you are not the right parents to have one, but we thought—'

There was a knock on the door and a beautiful young nun in a snow-white habit, whose dark eyes widened in wonder as she saw Rupert, came in bearing a tiny bundle hidden in a lace shawl.

'This is Sister Angelica, who runs the nursery,' said Maria Immaculata.

I wouldn't mind taking that home, thought Rupert irrationally.

'We thought Mr and Mrs Campbell-Black might like a glimpse of baby Bianca,' went on Maria Immaculata.

This time the hibiscus really did go flying, as Taggie leapt up and stumbled forward, drawing back the shawl and gazing down in wonder at the little crumpled face.

'Oh look,' she whispered. 'Oh, may I hold her? Oh Rupert, oh look,' she gasped, taking the fragile body in her arms.

As if it were the Christchild itself, thought Sister Angelica.

Taggie gazed and gazed.

'Look at her tiny nose and her perfect ears, and her long fingers and she's got little fingernails already and eyelashes and her skin's like ivory. Oh Rupert, was anything ever so adorable?' Taggie's gruff voice broke, and her tears splashed down onto Bianca's face waking her, so the baby blinked and opened big shiny black eyes.

'Oh thank you, she's so beautiful,' sobbed Taggie.

It was as instinctive as one of his brood mares nuzzling and suckling a new-born foal. Suddenly Rupert didn't need that cocaine hit after all.

Seeing the look of pride and triumph on his face, Maria Immaculata mopped her eyes. Sister Angelica was openly crying as she dabbed *Joy* behind her ears. Only Sister Mercedes looked as though her big end had gone.

'There, I mustn't monopolize her, you must hold her,' Taggie turned to Rupert.

But Rupert was only happy because Taggie was overjoyed. To him, Bianca was just a blob. In fact the only baby he'd ever liked had been his daughter Tabitha.

Perhaps Bianca sensed this, because when she was handed over to him she went absolutely rigid, screamed, and even regurgitated milk over his blazer, until Sister Angelica, laughing, removed her.

Meanwhile a dazed Taggie was hugging Maria Immaculata. 'I know it's only the beginning and she's not remotely ours yet, but thank you,' she mumbled. Then, turning to a still, stony faced Sister Mercedes, she settled just for clasping her hand.

'You've all been so kind, oh may I hold her again?'

'Would you like to give Bianca her bottle?' asked Maria Immaculata, then, ignoring Sister Mercedes – to hell with the raffle – added: 'I think this calls for a glass of brandy all round. I do hope you'll be comfortable in the hotel Sister Mercedes has chosen for you. It is very convenient, only three kilometres from the convent.'

To Rupert, the Red Parrot was Sister Mercedes' revenge – a two-storey, cockroach-ridden version of the hair shirt. Having acceded to Rupert's demands for double beds and air-conditioning over the telephone, the landlord, Alberto, whose tight, grease-stained grey vest displayed tufts of stinking, black armpit hair, showed them into a room where the double bed wouldn't have accommodated two anorexic midgets. The air-conditioning consisted of wire netting over the window, an electric fan which distributed the dust and

the swarms of insects, and a gap along the top of the walls to let in the glare of the television sets in neighbouring rooms. Outside the rickety balcony was about to collapse beneath the weight of two parched lemon trees in terracotta tubs, and traffic roared both ways up and down what had been described as a 'quiet one-way street'. It was only when Taggie looked round for water to relieve the parched lemon trees, that they realized the nearest bathroom was twenty yards down the corridor.

Seeing that Rupert was about to blow his top, Taggie said soothingly that Alberto couldn't be that bad.

'Did you see those sweet little hamsters running round his office?'

Rupert hadn't got the heart to tell her they were on tonight's menu along with another Colombian delicacy: giant fried ants.

'The only consolation,' he said, crushing a second cockroach underfoot, 'is that the Press will never dream of looking for us here. Tomorrow we'll move somewhere else.'

'I don't think we can. Alberto just told me he's Sister Mercedes' brother.'

But they were so tired and relieved they fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms in one tiny bed.

The next morning, Taggie, shrugging off any jet lag, was back at the convent, blissfully happy to be looking after Bianca and helping Sister Angelica with the other orphans. Having dropped her off, Rupert returned to the Red Parrot and spent half the morning on the telephone checking up on all his horses, including his best one, Penscombe Pride, who had happily recovered from a nasty fall in the Rutminster Gold Cup.

Rupert also tried to cheer up his favourite jockey, Lysander Hawkley, who was suicidal because his old horse Arthur had collapsed and died within a whisker of winning the Gold Cup, and because the girl he loved,

Kitty Rannaldini, was showing no signs of leaving her fiendish husband.

'No Arthur and no Kitty, Rupert, I don't think I can stand it.'

Afterwards Rupert visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bogotá. As a former government minister, he wanted to see how many strings he could pull, and how much red tape he would have to cut through to enable them to take Bianca back to England.

He lunched with a polo friend, a sleek, charming playboy called Salvador Molinari, who offered him a cocaine deal.

'You know so many reech people, Rupert.'

The deal would have sorted out all Rupert's problems at Lloyds. Regretfully, he refused.

'I've got to behave myself, Sal, until we've got Bianca safely home.'

Later, in the Avenida Jiminex, Rupert bought some cheap emeralds from a dealer for Taggie, his daughters, Perdita and Tabitha, and Dizzy, his head groom. In Bogotá, beside the dark-haired, dark-eyed Colombians, Rupert was as flashily conspicuous as a kingfisher. Leaving the dealers, he was stopped by a policeman, pretending to be doing an official search, who then tried to make off with Rupert's Rolex and his wallet. Being still high from a cocaine hit at the dealers', Rupert knocked the policeman across the street, leaving him minus two front teeth, and went off and bought a gun and a money belt.

On the way to pick up Taggie, the taxi broke down. Having asked Rupert to give him a push, the driver proceeded to drive off with Rupert's briefcase, containing the emeralds and all the adoption papers and medical reports, stamped both in Petty France and by the Ministry in Bogotá.

As Rupert proceeded to shoot the taxi's tyres out with his new gun, two more policemen smoking joints on the pavement, totally ignored the incident. Retrieving his

briefcase, finding excellent use for all the Colombian swear words he'd learnt on the flight over, Rupert went off and hired a bullet-proof Mercedes, which made him half an hour late picking up Taggie, which in turn resulted in a sharp dressing-down from Sister Mercedes.

Taggie, she said, had been worried and Rupert had missed a chance to bath and feed Bianca. Rupert tried not to look relieved. As the old monster waddled off to fetch Taggie, he reflected that in a battle with his bullet-proof Mercedes, Sister Mercedes would win hands down.

Taggie reeled out in manic mood.

'Oh Rupert, she's so sweet, she's wearing one of the dresses we brought, and she drank all her bottles, and Sister Angelica said she cried much less today, and I'm sure she smiled at me, although it was probably wind. And Sister Mercedes was really friendly and sat next to me at lunch.'

'Mercedes Bent,' said Rupert.

After a surprisingly good dinner at the Red Parrot, of shell-fish stew and mango-and-guava ice cream, enhanced by a bottle of Chilean Riesling, they were just drinking to little Bianca, when Taggie turned green and lurched upstairs. Glued to the only lavatory on the landing, Niagara at both ends, she threw up and up and up into a bucket until she was only producing yellow froth and specks of blood. A local doctor, summoned by a demented Rupert, said it was only altitude sickness and prescribed rest.

In the morning, when Mother Immaculata popped in with a bunch of roses from the convent garden and a bottle of water flavoured with lemon-juice and sugar, she was happy to report back to the nuns that never had she seen a husband more devoted or worried than Rupert.

By the evening Taggie was delirious, raging with fever,

too ill to be moved as various doctors supplied by Salvador trooped in and out. Trusting none of them, Rupert was onto James Benson, his doctor in Gloucestershire.

'I don't give a fuck if it's three o'clock in the morning, I want you out here.'

'Give it another twenty-four hours, altitude sickness often takes this form.'

'You've given her the wrong jabs, you overpaid clown.'

Upstairs, he could hear Taggie screaming. 'I'll ring back.'

Red-hot poker were gouging out Taggie's brain, she was being bombed by massive cockroaches, the blades of the electric fan crept nearer and nearer like the Pit and the Pendulum. It was getting hotter by the minute, not a breath of wind moved the gum trees outside, the rains were expected any day.

In her more lucid moments, Taggie screamed for Bianca. 'Don't take her away, I hate you, I hate you.' She was pummelling at Rupert's chest.

Then at three in the morning, Colombian time, as he was changing her soaking nightgown, he thought he was hallucinating too, and that Taggie had turned into his first wife, Helen, whose slender body had been covered with freckles. Then he realized it was a rash, and was on to the hospital in a flash, yelling at them. Twenty minutes later, an old man arrived, yawning, with his suit over his pyjamas.

'Just shut up and leave me alone with your wife.'

He was out in five minutes. He had given Taggie a jab to sedate her and curb the itching. When the blisters developed she would need calamine.

'And you got me out of bed for this,' he glared at Rupert.

'What is it, for Christ's sake?'

'Virulitis.'

A little Spanish is a dangerous thing. Rupert went ashen.

'Smallpox,' he whispered. 'Oh God, don't let her die.'
'Chicken pox,' grunted the doctor.
'Are you sure?'
'Quite; pretty uncomfortable in older patients. Now keep her quiet and stop her scratching. Pity to spoil such a lovely face.'

Dizzy with relief, Rupert belted back to the bedroom, only to find Taggie sobbing her heart out.

'Angel, you're going to be OK.' Rupert took her burning body in his arms. 'But you mustn't scratch.'

'The doctor says I c-c-can't see Bianca for a fortnight or go near the convent in case I give the babies chicken pox. They'll think I'm not healthy enough to be a mother, they'll give her to someone else. Oh Rupert, I can't bear it.'

'I'll sit with her, I'll go every day, I promise.'

Despite Sister Mercedes' furious chuntering, Maria Immaculata was most understanding. Of course Rupert could take Taggie's place. His was the side of the marriage of which she was unsure. It would be good to study him at close range.

T W O



As Sister Mercedes grimly predicted, Rupert caused havoc among the nuns. Anyone would have thought a high-ranking archangel, if not the Messiah, had rolled up as they made endless excuses to pop into the orphanage to gaze in wonder at this edgy, sunlit stranger, whose cold eyes were bluer than Mary's robes, and whose hair brighter gold than any medieval fresco. He also appeared to be poring over endless medieval scrolls.

Soon pale lips were being reddened by geranium petals, habits bleached to new whiteness, eyelashes darkened by olive oil from the kitchen, and beards and moustaches disappearing for the first time in years. Even Maria Immaculata discreetly wafting *Joy*, insisted on giving Rupert religious instruction, while the parish priest, who was as gay as a Meadow Brown after summer rain, bicycled over to preach a fierce sermon on the vanity of vanities.

The medieval scrolls were, in fact, reports on Rupert's racehorses, his television company, and his various enterprises faxed out to the Red Parrot from England.

Other faxes read more like an illiterate serial in a woman's magazine as Lysander, Rupert's jockey, who

was even more dyslexic than Taggie, joyfully chronicled the escape of his great love, Kitty Rannaldini, from her fiendish husband's clutches.

Kitty had evidently made her getaway on The Prince of Darkness, Rannaldini's most valuable and vicious racehorse and managed to stay on his back until she reached Lysander's cottage. The horse had carried on into the village and trampled all over the vicar's crown imperials. Rannaldini, even more incensed than the vicar, had retreated to New York to take over the New World Symphony Orchestra, vowing vengeance.

'and the besst news,' wrote Lysander, 'is that kittys having my baby in the ortum so Biacna will hav sum ass to kik. Sorry yooov got to babysitt at least yoo can OD on snow or dope. botaga is sposed to hav the best grarse in the werld.'

Aware of Sister Mercedes' massive disapproving shadow blocking out his light, Rupert hastily scrumpled up the fax.

Despite being the object of every other nun's adulation, Rupert often wondered how he endured those long days at the convent. There were only Sister Angelica and two novices to look after twenty babies in the orphanage, which was part of the old chapel and had high windows out of which you couldn't see. The din was fearful and when the rains came, to the incessant crying of babies, was added a machine-gun rattle on the corrugated roof.

Rupert was also exhausted. Having come to the end of a punishing racing season, masterminded the entire trip to Bogotá and worried himself into a frazzle over Taggie's illness, he was woken all through the night by calls from Tokyo, Kentucky and the Middle East. Like Bogotá, the bloodstock market never slept.

But, although Rupert ran one of the most successful National Hunt yards in the country, he was coming to the depressing conclusion that if he were going to beat Lloyd's and the recession, keep the estate going and support all his children, including Bianca, he would

have to switch to the flat full time. Rupert had always been a hands-on boss, but, as he gazed at the sleeping baby, he thought how nice it would have been if he could have started handing over the running of the estate to his son, Marcus. But Marcus was a wimp, only interested in playing the piano.

Bianca was very sweet, Rupert decided, and far prettier than the other babies, but she slept most of the day, and Rupert had finished his faxes by ten o'clock. With plenty of time on his hands, he soon noticed a nearby cot where an older child, with a terrible squint and a dark magenta birthmark down the side of his brown face, sat slumped, gazing at the white-washed wall, the picture of desolation. But when Rupert stretched out a hand to smooth back the child's hopelessly matted hair, he cringed away in terror, whimpering like a kicked puppy.

'Poor little sod, what happened to him?'

'Beaten up and left for dead by his Indian parents,' said Sister Angelica angrily. 'They regard birthmark as sign of devil. We call him Xavier,' she went on, 'but it's him who needs saving. He show no desire to walk or talk, the doctor think he's seriously backwards.'

When Xavier was two, next month, he was destined for the state orphanage, which meant he'd almost certainly never be adopted.

'Even then he'll be lucky,' Sister Angelica added bitterly. 'All over Bogotá, you must have seen the posters, advertising funerals. Always the government have purges. In Chile, unwanted children are left to die in concrete bunker, here, they shoot any kid hanging round street, because it make the place untidy.'

Outside the convent, knee deep in mud, a little graveyard lurked like a crocodile. Rupert shivered and, noticing Sister Angelica had tears in her eyes, put an arm round her shoulder. Sister Angelica, who'd been plunging rose thorns into her flesh at night to curb her immoral thoughts about Rupert, jumped away, but not

before a glowering Sister Mercedes appeared in the doorway.

'You're wanted in the kitchen, Sister.'

Rupert was so bored, he started playing with Xavier, bringing him toys and sweets. At first Xavier shrank from him, but gradually interest sparked in the boy's hopelessly crossed eyes. The next thing was to improve Xav's appearance. He shouldn't be wearing girl's clothes. Rupert returned next day with a blue checked shirt and blue jeans to replace the flowing white nightgown. It was then he realized how pitifully thin Xav was. The trousers, which had to be rolled up at the ankle, were meant for a one year old.

It took two hours, four tantrums and two bars of chocolate to untangle and wash his hair. The screams were so terrible that Rupert had to remove him from the dormitory. The novices were in raptures over Xav's lustrous black curls. Sister Mercedes looked thunderous. She had spent her life in the prison of being ugly; what right had Rupert to raise Xavier's hopes of escape?

The days slid by, the rains continued. They'd have to build an ark soon. Taggie made heroic efforts not to scratch her spots which were crusting over and beginning to drop off. Every night she bombarded Rupert with questions about Bianca, poring over the polaroids he brought her, but beyond telling her Bianca had drunk all her bottles, put on a couple of ounces, cooed and slept, there was little of interest to report. Instead, he found himself talking about Xav who was still shoving him away one moment, clinging and tearful the next.

'I took him a teddy bear this morning, he totally ignored me and it all day. He still hasn't forgiven me for untangling his hair but when I went he yelled his head off.'

This had upset Rupert more than he cared to admit.

* * *

But the next morning when he arrived at the convent, Xav babbled with incomprehensible joy, frantically waving his little hands, trying to express himself.

'He's happy,' smiled Sister Angelica. 'He refused to be parted from the bear even in the bath.'

As Bianca was asleep, Rupert gathered up a purring Xavier and carried him across to the delapidated convent school where Sister Angelica, to the counterpoint of rain dripping into several buckets, was telling the children the legend of El Dorado, the Indian ruler, who had coated himself in gold dust before bathing. In homage, his subjects had tossed gold and precious stones, mostly emeralds, into the lake after him. Later the name El Dorado was given to an equally legendary region of fabulous riches.

Many of the Spanish Conquistadores, explained Sister Angelica, men who looked like Senor Campbell-Black, blushing slightly, she pointed at Rupert, had died from shipwreck and starvation when they sailed across the oceans in search of the riches of the lake. Many more Colombian Indians, she pointed to Xav, had been butchered in the process.

'The pursuit of gold,' she added gravely, as she shut the book, 'will never bring happiness. The only El Dorado is found in your hearts.'

Rupert, who'd always pursued gold relentlessly, and who had been wondering what Sister Angelica's legs were like beneath her white robes, raised a sceptical eyebrow.

Wandering out of the classroom, he passed a pile of wooden madonnas, roughly carved in the convent workshop, waiting to be sold in the market. Examining one he was startled to find it opening to reveal a hollowed inside. Jesus, what a country: even the nuns were smuggling coke. As no-one was looking, he slid the madonna into his inside pocket.

Having lunched yet again on rice and herbal tea, any minute he'd turn into a bouquet garni, Rupert realized

it had stopped raining. Salvador had invited him out to his house in the country to try out a couple of horses. Suddenly desire to escape from Bogotá poverty and squalor became too much for him. As Sister Mercedes was out, no doubt terrorizing the poor, Rupert persuaded Sister Angelica to let him take Xavier along too, strapping him into the child seat in the back of the Mercedes.

After the rain, every blade of grass and leaf of jungle tree glittered in the sunlight like distilled emeralds. Xav gazed in wonder at towering dark grey mountains, brimming rivers, rainbows arched like limbo-dancing Josephs. He was even more excited by the fat piebald cows and the sleek horses, knee deep in the lush, rolling savannah round Salvador's beautiful white colonial house.

Salvador, who was sleeker than a Brylcreemed otter, was seriously rich. A Monet, a Picasso and a Modigliani hung on the drawing-room walls. Suntanned girls in bikinis decorated the swimming-pool. Sweeps of orchids grew everywhere like bluebells.

'You like?' he asked Rupert proudly.

'Of course, it's beautiful.'

'You should come in on that cocaine deal.'

'I have to keep my nose clean rather than running,' said Rupert, unhitching Xav from the child seat. 'I've got a lot of dependants. Anyway, I can't cope with this country, everything's crooked, the police, the government, the customs men, even the nuns. How d'you live with it?'

Salvador shrugged. 'We have a popular song in Colombia, if you dance with the devil, you must know the right steps.'

He was appalled by Xav.

'You said you were adopting lovely little girl.'

'We are. Just brought Xav along for the ride.'

Salvador lifted Xav's chin, looking in distaste at the

crossed eyes and the purple birthmark lit up by the sun, and shook his head.

'How old is he?'

'Nearly two.'

'Better buy him a pair of crutches for his second birthday, then he can beg in the street. He hasn't a chance once the nuns kick him out. Pity someone didn't give him a karate chop at birth.'

After that Rupert decided not to buy any of Salvador's horses. But if he hadn't resolved to switch to the flat, he would have been sorely tempted by a dark chestnut mare. Leaving a trail of silver spray, he let her have her head across the drenched green savannah, forgetting everything in the dull thud of hooves and the feel of a fit, beautiful horse beneath him. He was away for so long Xav had worked himself into a frenzy.

'Little runt seems quite attached to you,' said Salvador in surprise. 'Probably the only good thing that'll ever happen to him.'

'Come on then.' Leaning down, Rupert lifted Xav up in front of him and set off again.

He expected terror as he broke into a canter and then a gallop, but was amazed to hear screams of delighted crowing laughter, and the faster he went, the more Xav laughed.

Red-Indian blood coming out, thought Rupert, reflecting bitterly and briefly once again on his son Marcus who was terrified of everything, particularly horses.

As they returned to the house for tea and rum punches, three Borzois swarmed out to meet them. Rupert missed his dogs terribly. He had been very upset to find a drowned puppy in the gutter outside the hotel that morning. He'd probably grown so attached to Xav, he told himself firmly, because he regarded him as a surrogate dog. And he was a brave little boy; when one of the girls in bikinis took him for a swim in the pool,

after an initial look of panic in Rupert's direction, he screamed with delight again.

'He's a sweet kid,' admitted Salvador, as Xavier tucked into one of Colombia's more disgusting delicacies, cheese dipped in hot chocolate. 'But he's still too bloody ugly.'

On the way home, Rupert was held up by horrific traffic jams, a solid blockade of lorries belching out fumes, a bus had overturned tipping glass over the road, and a van was being checked by the police. Xav, however, slept through the whole thing. With a pang Rupert noticed the beauty of his left profile now his black combed curls fell over his forehead and his birthmark was hidden.

As Rupert walked into the convent, he was confronted by a jibbering Sister Mercedes, who snatched Xav away like a female gorilla scooping up her baby. How dare Rupert kidnap one of the children? He had seriously jeopardized his chances of adopting Bianca. How dare he raise expectations, she shouted, as a terrified Xav screamed and sobbed as he was dragged away.

Rupert flipped, all thought of behaving well for Bianca's sake forgotten. Sister Mercedes' squawks, in fact, were purely academic. There was no real likelihood of Rupert and Taggie being turned down. All the official documents were now stamped and, in private chats with Maria Immaculata, Rupert had agreed to donate a large sum to repair the school. He had also had enough of Sister Mercedes.

'If you don't shut your trap, you disgusting old monster,' he yelled, producing the hollowed-out madonna from his inside pocket, 'I'll tell the Cardinal exactly what you've been up to, although he's probably in it as well.' And he stalked out, dislodging most of the flaking green paint from the front door as he slammed it behind him.

* * *

Back at the Red Parrot, surrounded by polaroids of Bianca, Taggie had not realized how late Rupert was. She had been wrestling with a letter to her stepson, Marcus, wishing him good luck in a recital (how on earth did one spell that?) he was giving at college next week. She also begged him to come down to Penscombe soon to *'hopfully meat yor nu sisster'*.

Taggie's desire to bear Rupert's child had been intensified because she knew how much he wanted a son to run the estate. This, in turn, would have taken the pressure off Marcus. Saying Rupert got on brilliantly with Marcus had been the only time, in fact, she had lied to the social workers. She was equally ashamed that the moment Rupert walked in she shoved her letter under a cushion and launched into a flood of chat to distract him.

'Dr Mendoza says I'm not infectious any more.' Taggie was about to suggest they popped back to the convent for half an hour when she noticed the bleak expression on Rupert's face, and stammered that she couldn't wait to see Bianca tomorrow morning.

Fortunately Rupert was distracted by the telephone. It was Declan O'Hara, Taggie's father and Rupert's partner at Venturer Television, ringing from Gloucestershire. With his usual courtesy Declan asked after Bianca, Taggie's chicken pox and then the hotel.

'Even fleas boycott this place,' snapped Rupert. 'Get on with it, Declan, what d'you really want?'

'As you're in Bogotá, could you nip over to Buenos Aires tomorrow?'

'It's about two thousand miles, some nip,' protested Rupert, taking a large glass of whisky from Taggie. 'Didn't they teach you any geography at school?'

'I want you to go and see Abigail Rosen.'

'Who's she?'

'About the greatest fiddler in the world, and the hottest property in classical music,' said Declan reverently. 'They call her L'Appassionata. I want to do a

two-hour special on her, but her agents, Shepherd Denston, who are even greater fiddlers than she is, won't answer my telephone calls. You're so gifted at doing deals.'

'Blarney wouldn't get you anywhere if I wasn't desperate to get out of this cesspit. And I don't know anything about music.'

'Bullshit your way through. I'll fax out Abby Rosen's c.v. There'll be tickets for you and Taggie at the box-office.'

Rupert promptly rang and squared the trip with Mother Maria, who, delighted that someone had taken on Sister Mercedes, was more than accommodating.

'It will do you good to have a break, enjoy yourselves. I would give the world to hear L'Appassionata.'

'At least we can get out of this dump for twenty-four hours,' said Rupert jubilantly. 'Your father wants us to chat up some female Nigel Kennedy. You'll love BA.'

Taggie was so desperate to catch another glimpse of Bianca, Rupert agreed they could pop in to the convent on the way to the airport. Stopping off at a toyshop, waiting for Taggie, Rupert glanced at a cutting which Lysander had just faxed out from *The Scorpion*. This claimed that Rupert was giving sanctuary to Lysander and Kitty Rannaldini, now that she'd left her husband, and weaved in an old quote from Rupert, that Kitty was well shot of 'an *arriviste* wop like Rannaldini'. Political correctness was never Rupert's forte.

Taggie by now had settled for a pink fluffy rabbit and a musical box.

'We better move it,' said Rupert, adding a red racing car for Xavier to the pile.

But one look at Bianca was too much for Taggie.

'Oh Rupert, d'you mind terribly if I don't come to BA?'

Rupert did mind – terribly, particularly when he thought of his battles with bureaucracy, and his heroic

devotion to duty while she had chicken pox. The off-white suit he was wearing was the only thing in his wardrobe that didn't reek of sick. It was also the first time in seven years of marriage that Taggie had admitted that she wanted to be with anyone else more than him. But he was not going to show it.

'Why should I mind?' he said icily. 'Best-looking women in the world live in BA. Thanks for the pink ticket.'

Not even caring that Sister Angelica was witnessing such a scene, not bothering to kiss a horrified mouthing Taggie, ignoring the anguished bellows of Xavier, Rupert stalked out of the convent, nearly dislodging the battered virgin from her niche as he banged the door.