

The Lovable Rogue

THE ROGUE GOES TO THE DOGS

BY
TUX TOLEDO



Part I

It is said that a dog is man's best friend. For some men that is undoubtedly true. For others money is their best friend. In some rare cases both dog and money are a man's best friend. Nick Arthur was one of those cases.

"Sporting dogs are the only real dogs", Nick said with the stern emphasis of a man who wants to be taken seriously. "None of those sissified house pets for me. No, a dog belongs in the outdoors at his master's side."

"Man's best friend," I smiled.

"It's more than that," Nick snapped. His gaze was as sharp as the crease in a good butler's pants. "I'm talking about field trials. Ever heard of them?"

"Field trials? No, not really."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"They're sporting events where a dog becomes more than man's best friend, he becomes his partner. Each relies on the other. It's teamwork, Mr. Churchill. To win, dog and man must each do their jobs. There's more to it than friendship. Loyalty. Respect. That's what it's all about."

Nick Arthur looked as if he knew what he was talking about. He was a tall man with perpetually tanned skin, a head that looked as if it had been carved out of stone, and enough muscles to satisfy an anatomy class. A real outdoorsman. He was also a mergers and acquisitions specialist and the owner a gorgeous Spanish style home in the Marina with fabulous views of the Golden Gate Bridge, the yacht harbor, and Alcatraz. I had heard that he also owned a beautiful home down the peninsula in Woodside. Horsey country.

You would think that a man with all of that wealth would be exceedingly happy, but he was far from blissful. And the party he was throwing wasn't cheering him up much.

"If you don't know about field trials then you must not be a sportsman," he continued.

I found his statement a trifle irritating. No one has ever questioned my sporting nature.

"Well, now, I certainly appreciate sport, and I like to think that there's a certain amount of sporting blood running through my veins," I said.

He looked at me the way a breeder looks at horses. It may have been my ascot, a fine, dark-blue silk foulard, that eventually won him over.

"Well, maybe," he said.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"I assume you are successful in these field trials." I said.

"Very." He then carefully looked around the room. "Until recently, that is." His tanned skin suddenly looked the way Chateauneuf du Pape would look if you poured water into it.

"Oh?" Now we were getting somewhere.

Nick looked down at his feet and became another person, molded instead of sculpted, glued instead of sewn, shaken instead of stirred. He was quiet for a moment. Quiet, but restless. Nick Arthur did not wear humility well.

"Harry Avalon says you're a man who can be trusted," he said.

"Loyalty. Respect. That's what it's all about," I answered.

"Come and see me this weekend," he snickered. He scribbled a Woodside address on the back of a business card and handed it to me. "You may be able to help."

* * *

I expected Nick's Woodside home to be American Western. You know, one of those sprawling ranch style homes with low ceilings and attached garages. Imagine my surprise when I found a replica of an English country estate! The main house was large enough to be the ancestral home of a Duke. It alternated between two and three stories, had four wings, six chimneys and enough character to write a play about. The barn, a U-shaped structure with a thatch roof that sat on stone walls like a hat, was a mansion in itself. Dark wood beams crisscrossed the surface of its white sides. A large arch in its



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

center shaded a road that led to a long row of stables. Very pastoral. My Rolls Royce was created to be seen parked in front of places like this.

I expected a neatly attired servant to greet my arrival but no such creature appeared. All was quiet except for the sound of a horse in the distance and some barking dogs even farther away.

"This way, James," I said, strolling toward the barn.

"Yes, sir."

We rambled down the road, under the arch toward the stables where we encountered the first signs of Homo sapiens: a stable boy, a young man, actually, grooming a horse. He stopped grooming when he saw us.

"What do you want?" he asked. He was a fit young man with a haircut that made the most of his peaked forehead. He wore braces over an open-collared white shirt. He could have had a career as a Ralph Lauren model had he not chosen horses.

"My name is Winston Churchill. I'm here to see Mr. Arthur."

"He's in the field." He nodded to his right and continued to groom the horse. Each stroke was smoothly applied. Here was a man who knew his way around horses.

James nodded his approval. We then followed the sound of the dogs. Beyond the stables were several dozen acres of tall grass and trees. We found Nick on horseback struggling with the leashes attached to two energetic English Pointers. The dogs sniffed the ground and tried to outrun their master. Nick saw us and turned his horse to the left. The dogs immediately mimicked



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

the turn. Nick rode to us and dismounted. The stable boy appeared and took the dogs.

"I'm glad you could make it, Mr. Churchill." He shook my hand and looked at James.

"This is my chauffeur, James," I said.

Nick's eyebrows raised like a drawbridge.

"Very good," he said.

"Nice place you have."

He shrugged. He did not want to talk about real estate, he wanted to talk about dogs.

"It's nice to have enough land to be able to get out and condition them myself," he said. "Al exercises them when I'm in the City, but no one cares for them like I do. Al, bring Concorde over here."

The stable boy brought one of the dogs to Nick.

"Named him after the SST," Nick said, scratching the dog's ears.

"Beautiful dog," I said.

"Yes, beautiful and talented. Just watch."

Nick remounted. Al undid the leash and Concorde ran several hundred yards ahead of the horse and sniffed at the breeze. Nick's horse trotted at a leisurely pace. Concorde, unencumbered by the leash, roamed the field. After a few minutes his motions became forceful. He ran forward then quickly came to a complete halt, his tail frozen and pointed skyward at a ninety-degree angle. Nick goaded his horse into a brisk canter toward Concorde. He dismounted



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

and went to where the dog pointed. A startled quail launched itself into the air. Nick pulled a pistol from his side and fired at the quail. The bird flew on.

"Blanks," James said.

I nodded and watched the bird fly away. Concorde remained perfectly still until Nick gave him a signal to move.

"Good," Nick said. "Very good." Concorde reveled in his master's praise.

"Very impressive," I said to Nick upon his return.

"What you have just seen is a field trial," he explained. "Man and dog working as a team. Did you see how straight Concorde's tail was? And he didn't flinch at the sound of the gun. Concorde is first rate, the best dog I've ever had."

"So why aren't you winning?" I asked. Might as well get the poignant questions out of the way.

His face darkened in the sunlight.

"Let's go to my office," he said.

I followed him into the barn. I was surprised to find a beautiful office oozing with wood paneling and leather-covered furniture. Pictures of dogs covered the walls. Nick sat down behind a huge dark wooden desk.

"Have a seat," he said. "Would you like a drink?" He leaned back and opened a small refrigerator.

"Wouldn't happen to have a Bass Ale, would you?"

"What about a Coors?" he countered.

"I'll pass."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

He pulled a beer from the fridge.

"See those ribbons?" he said, nodding toward a cluster of ribbons on the wall. "Concorde and I won all of those. Trouble is, we haven't won anything in four months."

"In a slump?"

"It's more than a slump. You saw Concorde perform out there. You saw how easily he found that quail."

"Yes."

"Well, in the last three field trials we've entered he hasn't found a thing."

"Maybe there weren't any quail to be found," I said.

"The last three field trials were single field events. That means each contestant uses the same field. Quail are planted in the field before each dog goes out. There were quail out there, Mr. Churchill."

"I see."

"The worst part is, he picks up a scent, goes to it, and points. When I get there, there's no bird. Nothing at all."

"Nothing?"

"No. Maybe it's because I haven't spent enough time with Concorde recently. I don't know. Even though I'm very busy with the Spectrum Pharmaceuticals acquisition I do manage to break away every weekend. Besides, Al has been doing a good job of conditioning him. I don't understand what's happening. It's not natural."

"You suspect foul play?"



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

Nick shook his head.

"It's hard for me to believe it could be," he said. "Field trial contestants are true sportsmen, Mr. Churchill. We're fierce competitors and all of us want to win, but we want to win fairly. Skill, fair play, that's what it's all about."

"What a wonderful world."

Nick stared at his beer can as if it were a photograph of a long, lost love.

"I was wondering if you could come along with me to the field trial this weekend," he said.

"I don't know anything about dogs," I shrugged.

"That's all right. Perhaps you'll notice something that I'm missing because I'm too involved to see it."

"I guess a day in the fresh air would do me good," I said.

"Excellent!" He quickly rose from his chair. "Now, Mr. Churchill, I've got to get back to my dogs."

He led me out of the barn and returned to his horse. He mounted and rode back out into the field.

"Spectrum Pharmaceuticals," I said to James as we started back to the Rolls. "I recall reading a few things about that company."

"Yes, sir. It is quite a messy takeover attempt."

"Really?"

"There have been many complications."

"Well then, I suspect this takeover is the cause of Nick's field trial failures. Diverted attention and all of that."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"Very likely, sir."

"He and Concorde will probably start winning again once he completes his acquisition of that drug company."

"Spectrum Pharmaceuticals is more than just a drug company," James said. "They also manufacture other chemical-based products including one that can be sprayed into one's car to make it smell new again. They even have a scent that supposedly duplicates the smell of leather."

"How ghastly!" I said. "Of course, no one will ever be able to duplicate the aroma of real Connally leather."

"Very unlikely, sir."

We returned to the Rolls and as James opened my door I noticed someone in the far corner of the field beyond the barn.

"Who's that?" I said to James.

It was an older man and when he noticed us he hurried off.

"Rather suspicious behavior," James said.

"Perhaps we should have a look."

"Very prudent, sir."

I slid into the Rolls. James started the engine and drove down the long lane toward the main road. As we came to the intersection a black Mercedes sedan sped by.

"Isn't that him?" I asked.

"I believe so," James replied.

"I think he's going too fast for us to catch him."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"It would be a strain on the Rolls, but I could do it," James said.

"Yes, I know you could."

* * *

The air was brisk when we arrived at Nick's Woodside estate early Saturday morning. A light fog created a damp shroud that would eventually dissolve into the coming sunrise. A Jennings Challenger transporter, a monstrous vehicle with room for six horses, a groom's area, and seats that could be turned into bunks, could be seen in the pale mist.

"Good morning!" Nick called. He walked toward us at a brisk pace. "We're about ready to go." He clasped his hands together. "This is what I really live for, Mr. Churchill. Oh, I like the excitement of making a deal, acquiring a company, but nothing compares to this. There's nothing like the companionship of a good dog. To tell you the truth, I prefer dogs to people."

"I suspected that," I said.

"They're loyal, caring, and a lot less trouble." He waited for my reaction. There was none. Sometimes you've just got to play it cool.

"You know," I said. "I'm rather looking forward to seeing one of these field trials."

"Good! Maybe you'll catch the bug, get a dog of your own."

I smiled.

"Then again," Nick scrutinized me. "You may not be the type."

I was rather put off by that last comment. Nick was still unconvinced of my sporting nature. I mean, really! I was wearing a pair of thick, tan corduroy



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

pants with a dark green Welsh wool sweater under a tweed sport coat made from material actually woven in the Hebrides. A Barbour thornproof cap and a pair of real Wellies completed my outfit. What could be sportier than that? I was beginning to ask myself why I should help someone who did not recognize my sporting nature.

"Perhaps not," I mumbled. "By the way, do you know anyone with a black Mercedes sedan?"

"I don't know. Maybe. It's a common car. Why?"

"There's been one scouting your estate," I said.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Probably a real estate agent. They're always trying to get me to sell this land. I usually run them off. I'm not interested in selling. This place is perfect for Concorde."

Nick led us into the Jennings Challenger. Al took the helm, started the engine and we were off.

"You don't mind if I catch up on some work, do you?" Nick asked. He pulled a stack of papers from a worn leather satchel.

"No, not at all. Are you still working on the Spectrum Pharmaceuticals deal?"

"Yes," he said with a trace of surprise. "Do you know much about it?"

"Only what I read in the papers," I said. "Rather messy isn't it?"



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"They're always messy. This one is no different than the others. In most cases you've got to replace bad management, and bad management never wants to leave. Spectrum's CEO is trying to save the company, but it's too late. I think I have accumulated enough shares to win the fight. Besides, I'm offering a much higher price for the stock than its market value. Still, it's been a tough fight. Spectrum's CEO is putting up a very bitter struggle because he doesn't have a golden parachute."

"Golden parachute?"

"Yes. Severance pay, you could call it. Most high-ranking executives have clauses in their contracts that give them outrageous sums of money if they lose their jobs when their company is taken over. Spectrum's CEO wanted the job so bad that he agreed to accept it without a golden parachute. And of course no one likes to be removed from a leadership position. Spectrum's CEO deserves to be replaced, though. The company is worth more broken up and sold than it is as an ongoing business. That's his fault. I'm going to sell off the entire company after I buy it."

"Leaving Spectrum's CEO unemployed."

"That's the law of the jungle, Mr. Churchill. We're talking about competency and value to the shareholders. It's been a very messy fight with lots of bad press. But in the end he'll lose. In my opinion, he'll get what he deserves."

"I suppose so."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"I just wish Concorde would get back to normal. That bothers me more than anything. I can't understand what's wrong with him, and I hate things I can't understand. I don't suppose you understand."

"I understand."

"It's funny," he said. "Sport is supposed to take my mind off work. Here I am working to take my mind off sport."

He said nothing more about the merger and spent the rest of the time talking about dogs.

"Did you know, Mr. Churchill, that the forebears of the modern hunting dog came to England from Spain?"

"No, I didn't."

"That's how the spaniel got its name. The spaniel's a good dog, but I prefer pointers. You see, spaniels are bred for a different purpose. When a pointer finds the game, he points at it, keeping it down until the hunter gets there. The spaniel flushes out the game. The spaniel, therefore, is a smaller dog, better able to penetrate thickets.

"You know, I've got a two hundred year old print of an English Pointer. I bought it in England. The dog in the print looks just like Concorde. These dogs haven't changed in centuries. The sport has stayed the same too. I guess that's part of its attraction. I spend all of my time changing things, acquiring and merging. The stability of this sport is a welcome diversion."

Nick lapsed into thought and didn't speak again until we had reached a privately owned wooded area near the Mendocino National Forest, far north of



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

San Francisco. Motor homes and horse trailers filled the parking area the way bees fill a hive.

"I didn't know the sport was so popular," I said.

"Yes, the competition's getting fiercer every year. But I don't mind it. Competition and comradery. That's what it's all about."

Al pulled the transporter into a vacant space then immediately opened his door, jumped out and attended to the horses. Nick went to Concorde.

"Why don't you have a look around, James," I said.

"Yes, sir."

We stepped out of the transporter and into the brisk air. Al had already removed the horses from the transporter and was leading them in a wide oval to loosen their muscles. Concorde raised his nose and stretched his legs. After many hours of confinement he was happy to be in the fresh country air. So was I. Nick attached a leash to the dog and they marched toward the registration table.

"What happens next?" I asked Al.

"We wait our turn."

Al did an excellent job of mounting saddles on the two horses.

"Been working with horses long?" I asked.

"Since I could walk. My father had stables." He did not look at me.

"It shows."

He nodded.

"How long have you worked for Nick?" I asked.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"I don't know," he shrugged. "Several months."

"What do you think is wrong with Concorde?"

Al looked at me the way an established pro looks at an upstart.

"There's nothing wrong with Concorde," he said.

"Then why isn't he finding quail?"

"There's nothing wrong with Concorde," he repeated. "Will you be riding?"

"What?"

"It's the best way to view the event. You follow along behind."

"No, I don't think I'll be riding."

He appeared to be relieved that a neophyte wouldn't be abusing one of the horses.

"It's your choice," he shrugged.

James had brought along some high-powered binoculars and I planned to watch the activities from the top of the transporter. I was adjusting the focus when Nick returned from the registration table.

"All set?" I asked.

He nodded and was unable to hide his nervousness.

"I'll watch from the top of the transporter," I said. "I'll get a better view of the entire surroundings from up there."

"I hope so. This isn't a single field event."

"What does that mean?"



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"It means that this entire area is open." He swept the horizon with his arm. "The birds aren't planted. They're out there somewhere in their natural habitat. We can go anywhere to find them. Spectators will follow on horseback."

"Yes, Al told me about that."

"But if you want to stay here, fine."

"I've got these," I held up the binoculars. "James will wander around."

"You know best," Nick said.

I climbed up to the top of the transporter. Nick handed me a folding chair.

"Want something to drink?" he asked.

"Thank you, but I have my own." I pulled a leather-covered flask from inside my tweed coat. It was filled with Aberlour A'bunadh single malt scotch. In case you don't know, Aberlour A'bunadh is a cask strength scotch whiskey – just like in the old days.

"Save some for me," Nick said. He mounted his horse and rode off with Concorde.

I settled into my chair, took a sip from my flask for fortification, and readied my binoculars. The event started and I must admit that it was interesting. Each contestant took off on horseback with his dog running several hundred yards ahead. If the dog found a quail he would suddenly turn into a statue, tail pointed skyward. It was as if you were looking at a stuffed animal. Exciting in a reserved, controlled sort of way.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

When Nick took to the field the same thing happened. There must have been fifty spectators, all on horseback, following him. Concorde ran with poise and confidence. Then he too froze. He had found a bird. Well, he should have found one. Nick dismounted to stir the quail but there was no quail to be stirred. The mounted spectators groaned. Concorde had failed again.

Nick was shattered. The judges, who had also followed on horseback, shook their heads. Nick remounted and started back. Concorde trotted triumphantly ahead of him. The poor dog didn't realize he had failed. I climbed down from the transporter and waited for Nick's return. James soon joined me.

"Sad, isn't it?" I said to him.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see anything suspicious?"

"I can't say for sure. I did find this in a clearing." He held out an aspirin-size bottle, empty except for several drops of clear liquid clinging to its sides.

"What does it mean?"

"Perhaps nothing. But it wasn't there the first time I had passed through the clearing." He put the bottle into his pocket.

"Has anyone seen Al?" Nick asked, bringing his horse to a halt behind the transporter.

"No," I said.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

James shook his head. Then Al rode up and quickly dismounted. His horse had been ridden hard. He must have been following along with the spectators.

"Bad luck," he said to Nick.

Nick glared at him.

"Luck had nothing to do with it!" he yelled at Al. Then he looked at me. "Well, did you see anything unusual?"

"No. I didn't notice any difference between you and the other contestants."

"The other contestants found birds," Nick growled and turned away.

James helped Al remove the saddles from the horses.

"Don't give up yet," I said to Nick.

"I won't. I'm not a quitter." He stormed off and we didn't see him again until it was time to leave.

The drive home was quiet and tedious. Al parked the transporter in front of the barn and took the horses to the stables. Nick walked quietly into his house without saying goodbye.

"Sir," James said. He was in the groom's area of the transporter.

"What is it, James?"

"I think you should see this." He reached under one of the saddles and pulled out a pistol.

"What is it?"

"It's a pellet gun, sir."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"A pellet gun? I wonder what that's doing here?"

"Perhaps to scare off varmint."

"Perhaps."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

Part II



I remained convinced that the Spectrum Pharmaceuticals deal was behind Nick's field trial failures. With that in mind, I decided to learn more about it. Spectrum Pharmaceuticals, that is. That meant dinner with Harry Avalon.

We dined at the Pacific Union Club, Harry's favorite spot. It was the only place left in San Francisco that allowed him to cling to a past that had passed many years ago. A historic-looking servant seated us at "Harry's table" and we got down to business.

"There are two main players," Harry said over a steak the size of Rhode Island. "Nick Arthur and Lester Mospeete. Nick's attempting a hostile takeover. He's been acquiring shares and he's making an offer for more. If he gets his way he'll dismantle Spectrum and no doubt make a handsome profit.

"Lester is Spectrum's CEO. He, of course, wants to save the company and his job. He's cultivating this white knight image, good guy company man saving jobs and what not. He's made several impassioned pleas to the shareholders not to sell to Nick. It's been a standoff so far, with Lester claiming he's saving jobs and Nick claiming mismanagement."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"What about this Nick Arthur?" I asked.

Harry shrugged.

"He's aggressive and successful," he said.

There was something Harry wasn't telling me.

"And?" I asked.

"Well, this is only a rumor, mind you, but some people question the way he has accumulated his Spectrum stock."

"What do you mean?"

Harry shrugged again.

"They claim he has committed certain improprieties," he said.

"What do you think?"

"Me? Spectrum is a very desirable company. I wouldn't mind having it myself. It's been a bit mismanaged, but I think with a little help it could be a real winner."

"Then you wouldn't break it up?"

"You know I don't believe in that." Harry clipped the end off of a Davidoff Aniversario #1 and expertly lit it. He sat back and let the smoke create temporary, puffy castles over the table.

"You didn't answer my other question. What about Nick Arthur? Do you think he improperly acquired his shares?"

"My sources of information are good. I'd say he probably did. But I can't prove it. It's not really unusual to have a few skeletons in the closet in this



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

kind of business. But it would take some very good investigating to find any evidence of wrongdoing."

"I see," I said. "You know, Nick doesn't seem to be that type."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he's a dog fanatic. Animal lovers are typically good people. He also seems to be a real sportsman with a strong sense of fair play."

"You've been around long enough, Winston, to know better than to believe outward appearances. There's a difference between animal lovers and fanatics. Nick Arthur is a vicious competitor. He'd do anything to get what he wants."

"I just wanted to hear you say it, Harry," I smiled. It figures that someone who doubts my sporting nature would be involved in such behavior.

"So now what happens with Spectrum?" I asked.

"Maybe Lester and Nick will knock themselves out and allow a third party to sneak in and take the company."

"Yes, that would make a good story. Do you think it's possible?"

"Not probable. One of them will falter. They're playing a tenuous game. The first one to get his reputation damaged will lose."

"And if they both get their reputations damaged?"

"I wouldn't mind making an offer for Spectrum myself," Harry smiled. He had that wistful look.

I grinned, more of a smirk, actually.

"Thanks, Harry," I said.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"I say, Winston, you aren't involved in this mess, are you?"

"You know me, Harry."

* * *

A week passed before I heard again from Nick.

"Have you reached any conclusions?" he asked.

I hadn't a clue.

"Well, I'm down in Woodside. How'd you like to come with me to another field trial this weekend?"

"Actually, I rather enjoyed the first one," I said. "Fresh air, beautiful country, sporting atmosphere. Yes, I'd like to."

"Would you?" he said.

"Yes, but I want to be there from start to finish, from the time you prepare the transporter to the time you return to Woodside."

"It's a deal."

I always become nervous whenever a successful businessman tells me we have a deal, but this time I figured it was all right.

"I'll see you Saturday morning," I said.

Under the circumstances I decided the proper thing to do would be to stay in Nick's Marina house. James carted me off to the place and I made myself at home. I sat down with a Bass Ale and watched the boats navigate the bay. It wasn't long before James entered the room.

"Any luck with your bottle?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. It came from Spectrum Pharmaceuticals."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"What!" James always finds a way to get my attention. He took a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to me.

"The lab report, sir," he said.

I read it and gave him my best penetrating Bogart stare.

"I think it's time to visit Lester Mospeete," I said.

"I believe that would be in order, sir."

James found Lester's address and we drove to a cozy five bedroom bungalow in Pacific Heights. A black Mercedes sedan occupied the driveway. James parked the Rolls next to the curb in front of the house.

"Interesting," I said, nodding toward the car.

"It could simply be a coincidence," James said. "They are quite common."

"Yes, they are."

We navigated a moss-covered winding brick walkway to Lester's house. He opened the door when we rang.

"Hello," I said. "I'm Winston Churchill."

"I haven't got time for jokes," Lester said. He began to close the door on us but James stopped it with his foot. Good chauffeur, that James.

"Do you have time to talk about Nick Arthur?" I asked.

Lester recoiled slightly like he had been kicked in the shoulder by a .410 gauge shotgun.

"Nick Arthur?" he said.

"Yes. And Spectrum Pharmaceuticals."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"Are you a reporter?"

"Of course not. Do reporters have chauffeurs?"

He looked at James and then at the Rolls. "Come in," he said. He silently led us into his home. It was a dark house with dark paneling, dark curtains, and dark furniture. It felt damp even though it wasn't. Lester led us into his study and plopped himself into a stuffed chair. His wiry eyebrows drooped heavily over his eyes. Tufts of thinning hair nearly obscured a once prominent widow's peak. His suit was off-the-shelf and was as droopy as his eyebrows.

I sat down in a chair next to a massive desk. James stood by the door. His desk was littered with fading photographs of people and horses.

"Now, why do you want to talk about Spectrum Pharmaceuticals? Are you a shareholder?"

"No, but I have proof that Nick Arthur illegally obtained his shares of Spectrum."

"What?" Lester tried to conceal his shock but he couldn't.

"You didn't know he had acquired them illegally?" I asked.

"Well, one hears many rumors." He hadn't known. No wonder he was on the verge of losing his company. "Do you want a drink?" he asked. His eyelids no longer drooped. But his suit still did.

"No, thanks."

"I think I'll have one," he said. He took a bottle from a bookcase that contained more bottles than books and poured some Black Label into a fine



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

crystal glass. His hands shook and the bottle tinkled against the glass. He had the kind of look on his face that someone gets when their horse is about to come in first.

"What are you going to do with this proof?" he asked.

"Use it to stop Nick Arthur's takeover."

"How?"

"Not how, but when."

"Then when?" he asked.

"This weekend."

"This weekend?"

"Yes, at Nick's hunting dog event."

"Why there?"

"Because that's where the final piece of the puzzle is."

Lester looked at me with the kind of suspicion that all businessmen have. Maybe it's skepticism, not suspicion. Anyway, he was concerned.

"Where do you fit into all of this? You said you aren't a shareholder. Are you a lawyer?"

"You could say I'm a concerned citizen. I want to see Spectrum Pharmaceuticals continue as a going concern. I do not want to see people lose their jobs if it's broken up and sold off. I also want to see justice done."

"I'm not buying that silly story for a second. But if you can prove that Nick Arthur illegally obtained his shares of Spectrum Pharmaceuticals I don't care what your interests are."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"Good. I will meet you there this weekend. I'll have my chauffeur take you."

"I can drive."

"It's all right, I have a Rolls Royce."

"Oh."

"I don't want you arriving prematurely and spoiling everything," I explained. "The timing of your arrival is critically important."

"I see."

He didn't but the prospect of defeating Nick Arthur was overriding.

"A bit of fresh air will do me good," he said.

"That's what I always say."

* * *

Saturday morning dawned without fog. A crystal blue sky and a promising sun painted the bay. It was cool and wouldn't get much warmer until later on.

"Do you have everything, James?"

"Yes, sir," he said, displaying an envelope and a bottle identical to the one he had found at the last field trial.

"Then to the hunt, James."

"Yes, sir."

Forty minutes later James turned the Rolls down the lane toward Nick's estate. He parked next to the transporter, glided out from behind the steering



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

wheel and opened my door. I emerged from the Rolls and walked toward the house. James then left to pick up Lester.

"Hello, Winston!" Nick said. We were now on a first name basis.

"Good morning, Nick."

His face was puffy with enthusiasm.

"Where's James?" he asked.

"Running some errands. He'll drive to the event later by himself."

"I hope he gets there on time. I have a feeling Concorde is going to win today."

"I share that feeling," I said.

He smiled and led me into the Jennings Challenger. The drive to the field trial site, this time south, near Paso Robles, was electric. Nick was excited; Concorde was alert and bold.

"It's going to be a single field event today," Nick said. "All dogs will use the same field. They'll plant quail before each dog goes out."

I nodded and tried to doze but Nick kept babbling on about dogs. Concorde was immune to the chatter and slept peacefully. When he rose, stretched, and barked I knew we had finally reached the site. Al parked the transporter and began his usual tasks. James had already arrived. He knows all of the shortcuts.

"Ah, James!" Nick said. "I'm glad you could make it."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're going to see the real Concorde today."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Well, I'm going to register," Nick said. "I'll be back soon." He led Concorde toward a long line of men and dogs.

"How was the drive, James?" I asked.

"Very good, sir."

"And the package?"

"Safely tucked away."

"Good. Now let's see how many quail we can flush out."

* * *

Contestants and spectators loitered about the parking area and got in each other's way. Sporting gossip and meteorological commentary filled the air.

"There's good competition today," Nick said. "But none are better than Concorde."

We watched several contestants perform but none of them impressed Nick. He pointed out little faults in each dog.

"Tail wasn't straight enough. And did you see him flinch when the gun was fired?" he said.

"I suppose one must know what to look for," I said.

"I'm glad you're not a judge," he joked. I think he was joking. It was obvious to me that he still hadn't seen my true sporting nature. He was about to.

"So am I," I said. "I couldn't stand sitting on a horse all day."



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"It's our turn next," Nick said, petting Concorde. The dog rippled with energy and had the confident look of a first-rate hunting dog.

"Where's Al?" Nick asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't seen him."

"Never mind," Nick said. He mounted his horse. "See you in the winner's circle."

He rode to the starting area. Concorde trotted several paces ahead. When they hit the field Concorde bolted across the tall grass. Nick followed in full gallop. Concorde was on to a scent. He sprinted toward a clump of tall weeds then froze with his nose pointed toward the ground and his tail at a perfect ninety-degree angle. Nick rode to his dog and dismounted. Although he was quite some distance away, I could see his grin. He took out his pistol and fired a blank into the air. Concorde remained totally still as a quail flew off. Nick gave Concorde the signal to move and the audience greeted them with applause. A perfect performance.

Nick petted Concorde and started back. Then a disturbance broke out behind the spectators. All of the other dogs left their masters and ran in the same direction as if they were all on to a scent.

"Hey, what's going on?" someone asked. He jumped onto his horse and took off after the dogs. Everyone else mounted and followed. Concorde joined the chase. James pulled up in the Rolls. He left the driver's seat and opened the rear door in one fluid motion.

"The game is afoot," I said, climbing into the back seat.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

James closed the door and slid behind the wheel.

"Tally ho, James!"

We followed the horses for several hundred yards to where the dogs had come to a halt. We found Nick and pushed our way through the crowd.

"What's happening?" Nick asked.

"Look," I said.

Lester Mospeete stood quietly, surrounded by dozens of hunting dogs, all of them pointing at him with their tails straight in the air.

"They think they found a quail," I said.

"That's no quail, that's Lester Mospeete," Nick said. "What are you doing here?" he asked Lester.

"I've come to witness your defeat," Lester said.

"But I won."

Al suddenly pushed through the crowd.

"Dad!" he called.

"Dad?" Nick stared at me.

"Yes," I said. "Al is Lester's son."

"Is that true?" Nick asked Lester.

"Yes, it's true," Lester said. "Now get these dogs away from me."

Nick turned to me.

"Not only is he Lester's son," I said. "He is also the person responsible for Concorde's recent failures."

"What?"



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"On orders from his father."

"You double-crosser," Lester growled at me.

"What do you mean, Winston?" Nick asked.

"They've been using an imitation quail scent to trick Concorde."

James produced a bottle.

"Lester had it made at Spectrum Pharmaceuticals. He gave Al a bottle before every event. Every time you and Concorde went out in search of quail he would shoot a pellet of this stuff into the field. Concorde picked up the scent but of course there were no quail. The scent wore off after several minutes so the next dog out wasn't affected.

"James switched bottles today. Al shot water into the field and James discreetly put the imitation quail scent on Mr. Mospeete."

Nick's face turned crimson. He started toward Lester.

"You son of a..." I held him back. "What a disreputable thing to have done."

"Oh yeah?" Lester yelled. "You want to talk about disreputable behavior? What about your illegal acquisition of Spectrum Pharmaceuticals stock?" He waved an envelope in front of Nick.

Nick recoiled. It was time to go. A dozen reporters had arrived and they converged upon the two businessmen like hunting dogs following a scent.

"Thanks for the tip," one of them said to me as he hurried by.

"That goes for me, too," another said. "What do you think will happen to Spectrum Pharmaceuticals now?" he asked me.



"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."

"I don't know," I said. "It's a dog eat dog world. Home, James."