

The Lovable Rogue

THE ROGUE'S GAMBIT

BY
TUX TOLEDO



"Pull!"

The clay pigeon sailed across the sky like a shooting star. Ted Nance followed its trajectory with his 12-gauge and pulled the trigger when the target reached its apogee. His shot splattered the little black and orange disk into hundreds of pieces.

"Good shot!" his wife, Nancy, said. She loaded her gun and tested its balance before bringing it to her shoulder.

"Pull!" she yelled.

Another clay pigeon flew across the sky. She tracked it with the barrel of her gun then fired. Her substantial body silently absorbed the shotgun's recoil. Her figure may not have been perfect but her shot was. The clay pigeon returned to earth in pieces.



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

"Good shot, Nance," Ted said.

She grinned, lowered her gun and turned to me. "Your turn, Winston."

I hadn't done any shooting in quite a while and even though my Barbour Penine shooting jacket had padded shoulders I knew I would be sore in the morning. But that was no cause for complaint. It was good to be out in the country under a sparkling sky breathing invigoratingly crisp air. Saving Bernie from his "mob girl" and uncovering an art scam had proved to be a bit tiring and this day of shooting was doing me good.

"Pull!" I said.

James launched the target from a small shack to our right. The clay bird sailed across the sky in front of me. I followed its path with my barrel, leading it slightly, then squeezed the trigger. The shotgun kicked me in the shoulder like a backfiring Ford, but my shot hit the target dead center.

"Good shooting, Winston," Ted said.

"Thanks."

"Have you been practicing?" Nancy asked.

"No."

"Come, now, Winston," Ted said as he readied his gun. "James must be giving you lessons."

"Nothing of the sort," I said. "It was a lucky shot."

Nancy gave me that skeptical look that schoolteachers give schoolboys with poor excuses. James then took six more clay birds from a straw-lined wooden box and reloaded the launcher.



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

"What do you think of these clay pigeons?" Ted asked. "I got them from Mexico. Their balance is superb."

I took one of the clay pigeons from the box and examined it. It was nicely molded with "Made in Mexico" stamped into the clay along the edge.

"Yes, very good birds," I said. True skeet shooters are as picky about their clay pigeons as fanatical golfers are about their golf balls.

"I'm importing a shipment of them to use in the sporting clays tournament my hunting club is sponsoring next week," he said.

Now I supposed I should explain a few things. First, sporting clays. Sporting clays is a game, invented by the British of course, that combines skeet shooting and hunting. But instead of hunting real game, clay birds are used. Contestants move from station to station along a woodland course like golfers moving from hole to hole. The clay birds are launched and made to duplicate the movement of various game such as pheasant, quail, and rabbit. One point is given for each target hit. It's not as easy as it sounds.

And now Ted Nance. Ted owned a small, but successful, import/export business in San Francisco. He shipped mainly to and from Latin America. He also owned the beautiful piece of land we were shooting on: fifty acres nestled against the mountains separating the Napa and Sonoma valleys. He was an avid sportsman and adequate businessman. He wasn't perfect but he was a good man.

"You will be a member of my team, won't you?" he asked.

"Of course," I said. "Who else is on it?"

"Nance, of course, and a fellow named Richard Rigger. He's a banker."



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Nancy's face momentarily clouded over even though the sky was clear. That should have given me my first clue but I was enjoying the shooting too much to notice.

"Richard Rigger?" I said. "I don't know him."

"He's throwing a party next Saturday. You can meet him there. You're free next Saturday, aren't you?"

"Come on, Ted, it's your turn to shoot," Nancy growled.

"Pull!" Ted yelled.

Another clay pigeon crossed the sky. Ted raised his gun to his shoulder, aimed, shot, and hit the target just before it hit the ground. He turned toward us with a giant grin on his face.

"See if you can top that shot, Nance," he said to his wife.

"I've had enough shooting for today," she replied.

"Oh." Ted's giant grin dissolved into giant disappointment. "If that's the way you feel", he shrugged. You could always tell when Ted was disappointed. It was the way his eyebrows appeared to melt and drip into his eyes.

"You can stay here and shoot for as long as you like," Nancy said. "I'm going back to the house. Coming, Winston?" It was more of a command than a question.

"Sure," I said.

"You don't mind if James stays with me, do you Winston?" Ted asked. "I would like to get in a bit more practice."

"Have at it," I said.

"We'll have coffee waiting for you," Nancy said.



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

* * *

"Winston, something's wrong," Nancy said as we approached the house.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ted hasn't been himself. Something's troubling him. A wife can always tell. I don't know for sure, but I think it has something to do with this Rigger fellow. My intuition tells me he's getting Ted into trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry I can't be more specific, but Ted definitely hasn't been himself since he started doing business with Rigger."

I looked at Nancy.

"These days he's always nervous," she continued. "And he seems shifty. We both know that's not Ted. I just know this Rigger fellow is behind it all. Now there's a shifty one for you. I just don't trust him."

"Ted thinks highly enough of him to have invited him to be a member of his sporting clays team." I said. "There must be some trust there."

"There's something fishy about that, too" Nancy said. "I don't think it was all Ted's idea."

"You think Rigger muscled his way in?"

Nancy shrugged. "I suggested James. He's the logical choice. But no, Ted picked Rigger."

"Well, you know how businessmen like to stick together."

"There's more to it than that. I know there is."

"Would you like me to pursue it?" I asked.



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Nancy stopped and touched my arm. "Would you, Winston?" she said.
"It would make me feel so much better."

"Sure."

"Be discreet, though, would you? Don't let Ted know I suspect anything."

"You know me," I said. "I am always the epitome of discretion.

"And always the perfect gentleman," she said.

* * *

Ted and James returned after the sun had turned the sky purple. Ted led me into his living room where an entire wall was covered by shelves holding knick-knacks from around the world. I examined a few pieces while Ted pulled some cigars out of a wooden box.

"I've got something for you," he said. "Cubans, of course."

"Of, course." I stuffed them into my pocket.

"Don't see why you want them, though. You don't smoke."

"Gifts," I said, thinking of the Penguin.

Ted nodded.

"Oh, and wait until you see this." He went to a handsome walnut gun case, unlocked it, removed one of the shotguns and carefully carried it to me.

"Nice," I said.

"It's an AAHE-grade Parker. I paid \$38,000 for it."

I raised my eyebrows.

"Yes," Ted continued. "It was a real bargain. I've see them go for as much as 45k."



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It was a beautiful shotgun all right. Not too much engraving but meticulously crafted. It oozed precision.

"Oh, he's showing you **that**," Nancy said, bringing in four steaming mugs of coffee. "Give me a gun I can take out in the wilds and shoot with. All that one is good for is sitting in the case."

"Don't you use it?" I asked.

"No, it's a work of art," Ted said. "No true collector or lover of shotguns would ever take one of these out into the wilds. The risk of scratching it or damaging it is too great." He returned the gun to the case.

"It's a waste if you ask me," Nancy said. "Give me a gun I can shoot."

I smiled. Ted locked the gun case and joined us on the sofa.

"Now, Ted," Nancy said. "Tell us what kind of trouble Rigger's gotten you into."

So much for discretion. So much for not letting Ted know she was suspicious.

"What?" Ted said. He fumbled for a Cuban.

"There's something fishy going on, Ted. And don't deny it. A wife can always tell. I've asked Winston to look into it."

"Fishy?" Ted asked. He looked like a golden retriever who had failed to retrieve.

"Yes," Nancy said. "Now tell us about it."

"There's nothing to tell," Ted said, lighting his cigar. It took him three tries before it finally caught. He inhaled, filled his lungs with pungent smoke, then exhaled, clouding the air around us.



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"Nonsense," Nancy scoffed. Her eyes shot at him like the barrels of a Purdey side-by-side.

"Oh, Nance," Ted grumbled. "It's a business matter, nothing important. And it has nothing to do with you."

Nancy continued to stare at him with her loaded eyes. Ted turned to me for support.

"Really, Winston, it's nothing," he said.

"Come on, Ted, tell us," Nancy growled. She was going to get her way, it was only a matter of time. Ted could stall and fight it all the way, but the outcome was predetermined. He did the sensible thing and saved us all a nasty scene.

"All right, all right." He ground his cigar into the ashtray, extinguishing it slowly so Nancy would fume. He leaned over and rested his elbows on his thighs and cupped his chin in his hands.

"I'm being blackmailed," he said.

That was a showstopper. Nancy looked as if she had discovered a slug crawling out of her coffee. I, of course, remained cool. A dignified demeanor should be maintained at all times when wearing Barbour hunting apparel.

"But you could hardly call it blackmail," Ted continued. "Sometimes Richard makes me bring things in from South America. I get them into the country for him without paying duty or customs."

"That's risky," I said. "Why do you do it?"



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"Well, as you know, not everything I ship is strictly legal. Nothing harmful, mind you. I want to go on record for that. I'm very careful about what I import and export. Cuban cigars, things like that."

Nancy nodded.

"I never send dangerous contraband out. No weapons, nothing like that."

"Come on, Ted, get on with it," Nancy said. She had collected herself and taken on the role of chief inquisitor.

"All right, Nance, all right. Richard knows about my illegal imports and he knows that I haven't paid taxes on the income from them. He could get me into a lot of trouble with the IRS."

"Is he threatening to tell them?" I asked.

"Not exactly. But he has dropped hints."

"How did you get involved with Rigger?" I asked.

"I had to find a banker to finance my new ship, the *Azul Pacific*. My other bankers wouldn't touch it. They said I was already too leveraged. Conservative fools. Anyway, Richard specializes in Latin America so he was a natural choice. I didn't have to explain my business to him or justify my plans."

"How did he find out about your illegal imports?" I asked.

Ted shook his head. "I offered him a Cuban cigar, of course."

"Of course. So, what are these things he makes you bring into the country?"

"Oh, nothing serious. Cheap clay pots, things like that. Really, it's nothing serious."



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"Ha!" Nancy said. "I knew Rigger was trouble. Why did you invite him to be part of our sporting clays team?"

"He kind of invited himself," Ted shrugged. "I didn't know he was interested in shooting until he asked to be on the team."

"You should have invited James," Nancy said.

As you will see, she was right.

* * *

Daylight dissolved into the bay like dark ink. The Rolls cut silently through the Saturday evening traffic and James brought it to a dignified halt in front of Richard Rigger's house. It was a modest six bedroom affair in Cow Hollow. Pretty ritzy place by anyone's standards. James opened my door and we stepped into Rigger's party.

Cow Hollow parties aren't much different from Nob Hill parties. A bit more nouveau riche, perhaps, and therefore a bit more pretentious. The Claude Montana set instead of the Yves St. Laurent crowd. I threw caution to the wind and wore Italian: a nice solid gray Canali suit with a striped shirt and striped tie. I know, stripes on stripes isn't advisable but the shirt and tie colors were so complimentary that the look was perfect. Trust me.

I followed James into Rigger's library. It was a high-ceilinged room containing more people than books. We mingled and waited for Ted to find us.

"Careless storage," I said, pulling a cigar from a leather pencil holder conspicuously placed on a Louis-the-something antique desk. I sniffed the cigar and gave it to James.

"Cuban," he said after sniffing it.



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I nodded. I was about to place one in my vest pocket when Ted found us and introduced us to our host and future shooting partner.

"Winston, I'd like you to meet Richard Rigger," he said.

Rigger was a barrel of a man with a cigar stuck in his face. Three strands of hair stretched across the top of his head. Not sporting material if you ask me. Yes, looks can be deceiving, but, I mean, a man who wears a sport coat and pants of contrasting shades of dark blue? Really! Nothing good can come of a man like that.

"Winston is the other member of our sporting clays team," Ted said to Rigger.

"Yes, I've heard of you," Rigger said. "Any friend of Ted's is a friend of mine."

"Glad to hear it," I said.

"Yes, meeting Ted was a mutually fortuitous event," Rigger continued.

"I understand you financed the purchase of Ted's newest ship?" I asked.

"Yes, that's how we met. We both have business interests south of the border, so it was a natural partnership." His flabby hand patted Ted on the shoulder.

"You have banking business in Latin America?" I asked.

"Yes. I have clients there, wealthy clients, of course, who invest their money through me. I can offer them much better investment opportunities here than they can find at home. Those countries are so unenlightened when it comes to finance. I help my clients find more productive outlets for their assets."



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"I see," I said.

"And of course they're grateful for my services and reward me appropriately. That allows me to indulge in my hobbies."

"Like shooting?" I asked.

"Yes, like shooting." He closed one eye and aimed an imaginary gun at an imaginary target.

"Bang," he said. Then he laughed.

"He's no shooter," James whispered to me.

And James was right. A real skeet shooter keeps both eyes open. If you don't believe me ask Holland & Holland's shooting school outside of London.

"Speaking of shooting, when are those clay pigeons arriving?" he asked Ted.

"Early Saturday morning," Ted said. "The day of the tournament."

"That's cutting it close," Rigger said. "I'd better pick them up."

"There's no need for that, Richard," Ted said. "Don't go out of your way. If you pick them up you'll also have to deliver them to the shooting club. I'm sure it would be an inconvenience. You'd have to get up very early."

"That's no problem," Rigger said. "Those are special clay pigeons. I want to make sure nothing happens to them."

"I see your point," Ted said. "But my men can handle it."

"Will you be there personally?" Rigger asked.

"No, but..."

"We can't take chances, can we?" Rigger said.

"No, I suppose not," Ted agreed.



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"I don't think the clay pigeons will fly away on their own," I joked.

Rigger stared at me in a way that almost made me believe they would.

"Those are valuable clay pigeons," he said sternly. "I don't want to see anything happen to them."

"Yes," Ted said, rising to Rigger's self importance. "That would be bad. The shooting club is counting on those birds."

"Then it's all settled," Rigger said. "I'll pick them up and deliver them to the club. They are coming in on the *Azul Pacific*, aren't they?"

"Yes," Ted said.

"Good. What time does the ship arrive?"

"Five-thirty."

"I'll be waiting for it," Rigger said. "We can't take any chances with those birds."

"If you insist," Ted said.

"I do," Rigger smiled. "It was nice meeting you, Winston," he said, shaking my hand. He then melted back into his party.

"He's awfully worried about those clay pigeons, isn't he?" I asked Ted.

"Yes," Ted said. "But they are good birds."

"But they aren't gold, are they?"

He looked at me the way a French waiter looks at an American diner. "Of course not," he said.

* * *

"James, we still have a few contacts in Latin America, don't we?"

"Yes, sir."



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"We may need them. I suggest you do some investigating and learn more about this Rigger chap and his Latin American business interests."

"Very prudent, sir."

* * *

It was a typical Tuesday in San Francisco's Marina District. A sea wind marched down Cervantes Street and swirled through the gates protecting the affluent yards facing the harbor. I was firmly lost in my thoughts when Nancy unexpectedly arrived.

"Hello, Winston," she said.

"Nancy," I said. "What a surprise!"

"I hope I'm not interrupting."

"No, not at all. What can I get you to drink?"

"Coffee?" she asked.

I nodded and James left to brew some.

"Winston, I'm here to try to set some things straight," she said. "I don't want you to get the wrong impression about Ted. You know him. He's really not a bad man. He's just so intense about his business. And when his bankers wouldn't finance his new ship, well, it's easy to see how he could fall into Rigger's clutches, isn't it?"

"Certainly," I said.

James delivered the coffee and poured two cups. Nancy held her cup in her palms as if it was a hand warmer.

"And what he's doing doesn't really seem all that bad," she continued.

"So Rigger makes him smuggle cheap pottery. Is that such a crime?"



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"I suppose not."

She sipped her coffee and stared at the floor.

"But there's something else, isn't there?" I said.

Nancy raised her eyes. "How perceptive of you," she said. She put down her coffee and reached into her bag. "What do you make of this, Winston?"

It was a stone bird about six inches tall with turquoise eyes and roughly carved wings. It looked fragile and indestructible at the same time.

James studied the small piece of sculpture and then handed it to me.

"South American?" I asked.

"Peruvian to be exact," James said.

"It looks old."

"It's Moche, sir. From between the first and eighth century A.D."

"Is it authentic?" I asked.

"Very," he said.

I looked at the bird more closely.

"James," I said. "Isn't it illegal to export Peruvian antiquities?"

"Yes, sir."

Nancy blushed.

"Then I wonder how this one found its way to California?" I asked.

"There are always ways, sir. Sometimes they are shipped from Peru to Bolivia where they are coated in clay and stamped 'Made in Bolivia'. They are then shipped to North America or Europe as cheap Bolivian pottery. Upon arrival the clay coating is removed and..."



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"*Voilà*', a genuine Peruvian antiquity ready for someone's private collection. Very clever."

"Yes, sir."

"Nancy, where did you get this?" I asked.

"Ted got it from Rigger. I suspected something wasn't right about it but I wanted to be sure. Rigger's up to something, Winston. I don't know what it is, but it can't be any good. Whatever it is, we've got to stop him before Ted gets in too deep."

This little stone bird was actually quite a stool pigeon. I quickly glanced at James. Clay pigeons swirled in his eyes.

"I say, James, you don't think..."

"Yes, sir, I do."

"What, Winston?" Nancy asked. "What?"

* * *

The sporting clays tournament site resembled a small circus. Food, clothing, and gun vendors had set up shop under small, khaki tents in a clearing next to the parking area. A larger tent had been erected to accommodate the couple of hundred spectators who would all be staying for the post-tournament dinner. Have you ever noticed how there always seems to be more watchers than doers? No, you probably haven't. Well, it's true, especially where sporting clays are concerned.

Anyway, James parked the Rolls in a secure spot and began preparing my shooting gear. He opened the boot and removed my Wellingtons, Barbour shooting waistcoat (it was a bit too warm for a full jacket), the shotgun - a



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beautiful Baretta over-and-under borrowed from Ted - and several boxes of ammunition.

"I'll ready the gun, sir," James said.

I nodded.

"Winston!" It was Ted in a pair of sporting knickers that would have looked quite spiffy on a man thirty pounds lighter.

"Good morning, Ted."

"It may not be a such good morning," he said in one of those overly serious voices.

"What's wrong?"

"Richard just arrived. He was delayed by a traffic accident on his way to the ship, and when he finally got to it the clay pigeons were missing!"

"Relax," I said.

"Relax? I promised the club I would supply the birds for this tournament! They'll have to call the whole thing off without them!"

"They already have the clay pigeons," I said.

"What?"

"I took the liberty of having James pick them up. He was in the area. I knew you wouldn't mind. He brought them straight to your shooting club. And lucky for us he did, with Rigger having had that accident."

"Oh," Ted said.

"Sorry I forgot to tell you."

"That's okay. The clay pigeons are here, that's the important thing."

I smiled.



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"Here comes Mr. Rigger, sir," James said.

You can always tell when a man is nervous even if he's a hundred yards away. I think it has something to do with the lopsided way his head sits on his neck.

"Ted, have you found those clay pigeons yet?" His voice sounded like that of a golden retriever's.

"It's all right, Richard," Ted said. "Winston had his chauffeur pick them up. They're here. There's nothing to worry about."

Do you recall what it's like flipping on a light switch and having the 100-watter suddenly pop with a momentary flash of incandescent light before plunging the room back into darkness? If you do then you know how Rigger looked. He swallowed with such deliberateness that I thought his entire face would be drawn down his gullet. It wasn't.

"I told you I would pick them up," he said. His vocal cords stretched like rubber bands.

"Sorry, old sport," I said. "But James was in the area."

"It's okay, Richard," Ted beamed. "The pigeons have been delivered and the tournament will go on!"

Ted patted Rigger on the back and nearly knocked him over.

* * *

The first shooting station was set up for rabbit and pheasant. The targets were launched in pairs, those simulating pheasant crossing high and fast, those simulating rabbit bounding along the ground so realistically that you could almost see furry tails. Rigger carefully watched each contestant's



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shot, following the flight of each clay pigeon as it sailed through the trees or along the grass. He watched where the pieces landed when they were hit and even where the unhit targets went.

"Looking for something special, Richard?" I asked.

"What?"

"You seem awfully interested in those clay pigeons."

"Oh, ah, I'm, ah, studying the trajectories."

"I see," I said.

I figured Rigger would use this trajectory information to improve his shooting. I figured wrong.

Ted shot first for our team and hit just two of the targets.

"They're just like real pheasants," he grumbled.

Rigger shot next. The uncertain manner in which he held his gun did not inspire confidence. And, as you probably guessed, he wasn't properly dressed. He looked more like a clam digger than a shooter. Rather an embarrassment, actually.

"Pull," he crackled.

Two clay pigeons sailed toward the trees. He watched the first one intently but forgot to shoot at it. The second was nearly out of range by the time he finally pulled the trigger. When the smoke had cleared he had missed all ten shots. So much for studying trajectories.

"Bad luck," Ted said to him, bestowing a conciliatory pat on the back.

"Bad shooting," Nancy muttered to me.



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Nancy salvaged the round for us by hitting half of her shots. I'll admit that my six-for-ten didn't hurt either. We left the first station a bit rattled but still resolved to giving it the old college try. Rigger looked back as if he were trying to figure out what had gone wrong.

The second station was in front of a pond. The clay pigeons were launched at the waterline level of the pond in order to accurately simulate mallards ducks. Very authentic. It was going to be one of the more difficult stations.

Again Rigger watched each bird as it was launched. I was sure it would be only a matter of time before he figured it out, and when it was his turn to shoot he did show improvement. He remembered to shoot at the first clay pigeon. He didn't hit it, but he did shoot at it. He did, in fact, shoot at all of them. He didn't hit any of them, but at least he shot at them.

"You need to relax, Richard," Ted said to him.

"He needs to learn how to shoot," Nancy whispered to me.

"Yes," I said to Rigger. "You seem too obsessed with those clay pigeons, too concerned about trajectories and all that."

"Just aim and shoot," Nancy growled.

The third station simulated springing teal. The clay pigeons were launched across another pond. Unfortunately, by this time Rigger was completely demoralized. He cringed every time a clay pigeon splashed into the water.

"Take it easy, Richard," I said. "They're only clay pigeons, they're not gold."



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He stared at me and swallowed hard. Beads of sweat rolled down his forehead.

"He's a bundle of nerves," Nancy whispered.

"He certainly seems distracted," I said.

"He's going to cost us the tournament," she added.

"Relax, Nance," Ted said to her. "It's early yet."

We pointed Rigger toward the next shooting station, gave him a helpful little push, and watched him ready his gun.

"Pull," he said.

A clay pigeon flew across the sky, then another quickly behind it. Rigger fired two shots into the air and watched the unhit disks hit the water. One of them skipped several times before submerging.

And so it went. Rigger kept watching the pigeons as other contestants shot, but it didn't do him any good. Out of one-hundred attempts he hit only five and it appeared to me that those had been hit by accident. A bit of a burden on the team.

"I told you you should have invited James," Nancy growled at Ted.

He ignored her and turned to Rigger. "Are you feeling okay, Richard?" he asked. "You don't look well."

"Yes, cheer up, old man," I said. "After all, we didn't lose a fortune, only the shooting tournament."

He looked at me strangely. "Fortune?" he said. "What do you know about fortunes?" He turned and left in a huff.



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"Well, I never," Nancy said. "His poor shooting costs us the tournament then he acts like some *prima donna*."

"He's had a bad day," Ted said.

"You don't know how bad," I added.

Nancy looked at me funny.

* * *

The post-tournament dinner was excellent. Real game birds, not clay ones, were served in a light butter sauce with plenty of Napa Valley's finest grape juice to go around. Tasty. All in all, a first class meal. Too bad Rigger didn't have an appetite. He picked at his meal with disinterest. Something was eating him. He finally pushed his plate away and left the table.

"Where's Richard going?" Ted asked. "I hope he doesn't wander too far away and miss the awards ceremony."

"Why?" Nancy asked. "Are they going to give him an award for the worst shooter?"

"Nance, that's not a nice thing to say," Ted said.

Nancy tossed her napkin on the table and rose. Then someone struck up the band and diners suddenly became dancers. We were all separated from each other in the ensuing mayhem. I eventually found Ted extricating himself from a human sandwich.

"Where's Nance?" Ted asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Someone said they saw her going back out on the shooting course."

"What's she doing there?" Ted asked.



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"She is following Mr. Rigger, sir," James said, appearing next to Ted.

"What? Why is she doing that? And what's Richard doing?"

"He is looking for something, sir."

"What on earth for?" Ted asked.

"A pot of gold," I said.

Ted looked at me funny.

* * *

James knew a shortcut and we intercepted Nancy near the dove shooting station.

"Nance, what are you doing here?" Ted whispered.

"Rigger's up to something," she said. "I aim to find out what it is."

"I think you're about to find out," I said.

James led us into a clearing where we found Rigger rummaging through the foliage and breaking apart undamaged clay pigeons. James' flashlight shed some light on the scene.

"Looking for something?" I said.

Rigger jumped like a startled quail. "What?" he said "Who are you?"

"It's me, Churchill," I said.

"Churchill? Churchill! I should have known. It's all your fault, you know. I was supposed to pick up those clay pigeons. But you had to interfere, didn't you? You ruined everything. Now they're gone, those precious, valuable, irreplaceable..."

"You mean the Peruvian antiquities?"

He stared at me, surprised at first, then confused, then angry.



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

"You mean you knew the antiquities were in the clay pigeons?" he screamed. "And you let them be shot to pieces? Oh, how could you? You're inhuman!" Rigger fell to his knees.

"Don't worry," I said. "I took the liberty of substituting ordinary clay pigeons for those that contained the antiquities. You didn't really think I'd let those priceless artifacts be destroyed, did you?"

"What?" he looked up at me. "Then where are they?"

"On their way back to where they belong. And now you're going to where you belong."

"You can't send me to jail. I have friends in high places. You can't prove anything."

"Jail? I'm not sending you to jail. I'm sending you to the Peace Corps."

"Peace Corps?"

"Well, something like the Peace Corps," I said.

Two men silently emerged from the shadows and stood next to Rigger.

"It's time for you to repay your debt to society," I said. "These men will escort you."

They lifted Rigger to his feet and led him away.

"Addios," James said.

"Addios, *amigo*," one of the men replied.

"Winston, what's going on?" Ted asked. The poor boy was a bit confused.

"Those clay pigeons you imported from Mexico contained stolen Peruvian antiquities that Rigger was smuggling into the country. His Latin American clients molded some very old and very valuable gold and turquoise necklaces



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into the clay pigeons. They fit perfectly. Rigger planned to intercept the pigeons when they arrived on the *Azul Pacific* and substitute ordinary ones in their place. James, of course, beat him to it."

"So throughout the tournament Rigger thought we were shooting at the antiquities-laden clay pigeons," Nancy said.

"Correct," I said.

"No wonder he shot so poorly," she said. "He thought he was seeing a fortune disintegrate with every shot. I told you Rigger was trouble," she said to Ted, slapping his arm.

"Where are these Peruvian things now?" Ted asked.

"On their way back to Peru on the *Azul Pacific*." I said.

"That can't be," Ted said. "The *Azul Pacific* isn't leaving port until next week."

"Ah, yes," I said. "There's been a slight change. Smuggling antiquities back into Peru is almost as difficult as smuggling them out. Naturally, the people I arranged to undertake this task require compensation. The *Azul Pacific* is that compensation."

"What?" Ted asked. "You gave away my ship?" His face looked like a blank billboard.

"Small price to pay, don't you think, after all the trouble it nearly got you into."

"But..." Ted's voice tailed off. Nancy's stare reminded him that he was in no position to argue.



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"I knew Rigger was up to something," Nancy said. "My visit to you confirmed it. I just couldn't figure out what it was. Tell me, Winston, how did you know?"

"A little bird told me," I said. I looked at her and she smiled. "Home, James."