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WOLFGANG

a novel in 5 volumes

by Will Lorimer

VOLUME I



BEWARE OF THE DOG

Za-Za was seated at her typing station, holding a small antique hand mirror up to her right eye, when Wolfgang flounced into the sparsely furnished Victorian conservatory and slammed the pantry door behind him.

Stealing a glance in her direction, he gathered his tartan dressing gown more securely about his flanks and slipped into a highbacked Indian cane chair, strategically positioned to avoid drips from a cracked pane above. With a sigh, he stretched out, propped his paws up on the pine sill, and silently regarded his embroidered Arabian leather slippers, the only pair he

had left after his wife had donated the rest to a charity shop in the nearby town. They'd been snapped up by a collector, he'd later heard.

Formerly the pride of his collection, the slippers looked ridiculous to him now, with their fluffy red pom-poms. He couldn't imagine why he had them specially made, far less paid the exorbitant price of the oily Oriental who had measured his paws, down on his hands and knees on a worn old rug, in the slipper souk of a dusty bazaar somewhere in the Middle East. That was on one of his trips with Brünhilda. Istanbul? Or maybe Marrakesh – though that was to the south. Africa? Never mind. The great advantage of travelling with the Duchess was that, having a pigeon brain, she never got lost. Any shit going on passed her by, and trouble missed altogether, like she was protected by an invisible sheath. But the downside was, of course, he always drew the fire.

Aristocrats, can't put up with 'em, best without, he thought. *Accept it, she's gone, gone, into an abyss of her own choosing.* As surely as if she had been sucked into the plug hole of the cast-iron monstrosity with the lion's feet in the west turret bathroom, next to their bedroom in the eves, leaving only perfumed suds and a slick of Allure N^o.5 in the bath which was thoroughly impregnated with her expensive scents already.

Changing his perspective, he looked, via the vagaries of Victorian glass, towards a faint line of treetops blotted by low cloud, behind the blur of the siege wall. Veiled by drifting rain, it seemed far off but was a bare 150 yards distant. Appropriately, the wall, which was high but not unscalable, had proper abutments in keeping with the castellated buildings of the diminished estate, and had been built to specifications laid down by Harold of that ilk, the 13th Laird of Castle Haggard, her great-great grandpapa, who had to

sell off 500 acres of good arable land and two hill farms to pay for it. Designed to impress distinguished visitors to the castle's famous maze, its principal purpose, however, was to keep the revolting peasantry out of the large vegetable garden during the hungry years of the 30's, when Castle Haggard was defended by local militia. But then the garden and its tricky maze designed to trap intruders came under sustained attack, and the old laird was forced to order a tactical retreat.

The historic episode was recounted in the Haggard Year Book of '33. In Volume III of that year, he'd found a sepia photograph taken after the siege was lifted, showing trenches crossing the garden and its famous forking paths heaped with soil. Faded articles in newspapers of the day praised the defenders, and an editorial in the Kingdom Times cited it as an example of the not-insignificant part such minor actions played in turning the tide of the Great Civil War.

In one photograph, estate workers toasted the Laird as he stood up on the steps to the great hall, holding the blunderbuss with which, it was reported, he had shot one of the assailants in the leg. The celebrations however had been short-lived. All too soon, the spoils of victory arrived. Credit dried up, government war bonds became worthless. Banks closed their doors against angry depositors. Money stopped circulating, the economy crashed, factories closed, bankruptcies soared. Dole queues disappeared down manholes around street corners. In the countryside, the great estates of the gentry fell into disrepair. Some unfortunate aristocrats even had to sell land – The 13th Laird being no exception, and Haggard Hill was lost in the 'Great Estate Sell-off', as the Snaresburgh Dispatch reported at the time.

Long decline followed, the vegetable garden and its famous maze was lost to weeds. Then Brünhilda was born, her late arrival seen by locals as something of a minor miracle, because her mother was 52, and it was known the Laird and Lady of the castle rarely talked, and their bedrooms were in the east and west wings, respectively. Though not exactly an idyllic situation for a young child, at least she had Nanny to look after her in the big house, and there was lots to explore. Her bestest hiding place was the rusty clock room under the eaves of the Castle Tower, where she would sweep the boards clear of beetles' droppings, spread out sacking, lie down and stare up at the patch of sky exposed in a gap in the slates of the Clock Tower roof. Her favourite dreams were of spinning wool, weaving tapestries on a loom in that room, of entertaining friends she hadn't met yet who would admire the bright colours of her tapestries, and of having mad parties in the great hall, after she inherited the castle.

But when Brünhilda turned 13, her father, in despair at the quarry blasting away the granite crag of the original castle on Haggard Hill, and the predations of death watch beetles in the tower, left the ancestors' portraits to rot in the great hall, boarded up the big house and rented a bungalow from a former tenant on the facing hill, having leased the castle and stables to a pig farmer, much to the displeasure of his daughter and only heir.

Ten years later, the old laird died of apoplexy. It was widely supposed the attack was brought on because he hated living in the bungalow. However, there were doubts. Some thought it was to do with the 10-year lease of the pig farmer being up, and the prospect of having to move back into the big house. Others, perhaps more perceptive, thought it was the laird's shock at reading in the Dispatch that plans for the great Snaresburgh bypass had been

shelved and Castle Haggard would not now be demolished. Further weight was added to their speculations, because that day's edition of the Snaresburgh Dispatch had been found beside his cold dead body, lying open on the front page under the headline, *CASTLE HAGGARD SAVED*. But whether relief or disappointment, that surely was the final blow.

But no one spoke about that at the glorious June wedding, when the sun shone on bride and groom, and there was a great party after, with a band who later became famous with several No.1 hits. Hash cakes got mixed in with the hors d'oeuvres and served to one and all. It was all very democratic. Distinguished guests, among the common crowd of friends and former estate workers, never suspected. It was great fun, everyone agreed.

The newly married couple had only been in the big house a week when Wolfgang blew up the granite pig sties in the great hall, starting his renovations with a bang. To celebrate they popped bottles of bubbly and got rather tipsy with the quarry man, who had provided the TNT sticks, detonators and expertise for twenty quid on the QT. A price, he declared with a wink, which would have been downright insulting if blowing up the castle hadn't been his dream since hearing about the siege from his grandfather, who limped from buck-shot he took in the leg from the old laird's blunderbuss.

Inspired by the progress Wolfgang was soon making with hired men press-ganged from the pubs in nearby Snaresburgh, Brünhilda's merry band of women helpers, aided by the ever-willing but hapless Cockroach, soon set to in the vegetable garden. The Sisters of the Soil, as the feminist collective called themselves, toiled long hours to restore the garden to its 19th century salad days. Beds were raised according to modern methods, but on Brünhilda's insistence castle traditions were maintained. All agreed the box

hedges lining the maze of pink gravel paths looked much the same, when compared to old photographs in the Haggard Year book of 1899. The photos had been taken by a Count Kinsky from Bohemia who had stayed at the castle with his wife, Countess Constanze, a Georgian Princess. Later, she'd privately published a monogram published about their tour of the great gardens of the Kingdom. Special mention was made of their promenade in Castle Haggards's famous garden of forking paths. A sepia photograph showed the distinguished couple surveying the regimented legumes, divisions of carrots, onions and artichokes – Jerusalem and globe – the neat net fruit cages, the paved areas with alpine flora under glass, the cress beds in the corner of the garden where a little stream entered by a culvert under the siege wall.

However, once again, the vegetable garden and its famous maze of forking paths had fallen into ruination. The organic beds which over three summers the weekend lesbians had sifted, riddled, and dug with such care, not to mention increasing the fertility of the soil by sprinkling their menses, sadly were now overgrown with a riot of brassicas and Jerusalem artichokes, bamboo cane thickets, clumps of shooting spinach. Here and there, great heads of poisonous hogweed hovered above swaying stands of pampas grass, which had gone to seed since Brünhilda had left.

Though testament to her green fingers, and perhaps the power of lesbian menses too, still it was disturbing how much the plants had grown since, given it was barely two months, he considered, spying a blackened brassica like a monstrous Olmec head lurking under some jungle fronds. No doubt it was one of Brünhilda's exhibition cabbages, which had turned rotten

in her absence. With its black eye patch of mould and split skin grin, it resembled more a giant skull than a blotched and decaying white Dutch cabbage.

A goddamn skull! he realised with a stab of paranoia, *Skull was Dutch, wasn't he?*



‘And what is the matter with a singularly dishevelled laird this late morning?’ Za-Za demanded, laying her mirror down on a fresh ream of paper by the old fashioned Imperitor typewriter, once owned by a countess, swivelling her chair to get a better view on his averted face.

‘Bloody weather, I hate it!’ Wolfgang replied, brushing back a shaggy lick of thick black hair that had fallen across his unshaven cheek. He’d first noticed it was shot with stray silver strands three days after Brünhilda split from the castle in his pre-war Lamborghini of the long running boards –

disappearing in a haze of blue exhaust smoke, because she could never work the clutch of HIS CAR, leaving him her rusting vintage Riley. It was also inherited from her beloved papa, which, like the old Laird, spluttered a lot and regularly broke down.

‘Come-on, spit it out! I’m not starting work with you in this foul mood.’

‘The book, the castle.’ He twisted round, actually *looked* at the gorgon for the first time that day – he had to, so better sooner than later. ‘I hate it all, and that’s not to mention my absconding wife.’

‘And what’s brought this on?’

‘After everything we’ve been through, you ask me that?’

Tossing back her tawny mane, she exposed an ivory, surprisingly muscled throat – the muscles no doubt from all the blowjobs she gave Skull, he thought darkly. Then Za-Za rolled a laugh over Verushka pin-up shoulders, and what Wolfgang considered to be perfect Popocatepetl nipples peeked up through the uncertain mists of a discoloured T-shirt two sizes too big for her, a shirt that said ‘Wannabe a Rock Legend’, in cluster fucks of faded blue stars over an apocalypse wasteland, LA or somewhere, zombies of the hood at dusk.

‘I know just because of last night ...’ She blinked at him.

‘As if I cared about your lover...’ *Bitch*, he thought, wondering if she’d gotten the T-shirt from Skull. Looked to be about his brute size. *Fuck him*.

‘Former lover...’

Wolfgang shook his head, stood up and, edging past her wingback swivel chair, gave it and its occupant a twirl.

Then he laughed. 'Sure didn't look that way when I found you both in a clinch at the back of the bar.' Happier now, he loped across the conservatory's red stone tiles toward the stove in the corner. Reaching the log basket, he stooped, looked round, and half-snarled, 'Anyway, I thought you hated Skull. What was that about?'

'I have to keep him sweet,' Za-Za said, staring up at thickening clouds through cracked panes, continuing to swivel idly back and forth in the chair, her arms dangling over the wingback. 'He can be very dangerous you know ...'

'I don't doubt that.' Wolfgang cast a handful of chaff on the embers, fed in twigs, puffed up flames, put on two logs, closed the rusty iron door of the old pot belly stove with a clang. He padded back to her chair. 'How don't you ever get cold?' he asked, looking down at her.

'It doesn't bother me. See?' Staring back up, she pinched her chubby cheek. 'This kitty has a thermal layer of subcutaneous fat all over. It's unique to Inuit cat genes, skin that doesn't wear out. I'll never get wrinkles.'

'Even kitty Inuits from the good ol' USA get wrinkles in their forties. It's a proven fact,' he said, affecting what he imagined was a Kentucky drawl.

'I won't live that long.'

'Scary.' Wolfgang turned his Indian cane chair around to face her, sat down, and folded his hands in his lap.

'Crash and burn, that's me, baby.'

'What about Skull?' he asked.

'Nemo me impune laessit, that's him.'

'What's that mean?'

‘*No one insults me with impunity.* Boy, that Skull holds a grudge like no other.’

‘Oh great. Just what I need with his background in the Special Forces.’ Wolfgang frowned, crossed his arms, gathered his dressing gown more tightly about his flanks. ‘Or so you say.’ He arched a quizzical eyebrow. ‘You did tell him you’re only my secretary?’

‘Yes, but he doesn’t believe me.’

‘Show him your employment contract then. It’s a legal document. That should convince him, surely?’

‘I did, and he tore it into little pieces. He was particularly angry about the porridge.’

‘What? That contract had to be drawn up at short notice. Jaws doesn’t come cheap you know, for all I keep him on a retainer.’

‘Your wife must be very rich to be bankrolling all this.’ Za-za said, raised a broad hand (which would have looked outsize on a transvestite brickie) towards the dripping black stones of the castle’s clock tower, which loomed over the conservatory.

‘Unfortunately that well dried up some time ago.’ He shook his head. ‘She’s got her own lawyers now. Smiggle, Pagan and Thorpe. Fortunately Jaws went to school with Simon *goofy* Armitage.’ Wolfgang made a Bugs Bunny face, wagged his ears. ‘One of the partners. Jaws is hopeful they can work something out under the desk, so to speak.’

‘The old school tie brigade huh?’ Za-Za’s startling blue eyes twinkled like brilliant sapphires, set in Fabergé eggs formed of Siberian snow. In the icy distance across the tundra, a wolf howled.

‘Yes, and a bloody good thing too as far as I’m concerned.’ Wolfgang grinned hugely, thinking, *Great cheekbones too. Just what I need for a secretary since SHE packed up and left. And the excuse of an early fall of snow, arriving on an anticyclone from Norway, to harness up the old Muscovite sleigh, gathering dust half a century or more in the stables, and then get out Great-great Grandmama’s sable from the box in the No.2 store, from that count she met before the revolution... snuggle up and see what occurs*

‘So how come you and Brünhilda ever got together?’ She asked, harshly, divining his last thought, arching an eyebrow over the tortoiseshell-backed mirror with the castle crest inlaid in silver, which she’d filched from Brünhilda’s dressing room, earlier. ‘You’re not exactly in the same league, are you?’

‘No.’ he shook his head, wondering where he had seen the mirror before. ‘Much as he would have loved to board me out, my Oxbridge educated ex-army officer *father* would never have countenanced shelling out for school fees as his father did. Instead, I was sent to a failing state comprehensive where I was ridiculed for my wolf legs.’ He let out a sigh, reflexively stroking woolly flanks wrapped in the tartan of his clan, the McNemos – a broad check, brown and yellow squares, on a green background, crossed by thin red bands – which Brünhilda had woven on her loom, now abandoned in her weaving studio in the clock room of the east tower.

‘Yes,’ he went on, ‘Made to wear excruciating special shoes to shape my paws into *proper* feet. Reduced to the remedial class when my step-mother insisted, in another of her good deeds’ – an ironical chuckle – ‘presenting the school with a wire mesh cage to keep me in, even though I had

only been defending myself.' Wolfgang paused, realizing he had been panting. 'Where was I?'

'Brünhilda,' Za-Za said, dryly.

'Oh yes, the Duchess.' Wolfgang winced. Pretending, he probed a finger at a tooth, covering the slip. 'You know how it is with aristos.' He shrugged as if that explained everything.

'You forget I was born in a gulag in the old Soviet Union and brought up in the decadent USA. I find the class system in this mouldering Kingdom completely baffling.'

'Blue-blooded aristos such as my beloved wife, with their eccentricities of breeding and bifurcating lineages are born peculiar. Different from plebeians as, say, anthracite is from common coal. Conditioned from birth by wet nurses, nannies, and the parental neglect that comes with the territory, before being packed off to boarding school, aged seven, jolly hugs and goodbyes, suitcases on the platform. Date of birth, destination and return address, on a label tied to the button of said child's blazer. Onto the steam train, this being the Kingdom, placed in the guard's van, until they're collected from the station of destination by special arrangement. Or, if parents are sentimental, in the Rolls with James the chauffeur chain smoking the long drive to the other end of the country.

'Either way, before they know it, they are conjugating Latin verbs, cribbing and undergoing medical inspections by day, if lucky having g the occasional injection in the buttocks from Matron. At night, mutual masturbation in the dorms, when not sore from black-balling by prefects, or too bloated from midnight feasts. Monday afternoons Army, Navy and Airforce cadets, marching in the playing fields, standing to attention and presenting

arms. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, jolly hockey sticks, and inter-school cricket matches to endure, acne blistering in the summer sun. In winter, rugby in the mud, in opposing packs called scrums, pushing their heads against the other forwards' bottoms, while their teammates look on, before the referee blows his whistle and they do it again.

'Sunday at Chapel the good lord is our form master who canes us, we shall not want and God save the old alma mater. But even after all this, still no escape for the aristos, yet more humiliation.' Wolfgang looked up, checking she was listening.

'The girls of course,' he continued, 'on to Swiss finishing schools in the Alps, and lady lessons in deportment, dinner table etiquette, macramé and bedroom manners, before passing out to a season of deb balls, after which, endowed with a dowry and the hand of a good pedigree of a landed scion, hopefully. Meanwhile, the boys onwards and upwards to Sandhurst and the Army, forced marches on the Brecon Beacons, forwards to the frontiers of Afghanistan, in command of a platoon of real men, afterwards to write a book about it. Then a job in the City with Daddy's stockbrokers. Or better still, brain transplants in cloistered halls, where dons in gowns cram their already swollen cerebrums with dead languages, useless theories and undigestible facts. Yes Oxbridge, where they join fraternities that tie them for life, when not hunting and shooting on their estates, pontificating in the House of Lords, serving as MPs, taking consultancies, company directorships, and otherwise contributing to society.

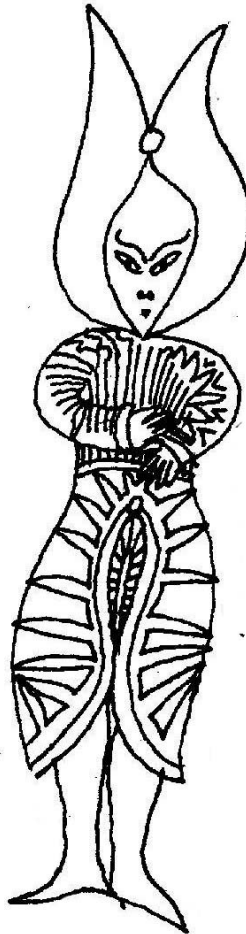
'Bred for leadership,' Wolfgang continued, addressing an imaginary audience in the stalls and grand circle, looking back adoringly through pince-nez and opera glasses, instead of just a disengaged secretary filing her nails,

placidly. 'Met everywhere with deference, but sneered at upon departure, consumed by feelings of worthlessness and shame all their lives, crushed by privilege, the final form of Homo Refluent Patricus which, if you recall, began its remarkable journey in life as exotic coal, is refined carbonite, faceted with sharp edges that need smoothed off if they want to bob along with the flotsam – the rest of us, washing in and out in the mucky tide, on the beach of human affairs.

'I'm relatively speaking the rough, as in uncut, diamond, delivered by a wave that raked the shingle rather more deeply than the preceding forty-eight, that's all. It's an age-old story. I'd been sleeping in sand a thousand years. Time to wake up. She just got lucky when I crashed her coming out ball.' Wolfgang laughed.

'Oh so that's how it happened.' Za-Za yawned, replaced her nail file in its case, and reached for the mirror again.

'Yes.' Wolfgang sat down suddenly, remembering his first sight of Brünhilda, shimmering in a sequined, body-hugging green dress. 'It was love at first sight.



She the moth and I the flame. Or the other way round? The feeling was *mothtual*. Yes, it was. Don't look like that at me,' he glared, 'it's a real word. All the chinless wonders in the ballroom just couldn't compete. I was Romeo in a bolero hat still dripping from the forty-ninth wave, a scarlet sash to go with a high-waisted matador's jacket with epaulettes and red sequins that complimented hers. Tights and pumps to match. We fandangoed, becoming hot, I soon dried off, all the time her father watching, disapproving.

'We made a swift exit by the stage door, ended up in the park nearby, drinking champagne, and making out on a pink drift of May blossom falling like snow from the cherry trees around, and howling up at a sickle moon.'

'Tell me, was it waxing, or waning?'

‘Why d’you ask?’

‘Just curious. I’m interested in how the workings of fate coincide with the phases of the moon.’

‘Waxing I think.’ He paused, uncertain. Absently, he stroked his three-day stubble. ‘Yes, definitely.’

‘So what went wrong, Wolfie?’ Za-Za asked, laying the hand mirror back down on the table.

‘Za-za,’ Wolfgang exclaimed, suddenly noticing the purple swelling above his secretary’s right eye, ‘what’s that bump below your eyebrow?’

‘Oh, just an embolism.’ She shrugged. ‘A little closer to my brain and I might be dead. Too much spike and not enough sleep these past months, I guess.’ She grinned, producing a glass vial of grey powder from her waist pouch. ‘Fancy a couple of fat lines to get the creative juices going, Wolfie dear?’

‘This spike is fucking A!’ Wolfgang, who had recently developed quite a taste for the designer drug, raised his head from the mirror. ‘Where did you get it?’ he said, distracted by his nose which, dusted by powder, looked distinctly luminous reflected in the conservatory’s mildewed glass, as the afternoon light of that already crepuscular day dimmed outside.

‘I told you I had to keep Skull sweet.’

‘Oh no, not him.’

‘Yes, Wolfie, and he’s promised me more later. It’s the best, all the way from Chetznia in the diplomatic bag.’

‘The diplomatic bag, really?’

‘Silly Wolfie,’ she tutted, ‘that’s just the way, not the means.’