The Englander

John Righten

My thanks once again to Kate, Jacky and Fran for translating my novel into the Queen's English. To Viki for her creative cover design, and Chris and Davy for creating the Rogues website.
To my sons, Logan and James, who with their mother, Kate, have made my life complete.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Contains adult content.

The 1930s epic: The Rogues Trilogy

Churchill's Rogue, *The Gathering Storm* & *The Darkest Hour*

The 1960s thriller: The Lochran Trilogy

Churchill's Assassin, *The Last Rogue* & *The Alpha Wolves*

The 1990s odyssey: The Lenka Trilogy

Heartbreak, *Resilience* & *Reflection*
&
The Benevolence of Rogues, *The 'Pane' of Rejection*
&

The Englander

For the latest updates on all my novels go to
https://www.rightensrogues.co.uk
facebook.com/theroguestrilogy
Instagram rightensrogues

Copyright © 2022 John Righten
ISBN: 9781093984217

John Righten, real name John Enright, has delivered medical aid to orphanages and hospitals across the globe, including Romania during the revolution, South America, Bosnia during the war, and the besieged Ukraine. His Rogues novels are based on the characters he encountered during his many dangerous missions, when he enlisted unlikely support from those he terms 'benevolent rogues'.

He has worked in over forty occupations, ranging from a gravedigger, a cocktail barman and a tree-surgeon, to a professional poker player and government 'Transactor'. He has ridden a British Army motorbike across India to support several children's charities and worked in a mental health facility in Manhattan. He is married to Kate and has two sons, Logan and James.

Along with his autobiography and a play, John has written three trilogies: the 1930s-based epic adventures, *The Rogues Trilogy*; the 1960s thrillers, *The Lochran Trilogy*; and the 1990s odyssey, *The Lenka Trilogy*.

Churchill's Rogue was shortlisted for the inaugural

Wilbur Smith Adventure Writing awards. *Heartbreak* won the Page Turner Audio Award.

'Let's make us med'cines of our great revenge to cure this deadly grief.'

Macbeth by William Shakespeare

Chapter 1: Dead Reckoning

8.15 am, New Year's Day 1993, Cork, the Republic of Ireland

The brooding, granite-faced man with fixed, glacial-blue eyes stared down at the inscription in the desolate graveyard.

Rachel Jane Galbraith

1979–1992

A short life, but one that enriched the lives of all those fortunate enough to know her

The former soldier in the Irish Army Ranger Wing, later a truck driver on several aid convoys and the father of Rachel Jane Galbraith, stood as resolute as the surrounding gravestones.

Heavy rain battered the golden-brown leaves of

beech trees, but the icy morning mist refused to lift. In the valley beyond the graveyard, the morning specks of city lights died.

A red dot rested on the base of the man's spine. A second red dot fluttered before settling on the centre of his back. A third red dot appeared on the back of the man's neck. A fourth red dot darted around the back of the man's head before resting on the centre of his skull.

Having found their target, the four assassins, members of an elite mercenary unit called the Wolves, each closed one eye and applied pressure to the triggers of their weapons.

Their target was Connor Pierce, known to his enemies, of which he had many, as the Englander.

8.25 am, New Year's Day 1993, London

Ten minutes later. 'An urgent message, Viscount Foxborough,' said Rufus, an ex-grenadier guardsman and the guardian of the front desk of the gentlemen's club, Brooks's, in Mayfair.

Foxy stirred from his slumber in front of the

fireplace. 'Thank you, Rufus.'

Rufus had left his post after unlocking the oak front doors of the club and admitting the first visitor of the day. He waved Foxy's chauffeur, Cedric, into the enormous, ornate lounge known as the Great Subscription Room. Cedric handed Foxy the telex he had been summoned to collect from Admiralty Arch one hour earlier.

The aristocrat would be sixty this year, but with his ill-disciplined grey hair and broken blood vessels on his puffy cheeks, he looked ten years older. He lifted a solid silver letter opener and ripped open the envelope marked HMG CLASSIFIED. VISCOUNT ARBUTHNOT FOXBOROUGH.

Foxy's rouge complexion paled. He sat up and raised his head. The other men shared his troubled mood.

'We must warn Connor immediately!' said Foxy. 'The Irish security services have reported that a unit of Wolves has arrived in Cork City.'

Cedric was about to offer to make the call, but his employer slumped into his burgundy armchair. The telex slipped from Foxy's hand and floated onto the

thick-pile Persian carpet.

'We're too late,' whispered Foxy, staring into the blue flames dancing between the freshly laid logs. 'I've just seen the time it was sent.'

'I came as soon as I could,' said Cedric. 'I received the call after our drive from Ireland last night, and drove straight to Admiralty Arch.' Though the former army engineer was in his late fifties, he had sprinted up the stairs of the private club. 'I did ask what was in the telex, but the duty officer refused to tell me and said it was only to be opened by you. I came directly here.' He paused. 'Should I have opened it, sir?'

'I have no secrets from you, Cedric. In fact, if you read the tabloids, I have no secrets at all. But it would have made no difference if you had read it, for certain individuals have ensured that we received this information far too late. The telex is marked 1.07 am; it was sent over eight hours ago.'

'Smithers,' muttered Cedric.

Foxy's thoughts were also of his old foe, the deputy head of MI6. 'The telex could have been kept secret. Instead, the sender wanted to notify me of its existence

when it was too late to act. It has the mark of malice, the signature of Sir Algorene Smithers.'

'The Irish security services will have taken action,' said Cedric.

Foxy nodded. 'Yes, of course. Major Coltrane would have deployed his Irish Army Ranger Wing immediately. But we are not talking about the Orange Order parading down the road, wearing bowler hats and bashing a drum. These are professionals who know how to disappear into the ether.'

'Shall I call Lieutenant Commander Janus?' asked Cedric. 'He may still be at Marisa's Arms after the funeral.'

'You're right, Cedric,' said Foxy. 'Please do.'

One of the club's waiters appeared with a telephone on a tray, connected to a long cable.

'You read our minds, Stephens,' said Foxy, trying, but failing, to summon cheer in his voice.

'It's for you, sir,' the servant said as he handed him the receiver. 'Your secure line.'

'It's Commander Stanford,' said the woman on the line. 'I've just heard about the hit unit landing in the

Republic. I've tried to get a message to Lieutenant Commander Janus in the orphanage, but the line's dead.'

'Then the attack is already in train,' whispered Foxy.

'We've also picked up that another Wolves hit team has landed in Frankfurt but has disappeared.'

'Ready to be sent into Holland as soon as they find Lenka,' said Foxy.

'That's my assessment,' said Stanford. 'With the Dutch authorities on high alert, the Wolves will remain across the border until they know Lenka's exact location.'

'Then it begins. The Wolves' attacks will be relentless until Lenka and Connor are dead.'

'Mind yourself, Foxy. The Wolves know you're the link between Lenka and her brother,' she said, ending the call.

He kept the receiver in his hand. 'If you're listening, Smithers, you're a spineless bastard!' he roared before replacing the receiver.

Cedric stared gravely at Foxy. 'Do you think the Wolves have reached the orphanage?'

Foxy closed his eyes. 'Yes, unless Connor has managed to lure them away.'

'Is there anything we can do?'

Foxy stared into the flames of the fire. 'Nothing. All we can do now is wait.'

The next day, news broadcasters on several television channels in Ireland warned that they were about to show video footage that might disturb some viewers. The film was of a pixilated, bloody-faced man lying face-up in an Irish graveyard.

What was surprising was that two respected American news anchors also carried the story. Dolores Channing, chief reporter on America's Channel 21 news, and Murray Grant, the first black anchorman on the prestigious US News at One, each led their evening news bulletin with the story.

Channing sat upright, staring sternly ahead, as the camera zoomed in on her. 'Another victim of the Wolves, a unit of elite mercenaries known to be in the pay of the CIA, and several other international security agencies, was found dead this morning.'

Murray was facing the screen with clasped hands when the bulletin went live. His tone was more measured than his female counterpart, but equally unequivocal.

'International aid worker, Connor Pierce, was murdered this morning after his sister, Lenka Brett, an Irish teacher and fellow aid worker, delivered a photo album documenting the atrocities of an international mercenary unit known as the Wolves to the International Court of Justice in the Hague.'

Channing and Grant's lead stories claimed the murder was carried out to silence Lenka Brett, who was in hiding, under police protection and about to testify in a war-crimes trial against Colonel Condor, the infamous Serbian commander, known as the Fire of the Balkans. Both bulletins ended by showing the pixilated, bloodied, black-and-white face of the victim in the graveyard, who they identified as Connor Pierce.

8.20 am New Year's Day, 1993, Cork

The day before the broadcasts covering his murder,

Connor Pierce stood silently above his daughter's grave. The grumbling, grey clouds took umbrage at the mist for refusing to relinquish its hold on the landscape. Even the weather was at war with itself.

Sheets of icy-rain slashed his unflinching face like scalpels. The blood was washed from his face and hands, but the mist remained. He returned the two semi-automatic M2 Beretta pistols, attached to spring extensions strapped to his wrists, back up and under the sleeves of his coat, and turned away.

Two hours earlier, Connor had stood in the kitchen of Marisa's Arms, his great-aunt's orphanage, and sliced the sleeves of his long black trench coat so the weapons would slide down easily.

Turning from his daughter's grave, he glanced at the body bent over a tombstone. The dead man's US army Ka-Bar knife was embedded in his forehead. The dead assassin and leader of the assault unit was Yuan Xing. Until a year ago, he was the top marksman in China's People's Liberation Army. Lauded by his Communist Party rulers, he had been the subject of a special television programme. There was no mention that he

never maintained his weapons. Instead, he instructed his lackeys to do that *menial task*. However, his name was no longer mentioned in China after he escaped to the West to use his skills for financial gain rather than fame.

The Englander continued on, making his way past the three corpses lying on the sodden earth. Several bullet holes punctured their faces.

The damp, woody smell of the graveyard was laced with gunpowder. Minutes earlier, Connor had been reading the engraving on his daughter's headstone. She had been buried the day before, so the gravestone was propped up on a metal frame. Fifty metres behind him, four hooded men, clad all in black and wearing infra-red goggles, snuck in through the mist carpeting the cemetery's wrought-iron gates. Each assassin had the extendable butt of their Colt M16 assault rifle wedged into their shoulders. Three took positions behind the nearest headstones. They failed to notice the tins containing freshly picked posies beneath them.

At ten o'clock the night before, nine hours after his

daughter's burial, Connor returned to the cemetery carrying two shopping bags. They contained ten empty baked bean cans, each with a handful of posies masking the sealed incendiary devices inside. He placed one by each of the headstones in the first three rows of the graves near the entrance to the small cemetery. Returning to his daughter's grave, he fell to his knees, buried his fingers in the newly turned soil, and wept.

Once the muddy boots behind him fell silent, the Englander pressed the remote control in his left pocket. Several explosions followed. He threw himself to the left of his daughter's grave, spinning himself in the air. Landing, he flipped his wrists, releasing the Berettas fixed to the lever extensions strapped to his arms into his hands. He rolled forward. Adopting a firing position and supporting his weight on one knee, he raised his weapons.

Plummeting back to Earth, the three mercenaries were greeted with a 'confirmation' bullet in the head.

Xing had advanced further than the others, and unlike them, he had not sought cover. He had dodged

the chorus of explosions. Hearing the three shots, he releasing one burst of fire in the direction they came from. The firing mechanism of his sub-machine gun – that he had not checked – jammed in the rain. Racing forward, he lunged at his prey with his unsheathed Ka-Bar knife in his left hand.

The Englander, having no time to aim his weapons towards his assailant, dived to his left. As Xing sailed past him, the Englander brought the butt of his weapon down like a guillotine on the back of his attacker's neck. Before Xing could scramble up from the mud, the Englander unloaded both chambers into the man's back. then leapt into the air, aiming his knee towards the base of Xing's spine.

To the Englander's surprise, his target rolled to one side and slashed him with the steel blade an inch below his right eye as he landed. Rolling in the mud away from his opponent, Xing sprung to his feet. His bulletproof jacket was visible beneath his military fatigues.

'Bollocks!' cursed the Englander, staggering up.

Xing dived towards him.

The Englander caught him by his arm, which was

holding the steel blade. His other hand grabbed his leather belt. Swinging his attacker through the air, he flipped him down across a headstone, snapping his spine. Seizing the Ka-Bar from Xing's lifeless hand, he plunged it into his skull.

After searching the four corpses, he extracted three rolls of sodden notes from one body, totalling nearly ten thousand US dollars. *I guess you didn't trust banks*. The Englander rose. He turned towards his daughter's grave. *I'm sorry, Rachel. You wouldn't have wanted this*. Trudging past the corpses, he closed the creaking gate, and disappeared into the unyielding, grey mist.