

CONRAD & ALICE
AND THE ECOLOGY MURDER

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AND THE SPACE-TIME BUBBLE MURDER

JJ SANDRAS

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volume 1: *The Knight of the Flower*,

volume 2: *The Lady of Noble Love*,

volume 3: *The Knight of the Boar*,

A philosophical trilogy on mysticism written as a fantasy tale with the background of France in the Middle Ages.

Conrad & Alice

An elderly pensioner and a young psychologist as crime investigators.

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BOOKS IN FRENCH:

Le Chevalier à la Fleur, éditions Déjà, 2001.

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Les Seigneurs Magiciens, éditions Clair de terre, 2005.

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Guy Marais, détective privé

Les mésaventures comiques d'un détective privé sud-africain à Paris.

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Conrad & Alice
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To my English sister, Maggie Partington-Smith

*Not all the characters, names and events
in this book are entirely fictitious.*

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CHAPTER 1

LIVING ON CREDIT

“But we’ve been living on credit for many years,” said Conrad. “Thanks to that we can buy houses, cars and whatever we need without having the ready cash. Credit is a good thing unless you overdo it. I don’t see why your patient considers credit as a catastrophe.”

Alice giggled. “She’s not really my patient,” she said. “Frances is someone I met in an English speaking group in Paris and she wasn’t talking about money but about our planet.”

“Our planet gives us bad credit?” asked Conrad with a smile.

“No,” said Alice returning the smile. “We consume too much of the resources like oil, coal and drinking water without allowing our planet to replenish its stocks.”

Conrad nodded. “Haven’t we been doing that for many years?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Alice, “but now the scientific world warns us because of that we’re on our way to our doom.”

“Then our credit with Earth is heading us straight into bankruptcy,” said Conrad. “How sad.”

Alice nodded in agreement. Our two friends were in the Café Fusain drinking espressos at one of the tables next to the window giving a large view on the rue Saint-Ambroise.

“The Bushmen living in the Kalahari are genuine ecologists. When they find a plant with three bulbs they only take two to allow the plant to produce other bulbs in the future. They were chased from the areas in Southern Africa where cattle can survive by the Blacks migrating south from Central Africa some three thousand years ago. The Hollanders began a supply station in Cape Town in 1652 for their ships sailing between Holland and the Far East before migrating northwards in the 1830s,” said Conrad. “And in the 1960’s life for the Bushmen in the Kalahari were coming to an end with the newer South Africans encroaching on their land.”

Readers having already read an episode of the Conrad and Alice series can skip the next two paragraphs.

Conrad was well into his sixties and had spent most of his adult life in the computer world before it changed dramatically in the early years of the third millennium with internet. He was neither fat nor thin and his face was rather square. His hair was closely cropped as well as his beard and moustache. With good eyesight for his age he didn’t wear glasses. He had earned a good living by working in various countries, mainly in Western Europe, as a software engineer in main line systems. Having grown up in sunny South Africa he started his computer career with IBM in Johannesburg in the late nineteen-sixties before moving to France six years later because of a serious emotional attack. He had fallen in love with a young French girl on holiday south of the Limpopo River who had responded favourably to his amorous advances but who insisted on going back to her country. If he wanted to carry on their lovely relationship he had to follow her. He wanted to

and thereafter they spent ten years together in France before the young lady complained of his being a workaholic. The truth is his job took so much of his time and energy that she said she was living with a phantom who was often away for several days at a time and when at home too tired to pay her the attention a woman expects of her man. The flame of passion had diminished with time and after their separation Conrad lived mainly for his job which he continued to find most interesting and his interest with the Dalai Lama's version of Buddhism. Although he was vegetarian and a teetotaler he was no ascetic. He continued to frequent friendly females. Being good looking and kindly disposed to women, he obtained what he desired while giving as much, if not more, than he took. Now that he was on pension he remained in Paris, a city he loved, and spent most of his time as a tourist in that famous world capital. His desire for intimate relationships with women had dwindled to the point of his being content to only spend time with them as friends.

Alice was tall, slim with long silky light brown hair falling gently on her shoulders. With an oval face she was an attractive woman of twenty-six who loved her job as psychologist to the point of being a workaholic which perturbed her love life. Her boyfriend put up with her because he knew she didn't sleep around and that her relationship with Conrad was purely platonic; two workaholics. The young lady had met Conrad recently at the annual Paris Book Festival when they bumped into each other accidentally. When moving in a dense crowd one inevitably bumps into people and their encounter was truly unintended by either of them unless one wants to believe it was their karma. After apologising to each other in French at the same time they both burst out laughing and ended up having a cup of coffee together. She liked Conrad's English accent and virtually begged him to always speak English with her to allow her to improve her command of

that language which she loved so much. As we already know Conrad was always happy to have an attractive young lady for company and he gladly accepted. They discovered that they had many interests in common and where they differed they were happy to learn the other one's point of view. Conrad being old enough to be Alice's grandfather he had the advantage of having more experience in life and she often asked him for his advice, just as she was doing now.

"I thought people consult shrinks because of personal problems," said Conrad. "If Frances isn't consulting you as a patient why is she talking to you about a problem concerning all humanity?"

"Because it is the root of her personal problem," answered Alice.

"And what is her personal problem?"

"She has a problem with the editor of *Ecology Monthly*."

"He doesn't agree with her about our living on credit with our planet?"

"Oh, but he does agree with her on that issue," said Alice. "They are both fervent ecologists. It's just that Patrick changed a drawing she gave him for his magazine without her permission."

Conrad shrugged. "Tell me a bit more about these two antagonists," he requested.

"Frances is an artist who earns her living by selling her drawings to various magazines. She is English and lives in London."

"And what about Patrick the editor of *Ecology Monthly*?" asked Conrad.

"Patrick Draw lives in France, near Limoges. His magazine is in English and is only available online. He was born in Nairobi. His parents, who worked for the colonial office, went back to England shortly after Kenya became independent."

"So both Frances and Patrick grew up in England."

“Frances from birth; Patrick from the age of 9 or so. They are both in their sixties, like you.”

“And they went to the same school or varsity in England?”

“No. They only met each other a few years ago, due to their common interest in ecology. They don’t see each other that much because they live in different countries.”

“They communicate mainly by email?”

“Yes. They do occasionally see each other when Patrick goes to London.”

“And they used to get on well together?”

Alice nodded. “That’s why she sent him a drawing to publish in his magazine free of charge.”

“She gets free publicity and he gets a free item for his magazine?”

“That’s about it.”

“Was the change Patrick made unfavourable to Frances?”

“Not really. It’s just annoying that that was not quite what she wanted to express.”

“And how does he justify his changes to her drawing?”

“He invokes editor’s prerogative,” answered Alice. “It’s not the drawing he changed but the caption that goes with it.”

“Has she laid a legal charge against him?”

“No.”

“We’re in Paris,” said Conrad. “If Frances lives in London, how did she get to meet you in Paris?”

“She came to Paris for a seminar on ecology.”

“Does she have other difficulties with Patrick?”

“Yes. It was during lunch with Penelope in her London flat last month Patrick thought he was funny with an obscene rugby supporter song he had recorded on his cell phone.”

“Now there are three people involved,” said Conrad. “Who is Penelope?”

“She is an old lady who lives in London,” answered Alice.

“She is also into ecology. That’s the connection between them.”

“Who was present for that lunch?”

“Just the three of them.”

“And how did Penelope react to hearing the obscene rugby supporter song?”

“Fortunately, she is hard of hearing and Frances told Patrick to stop his nonsense as soon as she realised what the song was about.”

“And did he stop the song?”

“Yes,” said Alice. “Like that, Penelope, who doesn’t hear well, didn’t know what was going on.”

“I don’t get the problem,” said Conrad. “What is it? The naughty lunch or the caption being changed?”

“They are linked, according to Frances,” said Alice. “She thinks that, by changing the caption, Patrick took revenge on her because she treated him like a naughty boy by ordering him to stop the song.”

“Isn’t that a small problem?” asked Conrad.

“It’s gone further,” answered Alice. “During the seminar, Frances discovered that Patrick told people that she was an ex drug addict who still needs professional help.”

“And that was to belittle her because it isn’t true?” asked Conrad.

“According to Frances,” said Alice. “In the late nineteen sixties and the nineteen seventies, many teenagers smoked dope, mainly marijuana. Many tried harder stuff and some of them did become addicted to heavy drugs, but not Frances.”

“Frances was never a drug addict?”

“She says never,” answered Alice. “Patrick is a dangerous man, according to her. He takes what you say and then distorts it to your disadvantage.”

“That is typical of many journalists who want to make their articles more interesting,” said Conrad.

“But according to Frances,” said Alice, “Patrick is sexually frustrated and vindictive.”

“What makes her say that?”

“She knows of incidents when women had to put Patrick in his place.”

“Did he try to seduce her?” asked Conrad.

“That’s a nice way of putting it,” said Alice. “Yes, very soon after their first meeting but she put him politely in his place. When he tried again some time later she put him off less politely and since then he has left her alone on that issue. Frances considers the incident during lunch at Penelope’s place as a declaration of war against her by Patrick.”

Conrad gave a wry smile. “Makes sense,” he said. “So now she wants people to know that Patrick was lying. She wants everyone to know that she was never a drug addict but doesn’t know how to go about it.”

“Exactly,” said Alice. “She wasn’t too surprised coming across Patrick during the seminar and she told him she no longer wanted to receive his magazine.”

“But if his magazine is online he doesn’t need to send it to people,” objected Conrad.

“Patrick insists on sending an email to his list of subscribers giving them the link to the magazine each time it comes out,” explained Alice. “That’s his way of knowing who reads his magazine.”

“And who pays?”

“Publicity,” replied Alice. “He only accepts publicity connected to ecology. Journalists can have their articles published for free. Frances is in the journalist class.”

“I see,” murmured Conrad. “So where do we go from here?”

“I’ll be having lunch with Frances tomorrow in a pizzeria because you can eat vegetarian in pizzerias,” said Alice. “Many ecologists are vegetarian because breeding cattle consumes too

much water and cereals. That's what they say." Alice swayed her head slowly from side to side. "I wonder if you'd like to come," she added. "I spoke of you to Frances and she'd be happy to meet an ex colonial before going back to London." Alice smiled. "What do you say?"

Conrad shook his head slowly. "Interesting story," he said. "I'll be happy to join you ladies tomorrow for lunch. Fear not, I don't have rugby supporter songs on my cell phone." And the two friends burst out laughing.

Suddenly Alice's cell phone rang. She dug into her handbag and pulled out the object interrupting their mirth. "Hello," she said after pressing the appropriate button and listened attentively for several seconds. "I see," she said in a surprised voice and switched off. "There's a problem," she said looking at Conrad with a serious face.

"What's up?" asked Conrad sitting upright.

"A suspicious death," replied Alice.

"Murder?"

Alice shrugged. "Perhaps," she said nodding.

"And you are concerned?"

"No. It was Frances who phoned." Alice shrugged. "The victim is Patrick's wife."

CHAPTER 2

DYING BY THEFT

Frances, Alice and Conrad were having lunch in the vegan Gentle Gourmet restaurant close to the Place de la Bastille. The restaurant proudly informs its customers that each season inspires a new menu at Gentle Gourmet. They carefully select and grow high quality products that are prepared by a team of qualified and passionate chefs who work every day to promote plant-based cuisine. Conrad liked eating there because he agreed with them. The three friends had finished with the main meal and dessert and were onto drinking tea for Frances and espressos for Alice and Conrad that the young pretty waitress elegantly dressed in black had served them.

Frances was a pretty lady thirty-five years old with light brown curly hair. She had keen green eyes and a friendly fleshy face. She was typically English according to Conrad. “Poor Patrick,” Frances was saying as she lifted her tea cup to her lips. She sipped her tea before adding: “it’s bad enough to lose your wife but a lot worse when you are considered suspect concerning her death. She died in the city she was