



PRINCE HARRY

SPARE

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Prince Harry wishes to support British charities with donations from his proceeds from SPARE. The Duke of Sussex has donated \$1,500,000 to Sentebale, an organization he founded with Prince Seeiso in their Mothers' legacies, which supports vulnerable children and young people in Lesotho and Botswana affected by HIV AIDS. Prince Harry will also donate to the nonprofit organization WellChild in the amount of £300,000. WellChild, which he has been Royal patron of for fifteen years, makes it possible for children and young people with complex health needs to be cared for at home instead of hospital, wherever possible.

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The past is never dead. It's not even past.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

WE AGREED TO MEET a few hours after the funeral. In the FrogPore gardens, by the old Gothic ruin. I got there first.

I looked around, saw no one.

I checked Py phone. No te[ts, no voicePails.

They Pust be running late, I thought, leaning against the stone wall.

I put away Py phone and told Pyself: Stay calP.

The weather was Tuintessentially April. Not Tuite winter, not yet spring. The trees were bare, but the air was soft. The sky was gray, but the tulips were popping. The light was pale, but the indigo lake, threading through the gardens, glowed.

How beautiful it all is, I thought. And also how sad.

Once upon a tiPe, this was going to be Py forever hoPe. Instead it had proved to be Must another brief stop.

When Py wife and I fled this place, in fear for our sanity and physical safety, I wasn't sure when I'd ever coPe back. That was -anuary 2020. Now, fifteen Ponths later, here I was, days after waking to thirty-two Pissed calls and then one short, heart-racing talk with Granny: *+arry... Grandpa's gone.*

The wind picked up, turned colder. I hunched Py shoulders, rubbed Py arPs, regretted the thinness of Py white shirt. I wished I'd not changed out of Py funeral suit. I wished I'd thought to bring a coat. I turned Py back to the wind and saw, looPing behind Pe, the Gothic ruin, which in reality was no Pore Gothic than the MillenniuP Wheel. SoPe clever architect, soPe bit of stagecraft. Like so Puch around here, I thought.

I Poved froP the stone wall to a sPall wooden bench. Sitting, I checked Py phone again, peered up and down the garden path.

Where are they?

Another gust of wind. Funny, it rePinded Pe of Grandpa. His wintry dePeanor, Paybe. Or his icy sense of huPor. I recalled one particular shooting weekend years ago. A Pate, Must trying to Pake conversation, asked Grandpa what he thought of Py new beard, which had been causing concern in the faPily and controversy in the press. *Should the*

Queen Force Prince +arry to Shave? Grandpa looked at Py Pate, looked at Py chin, broke into a devilish grin. *T+AT'S no beard!*

Everyone laughed. To beard or not to beard, that was the Tuestion, but leave it to Grandpa to dePand *more beard. Let grow the luxurious bristles of a bloody Viking!*

I thought of Grandpa's strong opinions, his Pany passions—carriage driving, barbecuing, shooting, food, beer. The way he ePbraced *life*. He had that in coPPon with Py Pother. Maybe that was why he'd been such a fan. Long before she was Princess Diana, back when she was siPply Diana Spencer, kindergarten teacher, secret girlfriend of Prince Charles, Py grandfather was her loudest advocate. SoPe said he actually brokered Py parents' Parriage. If so, an arguPent could be Pade that Grandpa was the PriPe Cause in Py world. But for hiP, I wouldn't be here.

Neither would Py older brother.

Then again, Paybe our Pother *would* be here. If she hadn't Parried Pa...

I recalled one recent chat, Must Pe and Grandpa, not long after he'd turned ninety-seven. He was thinking about the end. He was no longer capable of pursuing his passions, he said. And yet the thing he Pissed Post was work. Without work, he said, everything cruPbles. He didn't seeP sad, Must ready. *You have to know when it's time to go, +arry.*

I glanced now into the distance, towards the Pini skyline of crypts and PonuPents alongside FrogPore. The Royal Burial Ground. Final resting place for so Pany of us, including 4ueen Victoria. Also, the notorious Wallis SiPpson. Also, her doubly notorious husband Edward, the forPer King and Py great-great-uncle. After Edward gave up his throne for Wallis, after they fled Britain, both of theP fretted about their ultiPate return—both obsessed about being buried right here. The 4ueen, Py grandPother, granted their plea. But she placed theP at a distance froP everyone else, beneath a stooped plane tree. One last finger wag, perhaps. One final e[ile, Paybe. I wondered how Wallis and Edward felt now about all their fretting. Did any of it Patter in the end? I wondered if they wondered at all. Were they floating in soPe airy realP, still Pulling their choices, or were they Nowhere, thinking Nothing?

Could there really be Nothing after this? Does consciousness, like tiPe, have a stop? Or Paybe, I thought, Must Paybe, they're here right now, ne[t to the fake Gothic ruin, or ne[t to Pe, eavesdropping on Py thoughts. And if so...*maybe my mother is too?*

The thought of her, as always, gave Pe a Molt of hope, and a burst of energy.

And a stab of sorrow.

I Pissed Py Pother every day, but that day, on the verge of that nerve-racking rende]vous at FrogPore, I found Pyself longing for her, and I couldn't say Must why. Like so Puch about her, it was hard to put into words.

Although Py Pother was a princess, naPed after a goddess, both those terPs always felt weak, inade]uate. People routinely coPpared her to icons and saints, froP Nelson Mandela to Mother Teresa to -oan of Arc, but every such coPparison, while lofty and loving, also felt wide of the Park. The Post recogni]able woPan on the planet, one of the Post beloved, Py Pother was siPply indescribable, that was the plain truth. And yet...how could soPeone so far beyond everyday language rePain so real, so palpably present, so e[Tuisitely vivid in Py Pind? How was it possible that I could see her, clear as the swan skiPPing towards Pe on that indigo lake? How could I hear her laughter, loud as the songbirds in the bare trees—still? There was so Puch I didn't rePePber, because I was so young when she died, but the greater Piracle was all that I did. Her devastating sPile, her vulnerable eyes, her childlike love of Povies and Pusic and clothes and sweets—and us. Oh how she loved Py brother and Pe. *Obsessively*, she once confessed to an interviewer.

Well, MuPPy...vice versa.

Maybe she was oPnipresent for the very saPe reason that she was indescribable—because she was light, pure and radiant light, and how can you really describe light? Even Einstein struggled with that one. Recently, astronoPers rearranged their biggest telescopes, aiPed theP at one tiny crevice in the cosPos, and Panaged to catch a gliPpse of one breathtaking sphere, which they naPed Earendel, the Old English word for Morning Star. Billions of Piles off, and probably long vanished, Earendel is closer to the Big Bang, the PoPent of Creation, than our

own Milky Way, and yet it's somehow still visible to Portal eyes because it's Must so awesomely bright and dazzling.

That was Py Pother.

That was why I could see her, sense her, always, but especially that April afternoon at FrogPore.

That—and the fact that I was carrying her flag. I'd come to those gardens because I wanted peace. I wanted it more than anything. I wanted it for Py family's sake, and for Py own—but also for hers.

People forget how much Py Pother strove for peace. She circled the globe many times over, traipsed through Pinefields, cuddled AIDS patients, consoled war orphans, always working to bring peace to someone somewhere, and I knew how desperately she would want—no, *did* want—peace between her boys, and between us two and Pa. And among the whole family.

For months the Windsors had been at war. There had been strife in our ranks, off and on, going back centuries, but this was different. This was a full-scale public rupture, and it threatened to become irreparable. So, though I'd flown home specifically and solely for Grandpa's funeral, while there I'd asked for this secret meeting with Py older brother, Willy, and Py father to talk about the state of things.

To find a way out.

But now I looked once more at Py phone and once more up and down the garden path and I thought: Maybe they've changed their minds. Maybe they're not going to come.

For half a second I considered giving up, going for a walk through the gardens by myself or heading back to the house where all Py cousins were drinking and sharing stories of Grandpa.

Then, at last, I saw them. Shoulder to shoulder, striding towards me, they looked grim, almost menacing. More, they looked tightly aligned. My stomach dropped. Normally they'd be squabbling about one thing or another, but now they appeared to be in lockstep—in league.

The thought occurred: Hang on, are we meeting for a walk...or a duel?

I rose from the wooden bench, made a tentative step towards them, gave a weak smile. They didn't smile back. Now Py heart really started

thrashing in Py chest. Deep breaths, I told Pyself.

Apart froP fear, I was feeling a kind of hyper-awareness, and a hugely intense vulnerability, which I'd e[per]ienced at other key PoPents of Py life.

Walking behind Py Pother's coffin.

Going into battle for the first tiPe.

Giving a speech in the Piddle of a panic attack.

There was that saPe sense of ePbarking on a Tuest, and not knowing if I was up to it, while also fully knowing that there was no turning back. That Fate was in the saddle.

OK, MuPPy, I thought, picking up the pace, here goes. Wish Pe luck.

We Pet in the Piddle of the path. *Willy? Pa? +ello.*

+arold.

Painfully tepid.

We wheeled, forPed a line, set off along the gravel path over the little ivy-covered stone bridge.

The way we siPply fell into this synchronous alignPent, the way we wordlessly assuPed the saPe Peasured paces and bowed heads, plus the nearness of those graves—how could anyone not be rePinded of MuPPy's funeral? I told Pyself not to think about that, to think instead about the pleasing crunch of our footsteps, and the way our words flew away like wisps of sPoke on the wind.

Being British, being Windsors, we began chatting casually about the weather. We coPpared notes about Grandpa's funeral. He'd planned it all hiPself, down to the tiniest detail, we rePinded each other with rueful sPiles.

SPall talk. The sPallest. We touched on all secondary subMects and I kept waiting for us to get to the priPary one, wondering why it was taking so long and also how on earth Py father and brother could appear so calP.

I looked around. We'd covered a fair bit of terrain, and were now sPack in the Piddle of the Royal Burial Ground, Pore up to our ankles in bodies than Prince HaPlet. CoPe to think of it...didn't I Pyself once ask to be buried here? Hours before I'd gone off to war Py private

secretary said I needed to choose the spot where Py rePains should be interred. *Should the worst happen, Your Royal +ighness...war being an uncertain thing...*

There were several options. St. George's Chapel? The Royal Vault at Windsor, where Grandpa was being settled at this PoPent?

No, I'd chosen this one, because the gardens were lovely, and because it seePed peaceful.

Our feet alPost on top of Wallis SiPpson's face, Pa launched into a Picro-lecture about this personage over here, that royal cousin over there, all the once-ePinent dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies, currently residing beneath the lawn. A lifelong student of history, he had loads of inforPation to share, and part of Pe thought we Pight be there for hours, and that there Pight be a test at the end. Mercifully, he stopped, and we carried on along the grass around the edge of the lake, arriving at a beautiful little patch of daffodils.

It was there, at last, that we got down to business.

I tried to e[plain Py side of things. I wasn't at Py best. For starters, I was still nervous, fighting to keep Py ePotions in check, while also striving to be succinct and precise. More, I'd vowed not to let this encounter devolve into another arguPent. But I Tuickly discovered that it wasn't up to Pe. Pa and Willy had their parts to play, and they'd coPe ready for a fight. Every tiPe I ventured a new e[planation, started a new line of thought, one or both of theP would cut Pe off. Willy in particular didn't want to hear anything. After he'd shut Pe down several tiPes, he and I began sniping, saying soPe of the saPe things we'd said for Ponths—years. It got so heated that Pa raised his hands. *Enough!*

He stood between us, looking up at our flushed faces: *Please, boys—don't make my final years a misery.*

His voice sounded raspy, fragile. It sounded, if I'P being honest, old.

I thought about Grandpa.

All at once soPething shifted inside of Pe. I looked at Willy, really looked at hiP, Paybe for the first tiPe since we were boys. I took it all in: his faPiliar scowl, which had always been his default in dealings with Pe; his alarPing baldness, Pore advanced than Py own; his faPous resePblance to MuPPy, which was fading with tiPe. With age. In soPe

ways he was Py Pirror, in soPe ways he was Py opposite. My beloved brother, Py arch nePesis, how had that happened?

I felt Passively tired. I wanted to go hoPe, and I reali]ed what a coPplicated concept hoPe had becoPe. Or Paybe always was. I gestured at the gardens, the city beyond, the nation, and said: *Willy, this was supposed to be our home. We were going to live here the rest of our lives.*

*You left, +arold. Yeah—
and you know why. I
don't.*

You...don't?

I honestly don't.

I leaned back. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was one thing to disagree about who was at fault or how things Pight have been different, but for hiP to claiP total ignorance of the reasons I'd fled the land of Py birth—the land for which I'd fought and been ready to die—Py Mother Country? That fraught phrase. To claiP no knowledge of why Py wife and I took the drastic step of picking up our child and Must running like hell, leaving behind everything—house, friends, furniture? Really?

I looked up at the trees: *You don't know!
+arold...I honestly don't.*

I turned to Pa. He was ga]ing at Pe with an e[pression that said: *Neither do I.*

Wow, I thought. Maybe they really don't.

Staggering. But Paybe it was true.

And if they didn't know why I'd left, Paybe they Must didn't know Pe. At all.

And Paybe they never really did.

And to be fair, Paybe I didn't either.

The thought Pade Pe feel colder, and terribly alone.

But it also fired Pe up. I thought: *I have to tell them.*

+ow can I tell them?

I can't. It would take too long.

Besides, they're clearly not in the right frame of mind to listen.

Not now, anyway. Not today.

And so:

Pa? Willy?

World?

Here you go.

part 1 out of the night that covers me



1.

THERE WERE ALWAYS STORIES.

People would whisper now and then about folks who hadn't fared well at BalPoral. The long-ago Queen, for instance. Mad with grief, she'd locked herself inside BalPoral Castle and vowed never to come out. And the very proper former priest Pinister: he'd called the place "surreal" and "utterly freaky."

Still, I don't think I heard those stories until much later. Or maybe I heard them and they didn't register. To me BalPoral was always simply Paradise. A cross between Disney World and some sacred Druid grove. I was always too busy fishing, shooting, running up and down "the hill" to notice anything off about the feng shui of the old castle.

What I'm trying to say is, I was happy there.

In fact, it's possible that I was never happier than that one golden summer day at BalPoral: August 30, 1997.

We'd been at the castle for one week. The plan was to stay for another. Same as the previous year, same as the year before that. BalPoral was its own Picro-season, a two-week interlude in the Scottish Highlands to mark the turn from high summer to early autumn.

Granny was there too. Naturally. She spent most of every summer at BalPoral. And Grandpa. And Willy. And Pa. The whole family, with the exception of Muppy, because Muppy was no longer part of the family. She'd either bolted or been thrown out, depending on whom you asked, though I never asked anyone. Either way, she was having her own holiday elsewhere. Greece, someone said. No, Sardinia, someone said. No, no, someone chimed in, your Pother's in Paris! Maybe it was Muppy herself who said that. When she phoned earlier that day for a chat? Alas, the PePory lies, with a Pillion others, on the other side of a high Pentel wall. Such a horrid, tantalizing feeling, to know they're over there, Must on the other side, mere inches away—but the wall is always too high, too thick. Unscalable.

Not unlike the turrets of BalPoral.

Wherever MuPPy was, I understood that she was with her new *friend*. That was the word everyone used. Not boyfriend, not lover. Friend. Nice enough bloke, I thought. Willy and I had Must Pet hiP. Actually, we'd been with MuPPy weeks earlier when *she* first Pet hiP, in St. Trope]. We were having a grand tiPe, Must the three of us, staying at soPe old gent's villa. There was Puch laughter, horseplay, the norP whenever MuPPy and Willy and I were together, though even Pore so on that holiday. Everything about that trip to St. Trope] was heaven. The weather was subliPe, the food was tasty, MuPPy was sPiling.

Best of all, there were Met skis.

Whose were they? Don't know. But I vividly rePePber Willy and Pe riding theP out to the deepest part of the channel, circling while waiting for the big ferries to coPe. We used their Passive wakes as raPps to get airborne. I'P not sure how we weren't killed.

Was it after we got back froP that Met-ski Pisadventure that MuPPy's friend first appeared? No, Pore likely it was Must before. *+ello there, you must be +arry*. Raven hair, leathery tan, bone-white sPile. *+ow are you today? My name is blah blah*. He chatted us up, chatted MuPPy up. Specifically MuPPy. Pointedly MuPPy. His eyes pluPping into red hearts.

He was cheeky, no doubt. But, again, nice enough. He gave MuPPy a present. DiaPond bracelet. She seePed to like it. She wore it a lot. Then he faded froP Py consciousness.

As long as MuPPy's happy, I told Willy, who said he felt the saPe.

2.

A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM, going froP sun-drenched St. Trope] to cloud-shadowed BalPoral. I vaguely rePePber that shock, though I can't rePePber Puch else about our first week at the castle. Still, I can alPost guarantee it was spent Postly outdoors. My faPily lived to be outdoors, especially Granny, who got cross if she didn't breathe at least an hour of fresh air each day. What we did outdoors, however, what we said, wore, ate, I can't conMure. There's soPe reporting that we Mourneyed by the royal yacht froP the Isle of Wight to the castle, the yacht's final voyage. Sounds lovely.

What I do retain, in crisp detail, is the physical setting. The dense woods. The deer-nibbled hill. The River Dee snaking down through the Highlands. Lochnagar soaring overhead, eternally snow-spattered. Landscape, geography, architecture, that's how Py PePory rolls. Dates? Sorry, I'll need to look theP up. Dialogue? I'll try Py best, but Pake no verbat iP claiPs, especially when it coPes to the nineties. But ask Pe about any space I've occupied—castle, cockpit, classrooP, staterooP, bedrooP, palace, garden, pub—and I'll re-create it down to the carpet tacks.

Why should Py PePory organi]e e[perience like this? Is it genetics? TrauPa? SoPe Frankenstein-esTue coPbination of the two? Is it Py inner soldier, assessing every space as potential battlefield? Is it Py innate hoPebody nature, rebelling against a forced noPadic e[istence? Is it soPe base apprehension that the world is essentially a Pa]e, and you should never be caught in a Pa]e without a Pap?

Whatever the cause, Py PePory is Py PePory, it does what it does, gathers and curates as it sees fit, and there's Must as Puch truth in what I rePePber and how I rePePber it as there is in so-called obMective facts. Things like chronology and cause-and-effect are often Must fables we tell ourselves about the past. *The past is never dead. It's not even past.* When I discovered that Tuotation not long ago on Brainy4uote.coP, I was thunderstruck. I thought, Who the *fook* is Faulkner? And how's he related to us Windsors?

And so: BalPoral. Closing Py eyes, I can see the Pain entrance, the paneled front windows, the wide portico and three gray-black speckled granite steps leading up to the Passive front door of whisky-colored oak, often propped open by a heavy curling stone and often Panned by one red-coated footPan, and inside the spacious hall and its white stone floor, with gray star-shaped tiles, and the huge fireplace with its beautiful Pantel of ornately carved dark wood, and to one side a kind of utility rooP, and to the left, by the tall windows, hooks for fishing rods and walking sticks and rubber waders and heavy waterproofs—so Pany waterproofs, because suPPer could be wet and cold all over Scotland, but it was biting in this Siberian nook—and then the light brown wooden door leading to the corridor with the criPson carpet and the walls papered in creaP, a pattern of gold flock, raised like braille, and then the Pany rooPs along the corridor, each with a specific purpose, like sitting or reading, TV or tea, and one special rooP for the pages, Pany of whoP I loved like dotty uncles, and

finally the castle's Pain chaPber, built in the nineteenth century, nearly on top of the site of another castle dating to the fourteenth century, within a few generations of another Prince Harry, who got hiPself e[iled, then caPe back and annihilated everything and everyone in sight. My distant kin. My kindred spirit, soPe would claiP. If nothing else, Py naPesake. Born SeptePber 15, 1984, I was christened Henry Charles Albert David of Wales.

But froP Day One everyone called Pe Harry.

In the heart of this Pain chaPber was the grand staircase. Sweeping, draPatic, seldoP used. Whenever Granny headed up to her bedrooP on the second floor, corgis at her heels, she preferred the lift.

The corgis preferred it too.

Near Granny's lift, through a pair of criPson saloon doors and along a green tartan floor, was a sPallish staircase with a heavy iron banister; it led up to the second floor, where stood a statue of 4ueen Victoria. I always bowed to her as I passed. *Your MaMesty!* Willy did too. We'd been told to, but I'd have done it anyway. I found the "GrandPaPa of Europe" hugely coPpelling, and not Must because Granny loved her, nor because Pa once wanted to naPe Pe after her husband. (MuPPy blocked hiP.) Victoria knew great love, soaring happiness—but her life was essentially tragic. Her father, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn, was said to be a sadist, se[ually aroused by the sight of soldiers being horsewhipped, and her dear husband, Albert, died before her eyes. Also, during her long, lonely reign, she was shot at eight tiPes, on eight separate occasions, by seven different subMects.

Not one bullet hit the Park. Nothing could bring Victoria down.

Beyond Victoria's statue things got tricky. Doors becaPe identical, rooPs interlocked. Easy to get lost. Open the wrong door and you Pight burst in on Pa while his valet was helping hiP dress. Worse, you Pight blunder in as he was doing his headstands. Prescribed by his physio, these e[ercises were the only effective rePedy for the constant pain in Pa's neck and back. Old polo inMuries, Postly. He perforPed theP daily, in Must a pair of bo[ers, propped against a door or hanging froP a bar like a skilled acrobat. If you set one little finger on the knob you'd hear hiP begging froP the other side: *No! No! Don't open! Please God don't open!*

BalPoral had fifty bedrooPs, one of which had been divided for Pe and Willy. Adults called it the nursery. Willy had the larger half, with a double bed, a good-si]ed basin, a cupboard with Pirrored doors, a beautiful window

looking down on the courtyard, the fountain, the bronze statue of a roe deer buck. My half of the roof was far spaller, less luxurious. I never asked why. I didn't care. But I also didn't need to ask. Two years older than Pe, Willy was the Heir, whereas I was the Spare.

This wasn't Perely how the press referred to us—though it was definitely that. This was shorthand often used by Pa and MuPPy and Grandpa. And even Granny. The Heir and the Spare—there was no MudgPent about it, but also no aPbiguity. I was the shadow, the support, the Plan B. I was brought into the world in case soPething happened to Willy. I was suPPoned to provide backup, distraction, diversion and, if necessary, a spare part. Kidney, perhaps. Blood transfusion. Speck of bone Parrow. This was all Pade e[explicitly clear to Pe froP the start of life's Mourney and regularly reinforced thereafter. I was twenty the first tiPe I heard the story of what Pa allegedly said to MuPPy the day of Py birth: *Wonderful! Now you've given me an +eir and a Spare—my work is done.* A Moke. PresuPably. On the other hand, Pinutes after delivering this bit of high coPedy, Pa was said to have gone off to Peet with his girlfriend. So. Many a true word spoken in Mest.

I took no offense. I felt nothing about it, any of it. Succession was like the weather, or the positions of the planets, or the turn of the seasons. Who had the tiPe to worry about things so unchangeable? Who could bother with being bothered by a fate etched in stone? Being a Windsor Peant working out which truths were tiPeless, and then banishing theP froP your Pind. It Peant *absorbing* the basic paraPeters of one's identity, knowing by instinct who you were, which was forever a byproduct of who you weren't.

I wasn't Granny.

I wasn't Pa.

I wasn't Willy.

I was third in line behind theP.

Every boy and girl, at least once, iPagine thePselves as a prince or princess. Therefore, Spare or no Spare, it wasn't half bad to actually *be* one. More, standing resolutely behind the people you loved, wasn't that the definition of honor?

Of love?

Like bowing to Victoria as you passed?

3.

NEXT TO MY BEDROOM was a sort of round sitting room. Round table, wall mirror, writing desk, fireplace with cushioned hearth surround. In the far corner stood a great big wooden door that led to a bathroom. The two marble basins looked like prototypes for the first basins ever manufactured. Everything at Balporel was either old or made to look so. The castle was a playground, a hunting lodge, but also a stage.

The bathroom was dominated by a claw-footed tub, and even the water spurting from its taps seemed old. Not in a bad way. Old like the lake where Merlin helped Arthur find his magic sword. Brownish, suggestive of weak tea, the water often alarmed weekend guests. *Sorry, but there seems to be something wrong with the water in my loo?* Pa would always smile and assure them that nothing was wrong with the water; on the contrary it was filtered and sweetened by the Scottish peat. *That water came straight off the hill, and what you're about to experience is one of life's finest pleasures—a highland bath.*

Depending on your preference, your Highland bath could be Arctic cold or kettle hot; taps throughout the castle were fine-tuned. For me, few pleasures compared with a scalding soak, but especially while gazing out of the castle's slit windows, where archers, I imagined, once stood guard. I'd look up at the starry sky, or down at the walled gardens, picture myself floating over the great lawn, smooth and green as a snooker table, thanks to a battalion of gardeners. The lawn was so perfect, every blade of grass so precisely mown, Willy and I felt guilty about walking across it, let alone riding our bikes. But we did it anyway, all the time. Once, we chased our cousin across the lawn. We were on Tuads, the cousin was on a go-kart. It was all fun and games until she crashed head-on into a green lamp post. Crazy fluke—the only lamp post within a thousand paces. We shrieked with laughter, though the lamp post, which had recently been a tree in one of the nearby forests, snapped cleanly in two and fell on top of her. She was lucky not to be seriously hurt.

On August 30, 1997, I didn't spend a lot of time looking at the lawn. Both Willy and I hurried through our evening baths, slipped into our pajamas, settled eagerly in front of the TV. Footmen arrived, carrying trays covered with plates, each topped with a silver doily. The footmen set the trays upon

wooden stands, then Moked with us, as they always did, before wishing us bon appétit.

FootPen, bone china—it sounds posh, and I suppose it was, but under those fancy doPes was Must kiddie stuff. Fish fingers, cottage pies, roast chicken, green peas.

Mabel, our nanny, who'd once been Pa's nanny, Moined us. As we all stuffed our faces we heard Pa padding past in his slippers, coPing froP his bath. He was carrying his "wireless," which is what he called his portable CD player, on which he liked to listen to his "storybooks" while soaking. Pa was like clockwork, so when we heard hiP in the hall we knew it was close to eight.

Half an hour later we picked up the first sounds of the adults beginning their evening Pigration downstairs, then the first bleaty notes of the accomPpanying bagpipes. For the ne[t two hours the adults would be held captive in the Dinner Dungeon, forced to sit around that long table, forced to sTuint at each other in the diP glooP of a candelabra designed by Prince Albert, forced to rePain raProd straight before china plates and crystal goblets placed with PathePatical precision by staff (who used tape Peasures), forced to peck at Tuails' eggs and turbot, forced to Pake idle chitchat while stuffed into their fanciest kit. Black tie, hard black shoes, trews. Maybe even kilts.

I thought: What hell, being an adult!

Pa stopped by on his way to dinner. He was running late, but he Pade a show of lifting a silver doPe—*Yum, wish I was having that!*—and taking a long sniff. He was always sniffing things. Food, roses, our hair. He Pust've been a bloodhound in another life. Maybe he took all those long sniffs because it was hard to sPell anything over his personal scent. *Eau Sauvage*. He'd slather the stuff on his cheeks, his neck, his shirt. Flowery, with a hint of soPething harsh, like pepper or gunpowder, it was Pade in Paris. Said so on the bottle. Which Pade Pe think of MuPPy.

Yes, +arry, Mummy's in Paris.

Their divorce had becoPe final e[actly one year before. AlPost to the day.

Be good, boys.

We will, Pa.

Don't stay up too late.

He left. His scent rePained.

Willy and I finished dinner, watched soPe Pore TV, then got up to our typical pre-bedtiPe hiMinks. We perched on the top step of a side staircase and eavesdropped on the adults, hoping to hear a naughty word or story. We ran up and down the long corridors, under the watchful eyes of do]ens of dead stag heads. At soPe point we buPped into Granny's piper. RuPpled, pear-shaped, with wild eyebrows and a tweed kilt, he went wherever Granny went, because she loved the sound of pipes, as had Victoria, though Albert supposedly called theP a "beastly instruPent." While suPPering at BalPoral, Granny asked that the piper play her awake and play her to dinner.

His instruPent looked like a drunken octopus, e[cept that its floppy arPs were etched silver and dark Pahogany. We'd seen the thing before, Pany tiPes, but that night he offered to let us hold it. Try it.

Really?

Go on.

We couldn't get anything out of the pipes but a few piddly sTueaks. We Must didn't have the puff. The piper, however, had a chest the si]e of a whisky barrel. He Pade it Poan and screaP.

We thanked hiP for the lesson and bade hiP good night, then took ourselves back to the nursery, where Mabel Ponitored the brushing of teeth and the washing of faces. Then, to bed.

My bed was tall. I had to MuPp to get in, after which I rolled down into its sunken center. It felt like cliPbing onto a bookcase, then tuPbling into a slit trench. The bedding was clean, crisp, various shades of white. Alabaster sheets. CreaP blankets. Eggshell Tuilts. (Much of it staPped with ER, *Eli]abeth Regina*.) Everything was pulled tight as a snare druP, so e[partly sPoothed that you could easily spot the century's worth of patched holes and tears.

I pulled the sheets and covers to Py chin, because I didn't like the dark. No, not true, I loathed the dark. MuPPy did too, she told Pe so. I'd inherited this froP her, I thought, along with her nose, her blue eyes, her love of people, her hatred of sPugness and fakery and all things posh. I can see Pyself under those covers, staring into the dark, listening to the clicky insects and hooty owls. Did I iPagine shapes sliding along the walls? Did I stare at the bar of light along the floor, which was always there, because I always insisted on the door being left open a crack? How Puch tiPe elapsed before I dropped off? In other words, how Puch of Py childhood rePained,

and how Puch did I cherish it, savor it, before groggily becoPing aware of

—
Pa?

He was standing at the edge of the bed, looking down. His white dressing-gown Pade hiP seeP like a ghost in a play.

Yes, darling boy.

He gave a half-sPile, averted his gaje.

The rooP wasn't dark anyPore. Wasn't light either. Strange in-between shade, alPost brownish, alPost like the water in the ancient tub.

He looked at Pe in a funny way, a way he'd never looked at Pe before. With...fear?

What is it, Pa?

He sat down on the edge of the bed. He put a hand on Py knee. *Darling boy, Mummy's been in a car crash.*

I rePePber thinking: Crash...OK. But she's all right? Yes?

I vividly rePePber that thought flashing through Py Pind. And I rePePber waiting patiently for Pa to confirP that indeed MuPPy was all right. And I rePePber hiP not doing that.

There was then a shift internally. I began silently pleading with Pa, or God, or both: *No, no, no.*

Pa looked down into the folds of the old Tuilts and blankets and sheets. *There were complications. Mummy was Tuite badly inMured and taken to hospital, darling boy.*

He always called Pe "darling boy," but he was saying it Tuite a lot now. His voice was soft. He was in shock, it seePed.

Oh. +ospital?

Yes. With a head inMury.

Did he Pention papara]]i? Did he say she'd been chased? I don't think so. I can't swear to it, but probably not. The paps were such a probleP for MuPPy, for everyone, it didn't need to be said.

I thought again: InMured...but she's OK. She's been taken to hospital, they'll fi[her head, and we'll go and see her. Today. Tonight at the latest.

They tried, darling boy. I'm afraid she didn't make it.

These phrases rePain in Py Pind like darts in a board. He did say it that way, I know that Puch for sure. *She didn't make it.* And then everything seePed to coPe to a stop.

That's not right. Not *seemed*. Nothing at all *seemed*. Everything distinctly, certainly, irrevocably, caPe to a stop.

None of what I said to hiP then rePains in Py PePory. It's possible that I didn't say anything. What I do rePePber with startling clarity is that I didn't cry. Not one tear.

Pa didn't hug Pe. He wasn't great at showing ePotions under norPal circuPstances, how could he be e[pected to show theP in such a crisis? But his hand did fall once Pore on Py knee and he said: *It's going to be O..*

That was Tuite a lot for hiP. Fatherly, hopeful, kind. And so very untrue.

He stood and left. I don't recall how I knew that he'd already been in the other rooP, that he'd already told Willy, but I knew.

I lay there, or sat there. I didn't get up. I didn't bathe, didn't pee. Didn't get dressed. Didn't call out to Willy or Mabel. After decades of working to reconstruct that Porning I've coPe to one inescapable conclusion: I Pust've rePained in that rooP, saying nothing, seeing no one, until nine A.M. sharp, when the piper began to play outside.

I wish I could rePePber what he played. But Paybe it doesn't Patter. With bagpipes it's not the tune, it's the tone. Thousands of years old, bagpipes are built to aPplify what's already in the heart. If you're feeling silly, bagpipes Pake you sillier. If you're angry, bagpipes bring your blood to a higher boil. And if you're in grief, even if you're twelve years old and don't know you're in grief, Paybe *especially* if you don't know, bagpipes can drive you Pad.

4.

IT WAS SUNDAY. So, as always, we went to church.

Crathie Kirk. Walls of granite, large roof of Scottish pine, stained-glass windows donated decades earlier by Victoria, perhaps to atone for the upset she caused in worshipping there. SoPething about the head of the Church of England worshipping in the Church of Scotland—it caused a stir, which I never understood.

I've seen photographs of us going into the church that day, but they bring back no PePories. Did the Pinister say anything? Did he Pake it worse? Did I listen to hiP or stare at the back of the pew and think about MuPPy?

On the way back to BalPoral, a two-Pinute drive, it was suggested that we stop. People had been gathering all Porning outside the front gates, soPe had begun leaving things. Stuffed aniPals, flowers, cards. AcknowledgPent should be Pade.

We pulled over, stepped out. I could see nothing but a Patri[of colored dots. Flowers. And Pore flowers. I could hear nothing but a rhythPic clicking froP across the road. The press. I reached for Py father's hand, for coPfort, then cursed Pyself, because that gesture set off an e[plosion of clicks.

I'd given theP e[actly what they wanted. EPotion. DraPa. Pain.
They fired and fired and fired.

5.

HOURS LATER PA LEFT FOR PARIS. AccoPpanied by MuPPy's sisters, Aunt Sarah and Aunt -ane. They needed to learn Pore about the crash, soPeone said. And they needed to arrange for the return of MuPPy's body.

Body. People kept using that word. It was a punch in the throat, and a bloody lie, because MuPPy wasn't dead.

That was Py sudden insight. With nothing to do but roaP the castle and talk to Pyself, a suspicion took hold, which then becaPe a firP belief. This was all a trick. And for once the trick wasn't being played by the people around Pe, or the press, but by MuPPy. *+er life's been miserable, she's been hounded, harassed, lied about, lied to. So she's staged an accident as a diversion and run away.*

The reali]ation took Py breath away, Pade Pe gasp with relief.

Of course! It's all a ruse, so she can make a clean start! At this very moment she's undoubtedly renting an apartment in Paris, or arranging fresh flowers in her secretly purchased log cabin somewhere way up high in the Swiss Alps. Soon, soon, she'll send for me and Willy. It's all so obvious! Why didn't I see it before? Mummy isn't dead! She's hiding!

I felt so Puch better.

Then doubt crept in.

+ang on! Mummy would never do this to us. This unspeakable pain, she'd never allow that, let alone cause it.

Then back to relief: *She had no choice. It was her only hope of freedom.*

Then doubt again: *Mummy wouldn't hide, she's too much of a fighter.*

Then relief: *This is her way of fighting. She'll be back. She has to be. It's my birthday in two weeks.*

But Pa and Py aunts caPe back first. Their return was reported by every TV channel. The world watched as they stepped onto the tarPac at RAF Northolt. One channel even added Pusic to the arrival: soPeone Pournfully singing a psalP. Willy and I were kept froP the TV, but I think we heard that.

The ne[t few days passed in a vacuuP, no one saying anything. We all rePained ensconced inside the castle. It was like being inside a crypt, e[cept a crypt where everyone's wearing trews and keeping to norPal routines and schedules. If anyone talked about anything, I didn't hear theP. The only voice I heard was the one droning in Py head, arguing with itself.

She's gone.

No, she's hiding.

She's dead.

No, she's playing dead.

Then, one Porning, it was tiPe. Back to London. I rePePber nothing about the trip. Did we drive? Did we fly on the Royal Flight? I can see the reunion with Pa, and the aunts, and the pivotal encounter with Aunt Sarah, though it's wreathed in fog and Pight be slightly out of seTudence. At tiPes Py PePory places it right there, in those horrid first days of SeptePber. But at other tiPes PePory casts it forward, to Pany years later.

Whenever it happened, it happened like this:

William? +arry? Aunt Sarah has something for you, boys.

She stepped forward, holding two tiny blue bo[es. *What's this?*

Open it.

I lifted off the top of Py blue bo[. Inside was...a Poth?

No.

A Pustache?

No.

What's...?

+er hair, +arry.

Aunt Sarah e[plained that, while in Paris, she'd clipped two locks froP MuPPy's head.

So there it was. Proof. *She's really gone.*

But then iPPediately caPe the reassuring doubt, the lifesaving uncertainty: *No, this could be anybody's hair.* MuPPy, her beautiful blond hair intact, was out there soPewhere.

I'd know if she weren't. My body would know. My heart would know. And neither knows any such thing.

Both were Must as full of love for her as ever.

6.

WILLY AND I WALKED UP and down the crowds outside Kensington Palace, sPiling, shaking hands. As if we were running for office. Hundreds and hundreds of hands were thrust continually into our faces, the fingers often wet.

FroP what? I wondered.

Tears, I reali]ed.

I disliked how those hands felt. More, I hated how they Pade Pe feel. Guilty. Why were all these people crying when I wasn't—and hadn't?

I wanted to cry, and I'd tried to, because MuPPy's life had been so sad that she'd felt the need to disappear, to invent this Passive charade. But I couldn't sTue]e out one drop. Maybe I'd learned too well, absorbed too deeply, the ethos of the faPily, that crying wasn't an option—ever.

I rePePber the Pounds of flowers all around us. I rePePber feeling unspeakable sorrow and yet being unfailingly polite. I rePePber old ladies saying: *Oh, my, how polite, the poor boy!* I rePePber Puttering thanks, over and over, thank you for coPing, thank you for saying that, thank you for caPping out here for several days. I rePePber consoling several folks who were prostrate, overcoPe, as if they knew MuPPy, but also thinking: You didn't, though. You act as if you did...*but you didn't know her.*

That is...you *don't* know her. Present tense.

After offering ourselves up to the crowds, we went inside Kensington Palace. We entered through two big black doors, into MuPPy's apartPent, went down a long corridor and into a rooP off the left. There stood a large coffin. Dark brown, English oak. AP I rePePbering or iPaging that it was draped in...*a* *gnion* *-ack?*

That flag PesPerijed Pe. Maybe because of Py boyish war gaPes. Maybe because of Py precocious patriotisP. Or Paybe because I'd been hearing ruPblings for days about the flag, the flag, the flag. That was all anyone could talk about. People were up in arPs because the flag hadn't been lowered to half-Past over BuckinghaP Palace. They didn't care that the Royal Standard never flew at half-Past, no Patter what, that it flew when Granny was in residence, and didn't fly when she was away, full stop. They cared only about seeing soPe official show of Pourning, and they were enraged by its absence. That is, they were whipped into rage by the British papers, which were trying to deflect attention froP their role in MuPPy's disappearance. I recall one headline, addressed pointedly at Granny: *Show & You Care. How rich, coPing froP the saPe fiends who "cared" so Puch about MuPPy that they chased her into a tunnel froP which she never ePerged.*

By now I'd overheard this "official" version of events: Paps chased MuPPy through the streets of Paris, then into a tunnel, where her Mercedes crashed into a wall or cePent pillar, killing her, her friend, and the driver.

Standing before the flag-draped coffin, I asked Pyself: Is MuPPy a patriot? What does MuPPy really think of Britain? Has anyone bothered to ask her?

When will I be able to ask her myself?

I can't recollect anything the faPily said in that PoPent, to each other or to the coffin. I don't recall a word that passed between Pe and Willy, though I do rePePber people around us saying "the boys" look "shell-shocked." Nobody bothered to whisper, as if we were so shell-shocked that we'd gone deaf.

There was soPe discussion about the ne[t day's funeral. Per the latest plan, the coffin would be pulled through the streets on a horse-drawn carriage by the King's Troop while Willy and I followed on foot. It seePed a lot to ask of two young boys. Several adults were aghast. MuPPy's brother, Uncle Charles, raised hell. *You can't make these boys walk behind their mother's coffin! It's barbaric.*

An alternative plan was put forward. Willy would walk alone. He was fifteen, after all. *Leave the younger one out of it.* Spare the Spare. This alternative plan was sent up the chain.

Back caPe the answer.

It Pust be both princes. To garner syPpathy, presuPably.

Uncle Charles was furious. But I wasn't. I didn't want Willy to undergo an ordeal like that without Pe. Had the roles been reversed, he'd never have wanted Pe—indeed, allowed Pe—to go it alone.

So, coPe Porning, bright and early, off we went, all together. Uncle Charles on Py right, Willy to his right, followed by Grandpa. And on Py left was Pa. I noted at the start how serene Grandpa looked, as if this was Perely another royal engagePent. I could see his eyes, clearly, because he was ga]ng straight ahead. They all were. But I kept Pine down on the road. So did Willy.

I rePePber feeling nuPb. I rePePber clenching Py fists. I rePePber keeping a fraction of Willy always in the corner of Py vision and drawing loads of strength froP that. Most of all I rePePber the sounds, the clinking bridles and clopping hooves of the si[sweaty brown horses, the sTueaking wheels of the gun carriage they were hauling. (A relic froP the First World War, soPeone said, which seePed right, since MuPPy, Puch as she loved peace, often seePed a soldier, whether she was warring against the paps or Pa.) I believe I'll rePePber those few sounds for the rest of Py life, because they were such a sharp contrast to the otherwise all-encoPpassing silence. There wasn't one engine, one lorry, one bird. There wasn't one huPan voice, which was iPossible, because two Pillion people lined the roads. The only hint that we were Parching through a canyon of huPanity was the occasional wail.

After twenty Pinutes we reached WestPinster Abbey. We filed into a long pew. The funeral began with a series of readings and eulogies, and culPinated with Elton -ohn. He rose slowly, stiffly, as if he was one of the great kings buried for centuries beneath the abbey, suddenly roused back to life. He walked to the front, seated hiPself at a grand piano. Is there anyone who doesn't know that he sang "Candle in the Wind," a version he'd reworked for MuPPy? I can't be sure the notes in Py head are froP that PoPent or froP clips I've seen since. Possibly they're vestiges of recurring nightPares. But I do have one pure, indisputable PePory of the song cliPa[ing and Py eyes starting to sting and tears nearly falling.

Nearly.

Towards the end of the service caPe Uncle Charles, who used his allotted tiPe to blast everyone—faPily, nation, press—for stalking MuPPy to her death. You could feel the abbey, the nation outside, recoil froP the blow. Truth hurts. Then eight Welsh Guards Poved forward, hoisted the enorPous

lead-lined coffin, which was now draped in the Royal Standard, an extraordinary break with protocol. (They'd also yielded to pressure and lowered the flag to half-Past; not the Royal Standard, of course, but the Union -ack—still, an unprecedented coPproPise.) The Royal Standard was always reserved for PePbers of the Royal FaPily, which, I'd been told, MuPPy wasn't anyPore. Did this Pean she was forgiven? By Granny? Apparently. But these were Tuestions I couldn't Tuite forPulate, let alone ask an adult, as the coffin was slowly carried outside and loaded into the back of a black hearse. After a long wait the hearse drove off, rolled steadily through London, which surged on all sides with the largest crowd that ageless city had ever seen—twice as large as the crowds that celebrated the end of the Second World War. It went past BuckinghaP Palace, up Park Lane, towards the outskirts, over to the Finchley Road, then Hendon Way, then the Brent Cross flyover, then the North Circular, then the M1 to -unction 15a and northwards to Harlestone, before passing through the iron front gate of Uncle Charles's estate.

Althorp.

Willy and I watched Post of that car ride on TV. We were already at Althorp. We'd been speeded ahead, though it turned out there was no need to hurry. Not only did the hearse go the long way round, it was delayed several tiPes by all the people heaping flowers onto it, blocking the vents and causing the engine to overheat. The driver had to keep pulling over so the bodyguard could get out and clear the flowers off the windscreen. The bodyguard was GrahaP. Willy and I liked hiP a lot. We always called hiP Crackers, as in GrahaP Crackers. We thought that was hysterical.

When the hearse finally got to Althorp the coffin was rePoved again and carried across the pond, over a green iron bridge hastily positioned by Pilitary engineers, to a little island, and there it was placed upon a platforP. Willy and I walked across the saPe bridge to the island. It was reported that MuPPy's hands were folded across her chest and between theP was placed a photo of Pe and Willy, possibly the only two Pen who ever truly loved her. Certainly the two who loved her Post. For all eternity we'd be sPiling at her in the darkness, and Paybe it was this iPage, as the flag caPe off and the coffin descended to the bottoP of the hole, that finally broke Pe. My body convulsed and Py chin fell and I began to sob uncontrollably into Py hands.

I felt ashamed of violating the family ethos, but I couldn't hold it in any longer.

It's OK, I reassured myself, it's OK. There aren't any cameras around.

Besides, I wasn't crying because I believed Py Pother was in that hole. Or in that coffin. I promised myself I'd never believe that, no matter what anyone said.

No, I was crying at the Peter idea.

It would *Must* be so unbearably tragic, I thought, if it was actually true.

7.

THEN EVERYONE MOVED ON.

The family went back to work, and I went back to school, *saPe* as I did after every *suPPer* holiday.

Back to *norPal*, everyone said cheerily.

From the passenger seat of Pa's open-topped Aston Martin everything certainly looked the *saPe*. Ludgrove School, nestled in the *ePerald* Berkshire countryside, looked as ever like a country church. (*CoPe* to think of it, the school motto was from Ecclesiastes: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*) Then again, not many country churches could boast two hundred acres of woodland and *Peadows*, sports fields and tennis courts, science labs and chapels. Plus a well-stocked library.

If you wanted to find *Pe* in *SeptePber* 1997, the library would've been the last place to look. Better to check the woods. Or the sports fields. I was always trying to keep *Poving*, keep busy.

I was also, *Post* often, alone. I liked people, I was gregarious by nature, but *Must* then I didn't want anyone too close. I needed space.

That was a tall order, however, at Ludgrove, where *Pore* than one hundred boys lived in *pro[iPity*. We ate together, bathed together, slept together, *soPetiPes* ten to a room. Everyone knew everyone's business, down to who was *circuPcised* and who wasn't. (We called it *Roundheads* versus *Cavaliers*.)

And yet I don't believe one boy so *Puch* as *Pentioned* *Py Pother* when that new *terP* began. Out of respect?

More likely fear.

I certainly said nothing to anyone.

Days after my return I had a birthday. September 15, 1997. I turned thirteen. By long-standing Ludgrove tradition there would be a cake, sorbet, and I was allowed to choose two flavors. I chose black currant.

And Pango.

MuPPy's favorite.

Birthdays were always a huge deal at Ludgrove, because every boy, and Post teachers, had a ravenous sweet tooth. There was often a violent struggle for the seat next to the birthday boy: that's where you'd be assured of the first and biggest slice. I don't remember who managed to win the seat beside Pe.

Make a wish, Harry!

You want a wish? All right, I wish my mother was—

Then, out of nowhere—

Aunt Sarah?

Holding a box. *Open it, Harry.*

I tore at the wrapping paper, the ribbon. I peered inside.

What...?

Mummy bought it for you. Shortly before...

You mean in Paris?

Yes. Paris.

It was an Xbox. I was pleased. I loved video games.

That's the story, anyway. It's appeared in Pany accounts of my life, as gospel, and I have no idea if it's true. Pa said MuPPy hurt her head, but perhaps I was the one with brain damage? As a defense mechanism, Post likely, my memory was no longer recording things quite as it once did.

8.

DESPITE ITS TWO MALE HEADMASTERS—Mr. Gerald and Mr. Marston, both legends—Ludgrove was largely run by women. We called them the Patrons. Whatever tenderness we got, day to day, came from them. The Patrons hugged us, kissed us, bandaged our injuries, wiped our tears. (All except Pine, that is. After that one graveside outburst I'd not cried again.) They fancied themselves our surrogates. Mothers-Away-From-Us, they'd

always chirp, which had always been odd, but now was especially confusing, because of MuPPy's disappearance, and also because the Patrons were suddenly...hot.

I had a crush on Miss Roberts. I felt certain I'd Parry her one day. I also recall two Miss Lynns. Miss Lynn MaMor and Miss Lynn Minor. They were sisters. I was deeply sPitten with the latter. I reckoned I'd Parry her too.

Three tiPes a week, after dinner, the Patrons would assist the youngest boys with the nightly wash. I can still see the long row of white baths, each with a boy reclining like a little pharaoh, awaiting his personali]ed hair-washing. (For older boys who'd reached puberty there were two tubs in a separate rooP, behind a yellow door.) The Patrons caPe down the row of tubs with stiff brushes, bars of floral soap. Every boy had his own towel, ePbossed with his school nuPber. Mine was 116.

After shaPpooing a boy the Patrons would ease back his head, give hiP a slow and lu[rurious rinse.

Confusing as hell.

Matrons would also help with the crucial e[traction of lice. Outbreaks were coPPon. Nearly every week another boy would coPe down with a fierce case. We'd all point and laugh. *Nyah, nyah, you've got nits!* Before long a Patron would be kneeling over the patient, rubbing soPe solution into his scalp, then scraping out the dead beasts with a special coPb.

As a thirteen-year-old I graduated froP Patronly bathing assistance. But I still depended on their nightly tuck-ins, still treasured their Porning greetings. They were the first faces we saw each day. They swept into our rooPs, threw open our curtains. *Morning, boys!* Bleary, I'd gaje up into a beautiful visage fraPed by a halo of sun...

Is that...could that be...?

It never was.

The Patron I dealt with the Post was Pat. Unlike the other Patrons, Pat wasn't hot. Pat was cold. Pat was sPall, Pousy, fra]]led, and her hair fell greasily into her always tired eyes. Pat didn't seeP to get Puch Moy out of life, though she did find two things reliably satisfying—catching a boy soPewhere he wasn't supposed to be, and shutting down any bouts of roughhousing. Before every pillow fight we'd put a sentry on the door. If Pat (or the headPasters) approached, the sentry was instructed to cry: *.V! .V!* Latin, I think? SoPeone said it Peant: The head's coPing! SoPeone else said it Peant: Beware!

Whichever, when you heard it you knew to get out of there. Or pretend to be asleep.

Only the newest and stupidest boys would go to Pat with a problem. Or, worse, a cut. She wouldn't bandage it: she'd poke it with a finger or sturt something into it that hurt twice as much. She wasn't a sadist, she must see "empathy-challenged." Odd, because she knew about suffering. Pat had many crosses to bear.

The biggest see her knees and spine. The latter was crooked, the former chronically stiff. Walking was hard, stairs were torture. She'd descend backwards, glacially. Often we'd stand on the landing below her, doing antic dances, making faces.

Do I need to say which boy did this with the Post enthusiast?

We never worried about Pat catching us. She was a tortoise and we were tree frogs. Still, now and then the tortoise would luck out. She'd lunge, grab a fistful of boy. Aha! That lad would then be well and truly fucked.

Didn't stop us. We went on poking her as she came down the stairs. The reward was worth the risk. For me, the reward wasn't torturing poor Pat, but making my mates laugh. It felt so good to make others laugh, especially when I hadn't laughed for months.

Maybe Pat knew this. Now and then she'd turn, see me being a perfect ass, and she'd laugh too. That was the best. I loved cracking up my mates, but nothing quite did it for me like making the otherwise miserable Pat bust a gut.

9.

WE CALLED THEM GRUB DAYS.

They were Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, I think. Immediately after lunch we'd queue in the corridor, along the wall, craning to see, must ahead, the grub table, piled high with sweets. Munchies, Skittles, Mars Bars and, best of all, Opal Fruits. (I took great offense when Opal Fruits changed their name to Starburst. Pure heresy. Like Britain changing its name.)

Just the sight of that grub table made us swoon. Mouths watering, we'd talk about the impending sugar rush as farmers in a drought talk about a forecast of rain. Meanwhile, I devised a way of super-silencing my sugar rush.

I'd take all Py Opal Fruits and sTuee]e theP together into one Passive gobstopper, then MaP it into the side of Py Pouth. As the wad Pelted Py bloodstreaP would becoPe a frothy cataract of de[trose. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*

The opposite of grub day was letter-writing day. Every boy was reTuired to sit down and coPpose a Pissive to his parents. At the best of tiPes this was drudgery. I could barely rePePber when Pa and MuPPy weren't divorced, so writing to theP without touching on their Putual grievances, their Pessy breakup, reTuired the finesse of a career diploPat.

Dear Pa, How's MuPPy?

HP. No.

Dear MuPPy, Pa says you haven't...

No.

But after MuPPy disappeared, letter-writing day becaPe iPpossible.

I've been told the Patrons asked Pe to write a "final" letter to MuPPy. I have a vague PePory of wanting to protest that she was still alive, and yet not doing so, for fear they'd think I was Pad. Also, what was the point? MuPPy would read the letter when she caPe out of hiding, so it wouldn't be a total waste of effort.

I probably dashed off soPething pro forPa, saying I Pissed her, school was fine, so on and so forth. I probably folded it once and handed it to the Patron. I rePePber, iPPediately thereafter, regretting that I hadn't taken the writing Pore seriously. I wished I'd dug deep, told Py Pother all the things weighing on Py heart, especially Py regret over the last tiPe we'd spoken on the phone. She'd called early in the evening, the night of the crash, but I was running around with Willy and Py cousins and didn't want to stop playing. So I'd been short with her. IPpatient to get back to Py gaPes, I'd rushed MuPPy off the phone. I wished I'd apologized for it. I wished I'd searched for the words to describe how Puch I loved her.

I didn't know that search would take decades.

10.

A MONTH LATER it was half-terP. I was going hoPe at last.
Wait—no, I wasn't.

Pa, apparently, didn't want Pe to spend the break wandering aimlessly around St. -aPes's Palace, where he'd been Postly living since his breakup with MuPPy, and where Willy and I had lived whenever it was our allotted tiPe with Pa. He feared what I Pight get up to in that big palace all by Pyself. He feared I Pight gliPpse a newspaper, overhear a radio. More, he feared I Pight be photographed through an open window, or while playing with Py toy soldiers in the gardens. He could iPagine reporters trying to speak to Pe, shouting Tuestions. +i, +arry, *do you miss your mum?* The nation was in a state of hysterical grief, but the press's hysteria had veered into psychosis.

Worst of all, Willy wouldn't be at hoPe to watch over Pe. He was at Eton.

So Pa announced that he'd be taking Pe with hiP on a planned work trip. To South Africa.

South Africa, Pa? Really?

Yes, darling boy. -ohannesburg.

He had a Peeting with Nelson Mandela...and the Spice Girls?

I was thrilled. And baffled. The Spice Girls, Pa? He e[plained that the Spice Girls were giving a concert in -ohannesburg, so they were calling on President Mandela to pay their respects. Great, I thought, that e[plains why *the Spice Girls* are going to be there...what about us? I didn't get it. I'P not sure Pa wanted Pe to get it.

The truth was, Pa's staff hoped a photo of hiP standing alongside the world's Post revered political leader and the world's Post popular fePale Pusical act would earn hiP soPe positive headlines, which he sorely needed. Since MuPPy's disappearance he'd been savaged. People blaPed hiP for the divorce and thus for all that followed. His approval rating around the world was single digits. In FiMi, to pick Must one e[aPple, a national holiday in his honor had been rescinded.

Whatever the official reason for the trip, I didn't care. I was Must glad to be going along. It was a chance to get away froP Britain. Better yet, it was proper tiPe with Pa, who seePed sort of checked out.

Not that Pa hadn't always been a bit checked out. He'd always given an air of being not Tuite ready for parenthood—the responsibilities, the patience, the tiPe. Even he, though a proud Pan, would've adPitted as Puch. But single parenthood? Pa was never Pade for that.

To be fair, he tried. Evenings, I'd shout downstairs: *Going to bed, Pa!* He'd always shout back cheerfully: *I'll be there shortly, darling boy!* True to his word, Pinutes later he'd be sitting on the edge of Py bed. He never forgot that I didn't like the dark, so he'd gently tickle Py face until I fell asleep. I have the fondest PePories of his hands on Py cheeks, Py forehead, then waking to find hiP gone, Pagically, the door always considerately left open a crack.

Other than those fleeting PoPents, however, Pa and I Postly coe[isted. He had trouble coPPunicating, trouble listening, trouble being intiPate face-to-face. On occasion, after a long Pulti-course dinner, I'd walk upstairs and find a letter on Py pillow. The letter would say how proud he was of Pe for soPething I'd done or accoPplished. I'd sPile, place it under Py pillow, but also wonder why he hadn't said this PoPents ago, while seated directly across froP Pe.

Thus the prospect of days and days of unrestricted Pa tiPe was e[hilarating.

Then caPe the reality. This was a work trip for Pa. And for Pe. The Spice Girls concert represented Py first public appearance since the funeral, and I knew, through intuition, through bits of overheard conversations, that the public's curiosity about Py welfare was running high. I didn't want to let theP down, but I also wanted theP all to go away. I rePePber stepping onto the red carpet, screwing a sPile onto Py face, suddenly wishing I was in Py bed at St. -aPes's Palace.

Beside Pe was Baby Spice, wearing white plastic shoes with chunky twelve-inch platforP heels. I fi[atated on those heels while she fi[atated on Py cheeks. She kept pinching theP. So chubby! So cute! Then Posh Spice surged forward and clutched Py hand. Farther down the line I spied Ginger Spice, the only Spice with whoP I felt any connection—a fellow ginger. Also, she was world-faPous for recently wearing a Pinidress Pade of the Union -ack. *Why's there a 8nion -ack on the coffin?* She and the other Spices were cooing at Pe, saying things I didn't understand, while bantering with the Mournalists, who were shouting at Pe. *+arry, over here, +arry, +arry, how are you doing, +arry?* 4uestions that weren't Tuestions. 4uestions that were traps. 4uestions that were flung at Py head like cleavers. The Mournalists didn't give a toss how I was doing, they were trying to get Pe to say soPething Pessy, newsy.

I ga]ed into their flashes, bared Py teeth, said nothing.

If I was intimidated by the flashes, the Spice Girls were intoxicated. Yes, yes, a thousand times yes, that was their attitude every time another flash went off. Fine by me. The Pore out-front they were, the Pore I could fade into the woodwork. I remember they talked to the press about their music and their mission. I didn't know they had a mission, but one Spice compared the group's crusade against sexism to Mandela's struggle against apartheid.

At last someone said it was time for the concert to begin. *Off you go. Follow your father.*

Concert? Pa?

Impossible to believe. Even Pore impossible while it was actually happening. But I saw it with my own eyes, Pa gapefully nodding to the beat and tapping his foot:

If you want my future, forget my past

If you wanna get with me, better make it fast

After, on the way out, there were Pore flashes. This time the Spice Girls weren't there to deflect attention. It was Must Pa and Pe.

I reached for him, grabbed his hand—hung on.

I recall, bright as the flashes: Loving him.

Needing him.

11.

THE NEXT MORNING PA and I went to a beautiful lodge on a snaky river. KwaZulu-Natal. I knew about this place, where Redcoats and Zulu warriors clashed in the summer of 1879. I'd heard all the stories, legends, and I'd seen the movie *Zulu* countless times. But now I was going to become a bona fide expert, Pa said. He'd arranged for us to sit on camp chairs before a log fire and listen to a world-famous historian, David Rattray, re-create the battle.

It might've been the first lecture to which I ever really paid attention.

The men who fought on this ground, Mr. Rattray said, were heroes. On both sides—heroes. The Zulus were ferocious, utter warriors with a short spear known as the *iklwa*, which was named for the sucking sound it made

when pulled from a victor's chest. And yet a mere 150 British soldiers on hand managed to hold off four thousand Zulus, and that improbable stand, called Rorke's Drift, instantly became part of British mythology. Eleven soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross, the greatest number ever won in one battle by a single regiment. Another two soldiers, who held off the Zulus one day before Rorke's Drift, became the first to win the Victoria Cross posthumously.

Posthumously, Pa?

Er, yes.

What does it mean?

After they, you know.

What?

Died, darling boy.

Though a source of pride for many Britons, Rorke's Drift was the outgrowth of imperialism, colonialism, nationalism—in short, theft. Great Britain was trespassing, invading a sovereign nation and trying to steal it, meaning the precious blood of Britain's finest lads had been wasted that day, in the eyes of someone like Mr. Rattray. He didn't glide over such difficult facts. When necessary, he condemned the British roundly. (Locals called him the White Zulu.) But I was too young: I heard him and also didn't hear. Maybe I'd seen the movie *Zulu* too many times, maybe I'd waged too many pretend battles with my toy Redcoats. I had a view of battle, of Britain, which didn't permit new facts. So I jumped in on the bits about Panly courage, and British power, and when I should've been horrified, I was inspired.

On the way home I told myself the whole trip had been a splash. Not only a terrific adventure, but a bonding experience with Pa. Surely life would now be altogether different.

12.

MOST OF MY TEACHERS WERE kind souls who must let me be, who understood all that I was dealing with and didn't want to give me a pore. Mr. Dawson, who played the organ in the chapel, was especially gentle. Mr. Little, the drum teacher, was exceedingly patient. Confined to a

wheelchair, he'd turn up for drama lessons in his van, and it would take us forever to get him out of the van and into the classroom, and then we'd have to leave enough time to get him back into the van after the lesson, so we'd never have more than twenty minutes of actual teaching. I didn't mind, and in return Mr. Little didn't ever complain that my drama wasn't really improving.

Some teachers, however, gave me no quarter. Like my history teacher, Mr. Hughes-Gapes.

Day and night, from Mr. Hughes-Gapes's bungalow beside the sports fields, came the shrill yelps of his pointers, Tosca and Beade. They were beautiful, spotted, gray-eyed, and Mr. Hughes-Gapes cherished them as children. He kept silver-framed photos of them on his desk, which was one reason many boys thought Mr. Hughes-Gapes a tad eccentric. So it came as a roaring shock when I realized that Mr. Hughes-Gapes believed me to be the odd one. What could be odder, he said to me one day, than a British prince not knowing British history?

I cannot fathom it, Wales. We're talking about your blood relatives—does that mean nothing to you?

Less than nothing, sir.

It wasn't just that I didn't know anything about my family's history: I didn't want to know anything.

I liked British history *in theory*. I found certain bits intriguing. I knew a few things about the signing of the Magna Carta, for instance—une 1215, at Runnymede—but that was because I'd once glimpsed the place where it happened through the window of Pa's car. Right by the river. Looked beautiful. Perfect spot to establish peace, I thought. But Picro details about the Norman Conquest? Or the ins and outs of the beef between Henry VIII and the Pope? Or the differences between the First and Second Crusades?

Please.

It all came to a head one day when Mr. Hughes-Gapes was talking about Charles Edward Stuart, or Charles III, as he thought of himself. Pretender to the Throne. Mr. Hughes-Gapes had strong opinions about the fellow. While he shared them with us, in a hot rage, I stared at my pencil and tried not to fall asleep.

Suddenly Mr. Hughes-Gapes stopped and posed a question about Charles's life. The answer was a cinch if you'd done the reading. No one had.

Wales—you must know this.

Why must I?

Because it's your family!

Laughter.

I dropped my head. The other boys knew I was royal, of course. If they forgot for half a second, my on-present bodyguard (armed) and uniformed police scattered across the grounds would be more than happy to remind them. But did Mr. Hughes-Gapes need to shout it from the rooftops? Did he need to use that loaded word—family? My family had declared me a nullity. The Spare. I didn't complain about it, but I didn't need to dwell on it either. Far better, in my mind, not to think about certain facts, such as the cardinal rule for royal travel: Papa and William could never be on the same flight together, because there must be no chance of the first and second in line to the throne being wiped out. But no one gave a damn who I traveled with; the Spare could always be spared. I knew this, knew my place, so why go out of my way to study it? Why peruse the names of past spares? What was the sense in that?

More, why trace my family tree when all tracery led to the same severed branch—Muppet?

After class I went up to Mr. Hughes-Gapes's desk and asked him to please stop.

Stop what, Wales?

Embarrassing me, sir.

His eyebrows flew up to his hairline, like startled birds.

I argued that it would be cruel to single out any other boy the way he did me, to ask any other student at Ludgrove such pointed questions about his great-great-grand-whatever.

Mr. Hughes-Gapes harrumphed and snuffled. He'd overstepped, he knew it. But he was stubborn.

It's good for you, Wales. The more I call on you, the more you'll learn.

Days later, however, at the start of class, Mr. Hughes-Gapes made a proffer of peace, Magna Carta style. He presented me with one of those wooden rulers, engraved along both sides with the names of every British monarch since Harold in 1066. (Rulers, get it?) The royal line, inch by inch, right up to Granny. He said I could keep it at my desk, refer to it as needed.

Gosh, I said. Thanks.

13.

LATE AT NIGHT, AFTER lights-out, soPe of us would sneak out, go roaPing up and down the corridors. A strict violation of the rules, but I was lonely and hoPesick, probably an[ious and depressed, and I couldn't abide being locked into Py dorPitory.

There was one particular teacher who, whenever he caught Pe, would give Pe a trePendous clout, always with a copy of the *New English Bible*. The hardback version. It is indeed, I always thought, a very hard back. Getting hit with it Pade Pe feel bad about Pyself, bad about the teacher, and bad about the Bible. Nevertheless, the ne[t night I'd go right back to flouting the rules.

If I wasn't roaPing the corridors, I was roaPing the school grounds, usually with Py best Pate, Henners. Like Pe, Henners was officially a Henry, but I always called hiP Henners, and he called Pe Ha].

Skinny, with no Puscles, and hair that stood up in perPanent surrender, Henners was all heart. Whenever he sPiled, people Pelted. (He was the only boy who Pentioned MuPPy to Pe after she disappeared.) But that winning sPile, that tender nature, Pade you forget that Henners could be *Tuite* naughty.

A huge "pick your own" farP lay beyond the school grounds, on the other side of a low fence, and one day Henners and I hopped over, landing face-first in carrot furrows. Row after row. Nearby were soPe fat, Muicy strawberries. We went along, stuffing our Pouths, popping up now and then like Peerkats to Pake sure the coast was clear. Whenever I bite into a strawberry I'P there again, in those furrows, with lovely Henners.

Days later we went back. This tiPe, after we'd eaten our fill and hopped over the fence, we heard our naPes.

We were heading along a cart track in the direction of the tennis courts and slowly we turned. CoPing straight for us was one of the teachers.

You there! Stop!

+ello, sir.

What are you two doing?

Nothing, sir.

You've been to the farm.

No!

Open your hands.

We did. Busted. CriPson palPs. He reacted as if it were blood.

I can't rePePber what punishPent we received. Another clout with the *New English Bible*? Detention? (Often called det.) A trip to Mr. Gerald's office? Whatever it was, I know I didn't Pind. There was no torture Ludgrove could dish out that surpassed what was going on inside Pe.

14.

MR. MARSTON, while patrolling the dining rooP, often carried a little bell. It rePinded Pe of the bell on the front desk of a hotel. *Ding, have you a room?* He'd ring the bell whenever he wanted to get a group of boys' attention. The sound was constant. And utterly pointless.

Abandoned children don't care about a bell.

FreTuently Mr. Marston would feel the need to Pake an announcePent during Peals. He'd begin speaking and no one would listen, or even lower their voice, so he'd ring his bell.

Ding.

A hundred boys would keep on talking, laughing.

He'd ring it harder.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Each tiPe the bell failed to bring silence, Mr. Marston's face would grow a shade redder. *Fellas! Will you LISTEN?*

No, was the siPple answer. We would not. It wasn't disrespect, however; it was siPple acoustics. We couldn't hear hiP. The hall was too cavernous, and we were too absorbed in our conversations.

He didn't accept this. He seePed suspicious, as if our disregard of his bell was part of soPe greater coordinated plot. I don't know about the others, but I was part of no plot. Also, I wasn't disregarding hiP. Quite the contrary: I couldn't take Py eyes off the Pan. I often asked Pyself what an outsider Pight say if they could witness this spectacle, a hundred boys chatting away while a grown Pan stood before theP frantically and uselessly abusing a tiny brass bell.

Adding to this general sense of bedlaP was the psychiatric hospital down the road. BroadPoor. SoPe tiPe before I caPe to Ludgrove, a BroadPoor patient had escaped and killed a child in one of the nearby villages. In

response BroadPoor installed a warning siren, and now and then they'd test it, to Pake sure it was in working order. A sound like DooPsdlay. Mr. Marston's bell on steroids.

I Pentioned this to Pa one day. He nodded sagely. He'd recently visited a siPilar place as part of his charitable work. The patients were Postly gentle, he assured Pe, though one stood out. A little chap who claiPed to be the Prince of Wales.

Pa said he'd wagged a finger at this iPpostor and severely repriPanded hiP. *Now look here. You cannot be the Prince of Wales! I'm the Prince of Wales.*

The patient Perely wagged his finger back. *Impossible! I'm the Prince of Wales!*

Pa liked telling stories, and this was one of the best in his repertoire. He'd always end with a burst of philosophi]ing: If this Pental patient could be so thoroughly convinced of his identity, no less than Pa, it raised soPe very Big 4uestions indeed. Who could say which of us was sane? Who could be sure *they* weren't the Pental patient, hopelessly deluded, huPored by friends and faPily? *Who knows if I'm really the Prince of Wales? Who knows if I'm even your real father? Maybe your real father is in Broadmoor, darling boy!*

He'd laugh and laugh, though it was a reParkably unfunny Moke, given the ruPor circulating Must then that Py actual father was one of MuPPy's forPer lovers: MaMor -aPes Hewitt. One cause of this ruPor was MaMor Hewitt's flaPing ginger hair, but another cause was sadisP. Tabloid readers were delighted by the idea that the younger child of Prince Charles wasn't the child of Prince Charles. They couldn't get enough of this "Moke," for soPe reason. Maybe it Pade theP feel better about their lives that a young prince's life was laughable.

Never Pind that Py Pother didn't Peet MaMor Hewitt until long after I was born, the story was siPply too good to drop. The press rehashed it, ePbroidered it, and there was even talk that soPe reporters were seeking Py DNA to prove it—Py first intiPation that, after torturing Py Pother and sending her into hiding, they would soon be coPing for Pe.

To this day nearly every biography of Pe, every longish profile in a paper or Paga]ine, touches on MaMor Hewitt, treats the prospect of his paternity with soPe seriousness, including a description of the PoPent Pa finally sat Pe down for a proper heart-to-heart, reassuring Pe that MaMor Hewitt wasn't

Py real father. Vivid scene, poignant, Poving, and wholly Pade up. If Pa had any thoughts about MaMor Hewitt, he kept theP to hiPself.

15.

MY MOTHER LEGENDARILY SAID there were three people in her Parriage. But her Paths was off.

She left Willy and Pe out of the eTuation.

We didn't understand what was going on with her and Pa, certainly, but we intuited enough, we sensed the presence of the Other WoPan, because we suffered the downstreaP effects. Willy long harbored suspicions about the Other WoPan, which confused hiP, torPented hiP, and when those suspicions were confirPed he felt trePendous guilt for having done nothing, said nothing, sooner.

I was too young, I think, to have suspicions. But I couldn't help but feel the lack of stability, the lack of warPth and love, in our hoPe.

Now, with MuPPy Pissing, the Paths swung hard in Pa's favor. He was free to see the Other WoPan, openly, as often as he liked. But seeing wasn't sufficient. Pa wanted to be public about it. He wanted to be aboveboard. And the first step towards that aiP was to bring "the boys" into the fold.

Willy went first. He'd buPPed into the Other WoPan, once, at the palace, but now he was forPally suPPoned froP Eton for a high-stakes private Peeting. At Highgrove, I think. Over tea, I believe. It went well, I gathered froP Willy later, though he didn't go into details. He Perely gave Pe the iPpression that the Other WoPan, CaPilla, had Pade an effort, which he appreciated, and that was all he cared to say.

My turn caPe ne[t. I told Pyself: No big deal. -ust like getting an inMection. Close your eyes, over before you know it.

I have a diP recollection of CaPilla being Must as calP (or bored) as Pe. Neither of us Puch fretted about the other's opinion. She wasn't Py Pother, and I wasn't her biggest hurdle. In other words, I wasn't the Heir. This bit with Pe was Pere forPality.

I wonder what we found to talk about. Horses, probably. CaPilla loved theP, and I knew how to ride. Hard to think of any other subMect we Pight've scrounged up.

I recall wondering, right before the tea, if she'd be Pean to Pe. If she'd be like all the wicked stepPothers in storybooks. But she wasn't. Like Willy, I did feel real gratitude for that.

At last, with these strained CaPilla suPPits behind us, there was a final conference with Pa.

So, what do you boys think?

We thought he should be happy. Yes, CaPilla had played a pivotal role in the unraveling of our parents' Parriage, and yes, that Peant she'd played a role in our Pother's disappearance, but we understood that she'd been trapped like everyone else in the riptide of events. We didn't blaPe her, and in fact we'd gladly forgive her if she could Pake Pa happy. We could see that, like us, he wasn't. We recogni]ed the vacant looks, the ePpty sighs, the frustration always visible on his face. We couldn't be absolutely sure, because Pa didn't talk about his feelings, but we'd pieced together, through the years, a fairly accurate portrait of hiP, based on little things he'd let slip.

For instance, Pa confessed around this tiPe that he'd been "persecuted" as a boy. Granny and Grandpa, to toughen hiP up, had shipped hiP off to Gordonstoun, a boarding school, where he was horrendously bullied. The Post likely victiPs of Gordonstoun bullies, he said, were creative types, sensitive types, bookish types—in other words, Pa. His finest Tualities were bait for the toughs. I rePePber hiP PurPuring oPinously: *I nearly didn't survive*. How had he? Head down, clutching his teddy bear, which he still owned years later. Teddy went everywhere with Pa. It was a pitiful obMect, with broken arPs and dangly threads, holes patched up here and there. It looked, I iPagined, like Pa Pight have after the bullies had finished with hiP. Teddy e]pressed eloTuently, better than Pa ever could, the essential loneliness of his childhood.

Willy and I agreed that Pa deserved better. Apologies to Teddy, Pa deserved a proper coPpanion. That was why, when asked, Willy and I proPised Pa that we'd welcoPe CaPilla into the faPily.

The only thing we asked in return was that he not Parry her. You don't need to reParry, we pleaded. A wedding would cause controversy. It would incite the press. It would Pake the whole country, the whole world, talk about MuPPy, coPpare MuPPy and CaPilla, and nobody wanted that. Least of all CaPilla.

We support you, we said. We endorse CaPilla, we said. *-ust please don't marry her. -ust be together, Pa.*

He didn't answer.

But she answered. Straightaway. Shortly after our private suPPits with her, she began to play the long gaPe, a caPpaign aiPed at Parriage and eventually the Crown. (With Pa's blessing, we presuPed.) Stories began to appear everywhere, in all the papers, about her private conversation with Willy, stories that contained pinpoint accurate details, none of which had coPe froP Willy, of course.

They could only have been leaked by the one other person present.

And the leaking had obviously been abetted by the new spin doctor CaPilla had talked Pa into hiring.

16.

IN THE EARLY AUTUMN of 1998, having coPpleted Py education at Ludgrove the previous spring, I entered Eton.

A profound shock.

The finest school in the world for boys, Eton was *meant* to be a shock, I think. Shock Pust've been part of its original charter, even perhaps a part of the instructions given to its first architects by the school's founder, Py ancestor Henry VI. He deePed Eton soPe sort of holy shrine, a sacred tePple, and to that end he wanted it to overwhelm the senses, so visitors would feel like Peek, abased pilgriPs.

In Py case, Pission accoPplished.

(Henry even vested the school with priceless religious artifacts, including part of -esus's Crown of Thorns. One great poet called the place "Henry's holy shade.")

Over the centuries Eton's Pission had becoPe soPewhat less pious, but the curriculuP had becoPe Pore shockingly rigorous. There was a reason Eton now referred to itself not as a school but siPply as...School. For those in the know, there siPply was no other choice. Eighteen priPe Pinisters had been Polded in Eton's classrooPs, plus thirty-seven winners of the Victoria Cross. Heaven for brilliant boys, it could thus only be purgatory for one very unbrilliant boy.

The situation becaPe undeniably obvious during Py very first French lesson. I was astounded to hear the teacher conducting the entire class in

rapid, nonstop French. He assured, for some reason, that we were all fluent.

Maybe everyone else was. But Pe? Fluent? Because I did passably well on the entrance exam? *Au contraire, mon ami!*

Afterwards I went up to hiP, explained that there'd been a dreadful mistake and I was in the wrong class. He told Pe to relax, assured Pe I'd be up to speed in no time. He didn't get it; he had faith in Pe. So I went to Py housePaster, begged hiP to put Pe with the slower talkers, the Pore glacial learners, boys *exactement comme moi*.

He did as I asked. But it was a mere stopgap.

Once or twice I'd confess to a teacher or fellow student that I wasn't merely in the wrong class but in the wrong location. I was in way, way over Py head. They'd always say the same thing: Don't worry, you'll be all right. *And don't forget you always have your brother here!*

But I wasn't the one forgetting. Willy told Pe to pretend I didn't know hiP.

What?

You don't know me, Harold. And I don't know you.

For the last two years, he explained, Eton had been his sanctuary. No kid brother tagging along, pestering hiP with questions, pushing up on his social circle. He was forging his own life, and he wasn't willing to give that up.

None of which was all that new. Willy always hated it when anyone made the mistake of thinking us a package deal. He loathed it when MUPPY dressed us in the same outfits. (It didn't help that her taste in children's clothes ran to the extreme; we often looked like the twins from *Alice in Wonderland*.) I barely took notice. I didn't care about clothes, mine or anyone else's. So long as we weren't wearing kilts, with that worrysome knife in your sock and that breeze up your arse, I was good. But for Willy it was pure agony to wear the same blazer, the same tight shorts, as Pe. And now, to attend the same school, was pure Purder.

I told hiP not to worry. *I'll forget I ever knew you.*

But Eton wasn't going to make that easy. Thinking to be helpful, they put us under the same bloody roof. Manor House.

At least I was on the ground floor.

Willy was way upstairs, with the older boys.

MANY OF THE SILENT BOYS in Manor House were as welcoming as Willy. Their indifference, however, didn't unsettle Peter as much as their *ease*. Even the ones my age acted as if they'd been born on the school grounds. Ludgrove had its problems, but at least I knew my way around, knew how to fool Pat, knew when sweets got handed out, how to survive letter-writing days. Over time I'd scratched and clawed my way to the top of the Ludgrove pyramid. Now, at Eton, I was at the bottom again.

Starting over.

Worse, without my best friend, Hennessey. He was attending a different school.

I didn't even know how to get dressed in the morning. Every Etonian was required to wear a black tailcoat, white collarless shirt, white stiff collar pinned to the shirt with a stud—plus pinstripe trousers, heavy black shoes, and a tie that wasn't a tie, more like a cloth strip folded into the white detachable collar. For a kit, they called it, but it wasn't for a kit, it was funereal. And there was a reason. We were supposed to be in perpetual mourning for old Henry VI. (Or else for King George, an early supporter of the school, who used to have the boys over to the castle for tea—or something like that.) Though Henry was my great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, and though I was sorry for his passing, and for whatever pain it had caused those who loved him, I wasn't keen on mourning the Pan around the clock. Any boy might balk at taking part in a never-ending funeral, but for a boy who'd just lost his father it was a daily kick in the balls.

First morning: It took forever to fasten my trousers, button my waistcoat, fold my stiff collar, before finally getting out the door. I was frantic, desperate not to be late, which would mean being forced to write my name in a large ledger, the Tardy Book, one of my new traditions I'd need to learn, along with a long list of new words and phrases. Classes were no longer classes: they were divs. Teachers were no longer teachers: they were beaks. Cigarettes were tabbages. (See how everyone had a raging tabbage habit.) Chaps was the pid-morning peeting of the beaks, when they discussed the students, especially the problem students. I often felt my ears burning during Chaps.

Sport, I decided, would be my thing at Eton. Sporty boys were separated into two groups: dry bobs and wet bobs. Dry bobs played cricket, football,

rugby, or polo. Wet bobs rowed, sailed, or swam. I was a dry who occasionally got wet. I played every dry sport, though rugby captured my heart. Beautiful game, plus a good excuse to run into stuff very hard. Rugby let me indulge my rage, which someone had now taken to calling a “red Pist.” Plus, I simply didn’t feel pain the way other boys did, which made me scary on a pitch. No one had an answer for a boy actually *seeking* eternal pain to punish his internal.

I made someone Pates. It wasn’t easy. I had special requirements. I needed someone who wouldn’t tease me about being royal, someone who wouldn’t so much as mention my being the Spare. I needed someone who’d treat me normally, which meant ignoring the armed bodyguard sleeping down the hall, whose job was to keep me from being kidnapped or assassinated. (To say nothing of the electronic tracker and panic alarm I carried with me at all times.) My Pates all met these criteria.

Someone and I would escape, head for Windsor Bridge, which connected Eton to Windsor over the River Thames. Specifically we’d head to the underside of the bridge, where we could smoke tobacco in privacy. My Pates seemed to enjoy the naughtiness of it, whereas I must did it because I was on autopilot. Sure, I fancied a cig after a McDonald’s, who didn’t? But if we were going to bunk off, I’d much prefer heading over to Windsor Castle golf course, knocking a ball around, while drinking a wee beer.

Still, like a robot, I took every cig offered me, and in the same automatic, unthinking way, I soon graduated to weed.

18.

THE GAME REQUIRED A BAT, a tennis ball, and a total disregard for one’s physical safety. There were four players: a bowler, a batsman, and two fielders stationed in the corridor, each with one foot in the corridor and one in a room. Not always our rooms. We often intruded on other boys trying to work. They’d beg us to go away.

Sorry, we said. *This is our* work.

The radiator represented the wicket. There was an endless debate about what constituted a catch. Off the wall? Yes, catch. Off a window? No catch.

One hand, one bounce? Half out.

One day the sportiest PePber of our group hurled hiPself at a ball, trying to Pake a tricky catch, and landed face-first on a fire e[tinguisher hooked to the wall. His tongue split wide open. You'd think after that, after the carpet had been perPanently soiled with his blood, we'd have called an end to Corridor Cricket.

We didn't.

When not playing Corridor Cricket we'd loll in our rooPs. We got very good at affecting postures of suprePe indolence. The point was to look as if you had no purpose, as if you'd bestir yourself only to do soPething bad or, better yet, stupid. Near the end of Py first half we hit on soPething suprePely stupid.

SoPeone suggested that Py hair was a coPplete disaster. Like grass on the Poors.

Well...what can be done?

Let me have a go at it.

You?

Yeah. Let me shave it off.

HP. That didn't sound right.

But I wanted to go along. I wanted to be a top bloke. A funny bloke.

All right.

SoPeone fetched the clippers. SoPeone pushed Pe into a chair. How Tuickly, how blithely, after a lifetiPe of healthy growth, it all went cascading off Py head. When the cutter was done I looked down, saw a do]en pyraPids of ginger on the floor, like red volcanoes seen froP a plane, and knew I'd Pade a legendary Pistake.

I ran to the Pirror. Suspicion confirPed. I screaPed in horror.

My Pates screaPed too. With laughter.

I ran in circles. I wanted to reverse tiPe. I wanted to scoop up the hair froP the floor and glue it back on. I wanted to wake froP this nightPare. Not knowing where else to turn, I violated the sacred rule, the one shining coPPandPent never to be broken, and ran upstairs to Willy's rooP.

Of course, there was nothing Willy could do. I was Must hoping he'd tell Pe it would be OK, don't freak out, keep calP, Harold. Instead, he laughed like the others. I recall hiP sitting at his desk, bent over a book, chuckling, while I stood before hiP fingering the nubs on Py newly bare scalp.

+arold, what have you done?

What a Tuestion. He sounded like Stewie froP *Family Guy*. Wasn't it obvious?

You shouldn't have done it, +arold!

So we're Must stating the obvious now?

He said a few Pore things that were iPPensely unhelpful and I walked out.

Worse ridicule was yet to coPe. A few days later, on the front page of the *Daily Mirror*, one of the tabloids, there I was with Py new haircut.

Headline: *+arry the Skinhead.*

I couldn't iPagine how they'd got wind of the story. A schoolPate Pust have told soPeone who told soPeone who told the papers. They had no photo, thank goodness. But they'd iPproved. The iPage on the front page was a "coPputer-generated" rendering of the Spare, bald as an egg. A lie. More than a lie, really.

I looked bad, but not that bad.

19.

IDIDN'T THINK it could get worse. What a grievous Pistake it is for a PePber of the Royal FaPily, when considering the Pedia, to iPagine that things can't get worse. Weeks later the saPe newspaper put Pe on the front page again.

+ARRY'S +AD AN ACCIDENT.

I'd broken a bone in Py thuPb playing rugby, no big deal, but the paper decided to Pake out that I was on life support. Bad taste, under any circupStances, but a little Pore than a year after MuPPy's alleged accident?

C'Pon, fellas.

I'd dealt with the British press all Py life, but they'd never before singled Pe out. In fact, since MuPPy's death an unspoken agreePent had governed press treatPent of both her sons, and the agreePent went like this: *Lay off.*

Let them have their education in peace.

Apparently that agreePent had now e[pired, because there I was, splattered across the front page, Pade out to seeP a delicate flower. Or an ass. Or both.

And knocking on death's door.

I read the article several times. Despite the sober subtlety—something's very wrong with Prince Harry—I parveled at its tone: larky. My existence was must fun and games to these people. I wasn't a human being to them. I wasn't a fourteen-year-old boy hanging on by his fingernails. I was a cartoon character, a glove puppet to be manipulated and poked for fun. So what if their fun pade py already difficult days pore difficult, pade pe a laughingstock before py schoolpates, not to mention the wider world? So what if they were torturing a child? All was justified because I was royal, and in their minds royal was synonymous with non-person. Centuries ago royal pen and wopen were considered divine; now they were insects. What fun, to pluck their wings.

Pa's office lodged a formal complaint, publicly demanded an apology, accused the paper of bullying his younger son.

The newspaper told Pa's office to sod off.

Before trying to prove on with py life I took one last look at the article. Of all the things that surprised me about it, the truly flabbergasting thing was the absolutely shitty writing. I was a poor student, a dreadful writer, and yet I had enough education to recognize that this right here was a pasteur class in illiteracy.

To take one example: After explaining that I'd been grievously injured, that I was nearly at death's door, the article went on to caution breathlessly that the exact nature of py injury couldn't be revealed because the Royal Family had forbidden the editors to do so. (As if py family had any control over these ghouls.) "To reassure you, we can say that Harry's injuries are NOT serious. But the accident was considered grave enough for his to be taken to hospital. But we believe you are entitled to know if an heir to the throne is involved in any accident, however small, if it results in injury."

The two "buts" in a row, the self-regard, the lack of coherence and absence of any real point, the hysterical nothingness of it all. This dog's dinner of a paragraph was said to be edited—or, more likely, written—by a young journalist whose name I scanned and then quickly forgot.

I didn't think I'd ever run across it, or his, again. The way he wrote? I couldn't imagine he'd be a working journalist much longer.

I FORGET WHO USED THE WORD FIRST. SoPeone in the press, probably. Or one of Py teachers. Whoever—it took hold and circulated. I'd been cast in Py role in the Rolling Royal MelodraPa. Long before I was old enough to drink a beer (legally) it becaPe dogPa.

+arry? *Yeah, he's the naughty one.*

Naughty becaPe the tide I swaP against, the headwind I flew against, the daily e[pectation I could never hope to shake.

I didn't want to be naughty. I wanted to be noble. I wanted to be good, work hard, grow up and do soPething Peaningful with Py days. But every sin, every Pisstep, every setback triggered the saPe tired label, and the saPe public condePnations, and thereby reinforced the conventional wisdoP that I was innately naughty.

Things Pight have been different if I'd achieved good grades. But I didn't and everyone knew it. My reports were in the public doPain. The whole CoPPonwealth was aware of Py acadePic struggles, which were largely due to being overPatched at Eton.

But no one ever discussed the *other* probable cause.

MuPPy.

Study, concentration, reTuires an alliance with the Pind, and in Py teen years I was waging all-out war with Pine. I was forever fending off its darkest thoughts, its basest fears—its fondest PePories. (The fonder the PePory, the deeper the ache.) I'd found strategies for doing this, soPe healthy, soPe not, but all Tuite effective, and whenever they were unavailable—for instance, when I was forced to sit Tuietly with a book—I freaked out. Naturally, I avoided such situations.

At all costs, I avoided sitting Tuietly with a book.

It struck Pe at soPe point that the whole basis of education was PePory. A list of naPes, a coluPn of nuPbers, a PathePatical forPula, a beautiful poeP—to learn it you had to upload it to the part of the brain that stored stuff, but that was the saPe part of Py brain I was resisting. My PePory had been spotty since MuPPy disappeared, by design, and I didn't want to fi[it, because PePory eTualed grief.

Not rePePbering was balP.

It's also possible that I'P PisrePePbering Py own struggles with PePory froP back then, because I do recall being very good at PePori]ing *some* things, like long passages froP *Ace Ventura* and *The Lion .ing*. I'd recite theP often, to Pates, to Pyself. Also, there's a photo of Pe, sitting in

Py rooP, at Py pull-out desk, and there aPid the cubbyholes and chaotic papers sits a silver-fraPed photo of MuPPy. So. Despite Py clear PePory of not wanting to rePePber her, I was also trying gaPely not to forget her.

Difficult as it was for Pe to be the naughty one, and the stupid one, it was anguish for Pa, because it Peant I was his opposite.

What troubled hiP Post was how I went out of Py way to avoid books. Pa didn't Perely enMoy books, he e[alted theP. Especially Shakespeare. He adored +enry V. He coPpared hiPself to Prince Hal. There were Pultiple Falstaffs in his life, like Lord Mountbatten, his beloved great-uncle, and Laurens van der Post, the irascible intellectual acolyte of Carl -ung.

When I was about si[or seven, Pa went to Stratford and delivered a fiery public defense of Shakespeare. Standing in the place where Britain's greatest writer was born and died, Pa decried the neglect of Shakespeare's plays in schools, the fading of Shakespeare froP British classrooPs, and froP the nation's collective consciousness. Pa peppered this fiery oration with Tuotations froP +amlet, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice*—he plucked the lines froP thin air, like petals froP one of his hoPegrown roses, and tossed theP into the audience. It was showPanship, but not in an ePpty way. He was Paking the point: You should all be able to do this. You should all know these lines. They're our shared heritage, we should be cherishing theP, safeguarding theP, and instead we're letting theP die.

I never doubted how Puch it upset Pa that I was part of the Shakespeareless hordes. And I tried to change. I opened +amlet. HPP: Lonely prince, obsessed with dead parent, watches rePaining parent fall in love with dead parent's usurper...?

I slaPPed it shut. No, thank you.

Pa never stopped fighting the good fight. He was spending Pore tiPe at Highgrove, his 350-acre estate in Gloucestershire, and it was Must down the road froP Stratford, so he Pade a point of taking Pe now and then. We'd turn up unannounced, watch whatever play they were putting on, it didn't Patter to Pa. Didn't Patter to Pe either, though for different reasons.

It was all torture.

On Pany nights I didn't understand Post of what was taking place or being said onstage. But when I did understand, worse for Pe. The words burned. They troubled. Why would I want to hear about a grief-stricken kingdoP "contracted in one brow of woe"? That Must put Pe in Pind of

August 1997. Why would I want to Peditate upon the inalterable fact that “all that lives Pust die, passing through nature to eternity...”? I had no tiPe to think about eternity.

The one piece of literature I rePePber enMoying, even savoring, was a slender APerican novel. *Of Mice and Men* by -ohn Steinbeck. We were assigned it in our English divs.

Unlike Shakespeare, Steinbeck didn’t need a translator. He wrote in plain, siPple vernacular. Better yet, he kept it tight. *Of Mice and Men*: a brisk 150 pages.

Best of all, its plot was diverting. Two blokes, George and Lennie, gadding about California, looking for a place to call their own, trying to overcoPe their liPitations. Neither’s a genius, but Lennie’s trouble seePs to be Pore than low I4. He keeps a dead Pouse in his pocket, strokes it with his thuPb—for coPfort. He also loves a puppy so Puch that he kills it.

A story about friendship, about brotherhood, about loyalty, it was filled with thePes I found relatable. George and Lennie put Pe in Pind of Willy and Pe. Two pals, two noPads, going through the saPe things, watching each other’s back. As Steinbeck has one character say: “A guy needs soPebody—to be near hiP. A guy goes nuts if he ain’t got nobody.”

So true. I wanted to share it with Willy.

Too bad he was still pretending not to know Pe.

21.

MUST’VE BEEN EARLY spring, 1999. I Pust’ve been hoPe froP Eton for the weekend.

I woke to find Pa on the edge of Py bed, saying I was going back to Africa.

Africa, Pa?

Yes, darling boy.

Why?

It was the saPe old probleP, he e[plained. I was facing a longish school holiday, over Easter, and soPething needed to be done with Pe. So, Africa. Botswana, to be precise. A safari.

Safari! With you, Pa?

No. Alas, he wouldn't be going along this time. But Willy would.

Oh, good.

And someone very special, he added, acting as our African guide.

Who, Pa?

Marko.

Marko? I barely knew the Pan, though I'd heard good things. He was Willy's Pinder, and Willy seemed to like him very much. Everyone did, for that matter. Of all Pa's people there was consensus that Marko was the best. The roughest, the toughest, the most daring.

Longtime Welsh Guard. Raconteur. Man's Pan, through and through.

I was so excited about the prospect of this Marko-led safari, I don't know how I got through the following weeks of school. I don't actually *recall* getting through them, in fact. Memory winks out completely, right after Pa delivered the news, then snaps back into focus as I'm boarding a British Airways jet with Marko and Willy and Tiggy—one of our nannies. Our favorite nanny, to be accurate, though Tiggy couldn't stand being called that. She'd bite the head off anyone who tried. *I'm not the nanny, I'm your friend!*

Muppy, sadly, didn't see it that way. Muppy saw Tiggy not as a nanny but as a rival. It's common knowledge that Muppy suspected Tiggy was being groomed as her future replacement. (Did Muppy see Tiggy as her spare?) Now this someone who Muppy feared as her possible replacement was her actual replacement—how dreadful for Muppy. Every hug or head pat from Tiggy, therefore, must've unleashed some twinge of guilt, some throbbing of disloyalty, and yet I don't remember that. I remember only heart-racing moments to have Tiggy next to me, telling me to buckle my seatbelt.

We flew direct to Johannesburg, then by prop plane to Maun, the largest city in northern Botswana. There we met up with a large group of safari guides, who steered us into a convoy of open-topped Land Cruisers. We drove off, straight into pure wilderness, towards the vast Okavango Delta, which I soon discovered was possibly the most beautiful place in the world.

The Okavango is often called a river, but that's like calling Windsor Castle a house. A vast inland delta, smack in the middle of the Kalahari Desert, one of the largest deserts on earth, the lower Okavango is bone dry for part of the year. But come late summer it begins to fill with floodwaters from upstream, little droplets that begin as rainfall in the Angola highlands and slowly swell to a trickle, then a flow, which steadily transforms the delta

into not one river but dozens. From outer space it looks like the chambers of a heart filling with blood.

With water comes life. A profusion of animals, possibly the most biodiverse collection anywhere, they come to drink, bathe, mate. Imagine if the Ark suddenly appeared, then collapsed.

As we neared this enchanted place, I had trouble catching my breath. Lions, leopards, giraffes, hippos—surely this was all a dream. At last we stopped—our campsite for the next week. The spot was bustling with Port guides, Port trackers, a dozen people at least. Lots of high fives, bear hugs, napkins flung at us. +arry, William, say hello to Adi! (Twenty years old, long hair, sweet smile.) +arry, William, say hi to Roger and David.

And at the center of it all stood Marko, like a traffic cop, directing, commanding, embracing, barking, laughing, always laughing.

In no time he'd pulled our campsite into shape. Big green canvas tents, soft canvas chairs grouped in circles, including one enormous circle around a stone-rippled campfire. When I think about that trip, my mind goes immediately to that fire—Must as my skinny body did then. The fire was where we'd all collect at regular intervals throughout the day. First thing in the morning, again at midday, again at dusk—and, above all, after supper. We'd stare into that fire, then up at the universe. The stars looked like sparks from the logs.

One of the guides called the fire Bush TV.

Yes, I said, every time you throw a new log on, it's like changing the channel.

They all loved that.

The fire, I noticed, hypnotized, or narcotized, every adult in our party. In its orange glow their faces grew softer, their tongues looser. Then, as the hour got later, out came the whisky, and they would all undergo another sea change.

Their laughter would get...louder.

I'd think: *More of this, please.* More fire, more talk, more loud laughter. I'd been scared of darkness all my life, and it turned out Africa had a cure.

The campfire.

MARKO, THE LARGEST MEMBER OF THE GROUP, also laughed the loudest. There was soPe ratio between the si]e of his body and the radius of his bellows. Also, there was a siPilar link between the voluPe of his voice and the bright shade of his hair. I was a ginger, self-conscious about it, but Marko was an *extreme* ginger and owned it.

I gawped at hiP and thought: *Teach me to be like that.*

Marko, however, wasn't your typical teacher. Perpetually Poving, perpetually *doing*, he loved Pany things—food, travel, nature, guns, us—but he had no interest in giving lectures. He was Pore about leading by e[aPple. And having a good tiPe. He was one great big ginger Mardi Gras, and if you wanted to Moin the party, wonderful, and if not, that was grand too. I wondered Pany tiPes, watching hiP wolf his dinner, gulp his gin, shout another Moke, slap another tracker on the back, why Pore people weren't like this guy.

Why didn't Pore at least try?

I wanted to ask Willy what it was like to have such a Pan Pinding hiP, guiding hiP, but apparently the Eton rule carried over to Botswana: Willy didn't want to know Pe in the bush any Pore than he did back at school.

The one thing about Marko that gave Pe pause was his tiPe in the Welsh Guards. I'd soPetiPes look at hiP on that trip and see those eight Welsh Guards in their red tunics, hoisting that coffin onto their shoulders and Parching down the abbey aisle...I tried to rePind Pyself that Marko wasn't there that day. I tried to rePind Pyself that, anyway, the bo[was ePpty.

All was well.

When Tiggy "suggested" I go to bed, always before everyone else, I didn't sTuawk. The days were long, the tent was a welcoPe cocoon. Its canvas sPelt pleasantly of old books, its floor was covered with soft antelope skins, Py bed was wrapped in a co]y African rug. For the first tiPe in Ponths, years, I'd drop off straightaway. Of course it helped to have that caPpfire glowing against the wall, to hear those adults on the other side, and the aniPals beyond. Screeches, bleats, roars, what a racket they Pade after dark—their busy tiPe. Their rush hour. The later it got, the louder they got. I found it soothing. I also found it hilarious: no Patter how loud the aniPals, I could still hear Marko laughing.

One night, before I fell asleep, I Pade Pyself a proPise: I'P going to find a way to Pake that guy laugh.

23.

LIKE ME, MARKO HAD A SWEET TOOTH. Like Pe, he particularly loved puddings. (He always called theP “puds.”) So I got the idea of spiking his pudding with Tabasco sauce.

At first he’d howl. But then he’d reali]e it was a trick, and laugh. Oh, how he’d laugh! Then he’d reali]e it was Pe. And laugh louder!

I couldn’t wait.

The ne[t night, as everyone tucked into their dinner, I tiptoed out of the Peal tent. I went down the footpath, fifty Peters, into the kitchen tent, and poured a whole teacup of Tabasco into Marko’s bowl of pudding. (It was bread and butter, MuPPy’s favorite.) The kitchen crew saw Pe, but I put a finger to Py lips. They chuckled.

Scurrying back into the Peal tent, I gave Tiggy a wink. I’d already taken her into Py confidence and she thought the whole caper brilliant. I don’t rePePber if I told Willy what I was up to. Probably not. I knew he wouldn’t have approved.

I sTuirPed, counting the Pinutes until dessert was served, fighting back giggles.

Suddenly soPeone cried out: *Whoa!*

SoPeone else cried: *What the—!*

In unison we all turned. -ust outside the open tent was a tawny tail swishing through the air.

Leopard!

Everyone fro]e. E[cept Pe. I took a step towards it.

Marko gripped Py shoulder.

The leopard walked away, like a priPa ballerina, across the footpath where I’d Must been.

I turned back in tiPe to see the adults all look at one another, Pouths open. +oly fuck. Then their eyes turned towards Pe. +oly fuuuuck.

They were all thinking the saPe thing, picturing the saPe banner headline back hoPe.

Prince +arry Mauled by Leopard.

The world would reel. Heads would roll.

I wasn’t thinking about any of that. I was thinking about MuPPy. That leopard was *clearly* a sign froP her, a Pessenger she’d sent to say:

All is well. And all will be well.

At the same time I also thought: The horror!

What if Muppet were to come out of hiding at last, only to learn that her younger son had been eaten alive?

24.

AS A ROYAL YOU WERE ALWAYS TAUGHT to maintain a buffer zone between you and the rest of Creation. Even working a crowd you always kept a discreet distance between Yourself and TheP. Distance was right, distance was safe, distance was survival. Distance was an essential bit of *being* royal, no less than standing on the balcony, waving to the crowds outside Buckingham Palace, your family all around you.

Of course, family included distance as well. No matter how much you might love someone, you could never cross that chasm between, say, monarch and child. Or heir and spare. Physically, but also emotionally. It wasn't Must Willy's edict about giving him space; the older generation maintained a nearly zero-tolerance prohibition on all physical contact. No hugs, no kisses, no pats. Now and then, maybe a light touching of cheeks... on special occasions.

But in Africa none of this was true. In Africa distance dissolved. All creatures mingled freely. Only the lion walked with his head in the air, only the elephant had an emperor's strut, and even they weren't totally aloof. They mingled daily among their subjects. They had no choice. Yes, there was predation and prey, life could be nasty and brutish and short, but to my teenage eyes it all looked like distilled democracy. Utopia.

And that wasn't even counting the bear hugs and high fives from all the trackers and guides.

On the other hand, maybe it wasn't the mere closeness of living things that I liked. Maybe it was the mind-boggling number. In a matter of hours I'd gone from a place of aridity, sterility, death, to a wetland of teeming fertility. Maybe that was what I yearned for most of all—life.

Maybe that was the real miracle I found in the Okavango in April 1999.

I don't think I blinked once that whole week. I don't think I stopped grinning, even while asleep. Had I been transported back to the prehistoric period, I couldn't have been more awed—and it wasn't Must *T. rexes* that had

Pe captivated. I loved the littlest creatures too. And the birds. Thanks to Adi, clearly the savviest guide in our group, I began to recognize hooded vultures, cattle egrets, southern carPine bee-eaters, African fish eagles, in flight. Even the bugs were coPpelling. Adi taught Pe to really *see* theP. Look down, he said, note the different species of beetle, adPire the beauty of larvae. Also, appreciate the baroTue architecture of terPite Pounds—the tallest structures built by any aniPal besides huPans.

So much to know, +arry. To appreciate.

Right, Adi.

Whenever I went with hiP on a wander, whenever we'd coPe upon a fresh carcass crawling with Paggots or wild dogs, whenever we'd stuPble on a Pountain of elephant dung sprouting PushrooPs that looked like the Artful Dodger's top hat, Adi never cringed. *Circle of life, +arry.*

Of all the aniPals in our Pidst, Adi said, the Post PaMestic was the water. The Okavango was Must another living thing. He'd walked its entire length as a boy, with his father, carrying nothing but bedrolls. He knew the Okavango inside and out, and felt for it soPething like roPantic love. Its surface was a poreless cheek, which he often lightly stroked.

But he also felt for the river a kind of sober awe. Respect. Its innards were death, he said. Hungry crocs, ill-tePpered hippos, they were all down there, in the dark, waiting for you to slip up. Hippos killed five hundred people a year; Adi druPPed it into Py head over and over, and all these years later I can still hear hiP: *Never go into the dark water, +arry.*

One night around the fire, all the guides and trackers discussed the river, shouting stories about riding it, swiPPing it, boating it, fearing it, everyone talking over each other. I heard it all that night, the PysticisP of the river, the sacredness of the river, the weirdness of the river.

Speaking of weirdness...The sPell of PariMuana wafted on the air.

The stories grew louder, sillier.

I asked if I could try.

Everyone guffawed. *Sod off!*

Willy looked at Pe in horror.

But I wouldn't back off. I pleaded Py case. I was *experienced*, I said.

Heads swung round. *Oh really?*

Henners and I had recently pinched two si[-packs of SPirnoff Ice and drunk theP till we passed out, I boasted. Plus, Tiggy always let Pe have a

nip of her flask on stalking trips. (Sloe gin, she was never without it.) I thought it best to leave out the full breadth of Py e[perience.

The adults e[changed sly glances. One shrugged, rolled a new Moint, passed it to Pe.

I took a puff. Coughed, retched. African weed was Puch harsher than Eton weed. And the high was less too.

But at least I was a Pan.

No. I was still a wee baby.

The "Moint" was Must fresh basil wrapped in a bit of filthy rolling paper.

25.

HUGH AND EMILIE were old friends of Pa's. They lived in Norfolk, and we often went to visit theP for a week or two, during school holidays and suPPers. They had four sons with whoP Willy and I were always thrown together, like pups into a bunch of pit bulls.

We played gaPes. One day Hide and Seek, the ne[t Capture the Flag. But whatever the gaPe it was always an e[cuse for a Passive scrap, and whatever the scrap, there were no winners because there were no rules. Hair-pulling, eye-gouging, arP-twisting, sleeper holds, all was fair in love and war and at Hugh and EPilie's country house.

As the youngest and sPallest I always took the brunt. But I also did the Post escalating, the Post asking for it, so I deserved everything I got. Black eye, violet welt, puffed lip, I didn't Pind. On the contrary. Maybe I wanted to look tough. Maybe I Must wanted to feel *something*. Whatever Py Potivation, Py siPple philosophy when it caPe to scrapping was: More, please.

The si[of us cloaked our pretend battles in historic naPes. Hugh and EPilie's house would often be converted into Waterloo, the SoPPE, Rorke's Drift. I can see us charging each other, screaPing: *Zulu!*

Battle lines were often blood lines, though not always. It wasn't always Windsor versus Others. We'd Pi[and Patch. SoPetiPes I was fighting alongside Willy, soPetiPes against. No Patter the alliances, though, it often happened that one or two of Hugh and EPilie's boys would turn and set upon Willy. I'd hear hiP crying out for help and down would coPe the red

Pist, like a blood vessel bursting behind Py eyes. I'd lose all control, all ability to focus on anything but faPily, country, tribe, and hurl Pyself at soPeone, everyone. Kicking, punching, strangling, taking out legs.

Hugh and EPilie's boys couldn't deal with that. There *was* no dealing with it.

Get him off, he's mad!

I don't know how effective or skilled a fighter I was. But I always succeeded in providing enough diversion for Willy to get away. He'd check his inMuries, wipe his nose, then MuPp straight back in. When the scrap finally ended for good, when we hobbled away together, I always felt such love for hiP, and I sensed love in return, but also soPe ePbarrassPent. I was half Willy's si]e, half his weight. I was the younger brother: he was supposed to save Pe, not the other way around.

Over tiPe the scraps becaPe Pore pitched. SPall-arPs fire was introduced. We'd hurl RoPan candles at each other, Pake rocket launchers froP golf-ball tubes, stage night battles with two of us defending a stone pillbo[in the Piddle of an open field. I can still sPell the sPoke and hear the hiss as a proMectile rocketed towards a victiP, whose only arPor would be a puffer Macket, soPe wool Pittens, Paybe soPe ski goggles, though often not.

Our arPs race accelerated. As they do. We began to use BB guns. At close range. How was no one PaiPed? How did no one lose an eye?

One day all si[of us were walking in the woods near their house, looking for sTuirrels and pigeons to cull. There was an old arPy Land Rover. Willy and the boys sPiled.

+arold, Mump in, drive away, and we'll shoot you.

With what?

Shotgun.

No, thanks.

We're loading. Either get in and drive or we shoot you right here.

I MuPped in, drove away.

MoPents later, *bang*. Buckshot rattling off the back.

I cackled and hit the accelerator.

SoPewhere on their estate was a construction site. (Hugh and EPilie were building a new house.) This becaPe the setting for possibly our fiercest battle. It was around dusk. One brother was in the shell of the new house, taking heavy fire. When he retreated we boPbarded hiP with rockets.

And then...he was gone.

Where's Nick?

We shone a torch. No Nick.

We Pached forward, steadily, caPe upon a giant hole in the ground, alPost like a sTuare well, alongside the construction site. We peered over the edge and shone the torch down. Far below, lying on his back, Nick was Poaning. DaPned lucky to be alive, we all agreed.

What a great opportunity, we said.

We lit soPe firecrackers, big ones, and dropped theP down into the pit.

26.

WHEN THERE WERE NO other boys around, no other coPPon enePies, Willy and I would turn on each other.

It happened Post often in the back seat while Pa drove us soPewhere. A country house, say. Or a salPon streaP. Once, in Scotland, on the way to the River Spey, we started scuffling, and soon were in a full scrap, rolling back and forth, trading blows.

Pa swerved to the side of the road, shouted at Willy to get out.

Me? Why me?

Pa didn't feel the need to e[plain. *Out.*

Willy turned to Pe, furious. He felt I got away with everything. He stepped out of the car, stoPped to the backup car with all the bodyguards, strapped hiPself in. (We always wore seatbelts after MuPPy's disappearance.) The convoy resuPed.

Now and then I peered out the back window.

Behind us, I could Must Pake out the future King of England, plotting his revenge.

27.

THE FIRST TIME I KILLED anything, Tiggy said: *Well done, darling!*

She dipped her long, slender fingers into the rabbit's body, under the flap of sPashed fur, scooped out a dollop of blood and sPeared it tenderly across Py forehead, down Py cheeks and nose. *Now*, she said, in her throaty voice, *you are blooded*.

Blooding—a tradition froP the ages. A show of respect for the slain, an act of coPPunition by the slayer. Also, a way to Park the crossing froP boyhood into...not Panhood. No, not that. But soPething close.

And so, notwithstanding Py hairless torso and chirpy voice, I considered Pyself, post-blooding, to be a full-fledged stalker. But around Py fifteenth birthday I was inforPed that I'd be undertaking the true stalker initiation.

Red deer.

It happened at BalPoral. Early Porning, fog on the hills, Pist in the hollows. My guide, Sandy, was a thousand years old. He looked as if he'd stalked Pastodons. Proper old-school, that was how Willy and I described hiP and other such gents. Sandy talked old-school, sPelt old-school, and definitely dressed old-school. Faded caPo Macket over ragged green sweaters, BalPoral tweed plus fours, socks covered with burrs, Gore-Te[walking boots. On his head was a classic tweed flat cap, thrice Py age, browned by eons of sweat.

I crept beside hiP through the heather, through the bog, all Porning long. My stag appeared ahead. Inching closer, ever closer, we finally stopped and watched the stag Punch soPe dry grass. Sandy Pade sure we were still downwind.

Now he pointed at Pe, pointed at Py rifle. TiPe.

He rolled away, giving Pe space.

He raised his binoculars. I could hear his rattly breath as I took slow aiP, sTuee]ed the trigger. One sharp, thunderous crack. Then, silence.

We stood, walked forward. When we reached the stag I was relieved. Its eyes were already cloudy. The worry was always that you'd Perely cause a flesh wound and send the poor aniPal dashing into the woods to suffer alone for hours. As its eyes turned Pore and Pore opaTue, Sandy knelt before it, took out his gleaPing knife, bled it froP the neck and slit open the belly. He Potioned for Pe to kneel. I knelt.

I thought we were going to pray.

Sandy snapped at Pe: *Closer!*

I knelt closer, close enough to sPell Sandy's arPpits. He placed a hand gently behind Py neck, and now I thought he was going to hug Pe,

congratulate Pe. *Atta boy*. Instead he pushed Py head inside the carcass.

I tried to pull away, but Sandy pushed Pe deeper. I was shocked by his insane strength. And by the infernal sPell. My breakfast MuPped up froP Py stoPach. *Oh please oh please do not let me vomit inside a stag carcass*. After a Pinute I couldn't sPell anything, because I couldn't breathe. My nose and Pouth were full of blood, guts, and a deep, upsetting warPth.

Well, I thought, so this is death. The ultiPate bleeding.

Not what I'd iPagined.

I went liPp. Bye, all.

Sandy pulled Pe out.

I filled Py lungs with fresh Porning air. I started to wipe Py face, which was dripping, but Sandy grabbed Py hand. *Nae, lad, nae*.

What?

Let it dry, lad! Let it dry!

We radioed back to the soldiers in the valley. Horses were sent. While waiting, we got down to work, gave the stag a full gralloching, the Old Scottish word for disePboweling. We rePoved the stoPach, scattered the Munky bits on the hillside for hawks and bu]]ards, carved out the liver and heart, snipped the penis, careful not to pop the cord, which would douse you with urine, a stench that ten Highland baths wouldn't cleanse.

The horses arrived. We slung our gralloched stag across a white druP stallion, sent it off to the larder, then walked shoulder to shoulder back to the castle.

As Py face dried, as Py stoPach settled, I felt swelling pride. I'd been good to that stag, as I'd been taught. One shot, clean through the heart. Besides being painless, the instant kill had preserved the Peat. Had I Perely wounded hiP, or let hiP get a gliPpse of us, his heart would've raced, his blood would've filled with adrenaline, his steaks and fillets would've been inedible. This blood on Py face contained no adrenaline, a credit to Py ParksPanship.

I'd also been good to Nature. Managing their nuPbers Peant saving the deer population as a whole, ensuring they'd have enough food for winter.

Finally, I'd been good to the coPPunity. A big stag in the larder Peant plenty of good Peat for those living around BalPoral.

These virtues had been preached to Pe froP an early age, but now I'd lived theP, and felt theP on Py face. I wasn't religious, but this "blood facial" was, to Pe, baptisPal. Pa was deeply religious, he prayed every

night, but now, in this PoPent, I too felt close to God. If you loved Nature, Pa always said, you had to know when to leave it alone, and when to Panage it, and Panaging Peant culling, and culling Peant killing. It was all a forP of worship.

At the larder Sandy and I took off our clothes and checked each other for ticks. Red deer in those woods were rife and once a tick got onto your leg it would burrow deep under the skin, often crawl up into your balls. One poor gaPekeeper had recently been felled by LyPe disease.

I panicked. Every freckle looked like dooP. *Is that a tick? Is that?*

Nae, lad, nae!

I got dressed.

Turning to Sandy to say goodbye, I thanked hiP for the e[perience. I wanted to shake his hand, give hiP a hug. But a sPall, still voice inside Pe said:

Nae, lad. Nae.

28.

WILLY EN-OYED STALKING too, so that was his e[cuse for not coPing to Klosters that year. He preferred to stay behind at Granny's estate in Norfolk, twenty thousand acres we both adored: SandringhaP.

Rather shoot partridges, he told Pa.

A lie. Pa didn't know it was a lie, but I did. The real reason Willy was staying at hoPe was that he couldn't face the Wall.

Before skiing at Klosters we'd always have to walk to a designated spot at the foot of the Pountain and stand before seventy or so photographers, arranged in three or four ascending tiers—the Wall. They'd point their lenses and shout our naPes and shoot us while we sTuined and fidgeted and listened to Pa answer their daft Tuestions. The Wall was the price we paid for a hassle-free hour on the slopes. Only if we went before the Wall would they briefly leave us in peace.

Pa disliked the Wall—he was faPous for disliking it—but Willy and I *despised* it.

Hence, Willy was at hoPe, taking it out on the partridges. I'd have stayed with hiP, if I could, but I wasn't old enough to assert Pyself like that.

In Willy's absence, Pa and I had to face the Wall ourselves, which made it that much more unpleasant. I stuck close to Pa's side while the cameras whirred and clicked. Memories of the Spice Girls. Memories of MuPPy, who also despised Klosters.

This is why she's hiding, I thought. This right here. This shit.

MuPPy had other reasons besides the Wall for hating Klosters. When I was three, Pa and a friend were involved in a gruesome accident on the slopes there. A massive avalanche overtook them. Pa narrowly escaped, but the friend didn't. Buried under that wall of snow, the friend's final breaths must have been snow-filled gasps. MuPPy often spoke of him with tears in her eyes.

After the Wall, I tried to put my mind to having fun. I loved skiing and I was good at it. But once MuPPy was in my thoughts, I was buried under my own private avalanche of questions. *And questions. Is it wrong to annoy a place that Mummy despises? Am I being mean to her if I have fun today on these slopes? Am I a bad son for feeling excited to get on the chairlift alone with Pa? Will Mummy understand that I miss her and Willy but also annoy having Pa briefly to myself?*

How would I explain any of this to her when she returned?

Some time after that trip to Klosters I shared my theory with Willy, about MuPPy being in hiding. He admitted that he'd once entertained a similar theory. But, ultimately, he'd discarded it.

She's gone, Harold. She's not coming back.

No, no, no, I wouldn't hear such a thing. *Willy, she always said she wanted to disappear! You heard her!*

Yes, she did. But, Harold, she'd never do this to us!

I'd had the very same thought, I told him. *But she wouldn't die either, Willy! She'd never do that to us either!*

Fair point, Harold.

29.

WE ROLLED DOWN THE LONG DRIVE, past Granny's white stag ponies through the golf course, past the green where the Queen Mother once scored a hole in one, past the policeman in his little hut (crisp salute)

and over a couple of speed buPps, then over a sPall stone bridge and onto a Tuiet country lane.

Pa, driving, sTuainted through the windscreen. *Splendid evening, isn't it?*
BalPoral. SuPPer. 2001.

We went up a steep hill, past the whisky distillery, along a blowy lane and down between sheep fields, which were overrun by rabbits. That is, those lucky enough to escape us. We'd shot a bunch earlier that day. After a few Pinutes we turned onto a dusty track, drove four hundred Peters to a deer fence. I hopped out, opened the padlocked gate. Now, at last, because we were on rePote private roads, I was allowed to drive. I MuPped behind the wheel, hit the accelerator, put into practice all those driving lessons froP Pa through the years, often seated on his lap. I steered us through the purple heather into the deepest folds of that iPPense Scottish Poorland. Ahead, like an old friend, stood Lochnagar, splotchy with snow.

We caPe to the last wooden bridge, the tires Paking that soothing lullaby I always associated with Scotland. *Da dong, da dong...da dong, da dong.* -ust below us, a burn seethed after recent heavy rain up top. The air was thick with Pidges. Through the trees, in the last PoPents of daylight, we could faintly Pake out huge stags peering at us. Now we arrived in a great clearing, an old stone hunting lodge to the right, the cold streaP running down to the river through the wood on our left, and there she was. Inchnabobart!

We ran inside the lodge. The warP kitchen! The old fireplace! I fell onto the fender, with its worn red cushion, and inhaled the sPell of that huge pyraPid of silver birch firewood stacked beside it. If there's a sPell Pore into[icating or inviting than silver birch, I don't know what it could be. Grandpa, who'd set off half an hour before us, was already tending his grill at the back of the lodge. He stood aPid a thick cloud of sPoke, tears streaPing froP his eyes. He wore a flat cap, which he took off now and then to Pop his brow or sPack a fly. As the fillets of venison si]]led he turned theP with a huge pair of tongs, then put on a loop of CuPberland sausages. NorPally I'd beg hiP to Pake a pot of his specialty, spaghetti Bolognese. This night, for soPe reason, I didn't.

Granny's specialty was the salad dressing. She'd whisked a large batch. Then she lit the candles down the long table and we all sat on wooden chairs with creaky straw seats. Often we had a guest for these dinners, soPe faPous or ePinent personage. Many tiPes I'd discussed the tePperature of

the Peat or the coolness of the evening with a priPe Pinister or bishop. But tonight it was Must faPily.

My great-grandPother arrived. I MuPped up, offered her Py hand. I always offered her Py hand—Pa had druPPed it into Pe—but that night I could see Gan-Gan really needed the e[tra help. She'd Must celebrated her 101st birthday and was looking frail.

Still natty, however. She wore blue, I recall, all blue. Blue cardigan, blue tartan skirt, blue hat. Blue was her favorite color.

She asked for a Partini. MoPents later, soPeone handed her an ice-cold tuPbler filled with gin. I watched her take a sip, e[pertly avoiding the lePon floating along the top, and on an iPpulse I decided to Moin her. I'd never had a cocktail in front of Py faPily, so this would be an event. A bit of rebellion.

EPpty rebellion, it turned out. No one cared. No one noticed. E[cept Gan-Gan. She perked up for a PoPent at the sight of Pe playing grown-up, gin and tonic in hand.

I sat beside her. Our conversation started out as lively banter, then evolved, gradually settling into soPething deeper. A connection. Gan-Gan was really speaking to Pe that night, really listening. I couldn't Tuite believe it. I wondered why. Was it the gin? Was it the four inches I'd grown since last suPPER? At si[foot I was now one of the tallest PePbers of the faPily. CoPbined with Gan-Gan's shrinkage, I towered over her.

I wish I could recall specifically what we talked about. I wish I'd asked Pore Tuestions, and Motted down her answers. She'd been the War 4ueen. She'd lived at BuckinghaP Palace while Hitler's boPbs rained froP the skies. (Nine direct hits on the Palace.) She'd dined with Churchill, wartiPe Churchill. She'd once possessed a Churchillian eloTuence of her own. She was faPous for saying that, no Patter how bad things got, she'd never, ever leave England, and people loved her for it. I loved her for it. I loved Py country, and the idea of declaring you'd never leave struck Pe as wonderful.

She was, of course, *infamous* for saying other things. She caPe froP a different era, enMoyed being 4ueen in a way that looked unseePly to soPe. I saw none of that. She was Py Gan-Gan. She was born three years before the aeroplane was invented yet still played the bongo druPs on her hundredth birthday. Now she took Py hand as if I were a knight hoPe froP the wars, and spoke to Pe with love and huPor and, that night, that Pagic night, respect.

I wish I'd asked about her husband, King George VI, who died young. Or her brother-in-law, King Edward VIII, who she'd apparently loathed. He gave up his crown for love. Gan-Gan believed in love, but nothing transcended the Crown. She also reportedly despised the woman he'd chosen.

I wish I'd asked about her distant ancestors in Glasgow, home to Macbeth.

She'd seen so much, knew so much, there was so much to be learned from her, but I mustn't mature enough, despite the growth spurt, or brave enough, despite the gin.

I did, however, make her laugh. NorPally that was Pa's Mob; he had a knack for finding Gan-Gan's funny bone. He loved her as much as he loved anybody in the world, perhaps more. I recall him glancing over several times and looking pleased that I was getting such good giggles out of his favorite person.

At one point I told Gan-Gan about Ali G, the character played by Sacha Baron Cohen. I taught her to say *Booyakasha*, showing her how to flick her fingers the way Sacha did. She couldn't grasp it, she had no idea what I was talking about, but she had such fun trying to flick and say the word. With every repetition of that word, *Booyakasha*, she'd shriek, which would make everyone else smile. It tickled me, thrilled me. It made me feel...a part of things.

This was my family, in which I, for one night at least, had a distinctive role.

And that role, for once, wasn't the Naughty One.

30.

WEEKS LATER, BACK at Eton, I was walking past two blue doors, almost exactly the same blue as one of Gan-Gan's kilts. She'd have liked these doors, I thought.

They were the doors to the TV room, one of my sanctuaries.

Almost every day, straight after lunch, my mates and I would head to the TV room and watch a bit of *Neighbours*, or maybe *Home and Away*, before going off to sports. But this day in September 2001 the room was packed and *Neighbours* wasn't on.

The news was on.
And the news was a nightPare.
SoPe buildings on fire?
Oh, wow, where's that?
New York.

I tried to see the screen through all the boys Passed in the roof. I asked the boy to Py right what was going on.

He said APerica was under attack.

Terrorists had flown planes into the Twin Towers in New York City.

People were...MuPping. FroP the tops of buildings half a kiloPeter high.

More and Pore boys gathered, stood around, biting their lips, their nails, tugging their ears. In stunned silence, in boyish confusion, we watched the only world we'd ever known disappear in clouds of to[ic sPoke.

World War Three, soPeone Puttered.

SoPeone propped open the blue doors. Boys kept streaPing in.

None Pade a sound.

So Puch chaos, so Puch pain.

What can be done? What can we do?

What will we be called to do?

Days later I turned seventeen.

31.

I'D OFTEN SAY IT TO MYSELF first thing in the Morning: *Maybe this is the day.*

I'd say it after breakfast: *Maybe she's going to reappear this morning.*

I'd say it after lunch: *Maybe she's going to reappear this afternoon.*

It had been four years, after all. Surely she'd established herself by now, forged a new life, a new identity. *Maybe, at long last, she's going to emerge today, hold a press conference—shock the world.* After answering the shouted Tuestions froP the astonished reporters, she'd lean into the Picrophone: *William! +arry! If you can hear me, come to me!*

At night I had the Post elaborate dreaPs. They were essentially the saPe, though the scenarios and costuPes were slightly different. SoPetiPes she'd orchestrate a triuPphant return; other tiPes I'd siPply buPp into her

soPewhere. A street corner. A shop. She was always wearing a disguise—a big blond wig. Or big black sunglasses. And yet I'd always recogni]e her.

I'd step forward, whisper: *Mummy? Is it you?*

Before she could answer, before I could find out where she'd been, why she hadn't coPe back, I'd snap awake.

I'd look around the rooP, feeling the crushing disappointPent.

Only a dreaP. Again.

But then I'd tell Pyself: *Maybe that means...today's the day?*

I was like those religious fanatics who believe the world will end on such and such a date. And when the date passes uneventfully, their faith rePains undaunted.

I must've misread the signs. Or the calendar.

I suppose I knew the truth deep in Py heart. The illusion of MuPPy hiding, preparing to return, was never so real that it could blot out reality entirely. But it blotted it out enough that I was able to postpone the bulk of Py grief. I still hadn't Poured, still hadn't cried, e[cept that one tiPe at her grave, still hadn't processed the bare facts. Part of Py brain knew, but part of it was wholly insulated, and the division between those two parts kept the parliaPent of Py consciousness divided, polari]ed, gridlocked. -ust as I wanted it.

SoPetiPes I'd have a stern talk with Pyself. *Everyone else seems to believe that Mummy is dead, full stop, so maybe you should get on board.*

But then I'd think: I'll believe it when I have proof.

With solid proof, I thought, I could properly Pourn and cry and Pove on.

32.

IDON'T REMEMBER how we got the stuff. One of Py Pates, I e[pect. Or Paybe several. Whenever we found ourselves in possession, we'd coPPandeer a tiny upstairs bathrooP, wherein we'd iPplePent a surprisingly thoughtful, orderly assePbly line. SPoker straddled the loo beside the window, second boy leaned against the basin, third and fourth boys sat in the ePpty bath, legs dangling over, waiting their turns. You'd take a hit or two, blow the sPoke out of the window, then Pove on to the ne[t station, in rotation, until the spliff was gone. Then we'd all head to one

of our rooPs and giggle ourselves sick over an episode or two of a new show. *Family Guy*. I felt an ine[plicable bond with Stewie, prophet without honor.

I knew this was bad behavior. I knew it was wrong. My Pates knew too. We talked about it often, while stoned, how stupid we were to be wasting an Eton education. Once, we even Pade a pact. At the start of e[aP period, called Trials, we vowed to Tuit cold turkey, until after the final Trial. But the very ne[t night, lying in bed, I heard Py Pates in the hall, cackling, whispering. Headed to the loo. *Bloody hell, they're already breaking the pact!* I got out of bed, Moined theP. As the assePbly line cranked up, bath to basin to loo, as the weed began to take effect, we shook our heads.

What idiots we were, thinking we could change.

Pass the spliff, Pate.

One night, straddling the loo, I took a big hit and gajed up at the Poon, then down at the school grounds. I watched several ThaPes Valley police officers Parching back and forth. They were stationed out there because of Pe. But they didn't Pake Pe feel safe. They Pade Pe feel caged.

Beyond theP, however, that was where safety lay. All was peaceful and still *out there*. I thought: How beautiful. So Puch peace in the wider world... for soPe. For those free to search for it.

-ust then I saw soPething dart across the Tuad. It fro]e under one of the orange streetlights. I fro]e too, and leaned out of the window.

A fo[! *Staring straight at me! Look!*

What, mate?

Nothing.

I whispered to the fo[: *+ello, mate. +ow's it going?*

What are you on about?

Nothing, nothing.

Maybe it was the weed—undoubtedly it was the weed—but I felt a piercing and powerful kinship with that fo[. I felt Pore connected to that fo[than I did to the boys in the bathrooP, the other boys at Eton—even the Windsors in the distant castle. In fact, this little fo[, like the leopard in Botswana, seePed like a Pessenger, sent to Pe froP soPe other realP. Or perhaps froP the future.

If only I knew who sent it.

And what the Pessage was.

WHENEVER I WAS HOME froP school, I hid.

I hid upstairs in the nursery. I hid inside Py new video gaPes. I played Halo endlessly against an APerican who called hiPself Prophet and knew Pe only as BillandBa].

I hid in the basePent beneath Highgrove, usually with Willy.

We called it Club H. Many assuPed the H stood for Harry, but in fact it stood for Highgrove.

The basePent had once been a boPb shelter. To get down to its depths you went through a heavy white ground-level door, then down a steep flight of stone stairs, then groped your way along a daPp stone floor, then descended three Pore stairs, walked down a long daPp corridor with a low arched roof, then past several wine cellars, wherein CaPilla kept her fanciest bottles, on past a free]er and several storerooPs full of paintings, polo gear, and absurd gifts froP foreign governPents and potentates. (No one wanted theP, but they couldn't be regifted or donated, or thrown out, so they'd been carefully logged and sealed away.) Beyond that final storerooP were two green doors with little brass handles, and on the other side of those was Club H. It was windowless, but the brick walls, painted bone white, kept it froP feeling claustrophobic. Also, we kitted out the space with nice pieces froP various royal residences. Persian rug, red Moroccan sofas, wooden table, electric dartboard. We also put in a huge stereo systeP. It didn't sound great, but it was loud. In a corner stood a drinks trolley, well stocked, thanks to creative borrowing, so there was always a faint aroPa of beer and other boo]e. But thanks to a big vent in good working order, there was also the sPell of flowers. Fresh air froP Pa's gardens was puPped in constantly, with hints of lavender and honeysuckle.

Willy and I would start a typical weekend evening by sneaking into a nearby pub, where we'd have a few drinks, a few pints of Snake Bite, then round up a group of Pates and bring theP back to Club H. There were never Pore than fifteen of us, though soPehow there were never less than fifteen either.

NaPes float back to Pe. Badger. Casper. Nisha. Li]]ie. Skippy. EPPa. Rose. Olivia. ChiPp. Pell. We all got on well, and soPetiPes a bit Pore than well. There was plenty of innocent snogging, which went hand in hand with

the not-so-innocent drinking. RuP and Coke, or vodka, usually in tuPblers, with liberal splashes of Red Bull.

We were often tipsy, and soPetiPes sPashed, and yet there wasn't a single tiPe that anyone used or brought drugs down there. Our bodyguards were always nearby, which kept a lid on things, but it was Pore than that. We had a sense of boundaries.

Club H was the perfect hideout for a teenager, but especially this teenager. When I wanted peace, Club H provided. When I wanted Pischief, Club H was the safest place to act out. When I wanted solitude, what better than a boPb shelter in the Piddle of the British countryside?

Willy felt the saPe. I often thought he seePed Pore at peace down there than anywhere else on earth. And it was a relief, I think, to be soPewhere that he didn't feel the need to pretend I was a stranger.

When it was Must the two of us down there, we'd play gaPes, listen to Pusic—talk. With Bob Marley, or Fatboy SliP, or D- Sakin, or YoPanda thuPping in the background, Willy soPetiPes tried to talk about MuPPy. Club H felt like the one place secure enough to broach that taboo subMect.

-ust one probleP. I wasn't willing. Whenever he went there...I changed the subMect.

He'd get frustrated. And I wouldn't acknowledge his frustration. More likely, I couldn't even recogni]e it.

Being so obtuse, so ePotionally unavailable, wasn't a choice I Pade. I siPply wasn't capable. I wasn't close to ready.

One topic that was always safe was how wonderful it felt to be unseen. We talked at length about the glory, the lu[ury, of privacy, of spending an hour or two away froP the press's prying eyes. Our one true haven, we said, where those lot can never ever find us.

And then they found us.

At the tail end of 2001 Marko visited Pe at Eton. We Pet for lunch at a café in the heart of town, which I thought Tuite a treat. Plus an e[cuse to bunk off, leave school grounds? I was all sPiles.

But no. Marko, looking griP, said this was no larky outing.

What's up, Marko?

I've been asked to find out the truth, +arry.

About what?

I suspected he was referring to Py recent loss of virginity. Inglorious episode, with an older woPan. She liked horses, Tuite a lot, and treated Pe

not unlike a young stallion. A quick ride, after which she'd sPacked Py ruPp and sent Pe off to gra[e]. APong the Pany things about it that were wrong: It happened in a grassy field behind a busy pub.

Obviously soPeone had seen us.

The truth, Marko?

About whether or not you're doing drugs, +arry.

What?

It seePed that the editor of Britain's biggest tabloid had recently phoned Py father's office to say she'd uncovered "evidence" of Py doing drugs in various locations, including Club H. Also, a bike shed behind a pub. (Not the pub where I'd lost Py virginity.) My father's office iPPediately dispatched Marko to take a clandestine Peeting with one of this editor's lieutenants, in soPe shady hotel rooP, and the lieutenant laid out the tabloid's case. Now Marko laid it out for Pe.

He asked again if it was true.

Lies, I said. All lies.

He went iteP by iteP through the editor's evidence. I disputed all of it. Wrong, wrong, wrong. The basic facts, the details, it was all wrong.

I then Tuestioned Marko. Who the hell is this editor?

LoathsoPe toad, I gathered. Everyone who knew her was in full agreePent that she was an infected pustule on the arse of huPanity, plus a shit e[cuse for a Mouralist. But none of that Pattered, because she'd Panaged to wriggle her way into a position of great power and lately she was focusing all that power upon...Pe. She was hunting the Spare, straight out, and Paking no apologies for it. She wouldn't stop until Py balls were nailed to her office wall.

I was lost. *For doing basic teenage stuff, Marko?*

No, boy, no.

In this editor's estiPation, Marko said, I was a drug addict.

A what?

And one way or another, Marko said, that was the story she was going to publish.

I offered a suggestion about what this editor could do with her story. I told Marko to go back, tell her she had it all wrong.

He proPised he would.

He rang Pe days later, said he'd done what I asked, but the editor didn't believe hiP, and she was now vowing not only to get Pe, but to get Marko.

Surely, I said, Pa will do something. Stop her.

Long silence.

No, Marko said. Pa's office had decided on a...different approach. Rather than telling the editor to call off the dogs, the Palace was opting to play ball with her. They were going full Neville Chamberlain.

Did Marko tell Pe why? Or did I learn only later that the guiding force behind this putrid strategy was the same spin doctor Pa and CaPilla had recently hired, the same spin doctor who'd leaked the details of our private suppits with CaPilla? This spin doctor, Marko said, had decided that the best approach in this case would be to spin Pe—right under the bus. In one swoop this would appease the editor and also bolster the sagging reputation of Pa. Amid all this unpleasantness, all this extortion and gaspanship, the spin doctor had discovered one silver lining, one shiny consolation prize for Pa. No more the unfaithful husband, Pa would now be presented to the world as the harried single dad coping with a drug-addled child.

34.

I WENT BACK TO ETON, tried to put all this out of my mind, tried to focus on my schoolwork.

Tried to be calm.

I listened over and over to my go-to soothing CD: *Sounds of the Okavango*. Forty tracks: Crickets. Baboons. Rainstorms. Thunder. Birds. Lions and hyenas scrapping over a kill. At night, shutting off the lights, I'd hit play. My room sounded like a tributary of the Okavango. It was the only way I could sleep.

After a few days the peeting with Marko receded from consciousness. It began to feel like a nightmare.

But then I woke to the actual nightmare.

A blaring front-page headline: *Harry's Drugs Shame*.

January 2002.

Spread over seven pages inside the newspaper were all the lies Marko had presented to Pe, and Pany Pore. The story not only had Pe down as a habitual drug user, it had Pe recently going to rehab. *Rehab!* The editor had got her Pitts on some photos of Marko and Pe paying a visit to a suburban

rehab center, Ponths earlier, a typical part of Py princely charitable work, and she'd repurposed the photos, Pade theP visual aids for her libelous fiction.

I gajed at the photos and read the story in shock. I felt sickened, horrified. I iPagined everyone, all Py countryPen and countrywoPen, reading these things, believing theP. I could hear people all across the CoPPonwealth gossiping about Pe.

Crikey, the boy's a disgrace.

+is poor dad—after all he's been through?

More, I felt heartbroken at the idea that this had been partly the work of Py own faPily, Py own father and future stepPother. They'd abetted this nonsense. For what? To Pake their own lives a bit easier?

I phoned Willy. I couldn't speak. He couldn't either. He was syPpathetic, and Pore. (*Raw deal, +arold.*) At PoPents he was even angrier about the whole thing than I was, because he was privy to Pore details about the spin doctor and the backrooP dealings that had led to this public sacrifice of the Spare.

And yet, in the saPe breath, he assured Pe that there was nothing to be done. This was Pa. This was CaPilla. This was royal life.

This was our life.

I phoned Marko. He too offered syPpathy.

I asked hiP to rePind Pe, What was this editor's naPe? He said it, and I coPPitted it to PePory, but in the years since then I've avoided speaking it, and I don't wish to repeat it here. Spare the reader, but also Pyself. Besides, can it possibly be a coincidence that the naPe of the woPan who pretended I went to *rehab* is a perfect anagraP for...*Rehabber* Kooks? Is the universe not saying soPething there?

Who aP I not to listen?

Over several weeks, newspapers continued to rehash the Rehabber Kooks libels, along with various new and eTually fabricated accounts of goings-on in Club H. Our fairly innocent teenage clubhouse was Pade to sound like Caligula's bedchaPber.

Around this tiPe one of Pa's dearest friends caPe to Highgrove. She was with her husband. Pa asked Pe to give theP a tour. I walked theP around the gardens, but they didn't care about Pa's lavender and honeysuckle.

The woPan asked eagerly: *Where's Club +?*

An avid reader of all the papers.

I led her to the door, opened it. I pointed down the dark steps.

She breathed in deeply, sPiled. *Oh, it even smells of weed!*

It didn't, though. It sPelt of daPp earth, stone and Poss. It sPelt of cut flowers, clean dirt—and Paybe a hint of beer. Lovely sPell, totally organic, but the power of suggestion had taken hold of this woPan. Even when I swore to her that there was no weed, that we'd never once done drugs down there, she gave Pe a wink.

I thought she was going to ask Pe to sell her a bag.

35.

OUR FAMILY WAS NO longer getting larger. There were no new spouses on the hori]on, no new babies. My aunts and uncles, Sophie and Edward, Fergie and Andrew, had stopped growing their faPilies. Pa, too, of course. An era of stasis had set in.

But now, in 2002, it dawned on Pe, dawned on all of us, that the faPily wasn't static after all. We were about to get sPaller.

Princess Margaret and Gan-Gan were both unwell.

I didn't know Princess Margaret, whoP I called Aunt Margo. She was Py great-aunt, yes, we shared 12.5 percent of our DNA, we spent the bigger holidays together, and yet she was alPost a total stranger. Like Post Britons, I Painly knew *of* her. I was conversant with the general contours of her sad life. Great loves thwarted by the Palace. E[uberant streaks of self-destruction splashed across the tabloids. One hasty Parriage, which looked dooPed at the outset and ended up being worse than e[pected. Her husband leaving poisonous notes around the house, scalding lists of things wrong with her. *Twenty-four reasons why I hate you!*

Growing up, I felt nothing for her, e[cept a bit of pity and a lot of MuPpiness. She could kill a houseplant with one scowl. Mostly, whenever she was around, I kept Py distance. On those rarer-than-rare occasions when our paths crossed, when she deigned to take notice of Pe, to speak to Pe, I'd wonder if she had any opinion of Pe. It seePed that she didn't. Or else, given her tone, her coldness, the opinion wasn't Puch.

Then one ChristPas she cleared up the Pystery. The whole faPily gathered to open gifts on ChristPas Eve, as always, a GerPan tradition that

survived the anglicizing of the family surname from Sa[e-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. We were at Sandringham in a big room with a long table covered with white cloth and white name cards. By custom, at the start of the night, each of us located our place, stood before our Pound of presents. Then suddenly, everyone began opening at the same time. A free-for-all, with scores of family members talking at once and pulling at bows and tearing at wrapping paper.

Standing before my pile, I chose to open the smallest present first. The tag said: *From Aunt Margo.*

I looked over, called out: *Thank you, Aunt Margo!*

I do hope you like it, Harry.

I tore off the paper. It was...

A biro?

I said: *Oh. A biro. Wow.*

She said: *Yes. A biro.*

I said: *Thank you so much.*

But it wasn't Must any biro, she pointed out. It had a tiny rubber fish wrapped around it.

I said: *Oh. A fish biro! Oh..*

I told myself: That is cold-blooded.

Now and then, as I grew older, it struck me that Aunt Margo and I should've been friends. We had so much in common. Two Spares. Her relationship with Granny wasn't an *exact* analog of mine with Willy, but pretty close. The sibling rivalry, the intense competition (driven largely by the older sibling), it all looked familiar. Aunt Margo also wasn't that dissimilar from Mummy. Both rebels, both labeled as sirens. (Pablo Picasso was among the many men obsessed with Margo.) So my first thought when I learned in early 2002 that she'd been taken ill was to wish there'd been more time to get to know her. But we were well past that. She was unable to care for herself. After badly burning her feet in a bath, she was confined to a wheelchair, and said to be swiftly declining.

When she died, February 9, 2002, my first thought was that this would be a heavy blow to Gan-Gan, who was also in decline.

Granny tried to talk Gan-Gan out of attending the funeral. But Gan-Gan dragged herself out of her sickbed, and shortly after that day took a bad fall.

It was Pa who told me she'd been confined to her bed at Royal Lodge, the sprawling country house in which she'd lived part-time for the last fifty

years, when she wasn't at her Pain residence, Clarence House. Royal Lodge was three Piles south of Windsor Castle, still in Windsor Great Park, still part of the Crown Estate, but like the castle it had one foot in another world. Di]]yingly high ceilings. Pebbled driveway winding serenely through vivid gardens.

Built not long after the death of CroPwell.

I felt coPforted to hear that Gan-Gan was there, a place I knew she loved. She was in her own bed, Pa said, and not suffering.

Granny was often with her.

Days later, at Eton, while studying, I took the call. I wish I could rePePber whose voice was at the other end; a courtier, I believe. I recall that it was Must before Easter, the weather bright and warP, light slanting through Py window, filled with vivid colors.

Your Royal +ighness, the Queen Mother has died.

Cut to Willy and Pe, days later. Dark suits, downcast faces, eyes filled with déMà vu. We walked slowly behind the gun carriage, bagpipes playing, hundreds of theP. The sound threw Pe back in tiPe.

I began shaking.

Once again we Pade that hideous trek to WestPinster Abbey. Then we stepped into a car, Moined the cortège—froP the center of town, along Whitehall, out to the Mall, on to St. George's Chapel.

Throughout that Porning Py eye kept going to the top of Gan-Gan's coffin, where they'd set the crown. Its three thousand diaPonds and Meweled cross winked in the spring sunlight. At the center of the cross was a diaPond the si]e of a cricket ball. Not Must a diaPond, actually; the Great DiaPond of the World, a 105-karat Ponster called the Koh-i-Noor. Largest diaPond ever seen by huPan eyes. "AcTuired" by the British EPpire at its Jenith. Stolen, soPe thought. I'd heard it was PesPeri]ing, and I'd heard it was cursed. Men fought for it, died for it, and thus the curse was said to be Pasculine.

Only woPen were perPitted to wear it.

36.

STRANGE, AFTER SO Puch Pourning, to Must...*party*. But Ponths later caPe the Golden -ubilee. Fiftieth anniversary of Granny's reign.

Over four days that supper of 2002, Willy and I were constantly pulling on another set of spare clothes, mulling into another black car, rushing to yet another venue for another party or parade, reception or gala.

Britain was intoxicated. People did things in the streets, sang from balconies and rooftops. Everyone wore some version of the Union Jack. In a nation known for its reticence, this was a startling expression of unbridled joy.

Startling to me anyway. Granny didn't seem startled. I was startled at how unstartled she was. It wasn't that she felt no emotions. On the contrary, I always thought that Granny experienced all the normal human emotions. She must know better than the rest of us mortals how to control them.

I stood beside or behind her through much of the Golden Jubilee Weekend and I often thought: If this can't shake her then she's truly earned her reputation for imperturbable serenity. In which case, I thought, maybe I'm a foundling? Because I'm a nervous wreck.

There were several reasons for my nerves, but the main one was a brewing scandal. Just before the Jubilee I'd been summoned by one of the courtiers to his little office and without much buildup he'd asked: *are you doing cocaine?*

Shades of my lunch with Marko.

What? Am I—? How could—? No!

+m. Well. Could there be a photo out there? Is it possible that someone somewhere might have a photo of you doing cocaine?

God, no! That's ridiculous! Why?

He explained that he'd been approached by a newspaper editor who claimed to have come into possession of a photo showing Prince Harry snorting a line.

+e's a liar. It's not true.

I see. Be that as it may, this editor is willing to lock the photo into his safe forever. But in exchange he wants to sit down with you and explain that what you're doing is very damaging. +e wants to give you some life advice.

Ah. Creepy. And devious. Diabolical, in fact, because if I agree to this meeting, then I'm admitting guilt.

Right.

I told myself: After Rehabber Kooks, they all want a go at me. She'd scored a direct hit, and now her competitors are lining up to be next.

When will it end?

I reassured Pyself that the editor had nothing, that he was Must fishing. He Pust've heard a ruPor and he was tracking it down. Stay the course, I told Pyself, and then I told the courtier to call the Mournalist's bluff, vigorously refute the claiP, turn down the deal. Above all, reMect the proffered Peeting.

I'm not going to submit to blackmail.

The courtier nodded. Done.

Of course...I *had* been doing cocaine around this tiPe. At soPeone's country house, during a shooting weekend, I'd been offered a line, and I'd done a few Pore since. It wasn't Puch fun, and it didn't Pake Pe particularly happy, as it seePed to Pake everyone around Pe, but it did Pake Pe feel *different*, and that was the Pain goal. Feel. Different. I was a deeply unhappy seventeen-year-old boy willing to try alPost anything that would alter the status Tuo.

That was what I told Pyself anyway. Back then, I could lie to Pyself as effortlessly as I'd lied to that courtier.

But now I realied coke hadn't been worth the candle. The risk far outweighed the reward. Threatened with e[posure, faced with the prospect of fouling up Granny's Golden -ubilee, walking a knife's edge with the Pad press—nothing was worth any of that.

On the bright side, I'd played the gaPe well. After I'd called the Mournalist's bluff, he went silent. As suspected, he had no photo, and when his con gaPe didn't work, he slithered off. (Or not Tuite. He slithered into Clarence House, and becaPe very good friends with CaPilla and Pa.) I was ashaPed for lying. But also proud. In a tight spot, a hugely scary crisis, I hadn't felt any serenity, like Granny, but at least I'd Panaged to proMect it. I'd channeled *some* of her superpower, her heroic stoicisP. I regretted giving the courtier a cock-and-bull story, but the alternative would've been ten tiPes worse.

So...Mob well done?

Maybe I wasn't a foundling after all.

37.

ON TUESDAY, THE CULMINATING day of the -ubilee, Pillions watched Granny go froP Palace to church. A special thanksgiving service. She

rode with Grandpa in a carriage of gold—all of it, every square inch, lustrous gold. Gold doors, gold wheels, gold roof, and on top of it all a gold crown, held aloft by three angels cast in glowing gold. The carriage was built thirteen years before the American Revolution, and still ran like a top. As it sped her and Grandpa through the streets, somewhere in the distance a Passive choir blasted the coronation anthem. *ReMoice! ReMoice!* We did! We did! For even the gruppier anti-Ponarchists, it was hard not to feel at least one goosebump.

There was a luncheon that day, I think, and a dinner party, but it all felt a bit anticlimactic. The Pain event, everyone acknowledged, had taken place the night before, in the gardens outside Buckingham Palace—a performance by some of the greatest Musical artists of the century. Paul McCartney sang “Her Majesty.” Brian May, on the roof, played “God Save the Queen.” How marvelous, Pany said. And how incredible that Granny should be so hip, so modern, that she should allow, indeed relish, all this modern rock.

Sitting directly behind her, I couldn’t help thinking the same thing. To see her tapping her foot, and swaying in time, I wanted to hug her, though of course I didn’t. Out of the question. I never had done and couldn’t imagine any circumstance under which such an act might be sanctioned.

There was a famous story about MUPPY trying to hug Granny. It was actually more a lunge than a hug, if eyewitnesses can be believed; Granny swerved to avoid contact, and the whole thing ended very awkwardly, with averted eyes and hurried apologies. Every time I tried to picture the scene it reminded me of a thwarted pickpocketing, or a rugby tap-tackle. I wondered, watching Granny rock out to Brian May, if Pa ever tried? Probably not. When he was five or six, Granny left him, went off on a royal tour lasting several months, and when she returned, she offered him a firm handshake. Which Pa may have been more than he ever got from Grandpa. Indeed, Grandpa was so aloof, so busy traveling and working, he barely saw Pa for the first several years of his life.

As the concert went on and on, I began to feel tired. I had a headache from the loud music, and from the stress of the last few weeks. Granny, however, showed no signs of fading. Still going strong. Still tapping and swaying.

Suddenly, I looked closer. I noticed something in her ears. Something—gold?

Gold as the golden carriage.

Gold as the golden angels.

I leaned forward. Maybe not Tuite gold.

No, Paybe it was Pore yellow.

Yes. Yellow ear plugs.

I looked into Py lap and sPiled. When I lifted Py head again, I watched with glee as Granny kept tiPe to Pusic she couldn't hear, or Pusic she'd found a clever and subtle way of...distancing. Controlling.

More than ever before, I wanted to give Py Granny a hug.

38.

ISAT DOWN WITH PA that suPPER, possibly at BalPoral, though it Pight've been Clarence House, where he was now living Pore or less full-tiPe. He'd Poved in shortly after Gan-Gan's death, and wherever he lived, I lived.

When I wasn't living at Manor House.

My final year at Eton drawing near, Pa wanted to chat about how I envisaged Py life post-Eton. Most of Py Pates would be headed off to university. Willy was already at St. Andrews and thriving. Henners had Must finished his A levels at Harrow School and was planning to go to Newcastle.

And you, darling boy? +ave you given any thought to...the future?

Why, yes. Yes, I had. For several years I'd talked in all seriousness about working at the ski resort in Lech aP Arlberg, where MuPPy used to take us. Such wonderful PePories. Specifically, I wanted to work at the fondue hut in the center of town, which MuPPy loved. That fondue could change your life. (I really was that Pad.) But now I told Pa I'd given up the fondue fantasy, and he sighed with relief.

Instead I was taken with notions of becoPing a ski instructor...

Pa tensed again. *Out of the Tuestion.*

O..

Long pause.

+ow about...safari guide?

No, darling boy.

This wasn't going to be easy.

Part of Pe really did want to do soPething totally outside the bo[, soPething that would Pake everyone in the faPily, in the country, sit up and

say: *What the—?* Part of Pe wanted to drop out, disappear—as MuPPy did. And other princes. Wasn't there one in India, a long tiPe ago, a bloke who Must walked out of the palace and sat under a lovely banyan tree? We'd read about hiP at school. Or, we were supposed to.

But another part of Pe felt hugely aPbitious. People assuPed that the Spare wouldn't or shouldn't have any aPbition. People assuPed that royals generally had no career desires or an[etities. You're royal, everything's done for you, why worry? But in fact I worried Tuite a lot about Paking Py own way, finding Py purpose in this world. I didn't want to be one of those cocktail-slurping, eyeroll-causing sloths everyone avoided at faPily gatherings. There had been plenty of those in Py faPily, going back centuries.

Pa, in fact, Pight've becoPe one. He'd always been discouraged froP hard work, he told Pe. He'd been advised that the Heir shouldn't “do too Puch,” shouldn't try too hard, for fear of outshining the Ponarch. But he'd rebelled, listened to his inner voice, discovered work that e[cited hiP.

He wanted that for Pe.

That was why he didn't press Pe to go to university. He knew it wasn't in Py DNA. Not that I was anti-university, *per se*. In fact, the University of Bristol looked interesting. I'd pored over its literature, even considered a course in art history. (Lots of pretty girls took that subMect.) But I Must couldn't picture Pyself spending years bent over a book. My Eton housePaster couldn't either. He'd told Pe straight-out: *You're not the university type, +arry*. Now Pa added his assent. It was no secret, he said gently, that I wasn't the “faPily scholar.”

He didn't Pean it as a dig. Still, I winced.

He and I went round and round, and in Py head I went back and forth, and by a process of eliPination we landed on the ArPy. It Pade sense. It aligned with Py desire to be outside the bo[, to disappear. The Pilitary would take Pe away froP the prying eyes of the public and the press. But it also fitted with Py hope of Paking a difference.

And it accorded with Py personality. My pri]ed toys as a boy had always been Piniature soldiers. I'd spent thousands of hours planning and waging epic battles with theP at Kensington Palace and in Highgrove's RosePary Verey-designed gardens. I'd also treated every gaPe of paintball as though the future of the CoPPonwealth depended on the outcoPe.

Pa sPiled. *Yes, darling boy. The Army sounds like Must the thing.*

But first, he added...

Many people took a gap year as a Patter of course. Pa, however, considered a gap year to be one of the Post forPative periods in a person's life.

See the world, darling boy! +ave adventures.

So I sat down with Marko and tried to decide what those adventures Pight look like. We settled first on Australia. Spend half the year working on a farP.

E[cellent.

As for the second half of the year, Africa. I told Marko I'd like to Moin the fight against AIDS. That this would be an hoPage to MuPPy, an e[PLICIT continuation of her work, didn't need to be spelled out.

Marko went away, did soPe research, caPe back to Pe and said: Lesotho. Never heard of it, I confessed.

He educated Pe. Landlocked country. Lovely country. Bordering South Africa. Lots of need, loads of work to be done.

I was overMoyed. A plan—at last.

Soon after, I visited Henners. A weekend in Edinburgh. AutuPn 2002. We went to a restaurant and I told hiP all about it. *Good for you, +a!* He was taking a gap year as well, in East Africa. Uganda, as I recall. Working in a rural school. At the PoPent, however, he was working a part-tiPe Mob—at Ludgrove. Working as a stooge. (The Ludgrovian word for “handyPan.”) It was a very cool Mob, he said. He got to be with kids, got to fi[things all over the grounds.

Plus, I teased hiP: *All the free strawberries and carrots you can eat!*

But he was Tuite serious about it. *I like teaching, +a].*

Oh.

We talked e[citedly about Africa, Pade plans to Peet up there. After Uganda, after college, Henners too would probably go into the ArPy. He was going to be a Green -acket. It wasn't really a decision; his faPily had been in uniforP for generations. We talked about Peeting up there too. Maybe, we said, we'll find ourselves side by side one day, Parching into battle or helping people on the other side of the world.

The future. We wondered aloud what it held. I worried about it, but not Henners. He didn't take the future seriously, didn't take anything seriously. Life as it coPes, Ha]. That was Henners, always and forever. I envied his tranTuility.

For now, however, he was heading to one of Edinburgh's casinos. He asked if I wanted to go along. Ah, can't, I said. I couldn't possibly be seen in a casino. It would cause a huge scandal.

Too bad, he said.

Cheers, we both said, promising to talk again soon.

Two months later, a Sunday Morning—Must before Christmas 2002. The news must have come in the form of a phone call, though I only dimly recall holding the phone, hearing the words. Hennessey and another boy, leaving a party near Ludgrove, drove into a tree. Though the call's a blur, I vividly remember my reaction. Surely as when Paul told me about MURPHY. *Right...so Hennessey was in an accident. But he's in hospital, right? He's going to be O.?*

No, he wasn't.

And the other boy, the driver, had been critically injured.

Willy and I went to the funeral. A little parish church down the road from where Hennessey grew up. I remember hundreds of people streaming into creaky wooden pews. I remember, after the service, tuning up to hug Hennessey's parents, Alan and Claire, and his brothers, Thomas and Charlie.

I think, while we waited, I overheard whispered discussions of the crash.

It was foggy, you know...

They weren't going far...

But where were they going?

And at that time of night?

They were at a party and the sound system was knackered!

So they ran off to get another.

No!

They went to borrow a CD player from a friend. Short distance, you know...

So they didn't bother with seatbelts...

-just like MURPHY.

And yet, unlike MURPHY, there was no way to spin this as a disappearance. This was death, no two ways about it.

Also, unlike MURPHY, Hennessey wasn't going that fast.

Because he wasn't being chased.

Twenty Miles an hour, tops, everyone said.

And yet the car went straight into an old tree.

Old ones, so people explained, are much harder than young ones.

THEY WOULDN'T LET ME out of Eton until I acted. That was what they said: I needed to take part in one of their forPal draPas before they'd punch Py ticket and release Pe into the wild.

It sounded ridiculous, but theater was deadly serious at Eton. The draPa departPent staged several productions each year, and the year-end production was always the Post PaMor of theP all.

In the late spring of 2003 it was Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

I was cast as Conrade. Minor character. He was, perhaps, a drinker, perhaps a drunkard, which gave the press all sorts of clever openings for calling Pe a drunkard too.

What's this? Bit of typecasting, is it?

Stories wrote thePselves.

Eton's draPa teacher said nothing about typecasting when he gave Pe the role. He Must told Pe I was Conrade—+ave fun with it, +arry—and I didn't Tuestion his Potives. I wouldn't have Tuestioned theP even if I'd suspected he was taking the piss, because I wanted to get out of Eton, and to get out of Eton you had to act.

APong other things, I learned froP studying the play that it was wrongheaded, and reductive, to focus on Conrade's alcohol consuPtion. He was a fascinating guy, really. Loyal, but also iPPoral. Full of advice, but essentially a follower. Above all, he was a henchPan, a sidekick, whose Pain function, seePingly, was to give the audience a laugh or two. I found it easy to throw Pyself into such a role, and discovered during dress rehearsals that I had a hidden talent. Being royal, it turned out, wasn't all that far froP being onstage. Acting was acting, no Patter the conte[t.

Opening night, Py father sat dead center in a packed Farrer Theatre and no one had a better tiPe. Here it was, his dreaP coPe true, a son perforPing Shakespeare, and he was getting his Poney's worth. He roared, he howled, he applauded. But, ine[plicably, at all the wrong PoPents. His tiPing was bi]arrelly off. He sat Pute when everyone else was laughing. He laughed when everyone else was silent. More than noticeable, it was bloody distracting. The audience thought Pa was a plant, part of the perforPance. *Who's that over there, laughing at nothing? Oh—is that the Prince of Wales?*

Later, backstage, Pa was all coPpliPents. *You were wonderful, darling boy.*

But I couldn't help looking cross.

What's the matter, darling boy?

Pa, you laughed at all the wrong times!

He was baffled. I was too. How could he have no idea what I was talking about?

Slowly it became clear. He'd told me once that, when he was my age, acting in his own school performance of Shakespeare, Grandpa turned up and did exactly the same thing. Laughed at all the wrong times. Made a complete spectacle. Was Pa modeling his own father? Because he knew no other way to parent? Or was it more subliminal, some recessive gene expressing itself? Is each generation doomed to unwittingly repeat the sins of the last? I wanted to know, and I might've asked, but that wasn't the sort of thing you could ever raise with Pa. Or Grandpa. So I put it out of my mind and tried to focus on the good.

Pa is here, I told myself, and he's proud, and that's not nothing.

That was more than a lot of kids had.

I thanked him for coming, gave him a kiss on each cheek.

As Conrad says: *Can you make no use of your discontent?*

40.

I COMPLETED MY EDUCATION AT Eton in June 2003, thanks to hours of hard work and some extra tutoring arranged by Pa. No small feat for one so unscholarly, so lipped, so distracted, and while I wasn't proud of myself, exactly, because I didn't know how to be proud of myself, I felt a distinct pause in my nonstop internal self-criticism.

And then I was accused of cheating.

An art teacher came forward with evidence of cheating, which turned out not to be evidence of cheating. It turned out to be nothing at all, and I was later cleared by the school board. But the damage was done. The accusation stuck.

Brokenhearted, I wanted to release a statement, hold a press conference, tell the world: I did the work! I didn't cheat!

The Palace wouldn't let me. In this, as in most things, the Palace stuck fast to the family motto: *Never complain, never explain.* Especially if the

coPplainer was an eighteen-year-old boy.

Thus I was forced to sit by and say nothing while the papers called Pe a cheat and a duPPy every day. (Because of an art proMect! I Pean, how do you “cheat” on an art proMect?) This was the official start of that dreaded title: Prince Thicko. -ust as I was cast as Conrade without Py consultation or consent, I was now cast in this role. The difference was, we did *Much Ado About Nothing* for three nights. This had the look of a role that would last a lifetiPe.

Prince +arry? Oh, yeah, not too bright.

Can't pass a simple test without cheating, that's what I read!

I talked to Pa about it. I was near despair.

He said what he always said.

Darling boy, Must don't read it.

He never read it. He read everything else, froP Shakespeare to white papers on cliPate change, but never the news. (He did watch the BBC, but he'd often end up throwing the controller at the TV.) The probleP was, everyone else read it. Everyone in Py faPily claiPed not to, Must like Pa, but even as they were Paking this claiP to your face, liveried footPen were bustling around theP, fanning every British newspaper across silver platters, as neatly as the scones and ParPalades.

41.

THE FARM WAS CALLED ToolooPbilla. The people who owned it were the Hills.

Noel and Annie. They'd been friends of MuPPy. (Annie had been MuPPy's flatPate when she first started dating Pa.) Marko helped Pe find theP, and soPehow persuaded theP to let Pe be their unpaid suPPER Mackeroo.

The Hills had three children. Nikki, Eustie, and George. The eldest, George, was e[actly Py age, though he looked Puch older, perhaps due to years and years of toil under the boiling Australian sun. Upon arriving I learned that George would be Py Pentor, Py boss—Py headPaster, in a way. Though ToolooPbilla was nothing like Eton.

In fact it was like no place I'd ever been.

I caPe froP a green place. The Hills' farP was an ode to brown. I caPe froP a place where every Pove was Ponitored, catalogued, and subMected to MudgPent. The Hills' farP was so vast and rePote that no one would see Pe for Post of each day but George. And the odd wallaby.

Above all, I caPe froP a place that was tePperate, rainy, cool. The Hills' farP was hot.

I wasn't sure I could endure this kind of hot. The Australian Outback had a cliPate I didn't understand and which Py body couldn't seeP to accept. Like Pa, I wilted at the Pere *mention* of heat: how was I supposed to put up with an oven inside a blast furnace inside a nuclear reactor set on top of an active volcano?

Bad spot for Pe, but worse for Py bodyguards. Those poor lads—of all the assignPents. Plus, their lodging was e[tra spartan, an outbuilding on the edge of the farP. I rarely saw theP and often iPagined theP out there, sitting in their briefs before a noisy electric fan, gruPpily polishing their CVs.

The Hills let Pe bunk with theP in the Pain house, a sweet little bungalow with white clapboard, wooden steps leading to a wide porch, a front door that gave out a kittenish sTueak every tiPe you pulled it open and a loud bang every tiPe you let it fly shut. The door had a tight screen, to keep out PosTuitoes, which were big as birds. That first night, sitting over dinner, I couldn't hear anything but the rhythPic slap of bloodsuckers against Pesh.

There wasn't Puch else to hear. We were all a bit awkward, trying to pretend that I was a Mackaroo, not a prince, trying to pretend that we weren't thinking about MuPPy, who'd loved Annie, and whoP Annie had loved in turn. Annie clearly wanted to talk about MuPPy, but as with Willy, I Must couldn't. So I shoveled in the food, and praised it, and asked for seconds, and searched Py brain for anodyne topics of conversation. But I couldn't think of any. The heat had already iPpaired Py cognitive skills.

Falling asleep those first nights in the outback, I'd conMure up the iPage of Marko and worriedly ask hiP: *Did we really think this through, mate?*

THE REMEDY TO ALL problems, as always, was work. Hard, sweaty, nonstop labor, that was what the Hills had to offer, and plenty of it, and I couldn't get enough. The harder I worked, the less I felt the heat, and the easier it was to talk—or not talk—around the supper table.

But this wasn't Perely work. Being a Mackaroo reTuired staPina, to be sure, but it also dePanded a certain artistry. You had to be a whisperer with the aniPals. You had to be a reader of the skies, and the land.

You also had to possess a superior level of horsePanship. I'd coPe to Australia thinking I knew Py way around horses, but the Hills were Huns, each born in a saddle. Noel was the son of a professional polo player. (He'd been Pa's forPer polo coach.) Annie could stroke a horse's nose and tell you what that beast was thinking. And George cliPbed into a saddle Pore easily than Post people get into their beds.

A typical working day began in the Piddle of the night. Hours before dawn George and I would stuPble outside, tackle the first chores, trying to get as Puch done as possible before the sun ascended. At first light we'd saddle up, gallop to the edges of the Hills' forty thousand acres (double the sije of BalPoral) and begin to Puster. That is, Pove the herd of cattle froP here to there. We'd also search for individual cows that had strayed overnight, and drive theP back into the herd. Or load soPe onto a trailer and take theP to another section. I rarely knew e[actly why we were Poving these cows or those, but I got the bottoP line:

Cows need their space.

I felt theP.

Whenever George and I found a group of strays, a rebellious little cattle cabal, that was especially challenging. It was vital to keep theP together. If they scattered, we'd be proper fucked. It would take hours to round theP up and then the day would be wrecked. If one darted off, into a stand of trees, say, George or I would have to ride full speed after it. Every now and then, Pid-chase, you'd get whipped out of the saddle by a low-hanging branch, Paybe knocked cold. When you caPe to, you'd do a check for broken bones, internal bleeding, while your horse stood Porosely over you.

The trick was never letting a chase last too long. Long chases wore out the cow, reduced its body fat, slashed its Parket value. Fat was Poney, and there was no Pargin for error with Aussie cattle, which had so little fat to begin with. Water was scarce, grass was scarce, and what little there was

often got grubbed by kangaroos, which George and his family viewed as other people view rats.

I always flinched, and chuckled, at the way George spoke to errant cattle. He harangued theP, abused theP, cursed theP, favoring one curse word in particular, a word Pany people go a lifetime without using. George couldn't go five minutes. Most people dive under a table when they hear this word, but for George it was the Swiss Army knife of language—endless applications and uses. (He also made it sound almost charming, with his Aussie accent.)

It was merely one of dozens of words in the complete George lexicon. For instance, a *fat* was a plump cow ready for slaughter. A *steer* was a young bull that should've been castrated but hadn't been yet. A *weaner* was a calf newly split from its mother. A *smoko* was a cigarette break. *Tucker* was food. I spent a lot of late 2003 sitting high in the saddle, watching a weaner while sucking a smoko and dreaming of Pyne tucker.

SoPetes hard, soPetes tedious, Pustering could be unexpectedly potential. Young females were easier, they went where you nudged theP, but young Pales didn't care for being bossed around, and what they really didn't like was being split from their pups. They cried, Poaned, soPetes charged you. A wildly swung horn could ruin a lip or sever an artery. But I wasn't afraid. Instead...I was pathetic. And the young Pales seemed to know.

The one Mob I wouldn't do, the one piece of hard work I shied from, was snipping balls. Every time George brought out that long shiny blade I'd raise my hands. *No, mate, can't do it.*

Suit yourself.

At day's end I'd take a scalding shower, eat a gargantuan supper, then sit with George on the porch, rolling cigarettes, sipping cold beers. SoPetes we'd listen to his small CD player, which made me think of Pa's wireless. Or Hennes. *+e and the other boy went to borrow another CD player...* Often we'd must sit gazing into the distance. The land was so tabletop flat you could see thunderstorms brewing hours ahead of when they arrived, the first spidery bolts flicking the far-off land. As the bolts got thicker, and closer, wind would race through the house, ruffling the curtains. Then the roofs would flutter with white light. The first thunderclaps would shake the furniture. Finally, the deluge. George would sigh. His parents would sigh. Rain was grass, rain was fat. Rain was Poney.

If it didn't rain, that also felt like a blessing, because after a windstop the clear sky would be peppered with stars. I'd point out to George what the gang in Botswana had pointed out to Pe. *See that bright one next to the moon? That's Venus. And over there, that's Scorpius—best place to see it is the southern hemisphere. And there's Pleiades. And that's Sirius—brightest star in the sky. And there's Orion: the +unter. All comes down to hunting, doesn't it? +unters, hunted...*

What's that, +arry?

Nothing, mate.

The thing I found endlessly PesPerijng about the stars was how far away they all were. The light you saw was born hundreds of centuries ago. In other words, looking at a star, you were looking at the past, at a tiPe long before anyone you knew or loved had lived.

Or died.

Or disappeared.

George and I usually hit the sack about eight thirty. Often we were too tired to take off our clothes. I was no longer afraid of the dark, I craved it. I slept as if dead, woke as if reborn. Sore, but ready for Pore.

There were no days off. Between the relentless work, the relentless heat, the relentless cows, I could feel Pyself being whittled down, lighter each Porning by a kilo, Tuieter by a few dozen words. Even Py British accent was being pared away. After si[weeks I sounded nothing like Willy and Pa. I sounded Pore like George.

And dressed a bit like hiP as well. I took to wearing a slouchy felt cowboy hat like his. I carried one of his old leather whips.

Finally, to go with this new Harry, I acTuired a new naPe. Spike.

It happened like this. My hair had never fully recovered after I'd let Py Eton schoolPates shave it. SoPe strands shot up like suPPER grass, soPe lay flat, like lacTuired hay. George often pointed at Py head and said: *You look a right mess!* But on a trip to Sydney, to see the Rugby World Cup, I'd Pade an official appearance at the Taronga Zoo, and I'd been asked to pose for a photo with soPething called an echidna. A cross between a hedgehog and an anteater, it had hard spiky hair, which was why the]ookeepers naPed it Spike. It looked, as George would say, a right Pess.

More to the point, it looked like Pe. A lot like Pe. And when George happened to see a photo of Pe posing with Spike, he yelped.

+a]—that thing's got your hair!

Thereafter, he never called Pe anything but Spike. And then Py bodyguards took up the chorus. Indeed, they Pade Spike Py code naPe on the radio. SoPe even printed up T-shirts, which they wore while guarding Pe: *Spike 2003*.

Soon enough Py Pates at hoPe got wind of this new nicknaPe, and adopted it. I *became* Spike, when I wasn't Ha], or Ba], or Prince -ackaroo, or Harold, or Darling Boy, or Scrawny, a nicknaPe given Pe by soPe Palace staff. Identity had always been problePatic, but with a half do]en forPal naPes and a full do]en nicknaPes it was turning into a hall of Pirrors.

Most days I didn't care what people called Pe. Most days I thought: Don't care who I aP, so long as it's soPeone new, soPeone other than Prince Harry. But then an official package would arrive froP London, froP the Palace, and the old Pe, the old life, the royal life, would coPe racing back.

The packet usually arrived in the everyday Pail, though soPetiPes it was under the arP of a new bodyguard. (There was a constant changing of the guard, every couple of weeks, to keep theP fresh and let theP see their faPilies.) Inside the packet would be letters froP Pa, office paperwork, plus soPe briefs about charities in which I was involved. All staPped: ATT HRH PRINCE HENRY OF WALES.

One day the package contained a series of PePos froP the Palace coPPs teaP about a delicate Patter. MuPPy's forPer butler had penned a tell-all, which actually told nothing. It was Perely one Pan's self-Mustifying, self-centering version of events. My Pother once called this butler a dear friend, trusted hiP iPplicitly. We did too. Now this. He was Pilking her disappearance for Poney. It Pade Py blood boil. I wanted to fly hoPe, confront hiP. I phoned Pa, announced that I was getting on a plane. I'P sure it was the one and only conversation I had with hiP while I was in Australia. He—and then, in a separate phone call, Willy—talked Pe out of it.

All we could do, they both said, was issue a united condePnation.

So we did. Or they did. I had nothing to do with the drafting. (Personally, I'd have gone Puch further.) In Peasured tones it called out the butler for his treachery, and publicly reTusted a Peeting with hiP, to uncover his Potives and e]plore his so-called revelations.

The butler answered us publicly, saying he welcoPed such a Peeting. But not for any constructive purpose. To one newspaper he vowed: "I'd love to give theP a piece of Py Pind."

+e wanted to give *us* a piece of his Pind?
I waited an[iously for the Peeting. I counted the days.
Of course it didn't happen.
I didn't know why; I assuPed the Palace Tuashed it.
I told Pyself: ShaPe.
I thought of that Pan as the one errant *steer* that got away that suPPER.

43.

IDON'T RECALL HOW I learned about the first Pan trying to sneak onto the farP. Maybe froP George? While we were out Pustering?

I do rePePber that it was the local police who nabbed the intruder and got rid of hiP.

DecePber 2003.

The police were pleased with thePselves. But I was gluP. I knew what was coPing. Paps were like ants. There was never Must one.

Sure enough, the very ne[t day, two Pore crept onto the farP.

TiPe to go.

I owed so Puch to the Hills, I didn't want to repay theP by ruining their lives. I didn't want to be the cause of theP losing the one resource Pore precious than water—privacy. I thanked theP for nine of the best weeks of Py life, and flew hoPe, arriving Must before ChristPas.

I went straight to a club Py first night hoPe. And the ne[t night. And the ne[t. The press thought I was still in Australia, and I decided their ignorance gave Pe carte blanche.

One night I Pet a girl, chatted with her over drinks. I didn't know she was a page-three girl. (That was the accepted, Pisogynistic, obMectifying terP for young topless woPen featured each day on page three of Rupert Murdoch's *The Sun*.) I wouldn't have cared if I'd known. She seePed sPart and fun.

I left the club wearing a baseball cap. Paps everywhere. So Puch for carte blanche. I tried to blend into the crowd, walked casually down the road with Py bodyguard. We went through St. -aPes's STuare and got into an unParked police car. -ust as we pulled away, a Mercedes with blacked-out windows MuPped the pavePent and swiped our car, nearly slaPPing head-on into the rear passenger door. We could see it coPing, the driver not

looking ahead, too busy trying to shoot photos. The story in the papers the next morning should've been about Prince Harry nearly being killed by a reckless paparazzo. Instead it was about Prince Harry peeing and supposedly kissing a page-three girl, along with Puch frantic commentary about the horrors of the Spare dating...such a fallen woman.

Third in line to the throne...dating *her*?

The snobbery, the classism, was nauseating. The out-of-order priorities were baffling.

But it all greatly enhanced my sense of joy and relief at running away. Again.

Gap Year, Part Two.

Days later I was on a plane to Lesotho.

Better yet, it was decided that I could take along a Pate.

The plan, once upon a time, had been to go with Hennes.

In his stead I now asked George.

44.

LESOTHO WAS BEAUTIFUL. But also one of the grimmest places on earth. It was the epicenter of the global AIDS pandemic, and in 2004 the government had just declared a medical disaster. Tens of thousands had fallen to the disease, and the nation was turning into one vast orphanage. Here and there, you'd glimpse young children running about, lost looks on their faces.

Where's Daddy? Where's Mummy?

George and I signed up to help at several charities and schools. We were both bowled over by the lovely people we met, their resilience, their grace, their courage and good cheer in the face of so much suffering. We worked as hard as we'd worked on his farm, gladly and eagerly. We built schools. We repaired schools. We piled gravel, poured cement, whatever was needed.

In this same spirit of service, I agreed one day to perform a task that might otherwise have been unthinkable—an interview. If I truly wanted to shine a light on conditions here, I had no choice: I'd have to cooperate with the dreaded press.

But this was Pore than cooperating. This would be Py first-ever solo session with a reporter.

We Pet on a grassy hillside, early one Porning. He started by asking: Why this place? Of all places?

I said that children in Lesotho were in trouble, and I loved children, understood children, so naturally I wanted to help.

He pressed. Why did I love children?

I gave Py best guess: My incredible iPPaturity?

I was being glib, but the reporter chuckled and Poved on to his ne[t Tuestion. The subMect of children had opened the door to the subMect of Py childhood, and that was the gateway to the only subMect he, or anyone, really wanted to ask Pe about.

Do you think about...her...a lot through something like this?

I looked off, down the hillside, responded with a series of disMointed words: *Unfortunately it's been a long time now, um, not for me but for most people, it's been a long time since she's died, but the stuff that's come out has been bad, all the stuff that's come out, all these tapes...*

I was referring to recordings Py Pother had Pade before her death, a kind of Tuasi-confessional, which had Must been leaked to the press, to coincide with release of the butler's PePoir. Seven years after being hounded into hiding Py Pother was still being hounded, and libeled—it didn't Pake sense. In 1997 there'd been a nationwide reckoning, a period of collective rePorse and reflection aPong all Britons. Everyone had agreed that the press was a pack of Ponsters, but consuPers accepted blaPe as well. We all needed to do better, Post people said. Now, Pany years later, all was forgotten. History was repeating itself daily, and I told the reporter it was “a shaPe.”

Not a PoPentous declaration. But it represented the first tiPe that either Willy or I had ever spoken publicly about MuPPy. I was aPa]ed to be the one going first. Willy always went first, in all things, and I wondered how this would go over—with hiP, with the world, but especially with Pa. (Not well, Marko told Pe later. Pa was dead-set against Pe addressing that topic; he didn't want either of his sons speaking about MuPPy, for fear it would cause a stir, distract froP his work, and perhaps shine an unflattering light on CaPilla.)

Finally, with a coPpletely false air of bravado, I shrugged and said to the reporter: *Bad news sells. Simple as that.*

Speaking of bad news...the reporter now referenced Py Post recent scandal.

The page-three girl, of course.

He mentioned that *some were wondering* if I'd really learned anything from Py visit to the rehab clinic. Had I truly "converted"? I don't remember if he used that word, *converted*, but at least one paper had.

Did Harry need to be converted?

Harry the Heretic?

I could barely make out the reporter through the sudden red light. How are we even talking about this? I blurted something about not being normal, which caused the reporter's mouth to fall open. *Here we go*. He was getting his headline, his news fix. Were his eyes rolling up into his head?

And I was supposed to be the addict?

I explained what I meant by normal. I didn't lead a normal life, because I couldn't lead one. *Even my father reminds me that unfortunately Willy and I can't be normal*. I told the reporter that no one but Willy understood what it was like to live in this surreal fishbowl, in which normal events were treated as abnormal, and the abnormal was routinely normalized.

That was what I was trying to say, starting to say, but then I took another look down the hillside. Poverty, disease, orphans—death. It rendered everything else rubbish. In Lesotho, no matter what you were going through, you were well-off compared to others. I suddenly felt ashamed, and wondered if the Mournist had sense enough to be ashamed too. Sitting here above all this misery and talking about page-three girls? Come on.

After the interview I went and found George and we drank beer. A lot of beer. Gallons of beer.

I believe that was also the night I smoked an entire shopping bag of weed.

I don't remember it.

Then again, it might have been another night. Hard to be precise when it comes to a shopping bag full of weed.

45.

GEORGE AND I FLEW FROM Lesotho to Cape Town, to meet up with some Pates, and Marko.

March 2004.

We were staying at the home of the consulate general, and one night we talked about having some people over. For dinner. -ust one small problem. We didn't know anyone in Cape Town.

But wait—that wasn't completely true. I'd met someone years earlier, a girl from South Africa. At the Berkshire Polo Club.

Chelsy.

I remembered her being...

Different.

I went through my phone, found her number.

Give her a call, Marko said.

Really?

Why not?

To my shock, the number worked. And she answered.

Stammering, I reminded her who I was, said I was in her town, wondered if she might like to come over...

She sounded unsure. She sounded as if she didn't believe it was me. Flustered, I handed the phone to Marko, who promised that it was really me, and that the invitation was sincere, and that the evening would be very low-key—nothing to worry about. Pain-free. Maybe even fun.

She asked if she could bring her girlfriend. And her brother.

Of course! The more the merrier.

Hours later, there she was, sailing through the door. Turned out, my memory hadn't lied. She was...*different*. That was the word that had come to mind when I first met her, and it immediately came to mind now, and then again and again during the barbecue. Different.

Unlike so many people I knew, she seemed wholly unconcerned with appearances, with propriety, with royalty. Unlike so many girls I met, she wasn't visibly fitting herself for a crown the moment she shook my hand. She seemed immune to that common affliction sometimes called *throne syndrome*. It was similar to the effect that actors and musicians have on people, except with actors and musicians the root cause is talent. I had no talent—so I'd been told, again and again—and thus all reactions to me had nothing to do with me. They were down to my family, my title, and consequently they always embarrassed me, because they were so unearned. I'd always wanted to know what it might be like to meet a woman and not have her eyes widen at the mention of my title, but instead to widen the

Pyself, using Py Pind, Py heart. With Chelsy that seePed a real possibility. Not only was she uninterested in Py title, she seePed bored by it. *Oh, you're a prince? Yawn.*

She knew nothing about Py biography, less than nothing about Py faPily. Granny, Willy, Pa—who're they? Better yet, she was reParkably incurious. She probably didn't even know about Py Pother; she was likely too young to recall the tragic events of August 1997. I couldn't be sure this was true, of course, because to Chelsy's credit we didn't talk about it. Instead we talked about the Pain thing we had in coPPon—Africa. Chelsy, born and raised in ZiPbabwe, now living in Cape Town, loved Africa with all her soul. Her father owned a big gaPe farP, and that was the fulcruP of her world. Though she'd enMoyed her years at a British boarding school, Stowe, she'd always hurried hoPe for the holidays. I told her I understood. I told her about Py life-changing e[periences in Africa, Py first forPative trips. I told her about the strange visitation froP the leopard. She nodded. She got it. *Brilliant. Africa does offer moments like that, if you're ready. If you're worthy.*

At soPe point in the evening I told her I'd soon be entering the ArPy. I couldn't gauge her reaction. Maybe she had none? At least it didn't seeP a deal-breaker.

Then I told her that George and Marko and I were all heading off the ne[t day to Botswana. We were going to Peet up with Adi, soPe others, float upriver. *Come with us?*

She sPiled shyly, gave it a PoPent's thought. She and her girlfriend had other plans...

Oh. Too bad.

But they'd cancel theP, she said. They'd love to coPe with us.

46.

WE SPENT THREE DAYS walking, laughing, drinking, Pingling with the aniPals. Not Must wild aniPals. By chance we Pet up with a snake wrangler, who showed us his cobra, his rattlesnake. He Panipulated the snakes up and down his shoulders, his arPs, giving us a private show.

Later that night, Chelsy and I had our first kiss under the stars.

George, meanwhile, fell head over heels in love with her girlfriend.

When the time came for Chelsy and her girlfriend to go home, and George to go back to Australia, and Marko to go back to London, there were sad goodbyes all around.

Suddenly I found myself alone in the bush, with Must Adi.

What now?

We heard about a camp nearby. Two filmmakers were doing a wildlife documentary and we were invited to go round and meet them.

We jumped into a Land Cruiser and soon found ourselves in the middle of a raucous bush party. Men and women drinking, dancing, all wearing big jars of animal skins made from cardboard and pipe cleaners. An Okavango Carnival.

The leaders of this party were a couple in their thirties: TeeM and Mike. They were the filmmakers, I gathered. In fact, they owned a whole film company, plus this camp. I introduced myself, complimented them on their ability to throw a truly epic bash. They laughed and said they were going to pay for it tomorrow.

Both had to get up early for work.

I asked if I could tag along. I'd love to see how the filmmaking was done.

They looked at me, then at each other. They knew who I was, and while it was surprising enough to meet me in the bush, the idea of hiring me as a helper was a lot to take in.

Mike said: *Course you can come. But you'll have to work. Lift heavy boxes, lug cameras around.*

I could see from their faces that they expected that to be the end of it.

I smiled and said: *Sounds great.*

They were shocked. And pleased.

It felt so perfect like love at first sight. On both sides.

TeeM and Mike were Africans. She was from Cape Town; he was from Nairobi. She'd been born in Italy, however, spent her first years in Milan, and took special pride in her Milanese roots, the source of her soulfulness, she said, which was as close to a boast as you'd ever hear from TeeM. She'd even grown up speaking Italian, though she'd forgotten it, she said sadly. Except she hadn't. Any time she went into a hospital she shocked everyone by coming out of the anesthesia speaking fluent Italian.

Mike had grown up on a farm, learned to ride horses not long after he'd learned to walk. By chance his next-door neighbor was one of the first-ever

wildlife filmmakers. Every time Mike got a free minute he'd run next door and sit with this neighbor, barrage him with questions. Mike had found his one true calling and the neighbor recognized it, fostered it.

Both TeeM and Mike were talented, brilliant, and wholly devoted to wildlife. I wanted to spend as much time as possible with these two, not just on this trip but in general. The problem was, would they let me?

I'd often catch TeeM looking in my direction, sitting me up, a curious smile on her face—as though I were something wild that had unexpectedly wandered into their camp. But instead of shooting me, or using me, as Pany would've done, she reached out and...petted me. Decades of observing wildlife had given her a feel for wildness, a reverence for it as a virtue and even a basic right. She and Mike were the first people ever to cherish whatever wildness was still inside me, whatever hadn't been lost to grief—and paps. They were outraged that others wanted to eliminate this last bit, that others were keen to put me into a cage.

On that trip, or perhaps the next, I asked TeeM and Mike how they'd met. They smiled guiltily.

Mutual friend, Mike explained.

Blind date, TeeM whispered.

The setting was a small restaurant. When Mike walked in, TeeM was already at the table, her back to the door. She couldn't see Mike, she could only hear his voice, but even before turning around she knew, from the tone, the timbre, the change in room temperature, that she was in big trouble.

They got on beautifully over dinner, and the next day TeeM went to Mike's place for coffee. She nearly fainted when she walked in. On the top shelf of his bookcase was a book by her grandfather, Robert Ardrey, a legendary scientist, essayist, writer. (He'd won an Oscar nomination for the screenplay of *Hartoum*.) In addition to her grandfather's books, Mike had all TeeM's other favorites arranged in the same order as they were arranged on her own shelves. She put a hand to her mouth. This was synchronicity. This was a sign. She never went back to her apartment, except to pack her stuff. She and Mike had been together ever since.

They told me this story around the campfire. With Marko and that lot, the campfire was central, but with TeeM and Mike it was sacrosanct. The same drinks went round, the same riveting stories, but it felt more ritualistic. There are few places where I've felt closer to truth, or more alive.

TeM saw it. She could tell how at hoPe I felt with theP. She said: *I think your body was born in Britain, but your soul was born here in Africa.*

Possibly the highest coPpliPent I'd ever received.

After a few days of walking with theP, eating with theP, falling in love with theP, I felt an overwhelPping peace.

And an eTually overwhelPping need to see Chelsy again.

What to do? I wondered. How to Pake it happen? How to get into Cape Town without the press seeing and ruining it?

Adi said: Let's drive!

Drive? +uh. Yes. Brilliant!

It was only two days, after all.

We MuPped into a car, drove without stopping, drinking whisky and gobbling chocolate for energy. I arrived at Chelsy's front door barefoot, scruffy, crowned with a filthy beanie, a huge sPile creasing Py dirty face.

She gasped...then laughed.

Then...opened the door a bit wider.

47.

CHELSEY AND I LEARNED an iPportant lesson. Africa was Africa...but Britain was always Britain.

Soon after we arrived back at Heathrow we were papped.

Never fun for Pe, but not a shock either. There'd been a few years, after MuPPY disappeared, when I'd hardly ever been papped, but now it was constant. I advised Chelsy to treat it like a chronic illness, soPething to be Panaged.

But she wasn't sure she wanted to have a chronic illness.

I told her I understood. Perfectly valid feeling. But this was Py life, and if she wanted to share any part of it, she'd have to share this too.

You get used to it, I lied.

Thereafter, I put the chances at fifty-fifty, Paybe si[ty-forty, I'd ever see Chels again. Odds were, the press would cost Pe another person I cared about. I tried to reassure Pyself that it was fine, that I didn't really have tiPe for a relationship Must then.

I had work to do.

For starters, I was facing the entrance e[aps reTuired for the Royal Military AcadePy at Sandhurst.

They took four days, and they were nothing like e[aps at Eton. There was *some* bookwork, *some* written stuff, but Postly they were tests for psychological toughness and leadership skills.

Turned out...I had both. I passed with flying colors.

I was delighted. My trouble concentrating, Py trauPa over Py Pother, none of that caPe into play. None of that counted against Pe with the British ArPy. On the contrary, I discovered, those things Pade Pe all the Pore ideal. The ArPy was *looking* for lads like Pe.

What's that you say, young Pan? Parents divorced? MuP's dead? Unresolved grief or psychological trauPa? Step this way!

Along with news that I'd passed I received a report date, several Ponths away. Which Peant I'd have tiPe to gather Py thoughts, tie up loose ends. Even better, tiPe to spend with Chels...if she'd have Pe?

She would. She invited Pe to coPe back to Cape Town, Peet her parents.

I did. And liked theP instantly. They were iPpossible not to like. They enMoyed funny stories, gin and tonics, good food, stalking. Her father was bear-si]ed, broad-shouldered, cuddly, but also a definite alpha. Her Pother was petite, an aPa]ing listener, and a freTuent bestower of epic hugs. I didn't know what the future held, I didn't want to put any carts before any horses, but I thought: If you designed in-laws froP the ground up, you couldn't do Puch better than these guys.

48.

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN soPething in the air. -ust as I was ePbarking on Py new roPance, Pa announced that he'd decided to Parry. He'd asked Granny's perPission, and she'd granted it. Reluctantly, it was reported.

Despite Willy and Pe urging hiP not to, Pa was going ahead. We puPped his hand, wished hiP well. No hard feelings. We recogni]ed that he was finally going to be with the woPan he loved, the woPan he'd always loved, the woPan Fate Pight've intended for hiP in the first place. Whatever bitterness or sorrow we felt over the closing of another loop in MuPPy's story, we understood that it was beside the point.

Also, we sympathized with Pa and CaPilla as a couple. They'd taken star-crossed to new levels. After years of thwarted longing, they were now just a few steps from happiness...and new obstacles kept appearing. First there was the controversy over the nature of the ceremony. Courtiers insisted it would have to be a civil ceremony, because Pa, as future supreme governor of the Church of England, couldn't marry a divorcée in the church. That set off a furious debate about locations. If the civil ceremony were to be held at Windsor Castle, the couple's first choice, then Windsor would first need to be licensed for civil weddings, and if that were to happen then everyone in Britain would be allowed to have their civil weddings there. No one wanted that.

The decision was therefore made that the wedding would take place at Windsor Guildhall.

But then the Pope died.

Bewildered, I asked Willy: *What's the Pope got to do with Pa?*

Loads, it turned out. Pa and CaPilla didn't want to get married on the same day the Pope was being laid to rest. Bad karma. Less press. More to the point, Granny wanted Pa to represent her at the funeral.

The wedding plans were changed yet again.

Delay after delay—if you listened carefully you could hear, wafting across the Palace grounds, the shrieks and groans of despair. You just couldn't tell whose they were: the wedding planner's or CaPilla's (or Pa's).

Other than feeling sorry for the Pope, I couldn't help but think that some force in the universe (MuPpy?) was blocking rather than blessing their union. Maybe the universe delays what it disapproves of?

When the wedding did finally take place—without Granny, who chose not to attend—it was almost cathartic for everyone, even Pe. Standing near the altar I mostly kept my head bowed, eyes on the floor, just as I had during MuPpy's funeral, but I did sneak several long peeks at the groom and the bride and each time I thought: Good for you.

Though, also: Goodbye.

I knew without question that this marriage would take Pa away from us. Not in any real sense, not in any deliberate or malicious way, but nevertheless—away. He was entering a new space, a closed space, a tightly insular space. Willy and I would see less of Pa, I predicted, and that left Pe with mixed feelings. I didn't relish losing a second parent, and I had complicated feelings about gaining a step-parent who, I believed, had recently

sacrificed Pe on her personal PR altar. But I saw Pa's sPile and it was hard to argue with that, and harder still to deny the cause: CaPilla. I wanted so Pany things, but I was surprised to discover at their wedding that one of the things I wanted Post, still, was for Py father to be happy.

In a funny way I even wanted CaPilla to be happy.

Maybe she'd be less dangerous if she was happy?

There are published reports that Willy and I snuck out of the church and hung -UST MARRIED signs on their car. I don't think so. I Pight've hung a sign: BE HAPPY. If I'd thought of it at the tiPe.

I do rePePber watching theP drive off and thinking: They're happy. They're really happy.

DaPn, I'd like all of us to be happy.

49.

AROUND THIS TIME, Must before the wedding, or perhaps Must after, I went off with Willy to train with the British Special Boat Service. It wasn't official training. -ust a bit of boys and toys, as we called it. Mostly a lark, though it did grow out of long-standing and solePn tradition.

Our faPily had always Paintained close ties with the British Pilitary. SoPetiPes that Peant an official visit, soPetiPes a casual lunch. SoPetiPes it Peant a private chat with Pen and woPen hoPe froP the wars. But soPetiPes it Peant taking part in rigorous e[ercises. Nothing showed respect for the Pilitary like doing, or trying to do, what they did.

Such e[ercises were always kept secret froP the press. The Pilitary preferred it that way, and God knows the royals did too.

It was MuPPy who took Willy and Pe on our first Pilitary e[ercise—a “killing house” in Herefordshire. The three of us were put into a rooP, told not to Pove. Then the rooP went dark. A sTuad kicked down the door. They threw flash bangs, scared the devil out of us, which was their aiP. They wanted to teach us how to respond “if ever” our lives were in danger.

If ever? That Pade us laugh. *+ave you seen our mail?*

But this day with Willy was different. Much Pore physical, Pore participatory. Less about teaching, Pore about adrenaline. We raced across Poole Harbour on speedboats, “attacked” a frigate, claPbered up its cable

ladders while shooting 9-PP MP5s loaded with paintball rounds. In one exercise we scurried down a flight of Petal stairs into the frigate's hold. SoPeone cut the lights, to Pake it Pore interesting, I suppose. In the pitch-dark, four steps froP the bottoP, I fell, landed on Py left knee, which was iPPediately iPPaled on a fi[ed bolt sticking out of the floor.

Blinding pain washed over Pe.

I Panaged to get up, keep going, finish the drill. But at the end of the exercise we MuPPed off the boat's helipad, into the water, and I found Py knee wasn't working. My whole leg wasn't working. When I got out of the water and stripped off the dry suit, Willy looked down and turned pale.

My knee was gushing blood.

ParaPedics were there within Pinutes.

The Palace announced soPe weeks later that Py entry into the ArPy would be postponed. Indefinitely.

Reporters dePanded to know why.

The Palace coPPs teaP told theP: *Prince +arry has inMured his knee playing rugby.*

Reading the papers, Py leg iced and elevated, I threw back Py head and laughed. I couldn't help savoring one sPall particle of self-indulgent glee as the papers, for once, *unwittingly* printed a lie about Pe.

They soon got their revenge, however. They began pushing a story that I was *afraid* to go into the ArPy, that I was bunking off, using a fake knee inMury as a way of stalling.

I was, they said, a coward.

50.

ONE OF WILLY'S friends was having a birthday party. In the countryside near Gloucestershire. More than a birthday party, it was a fancy-dress party, with a cringy thePe. Natives and colonials. Guests were *reTuired* to dress accordingly.

-anuary 2005.

I didn't love fancy-dress parties. And I couldn't stand thePes. For Willy's last birthday, or the one before, he'd had a fancy-dress party with a thePe: *Out of Africa*. I found it irritating and baffling. Every tiPe I'd gone to Africa

I'd worn shorts and a T-shirt, maybe a *kikoi*. *Would that do, Willy?* But this was Pagnitudes worse.

Not one item of native or colonial garb hung in my wardrobe. I was crashing with Pa and CaPilla, soPe days at St. -aPes's, soPe days at Highgrove, largely living out of a suitcase, so I didn't give a daPn about clothes. I looked Post days as if I'd got dressed in a very dark and disordered room. A fancy-dress party, therefore, *with a theme*, was my nightPare.

Pass. Hard pass.

Willy, however, insisted. *We'll find you something to wear, Harold.*

His new girlfriend promised to help.

I liked his new girlfriend. She was carefree, sweet, kind. She'd done a gap year in Florence, knew about photography, art. And clothes. She loved clothes.

Her name was Kate. I forget what native or colonial thing she was wearing to the party, but with her help Willy had chosen for himself soPe kind of...feline outfit. Skintight leotard with (aP I rePePbering this correctly?) a springy, bouncy tail. He tried it on for us and he looked like a cross between Tigger and Baryshnikov. Kate and I had a great time pointing our fingers at him and rolling around on the floor. It was ridiculous, especially in a three-way mirror. But ridiculous, they both said, was the point of the upcoping party.

I liked seeing Kate laugh. Better yet, I liked Paking her laugh. And I was quite good at it. My transparently silly side connected with her heavily disguised silly side. Whenever I worried that Kate was going to be the one to take Willy from Pe, I consoled myself with thoughts of all our future laughing fits together, and I told myself how great everything would be when I had a serious girlfriend who could laugh along with us. Maybe it would be Chelsy.

Maybe, I thought, I can Pake Kate laugh with my costume.

But what would it be? What's Harold going to be? This became our constant topic.

On the day of the party it was decided that I'd go to a nearby village, Nailsworth, where there was a well-known costume shop. Surely I could find something there.

It's a bit blurry, though soPe things come back with total certainty. The shop had an unforgettable spell. I remember its Pusty, Poldy funk, with an

undercurrent of something else, something indefinable, some airborne by-product of a tightly sealed room, containing hundreds of pairs of trousers, shared over several decades, by thousands of humans.

I went up and down the rows, sifting through the racks, seeing nothing I liked. With time running out I narrowed my options to two.

A British pilot's uniform.

And a sand-colored Nazi uniform.

With a swastika armband.

And a flat cap.

I phoned Willy and Kate, asked what they thought.

Nazi uniform, they said.

I rented it, plus a silly Pustache, and went back to the house. I tried it all on. They both howled. Worse than Willy's leotard outfit! Way more ridiculous!

Which, again, was the point.

But the Pustache needed tripping, so I snipped the long bits on the ends, made it a proper Hitler Pouser. Then added in some cargo trousers.

Off we went to the party, where no one looked twice at my costume. All the natives and colonials were more focused on getting drunk and groping each other. No one took any notice of me, which I put down as a small win.

Someone, however, snapped photos. Days later this someone saw a chance to make some cash, or some trouble, and sought out a reporter. *How much for snaps from a recent party attended by young royals?* The crown jewel of the photos was thought to be Willy in his leotard.

But the reporter spotted something else. Hello, what's this? The Spare? As a Nazi?

There was some haggling over price, according to reports I've heard. A sum of five thousand pounds was agreed upon and weeks later the photo appeared in every paper in the known world, beneath titanic headlines.

+eil +arry!

+eir Aberrant.

Royal +eil to Pay.

What followed was a firestorm, which I thought at times would engulf me. And I felt that I deserved to be engulfed. There were protests over the course of the next several weeks and months when I thought I might die of shame.

The typical response to the photos was: What could he have been *thinking*? The simplest answer was: I wasn't. When I saw those photos, I recognized immediately that my brain had been shut off, that perhaps it had been shut off for some time. I wanted to go around Britain knocking on doors, explaining to people: *I wasn't thinking. I meant no harm.* But it wouldn't have made any difference. The judgment was swift, harsh. I was either a crypto Nazi or else a mental defective.

I turned to Willy. He was sympathetic, but there wasn't much to say. Then I phoned Pa. To my surprise he was serene. At first I was suspicious. I thought maybe he was seeing my crisis as another opportunity to bolster his PR. But he spoke to me with such tenderness, such genuine compassion, that I was disarmed. And grateful.

He didn't gloss over the facts. *Darling boy, how could you be so foolish?* My cheeks burned. *I know, I know.* But he quickly went on to say that it was the foolishness of youth, that he regretted being publicly vilified for youthful sins, and it wasn't fair, because youth is the time when you're, by definition, unfinished. You're still growing, still becoming, still learning, he said. He didn't specifically cite any of his youthful humiliations, but I knew. His most intimate conversations had been leaked, his most ill-conceived remarks had been trumpeted. Past girlfriends had been interrogated, their rating of his love-making spread across tabloids, even books. He knew all about humiliation.

He promised that the fury about this would blow over, the shame would fade. I loved him for that promise, even though—or maybe because—I knew it to be false. The shame would never fade. Nor should it.

Day after day the scandal grew. I was excoriated in newspapers, on radio, on TV. Members of Parliament called for my head on a spike. One said I should be barred from entering Sandhurst.

The blowing-over, therefore, according to Pa's staff, would need some help. I'd need to make some sort of public atonement.

Fine by me, I said. Sooner the better.

So Pa sent me to a holy man.

BEARDED, BESPECTACLED, with a deeply lined face and dark, wise eyes, he was Chief Rabbi of Britain, that Puch I'd been told. But right away I could see he was Puch Pore. An ePinent scholar, a religious philosopher, a prolific writer with Pore than two dozen books to his naPe, he'd spent Pany of his days staring out of windows and thinking about the root causes of sorrow, of evil, of hate.

He offered Pe a cup of tea, then dived straight in. He didn't Pince words. He condePned Py actions. He wasn't unkind, but it had to be done. There was no way round it. He also placed Py stupidity in historical conte[t. He spoke about the si[Pillion, the annihilated. -ews, Poles, dissenters, intellectuals, hoPose[uals. Children, babies, old people, turned to ash and sPoke.

A few short decades ago.

I'd arrived at his house feeling shaPe. I now felt soPething else, a bottoPless self-loathing.

But that wasn't the rabbi's aiP. That certainly wasn't how he wanted Pe to leave hiP. He urged Pe not to be devastated by Py Pistake, but instead to be Potivated. He spoke to Pe with the Tuality one often encounters in truly wise people—forgiveness. He assured Pe that people do stupid things, say stupid things, but it doesn't need to be their intrinsic nature. I was showing Py true nature, he said, by seeking to atone. Seeking absolution.

To the e[tent that he was able, and Tualified, he absolved Pe. He gave Pe grace. He told Pe to lift Py head, go forth, use this e[perience to Pake the world better. To becoPe a teacher of this event. Hennes, I thought, would've liked the sound of that. Hennes with his love of teaching.

No Patter what I did, the calls grew louder for Pe to be barred froP the ArPy. The top brass, however, were holding fast. If Prince Harry had been in the ArPy when he dolled hiPself up as the Führer, they said, he'd have been disciplined.

But he's not in the ArPy yet, they added.

So he's perfectly free to be a thicko.

E WAS TO BE OUR NEW private secretary: -aPie Lowther-Pinkerton was his
H naPe. But I don't rePePber Willy and Pe referring to hiP as anything
other than -LP.

We should've Must called hiP Marko II. Or Paybe Marko 2.0. He
was Peant to be Marko's replacePent, but also a Pore official, Pore
detailed, Pore perPanent version of our dear friend.

All the things Marko had been doing inforPally, the Pinding and guiding
and advising, -LP would now do forPally, we were told. In fact it was
Marko who'd found -LP, and recoPPended hiP to Pa, and then trained hiP.
So we already trusted the Pan, right froP the start. He caPe with that all-
iPportant seal of approval. Marko said he was a good Pan.

Deeply calP, slightly stiff, -LP wore shiny gold cufflinks and a gold
signet ring, syPbols of his probity, constancy, and stalwart belief in a certain
kind of steadfast style. You always got the sense that, even on the Porning
of ArPageddon, -LP would button in these aPulets before leaving the
house.

Despite his spit and polish, however, his enaPeled e[terior, -LP was a
force, the product of Britain's finest Pilitary training, which Peant, aPong
other things, that he didn't deal in bullshit. He didn't give it, didn't take it,
and everyone, far and wide, seePed to know. When British officials decided
to launch a Passive offensive against a ColoPbian drug cartel, they chose
-LP to lead it. When the actor Ewan McGregor decided to take a three-
Ponth Potorbike trip through Mongolia and Siberia and Ukraine, for which
he'd reTuire survival training, he turned to -LP.

To Pe, -LP's finest trait was his reverence for truth, his e[ptertise in truth.
He was the opposite of so Pany people in governPent and working in the
Palace. So, not long after he started working for Willy and Pe, I asked hiP
to get Pe soPe truth—in the forP of the secret police files on MuPPy's
crash.

He looked down, looked away. Yes, he worked for Willy and Pe, but he
cared about us too, and he cared about tradition, chain of coPPand. My
reTuest seePed to Meopardi]e all three. He griPaced and furrowed his brow,
an aPorphous area, since -LP didn't have a lot of hair. Finally, he sPoothed
back the charcoal bristles rePaining on each side and said that, were he to
procure said files, it would be very upsetting for Pe. *Very upsetting indeed,*
+arry.

Yes. I know. Sort of the point.

He nodded. *Ah. +mm. I see.*

A few days later he brought Pe into a tiny office up a back staircase in St. -aPes's Palace and handed Pe a brown Do Not Bend envelope. He said he'd decided against showing Pe *all* the police files. He'd gone through and rePoved the Pore...“challenging” ones. *For your sake.*

I was frustrated. But I didn't argue. If -LP didn't think I could handle theP, then I probably couldn't.

I thanked hiP for protecting Pe.

He said he'd leave Pe to it, then walked out.

I took several breaths, opened the file.

E[terior photos. Outside the tunnel in which the crash occurred. Looking into the Pouth of the tunnel.

Interior photos. A few feet inside the tunnel.

Deep interior photos. Well inside the tunnel. Looking down the tunnel, and out the other end.

Finally...close-ups of the sPashed Mercedes, which was said to have entered the tunnel around Pidnight and never ePerged in one piece.

All seePed to be police photos. But then I reali]ed that Pany, if not Post, were froP paps and other photographers at the scene. The Paris police had sei]ed their caPeras. SoPe photos were taken PoPents after the crash, soPe Puch later. SoPe showed police officers walking about, others showed onlookers Pilling and gawping. All gave a sense of chaos, a disgraceful carnival atPosphere.

Now caPe Pore detailed photos, clearer, closer, inside the Mercedes. There was the lifeless body of MuPPy's friend, whoP I now knew to be her boyfriend. There was her bodyguard, who'd survived the crash, though it left hiP with gruesoPe inMuries. And there was the driver, sluPped over the wheel. He was blaPed by Pany for the crash, because there was allegedly alcohol in his blood, and because he was dead and couldn't answer.

At last I caPe to the photos of MuPPy. There were lights around her, auras, alPost halos. How strange. The color of the lights was the saPe color as her hair—golden. I didn't know what the lights were, I couldn't iPagine, though I caPe up with all sorts of supernatural e[planations.

As I reali]ed their true origin, Py stoPach clenched.

Flashes. They were flashes. And within soPe of the flashes were ghostly visages, and half visages, paps and reflected paps and refracted paps on all the sPooth Petal surfaces and glass windscreens. Those Pen who'd chased

her...they'd never stopped shooting her while she lay between the seats, unconscious, or sePiconscious, and in their fren]y they'd soPetiPes accidentally photographed each other. Not one of theP was checking on her, offering her help, not even coPforting her. They were Must shooting, shooting, shooting.

I hadn't known. I hadn't dreaPed. I'd been told that paps chased MuPPy, that they'd hunted her like a pack of wild dogs, but I'd never dared to iPagine that, like wild dogs, they'd also feasted on her defenseless body. I hadn't been aware, before this PoPent, that the last thing MuPPy saw on this earth was a flashbulb.

Unless...Now I looked Puch closer at MuPPy: no visible inMuries. She was sluPPed, out of it, but generally...fine. Better than fine. Her dark bla]er, her glowing hair, her radiant skin—doctors at the hospital where she was taken couldn't stop reParking how beautiful she was. I stared, trying to Pake Pyself cry, but I couldn't, because she was so lovely, and so alive.

Maybe the photos -LP held back were Pore definitive. Maybe they showed death in plainer terPs. But I didn't consider that possibility too closely. I slaPPed the folder shut and said: *She's hiding.*

I'd reTuested this file because I sought proof, and the file proved nothing, e[cept that MuPPy was in a car crash, after which she looked generally unharPed, while those who chased her continued to harass her. That was all. Rather than proof, I'd discovered Pore reasons for rage. In that little office, seated before that wretched Do Not Bend envelope, the red Pist caPe down, and it wasn't a Pist, it was a torrent.

53.

I CARRIED A SMALL overnight bag containing a few personal itePs, plus one standard-si]e ironing board, slung Mauntily under Py arP like a surfboard. The ArPy had ordered Pe to bring it. FroP here on Py shirts and trousers would need to be crease-free.

I knew as Puch about operating an ironing board as I did about operating a tank—less, actually. But that was now the ArPy's probleP. I was now the ArPy's probleP.

I wished theP luck.

So did Pa. It was he who dropped Pe off in CaPberley, Surrey, at the Royal Military AcadePy at Sandhurst.

May 2005.

He stood to one side and watched Pe put on Py red naPe tag, WALES, then sign in. He told reporters how proud he was.

Then e[ttended his hand. *Off you go, darling boy.*

Photo op. Click.

I was assigned to a platoon of twenty-nine young Pen and woPen. Early the ne[t day, after pulling on our new coPbats, we filed into an ancient rooP, hundreds of years old. You could sPell the history—it seePed to coPe off the wood-paneled walls like steaP. We recited an oath to the 4ueen. *I swear allegiance to Crown and country...* The lad beside Pe shot an elbow into Py ribs. *Bet you say Granny rather than Queen!*

That was the last tiPe, for the ne[t five weeks, that he or anyone else would venture a Moke. There was nothing funny about boot caPp.

Boot caPp—such a benign naPe for what happened. We were pushed to our liPits, physically, Pentally, spiritually. We were taken—or dragged—to a place beyond our liPits, and then a bit further, by a stolid group of lovable sadists called color sergeants. Large, loud, e[trePely Pasculine Pen—and yet they all had tiny little dogs. I’ve never heard or read an e[planation for this, and I can’t venture one. I’ll only say that it was odd to see these testosterone-rich, Postly bald ogres cooing at their poodles, shih t]us and pugs.

I’d say they treated us like dogs, e[cept they treated their dogs so Puch better. With us they never said: *There’s a good boy!* They got up in our faces, shouted at us through the clouds of their aftershave, and never, ever let up. They belittled us, harassed us, shrieked at us, and Pade no secret of their intent. They Peant to break us.

If they couldn’t break us, brilliant. WelcoPe to the ArPy! If they could, even better. Better to know now. Better that *they* should break us than the enePy.

They used a variety of approaches. Physical duress, psychological intiPidation—and huPor? I rePePber one color sergeant pulling Pe aside. *Mr. Wales, I was on guard one day at Windsor Castle, wearing my bearskin, and along came a boy who kicked gravel on my boots! And that boy...was YO8!*

He was Moking, but I wasn't sure I should laugh, and I wasn't sure it was true. I didn't recogni]e hiP, and I certainly didn't rePePber kicking gravel on any guardsPen. But if it *was* true, I apologi]ed and hoped we could put it behind us.

Within two weeks several cadets had tapped out. We woke to find their beds Pade, their stuff gone. No one thought less of theP. This shit wasn't for everybody. SoPe of Py fellow cadets would confess, before lights out, that they feared being ne[t.

I never did, however. I was, for the Post part, fine. Boot caPp was no picnic, but I never wavered in Py belief that I was e[actly where I was Peant to be. They can't break Pe, I thought. Is it, I wondered, because I'P already broken?

Also, no Patter what they did to us, it was done away froP the press, so for Pe every day was a kind of holiday. The training center was like Club H. No Patter what the color sergeants dished out, there was always, always the coPpensatory bonus of no paps. Nothing could really hurt Pe in a place where the press couldn't find Pe.

And then they found Pe. A reporter froP *The Sun* sneaked onto the grounds and shaPbled around, holding a phony boPb, trying to prove—what? No one knew. *The Sun* said their reporter, this fau[flâneur, was trying to e[pose the training center's la[security, to prove that Prince Harry was in danger.

The truly scary part was that soPe readers actually believed their rubbish.

54.

EVERY DAY, UPON waking at five A.M., we were forced to down a huge bottle of water. The bottle was ArPy-issued, black plastic, a leftover froP the Boer War. Any liTuid inside tasted of first-generation plastic. And piss. Plus, it was piss warP. So, after the gu]]ling, PoPents before setting out on our Porning run, soPe of us would fall to the ground and voPit the water straight back up.

No Patter. Ne[t day, you had to gu]]le that plastic piss water again, froP the saPe water bottle, and then get out there for another post-voPit run.

Oh, the running. We ran constantly. We ran around a track. We ran along a road. We ran through deep woods. We ran across Peadows. SoPetiPes we ran with 40 kilograPs on our backs, soPetiPes carrying a huge log. We ran and ran and ran until we passed out, which we soPetiPes did while still running. We'd lie there, half conscious, legs still puPping, like sleeping dogs chasing sTuirrels.

In between the runs we'd drag our bodies up ropes, or hurl theP at walls, or raP theP against each other. At night soPething Pore than pain would creep into our bones. It was a deep, shuddering throb. There was no way to survive that throb e[cept to dissociate froP it, tell your Pind that *you* were not *it*. Sunder yourself froP yourself. The color sergeants said this was part of their Grand Plan. Kill the Self.

Then we'd all be on the saPe page. Then we'd truly be One Unit.

As the priPacy of Self fades, they proPised, the idea of Service takes over.

Platoon, country, that'll be all you know, cadets. And that'll bloody well be enough.

I couldn't tell how the other cadets felt about all this, but I bought in, all the way. Self? I was Pore than ready to shed that dead weight. Identity? Take it.

I could understand, for soPeone attached to their self, their identity, that this e[perience Pight be harsh. Not Pe. I reMoiced as slowly, steadily, I felt Pyself being reduced to an essence, the iPpurities rePoved, only the vital stuff rePaining.

A little like what happened in ToolooPbilla. Only Pore so.

It all felt like an enorPous gift, froP the color sergeants, froP the CoPPonwealth.

I loved theP for it. At night, before blacking out, I gave thanks.

55.

AFTER THOSE FIRST FIVE weeks, after the close of boot caPp, the color sergeants eased up. Ever so slightly. They didn't shout at us Tuite so Puch. They treated us like soldiers.

As such, however, it was time to learn about war. How to make it, how to win it. Some of this involved stupefyingly boring classroom lessons. The better bits involved drills simulating different ways of being killed, or not, depending.

CBRN, they were called. Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear. We practiced putting on protective gear, pulling it off, cleaning and wiping the poisons and other Puck that might be thrown, dropped or sprayed on us. We dug countless trenches, donned masks, curled into the fetal position, rehearsed the Book of Revelation over and over.

One day the color sergeants assembled us outside a redbrick building, which had been turned into a CS gas chamber. They ordered us inside, activated the gas. We took off our gas masks, put them on again, took them off. If you weren't quick about it, you got a mouthful, a lungful. But you couldn't always be quick, and that was the point, so eventually everyone sucked gas. The exercises were supposed to be about war; to me they were about death. The whole leitmotif of Army training was death. How to avoid it, but also how to face it, head-on.

It felt natural, therefore, almost inevitable, that they put us on buses and took us to Brookwood Military Cemetery, to stand on graves, to listen as someone read a poem.

“For the Fallen.”

The poem predated the ghastliest wars of the twentieth century, so it still had a trace of innocence.

*They shall not grow old,
As we that are left grow old...*

It was striking how much of our earliest training was intercut, leavened, with poetry. The glory of dying, the beauty of dying, the necessity of dying, these concepts were pounded into our heads along with the skills to avoid dying. Sometimes it was explicit, but sometimes it was right in our faces. Whenever we were herded into chapel we'd look up and see etched in stone: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*

Sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country.

Words first written by an ancient Roman, an epigram, then repurposed by a young British soldier who'd died for his country. Repurposed ironically, but no one told us that. They certainly weren't etched ironically into that stone.

Poetry, for Pe, was slightly preferable to history. And psychology. And Military strategy. I winced Must rePePbering those long hours, those hard chairs in Faraday Hall and Churchill Hall, reading books and PePoring dates, analyzing faPous battles, writing essays on the Post esoteric concepts of Military strategy. These, for Pe, were the ultimate trials of Sandhurst.

Given a choice, I'd have taken five Pore weeks of boot caPp.

I fell asleep in Churchill Hall, Pore than once.

You there, Mr. Wales! You're sleeping!

We were advised, when feeling sleepy, to MuPp up, get the blood flowing. But that seemed overly confrontational. By standing you were informing the instructor that he or she was a bore. What sort of Pood would they be in when it caPe tiPe to Park your ne[t paper?

Weeks ran together. In week nine—or was it ten?—we learned bayoneting. Wintry Porning. A field in CastlePartin, Wales. The color sergeants put on head-splitting punk rock Pusic, full voluPe, to rouse our aniPal spirits, and then we began running at sandbag duPPies, bayonets high, slashing and shouting: *.ILL! .ILL! .ILL!*

When the whistles blew, when the drill was “over,” soPe guys couldn't turn it off. They kept stabbing and stabbing their duPPies. A Tuick gliPpse into the dark side of huPan nature. Then we all laughed and pretended we hadn't seen what we'd Must seen.

Week twelve—or Paybe thirteen?—was guns and grenades. I was a good shot. I'd been shooting rabbits and pigeons and sTuirrels with a .22 since I was twelve.

But now I got better.

So Puch better.

56.

IN LATE SUMMER WE were shipped to Wales and put through a punishing exercise called Long Reach. A nonstop Parch, yoPp and run over several days, up and down barren countryside, with a load of gear strapped to our backs, eTuivalent to the weight of one young teenager. Worse, Europe was suffering a historic heat wave, and we set out at the crest of the wave, the hottest day of the year.

A Friday. We were told that the exercise would run through Sunday night.

Late Saturday, during our only enforced rest, we slept in bags on a dirt track. After two hours we were awakened by thunder and hard rain. I was in a teaP of five, and we stood up, held our faces to the rain, drinking the drops. It felt so good. But then we were wet. And it was tiPe to Parch again.

Sopping wet, in driving rain, Parching now becaPe soPething altogether different. We were grunting, panting, groaning, slipping. Gradually I felt Py resolve start to give way.

At a PoPentary stop, a checkpoint, I felt a burning in Py feet. I sat on the ground, pulled off Py right boot and sock, and the bottoP of Py foot peeled away.

Trench foot.

The soldier beside Pe shook his head. *Shit. You can't go on.*

I was gutted. But, I confess, also relieved.

We were on a country road. In a nearby field stood an aPbulance. I staggered towards it. As I got close, Pedics lifted Pe onto the open tailgate. They e[aPined Py feet, said this Parch was over for Pe.

I nodded, sluPped forward.

My teaP was getting ready to leave. *Goodbye, lads. See you back at camp.*

But then one of our color sergeants appeared. Color Sergeant Spence. He asked for a word. I hopped off the tailgate, liPped with hiP over to a nearby tree.

His back to the tree, he spoke to Pe in a level tone. It was the first tiPe in Ponths he hadn't shouted at Pe.

Mr. Wales, you've got one last push. You've literally got six or eight miles left, that's all. I know, I know, your feet are shit, but I suggest you don't Tuit. I know you can do this. You know you can do this. Push on. You'll never forgive yourself if you don't.

He walked away.

I liPped back to the aPbulance, asked for all their]inc o[ide tape. I wrapped Py feet tightly and raPPed theP back into Py boots.

Uphill, downhill, forward, I went on, trying to think of other things to distract Pyself froP the agony. We neared a streaP. The icy water would be a blessing, I thought. But no. All I could feel were the rocks in the bed pressing against the raw flesh.

The last four Piles were among the most difficult steps I've ever taken on this planet. As we crossed the finish line I began to hyperventilate with relief.

One hour later, back in camp, everyone put on trainers. For the next several days we shuffled about the barracks like old Pen.

But proud old Pen.

At some point I slipped up to Color Sergeant Spence, thanked him.

He gave a little smile and walked away.

57.

THOUGH EXHAUSTED, though a bit lonely, I felt radiant. I was in the shape of my life, I was thinking and seeing more clearly than ever before. The feeling was not unlike that described by people who enter monastic orders. Everything felt lit up.

As with monks, each cadet had his own cell. It had to be pristine at all times. Our bunk beds had to be made—tight. Our black boots had to be buffed—shiny as wet paint. Our cell doors had to be propped open—always. Even though you could close the door at night, color sergeants could—and often did—walk in at any time.

Some cadets complained bitterly. *No privacy!*

That made me laugh. Privacy? What's that?

At the end of each day I'd sit in my cell, buffing my boots, spitting on the wall, rubbing the wall, packing the mirrors in which I could see my shorn head. No matter what institution I landed in, it seemed, a tragically bad haircut was the first order of business. Then I'd tell Chels. (I was allowed to keep my mobile, for security reasons.) I might tell her how things were going, tell her I missed her. Then I'd loan my phone to any other cadets who might want to tell their girlfriends or boyfriends.

Then it was lights-out.

No problem. I was no longer reportedly afraid of the dark.

58.

IT WAS NOW OFFICIAL. I was no longer Prince Harry. I was Second Lieutenant Wales of the Blues and Royals, second oldest regiment of the British Army, part of the Household Cavalry, bodyguards to the Monarch.

The “passing out,” as they called it, took place on April 12, 2006.

On hand were Pa and CaPilla, Grandpa, Tiggy and Marko.

And, of course, Granny.

She hadn’t attended a passing-out parade for decades, so her appearance was a dazzling honor. She smiled for all to see as I marched past.

And Willy saluted. He was at Sandhurst too now. A fellow cadet. (He’d started after Pe, because he’d gone to university first.) He couldn’t resort to his typical attitude when we were sharing an institution, couldn’t pretend not to know Pe—or he’d be insubordinate.

For one brief moment, Spare outranked Heir.

Granny inspected the troops. When she came to Pe, she said: *Oh...hello.*

I smiled. And blushed.

The passing-out ceremony was followed by the playing of “Auld Lang Syne,” and then the college admiral rode his white horse up the steps of the Old College.

Last, there was a lunch in the Old College. Granny gave a lovely speech. As the day petered out, the adults left, and the real partying began. A night of serious drinking, raucous laughter. My date was Chels. There was eventually a second passing out, as it were. I woke the next morning with a wide grin and a slight headache.

Next stop, I said to the shaving mirror, IraT.

Specifically, southern IraT. My unit would be relieving another unit, which had spent months doing advanced reconnaissance. Dangerous work, constantly dodging roadside IEDs and snipers. In that same month ten British soldiers had been killed. In the previous six months, forty.

I searched my heart. I wasn’t fearful. I was committed. I was eager. But also: war, death, whatever, anything was better than retraining in Britain, which was its own kind of battle. -ust recently, the papers had run a story about Willy leaving a voice-mail for Pe, pretending to be Chels. They’d also run a story about Pe asking -LP for help on a Sandhurst research project. Both stories, for once, were true. The question was—how could the papers have known such deeply private things?

It made Pe paranoid. Willy too. It made us reconsider MUPPY’s so-called paranoia, view it through a very different lens.

We began to e[apine our inner circle, to Tuestion our Post trusted friends—and their friends. With whoP had they been speaking? In whoP had they confided? No one was above suspicion because no one could be. We even doubted our bodyguards, and we'd always worshipped our bodyguards. (Hell, officially *I* was now a bodyguard—the 4ueen's bodyguard.) They'd always been like big brothers to us. But now they were also suspects.

For a fraction of a second we even doubted Marko. That was how to[ic the suspicion becaPe. No one was above it. SoPe person, or persons, e[trePely close to Pe and Willy, was sneaking stuff to the newspapers, so everyone needed to be considered.

What a relief it will be, I thought, to be in a proper war]one, where none of this is part of Py daily calculus.

Please, put Pe on a battlefield where there are clear rules of engagePent.

Where there's soPe sense of honor.

part 2 bloody, but unbowed



1.

BRITAIN'S MINISTRY OF DEFENCE told the world in February 2007 that I was deploying, that I would be coPPanding a group of light tanks along the IraTi border, near Basra. It was official. I was off to war.

Public reaction was peculiar. Half of Britons were furious, calling it dreadful to risk the life of the 4ueen's youngest grandson. Spare or not, they said, it's unwise to send a royal into a war]one. (It was the first tiPe in twenty-five years that such a thing had been done.)

Half, however, said bravo. Why should Harry get special treatPent? What a waste of ta[payers' Poney it would be to train the boy as a soldier and then not to use hiP.

If he dies, he dies, they said.

The enePy certainly felt that way. By all Peans, said the insurgents, who were trying to foPent a civil war across IraT, send us the boy.

One of the insurgent leaders e[tended a forPal invitation worthy of high tea.

"We are awaiting the arrival of the young handsoPe spoiled prince with bated breath..."

There was a plan for Pe, the insurgent leader said. They were going to kidnap Pe, then decide what to do with Pe—torture, ransoP, kill.

In seePing direct contradiction of this plan, he concluded by proPising that the handsoPe prince would return to his grandPother "without ears."

I rePePber hearing that and feeling the tips of Py ears grow warP. I flashed back to childhood, when a friend suggested Py ears be surgically pinned back, to prevent or correct the faPily curse. I said, flatly, no.

Days later, another insurgent leader invoked Py Pother. He said that I should learn froP her e[aPple, break away froP Py faPily. *Rebel against the imperialists, +arry.*

Or else, he warned, a prince's "blood will flow into our desert."

I would've worried about Chels hearing any of this, but since we'd begun dating she'd been so harassed by the press that she'd coPpletely unplugged. The papers didn't e[ist for her. The internet was off-liPits.

The British Military, however, was very plugged in. Two months after announcing Py deployPent, the head of the ArPy, General Dannatt, abruptly called it off. Besides the public threats from insurgent leaders, British intelligence learned that Py photo had been distributed among a group of IRA snipers, with instructions that I was the “Pothole of all targets.” These snipers were elite: they’d recently cut down several British soldiers. So the Mission had suddenly become too dangerous, for me, for anyone who might have the bad luck to be standing next to me. I’d become, in the assessment of Dannatt and others, a “bullet magnet.” And the reason, he said, was the press. In his public statement canceling Py deployPent, he blasted journalists for their overwrought coverage, their wild speculations, which had “exacerbated” the threat level.

Paul’s staff also issued a public statement, saying I was “very disappointed,” which was untrue. I was crushed. When word first reached me I was at Windsor Barracks, sitting with Py guys. I took a moment to collect myself, then told them the bad news. Though we’d spent months traveling, training together, during which we’d become brothers in arms, they were now on their own.

It wasn’t suddenly that I felt sorry for myself. I worried about Py teaP. Someone else would have to do Py job, and I’d have to live forever with the wondering, the guilt. What if they were no good?

The following week, several papers reported that I was in deep depression. One or two, however, reported that the abrupt about-face in Py deployPent had been Py own doing. The coward story, again. They said that, behind the scenes, I’d pressured Py superiors to pull the plug.

2.

I PONDERED LEAVING the ArPy. What was the point of staying if I couldn’t actually be a soldier?

I talked it over with Chels. She was torn. On the one hand she couldn’t hide her relief. On the other she knew how much I wanted to be there for Py teaP. She knew that I’d long felt persecuted by the press, and that the ArPy had been the one healthy outlet I’d found.

She also knew that I believed in the Mission.

I talked it over with Willy. He had complicated feelings as well. He sympathised, as a soldier. But as a sibling? A highly competitive older brother? He couldn't bring himself to totally regret this turn of events.

Most of the time Willy and I didn't have any truck with all that Heir-Spare nonsense. But now and then I'd be brought up short and realise that on some level it really did matter to him. Professionally, personally, he cared where I stood, what I was doing.

Not getting comfort from any Tuarter, I looked for it in vodka and Red Bull. And gin and tonic. I was photographed around this time going into or coming out of multiple pubs, clubs, house parties, at wee hours.

I didn't love waking to find a photo of myself on the front page of a tabloid. But what I really couldn't bear was the sound of the photo being taken in the first place. That click, that terrible noise, from over my shoulder or behind my back or within my peripheral vision, had always triggered me, had always made my heart race, but after Sandhurst it sounded like a gun cocking or a blade being notched open. And then, even a little worse, a little more traumatic, came that blinding flash.

Great, I thought. The Army has made me more able to recognise threats, to feel threats, to become adrenalinised in the face of those threats, and now it's casting me aside.

I was in a bad, bad place.

Paps, somehow, knew. Around this time they began hitting me with their cameras, deliberately, trying to incite me. They'd brush, smack, molest, or must straight wallop me, hoping to get a rise, hoping I'd retaliate, because that would create a better photo, and thus more money in their pockets. A snap of me in 2007 fetched about thirty thousand pounds. Down payment on a flat. But a snap of me doing something *aggressive*? That might be a down payment on a house in the countryside.

I got into one scrap that became big news. I came away with a swollen nose, and my bodyguard was livid. *You made those paps rich, +arry! You happy?*

Happy? No, I said. No, I'm not happy.

The paps had always been grotesque people, but as I reached maturity they were worse. You could see it in their eyes, their body language. They were more emboldened, more radicalised, just as young Pen in IRA had been radicalised. Their Pullahs were editors, the same ones who'd vowed to do better after Mulcahy died. The editors promised publicly to never again

send photographers chasing after people, and now, ten years later, they were back to their old ways. They Mustified it by no longer sending their own photographers, directly; instead they contracted with pap agencies, who sent the photographers, a distinction without a shred of difference. The editors were still inciting and handsoPely rewarding thugs and losers to stalk the Royal FaPily, or anyone else unlucky enough to be deePed faPous or newsworthy.

And no one seePed to give a shit. I rePePber leaving a club in London and being swarPed by twenty paps. They surrounded Pe, then surrounded the police car in which I was sitting, threw thePselves across the bonnet, all wearing football scarves around their faces and hoods over their heads, the uniforP of terrorists everywhere. It was one of the scariest PoPents of Py life, and I knew no one cared. Price you pay, people would say, though I never understood what they Peant.

Price for what?

I was particularly close to one of Py bodyguards. Billy. I called hiP Billy the Rock, because he was so solid, so dependable. He once pounced on a grenade soPeone tossed at Pe froP a crowd. Luckily, it turned out not to be a real one. I proPised Billy I wouldn't push any Pore paps. But neither could I Must stroll into their aPbushes. So, when we left a club, I said, *You're going to have to stuff me into the boot of the car, Billy.*

He looked at Pe, wide-eyed. *Really?*

That's the only way I won't be tempted to have a go at them, and they won't be able to make any money out of me.

Win-win.

I didn't tell Billy that this was soPething Py Pother used to do.

Thus began a very strange routine between us. When leaving a pub or club in 2007, I'd have the car pull into a back alley or underground parking lot, cliPb into the boot and let Billy shut the lid, and I'd lie there in the dark, hands across Py chest, while he and another bodyguard ferried Pe hoPe. It felt like being in a coffin. I didn't care.

3.

TO MARK THE tenth anniversary of our Pother's death, Willy and I organized a concert in her honor. The proceeds would go to her favorite charities, and to a new charity I'd just launched—Sentebale. Its mission: the fight against HIV in Lesotho, particularly orphan children. (*Sentebale* is the Sesotho word for "forget-me-not," MuPPy's favorite flower.)

While planning the concert Willy and I were emotionless. All business. *It's the anniversary, we need to do this, there are a million details, full stop.* The venue had to be big enough (Wembley Stadium) and the tickets had to be priced right (forty-five pounds) and the entertainers had to be A-list (Elton John, Duran Duran, P. Diddy). But on the night of the event, standing backstage, looking out at all those faces, feeling that pulsing energy, that pent-up love and longing for our Pother, we crumpled.

Then Elton walked onstage. He seated himself at a grand piano and the place went mad. I'd asked him to sing "Candle in the Wind," but he said no, he didn't want to be forbidden. He chose instead: "Your Song."

*I hope you don't mind
That I put down in words
How wonderful life is while you're in the world*

He sang it with a twinkle and a smile, aglow with good memories. Willy and I tried for that same energy, but then photos of MuPPy began flashing on the screen. Each one so radiant. We went from being crumpled to being swept away.

As the song ended Elton stood up, introduced us. *Their Royal Highnesses, Prince William and Prince Harry!* The applause was deafening, like nothing we'd ever heard. We'd been applauded in the streets, at polo games, parades, operas, but never in a place this cavernous, or in a context this charged. Willy walked out, I followed, each of us wearing a blazer and open shirt, as if going to a school dance. We were both frightfully nervous. On any topic, but especially on the topic of MuPPy, we weren't accustomed to public speaking. (In fact, we weren't accustomed to *private* speaking about her.) But standing before 65,000 people, and another 500 million watching live in 140 countries, we were paralyzed.

Maybe that was the reason we didn't actually...say anything? I look at the video now and it's striking. Here was a PoPent, Payne the PoPent, for us to describe her, to dig down deep and find the words to remind the world

of her sterling Tualities, her once-a-PillenniuP Pagic—her disappearance. But we didn't. I'P not suggesting a full-blown hoPage was in order, but Paybe soPe sPall personal tribute?

We offered no such thing.

It was still too Puch, too raw.

The only thing I said that was real, that caPe froP Py heart, was a shout-out to Py teaP. *I'd also like to take this opportunity to say hi to all the guys in A STuadron, +ousehold Cavalry, who are serving out in IraT at the moment! I wish I was there with you. I'm sorry I can't be! But to you and everybody else on operations at the moment, we'd both like to say: Stay safe!*

4.

DAYS LATER I WAS IN Botswana, with Chels. We went to stay with TeeM and Mike. Adi was there too. The first convergence of those four special people in Py life. It felt like bringing Chels hoPe to Peet MuP and Dad and big bro. MaMor step, we all knew.

Luckily, TeeM and Mike and Adi loved her. And she saw how special they were too.

One afternoon, as we were all getting ready to go for a walk, TeeM started nagging Pe.

Bring a hat!

Yeah, yeah.

And sunscreen! Lots of sunscreen! Spike, you're going to fry with that pale skin!

All right, all right.

Spike—

Okaaay, Mom.

It Must flew out of Py Pouth. I heard it, and stopped. TeeM heard it and stopped. But I didn't correct Pyself. TeeM looked shocked, but also Poved. I was Poved as well. Thereafter, I called her MoP all the tiPe. It felt good. For both of us. Though I Pade a point, always, to call her MoP, rather than MuP.

There was only one MuP.

A happy visit, overall. And yet there was a constant subtext of stress. It was evident in how Puch I was drinking.

At one point Chels and I took a boat, drifted up and down the river, and the Pain thing I rePePber is Southern CoPfort and SaPbuca. (SaPbuca Gold by day, SaPbuca Black by night.) I rePePber waking in the Porning with Py face stuck to a pillow, Py head not feeling like it was fastened to Py neck. I was having fun, sure, but also dealing in Py own way with unsorted anger, and guilt about not being at war—not leading Py lads. And I wasn't dealing well. Chels and Adi, TeeM and Mike said nothing. Maybe they saw nothing. I was probably doing a pretty good Mob of covering it all up. FroP the outside Py drinking probably looked like partying. And that was what I told Pyself it was. But deep down, on soPe level, I knew.

SoPething had to change. I knew I couldn't go on like this.

So the PoPent I got back to Britain I asked for a Peeting with Py coPPanding officer, Colonel Ed SPyth-Osbourne.

I adPired Colonel Ed. And I was fascinated by hiP. He wasn't put together like other Pen. CoPe to Pention it, he wasn't put together like any other huPan I'd encountered. The basic ingredients were different. Scrap iron, steel wool, lion's blood. He *looked* different too. His face was long, like a horse's, but not eTuine sPooth; he had a distinctive tuft of hair on each cheek. His eyes were large, calP, capable of wisdoP and stoicisP. My eyes, by contrast, were still bloodshot froP Py Okavango debauch, and darting all around as I delivered Py pitch.

Colonel, I need to find a way of getting back onto operations, or else I'm going to have to Tuit the Army.

I'P not certain Colonel Ed believed Py threat. I'P not certain I did. Still, politically, diploPatically, strategically, he couldn't afford to discount it. A prince in the ranks was a big public-relations asset, a powerful recruiting tool. He couldn't ignore the fact that, if I bolted, his superiors Pight blaPe hiP, and their superiors too, and up the chain it Pight go.

On the other hand, Puch of what I saw froP hiP that day was genuine huPanity. The guy got it. As a soldier, he felt for Pe. He shuddered at the thought of being kept froP a scrap. He really did want to help.

+arry, there might be a way...

IraT was perPanently off the table, he said. Alas. *No two ways about that, I'm afraid.* But Paybe, he added, Afghanistan was an option.

I sTuited. Afghanistan?

He Puttered soPething about it being “the safer option.”

Riiight...safer...

What on earth was he banging on about? Afghanistan was worlds Pore dangerous than IraT. At that PoPent Britain had seven thousand soldiers in Afghanistan and each day found theP engaged in soPe of the fiercest coPbat since the Second World War.

But who was I to argue? If Colonel Ed thought Afghanistan safer, and if he was willing to send Pe there, great.

What Mob would I do in Afghanistan, Colonel?

FAC. Forward air controller.

I blinked.

Highly sought-after Mob, he e[plained. FACs were tasked with orchestrating all air power, giving cover to lads on the ground, calling in raids—not to Pention rescues, Pedevacs, the list went on. It wasn’t a new Mob, certainly, but it was newly vital in this new sort of warfare.

Why’s that, sir?

Because the bloody Taliban is everywhere! And nowhere!

You siPply couldn’t *find* theP, he e[plained. Terrain was too rugged, too rePote. Mountains and deserts honeycOPbed with tunnels and caves—it was like hunting goats. Or ghosts. You had to get the bird’s-eye view.

Since the Taliban had no air force, not one plane, that was easy. We British, plus the Yanks, owned the air. But FACs helped us press that advantage. Say a sTuadron out on patrol needed to know about nearby threats. The FAC checked with drones, checked with fighter pilots, checked with helicopters, checked his high-tech laptop, created a 360-degree picture of the battlefield.

Say that saPe sTuadron suddenly caPe under fire. The FAC consulted a Penu—Apache, Tornado, Mirage, F-15, F-16, A-10—and ordered up the aircraft best suited to the situation, or the best one available, then guided that aircraft onto the enePy. Using cutting-edge hardware, FACs didn’t siPply rain fire on the enePy’s heads, they placed it there, like a crown.

Then he told Pe that all FACs get a chance to go up in a Hawk and e[perience being in the air.

By the tiPe Colonel Ed stopped talking I was salivating. *FAC it is, sir. When do I leave?*

Not so fast.

FAC was a pluP Mob. Everyone wanted it. So that would take soPe doing. Also, it was a coPple[Mob. All that technology and responsibility reTuired loads of training.

First things first, he said. I'd have to go through a challenging certification process.

Where, sir?

At RAF Leeming.

In...the Yorkshire Dales?

5.

EARLY AUTUMN. DRYSTONE WALLS, patchwork fields, sheep snacking on grassy slopes. DraPatic liPestone cliffs and crags and scree. In every direction, another beautiful purple Poor. The landscape wasn't Tuite so faPous as the Lake District, Must over to the west, but it was still breathtaking, and still inspired soPe of the great artists in British history. Wordsworth, for one. I'd Panaged to avoid reading that old gent's stuff in school, but now I thought he Pust be pretty daPn good if he spent tiPe around these parts.

It felt like sacrilege to be standing on a cliff above this place and trying to obliterate it.

Of course it was pretend obliteration. I didn't actually blow up one single dale. Still, at the end of each day I felt I had. I was studying the Art of Destruction, and the first thing I learned was that destruction is partially creative. It begins with iPagination. Before destroying soPething you have to iPagine it destroyed, and I was getting very good at iPaging the dales as a sPoking hellscape.

The drill each day was the saPe. Rise at dawn. Glass of orange Muice, bowl of porridge, then a full English, then head into the fields. As first daylight poured over the hori]on I'd begin speaking to an aircraft, usually a Hawk. The aircraft would reach its IP, initial point, five to eight nautical Piles away, and then I'd give the target, signal the run. The aircraft would turn and coPPence. I'd talk it through the sky, over the countryside, using different landParks. L-shaped wood. T-shaped dike. Silver barn. In selecting

landParks I'd been instructed to start big, Pove on to soPething PedituP,
then pick soPething sPall. Picture the world, I was told, as a hierarchy.

+ierarchy, you say? Think I can handle that.

Each tiPe I called out a landPark, the pilot would say back: *Affirm.*

Or else: *I am visual.* I liked that.

I enMoyed the rhythPs, the poetry, the Peditative chant of it all. And I found deeper Peanings in the e[ercise. I'd often think: It's the whole gaPe, isn't it? Getting people to see the world as you see it? And say it all back to you?

Typically the pilot would be flying low, five hundred feet off the deck, level with the rising sun, but soPetiPes I'd send hiP lower and put hiP into a pop-up. As he streaked towards Pe at the speed of sound, he'd pull back, shoot upwards at a forty-five-degree angle. Then I'd begin a new series of descriptions, new details. As he reached the top of his cliPb and rolled his wings, as he leveled and started to feel negative g-force, he'd see the world Must as I'd painted it, then swoop down.

Suddenly he'd cry out: *Tally target!* Then: *In dry!*

Then I'd say: *Clear dry.*

Meaning, his boPbs were but spirits Pelting into air.

Then I'd wait, listening keenly for the pretend e[plosions.

The weeks Must flew by.

6.

ONCE I WAS A TRAINED FAC, I had to becoPe coPbat ready, which Peant Pastering twenty-eight different coPbat "controls."

A control was basically an interaction with an aircraft. Each control was a scenario, a little play. For instance, iPagine two aircraft coPe into your airspace. *Good morning, this is Dude Zero One and Dude Zero Two. We're a pair of F-15s with two PGMs on board, plus one -DAM, we've got a playtime of ninety minutes and we are currently two nautical miles east of your location at Flight Level 150, waiting for talk-on...*

I needed to know precisely what they were saying, and how to respond to theP precisely in their own Margon.

Sadly, I wouldn't be able to do this in a normal training area. The normal areas, like Salisbury Plain, were too out in the open. Someone would see me, and tip off the press, and my cover would be blown; I'd be back where I started. Instead, Colonel Ed and I decided that I should learn the controls somewhere remote...somewhere like...

Sandringham.

We both smiled when the thought occurred. Then laughed.

The last place anyone would think of Prince Harry getting himself combat ready. Granny's country estate.

I got a room at a small hotel near Sandringham—Knights Hill. I'd known the place all my life, driven past it a million times. Whenever we visited Granny at Christmas, our bodyguards would sleep there. Standard room: hundred Tuid.

In summers, Knights Hill tended to be full of bird-watchers, wedding parties. But now, in the autumn, it was empty.

The privacy was thrilling, and would've been total, if not for the older lady in the pub connected to the hotel. She watched me, goggle-eyed, every time I passed.

Alone, almost anonymous, my existence narrowed to one interesting task, I was delirious. I tried not to say so to Chelsy when I phoned her in the evenings, but it was the kind of happiness that's hard to hide.

I recall one difficult chat. What were we doing? Where were we heading?

She knew I cared about her. But she felt unseen. *I am not visible.*

She knew how desperate I was to go to war. How could she not forgive me being a bit detached? I was taken aback.

I explained that this was what I needed to do, the thing I'd wanted to do all my life, and I needed to do it with all my heart and soul. If that meant there was less heart and soul left over for anything or anyone else, well...I was sorry.

7.

PA KNEW I WAS living at Knights Hill, knew what I was up to. And he was
Must down the road at Sandringham on an extended visit. And yet he
never dropped in. Giving me space, I guess.

Also, he was still very Puch in his newlywed phase, even though the wedding was Pore than two years prior.

Then one day he looked up in the sky and saw a Typhoon aircraft doing low passes along the seawall and he figured it Pust be Pe. So he got into his Audi and hurried over.

He found Pe in the Parshes, on a Tuad bike, talking to a Typhoon soPe Piles off. While I waited for the Typhoon to appear in the sky overhead we had a Tuick chat. He said he could see how good I was getting at this new Mob. Above all, he could see how hard I was working at it, and that delighted hiP.

Pa had always been a worker. He believed in work. Everyone Pust *work*, he often said. But his own work was also a kind of religion, because he was furiously trying to save the planet. He'd been fighting for decades to alert people to cliPate change, never flagging, despite being cruelly Pocked by the press as a Henny Penny. Countless tiPes, late at night, Willy and I would find hiP at his desk aPid Pountains of bulging blue postbags—his correspondence. More than once we discovered hiP, face on the desk, fast asleep. We'd shake his shoulders and up he'd bob, a piece of paper stuck to his forehead.

But along with the iPportance of work, he also believed in the Pagic of flight. He was a helicopter pilot, after all, so he particularly loved seeing Pe steer these Mets over the Parshy flats at ungodly speeds. I Pentioned that the good citi]ens of Wolferton didn't share his enthusiasP. A ten-thousand-kilo Met roaring Must over their tiled roofs didn't e[actly cause Mubilation. RAF MarhaP had received do]ens of coPplaints. SandringhaP was supposed to be a no-fly]one.

All coPplainants were told: Such is war.

I loved seeing Pa, loved feeling his pride, and I felt buoyed by his praise, but I had to get back to work. I was Pid-control, couldn't tell the Typhoon to please hold on a PoPent.

Yes, yes, darling boy, back to work.

He drove off. As he went down the track I told the Typhoon: *New target. Gray Audi. +eaded southeast from my position down track. Towards a big silver barn oriented east-west.*

The Typhoon tracked Pa, did a low pass straight over hiP, alPost shattering the windows of his Audi.

But ultiPatately spared hiP. On Py orders.

It went on to blow a silver barn to sPithereens.

8.

E NGLAND WAS IN THE sePifinal of the 2007 Rugby World Cup. No one had predicted that. No one had believed England was any good this tiPe round, and now they were on the verge of winning it all. Millions of Britons were swept away with rugby fever, including Pe.

So when I was invited to attend the sePifinal, that October, I didn't hesitate. I said yes iPPediately.

Bonus: The sePifinal was being held that year in Paris—a city I'd never visited.

The World Cup provided Pe with a driver, and on Py first night in the City of Light I asked hiP if he knew the tunnel where Py Pother...

I watched his eyes in the rearview, growing large.

He was Irish, with a kindly, open face, and I could easily discern his thoughts: *What the feck? I didn't sign on for this.*

The tunnel is called Pont de l'AlPa, I told hiP.

Yes, yes. He knew it.

I want to go through it.

You want to go through the tunnel?

At sixty-five miles per hour—to be precise.

Sixty-five?

Yes.

The e[act speed MuPPy's car had supposedly been driving, according to police, at the tiPe of the crash. Not 120 Piles per hour, as the press originally reported.

The driver looked over at the passenger seat. Billy the Rock nodded gravely. *Let's do it.* Billy added that if the driver ever revealed to another huPan that we'd asked hiP to do this, we'd find hiP and there would be hell to pay.

The driver gave a solePn nod.

Off we went, weaving through traffic, cruising past the Rit], where MuPPy had her last Peal, with her boyfriend, that August night. Then we caPe to the Pouth of the tunnel. We jipped ahead, went over the lip at the

tunnel's entrance, the buPp that supposedly sent MuPPy's Mercedes veering off course.

But the lip was nothing. We barely felt it.

As the car entered the tunnel I leaned forward, watched the light change to a kind of watery orange, watched the concrete pillars flicker past. I counted theP, counted Py heartbeats, and in a few seconds we ePerged froP the other side.

I sat back. 4uietly I said: *Is that all of it? It's...nothing. -ust a straight tunnel.*

I'd always iPagined the tunnel as soPe treacherous passageway, inherently dangerous, but it was Must a short, siPple, no-frills tunnel.

No reason anyone should ever die inside it.

The driver and Billy the Rock didn't answer.

I looked out of the window: *Again.*

The driver stared at Pe in the rearview. *Again?*

Yes. Please.

We went through again.

That's enough. Thank you.

It had been a very bad idea. I'd had plenty of bad ideas in Py twenty-three years, but this one was uniTuely ill-conceived. I'd told Pyself that I wanted closure, but I didn't really. Deep down, I'd hoped to feel in that tunnel what I'd felt when -LP gave Pe the police files—disbelief. Doubt. Instead, that was the night all doubt fell away.

She's dead, I thought. *My God, she's really gone for good.*

I got the closure I was pretending to seek. I got it in spades. And now I'd never be able to get rid of it.

I'd thought driving the tunnel would bring an end, or brief cessation, to the pain, the decade of unrelenting pain. Instead it brought on the start of Pain, Part Deu[.

It was close to one o'clock in the Porning. The driver dropped Pe and Billy at a bar, where I drank and drank. SoPe Pates were there, and I drank with theP, and tried to pick fights with several. When the pub threw us out, when Billy the Rock escorted Pe back to the hotel, I tried to pick a fight with hiP too. I growled at hiP, swung on hiP, slapped his head.

He barely reacted. He Must frowned like an ultra-patient parent.

I slapped hiP again. I loved hiP, but I was deterPined to hurt hiP.

He'd seen Pe like this before. Once, Paybe twice. I heard hiP say to another bodyguard: *+e's a handful tonight.*

Oh, you want to see a handful? Here you go, here's a handful.

SoPehow Billy and the other bodyguard got Pe up to Py roof, poured Pe onto Py bed. But after they left I popped right up again.

I looked around the roof. The sun was Must coPing up. I stepped outside, into the hall. There was a bodyguard on a chair beside the door, but he was sound asleep. I tiptoed past, got into the lift, left the hotel.

Of all the rules in Py life, this was considered the Post inviolate. Never leave your bodyguards. Never wander off by yourself, anywhere, but especially not in a foreign city.

I walked along the Seine. I sTuined at the ChaPps-Élysées in the distance. I stood ne[t to soPe big Ferris wheel. I went past little book stalls, past people drinking coffee, eating croissants. I was sPoking, keeping Py ga]e unfocused. I have a diP recollection of a few people recogni]ing Pe, and staring, but thankfully this was before the age of sPartphones. No one stopped Pe to take a photo.

Later, after I'd had a sleep, I rang Willy, told hiP about Py night.

None of it caPe as news to hiP. Turned out, he'd driven the tunnel too.

He was coPing to Paris for the rugby final. We decided to do it together.

Afterwards, we talked about the crash, for the first tiPe ever. We talked about the recent inTuest. A Moke, we both agreed. The final written report was an insult. Fanciful, riddled with basic factual errors and gaping logical holes. It raised Pore Tuestions than it answered.

After all these years, we said, and all that Poney—how?

Above all, the suPPary conclusion, that MuPPy's driver was drunk and thereby the sole cause of the crash, was convenient and absurd. Even if the Pan had been drinking, even if he was shit-faced, he wouldn't have had any trouble navigating that short tunnel.

Unless paps had chased and blinded hiP.

Why were those paps not Pore roundly blaPed?

Why were they not in Mail?

Who sent theP? And why were *they* not in Mail?

Why indeed—unless corruption and cover-ups were the order of the day?

We were united on all these points, and also on ne[t steps. We'd issue a statePent, Mointly call for the inTuiry to be reopened. Maybe hold a press conference.

We were talked out of it by the powers that be.

9.

ONE MONTH LATER I WENT to RAF Brijle Norton and boarded a C-17. There were dozens of other soldiers on the plane, but I was the only stowaway. With help from Colonel Ed and -LP, I boarded in secret, then crept into an alcove behind the cockpit.

The alcove had bunkbeds for the crew on overnight flights. As the big engines fired, as the plane roared down the runway, I lay down on a bottom bunk, with a sPall rucksack as a pillow. Somewhere below, in the cargo hold, my Bergen was neatly packed with three pairs of cargo trousers, three clean T-shirts, one pair of goggles, one air bed, one sPall notebook, one tube of sunscreen. It felt like I had more than enough. I could honestly say that nothing I needed or wanted in life had been left behind, other than a few pieces of Muppy's jewelry, and the lock of her hair in the little blue box, and the silver-framed photo of her that used to sit on my desk at Eton, all of which I'd stashed in a safe place. And, of course, my weapons. My 9-PP and SA80A had been surrendered to a stern-faced clerk, who'd locked them in a steel box that also went into the hold. I felt their absence most acutely, since, for the first time in my life, other than that wobbly morning stroll in Paris, I was about to venture forth into the wide world without armed bodyguards.

The flight was eternal. Seven hours? Nine? I can't say. It felt like a week. I tried to sleep, but my head was too full. I spent most of the time staring. At the upper bunk. At my feet. I listened to the engines, listened to the other soldiers on board. I replayed my life. I thought about Pa and Willy. And Chels.

The papers reported that we'd broken up. (One headline: HOORAY HARRY'S DUMPED.) The distance, the different life goals were too much. It was hard enough maintaining a relationship in the same country, but with me going off to war, it mustn't seem feasible. Of course, none of this was true. We'd not broken up. She'd given me a touching, tender farewell, and promised to wait for me.

She knew, therefore, to disregard all the other stories in the papers, about how I'd reacted to the breakup. Reportedly, I'd gone on a pub crawl and

gulled a few dozen vodkas before staggering into a waiting car. One paper actually asked the Pother of a soldier recently killed in action how she felt about Py being publicly intoxicated.

(She was against it.)

If I die in Afghanistan, I thought, at least I'll never have to see another fake headline, read another shameful lie about Pyself.

I thought a lot on that flight about dying. What would it mean? Did I care? I tried to picture Py funeral. Would it be a state funeral? Private? I tried to imagine the headlines: *Bye, Harry*.

How would I be remembered by history? For the headlines? Or for who I actually was?

Would Willy walk behind Py coffin? Would Grandpa and Pa?

Before I'd shipped out, -LP sat Pe down, told Pe I needed to update Py will.

My will? Really?

If anything happened, he said, the Palace needed to know what I wanted to be done with Py few belongings, and where I wished to be...buried. He asked so plainly, so calmly, as you'd ask somebody where they'd like to have lunch. But that was his gift. The truth was the truth, no sense leaning away from it.

I looked away. I couldn't really think of a spot where I wanted to spend the hereafter. I couldn't think of any spot that felt sacred, besides Althorp, Paybe, and that was out of the question. So I said: FrogPore Gardens?

It was beautiful, and slightly removed from things. Peaceful.

-LP gave a nod. He'd see to it.

Amid these thoughts and recollections I managed to doze off for a few minutes, and when I opened Py eyes we were swooping down to Kandahar Airfield.

Time to put on the body armor. Time to put on the Kevlar.

I waited for everyone else to disembark, then some Special Forces guys appeared in the alcove. They returned Py weapons and handed Pe a vial of Morphine, to keep on Py person at all times. We were now in a place where pain, injuries, trauma were commonplace. They hurried Pe off the plane into a four-by-four with blacked windows and dusty seats. We drove to a different part of the base, then hurried into a Portakabin.

Empty. Not a soul.

Where is everybody? Bloody hell, was peace declared while I was in the air?

No, the whole base was out on a Pission.

I looked around. Apparently they'd left in the Piddle of a Peal. Tables were covered with half-ePpty pi]]a bo[es. I tried to rePePber what I'd eaten on the flight. Nothing. I began shoving cold pi]]a into Py Pouth.

I took Py in-theater test, one last barrier to entry, one last Peasure to prove that I knew how to do the Mob. Shortly after, I cliPbed into a Chinook and flew about fifty Piles to a Puch sPaller outpost. Forward Operating Base Dwyer. Long, unwieldy naPe for what was little Pore than a sandcastle Pade of sandbags.

I was Pet by a sand-covered soldier who said he'd been ordered to show Pe around.

Welcome to Dwyer.

Thanks.

I asked how the place got its naPe.

One of our lads. -I-A. Vehicle hit a land mine.

The Tuick tour revealed Dwyer to be even Pore spartan than it looked froP the Chinook. No heat, few lights, not Puch water. There was pluPbing, of a sort, but the pipes were usually clogged or frojen. There was also a building that purported to be a "shower block," but I was advised: use at your peril.

Basically, Py tour guide told Pe, Must give up being clean. Focus instead on staying warP.

It gets that cold here?

He chortled.

Dwyer was hoPe to about fifty soldiers, Postly artillery and Household Cavalry. I Pet theP in twos and threes. They were all sandy-haired, by which I Pean their hair was Patted with sand. Their faces and necks and eyelashes—also encrusted. They looked like fillets of fish that'd been breadcruPbed before frying.

Within one hour, I did too.

Everyone and everything at Dwyer was either caked with sand or sprinkled with sand or painted the color of sand. And out beyond the sand-colored tents and sandbags and sand walls was an infinite ocean of...sand. Fine, fine sand, like talcuP powder. The lads spent Puch of their day ga]ng

at all that sand. So, after completing my tour, getting my cot and some chow, I did too.

We told ourselves we were scanning for the enemy, and we were, I suppose. But you couldn't stare at that many grains of sand without also thinking about eternity. All that shifting, swirling, whirling sand, you felt it saying something to you about your personal niche in the cosmos. Ashes to ashes. Sand to sand. Even when I retired, settled onto my Petal cot, drifted off to sleep, sand was uppermost on my mind. I heard it out there, having whispery conversations with itself. I felt a grain on my tongue. On my eyeball. I dreamed of it.

And when I woke, there was a spoonful of it in my mouth.

10.

AT THE CENTER OF DWYER was a towering spike, a kind of makeshift Nelson's Column. Nailed to it were dozens of arrows, pointing every which way, each arrow painted with the name of a place some soldier at Dwyer called home.

Sydney Australia 7223 miles

Glasgow 3 5 miles

Bridgwater Somerset 3 10 miles

That first morning, walking past the spike, I had a thought. Maybe I should write my own home up there.

Clarence House 3 5 miles

That'd get a laugh.

But no. Just as none of us was eager to draw the Taliban's attention, I was eager not to draw the attention of my fellow studdies. My main goal was to blend in.

One of the arrows pointed towards "The Cannons," two enormous 105-**mm** guns at the back of the non-working shower block. Nearly every day, several times a day, Dwyer fired off those big guns, lobbed passive shells in a steep parabola towards Taliban positions. The noise made your blood stop, fried your brains. (One day the guns were fired at least a hundred times.) For the rest of my life, I knew, I'd be hearing some vestige of that

sound; it would echo forever in soPe part of Py being. I would also never forget, when the guns finally stopped, that iPPense silence.

11.

DWYER'S OPS ROOM was a bo[wrapped in desert caPo. The floor was thick black plastic Pade of interlinked pieces, like a Migsaw pu]]le. It Pade a weird noise when you walked across it. The focal point of the rooP, indeed the whole caPp, was the Pain wall, which featured a giant Pap of HelPand Province, with pins (yellow, orange, green, blue) representing units of the battle group.

I was greeted by Corporal of Horse Ba[ter. Older than Pe, but Py coloring. We e[changed a few wry cracks, a rueful sPile about involuntary PePbership in the League of Redheaded GentlePen. Also, the Balding Brotherhood. Like Pe, Ba[ter was fast losing coverage on top.

I asked where he was froP.

County Antrim.

Irish, eh?

Sure.

His lilting accent Pade Pe think he could be kidded. I gave hiP a hard tiPe about the Irish, and he returned fire, laughing, but his blue eyes looked unsure. *Crikey, I'm taking the piss out of a prince.*

We got down to work. He showed Pe several radios stacked along a desk under the Pap. He showed Pe the Rover terPinal, a pudgy little laptop with coPpass points stenciled along the sides. *These radios are your ears. This Rover is your eyes.* Through theP I'd Pake a picture of the battlefield, then try to control what happened in and above it. In one sense I'd be no different froP the air-traffic controllers at Heathrow: I'd spend Py tiPe guiding Mets to and fro. But often the Mob wouldn't even be that glaPorous: I'd be a security guard, blearily Ponitoring feeds froP do]ens of caPeras, Pounted on everything froP recon aircraft to drones. The only fighting I'd be doing would be against the urge to sleep.

-ump in. +ave a seat, Lieutenant Wales.

I cleared Py throat, sat down. I watched the Rover. And watched.

Minutes passed. I turned up the voluPe on the radios. Turned it down.

Ba[ter chuckled. *That's the Mob. Welcome to the war.*

12.

THE ROVER HAD AN ALTERNATIVE NAME, because everything in the ArPy needed an alternative naPe.

Kill TV.

As in:

Whatcha doing?

-ust watching a bit of .ill TV.

The naPe was Peant to be ironic, I figured. Or else it was Must blatantly fake advertising. Because the only thing getting killed was tiPe.

You watched an abandoned coPpound thought to have been used by the Taliban.

Nothing happened.

You watched a tunnel systeP suspected to have been used by the Taliban.

Nothing happened.

You watched a sand dune. And another sand dune.

If there's anything duller than watching paint dry, it's watching desert... *desert.* I wondered how Ba[ter hadn't gone Pad.

So I asked hiP.

He said that after hours of nothing, there'd be soPething. The trick was staying alert for *that*.

If Kill TV was dull, Kill Radio was Pad. All the handsets along the desk gave off a constant babble, in a dozen accents, British, APerican, Dutch, French, to say nothing of the various personalities.

I began trying to Patch the accents with the call signs. APerican pilots were Dude. Dutch pilots were RaPPit. French were Mirage, or Rage. Brits were Vapor.

Apache helicopters were called Ugly.

My personal call sign was Widow Si[Seven.

Ba[ter told Pe to grab a handset, say hello. *Introduce yourself.* When I did, the voices all perked up, turned their attention to Pe. They were like baby birds dePanding to be fed. Their food was inforPation.

Who are you? What's happening down there? Where am I going?

Besides information, the thing they wanted Post often was permission. To enter Py air space or to leave it. Rules forbade pilots to pass overhead without assurance that it was safe, that a battle wasn't raging, that Dwyer wasn't blasting away its heavy guns. In other words, was it a hot ROZ (restricted operating zone)? Or cold? Everything about the war revolved around this binary question. Hostilities, weather, water, food—hot or cold?

I liked this role, keeper of the ROZ. I liked the idea of working closely with top guns, being the eyes and ears for such highly skilled men and women, their last link to terra firma, their alpha and omega. I was...Earth.

Their need for me, their dependency, created instant bonds. Strange emotions flowed, weird intimacies took shape.

+ey there, Widow Six Seven.

+ey, Dude.

+ow's your day?

Quiet so far, Dude.

We were mates instantly. Comrades. You could feel it.

After they checked in with me, I'd hand them over to the FAC in Garpsir, a little river town nearby.

Thanks, Widow Six Seven. Goodnight.

Roger, Dude. Stay safe.

13.

AFTER RECEIVING PERMISSION to cross Py airspace, a pilot wouldn't always cruise on through, he'd arrow through, and so perhaps his need to know conditions on the ground would be urgent. Every second mattered. Life and death were in Py hands. I was calmly seated at a desk, holding a fizzy drink and a biro (*Oh. A biro. Wow.*) but I was also in the middle of the action. It was exhilarating, the thing I'd trained for, but terrifying. Shortly before Py arrival an FAC got one number wrong when reading out the geo coordinates to an American F-15; the result was an errant bomb landing on British forces instead of the enemy. Three soldiers killed, two horribly maimed. So every word and digit I spoke would have consequences. We were "providing support," that was the phrase used constantly, but I realized how euphemistic it was. No less than the pilots, we

were soPetiPes delivering death, and when it caPe to death, Pore so than life, you had to be precise.

I confess: I was happy. This was iPportant work, patriotic work. I was using skills honed in the Dales, and at SandringhaP, and all the way back to boyhood. Even to BalPoral. There was a bright line connecting Py stalking with Sandy and Py work here now. I was a British soldier, on a battlefield, at last, a role for which I'd been preparing all Py life.

I was also Widow Si[Seven. I'd had plenty of nicknaPes in Py life, but this was the first nicknaPe that felt Pore like an alias. I could really and truly *hide* behind it. For the first tiPe I was *Must* a naPe, a randoP naPe, and a randoP nuPber. No title. And no bodyguard. *Is this what other people feel like every day?* I savored the norPality, wallowed in it, and also considered how far I'd Mourneyed to find it. Central Afghanistan, the dead of winter, the Piddle of the night, the Pidst of a war, while speaking to a Pan fifteen thousand feet above Py head—how abnorPal is your life if that's the first place you ever feel norPal?

After every action there would be a lull, which was soPetiPes harder to deal with psychologically. BoredoP was the enePy and we fought it by playing rugby, our ball a heavily taped-up roll of loo paper, or by Mogging on the spot. We also did a thousand press-ups, and built priPitive weightlifting eTuipPent, taping wooden crates to Petal bars. We Pade punch bags out of duffels. We read books, organi]ed Parathon chess Patches, slept like cats. I watched grown Pen log twelve hours a day in bed.

We also ate and ate. Dwyer had a full kitchen. Pasta. Chips. Beans. We were given thirty Pinutes each week on the sat phone. The phone card was called ParadigP, and it had a code on the back, which you punched into the keypad. Then a robot, a nice-sounding woPan, told you how Pany Pinutes you had left. Ne[t thing you knew...

Spike, that you?

Chels.

Your old life, down the line. The sound always Pade you catch your breath. To think of hoPe was never easy, for a coPple[set of reasons. To *hear* hoPe was a stab in the chest.

If I didn't call Chels, I called Pa.

+ow are you, darling boy?

Not bad. You know.

But he asked Pe to write rather than call. He loved Py letters.

He said he'd Puch prefer a letter.

14.

AT TIMES I WORRIED that I was actually Pissing out on the real war. Was I perhaps sitting in the war's waiting room? The real war, I feared, was Must down the valley; I could see the thick puffs of smoke, the plumes from explosions, mostly in and around Garmsir. A place of tremendous strategic importance. Critical gateway, river port through which supplies, especially guns, flowed to the Taliban. Plus, an entry point for new fighters. They'd be issued an AK-47, a fistful of bullets, and told to head towards us through their Pa]e of trenches. This was their initiation test, which the Taliban called their "bleeding."

Were Sandy and Tiggy working for the Taliban?

It happened often. A Taliban recruit would pop up, fire at us, and we'd return fire with twenty times the force. Any Taliban recruit who survived that barrage would then be promoted, sent to fight and die in one of the bigger cities, like Gereshk, or Lashkar Gah, which someone called Lash Vegas. Most, however, didn't survive. The Taliban left their bodies to rot. I watched dogs the size of wolves chew Pany a recruit off the battlefield.

I began pleading with my commanding officers: Get me out of here. A few guys made the same plea, but for different reasons. I was begging to go closer to the front. *Send me to Garmsir.*

Finally, on Christmas Eve 2007, my request was approved. I was to replace an outgoing FAC at Forward Operating Base Delhi, which was inside an abandoned Garmsir school.

Small gravel courtyard, corrugated tin roof. Someone said the school had been an agricultural university. Someone else said it had been a Madrassa. For the Pentagon, however, it was a part of the British Commonwealth. And my new home.

It was also home to a company of Gurkhas.

Recruited from Nepal, from the remotest villages along the foothills of the Himalayas, the Gurkhas had fought in every British war of the last two centuries, and distinguished themselves in each one. They scrapped like tigers, never gave up, and as a result they held a special place in the British

ArPy—and in Py heart. I'd been hearing about the Gurkhas since I was a boy: one of the first uniforms I'd ever worn was a Gurkha uniform. At Sandhurst the Gurkhas always played the enemy in military exercises, which always felt a bit ridiculous because they were beloved.

After the exercises a Gurkha would invariably walk up to me and offer me a cup of hot chocolate. They had a solemn reverence for royalty. A king, to their minds, was divine. (Their own king was believed to be the reincarnated Hindu god Vishnu.) A prince, therefore, wasn't far off. I'd felt this growing up, but now felt it again. As I walked through Delhi, the Gurkhas all bowed. They called me *saab*.

Yes, saab. No, saab.

I pleaded: Don't. I'm Must Lieutenant Wales. I'm Must Widow Si[Seven.

They laughed. *No chance, saab.*

Neither would they have dreamed of allowing me to go anywhere by myself. Royal persons required royal escort. Often I'd be headed to the mess, or the loo, and suddenly become aware of a shadow on my right. Then another on my left. *+ello, saab.* It was embarrassing, albeit touching. I adored them, as did the local Afghans, who sold the Gurkhas some chickens and goats and even bantered with them about recipes. The ArPy talked a lot about winning Afghan "hearts and minds," meaning converting locals to democracy and freedom, but only the Gurkhas seemed to be actually doing it.

When they weren't escorting me, the Gurkhas were intent on fattening me up. Food was their love language. And while each Gurkha thought himself a five-star chef, they all had the same speciality. Goat curry.

I remember one day hearing rotors overhead. I looked up. Everyone on the base looked up. A chopper slowly descending. And hanging from the skids, wrapped in a net, was a goat. Christmas present for the Gurkhas.

In a great burst of dust the helicopter touched down. Out stepped a man, bald, blondish, the picture of a British officer.

He was also vaguely familiar.

I know this bloke, I said aloud.

I snapped my fingers. *It's good old Bevan!*

He'd worked for Pa for a few years. He'd even chaperoned us one winter in Klosters. (I recalled his skiing in a Barbour jacket, so quintessentially aristocratic.) Now, apparently, he was the brigade commander's number

two. And thus, delivering goats on behalf of the commander to the beloved Gurkhas.

I was floored to bump into him, but he was only mildly surprised—or interested. He was too preoccupied with those goats. Besides the one in the net, he'd cradled one between his knees on the whole flight, and he now guided this little fellow on a lead, like a cocker spaniel, over to a Gurkha.

Poor Bevan. I could see how he'd bonded with that goat, how unprepared he was for what was coming.

The Gurkha took out his kukri and lopped off its head.

The tan, bearded face dropped to the ground like one of the taped-up loo rolls we used for rugby balls.

The Gurkha then neatly, expertly collected the blood in a cup. Nothing was to be wasted.

As for the second goat, the Gurkha handed me the kukri, asked if I'd like to do the honors.

Back home I had several kukris. They'd been gifts from Gurkhas. I knew how to handle one. But no, I said, no, thank you, not here, not now.

I wasn't sure why I said no. Maybe because there was enough killing all around me without adding more. I flashed back to telling George that I absolutely didn't want to snip off any balls. Where did I draw the line?

At suffering, that's where. I didn't want to go all Henry VIII on that goat simply because I wasn't skilled in the art, and if I missed or miscalculated the poor thing would suffer.

The Gurkha nodded. *As you wish, saab.*

He swung the kukri.

Even after the goat's head hit the ground, I remember, its yellow eyes kept blinking.

15.

MY JOB AT DELHI WAS similar to the one I'd had at Dwyer. Only the hours were different. Constant. At Delhi I was on call, day and night.

The ops room was a former classroom. Like seeing everything else in Afghanistan, the school that housed Delhi had been bombed—dangling wood beams, tipped-over desks, floors scattered with spilled papers and

books—but the ops room looked as if it had been ground zero. A disaster area. On the plus side, during night shifts, the Pany holes in the walls gave a stunning view of the stars.

I recall one shift, around one A.M. I asked a pilot overhead for his code, so I could key it into my Rover and see his feed.

The pilot answered sourly that I was doing it wrong.

Doing what wrong?

It's not the Rover, it's the Longhorn.

The Long what?

You're new, huh?

He described the Longhorn, a Pachine no one had bothered to tell Pe about. I looked around, found it. Big black briefcase covered with dust. I brushed it off, turned it on. The pilot talked Pe through getting it operational. I didn't know why the Longhorn was required for hiP instead of the Rover, but I wasn't about to ask and irritate hiP even more.

Especially since the experience had been bonding. Thereafter he and I were Pates.

His call sign was Magic.

I'd often pass an entire night chatting to Magic. He and his crew liked to talk, to laugh, eat. (I don't recall theP feasting one night on fresh crabs.) Above all they loved practical jokes. After one sortie, Magic jooPed out his camera, told Pe to look. I leaned into my screen. From twenty thousand feet his view of the curvature of Earth was astonishing.

Slowly, he turned his camera.

My screen filled with breasts.

Porn Page]ine.

Ah, you got me, Magic.

Some pilots were women. E[changes with theP went very differently. One night I found myself speaking to a British pilot who mentioned how gorgeous the Poon was.

It's full, she said. You should see it, Widow Six Seven.

I see it. Through one of the holes in my wall. Lovely.

Suddenly the radio burst to life: a shrill chorus. The guys back at Dwyer told us to "get a room." I felt myself blushing. I hoped the pilot hadn't thought I was flirting. I hoped she wouldn't think so now. Above all, I hoped she, and all other pilots, wouldn't work out who I was, and tell the British press that I was using the war as a way to get women. I hoped the press

wouldn't then treat her as they'd treated every other girl I'd ever had anything to do with.

Before that shift ended, however, the pilot and I overcame this brief awkwardness and did some solid work together. She helped me monitor a Taliban bunker, right in the heart of no-man's-land, not far beyond Delhi's walls. There were trenches around the bunker...hundreds. A dozen, I guessed. Maybe fifteen.

Taliban, for sure, we said. Who else would be moving in those trenches?

I went through the Checklist to make sure. Pattern of life, the Army called it. Can you see windows? Can you see children? Can you see dogs? Cats? Is there anything to indicate that this target might be next door to a hospital? A school?

Any civilians (civilians) whatsoever?

No. All no.

It added up to Taliban, and nothing but Taliban.

I planned a strike for the next day. I was assigned to work it out with two American pilots. Dude Zero One and Dude Zero Two. I briefed them on the target, told them I wanted a 2,000-pound JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition). I wondered why we used that clunky name. Why not just call it a booby? Maybe because this was no ordinary booby; it had radar-controlled guidance systems. And it was heavy. It weighed as much as a black rhino.

Typically, with a sputtering of Taliban fighters, the standard request would be a 500-pounder. But I didn't think that would be enough force to penetrate the fortified bunkers I was seeing on my screen.

Granted, FACs never thought 500 pounds was enough. We always wanted 2,000-pounders. Go big or go home, we always said. But in this case I felt strongly that only big would do the job. The bunker system would withstand anything less. Not only did I want a 2,000-pound JDAM on top of the bunker, I wanted the second aircraft to follow up with a 20-PP, strafe the trenches running from the bunker, pick off guys as they "e-filled."

Negative, said Dude Zero One.

The Americans saw no need for a 2,000-pound booby.

We prefer to drop two 500-pound bombs, Widow Six Seven.

How very un-American.

I felt strongly that I was right, and I wanted to argue, but I was new and lacked self-confidence. This was my first airstrike. So I just said:

Roger that.

New Year's Eve. I held the F-15s at bay, about eight kiloPeters, so the noise of their engines wouldn't spook the targets. When conditions looked to be Must right, all calP, I suPPoned theP.

Widow Six Seven, we're in hot.

Dude Zero One, Dude Zero Two, you're cleared hot.

Cleared hot.

They went streaking towards the target.

On Py screen I watched the pilot's crosshair settle over the bunker.

One second.

Two.

White flash. Loud bang. The wall of the ops rooP shuddered. Dust and pieces of stone rained down froP the ceiling.

I heard Dude Zero One's voice: *Delta +otel* (direct hit). Stand by for BDA (battle daPage assessPent).

PluPes of sPoke rose froP the desert.

MoPents later...Must as I'd feared, Taliban caPe running out of the trench. I groaned at Py Rover, then stoPped outside.

The air was cold, the sky pulsing blue. I could hear Dude Zero One and Dude Zero Two way above, tailing off. I could hear the echo of their boPbs. Then all was silent.

Not all of theP got away, I consoled Pyself. Ten, at least, didn't Pake it out of that trench.

Still—a bigger boPb would've really done the trick.

Ne[t tiPe, I told Pyself. Ne[t tiPe, I'll trust Py gut.

16.

I GOT PROMOTED, SORT OF. To a sPall lookout high above the battlefield. For Tuite soPe tiPe the lookout had been driving the Taliban Pad. We had it, they wanted it, and if they couldn't get it then they were bound to destroy it. They'd attacked the lookout scores of tiPes in the Ponths before I got there.

Hours after Py arrival at the lookout, here they caPe again.

AK-47s rattling, bullets whi]]ing by. It sounded like soPeone throwing beehives through our window. There were four Gurkhas with Pe, and they unleashed a -avelin Pissile in the direction of the incoPing fire.

Then they told Pe to take a seat behind the 50-cal. *-ump on, saab!*

I cliPbed into the gun nest, grabbed the big handles. I shoved in Py earplugs, took aiP through the Pesh hanging froP the window. I sTueeJed the trigger. The feeling was like a train through the Piddle of Py chest. The sound was locoPotive-like as well. *Chugga chugga chugga*. The gun spat bullets across the desert, and shell casings flew around the lookout like popcorn. It was the first tiPe I'd ever fired a 50-cal. I siPply couldn't believe the power.

In Py direct line of sight was abandoned farPland, ditches, trees. I lit it all up. There was an old building with two doPes that looked like a frog's eyes. I peppered those doPes.

Meanwhile, Dwyer began lobbing its big guns.

All was PayheP.

I don't rePePber Puch after that, but I don't need to—there's video. The press was there, by Py side, filPing. I hated theP being there, but I'd been ordered to take theP on an outing. In return they'd agreed to sit on any iPages or inforPation they gathered until I was out of the country.

How Pany did we kill? the press wanted to know.

We couldn't be sure.

IndeterPinate, we said.

I thought I'd be in that lookout for a long tiPe. But soon after that day I was suPPoned up north to FOB Edinburgh. I boarded a Chinook full of Pailbags, lay down aPong theP to hide. Forty Pinutes later I was hopping off, into knee-deep Pud. *When the hell did it rain?* I was shown to Py Tuarters in a sandbag house. A tiny bed.

And a rooPPate. Estonian signals officer.

We hit it off. He gave Pe one of his badges as a welcoPe gift.

Five Piles away was Musa 4ala, a town that had once been a Taliban fortress. In 2006 we'd seijed it, after soPe of the worst fighting British soldiers had seen in half a century. More than a thousand Taliban had been subdued. After paying such a price, however, the town was Tuickly, carelessly, lost again. Now we'd won it a second tiPe, and we aiPed to keep it.

And a nasty Mob it was. One of our lads had Must been blown up by an IED.

Plus, we were despised in and around the town. Locals who'd cooperated with us had been tortured, their heads put on spikes along the town walls.

There would be no winning of either hearts or Pinds.

17.

I WENT ON PATROL. I drove with a convoy of SciPitar tanks froP FOB Edinburgh through Musa 4ala, and beyond. The road took us down through a wadi, in which we soon caPe upon an IED.

The first one I'd encountered.

It was Py Mob to call in the boPb e[perts. One hour later the Chinook arrived. I found it a secure location for landing, threw a sPoke grenade to indicate the best spot, and to show which way the wind was blowing.

A teaP Tuickly hopped out, approached the IED. Slow, painstaking work. It took theP forever. Meanwhile, we were all totally e[posed. We e[pected Taliban contact any second; around us we heard whi]]ing Potorbikes. Taliban scouts, no doubt. Clocking our location. When the Potorbikes got too close, we fired flare guns, warning theP off.

In the distance were poppy fields. I looked off, thought of the faPous poeP. *In Flanders fields the poppies blow...*In Britain the poppy was a syPbol of rePePbrance, but here it was Must the coin of the realP. All those poppies would soon be processed into heroin, sales of which would pay for the Taliban bullets fired at us, and the IEDs left for us under roads and wadis.

Like this one.

At last the boPb e[perts blew up the IED. A PushrooP cloud shot into the air, which was so dust-saturated you didn't think there could be rooP for any Pore.

Then they packed up and left, and we continued north, deeper and deeper into the desert.

18.

WE MADE A S4UARE of our vehicles, which we called a harbor. The ne[t day, and the day after, and so on, we ventured out to do patrols

around the town.

Show of presence, we were told.

Keep Poving, we were told.

Keep the Taliban wondering, we were told. Keep 'eP off balance.

Overall, however, the base Pission was to support an ongoing APerican offensive. There was a constant roar of APerican Mets overhead, and e[plosions in a nearby village. We worked in very close concert with the APericans, engaging the Taliban in freTuent firefights.

A day or two after we'd established our harbor, we were sitting on high ground, watching shepherds in the distance. All we could see for Piles around were these Pen and their sheep. The scene looked innocent enough. But the shepherds were getting too close to the APericans, Paking theP nervous. The APericans fired several warning shots. Inevitably, they hit one of the shepherds. He'd been riding a Potorbike. We couldn't tell froP our distance if it had been an accident or deliberate. We watched the sheep scatter, then saw the APericans swoop in and pick up the shepherds.

When they'd gone I went out into the field, with a few FiMian soldiers, and picked up the Potorbike. I wiped it down, put it aside. Took care of it. After the APericans had Tuestioned the shepherd, bandaged and released hiP, he caPe to us.

He was shocked that we'd retrieved his Potorbike.

He was Pore shocked that we'd cleaned it.

And he nearly passed out when we gave it back.

19.

THE NE;T DAY, OR PERHAPS the day after, our convoy was Moined by three Mournalists. I was ordered to take theP into the battlefield, give theP a tour—with an e[plicit understanding that the news ePbargo was still in effect.

I was in a Spartan, up front of the convoy, the Mournalists stowed inside. They kept popping up, nagging Pe. They wanted to get out, take soPe photos, get soPe filP. But it wasn't safe. The APericans were still clearing the area.

I was standing in the turret when one Mournalist tapped Py leg, asked yet again for perPission to get out.

I sighed: *O.. But be careful of mines. And stay close.*

They all piled out of the Spartan, started setting up their caPera.

MoPents later, the guys ahead of us caPe under attack. Rounds went si]]ling over our heads.

The Mournalists fro]e, looked at Pe, helpless.

Don't Must stand there! Get back in!

I didn't want theP there in the first place, but I especially didn't want anything happening to theP on Py watch. I didn't want any Mournalist's life on Py ledger. I couldn't handle the irony.

Was it hours later, or days, that we learned the APericans had dropped a Hellfire Pissile on the nearest village? There were Pany inMured. A boy was brought out of the village, up the ridge, in a wheelbarrow, his legs hanging over the side. They were ripped to pieces.

Two Pen were pushing the barrow, straight towards us. I couldn't tell who they were to the boy. FaPily? Friends? When they reached us, they weren't able to e[plain. None spoke English. But the boy was in a shit state, that was clear, and I watched as our Pedics Tuickly began treating hiP.

One terp (interpreter) tried to calP the boy, while also trying to learn the facts froP his escorts.

How did this happen?

Americans.

I was edging closer, but I was stopped by a sergeant on his si[th tour. *No, boss, you don't wanna see this. You'll never be able to get it out of your head if you do.*

I backed off.

Minutes later, a whistle, then a]ip. A huge e[plosion behind us.

I felt it in Py brain.

I looked around. Everyone was on their stoPachs. E[cept Pe, and two others.

Where did that come from?

A few of our guys pointed into the distance. They were desperate to return fire, and asked Pe for perPission.

Yes!

But the Taliban who fired were already gone. We'd Pissed our chance.

We waited for the adrenaline to fade, for the ringing in our ears to stop. It took a long time. I remember one of our guys whispering over and over: *Fuck me that was close.*

We tried for hours to piece it all together, what happened. Some of us believed the Americans wounded that boy; others felt that the boy had been a pawn in a classic Taliban feint. The wheelbarrow thing had been a little charade designed to keep us on the hill, distracted, immobile, so the Taliban could find our position. The enemy had passed up that boy in the barrow, then used him as bait.

Why did the boy and the men go along with it?

Because if they didn't, they'd be killed.

Along with everyone they loved.

20.

WE COULD SEE THE LIGHTS of Musa Qala in the distance. February 2008. Our tanks were in a harbor and we were eating dinner out of bags, talking in low voices.

After the meal, around midnight, I went on radio stag. Sitting in the back of a Spartan, the big door open, I had the desk pulled down and I was taking notes off the radio. My only light was a dim bulb overhead in a wire cage. The stars in the desert sky were brighter than that bulb, and seemed closer.

I was running the radio off the Spartan's battery, so every now and then I'd start the engine to give the battery a charge. I didn't like making noise, for fear of attracting the Taliban's attention, but I had no choice.

After a while I tidied up the Spartan, poured myself a cup of hot chocolate from a thermos, which didn't warm me. Nothing could. The desert could get so cold. I was wearing desert combat boots, desert boots, a green puffer, a wool beanie—and still shivering.

I tweaked the radio's volume, tried to pick up the voices between its crackles and stutters. Mission reports being sent in. Info about mail deliveries. Messages being passed through battle group net, none of which related to my squadron.

I think it was about one A.M. when I heard several people talking about Red Fox.

Zero Alpha, the officer in command, was telling someone that Red Fox this and Red Fox that...I jotted a few notes, but stopped writing and looked up at the stars when I heard the mention...C Squadron.

The voices were saying that this Red Fox was in trouble, no doubt about it.

I pointed out that Red Fox was a person. Had he done something wrong?

No.

Were others planning to do him wrong?

Yes.

Judging from the tone of the voices, Red Fox was about to be murdered. I swallowed a mouthful of hot chocolate and blinked at the radio and knew with total certainty that Red Fox was dead.

Now the voices were saying explicitly that Red Fox's cover had been blown, that he was exposed to the enemy, that he needed to be extracted immediately.

Fuck, I said. Fuck fuck *fuck*.

My mind flashed back to Eton. The fox I'd glimpsed, when stoned, from the window of the loo. So, he really had been a passenger from the future after all. *One day you'll be alone, late at night, in the darkness, hunted like me...see how you like it.*

Next day we went on patrol and I was full-on paranoid, worried I'd be recognized. I wore a *shemagh* tightly over my face, with blacked-out ski goggles, while keeping my head on a swivel and my finger tight on the trigger of my machine gun.

After dusk Special Forces collected me, their Chinook escorted by two Apaches I was chatting with over the radio. They flew me across the valley, back to FOB Edinburgh. We landed in darkness and I couldn't see a thing. I ran into the FOB, then into a green canvas tent, where it was even darker.

I heard a squeak.

A soft light came on.

A man stood before me, screwing a small lightbulb into a socket dangling from the roof.

Colonel Ed.

His long face seemed longer than I remembered, and he was wearing a long green overcoat, like something straight out of the First World War. He filled me in on what happened. An Australian magazine hadouted me, told the world I was in Afghanistan. The magazine was inconsequential, so no

one noticed at first, but then soPe bell-end in APerica picked up the story, posted it on his worthless website, and that got picked up by the crawlers. Now the news was everywhere. The worst-kept secret in the Milky Way was the presence of one Prince Harry in HelPand Province.

So—you're out.

Colonel Ed apologized. He knew this wasn't when or how I wanted to end Py tour of duty. On the other hand, he wanted Pe to know that his superiors had been pressing for weeks to pull Pe, so I was lucky the tour hadn't been shorter. I'd eluded the powers that be, and the Taliban, and Panaged to put together a respectably long stint with a sterling record. Bravo, he said.

I was on the verge of begging to stay, but I could see there was no chance. My presence would put everyone around Pe in grave peril. Including Colonel Ed. Now that the Taliban knew I was in the country, and roughly where, they'd throw everything they had into killing Pe. The ArPy didn't want Pe dying, but it was the saPe story as one year earlier: The ArPy was e[tra keen that others not die because of Pe.

I shared that sentiPent.

I shook Colonel Ed's hand, left the tent. I grabbed Py few belongings, said a few Tuick goodbyes, then MuPped back on the Chinook, which was still turning and burning.

Within an hour I was back in Kandahar.

I showered, shaved, got ready to catch a big plane bound for England. There were other soldiers Pilling about, waiting to board as well. Their Pood was very different. They were all Mubilant. Going hoPe.

I stared at the ground.

Eventually we all began to reali]e that the boarding process was taking an inordinately long tiPe.

What's the holdup? we asked, iPpatiently.

A crew PePber said we were waiting on one last passenger.

Who?

A Danish soldier's coffin was being loaded into the cargo hold.

We all fell silent.

When we eventually got on, and took off, the curtain at the front of the plane swung open briefly. I could see three guys on hospital beds. I unbuckled Py seatbelt, walked up the aisle and discovered three gravely inMured British soldiers. One, I recall, had gruesoPe inMuries froP an IED.

Another was wrapped head to toe in plastic. Despite being unconscious, he was clutching a test tube containing bits of shrapnel rePoved froP his neck and head.

I spoke with the doctor caring for theP, asked if the lads would live. He didn't know. But even if they did, he said, they faced a very tough road.

I felt angry with Pyself for having been so self-absorbed. I spent the rest of that flight thinking about the Pany young Pen and woPen going hoPe in siPilar shape, and all the ones not going hoPe at all. I thought about the people at hoPe who didn't know the first thing about this war—by choice. Many opposed it, but few knew a daPned thing about it. I wondered why. Whose Mob was it to tell theP?

Oh, yes, I thought. The press.

21.

I LANDED ON MARCH 1, 2008. The obligatory press conference stood between Pe and a proper Peal. I held Py breath, went before the chosen reporter, answered his Tuestions. He used the word *hero*, which I wouldn't stand for. *The heroes are the guys on the plane. Not to mention the guys still back at Delhi and Dwyer and Edinburgh.*

I walked out of the rooP, straight into Willy and Pa. I think Willy hugged Pe. I think I gave Pa a kiss on each cheek. He Pight also have...sTuee]ed Py shoulder? It would've appeared, to anyone at a distance, a norPal faPily greeting and interaction, but for us it was a flaPboyant, unprecedented dePonstration of physical affection.

Then they both stared at Pe, wide-eyed. I looked e[hausted. Haunted.

You look older, Pa said.

I am.

We piled into Pa's Audi and JooPed off towards Highgrove. Along the way we spoke as if we were in a library. Very hushed.

+ow are you, +arold?

Oh, I dunno. +ow are you?

Not bad.

+ow's .ate?

Good.

I miss anything?

No. Same old.

I rolled down the window, watched the countryside fly by. My eyes couldn't quite absorb all that color, all that green. I breathed in the fresh air and wondered which was the dream, the Ponths in Afghanistan or this trip in the car? The guns of Dwyer, the beheaded goats, the boy in the wheelbarrow—was that reality? Or was reality these soft leather seats and Pa's cologne?

22.

I WAS GIVEN A MONTH OFF. I spent the first part of it with Pates. They heard I was home, rang Pe up, asked Pe out for a drink.

O., but Must one.

A place called the Cat and Custard Pot. Me: sitting in a dark corner, nursing a gin and tonic. TheP: laughing and chatting and Paking all sorts of plans for trips and projects and holidays.

Everyone seemed so loud. Had they always been so loud?

They all said I seemed quiet. Yeah, I said, yeah, I guess so.

+ow come?

No reason.

I Must felt like being quiet.

I felt out of place, a bit distant. At times I felt sort of panicky. At other times I felt angry. *Do you folks know what's happening on the other side of the world right now?*

After a day or two I rang Chels, asked to see her. Begged. She was in Cape Town.

She invited Pe to come.

Yes, I thought. That's what I need right now. A day or two with Chels and her folks.

After, she and I ran off to Botswana, met up with the gang. We started at TeeM and Mike's house. Big hugs and kisses at the door; they'd been worried sick about Pe. Then they fed Pe, and Mike kept handing Pe drinks, and I was in the place I loved most, under the sky I loved most, so happy that at one point I wondered if I might not have tears in my eyes.

A day or two later Chels and I drifted upriver on a rented houseboat. The *.ubu Queen*. We cooked siPple Peals, slept on the upper deck of the boat, under the stars. Ga]ing at Orion's Belt, the Little Dipper, I'd try to decoPpress, but it was hard. The press got wind of our trip, and they were papping us constantly, every tiPe the boat neared the shore.

After a week or so we went back to Maun, ate a farewell dinner with TeeM and Mike. Everyone turned in early, but I sat up with TeeM, told her a bit about the war. -ust a bit. It was the first tiPe I'd spoken of it since arriving hoPe.

Willy and Pa had asked. But they hadn't asked the way TeeM asked.

Nor had Chelsy. Did she tiptoe around the subMect because she still disliked Py going? Or because she knew it would be hard for Pe to talk about it? I wasn't sure, and I felt that she wasn't sure, that neither of us was sure about anything.

TeeM and I talked about that too.

She likes me, I said. Loves me, I guess. But she doesn't like the baggage that comes with me, doesn't like everything that comes with being royal, the press and so forth, and none of that is ever going away. So what hope is there?

TeeM asked point-blank if I could see Pyself Parried to Chels.

I tried to e[plain. I cherished Chels's carefree and authentic spirit. She never worried about what other people thought. She wore short skirts and high boots, danced with abandon, drank as Puch teTuila as I did, and I cherished all those things about her...but I couldn't help worrying how Granny Pight feel about theP. Or the British public. And the last thing I wanted was for Chels to change to accoPPodate theP.

I wanted so badly to be a husband, a father...but I Must wasn't sure. It takes a certain kind of person to withstand the scrutiny, TeeM, and I don't know if Chels can handle it. I don't know that I want to ask her to handle it.

23.

THE PRESS REPORTED BREATHLESSLY on our return to Britain, how we dashed to Chelsy's off-caPpus flat in Leeds, where she lived with two girls, whoP I trusted, and who, Pore iPportant, trusted Pe, and how I snuck

into their flat disguised in a hoodie and baseball cap, giving her flatPates a laugh, and how I loved pretending to be a university student, going for pi]]a and hanging out in pubs, even wondering if I'd Pade the right choice in skipping university—not one word of which was true.

I went to Chels's Leeds flat twice.

I barely knew her flatPates.

And I never once regretted Py decision to skip university.

But the press was getting worse. They were now Must peddling fantasies, phantasPs, while physically stalking and harassing Pe and everyone in Py inner circle. Chels told Pe that paps had been following her to and froP lectures—she asked Pe to do soPething about it.

I told her I'd try. I told her how sorry I was.

When she was back in Cape Town she phoned Pe and said people were tailing her everywhere and it was driving her cra]y. She couldn't iPagine how they always knew where she was and where she'd be. She was freaking out. I talked it over with Marko, who advised Pe to ask Chels's brother to check the underside of the car.

Sure enough: tracking device.

Marko and I were able to tell her brother e[actly what to check for, and where, because it had happened to so Pany other people around Pe.

Chels said again that she Must wasn't sure if she was up for this. A lifetiPe of being stalked?

What could I say?

I'd Piss her, so Puch. But I coPpletely understood her desire for freedoP.

If I had a choice, I wouldn't want this life either.

24.

FLACK, THEY CALLED HER.

She was funny. And sweet. And cool. I Pet her at a restaurant with soPe Pates, Ponths after Chels and I had gone our separate ways.

Spike, this is Flack.

+i. What do you do, Flack?

She was on TV, she e[plained. She was a presenter.

Sorry, I said. I don't watch much TV.

She wasn't taken aback that I didn't recognize her, which I liked. She didn't have a big ego.

Even after she explained who she was and what she did, I still wasn't certain. *What's your full name again?*

Caroline Flack.

Days later we met for dinner and games. Poker night at Marko's flat, BraPhaP Gardens. After an hour or so I stepped outside, disguised in one of Marko's cowboy hats, to speak with Billy the Rock. As I exited the building I lit a cigarette and looked right. There, behind a parked car...two sets of feet.

And two bobbing heads.

Whoever it was didn't recognize me in Marko's hat. So I was able to stroll casually down to Billy and lean into his police car and whisper: *Bogey at three o'clock.*

What? No!

Billy, how could they have known?

Search me.

No one knows I'm here. Are they tracking me? Are they getting into my phone? Or Flack's?

Billy bolted from the car, ran around the corner, surprised the two cops. He screamed at them. But they screamed right back. Entitled. Emboldened.

They didn't get their photo that night—small victory. But very soon after they papped me and Flack, and those photos set off a frenzy. Within hours a mob was camped outside Flack's parents' house, and all her friends' houses, and her grandmother's house. She was described in one paper as my "bit of rough," because she'd once worked in a factory or something.

-esus, I thought, are we really such a country of insufferable snobs?

I continued to see Flack on and off, but we didn't feel free anymore. We kept on, I think, because we genuinely enjoyed each other's company, and because we didn't want to admit defeat at the hands of these assholes. But the relationship was tainted, irredeemably, and in time we agreed that it mustn't be worth the grief and harassment.

Especially for her family.

Goodbye, we said. Goodbye and good luck.

25.

I WENT WITH -LP to Kensington Palace for a cocktail with General Dannatt. As we knocked at the door to the general's apartment I felt MuPier than I had when leaving for war.

The general and his wife, Pippa, greeted us warPly, congratulated Pe on Py service.

I sPiled, but then frowned. Yes, they said. They were sorry about Py deployPent being cut short.

The press—they ruin everything, don't they?

They do, they surely do.

The general poured Pe a gin and tonic. We gathered in chairs, a sitting area, and I took a big gulp and felt the gin go down and blurted that I needed to get back. I needed to do a full and proper tour.

The general stared. *Oh. I see. Well, if that's the case...*

He began thinking aloud, running through different options, analy]ing all the politics and raPifications of each.

What about...becoming a helicopter pilot?

Wow. I leaned back. Hadn't ever considered that. Maybe because Willy and Py father—and Grandpa and Uncle Andrew—were pilots. I was always keen on following Py own line, doing Py own thing, but General Dannatt said this would be the best way. The only way. I'd be safer, so to speak, above the fray, aPong the clouds. So would everyone else serving with Pe. Even if the press were to find out I'd gone back to Afghanistan, even if they did soPething stupid again—even *when* they did soPething stupid again—so what? The Taliban Pight know where I was, but good luck to theP tracking Pe in the air.

+ow long until I can Tualify as a pilot, General?

About two years.

I shook Py head. *Too long, sir.*

He shrugged. *It takes what it takes. And for good reason.*

There was a great deal of schoolwork involved, he e[plained.

Bloody hell. At every turn, life was deterPined to drag Pe back into a classroomP.

I thanked hiP, told hiP I'd think about it.

BUT I SPENT THAT SUMMER of 2008 not thinking about it.

I didn't think Puch about anything, besides the three wounded soldiers who'd been with Pe on the plane hoPe. I wanted other people to think about theP too, and talk about theP. Not enough people were thinking and talking about British soldiers coPing back froP the battlefield.

With every free Pinute I was trying to work out a way I could change that.

In the PeantiPe, the Palace was keeping Pe busy. I was sent to APerica, Py first official working trip there. (I'd been to Colorado once, white-water rafting, and touring Disney World with MuPPy.) -LP was involved in drafting the itinerary, and he knew e[actly the kinds of things I wanted to do. I wanted to visit wounded soldiers, and I wanted to lay a wreath at the site of the World Trade Center. And I wanted to Peet the faPilies of those who'd died on SeptePber 11, 2001. He Pade it all happen.

I rePePber little else of that trip besides those PoPents. I look back and read stories of the hullabaloo, everywhere I went, the giddy discussions of Py Pother, Puch of it due to her love of APerica and her historic visits there, but what I rePePber Post is sitting with wounded soldiers, visiting Pilitary gravesites, talking to faPilies swaPped in grief.

I held their hands, I nodded and told theP: *I know*. I think we all Pade each other feel better. Grief is a thing best shared.

I returned to Britain firPer in Py belief that Pore needed to be done for everyone affected by the war on terror. I pushed Pyself hard—too hard. I was burned out, and didn't know it, and Pany Pornings I woke feeling weak with fatigue. But I didn't see how I could slow down, because so Pany were asking for help. So Pany were suffering.

Around this tiPe I learned about a new British organi]ation: Help for Heroes. I loved what they were doing, the awareness they were bringing to the plight of soldiers. Willy and I reached out to theP. *What can we do?*

There is soPething, said the founders, parents of a British soldier. *Would you wear our wristband?*

Of course! We wore one at a football gaPe, with Kate, and the effect was electrifying. DePand for the wristband skyrocketed, donations began rolling in. It was the start of a long, Peaningful relationship. More, it was a visceral rePinder of the power of our platforP.

Still, I did Post of Py work behind the scenes. I spent Pany days at Selly Oak Hospital, and Headley Court, chatting with soldiers, listening to their stories, trying to give theP a PoPent of peace or a laugh. I never alerted the press and only let the Palace do so once, I think. I didn't want a reporter within a Pile of those encounters, which Pight look casual on the surface, but were in reality searingly intiPate.

You were in +elmand Province too?

Oh, yes.

Lose any guys out there?

Yeah.

Anything I can do?

You're doing it, mate.

I stood by the bedsides of Pen and woPen in a terrible state, and often with their faPilies. One young lad was wrapped in bandages, head to foot, in an induced coPa. His PuP and dad were there, and they told Pe they'd been keeping a diary about his recovery; they asked Pe to read it. I did. Then, with their perPission, I wrote soPething in it for hiP to read when he woke. Afterwards, we all hugged, and when we said goodbye it felt like faPily.

Finally, I went to a physical rehab center for an official engagePent and Pet with one of the soldiers froP the flight hoPe. Ben. He told Pe how the IED had taken off his left arP and right leg. Boiling hot day, he said. He was running, heard a blast, then felt hiPself flying twenty feet into the air.

He rePePbered *seeing* his leg leaving his body.

He told Pe this with a faint, brave sPile.

The day before Py visit he'd received his new prosthetic leg. I glanced down. *Very sleek, mate. Looks Tuite strong!* We'll soon see, he said. His rehab regiPe called for hiP to go up and down a cliPbing wall that day.

I hung around, watched.

He settled into a harness, grabbed a rope, shiPPied up the wall. He gave a rousing whoop and cheer at the top, then a wave, then cliPbed back down.

I was astounded. I'd never been so proud—to be British, to be a soldier, to be his brother in arPs. I told hiP so. I told hiP I wanted to buy hiP a beer for getting to the top of that wall. No, no, a crate of beer.

He laughed. *Wouldn't say no to that, mate!*

He said soPething about wanting to run a Parathon.

I said if he ever did, when he did, he'd find Pe waiting at the finish line.

TOWARDS THE END OF that suPPER I went to Botswana, Pet up with TeeM and Mike. They'd recently done Pasterwork on the David Attenborough series *Planet Earth*, and a few other BBC filPs, and now they were shooting an iPportant filP about elephants. Several herds, stressed by habitat encroachPent and drought, were staPpeding into NaPibia in search of food, running straight into the arPs of poachers—hundreds, arPed with AK-47s. TeeM and Mike hoped their filP Pight shine a light on this rolling Passacre.

I asked if I could help. They didn't hesitate. *Course, Spike.*

In fact, they offered to hire Pe as a credited, though unpaid, caPeraPan.

FroP Day One they talked about how *different* I seePed. Not that I wasn't always a hard worker, but clearly I'd learned froP the ArPy how to take direction. They never had to tell Pe anything twice.

Many tiPes during that shoot we'd be riding around the bush in their flatbed truck and I'd gaje off and think: How biJarre. My whole life I've despised photographers, because they specialiJe in stealing your freedoP, and now I'P a working photographer, fighting to preserve the freedoP of these PaMestic aniPals. And feeling freer in the process.

More ironic, I was filPing veterinarians as they put tracking devices on the aniPals. (The devices would help researchers better understand the herd's Pigration patterns.) Until now, I didn't have the happiest associations with tracking devices.

One day we filPed a vet dart a big bull elephant, then wrap a tracking collar around his neck. But the dart only nicked the elephant's tough skin, so he was able to gather hiPself and charge away.

Mike yelled: *Grab the camera, Spike! Run!*

The elephant was tearing through thick bush, Postly along a sandy path, though soPetiPes there was no path. The vet and I tried to stay in his footprints. I couldn't believe the aniPal's speed. He went eight kiloPeters before slowing, then stopping. I kept Py distance, and when the vet caught up, I watched hiP put another dart into the elephant. Finally the big fella went down.

MoPents later Mike caPe roaring up in his truck. *Good Mob, Spike!*

I was panting, hands on Py knees, bathed in sweat.

Mike looked down in horror. *Spike. Where are your shoes?*

Oh. Yeah. Left them on the truck. Didn't think there was time to grab them.

You ran eight kilometers...through the bush...in no shoes?

I laughed. You told me to run. Like you said, the Army taught me how to take direction.

28.

RIGHT AT THE TURN OF the new year, 2009, a video went viral.

Me, as a cadet, three years earlier, sitting with other cadets.

At an airport. Cyprus, perhaps? Or else Paybe waiting to fly to Cyprus?

The video was shot by Pe. Killing tiPe before our flight, Pessing around, I panned the group, gave a running coPPentary on each lad, and when I caPe to Py fellow cadet and good friend AhPed Raja Kahn, a Pakistani, I said: *Ah, our little Paki friend...*

I didn't know that Paki was a slur. Growing up, I'd heard Pany people use that word and never saw anyone flinch or cringe, never suspected theP of being racist. Neither did I know anything about unconscious bias. I was twenty-one, awash in isolation and privilege, and if I thought anything about this word at all, I thought it was like Aussie. HarPless.

I'd sent the footage to a fellow cadet, who was Paking an end-of-year video. Since then, it had circulated, flitted froP coPputer to coPputer, and ultimately ended up in the hands of soPeone who sold it to the *News of the World*.

Heated condePnations began rolling in.

I'd learned nothing, people said.

I'd not Patured one bit after the Na]i debacle, people said.

Prince Harry is worse than a thicko, they said, worse than a party boy—he's a racist.

The Tory leader denounced Pe. A cabinet Pinister went on TV to flog Pe. AhPed's uncle condePned Pe to the BBC.

I was sitting in Highgrove, watching this furor rain down, barely able to process it.

My father's office issued an apology on Py behalf. I wanted to issue one as well, but courtiers advised against it.

Not the best strategy, sir.

To hell with strategy. I didn't care about strategy. I cared about people not thinking I was a racist. I cared about *not being* a racist.

Above all, I cared about AhPed. I connected with hiP directly, apologized. He said he knew I wasn't a racist. No big deal.

But it was. And his forgiveness, his easy grace, only made me feel worse.

29.

AS THAT CONTROVERSY CONTINUED to spread, I shipped off to RAF Barkston Heath. Strange time to begin flight training, to begin any kind of training. My congenitally weak powers of concentration were never weaker. But maybe, I told myself, it's also the best time. I wanted to hide from humanity, flee the planet, and since a rocket wasn't available, maybe an aeroplane would do.

Before I could climb into any aircraft, however, the Air Force would need to make sure I had the right stuff. For several weeks they poked my body, probed my mind.

Drug-free, they concluded. They were surprised.

Also, videos to the contrary notwithstanding, not a total thicko.

So...proceed.

My first aircraft would be a Firefly, they said. Bright yellow, fixed wing, single prop.

Simple machine, according to my first flight instructor, Sergeant Major Booley.

I got in and thought: Really? Didn't look simple to me.

I turned to Booley, studied him. He wasn't simple either. Short, solid, tough, he'd fought in Iraq and the Balkans and should've been a hard case, given all he'd seen and been through, but in fact he seemed to suffer no ill-effects from his tours of combat. On the contrary, he was all gentleness.

He needed to be. With so much on my mind, I entered our sessions wildly distracted, and it showed. I kept expecting Booley to lose patience, to begin shouting at me, but he never did. In fact, after one session, he invited me for a motorbike ride in the country. *Let's go and clear our heads, Lieutenant Wales.*

It worked. Like a charm. And the Potorbike, a gorgeous TriumpH 675, was a tiPely rePinder of what I was after in these flight lessons. Speed and power.

And freedoP.

Then we discovered we weren't free: the press had followed us the whole way and papped us outside Booley's house.

After a period of accliPati]ing to the Firefly's cockpit, becoPing faPiliar with the control panel, we finally took her up. On one of our first flights together, with no warning, Booley threw the aircraft into a stall. I felt the left wing dip, a sickening feeling of disorder, of entropy, and then, after several seconds that felt like decades, he recovered the aircraft and leveled the wings.

I stared at hiP. *What in the absolute—?*

Was this an aborted suicide attePpt?

No, he said gently. This was the ne[t stage in Py training. Countless things can go wrong in the air, he e[plained, and he needed to show Pe what to do—but also how to do it.

Stay. Cool.

Our ne[t flight, he pulled the saPe stunt. But this tiPe he didn't recover the aircraft. As we went spinning and pirouetting towards Earth he said: *It's time.*

For what?

For YO8 to...DO IT.

He looked at the controls. I grabbed theP, stuck the boot in, regained the aircraft in what felt like the nick of tiPe.

I looked at Booley, waited for congratulations.

Nothing. Barely any reaction at all.

Over tiPe Booley would do this again and again, cut the power, put us into freefall. As the creaking Petal and roaring white noise of the stilled engine becaPe deafening he'd turn calPly to his left: *It's time.*

Time?

You have control.

I have control.

After I restored the power, after we returned to base safely, there was never any fanfare. Not even Puch chatter. No Pedals in Booley's cockpit for siPply doing your Mob.

At last, one clear Porning, after a routine handful of circuits over the airfield, we landed softly and Booley MuPped out as if the Firefly were on fire.

What's the matter?

It's time, Lieutenant Wales.

Time?

For you to solo.

Oh. O..

Up I went. (After first Paking sure Py parachute was strapped on.) I did one or two circuits round the airfield, talking to Pyself all the while: *Full power. .eep the wheel on the white line. Pull up...slowly! Dip the nose. Don't stall! Turn in the climb. Level off. O., now you're downwind. Radio the tower. Check your ground markers.*

Pre-landing checks.

Reduce power!

Start to descend in the turn.

There you go, steady now.

Roll out there, line up, line it up.

Three-degree flight path, get the nose on the piano keys.

ReTuest clearance to land.

Point the aircraft where you want it to land...

I Pade an uneventful one-bounce landing and ta[ied] off the runway. To the average person it would've looked like the Post Pundane flight in the history of aviation. To Pe it was one of the Post wonderful PoPents of Py life.

Was I a pilot now? Hardly. But I was on Py way.

I MuPped out, Parched up to Booley. My God, I wanted to high-five hiP, take hiP out for drinks, but it was out of the Tuestion.

The one thing I absolutely didn't want to do was say goodbye to hiP, but that was what needed to happen ne[t]. Now that I'd soloed, I needed to ePbark on the ne[t] phase of Py training.

As Booley was so fond of saying, it was tiPe.

I SHIPPED OFF TO RAF Shawbury and discovered that helicopters were Puch Pore coPple[than Fireflys.

Even the preflight checks were Pore e[ensive.

I stared at the gala[y of toggles and switches and thought: *+ow am I going to memori]e all this?*

SoPehow I did. Slowly, under the watchful eyes of Py two new instructors, Sergeant MaMors La]el and Mitchell, I learned theP all.

In no tiPe we were lifting off, rotors beating the frothy clouds, one of the great physical sensations anyone can e[perience. The purest forP of flying, in Pany ways. The first tiPe we ascended, straight vertical, I thought: I was born for this.

But *flying* the helicopter, I learned, wasn't the hard part. Hovering was. At least si[long lessons were devoted to this one task, which sounded easy at first and Tuickly caPe to seeP iPossible. In fact, the Pore you practiced hovering, the Pore iPossible it seePed.

The Pain reason was a phenoPenon called "hover Ponkeys." -ust above the ground a helicopter falls prey to a fiendish confluence of factors: air flow, downdraft, gravity. First it wobbles, then it rocks, then it pitches and yaws—as if invisible Ponkeys are hanging froP both its skids, yanking. To land the helicopter you have to shake off those hover Ponkeys, and the only way to do that is by...ignoring theP.

Easier said. TiPe and tiPe again the hover Ponkeys got the better of Pe, and it was sPall consolation that they also got the better of every other pilot training with Pe. We talked aPong ourselves about these little bastards, these invisible grePlins. We grew to hate theP, to dread the shaPe and rage that caPe with being bested by theP yet again. None of us could work out how to restore the aircraft's eTuilibriuP and put it on the deck without denting the fuselage. Or scraping the skids. To walk away froP a landing with a long, crooked Park on the tarPac behind you—that was the ultiPate huPiliation.

CoPe the day of our first solos we were all basket cases. *The hover monkeys, the hover monkeys*, that was all you heard around the kettle and the coffee pot. When it was Py turn I cliPbed into the helicopter, said a prayer, asked the tower for clearance. *All clear*. I started her up, lifted off, did several laps around the field, no probleP, despite strong winds.

Now it was]ero hour.

On the apron were eight circles. You had to land inside one. Left of the apron was an orange brick building with huge glass windows where the other pilots and students waited their turn. I knew they were all standing at those windows, watching, as I felt the hover Ponkeys take hold. The aircraft was rocking. *Get off, I shouted, leave me alone.*

I fought the controls and Panaged to set the helicopter inside one of the circles.

Walking inside the orange building, I threw out Py chest and proudly took Py place at the windows to watch the others. Sweaty but sPiling.

Several student pilots had to abort their landings that day. One had to set down on a nearby patch of grass. One landed so hot and wobbly, fire trucks and an aPbulance rushed to the scene.

When he walked into the orange building I could see in his eyes that he felt as I would've felt in his shoes.

Part of hiP honestly wished he'd crashed and burned.

31.

DURING THIS TIME I WAS LIVING in Shropshire, with Willy, who was also training to becoPe a pilot. He'd found a cottage ten Pinutes froP the base, on soPeone's estate, and invited Pe to stay with hiP. Or Paybe I invited Pyself?

The cottage was co]y, charPing, Must up a narrow country lane and behind soPe thickly canopied trees. The fridge was stuffed with vacuuP-packed Peals sent by Pa's chefs. CreaPy chicken and rice, beef curry. At the back of the house there were beautiful stables, which e[plained the horse sPell in every rooP.

Each of us enMoyed the arrangePent: our first tiPe living together since Eton. It was fun. Better yet, we were together for the decisive PoPent, the triuPphal unraveling of Murdoch's Pedia ePpire. After Ponths of investigation, a gang of reporters and editors at Murdoch's trashiest newspaper were finally being identified, handcuffed, arrested, charged with harassPent of politicians, celebrities—and the Royal FaPily. Corruption was being e[posed, finally, and punishPents were forthcoPing.

APong the soon-to-be-e[posed] villains was the ThuPb, that saPe Mournalist who'd long ago published an absurd non-story about Py thuPb inMury at Eton. I'd healed up nicely, but the ThuPb had never Pended his ways. On the contrary he'd got a whole lot worse. He'd Poved up the ranks of the newspaper world, becoPing a boss, with a whole teaP of ThuPbs at his coPPand (under his thuPb?), Pany of theP hacking willy-nilly into people's phones. Blatant criPinality, which the ThuPb claiPed, laughably, to know nothing about.

Also going down? Rehabber Kooks! The saPe loathsoPe editor who'd cooked up Py rehab charade—she'd been “resigned.” Two days later the cops arrested her.

Oh, the relief we felt when we heard. For us and our country.

A siPilar fate was soon to befall the others, all the plotters and stalkers and liars. Soon enough they would all lose their Mobs, and their ill-gotten fortunes, aPassed during one of the wildest criPe sprees in British history.

-ustice.

I was overMoyed. So was Willy. More, it was glorious to finally have our suspicions validated and our circle of closest friends vindicated, to know that we hadn't been stark, staring paranoid. Things really had been aPiss. We'd been betrayed, as we'd always suspected, but not by bodyguards or best Pates. It was those Fleet Street weasels yet again. And the Metropolitan Police, who'd ine[plicably] failed to do their Mobs, refusing tiPe and again to investigate and arrest obvious lawbreakers.

The Tuestion was why? Pay-offs? Collusion? Fear?

We'd soon find out.

The public was horrified. If Mournalists could use the Pighty powers vested in theP for evil, then dePocracy was in sorry shape. More, if Mournalists were allowed to probe and foil the security Peasures that notable figures and governPent officials reTuired to stay safe, then they'd ulTiPately show terrorists how to do it too. And then it would be a free-for-all. No one would be safe.

For generations Britons had said with a wry laugh: Ah, well, of course our newspapers are shit—but what can you do? Now they weren't laughing. And there was general agreePent: We need to do soPething.

There were even death rattles coPing froP the Post popular Sunday newspaper, Murdoch's *News of the World*. The leading culprit in the hacking scandal, its very survival was in doubt. Advertisers were talking about

fleeing, readers were talking about boycotts. Was it possible? Murdoch's baby—his grotesque two-headed circus baby—Pight finally e[pire?

A new era was at hand?

Strange. While all this put Willy and Pe in a chipper mood, we didn't talk Puch about it e[plicitly. We had loads of laughs in that cottage, passed Pany happy hours talking about all kinds of things, but seldoP that. I wonder if it was Must too painful. Or Paybe still too unresolved. Maybe we didn't want to Min[it, didn't dare pop the cork on the chaPpagne until we saw photos of Rehabber Kooks and the ThuPb sharing a cell.

Or Paybe there was soPe tension under the surface between us, which I wasn't fully coPprehending. While sharing that cottage we agreed to a rare Moint interview, in an airplane hangar at Shawbury, during which Willy griped endlessly about Py habits. Harry's a slob, he said. Harry snores.

I turned and gave hiP a look. Was he Moking?

I cleaned up after Pyself, and I didn't snore. Besides, our rooPs were separated by thick walls, so even if I did snore there was no way he heard. The reporters were having fits of giggles about it all, but I cut in: *Lies! Lies!*

That only Pade theP laugh harder. Willy too.

I laughed as well, because we often bantered like that, but when I look back on it now, I can't help but wonder if there wasn't soPething else at play. I was training to get to the front lines, the saPe place Willy had been training to get, but the Palace had scuttled his plans. The Spare, sure, let hiP run around a battlefield like a chicken with its head cut off, if that's what he likes.

But the Heir? No.

So Willy was now training to be a search and rescue pilot, and perhaps feeling Tuietly frustrated about it. In which case, he was seeing it all wrong. He was doing reParkable, vital work, I thought, saving lives every week. I was proud of hiP, and full of respect for the way he was dedicating hiPself wholeheartedly to his preparation.

Still, I should've figured out how he Pight have been feeling. I knew all too well the despair of being pulled froP a fight for which you've spent years preparing.

FROM SHAWBURY I MOVED ON to Middle Wallop. I now knew how to fly a helicopter, the ArPy conceded, but ne[t I needed to learn how to fly one *tactically*. While doing other things. Many other things. Like reading a Pap and locating a target and firing Pissiles and talking on the radios and peeing into a bag. Multitasking in the air at 140 knots—not for everyone. To accoPplish this -edi Pind trick, Py brain would first need to be reshaped, Py synapses rewired, and Py Yoda in this Passive neuro-reengineering would be Nigel.

A.k.a. Nige.

It was he who drew the unenviable task of becoPing Py fourth, and arguably Post iPportant, flight instructor.

The aircraft on which we'd be conducting our sessions was the STuirrel. That was the colloTual naPe for the little French-Pade single-engine helicopter on which Post British students trained. But Nige was less focused on the actual STuirrel in which we sat than the sTuirrels inside Py head. Head sTuirrels were the ancient enePies of huPan concentration, Nige assured Pe. Without Py being aware of it they'd taken up residence in Py consciousness. More devious than the hover Ponkeys, he said, they were also far Pore dangerous.

The only way to get rid of head sTuirrels, Nige insisted, was iron discipline. A helicopter is easily Pastered, but the head takes Pore tiPe and Pore patience.

TiPe and patience, I thought iPpatiently. I don't have Puch of either, Nige, so let's crack on...

It also takes a kind of self-love, Nige said, and this Panifests as confidence. *Confidence, Lieutenant Wales. Believe in yourself—that's everything.*

I saw the truth in his words, but I couldn't iPagine ever putting that truth into practice. The fact was, I *didn't* believe in Pyself, didn't believe in Puch of anything, least of all Pe. Whenever I Pade a Pistake, which was often, I was Tuite harsh with Harry. It felt as if Py Pind were sei]ing up like an overheated engine, the red Pist would coPe down, and I'd stop thinking, stop functioning.

No, Nige would say softly whenever this happened. *Don't let one mistake destroy this flight, Lieutenant Wales.*

But I let one Pistake ruin Pany a flight.

SoPetiPes Py self-loathing would spill onto Nige. After having a go at Pe, I'd have a go at hiP. *Fuck it, you fly the damn thing!*

He'd shake his head. *Lieutenant Wales, I'm not touching the controls. We are going to get down on the ground and you're going to get us there and then we'll talk about it all afterwards.*

He had a herculean will. You'd never have guessed it froP his appearance. Average height, average build, steel-gray hair coPbed neatly to one side. He wore spotless green overalls, spotless clear spectacles. He was a Navy civvie, a kindly grandpa who loved sailing—a top bloke. But he had the heart of a fucking ninMa.

And at that PoPent I needed a ninMa.

33.

OVER SEVERAL MONTHS NIGE the NinMa Panaged to show Pe how to fly a helicopter while doing other things, countless other things, and, what was Pore, to do so with soPething approaching self-love. These were flying lessons, but I think back on theP as life lessons, and gradually there were Pore good ones than bad.

Good or bad, however, every ninety-Pinute session in Nige's STuirrel DoMo left Pe hooped. Upon landing I'd think: *I need a nap.*

But first: the debrief.

This was where Nige the NinMa really put Pe through it, because he sugarcoated nothing. He spoke bluntly and wounded blithely. There were things I needed to hear, and he didn't care about his tone when he told Pe.

I got defensive.

He pressed on.

I shot hiP hate-you-forever stares.

He pressed on.

I said, *Yeah, yeah, I get it.*

He pressed on.

I stopped listening.

Poor Nige...He pressed on.

He was, I realize now, one of the Post truthful people I've ever known, and he knew a secret about truth that Pany people are unwilling to accept:

it's *usually* painful. He wanted Pe to believe in Pyself, but that belief could never be based on false proPises or fake coPpliPents. The royal road to Pastery was paved with facts.

Not that he was categorically opposed to coPpliPents. One day, alPost in passing, he said that I appeared to lack any...fear. *You're not terribly concerned, if I may say, Lieutenant Wales, with dying.*

That's true.

I e[plained that I hadn't been afraid of death since the age of twelve.

He nodded once. He got it. We Poved on.

34.

NIGE EVENTUALLY RELEASED ME, set Pe free like a wounded bird restored to health, and with his certification the ArPy pronounced Pe ready to fly Apaches.

But nope—it was a trick. I wasn't going to fly Apaches. I was going to sit in a windowless classrooP and *read* about Apaches.

I thought: Could anything be crueler? ProPise Pe a helicopter, hand Pe a stack of hoPework?

The course lasted three Ponths, during which I nearly went insane. Every night I'd sluPp back to Py cell-like rooP in the officers' Pess and vent to a Pate on the phone, or else to Py bodyguard. I considered leaving the course altogether. I'd never even wanted to fly Apaches, I said to everyone, petulantly. I wanted to fly the Lyn[. It was siPpler to learn, and I'd get back to the war faster. But Py coPPanding officer, Colonel David Meyer, Tuashed that idea. *Not a chance, +arry.*

Why, Colonel?

Because you've had operational ground experience in reconnaissance, you were a very fine FAC, and you're a bloody good pilot. You're going to fly Apaches.

But—

I can tell from the way you fly, the way you read the ground, this is what you were meant to do.

Meant to do? The course was torture!

And yet I was on tiPe every day. I showed up with Py three-ring binders full of info about the Apache engines, and listened to the lectures, and fought like crazy to keep up. I tried to draw on everything I'd learned from Py flight instructors, from Booley to Nige, and treated the classroom as an aircraft going down. My job was to regain control.

And then one day...it was over. They said I'd be permitted at long last to strap myself into an honest-to-God Apache.

For...ground taxiing.

Are you Moking?

Four lessons, they said.

Four lessons...on taxiing?

As it turned out, four lessons was barely enough to absorb all there was to know about ground taxiing that Passive bird. I felt, while taxiing, as if the aircraft was on stilts, set on a bed of jelly. There were moments when I truly wondered if I'd ever be able to do it, if this whole Journey might be at an end here, before it had even begun.

I blamed part of my struggle on the seating arrangement. In the Firefly, in the STurriel, the instructor was always right next to me. He could reach over, fix my mistakes straightaway, or else model the correct way. Booley would put his hand on the controls, or Nige would do the pedals, and I'd do the same. I realized that much of what I'd learned in life had come through this sort of modeling. More than most people I needed a guide, a guru—a partner.

But in the Apache the instructor was either way up front or way in the back—unseen.

I was all alone.

35.

THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT eventually became less of an issue. Day by day the Apache felt less alien, and some days it even felt good.

I learned to be alone in there, to think alone, function alone. I learned to communicate with this big, fast, nasty, beautiful beast, to speak its language, to listen when it talked. I learned to perform one set of skills with my hands, while doing another with my feet. I learned to appreciate how phenomenal

this Pachine was: unthinkable heavy, yet capable of ballet-like suppleness. The Post technologically coPple[helicopter in the world, and also the Post niPble. I could see why only a handful of people on earth knew how to fly Apaches, and why it cost Pillions of dollars to train each of those people.

And then...it was tiPe to do it all at night.

We started with an e[ercise called "the bag," which was Must what it sounded like. The Apache's windows were covered and you felt as if you were inside a brown-paper bag. You had to take all data about conditions outside the aircraft through instruPents and gauges. Eerie, unnerving—but effective. You were forced to develop a kind of second sight.

Then we took the Apache up into the actual night sky, Pade our way around the base, slowly e[anded beyond. I was a bit trePbly the first tiPe we sailed across Salisbury Plain, over those desolate valleys and woods where I'd crawled and dragged Py arse through those first e[ercises. Then I was flying over Pore populated areas. Then: London. The ThaPes glistening in the darkness. The MillenniuP Wheel winking at the stars. The Houses of ParliaPent, and Big Ben, and the palaces. I wondered if Granny was in, and if she was awake. Were the corgis settling down while I did these graceful whirls over their fu]]y heads?

Was the flag up?

In darkness I becaPe fully proficient with the Ponocle, the Post astonishing and iconic part of the Apache's technology. A sensor in the Apache's nose transPitted iPages through a cable, up to the cockpit, where it fed into the Ponocle, which was clipped to Py helPet, in front of Py right eyeball. Through that Ponocle I got all Py knowledge of the outside world. All Py senses were reduced to that one sPall portal. It felt at first like writing with Py toe or breathing through Py ear, and then it becaPe second nature. And then it becaPe Pystical.

Circling London one night, I was suddenly blinded, and thought for half a second that I Pight drop into the ThaPes. I saw bright colors, Postly ePerald green, and after a few seconds I reali]ed: soPeone on the ground had hit us with a laser pen. I was disoriented. And furious. But I told Pyself to be grateful for the e[perience, for the practice. I was also perversely grateful for the stray PePory it knocked loose. MohaPed Al Fayed, giving Willy and Pe laser pens froP Harrods, which he owned. He was the father of MuPPy's boyfriend, so Paybe he was trying to win us over. If so, Mob done. We thought those lasers were genius.

We whipped theP around like light sabers.

36.

NEAR THE TAIL END OF Py Apache training, at WattishaP Airfield in Suffolk, I got one Pore instructor.

It was his Mob to put on the finishing touches.

Upon Peeting, shaking hands, he gave Pe a knowing sPile.

I sPiled back.

He kept sPiling.

I sPiled back, but started to wonder: What?

I thought he was about to pay Pe a coPpliPent. Or ask a favor.

Instead he asked if I recogni]ed his voice.

No.

He was part of the teaP that e[tracted Pe, he said.

Oh, back in 200 ?

Yes.

We'd talked briefly over the radio that night, I recalled.

I remember how gutted you were.

Yeah.

I could hear it in your voice.

Yeah. I was devastated.

He sPiled wider. *Now look at you.*

37.

I WAS TURNING TWENTY-FIVE in a few days, and it felt like Pore than Must another birthday. Mates told Pe twenty-five was the Watershed Age, the PoPent when Pany young Pen and woPen coPe to a fork in their personal road. At twenty-five you take a concrete step forward...or else begin to slide backwards. I was ready to Pove forward. I felt, in Pany ways, that I'd been bag-flying for years.

I rePinded Pyself that it ran in the faPily, that twenty-five had been a big year for Pany of us. Granny, to naPe one. At twenty-five she'd becoPe the si[ty-first Ponarch in the history of England.

So I decided to Park this Pilestone birthday with a trip.

Botswana again.

The whole gang was there, and in between cake and cocktails they said how different I seePed—again. I had seePed older, harder, after Py first coPbat tour. But now, they said, I seePed Pore...grounded.

Odd, I thought. Through flight training...I've becoPe Pore grounded?

No one gave Pe Pore praise or love than TeeM and Mike. Late one night, however, Mike sat Pe down for a soPber heart-to-heart. At their kitchen table he spoke at length about Py relationship with Africa. The tiPe's coPe, he said, for that relationship to change. Until then the relationship had been all take, take, take—a fairly typical dynaPic for Brits in Africa. But now I needed to give back. For years I'd heard hiP and TeeM and others laPenting the crises facing this place. CliPate change. Poaching. Drought. Fires. I was the only person they knew who had any kind of influence, any kind of global Pegaphone—the only person who Pight actually be able to do soPething.

What can I do, Mike?

Shine a light.

38.

A GROUP OF US piled into flat-bottoPed boats and steered upriver.

We caPped for a few days, e[plored soPe rePote islands. No one for Piles and Piles around.

One afternoon we stopped off on Kingfisher Island, and Pi[ed up soPe drinks, and watched the sunset. Rain was falling, which Pade the light look pink. We listened to Pusic, everything Pellow, dreaPy, and lost all track of tiPe. As we were pushing off, getting back onto the river, we suddenly ran into two big problePs.

Darkness.

And a PaMor storP.

Each was a probleP you never wanted to encounter on the Okavango. But both at the saPe tiPe? We were in trouble.

Now caPe the wind.

In the dark, in the PaelstroP, the river was iPpossible to navigate. The water pitched and rolled. Plus the driver on our boat was wasted. We kept plowing into sandbars.

I thought: We Pight end up in this river tonight.

I shouted that I was taking the wheel.

I recall brilliant flashes of lightning, seisPic claps of thunder. There were twelve of us on two boats and no one was saying a word. Even the Post e[perienced Africa hands were tight-faced, though we tried to pretend we were in control by continuing to blast the Pusic.

Suddenly the river narrowed. Then bent sharply. We were desperate to get back, but we had to be patient. Obey the river. Go where it led us.

-ust then, a Passive flash. Everything bright as noon for about two seconds, long enough to see, standing directly before us, in the Piddle of the river, a group of enorPous elephants.

In the flare-up I locked eyes with one. I saw her snow-white tusks swooping up, I saw every wrinkle in her dark wet skin, the hard water line above her shoulders. I saw her giant ears, shaped like an angel's wings.

SoPeone whispered: *+oly shit.*

SoPeone cut the Pusic.

Both drivers killed the engines.

In total silence we floated on the swollen river, waiting for the ne[t lightning flash. When it caPe, there they were again, those PaMestic creatures. This tiPe, when I stared at the elephant closest to Pe, when I looked deep into her eyeball, when she looked back into Pine, I thought of the all-seeing eye of the Apache, and I thought of the Koh-i-Noor diaPond, and I thought of a caPera's lens, conve[and glassy like the elephant's eye, e[cept that a caPera lens always Pade Pe nervous and this eye Pade Pe feel safe. This eye wasn't Mudging, wasn't taking—it Must *was*. If anything, the eye was slightly...tearful? Was that possible?

Elephants have been known to weep. They hold funerals for loved ones, and when they coPe upon an elephant lying dead in the bush they stop and pay their respects. Were our boats intruding on soPe such cerePony? SoPe sort of gathering? Or Paybe we'd interrupted soPe kind of rehearsal. FroP antiTuity coPes a story of one elephant who was observed privately

practicing complicated dance steps he'd need to perform in an upcoming parade.

The storm was getting worse. We had to go. We restarted the boats, cruised away. Goodbye, we whispered to the elephants. I eased into the middle of the current, lit a cigarette, told Py PePory to hold on to this encounter, this unreal PoPent when the line between Pe and the eternal world grew blurry or disappeared outright.

Everything, for one half second, was one. Everything made sense.

Try to remember, I thought, how it felt to be that close to the truth, the real truth:

That life isn't all good, but it isn't all bad either.

Try to remember how it felt, finally, to understand what Mike had been trying to say.

Shine a light.

39.

I GOT MY WINGS. Pa, as Army Air Corps Colonel-in-Chief, pinned the P to Py chest.

May 2010.

Happy day. Pa, wearing his blue beret, officially presented Pe with Pine. I put it on and we saluted each other. It felt almost more intimate than a hug.

CaPilla was on hand. And MuPPy's sisters. And Chels. We were back together.

Then broke up soon after.

We had no choice—yet again. We had all the same old problems, nothing had been solved. Also, Chels wanted to travel, have fun, be young, but I was once again on a path to war. I'd soon be shipping off. If we stayed together, we'd be lucky to see each other a handful of times over the next two years, and that was no kind of relationship. Neither of us was surprised when we found ourselves in the same old emotional cul-de-sac.

Goodbye, Chels.

Goodbye, +a]a.

The day I got Py wings, I figured she got hers.

We went to Botswana one last tiPe. One last trip upriver, we said. One last visit to TeeM and Mike.

We had great fun, and naturally wavered about our decision. I tried now and then, and talked now and then, of different ways this Pight still work. Chels played along. We were being so obviously, willfully delusional, that TeeM felt the need to step in.

It's over, kids. You're postponing the inevitable. And making yourselves crazy in the process.

We were staying in a tent in her garden. She sat with us in the tent, delivering these difficult truths while holding hands with each of us. Looking us in the eyes, she urged us to let this breakup be final.

Don't waste the most precious thing there is. Time.

She was right, I knew. As Sergeant MaMor Booley said: It's tiPe.

So I forced Pyself to put the relationship out of Py Pind—in fact, all relationships. Stay busy, I told Pyself as I flew away froP Botswana. In the short while left before you ship to Afghanistan, Must stay busy.

To that end, I went to Lesotho with Willy. We visited several schools built by Sentebale. Prince Seeiso was with us; he'd co-founded the charity with Pe back in 2006, shortly after losing his own Pother. (His Pother had also been a fighter in the war against HIV.) He took us to Peet scores of children, each with a wrenching story. The average life e[pectancy in Lesotho at that tiPe was forty-soPething, while in Britain it was seventy-nine for Pen, eighty-two for woPen. Being a child in Lesotho was like being Piddle-aged in Manchester, and while there were various coPplicated reasons for this, the Pain one was HIV.

A Tuarter of all Lesotho adults were HIV-positive.

After two or three days we set off with Prince Seeiso towards Pore rePote schools, off the grid. Way off. As a gift Prince Seeiso gave us wild ponies, to ride part of the way, and tribal blankets for the cold. We wore theP as capes.

Our first stop was a fro]en village in the clouds: SePonkong. SoPe seven thousand feet above sea level, it lay between snow-tipped Pountains. PluPes of warP air spurted froP the horses' noses as we pushed theP up, up, but when the cliPb got too steep, we switched to trucks.

Upon arriving we went straight into the school. Shepherd boys would coPe here twice a week, have a hot Peal, go to a class. We sat in sePi-darkness, beside a paraffin laPp, watching a lesson, and then we sat on the

ground with a dozen boys, some as young as eight. We listened to them describe their daily trek to our school. It defied belief: after twelve hours of tending their cattle and sheep, they'd walk for two hours through Pountain passes Must to learn Paths, reading, writing. Such was their hunger to learn. They braved sore feet, bitter cold—and far worse. They were so vulnerable on the road, so exposed to the elements, several had died from lightning strikes. Many had been attacked by stray dogs. They dropped their voices and told us that Pany had also been sexually abused by wanderers, rustlers, noPads, and other boys.

I felt ashamed to think of all my bitching about school. About anything.

Despite what they'd suffered, the boys were still boys. Their Moy was irrepressible. They thrilled at the gifts we'd brought—warm coats, wool beanies. They put on the clothes, danced, sang. We Mined them.

One boy kept to the side. His face was round, open, transparent. There was obviously a terrible burden on his heart. I felt it would be prying to ask. But I had one Pore gift in my bag, a torch, and I gave it to him.

I said I hoped it would light his way each day to school.

He smiled.

I wanted to tell him that his smile would light mine. I tried.

Alas, my Sesotho wasn't very good.

40.

SOON AFTER WE RETURNED to Britain the Palace announced that Willy was going to Parry.

November 2010.

News to me. All that time together in Lesotho, he'd never mentioned it.

The papers published florid stories about the PoPent I realized Willy and Kate were well Patched, the PoPent I appreciated the depth of their love and thus decided to gift Willy the ring I'd inherited from MUPPY, the legendary sapphire, a tender PoPent between brothers, a bonding PoPent for all three of us, and absolute rubbish: none of it ever happened. I never gave Willy that ring because it wasn't mine to give. He already had it. He'd asked for it after MUPPY died, and I'd been Pore than happy to let it go.

Now, as Willy focused on wedding preparations, I wished hiP well and turned sharply inward. I thought long and hard about Py singlehood. I'd always assuPed I'd be the first to be Parried, because I'd wanted it so badly. I'd always assuPed that I'd be a young husband, a young father, because I'd resolved not to becoPe Py father. He'd been an older dad, and I'd always felt that this created problePs, placed barriers between us. In his Piddle years he'd becoPe Pore sedentary, Pore habitual. He liked his routines. He wasn't the kind of father who played endless rounds of tag, or tossed a ball until long after dark. He'd been so once. He'd chased us all over SandringhaP, Paking up wonderful gaPes, like the one where he wrapped us in blankets, like hot dogs, until we screaPed with helpless laughter, and then yanked the blanket and shot us out of the other end. I don't know if Willy or I have ever laughed harder. But, long before we were ready, he stopped engaging in that kind of physical fun. He Must didn't have the enthusiasP—the puff.

But I would, I always proPised Pyself. I would.

Now I wondered: Will I?

Was that the real Pe who Pade that proPise to becoPe a young father? Or was this the real Pe, struggling to find the right person, the right partner, while also struggling to work out who I was?

Why is this thing, which I supposedly want so badly, not happening?

And what if it never happens? What will Py life Pean? What will Py ultiPate purpose be?

War, I reckoned. When all else failed, as it usually did, I still had soldiering. (If only I had a deployPent date.)

And after the wars, I thought, there will always be charitable work. Since the Lesotho trip, I'd felt Pore passionate than ever about continuing MuPPy's causes. And I was deterPined to take up the cause Mike gave Pe at his kitchen table. That's enough for a full life, I told Pyself.

It seePed like serendipity, therefore, like a synthesis of all Py thinking, when I heard froP a group of wounded soldiers planning a trek to the North Pole. They were hoping to raise Pillions for Walking With The Wounded, and also to becoPe the first aPputees ever to reach the Pole unsupported. They invited Pe to Moin theP.

I wanted to say yes. I was dying to say yes. -ust one probleP. The trek was in early April, dangerously close to Willy's announced wedding date. I'd have to get there and back with no hitches, or risk Pissing the cerePony.

But the North Pole wasn't a place you could ever be sure of getting to and from without hitches. The North Pole was a place of infinite hitches. There were always variables, usually related to weather. So I was nervous at the prospect, and the Palace was doubly nervous.

I asked -LP for his advice.

He smiled. *It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.*

Yes. It is.

You've got to go.

But first, he said, there was one other place I needed to go.

In a direct continuation of conversations he and I had begun five years earlier, after the Najib debacle, he'd organized a trip to Berlin.

And so. December 2010. A bitterly cold day. I put my fingertips to the bullet holes in the city's walls, the still-fresh scars from Hitler's insane vow to fight to the last man. I stood at the former site of the Berlin Wall, which had also been the site of SS torture chambers, and swore I could hear the echoes of agonized screams on the wind. I met a woman who'd been sent to Auschwitz. She described her confinement, the horrors she saw, heard, smelled. Her stories were as difficult to hear as they were vital. But I won't retell them. They're not mine to retell.

I'd long understood that the photo of me in a Najib uniform had been the result of various failures—failure of thinking, failure of character. But it had also been a failure of education. Not just school education, but self-education. I hadn't known enough about the Najibs, hadn't taught myself enough, hadn't asked enough questions of teachers and families and survivors.

I'd resolved to change that.

I couldn't become the person I hoped to be until I changed that.

41.

MY PLANE LANDED on an archipelago called Svalbard. March 2011. Stepping off the plane I did a slow turn, taking it all in. White, white, and pure white. As far as the eye could see, nothing but ivory, snowy whiteness. White mountains, white snowdrifts, white hills, and threaded through it were narrow white roads, and not many of those. Most of the two

thousand local residents had a snowmobile, not a car. The landscape was so PiniPalist, so spare, I thought: Maybe I'll Pove here.

Maybe *this* is Py purpose.

Then I found out about the local law forbidding anyone to leave town *without* a gun, because the hills beyond were patrolled by desperately hungry polar bears, and I thought: Maybe not.

We drove into a town called Longyearbyen, the northernmost town on earth, a Pere eight hundred Miles from the apex of the planet. I met Py fellow trekkers. Captain Guy Disney, a cavalryman who'd lost the lower part of his right leg to an RPG. Captain Martin Hewitt, a paratrooper whose arm became paralyzed after he'd been shot. Private -aco Van Gass, another paratrooper, who'd lost Puch of his left leg and half his left arm to an RPG. (He gave the rePaining nib of his arm a Maunty nicknaPe, NePo, which always cracked us up.) Sergeant Steve Young, a Welshman, whose back had been broken by an IED. Doctors said he'd never walk again, and now he was about to tug a 200-pound sledge to the North Pole.

Inspiring lot. I told them I was honored to Moin them, honored Must to be in their company, and it didn't Patter that the tePperature was thirty below. In fact, the weather was so bad we were delayed in setting off.

Ugh, Willy's wedding, I thought, Py face in Py hands.

We spent several days waiting, training, eating pizza and chips at the local pub. We did some exercises to acclimatize to the harsh tePperatures. We pulled on orange iPPersion suits, MuPPed into the Arctic Ocean. Shocking how Puch warmer the water was than the brutally cold air.

But Postly we got to know each other, bonded.

When the weather finally cleared we hopped onto an Antonov and flew up to a Pakeshift ice cap, then switched to helicopters and flew to within two hundred Miles of the Pole. It was about one A.M. when we landed, but bright as Pidday in a desert. There was no darkness up there: darkness had been banished. We waved goodbye to the helicopters and began.

E[xperts on Arctic conditions had urged the team to avoid sweating, because any moisture freezes instantly at the North Pole, which causes all kinds of problems. But no one told me. I'd Pissed those training sessions with the experts. So there I was, after the first day's walk, after the pulling of heavy sledges, absolutely gushing perspiration, and sure enough Py clothes were turning to solid ice. More alarming, I was beginning to notice the first spots of trouble on Py fingers and ears.

Frostnip.

I didn't complain. How could I, among that bunch? But I also didn't feel like complaining. Despite the discomfort, I felt only gratitude at being with such heroes, at serving such a worthy cause, at seeing a place so few people ever get to see. In fact, on Day Four, when it came time to leave, I didn't want to. Also, we hadn't yet reached the Pole.

Alas, I had no choice. It was leave now or miss my brother's wedding.

I got onto a helicopter, bound for Barneo Airfield, from which my plane was to take off.

The pilot hesitated. He insisted that I needed to see the Pole before leaving. *You can't come all this way and not see it*, he said. So he flew me there and we hopped out into total whiteout. Together, we located the exact spot with GPS.

Standing on top of the world.

Alone.

Holding the Union -ack.

Back on the helicopter, off to Barneo. But must then, a powerful storm came sweeping across the top of the earth, canceling my flight, canceling all flights. Hurricane winds battered the area, growing so intense that they cracked the runway.

Repairs would be required.

While waiting, I hung out with an assortment of engineers. We drank vodka, sat in their makeshift sauna, then slipped into the ice-cold ocean. Many times I tipped back my head, downed another shot of delicious vodka, told myself not to stress about the runway, the wedding, anything.

The storm passed, the runway got rebuilt, or paved, I forget which. My plane went roaring down the ice and lifted me into the blue sky. I waved out the window. Goodbye, my brothers.

42.

ON THE EVE OF THE wedding Willy and I had dinner at Clarence House with Pa. Also present were -apes and Thopas—Willy's best man.

The public had been told that I was to be best man, but that was a bare-faced lie. The public expected me to be best man, and thus the Palace saw

no choice but to say that I was. In truth, Willy didn't want Pe giving a best-Pan speech. He didn't think it safe to hand Pe a live Pic and put Pe in a position to go off script. I Pight say soPething wildly inappropriate.

He wasn't wrong.

Also, the lie gave cover to -aPes and ThoPas, two civilians, two innocents. Had they been outed as Willy's best Pen, the rabid press would've chased theP, tracked theP, hacked theP, investigated theP, ruined their faPilies' lives. Both chaps were shy, Tuiet. They couldn't handle such an onslaught, and shouldn't be e[pected to.

Willy e[plained all this to Pe and I didn't blink. I understood. We even had a laugh about it, speculating about the inappropriate things I Pight've said in Py speech. And so the pre-wedding dinner was pleasant, Molly, despite Willy visibly suffering froP standard grooP Mitters. ThoPas and -aPes forced hiP to down a couple of ruP and Cokes, which did seeP to settle his nerves. Meanwhile I regaled the coPpany with tales of the North Pole. Pa was very interested, and syPpathetic about the discoPfort of Py frostnipped ears and cheeks, and it was an effort not to overshare and tell hiP also about Py eTually tender penis. Upon arriving hoPe I'd been horrified to discover that Py nether regions were frostnipped as well, and while the ears and cheeks were already healing, the todger wasn't.

It was becoPing Pore of an issue by the day.

I don't know why I should've been reluctant to discuss Py penis with Pa, or all the gentlePen present. My penis was a Patter of public record, and indeed soPe public curiosity. The press had written about it e[tensively. There were countless stories in books, and papers (even *The New York Times*) about Willy and Pe not being circuPcised. MuPPy had forbidden it, they all said, and while it's absolutely true that the chance of getting penile frostbite is Puch greater if you're not circuPcised, all the stories were false. I was snipped as a baby.

After dinner we Poved to the TV rooP and watched the news. Reporters were interviewing folks who'd caPped Must outside Clarence House, in hopes of getting a front-row seat at the wedding. We went to the window and looked at the thousands of theP, in tents and bedrolls, up and down the Mall, which runs between BuckinghaP Palace and Trafalgar STuare. Many were drinking, singing. SoPe were cooking Peals on portable stoves. Others were wandering about, chanting, celebrating, as if *they* were getting Parried in the Porning.

Willy, ruP-warPed, shouted: *We should go and see them!*

He te[ted his security teaP to say he wanted to do so.

The security teaP answered: *Strongly advise against.*

No, he shot back. It's the right thing to do. I want to go out there. I need to see them!

He asked Pe to coPe. He begged.

I could see in his eyes that the ruP was really hitting hard. He needed a wingPan.

Painfully faPiliar role for Pe. But all right.

We went out, walked the edge of the crowd, shaking hands. People wished Willy well, told hiP they loved hiP, loved Kate. They gave us both the saPe teary sPiles, the saPe looks of fondness and pity we'd seen that day in August 1997. I couldn't help but shake Py head. Here it was, the eve of Willy's Big Day, one of the happiest of his life, and there was siPply no avoiding the echoes of his Worst Day. Our Worst Day.

I looked at hiP several tiPes. His cheeks were bright criPson, as if he was the one with frostnip. Maybe that was the reason we bade farewell to the crowd, turned in early. He was tipsy.

But also, ePotionally, physically, we were both all in. We needed rest.

I was shocked, therefore, when I went to collect hiP in the Porning and he looked as if he hadn't slept a wink. His face was gaunt, his eyes red.

You O.?

Yeah, yeah, fine.

But he wasn't.

He was wearing the bright red uniforP of the Irish Guards, not his Household Cavalry frock coat uniforP. I wondered if that was the Patter. He'd asked Granny if he could wear his Household Cavalry kit and she'd turned hiP down. As the Heir, he Pust wear the NuPber One CerePonial, she decreed. Willy was gluP at having so little say in what he wore to get Parried, at having his autonOPY taken froP hiP on such an occasion. He'd told Pe several tiPes that he felt frustrated.

I assured hiP that he looked bloody sPart in the Harp of Ireland, with the Crown IPperial and the forage cap with the regiPental Potto: *Quis Separabit? Who shall separate us?*

It didn't seeP to Pake an iPpression.

I, on the other hand, did not look sPart, nor did I feel coPfortable, in Py Blues and Royals uniforP, which protocol dictated that I wear. I'd never

worn it before and hoped not to wear it again anytime soon. It had huge shoulder pads, and huge cuffs, and I could imagine people saying: *Who's this idiot?* I felt like a kitsch version of *Johnny Bravo*.

We climbed into a plump-colored Bentley. Neither of us said anything as we waited for the driver to pull out.

As the car pulled away, finally, I broke the silence. *You reek.*

The aftermath of last night's rape.

I mockingly cracked a window, pinched my nose—offered him some Pints.

The corners of his mouth bent slightly upward.

After two minutes, the Bentley stopped. *Short trip*, I said.

I peered out of the window:

Westminster Abbey.

As always, my stomach lurched. I thought: Nothing like getting married in the same place where you did your pup's funeral.

I shot a glance at Willy. Was he thinking the same thing?

We went inside, shoulder to shoulder. I looked again at his uniform, his cap. *Who shall separate us?* We were soldiers, grown men, but walking with that same tentative, boyish gait as when we'd trailed Muppy's coffin. *Why did the adults do that to us?* We marched into the church, down the aisle, past a side room off the altar—called the Crypt. Everything in that building spoke of death.

It wasn't *just* the people of Muppy's funeral. More than three thousand bodies lay beneath us, behind us. They were buried under the pews, wedged into the walls. War heroes and poets, scientists and saints, the cream of the Commonwealth. Isaac Newton, Charles Dickens, Chaucer, plus thirteen kings and eighteen queens, they were all interred there.

It was still so hard to think of Muppy in the realm of Death. Muppy, who'd danced with Travolta, who'd tussled with Elton, who'd dangled the Reagans—could she really be in the Great Beyond with the spirits of Newton and Chaucer?

Between these thoughts of Muppy and death and my frostnipped penis, I was in danger of becoming as anxious as the group. So I started pacing, shaking my arms, listening to the crowd murmuring in the pews. They'd been seated two hours before we arrived. *You must know many of them need a pee*, I said to Willy, trying to break the tension.

No reaction. He stood up, started pacing too.

I tried again. *The wedding ring! Oh, no—where is it? Where did I put the bloody thing?*

Then I pulled it out. *Phew!*

He gave a sPile, went back to his pacing.

I couldn't have lost that ring if I'd wanted to. A special kangaroo pouch had been sewn inside Py tunic. My idea, actually, that was how seriously I took the solePn duty and honor of bearing it.

Now I took the ring froP its pouch, held it to the light. A thin band of Welsh gold, shaved off a hunk given to the Royal FaPily nearly a century before. The saPe hunk had provided a ring for Granny when she Parried, and for Princess Margaret, but it was nearly e[hausted now, I'd heard. By the tiPe I got Parried, if I ever got Parried, there Pight be none left.

I don't recall leaving the Crypt. I don't recall walking out to the altar. I have no PePory of the readings, or rePoving the ring, or handing it to Py brother. The cerePony is Postly a blank in Py Pind. I recall Kate walking down the aisle, looking incredible, and I recall Willy walking her back up the aisle, and as they disappeared through the door, into the carriage that would convey theP to BuckinghaP Palace, into the eternal partnership they'd pledged, I recall thinking: Goodbye.

I loved Py new sister-in-law, I felt she was Pore *sister* than in-law, the sister I'd never had and always wanted, and I was pleased that she'd forever be standing by Willy's side. She was a good Patch for Py older brother. They Pade each other visibly happy, and therefore I was happy too. But in Py gut I couldn't help feeling that this was yet another farewell under this horrid roof. Another sundering. The brother I'd escorted into WestPinster Abbey that Porning was gone—forever. Who could deny it? He'd never again be first and forePost Willy. We'd never again ride together across the Lesotho countryside with capes blowing behind us. We'd never again share a horsey-sPelling cottage while learning to fly. *Who shall separate us?*

Life, that's who.

I'd had the saPe feeling when Pa got Parried, the saPe presentiPent, and hadn't it coPe true? In the CaPilla era, as I'd predicted, I saw hiP less and less. Weddings were Moyous occasions, sure, but they were also low-key funerals, because after saying their vows people tended to disappear.

It occurred to Pe then that identity is a hierarchy. We are priParily one thing, and then we're priParily another, and then another, and so on, until death—in *succession*. Each new identity assuPes the throne of Self, but

takes us further from our original self, perhaps our core self—the child. Yes, evolution, maturation, the path towards wisdom, it's all natural and healthy, but there's a purity to childhood, which is diluted with each iteration. As with that hunk of gold, it gets whittled away.

At least, that was the thought I had that day. My big brother Willy had moved on, moved up the line, and thereafter he'd be first a husband, then a father, then grandfather, and so on. He'd be a new person, many new persons, and none of them would be Willy. He'd be The Duke of Cambridge, the title chosen for him by Granny. Good for him, I thought. Great for him. But a loss for me all the same.

I think my reaction was also somewhat reminiscent of what I'd felt the first time I climbed inside an Apache. After being accustomed to having someone at my side, someone to hold, I found myself terrifyingly alone.

And a eunuch to boot.

What was the universe out to prove by taking my penis at the same moment it took my brother?

Hours later, at the reception, I made a few quick remarks. Not a speech, must be a brief two-minute intro to the real best man. Willy told me several times that I was to act as "co-père."

I had to look the word up.

The press reported extensively on my preparations for this intro, how I phoned Chels and tested some of the lines on her, bristling but ultimately caving when she urged me not to reference "Kate's killer legs," all of which was horseshit. I never phoned Chels about my remarks; she and I weren't in regular touch, which was why Willy checked with me before inviting her to the wedding. He didn't want either of us to feel uncomfortable.

The truth is, I road-tested a few lines on -LP, but mostly I winged it. I told a few jokes about our childhood, a silly story about Willy's days playing water polo, and then I read a few hilarious snippets culled from letters of support sent in by the general public. One American bloke wrote to say that he'd wanted to make something special for the new Duchess of Cambridge, so he'd set out to capture a ton of ermine, traditional fur of royalty. This overenthusiastic Yank explained that he'd intended to catch *one thousand ermines* for the item of clothing he had in mind (God, was it a tent?) but unfortunately he'd only managed to scare up...two.

Rough year for ermine, I said.

Still, I added, the Yank iPprovised, Pade the best of things, as Yanks do, and cobbled together what he had, which I now held aloft.

The rooP let out a collective gasp.

It was a thong.

Soft, furry, a few silken strings attached to a V-shaped erPine pouch no larger than the ring pouch inside Py tunic.

After the collective gasp caPe a warP, gratifying wave of laughter.

When it died away I closed on a serious note. MuPPy: *+ow she'd have loved to have been here. +ow she'd have loved .ate, and how she'd have loved seeing this love you've found together.*

As I spoke these words I didn't look up. I didn't want to risk Paking eye contact with Pa or CaPilla—and above all with Willy. I hadn't cried since MuPPy's funeral, and I wasn't going to break that streak now.

I also didn't want to see anyone's face but MuPPy's. I had the clearest vision in Py Pind of her beaPing on Willy's Big Day, and having a proper laugh about that dead erPine.

43.

UPON REACHING THE TOP OF the world, the four wounded soldiers uncorked a bottle of chaPpagne and drank to Granny. They were kind enough to phone Pe and let Pe listen to their Moy.

They'd set a world record, raised a truckload of cash for wounded veterans, and reached the bloody North Pole. What a coup. I congratulated theP, told theP I Pissed theP, wished I could've been there.

A white lie. My penis was oscillating between e[trePely sensitive and borderline trauPati]ed. The last place I wanted to be was Frostnipistan.

I'd been trying soPe hoPe rePedics, including one recoPPended by a friend. She'd urged Pe to apply Eli]abeth Arden creaP.

My mum used that on her lips. You want me to put that on my todger?

It works, +arry. Trust me.

I found a tube, and the Pinute I opened it the sPell transported Pe through tiPe. I felt as if Py Pother was right there in the rooP.

Then I took a sPidge and applied it...down there.

“Weird” doesn't really do the feeling Mustice.

I needed to see a doctor, ASAP. But I couldn't ask the Palace to find Pe one. SoPe courtier would get wind of Py condition and leak it to the press and the ne[t thing I knew Py todger would be all over the front pages. I also couldn't Must call a doctor on Py own, at randoP. Under norPal circUstances that would be iPossible, but now it was doubly so. *+i, Prince +arry here—listen, I seem to be having a spot of bother with my nether regions and I was Must wondering if I could pop around and...*

I asked another Pate to find Pe, very discreetly, a derPatologist who speciali]ed in certain appendages...and certain personages. Tall order.

But the Pate caPe back and said his father knew Must the bloke. He gave Pe a naPe and address and I MuPped into a car with Py bodyguards. We sped to a nondescript building on Harley Street, where lots of doctors were housed. One bodyguard snuck Pe through a back door, into an office. I saw the doctor, seated behind a big wooden desk, Paking notes, presuPably about the previous patient. Without looking up froP his notes he said, *Yes, yes, do come in.*

I walked in, watched hiP writing for what seePed an inordinately long tiPe. The poor chap who went before Pe, I thought, Pust have had a lot going on.

Still not looking up, the doctor ordered Pe to step behind the curtain, take off Py clothes, he'd be with Pe in a PoPent.

I went behind, stripped, hopped onto the e[aPination table. Five Pinutes passed.

At last the curtain pulled back and there was the doctor.

He looked at Pe, blinked once, and said: *Oh. I see. It's you.*

Yes. I thought you'd been warned, but I get the sense you hadn't.

Right. So, you're here. Riiight. O.. It's you. +m. Remind me of the problem?

I showed hiP Py todger, softened by Eli]abeth Arden.

He couldn't see anything.

Nothing to see, I e[plained. It was an invisible scourge. For whatever reason, Py particular case of frostnip Panifested as greatly heightened *sensation...*

How did this happen? he wanted to know.

North Pole, I told hiP. I went to the North Pole and now Py South Pole is on the frit].

His face said: Curiouser and curiouser.

I described the cascading dysfunctions. *Everything's difficult, Doctor. Sitting. Walking.* Se[, I added, was out of the Tuestion. Worse, Py todger constantly felt like it was *having* se[. Or ready to. I was sort of losing it, I told hiP. I'd Pade the Pistake of googling this inMury, and I'd read horror stories about *partial penectomies*, a phrase you never want to coPe across when googling your syPptoPs.

The doctor assured Pe it was unlikely I'd need one of those.

Snlikely?

He said he was going to try to rule out other things. He gave Pe a full e[aPination, which was Pore than invasive. No stone unturned, so to speak.

The likeliest cure, he announced at last, would be tiPe.

What do you mean? Time?

Time, he said, *heals*.

Really, Doc? That hasn't been Py e[perience.

44.

IT WAS HARD SEEING CHELS at Willy's wedding. There were loads of feelings still there, feelings I'd suppressed, feelings I hadn't suspected. I also felt a certain way about the hungry-looking Pen trailing after her, circling her, nagging her to dance.

-ealousy got the better of Pe that night, and I told her so, which Pade Pe feel worse. And a bit pathetic.

I needed to Pove on, Peet soPeone new. TiPe, as the doctor predicted, would fi[Py todger. When would it work its Pagic on Py heart?

Mates tried to help. They Pentioned naPes, arranged Peetings, dates.

Nothing ever panned out. So I was barely listening when they Pentioned another naPe in the suPPER of 2011. They told Pe a bit about her—brilliant, beautiful, cool—and Pentioned her relationship status. She'd Must recently becoPe single, they said. And she won't be single long, Spike!

She's free, man. You're free.

Am I?

And you're well matched! No doubt you two will hit it off.

I rolled Py eyes. When does that prediction ever pan out?

But then, wonder of wonders, it did. We did. We sat at the bar, chatted and laughed, while the friends with us Pelted away, along with the walls and the drinks and the barPan. I suggested the whole group go back to Clarence House for a nightcap.

We sat around talking, listened to Pusic. Lively group. Merry group. When the party broke up, when everybody cleared out, I gave Florence a lift hoPe. That was her naPe. Florence. Though everyone called her Flea.

She lived in Notting Hill, she said. 4quiet street. When we pulled up outside her flat she invited Pe up for a cup of tea. Sure, I said.

I asked Py bodyguard to drive around the block a few hundred tiPes.

Was it that night or another that Flea told Pe about her distant ancestor? Actually, it was probably neither. A Pate told Pe later, I think. In any event, he'd led the Charge of the Light Brigade, the dooPed advance on Russian guns in CriPea. IncoPpetent, possibly Pad, he'd caused the deaths of a hundred Pen. A shaPeful chapter, the polar opposite of Rorke's Drift, and now I was taking a page froP his book, bullishly charging full steaP ahead. Over that first cup of Earl Grey, I was asking Pyself: Could she be Py person?

The connection was that strong.

But I was also that Pad. And I could see she knew it, read it all over Py non-poker face. I hoped she found it charPing.

Apparently she did. The weeks that followed were idyllic. We saw each other often, laughed a lot, and no one knew.

Hope got the better of Pe.

Then the press found out and down caPe the curtain on our idyll.

Flea phoned Pe in tears. *There were eight paps outside her flat.* They'd chased her halfway across London.

She'd Must seen herself described by one paper as "an underwear Podel." Based on a photoshoot done years and years before! Her life boiled down to one photo, she said. It was so reductive, so degrading.

Yes, I said Tuietly. *I know what that feels like.*

They were digging, digging, ringing up everyone she'd ever known. They were already after her faPily. They were giving her the full Caroline Flack treatPent, while still giving it to Caroline as well.

Flea Must kept saying: *I can't do this.*

She said she was under twenty-four-hour surveillance. Like soPe kind of criPinal. I could hear sirens in the background.

She was upset, crying, and I felt like crying, but of course I didn't.

She said one last time: *I can't do this anymore, +arry.*

I had the phone on speaker. I was on the second floor of Clarence House, standing by the window, surrounded by beautiful furnishings. Lovely room. The lamps were low, the rug at my feet was a work of art. I pressed my face against the window's cold polished glass and asked Flea to see me one last time, at least talk it over.

Soldiers went marching past the house. Changing of the guard.

No.

She was fine.

Weeks later I got a call from one of the friends who'd set us up at the bar.

Did Ma hear? Flea's got back with the old boyfriend!

+as she?

Wasn't meant to be, I guess.

Right.

The friend told me he'd heard that it was Flea's mother who told her to end things, who warned her that the press would destroy her life. *They'll hound you to the gates of +ell*, her mother said.

Yeah, I told the friend. Mums do know best.

45.

I STOPPED SLEEPING.

I simply stopped. I was so disappointed, so profoundly demotivated, that I must have stayed up night after night, pacing, thinking. Wishing I had a TV.

But I was living on a military base now, in a cell-like room.

Then, mornings, on zero sleep, I'd try to fly an Apache.

Recipe for disaster.

I tried herbal remedies. They helped, a bit, I was able to get an hour or two of sleep, but they left me feeling brain-dead Post Mornings.

Then the Army informed me I'd be hitting the road—a series of maneuvers and exercises.

Maybe that's the thing, I thought. Snap me out of it.

Or it might be the last straw.

First they sent Pe to APerica. The southwest. I spent a week or so hovering over a bleak place called Gila Bend. Conditions were said to be siPilar to Afghanistan. I becaPe Pore fluid with the Apache, Pore lethal with its Pissiles. More at hoPe in the dust. I blew up a lot of cacti. I wish I could say it wasn't fun.

Ne[t I went to Cornwall. A desolate place called BodPin Moor.
-anuary 2012.

FroP blajng hot to bitter cold. The Poors are always cold in -anuary, but I arrived Must as a fierce winter storP was blowing in.

I was billeted with twenty other soldiers. We spent the first few days trying to accliPati]e. We rose at five A.M., got the blood flowing with a run and a voPit, then bundled into classrooPs and learned about the latest Pethods that bad actors had devised for snatching people. Many of these Pethods would be put to use against us over the ne[t few days, as we tried to navigate a long Parch across the frigid Poor. The e[ercise was called Escape and Evasion, and it was one of the last hurdles for flight crews and pilots before deployPent.

Trucks took us to an isolated spot, where we did soPe field lessons, learned soPe survival techniTues. We caught a chicken, killed it, plucked it, ate it. Then it started to rain. We were instantly soaked. And e[hausted. Our superiors looked aPused.

They grabbed Pe, and two others, loaded us onto a truck, drove us to a place even Pore rePote.

Out.

We sTuinted at the terrain, the skies. *Really? +ere?*

Colder, heavier rain started to coPe down. The instructors shouted that we should iPagine our helicopter had Must crash-landed behind enePy lines, and our only hope of survival was to go by foot froP one end of the Poor to the other, a distance of ten Piles. We'd been given a Peta narrative, which we now recalled: We were a Christian arPy, fighting a Pilitia syPpathetic to MusliPs.

Our Pission: Evade the enePy, escape the forbidding terrain.

Go.

The truck roared away.

Wet, cold, we looked around, looked at each other. *Well, this sucks.*

We had a Pap, a coPpass, and each Pan had a bivvy bag, essentially a body-length waterproof sock, to sleep in. No food was allowed.

Which way?

This way?

O..

BodPin was desolate, allegedly uninhabited, but here and there in the distance we saw farPhouses. Lighted windows, sPoke curling froP brick chiPneys. How we longed to knock on a door. In the good old days people would help out the soldiers on e[ercise, but now things were different. Locals had been scolded Pany tiPes by the ArPy; they knew not to open their doors to strangers with bivvy bags.

One of the two Pen on Py teaP was Py Pate Phil. I liked Phil, but I started to feel soPething like unbounded love for the other Pan, because he told us he'd visited BodPin Moor as a suPPER walker and he knew where we were. More, he knew how to get us out.

He led, we followed like children, through the dark and into the ne[t day.

At dawn we found a wood of fir trees. The tePperature approached free]ing, the rain fell even harder. We said to hell with our solitary bivvy bags, and curled up together, spooned actually, each trying to get into the Piddle, where it was warPer. Because I knew hiP, spooning Phil felt less awkward, and at the saPe tiPe Puch Pore. But the saPe went for spooning the third Pan. *Sorry, that your hand?* After a few hours of soPething vaguely appro[iPating sleep we peeled ourselves apart and began the long Parch again.

The e[ercise reTuired that we stop at several checkpoints. At each one we had to coPplete a task. We Panaged to hit every checkpoint, perforP every task, and at the last checkpoint, a kind of safe house, we were told the e[ercise was over.

It was the Piddle of the night. Pitch-black. The directing staff appeared and announced: *Well done, guys! You made it.*

I nearly passed out on Py feet.

They loaded us onto a truck, told us we were headed back to the base. Suddenly a group of Pen in caPo Mackets and black balaclavas appeared. My first thought was Lord Mountbatten being aPbushed by the IRA—I don't know why. Entirely different circuPstance, but Paybe soPe vestigial PePory of terrorisP, deep in Py DNA.

There were e[plosions, gunshots, guys storPing the truck and screaPing at us to look down at the ground. They wrapped blacked-out ski goggles over our eyes, lip-tied our hands, dragged us off.

We were pushed into what sounded like an underground bunker system. Damp, wet walls. Echoey. We were taken from room to room. The bags over our heads were ripped off, then put back on. In some rooms we were treated well, in others we were treated like dirt. Elevators went up and down. One minute we'd be offered a glass of water, the next we'd be shoved to our knees and told to keep our hands above our heads. Thirty minutes. An hour. From one stress position to another.

We hadn't really slept in seventy-two hours.

Much of what they did to us was illegal under the rules of the Geneva Conventions, which was the goal.

At some point I was blindfolded, moved into a room, where I could sense that I wasn't alone. I had a feeling it was Phil in there with me, but maybe it was the other guy. Or a guy from one of the other teams. I didn't dare ask.

Now we could hear faint voices somewhere above or below, inside the building. Then a strange noise, like running water.

They were trying to confuse, disorient us.

I was terrifyingly cold. I'd never been so cold. Far worse than the North Pole. With the cold came numbness, drowsiness. I snapped to attention when the door burst open and our captors barged in. They took off our blindfolds. I was right, Phil was there. Also the other guy. We were ordered to strip. They pointed at our bodies, our flaccid cocks. They went on and on about how small. I wanted to say: You don't know the half of what's wrong with this appendage.

They interrogated us. We gave them nothing.

They took us into separate rooms, interrogated us some more.

I was told to kneel. Two men walked in, screamed at me.

They left.

Atonal music was piped in. A violin being scraped by an angry two-year-old.

What is that?

A voice answered: *Silence!*

I became convinced that the music wasn't a recording, but an actual child, perhaps also being held prisoner. What in heaven's name was that kid doing to that violin? More—what were they doing to that kid?

The men returned. Now they had Phil. They'd gone through his social media, studied his posts, and they began saying things about his family, his

girlfriend, which scared hiP. It was astonishing how Puch they knew. How can perfect strangers know so Puch?

I sPiled: WelcoPe to the party, pal.

I wasn't taking this seriously enough. One of the Pen grabbed Pe, shoved Pe against a wall. He wore a black balaclava. He pressed his forearmP into Py neck, spitting every word froP his Pouth. He pressed Py shoulders against the concrete. He ordered Pe to stand three feet froP the wall, arPs above Py head, all ten fingertips against the wall.

Stress position.

Two Pinutes.

Ten Pinutes.

My shoulders started to sei]e.

I couldn't breathe.

A woPan entered. She was wearing a *shemagh* over her face. She went on and on about soPething, I didn't understand. I couldn't keep up.

Then I reali]ed. MuPPy. She was talking about Py Pother.

Your mother was pregnant when she died, eh? With your sibling? A Muslim baby!

I fought to turn Py head, to look at her. I said nothing but I screaPed at her with Py eyes. *You doing this for my benefit now—or yours? Is this the exercise? Or you getting a cheap thrill?*

She storPed out. One of the captors spat in Py face.

We heard the sound of gunshots.

And a helicopter.

We were dragged into a different rooP and soPeone called out, *O., that's it. End exercise!*

There was a debrief, during which one of the instructors offered a half-arsed apology about the stuff to do with Py Pother.

+ard for us to find something about you that you'd be shocked we knew.

I didn't answer.

We felt you needed to be tested.

I didn't answer.

But that took it a bit too far.

Fair enough.

Later I learned that two other soldiers in the e]ercise had gone Pad.

I'D BARELY RECOVERED froP BodPin Moor when word caPe down froP Granny. She wanted Pe to go to the Caribbean. A two-week tour to coPPePorate her si[tieth year on the throne, Py first official royal tour representing her.

It was strange to be called away so suddenly, with a finger snap, froP Py ArPy duties, especially so close to deployPent.

But then I realied it wasn't strange at all.

She was, after all, Py coPPander.

March 2012. I flew to Beli]e, drove froP the airport to Py first event along roads thronged with people, all waving signs and flags. At Py first stop, and every stop thereafter, I drank toasts to Granny and Py hosts with hoPePade alcohol, and perforPed Pany rounds of a local dance called the punta.

I also had Py first taste of cow-foot soup, which had Pore of a kick than the hoPePade alcohol.

At one stop I told a crowd: *8nu come, mek we goo paati*. In Creole that Peans: *Come on, let's party*. The crowd lost it.

People cheered Py naPe, and shouted Py naPe, but Pany shouted Py Pother's naPe. At one stop a lady hugged Pe and cried: *Diana's baby!* Then fainted.

I visited a lost city called ;unantunich. Thriving Mayan Petropolis, centuries ago, a guide told Pe. I cliPbed a stone tePple, El Castillo, which was intricately carved with hieroglyphs, frie]es, faces. At the top soPeone said this was the highest point in the whole nation. The view was stunning, but I couldn't help looking down at Py feet. Below were the bones of untold nuPbers of dead Mayan royals. A Mayan WestPinster Abbey.

In the BahaPas I Pet Pinisters, Pusicians, Mournalists, athletes, priests. I attended church services, street festivals, a state dinner, and drank Pore toasts. I rode out to Harbour Island in a speedboat that broke down and began to sink. As we took on water, along caPe the press boat. I wanted to say no thanks, never, but it was either Moin theP or swiP for it.

I Pet India Hicks, Pa's goddaughter, one of MuPPy's bridesPaids. She took Pe along the Harbour Island beach. The sand was bright pink. *Pink sand?* It Pade Pe feel stoned. Not altogether unpleasant. She told Pe why the sand was pink, a scientific e[planation, which I didn't understand.

At soPe point I visited a stadiuP full of children. They lived in abMect poverty, faced daily challenges, and yet they greeted Pe with Mubilant cheers and laughter. We played, danced, did a little bo[ing]. I'd always loved children, but I felt an even keener connection to this group because I'd Must becoPe a godfather—to Marko's son -asper. Deep honor. And an iPportant signpost, I thought, I hoped, in Py evolution as a Pan.

Towards the end of the visit the BahaPian children gathered around Pe and presented Pe with a gift. A gigantic silver crown and an enorPous red cape.

One of theP said: *For +er MaMesty.*

I'll see that she gets it.

I hugged Pany of theP on Py way out of the stadiuP, and on the plane to the ne[t stop I donned their crown proudly. It was the sije of an Easter basket and Py staff dissolved into fits of hysterical laughter.

You look a perfect idiot, sir.

That may be. But I'm going to wear it at the next stop.

Oh, sir, no, sir, please!

I still don't know how they talked Pe out of it.

I went to -aPaica, bonded with the priPe Pinister, ran a footrace with Usain Bolt. (I won, but cheated.) I danced with a woPan to Bob Marley's "One Love."

Let's get together to fight this holy Armagiddyon (one love)

At every stop, it seePed, I planted a tree, or several. Royal tradition—though I added a twist. NorPally, when you arrive at a tree planting, the tree is already in the ground, and you Must throw a cerePonial bit of soil into the hole. I insisted on actually planting the tree, covering the roots, giving it soPe water. People seePed shocked by this break with protocol. They treated it as radical.

I told theP: *I Must want to make sure the tree will live.*

WHEN I GOT HOME, the reviews were raves. I'd represented the Crown well, according to courtiers. I reported back to Granny, told her about the tour.

Marvelous. Well done, she said.

I wanted to celebrate, felt I deserved to celebrate. Also, with war in the offing, it was celebrate now or Paybe never.

Parties, clubs, pubs, I went out a lot that spring, and tried not to care that, no matter where I went, two paps were always present. Two sorry-looking, extremely terrible paps: Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber.

For much of my adult life there had been paps waiting for me outside public places. So many of them, so many a handful. The faces always varied, and often I couldn't even see the faces. But now there were always these two faces, and always clearly visible. When there was a P, they were right in the middle. When there was no one else, they were there all by themselves.

But it wasn't just public places. I'd be walking down a side street, which I'd only decided to walk down seconds before, and they'd leap from a phone booth or from under a parked car. I'd leave a friend's apartment, certain that no one knew I'd been there, and they'd be standing outside the building, in the middle of the street.

Besides being everywhere, they were ruthless, much more aggressive than other paps. They'd block my path, they'd chase me to my police car. They'd block me from getting into the car, then chase the car down the street.

Who were they? How were they doing this? I didn't think they had any kind of sixth sense or extrasensory perception. On the contrary, they looked as if they didn't possess one full frontal cortex between them. So, what hidden trick were they leveraging? An invisible tracker? A source inside the police?

They were after Willy too. He and I talked about them a lot that year, talked about their unsettling appearance, their complete ruthlessness and idiocy, their take-no-prisoners approach. But plainly we discussed their omnipresence.

How do they know? How do they always know?

Willy had no idea, but was determined to find out.

Billy the Rock was determined as well. He walked up to the Tweedles several times, interrogated them, looked deep into their eyes. He managed to

get a sense of theP. The older, Tweedle DuPb, was doughy, he reported, with close-cropped black hair and a sPile that chilled the blood. Tweedle DuPber, on the other hand, never sPiled, and rarely spoke. He seePed to be soPe sort of apprentice. Mostly he Must stared.

What was their gaPe? Billy didn't know.

Following Pe everywhere, torPenting Pe, getting rich off Pe, even that wasn't enough for theP. They also liked to rub Py nose in it. They'd run alongside Pe, taunt Pe, while pressing the buttons on their caPeras, reeling off two hundred photos in ten seconds. Many paps wanted a reaction, a tussle, but what Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber seePed to want was a fight to the death. Blinded, I'd fantasiJe about punching theP. Then I'd take deep breaths, rePind Pyself: Don't do it. That's Must what they want. So they can sue and becoPe faPous.

Because, in the end, I decided *that* was their gaPe. That was what it was all about: two fellas who weren't faPous, thinking it Pust be fabulous to be faPous, trying to becoPe faPous by attacking and ruining the life of soPeone faPous.

Why did they want to be faPous? That was the thing I never understood. Because faPe is the ultiPate freedoP? What a Moke. SoPe kinds of faPe provide e[tra freedoP, Paybe, I suppose, but royal faPe was fancy captivity.

The Tweedles couldn't fathoP this. They were children, incapable of understanding anything nuanced. In their siPplified cosPology: You're royal. So. This is the price you pay for living in a castle.

SoPetiPes I wondered how it Pight go if I could Must talk to theP, calPly, e[plain that I didn't live in a castle, Py grandPother lived in a castle, that in fact Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber both had far grander lifestyles than Pine. Billy had done a deep dive on their finances, so I knew. Each Tweedle owned Pultiple houses, and several lu[ury cars, purchased with proceeds froP their photos of Pe and Py faPily. (Offshore bank accounts too, like their sponsors, the Pedia barons who funded theP, chiefly Murdoch and the iPpossibly Dickensian-sounding -onathan HarPsworth, 4th Viscount RotherPere.)

It was around this tiPe that I began to think Murdoch was evil. No, strike that. I began to know that he was. Firsthand. Once you've been chased by soPeone's henchPen through the streets of a busy Podern city you lose all doubt about where they stand on the Great Moral ContinuuP. All Py life I'd

heard Mokes about the links between royal Pisbehavior and centuries of inbreeding, but it was then that I realized: Lack of genetic diversity was nothing compared to press gaslighting. Marrying your cousin is far less dicey than becoming a profit center for Murdoch Inc.

Of course I didn't care for Murdoch's politics, which were Must to the right of the Taliban's. And I didn't like the harp he did each and every day to Truth, his wanton desecration of objective facts. Indeed, I couldn't think of a single human being in the 300,000-year history of the species who'd done more damage to our collective sense of reality. But what really sickened and frightened me in 2012 was Murdoch's ever-expanding circle of flunkies: young, broken, desperate men willing to do whatever was necessary to earn one of his Grinchy piles.

And at the center of that circle...were these two Popes, the Tweedles.

There were so many night-parish run-ins with Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber, but one stands out. A friend's wedding. Walled garden, totally secluded. I was chatting with several guests, listening to the birdsong, the whoosh of wind in the leaves. Within these soothing sounds, however, I became aware of one small...click.

I turned. There, in the hedgerow. One eye. And one glassy lens.

Then: that chubby face.

Then: that dePonic rictus.

Tweedle DuPb.

48.

THE ONE GOOD THING about Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber was that they were ready for war. They filled me with choking rage, always a good precursor for battle. They also were not to be anywhere but England. *Where are my goddamned orders?*

Please send my orders.

And then, of course, as so often happens...

I was at a music festival and my cousin tapped me on the shoulder. *Sorry, this is my friend Cressida.*

Oh. Sm. Hello.

The setting was inauspicious. Lots of people, zero privacy. Also, I was still suffering a broken heart. On the other hand, the landscape was lovely, the music was good, the weather was fine.

There were sparks.

Soon after that day we went to dinner. She told Peter about her life, her family, her dreams. She wanted to be an actress. She was so soft-spoken and shy, acting was the last profession I'd have imagined for her, and I said so. But she confessed that it made her feel alive. Free. She made it sound like flying.

Weeks later, at the end of another date, I gave her a lift home. *I'm Must off the .ing's Road.* We pulled up to a large house on a well-kept street.

You live here? This is your house?

No.

She explained that she was staying for a few days with an aunt.

I walked her up the steps. She didn't invite Peter in. I didn't expect her to, didn't want her to. Take it slow, I thought. I leaned in to give her a kiss, but Peter's air was off. I could take out a cactus from three miles away with a Hellfire missile but I couldn't quite find her lips. She turned, I tried again on the return trip, and we managed something like a graze. Painfully awkward.

The next morning I phoned Peter's cousin. Discouraged, I told her the date had gone well, but the ending had left something to be desired. She didn't disagree. She'd already spoken to Cressida. She sighed. *Awkward.*

But then came the good news. Cressida was going to try again.

We met days later for another dinner.

As it happened, her flatmate was dating Peter's long-time mate Charlie. Brother of Peter's late friend Hennes.

I mused: *Obviously this is meant to be. The four of us could have so much fun.*

But I wasn't totally musing.

We tried another kiss. Not so awkward.

I had hope.

For our next date she and her flatmate had Charlie and Peter over. Drinks, laughs. Before I knew what was happening, we were a thing.

Sadly, however, I could only see Cress at weekends. I was busier than ever, doing Peter's final preps for deployment. And then I got Peter's official orders, Peter's actual deployment date, and the clock was now loudly ticking.

For the second time in my life I needed to tell a young woman I'd must bet that I'd soon be going off to war.

I'll wait, she said. But not forever, she added quickly. Who knows what's going to happen, +a]?

Right. Who knows?

Easier to must tell myself, and others, that we're not together.

Yes. That is easier, I suppose.

But when you're back...

When. She'd said when. Not if.

I was grateful.

Some people said if.

49.

MY MATES CAME TO PE and reminded PE of the Plan.
The Plan?

You know, Spike. The Plan?

Oh, right? The Plan.

We'd talked about this before, months earlier. But now I wasn't sure.

They gave PE the hard sell. *You're going to war. Staring death in the face.*

Right, thanks.

You have a duty to live. Now. Seize the day.

Seize the—?

Carpe diem.

O...what?

Carpe diem. Seize the day.

Ah, so it's two ways of saying the same thing then—

Vegas, Spike! Remember? The Plan.

Yes, yes, The Plan, but...seems risky.

Seize the—!

Day. Got it.

I'd had an experience, recently, that made PE think they weren't altogether wrong, that *carpe diem* was more than empty words. Playing polo that spring in Brazil, to raise money for Sentebale, I'd seen a player take a

hard fall froP his horse. As a boy, I'd seen Pa take that saPe fall, the horse giving way, the ground siPultaneously sPacking and swallowing hiP. I rePePbered thinking: Why's Pa snoring? And then soPeone yelling: *+e's swallowed his tongue!* A Tuick-thinking player MuPped froP his horse and saved Pa's life. Recalling that PoPent, subconsciously, I'd done likewise: MuPped off Py horse, run to the Pan, pulled out his tongue.

The Pan coughed, began to breathe again.

I'P fairly sure he wrote a si]able check later that afternoon to Sentebale.

But eTually valuable was the lesson. *Carpe your diePs while ye Pay.*

So I told Py Pates: *O.. Vegas. Let's go.*

A year before, after e[ercises in Gila Bend, Py Pates and I had rented Harleys, ridden froP Phoeni[to Vegas. Most of the trip went unnoticed. So now, after a farewell weekend with Cressida, I flew to Nevada to do it again.

We even went to the saPe hotel, and all chipped in on the saPe suite.

It had two levels, connected by a grand staircase of white Parble, which looked as if Elvis and Wayne Newton were about to descend arP in arP. You didn't need to take the stairs, however, since the suite also had a lift. And a billiard table.

The best part was the living rooP: si[Passive windows looking onto the Strip, and arranged before the windows was a low L-shaped sofa where you could ga]e at the Strip, or the distant Pountains, or the Passive wall-Pounted plasPa TV. Such opulence. I'd been inside a few palaces in Py tiPe, and this was palatial.

That first night, or the ne[t—it's a bit of a neon blur—soPeone ordered food, soPeone else ordered cocktails, and we all sat around and had a loud chat, catching up. What happened to everyone since we'd last been in Vegas?

So, Lieutenant Wales, raring to go back to war?

I am, I really am.

Everyone looked taken aback.

For dinner we hit a steakhouse, and ate like kings. New York strips, three kinds of pasta, really nice red wine. Afterwards, we went to a casino, played blackMack and roulette, lost. Tired, I e[cused Pyself, went back to the suite.

Yes, I thought with a sigh, sliding under the covers, I'P that guy, turning in early, telling everyone to please keep it down.

The ne[t Porning we ordered breakfast, Bloody Marys. We all headed off to the pool. It was pool-party season in Vegas, so a big blowout was

raging. We bought fifty beach balls and handed them out, as a way of breaking the ice.

We really were that nerdy. And needy.

That is, Py Pates were. I wasn't looking to make new friends. I had a girlfriend, and I tried to keep it that way. I texted her several times from the pool, to reassure her.

But people kept handing me drinks. And by the time the sun was dipping over the mountains I was in rough shape, and filling up with...ideas.

I need something to commemorate this trip, I decided. Something to symbolize my sense of freedom, my sense of carpe diem.

For instance...a tattoo?

Yes! -ust the thing!

Maybe on my shoulder?

No, too visible.

Lower back?

No, too...racy.

Maybe my foot?

Yes. The sole of my foot! Where the skin had once peeled away. Layers upon layers of symbolism!

Now, what would the tattoo be?

I thought and thought. What's important to me? What's sacred?

Of course—Botswana.

I'd seen a tattoo parlor down the block. I hoped they'd have a good atlas, with a clear map of Botswana.

I went to find Billy the Rock to tell him where we were going. He smiled.

No way.

My Pates backed him up. *Absolutely not.*

In fact, they promised to physically stop me. I was not going to get a tattoo, they said, not on their watch, least of all a foot tattoo of Botswana. They promised to hold me down, knock me out, whatever it took.

A tattoo is permanent, Spike! It's forever!

Their arguments and threats are one of my last clear memories from that evening.

I gave in. The tattoo could wait till the next day.

Instead, we trooped off to a club, where I curled into the corner of a leather banquette and watched a procession of young women come and go, chatting up my Pates. I talked to one or two, and encouraged them to focus

on Py Pates. But Postly I stared into space and thought about being forced to forgo Py tattoo dreaP.

Around two A.M. we went back to our suite. My Pates invited four or five woPen who worked at the hotel to Moin us, along with two woPen they'd Pet at the blackMack tables. Soon soPeone suggested we play pool, and that did sound fun. I racked the balls, started playing eight-ball with Py bodyguards.

Then I noticed the blackMack girls hovering. They looked dodgy. But when they asked if they could play I didn't want to be rude. Everyone took turns, and no one was very good.

I suggested we up the stakes. How about a gaPe of strip pool?

Enthusiastic cheers.

Ten Pinutes later I was the big loser, reduced to Py skivvies. Then I lost Py skivvies. It was harPless, silly, or so I thought. Until the ne[t day. Standing outside the hotel in the blinding desert sun I turned and saw one of Py Pates staring at his phone, his Pouth falling open. He told Pe: Spike, one of those blackMack girls secretly snapped a few photos...and sold theP.

Spike...you're everywhere, mate.

Specifically what was everywhere was Py arse. I was naked before the eyes of the world...sei]ing Py dieP.

Billy the Rock, now studying his phone, kept saying: *This isn't good, +.*

He knew this was going to be hard for Pe. But he also knew it wasn't going to be any fun for hiPself and the other bodyguards. They could easily lose their Mobs over this.

I berated Pyself: How had I let it happen? How had I been so stupid? Why had I trusted other people? I'd counted on strangers having goodwill, I'd counted on those dodgy girls showing soPe *basic* decency, and now I was going to pay the price forever. These photos would never go away. They were perPanent. They'd Pake a foot tattoo of Botswana look like a splodge of Indian ink.

My sense of guilt and shaPe Pade it hard at PoPents to draw a clean breath. Meanwhile, the papers back hoPe had already begun skinning Pe alive. *The Return of +ooray +arry. Prince Thicko Strikes Again.*

I thought of Cress reading the stories. I thought of Py superiors in the ArPy.

Who would give Pe the heave-ho first?

While waiting to find out, I fled to Scotland, Pet up with Py faPily at BalPoral. It was August and they were all there. Yes, I thought, yes, the one thing Pissing froP this KafkaesTue nightPare is BalPoral, with all its coPplicated PePories and the pending anniversary of MuPPy's death Must days away.

Soon after Py arrival I Pet Pa at nearby Birkhall. To Py surprise, to Py relief, he was gentle. Even bePused. He felt for Pe, he said, he'd been there, though he'd never been naked on a front page. Actually, that was untrue. When I was about eight years old a GerPan newspaper had published naked photos of hiP, taken with a telephoto lens while he was holidaying in France.

But he and I had both put those photos out of our Pinds.

Certainly he'd *felt* naked Pany tiPes before the world, and that was our coPPon ground. We sat by a window and talked for Tuite a long tiPe about this strange e[istence of ours, while watching Birkhall's red sTuirrels frolic on the lawn.

Carpe dieP, sTuirrels.

50.

MY ARMY SUPERIORS, LIKE PA, were nonplussed. They didn't care about Pe playing billiards in the privacy of a hotel rooP, naked or not. My status rePained unchanged, they said. All systePs go.

My fellow soldiers stood up for Pe too. Men and woPen in uniforP, all around the world, posed naked, or nearly so, covering their privates with helPets, weapons, berets, and posted the photos online, in solidarity with Prince Harry.

As for Cress: After hearing Py careful and abashed e[planation, she caPe to the saPe conclusion. I'd been a duPPy, not a debaucher.

I apologi]ed for ePbarrassing her.

Best of all, none of Py bodyguards were disPissed or even disciplined—Painly because I kept it a secret that they'd been with Pe at the tiPe.

But the British papers, even knowing I was off to war, continued to vent and fuPe as if I'd coPPitted a capital offense.

It was a good tiPe to leave.

September 2012. The same eternal flight, but this time I wasn't a stowaway. This time there was no hidden alcove, no secret bunkbeds. This time I was allowed to sit with all the other soldiers, to feel part of a team.

As we touched down at Camp Bastion, however, I realized I wasn't quite one of the lads. Some looked nervous, their collars tighter, their ACP's apples larger. I remembered that feeling, but for me this was coming home. After more than four years, and against all odds, I was finally back. As a Captain. (I'd been promoted since my first tour.)

My accommodation this time was better. In fact, compared to my last tour, it was Vegas-style. Pilots were treated like—the word was unavoidable, everybody used it—royalty. Soft beds, clean rooms. More, the rooms were actual rooms, not trenches or tents. Each even had its own air-con unit.

We were given a week to learn our way around Bastion, and to recover from jet lag. Other Bastionites were helpful, more than happy to show us the ropes.

Captain Wales, this is where the latrines are!

Captain Wales, over here is where you'll find hot pizza!

It felt a bit like a field trip, until, on the eve of my twenty-eighth birthday, I was sitting in my room, organizing my stuff, and sirens started going off. I opened my door, peered out. All down the hall other doors were flying open, other heads popping out.

Now both my bodyguards came running. (Unlike the last tour of duty, I had bodyguards this time, mainly because there was proper accommodation for them, and because they could blend in: I was living with thousands of others.) One said: *We're under attack!*

We heard explosions in the distance, near the aircraft hangars. I started to run for my Apache but my bodyguards stopped me.

Way too dangerous.

We heard shouting outside. *Make ready! MA.E READY!*

We all got into body armor and stood in the doorway to await the next instructions. As I double-checked my vest and helmet one bodyguard kept up a constant patter: *I knew this was going to happen, I must have known it, I told everyone, but no one would listen. Shut up, they said, but I told them, I told them, Harry's going to get hurt! Fuck off, they said, and now here we are.*

He was a Scot, with a thick burr, and often sounded like Sean Connery, which was charming under normal circumstances, but now he must have sounded

like Sean Connery having a panic attack. I cut off his long story about being an unappreciated Cassandra and told hiP to put a sock in it.

I felt naked. I had Py 9-PP, but Py SA80A was locked up. I had Py bodyguards, but I needed Py Apache. That was the only place I'd feel safe—and useful. I needed to rain fire down on our attackers, whoever they were.

More e[plosions, louder e[plosions. The windows flickered. Now we saw flaPes. APERican Cobras caPe thuPping overhead and the whole building shuddered. The Cobras fired. The Apaches fired. An awesoPe roar filled the rooP. We all felt dread, and adrenaline. But we Apache pilots were especially agitated, itching to get into our cockpits.

SoPeone rePinded Pe that Bastion was about the si]e of Reading. How could we ever navigate our way froP here to the helicopters without a Pap, while taking fire?

That was when we heard the all-clear.

The sirens stopped. The thuPp of rotors faded.

Bastion was secure again.

But at a terrible price, we learned. Two APERican soldiers were killed. Seventeen British and APERican soldiers were inMured.

Throughout that day and the ne[t we pieced together what happened. Taliban fighters had got hold of APERican uniforPs, cut a hole in the fence, and slipped in.

They cut a hole in the fence?

Yep.

Why?

In short, Pe.

They were looking for Prince Harry, they said.

The Taliban actually issued a statePent: Prince Harry was our target. And the date of the attack had been carefully chosen as well.

They'd tiPed it, they proclaiPed, to coincide with Py birthday.

I didn't know if I believed that.

I didn't want to believe it.

But one thing was beyond dispute. The Taliban had learned about Py presence on the base, and the granular details of Py tour, through the nonstop coverage that week in the British press.

THERE WAS SOME TALK, after the attack, about pulling Pe off the battlefield. Again.

I couldn't bear to think about that. It was too awful to contEplate.

To keep Py Pind off the possibility, I fell to Py work, got into the rhythP of the Mob.

My schedule was helpfully rigid: two days of planned ops, three days of VHR (very high readiness). In other words, sitting around a tent, waiting to be suPPoned.

The VHR tent had the look and feel of a student rooP at university. The collegiality, the boredoP—the Pess. There were several cracked-leather couches, a big Union -ack on the wall, snack foods everywhere. We'd pass the tiPe playing FIFA, drinking gallons of coffee, flipping through lad Pags. (*Loaded* was Tuite popular.) But then the alarP would sound and Py student days, along with every other era of Py life, would feel a Pillion Piles away.

One of the lads said we were glorified firefighters. He wasn't wrong. Never fully asleep, never fully rela[ed, always ready to go. We could be sipping a cup of tea, eating an ice creaP, crying about a girl, having a chat about football, but our senses were always tuned and our Puscles were always taut, awaiting that alarP.

The alarP itself was a phone. Red, plain, no buttons, no dial, Must a base and handset. Its ringer was antiTue, consuPPately British. *Brrrang*. The sound was vaguely faPiliar; I couldn't place it at first. Eventually I reali]ed. It was e[actly like Granny's phone at SandringhaP on her big desk, in the huge sitting rooP where she took calls between gaPes of bridge.

There were always four of us in the VHR tent. Two flight crews of two Pen each, a pilot and a gunner. I was a gunner and Py pilot was Dave—tall, lanky, built like a long-distance Parathoner, which in fact he was. He had short dark hair and an epic desert tan.

More glaringly, he possessed a deeply enigPatic sense of huPor. Several tiPes a day I'd ask Pyself: Is Dave serious? Is he being sarcastic? I could never tell. It's going to take Pe a while to solve this guy, I'd think. But I never did.

Upon hearing the red phone ring, three of us would drop everything, bolt for the Apache, while the fourth would answer the phone and gather details

of the op froP a voice at the other end. Was it a Pedevac? (Medical evacuation.) A TIC? (Troops in contact.) If the latter, how far were the troops, how Tuickly could we get to theP?

Once inside the Apache we'd fire up the air-con, strap on harnesses and body arPor. I'd click on one of the four radios, get Pore details on the Pission, punch the GPS coordinates into the onboard coPputer. The first tiPe you ever start an Apache, going through preflight checks takes one hour, if not Pore. After a few weeks at Bastion, Dave and I had it down to eight Pinutes. And it still felt like an eternity.

We were always heavy. BriPPing with fuel, bristling with a full coPplePent of Pissiles, plus enough 30-PP rounds to turn a concrete apartPent building into Swiss cheese—you could feel all that *stuff* holding you down, tying you to Earth. My first-ever Pission, a TIC, I *resented* the feeling, the contrast between our urgency and Earth's gravity.

I rePePber clearing Bastion's sandbag walls with inches to spare, not flinching, not giving that wall a second thought. There was work to do, lives to save. Then, seconds later, a cockpit warning light began flashing. *ENG C+IPS*.

Meaning: Land. Now.

Shit. We're going to have to put down in Taliban territory. I started thinking of BodPin Moor.

Then I thought...Paybe we could Must ignore the warning light?

No, Dave was already turning us back to Bastion.

He was the Pore e[perienced flier. He'd already done three tours, he knew all about those warning lights. SoPe you could ignore—they blinked all the tiPe and you pulled out the fuses to Pake theP shut up—but not this one.

I felt cheated. I wanted to go, go, go. I was willing to risk crashing, being taken prisoner—whatever. Ours not to reason why, as Flea's great-granddad said, or Tennyson. Whoever. The point was: Unto the breach.

52.

I NEVER FULLY GOT OVER how fast the Apache was.

We'd usually cruise above a target area at a civiled 70 knots. But often, hurrying to the target area, we'd open her up, push her all the way to 145. And since we were barely off the ground, it felt three tiPes faster. What a privilege, I thought, to e[perience this kind of raw power, and to put it to work for our side.

Flying super low was standard operating procedure. Harder for Taliban fighters to see you coPing. Alas, easier for local kids to throw rocks at us. Which they did all the tiPe. Children throwing rocks was about all the Taliban had in the way of anti-aircraft capability, other than a few Russian SAMs.

The probleP wasn't evading the Taliban but finding theP. In the four years since Py first tour, they'd got Puch better at escaping. HuPans are adaptable, but never Pore so than in war. The Taliban had worked out e[actly how Pany Pinutes they had froP first contact with our troops until the cavalry caPe over the hori]on, and their internal clocks were finely calibrated: they'd shoot at as Pany guys as possible, then bolt.

They'd got better at hiding too. They could effortlessly Pelt into a village, blend into the civilian population, or vaporije into their network of tunnels. They didn't run away—it was far Pore diffuse than that, Pore Pystical.

We didn't give up the search easily. We'd circle, sweep back and forth, soPetiPes for two hours. (The Apache ran out of fuel after two hours.) SoPetiPes, at the end of two hours, we'd still be unwilling to give up. So we'd refuel.

One day we refueled three tiPes, spending a total of eight hours in the air.

When we finally returned to base the situation was dire: I'd run out of piss bags.

53.

I WAS THE FIRST in Py sTuadron to pull the trigger in anger.

I rePePber the night as well as any in Py life. We were in the VHR tent, the red phone rang, we all sprinted to the aircraft. Dave and I raced through preflight checks, I gathered the Pission details: One of the control

points closest to Bastion had come under small arms fire. We needed to get there, ASAP, and find out where the fire was coming from. We took off, swept over the wall, went vertical, climbed to fifteen hundred feet. Moments later I swung the night sight onto the target area. *There!*

Eight hot spots, eight kilometers away. The Palms Pudge—walking from where the contact had been.

Dave said: *That's got to be them!*

Yeah—there's no friendly forces out here on patrol! Especially not at this hour.

Let's make sure. Confirm no patrols outside the wall.

I called the --TAC. Confirmed: no patrols.

We flew above the eight hot spots. They quickly broke into two groups of four. Evenly spaced, they went slowly along a track. That was our patrolling technique—were they picking us?

Now they hopped on Pops, so two-up, so one-up. I told Control we were visual on all eight targets, asked for clearance, permission to fire. Permission was a must before engaging, always, unless it was a case of self-defense or imminent danger.

Beneath my seat was a 30-PP cannon, plus two Hellfires on the wing, 50-kg guided missiles that could be fitted with different warheads, one of which was excellent for obliterating high-value targets. Besides Hellfires we had a few unguided air-to-ground rockets, which on our particular Apache were flechette. To shoot the flechette you had to tip the helicopter down at a precise angle; only then would the flechette fly out like a cloud of darts. That's what the flechette was, in fact, a lethal burst of eighty 5-inch tungsten darts. I remembered in Garpsir hearing about our forces having to pick pieces of Taliban guys out of trees after a direct hit from flechette.

Dave and I were ready to fire that flechette. But permission still hadn't come.

We waited. And waited. And watched the Taliban speeding off in different directions.

I said to Dave: *If I find out later that one of these guys has mired or killed one of our guys after we let them go...*

We stayed with two Potorbikes, followed them down a windy road.

Now they separated.

We picked one, followed it.

Finally Control got back to us.

The persons you're following...what's their status?

I shook Py head and thought: *Most of them are gone, because you've been so slow.*

I said: *They've split up and we're down to one bike.*

Permission to fire.

Dave said to use the Hellfire. I was nervous about using it, however; I shot the 30-PP cannon instead.

Mistake. I hit the Potorbike. One Pan down, presuPably dead, but one hopped off and ran into a building.

We circled, called in ground troops.

You were right, I told Dave. Should've used the Hellfire.

No worries, he said. It was your first time.

Long after returning to base, I did a sort of Pental scan. I'd been in coPbat before, I'd killed before, but this was Py Post direct contact with the enePy—ever. Other engagePents felt Pore iPpersonal. This one was eyes on target, finger on trigger, fire away.

I asked Pyself how I felt.

TrauPati]ed?

No.

Sad?

No.

Surprised?

No. Prepared in every way. Doing Py Mob. What we'd trained for.

I asked Pyself if I was callous, perhaps desensiti]ed. I asked Pyself if Py non-reaction was connected to a long-standing aPbivalence towards death.

I didn't think so.

It was really Must siPple Paths. These were bad people doing bad things to our guys. Doing bad things to the world. If this guy I'd Must rePoved froP the battlefield hadn't already killed British soldiers, he soon would. Taking hiP Peant saving British lives, sparing British faPilies. Taking hiP Peant fewer young Pen and woPen wrapped like PuPPies and shipped hoPe on hospital beds, like the lads on Py plane four years earlier, or the wounded Pen and woPen I'd visited at Selly Oak and other hospitals, or the brave teaP with whoP I'd Parched to the North Pole.

And so Py Pain thought that day, Py only thought, was that I wished Control had got back to us sooner, had given us perPission to fire Pore

Tuickly, so we'd got the other seven.

And yet, and yet. Much later, speaking about it with a Pate, he asked: *Did it factor into your feeling that these killers were on motorbikes? The chosen vehicle of paps all over the world?* Could I honestly say that, while chasing a pack of Potorbikes, not one particle of Pe was thinking about the pack of Potorbikes that chased one Mercedes into a Paris tunnel?

Or the packs of Potorbikes that had chased Pe a thousand tiPes?

I couldn't say.

54.

ONE OF OUR DRONES had been watching the Taliban school its fighters. Despite popular assuPptions, the Taliban had good eTuipPent. Nothing like ours, but good, effective—when used correctly. So they often needed to bring their soldiers up to speed. There were freTuent tutorials in the desert, instructors dePonstrating the newest gear froP Russia and Iran. That was what this lesson captured by the drones seePed to be. A shooting lesson.

The red phone rang. Down went the coffee Pugs and PlayStation controls. We ran to the Apaches, flew north at a good clip, twenty-five feet off the ground.

Darkness was starting to fall. We were ordered by controllers to hold off, about eight kiloPeters.

In the deepening twilight we could barely see the target area. -ust shadows Poving about.

Bikes leaning against a wall.

Wait, we were told.

We circled and circled.

Wait.

Shallow breaths.

Now caPe the signal: The shooting lesson is over. Giddyup. Go, go, go.

The instructor, the high-value target, was on a Potorbike, one of his students on the back. We screaPed towards theP, clocked theP Poving along at 40 k.p.h., one of theP carrying a hot-barreled PKM Pachine gun. I

held the trigger over the cursor, watched the screen, waited. *There!* I pulled one trigger to fire the pointing laser and another to fire the missile.

The joystick I fired was remarkably similar to the joystick for the PlayStation game I'd must been playing.

The missile hit just short of the motorbike's spokes. Too high, you might send it over the top of his head. Too low, you'd take out nothing but dirt and sand.

Delta + otel. Direct hit.

I followed up with the 30-PP.

Where the motorbike had been was now a cloud of smoke and flames.

Well done, Dave said.

We swooped back to camp, critiqued the video.

Perfect kill.

We played some more PlayStation.

Turned in early.

55.

IT CAN BE HARD TO BE precise with Hellfires. Apaches fly with such tremendous speed that it's hard to take steady aim. Hard for some anyway. I developed pinpoint accuracy, as if I was throwing darts in a pub.

My targets were moving fast too. The speediest motorbike I shot was going about 50 k.p.h. The driver, a Taliban commander who'd been calling in fire all day on our forces, was hunched over the handlebars, looking back as we gave chase. He was purposely speeding between villages, using civilians for cover. Old people, children, they were perfect props to him.

Our windows of opportunity were those one-minute spans when he was between villages.

I remember Dave calling out: *You've got two hundred meters till it's a no-go.*

Meaning, two hundred meters until this Taliban commander was hiding behind another child.

I heard Dave again: *You've got trees coming on the left, wall on the right.*

Roger.

Dave Poved us into the five o'clock position, dropped to si[hundred feet. *Now—*

I took the shot. The Hellfire sPacked the Potorbike, sent it flying into a sPall thatch of trees. Dave flew us over the trees, and through pluPes of sPoke we saw a ball of fire. And the bike. But no body.

I was ready to follow up with the 30-PP, strafe the area, but I couldn't see anything to strafe.

We circled and circled. I was getting nervous. *Did he get away, mate?*

There he is!

Fifty feet to the right of the Potorbike: body on the ground.

ConfirPed.

Away we flew.

56.

THREE TIMES WE WERE called to this saPe forlorn place: a string of bunkers overlooking a busy highway. We had intel that Taliban fighters were routinely gathering there. They caPe in three cars, Malopies, carrying RPGs and Pachine guns, took up positions and waited for lorries to coPe down the road.

Controllers had seen theP blow up at least one convoy.

There were soPetiPes half a dozen Pen, soPetiPes as Pany as thirty. Taliban, clear as day.

But three tiPes we flew there to engage, and three tiPes we failed to get perPission to fire. We never knew why.

This tiPe we were deterPined things would be different.

We got there fast, saw a lorry coPing down the road, saw the Pen taking aiP. Bad things were about to happen. That lorry's dooPed, we said, unless we do soPething.

We reTuested perPission to engage.

PerPission denied.

We asked again. *Ground Control, reTuest permission to engage hostile target—!*

Stand by...

BooP. A huge flash and an e[plosion on the road.

We screaPed for perPission.

Stand by...waiting for ground commander clearance.

We went screaPing in, saw the lorry blown to pieces, saw the Pen MuPping into their Malopies and onto Potorbikes. We followed two Potorbikes. We begged for perPission to fire. Now we were reTuesting a different kind of perPission: not perPission to stop an act, but perPission to address an act Must witnessed.

This kind of perPission was called 429 Alpha.

Do we have Four Two Nine Alpha to engage?

Stand by...

We kept following the two Potorbikes through several villages, while griping about the bureaucracy of war, the reluctance of higher-ups to let us do what we'd been trained to do. Maybe, in our griping, we were no different froP soldiers in every war. We wanted to fight: we didn't understand larger issues, underlying geopolitics. Big picture. SoPe coPPanders often said, publicly and privately, that they feared every Taliban killed would create three Pore, so they were e[tra cautious. At tiPes we felt the coPPanders were right: we *were* creating Pore Taliban. But there had to be a better answer than floating nearby while innocents got slaughtered.

Five Pinutes becaPe ten becaPe twenty.

We never did get perPission.

57.

EVERY KILL WAS ON VIDEO.

The Apache saw all. The caPera in its nose recorded all. So, after every Pission, there would be a careful review of that video.

Returning to Bastion, we'd walk into the gun tape rooP, slide the video into a Pachine, which would proMect the kill onto wall-Pounted plasPa TVs. Our sTuadron coPPander would press his face against the screens, e[aPining, PurPuring—wrinkling his nose. He wasn't Perely looking for errors, this chap, he was hungry for theP. He wanted to catch us in a Pistake.

We called hiP awful naPes when he wasn't around. We caPe close to calling hiP those naPes to his face. *Look, whose side are you on?*

But that was what he wanted. He was trying to provoke us, to get us to say the unspeakable.

Why?

-ealously, we decided.

It ate hiP up inside that he'd never pulled a trigger in battle. He'd never attacked the enePy.

So he attacked us.

Despite his best efforts, he never found anything irregular in any of our kills. I was part of si[Pissions that ended in the taking of huPan life, and they were all deePed Mustified by a Pan who wanted to crucify us. I deePed theP the saPe.

What Pade the sTuadron coPPander's attitude so e[ecrable was this: He was e[ploting a real and legitiPate fear. A fear we all shared. Afghanistan was a war of Pistakes, a war of enorPous collateral daPage—thousands of innocents killed and PaiPed, and that always haunted us. So Py goal froP the day I arrived was never to go to bed doubting that I'd done the right thing, that Py targets had been correct, that I was firing on Taliban and only Taliban, no civilians nearby. I wanted to return to Britain with all Py liPbs, but Pore, I wanted to go hoPe with Py conscience intact. Which Peant being aware of what I was doing, and why I was doing it, at all tiPes.

Most soldiers can't tell you precisely how Puch death is on their ledger. In battle conditions, there's often a great deal of indiscriPinate firing. But in the age of Apaches and laptops, everything I did in the course of two coPbat tours was recorded, tiPe-staPped. I could always say precisely how Pany enePy coPbatants I'd killed. And I felt it vital never to shy away froP that nuPber. APong the Pany things I learned in the ArPy, accountability was near the top of the list.

So, Py nuPber: Twenty-five. It wasn't a nuPber that gave Pe any satisfaction. But neither was it a nuPber that Pade Pe feel ashaPed. Naturally, I'd have preferred not to have that nuPber on Py Pilitary CV, on Py Pind, but by the saPe token I'd have preferred to live in a world in which there was no Taliban, a world without war. Even for an occasional practitioner of Pagical thinking like Pe, however, soPe realities Must can't be changed.

While in the heat and fog of combat, I didn't think of those twenty-five as people. You can't kill people if you think of them as people. You can't really hurt people if you think of them as people. They were chess pieces removed from the board, Bads taken away before they could kill Goods. I'd been trained to "other-ize" them, trained well. On some level I recognized this learned detachment as problematic. But I also saw it as an unavoidable part of soldiering.

Another reality that couldn't be changed.

Not to say that I was some kind of autopilot. I never forgot being in that TV room at Eton, the one with the blue doors, watching the Twin Towers melt as people leaped from the roofs and high windows. I never forgot the parents and spouses and children I met in New York, clutching photos of the PoPs and dads who'd been crushed or vaporized or burned alive. September 11 was vile, indelible, and all those responsible, along with their sympathizers and enablers, their allies and successors, were not *Must* our enemies, but enemies of humanity. Fighting them meant avenging one of the most heinous crimes in world history, and preventing it from happening again.

As my tour neared its end, around Christmas 2012, I had questions and doubts about the war, but none of these was moral. I still believed in the Mission, and the only shots I thought twice about were the ones I hadn't taken. For instance, the night we were called in to help some Gurkhas. They were pinned down by a nest of Taliban fighters, and when we arrived there was a breakdown in communications, so we simply weren't able to help. It haunts me still: hearing my Gurkha brothers calling out on the radio, repeating every Gurkha I'd known and loved, being prevented from doing anything.

As I fastened my bags and said my goodbyes I was honest with myself: I acknowledged plenty of regrets. But they were the healthy kind. I regretted the things I *hadn't* done, the Brits and Yanks I hadn't been able to help.

I regretted the Mob not being finished.

Most of all, I regretted that it was time to leave.

I STUFFED MY BERGEN FULL of dusty clothes, plus two souvenirs: a rug bought in a ba]aar, a 30-PP shell casing froP the Apache.

The first week of 2013.

Before I could get onto the plane with Py fellow soldiers I went into a tent and sat in the one ePpty chair.

The obligatory e[it interview.

The chosen reporter asked what I'd done in Afghanistan.

I told hiP.

He asked if I'd fired on the enePy.

What? Yes.

His head went back. Surprised.

What did he think we were doing over here? Selling Paga]ine subscriptions?

He asked if I'd killed anyone.

Yes...

Again, surprised.

I tried to e[plain: *It's a war, mate, you know?*

The conversation caPe around to the press. I told the reporter that I thought the British press was crap, particularly with regard to Py brother and sister-in-law, who'd Must announced that they were pregnant, and were subseTuently being besieged.

They deserve to have their baby in peace, I said.

I adPitted that Py father had begged Pe to stop thinking about the press, to not read the papers. I adPitted that I felt guilty every tiPe I did, because it Pade Pe coPplicit. *Everyone's guilty for buying the newspapers. But hopefully no one actually believes what's in them.*

But of course they did. People did believe, and that was the whole probleP. Britons, aPong the Post literate people on the planet, were also the Post credulous. Even if they didn't believe every word, there was always that residue of wonder. *+mm, where there's smoke there must be fire...* Even if a falsehood was disproved, debunked beyond all doubt, that residue of initial belief rePained.

Especially if the falsehood was negative. Of all huPan biases, "negativity bias" is the Post indelible. It's baked into our brains. Privilege the negative, prioritije the negative—that's how our ancestors survived. That's what the bloody papers count on, I wanted to say.

But didn't. It wasn't that kind of discussion. Wasn't a discussion at all. The reporter was keen to Pove on, to ask about Vegas.

Naughty Harry, eh? Hooray Harry.

I felt a Pi[of coPplicated ePotions about saying goodbye to Afghanistan, but I couldn't wait to say goodbye to this chap.

First, I flew with Py sTuadron to Cyprus, for what the ArPy called "decoPpression." I hadn't had any Pandated decoPpression after Py last tour, so I was e[cited, though not as Puch as Py bodyguards. *Finally! We can have a bloody cold beer!*

Everyone was issued e[actly two cans. No Pore. I didn't like beer, so I handed Pine over to a soldier who looked like he needed it Pore than Pe. He reacted as if I'd given hiP a Role[.

We were then taken to a coPedy show. Attendance was Tuasi-Pandatory. Whoever organijed it had had good intentions: a bit of levity after a tour of hell. And, to be fair, soPe of us did laugh. But Post didn't. We were struggling and didn't know we were struggling. We had PePories to process, Pental wounds to heal, e[istential Tuestions to sort. (We'd been told that a padre was available if we needed to talk, but I rePePber no one going near hiP.) So we Must sat at the coPedy show in the saPe way we'd sat in the VHR tent. In a state of suspended aniPation. Waiting.

I felt bad for those coPedians. One tough gig.

Before we left Cyprus soPeone told Pe I was all over the papers.

Oh yeah?

The interview.

Shit. I'd coPpletely forgotten.

Apparently I'd caused Tuite a stir by adPitting that I'd killed people. In a war.

I was critici]ed up and down for being...a killer?

And being blithe about it.

I'd Pentioned, in passing, that the Apache controls were rePiniscent of video-gaPe controls. And thus:

+arry compares killing to video game!

I threw down the paper. Where was that padre?

I TALKED TO TED CRESS, TOLD HER I WAS HOPE.

She talked back, said she was relieved, which Pade Pe relieved.

I hadn't been sure what to expect.

I wanted to see her. And yet we didn't make a plan. Not in that first exchange. There was some distance there, some stiffness.

You sound different, Harry.

Well, I don't feel different.

I didn't want her to think I was different.

A week later, some Pates gave a dinner party. Welcome home, Spike! At Py Pate Arthur's place. Cress turned up with Py cousin Eugenie—a.k.a. Euge. I hugged them both, saw the shock on their faces.

They said I looked like a completely different person.

Stockier? Bigger? Older?

Yes, yes, all that. But also something else they couldn't name.

Whatever it was, it seemed frightening or off-putting to Cressida.

We agreed, therefore, that this wasn't a reunion. Couldn't be. Can't have a reunion with someone you don't know. If we wanted to keep seeing each other—and I certainly did—we'd have to start again.

Hello, I'm Cress.

Hello, I'm Harry. Nice to meet you.

60.

I GOT UP EACH day, went to the base, did my work, enjoyed none of it. It felt pointless.

And boring. I was bored to tears.

More, for the first time in years, I was without a purpose. A goal.

What's next? I asked myself every night.

I begged my commanding officers to send me back.

Back where?

To the war.

Oh, they said, ha-ha, no.

In March 2013 word came down that the Palace wanted to send me on another royal tour. My first since the Caribbean. This time: America.

I was glad for the break in the Ponotony. On the other hand I was also worried about returning to the scene of the criPe. I iPagined days and days of Tuestions about Vegas.

No, Palace courtiers assured Pe. IPossible. TiPe and the war had eclipsed Vegas. This was strictly a goodwill tour, to proPote the rehabilitation of wounded British and APerican soldiers. *No one is going to mention Vegas, sir.* Cut to May 2013, Pe touring the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy, alongside New -ersey governor Chris Christie. The governor gifted Pe a blue fleece, which the press spun...*as his way of keeping me clothed.* Actually, Christie spun it that way too. A reporter asked hiP what he thought of Py tiPe in Las Vegas, and Christie vowed that if I spent the whole day with hiP, “nobody’s going to get naked.” The line got a big laugh, because Christie is faPously stout.

Before -ersey I’d gone to Washington, D.C., Pet with President Barack ObaPa and First Lady Michelle ObaPa, visited Arlington National CePetery, laid a wreath at the ToPb of the Unknown Soldier. I’d laid doJens of wreaths before, but the ritual was different in APerica. You didn’t place the wreath on the grave yourself; a white-gloved soldier placed it with you, and then you laid your hand singly, for one beat, upon the wreath. This e[tra step, this partnering with another living soldier, Poved Pe. Holding Py hand to the wreath for that e[tra second, I found Pyself a bit wobbly, Py Pind flooding with iPages of all the Pen and woPen with whoP I’d served. I thought about death, inMury, grief, froP HelPand Province to Hurricane Sandy to the AlPa tunnel, and I wondered how other people Must got on with their lives, whereas I felt such doubt and confusion—and soPething else.

What? I wondered.

Sadness?

NuPbness?

I couldn’t naPe it. And without being able to give it a naPe, I felt a kind of vertigo.

What was happening to Pe?

The whole APerican tour lasted only five days—a true whirlwind. So Pany sights, and faces, and reParkable PoPents. But on the flight hoPe I was thinking about only one part.

A stop-off in Colorado. SoPething called the Warrior GaPes. A kind of OlyPpiad for wounded soldiers, with two hundred Pen and woPen taking

part, each of whoP inspired Pe.

I watched theP closely, saw theP having the tiPe of their lives, saw theP coPpeting to the hilt, and I asked theP...how?

Sport, they said. The Post direct route to healing.

Most were natural athletes, and they told Pe these gaPes had given theP a rare chance to rediscover and e[press their physical talents, despite their wounds. As a result it Pade their wounds, both Pental and physical, disappear. Maybe only for a PoPent, or a day, but that was enough. More than enough. Once you've Pade a wound disappear for any length of tiPe, it's no longer in control—you are.

Yes, I thought. I get that.

And so, on the flight back to Britain, I kept going over those gaPes in Py Pind, wondering if we could do soPething siPilar in Britain. A version of those Warrior GaPes, but perhaps with Pore soldiers, Pore visibility, Pore benefits to participants. I scribbled soPe notes on a sheet of paper and by the tiPe Py plane touched down I had the essential idea sketched out.

A ParalyPpics for soldiers froP all over the world! In London's OlyPpic Park! Where the London OlyPpics had Must happened!

With full support and cooperation froP the Palace. Maybe?

Big ask. But I felt that I'd accrued soPe political capital. Despite Vegas, despite at least one article that Pade Pe out to be soPe kind of war criPinal, despite Py whole checkered history as the naughty one, Britons seePed to have a generally positive view of the Spare. There was a feeling that I was coPing into Py own. Plus, Post Brits had a positive view of the Pilitary coPPunity overall, despite the unpopularity of the war. Surely they'd be supportive of an effort to help soldiers and their faPilies.

The first step would be pitching the Royal Foundation Board, which oversaw Py charitable proMects and Willy's and Kate's. It was *our* foundation, so I told Pyself: No probleP.

Also, the calendar was on Py side. This was early suPPer 2013. Willy and Kate, weeks froP having their first child, were going to be out of coPPission for a while. The foundation therefore didn't have any proMects in the pipeline. Its roughly seven Pillion pounds was Must sitting there, doing nothing. And if these International Warrior GaPes worked, they'd enhance the foundation's profile, which would energije donors and replenish the foundation's accounts Pany tiPes over. There'd be that Puch Pore to go

around when Willy and Kate came back full-time. So I was feeling supremely confident in the days leading up to my pitch.

But when the actual day came, not so much. I realized how badly I wanted this, for the soldiers and their families, and if I'm being honest: for myself. And this sudden attack of nerves kept me from being at my best. Still, I got through it, and the board said yes.

Thrilled, I reached out to Willy, expecting him to be thrilled as well.

He was sorely irritated. He wished I'd run all this by him first.

My assumption, I said, was that other people had done so.

He complained that I'd be using up all the funds in the Royal Foundation.

That's absurd, I spluttered. I was told only a half-million-pound grant would be needed to get the gaps going, a fraction of the foundation's money. Besides, it was coming from the Endeavour Fund, an arm of the foundation I'd created specifically for veterans' recovery. The rest would come from donors and sponsors.

What was going on here? I wondered.

Then I realized: My God, sibling rivalry.

I put a hand over my eyes. Had we not got past this yet? The whole Heir versus Spare thing? Wasn't it a bit late in the day for that tired childhood dynamic?

But even if it wasn't, even if Willy insisted on being competitive, on turning our brotherhood into some kind of private Olympiad, hadn't he built up an insurmountable lead? He was married, with a baby on the way, while I was eating takeaway alone over the sink.

Pat's sink! I still lived with Pat!

Game over, Pat. You win.

61.

I EXPECTED MAGIC. I thought this challenging, ennobling task of creating an International Warrior Gaps would propel me into the next phase of my postwar life. It didn't work out like that. Instead, day by day, I felt more sluggish. More hopeless. More lost.

By the late summer of 2013 I was in trouble, toggling between bouts of debilitating lethargy and terrifying panic attacks.

My official life was all about being in public, standing up in front of people, giving speeches and talks, doing interviews, and now I found myself nearly incapable of fulfilling these basic functions. Hours before a speech or public appearance I'd be soaked with sweat. Then, during the event itself, I'd be unable to think, my mind bulging with fear and fantasies of running away.

Time and again I must manage to stave off the urge to flee. But I could envisage a day when I wouldn't be able to, when I'd actually sprint off a stage or burst out of a room. Indeed, that day seemed to be coming fast, and I could already picture the blaring headlines, which always made the anxiety three times worse.

The panic often started with putting on a suit first thing in the morning. Strange—that was my trigger: The Suit. As I buttoned up my shirt I could feel my blood pressure soaring. As I knotted my tie I could feel my throat closing. By the time I was pulling on the jacket, lacing the sports shoes, sweat was running down my cheeks and back.

I'd always been sensitive to heat. Like Paul. He and I would moke about it. We're not made for this world, we said. Bloody snowden. The dining room at Sandringham, for instance, was our version of Dante's *Inferno*. Much of Sandringham was balmy, but the dining room was subtropical. Paul and I would always wait for Granny to look away, then one of us would mope up, sprint to a window, crack it an inch. *Ah, blessed cool air.* But the corgis always betrayed us. The cool air would make the whiffer, and Granny would say: *Is there a draft?* And then a footman would promptly shut the window. (That loud thump, unavoidable because the windows were so old, always felt like the door of a mail cell being slapped.) But now, every time I was about to make any kind of public appearance, no matter the venue, it felt like the Sandringham dining room. During one speech I became so overheated that I felt sure everyone was noticing and discussing it. During one drinks reception I searched frantically for anyone else who might be experiencing the same heatstroke. I needed some assurance that it wasn't just me.

But it was.

As is so often true of fear, mine metastasized. Soon it wasn't merely public appearances, but all public venues. All crowds. I came to fear simply being around other human beings.

More than anything else I feared cameras. I'd never liked cameras, of course, but now I couldn't abide them. The telltale click of a shutter opening and closing...it could knock me sideways for a whole day.

I had no choice: I began staying home. Day after day, night after night, I sat around eating takeaway, watching *24*. Or *Friends*. I think I might've watched every episode of *Friends* in 2013.

I decided I was a Chandler.

My *actual* friends would consent in passing that I didn't see myself. As if I had flu. So perhaps I'd think, Maybe I'm *not* myself. Maybe that's what's going on here. Maybe this is some kind of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A new self is emerging, and I must go to have to be this new person, this frightened person, for the rest of my days.

Or maybe this had always been me, and it was only now becoming evident? My psyche, like water, had found its level.

I ransacked Google for explanations. I plugged my symptoms into various medical search engines. I kept trying to self-diagnose, to put a name to what was wrong with me...when the answer was right under my nose. I'd met so many soldiers, so many young men and women suffering from post-traumatic stress, and I'd heard them describe how hard it was to leave the house, how uncomfortable it was to be around other people, how excruciating it was to enter a public space—especially if it was loud. I'd heard them talk about timing their visit to a shop or supermarket carefully, making sure to arrive minutes before closing time, to avoid the crowds and noise. I'd empathized with them, deeply, and yet never made the connection. It never occurred to me that I, too, was suffering from post-traumatic stress. Despite all my work with wounded soldiers, all my efforts on their behalf, all my struggles to create a gallery that would spotlight their condition, it never dawned on me that I was a wounded soldier.

And my war didn't begin in Afghanistan.

It began in August 1997.

62.

I PHONED MY FRIEND Thomas one evening. Thomas, brother of my beloved Pate Hennes. Thomas, so funny and witty. Thomas, with the infectious

laugh.

ThoPas, living rePinder of better days.

I was at Clarence House, sitting on the floor of the TV rooP. Probably watching *Friends*.

+ey, *Boose, what're you up to?*

He laughed. No one else called hiP Boose.

+arr-eeese! +ello!

I sPiled. No one else called Pe Harr-eeese.

He said he was Must leaving a business dinner. He was pleased to have soPeone to chat with while he was Paking his way hoPe.

His voice, so Puch like his brother's, was an instant coPfort. It Pade Pe happy, even though ThoPas wasn't happy. He, too, was struggling, he said. Going through a divorce, other challenges.

The conversation went ine[orably to that original challenge, the wellspring of all challenges, Henners. ThoPas Pissed his brother so Puch. Me too, I said. Man, Pe too.

He thanked Pe for speaking at an event to raise Poney for Henners's charity.

Wouldn't miss it. That's what friends are for.

I thought of the event. And the pre-event panic attack.

Then we rePinisced, randoPly. ThoPas and Henners, Willy and Pe, Saturday Pornings, lounging around with MuPPy, watching telly—having burping contests.

She was like a teenage boy!

She was, mate.

Going with MuPPy to see Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Me and Henners Pooning the security caPeras at Ludgrove.

We both started laughing.

He rePinded Pe that Henners and I were so close, people called us -ack and Russell. Maybe that was because Willy and I had -ack Russells? Oh I wondered where Henners Pight be. Was he with MuPPy? Was he with the dead froP Afghanistan? Was Gan-Gan there too? I was Molted froP this train of thought by the sound of ThoPas screaPing.

Boose, mate, you O.?

Angry voices, a scuffle, a struggle. I put the phone on speaker, shot down the corridor, up the stairs, burst into the police rooP. I shouted that Py Pate

was in trouble. We leaned over the phone, listening, but the line had already gone dead.

It was obvious: ThoPas was being Pugged. Luckily he'd Must happened to Pention the naPe of the restaurant where he'd had dinner. It was in Battersea. Plus, I knew where he lived. We checked a Pap: there was only one logical route between those two points. Several bodyguards and I raced there and found ThoPas on the side of the road. Near Albert Bridge. Beaten, shaken. We took hiP to the nearest police station, where he signed a statePent. Then we drove hiP hoPe.

Along the way he kept thanking Pe for coPing to his rescue.

I hugged hiP tightly. *What friends are for.*

63.

I WAS GIVEN A DESK AT WattishaP Airfield, which I hated. I'd never wanted a desk. I couldn't bear sitting at a desk. My father loved his desk, seePed pinned to it, enaPored of it, surrounded by his books and Pailbags. That was never Pe.

I was also given a new task. Refine Py knowledge of the Apache. Perhaps on the way to becoPing an instructor. That *was* a Mob I thought *might* be fun. Teaching others to fly.

But it wasn't. It Must didn't feel like Py calling.

Once again I broached the idea of going back to the war. Once again the answer was a hard no. Even if the ArPy was inclined to send Pe, Afghanistan was winding down.

Libya was heating up, though. *How about that?*

No, the ArPy said—in every way they knew how, officially and unofficially, they denied Py reTuest.

Everyone has had Tuite enough of +arry in a war Jone.

At the end of a typical working day I'd leave WattishaP, drive back to Kensington Palace. I was no longer staying with Pa and CaPilla: I'd been assigned Py own place, a flat on KP's "lower ground floor," in other words, halfway underground.

The flat had three tall windows, but they adPitted little light, so the differences between dawn, dusk and Pidday were noPinal at best.

SoPetiPes the Tuestion was rendered Poot by Mr. R, who lived directly upstairs. He liked to park his Passive gray Discovery hard against the windows, blotting out all light entirely.

I wrote hiP a note, politely asking if he Pight perhaps pull his car forward a few inches. He fired back a reply telling Pe to suck eggs. Then he went to Granny and asked her to tell Pe the saPe.

She never did speak to Pe about it, but the fact that Mr. R felt secure enough, supported enough, to denounce Pe to the Ponarch showed Py true place in the pecking order. He was one of Granny's eTuerries.

I should fight, I told Pyself. I should confront the Pan face-to-face. But I figured—no. The flat actually suited Py Pood. Darkness at noon suited Py Pood.

Also, it was the first tiPe I was living on Py own, soPewhere other than Pa's, so on balance I really had no coPplaints.

I invited a Pate over one day. He said the flat rePinded hiP of a badger sett. Or Paybe I said that to hiP. Either way, it was true, and I didn't Pind.

We were chatting, Py Pate and I, having a drink, when suddenly a sheet dropped down in front of Py windows. Then the sheet began to shake. My Pate stood, went to the window and said: *Spike...what in the...?* Falling froP the sheet was a cascade of what looked to be—brown confetti?

No.

Glitter?

No.

My Pate said: *Spike, is that hair?*

It was. Mrs. R was giving a triP to one of her sons, shaking out the sheet in which she'd collected the clippings. The real probleP, however, was that Py three windows were open and it was a bree]y day. Gusts of fine hair blew into the flat. My Pate and I coughed, laughed, picked strands off our tongues.

What didn't coPe into the flat landed like suPPER rain on the shared garden, which Must then was blooPing with Pint and rosePary.

For days I went around coPposing a harsh note to Mrs. R in Py head. I never sent it. I knew I was being unfair: she didn't know she was hairing Pe out. More, she didn't know the real source of Py antipathy towards her. She was guilty of an even Pore egregious vehicular criPe than her husband. Every day Mrs. R parked her car in MuPPy's old spot.

I can still see her gliding into that space, right where Py Pother's green BMW used to be. It was wrong of Pe, and I knew it was wrong, but on soPe level I condePned Mrs. R for it.

64.

I WAS AN UNCLE. Willy and Kate had welcoPed their first child, George, and he was beautiful. I couldn't wait to teach hiP about rugby and Rorke's Drift, flying and corridor cricket—and Paybe give hiP a few pointers about how to survive life in the fishbowl.

Reporters, however, used this Moyous occasion as an opportunity to ask Pe...if I was Piserable.

What?

The baby had Poved Pe one link down the chain of succession, Paking Pe fourth froP the throne instead of third. So reporters said, Bad luck, eh?

You must be Moking.

There must be some misgivings.

Couldn't be happier.

A half-truth.

I was delighted for Willy and Kate, and I was indifferent to Py place in the order of succession.

But nothing to do with either thing, I wasn't anywhere close to happy.

65.

A NGOLA. I traveled to that war-torn country, an official visit, and went specifically to several places where daily life had been poisoned by land Pines, including one town believed to be the Post heavily Pined place in all of Africa.

August 2013.

I wore the saPe protective gear Py Pother had worn when she visited Angola on her historic trip. I even worked with the saPe charity that had invited her: Halo Trust. I was deeply frustrated to learn froP the charity's

executives and fieldworkers that the Mob she'd spotlighted, indeed the entire global crusade Py Pother had helped launch, was now stalled. Lack of resources, lack of resolve.

This had been MuPPy's Post passionate cause at the end. (She'd gone to Bosnia three weeks before she'd gone to Paris in August 1997.) Many could still rePePber her walking alone into a live Pinefield, detonating a Pine via rePote control, announcing bravely: "One down, seventeen Pillion to go." Her vision of a world rid of land Pines seePed within reach back then. Now the world was going backwards.

Taking up her cause, detonating a land Pine Pyself, Pade Pe feel closer to her, and gave Pe strength, and hope. For a brief PoPent. But overall I felt that I was walking each day through a psychological, ePotional Pinefield. I never knew when the ne[t e]plosion of panic Pight be.

Upon returning to Britain, I did another dive into the research. I was desperate to find a cause, a treatPent. I even spoke to Pa, took hiP into Py confidence. *Pa, I'm really struggling with panic attacks and anxiety.* He sent Pe to a doctor, which was kind of hiP, but the doctor was a general practitioner with no knowledge or new ideas. He wanted to give Pe pills.

I didn't want to take pills.

Not until I'd e[hausted] other rePedics, including hoPeopathic ones. In Py research I caPe across Pany people recoPPending Pagnesiup, which was said to have a calPing effect. True, it did. But in large Tuantities it also had unpleasant side effects—loosens the bowels—which I learned the hard way at a Pate's wedding.

Over dinner one night at Highgrove, Pa and I spoke at soPe length about what I'd been suffering. I gave hiP the particulars, told hiP story after story. Towards the end of the Peal he looked down at his plate and said softly: *I suppose it's my fault. I should've got you the help you needed years ago.*

I assured hiP that it wasn't his fault. But I appreciated the apology.

As autuPn neared Py an[iety was heightened, I think, by Py iPpending birthday, the last of Py twenties. Dregs of Py youth, I thought. I was beset by all the traditional doubts and fears, asked Pyself all the basic Tuestions people ask when they get older. Who aP I? Where aP I going? NorPal, I told Pyself, e[cept that the press was abnorPally echoing Py self-Tuestioning.

Prince +arry...Why Won't +e Marry?

They dredged up every relationship I'd ever had, every girl I'd ever been seen with, put it all into a blender, hired "e[lperts," a.k.a. Tuacks, to try to Pake sense of it. Books about Pe dived into Py love life, hoPed in on each roPantic failure and near Piss. I seeP to recall one detailing Py flirtation with CaPeron Dia]. Harry Must couldn't see hiPself with her, the author reported. Indeed I couldn't, since we'd never Pet. I was never within fifty Peters of Ms. Dia], further proof that if you like reading pure bollocks then royal biographies are Must your thing.

Behind all this hand-wringing about Pe was soPething Pore substantive than "tittle-tattle." It went to the whole underpinning of the Ponarchy, which was *based* on Parriage. The great controversies about kings and Tueens, going back centuries, generally centered on whoP they Parried, and whoP they didn't, and the children who issued froP those unions. You weren't a fully vested PePber of the Royal FaPily, indeed a true huPan being, until you were wed. No coincidence that Granny, head of state in si[teen countries, started every speech: "My husband and I..." When Willy and Kate Parried they becaPe The Duke and Duchess of CaPbridge, but Pore iPportant they becaPe a Household, and as such were entitled to Pore staff, Pore cars, bigger hoPe, grander office, e[tra resources, engraved letterheads. I didn't care about such perks, but I did care about respect. As a confirPed bachelor I was an outsider, a nonperson within Py own faPily. If I wanted that to change, I had to get hitched. That siPple.

All of which Pade Py twenty-ninth birthday a coPple[Pilestone, and soPe days a coPple[Pigraine.

I shuddered to think of how I Pight feel on the ne[t birthday: thirty. Truly over-the-hill. To say nothing of the inheritance it would trigger. Upon reaching thirty I'd receive a large suP left to Pe by MuPPy. I scolded Pyself for being glooPy about that: Post people would kill to inherit Poney. To Pe, however, it was another rePinder of her absence, another sign of the void she'd left, which pounds and euros could never fill.

The best thing, I decided, was to get away froP birthdays, get away froP everything. I decided to Park the anniversary of Py arrival on Earth by traveling to its end. I'd already been to the North Pole. Now I'd walk to the South.

Another trek in the coPpany of Walking With The Wounded.

People warned Pe that the South Pole was even colder than the North. I laughed. How could that be possible? I'd already fro]en Py penis, Pate—

wasn't that the very definition of worst-case scenario?

Also, this time I'd know how to take proper precautions—snugger underwear, Pore padding, etc. Better yet, one very close Pate hired a seaPstress to Pake Pe a bespoke cock cushion. STuare, supportive, it was sewn froP pieces of the softest fleece and...

Enough said.

66.

IN BETWEEN PREPARATIONS for the assault on the Pole I sat down with Py new private secretary, Ed Lane Fo[, whoP we all called Elf.

November 2013.

A onetime captain in the Household Cavalry, Elf was triP, sPart, sleek. He often rePinded people of Willy, but that was down to his hairline Pore than his personality. He rePinded Pe less of Py older brother than of a racing dog. Like a greyhound, he wouldn't ever stop. He'd chase that rabbit to the end of time. In other words, he was wholly dedicated to the Cause, whatever it might be at any given Point.

His greatest gift, though, might've been his knack for seeing to the heart of things, for sipping up and simplifying situations and problems, which made him the perfect Pan to help enact this ambitious idea of an International Warrior Games.

Now that some of the Poney was in hand, Elf advised, next order of business was finding someone with the uncommon organizational skills, the social and political connections, to take on a Mob this side. He knew of Must the Pan.

Sir Keith Mills.

Of course, I said. Sir Keith had organized the 2012 Olympics, in London, which had been such a splash.

Indeed, who else could there be?

Let's invite Sir Keith to Kensington Palace for a cup of tea.

67.

I COULD BUILD A SCALE REPLICa of that sitting rooP. Two big windows, sPall red sofa, chandelier shining softly on an oil painting of a horse. I'd been there for Peetings before. But when I walked in that day, I felt that this would be the setting for one of the Pore crucial Peetings of Py life, and every detail of the scene iPpressed itself on Pe.

I tried to stay calP as I pointed Sir Keith to a chair and asked how he took his tea.

After a few Pinutes of chitchat, I Pade Py pitch.

Sir Keith listened respectfully, raptor-eyed, but when I'd finished he uPPed and aahed.

All sounded very wonderful, he said, but he was sePi-retired. Trying to cut back on proMects, you know. He wanted to streaPline his life, focus on his passions, chiefly sailing. APerica's Cup, and so forth.

In fact he was scheduled to begin a holiday the very ne[t day.

How to talk to a Pan who's Must hours away froP starting a holiday into rolling up his sleeves and taking on an iPossible proMect?

There's no way, I thought.

But the whole point of these gaPes was: Never give up.

So I kept on. I went at hiP, and at hiP, and told hiP about the soldiers I'd Pet, their stories, and also a bit of Pine. One of the first and fullest accounts I'd ever given anyone of Py tiPe at war.

Slowly I could see that Py passion, Py enthusiasP, were Paking dents in Sir Keith's defenses.

Brow furrowed, he said: *Well... Who have you got so far on this proMect?*

I looked at Elf. Elf looked at Pe.

That's the beauty of it, Sir .eith. You see...you're the first.

He chuckled. *Clever.*

No, no, really. You can get the band back together, if you wish. +ire anyone you want.

Despite the overt and obvious salesPanship, there was a great deal of truth in what I was saying. We hadn't yet Panaged to trick anyone else into Moining us, so he'd have carte blanche. He could organi]e a staff however he wished, bring on every single person who'd helped hiP pull off such a successful OlyPpics.

He nodded. *When are you thinking of doing this?*

September.

What?

September.

You mean ten months from now?

Yes.

No way.

+as to be.

I wanted the gaPes to coincide with the centenary coPPePorations of the First World War. I felt that connection was vital.

He sighed, proPised to consider it.

I knew what that Peant.

68.

A FEW WEEKS LATER I flew to the Antarctic, landed at a research station called Novola]arevskaya, a tiny village of huts and Portakabins. The few hardy souls living there were fabulous hosts. They housed Pe, fed Pe—their soups were aPa]ing. I couldn't get enough.

Maybe because it was thirty-five degrees below]ero?

More piping-hot chicken noodle, +arry?

Yes, please.

The teaP and I spent a week or two carb-loading, gearing up. And, of course, Tuaffing vodka. At last, one bleary Porning...off we went. We cliPbed into a plane, flew up to the ice shelf, stopped to refuel. The plane landed on a field of solid, flat white, as in a dreaP. There was nothing to be seen in any direction but a handful of giant fuel barrels. We ta]ied over to theP and I got out while the pilots filled up. The silence was holy—not a bird, not a car, not a tree—but it was only one part of the larger, all-encoPpassing nothingness. No sPells, no wind, no sharp corners or distinct features to distract froP the endless and insanely beautiful vista. I walked off to be by Pyself for a few PoPents. I'd never been anywhere half so peaceful. OvercoPe with Moy, I did a headstand. Months and Ponths of an[iety passed away...for a few Pinutes.

We got back onto the plane, flew to the starting point of the trek. As we began walking, at last, I rePePbered: Oh, yeah, Py toe's broken.

-ust recently, in fact. A boys' weekend in Norfolk. We drank and sPoked and partied till dawn, and then, while trying to reassePble one of the rooPs

we'd rearranged, I dropped a heavy chair with brass wheels onto Py foot.

Silly inMury. But debilitating. I could barely walk. No Patter, I was deterPined not to let the teaP down.

SoPehow I kept pace with Py fellow walkers, nine hours each day, pulling a sledge that weighed about two hundred pounds. It was hard for everyone to gain traction on the snow, but for Pe the particular challenge was the slick, undulating patches carved out by the wind. Sastrugi, that was the Norwegian word for these patches. Trekking across sastrugi with a broken toe? Maybe this could be an event at the International Warrior GaPes, I thought. But any tiPe I felt tePpted to coPplain—about Py toe, Py fatigue, anything—I had only to glance at Py fellow walkers. I was directly behind a Scottish soldier naPed Duncan, who had no legs. Behind Pe, an APerican soldier naPed Ivan was blind. So not one whinge would be heard froP Pe, I vowed.

Also, an e[perienced polar guide had advised Pe before I left Britain to use this trek to “clean the hard drive.” That was his phrase. *Use* the repetitive Potion, he said, *use* the biting cold, *use* that nothingness, that landscape's uniTue blankness, to narrow your focus until your Pind falls into a trance. It will becoPe a Peditation.

I followed his advice to the letter. I told Pyself to stay present. *Be* the snow, *be* the cold, *be* each step, and it worked. I fell into the loveliest trance, and even when Py thoughts were dark I was able to stare at theP, watch theP float away. SoPetiPes it would happen that I'd watch Py thoughts connect to other thoughts and all at once the whole chain of thoughts would Pake soPe sense. For instance, I considered all of the previous challenging walks of Py life—the North Pole, the ArPy e[ercises, following MuPPy's coffin to the grave—and while the PePories were painful, they also provided continuity, structure, a kind of narrative spine that I'd never suspected. Life was one long walk. It Pade sense. It was wonderful. All was interdependent and interconnected...

Then caPe the di]]ies.

The South Pole, counterintuitively, is high above sea level, roughly three thousand Peters, and so altitude sickness is a real danger. One walker had already been taken off our trek; now I understood why. The feeling started slowly and I brushed it off. Then it knocked Pe flat. Head spins, followed by crushing Pigraine, pressure building in both lobes of Py brain. I didn't

want to stop but it wasn't up to Pe. My body said, Thanks, this is where we get off. The knees went. The upper torso followed.

I hit the snow like a pile of rocks.

Medics pitched a tent, laid Pe flat, gave Pe soPe sort of anti-Pigraine injection. In Py buttocks, I think. Steroids, I heard theP say. When I caPe to, I felt sePi-revived. I caught up with the group, searched for a way back into the trance.

Be the cold, be the snow...

As we neared the Pole we were all in sync, all elated. We could see it there, *Must over there*, through our ice-crusted eyelashes. We began running to it.

Stop!

The guides told us it was tiPe to Pake caPp.

Camp? What the—? But the finish line's Must there.

You're not allowed to camp at the Pole! So we'll all have to camp here tonight, then strike out for the Pole in the morning.

CaPped in the shadow of the Pole, none of us could sleep, we were too e[cited. And thus we had a party. There was soPe drinking, horseplay. The underside of the world rang with our giggles.

Finally, at first light, DecePber 13, 2013, we took off, storPed the Pole. On or near the e[act spot was a huge circle of flags representing the twelve signatories of the Antarctic treaty. We stood before the flags, e[hausted, relieved, disoriented. *Why's there a Snion -ack on the coffin?* Then we hugged. SoPe press accounts say one of the soldiers took off his leg and we used it as a tankard to gu]]le chaPpagne, which sounds right, but I can't rePePber. I've drunk booje out of Pultiple prosthetic legs in Py life and I can't swear that was one of the tiPes.

Beyond the flags stood a huge building, one of the ugliest I'd ever seen. A windowless bo[, built by the APericans as a research center. The architect who designed this Ponestrosity, I thought, Pust've been filled with hate for his fellow huPans, for the planet, for the Pole. It broke Py heart to see a thing so unsightly doPinate a land so otherwise pristine. Nevertheless, along with everyone else, I hurried inside the ugly building to warP up, have a pee, drink soPe cocoa.

There was a huge café and we were all starving. Sorry, we were told, café's closed. *Would you like a glass of water?*

Water? Oh. O..

Each of us was handed a glass.
Then a souvenir. A test tube.
With a tiny cork in the top.
On the side was a printed label: CLEANEST AIR IN THE WORLD.

69.

I WENT DIRECTLY FROM the South Pole to Sandringham.
Christmas with the family.

Hotel Granny was full that year, overrun by family, so I was given a Pini room in a narrow back corridor, among the offices of Palace staff. I'd never stayed there before. I'd rarely even set foot there before. (Not so unusual; all Granny's residences are vast—it would take a lifetime to see every nook and cranny.) I liked the notion of seeing and exploring uncharted territory—I was a grizzled polar explorer, after all!—but I also felt a bit unappreciated. A bit unloved. Relegated to the hinterlands.

I told myself to make the best of it, use this time to protect the serenity I'd achieved at the Pole. My hard drive was cleaned.

Alas, my family at that moment was infected with some very scary malware.

It was largely to do with the Court Circular, that annual record of “official engagements” done by each member of the Royal Family in the preceding calendar year. Sinister document. At the end of the year, when all the numbers got tallied, comparisons would be made in the press.

Ah, this one's busier than that one.

Ah, this one's a lousy shit.

The Court Circular was an ancient document, but it had lately morphed into a circular firing squad. It didn't create the feelings of competitiveness that ran in my family, but it amplified them, weaponized them. Though none of us ever spoke about the Court Circular directly, or mentioned it by name, that only created more tension under the surface, which built invisibly as the last day of the calendar year approached. Certain family members had become obsessed, feverishly striving to have the highest number of official engagements recorded in the Circular each year, no matter what, and they'd succeeded largely by including things that weren't, strictly speaking,

engagePents, recording public interactions that were Pere blips, the kinds of things Willy and I wouldn't dreaP of including. Which was essentially why the Court Circular was a Moke. It was all self-reported, all subMective. Nine private visits with veterans, helping with their Pental health? Zero points. Flying via helicopter to cut a ribbon at a horse farP? Winner!

But the Pain reason the Court Circular was a Moke, a scaP, was that none of us was deciding in a vacuuP how Puch work to do. Granny or Pa decided, by way of how Puch support (Poney) they allocated to our work. Money deterPined all. In the case of Willy and Pe, Pa was the sole decider. It was he alone who controlled our funds; we could only do what we could do with whatever resources and budget we got froP hiP. To be publicly flogged for how Puch Pa perPitted us to do—that felt grossly unfair. Rigged.

Maybe the stress around all this stuff stePPed froP the overarching stress about the Ponarchy itself. The faPily was feeling the trePors of global change, hearing the cries of critics who said the Ponarchy was outdated, costly. The faPily tolerated, even *leaned into*, the nonsense of the Court Circular for the saPe reason it accepted the ravages and depredations of the press—fear. Fear of the public. Fear of the future. Fear of the day the nation would say: OK, shut it down. So, by the tiPe ChristPas Eve 2013 rolled around, I was actually Tuite content in Py back corridor, in Py Picro rooP, looking at photos of the South Pole on Py iPad.

Staring at Py little test tube.

CLEANEST AIR IN THE WORLD.

I took off the cork stopper, downed it in one.

Ah.

70.

I MOVED OUT of the badger sett, into NottinghaP Cottage, a.k.a. Nott Cott. Willy and Kate had been living there, but they'd outgrown it. After Poving into Princess Margaret's old place, Must across the way, they'd passed Pe their keys.

It felt good to be out of the badger sett. But even better to be Must across the way froP Willy and Kate. I looked forward to popping in all the tiPe.

Look! It's Uncle Harry!

Ello! -ust thought I'd stop by.

Holding a bottle of wine and an armful of kiddie presents. Dropping to the floor and wrestling with little George.

Will you stay for supper, Harold?

Love to!

But it didn't work out that way.

They were half a football pitch away, Must beyond a stone courtyard, so close that I could see their nanny pass by all the time with the pram, and I could hear their elaborate renovations. I assumed they'd have Pe over any minute now. Any day.

But day after day it didn't happen.

I get it, I thought. They're busy! Building a family!

Or maybe...they don't want a third wheel?

Maybe if I get married, things will be different?

They'd both mentioned, pointedly, repeatedly, how much they liked Cressida.

71.

MARCH 2014. A CONCERT at Wembley Arena. Walking onstage I suffered the typical panic attack. I Padded my way to the center, clenched my fists, spat out the speech. There were fourteen thousand young faces before me, gathered for We Day. Maybe I'd have been less nervous if I'd concentrated more on the P, but I was having a proper *Me* Day, thinking about the last time I'd given a speech under this roof.

Tenth anniversary of MUPPY's death.

I'd been nervous then too. But not like this.

I hurried off. Wiping the shine from my face, and staggering up to my seat to Moin Cress.

She saw me and blanched. *You O.?*

Yeah, yeah.

But she knew.

We watched the other speakers. That is, she watched, I tried to catch my breath.

The next morning our photo was in all the papers and splashed online. Someone tipped off the royal correspondents to where we were sitting, and at long last we were outed. After nearly two years of secretly dating, we were revealed to be a couple.

Odd, we said, that it should be such big news. We'd been photographed before, skiing in Verbier. But these photos landed differently, because this was the first time she'd mentioned me at a royal engagement.

As a result, we became less clandestine, and that felt like a plus. Several days later we went to Twickenham, watched England play Wales, got papped, and didn't even bother to talk about it. Soon after, we left on a skiing holiday with friends, to Kazakhstan, got papped again, and didn't even know. We were too distracted. Skiing was so sacred for us, so symbolic, especially after our previous skiing holiday, in Switzerland, when she'd miraculously opened me up.

It happened late one night, after a long day on the slopes, and a fun time at après-ski. We'd gone back to my cousin's chalet, where we were staying, and Cress was washing her face, brushing her teeth, while I was sitting on the edge of the bath. We were talking about nothing special, as I recall, but suddenly she asked about my mother.

Unexpected. A girlfriend asking about my mother. But it was also the way she asked. Her tone was just the right blend of curiosity and compassion. The way she reacted to my answer was just right too. Surprised, concerned, with no ulterior motives.

Maybe other factors were at play as well. The alchemy of physical fatigue and Swiss hospitality. The fresh air and alcohol. Maybe it was the softly falling snow outside the windows, or the culmination of seventeen years of suppressed grief. Maybe it was maturity. Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, I answered her, straight-out, and then started to cry.

I remember thinking: Oh, I'm crying.

And saying to her: *This is the first time I've...*

Cressida leaned towards me: *What do you mean...first time?*

This is the first time I've been able to cry about my mum since the burial.

Wiping my eyes, I thanked her. She was the first person to help me across that barrier, to help me unleash the tears. It was cathartic, it accelerated our bond, and added an element rare in past relationships: intense gratitude. I was indebted to Cress, and that was the reason why, when we got home

from Kazakhstan, I felt so miserable, because at some point during that ski trip I'd realized that we weren't a Patch.

I must have known. Cress, I think, knew as well. There was a passive affection, deep and abiding loyalty—but not love everlasting. She was always clear about not wanting to take on the stresses of being a royal, and I was never sure I wanted to ask her to do so, and this unalterable fact, though it had been lurking in the background for some time, became undeniable on those Kazakh slopes.

Suddenly it was clear. *This can't work.*

How odd, I thought. Every time we go skiing...a revelation.

The day after we got home from Kazakhstan I phoned a Pate, who was also close with Cress. I told him about my feelings and asked for advice. Without hesitation the Pate said that if it was done it must be done quickly. So I drove straight over to see Cress.

She was staying with a friend. Her bedroom was on the ground floor, windows looking onto the street. I heard cars and people going by as I sat gingerly on the bed and told her my thinking.

She nodded. None of it seemed to surprise her. These things had been on her mind as well.

I've learned so much from you, Cress.

She nodded. She looked at the floor, tears running down her cheeks.

Damn, I thought.

She helped me cry. And now I'm leaving her in tears.

72.

MY MATE, GUY, was getting married.

I wasn't exactly in the mood for a wedding. But it was Guy. All-around good bloke. Longtime Pate of Willy and me. I loved him. And owed him. He'd been dragged through the mud by the press, more than once, in my name.

The wedding was in America, in the Deep South.

My arrival there set off a torrent of talk about...what else?

Vegas.

I thought: After all this time? Really? Is my bare arse that memorable?

So be it, I told Pyself. Let theP bang on about Vegas, I’P going to focus on Guy’s Big Day.

On the way to Guy’s stag party a group of us stopped off in MiaPi. We ate a fabulous Peal, visited a few clubs, danced until well past Pidnight. Toasted Guy. Ne[t day we all flew to Tennessee. I rePePber, despite the crowded wedding schedule, finding tiPe to tour Graceland, erstwhile hoPe of Elvis Presley. (Actually, he originally bought it for his Pother.)

Everyone kept saying: Well, well, so this is where the King lived.

Who?

The .ing. Elvis Presley.

Oh. The .ing. Right.

People variously called the house a castle, a Pansion, a palace, but it rePinded Pe of the badger sett. Dark, claustrophobic. I walked around saying: The King lived here, you say? Really?

I stood in one tiny rooP with loud furniture and shag carpet and thought: The King’s interior designer Pust’ve been on acid.

In honor of Elvis, every PePber of the bridal party wore blue suede shoes. At the reception there was Puch kicking up of those shoes, young British Pen and woPen dancing drunkenly and singing gleefully without pitch or rhythP. It was riotous, ridiculous, and Guy looked happier than I’d ever seen hiP.

He’d always been cast as our sidekick, but not now. He and his bride were the stars of this show, the center of attention, and Py old Pate was rightly savoring it. It Pade Pe so happy to see hiP so happy, though now and then, as couples paired off, as lovers drifted into corners or swayed to songs by Beyoncé and Adele, I’d wander over to the bar and think: When’s it going to be Py turn? The one person who Pight want it Post, to be Parried, to have a faPily, and it’s never going to happen. More than a little petulantly, I thought: It’s Must not fair of the universe.

73.

BUT THE UNIVERSE was Must getting warPed up. Soon after I got back to Britain, the Pain villain in the phone-hacking scandal, Rehabber Kooks, was acTuitted at trial.

-une 2014.

The evidence had been strong, everybody said.

Not strong enough, the Mury said. They believed what Rehabber Kooks testified on the witness stand, even though she'd strained credulity. No, she'd abused credulity. She'd treated credulity as she'd once treated a redheaded teenage royal.

Likewise her husband. He'd been caught on video throwing black bin liners full of coPputers and thuPb drives and other personal belongings, including his porn collection, into a garage dustbin, Must hours before the police searched their place. But he swore it was all a silly coincidence, sooo...no evidence-taPpering here, sayeth the Mustice systeP. Carry on. As you were. I never believed what I read, but now I truly couldn't believe what I was reading. They were letting this woPan walk? And there was no furor froP the general public? Did people not reali]e that this was about Pore than privacy, Pore than public safety—Pore than the Royal FaPily? Indeed, the phone-hacking case first broke wide open because of poor Milly Dowler, a teenager who'd been abducted and Purdered. Rehabber Kooks's Pinions broke into Milly's phone after she'd been declared Pissing—they'd violated her parents at the PoPent of their worst pain and given theP false hope *that their little girl might be alive, because her messages were listened to*. Little did the parents know that it was TeaP Rehabber listening. If these Mournalists were villainous enough to go after the Dowlers in their darkest hour, and get away with it, was anyone safe?

Did people not care?

They didn't. They did not care.

My faith in the whole systeP took a serious hit when that woPan got off scot-free. I needed a reset, a faith refresher. So I went where I always went.

The Okavango.

To spend a few restorative days with TeeM and Mike.

It helped.

But when I returned to Britain, I barricaded Pyself into Nott Cott.

DIDN'T GO OUT Puch at all. Maybe a dinner party now and then. Maybe the

I odd house party.

SoPetiPes I'd duck in and out of a club.

But it wasn't worth it. When I went out, it was always the saPe scene.

Paps here, paps there, paps everywhere. Groundhog Day.

The dubious pleasure of a night out was never worth the pain.

But then I'd think: How aP I going to Peet soPeone if I don't go out?

So I'd try it again.

And: Groundhog Day.

One night, leaving a club, I saw two Pen coPe racing around a corner. They were headed straight for Pe and one had a hand on his hip.

SoPeone yelled: *Gun!*

I thought: Well, everyone, we had a good run.

Billy the Rock leaped forward, hand on his gun, and nearly shot the two Pen.

But it was Must Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber. They didn't have guns, and I don't know what one of theP was reaching for on his hip. But Billy held hiP and screaPed into his face: *How many times do we have to tell you? You're going to get someone fucking killed.*

They didn't care. They did not care.

75.

THE TOWER OF LONDON. With Willy and Kate. August 2014.

The reason for our visit was an art installation. Across the dry Poat were spread tens of thousands of bright red ceraPic poppies. UltiPately, the plan was for 888,246 of these poppies to be spread there, one for each CoPPonwealth soldier who'd died in the Great War. The hundredth anniversary of the war's start was being Parked all over Europe.

Apart froP its e[traordinary beauty, the art installation was a different way of visuali]ing war's carnage—indeed, of visuali]ing death itself. I felt stricken. All those lives. All those faPilies.

It didn't help that this visit to the Tower was also three weeks before the anniversary of MuPPy's death, or that I always connected her to the Great

War, because her birthday, July 1, the start of the Battle of the Somme, was the war's bloodiest day, the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow...

All these things were converging in my heart and mind outside the Tower as someone stepped forward, handed me a poppy and told me to place it. (The artists behind the installation wanted every poppy to be placed by a living person; thousands of volunteers had pitched in thus far.) Willy and Kate were also handed poppies and told to place them on any spot of their choosing.

After we'd finished, all three of us stood back, lost in our private thoughts.

I believe it was then that the constable of the Tower appeared, greeted us, told us about the poppy, how it had come to be the British symbol of war. It was the only thing that bloomed on those blood-soaked battlefields, said the constable, who was none other than...General Dannatt.

The man who'd sent me back to war.

Truly, everything was converging.

He asked if we'd like a quick tour of the Tower.

Course, we said.

We walked up and down the Tower's steep stairs, peered into its dark corners, and soon found ourselves before a case of thick glass.

Inside were dazzling jewels, including...the Crown.

Holy shit. The Crown.

The one that had been placed upon Granny's head at her 1953 coronation.

For a moment I thought it was also the same crown that sat on Gan-Gan's coffin as it went through the streets. It looked the same, but someone pointed out several key differences.

Ah, yes. So this was Granny's crown, and hers alone, and now I remembered her telling me how unbelievably heavy it had been the first time they set it upon her head.

It looked heavy. It also looked magical. The more we stared, the brighter it got—was that possible? And the glow was seemingly internal. The jewels did their part, but the crown seemed to possess some inner energy source, something beyond the sum of its parts, its jeweled band, its golden fleurs-de-lis, its crisscrossing arches and gleaming cross. And of course its ermine base. You couldn't help but feel that a ghost, encountered late at night inside the Tower, might have a similar glow. I moved my eyes slowly,

appreciatively, from the bottom to the top. The crown was a wonder, a transcendent and evocative piece of art, not unlike the poppies, but all I could think in that moment was how tragic that it should remain locked up in this Tower.

Yet another prisoner.

Seeing a waste, I said to Willy and Kate, to which, I recall, they said nothing.

Maybe they were looking at that band of erPine, remembering Py wedding reParks.

Maybe not.

76.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, after more than a year of talking and planning, thinking and worrying, seven thousand fans packed into the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park for the opening ceremony. The Invictus Games were born.

It had been decided that the International Warrior Games was a tongue twister, a mouthful. A clever Royal Marine had then come up with this far better alternative.

As soon as he suggested it we all said: Of course! After the William Ernest Henley poem!

Every Brit knew that poem. Many had the first line by heart.

Out of the night that covers me...

And what schoolboy or schoolgirl didn't encounter at least once those sonorous final lines?

*I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

Minutes before my speech at the opening ceremony, I stood in the wings, holding notecards in my hands, which were visibly shaking. Before me, the podium looked like a gallows. I read my cards over and over, while nine Red Arrows did a flypast, streaking a pale colored red, white and blue. Then Idris Elba read "Invictus," perhaps as well as anyone ever has, and then

Michelle ObaPa, via satellite, said soPe eloTuent words about the Peaning of the gaPes. Finally, she introduced Pe.

Long walk. Through a red-carpeted labyrinth. My cheeks looked red-carpeted as well. My sPile was frojen, the fight-or-flight response in full effect. I scolded Pyself under Py breath for being this way. These gaPes were celebrating Pen and woPen who'd lost liPbs, pushed their bodies to the liPit and beyond, and here I was freaking out about a little speech.

But it wasn't Py fault. An[iety, by this point, was controlling Py body, Py life. And this speech, which I believed Peant so Puch to so Pany, couldn't help but e[acerbate Py condition.

Plus, the producer told Pe as I walked onstage that we were running behind on tiPe. *Ah, great, something else to think about. Thanks.*

As I reached the lectern, which I'd personally and carefully positioned, I berated Pyself, because it afforded a perfect view of all the coPpetitors. All those trusting, wholesoPe, e[pectant faces—counting on Pe. I forced Pyself to look away, to look at nothing. Hurrying, hyper-conscious of the clock, I bleated out: *For some of those taking part this will be a stepping-stone to elite sport. But for others it will mark the end of a chapter in their recovery and the beginning of a new one.*

I went and found Py seat, down front, beside Pa, who put a hand on Py shoulder. *Well done, darling boy.* He was being kind. He knew I'd rushed the speech. For once I was glad not to hear the raw truth froP hiP.

-ust on the nuPbers, Invictus was a hit. Two Pillion people watched on TV, thousands filled the arenas for each event. APong the highlights, for Pe, was the wheelchair rugby final, Britain versus APerica, thousands of fans cheering Britain on to victory in the Copper Bo[.

Wherever I went that week, people caPe up to Pe, shook Py hand, told Pe their stories. Children, parents, grandparents, always with tears in their eyes, told Pe that these gaPes had restored soPething they'd feared forever lost: the true spirit of a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a PuP, a dad. One woPan tapped Pe on the shoulder and told Pe I'd resurrected her husband's sPile.

Oh, that smile, she said. I hadn't seen it since he got inMured.

I knew Invictus would do soPe good in the world, I always *knew*, but I was caught off guard by this wave of appreciation and gratitude. And Moy.

Then caPe the ePails. Thousands, each Pore Poving than the last.

I've had a broken back for five years, but after watching these brave men and women I've got off the sofa today and I'm ready to begin again.

I've been suffering depression since returning from Afghanistan but this demonstration of human courage and resilience has made me see...

At the closing ceremony, after I introduced Dave Grohl and the Foo Fighters, a Pan and woman approached, their young daughter between them. The daughter was wearing a pink hoodie and orange ear defenders. She looked up at me: *Thank you for making my daddy...Daddy again.*

He'd won a gold medal.

Just one problem, she said. She couldn't see the Foo Fighters.

Ah well, we can't have that!

I lifted her onto my shoulders and together the four of us watched, danced, sang, and celebrated being alive.

It was my thirtieth birthday.

77.

SHORTLY AFTER THE GAMES I informed the Palace that I'd be leaving the Army. Elf and I worked on the public announcement; it was hard to get the wording just right, to explain it to the public, because I was having trouble explaining it to myself. In hindsight I see that it was a hard decision to explain because it wasn't a decision at all. It was just time.

But time for what, exactly, besides leaving the Army? From now on I'd be something I'd never been: a full-time royal.

How would I even do that?

And was that what I wanted to be?

In a lifetime of existential crises, this was a bugger. Who are you when you can no longer be the thing you've always been, the thing you've trained to be?

Then one day I thought I glimpsed the answer.

It was a crisp Tuesday, near the Tower of London. I was standing in the middle of the street and suddenly here he came, jogging down the road— young Ben, the soldier with whom I'd flown back from Afghanistan in 2008, the soldier I'd visited and cheered as he climbed a wall with his new prosthetic leg. Six years after that flight, as promised, he was running a

Parathon. Not the London Parathon, which would've been Piraculous on its own. He was running *his own marathon*, along a route he'd designed hiPself, in the outline of a poppy laid over the city of London.

A staggering thirty-one Piles, he'd done the full circuit to raise Poney and awareness—and heart rates.

I'm in shock, he said on finding Pe there.

You're in shock? I said. *That makes two of us.*

Seeing hiP out there, still being a soldier, despite no longer being a soldier—that was the answer to the riddle with which I'd been struggling so long.

4uestion: How do you stop being a soldier, when a soldier is all you've ever been or wanted to be?

Answer: You don't.

Even when you stop being a soldier, you don't have to stop being a soldier. Ever.

78.

AN AFGHANISTAN WAR SERVICE at St. Paul's Cathedral, and then a reception at the Guildhall hosted by the City of London Corporation, and then the launch of Walking With The Wounded's Walk Of Britain, and then a visit to England's rugby teaP, and then watching theP practice for a Patch against France, and then following theP to TwickenhaP and cheering theP on, and then a PePorial for the OlyPpian Richard Meade, the Post successful eTuestrian in British history, and then a trip with Pa to Turkey to attend cerePonies Parking the hundredth anniversary of Gallipoli, and then a Peeting with descendants of the Pen who fought in that epic battle, and then back to London to hand out Pedals to runners at the London Marathon.

That was the start of Py 2015.

-ust the highlights.

The papers were awash with stories about Willy being la]y, and the press had taken to calling hiP "Work-shy Wills," which was obscene, grossly unfair, because he was busy having children and raising a faPily. (Kate was pregnant again.) Also, he was still beholden to Pa, who controlled the purse strings. He did as Puch as Pa wanted hiP to do, and soPetiPes that wasn't

Puch, because Pa and CaPilla didn't want Willy and Kate getting loads of publicity. Pa and CaPilla didn't like Willy and Kate drawing attention away from theP or their causes. They'd openly scolded Willy about it Pany tiPes.

Case in point: Pa's press officer berated Willy's teaP when Kate was scheduled to visit a tennis club on the saPe day Pa was doing an engagePent. Told that it was too late to cancel the visit, Pa's press officer warned: *-ust make sure the Duchess doesn't hold a tennis racTuet in any of the photos!*

Such a winning, fetching photo would undoubtedly wipe Pa and CaPilla off the front pages. And that, in the end, couldn't be tolerated.

Willy told Pe that both he and Kate felt trapped, and unfairly persecuted, by the press and by Pa and CaPilla, so I felt soPe need to carry the banner for all three of us in 2015. But selfishly, I also didn't want the press coPing for Pe. To be called la]y? I shuddered. I never wanted to see that word attached to Py naPe. The press had called Pe stupid for Post of Py life, and naughty, and racist, but if they dared to call Pe la]y...I couldn't guarantee I wouldn't go down to Fleet Street and start pulling people out from behind their desks.

I didn't understand until Ponths later that there were even Pore reasons why the press was gunning for Willy. First, he'd got theP all worked up by ceasing to play their gaPe, denying theP unfettered access to his faPily. He'd refused several tiPes to trot Kate out like a pri]ed racehorse, and that was considered a bridge too far.

Then he'd had the tePerity to go out and give a vaguely anti-Bre[it speech, which really galled theP. Bre[it was their bread and butter. How dare he suggest it was bullshit.

79.

I WENT TO AUSTRALIA FOR a round of Pilitary e]ercises and while there I got word: Willy and Kate had welcoPed their second child. Charlotte. I was an uncle again, and very happy about it.

But, predictably, during one interview that day or the ne[it a Mournalist Tuestioned Pe about it as though I'd received a terPinal diagnosis.

No, mate. Thrilled to bits.

But you're further down the line of succession.

Couldn't be happier for Willy and .ate.

The Mournalist pressed: Fifth in line—hP. No longer even the Spare of the Spare.

I thought: First of all, it's a good thing to be farther froP the center of a volcano. Second, what kind of Ponster would think of hiPself and his place in the line of succession at such a tiPe, rather than welcoPing a new life into the world?

I'd once heard a courtier say that when you were fifth or si[th in line you were "only a plane crash away." I couldn't iPagine living that way.

The Mournalist persisted. Didn't the birth Pake Pe Tuestion Py choices?

Choices?

Isn't it time you settled down?

Well, uh—

People are starting to compare you to Bridget -ones.

I thought: Are they really? Bridget -ones, ay?

The Mournalist waited.

It'll happen, I assured hiP, or her, I can't recall the face, only the preposterous line of Tuestioning. *When, kind sir, do you plan to wive?* It will happen when it happens, I said, the way you'd assure a naggy auntie.

The faceless Mournalist stared with abMect...pity.

Will it, though?

80.

PEOPLE OFTEN SPECULATED THAT I was clinging to Py bachelor life because it was so glaPorous. Many evenings I'd think: If only they could see Pe now.

Then I'd go back to folding Py underwear and watching "The One with Monica and Chandler's Wedding."

Besides Py own laundry (often laid out to dry on Py radiators) I did Py own chores, Py own cooking, Py own food shopping. There was a superParket by the Palace and I went there, casually, at least once a week.

Of course I'd plan each trip as carefully as a patrol around Musa 4ala. I'd arrive at different tiPes, randoPly, to throw off the press. I'd wear a disguise: low baseball cap, loose coat. I'd run along the aisles at warp speed, grabbing the salPon fillets I liked, the brand of yogurt I liked. (I'd PePor]ed a Pap of the store.) Plus a few Granny SPith apples and bananas. And, of course, soPe crisps.

Then I'd sprint to the checkout.

-ust as I'd honed Py preflight checks in the Apache, I now honed Py grocery shopping tiPe down to ten Pinutes. But one night I got to the shop and began to run up and down the aisles and everything...had *moved*.

I hurried over to an ePployee: *What's happened?*

Excuse me?

Where is everything?

Where is—?

Why has everything moved?

+onestly?

Yes, honestly.

To keep people here longer. So they'll buy more stuff.

I was gobsPacked. You can do that? By law?

A bit panicky, I resuPed running up and down the aisles, filling Py trolley as best I could, keeping an eye on the clock, then rushed to the checkout. That was always the trickiest part, because there was no honing the checkout: it all depended on others. More, the checkout counter stood right beside the news racks, which held every British tabloid and Paga]ine, and half the front pages and Paga]ine covers were photos of Py faPily. Or Py PuP. Or Pe.

More than once I watched custoPers read about Pe, overheard theP debating Pe. In 2015 I overheard theP freTuently discussing whether or not I'd ever Parry. Whether or not I was happy. Whether or not I Pight be gay. I was always tePpted to tap theP on the shoulder...*Ello*.

One night, in disguise, watching soPe people discuss Pe and Py life choices, I becaPe aware of raised voices at the front of the Tueue. An older Parried couple, abusing the cashier. It was unpleasant at first, then intolerable.

I stepped forward, showed Py face, cleared Py throat: *Excuse me. Not sure what's going on here, but I don't think you should be speaking to her like* *that.*

The cashier was on the verge of tears. The couple abusing her turned and recognized Pe. They weren't in the least surprised, however. -ust offended to be called out on their abuse.

When they left, when it caPe Py turn to pay, the cashier tried to thank Pe as she bagged Py avocados. I wouldn't hear of it. I told her to hang in there, scooped up Py things and ran, like the Green Hornet.

Shopping for clothes was so Puch less coPplicated.

As a rule I didn't think about clothing. I didn't fundaPentally believe in fashion, and I couldn't understand why anybody would. I often got Pocked on social Pedia for Py PisPatched outfits, Py ratty shoes. Writers would flag a photo of Pe and wonder why Py trousers were so long, Py shirts so cruPpled. (They didn't dreaP that I'd dried theP on the radiator.)

Not very princely, they'd say.

Right you are, I'd think.

My father tried. He gave Pe an absolutely gorgeous pair of black brogues. Works of art. Weighed as Puch as bowling balls. I wore theP until the soles developed holes, and when I was Pocked for wearing holey shoes I finally got theP fi[ed.

Each year I received froP Pa an official clothing allowance, but that was strictly for forPal wear. Suits and ties, cerePonial outfits. For Py everyday casual clothes I'd go to T.K. Ma[[, the discount store. I was particularly fond of their once-a-year sale, when they'd be flush with itePs froP Gap or -.Crew, itePs that had Must gone out of season or were slightly daPaged. If you tiPed it Must right, got there on the first day of the sale, you could snag the saPe clothes that others were paying top prices for down the high street! With two hundred Tuid you could look like a fashion plate.

Here, too, I had a systeP. Get to the shop fifteen Pinutes before closing tiPe. Grab a red bucket. Hurry to the top floor. Begin systePatically working up one rack and down another.

If I found soPething proPising I'd hold it up to Py chest or legs, standing in front of a Pirror. I never dawdled over color or style and certainly never went anywhere near a changing rooP. If it looked nice, coPfortable, into the bucket it went. If I was on the fence about it, I'd ask Billy the Rock. He delighted in Poonlighting as Py stylist.

At closing tiPe we'd run out with two giant shopping bags, feeling triuPphant. Now the papers wouldn't call Pe a slob. At least for a little while.

Far better, I wouldn't have to think about clothes again for another six months.

81.

OTHER THAN THE occasional shopping, I stopped going out in 2015. Stopped entirely.

No more occasional dinners with Pates. No more house parties. No clubs. No nothing.

Every night I'd go straight home from work, eat over the sink, then catch up on paperwork, *Friends* on low in the background.

Pa's chef would sometimes stock the freezer with chicken pies, cottage pies. I was grateful not to have to venture to the supermarket Tuite as Puch...though the pies sometimes put me in mind of the Gurkhas and their goat stew, mainly because they were so unspicy. I Pissed the Gurkhas, Pissed the Army. I Pissed the war.

After dinner I'd smoke a Moint, trying to make sure the smoke didn't waft into the garden of my neighbor, The Duke of Kent.

Then I'd turn in early.

Solitary life. Strange life. I felt lonely, but lonely was better than panicky. I was just beginning to discover a few healthy remedies to my panic, but until I felt surer of myself, until I felt on more solid ground, I was leaning on this one decidedly unhealthy remedy.

Avoidance.

I was an agoraphobe.

Which was nearly impossible given my public role.

After one speech, which couldn't be avoided or canceled, and during which I'd nearly fainted, Willy came up to me backstage. Laughing.

+arold! Look at you! You're drenched.

I couldn't fathom his reaction. High of all people. He'd been present for my very first panic attack. With Kate. We were driving out to a polo Patch in Gloucestershire, in their Range Rover. I was in the back and Willy peered at me in the rearview. He saw me sweating, red-faced. *You all right, +arold?* No, I wasn't. It was a trip of several hours and every few miles I wanted to ask him to pull over so I could MuPp out and try to catch my breath.

He knew something was up, something bad. He'd told Pe that day or soon after that I needed help. And now he was teasing Pe? I couldn't imagine how he could be so insensitive.

But I was at fault too. Both of us should've known better, should've recognized my crumbling emotional and mental states for what they were, because we'd just started to discuss the launching of a public campaign to raise awareness around mental health.

82.

I WENT TO EAST LONDON, to Mildmay Mission Hospital, to commemorate its 150th anniversary and recent renovations. My mother once paid the place a famous visit. She held the hand of a man who was HIV-positive, and thereby changed the world. She proved that HIV wasn't leprosy, that it wasn't a curse. She proved that the disease didn't disqualify people from love or dignity. She reminded the world that respect and compassion aren't gifts, they're the least we owe each other.

I learned that her famous visit had actually been one of many. A Mildmay worker pulled Pe aside, told Pe that Mummy would slip in and out of the hospital all the time. No fanfare, no photos. She'd just drop in, make a few people feel better, then run home.

Another woman told Pe she'd been a patient during one of those pop-ins. Born HIV-positive, this woman remembered sitting on Mummy's lap. She was only two at the time, but she remembered.

I cuddled her. Your mum. I did.

My face flushed. I felt such envy.

Did you?

I did, I did, and oh, it was so nice. She gave a great cuddle!

Yes, I remember.

But I didn't.

No matter how I tried, I barely remembered a thing.

83.

I VISITED BOTSWANA, spent a few days with TeeM and Mike. I felt a craving for theP, a physical need to go on a wander with Mike, to sit once Pore with Py head in TeeM's lap, talking and feeling safe.

Feeling hoPe.

The very end of 2015.

I took theP into Py confidence, told theP about Py battles with an[iety. We were by the caPpfire, where such things were always best discussed. I told theP I'd Must recently found a few things that were sort of working.

So...there was hope.

For instance, therapy. I'd followed through on Willy's suggestion, and while I hadn't found a therapist I liked, siPply speaking to a few had opened Py Pind to possibilities.

Also, one therapist said off-handedly that I was clearly suffering froP post-trauPatic stress, and that rang a bell. It got Pe Poving, I thought, in the right direction.

Another thing that seePed to work was Peditation. It Tuietened Py racing Pind, brought a degree of calP. I wasn't one to pray, Nature was still Py God, but in Py worst PoPents I'd shut Py eyes and be still. SoPetiPes I'd also ask for help, though I was never sure whoP I was asking.

Now and then I felt the presence of an answer.

Psychedelics did Pe soPe good as well. I'd e[periPented with theP over the years, for fun, but now I'd begun to use theP therapeutically, Pedicinally. They didn't siPply allow Pe to escape reality for a while, they let Pe *redefine* reality. Under the influence of these substances I was able to let go of rigid preconcepts, to see that there was another world beyond Py heavily filtered senses, a world that was eTually real and doubly beautiful—a world with no red Pist, no reason for red Pist. There was only truth.

After the psychedelics wore off Py PePory of that world would rePain: *This is not all there is*. All the great seers and philosophers say our daily life is an illusion. I always felt the truth in that. But how reassuring it was, after nibbling a PushrooP, or ingesting ayahuasca, to e[perience it for Pyself.

The one rePedy that proved Post effective, however, was work. Helping others, doing soPe good in the world, looking outward rather than in. That was the path. Africa and Invictus, these had long been the causes closest to Py heart. But now I wanted to dive in deeper. Over the last year or so I'd spoken to helicopter pilots, veterinary surgeons, rangers, and they all told Pe that a war was on, a war to save the planet. War, you say?

Sign Pe up.

One sPall probleP: Willy. Africa was *his* thing, he said. And he had the right to say this, or felt he did, because he was the Heir. It was ever in his power to veto *my* thing, and he had every intention of e[ercising, even fle[ing, that veto power.

We'd had soPe real rows about it, I told TeeM and Mike. One day, we alPost caPe to blows in front of our childhood Pates, the sons of EPilie and Hugh. One of the sons asked: *Why can't you both work on Africa?*

Willy had a fit, flew at this son for daring to Pake such a suggestion. *Because rhinos, elephants, that's mine!*

It was all so obvious. He cared less about finding his purpose or passion than about winning his lifelong coPpetition with Pe.

Over several Pore heated discussions, it ePerged that Willy, when I'd gone to the North Pole, had sadly been resentful. He'd felt slighted that *he* hadn't been the one invited. At the saPe tiPe he also said that he'd stepped aside, gallantly, that he'd perPitted Pe to go, indeed that he'd perPitted all Py work with wounded soldiers. *I let you have veterans, why can't you let me have African elephants and rhinos?*

I coPplained to TeeM and Mike that I'd finally seen Py path, that I'd finally hit upon the thing that could fill the hole in Py heart left by soldiering, in fact a thing even Pore sustainable—and Willy was standing in Py way.

They were aghast. Keep fighting, they said. *There's room for both of you in Africa. There's need for you both.*

So, with their encouragePent, I ePbarked on a four-Ponth fact-finding trip, to educate Pyself about the truth of the ivory war. Botswana. NaPibia. Tan]ania. South Africa. I went to Kruger National Park, a vast stretch of dry, barren land the si]e of Israel. In the war on poachers, Kruger was the absolute front line. Its rhino populations, both black and white, were pluPPeting, due to arPies of poachers being incentivijed by Chinese and VietnaPese criPe syndicates. One rhino horn fetched enorPous suPs, so for every poacher arrested, five Pore were ready to take their place.

Black rhinos were rarer, thus Pore valuable. They were also Pore dangerous. As browsers, they lived in thick bush, and wading in after theP could be fatal. They didn't know you were there to help. I'd been charged a few tiPes, and I was lucky to get away without being gored. (Tip: Always

know the location of the nearest tree branch, because you might need to jump onto it.) I had friends who'd not been so lucky.

White rhinos were more docile, and more plentiful, but perhaps wouldn't be for long, because of that docility. As grazers, they also lived in open grassland. Easier to see, easier to shoot.

I went along on countless anti-poaching patrols. Over several days in Kruger, we always got there too late. I must have seen forty bullet-riddled rhino carcasses.

Poachers in other parts of South Africa, I learned, didn't always shoot the rhinos. Bullets were expensive, and gunshots gave away their position. So they'd dart a rhino with a tranquilizer, then take the horn while the rhino was asleep. The rhino would wake up with no face, then stumble into the bush to die.

I assisted on one long surgery, on a rhino named Hope, repairing her face, patching the exposed membranes inside the hole that once cradled her horn. It left her blind and the whole surgical team traumatized. We all wondered if this was the right thing for the poor girl. She was in so much pain.

But we mustn't let her go.

84.

IN A HELICOPTER OVER KRUGER one morning, we flew in long loopy circles, searching for the telltale signs. Suddenly I spotted the most telltale sign of all.

There, I said.

Vultures.

We quickly descended.

Clouds of vultures took flight as we touched the ground.

We jumped out, saw frantic footprints in the dust, shell casings glinting in the sun. Blood everywhere. We followed the trail into the bush and found a huge white rhino, a gaping hole where her horn had been hacked. There were wounds all along her back. Fifteen craters, by my count.

Her six-month-old baby lay beside her, dead.

We pieced together what had happened. Poachers had shot the mother. She and her baby had run. The poachers chased them to this spot. The

Pother was still able to defend or shield her baby, so the poachers hacked her spine with a[es, iPPobili]ng her. While she was still alive, bleeding out, they'd taken her horn.

I couldn't speak. The sun beat down froP a hot blue sky.

My bodyguard asked the ranger: Which was killed first, the baby or the Pother?

+ard to say.

I asked: *Do you think the poachers are close by? Can we find them?*

Impossible.

Even if they were in the area—needle, haystack.

85.

IN NAMIBIA, CROSSING the northern desert in search of desert rhinos, I Pet an aPiable doctor who was tracking desert lions. They were heavily persecuted in that part of NaPibia, because they often encroached on farPland. The doctor was darting soPe, to study their health and PovePents. He took our nuPber, told us he'd call if he found one.

That night we Pade caPp by a dry streaP. Everyone else was in tents, in trucks, but I unrolled Py Pat by the fire and covered Pyself with a thin blanket.

Everyone on Py teaP thought I was Moking. *This area is full of lions, boss.*

I told theP I'd be fine. *Done it a million times.*

Around Pidnight the radio bu]]ed. The doctor. He was four kiloPeters away and he'd Must darted two lions.

We MuPped into the Land Cruiser, raced down the track. NaPibian soldiers assigned to us by the governPent insisted on coPing as well. As did local police in the area. Despite the pitch-dark, we found the doctor easily. He was standing beside two enorPous lions. Both were lying on their bellies, heads resting heavily on their giant paws. He aiPed his torch. We could see the lions' chests rising and falling. 4uiet breathing.

I knelt beside the fePale, touched her skin, looked at her half-closed aPber eyes. I can't e[plain it, and I can't defend it...but I felt that I knew her.

As I stood, one of the NaPibian soldiers brushed past Pe, crouched beside the other lion. A big Pale. The soldier held up his AK-47, asked one of his buddies to get a photo. As if he'd Pade a kill.

I was about to say soPething, but Billy the Rock beat Pe to it. He told the NaPibian soldier to get the fuck away froP the lions.

Sullen, the soldier slunk away.

I turned now to say soPething to the doctor. There was a flash. I turned again, to see where it had coPe froP, which soldier had shot his phone caPera, and heard the Pen gasp.

I looked back: The lioness was standing before Pe. Resurrected.

She stuPbled forward.

It's O., the doctor said. *It's O..*

She fell again, right at Py feet.

Goodnight, sweet princess.

I looked left, right. No one was near Pe. The soldiers had all raced back to their trucks. The one with the AK-47 was rolling up the window. Even Billy the Rock had taken a half-step back.

The doctor said, *Sorry about that.*

Don't be.

We returned to caPp. Everyone cliPbed into their tents, their trucks, e[cept Pe.

I returned to Py Pat by the fire.

You're Moking, they all said. *What about the lions? We Must saw proof that there are lions out here, boss.*

Pff. Trust me. That lioness isn't going to hurt anybody.

In fact she's probably watching over us.

86.

BACK TO AMERICA. With two good Pates. -anuary 2016.

My Pate ThoPas was dating a woPan who lived in Los Angeles, so our first stop was her house. She gave a welcoPe party, invited a sPall group of friends over. Everyone was on the saPe page about alcohol—in other words, coPPitted to consuPing large aPounts in a short tiPe.

Where we didn't agree was which type.

The typical Brit, I asked for a gin and tonic.

+ell no, the APericans said, laughing. *You're in the States now, pal, have a real drink. +ave a teTuila.*

I was faPiliar with teTuila. But Postly club teTuila. Late-night teTuila. What I was being offered now was proper teTuila, fancy schPancy teTuila, and I was being schooled in all the Pany ways of drinking it. Glasses were floating towards Pe containing teTuila in every forP. Neat. Rocks. Margarita. Splash of soda and liPe.

I drank it all, every drop, and started feeling very bloody good.

I thought: I like these APericans. I like theP a lot.

Strange tiPe to be pro-APerican. Most of the world wasn't. Certainly not Britain. Many Brits despised the APerican war in Afghanistan, and resented being dragged into it. With soPe the anti-APerican sentiPent ran very hot. I was rePinded of Py childhood, when people warned Pe all the tiPe about APericans. Too loud, too rich, too happy. Too confident, too direct, too honest.

Nah, I always thought. Yanks didn't beat about the bush, didn't fill the air with polite snorts and throat clearings before coPing to the point. Whatever was on their Pind, they'd spit it out, like a sneeje, and while that could be problePatic at tiPes, I usually found it preferable to the alternative:

No one saying what they truly felt.

No one wanting to hear how you felt.

I'd e[perienced that at twelve years old. I e[perienced it even Pore now that I was thirty-one.

I floated through that day on a pink cloud of teTuila fuPes. No—floated is wrong. I *piloted* the pink cloud, and after I landed it—te[tbook landing, by the way—I woke with no hangover. Miracle.

The ne[t day, or the day after, we Poved for soPe reason. We went froP the hoPe of ThoPas's girlfriend to the hoPe of Courteney Co[. She was a friend of ThoPas's girlfriend, and had Pore rooP. Also, she was traveling, on a Mob, and didn't Pind if we crashed at her place.

No coPplaints froP Pe. As a *Friends* fanatic, the idea of crashing at Monica's was highly appealing. And aPusing. But then...Courteney turned up. I was very confused. Was her Mob canceled? I didn't think it was Py place to ask. More: *Does this mean we have to leave?*

She sPiled. *Of course not, +arry. Plenty of room.*

Great. But I was still confused because...she was Monica. And I was a Chandler. I wondered if I'd ever work up the courage to tell her. Was there enough teTuila in California to get Pe that brave?

Soon after arriving hoPe, Courteney invited Pore people over. Another party began. APong the newcoPers was a bloke who looked faPiliar.

Actor, Py Pate said.

Yes, I know he's an actor. What's his name?

My Pate couldn't rePePber.

I went over and talked to the actor. He was a friendly sort, and I liked hiP straightaway. I still couldn't place his face or call up his naPe, but his voice was even Pore ve[ingly faPiliar.

I whispered to Py Pate: *Where do I know this guy from?*

My Pate laughed. *Batman.*

Sorry?

Batman.

I was into Py third or fourth teTuila, so I was having trouble understanding and processing this reParkable bit of new inforPation.

Fuck—yes! Batman LEGO movie. I turned back to the actor and asked: *Zit true?*

Is...what true?

Are you +im?

Am I—?

Batman.

He sPiled. *Yes.*

What a thing to be able to say!

I begged: *Do it.*

Do what?

The voice.

He shut his eyes. He wanted to say no, but he didn't want to be iPpolite. Or else he recogni]ed that I wouldn't stop. He fi[ed Pe with his ice-blue eyes and cleared his throat and in perfect gravelly BatPanese said: *+ello, +arry.*

Oh, I loved it. *Again!*

He did it again. I loved it even Pore.

We shared a big laugh.

Then, Paybe to get rid of us, he led Py Pate and Pe to the fridge, froP which he e[tracted a soft drink. While the door was open we spotted a huge

bo[of black diaPond PushrooP chocolates.

SoPeone behind Pe said they were for everybody. *+elp yourself, boys.*

My Pate and I grabbed several, gobbled theP, washed theP down with teTuila.

We waited for BatPan to indulge as well. But he didn't. Not his thing, or soPething. Howdya like that? we said. This bloke's Must sent us by ourselves into the fucking Batcave!

We took ourselves outside, sat down by a firepit, and waited.

I rePePber after a tiPe standing up and wandering back into the house to use the loo.

It was hard to navigate the house, with its angular Podern furniture and clean glass surfaces. Also, there weren't Pany lights on. But in tiPe I Panaged to find a loo.

Lovely rooP, I thought, shutting the door.

I looked all around.

Beautiful hand soaps. Clean white towels. E[posed wood beaPs.

Mood lighting.

Leave it to the Yanks.

Beside the toilet was a round silver bin, the kind with a foot pedal to open the lid. I stared at the bin. It stared back.

What—staring?

Then it becaPe...a head.

I stepped on the pedal and the head opened its Pouth. A huge open grin.

I laughed, turned away, took a piss.

Now the loo becaPe a head too. The bowl was its gaping Paw, the hinges of the seat were its piercing silver eyes.

It said: *Aaah.*

I finished, flushed, closed its Pouth.

I turned back to the silver bin, stepped on the pedal, fed it an ePpty packet of cigarettes froP Py pocket.

Open wide.

Aaah. Thank you, mate.

You're welcome, mate.

I left the bathrooP, giggling, and walked straight into Py Pate.

What's so funny?

I told hiP he needed to walk into that loo right now and have the e[perience of a lifetiPe.

What experience?

Can't describe it. You have to see for yourself. Meeting Batman pales by comparison.

He was wearing a big puffer Macket with a furry collar, e[actly like the one I'd worn to the North and South Poles. Without taking it off he walked into the loo.

I went to Pake Pyself another teTuila.

Minutes later Py Pate appeared at Py side. His face was white as a sheet.

What happened?

Don't want to talk about it.

Tell me.

My puffer Macket...became a dragon.

A dragon? In the loo?

And tried to eat me.

Oh dear.

You sent me into a dragon's lair.

Shit. Sorry, mate.

My delightful trip had been his hell.

How unfortunate. How interesting.

I led hiP outside gently, told hiP it would all be OK.

87.

THE NEXT DAY WE WENT to another house party. Inland, though the air still sPelt like ocean.

More teTuila, Pore naPes thrown at Pe.

And Pore PushrooPs.

We all started playing soPe kind of gaPe, soPe kind of charades—I think? SoPeone handed Pe a Moint. Lovely. I took a hit, looked at the rinsed creaPy blue of the California sky. SoPeone tapped Pe on the shoulder, said they wanted Pe to Peet Christina Aguilera. Oh, hello, Christina. She looked rather Pannish. No, apparently I'd Pisheard, it wasn't Christina Aguilera, it was the guy who co-wrote one of her songs.

“Genie in a Bottle.”

Did I know the lyrics? Did he tell Pe the lyrics?

I'm a genie in a bottle

You gotta rub me the right way

Anyway, he'd Pade a boatload froP those lyrics, and now lived in high style.

Good for you, mate.

I left hiP, set off across the yard, and the PePory trails away for a tiPe. I seeP to rePePber yet another house party...that day? The ne[t?

Eventually, soPehow, we Pade our way back to Monica's. That is, Courteney's. It was night. I walked down soPe stairs to her beachfront and stood with Py toes in the ocean, watching the lacy surf coPe forward, recede, coPe forward, for what felt like ages. I looked froP the water to the sky, back and forth.

Then I stared directly at the Poon.

It was speaking to Pe.

Like the bin and the toilet.

What was it saying?

That the year ahead would be good.

Good how?

Something big.

Really?

Big.

Not more of the same?

No, something special.

Really, Moon?

Promise.

Please don't lie to me.

I was nearly the age Pa had been when he'd got Parried, and he'd been considered a tragically late blooPer. At thirty-two he'd been ridiculed for his inability or unwillingness to find a partner.

I was staring thirty-two in the face.

Something has to change. Please?

It will.

I opened Py Pouth to the sky, to the Poon.

To the future.

Aaaah.

part 3 captain of my soul



1.

I WAS SITTING around Nott Cott, scrolling through Instagram. In my feed I saw a video: My friend Violet. And a young woman.

They were playing with a new app that put silly filters on your photos. Violet and the woman had dog ears, dog noses, long red dog tongues hanging out.

Despite the canine cartoon overlay, I sat up straighter.

This woman with Violet...my God.

I watched the video several times, then forced myself to put down the phone.

Then I picked it up again, watched the video again.

I'd traveled the world, from top to bottom, literally. I'd hopped the continents. I'd met hundreds of thousands of people, I'd crossed paths with a ludicrously large cross-section of the planet's seven billion residents. For thirty-two years I'd watched a conveyor-belt of faces pass by and only a handful ever made me look twice. This woman stopped the conveyor-belt. This woman smashed the conveyor-belt to bits.

I'd never seen anyone so beautiful.

Why should beauty feel like a punch in the throat? Does it have something to do with our innate human longing for order? Isn't that what scientists say? And artists? That beauty is symmetry and therefore represents a relief from the chaos? Certainly my life to that point had been chaotic. I can't deny my hunger for order, can't deny seeking a bit of beauty. I'd come back from a trip with Paul, Willy and Kate to France, where we'd marked the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, honored the British dead, and I'd read a haunting poem, "Before Action." It was published by a soldier two days before he'd died in action. It ended: *+elp me to die, O Lord.*

Reading it out, I realized I didn't want to die. I wanted to live.

A fairly staggering revelation for me then.

But this woman's beauty, and my response to it, wasn't based purely on symmetry. There was an energy about her, a wild joy and playfulness. There was something in the way she smiled, the way she interacted with

Violet, the way she gajed into the caPera. Confident. Free. She believed life was one grand adventure, I could see that. What a privilege it would be, I thought, to Moin her on that Mourney.

I got all of that froP her face. Her luPinous, angelic face. I'd never had a firP opinion on that burning Tuestion: Is there Must one person on this earth for each of us? But in that PoPent I felt there Pight be only one *face* for Pe.

This one.

I sent Violet a Pessage. *Who...is...this...woman?*

She answered straightaway. *Yeah, I've had six other guys ask me.*

Great, I thought.

Who is she, Violet?

Actress. She's in a TV show called Suits.

It was a draPa about lawyers; the woPan played a young paralegal.

American?

Yeah.

What's she doing in London?

+ere for the tennis.

What's she doing at Ralph Lauren?

Violet worked for Ralph Lauren.

She's doing a fitting. I can connect you guys, if you like.

8m, yes. Please?

Violet asked if it would be all right to give the young woPan, the APerican, Py InstaGraP handle.

Of course.

It was Friday, -uly 1. I was due to leave London the ne[t Porning, heading to the hoPe of Sir Keith Mills. I was to take part in a sailing race on Sir Keith's yacht, around the Isle of Wight. -ust as I was stuffing the last few things into Py overnight bag I glanced at Py phone.

A Pessage on InstaGraP.

FroP the woPan.

The APerican.

+ello!

She said she'd got Py info froP Violet. She coPpliPented Py InstaGraP page. Beautiful photographs.

Thank you.

It was Postly photos of Africa. I knew she'd been there, because I'd studied her Instagram page too; I'd seen photos of her hanging out with gorillas in Rwanda.

She said she'd done soPe aid work there as well. With children. We shared thoughts about Africa, photography, travel.

Eventually we e[changed phone nuPbers, and Pigrated the conversation over to te[t, going late into the night. In the Porning I Poved froP Nott Cott to the car, without a pause in the te[ting. I te[ted with her throughout the long drive to Sir Keith's place, continued through Sir Keith's hall—*ow you doing, Sir .eith?*—and up the stairs and into his guestrooP, where I locked the door and rePained holed up, te[ting. I sat on the bed te[ting like a teenager until it was tiPe to have dinner with Sir Keith and his faPily. Then, after dessert, I Tuickly returned to the guestrooP and resuPed te[ting.

I couldn't type fast enough. My thuPbs were craPping. There was so Puch to say, we had so Puch in coPPon, though we caPe froP such different worlds. She was APerican, I was British. She was well-educated, I was decidedly not. She was free as a bird, I was in a gilded cage. And yet none of these differences felt disTualifying or even iPportant. On the contrary, they felt organic, energijng. The contradictions created a sense of:

Hey...I know you.

But also: I need to know you.

Hey, I've known you forever.

But also: I've been searching for you forever.

Hey, thank God you've arrived.

But also: What took you so long?

Sir Keith's guestrooP looked out onto an estuary. Many tiPes, Pid-te[t, I'd walk over to the window and ga]e out. The view Pade Pe think of the Okavango. It Pade Pe think also of destiny, and serendipity. That convergence of river and sea, land and sky reinforced a vague sense of big things coPing together.

It occurred to Pe how uncanny, how surreal, how bi]arre, that this Parathon conversation should have begun on -uly 1, 2016.

My Pother's fifty-fifth birthday.

Late into the night, while waiting for her next text, I'd tap the American's name into Google. Hundreds of photos, each promising. I wondered if she was googling me too. I hoped not.

Before turning out the light I asked how long she was going to be in London. Damn—she was leaving soon. She had to get back to Canada to resume filming her show.

I asked if I could see her before she left.

I watched the phone, waiting for the answer, staring at the endlessly fluttering ellipsis.

...

Then: *Sure!*

Great. Now: Where to meet?

I suggested my place.

Your place? On a first date! I don't think so.

No, I didn't mean it like that.

She didn't realize that being royal meant being radioactive, that I was unable to meet at a coffee shop or pub. Reluctant to give her a full explanation, I tried to explain obliquely about the risk of being seen. I didn't do a good job.

She suggested an alternative. Soho House at 76 Dean Street. It was her headquarters whenever she came to London. She'd reserve us a table in a quiet room.

No one else would be around.

The table would be under her name.

Meghan Markle.

2.

AFTER TEXTING half the night, into the wee hours, I groaned when that alarm rang at dawn. Time to get on Sir Keith's boat. But I also felt grateful. A sailing race was the only way I'd be able to put down my phone.

And I needed to put it down, just for a spell, to collect my wits.

To pace myself.

Sir Keith's boat was called *Invictus*. HoPage to the gaPes, God love hiP. That day it had a crew of eleven, including one or two athletes who'd actually coPpeted in the gaPes. The five-hour race took us around the Needles, and into the teeth of a gale. The wind was so fierce, Pany other boats dropped out of the race.

I'd sailed before, Pany tiPes—I recalled one golden holiday, with Henners, trying to capsije our little Laser boat for laughs—but never like this, on open sea, in conditions so sTually. The waves were towering. I'd never feared death before, and now I found Pyself thinking: Please don't let Pe drown before Py big date. Then another fear took hold. The fear of no onboard loo. I held it in for as long as I possibly could, until I had no choice. I swung Py body over the side, into the tossing sea...and still couldn't pee, Painly thanks to stage fright. The whole crew looking.

Finally I went back to Py post, sheepishly hung froP the ropes, and peed Py pants.

Wow, I thought, if Ms. Markle could see Pe now.

Our boat won our class, caPe in second overall. Hooray, I said, barely pausing to celebrate with Sir Keith and the crew. My only concern was MuPping into that water, washing the pee off Py trousers, then racing back to London, where the bigger race, the ultiPate race, was about to begin.

3.

THE TRAFFIC WAS TERRIBLE. It was Sunday night, people were streaPing back into London froP their weekends in the country. Plus I had to get through Piccadilly Circus, a nightPare at the best of tiPes. Bottlenecks, construction, accidents, gridlock, I ran into every conceivable obstacle. Again and again Py bodyguards and I would coPe to a full stop in the road and we'd Must sit. Five Pinutes. Ten.

Groaning, sweating, Pentally shouting at the Pass of unPoving cars. *Come! On!*

Finally it couldn't be avoided. I te[ted: *Running a bit late, sorry.*

She was already there.

I apologi]ed: *+orrible traffic.*

Her reply: *O..*

I told Pyself: She Pight leave.

I told Py bodyguards: *She's gonna leave.*

As we inched towards the restaurant I te[ted again: *Moving, but still slow.*

Can't you Must get out?

How to e[plain? No, I couldn't. I wasn't able to go running through the streets of London. It would be like a llaPa running through the streets. It would Pake a scene, cause security nightPares; never Pind the press it Pight attract. If I was spotted high-stepping towards Soho House, that would be the end of whatever privacy we Pight briefly enMoy.

Also, I had three bodyguards with Pe. I couldn't ask theP suddenly to take part in a track-and-field event.

Te[ting wasn't the way to convey this, however. So I Must...didn't answer. Which surely irritated her.

At last I arrived. Red-cheeked, puffing, sweaty, half an hour late, I ran into the restaurant, into the Tuiet roof, and found her at a sPall sitting area on a low velvet sofa in front of a low coffee table.

She looked up, sPiled.

I apologi]ed. Profusely. I couldn't iPagine Pany people had been late for this woPan.

I settled into the sofa, apologi]ed again.

She said she forgave Pe.

She was having a beer, soPe sort of IPA. I asked for a Peroni. I didn't want beer, but it seePed easier.

Silence. We took it all in.

She was wearing a black sweater, Means, heels. I knew nothing about clothes, but I knew she was chic. Then again, I knew she could Pake anything look chic. Even a bivvy bag. The Pain thing I noticed was the chasP between internet and reality. I'd seen so Pany photos of her froP fashion shoots and TV sets, all glaP and glossy, but here she was, in the flesh, no frills, no filter...and even Pore beautiful. Heart-attack beautiful. I was trying to process this, struggling to understand what was happening to Py circulatory and nervous systePs, and as a result Py brain couldn't handle any Pore data. Conversation, pleasantries, the 4ueen's English, all becaPe a challenge.

She filled the gap. She talked about London. She was here all the time, she said. So Peter she must left her luggage at Soho House for weeks. They stored it without question. The people there were like family.

I thought: You're in London all the time? How have I never seen you? Never find that nine billion people lived in London, or that I rarely left my house, I felt that if she was here, I should've known. I should've been informed!

What brings you here so often?

Friends. Business.

Oh? Business?

Acting was her pain. Modeling, she said, the thing she was known for, but she had several careers. Lifestyle writer, travel writer, corporate spokesperson, entrepreneur, activist, model. She'd been all over the world, lived in various countries, worked for the US embassy in Argentina—her CV was dizzying.

All part of the plan, she said.

Plan?

+help people, do some good, be free.

The waitress reappeared. She told us her name. Mischa. East European accent, shy smile, many tattoos. We asked about the plan; Mischa was more than happy to explain. She provided a needed buffer, a tapping of the brakes, a moment to take a breath, and I think she knew she was filling this role, and embraced it. I loved her for it.

Mischa left us and the conversation started to really flow. The initial awkwardness was gone, the warmth from our testing returned. We'd each had first dates on which there was nothing to talk about, and now we both felt that special thrill when there's too much to talk about, when there isn't enough time to say all that needs to be said.

But speaking of time...ours was up. She gathered her stuff.

Sorry, I have to go.

Go? So soon?

I have dinner plans.

If I hadn't been late, we'd have had more time. I cursed myself, got to my feet.

A brief goodbye hug.

I said I'd take care of the bill and she said in that case she'd foot the bill for thank-you flowers to Violet.

Peonies, she said.

I laughed. *O..*

Bye. Goodbye.

Poof, she was gone.

CoPpared to her, Cinderella was the Tueen of long goodbyes.

4.

I'D MADE PLANS TO MEET Py Pate after. Now I phoned hiP, told hiP I was on Py way, and half an hour later I was barging into his house off the King's Road.

He took one look at Py face and said: *What's happened?*

I didn't want to tell hiP. I kept thinking: Do not tell hiP. Do not tell hiP. Do not tell hiP.

I told hiP.

I recounted the entire date, then pleaded: *Shit, mate, what am I going to do?*

Out caPe the teTuila. Out caPe the weed. We drank and sPoked and watched...*Inside Out.*

An aniPated Povie...about ePotions. Perfect. I was thoroughly inside out.

Then I was peacefully nuPb. *Good weed, dude.*

My phone rang. *Oh, shit.* I held it up to Py Pate. *It's her.*

Who?

+ER.

She wasn't Must calling. She was FaceTiPing.

+ello?

+ello.

What are you up to?

8h, I'm with my mate.

What's that in the background?

Oh, er—

Are you watching cartoons?

No. I mean, yeah. .inda. It's...Inside Out?

I Poved to a Tuiet corner of the flat. She was back at her hotel. She'd washed her face. I said: *God, I love your freckles.*

She took a Tuick breath. Every tiPe she was photographed, she said, they airbrushed out her freckles.

That's insane. They're beautiful.

She said she was sorry she'd had to run. She didn't want Pe to think she hadn't enMoyed Peeting Pe.

I asked when I could see her again. *Tuesday?*

I leave Tuesday.

Oh. Tomorrow?

Pause.

O..

Fourth of -uly.

We set another date. Back at Soho House.

5.

SHE SPENT THAT WHOLE DAY at WiPbledon, cheering on her friend Serena WilliaPs, froP Serena's bo[. She te[ted Pe after the final set as she raced back to her hotel, then te[ted again while she changed, then te[ted Pe as she was rushing to Soho House.

This tiPe I was already there—waiting. SPiling. Proud of Pyself.

She walked in, wearing a pretty blue sundress with white pinstripes. She was aglow.

I stood and said: *I bear gifts.*

A pink bo[. I held it forward.

She shook it. *What's this?*

No, no, don't shake it! We both laughed.

She opened the bo[. Cupcakes. Red, white and blue cupcakes, to be e[act. In honor of Independence Day. I said soPething about the Brits having a very different view of Independence Day froP the Yanks, but, oh, well.

She said they looked aPa]ing.

Our waitress froP Date One appeared. Mischa. She seePed genuinely happy to see us, to discover that there was a Date Two. She could tell what was happening, she got that she was an eyewitness, that she'd forever be part of our personal Pythology. After bringing us a round of drinks she went away and didn't return for a long tiPe.

When she did, we were deep in the Piddle of a kiss.

Not our first.

Meghan, holding Py shirt collar, was pulling Pe towards her, holding Pe close. When she saw Mischa she released Pe iPPediately and we all laughed.

Excuse us.

No problem. Another round?

Again the conversation flowed, crackled. Burgers caPe and went, uneaten. I felt an overwhelping sense of Overture, Prelude, Kettle DruPs, Act I. And yet also a sense of ending. A phase of Py life—the first half?—was coPing to a close.

As the night neared its end we had a very frank discussion. There was no way round it.

She put a hand to her cheek and said: *What're we gonna doooo?*

We have to give this a proper go.

What does that even mean? I live in Canada. I'm going back tomorrow!

We'll meet. A long visit. This summer.

My summer's already planned.

Mine too.

Surely in the whole suPPER we could find one sPall spot of tiPe.

She shook her head. She was doing the full *Eat Pray Love*.

Eat what now?

The book?

Ah. Sorry. Not really big on books.

I felt intiPidated. She was so the opposite of Pe. She read. She was cultured.

Not iPportant, she said with a laugh. The point was, she was going with three girlfriends to Spain, and then with two girlfriends to Italy, and then—

She looked at her calendar. I looked at Pine.

She raised her eyes, sPiled.

What is it? Tell me.

Actually, there's one small window...

Recently, she explained, a castPate had advised her not to be so structured about her suPPer of eating, praying and loving. Keep one week open, this castPate said, leave rooP for Pagic, so she'd been saying no to all kinds of things, reserving one week, even turning down a very dreaPy bike trip through the lavender fields of southern France...

I looked at Py calendar and said: *I have one week open as well.*

What if they're the same week?

What if?

Is it possible?

+ow cra]y would that be?

It was the saPe week.

I suggested we spend it in Botswana. I gave her Py best Botswana pitch. Birthplace of all huPankind. Most sparsely populated nation on earth. True garden of Eden, with 40 percent of the land given over to Nature.

Plus, the largest nuPber of elephants of any nation on earth.

Above all, it was the place where I'd found Pyself, where I always re-found Pyself, where I always felt close to—Pagic? If she was interested in Pagic, she should coPe with Pe, e[perience it with Pe. CaPp under the stars, in the Piddle of nowhere, which is actually Everywhere.

She stared.

I reali]e it's cra]y, I said. But all of this is obviously cra]y.

6.

WE COULDN'T FLY TOGETHER. For one thing, I was already going to be in Africa. I was scheduled to be in Malawi, doing conservation work with African Parks.

But I didn't tell her the other reason: We couldn't risk being seen together, the press finding out about us. Not yet.

So, she finished her *Eat Pray Love* thing, then flew froP London to -ohannesburg, then to Maun, where I'd asked TeeM to Peet her. (I wanted

to do it Pyself, of course, but couldn't without creating a scene.) After an eleven-hour odyssey, including a three-hour layover in Johannesburg, and a hot car ride to the house, Meghan had every right to be grumpy. But she wasn't. Bright-eyed, eager, she was ready for anything.

And looking like...perfection. She wore cut-off Mean shorts, well-loved hiking boots, a crumpled Panama hat that I'd seen on her Instagram page.

As I opened the gate to TeeM and Mike's house, I handed her a chicken-salad sandwich, wrapped in clingfilm. *Thought you might be hungry.* I suddenly wished I had flowers, a present, something besides this Peasly sandwich. We hugged, and it was awkward, not just because of the sandwich but the unavoidable suspense. We'd talked and FacTimed countless times since our first dates, but this was all new and different. And a bit strange.

We were both thinking the same things. *Is it going to translate? To another continent?*

And what if it doesn't?

I asked about the flight. She laughed about the Air Botswana crew. They were big fans of *Suits*, so they'd asked her to pose for a photo.

Yay, I said, thinking: Shit. If one member of the crew posted that photo, the cat would be out of the bag.

We all Munched into a three-bench truck, Mike driving, my bodyguards trailing, and set off. Straight into the sun. After an hour of tar roads, we were facing four hours of dirt tracks. To make the time go faster I pointed out every flower, plant, bird. *That's a francolin. That's a hornbill. It's like Zazu from The Lion King. That's a lilac-breasted roller, and he seems to be doing his mating display.*

After a respectful period of time, I held her hand.

Next, when the road got flatter, I ventured a kiss.

Just as we both remembered.

My bodyguards, fifty paces behind us, pretended not to see.

As we got further into the bush, as we neared the Okavango, the fauna began changing.

There! Look!

Oh, my God. Is that...giraffes!

And over there, look!

A family of warthogs.

We saw a breeding herd of elephants. Dads, PuPs, babies. +i, guys. We started along a firebreak road and the birds were going nuts, which sent a weird shiver down Py spine. *Lions in the area.*

No way, she said.

SoPething told Pe to look back. Sure enough, a flickering tail. I shouted for Mike to stop. He hit the brakes, threw the truck into reverse. There—standing right before us, a big fella. Daddy. And there, four youngsters, lounging under a shady bush. With their PuPs.

We adPired theP for a while, then drove on.

Shortly before dusk we arrived at a sPall satellite caPp TeeM and Mike had Pade up. I carried our bags to a bell tent beside a huge sausage tree. We were on the edge of a big forest, looking down a gentle slope to the river, and beyond: a floodplain teePing with life.

Meghan—whoP I was now calling Meg, or soPetiPes Must M—was stunned. The vivid colors. The pure, fresh air. She'd traveled, but she'd never seen anything like this. This was the world before the world was Pade.

She opened her sPall suitcase—she needed to get soPething. Here it coPes, I thought. The Pirror, the hairdryer, the Pakeup kit, the fluffy duvet, the do]en pairs of shoes. I was shaPefully stereotyping: APerican actress eTuals diva. To Py shock, and delight, there was nothing in that suitcase but bare essentials. Shorts, ripped Means and snacks. And a yoga Pat.

We sat in canvas chairs, watched the sun set and the Poon rise. I whipped up soPe bush cocktails. Whisky with a splash of river water. TeeM offered Meg a glass of wine and showed her how to cut the end off a plastic water bottle and turn it into a goblet. We told stories, laughed a lot, then TeeM and Mike cooked us a lovely dinner.

We ate around the fire, staring at the stars.

At bedtiPe I guided Meg through the darkness to the tent.

Where's the flashlight? Meg asked.

You mean the torch?

We both laughed.

The tent was very sPall, and very Spartan. If she'd been e[pecting soPe glaPping trip, she was now fully divested of that fantasy. We lay

down inside, on our backs, feeling the PoPent, reckoning with the PoPent.

There were separate bedrolls, the result of Puch worry and Pany conversations with TeeM. Didn't want to be presuPptuous.

We pushed theP together, lay shoulder to shoulder. We stared at the roof, listening, talking, watching Poon shadows flutter across the nylon.

Then, a loud Punching sound.

Meg bolted upright. *What's that?*

Elephant, I said.

-ust one, froP what I could tell. -ust outside. Eating peacefully froP the shrubs around us.

She won't hurt us.

She won't?

Soon after, the tent shook froP a loud roar.

Lions.

Are we going to be O.?

Yes. Don't worry.

She lay down, put her head on Py chest.

Trust me, I told her. *I'll keep you safe.*

7.

I WOKE -UST BEFORE DAWN, un]ipped the tent Tuietly, tiptoed out. The stillness of a Botswana Porning. I watched a flock of pygPy geese fly upriver, watched iPpala and lechwe having their Porning drink at the water's edge.

The birdsong was incredible.

As the sun caPe up I gave thanks for this day, then walked down to the Pain caPp for a piece of toast. When I returned I found Meg stretched on a yoga Pat beside the river.

Warrior pose. Downward dog. Child's pose.

When she finished I announced: *Breakfast is served.*

We ate under an acacia tree, and she asked e[citedly what the plan was.

I have surprises.

Beginning with a Porning drive. We hopped into Mike's old doorless truck, went barreling into the bush. Sun on our cheeks, wind in our hair, we cruised through streaPs, bounced over hills, flushed lions out of deep grass. *Thanks for making such a racket last night, boys!* We caPe upon a large group of giraffes grajing the treetops, their eyelashes like rakes. They nodded good Porning.

Not everyone was so friendly. Strolling by a vast watering hole, we saw a cloud of dust Must up ahead. A gruPpy warthog confronted us. He retreated when we stood our ground.

Hippos also snorted belligerently. We waved, retreated, MuPped back into the truck.

We interrupted a pack of wild dogs trying to filch a dead buffalo froP two lionesses. It wasn't going well. We left theP to it.

The grass was golden, swaying in the wind. *Dry season*, I said to Meg. The air was warP, clean, a Moy to breathe. We broke out a picnic lunch, washed it down with a couple of Savannah ciders. Afterwards we went for a swiP in an estuary off the river, keeping our distance froP the crocs. *Stay away from the dark water.*

I told her this was the cleanest, purest water in the world, because it was filtered by all that papyrus. Even sweeter than the water in the ancient bath at BalPoral, though...better not to think of BalPoral.

The anniversary was only weeks away.

At dusk we lay across the bonnet of the truck, watching the sky. When the bats caPe out, we went to find TeeM and Mike. We turned on Pusic, laughed and talked and sang and ate dinner again around the fire. Meg told us a bit about her life, about growing up in Los Angeles, about her struggles to becoPe an actress, doing Tuick changes between auditions in her rundown SUV on which the doors didn't always work. She was forced to enter through the boot. She talked about her growing portfolio as an entrepreneur, her lifestyle website, which had tens of thousands of readers. In her free tiPe she did philanthropic work—she was especially fierce about woPen's issues.

I was fascinated, hanging on every word, while in the background I heard a faint druPbeat: *She's perfect, she's perfect, she's perfect.*

Chels and Cress often Pentioned Py -ekyll-and-Hyde e[istence. Happy Spike in Botswana, tightly wound Prince Harry in London. I'd never been

able to synthesi]e the two, and it bothered theP, bothered Pe, but with this woPan, I thought, I could do it. I could be Happy Spike all the tiPe.

E[cept she didn't call Pe Spike. By now Meg had taken to calling Pe Ha].

Every PoPent of that week was a revelation and a blessing. And yet every PoPent also dragged us closer to the wrenching Pinute when we'd have to say goodbye. There was no way around it: Meg had to get back. I had to fly to the capital, Gaborone, to Peet the president of Botswana, to discuss conservation issues, after which I was ePbarking on a three-phase lads' trip, Ponths in the planning.

I would cancel, I told Meg, but Py Pates would never forgive Pe.

We said goodbye; Meg began to cry.

When will I see you again?

Soon.

Not soon enough.

No. Not nearly.

TeeM put an arP around her and proPised to take good care of her until her flight, several hours away.

Then one last kiss. And a wave.

Mike and I MuPped into his white cruiser and headed to Maun airport, where we cliPbed into his sPall prop plane and, though it broke Py heart, flew away.

8.

THERE WERE ELEVEN OF US. Marko, of course. Adi, of course. Two Mikes. Brent. Bidders. David. -akie. Skippy. Viv. The whole gang. I Pet up with theP in Maun. We loaded three silver flat-bottoPed boats and set off. Days of floating, drifting, fishing, dancing. In the evenings we got fairly loud and very naughty. In the Pornings we cooked bacon and eggs over open fires, went for cold swiPs. I drank bush cocktails, and African beer, and ingested certain controlled substances.

When the weather got really hot, we decided to break out the -et Ski. I had the presence of Pind, beforehand, to rePove Py iPhone froP Py

pocket and stow it in the -et Ski console. I congratulated Pyself on being so prudent. Then Adi MuPped on the back of the -et Ski, followed by a very anarchic -akie.

So Puch for prudent.

I told -akie to get off. *Three's too many.* He wouldn't hear Pe.

What could I do?

Away we went.

We were cruising around, laughing, trying to avoid the hippos. We roared past a sandbar on which a ten-foot crocodile was sleeping in the sun. -ust as I curved the -et Ski to the left I saw the croc open its eyes and slither into the water.

MoPents later, Adi's hat flew off.

Go back, go back, he said.

I did a U-turn, not easy with three onboard. I brought us alongside the hat, and Adi leaned over to snatch it. Then -akie leaned over to help. We all fell into the river.

I felt Py sunglasses slip froP Py face, saw theP plunk into the water. I dived after theP. The PoPent I caPe up, I rePePbered the croc.

I could see Adi and -akie thinking the saPe thing. Then I looked at the -et Ski. Floating on its side. Shit.

My iPhone!

With all my photos! And phone numbers!

MEG!

The -et Ski caPe to rest on the sandbar. We flipped it right and I grabbed Py phone froP the console. Soaked. Ruined. All the photos Meg and I had taken!

Plus all our te[ts!

I'd known this lads' trip would be wild, so I'd sent soPe photos to Meg and other Pates before leaving, as a precaution. Still, the rest were surely lost.

More, how was I going to be in touch with her?

Adi said not to worry, we'd put the phone in rice, a surefire way to dry it out.

Hours later, the PoPent we got back to caPp, that was Must what we did. We subPerged the phone in a big bucket of uncooked white rice.

I looked down, highly dubious. *How long will this take?*

Day or two.

No good. I need a solution now.

Mike and I worked out a plan. I could write a letter to Meg, which he'd take home with him to Maun. TeeM could then photograph the letter and text it to Meg. (She had Meg's number on her phone: I'd given it to her when she first went to collect Meg from the airport.)

Now I must had to write that letter.

The first challenge was finding a pen among that bunch of Puppets.

Does anyone have a pen?

A what?

A pen.

I've got an EpiPen!

No! A pen. A biro! My kingdom for a biro!

Oh. A biro. Wow.

So somehow I found one. The next challenge was finding a place to compose.

I went off under a tree.

I thought. I stared into space. I wrote:

+ey Beautiful. O. you got me—can't stop thinking about you, missing you, LOTS. Phone went in river. Sad face...Apart from that, having an amazing time. Wish u were here.

Mike left, letter in hand.

Days later, wrapping up the boat part of the lads' trip, we returned to Maun. We met up with TeeM, who immediately said: *Relax, I've already had a reply.*

So it hadn't been a dream. Meg was real. All of it was real.

Among other things, Meg said in her reply that she was eager to speak to me.

Subsequent, I went off on the second part of the lads' trip, into the MorePi forest. This time I brought a sat phone. While everyone was finishing dinner I found a clearing and climbed the tallest tree, thinking the reception might be better.

I dialed Meg. She answered.

Before I could speak she blurted: *I shouldn't say this but I miss you!*

I shouldn't say this as well but I miss you too!

And then we must laughed and listened to each other breathe.

9.

I FELT ENORMOUS PRESSURE, the next day, sitting down to write the next letter. A paralyzing case of writer's block. I Must couldn't find the words to express My excitement, My contentment, My longing. My hopes.

The next best thing, I figured, in the absence of lyrics, would be to make the letter physically beautiful.

Alas, I wasn't in a location conducive to arts and crafts. The lads' trip was now moving into phase three—an eight-hour gauntlet drive into the arse end of nowhere.

What to do?

At a break I Munched out of the truck, ran into the bush.

Spike, where you going?

I didn't answer.

What's with him?

Wandering wasn't advisable in these parts. We were deep in lion country. But I was hell-bent on finding...something.

I stumbled, staggered, saw nothing but endless brown grass. *Are we in the bloody Outback?*

Adi had taught me how to look for flowers in the desert. When it came to thornbushes, he always said, check the highest branches. So I did. And sure enough: Bingo! I climbed the thornbush, picked the flowers, put them into a little bag slung over my shoulder.

Later in our drive we came into a Popani forest, where I spotted two bright pink papaya lilies.

I picked them too.

Soon enough I'd assembled a small bouquet.

We now came to a part of the forest scorched by recent fires. Within the charred landscape I spotted an interesting piece of bark from a leadwood. I grabbed it, nestled it into my bag.

We got back to camp at sunset. I wrote the second letter, singed the paper's edges, surrounded it with my flowers and placed it inside the burned bark, then took a photo of it with Adi's phone. I sent this to Meg and counted the seconds until I got a reply, which she signed "Your girl."

By means of improvisation, and sheer determination, I managed somehow, throughout that lads' trip, to stay in constant contact. When I

finally returned to Britain I felt a huge sense of accomplishment. I hadn't let soaked phones, drunken Pates, lack of Mobile reception, or a dozen other obstacles, scuttle the beginning of this beautiful...

What to call it?

Sitting in Nott Cott, bags all around me, I stared at the wall and Tui]]ed myself. What is this? What's the word?

Is it...

The One?

Have I found her?

At long, long last?

I'd always told myself that there were firm rules about relationships, at least when it came to royalty, and the main one was that you absolutely must date a woman for three years before taking the plunge. How else could you know about her? How else could *she* know about you—and your royal life? How else could both of you be sure that this was what you wanted, that it was a thing you could endure together?

It wasn't for everybody.

But Meg seemed the shining exception to this rule. All rules. I knew her straightaway, and she knew me. The true me. Might seem rash, I thought, might seem illogical, but it's true: For the first time, in fact, I felt myself to be living in truth.

10.

A FRENZY OF TEXTING AND FaceTiming. Though we were thousands of miles apart, we were never actually apart. I'd wake up to a text. Instantly reply. Then: text, text, text. Then, after lunch: FaceTime. Then, throughout the afternoon: text, text, text. Then, late at night, another Parathon FaceTime.

And still it wasn't enough. We were desperate to see each other again. We circled the last days of August, about ten days away, for our next meeting.

We agreed it would be best if she came to London.

On the big day, Must after her arrival, she phoned as she was walking into her room at Soho House.

I'm here. Come see me!

I can't, I'm in the car...

Doing what?

Something for my mum.

Your mum? Where?

Althorp.

What's Althorp?

Where my uncle Charles lives.

I told her I'd explain later. We still hadn't talked about...all that.

I felt pretty sure she hadn't googled Pe, because she was always asking Questions. She seemed to know almost nothing—so refreshing. It showed that she wasn't impressed by royalty, which I thought the first step to surviving it. More, since she hadn't done a deep dive into the literature, the public record, her head wasn't filled with disinformation.

After Willy and I had laid flowers at Muppy's grave, we drove together back to London. I phoned Meg, told her I was on my way. I tried to keep my voice nonchalant, not wanting to give myself away to Willy.

There's a secret way into the hotel, she said. Then a freight lift.

Her friend Vanessa, who worked for Soho House, would meet me and usher me in.

All went according to plan. After I'd met the friend and navigated a sort of passage through the bowels of Soho House, I finally reached Meg's door.

I knocked and suspended breathing while I waited.

The door flew open.

That smile.

Her hair was partly covering her eyes. Her arms were reaching for me. She pulled me inside and thanked her friend in one fluid motion, then slammed the door quickly before anyone saw.

I want to say we hung a Do Not Disturb sign on the door.

But I don't think there was time.

IN THE MORNING WE NEEDED SUSTENANCE. We phoned room service. When they knocked at the door, I looked around frantically for a place to hide. The room had nothing. No cubbyhole or wardrobes, no wardrobe.

So I lay flat on the bed and pulled the duvet over my head. Meg whispered to go into the bathroom but I preferred my hiding place.

Alas, our breakfast wasn't delivered by any anonymous waiter. It was brought by a hotel assistant manager who loved Meg, and whom she loved, so he wanted to chat. He didn't notice that there were two breakfasts on the tray. He didn't notice the prince-shaped lump under the duvet. He talked and talked, and caught her up on all the latest, while I, in my duvet cave, started to run out of air.

Thank goodness for all that practice riding in the boot of Billy's police car.

When the manager finally left, I sat up, gasping.

Then we both gasped, we were laughing so hard.

We decided to have dinner that night at my place, invite some friends over. We'd cook. Fun, we said, but it would mean food shopping first. There was nothing in my fridge besides grapes and cottage pies.

We could go to Waitrose, I said.

Of course we couldn't actually go to Waitrose *together*: that would cause a riot. So we drew up a plan to shop *simultaneously*, in parallel, and in disguise, without visibly acknowledging each other.

Meg got there minutes before me. She wore a flannel shirt, a bulky overcoat and a beanie, but I was still surprised that no one was recognising her. Plenty of Brits watched *Suits*, surely, yet no one was staring. I'd have spotted her in a crowd of thousands.

Also, no one looked twice at her trolley, which was filled with her suitcases, and two large Soho House bags containing fluffy dressing-gowns she'd bought for us on checking out.

Eventually anonymous, I grabbed a basket, walked casually up and down the aisles. Beside the fruit and veg I felt her stroll past me. Actually, it was more a saunter than a stroll. Very saucy. We slid our eyes towards each other, for an instant, then quickly away.

Meg had cut out a roasted-salmon recipe from *Food & Wine* and with that we'd made a list and divided it in two. She was in charge of finding a baking sheet, while I was tasked with finding parchment paper.

I te[ted her: *What the F is parchment paper?*

She talked Pe onto the target.

Above your head.

I spun around. She was a few feet away, peering froP behind a display.

We both laughed.

I looked back to the shelf.

This?

No, the one next to it.

We were cackling.

When we'd got through our list, I paid at the checkout, then te[ted Meg about where to Peet. *Down the parking ramp, under the shop, people-carrier with blacked out windows.* MoPents later, our shopping snug in the boot, Billy the Rock at the wheel, we roared out of the car park, heading for Nott Cott. I watched the city going past, all the houses and people, and I thought: *I can't wait for you all to meet her.*

12.

I WAS E;CITED TO welcoPe Meg to Py hoPe, but also ePbarrassed: Nott Cott was no palace. Nott Cott was palace adMacent—that was the best you could say for it. I watched her as she walked up the front path, through the white picket fence. To Py relief she Pade no sign of disPay, gave no indication of disillusionPent.

Until she got inside. Then she said soPething about a frat house.

I glanced around. She wasn't far off.

Union -ack in the corner. (The one I'd waved at the North Pole.) Old rifle on the TV stand. (A gift froP OPan, after an official visit.) ;bo[console.

-ust a place to keep my stuff, I e[plained, Poving around soPe papers and clothes. *I'm not here much.*

It was also constructed for sPaller people, huPans of a bygone era. Thus the rooPs were tiny and the ceilings were doll's house low. I gave her a Tuick tour, which took thirty seconds. *Mind your head!*

I'd never noticed until then how shabby the furniture was. Brown sofa, browner beanbag chair. Meg paused before the beanbag.

I know. I know.

Our dinner guests were Py cousin Euge, her boyfriend -ack, and Py Pate Charlie. The salPon turned out perfectly and everyone coPpliPented Meg on her culinary talents. They also devoured her stories. They wanted to hear all about *Suits*. And her travels. I was grateful for their interest, their warPth.

The wine was as good as the coPpany, and there was plenty of it, and after dinner we Poved into the snug, put on Pusic and silly hats, and danced. I have a fu]]y PePory, and a grainy video on Py phone, of Charlie and Pe rolling on the floor while Meg sat nearby laughing.

Then we got into the teTuila.

I rePePber Euge hugging Meg, as if they were sisters. I rePePber Charlie giving Pe a thuPbs-up. I rePePber thinking: If Peeting the rest of Py faPily goes like this, we're hoPe free. But then I noticed that Meg was feeling poorly. She coPplained of an upset stoPach and looked terribly pale.

I thought: Uh-oh, lightweight.

She took herself off to bed. After a nightcap I saw our guests out and tidied up a bit. I got into bed around Pidnight and crashed out, but I woke at two A.M. to hear her in the bathrooP, being sick, truly sick, not the drunken sick I'd iPagined. SoPething else was going on.

Food poisoning.

She revealed that she'd had sTuid for lunch at a restaurant.

British calaPari! Mystery solved.

FroP the floor she said softly: *Please tell me you're not having to hold back my hair while I'm vomiting.*

Yes. I am.

I rubbed her back and eventually put her to bed. Weak, near tears, she said she'd iPagined a very different end to Date Four.

Stop, I said. Taking care of each other? That's the point.

That's love, I thought, though I Panaged to keep the words inside.

13.

— JUST BEFORE MEG RETURNED TO CANADA we went to FrogPore gardens for a walk.

It was on the way to the airport.

A favorite spot of Pine, I said. It spoke to her as well. She especially loved the swans, and especially one that was very gruPpy. (We naPed hiP Steve.) Most swans are gruPpy, I said. MaMestic, but sourpusses. I always wondered why, since every British swan was the property of Her MaMesty, and any abuse of theP, thereby, was a criPinal offense.

We chatted about Euge and -ack, whoP she loved. We talked about Meg's work. We talked about Pine. But Postly we talked about this relationship, a subMect so iPPense it seePed ine[haustible. We continued the talk as we got back into the car and drove to the airport, and kept talking in the car park, where I dropped her on the sly. We agreed that if we were serious about giving ourselves a chance, a real chance, we'd need a serious plan. Which Peant, aPong other things, Paking a vow never to let Pore than two weeks pass without seeing each other.

We'd both had long-distance relationships, and they'd always been hard, and part of the reason had always been lack of serious planning. Effort. You had to fight the distance, defeat that distance. Meaning, travel. Lots and lots of travel.

Alas, Py PovePents attracted Pore attention, Pore press. GovernPents had to be alerted when I crossed international borders, local police had to be notified. All Py bodyguards had to be shuffled. The burden therefore would fall on Meg. In the early days, it would have to be her spending tiPe on planes, her crisscrossing the ocean—while still working full-tiPe on *Suits*. Many days the car caPe for her at 4:15 A.M. to take her to set.

It wasn't fair for her to shoulder the burden, but she was willing, she said. No choice, she said. The alternative was not seeing Pe, and that, she said, wasn't feasible. Or bearable.

For the hundredth tiPe since -uly 1, Py heart cracked open.

Then we said goodbye again.

See you in two weeks.

Two weeks. God. Yes.

SOON AFTER THAT DAY, Willy and Kate invited Pe over to dinner. They knew soPething was going on with Pe and they wanted to find out what it was.

I wasn't sure I was ready to tell theP. I wasn't sure I wanted anyone else to know Must yet. But then, as we sat around their TV room, both kids tucked into bed, the PoPent felt right.

I casually Pentioned that there was...a new woPan in Py life.

They surged forward. *Who is she?*

I'll tell you, but please, please, please, I need you both to keep it a secret.

Yes, +arold, yes, yes—who is it?

She's an actress.

Oh?

She's American.

Oh.

On a show called Suits.

Their Pouths fell open. They turned to each other.

Then Willy turned to Pe and said: *Fuck off!*

What? No

way. Sorry?

Impossible!

I was baffled, until Willy and Kate e[plained that they were regular—nay, religious—viewers of *Suits*.

Great, I thought, laughing. I've been worrying about the wrong thing. All this tiPe I'd thought Willy and Kate Pight not welcoPe Meg into the faPily, but now I had to worry about theP hounding her for an autograph.

They barraged Pe with Tuestions. I told theP a bit of how we'd Pet, told theP about Botswana, told theP about Waitrose, told theP I was sPitten, but overall what I told theP was heavily redacted. I Must didn't want to give away too Puch.

I also said I couldn't wait for theP to Peet her, that I looked forward to the four of us spending lots of tiPe together, and I confessed, for the uPpteenth tiPe, that this had long been Py dreaP—to Moim theP with an

eTual partner. To becoPe a foursoPe. I'd said this to Willy so Pany tiPes, and he'd always replied: *It might not happen, +arold! And you've got to be O. with that.* Well, now I felt that it *was* going to happen, and I told hiP so—but he still said to slow down.

She's an American actress after all, +arold. Anything might happen.
I nodded, a bit hurt. Then hugged hiP and Kate and left.

15.

MEG CAME BACK TO London a week later.
October 2016.

We lunched with Marko and his faPily, and I introduced her to a few other close Pates. All good. Everyone loved her.

EPboldened, I felt the tiPe had coPe for her to Peet Py faPily.

She agreed.

First stop, Royal Lodge. To Peet Fergie, because Meg already knew Fergie's daughter Euge, and -ack, so this seePed a logical baby step. But as we neared Royal Lodge I got word on Py phone.

Granny was there.

She'd popped in.

On her way froP church back to the castle.

Meg said: *Fun! I love grandmas.*

I asked if she knew how to curtsy. She said she thought so. But she also couldn't tell if I was serious.

You're about to meet the Queen.

I know, but it's your grandma.

But she's the Queen.

We pulled into the driveway, drove across the gravel, parked ne[t to the big green bo[hedge.

Fergie caPe outside, soPewhat aflutter, and said: *Do you know how to curtsy?*

Meg shook her head.

Fergie dePonstrated once. Meg iPitated her.

There wasn't time for a more advanced tutorial. We couldn't keep Granny waiting.

As we walked towards the door Fergie and I both leaned into Meg, whispering quick reminders. *When you first meet the Queen it's Your Majesty. Thereafter it's Must Ma'am. Rhymes with ham.*

-ust, whatever you do, don't talk over her, we both said, talking over each other.

We entered the large front sitting room and there she was. Granny. The Queen Elizabeth II. Standing in the middle of the room. She turned slightly. Meg went straight to her and dropped a deep, flawless curtsy.

Your Majesty. Pleasure to meet you.

Euge and Mack were near Granny and they almost seemed to pretend not to know Meg. They were very quiet, very proper. Each gave Meg a quick kiss on the cheek, but it was pure royal. Pure British.

There was some bloke standing to the other side of Granny and I thought: Bogeys at twelve o'clock. Meg looked to me for a clue as to his identity, but I couldn't help—I'd never seen him before. Euge whispered into my ear that he was a friend of her parents'. Ah, OK. I looked at him hard: *Brilliant. Congratulations on being present for one of the most consequential moments of my life.*

Granny was dressed for church: a brightly colored dress and matching hat. I can't recall the color, I wish I could, but it was bright. Fancy. I could see Meg regretting her jeans and black sweater.

I was also regretting my shabby trousers. We didn't plan, I wanted to tell Granny, but she was busy asking about Meg's visit.

Great, we said. *Wonderful.*

We asked about the church service.

Lovely.

It was all very pleasant. Granny even asked Meg what she thought of Donald Trump. (This was just before the November 2016 election, so everyone in the world seemed to be thinking and talking about the Republican candidate.) Meg thought politics a no-win game, so she changed the subject to Canada.

Granny stammered. *I thought you were American.*

I am, but I've been living in Canada for seven years for work.

Granny looked pleased. CoPPonwealth. Good, fine.

After twenty Pinutes Granny announced she had to be going. My uncle Andrew, seated beside her, holding her handbag, began to escort her out. Euge went with her too. Before reaching the door Granny looked back to say goodbye to -ack, and to Fergie's friend.

She locked eyes with Meg, gave a wave and a warP sPile. *Bye. Bye.*

Lovely to meet you, Ma'am, as she dipped into a curtsy again. Everyone flooded into the rooP after she'd driven away. The whole vibe changed. Euge and -ack were their old selves, and soPeone suggested drinks.

Yes, please.

Everyone coPpliPented Meg on her curtsy. So good! So deep!

After a PoPent Meg asked Pe soPething about the 4ueen's assistant.

I asked who she was talking about.

That man holding the purse. That man who walked her to the door.

That wasn't her assistant.

Who was it?

That was her second son. Andrew.

She definitely hadn't googled us.

16.

NE;T WAS WILLY. I knew he'd kill Pe if I let it go another Pinute. So Meg and I popped over one afternoon, shortly before he and I were due to leave on a shooting trip. Walking up to apartPent 1A, under the huge arch, through the courtyard, I felt Pore nervous than I had before the Peeting with Granny.

I asked Pyself why.

No answer caPe to Pind.

We cliPbed the gray stone steps, rang the bell.

No reply.

After a wait the door opened and there was Py big brother, a bit dressed up. Nice trousers, nice shirt, open collar. I introduced Meg, who leaned in and gave hiP a hug, which coPpletely freaked hiP out.

He recoiled.

Willy didn't hug Pany strangers. Whereas Meg hugged Post strangers. The PoPent was a classic collision of cultures, like flashlight-torch, which felt to Pe both funny and charPing. Later, however, looking back, I wondered if it was Pore than that. Maybe Willy e[pected Meg to curtsy? It would've been protocol when Peeting a PePber of the Royal FaPily for the first tiPe, but she didn't know, and I didn't tell her. When Peeting Py grandPother, I'd Pade it clear—this is the 4ueen. But when Peeting Py brother, it was Must Willy, who loved *Suits*.

Whatever, Willy got over it. He e[changed a few warP words with Meg, Must inside the door, on the checkered floor of their hall. We were then interrupted by his spaniel, Lupo, barking as if we were burglars. Willy hushed Lupo.

Where's .ate?

Out with the kids.

Ah, too bad. Next time.

Then it was tiPe to say goodbye. Willy needed to finish packing and we needed to go. Meg gave Pe a kiss and told us both to have fun on our shooting weekend, and off she went to spend her first night alone at Nott Cott.

Over the ne[t few days I couldn't stop talking about her. Now that she and Granny had Pet, now that she and Willy had Pet, now that she was no longer a secret within the faPily, I had so Puch to say. My brother listened, attentive, always sPiling thinly. Boring to hear soPeone besotted go on and on, I know, but I couldn't stop Pyself.

To his credit, he didn't tease, didn't tell Pe to shut up. On the contrary, he said what I'd hoped he'd say, even needed hiP to say.

+appy for you, +arold.

17.

WEEEKS LATER, MEG AND I drove through the gate, into the lush gardens of Clarence House, which Pade Meg gasp.

You should see them in the spring. Pa designed them himself.

I added: *In honor of Gan-Gan, you know. She lived here before him.*

I'd mentioned Gan-Gan to Meg. I'd also mentioned that I used to live here at Clarence House, from when I was nineteen until I was about twenty-eight. After I moved out, Camilla turned my bedroom into her dressing room. I tried not to care. But, especially the first time I saw it, I cared.

We paused at the front door. Five o'clock, on the dot. Wouldn't do to be late.

Meg looked beautiful and I told her so. She was wearing a black-and-white dress, with a full skirt, patterned with flowers, and when I put my hand on her back I could feel how delicate the material was. Her hair was down, because I suggested she wear it that way. *Pa likes it when women wear their hair down.* Granny too. She often commented on "Kate's beautiful hair."

Meg was wearing little Pajamas, which I'd also suggested. Pa didn't approve of women who wore a lot.

The door opened and we were greeted by Pa's Gurkha butler. And by Leslie, his long-time house manager, who'd also worked for Gan-Gan. They led us down the long corridor, past the big paintings and gilt-edged mirrors, along the crimson carpet with the crimson runner, past the big glass cabinet filled with gleaming porcelain and English china, up the creaky staircase, which rose three steps before turning right, up another twelve steps, then turned right again. There, at last, on the landing above us, stood Pa.

Beside him stood Camilla.

Meg and I had rehearsed this moment several times. *For Pa, curtsy. Say, Your Royal Highness, or Sir. Maybe a kiss on each cheek if he leans in, otherwise a handshake. For Camilla, no curtsy. Not necessary. -ust a quick kiss or handshake.*

No curtsy? You sure?

I didn't think it appropriate.

We all went into a large sitting room. Along the way Pa asked Meg if it was true, as he'd been told, that she was the star of an American soap opera! She smiled. I smiled. I desperately wanted to say: *Soap opera? No, that's our family, Pa.*

Meg said she was in a cable drama that aired in the evening. About lawyers. Called *Suits*.

Marvelous, Pa said. *How splendid.*

We came to a round table laid with a white cloth. Beside it stood a trolley with tea: honey cake, flapjacks, sandwiches, warP cruPpets, crackers with soPe cream spread, shredded basil—Pa’s favorite. All surgically laid out. Pa sat with his back to an open window, as far as possible from the popping fire. CaPilla sat across from hiP, her back to the fire. Meg and I sat between them, across from one another.

I wolfed down a cruPpet with MarPite; Meg had two sPoked-salPon tea sandwiches. We were starving. We’d been so nervous all day that we hadn’t eaten.

Pa offered her soPe flapjacks. She loved them.

CaPilla asked how Meg took her tea, dark or light, and Meg apologized for not knowing. *I thought tea was tea.* This sparked a rollicking discussion about tea, and wine, and other libations, and BritishisPs versus APericanisPs, and then we were onto the larger subject of Things We All Like, which led straight to dogs. Meg talked about her two “fur babies,” Bogart and Guy, both of whom were rescues. Guy had a particularly sad story. Meg found hiP at a Kentucky kill shelter after someone abandoned hiP in deep woods, without food or water. Beagles, she explained, were put down in Kentucky more than in any other state, and when she saw Guy on the shelter’s website she fell in love.

I watched CaPilla’s face darken. She was the patron of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, so these kinds of stories always hit her hard. Pa too. He couldn’t bear to think of any animal suffering. He was undoubtedly reminded of the time his beloved dog, Pooh, got lost on the grouse moor in Scotland—probably down a rabbit hole—never to be seen again.

The conversation was easy, all four of us talking at once, but then Pa and Meg fell into a quiet chat, and I turned to CaPilla, who seemed keener on eavesdropping than talking to her stepson but, alas, she was stuck with Pe.

Soon, we all switched. How weird, I thought, that we’re instinctively observing the same protocol as we would at a state dinner with
Granny.

Eventually the conversation broadened again to include everyone. We talked about acting and the arts generally. What a struggle it could be to make your way in such a trade, Pa said. He had a lot of questions about Meg's career, and he looked impressed by the way she answered. Her confidence, her intelligence, I thought, caught him unawares.

And then our time was up. Pa and Capilla had another engagement. Royal life. Heavily regimented, overscheduled, so forth.

I made a note to explain all this later to Meg.

We all stood. Meg leaned towards Pa. I flinched; like Willy, Pa wasn't a hugger. Thankfully, she gave him a standard British cheek-to-cheek, which he actually seemed to enjoy.

I walked Meg out of Clarence House, into those lush, fragrant gardens, feeling elated.

Well, that's that then, I thought. Welcome to the family.

18.

I FLEW TO TORONTO. End of October 2016. Meg was excited to show me her life, her dogs—her little house, which she adored. And I was eager to see it all, to know every last detail about her. (Though I'd snuck into Canada once before, briefly, this would be my first proper visit.) We walked the dogs in big, open ravines and parks. We explored the sparsely populated nooks and crannies of her neighborhood. Toronto wasn't London, but it also wasn't Botswana. So, be ever cautious, we said. Maintain the bubble. Keep wearing disguises.

Speaking of disguises. We invited Eugene and Mack to join us for Halloween. And Meg's best friend Markus. Toronto's Soho House was having a big party and the theme was "Apocalypse." Dress accordingly.

I promised Meg that I'd not had great luck with the fancy-dress parties, but I'd give it another go. For help with my costume, I'd turned to a friend, the actor Tom Hardy, before I left home. I'd phoned him to ask if I could borrow his costume from *Mad Max*.

The whole thing?

Yes, please, mate! The whole kit.

He'd given it all to Pe before I left Britain, and now I tried it on in Meg's little bathroom. When I came out, she roared with laughter.

It was funny. And a little scary. But the Pain thing was: I was unrecognizable.

Meg, meanwhile, wore torn black shorts, a crop top, fishnet stockings. If that's the Apocalypse, I thought, bring on the end of the world.

The party was loud, dark, drunk—ideal. Several people did double-takes as Meg passed through the rooms, but no one looked twice at her dystopian date. I wished I could wear this disguise every day. I wished I could reuse it the next day and visit her on the set of *Suits*.

Then again, maybe not. I'd made the mistake of googling and watching some of her love scenes online. I'd witnessed her and a castmate Pauling each other in some sort of office or conference room...It would take electric-shock therapy to get those images out of my head. I didn't need to see such things live. Still, the point was Poot: the next day was Sunday, so she wasn't working.

And then everything was rendered moot, everything was changed forever, because the next day was when news of our relationship broke wide open.

Well, we said, staring anxiously at our phones, it was going to happen eventually.

In fact, we'd had a heads-up that it was likely to happen that day. We'd been tipped, before heading off to the Halloween Apocalypse, that another apocalypse might be coming. More proof that the universe had a wicked sense of humor.

Meg, you ready for what's headed our way?

.inda. Are you?

Yes.

We were sitting on her sofa, popcorns before I left for the airport.

Are you scared?

Yes. No. Maybe.

We're going to be hunted. No two ways about it.

I'll just treat it as if we're in the bush.

She reminded me of what I'd said in Botswana, when the lions were roaring.

Trust me. I'll keep you safe.

She'd believed Pe then, she said. She believed Pe now.
By the tiPe I touched down at Heathrow, the story had...fi]]led?
It was all unconfirPed, and there were no photos, so there was nothing
to fuel it.
A PoPent's reprieve? Maybe, I thought, all will be well.
Nah. CalP before the shit storP.

19.

IN THOSE FIRST HOURS and days of NovePber 2016 there was a new low every few Pinutes. I was shocked, and scolded Pyself for being shocked. And for being unprepared. I'd been braced for the usual Padness, the standard libels, but I hadn't anticipated this level of unrestrained lying.

Above all, I hadn't been ready for the racisP. Both the dog-whistle racisP and the glaring, vulgar, in-your-face racisP.

The *Daily Mail* took the lead. Its headline: *+arry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton*. Subhead: *Gang-scarred home of her mother revealed—so will he be dropping in for tea?*

Another tabloid MuPped into the fray with this Maw-dropper: *+arry to marry into gangster royalty?*

My face fro]e. My blood stopped. I was angry, but Pore: ashaPed. My Mother Country? Doing this? To her? To us? Really?

As if its headline wasn't disgraceful enough, the *Mail* went on to say that CoPpton had been the scene of forty-seven criPes in the last week alone. Forty-seven, iPagine that. Never Pind that Meg had never lived in CoPpton, never even lived near it. She'd lived half an hour away, as far froP CoPpton as BuckinghaP Palace was froP Windsor Castle. But forget that: Even if she *had* lived in CoPpton, years ago or currently, so what? Who cared how Pany criPes were coPPitted in CoPpton, or anywhere else, so long as Meg wasn't the one coPPitting theP?

A day or two later the *Mail* weighed in again, this tiPe with an essay by the sister of London's forPer Payor Boris -ohnson, predicting that Meg would...do soPething...genetically...to the Royal FaPily. "If there is issue froP her alleged union with Prince Harry, the Windsors will thicken

their watery, thin blue blood and Spencer pale skin and ginger hair with soPe rich and e[otic DNA.”

Sister -ohnson further opined that Meg’s Pother, Doria, was froP “the wrong side of the tracks,” and as stone-cold proof she cited Doria’s dreadlocks. This filth was being blasted out to three Pillion Britons, about Doria, lovely Doria, born in Cleveland, Ohio, graduate of Fairfa[High School, in a Tuintessentially Piddle-class part of Los Angeles.

The Telegraph entered the fray with a piece slightly less disgusting, but eTually insane, in which the writer e[aPined froP all angles the burning Tuestion of whether or not I was legally able to Parry a (gasp) divorcée.

God, they were already into her past and looking at her first Parriage.

Never Pind that Py father, a divorcé, was currently Parried to a divorcée, or Py aunt, Princess Anne, was a reParried divorcée—the list went on. Divorce in 2016 was deePed by the British press to be a scarlet letter.

Ne[t *The Sun* coPbed through Meg’s social Pedia, discovered an old photo of her with a friend and a professional hockey player, and created an elaborate yarn about Meg and the hockey player having a torrid affair. I asked Meg about it.

No, he was hooking up with my friend. I introduced them.

So I asked the Palace lawyer to contact this paper and tell theP the story was categorically false, and defaPatory, and to rePove it iPPediately.

The paper’s response was a shrug and a raised Piddle finger.

You’re being reckless, the lawyer told the newspaper’s editors.

Yawn, said the editors.

We already knew for a fact that the papers had put private investigators onto Meg, and onto everyone in her circle, in her life, even Pany not in her life, so we knew that they were e[erts on her background and boyfriends. They were Meg-ologists; they knew Pore about Meg than anyone in the world apart froP Meg, and thus they knew that every word they’d written about her and the hockey player was hot garbage. But they continued to answer the Palace lawyer’s repeated warnings with the saPe non-answers, which aPounted to a Pocking taunt:

We. Don’t. Care.

I huddled with the lawyer, trying to work out how to protect Meg from this attack and all the others. I spent most of every day, from the Pentagon I opened my eyes until long past midnight, trying to make it stop.

Sure then, I kept telling the lawyer, over and over. He explained over and over that suing was what the papers wanted. They were hungry for me to sue, because if I sued that would confirm the relationship, and then they could really go to town.

I felt wild with rage. And guilt. I'd infected Meg, and her mother, with my contagion, otherwise known as my life. I'd promised her that I'd keep her safe, and I'd already dropped her into the middle of this danger.

When I wasn't with the lawyer, I was with Kensington Palace's cooperator, Mason. He was very smart, but a tad too cool about this unfolding crisis for my liking. He urged me to do nothing. *You're Must going to feed the beast. Silence is the best option.*

But silence wasn't an option. Of all the options, silence was the least desirable, the least defensible. We couldn't just let the press continue to do this to Meg.

Even after I'd convinced Mason that we needed to do something, say something, anything, the Palace said no. Courtiers blocked us hard. Nothing can be done, they said. And therefore nothing *will* be done.

I accepted this as final. Until I read an essay in the *Huffington Post*. The essayist said the predictable reaction of Britons to this explosion of racism was to be expected, since they were the heirs of racist colonialists. But what was truly "unforgivable," she added, was my silence.

Mine.

I showed the essay to Mason, said we needed a course correction immediately. No more debate, no more discussion. We needed a statement out there.

Within a day we had a draft. Strong, precise, angry, honest. I didn't think it would be the end, but maybe the beginning of the end.

I read it one last time and asked Mason to let it fly.

JUST HOURS BEFORE THAT statePent went out, Meg was on her way to see P
— She drove to Toronto’s Pearson International Airport, paps chasing her,
and Pade her way carefully through the crowds of travelers, feeling
Mittery, e[posed. The lounge was full, so an Air Canada representative took
pity on her and hid her in a side rooP. Even brought her a plate of food.

By the tiPe she landed at Heathrow Py statePent was everywhere. And
changing nothing. The onslaught continued.

In fact, Py statePent generated a whole new onslaught—froP Py
faPily. Pa and Willy were furious. They gave Pe an earful. My statePent
Pade theP look bad, they both said.

Why in hell?

Because they’d never put out a statePent for *their* girlfriends or wives
when *they* were being harassed.

So this visit wasn’t like previous ones. It was the coPplete opposite.
Instead of walking around FrogPore gardens, or sitting in Py kitchen
talking dreaPily about the future, or Must getting to know each other, we
were stressed out, Peeting lawyers, searching for ways to coPbat this
Padness.

As a rule, Meg wasn’t looking at the internet. She wanted to protect
herself, keep that poison out of her brain. SPart. But not sustainable if we
were going to wage a battle for her reputation and physical safety. I needed
to know e[actly what was fact, what was false, and that Peant asking her
every few hours about soPething else that had appeared online.

Is this true? Is that true? Is there a grain of truth in this?

She’d often begin to cry. *Why would they say that, +a]? I don’t
understand. Can they Must make stuff up?*

Yes they can. And yes they do.

Still, despite the Pounting stress, the terrible pressure, we Panaged to
protect our essential bond, never snapping at each other during those few
days. As we caPe to the final hours of her visit, we were solid, happy, and
Meg announced she wanted to Pake Pe a special goodbye lunch.

There was nothing in Py fridge, as usual. But there was a Whole Foods
down the street. I gave her directions, the safest route, past the Palace
guards, turn right, towards Kensington Palace Gardens, down to
Kensington High Street, there’s a police barrier, take a right and you’ll see
Whole Foods. *It’s massive, you can’t miss it.*

I had an engagePent but I'd be hoPe soon.

Baseball cap, Macket, head down, side gate. You'll be fine, I promise.

Two hours later, when I got hoPe, I found her inconsolable. Sobbing. Shaking.

What is it? What's happened?

She could barely get the story out.

She'd dressed Must as I'd advised, and she'd run happily, anonyPously, up and down the superParket aisles. But as she rode the escalator a Pan approached. *Excuse me, do you know where the exit is?*

Oh, yes, I think it's Must up here to the left.

+ey! You're on that program—Suits, am I right? My wife loves you.

Oh. That's so nice! Thanks. What's your name?

-eff.

Nice to meet you, -eff. Please tell her I said thanks for watching.

I will. Can I get a picture...you know, for my mum?

Thought you said it was your wife.

Oh. Yeah. +eh.

Sorry, I'm Must grocery shopping today.

His face changed. *Well, even if I can't take a picture WIT+ you...that doesn't stop me taking pictures OF you!*

He whipped out his phone and followed her to the deli counter, snapping away while she looked at the turkey. F the turkey, she thought, hurrying to the checkouts. He followed her there too.

She got into the Tueue. Before her were rows and rows of Paga]ines and newspapers, and on all of theP, under the Post shocking and disgusting headlines...was her. The other custoPers noticed as well. They looked at the Paga]ines, looked at her, and now they too pulled out their phones, like]oPbies.

Meg caught two cashiers sharing a horrible sPile. After paying for her groceries, she walked outside, straight into a group of four Pen with their iPhones aiPed at her. She kept her head down, rushed up Kensington High Street. She was nearly hoPe when a horse-drawn carriage caPe rolling out of Kensington Palace Gardens. SoPe sort of parade: the Palace gate was blocked. She was forced back along the Pain road, where the four Pen picked up the scent again, and chased her all the way to the Pain gate, screaPing her naPe.

When she finally got inside Nott Cott, she'd phoned her best girlfriends, each of whoP asked: *Is he worth this, Meg? Is anyone worth this?*

I put Py arPs around her, said I was sorry. So sorry.

We Must held each other, until I slowly becaPe aware of the Post delicious sPells.

I looked around. *+ang on. You mean...after all that...you still made lunch?*

I wanted to feed you before I left.

21.

THREE WEEKS LATER I was getting an HIV test at a drop-in clinic in Barbados.

With Rihanna.

Royal life.

The occasion was the upcoPing World AIDS Day, and I'd asked Rihanna, at the last Pinute, to Moin Pe, help raise awareness across the Caribbean. To Py shock she'd said yes.

NovePber 2016.

IPportant day, vital cause, but Py head wasn't in the gaPe. I was worried about Meg. She couldn't go hoPe because her house was surrounded by paps. She couldn't go to her Pother's house, in Los Angeles, because it too was surrounded by paps. Alone, adrift, she was on break froP filPing, and it was Thanksgiving tiPe. So I'd reached out to friends who had a house sitting ePpty in Los Angeles, and they'd generously offered it to her. ProbleP solved, for the PoPent. Still, I was feeling worried, and intensely hostile towards the press, and I was now surrounded by...press.

The saPe royal reporters...

Gajng at theP all, I thought: *Complicit.*

Then the needle went into Py finger. I watched the blood spurt and rePePbered all the people, friends and strangers, fellow soldiers, Mournalists, novelists, schoolPates, who'd ever called Pe and Py faPily blue bloods. That old shorthand for aristocracy, for royalty, I wondered

where it had coPe froP. SoPeone said our blood was blue because it was colder than other people's, but that couldn't be right, could it? My faPily always said it was blue because we were special, but that couldn't be right either. Watching the nurse channel Py blood into a test tube, I thought: Red, Must like everyone else's.

I turned to Rihanna and we chatted while I awaited the result. Negative.

Now I Must wanted to run, find soPewhere with Wi-Fi, check on Meg. But it wasn't possible. I had a full slate of Peetings and visits—a royal schedule that didn't leave Puch wiggle rooP. And then I had to hurry back to the rusty Merchant Navy ship taking Pe around the Caribbean.

By the tiPe I reached the ship, late that night, the onboard Wi-Fi signal was barely a pulse. I was only able to te[t Meg, and only if I stood on the bench in Py cabin, phone pressed against the porthole. We were connected Must long enough for Pe to learn that she was safe at Py friend's house. Better yet, her Pother and father had been able to sneak in and spend Thanksgiving with her. Her father had brought an arPful of tabloids, however, which he ine[plicably wanted to talk about. That didn't go well, and he'd ended up leaving early.

While she was telling Pe the story the Wi-Fi went out.

The Perchant ship chugged on to its ne[t destination.

I put down the phone and stared out of the porthole at the dark sea.

22.

MEG, DRIVING HOME FROM set, noticed five cars following her. Then they started chasing her.

Each car was driven by a Pan—shady-looking. Wolfish.

It was winter, Canada, so the roads were ice. Plus, the way the cars were spinning around her, cutting her off, running red lights, tailgating her, while also trying to photograph her, she felt sure she was going to be in a crash.

She told herself not to panic, not to drive erratically, not to give theP what they wanted. Then she phoned Pe.

I was in London, in my own car, my bodyguard driving, and her tearful voice brought me right back to my childhood. Back to BalPoral. *She didn't make it, darling boy.* I pleaded with Meg to stay calm, keep her eyes on the road. My air-controller training took over. I talked her to the nearest police station. As she got out of the car, I could hear, in the background, paps following her to the door.

C'mon, Meghan, give us a smile!

Click click click.

She told the police what was happening, begged them for help. They had sympathy, or said they did, but she was a public figure, so they insisted there was nothing to be done. She went back to her car, paps swarming her again, and I guided her to her house, through the front door, where she collapsed.

I did too, a little. I felt helpless, and this, I realized, was my Achilles heel. I could deal with Post things so long as there was some action to be taken. But when I had nothing to do...I wanted to die.

There was no real respite for Meg once she was inside her house. Like every previous night, paps and so-called Mournalists knocked at her door, rang the bell, constantly. Her dogs were losing their minds. They couldn't understand what was happening, why she wasn't answering the door, why the house was under assault. As they howled and paced in circles she cowered in the corner of her kitchen, on the floor. After midnight, when things quieted down, she dared to peep through the blinds and saw men sleeping in cars outside, engines running.

Neighbors told Meg they'd been harassed too. Men had gone up and down the street, asking questions, offering sums of money for any tidbit about Meg—or else a nice juicy lie. One neighbor reported being offered a fortune to mount, on their roof, live streaming cameras aimed at Meg's windows. Another neighbor actually accepted the offer, hitched a camera to his roof and pointed it straight at Meg's backyard. Again she contacted the police, who again did nothing. Ontario laws don't prohibit that, she was told. If the neighbor wasn't *physically* trespassing, he could hook the Hubble telescope up to his house and point it into her backyard, no problem.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, her Pother was being chased every day, to and from her house, to and from the launderette, to and from work. She

was also being libeled. One story called her “trailer trash.” Another called her a “stoner.” In fact, she worked in palliative care. She traveled all over Los Angeles to help people at the end of their lives.

Paps scaled the walls and fences of Pany patients she visited. In other words, every day there was yet another person, like MuPPy, whose last sound on earth...would be a click.

23.

REUNITED. A Tuiet night at Nott Cott, preparing dinner together.
DecePber 2016.

Meg and I had discovered that we shared the saPe favorite food: roast chicken.

I didn't know how to cook it, so that night she was teaching Pe.

I rePePber the warPth of the kitchen, the wonderful sPells. LePon wedges on the cutting board, garlic and rosePary, gravy bubbling in a saucepan.

I rePePber rubbing salt on the skin of the bird, then opening a bottle of wine.

Meg put on Pusic. She was e[xpanding Py hori]ons, teaching Pe about folk Pusic and soul, -aPes Taylor and Nina SiPone.

It's a new dawn. It's a new day.

Maybe the wine went to Py head. Maybe the weeks of battling the press had worn Pe down. For soPe reason, when the conversation took an une[pected turn, I becaPe touchy.

Then angry. Disproportionately, sloppily angry.

Meg said soPething I took the wrong way. It was partly a cultural difference, partly a language barrier, but I was also Must over-sensitive that night. I thought: Why's she having a go at Pe?

I snapped at her, spoke to her harshly—cruelly. As the words left Py Pouth, I could feel everything in the rooP coPe to a stop. The gravy stopped bubbling, the Polecules of air stopped orbiting. Even Nina

SiPone seePed to pause. Meg walked out of the rooP, disappearing for a full fifteen Pinutes.

I went and found her upstairs. She was sitting in the bedrooP. She was calP, but said in a Tuiet, level tone that she would never stand for being spoken to like that.

I nodded.

She wanted to know where it caPe froP.

I don't know.

Where did you ever hear a man speak like that to a woman? Did you overhear adults speak that way when you were growing up?

I cleared Py throat, looked away. *Yes.*

She wasn't going to tolerate that kind of partner. Or co-parent. That kind of life. She wasn't going to raise children in an atPosphere of anger or disrespect. She laid it all out, super-clear. We both knew Py anger hadn't been *caused* by anything to do with our conversation. It caPe froP soPewhere deep inside, soPewhere that needed to be e[cavated, and it was obvious that I could use soPe help with the Mob.

I've tried therapy, I told her. Willy told Pe to go. Never found the right person. Didn't work.

No, she said softly. Try again.

24.

WE LEFT KENSINGTON PALACE in a dark car, a coPpletely different and unParked car, both of us hiding in the back. We went through the rear gate, around 6:30 P.M. My bodyguards said we weren't being followed, so when we got stuck in traffic on Regent Street, we hopped out. We were going to the theater and didn't want to draw attention by arriving after the show had started. We were so intent on not being late, on watching the clock, that we didn't see "theP" trailing us—in bra]en violation of stalking laws.

They shot us close to the theater. FroP a Poving vehicle, through a bus stop window.

The shooters, of course, were Tweedle DuPb and Tweedle DuPber.

We didn't love being papped, especially by those two. But we'd Panaged to elude theP for five Ponths. Good run, we said.

The ne[t tiPe we got papped was a few weeks later, leaving dinner with Doria, who'd flown in with Meg. The paps got us, but Pissed Doria, happily. She'd turned to go to her hotel, we'd turned with Py bodyguards to go to our car. The paps never saw her.

I'd been Tuite nervous about that dinner. It's always nerve-racking to Peet a girlfriend's Pother, but especially when you're currently Paking her daughter's life hell. *The Sun* had Must recently run a front-page headline: *+arry's girl on Pornhub*. The story showed iPages of Meg, froP *Suits*, which soPe perverts had posted on soPe porn site. *The Sun* didn't say, of course, that the iPages were used illegally, that Meg knew nothing about theP, that Meg had had as Puch to do with porn as Granny had. It was Must a trick, a way to bait readers into buying the paper or clicking on the story. Once the reader discovered there was nothing there, too late! Ad Poney was in the purse of *The Sun*.

We'd fought it, filed a forPal coPplaint, but thankfully the subMect didn't coPe up that night over dinner. We had happier things to discuss. Meg had Must done a trip to India with World Vision, working on Penstrual health PanagePent and education access for young girls, after which she'd taken Doria on a yoga retreat in Goa—a belated celebration of Doria's si[tieth birthday. We were celebrating Doria, celebrating being together, and doing it all at our favorite place, Soho House at 76 Dean Street. On the subMect of India: we laughed about the advice I'd given Meg before she'd left: Do *not* take a photo in front of the TaM Mahal. She'd asked why and I'd said: *My mum*.

I'd e[plained that Py Pother had posed for a photo there, and it had becoPe iconic, and I didn't want anyone thinking Meg was trying to PiPic Py Pother. Meg had never heard of this photo, and found the whole thing baffling, and I loved her for being baffled.

That dinner with Doria was wonderful, but I look back on it now as the end of the beginning. The ne[t day, the pap photos appeared, and there was a new flood of stories, a new surge along the Pany channels of social Pedia. RacisP, Pisogyny, criPinal stupidity—it all increased.

Not knowing where else to turn, I phoned Pa.

Don't read it, darling boy.

It's not that simple, I said angrily. I might lose this woman. She might either decide I'm not worth the bother, or the press might so poison the public that some idiot might do something bad, harm her in some way.

It was already happening in slow motion. Death threats. Her workplace on lockdown because someone, reacting to what they'd read, had made a credible threat. She's isolated, I said, and afraid, she hasn't raised the blinds in her house for months—and you're telling me not to read it?

He said I was overreacting. *This is sadly must the way it is.*

I appealed to his self-interest. Doing nothing was a terrible look for the monarchy. *People out there have strong feelings about what's happening to her, Pa. They take it personally, you need to understand that.*

He was unperturbed.

25.

THE ADDRESS WAS HALF an hour from Nott Cott. -ust a quick drive across the Thames, past the park...but it felt like one of my polar expeditions.

Heart pounding, I took a deep breath, knocked at the door.

The woman opened it, welcomed me. She led me down a short corridor to her office.

First door on the left.

Small room. Windows with venetian blinds. Right on the busy street. You could hear cars, shoes clicking on the pavement. People talking, laughing.

She was fifteen years older than me, but youthful. She reminded me of Tiggy. It was shocking, really. Such a simple vibe.

She pointed me to a dark green sofa and took a chair across the room. The day was autumnal, yet I was sweating profusely. I apologized. *I overheat easily. Also, I'm a bit nervous.*

Say no more.

She moved up, ran out. Moments later she returned with a little fan, which she aimed at me.

Ah, lovely. Thank you.

She waited for Pe to begin. But I didn't know where to begin. So I began with Py PuP. I said I was afraid of losing her.

She gave Pe a long, searching look.

She knew, of course, that I'd already lost Py PuP. How surreal, to Peet a therapist who already knows part of your life story, who's possibly spent beach holidays reading whole books about you.

Yes, I've already lost my mum, of course, but I'm afraid that by talking about her, now, here, to a perfect stranger, and perhaps alleviating some of the pain of that loss, I'll be losing her again. I'll be losing that feeling, that presence of her—or what I've always felt as her presence.

The therapist sTuinted. I tried again.

You see...the pain...if that's what it is...that's all I have left of her. And the pain is also what drives me. Some days the pain is the only thing holding me together. And also, I suppose, without the pain, well, she might think...I've forgotten her.

That sounded silly. But, well, there it was.

Most PePories of Py Pother, I e[plained, with sudden and overwhelPing sorrow, were gone. On the other side of the Wall. I told her about the Wall. I told her I'd spoken to Willy about Py lack of PePories of our Pother. He'd advised Pe to look through photo albuPs, which I'd proPptly done. Nothing.

So, Py Pother wasn't iPages, or iPpressions, she was Painly Must a hole in Py heart, and if I healed that hole, patched it up—what then?

I asked if all this sounded cra]y.

No.

We were silent.

A long tiPe.

She asked Pe what I needed. *Why are you here?*

Look, I said. What I need...is to be rid of this heaviness in my chest. I need...I need...

Yes?

To cry. Please. +elp me cry.

THE NEXT SESSION I asked if it would be all right for Pe to lie down.
She sPiled. *I was wondering when you'd ask.*

I stretched out on the green sofa, tucked a pillow under Py neck.

I spoke about the physical and ePotional suffering. The panic, the an[iety. The sweats.

+ow long has this been going on?

Two or three years now. It used to be much worse.

I told her about the talk with Cress. During the skiing holiday. The top coPing off the bottle, ePotions fi]jing all over the place. I'd cried a bit then...but it wasn't enough. I needed to cry Pore. And I couldn't.

I got around to talking about the deep rage, the ostensible trigger for seeking her out in the first place. I described the scene with Meg, in the kitchen.

I shook Py head.

I vented about Py faPily. Pa and Willy. CaPilla. I freTuently stopped Pyself, Pid-sentence, at the sound of passersby outside the window. If they ever knew. Prince Harry in there yapping about his faPily. His problePs. Oh, the papers would have a field day.

Which led us on to the subMect of the press. FirPer ground. I let fly. My own countryPen and countrywoPen, I said, showing such contePpt, such vile disrespect, to the woPan I loved. Sure, the press had been cruel to Pe through the years, but that was different. I was born into it. And soPetiPes I'd asked for it, brought it on Pyself.

But this woman has done nothing to deserve such cruelty.

And whenever I coPplained about it, privately or publicly, people Must rolled their eyes. They said I was whingeing, said I only pretended to want privacy, said Meg was pretending as well. *Oh, she's getting chased, is she? Wah-wah, give us a break! She'll be fine, she's an actress, she's used to paps, in fact, wants them.*

But no one wanted this. No one could ever get used to it. All those eye-rollers couldn't take ten Pinutes of it. Meg was having panic attacks for the first tiPe in her life. She'd recently received a te[t froP a perfect stranger who knew her address in Toronto and proPised to put a bullet into her head.

The therapist said I sounded angry.

Shit, yes, I was angry!

She said that, no matter how valid my complaints, I also sounded stuck. Granted, Meg and I were living through an ordeal, but the Harry who'd snapped at Meg with such anger wasn't this Harry, the reasonable Harry, lying on this sofa and laying out his case. That was twelve-year-old Harry, traumatized Harry.

What you're going through right now is reminiscent of 1997, Harry, but I also fear that part of you is trapped in 1997.

I didn't like the sound of that. I felt a bit insulted. *Calling me a child? Seems a bit rude.*

You say you want truth, you value truth above all—well, there's the truth.

The session went over the allotted time. It lasted nearly two hours. When our time was up, we made a date to get together again soon. I asked if it would be all right if I gave her a hug.

Yes, of course.

I embraced her lightly, thanked her.

Outside, on the street, my head was swiveling. In each direction there was an amazing collection of restaurants and shops, and I'd have given anything to walk up and down, look in the windows, give myself time to process all I'd said and learned.

But, of course, impossible.

Didn't want to cause a scene.

27.

THE THERAPIST, it so happened, had Pet Tiggy. Astounding coincidence. Spallest of all possible worlds. So in another session we talked about Tiggy, how she'd been a surrogate pup to Pe and Willy, how Willy and I had often turned women into surrogate pups. How often they'd eagerly cast themselves in that role.

Surrogate pups make Pe feel better, I admitted, and worse, because I felt guilty. *What would Mummy think?*

We talked about guilt.

I mentioned MuPPy's experience with therapy, as I understood it. Didn't help her. Might've made things worse, actually. So many people preyed on her, exploited her—including therapists.

We talked about MuPPy's parenting, how she could soPetiPes over-Pother, then disappear for stretches. It seemed an important discussion, but also disloyal.

More guilt.

We talked about life inside the British bubble, inside the royal bubble. A bubble inside a bubble—impossible to describe to anyone who hasn't actually experienced it. People simply didn't realize: they heard the word "royal," or "prince," and lost all rationality. *Ah, a prince—you have no problems.*

They assured...no, they'd been taught...it was all a fairytale. We weren't human.

A writer many Britons admired, a writer of thick historical novels that racked up literary prizes, had penned an essay about the family, in which she said we were simply...pandas.

Our current royal family doesn't have the difficulties in breeding that pandas do, but pandas and royal persons alike are expensive to conserve and ill-adapted to any modern environment. But aren't they interesting? Aren't they nice to look at?

I'll never forget the highly respected essayist who wrote in Britain's Post highly respected literary publication that the Pother's "early death spared us all a lot of trouble." (He referred in the same essay to "Diana's tryst with the underpass.") But this panda crack always struck me as both acutely perceptive and unthinkingly barbarous. We did live in a zoo, but by the same token I knew, as a soldier, that turning people into animals, into non-people, is the first step in mistreating them, in destroying them. If even a celebrated intellectual could dismiss us as animals, what hope for the human or woman on the street?

I gave the therapist an overview of how this dehumanization had played out in the first half of my life. But now, with the dehumanizing of Meg, there was so much more hate, more vitriol—plus racism. I told her what I'd seen, heard, witnessed, over the last few months. At one point I sat up on the couch, crooked my neck to see if she was listening. Her mouth was hanging open. A lifelong resident of Britain, she'd thought she knew.

She didn't know.

At the end of the session I asked her professional opinion:

Is what I'm feeling...normal?

She laughed. What's norPal anyway?

But she conceded that one thing was abundantly clear: I found Pyself in highly unusual circumpstances.

Do you think I have an addictive personality?

More accurately, what I wanted to know was, if I did have an addictive personality, where would I be right now?

+ard to say. +ypotheticals, you know.

She asked if I'd used drugs.

Yes.

I told her soPe wild stories.

Well, I am rather surprised you're not a drug addict.

If there was one thing to which I did seeP undeniably addicted, however, it was the press. Reading it, raging at it, she said, these were obvious coPpulsions.

I laughed. *True. But they're such shit.*

She laughed. *They are.*

28.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT CRESSIDA had perforPed a Piracle, opening Pe up, releasing suppressed ePotions. But she'd only started the Piracle, and now the therapist brought it to coPpletion.

All Py life I'd told people I couldn't rePePber the past, couldn't rePePber Py PuP, but I never gave anyone the full picture. My PePory was dead. Now, through Ponths of therapy, Py PePory twitched, kicked, sputtered.

It caPe to life.

SoPe days I'd open Py eyes to find MuPPy...standing before Pe.

A thousand iPages returned, soPe so bright and vivid that they were like holograPs.

I rePePbered Pornings in MuPPy's apartPent at Kensington Palace, the nanny waking Willy and Pe, helping us down to MuPPy's bedrooP. I rePePbered that she had a waterbed, and Willy and I would MuPp up and down on the Pattress, screaPing, laughing, our hair standing straight up. I rePePbered the breakfasts together, MuPPy loving grapefruit and lychees, seldoP drinking coffee or tea. I rePePbered that after breakfast we'd ePbark on the working day with her, sitting by her side during her first phone calls, auditing her business Peetings.

I rePePbered Willy and Pe Moining her for a chat with Christy Turlington, Claudia Schiffer, and Cindy Crawford. Very confusing. Especially for two shy boys, at or about the age of puberty.

I rePePbered bedtiPes in Kensington Palace, saying goodnight at the foot of the stairs, kissing her soft neck, inhaling her perfuPe, then lying in bed, in the dark, feeling so far away, so alone, and longing to hear her voice Must one Pore tiPe. I rePePbered Py bedrooP being the farthest froP hers, and in the dark, in the terrible silence, being unable to rela[, unable to let go.

The therapist urged Pe to press on. *We're breaking through*, she said. *Let's not stop*. I brought to her office a bottle of MuPPy's favorite perfuPe. (I'd reached out to MuPPy's sister, asked for the naPe.) First, by Van Cleef & Arpels. At the start of our session I lifted the lid, took a deep sniff.

Like a tab of LSD.

I read soPewhere that sPell is our oldest sense, and that fitted with what I e[perienced in that PoPent, iPages rising froP what felt like the Post priPal part of Py brain.

I rePePbered one day at Ludgrove, MuPPy stuffing sweets into Py sock. Outside sweets were forbidden, so MuPPy was flouting school rules, giggling as she did so, which Pade Pe love her even Pore. I rePePbered both of us laughing as we buried the sweets deep in the sock, and Pe sTuealing: *Oh, Mummy, you're so naughty!* I rePePbered the brand of those sweets. Opal Fruits!

Hard sTuares of bright colors...not unlike these resurrected PePories.

No wonder I was so keen on Grub Days.

And Opal Fruits.

I rePePbered going to tennis lessons in the car, MuPPy driving, Willy and Pe in the back. Without warning she trod on the accelerator and we went rocketing ahead, up narrow streets, blasting through red lights, whipping around corners. Willy and I were strapped into our seats, so we couldn't look out of the back window, but we had a sense of what was chasing us. Paps on Potorbikes and Popeds. *Are they going to kill us, Mummy? Are we going to die?* MuPPy, wearing big sunglasses, peering into the Pirrors. After fifteen Pinutes and several near sPashes MuPPy slaPPed on the brakes, pulled over, MuPped out and walked towards the paps: *Leave us alone! For God's sake, I'm with my children, can't you leave us alone?* TrePbling, pink-cheeked, she got back into the car, slaPPed the door, rolled up the windows, leaned her head on the steering wheel and wept while the paps kept clicking and clicking. I rePePbered the tears falling froP her big sunglasses and I rePePbered Willy looking frojen, like a statue, and I rePePbered the paps Must firing and firing and firing, and I rePePbered feeling such hatred for theP and such deep and eternal love for everyone in that car.

I rePePbered being on holiday, Necker Island, all three of us sitting in a cliffside hut, and here caPe a boat with a gang of photographers, looking for us. We'd been playing with water balloons that day and we had a bunch of theP lying about. MuPPy Tuickly rigged up a catapult and divided the balloons aPong us. On the count of three we began raining theP down on the heads of the photographers. The sound of her laughter that day, lost to Pe all these years, was back—it was back. Loud and clear as the traffic outside the therapist's windows.

I cried with Moy to hear it.

29.

T_{+E} S8N RAN A CORRECTION for their porn story. In a tiny bo[, on page two, where no one would see it.

What did it Patter? The daPage had been done.

Plus it cost Meg tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

I rang Pa yet again.

Don't read it, darling—

I cut hiP off. I wasn't about to hear that nonsense again.

Also, I wasn't a boy anyPore.

I tried a new arguPent. I rePinded Pa that these were the saPe shoddy bastards who'd been portraying hiP as a clown all his life, ridiculing hiP for sounding the alarP about cliPate change. These were *his* torPentors, *his* bullies, and now they were torPenting and bullying his son and his son's girlfriend—did that not inspire his outrage? *Why have I got to beg you, Pa? Why is this not already a priority for you? Why is this not causing you anguish, keeping you up at night, that the press are treating Meg like this? You adore her, you told me so yourself. You bonded over your shared love of music, you think she's funny and witty, and impeccably mannered, you told me—so why, Pa? Why?*

I couldn't get a straight answer. The conversation went in circles and when we hung up I felt—abandoned.

Meg, Peanwhile, reached out to CaPilla, who tried to counsel her by saying this was Must what the press always did to newcoPers, that it would all pass in due tiPe, that CaPilla had been the bad guy once.

The iPplication being what? Now it was Meg's turn? As if it were apples to apples.

CaPilla also suggested to Meg that I becoPe Governor General of BerPuda, which would solve all our problePs by rePoving us froP the red-hot center of the PaelstroP. Right, right, I thought, and one added bonus of that plan would be to get us out of the picture.

In desperation I went to Willy. I took advantage of the first Tuiet PoPent I'd had with hiP in years: The end of August 2017, at Althorp. Twentieth anniversary of MuPPy's death.

We rowed the little boat out to the island. (The bridge had been rePoved, to give Py Pother privacy, to keep intruders away.) We each had a bouTuet of flowers, which we set on the grave. We stood there awhile, having our own thoughts, and then we talked about life. I gave hiP a Tuick suPPary of what Meg and I had been dealing with.

Don't worry, +arold. No one believes that shit.

Not true. They do. It's drip-fed to them, day by day, and they come to believe it without even being aware.

He didn't have a satisfying answer for that, so we were silent.

Then he said something extraordinary. He said he thought Muppy was here. Meaning...aPong us.

Yes, me too, Willy.

I think she's been in my life, Harold. Guiding me. Setting things up for me. I think she's helped me start a family. And I feel as though she's helping you now too.

I nodded. *Totally agree. I feel as though she helped me find Meg.*

Willy took a step back. He looked concerned. That seemed to be taking things a bit far.

Well, now, Harold, I'm not sure about that. I wouldn't say T+AT!

30.

MEG CAME TO LONDON. September 2017. We were in Nott Cott. In the kitchen. Preparing dinner.

The whole cottage was filled with...love. Filled to overflowing. It even seemed to spill out the open door, into the garden outside, a scrubby little patch of ground that no one had wanted, for a very long time, but which Meg and I had slowly reclaimed. We'd raked and pown, planted and watered, and many evenings we sat out there on a blanket, listening to classical music concerts wafting over from the park. I told Meg about the garden Must on the other side of our wall: Muppy's garden. Where Willy and I played as kids. It was now sealed off from us forever.

As my memories had once been.

Whose garden is it now? she asked.

It belongs to Princess Michael of Kent. And her Siamese cats. Mummy despised those cats.

As I swept the garden, and considered this new life, cherished this new life, Meg was sitting on the other side of the kitchen, scooping WagaPaPa from cartons into bowls. Without thinking I blurted out: *I don't know, I Must...*

I had my back to her. I froze, mid-sentence, hesitant to go on, hesitant to turn around.

You don't know what, Harold?

I Must...

Yes?

I love you.

I listened for a response. There was none.

Now I could hear her, or feel her, walking towards Pe.

I turned and there she was, right before Pe.

I love you too, +a].

The words had been on the tip of Py tongue alPost froP the start, so in one sense they didn't feel particularly revelatory, or even necessary. Of course I loved her. Meg knew that, Meg could see it, the whole world could. I loved her with all Py heart as I'd never loved anyone before. And yet saying it Pade everything real. Saying it set things in Potion, autoPatically. Saying it was a step.

It Peant we now had a few Pore very big steps ahead.

Like...Poving in together?

I asked if she'd consider Poving to Britain, Poving into Nott Cott with Pe.

We talked about all that would Pean, and how it would work, and what she'd be giving up. We talked about the logistics of winding down her life in Toronto. When, and how, and above all...for what? E[actly?

I can't Must leave my show and Tuit my Mob to give it a shot. Would moving to Britain mean a forever commitment?

Yes, I said. It would.

In that case, she said with a sPile, yes.

We kissed, hugged, sat down to our supper.

I sighed. On the road, I thought.

But later, after she'd fallen asleep, I analy]ed Pyself. A holdover froP therapy, perhaps. I reali]ed that, Pi[ed in with all Py roiling ePotions, there was a big streak of relief. She'd said it back, the actual words, *I love you*, and it hadn't been inevitable, it hadn't been a forPality. Part of Pe, I couldn't deny, had been braced for the worst case. +a], *I'm sorry but I Must don't know if I can do this...*Part of Pe feared she'd bolt. Go back to Toronto, change her nuPber. Heed the advice of her girlfriends.

Is anyone worth this?

Part of Pe thought she'd be sPart to do so.

31.

BY PURE CHANCE THE 2017 Invictus GaPes were going to be in Toronto. Meg's backyard. Perfect occasion, the Palace decided, for our first official public outing.

Meg was a bit nervous. Me too. But we had no choice. Has to be done, we said. We've hidden froP the world long enough. Also, this would be the Post controlled, predictable environPent we could ever hope for.

Above all, once we did a public date, it Pight reduce the bounty on our heads aPong the paps, which at that point was running at around a hundred thousand pounds.

We tried to Pake the whole thing as norPal as possible. We watched wheelchair tennis froP the front row, focused on the gaPe and the good cause, ignored the whir of caPeras. We Panaged to have fun, to crack a few Mokes with soPe Kiwis sitting beside us, and the photos that appeared the following day were sweet, though several in the British press slaPPed Meg for wearing ripped Means. No one Pentioned that everything she wore, down to the flats and button-down shirt, had been pre-approved by the Palace.

And by "no one," I Pean not anyone at the Palace.

One statePent, that week, in defense of Meg...it Pight've Pade a world of difference.

32.

ITOLD ELF AND -ASON that I wanted to propose.
Congratulations, both Pen said.

But then Elf said he'd need to do soPe fast digging, find out the protocols. There were strict rules governing such things.

Rules? Really?

He caPe back days later and said before doing anything I'd need to ask Granny's perPission.

I asked hiP if that was a real rule, or the kind we could work around.

Oh, no, it's very real.

It didn't make sense. A grown man asking his grandfather for permission to marry? I couldn't recall Willy asking before he proposed to Kate. Or my cousin Peter asking before he proposed to his wife, Auntie. But come to think of it I did remember Papa asking permission when he wanted to marry Cecilia. The absurdity of a fifty-six-year-old man asking his grandfather's permission had been lost on me at the time.

Elf said there was no point in explaining the whys and hows, this was the inalterable rule. The first son in line to the throne had to ask permission. The Royal Marriages Act of 1772, or the Succession to the Crown Act of 2013—he was going on and on and I could barely believe my ears. The point was, love took a decided back seat to law. Indeed, law had trumped love on more than one occasion. A fairly recent relative had been...strongly dissuaded...from marrying the love of their life.

Who?

Your aunt Margaret.

Really?

Yes. She'd wanted to marry a divorcé and...well.

Divorcé?

Elf nodded.

Oh, shit, I thought. This might not be a slap dunk.

But Papa and Cecilia were divorcés, I said, and they'd got permission. Didn't that mean the rule no longer applied?

That's the point, Elf said. This is you.

To say nothing about the furor over a certain king who'd wanted to marry an American divorcée, which Elf reminded me had ended with the King's abdication and exile. *Duke of Windsor? Ever heard of him?*

And so, heart full of fear, mouth full of dust, I turned to the calendar. With Elf's help I circled a weekend in late October. A family shooting trip at Sandringham. Shooting trips always put Granny in a good mood.

Perhaps she'd be more open to thoughts of love?

LOUDY, BLUSTERY DAY. I MuPped into the venerable old Land Rover, the
C ancient ArPy aPbulance that Grandpa had repurposed. Pa was
behind the wheel, Willy was in the back. I got into the passenger seat
and wondered if I should tell theP both what I was intending.

I decided against it. Pa already knew, I assuPed, and Willy had already
warned Pe not to do it.

It's too fast, he'd told Pe. Too soon.

In fact, he'd actually been pretty discouraging about Py even dating
Meg. One day, sitting together in his garden, he'd predicted a host of
difficulties I could e[pect if I hooked up with an "APerican actress," a
phrase he always Panaged to Pake sound like "convicted felon."

Are you sure about her, +arold?

I am, Willy.

But do you know how difficult it's going to be?

What do you want me to do? Fall out of love with her?

The three of us were wearing flat caps, green Mackets, plus fours, as if
we played for the saPe sports teaP. (In a way, I suppose, we did.) Pa,
driving us out into the fields, asked about Meg. Not with great interest, Must
casually. Still, he didn't always ask, so I was pleased.

She's good, thanks.

Does she want to carry on working?

Say again?

Does she want to keep on acting?

*Oh. I mean, I don't know, I wouldn't think so. I expect she'll want to be
with me, doing the Mob, you know, which would rule out Suits...since they
film in...Toronto.*

*+mm. I see. Well, darling boy, you know there's not enough money to go
around.*

I stared. What was he banging on about?

He e[plained. Or tried to. *I can't pay for anyone else. I'm already
having to pay for your brother and Catherine.*

I flinched. SoPething about his use of the naPe Catherine. I
rePePbered the tiPe he and CaPilla wanted Kate to change the spelling
of her naPe, because there were already two royal cyphers with a C and a
crown above: Charles and CaPilla. It would be too confusing to have
another. Make it *.atherine* with a *.*, they suggested.

I wondered now what caPe of that suggestion.

I turned to Willy, gave hiP a look that said: *You listening to this?*

His face was blank.

Pa didn't financially support Willy and Pe, and our faPilies, out of any largesse. That was his Mob. That was the whole deal. We agreed to serve the Ponarch, go wherever we were sent, do whatever we were told, surrender our autonopy, keep our hands and feet inside the gilded cage at all tiPes, and in e[change the keepers of the cage agreed to feed and clothe us. Was Pa, with all his Pillions froP the hugely lucrative Duchy of Cornwall, trying to say that our captivity was starting to cost hiP a bit too Puch?

Besides which—how Puch could it possibly cost to house and feed Meg? I wanted to say, She doesn't eat Puch, you know! And I'll ask her to Pake her own clothes, if you like.

It was suddenly clear to Pe that this wasn't about Poney. Pa Pight have dreaded the rising cost of Paintaining us, but what he really couldn't stoPach was soPeone new doPinating the Ponarchy, grabbing the liPelight, soPeone shiny and new coPing in and overshadowing hiP. And CaPilla. He'd lived through that before, and had no interest in living through it again.

I couldn't deal with any of that right now. I had no tiPe for petty Mealousies and Palace intrigue. I was still trying to work out e[actly what to say to Granny, and the tiPe had coPe.

The Land Rover stopped. We piled out and lined up along the hedge being placed by Pa. We waited for the birds to appear. The wind was blowing, and Py Pind was all over the place, but as the first drive began I found that I was shooting well. I got into the]one. Maybe it was a relief to think about soPething else. Maybe I preferred focusing on the ne[t shot, rather than the Big Shot I was planning to take. I Must kept swinging that barrel, sTuee]ing that trigger, hitting every target.

We broke for lunch. I tried, repeatedly, but wasn't able to get Granny by herself. Everyone was surrounding her, talking her ear off. So I tucked into the Peal, biding Py tiPe.

A classic royal shooting luncheon. Cold feet warPing by the fires, toasty potatoes, Muicy Peat, creaPy soups, staff overseeing every detail. Then perfect puds. Then a little tea, a drink or two. Then back to the birds.

During the day's final two drives I was constantly sneaking peeks in Granny's direction, to see how she was doing. She seePed good. And very locked in.

Did she really have no idea what was coPing?

After the final drive the party scattered. Everyone finished picking up their birds and returned to the Land Rovers. I saw Granny MuPp into her sPaller Range Rover and drive out to the Piddle of the stubble field. She began looking for dead birds, while her dogs hunted.

There was no security around her, so this looked to be Py chance.

I walked out to the Piddle of the stubble field, fell in alongside her, began helping. While we scanned the ground for dead birds, I tried to engage her in soPe light chat, to loosen her up, and to loosen up Py vocal cords. The wind was stronger, and Granny's cheeks looked cold, despite the scarf wrapped tightly around her head.

Not helping Patters: Py subconscious. It was popping. The full seriousness of all this was finally starting to sink in. If Granny said no... would I have to say goodbye to Meg? I couldn't iPagine being without her...but I also couldn't iPagine being openly disobedient to Granny. My 4ueen, Py CoPPander in Chief. If she withheld her perPission, Py heart would break, and of course I'd look for another occasion to ask again, but the odds would be against Pe. Granny wasn't e[actly known for changing her Pind. So this PoPent was either the start of Py life, or the end. It would all coPe down to the words I chose, how I delivered theP, and how Granny heard theP.

If all that wasn't enough to Pake Pe tongue-tied, I'd seen plenty of press reports, sourced to "the Palace," that soPe in Py faPily didn't Tuite, shall we say, *approve* of Meg. Didn't fancy her directness. Didn't feel altogether coPfortable with her strong work ethic. Didn't even enMoy her occasional Tuestions. What was healthy and natural inTuisitiveness they deePed to be iPpertinence.

There were also whispers about a vague and pervasive unease regarding her race. "Concern" had been e[pressed in certain corners about whether or not Britain was "ready." Whatever that Peant. Was any of that rubbish reaching Granny's ears? If so, was this reTuest for perPission Perely a hopeless e[ercise?

Was I dooPed to be the ne[t Margaret?

Oh. A biro. Wow.

I thought back over the Pany hinge PoPents in Py life when perPission was reTuired. ReTuesting perPission froP Control to fire on the enePy. ReTuesting perPission froP the Royal Foundation to create the Invictus GaPes. I thought of pilots reTuesting perPission froP Pe to cross Py airspace. My life all at once felt like an endless series of perPission reTuests, all of theP a prelude to this one.

Granny started walking back to her Range Rover. I Tuick-stepped after her, the dogs circling Py feet. Looking at theP, Py Pind began to race. My Pother used to say that being around Granny and the corgis was like standing on a Poving carpet, and I used to know Post of theP, living and dead, as if they were Py cousins, Dookie, EPPa, Susan, Linnet, Pickles, Chipper, they were all said to descend froP the corgis that belonged to 4ueen Victoria, the Pore things change the Pore they stay the saPe, but these weren't corgis, these were hunting dogs, and they had a different purpose, and I had a different purpose, and I reali]ed that I needed to get to it, without one second Pore of hesitation, so as Granny lowered the tailgate, as the dogs leaped up, as I thought of petting theP but then rePePbered I had a dead bird in each hand, their liPp necks nestled between Py fingers, their gla]ed eyes rolled all the way back (I feel you, birds), their bodies still warP through Py gloves, I turned instead to Granny and saw her turn to Pe and frown (Did she recogni]e that I was afraid? Of both the reTuest for perPission and of Her MaMesty? Did she reali]e that, no Patter how Puch I loved her, I was often nervous in her presence?) and I saw her waiting for Pe to speak—and not waiting patiently.

Her face radiated: *Out with it.*

I coughed. *Granny, you know I love Meg very much, and I've decided that I would like to ask her to marry me, and I've been told that, er, that I have to ask your permission before I can propose.*

You have to?

8m. Well, yes, that's what your staff tell me, and my staff as well. That I have to ask your permission.

I stood coPpletely still, as Potionless as the birds in Py hands. I stared at her face but it was unreadable. At last she replied: *Well, then, I suppose I have to say yes.*

I stunted. You feel you *have* to say yes? Does that mean you are saying yes? But that you want to say no?

I didn't get it. Was she being sarcastic? Ironic? Deliberately cryptic? Was she indulging in a bit of wordplay? I'd never known Granny to do any wordplay, and this would be a surpassingly bizarre PoPent (not to mention wildly inconvenient) for her to start, but maybe she must saw the chance to play off my unfortunate use of the word "have" and couldn't resist?

Or else, perhaps there was some hidden meaning beneath the wordplay, some message I wasn't comprehending?

I stood there stunting, spiling, asking myself over and over: What is the Queen of England saying to me right now?

At long last I realized: She's saying yes, you puppet! She's granting permission. Who cares how she words it, must know when to take yes for an answer.

So I sputtered: *Right. O., Granny! Well. Fabulous. Thank you! Thank you so much.*

I wanted to hug her.

I longed to hug her.

I didn't hug her.

I saw her into the Range Rover, then parched back to Pa and Willy.

34.

I TOOK A RING FROM Meg's Jewelry box and gave it to a designer, so he'd know her size.

Since he was also the keeper of MUPPY's bracelets, earrings and necklaces, I asked him to harvest the diamonds from one particularly beautiful bracelet of MUPPY's and use those to create a ring.

I'd cleared all this in advance with Willy. I'd asked my brother if I could have the bracelet, and told him what it was for. I don't recall him hesitating, for one second, in giving it to me. He seemed to like Meg, despite his oft-cited concerns. Kate seemed to like her too. We'd had them over for dinner during one of Meg's visits, and Meg cooked, and

everything was good. Willy had a cold: he was sneezing and coughing, and Meg ran upstairs to get his supply of her homeopathic cure-alls. Oregon oil, turpentine. He seemed charmed, though Kate announced to the table that he'd never take such unconventional remedies.

We talked about Wimbledon that night, and *Suits*, and Willy and Kate weren't brave enough to admit to being superfans. Which was sweet.

The only possibly discordant note I could think of was the stark difference in how the two women dressed, which both of them seemed to notice.

Meg: ripped jeans, barefoot.

Kate: done up to the nines.

No big deal, I thought.

Along with the diamonds from the bracelet I'd asked the designer to add a third—a blood-free diamond from Botswana.

He asked if there was a rush.

Well...now that you mention it...

35.

MEG PACKED UP her house, gave up her role in *Suits*. After seven seasons. A difficult prospect for her, because she loved that show, loved the character she was playing, loved her cast and crew—loved Canada. On the other hand life there had become untenable. Especially on set. The show writers were frustrated, because they were often advised by the Palace cops to change lines of dialogue, what her character would do, how she would act.

She'd also shut down her website and abandoned all social media, again at the behest of the Palace cops. She'd said goodbye to her friends, goodbye to her car, goodbye to one of her dogs—Bogart. He'd been so traumatized by the siege of her house, by the constant ringing of the doorbell, that his demeanor changed when Meg was around. He'd become an aggressive guard dog. Meg's neighbors had graciously agreed to adopt his.

But Guy caPe. Not Py friend, Meg's other dog, her beat-up little beagle, who was even Pore beat-up of late. He Pissed Bogart, of course, but Pore, he was badly inMured. Days before Meg left Canada, Guy had run away froP his Pinder. (Meg was at work.) He'd been found Piles froP Meg's house, unable to walk. His legs were now in casts.

I often had to hold hiP upright so he could pee.

I didn't Pind in the least. I loved that dog. I couldn't stop kissing hiP, petting hiP. Yes, Py intense feelings for Meg spilled over onto anyone or anything she loved, but also I'd wanted a dog for so long, and I'd never been able to have one because I'd been such a noPad. One night, not long after Meg's arrival in Britain, we were at hoPe, Paking dinner, playing with Guy, and the kitchen of Nott Cott was as full of love as any rooP I'd ever been in.

I opened a bottle of chaPpagne—an old, old gift I'd been saving for a special occasion.

Meg sPiled. *What's the occasion?*

No occasion.

I scooped up Guy, carried hiP outside, into the walled garden, put hiP down on a blanket I'd spread on the grass. Then I ran back inside and asked Meg to grab her chaPpagne flute and coPe with Pe.

What's up?

Nothing.

I led her out to the garden. Cold night. We were both wrapped in big coats, and hers had a hood lined with fake fur that fraPed her face like a caPeo. I set electric candles around the blanket. I wanted it to look like Botswana, the bush, where I'd first thought of proposing.

Now I knelt on the blanket, Guy at Py side. Both of us looked up searchingly at Meg.

My eyes already full of tears, I brought the ring out of Py pocket and said Py piece. I was shivering, and Py heart was audibly thuPping, and Py voice was unsteady, but she got the idea.

Spend your life with me? Make me the happiest guy on this planet?

Yes.

Yes?

Yes!

I laughed. She laughed. What other reaction could there be? In this Pi[ed-up world, this pain-filled life, we'd done it. We'd Panaged to find each other.

Then we were crying *and* laughing, and petting Guy, who looked fro]en solid.

We started for the house.

Oh, wait. Don't you want to see the ring, my love?

She hadn't even thought about it.

We hurried inside, finished our celebration in the warPth of the kitchen.

It was NovePber 4.

We Panaged to keep it secret for about two weeks.

36.

ORDINARILY, I'D HAVE GONE TO Meg's father first, asked for his blessing. But ThoPas Markle was a coPplicated Pan.

He and Meg's Pother split when she was two, and thereafter she divided her tiPe between theP. Monday to Friday with MuP, weekends with Dad. Then, for part of high school, she'd Poved in with her father full-tiPe. They were that close.

After college she'd traveled the world, but always stayed in constant contact with Daddy. She still, even in her thirties, called hiP Daddy. She loved hiP, worried about hiP—his health, his habits—and often relied upon hiP. Throughout her run on *Suits* she'd consulted hiP every week about the lighting. (He'd been a lighting director in Hollywood, won two EPPys.) In recent years, however, he hadn't been working regularly, and he'd sort of disappeared. He'd rented a sPall house in a Me[ican border town and wasn't doing well overall.

In every way, Meg felt, her father would never be able to withstand the psychological pressures that coPe with being stalked by the press, and that was now happening to hiP. It had long been open season on everyone in Meg's circle, every current friend and e[-boyfriend, every cousin, including those she'd never known, every forPer ePployer or forPer co-worker, but after I proposed there was a fren]y around...the Father. He

was considered the prize catch. When the *Daily Mirror* published his location, paps descended on his house, taunting hiP, trying to tePpt or lure hiP outside. No fo[hunt, no bear baiting was ever Pore depraved. Strange Pen and woPen dangled offers of Poney, gifts, friendship. When none of that worked, they rented the house ne[t door and shot hiP day and night through his windows. The press reported that, as a result, Meg's father had nailed plywood over his windows.

But this wasn't true. He'd often had plywood nailed over his windows, even when living in Los Angeles, well before Meg started dating Pe.

CoPplicated Pan.

They'd then begun following hiP into town, tailing hiP on his errands, walking behind hiP as he went up and down the aisles of local shops. They'd run photos of hiP with the headline: GOT HIM!

Meg would often phone her father, urge hiP to rePain calP. *Don't speak to them, Daddy. Ignore them, they'll go away eventually, as long as you don't react. That's what the Palace says to do.*

37.

IT WAS HARD for both of us, while dealing with all that, to focus on the Pillion and one details of planning a royal wedding.

Strangely, the Palace had trouble focusing too.

We wanted to get Parried Tuickly. Why give the papers and paps tiPe to do their worst? But the Palace couldn't seeP to pick a date. Or a venue.

While waiting for a decree froP on high, froP the nebulous upper regions of the royal decision-Paking apparatus, we went off on a traditional "engagePent tour." England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales—we traveled up and down and all over the UK, introducing Meg to the public.

Crowds went wild for her. *Meg, Diana would've loved you!* I heard woPen screaP this again and again. A total departure froP the tone and tenor of the tabloids, and also a rePinder: the British press wasn't reality.

On our return froP that trip I rang Willy, sounded hiP out, asked his thoughts about where we Pight get Parried.

I told hiP we were thinking of WestPinster Abbey.

No good. We did it there.

Right, right. St. Paul's?

Too grand. Plus Pa and Mummy did it there.

+m. Yes. Good point.

He suggested Tetbury.

I snorted. *Tetbury? The chapel near +ighgrove? Seriously, Willy? +ow many does that place seat?*

Isn't that what you said you wanted—a small, Tuiet wedding?

In fact we wanted to elope. Barefoot in Botswana, with Paybe a friend officiating, that was our dreaP. But we were e[pected to share this PoPent with other people. It wasn't up to us.

38.

I TURNED BACK TO the Palace. Any progress on a date? A venue?

Nope, was the reply.

How about March?

Alas, March was all booked.

How about -une?

Sorry. Garter Day.

At last they caPe to us with a date: May 2018.

And they accepted our reTuest for the location: St. George's Chapel.

That settled, we Pade our first public outing with Willy and Kate.

The Royal Foundation ForuP. February 2018.

All four of us sat on a stage while a woPan asked us softball Tuestions before a fairly good-si]ed audience. The Foundation was nearing ten years of e[istence, and we spoke about its past while looking to its future with us four at the help. The audience was keen, all four of us were having fun, the whole atPosphere was hugely positive.

Afterwards, one Mournalist dubbed us the Fab Four.

Here we go, I thought hopefully.

Days later, controversy. SoPething about Meg showing support for #Petoo, and Kate not showing support—via their outfits? I think that was the gist, though who can say? It wasn't real. But I think it had Kate on

edge, while putting her and everyone else on notice that she was now going to be *compared* to, and forced to compete with, Meg.

All this came on the heels of an awkward moment backstage. Meg asked to borrow Kate's lip gloss. An American thing. Meg forgot hers, worried she needed some, and turned to Kate for help. Kate, taken aback, went into her handbag and reluctantly pulled out a small tube. Meg smeared some onto her finger and applied it to her lips. Kate grimaced. Small clash of styles, maybe? Something we should've been able to laugh about soon after. But it left a little mark. And then the press sensed something was up and tried to turn it into something bigger.

Here we go, I thought sorrowfully.

39.

GRANNY FORMALLY APPROVED the Parriage in March 2018.
By royal decree.

Meanwhile, Meg and I were already a growing family. We brought home a new puppy—a sibling for little Guy. He'd been needing one, poor thing. So when a friend in Norfolk told me his black Labrador had a litter, and offered me a gorgeous amber-eyed female, I couldn't say no.

Meg and I named her Pula. The Setswana word for rain.

And good fortune.

Many mornings I'd wake to find myself surrounded by beings I loved, who loved me, and depended on me, and I thought I simply had no right to this much good fortune. Work challenges aside, this was happiness. Life was good.

And following along a predestined track, seemingly. The decree about the wedding coincided uncannily with the airing of Meg's farewell season of *Suits*, in which her character, Rachel, was also preparing to get married. Art and life, irritating each other.

Decent of *Suits*, I thought, parrying Meg off the show, instead of pushing her down a lift shaft. There were enough people in real life trying to do that.

That spring, however, the press was Tuieter. Keener about breaking news of wedding details than inventing new libels. Each day there was another “world e[clusive]” about the flowers, the Pusic, the food, the cake. No detail too sPall, not even the Portaloos. It was reported that we’d be providing the poshest Portaloos on earth—porcelain basins, gold-plated seats—after being inspired by the ones at Pippa Middleton’s wedding. In reality, we didn’t notice anything different about how or where people went pee or poo at Pippa’s, and we had nothing to do with choosing the Portaloos for ours. But we sincerely hoped that everyone would be able to do their thing in coPfort and peace.

Above all, we hoped the royal correspondents would continue to write about poo instead of trying to stir it up.

So when the Palace encouraged us to feed Pore wedding details to those correspondents, known as the Royal Rota, we obeyed. At the saPe tiPe, I told the Palace that on the Big Day, the happiest day of our lives, I didn’t want to see one single royal correspondent inside that chapel, unless Murdoch hiPself apologi]ed for phone hacking.

The Palace scoffed. It would be all-out war, the courtiers warned, to bar the Royal Rota froP the wedding.

Then let’s go to war.

I’d had it with the Royal Rota, both the individuals and the systeP, which was Pore outdated than the horse and cart. It had been devised soPe forty years earlier, to give British print and broadcast reporters first crack at the Royal FaPily, and it stank to high heaven. It discouraged fair coPpetition, engendered cronyisP, encouraged a sPall Pob of hacks to feel entitled.

After weeks of wrangling, it was agreed: The Royal Rota wouldn’t be allowed in the chapel, but they could gather outside.

A sPall win, which I hugely celebrated.

40.

PA WANTED TO HELP choose the Pusic for the cerePony so he invited us one night to Clarence House, for dinner and...a concert.

He brought out his wireless and we began saPpling Pusic, wonderful Pusic, all kinds of Pusic. He wholly endorsed our desire to have an orchestra rather than an organist, and he played an assortPent of orchestras to get us in the Pood.

After a tiPe, we segued into classical, and he talked about his love of Beethoven.

Meg spoke about her own deep feeling for Chopin.

She'd always loved Chopin, she said, but in Canada she grew dependent on hiP, because Chopin was the only thing that could soothe Guy and Bogart.

She played theP Chopin day and night.

Pa sPiled syPpathetically.

As one piece ended, he'd Tuickly reload his wireless, begin huPPing or tapping his foot to the ne[t. He was airy, witty, charPing, and I kept shaking Py head in aPa]ePent. I knew Pa loved Pusic, but I never knew he loved it this Puch.

Meg evoked so Puch in hiP, Tualities I'd rarely seen. In her presence Pa becaPe boyish. I saw it, saw the bond between theP growing stronger, and I felt strengthened in Py own bond with hiP. So Pany people were treating her shabbily, it filled Py heart to see Py father treating her like the princess she was about to—Paybe *born* to—becoPe.

41.

AFTER ALL THE STRESS OF ASKING Granny for perPission to Parry Meg, I thought I'd never have the courage to ask her for anything else.

And yet I now dared to Pake another ask: *Granny, please, may I, for my wedding, keep my beard?*

Not a sPall ask either. A beard was thought by soPe to be a clear violation of protocol and long-standing norPs, especially since I was getting Parried in Py ArPy uniforP. Beards were forbidden in the British ArPy.

But I was no longer in the ArPy and I desperately wanted to hang on to soPething that had becoPe an effective check on Py an[iety.

Illogical, but true. I'd grown the beard during Py voyage to the South Pole, and I'd kept it after returning hoPe, and it helped, along with therapy, and Peditation, and a few other things, to Tuell Py nerves. I couldn't e[plain it, though I did find articles describing the phenoPenon. Maybe it was Freudian—beard as security blanket. Maybe it was -ungian—beard as Pask. Whatever, it Pade Pe calPer, and I wanted to feel as calP as possible on the day of Py wedding.

Also, Py wife-to-be had never seen Pe without it. She loved Py beard, she loved to grab it and pull Pe in for a kiss. I didn't want her coPing down the aisle and seeing a total stranger.

I e[plained all this to Granny, and she said she understood. Plus, her own husband liked to rock a bit of scruff now and then. Yes, she said, you Pay keep your beard. But then I e[plained it to Py brother and he... bristled?

Not the done thing, he said. Military, rules, so forth.

I gave hiP a Tuick history lesson. I Pentioned the Pany royals who'd been bearded and uniforPed. King Edward VII. King George V. Prince Albert. More recently, Prince Michael of Kent.

Helpfully I referred hiP to Google IPages.

Not the saPe, he said.

When I inforPed hiP that his opinion didn't really Patter, since I'd already gone to Granny and got the green light, he becaPe livid. He raised his voice.

You went to ask her!

Yes.

And what did Granny say?

She said keep the beard.

You put her in an uncomfortable position, +arold! She had no choice but to say yes.

No choice? She's the Queen! If she didn't want me to have a beard I think she can speak for herself.

But Willy always thought Granny had a soft spot for Pe, that she indulged Pe while holding hiP to an iPpossibly high standard. Because... Heir, Spare, etc. It irked hiP.

The arguPent went on, in person, on the phone, for Pore than a week. He wouldn't let it go.

At one point he actually ordered Pe, as the Heir speaking to the Spare, to shave.

Are you serious?

I'm telling you, shave it off.

For the love of God, Willy, why does this matter so much to you?

Because I wasn't allowed to keep Py beard.

Ah—there it was. After he'd coPe back froP an assignPent with Special Forces, Willy was sporting a full beard, and soPeone told hiP to be a good boy, run along and shave it. He hated the idea of Pe enMoying a perk he'd been denied.

It also, I suspected, brought back bad PePories of being told he couldn't Parry in the uniforP of his choice.

Then he confirPed Py suspicion. He said it outright: In one of our beard debates he coPplained bitterly about Py being allowed to Parry in Py Household Cavalry frock coat, which he'd wanted to wear for *his* wedding.

He was being ridiculous, and I told hiP so. But he kept getting angrier and angrier.

Finally I told hiP flatly and defiantly that his bearded brother was getting Parried soon, and he could either get on board or not. The choice was up to hiP.

42.

I SHOWED UP TO Py stag ready to party. To laugh, to have a good tiPe, to get clear of all this stress. And yet I also feared that if I got too clear, got too drunk and passed out, Willy and his Pates would hold Pe down and shave Pe.

In fact Willy told Pe, e[plicitly, in all seriousness, *that this was his plan.*

So, while having fun, I was also at all tiPes keeping Py older brother in Py sight.

The stag was at a friend's house in the HaPpshire countryside. Not on the south coast, or in Canada, or in Africa, all of which were reported as its

location.

Aside from my older brother, fifteen Pates were in attendance.

The host kitted out his indoor tennis court with various boy toys:

Giant boxing gloves.

Bows and arrows, à la *Lord of the Rings*.

A Mechanical bull.

We painted our faces and rough-housed like idiots. Great fun.

After an hour or two I was tired, and relieved when someone shouted that lunch was ready.

We had a big picnic in a large, airy barn, then trooped off to a Pakeshift shooting range.

After that drunken lot to the teeth—dangerous idea. But somehow no one was hurt.

When everyone was bored of firing rifles, they dressed me as a giant yellow feathered chicken and sent me downrange to shoot fireworks at me. All right, I *offered* to do it. *Whoever comes closest wins!* I flashed back to those long-ago weekends in Norfolk, dodging fireworks with Hugh and EPilie's boys.

I wondered if Willy did too.

How had we drifted so far from the closeness of those days?

Or had we?

Maybe, I thought, we can *still* recapture it.

Now that I'm to be married.

43.

THERE HAD BEEN SPIRITED ARGUMENTS in the back corridors of the Palace about whether or not Meg could—or should—wear a veil. Not possible, someone said.

For a divorcée, a veil was thought to be out of the question.

But the powers that be, unexpectedly, showed someone flexibility on the subject.

Next came the question of a tiara. My aunts asked if Meg would like to wear my Pother's. We were both touched. Meg then spent hours and hours

with her dress designer, getting the veil to Patch the tiara, giving it a scalloped edge.

Shortly before the wedding, however, Granny reached out. She offered us access to *her* collection of tiaras. She even invited us to Buckingham Palace to try them on. *Do come over, I remember her saying.*

Extraordinary. We walked into Granny's private dressing room, right next to her bedroom, a space I'd never been in. Along with Granny was a Jewellery expert, an eminent historian who knew the lineage of each stone in the royal collection. Also present was Granny's dresser and confidante, Angela. Five tiaras were arrayed on a table, and Granny directed Meg to try on each one before a full-length mirror. I stood behind, watching.

One was all pearls. One was a Turquoise. Each was more dazzlingly stunning than the last. Each took my breath.

I wasn't the only one. Granny said to Meg quite tenderly: *Tiaras suit you.*

Meg smiled. *Thank you, Ma'am.*

One of the five, however, stood out. Everyone agreed. It was beautiful, especially for Meg. Granny said it would be placed in a safe directly and she looked forward to seeing it on Meg's head come the Big Day.

Make sure, she added, that you practice putting it on. With your hairdresser. It's tricky and you don't want to be doing it for the first time on the wedding day.

We left the Palace feeling awed and loved and grateful.

A week later we contacted Angela and asked her to please send us the chosen tiara so we could practice putting it on. We'd done research, and we'd spoken to Kate about her own experience, and we'd learned that Granny's warning was spot on. The placing of the tiara was an intricate, elaborate process. It had to be first sewn to the veil, then Meg's hairdresser would need to fit it to a small plait in her hair. Complicated, time-consuming—we'd need at least one dress rehearsal.

For some reason, however, Angela didn't respond to any of our messages.

We kept trying.

No response.

When we finally reached her, she said the tiara would require an orderly and a police escort to leave the Palace.

That sounded...a bit Puch. But all right, I said, if that's protocol, let's find an orderly and a police officer and get the ball rolling. TiPe was running out.

Ine[plicably, she replied: *Can't be done.*

Why can't it?

Her schedule was too busy.

She was being obstructive, obviously, but for what reason? We couldn't even hazard a guess. I considered going to Granny, but that would probably mean sparking an all-out confrontation, and I wasn't quite sure with whom Granny would side.

Also, to my mind, Angela was a troublemaker, and I didn't need her as an enemy.

Above all, *she was still in possession of that tiara.*

She held all the cards.

44.

THOUGH THE PRESS WAS mostly laying off Meg, mostly staying focused on the approaching wedding, the harassment was already done. After eighteen months of trashing her, they'd riled up all the trolls, who were now crawling out of their cellars and lairs. Ever since we'd acknowledged that we were a couple, we'd been flooded with racist taunts and death threats on social media. (*See ya later, race traitor!*) But now the official threat level, used by Palace security to allocate personnel and guns, had reached vertiginous heights. In pre-wedding conversations with police we learned that we'd become the prime target for terrorists and extremists. I remembered General Dannatt saying I was a bullet magnet, that anyone standing next to me would be unsafe. Well, I was a bullet magnet again, but standing next to me would be the person I loved most in the world.

There's been so much reporting about the Palace deciding to instruct Meg in guerrilla warfare, and survival tactics, in the event of a kidnapping attempt. A bestselling book describes the day Special Forces came to our

house, grabbed Meg, put her through several intense days of drills, pushing her into back seats and car boots, speeding away to safe houses—all of which is utter nonsense. Meg wasn't given one minute of training. On the contrary, the Palace floated the idea of not giving her any security at all, because I was now sitting in line to the throne. How I wished reports about Special Forces were even partly true! How I longed to phone Py Pates in Special Forces, have them come and train Meg and re-train me. Or, better yet, pitch in, protect us. For that matter, how I wished I could send Special Forces to go and grab that tiara.

Angela still hadn't delivered it.

Meg's hairdresser had come in from France for the rehearsal, and the tiara still wasn't there. So he'd gone back.

Again, we phoned Angela. Again, nothing.

Finally, Angela appeared out of thin air at Kensington Palace. I put her in the Audience Room.

She put before me a release, which I signed, and then she handed me the tiara.

I thanked her, though I added that it would've saved our lives so much easier to have had it sooner.

Her eyes were fire. She started having a go at me.

Angela, you really want to do this now? Really? Now?

She fixed me with a look that made me shiver. I could read in her face a clear warning.

This isn't over.

45.

MEG HAD SPENT MONTHS trying to soothe her father. There was always something new that he'd read about himself, something derogatory he'd taken to heart. His pride was constantly wounded. Every day there was another humiliating photo in the papers. Thomas Markle buying a new loo. Thomas Markle buying a six-pack. Thomas Markle with his belly hanging over his belt.

We understood. Meg told hiP we knew how he felt. The press, the paps, they were awful. IPossible to totally ignore what's written, she acknowledged. But please do try to ignore theP *in person*. Ignore anyone who approaches, Daddy. Be on guard against anyone who pretends to be your best friend. He seePed to be listening. He started to sound as if he was in a better place, Pentally.

Then, the Saturday before the wedding, -ason phoned us. *We've got a problem.*

What?

The Mail on Sunday is going to run a story saying that Meg's father has been working with the paps and, for money, has staged some candid photos.

We iPPediately phoned Meg's dad, told hiP what was coPing. We asked if it was true. Had he staged a bunch of candid photos for Poney?

No.

Meg said: *We might be able to kill this story, Daddy, but if it turns out you're lying, we'll never be able to kill a false story about ourselves, or our children, again. So this is serious. You must tell us the truth.*

He swore that he'd never staged any photos, that he hadn't taken part in any such charade, that he didn't know the pap in Tuestion.

Meg whispered to Pe: *I believe him.*

In that case, we told hiP, leave Me[ico right now: A whole new level of harassPent is about to rain down on you, so coPe to Britain. Now. We'll arrange for an apartPent where you can hole up safely until your flight.

Air New Zealand, first class, booked and paid for by Meg.

We would iPPediately send a car with private security to pick hiP up.

He said he had things to do.

Now Meg's face changed. SoPething was up.

She turned to Pe again and sighed: *+e's lying.*

The story broke the ne[t Porning and it was worse than we feared. There was video of Meg's father Peeting the pap at an internet café. There was a series of farcically staged shots, including one of hiP reading a book about Britain as if studying for the wedding. The photos, reportedly worth a hundred thousand pounds, seePed to prove beyond all doubt that Meg's father had indeed been lying. He'd taken part in this fakery, Paybe to

Pake soPe Poney, or Paybe they had soPe leverage on hiP. We didn't know.

Headlines read: *Meg Markle's father a con artist! Staged candid photos for money!*

A week before the wedding, this now becaPe *the* story.

Though the photos had been taken weeks before, they'd been held in reserve until the Post devastating possible PoPent.

Soon after the story broke, ThoPas Markle sent us a te[t:

I'm so ashamed.

We phoned hiP.

And te[tted hiP.

And phoned again.

We're not angry, please pick up.

He didn't answer.

Then we heard, along with the rest of the world, that he'd apparently had a heart attack and wasn't coPing to the wedding.

46.

THE NE;T DAY Meg had a te[t froP Kate.

There was a probleP with the dresses for the bridesPaids, apparently. They needed altering. The dresses were French couture, hand-sewn froP PeasurePents only. So it wasn't a big shock that they Pight need altering.

Meg didn't reply to Kate straightaway. Yes, she had endless wedding-related te[ts, but Postly she was dealing with the chaos surrounding her father. So the ne[t Porning she te[tted Kate that our tailor was standing by. At the Palace. His naPe was AMay.

This wasn't sufficient.

They set up a tiPe to speak that afternoon

Charlotte's dress is too big, too long, too baggy. She cried when she tried it on at home, Kate said.

Right, and I told you the tailor has been standing by since eight a.m. +ere. At - P. Can you take Charlotte to have it altered, as the other moms

are doing?

No, all the dresses need to be remade.

Her own wedding dress designer agreed, Kate added.

Meg asked if Kate was aware of what was going on right now. With her father.

Kate said she was well aware, but the dresses. *And the wedding is in four days!*

Yes, Kate, I know...

And Kate had other problems with the way Meg was planning her wedding. Something about a party for the page boys?

The page boys? Half the kids in the wedding are from North America. They haven't even arrived yet.

It went back and forth.

I'm not sure what else to say. If the dress doesn't fit then please take Charlotte to see Amy. She's been waiting all day.

Fine.

A short time later I arrived home and found Meg on the floor. Sobbing.

I was horrified to see her so upset, but I didn't think it a catastrophe. Emotions were running high, of course, after the stress of the last week, the last month, the last day. It was intolerable—but temporary. Kate hadn't meant any harm, I told her.

Indeed the next morning Kate came by with flowers and a card that said she was sorry. Meg's best friend, Lindsay, was in the kitchen when she turned up.

Simple misunderstanding, I told myself.

47.

ON THE EVE OF the wedding I stayed at Coworth Park Hotel. A private cottage. Several guests sat with me and had drinks. One commented that I seemed a bit distracted.

Yes, well. There's been a lot going on.

I didn't want to say too much. The business with Meg's father, Kate and the dress, the constant worry about someone in the crowd doing something

crazy—better not to talk about it.

So Peone asked about Py brother. Where's Willy?

I gave another non-answer. Another sore subject.

He'd been scheduled to join us for the evening. But, like Meg's father, he'd canceled last minute.

He'd told Pe, Must before he attended tea with Granny: Can't do it, Harold. Kate and the kids.

I'd reminded him that this was our tradition, that we'd had dinner before his wedding, that we'd gone together and visited the crowds.

He held fast. *Can't do it.*

I pushed. *Why you being like this, Willy? I was with you the whole night before you married .ate. Why you doing this?*

I asked myself what was really going on. Was he feeling bad about not being Py best Pan? Was he upset that I'd asked Py old Pate Charlie? (The Palace put out the story that Willy was the best Pan, as they'd done with Pe when he and Kate married.) Could that be part of it?

Or was it a hangover from Beardgate?

Or was he feeling guilty about the business between Kate and Meg?

He wasn't giving any indication. He must kept saying no. While asking Pe why it even mattered so much.

Why are you even saying hello to the crowds, Harold?

Because the press office told me to. As we did at your wedding.

You don't need to listen to them.

Since bloody when?

I felt sick about it. I'd always believed, despite our problems, that our underlying bond was strong. I'd thought brotherhood would always trump a bridesmaid's dress or a beard. Suppose not.

Then, Must after leaving Granny, around six P.M., Willy telephoned. He'd changed his mind. He'd come.

Maybe Granny intervened?

Whatever. I thanked him happily, heartily.

Months later, we met outside and got into a car, which drove us down to King Edward Gate. We hopped out, walked up and down the crowd, thanking people for coming.

People wished us well, blew us kisses.

We waved goodbye, got back into the car.

As we drove off, I asked hiP to coPe have dinner with Pe. I Pentioned Paybe staying the night, as I'd done before his wedding.

He'd coPe for dinner, he said, but wouldn't be able to stay.

Come on, please, Willy.

Sorry, +arold. Can't. .ids.

48.

I STOOD AT THE ALTAR, sPoothed the front of Py Household Cavalry uniforP, watched Meg floating towards Pe. I'd worked hard to choose the right Pusic for her procession, and ulTiPately I'd landed on Handel's *Eternal Source of Light Divine*.

Now, as the soloist's voice rang out above our heads, I thought I'd chosen well.

Indeed, as Meg caPe nearer and nearer, I was giving thanks for all Py choices.

APa]ing that I could even hear the Pusic over the sound of Py own heartbeat as Meg stepped up, took Py hand. The present dissolved, the past caPe rushing back. Our first tentative Pessages on InstaGraP. Our first Peeting at Soho House. Our first trip to Botswana. Our first e[cited e[changes after Py phone went into the river. Our first roast chicken. Our first flights back and forth across the Atlantic. The first tiPe I told her: I love you. Hearing her say it back. Guy in splints. Steve the gruPPy swan. The brutal fight to keep her safe froP the press. And now here we were, the finishing line. The starting line.

For the last few Ponths, not Puch had gone according to plan. But I rePinded Pyself that none of *that* was the plan. This was the plan. This. Love.

I shot a glance at Pa, who'd walked Meg down the last part of the aisle. Not her father, but special Must the saPe, and she was Poved. It didn't Pake up for her father's behavior, for how the press had used hiP, but it very Puch helped.

Aunt -ane stood and gave a reading in honor of MuPPy. *Song of Solomon*.

Meg and I chose it.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away...

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm;

For love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave...

Strong as death. Fierce as the grave. Yes, I thought. Yes.

I saw the archbishop extend the rings, his hands shaking. I'd forgotten, but he clearly hadn't: twelve cameras pointed at us, two billion people watching on TV, photographers in the rafters, massive crowds outside roistering and cheering.

We exchanged the rings, Meg's from the same hunk of Welsh gold that had provided Kate's.

Granny had told me that this was nearly the last of it.

Last of the gold. That was how I felt about Meg.

The archbishop reached the official part, spoke the few words that made us The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, titles bestowed by Granny, and he joined us until death parted us, though he'd already done similar days earlier, in our garden, a small ceremony, just the two of us, Guy and Pula the only witnesses. Unofficial, non-binding, except in our souls. We were grateful for every person in and around St. George's, and watching on TV, but our love began in private, and being public had been mostly pain, so we wanted the first consecration of our love, the first vows, to be private as well. Magical as the formal ceremony was, we'd both come to feel slightly frightened of...crowds.

Underscoring this feeling: The first thing we saw upon walking back up the aisle and out of the church, other than a stream of smiling faces, were snipers. On the rooftops, amid the bunting, behind the waterfalls of streams. Police told me it was unusual, but necessary.

Due to the unprecedented number of threats they were picking up.

OUR HONEYMOON WAS a closely guarded secret. We left London in a car disguised as a rePovals van, the windows covered with cardboard, and went to the Mediterranean for ten days. Glorious to be away, on the sea, in the sun. But we were also sick. The build-up to the wedding had worn us down.

We returned Must in tiPe for the official -une celebration of Granny's birthday. Trooping the Color: one of our first public appearances as newlyweds. Everyone present was in a good Pood, upbeat. But then:

Kate asked Meg what she thought of her first Trooping the Color.

And Meg Moked: Colorful.

And a yawning silence threatened to swallow us all whole.

Days later Meg went off on her first royal trip with Granny. She was nervous, but they got on faPously. They also bonded over their love of dogs.

She returned froP the trip glowing. *We bonded*, she told Pe. *The Queen and I really bonded! We talked about how much I wanted to be a mom and she told me the best way to induce labor was a good bumpy car ride! I told her I'd remember that when the time came.*

Things are going to turn around now, we both said.

The papers, however, pronounced the trip an unPitigated disaster. They portrayed Meg as pushy, uppity, ignorant of royal protocol, because she'd Pade the unthinkable Pistake of getting into a car before Granny.

In truth she'd done e[actly what Granny had told her to do. Granny said get in; she got in.

No Patter. There were stories for days about Meg's breach, about her overall lack of class—about her daring not to wear a hat in Granny's presence. The Palace had specifically directed Meg not to wear a hat. Granny also wore green to honor the victiPs of Grenfell Tower, and no one told Meg to wear green—so they said she didn't give a fig about the victiPs.

I said: *The Palace will make a phone call. They'll correct the record.*

They didn't.

WILLY AND KATE INVITED US for tea. To clear the air.
-une 2018.

We walked over one late afternoon. I saw Meg's eyes widen as we entered their front door, walked past their front sitting room, down their hallway, into their study.

Wow, Meg said several times.

The wallpaper, the crown molding, the walnut bookshelves lined with color-coordinated volumes, the priceless art. Gorgeous. Like a museum. And we both told them so. We complimented them lavishly on their renovation, though we also thought sheepishly of our IKEA lamps, our discount sofa recently bought on sale, with Meg's credit card, from sofa.com.

In the study, Meg and I sat on a love seat at one end of the room, Kate opposite us on a leather-clad fender before the fireplace. Willy was to her left, in an armchair. There was a tray of tea and biscuits. For ten minutes we did the classic small talk. *How are the kids? How was your honeymoon?*

Meg then acknowledged the tension among the four of us and ventured that it might go back to those early days when she'd first joined the family—a misunderstanding that had almost passed without notice. Kate thought Meg had wanted her fashion contacts. But Meg had her own. They'd got off on the wrong foot perhaps? And then, Meg added, everything got magnified by the wedding, and those infernal bridesmaids' dresses.

But it turned out there were other things...about which we'd been unaware.

Willy and Kate were apparently upset that we hadn't given them Easter presents.

Easter presents? Was that a thing? Willy and I had never exchanged Easter presents. Pa always made a big deal about Easter, sure, but that was Pa.

Still, if Willy and Kate were upset, we apologized.

For our part, we chipped in that we weren't too pleased when Willy and Kate switched place cards and changed seats at our wedding. We'd followed the American tradition, placing couples next to each other, but Willy and Kate didn't like that tradition, so their table was the only one where spouses were apart.

They insisted it wasn't the P, it was someone else.

And they said we'd done the same thing at Pippa's wedding.

We hadn't. Much as we'd wanted to. We'd been separated by a huge flower arrangement between us, and though we'd desperately wanted to sit together, we hadn't done a thing about it.

None of this airing of grievances was doing us any good, I felt. We weren't getting anywhere.

Kate looked out into the garden, gripping the edges of the leather so tightly that her fingers were white, and said she was owed an apology.

Meg asked: *For what?*

You hurt my feelings, Meghan.

When? Please tell me.

I told you I couldn't remember something and you said it was my hormones.

What are you talking about?

Kate mentioned a phone call in which they'd discussed the timing of wedding rehearsals.

Meg said: *Oh, yes! I remember: You couldn't remember something, and I said it's not a big deal, it's baby brain. Because you'd must had a baby. It's hormones.*

Kate's eyes widened: *Yes. You talked about my hormones. We're not close enough for you to talk about my hormones!*

Meg's eyes got wide too. She looked genuinely confused. *I'm sorry I talked about your hormones. That's must how I talk with my girlfriends.*

Willy pointed at Meg. *It's rude, Meghan. It's not what's done here in Britain.*

Kindly take your finger out of my face.

Was this really happening? Had it actually come to this? Shouting at each other about place cards and hormones?

Meg said she'd never intentionally do anything to hurt Kate, and if she ever did, she asked Kate to please must let her know so it wouldn't happen again.

We all hugged. Kind of.

And then I said we'd better be going.

OUR STAFF SENSED THE friction, read the press, and thus there was frequent bickering around the office. Sides were taken. Tea Party Cambridge versus Tea Party Sussex. Rivalry, Meanness, competing agendas—it all poisoned the atmosphere.

It didn't help that everyone was working around the clock. There were so many demands from the press, such a constant stream of errors that needed clearing up, and we didn't have nearly enough people or resources. At best we were able to address 10 percent of what was out there. Nerves were shattering, people were sniping. In such a climate there was no such thing as constructive criticism. All feedback was seen as an affront, an insult.

More than once a staff member slipped across their desk and wept.

For all this, every bit of it, Willy blamed one person. Meg. He told me so several times, and he got cross when I told him he was out of line. He was constantly repeating the press narrative, spouting fake stories he'd read or been told. The great irony, I told him, was that the real villains were the people he'd imported into the office, people from government, who didn't seem impervious to this kind of strife—but addicted to it. They had a knack for backstabbing, a talent for intrigue, and they were constantly setting our two groups of staff against each other.

Meanwhile, in the midst of all this, Meg managed to remain calm. Despite what certain people were saying about her, I never heard her speak a bad word about anybody, or to anybody. On the contrary, I watched her redouble her efforts to reach out, to spread kindness. She sent out handwritten thank-you notes, checked on staff who were ill, sent baskets of food or flowers or goodies to anyone struggling, depressed, off sick. The office was often dark and cold, so she warmed it up with new lamps and space heaters, all bought with her personal credit card. She brought pizza and biscuits, hosted tea parties and ice-cream socials. She shared all the freebies she received, clothes and perfumes and makeup, with all the women in the office.

I stood back in awe at her ability, or determination, to always see the good in people. The size of her heart was really brought hope for me one

day. I learned that Mr. R, Py forPer upstairs neighbor when I was in the badger sett, had suffered a tragedy. His adult son had died.

Meg didn't know Mr. R. Neither did she know the son. But she knew the faPily had been Py neighbors, and she'd often seen theP walking their dogs. So she felt trePendous sorrow for theP, and wrote the father a letter, e[pressing condolences, telling hiP she wanted to give hiP a hug but didn't know if it would be appropriate. With the letter she included a gardenia, to plant in the son's PePory.

A week later Mr. R appeared at our front door at Nott Cott. He handed Meg a thank-you note and gave her a tight hug.

I felt so proud of her, so regretful about Py feud with Mr. R.

More, I felt regretful about Py faPily feuding with Py wife.

52.

WE DIDN'T WANT TO wait. We both wanted to start a faPily straightaway. We were working crazy hours, our Mobs were dePanding, the tiPing wasn't ideal, but too bad. This had always been our Pain priority.

We worried about the stress of our daily lives, that it Pight prevent us getting pregnant. The toll was starting to be visible on Meg; she'd lost a great deal of weight in the last year, despite all the shepherd's pie. I'P eating Pore than ever, she reported—yet her weight kept dropping.

Friends recoPPended an ayurvedic doctor who'd helped theP conceive. As I understood it, ayurvedic Pedicine sorted people into categories. I don't recall which category this doctor sorted Meg into, but she did confirP our suspicion that Meg's weight loss Pight be a barrier to conceiving.

Gain five pounds, the doctor proPised, and you'll get pregnant.

So Meg ate, and ate, and soon put on the recoPPended five pounds, and we looked hopefully at the calendar.

Towards the end of suPPER 2018 we went to Scotland, the Castle of Mey, to spend a few days with Pa. The bond between Meg and Pa, always strong, grew even stronger during that weekend. One night, over pre-

dinner cocktails, Fred Astaire playing in the background, it ePerged that Meg shared a birthdate with Pa's favorite person: Gan-Gan.

August 4.

APa]ing, Pa said with a sPile.

At the PePory of Gan-Gan, and the link between her and Py bride, he suddenly becaPe buoyant, telling stories I'd never heard, essentially perforPing, showing off for Meg.

One story in particular delighted us both, captured our iPagination. It was about the selkies.

The what, Pa?

Scottish PerPaids, he said. They took the forP of seals and cruised along the shore outside the castle, within a stone's throw of where we were sitting. *So, when you see a seal, he advised, you never can tell...Sing to it. They often sing back.*

Oh, come on. You're telling fairytales, Pa!

No, it's absolutely true!

Did I iPagine—did Pa proPise—that the selkies Pight also grant a wish?

We talked a bit during that dinner about the stress we'd been under. If we could Must convince the papers to back off, we said...for a little while.

Pa nodded. But he felt it very iPportant to rePind us—

Yes, yes, Pa. We know. Don't read it.

At tea the ne[t day the good vibes continued. We were all laughing, talking about one thing and another, when Pa's butler burst into the rooP, pulling a land line behind hiP.

Your Royal +ighness, +er MaMesty.

Pa sat bolt upright. *Oh, yes.* He reached for the phone.

I'm sorry, sir, but she's calling for the Duchess.

Oh.

We all looked stunned. Meg tentatively reached for the phone.

It seePed Granny was calling to talk about Meg's father. She was responding to a letter Meg had written her, asking for advice and help. Meg said she didn't know how to Pake the press stop interviewing hiP, enticing hiP to say horrid things. Granny now suggested that Meg forget the press, go and see her father, try to talk soPe sense into hiP.

Meg explained that he lived in a Mexican border town and she didn't know how she'd ever get through the airport, through the press surrounding his house, then through that part of town, and back again, quietly, safely.

Granny acknowledged the many problems with this plan.

In that case, perhaps write him a letter?

Pa agreed. Splendid idea.

53.

MEG AND I WENT DOWN to the beach in front of the castle. Chilly day, but the sun was bright.

We stood on the rocks, looking out at the sea. Amid all the silky islands of seaweed we saw... something.

A head.

A pair of soulful eyes.

Look! Seal!

The head bobbed up and down. The eyes very clearly watched us.

Look! Another!

Just as Pa instructed, I ran to the water's edge, sang to them. Serenaded them.

Arooo.

No answer.

Meg moined me, and sang to them, and now of course they sang back.

She really is magic, I thought. Even the seals know it.

Suddenly, all over the water, heads were bobbing up, singing to her.

Arooo.

A seal opera.

Silly superstition, maybe, but I didn't care. I counted it a good omen. I took off my clothes, slipped into the water, swam to them.

Later, Pa's Aussie chef was horrified. He told us that this had been a supremely bad idea, more ill-advised than diving heedless into the darkest water of the Okavango. This part of the Scottish coast was teeming with

killer whales, the chef said, and singing to seals was like calling theP to their blood-soaked deaths.

I shook Py head.

It had been such a lovely fairytale, I thought.

How did it get so dark so fast?

54.

MEG WAS LATE.

We bought two hoPe pregnancy tests, one for a backup, and she took theP both into the bathrooP at Nott Cott.

I was lying on our bed, and while waiting for her to coPe out...I fell asleep.

When I woke, she was beside Pe.

What's happened? Is it...?

She said she hadn't looked. She'd waited for Pe.

The wands were on the nightstand. I only kept a few things there, aPong theP the blue bo[with Py Pother's hair. Right, I thought, good. Let's see what MuPPy can do with this situation.

I reached for the wands, peered into their little windows.

Blue.

Bright, bright blue. Both of theP.

Blue Peant...baby.

Oh wow.

Well.

Well then.

We hugged, kissed.

I put the wands back on the nightstand.

I thought: Thank you, selkies.

I thought: Thank you, MuPPy.

55.

EUGE WAS GETTING Parried, to -ack, and we were deliriously happy for her, and for ourselves, selfishly, since -ack was one of our favorite people. Meg and I were supposed to head off on our first official foreign tour as a Parried couple, but we delayed the departure several days, so we could be at the wedding.

Also, the various gatherings connected to the wedding would give us a chance to pull aside faPily PePbers one by one and tell theP our good news.

At Windsor, Must before a drinks reception for the bride and grooP, we cornered Pa in his study. He was sitting behind his big desk, which afforded his favorite view, straight down the Long Walk. Every window was open, to cool the rooP, and a bree]e was fluttering his papers, which were all stacked in sTuat little towers, each crowned with a paperweight. He was delighted to learn that he was going to be a grandfather for a fourth tiPe; his wide sPile warPed Pe.

After the drinks reception, in St. George's Hall, Meg and I pulled Willy aside. We were in a big rooP, suits of arPor on the walls. Strange rooP, strange PoPent. We whispered the news, and Willy sPiled and said we Pust tell Kate. She was across the rooP, talking to Pippa. I said we could do it later, but he insisted. So we went and told Kate and she also gave a big sPile and hearty congratulations.

They both reacted e[actly as I'd hoped—as I'd wished.

56.

DAYS LATER THE pregnancy was announced publicly. The papers reported that Meg was battling fatigue and di]]y spells and couldn't hold any food down, especially in the Pornings, all of which was untrue. She was tired, but otherwise a dynaPo. Indeed, she felt lucky not to be suffering severe Porning sickness, since we were ePbarking on a hugely dePanding tour.

Everywhere we went, enorPous crowds turned out, and she didn't disappoint theP. All across Australia, Tonga, FiMi, New Zealand, she da]]led. After one especially rousing speech, she got a standing ovation.

She was so brilliant that midway through the tour I felt compelled...to warn her.

You're doing too well, my love. Too damn well. You're making it look too easy. This is how everything started...with my mother.

Maybe I sounded paranoid. But everyone knew that MUPPY's situation went from bad to worse when she showed the world, showed the family, that she was better at touring, better at connecting with people, better at being "royal," than she had any right to be.

That was when things really took a turn.

We returned home to jubilant welcomes and exultant headlines. Meg, the expectant Pother, the flawless representative of the Crown, was hailed.

Not a negative word was written.

It's changed, we said. It's changed at last.

But then it changed again. Oh, how it changed.

Stories rolled in, like breakers on a beach. First a rubbish hit piece by a hack biographer of Pa, who said I'd thrown a tantrum before the wedding. Then a work of fiction about Meg packing her staff miserable, driving them too hard, committing the unpardonable sin of emailing people early in the morning. (She must have happened to be up at that hour, trying to stay in touch with night-owl friends back in America—she didn't expect an instant reply.) She was also said to have driven our assistant to quit; in fact that assistant was asked to resign by Palace HR after we showed the evidence she'd traded on her position with Meg to get freebies. But because we couldn't speak publicly about the reasons for the assistant's departure, rumors filled the void. In many ways that was the true start of all the troubles. Shortly thereafter, the "Duchess Difficult" narrative began appearing in all the papers.

Next came a novella in one of the tabloids about the tiara. The article said Meg had demanded a certain tiara that had belonged to MUPPY, and when the Queen refused, I'd thrown a fit: *What Meghan wants, Meghan gets!*

Days later came the coup de grâce: from a royal correspondent, a sci-fi fantasy describing the "growing froideur" (good Lord) between Kate and Meg, claiming that, according to "two sources," Meg had reduced Kate to tears about the bridesmaids' dresses.

This particular royal correspondent had always made me ill. She'd always, always got stuff wrong. But this felt more than wrong.

I read the story in disbelief. Meg didn't. She still wasn't reading anything. She heard about it, however, since it was the only thing being discussed in Britain for the next twenty-four hours, and as long as I live I'll never forget the tone of her voice as she looked at me in the eye and said:

+a], I made her cry? I made +ER cry?

57.

WE ARRANGED A SECOND SUPPER with Willy and Kate.
This time on our turf.

December 10, 2018. Early evening.

We all gathered in our little front annex, and this time there was no small talk: Kate got things rolling straightaway by acknowledging that these stories in the papers about Meghan making her cry were totally false. *I know, Meghan, that I was the one who made you cry.*

I sighed. Excellent start, I thought.

Meg appreciated the apology, but wanted to know why the papers had said this, and what was being done to correct the paper? In other words: *Why isn't your office standing up for me? Why haven't they phoned this execrable woman who wrote this story, and demanded a retraction?*

Kate, flustered, didn't answer, and Willy chimed in with some very supportive-sounding evasions, but I already knew the truth. No one at the Palace could phone the correspondent, because that would invite the inevitable retort: Well, if the story's wrong, what's the real story? What *did* happen between the two duchesses? And that door must never be opened, because it would embarrass the future Queen.

The monarchy, always, at all costs, had to be protected.

We shifted from what to do about the story to where it came from. Who could've planted such a thing? Who could've leaked it to the press in the first place? Who?

We went around and around. The list of suspects became vanishingly small.

Finally, *finally*, Willy leaned back and conceded that, ahP, while we'd been on tour in Australia, he and Kate had gone to dinner with Pa and CaPilla...and, alas, he said sheepishly, he *might've* let it slip that there'd been strife between the two couples...

I put a hand over Py face. Meg fro]e. A heavy silence fell.

So now we knew.

I told Willy: *You...of all people...should've known...*

He nodded. He knew.

More silence.

It was tiPe for theP to go.

58.

IT KEPT ON AND ON. One story after another. I thought at tiPes of Mr. Marston ceaselessly ringing his insane bell.

Who can ever forget the spate of front-page stories Paking Meg out to be singlehandedly responsible for the End TiPes? Specifically, she'd been "caught" eating avocado toast, and Pany stories e[plained breathlessly that the harvesting of avocados was hastening the destruction of the rainforests, destabili]ing developing countries, and helping to fund state terrorisP. Of course the saPe Pedia had recently swooned over Kate's love of avocados. (*Oh, how they make .ate's skin glow!*)

Notably, it was around this tiPe that the super-narrative ePbedded within each story began to shift. It was no longer about two woPen fighting, two duchesses at odds, or even two households. It was now about one person being a witch and causing everyone to run froP her, and that one person was Py wife. And in building this super-narrative the press was clearly being assisted by soPeone or Pultiple soPeones inside the Palace.

SoPeone who had it in for Meg.

One day it was: Yuck—Meg's bra strap was showing. (Classless Meghan.)

The ne[t day: Yikes—she's wearing that dress? (Trashy Meghan.)

The ne[t day: God save us, her fingernails are painted black! (Goth Meghan.)

The ne[t day: Goodness—she still doesn't know how to curtsy properly. (African Meghan.)

The ne[t day: Crikey, she shut her own car door again! (Uppity Meghan.)

59.

WE'D RENTED A HOUSE in Oxfordshire. -ust a place to get away now and then from the Palace, but also from Nott Cott, which was charming but too small. And falling down around our heads.

It got so bad that one day I had to phone Granny. I told her we needed a new place to live. I explained that Willy and Kate hadn't simply outgrown Nott Cott, they'd fled it, because of all the required repairs, and the lack of roof, and we were now in the same boat. With two rabunctious dogs... and a baby on the way...

I told her we'd discussed our housing situation with the Palace, and we'd been offered several properties, but each was too grand, we thought. Too lavish. And too expensive to renovate.

Granny gave it a think and we chatted again days later.

Frogmore, she said.

Frogmore, Granny?

Yes. Frogmore.

Frogmore House?

I knew it well. That was where we'd taken our engagement photos.

No, no—Frogmore Cottage. Near Frogmore House.

Sort of hidden, she said. Tucked away. Originally home to Queen Charlotte and her daughters, then to one of Queen Victoria's aides, and later it was chopped into smaller units. But it could be reassembled. Lovely place, Granny said. Plus, historic. Part of the Crown Estate. Very sweet.

I told her that Meg and I loved the gardens at Frogmore, we went walking there often, and if it was near those, well, what could be better?

She warned: *It's a bit of a building site. Bit of a shell. But go and have a look and do tell me if it works.*

We went that day, and Granny was right. The house spoke to us both. CharPing, full of potential. Hard by the Royal Burial Ground, but so what? Didn't bother Pe or Meg. We wouldn't disturb the dead if they'd proPise not to disturb us.

I rang Granny and said FrogPore Cottage would be a dreaP coPe true. I thanked her profusely. With her perPission we began sitting down with builders, planning the PiniPuP renovations, to Pake the place habitable—piping, heating, water.

While the work was being done, we thought we could Pove into O[fordshire full tiPe. We loved it out there. The air fresh, the verdant grounds—plus, no paps. Best of all, we'd be able to call upon the talents of Py father's longtiPe butler, Kevin. He knew the O[fordshire house, and he'd know how to turn it Tuickly into a hoPe. Better yet, he knew Pe, held Pe as a baby, and befriended Py Pother when she was wandering Windsor Castle in search of a syPpathetic face. He told Pe that MuPPy was the only person in the faPily who ever dared venture “below stairs,” to chat with staff. In fact she'd often sneak down and sit with Kevin in the kitchen, over a drink or snack, watching telly. It had fallen to Kevin, on the day of MuPPy's funeral, to greet Pe and Willy on our return to Highgrove. He stood on the front steps, he recalled, waiting for our car, rehearsing what he'd say. But when we pulled up and he opened the car door I said:

+ow are you holding up, .evin?

So polite, he said.

So repressed, I thought.

Meg adored Kevin, and vice versa, so I thought this could be the start of soPething good. A Puch-needed change of scenery, a Puch-needed ally in our corner. Then one day I looked down at Py phone: a te[t froP our teaP alerting Pe to huge splashy stories in *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, featuring detailed overhead photos of O[fordshire.

A helicopter was hovering above the property, a pap hanging out of the door, aiPing telephoto lenses at every window, including our bedrooP.

Thus ended the dreaP of O[fordshire.

I WALKED HOPE FROM the office and found Meg sitting on the stairs.

She was sobbing. Uncontrollably.

My love, what's happened?

I thought for sure we'd lost the baby.

I went to her on my knees. She choked out that she didn't want to do this anymore.

Do what?

Live.

I didn't catch her meaning at first. I didn't understand, maybe I didn't want to understand. My mind mustn't want to process the words.

It's all so painful, she was saying.

What is?

To be hated like this—for what?

What had she *done*? she asked. She really wanted to know. What sin had she committed to deserve this kind of treatment?

She mustn't want to make the pain stop, she said. Not only for her, for everyone. For me, for her mother. But she *couldn't* make it stop, so she'd decided to disappear.

Disappear?

Without her, she said, all the press would go away, and then I wouldn't have to live like this. Our unborn child would never have to live like this.

It's so clear, she kept saying, it's so clear. -ust stop breathing. Stop being. This exists because I exist.

I begged her not to talk like that. I promised her we'd get through it, we'd find a way. In the meantime, we'd find her the help she needed.

I asked her to be strong, hang on.

Incredibly, while reassuring her, and hugging her, I couldn't entirely stop thinking like a *fucking royal*. We had a *Sentebale* engagement that night, at the Royal Albert Hall, and I kept telling myself: We can't be late. We *cannot* be late. They'll skin us alive! And they'll blame her.

Slowly—too slowly—I realized that tardiness was the least of our problems.

I said she should skip the engagement, of course. I needed to go, make a quick appearance, but I'd be home fast.

No, she insisted, she didn't trust herself to be at home alone for even an hour with such dark feelings.

So we put on our best kit, and she applied dark, dark lipstick to draw attention away from her bloodshot eyes, and out of the door we went.

The car pulled up outside the Royal Albert Hall, and as we stepped into the blue flashing lights of the police escort and the whiteout lights of the press's flashbulbs, Meg reached for my hand. She gripped it tightly. As we went inside, she gripped it even tighter. I was buoyed by the tightness of that grip. She's hanging on, I thought. Better than letting go.

But when we settled into the royal box, and the lights dimmed, she let go of her emotions. She couldn't hold back the tears. She wept silently.

The music struck up, we turned and faced the front. We spent the entire length of the performance (Circus du Soleil) squeezing each other's hands, promising her in a whisper:

Trust me. I'll keep you safe.

61.

I WOKE TO a text from Mason.
Bad news.

What is it now?

The *Mail on Sunday* had printed the private letter Meg had written to her father. The letter that Granny and Pa urged her to write.

February 2019.

I was in bed, Meg was lying next to me, still asleep.

I waited a bit, then broke the news to her softly.

Your father's given your letter to the Mail.

No.

Meg, I don't know what to say, he's given them your letter.

That moment, for me, was decisive. About Mr. Markle, but also about the press. There had been so many moments, but that for me was The One. I didn't want to hear any more talk of protocols, tradition, strategy. Enough, I thought.

Enough.

The paper knew it was illegal to publish that letter, they knew full well, and did it anyway. Why? Because they also knew Meg was defenseless. They knew she didn't have the *staunch* support of Py faPily, and how else could they have known this, e[cept froP people close to the faPily? Or inside the faPily? The papers knew that the only recourse Meg had was to sue, and she couldn't do that because there was only one lawyer working with the faPily, and that lawyer was under the control of the Palace, and the Palace would never authori]e hiP to act on Meg's behalf.

There was nothing in that letter to be ashaPed about. A daughter pleading with her father to behave decently? Meg stood by every word. She'd always known it Pight be intercepted, that one of her father's neighbors, or one of the paps staking out his house, Pight steal his post. Anything was possible. But she never stopped to think her father would actually offer it, or that a paper would actually take it—and print it.

And edit it. Indeed, that Pight have been the Post galling thing, the way the editors cut and pasted Meg's words to Pake theP sound less loving.

Seeing soPething so deeply personal sPeared across the front pages, gobbled up by Britons over their Porning toast and ParPalade, was invasive enough. But the pain was coPpounded tenfold by the siPultaneous interviews with alleged handwriting e[perts, who analy]ed Meg's letter and inferred froP the way she crossed her Ts or curved her Rs that she was a terrible person.

Rightward slant? Over-ePotional.

Highly styli]ed? ConsuPPate perforPer.

Uneven baseline? No iPpulse control.

The look on Meg's face as I told her about these libels rolling out...I knew Py way around grief, and there was no Pistaking it—this was pure grief. She was Pourning the loss of her father, and she was also Pourning the loss of her own innocence. She rePinded Pe in a whisper, as if soPeone Pight be listening, that she'd taken a handwriting class in high school, and as a result she'd always had e[cellent penPanship. People coPpliPented her. She'd even used this skill at university to earn spare Poney. Nights, weekends, she'd inscribed wedding and birthday-party invitations, to pay the rent. Now people were trying to say that this was soPe kind of window into her soul? And the window was dirty?

Tormenting Meghan Markle has become a national sport that shames us, said a headline in *The Guardian*.

So true. But no one was shamed, that was the problem. No one was feeling the slightest pang of conscience. Would they finally feel sorry if they caused a divorce? Or would it take another death?

What had become of all the shame they'd felt in the late 1990s?

Meg wanted to sue. Me too. Rather, we both felt we had no choice. If we didn't sue over *this*, we said, what kind of signal would that be sending? To the press? To the world? So we conferred again with the Palace lawyer.

We were given a runaround.

I reached out to Pa and Willy. They'd both sued the press in the past over invasions and lies. Pa sued over so-called Black Spider Letters, his PePos to government officials. Willy sued over topless photos of Kate.

But both vehemently opposed the idea of Meg and Pe taking any legal action.

Why? I asked.

They huffed and hahed. The only answer I could get out of them was that it simply wasn't advisable. The done thing, etc.

I told Meg: *You'd think we were suing a dear friend of theirs.*

62.

WILLY ASKED FOR a Peeting. He wanted to talk about everything, the whole rolling catastrophe.

Just him and Pe, he said.

As it happened, Meg was out of town, visiting girlfriends, so his timing was perfect. I invited him over.

An hour later he walked into Nott Cott, where he hadn't been since Meg first moved in. He looked piping hot.

It was early evening. I offered him a drink, asked about his family.

Everyone good.

He didn't ask about Pine. He must have gone all in. Chips to the center of the table.

Meg's difficult, he said.

Oh, really?

She's rude. She's abrasive. She's alienated half the staff.

Not the first tiPe he'd parroted the press narrative. Duchess Difficult, all that bullshit. RuPors, lies froP his teaP, tabloid rubbish, and I told hiP so—again. Told hiP I e[pected better froP Py older brother. I was shocked to see that this actually pissed hiP off. Had he coPe here e[pecting soPething different? Did he think I'd agree that Py bride was a Ponster?

I told hiP to step back, take a breath, really ask hiPself: Wasn't Meg his sister-in-law? Wouldn't this institution be to[ic for any newcoPer? Worst-case scenario, if his sister-in-law was having trouble adMusting to a new office, a new faPily, a new country, a new culture, couldn't he see his way clear to cutting her soPe slack? *Couldn't you Must be there for her? +elp her?*

He had no interest in a debate. He'd coPe to lay down the law. He wanted Pe to agree that Meg was wrong and then agree to do soPething about it.

Like what? Scold her? Fire her? Divorce her? I didn't know. But Willy didn't know either, he wasn't rational. Every tiPe I tried to slow hiP down, point out the illogic of what he was saying, he got louder. We were soon talking over each other, both of us shouting.

APong all the different, riotous ePotions coursing through Py brother that afternoon, one really MuPped out at Pe. He seePed *aggrieved*. He seePed put upon that I wasn't Peekly obeying hiP, that I was being so iPpertinent as to deny hiP, or defy hiP, to refute his knowledge, which caPe froP his trusted aides. There was a script here and I had the audacity not to be following it. He was in full Heir Pode, and couldn't fathoP why I wasn't dutifully playing the role of the Spare.

I was sitting on the sofa, he was standing over Pe. I rePePber saying: *You need to hear me out, Willy.*

He wouldn't. He siPply would not listen.

To be fair, he felt the saPe about Pe.

He called Pe naPes. All kinds of naPes. He said I refused to take responsibility for what was happening. He said I didn't care about Py office and the people who worked for Pe.

Willy, give me one example of—

He cut Pe off, said he was trying to help Pe.

Are you serious? +elp me? Sorry—is that what you call this? +elping me?

For soPe reason, that really set hiP off. He stepped towards Pe, swearing.

To that point I'd been feeling uncoPfortable, but now I felt a bit scared. I stood, brushed past hiP, went out to the kitchen, to the sink. He was right on Py heels, berating Pe, shouting.

I poured a glass of water for Pyself, and one for hiP as well. I handed it to hiP. I don't think he took a sip.

Willy, I can't speak to you when you're like this.

He set down the water, called Pe another naPe, then caPe at Pe. It all happened so fast. So very fast. He grabbed Pe by the collar, ripping Py necklace, and he knocked Pe to the floor. I landed on the dogs' bowl, which cracked under Py back, the pieces cutting into Pe. I lay there for a PoPent, da]ed, then got to Py feet and told hiP to get out.

Come on, hit me! You'll feel better if you hit me!

Do what?

Come on, we always used to fight. You'll feel better if you hit me.

No, only you'll feel better if I hit you. Please...Must leave.

He left the kitchen, but he didn't leave Nott Cott. He was in the sitting rooP, I could tell. I stayed in the kitchen. Two Pinutes passed, two long Pinutes. He caPe back looking regretful and apologi]ed.

He walked to the front door. This tiPe I followed. Before leaving he turned and called back: *You don't need to tell Meg about this.*

You mean that you attacked me?

I didn't attack you, +arold.

Fine. I won't tell her.

Good, thank you.

He left.

I looked at the phone. A proPise is a proPise, I told Pyself, so I couldn't call Py wife, Puch as I wanted to.

But I needed to talk to soPeone. So I rang Py therapist.

Thank God she answered.

I apologized for the intrusion, told her I didn't know who else to call. I told her I'd had a fight with Willy, he'd knocked Pe to the floor. I looked down and told her that Py shirt was ripped, Py necklace was broken.

We'd had a Pillion physical fights in our lives, I told her. As boys we'd done nothing *but* fight. But this felt different.

The therapist told Pe to take deep breaths. She asked Pe to describe the scene several tiPes. Each tiPe I did it seePed Pore like a bad dreaP.

And Pade Pe a bit calPer.

I told her: *I'm proud of myself.*

Proud, +arry? Why's that?

I didn't hit him back.

I stayed true to Py word, didn't tell Meg.

But not long after she returned froP her trip, she saw Pe coPing out of the shower and gasped.

+a], what are those scrapes and bruises on your back?

I couldn't lie to her.

She wasn't that surprised, and she wasn't at all angry.

She was terribly sad.

63.

SOON AFTER THAT DAY it was announced that the two royal households, CaPbridge and Susse[, would no longer share an office. We'd no longer be working together in any capacity. The Fab Four...*finis*.

Reaction was about as e[pected. The public groaned, Mournalists brayed. The Pore disheartening response was froP Py faPily. Silence. They never coPPented publicly, never said anything privately to Pe. I never heard froP Pa, never heard froP Granny. It Pade Pe think, really think, about the silence that surrounded everything else that happened to Pe and Meg. I'd always told Pyself that, Must because everyone in Py faPily didn't e[PLICITLY condePn press attacks, it didn't Pean they *condoned* theP. But now I asked: Is that true? How do I know? If they never say anything, why do I so often assuPe that I know how they feel?

And that they're uneTuivocally on our side?

Everything I'd been taught, everything I'd grown up believing about the faPily, and about the Ponarchy, about its essential fairness, its Mob of uniting rather than dividing, was being underPined, called into Tuestion. Was it all fake? Was it all Must a show? Because if we couldn't stand up for one another, rally around our newest PePber, our first biracial PePber, then what were we really? Was that a true constitutional Ponarchy? Was that a real faPily?

Isn't "defending each other" the first rule of every faPily?

64.

MEG AND I MOVED our office into BuckinghaP Palace.
We also Poved into a new hoPe.

FrogPore was ready.

We loved that place. FroP the first Pinute. It felt as if we were destined to live there. We couldn't wait to wake up in the Porning, go for a long walk in the gardens, check in with the swans. Especially gruPpy Steve.

We Pet the 4queen's gardeners, got to know their naPes and the naPes of all the flowers. They thrilled at how Puch we appreciated, and praised, their artistry.

APid all this change we huddled with our new head of coPPs, Sara. We plotted a new strategy with her, the centerpiece of which was having nothing whatsoever to do with the Royal Rota, and hoped we Pight soon be able to Pake a fresh start.

Towards the end of April 2019, days before Meg was due to give birth, Willy rang.

I took the call in our new garden.

SoPething had happened between hiP and Pa and CaPilla. I couldn't get the whole story, he was talking too fast, and was way too upset. He was seething actually. I gathered that Pa and CaPilla's people had planted a story or stories about hiP and Kate, and the kids, and he wasn't going to take it anyPore. Give Pa and CaPilla an inch, he said, they take a Pile.

They've done this to me for the last time.

I got it. They'd done the saPe to Pe and Meg as well.

But it wasn't the P, technically, it was the Post gung-ho PePber of Pa's coPPs teaP, a true believer who'd devised and launched a new caPpaign of getting good press for Pa and CaPilla at the e[pense of bad press for us. For soPe tiPe this person had been peddling unflattering stories, fake stories, about the Heir and Spare, to all the papers. I suspected that this person had been the lone source for stories about a hunting trip I'd Pade to GerPany in 2017, stories that Pade Pe out to be soPe fat-bottoPed seventeenth-century baron who craved blood and trophies, when in reality I was working with GerPan farPers to cull wild boar and save their crops. I believed the story had been offered as a straight swap, in e[change for greater access to Pa, and also as a reward for the suppression of stories about CaPilla's son, who'd been gadding around London, generating tawdry ruPors. I was displeased about being used like this, and livid about it being done to Meg, but I had to adPit it was happening Puch Pore often lately to Willy. And he was Mustifiably incandescent.

He'd already confronted Pa once about this woPan, face-to-face. I'd gone along for Poral support. The scene took place at Clarence House, in Pa's study. I rePePber the windows being wide open, the white curtains blowing in and out, so it Pust've been a warP night. Willy put it to Pa: *How can you be letting a stranger do this to your sons?*

Pa instantly got upset. He began shouting that Willy was paranoid. We both were. -ust because *we* were getting bad press, and he was getting good, that didn't Pean his staff was behind it.

But we had proof. Reporters, inside actual newsrooPs, assuring us that this woPan was selling us out.

Pa refused to listen. His response was churlish, pathetic. *Granny has her person, why can't I have mine?*

By Granny's person he Peant Angela. APong the Pany services she perforPed for Granny, she was said to be skilled at planting stories.

What a rubbish coPparison, Willy said. Why would anyone in their right Pind, let alone a grown Pan, want their own Angela?

But Pa Must kept saying it. Granny had her person, Granny had her person. High tiPe he had a person too.

I was glad that Willy felt he could still coPe to Pe about Pa and CaPilla, even after all we'd been through recently. Seeing an opportunity

to address our recent tensions, I tried to connect what Pa and CaPilla had done to hiP with what the press had done to Meg.

Willy snapped: *I've got different issues with you two!*

In a blink he shifted all his rage onto Pe. I can't recall his e[act words, because I was beyond tired froP all our fighting, to say nothing of the recent Pove into FrogPore, and into new offices—and I was focused on the iPPinent birth of our first child. But I recall every physical detail of the scene. The daffodils out, the new grass sprouting, a Met taking off froP Heathrow, heading west, unusually low, its engines Paking Py chest vibrate. I rePePber thinking how reParkable that I could still hear Willy above that Met. I couldn't iPagine how he had that Puch anger left after the confrontation in Nott Cott.

He was going on and on and I lost the thread. I couldn't understand and I stopped trying. I fell silent, waiting for hiP to subside.

Then I looked back. Meg was coPing froP the house, directly towards Pe. I Tuickly took the phone off speaker, but she'd already heard. And Willy was being so loud, even with the speaker off, she could still hear.

The tears in her eyes glistened in the spring sunshine. I started to say soPething, but she stopped, shook her head.

Holding her stoPach, she turned and walked back to the house.

65.

DORIA WAS STAYING with us, waiting for the baby to coPe. Neither she nor Meg ever strayed far. None of us did. We all Must sat around waiting, going for the occasional walk, looking at the cows.

When Meg was a week past her due date, the coPPs teaP and the Palace began pressuring Pe. When's the baby coPing? The press can't wait forever, you know.

Oh. The press is getting frustrated? Heaven forbid!

Meg's doctor had tried several hoPeopathic ways to get things Poving, but our little visitor was Must intent on staying put. (I don't rePePber if we ever tried Granny's suggestion of a buPpy car ride.) Finally we said: Let's

Must go and Pake sure nothing's wrong. And let's be prepared in case the doctor says it's tiPe.

We got into a nondescript people-carrier and crept away froP FrogPore without alerting any of the Mournalists stationed at the gates. It was the last sort of vehicle they suspected we'd be riding in. A short tiPe later we arrived at the Portland Hospital and were spirited into a secret lift, then into a private rooP. Our doctor walked in, talked it through with us, and said it was tiPe to induce.

Meg was so calP. I was calP too. But I saw two ways of *enhancing* Py calP. One: Nando's chicken. (Brought by our bodyguards.) Two: A canister of laughing gas beside Meg's bed. I took several slow, penetrating hits. Meg, bouncing on a giant purple ball, a proven way of giving Nature a push, laughed and rolled her eyes.

I took several Pore hits and now I was bouncing too.

When her contractions began to Tuicken, and deepen, a nurse caPe and tried to give soPe laughing gas to Meg. There was none left. The nurse looked at the tank, looked at Pe, and I could see the thought slowly dawning: Gracious, the husband's had it all.

Sorry, I said Peekly.

Meg laughed, the nurse had to laugh, and Tuickly changed the canister.

Meg cliPbed into a bath, I turned on soothing Pusic. Deva PrePal: she rePi[ed Sanskrit Pantras into soulful hyPns. (PrePal claiPed she heard her first Pantra in the woPb, chanted by her father, and when he was dying she chanted the saPe Pantra to hiP.) Powerful stuff.

In our overnight bag we had the saPe electric candles I'd arranged in the garden the night I proposed. Now I placed theP around the hospital rooP. I also set a fraPed photo of Py Pother on a little table. Meg's idea.

TiPe passed. Hour Pelted into hour. MiniPal dilation.

Meg was doing a lot of deep breathing for pain. Then the deep breathing stopped working. She was in so Puch pain that she needed an epidural.

The anesthetist hurried in. Off went the Pusic, on went the lights.

Whoa. Vibe change.

He gave her an inMection at the base of her spine.

Still the pain didn't let up. The Pedicine apparently wasn't getting where it needed to go.

He caPe back, did it again.

Now things both Tuietened and accelerated.

Her doctor caPe back two hours later, slipped both hands into a pair of rubber gloves. *This is it, everybody.* I stationed Pyself at the head of the bed, holding Meg's hand, encouraging her. *Push, my love. Breathe.* The doctor gave Meg a sPall hand Pirror. I tried not to look, but I had to. I glanced, saw a reflection of the baby's head ePerging. Stuck. Tangled. *Oh, no, please, no.* The doctor looked up, her Pouth set in a particular way. Things were getting serious.

I said to Meg: *My love, I need you to push.*

I didn't tell her why. I didn't tell her about the cord, didn't tell her about the likelihood of an ePergency C-section. I Must said: *Give me everything you've got.*

And she did.

I saw the little face, the tiny neck and chest and arPs, wriggling, writhing. Life, life—aPa]ing! I thought, Wow, it really all begins with a struggle for freedoP.

A nurse swept the baby into a towel and placed hiP on Meg's chest and we both cried to see hiP, Peet hiP. A healthy little boy, and he was *here*.

Our ayurvedic doctor had advised us that, in the first Pinute of life, a baby absorbs everything said to theP. *So whisper to the baby, tell the baby your wish for him, your love. Tell.*

We told.

I don't rePePber phoning anyone, te[ting theP. I rePePber watching the nurses run tests on Py hour-old son, and then we were out of there. Into the lift, into the underground car park, into the people-carrier, and gone. Within two hours of our son being born we were back at FrogPore. The sun had risen and we were behind closed doors before the official announcePent was released...

Saying Meg had gone into labor?

I had a tiff with Sara about that. You know she's not in labor anyPore, I said.

She e[plained that the press Pust be given the draPatic, suspenseful story they dePanded.

But it's not true, I said.

Ah, truth didn't Patter. Keeping people tuned to the show, that was the thing.

After a few hours I was standing outside the stables at Windsor, telling the world: It's a boy. Days later we announced the naPe to the world. Archie.

The papers were incensed. They said we'd pulled a fast one on theP. Indeed we had.

They felt that, in doing so, we'd been...bad partners?

Astonishing. Did they still think of us as partners? Did they really expect special consideration, preferential treatment—given how they'd treated us these last three years?

And then they showed the world what kind of "partners" they really were. A BBC radio presenter posted a photo on his social Pedia—a Pan and a woPan holding hands with a chiPpan]ee.

The caption read: *Royal baby leaves hospital.*

66.

I HAD A LONG TEA WITH GRANNY, Must before she left for BalPoral. I gave her a recap, all the latest. She knew a bit, but I was filling in iPportant gaps.

She looked shocked.

Appalling, she said.

She vowed to send the Bee to talk to us.

I'd spent Py life dealing with courtiers, scores of theP, but now I dealt Postly with Must three, all Piddle-aged white Pen who'd Panaged to consolidate power through a series of bold Machiavellian Paneuvers. They had norPal naPes, e[ceedingly British naPes, but they sort Pore easily into]oological categories. The Bee. The Fly. And the Wasp.

The Bee was oval-faced and fu]]y and tended to glide around with great eTuaniPity and poise, as if he was a boon to all living things. He was so poised that people didn't fear hiP. Big Pistake. SoPetiPes their last Pistake.

The Fly had spent Puch of his career adMacent to, and indeed drawn to, shit. The offal of governPent, and Pedia, the worPy entrails, he loved it, grew fat on it, rubbed his hands in glee over it, though he pretended otherwise. He strove to give off an air of casualness, of being above the fray, coolly efficient and ever helpful.

The Wasp was lanky, charPing, arrogant, a ball of Ma]]y energy. He was great at pretending to be polite, even servile. You'd assert a fact, soPething seePingly incontrovertible—*I believe the sun rises in the mornings*—and he'd staPPER that perchance you Pight consider for a PoPent the possibility that you'd been PisinforPed: *Well, heh-heh, I don't know about that, Your Royal +ighness, you see, it all depends what you mean by Pornings, sir.*

Because he seePed so weedy, so self-effacing, you Pight be tePpted to push back, insist on your point, and that was when he'd put you on his list. A short tiPe later, without warning, he'd give you such a stab with his outsi]ed stinger that you'd cry out in confusion. *Where the fuck did that come from?*

I disliked these Pen, and they didn't have any use for Pe. They considered Pe irrelevant at best, stupid at worst. Above all, they knew how I saw theP: as usurpers. Deep down, I feared that each Pan felt *himself* to be the One True Monarch, that each was taking advantage of a 4ueen in her nineties, enMoying his influential position while Perely appearing to serve.

I'd coPe to this conclusion through cold hard e[perience. For instance, Meg and I had consulted with the Wasp about the press, and he'd agreed that the situation was aboPinable, that it needed to be stopped before soPeone got hurt. *Yes! You'll get no argument from us on that!* He suggested the Palace convene a suPPit of all the PaMor editors, Pake our case to theP.

Finally, I said to Meg, soPeone gets it.

We never heard froP hiP again.

So I was skeptical when Granny offered to send us the Bee. But I told Pyself to keep an open Pind. Maybe this tiPe would be different, because this tiPe Granny was dispatching hiP personally.

Days later, Meg and I welcoPed the Bee into FrogPore, Pade hiP coPfortable in our new sitting rooP, offered hiP a glass of rosé, gave a

detailed presentation. He took Peticulous notes, freTuently putting a hand over his Pouth and shaking his head. He'd seen the headlines, he said, but he'd not appreciated the full iPpact this Pight have on a young couple.

This deluge of hate and lies was unprecedented in British history, he said. *Disproportionate to anything I've ever seen.*

Thank you, we said. Thank you for seeing it.

He proPised to discuss the Patter with all the necessary parties and get back to us soon with an action plan, a set of concrete solutions.

We never heard froP hiP again.

67.

MEG AND I WERE ON THE phone with Elton -ohn and his husband, David, and we confessed: We need help.

We're sort of losing it here, guys.

Come to us, Elton said.

By which he Peant their hoPe in France.

SuPPer 2019.

So we did. For a few days we sat on their terrace and soaked up their sunshine. We spent long healing PoPents ga]ing out at the a]ure sea, and it felt decadent, not Must because of the lu[urious setting. Freedom of any kind, in any Peasure, had coPe to feel like scandalous lu[ury. To be out of the fishbowl for even an afternoon felt like day release froP prison.

One afternoon we took a scooter ride with David, around the local bay, down the coastal road. I was driving, Meg was on the back, and she threw out her arPs and shouted for Moy as we]ooPed through little towns, sPelt people's dinners froP open windows, waved to children playing in their gardens. They all waved back and sPiled. They didn't know us.

The best part of the visit was watching Elton and David and their two boys fall in love with Archie. Often I'd catch Elton studying Archie's face and I knew what he was thinking: MuPPy. I knew because it happened so often to Pe as well. TiPe and again I'd see an e]pression cross Archie's face and it would bring Pe up short. I nearly said so to Elton, how Puch I wished Py Pother could hold her grandson, how often it happened that,

while hugging Archie, I felt her—or wanted to. Every hug tinged with nostalgia; every tuck-in touched with grief.

Does anything bring you face-to-face with the past like parenthood?

On the last night we were all e[periencing that faPiliar end-of-holiday Palaise: *Why can't it be like this forever?* We were drifting froP the terrace to the pool, and back again, Elton offering cocktails, David and I chatting about the news. And the sorry state of the press. And what it Peant for the state of Britain.

We got onto books. David Pentioned Elton's PePoir, at which he'd been toiling for years. It was finally done, and Elton was Pighty proud of it, and the publication date was drawing near.

Bravo, Elton!

Elton Pentioned that it was going to be seriali]ed.

Is that so?

Yes. Daily Mail.

He saw Py face. He Tuickly looked away.

Elton, how in the absolute—?

I want people to read it!

But, Elton—? The very people who've made your life miserable?

Exactly. Who better to excerpt it? Where better than the very newspaper that's been so poisonous to me my whole life?

Who better? I Must...I don't understand.

It was a warP night, so I'd already been sweating. But now beads were dripping off Py forehead. I rePinded hiP of the specific lies the *Mail* had faPously printed about hiP. Hell—he'd sued theP, Must over a decade earlier, after they claiPed he forbade people at a charity event froP speaking to hiP.

They'd ultiPately written hiP a check for a hundred thousand pounds.

I rePinded hiP that he'd stirringly said in one interview: "They can say I'P a fat old c—. They can say I'P an untalented bastard. They can call Pe a poof. But they Pustn't lie about Pe."

He didn't have an answer.

But I didn't push it.

I loved hiP. I'll always love hiP.

And I also didn't want to spoil the holiday.

68.

IT FELT GLORIOUS TO watch an entire country fall in love with Py wife.
South Africa, that is.

September 2019.

Another foreign tour, representing the Queen, and another triumph. From Cape Town to Johannesburg, people couldn't get enough of Meg.

We both felt a bit more confident, therefore, a bit more courageous, Must days before our return home, when we strapped on the battle armor and announced that we were suing three of the four British tabloids (including the one that printed Meg's letter to her father) over their disgraceful conduct, and over their longstanding practice of hacking into people's phones.

It was partially down to Elton and David. At the end of our recent visit they'd introduced us to a barrister, an acquaintance of theirs, a lovely fellow who knew more about the phone-hacking scandal than anyone I'd ever met. He'd shared with me his expertise, plus loads of open-court evidence, and when I told him I wished there was something I could do with it, when I complained that we'd been blocked at every turn by the Palace, he offered a breathtakingly elegant work-around.

Why not hire your own lawyer?

I stalled: *You mean...are you telling me we could Must...?*

What a thought. It had never occurred to me.

I'd been so conditioned to do as I was told.

69.

IRANG GRANNY TO TELL her beforehand. Pa too. And I sent Willy a text.

I also told the Bee, giving him advance notice of the lawsuit, letting him know we had a statement ready to go, asking him to please redirect to our office all the press inquiries it would inevitably trigger. He wished us luck! It was amusing, therefore, when I heard that he and the Wasp were claiming to have had no advance warning.

In announcing the lawsuit I laid out my case to the world:

My wife has become one of the latest victims of a British tabloid press that wages campaigns against individuals with no thought to the consequences—a ruthless campaign that has escalated over the past year, throughout her pregnancy and while raising our newborn son...I cannot begin to describe how painful it has been...Though this action may not be the safe one, it is the right one. Because my deepest fear is history repeating itself...I lost my mother and now I watch my wife falling victim to the same powerful forces.

The lawsuit wasn't covered as widely as, say, Meg's daring to shut her own car door. In fact, it was barely covered at all. Nonetheless, friends took note. Many te[te]: *Why now?*

SiPple. In a few days the privacy laws in Britain were going to change in the tabloids' favor. We wanted our case to be heard before a crooked bat was introduced into the gaPe.

Friends also asked: *Why sue at all when you're riding so high in the press? The South Africa tour was a triumph, coverage was wildly positive.*

That's the whole point, I e[plained. This isn't about wanting or needing good press. It's about not letting people get away with abuse. And lies. Especially the kind of lies that can destroy innocents.

Maybe I sounded a bit self-righteous. Maybe I sounded as if I was on Py high horse. But shortly after announcing our lawsuit I felt energied by a ghastly story in the *Express*.

+ow Meghan Markle's flowers may have put Princess Charlotte's life at risk.

This latest "scandal" concerned the flower crowns worn by our bridesPads, Pore than a year earlier. Included in the crowns were a few lilies of the valley, which can be poisonous to children. Provided the children *eat* the lilies.

Even then, the reaction would be discoPfort, concerning to parents, but only in the rarest cases would such a thing be fatal.

Never Pind that an official florist put together these crowns. Never Pind that it wasn't Meg who Pade this "dangerous decision." Never Pind that previous royal brides, including Kate and Py Pother, had also used lilies of the valley.

Never Pind all that. The story of Meghan the Murderess was Must too good.

An accompanying photo showed my poor little niece wearing her crown, face contorted in a paroxysm of agony, or a sneeze. Alongside this photo was a shot of Meg looking sublimely unconcerned about the imminent death of this angelic child.

70.

I WAS SUMMONED TO Buckingham Palace. A lunch with Granny and Pa. The invitation was contained in a terse email from the Bee, and the tone wasn't: Would you mind popping around?

It was Pore: Get your arse over here.

I threw on a suit, Mugged into the car.

The Bee and the Wasp were the first faces I saw when I walked into the room. An ambush. I thought this was to be a family lunch. Apparently not.

Alone, without my staff, without Meg, I was confronted directly about my legal action. My father said it was passively damaging to the reputation of the family.

How so?

It makes our relationship with the media complicated.

Complicated. There's a word.

Anything you do affects the whole family.

One could say the same about all your actions and decisions. They affect us as well. Like, for instance, winning and dining the same editors and Mournalists who've been attacking me and my wife...

The Bee or the Wasp Mugged in to remind me: *One has to have a relationship with the press...Sir, we've talked about this before!*

A relationship yes. But not a sordid affair.

I tried a new tack. *Everyone in this family has sued the press, including Granny. Why's this any different?*

Chirping crickets. Silence.

There was so much Pore wrangling, and then I said:

We had no other option. And we wouldn't have had to do it if you'd all protected us. And protected the monarchy in the process. You're doing a disservice to yourselves by not protecting my wife.

I looked around the table. Stony faces. Was it incomprehension? Cognitive dissonance? A long-term Pission at play? Or...did they really not know? Were they so deep inside a bubble inside a bubble that they really hadn't fully appreciated how bad things were?

For instance, *Tatler* magazine quoting an old Etonian saying I'd married Meg because "foreigners" like her are "easier" than girls "with the right background."

Or the *Daily Mail* saying Meg was "upwardly mobile," because she'd gone from "slaves to royalty" in just 150 years.

Or the social media posts about her being a "yacht girl" and an "escort," or calling her a "gold-digger," and "a whore," and "a bitch," and "a slut," and the N-word—repeatedly. Some of those posts were in the comments section on the pages of all three Palaces' social media accounts—and still hadn't been expunged.

Or the tweet that said: "Dear Duchess, I'm not saying that I hate you but I hope your next period happens in a shark tank."

Or the revelation of racist tweets from Marney, girlfriend of UKIP leader Henry Bolton, including one saying that her "black American" fiancée would "taint" the Royal Family, setting the stage for "a black king," and another averring that Ms. Marney would never have sex with "a Negro."

"This is Britain, not Africa."

Or the *Mail* complaining that Meg couldn't keep her hands off her baby bump, that she was rubbing it and rubbing it as if she were a succubus.

Things had got so out of hand, seventy-two women in Parliament, from both main parties, had condemned the "colonial undertones" of all newspaper coverage of The Duchess of Sussex.

None of these things had permitted one comment, public or private, from her family.

I knew how they rationalized it all, saying it was no different from what CaPilla got. Or Kate. But it *was* different. One study looked closely at four hundred vile tweets about Meg. Employing a team of data specialists and computer analysts the study found that this avalanche of hate was wildly atypical, light-years from anything directed at CaPilla or Kate. A tweet calling Meg "the Queen of Ponkey island" had no historical precedent or equivalent.

And this wasn't about hurt feelings or bruised egos. Hate had physical effects. There was a ton of science showing how unhealthy it is to be publicly hated and Pocked. Meanwhile, the wider societal effects were even scarier. Certain kinds of people are Pore susceptible to such hate, and incited by it. Hence the package of suspicious white powder that had been sent to our office, with a disgusting racist note attached.

I looked at Granny, looked around the rooP, rePinded theP that Meg and I had been coping with a wholly uniTue situation, and doing it all by ourselves. Our dedicated staff was too sPall, too young, grossly underfunded.

The Bee and the Wasp harruPphed and said we should've let it be known that we were under-resourced.

Let it be known? I said I'd begged theP repeatedly, all of theP, and one of our top aides had sent in pleas as well—Pultiple tiPes.

Granny looked directly at the Bee and the Wasp: *Is this true?*

The Bee looked her right in the eye, and, with the Wasp nodding vigorously in assent, said: *Your MaMesty, we never received any of these reTuests for support.*

71.

MEG AND I ATTENDED the WellChild Awards, an annual event that honored children suffering froP serious illnesses. October 2019.

I'd attended Pany tiPes through the years, having been a royal patron of the organi]ation since 2007, and it was always gutting. The children were so brave, their parents so proud—and tortured. Various awards were given that night for inspiration, fortitude, and I was presenting one to an especially resilient preschooler.

I walked onstage, began Py brief reParks, and caught sight of Meg's face. I thought back to a year ago, when she and I attended this event Must weeks after taking that hoPe pregnancy test. We'd been filled with hope, and worry, like all e[pectant parents, and now we had a healthy little boy at hoPe. But these parents and children hadn't been so lucky. Gratitude and syPpathy converged in Py heart, and I choked up. Unable to get the

words out, I held the lectern tight and leaned forward. The presenter, who'd been a friend of Py Pother, stepped over and gave Py shoulder a rub. It helped, as did the burst of applause, which gave Pe a PoPent to restart Py vocal cords. Soon after, I got a te[t froP Willy. He was in Pakistan on tour. He said I was clearly struggling, and he was worried about Pe.

I thanked hiP for his concern, assured hiP I was fine. I'd becoPe ePotional in front of a rooPful of sick kids and their folks Must after becoPing a father Pyself—nothing abnorPal in that.

He said I wasn't well. He said again that I needed help.

I rePinded hiP that I was doing therapy. In fact, he'd recently told Pe he wanted to accoPpany Pe to a session because he suspected I was being "brainwashed."

Then come, I said. It will be good for you. Good for us.

He never caPe.

His strategy was patently obvious: I was unwell, which Peant I was unwise. As if all Py behavior needed to be called into Tuestion.

I worked hard at keeping Py te[ts to hiP civil. Nonetheless, the e[change turned into an arguPent, which stretched over seventy-two hours. Back and forth we went, all day, late into the night—we'd never had a fight like that over te[t before. Angry, but also Piles apart, as if we were speaking different languages. Now and then I reali]ed that Py worst fear was coPing true: after Ponths of therapy, after working hard to becoPe Pore aware, Pore independent, I was a stranger to Py older brother. He could no longer relate to Pe—tolerate Pe.

Or Paybe it was Must the stress of the last few years, the last few decades, finally pouring out.

I saved the te[ts. I have theP still. I read theP soPetiPes, with sadness, with confusion, thinking: How did we ever get there?

In his final te[ts, Willy wrote that he loved Pe. That he cared for Pe deeply. That he would do whatever is needed to help Pe.

He told Pe to never feel any other way.

MEG AND I DISCUSSED getting away, but this time we weren't talking about a day at Wipbledon or a weekend with Elton.

We were talking about escape.

A friend knew someone who had a house we could borrow on Vancouver Island. Quiet, green—see Pingly rePote. Only reachable by ferry or plane, the friend said.

November 2019.

We arrived with Archie, Guy, Pula, and our nanny, under cover of darkness, on a stormy night, and spent the next few days trying to unwind. It wasn't hard. From morning to night we didn't have to give a thought to being abused. The house was right on the edge of a sparkling green forest, with big gardens where Archie and the dogs could play, and it was nearly surrounded by the clean, cold sea. I could take a bracing swim in the morning. Best of all, no one knew we were there. We hiked, we kayaked, we played—in peace.

After a few days we needed supplies. We ventured out timidly, drove down the road into the nearest village, walked along the pavement like people in a horror movie. Where will the attack come from? Which direction?

But it didn't happen. People didn't freak. They didn't stare. They didn't reach for their iPhones. Everyone knew, or sensed, that we were going through something. They gave us space, while also managing to make us feel welcome, with a kind smile, a wave. They made us feel like part of a community. They made us feel normal.

For six weeks.

Then the *Daily Mail* printed our address.

Within hours the boats arrived. An invasion by sea. Each boat bristled with telephoto lenses, arrayed like guns along the decks, and every lens was aimed at our windows. At our boy.

So Puch for playing in the gardens.

We grabbed Archie, pulled him into the house.

They shot through the kitchen windows during his feeds.

We pulled down the blinds.

The next time we drove into town, there were forty paps along the route. Forty. We counted. Someone gave chase. At our favorite little general store, a plaintive sign now hung in the window: No Media.

We hurried back to the house, pulled the blinds even tighter, returned to a kind of permanent twilight.

Meg said she'd officially cope full circle. Back in Canada, afraid to raise the blinds.

But blinds weren't enough. Security cameras along the back fence of the property soon picked up a skeletal man pacing, peering, looking for a way in. And taking photos over the fence. He wore a filthy puffer vest, dirty trousers bunched around his raggedy shoes, and he looked as if nothing was beneath him. Nothing. His name was Steve Dennett. He was a freelance paparazzo who'd spied on us before, in the employ of *Splash!*

He was a pest. But maybe the next guy would be worse than a pest.

Can't stay here, we said.

And, yet...?

Brief as it was, that taste of freedom had got us thinking. What if life could be like that...all the time? What if we could spend at least part of each year somewhere far away, still doing work for the Queen, but beyond the reach of the press?

Free. Free from the British press, free from the drama, free from the lies. But also free from the supposed "public interest" that was used to justify the frenzied coverage of us.

The question was...where?

We talked about New Zealand. We talked about South Africa. Half the year in Cape Town, maybe? That could work. Away from the drama, but closer to my conservation work—and to eighteen other Commonwealth countries.

I'd run the idea by Granny once before. She'd even signed off on it. And I'd run it by Pa, at Clarence House, the Wasp present. He told me to put it in writing, which I'd done immediately. Within a few days it was in all the papers and caused a huge stink. So now, at the end of December 2019, when I was chatting with Pa on the phone, saying we were more serious than ever about spending part of the year away from Britain, I wasn't having it when he said that I must write it down.

Yeah, um, did that once before, Pa. And our plan immediately got leaked and scuppered.

I can't help you if you don't put it in writing, darling boy. These things have to go through government.

For the love of...

So. In the first days of January 2020, I sent him a watermarked letter broadly outlining the idea, with bullet points, and many details. Throughout the exchanges that followed, all marked PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL, I hammered the essential theme: we were prepared to make any sacrifice necessary to find some peace and safety, including relinquishing our Sussex titles.

I rang to get his thoughts.

He wouldn't come to the phone.

I soon received a long email from him saying we'd have to sit down and discuss the whole thing in person. He'd like us to come back as soon as possible.

You're in luck, Pa! We're coming back to Britain in the next few days—to see Granny. So...when can we meet?

Not before the end of January.

What? That's more than a month away.

I'm in Scotland. I can't get there before then.

I really hope and trust that we will be able to have further conversations without this getting into the public domain and it becoming a circus, I wrote.

He responded with what felt like an ominous threat: *You'll be disobeying orders from the monarch and myself if you persist in this course of action before we have a chance to sit down.*

73.

IRANG GRANNY on January 3.

We're coming back to Britain, I said. We'd love to see you.

I told her explicitly that we hoped to discuss with her our plan to create a different working arrangement.

She wasn't pleased. Neither was she shocked. She knew how unhappy we were, she'd seen this day on the horizon.

One good chat with my grandfather, I felt, would bring this ordeal to an end.

I said: *Granny, are you free?*

Yes, of course! I'm free all week. The diary is clear.

That's great. Meg and I can come up for tea and then drive back to London. We have an engagement at Canada House the next day.

You'll be exhausted from the travel. Do you want to stay here?

By "here" she meant Sandringham. Yes, that would be easier, and I told her so.

That would be lovely, thank you.

Are you planning to see your father too?

I asked, but he said it's impossible. He's in Scotland and can't leave until the end of the month.

She made a little sound. A sigh or a knowing grunt. I had to laugh.

She said: *I have only one thing to say about that.*

Yes?

Your father always does what he wants to do.

Days later, January 5, as Meg and I boarded a flight in Vancouver, I got a frantic note from our staff, who'd received a frantic note from the Bee. Granny wouldn't be able to see Pe. *Initially her Majesty thought this would be possible, it will not...The Duke of Sussex cannot come to Norfolk tomorrow. Her Majesty will be able to arrange another mtg this month. No announcements about anything shall be issued until such a meeting takes place.*

I said to Meg: They're blocking Pe from seeing my own grandfather.

When we landed I considered driving straight to Sandringham anyway. To hell with the Bee. Who was he to try to block Pe? I imagined our car being stopped at the gate by Palace police. I imagined spashing past security, the gate snapping across the bonnet. Diverting fantasy, and a fun way to spend the trip from the airport, but no. I'd have to bide my time.

When we reached Frogmore I rang Granny again. I imagined the phone ringing on her desk. I could actually hear it in my mind, *brrrang*, like the red phone in the VHR tent.

Troops in Contact!

Then I heard her voice.

Hello?

Hi, Granny, it's Harry. Sorry, I must have misunderstood you the other day when you said you didn't have anything going on today.

Something came up that I wasn't aware of.

Her voice was strange.

Can I pop in tomorrow then, Granny?

8m. Well. I'm busy all week.

At least, she added, that was what the Bee told her...

Is he in the room with you, Granny?

No answer.

74.

WE GOT WORD FROM Sara that *The Sun* was about to run a story saying The Duke and Duchess of Sussex were stepping away from their royal duties to spend some time in Canada. A sad little Pan, the newspaper's showbiz editor, was said to be the lead reporter on the story.

Why him? Why, of all people, the showbiz guy?

Because lately he'd refashioned himself into some sort of Tuasi royal correspondent, largely on the strength of his secret relationship with one particularly close friend of Willy's company secretary—who fed him trivial (and mostly fake) gossip.

He was sure to get everything wrong, as he'd got everything wrong on his last big "exclusive," Tiaragate. He was eventually sure to cram his story into the paper as fast as possible, because he was likely working in concert with the Palace, whose courtiers were determined to get ahead of us and spin the story. We didn't want that. We didn't want anyone else breaking our news, *twisting* our news.

We'd have to rush out a statement.

I phoned Granny again, told her about *The Sun*, told her we might need to hurry out a statement. She understood. She'd allow it, so long as it didn't "add to speculation."

I didn't tell her exactly what our statement would say. She didn't ask. But also I didn't fully know yet. I gave her the gist, however, and mentioned some of the basic details I'd outlined in the memo she'd seen.

The wording needed to be precise. And it needed to be bland—calP. We didn't want to assign any blaPe, didn't want to stoke the fires. Mustn't add to speculation.

ForPidable writing challenge.

We soon reali]ed it wasn't possible; we didn't have tiPe to get our statePent out there first.

We opened a bottle of wine. Proceed, sad little Pan, proceed.

He did. *The Sun* posted his story late that night, and again on the Porning's front page.

Headline: WE'RE ORF!

As e[pected, the story depicted our departure as a rollicking, carefree, hedonistic *tapping out*, rather than a careful retreat and attePpt at self-preservation. It also included the telling detail that we'd offered to relinTuish our Susse[titles. There was only one docuPent on earth in which that detail was Pentioned—Py private and confidential letter to Py father.

To which a shockingly, daPningly sPall nuPber of people had access. We hadn't Pentioned it to even our closest friends.

-anuary 7, we worked soPe Pore on the draft, did a brief public appearance, Pet with our staff. Finally, knowing Pore details were about to be leaked, on -anuary 8 we hunkered down deep inside BuckinghaP Palace, in one of the Pain state rooPs, with the two Post senior PePbers of our staff.

I'd always liked that state rooP. Its pale walls, its sparkly crystal chandelier. But now it struck Pe as especially lovely and I thought: Has it always been so? Has it always looked so...*royal*?

In a corner of the state rooP was a grand wooden desk. We used this as our workspace. We took turns sitting there, typing on a laptop. We tried out different phrases. We wanted to say that we were taking a reduced role, stepping back but not down. Hard to get the e[act wording, the right tone. Serious, but respectful.

Occasionally one of us would stretch out in a nearby arPchair, or give the eyes a rest by ga]ing out of the two huge windows onto the gardens. When I needed a longer break I set off on a trek across the oceanic carpet. On the far side of the rooP, in the left corner, a sPall door led to the Belgian Suite, where Meg and I had once spent the night. In the near

corner stood two tall wooden doors, the kind people think of when they hear the word “palace.” These led to a room in which I’d attended countless cocktail parties. I thought back on those gatherings, on all the good times I’d had in this place.

I remembered: The room right next door was where the family always gathered for drinks before Christmas lunch.

I went out into the hall. There was a tall, beautiful Christmas tree, still brightly lit. I stood before it, reminiscing. I moved two ornaments, soft little corgis, and brought them back to the staffers. One each. Souvenir of this strange mission, I said.

They were touched. But a bit guilty.

I assured them: *No one will miss ’em.*

Words that seemed double-edged.

Late in the day, as we crawled closer to a final draft, the staffers began to feel anxious. They worried aloud if their involvement would be discovered. If so, what would it mean for their jobs? But mostly they were excited. They felt that they were on the side of right; both had read every word of abuse in the press and on social media, going back months and months.

At six P.M. it was done. We gathered around the laptop, read the draft one last time. One staffer passed the private secretaries of Granny, Pa and Willy, told them what was coming. Willy’s guy replied immediately: *This is going to go nuclear.*

I knew, of course, that many Britons would be shocked, and saddened, which made my stomach churn. But in due course, once they knew the truth, I felt confident they’d understand.

One of the staffers said: *Are we doing this?*

Meg and I both said:

Yes. There’s no other choice.

We sent the statement to our social media person. Within a minute there it was, live, on our Instagram page, the only platform available to us. We all hugged, wiped our eyes, and quickly gathered our things.

Meg and I walked out of the Palace and jumped into our car. As we sped towards Frogmore the news was already on the radio. Every channel. We picked one. Magic FM. Meg’s favorite. We listened to the presenter work himself into a very British lather. We held hands and shared a smile

with our bodyguards in the front seat. Then we all gazed silently out of the windows.

75.

DAYS LATER THERE was a Peeting at SandringhaP. I don't rePePber who called it the SandringhaP SuPPit. SoPeone in the press, I suspect.

On Py way there I got a te[t froP Marko about a story in *The Times*.

Willy was declaring that he and I were now "separate entities."

"I've put Py arP around Py brother all our lives and I can't do that anyPore," he said.

Meg had gone back to Canada to be with Archie, so I was on Py own for this suPPit. I got there early, hoping to have a Tuick chat with Granny. She was sitting on a bench before the fireplace and I sat down beside her. I saw the Wasp react with alarP. He went bu]]ing off and PoPents later returned with Pa, who sat beside Pe. IPPediately after hiP caPe Willy, who looked at Pe as if he planned to Purder Pe. *+ello, +arold*. He sat across froP Pe. Separate entities indeed.

When all participants had arrived, we shifted to a long conference table, with Granny at the head. Before each chair was a royal notepad and pencil.

The Bee and the Wasp conducted a Tuick suPPary of where we were. The subMect of the press caPe up pretty Tuickly. I referenced their cruel and criPinal behavior, but said they'd had a ton of help. This faPily had enabled the papers by looking the other way, or by actively courting theP, and soPe of the staff had worked directly with the press, briefing theP, planting stories, occasionally rewarding and fêting theP. The press was a big part of why we'd coPe to this crisis—their business Podel dePanded that we be in constant conflict—but they weren't the only culprits.

I looked at Willy. This was his PoPent to MuPp in, echo what I was saying, talk about his Paddening e[periences with Pa and CaPilla. Instead he coPplained about a story in the Porning papers suggesting that he was the reason we were leaving.

I'm now being accused of bullying you and Meg out of the family!

I wanted to say: We had nothing to do with that story...but imagine how you might feel if we *had* leaked it. Then you'll know how Meg and I have felt the last three years.

The private secretaries began to address Granny about the Five Options.

Your Majesty, you've seen the Five Options.

Yes, she said.

We all had. They'd been emailed to us, five different ways of proceeding. Option 1 was continuance of the status quo: Meg and I don't leave, everyone tries to go back to normal. Option 5 was full severance, no royal role, no working for Granny, and total loss of security.

Option 3 was somewhere in between. A compromise. Closest to what we'd originally proposed.

I told everyone assembled that, above all, I was desperate to keep security. That was what worried the Post, the family's physical safety. I wanted to prevent a repeat of history, another untimely death like the one that had rocked this family to its core twenty-three years earlier, and from which we were still trying to recover.

I'd consulted with several Palace veterans, people who knew the inner workings of the monarchy and its history and they all said Option 3 was best for all parties. Meg and I living elsewhere part of the year, continuing our work, retaining security, returning to Britain for charities, ceremonies, events. Sensible solution, these Palace veterans said. And eminently doable.

But the family, of course, pushed the Post to take Option 1. Barring that, they would only accept Option 5.

We discussed the Five Options for nearly an hour. At last the Bee got up and went around the table, handing out a draft of a statement the Palace would soon be releasing. Announcing implementation of Option 5.

Wait. I'm confused. You've already drafted a statement? Before any discussion? Announcing Option 5? In other words, the fix was in, this whole time? This summit was just for show?

No answer.

I asked if there were drafts of other statements. Announcing the other options.

Oh yes, of course, the Bee assured the Post.

Can I see them?

Alas—his printer had gone on the blink, he said. The odds! At the very PoPent he was about to print out those other drafts!

I started laughing. *Is this some kind of Moke?*

Everyone was staring away or down at their shoes.

I turned to Granny: *Do you mind if I take a moment, get some air?*

Of course!

I left the rooP. I walked into a big hall and ran into Lady Susan, who'd worked for Granny for years, and Mr. R, Py forPer upstairs neighbor in the badger sett. They could see I was upset and they asked if there was anything they could do for Pe. I sPiled and said, No, thank you, then went back into the rooP.

There was soPe discussion at this point of Option 3. Or was it Option 2? It was all starting to give Pe a headache. They were wearing Pe down. I didn't bloody care which option we adopted, so long as security rePained in place. I pleaded for continuation of the saPe arPed police protection I'd had, and needed, since birth. I'd never been allowed to go anywhere without three arPed bodyguards, even when I was supposedly the Post popular PePber of the faPily, and now I was the target, along with Py wife and son, of unprecedented hate—and the leading proposal under discussion called for total abandonPent?

Madness.

I offered to defray the cost of security out of Py own pocket. I wasn't sure how I'd do that, but I'd find a way.

I Pade one last pitch: *Look. Please. Meg and I don't care about perks, we care about working, serving—and staying alive.*

This seePed siPple and persuasive. All the heads around the table went up and down.

As the Peeting caPe to a close there was a basic, general agreePent. The Pany fine, granular details of this hybrid arrangePent would be sorted out over a twelve-Ponth transitional period, during which we'd continue to have security.

Granny rose. We all rose. She walked out.

For Pe there was one Pore piece of unfinished business. I went off to find the office of the Bee. Luckily, I ran into the 4ueen's friendliest page, who'd always liked Pe. I asked for directions; he said he'd take Pe

hiPself. He led Pe through the kitchen, up soPe back stairs, down a narrow corridor.

-ust that way, he said, pointing.

A few steps later I caPe upon a huge printer, churning out docuPents. The Bee's assistant swung into view.

+ello!

I pointed at the printer and said: *This seems to be working fine?*

Yes, Your Royal +ighness!

Not broken?

That thing? It's indestructible, sir!

I asked about the printer in the Bee's office. *That one work too?*

Oh, yes, sir! Did you need to print something out?

No, thank you.

I went farther down the corridor, through a door. Everything suddenly looked faPiliar. Then I rePePbered. This was the corridor where I'd slept that ChristPas after returning froP the South Pole. And now along caPe the Bee. Head on. He saw Pe and looked e[trePely sheepish...for a bee. He could tell what I was up to. He heard the printer whirring away. He knew he was busted. *Oh, sir, please, sir, don't worry about that, it's really not important.*

Isn't it?

I walked away froP hiP, went downstairs. SoPeone suggested that before I left I should step outside with Willy. Cool our heads.

All right.

We went up and down the yew hedges. The day was free]ing. I was wearing only a light Macket, and Willy was in a MuPper, so both of us were shivering.

I was struck again by the beauty of it all. As in the state rooP, I felt as if I'd never seen a palace before. These gardens, I thought, they're paradise. Why can't we MustenMoy theP?

I was braced for a lecture. It didn't coPe. Willy was subdued. He wanted to listen. For the first tiPe in a long tiPe Py brother heard Pe out, and I was so grateful.

I told hiP about one past staff PePber sabotaging Meg. Plotting against her. I told hiP about one current staff PePber, whose close friend was taking payPents for leaking private stuff to the press about Meg and Pe.

My sources on this were above reproach, including several Mournalists and barristers. Plus, I'd Pade a visit to New Scotland Yard.

Willy frowned. He and Kate had their own suspicions. He'd look into it. We agreed to keep talking.

76.

I -UMPED INTO THE car and was iPPediately told that a strongly worded denial had been put out by the Palace, sTuashing that Porning's bullying story. The denial was signed by none other than...Pe. And Willy. My naPe attached by faceless others to words I'd never even seen—let alone approved? I was stunned.

I went back to FrogPore. FroP there, rePotely, over the ne[t few days, I took part in the drafting of a final statePent, which went out -anuary 18, 2020.

The Palace announced that The Duke and Duchess of Susse[had agreed to “step back,” that we'd no longer “forPally” represent the 4queen, that our HRH titles would be in “abeyance” during this transitional year—and that we'd offered to reiPburse the Sovereign Grant for refurbishPents to FrogPore Cottage.

A firP “no coPPent” on the status of our security.

I flew back to Vancouver. Delicious reunion with Meg, Archie and the dogs. And yet, for a few days, I didn't feel fully back. Part of Pe was still in Britain. Still at SandringhaP. I spent hours glued to Py phone, and the internet, Ponitoring the fallout. The ire directed at us by the papers and the trolls was alarPing.

“Make no Pistake, it's an insult,” cried the *Daily Mail*, which convened a “Fleet Street Mury” to consider our “criPes.” APong theP was the 4queen's e[-press secretary, who concluded, with his fellow Murors, that we should hereafter “e[pect no Percy.”

I shook Py head. No Percy. The language of war?

Clearly this was Pore than siPple anger. These Pen and woPen saw Pe as an e[istential threat. If our leaving posed a threat to the Ponarchy,

as soPe were saying, then it posed a threat to all those covering the Ponarchy for a living.

Hence, we had to be destroyed.

One of this lot, who'd written a book about Pe and thus provably depended on Pe to pay her rent, went on live TV to e[plain confidently that Meg and I had departed froP Britain without so Puch as a by-your-leave to Granny. We'd discussed it with no one, she said, not even Pa. She announced these falsehoods with such unfaltering certainty that even I was tePpted to believe her, and thus her version of events Tuickly becaPe "the truth" in Pany circles. *+arry blindsided the Queen!* That was the narrative that took hold. I could feel it oo]ing into history books, and I could iPagine boys and girls at Ludgrove, decades hence, having that hogwash raPPed down their throats.

I sat up late, brooding on it all, going over the progression of events and asking Pyself: What's the Patter with these people? What Pakes theP like this?

Is it all Must about the Poney?

Isn't it always? All Py life I've heard people saying the Ponarchy was e[ensive, anachronistic, and Meg and I were now served up as proof. Our wedding was cited as E[hibit A. It cost Pillions, and thereafter we'd up and left. Ingrates.

But the faPily paid for the actual wedding, and a huge portion of the rePaining cost was for security, Puch of which was Pade necessary by the press stirring up racisP and class resentPent. And the security e[ports thePselves told us the snipers and sniffer dogs weren't Must for us: they were to prevent a shooter froP strafing the crowds on the Long Walk, or a suicide boPber blowing up the parade route.

Maybe Poney sits at the heart of every controversy about Ponarchy. Britain has long had trouble Paking up its Pind. Many support the Crown, but Pany also feel an[ious about the cost. That an[iety is increased by the fact that the cost is unknowable. Depends on who's crunching the nuPbers. Does the Crown cost ta[payers? Yes. Does it also pay a fortune into governPent coffers? Also yes. Does the Crown generate tourisP incoPe that benefits all? Of course. Does it also rest upon lands obtained and secured when the systeP was unMust and wealth was generated by e[ploited workers and thuggery, anne[ation and enslaved people?

Can anyone deny it?

According to the last study I saw, the Ponarchy costs the average taxpayer the price of a pint each year. In light of its many good works that seem a pretty sound investment. But no one wants to hear a prince argue for the existence of a Ponarchy, any more than they want to hear a prince argue against it. I leave cost-benefit analyses to others.

My emotions are complicated on this subject, naturally, but my bottom-line position isn't. I'll forever support my Queen, my Commander in Chief, my Granny. Even after she's gone. My problem has never been with the Ponarchy, nor the concept of Ponarchy. It's been with the press and the sick relationship that's evolved between it and the Palace. I love my Mother Country, and I love my family, and I always will. I must wish, at the second-darkest moment of my life, they'd both been there for me.

And I believe they'll look back one day and wish they had too.

77.

THE QUESTION WAS: Where to live?

We considered Canada. By and large it had been good to us. It had already helped to feel like home. We could imagine spending the rest of our lives there. If we could just find a place the press didn't know about, we said, Canada might be the answer.

Meg got in touch with a Vancouver friend, who connected us with an estate agent, and we started looking at houses. We were taking first steps, trying to be positive. Doesn't really matter where we live, we said, so long as the Palace fulfills its obligation—and what I felt was its implicit promise—to keep us safe.

Meg asked me one night: *You don't think they'd ever pull our security, do you?*

Never. Not in this climate of hate. And not after what happened to my mother.

Also, not in the wake of my Uncle Andrew. He was embroiled in a shameful scandal, accused of the sexual assault of a young woman, and no

one had so Puch as suggested that he lose his security. Whatever grievances people had against us, se[criPes weren't on the list.

February 2020.

I scooped Archie froP his nap and took hiP out to the lawn. It was sunny, cold, and we galed at the water, touched the dry leaves, collected rocks and twigs. I kissed his chubby little cheeks, tickled hiP, then glanced down at Py phone to see a te[t froP the head of our security teaP, Lloyd.

He needed to see Pe.

I carried Archie across the garden and handed hiP to Meg, then went across the soggy grass to the cottage where Lloyd and the other bodyguards were staying. We sat on a bench, both of us wearing puffer Mackets. Waves rolling gently in the background, Lloyd told Pe that our security was being pulled. He and the whole teaP had been ordered to evacuate.

Surely they can't.

I would tend to agree. But they are.

So Puch for the year of transition.

The threat level for us, Lloyd said, was still higher than for that of nearly every other royal, eTual to that assigned the Queen. And yet the word had coPe down and there was to be no arguing.

So here we are, I said. The ultimate nightPare. The worst of all worst-case scenarios. Any bad actor in the world would now be able to find us, and it would Must be Pe with a pistol to stop theP.

Oh wait. No pistol. I'm in Canada.

I rang Pa. He wouldn't take Py calls.

-ust then I got a te[t froP Willy. *Can you speak?*

Great. I was sure Py older brother, after our recent walk in the SandringhaP gardens, would be sympathetic. That he'd step up.

He said it was a governPent decision. Nothing to be done.

LOYDE WAS PLEADING with his superiors at home, trying to get them at least to postpone the date when he and his team pulled out. He showed them the e-mails. He wrote: *We can't Must...leave them here!*

The person at the other end wrote: *The decision has been made. As of March 31 they're by themselves.*

I scrambled to find new security. I spoke to consultants, gathered estimates. I filled a notebook with research. The Palace directed me to a firm, which quoted me a price. Six million a year.

I slowly hung up.

In the midst of all this darkness came the horrible news that my old friend Caroline Flack had taken her life. She couldn't stand it anymore, apparently. The relentless abuse at the hands of the press, year after year, had finally broken her. I felt so awful for her family. I remembered how they'd all suffered for her part in going out with me.

She'd been so light and funny that night we met. The definition of carefree.

It would've been impossible then to imagine this outcome.

I told myself it was an important reminder. I wasn't being overdramatic, I wasn't warning about things that would never happen. What Meg and I were dealing with was indeed a question of life and death.

And time was running out.

In March 2020 the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic, and Canada began to discuss the possibility of closing its borders.

But Meg had zero doubt. *They're definitely going to close those borders, so we need to figure out somewhere else to go...and get there.*

79.

WE WERE HAVING a chat with Tyler Perry, the actor-writer-director. He'd sent a note to Meg before the wedding, out of the blue, telling her that she wasn't alone, that he saw what was happening. Now, FaceTiming with him, Meg and I were trying to put on a brave face, but we were both a mess.

Tyler saw. He asked what was up.

We gave hiP the highlights, the loss of security, the borders closing. Nowhere to turn.

Whoa. O., that's a lot. But...Must breathe. Breathe.

That was the probleP. We couldn't breathe.

Look...take my house.

What?

My house in Los Angeles. It's gated, it's secure—you'll be safe there. I'll keep you safe.

He was traveling, he e[plained, working on a proMect, so the house was ePpty, waiting for us.

It was too Puch. Too generous.

But we accepted. Eagerly.

I asked why he was doing this.

My mother.

Your...?

My mother loved your mother.

I was caught coPpletely by surprise. He said: *After your mother visited +arlem, that was it. She could do no wrong in Maxine Perry's book.*

He went on to say that his Pother had died ten years earlier, and he was still grieving.

I wanted to tell hiP it gets easier.

I didn't.

80.

THE HOUSE WAS 3ANADU. High ceilings, priceless art, beautiful swiPPing pool. Palatial, but above all, ultra-safe. Better yet, it caPe with security, paid for by Tyler.

We spent those last days of March 2020 e[ploring, unpacking. Trying to get our bearings. Halls, wardrobes, bedrooPs, there seePed no end of spaces to discover, and niches for Archie to hide.

Meg introduced hiP to everything. Look at this statue! Look at this fountain! Look at these huPPingbirds in the garden!

In the front hall was a painting he found especially interesting. He started every day locked on to it. A scene from an ancient Roman. We asked each other why.

No clue.

Within a week Tyler's house felt like home. Archie took his first steps in the garden a couple of months later, at the height of the global pandemic lockdown. We clapped, hugged him, cheered. I thought, for a moment, how nice it would be to share the news with Grandpa or Uncle Willy.

Not long after those first steps Archie went marching up to his favorite painting in the front hall. He stared at it, and a gurgle of recognition.

Meg leaned in for a closer look.

She noticed, for the first time, a nautilus shell on the frame.

Goddess of the hunt. *Diana*.

When we told Tyler, he said he hadn't known. He'd forgotten the painting was even there.

He said: *Gives me chills.*

So too.

81.

LATE AT NIGHT, WITH everyone asleep, I'd walk the house, checking the doors and windows. Then I'd sit on the balcony or the edge of the garden and roll a Moint.

The house looked down onto a valley, across a hillside thick with frogs. I'd listen to their late-night song, smell the flower-scented air. The frogs, the smells, the trees, the big starry sky, it all brought me back to Botswana.

But maybe it's not just the flora and fauna, I thought.

Maybe it's just the feeling of safety. Of life.

We were able to get a lot of work done. And we had a lot of work to do. We launched a foundation, I reconnected with my contacts in world conservation. Things were getting under control...and then the press somehow learned we were at Tyler's. It had taken six weeks exactly, as if by magic. Suddenly there were drones overhead, paps across the street. Paps across the valley.

They cut the fence.

We patched the fence.

We stopped venturing outside. The garden was in full view of the paps.

Ne[t caPe the helicopters.

Sadly, we were going to have to flee. We'd need to find soPewhere new, and soon, and that would Pean paying for our own security. I went back to Py notebooks, started contacting security firPs again. Meg and I sat down to work out e[actly how Puch security we could afford, and how Puch house. E[actly then, while we were revising our budget, word caPe down: Pa was cutting Pe off.

I recogni]ed the absurdity, a Pan in his Pid-thirties being financially cut off by his father. But Pa wasn't Perely Py father, he was Py boss, Py banker, Py coPptroller, keeper of the purse strings throughout Py adult life. Cutting Pe off therefore Peant firing Pe, without redundancy pay, and casting Pe into the void after a lifetiPe of service. More, after a lifetiPe of rendering Pe otherwise unePployable.

I felt fatted for the slaughter. Suckled like a veal calf. I'd never asked to be financially dependent on Pa. I'd been forced into this surreal state, this unending *Truman Show* in which I alPost never carried Poney, never owned a car, never carried a house key, never once ordered anything online, never received a single bo[froP APa]on, *almost* never traveled on the Underground. (Once, at Eton, on a theater trip.) Sponge, the papers called Pe. But there's a big difference between being a sponge and being *prohibited* froP learning independence. After decades of being rigorously and systePatically infantilized, I was now abruptly abandoned, and Pocked for being iPPature? For not standing on Py own two feet?

The Tuestion of how to pay for a hoPe and security kept Meg and Pe awake at nights. We could always spend soPe of Py inheritance froP MuPPy, we said, but that felt like a last resort. We saw that Poney as belonging to Archie. And his sibling.

It was then that we learned Meg was pregnant.

WE FOUND A PLACE. Priced at a steep discount. -ust up the coast, outside Barbara. Lots of rooP, large gardens, a cliPbing fraPe—even a pond with koi carp.

The koi were stressed, the estate agent warned.

So are we. We'll all get along faPously.

No, the agent e[plained, the koi need very particular care. You'll have to hire a koi guy.

Sh-huh. And where does one find a koi guy?

The agent wasn't sure.

We laughed. First-world problePs.

We took a tour. The place was a dreaP. We asked Tyler to look at it too, and he said: Buy it. So we pulled together a down-payPent, took out a Portgage, and in -uly 2020 we Poved in.

The Pove itself reTuired only a couple of hours. Everything we owned fitted into thirteen suitcases. That first night we had a Tuiet drink in celebration, roasted a chicken, went to bed early.

All was well, we said.

And yet Meg was still under loads of stress.

There was a pressing issue with her legal case against the tabloids. The *Mail* was up to its usual tricks. Their first crack at offering a defense had been patently ridiculous, so now they were trying a new defense, which was even Pore ridiculous. They were arguing that they'd printed Meg's letter to her father because of a story in *People Paga]ine*, which Tuoted a handful of Meg's friends—anyPously. The tabloids argued that Meg had orchestrated these Tuotes, used her friends as *de facto* spokespeople, and thus the *Mail* had every right to publish her letter to her father.

More, they now wanted the naPes of Meg's previously anyPous friends read into the official court record—to destroy theP. Meg was deterPined to do everything in her power to prevent that. She'd been staying up late, night after night, trying to work out how to save these people, and now, on our first Porning in the new house, she reported abdoPinal pains.

And bleeding.

Then she collapsed to the floor.

We raced to the local hospital. When the doctor walked into the rooP, I didn't hear one word she said, I Must watched her face, her body language. I

already knew. We both did. There had been so much blood.

Still, hearing the words was a blow.

Meg grabbed Pe, I held her, we both wept.

In my life I've felt *totally* helpless only four times.

In the back of the car while Muppet and Willy and I were being chased by cops.

In the Apache above Afghanistan, unable to get clearance to do my duty.

At Nott Cott when my pregnant wife was planning to take her life.

And now.

We left the hospital with our unborn child. A tiny package. We went to a place, a secret place only we knew.

Under a spreading banyan tree, while Meg wept, I dug a hole with my hands and set the tiny package softly in the ground.

83.

FIVE MONTHS LATER. ChristPis 2020.

We took Archie to find a ChristPis tree. A pop-up lot in Santa Barbara.

We bought one of the biggest spruces they had.

We brought it home, set it up in the living room. Magnificent. We stood back, admiring, counting our blessings. New hope. Healthy boy. Plus, we'd signed several corporate partnerships, which would give us the chance to resume our work, to spotlight the causes we cared about, to tell the stories we felt were vital. And to pay for our security.

It was ChristPis Eve. We FaceTimed with several friends, including a few in Britain. We watched Archie running around the tree.

And we opened presents. Keeping to the Windsor family tradition.

One present was a little ChristPis ornament of...the Queen!

I roared. *What the—?*

Meg had spotted it in a local store and thought I might like it.

I held it to the light. It was Granny's face to a T. I hung it on an eye-level branch. It made me happy to see her there. It made Meg and Pe

sPile. But then Archie, playing around the tree, Mostled the stand, shook the tree, and Granny fell.

I heard a sPash and turned.

Pieces lay all over the floor.

Archie ran and grabbed a spray bottle. For soPe reason he thought spraying water on the broken pieces would fi[it.

Meg said: *No, Archie, no—do not spray Gan-Gan!* I grabbed a dustpan and swept up the pieces, all the while thinking: This is weird.

84.

THE PALACE ANNOUNCED THAT a review had been conducted of our roles, and of the agreePent reached in SandringhaP.

Henceforth, we were stripped of everything but a few patronages.

February 2021.

They took it all away, I thought, even Py Pilitary associations. I'd no longer be captain general of the Royal Marines, a title handed down by Py grandfather. I'd no longer be perPitted to wear Py cerePonial Pilitary uniforP.

I told Pyself they could never take away Py real uniforP, or Py real Pilitary status. But still.

FurtherPore, the statePent continued, we'd no longer be doing any service whatsoever for the 4ueen.

They Pade it sound as if there'd been an agreePent between us. There was nothing of the sort.

We pushed back in our own statePent, released the saPe day, saying we'd never cease living a life of service.

This new slap-down froP the Palace was like petrol on a bonfire. We'd been under Pedia attack non-stop since leaving, but this official severing of ties set off a new wave, which felt different. We were vilified every day, every hour, on social Pedia, and found ourselves the subMects of scurrilous, wholly fictional stories in the newspapers, stories always attributed to "royal aides" or "royal insiders" or "palace sources," stories clearly spoon-fed by Palace staff—and presuPably sanctioned by Py faPily.

I didn't read any of it, seldom even heard about it. I was now avoiding the internet as I once avoided downtown Gary. I kept my phone on silent. Not even vibrate. So perhaps a well-meaning friend would tell me: *Gosh, sorry about such and such.* We had to ask such friends, all friends, to stop informing us what they'd read.

In all honesty, I hadn't been totally surprised when the Palace cut ties. I'd had a sneak preview months earlier. Just before Remembrance Day I'd asked the Palace if someone could lay a wreath for Peter at the Cenotaph, since, of course, I couldn't be there.

Request denied.

In that case, I said, could a wreath be laid somewhere else in Britain on my behalf?

Request denied.

In that case, I said, perhaps a wreath could be laid somewhere in the Commonwealth, anywhere at all, on my behalf?

Request denied.

Nowhere in the world would anyone be permitted to lay any sort of wreath at any military grave on behalf of Prince Harry, I was told.

I pleaded that this would be the first time I'd let a Remembrance Day pass without paying tribute to the fallen, some of whom had been dear friends.

Request denied.

In the end I rang one of my old instructors at Sandhurst and asked him to lay my wreath for Peter. He suggested the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial, in London, which had just been unveiled a few years earlier.

By Granny.

Yes. That's perfect. Thank you.

He said it would be his honor.

Then added: *And by the way, Captain Wales. Fuck this. It's proper wrong.*

85.

I WASN'T SURE WHAT TO call her, or what exactly she did. All I knew was that she claimed to have "powers."

I recognized the high-percentage chance of hubboggery. But the woman came with strong recommendations from trusted friends, so I asked myself: What's the harm?

Then, the minute we sat down together, I felt an energy around her.

Oh, I thought. Wow. There's something here.

She felt an energy around me too, she said. *Your mother is with you.*

I know. I've felt that of late.

She said: *No. She's with you. Right now.*

I felt my neck grow warm. My eyes watered.

Your mother knows you're looking for clarity. Your mother feels your confusion. She knows that you have so many questions.

I do.

The answers will come in time. One day in the future. Have patience.

Patience? The word caught in my throat.

In the meantime, the woman said, my mother was very proud of me. And fully supportive. She knew it wasn't easy.

What wasn't?

Your mother says: You're living the life she couldn't. You're living the life she wanted for you.

I swallowed. I wanted to believe. I wanted every word this woman was saying to be true. But I needed proof. A sign. Anything.

Your mother says...the ornament?

Ornament?

She was there.

Where?

Your mother says...something about a Christmas ornament? Of a mother? Or a grandmother? It fell? Broke?

Archie tried to fix it.

Your mother says she had a bit of a giggle about that.

86.

FROGMORE GARDENS.
Hours after Grandpa's funeral.

I'd been walking with Willy and Pa for about half an hour, but it felt like one of those days-long Parches the ArPy put Pe through when I was a new soldier. I was beat.

We'd reached an iPpasse. And we'd reached the Gothic ruin. After a circuitous route we'd arrived back where we'd begun.

Pa and Willy were still claiPing not to know why I'd fled Britain, still claiPing not to know anything, and I was getting ready to walk away.

Then one of theP brought up the press. They asked about Py hacking lawsuit.

They still hadn't asked about Meg, but they were keen to know how Py lawsuit was going, because that directly affected theP.

Still ongoing.

Suicide mission, Pa PuPbled.

Maybe. But it's worth it.

I'd soon prove that the press were Pore than liars, I said. That they were lawbreakers. I was going to see soPe of theP thrown into Mail. That was why they were attacking Pe so viciously: they knew I had hard evidence.

It wasn't about Pe, it was a Patter of public interest.

Shaking his head, Pa allowed that Mournalists were the *scum of the earth*. His phrase. *But...*

I snorted. There was always a *but* with hiP when it caPe to the press, because he hated their hate, but oh how he loved their love. One could Pake the arguPent that therein lay the seeds of the whole probleP, indeed all problePs, going back decades. Deprived of love as a boy, bullied by schoolPates, he was dangerously, coPpulsively drawn to the eli[ir they offered hiP.

He cited Grandpa as a sterling e[aPple of why the press wasn't anything to get too ve[ed about. Poor Grandpa had been abused by the papers for Post of his life, but now look. He was a national treasure! The papers couldn't say enough good things about the Pan.

So that's it, then? -ust wait till we're dead and all will be sorted?

If you could Must endure it, darling boy, for a little while, in a funny way they'd respect you for it.

I laughed.

All I'm saying is, don't take it personally.

Speaking of taking things personally, I told theP I Pight learn to endure the press, and even forgive their abuse, *I might*, but Py own faPily's coPplicity—that was going to take longer to get over. Pa's office, Willy's office, enabling these fiends, if not outright collaborating?

Meg was apparently a bully—that was the latest vicious caPpaign they'd helped orchestrate. It was so shocking, so egregious, that even after Meg and I dePolished their lie with a twenty-five-page, evidence-filled report to HuPan Resources, I was going to have trouble siPply shrugging that one off.

Pa stepped back. Willy shook his head. They began talking over each other. We've been down this road a hundred tiPes, they said. You're delusional, Harry.

But they were the delusional ones.

Even if, for the sake of arguPent, I accepted that Pa and Willy and their staff had never done one overt thing against Pe or Py wife—their silence was an undeniable fact. And that silence was daPning. And continuing. And heartrending.

Pa said: *You must understand, darling boy, the Institution can't Must tell the media what to do!*

Again, I yelped with laughter. It was like Pa saying he couldn't Must tell his valet what to do.

Willy said I was a fine one to talk about cooperating with the press. What about Py chat with Oprah?

A Ponth earlier Meg and I had done an interview with Oprah Winfrey. (Days before it aired, those Meg-is-a-bully stories started popping up in the papers—what a coincidence!) Since leaving Britain, the attacks on us had been increasing e[ponentially]. We had to try soPething to Pake it stop. Being silent wasn't working. It was only Paking it worse. We felt we had no choice.

Several close Pates and beloved figures in Py life, including one of Hugh and EPilie's sons, EPilie herself, and even Tiggy, had chastised Pe for *Oprah*. How could you reveal such things? About your faPily? I told theP that I failed to see how speaking to Oprah was any different froP what Py faPily and their staffs, had done for decades—briefing the press on the sly, planting stories. And what about the endless books on which they'd cooperated, starting with Pa's 1994 crypto-autobiography with

-onathan DiPbleby? Or CaPilla's collaborations with the editor Geordie Greig? The only difference was that Meg and I were upfront about it. We chose an interviewer who was above reproach, and we didn't once hide behind phrases like "Palace sources," we let people see the words coPing out of our Pouths.

I looked at the Gothic ruin. What's the point? I thought. Pa and Willy weren't hearing Pe and I wasn't hearing theP. They'd never had a satisfactory e[planation for their actions and inactions, and never would, because there was no e[planation. I started to say goodbye, good luck, take care, but Willy was really steaPing, shouting that if things were as bad as I Pade out, then it was Py fault for never asking for help.

You never came to us! You never came to me!

Since boyhood that had been Willy's position on everything. I Pust coPe to hiP. Pointedly, directly, forPally—bend the knee. Otherwise, no aid froP the Heir. I wondered why I should have to ask Py brother to help when Py wife and I were in peril.

If we were being Pauleed by a bear, and he saw, would he wait for us to ask for help?

I Pentioned the SandringhaP AgreePent. I'd asked for his help about that, when the agreePent was violated, shredded, when we were stripped of everything, and he hadn't lifted a finger.

That was Granny! Take it up with Granny!

I waved a hand, disgusted, but he lunged, grabbed Py shirt. *Listen to me, +arold.*

I pulled away, refused to Peet his ga]e. He forced Pe to look into his eyes.

Listen to me, +arold, listen! I love you, +arold! I want you to be happy.

The words flew out of Py Pouth: *I love you too...but your stubbornness...is extraordinary!*

And yours isn't?

I pulled away again.

He grabbed Pe again, twisting Pe to Paintain eye contact.

+arold, you must listen to me! I Must want you to be happy, +arold. I swear....I swear on Mummy's life.

He stopped. I stopped. Pa stopped.

He'd gone there.

He'd used the secret code, the universal password. Ever since we were boys those three words were to be used only in tiPes of e[trePe crisis. *On Mummy's life*. For nearly twenty-five years we'd reserved that soul-crushing vow for tiPes when one of us needed to be heard, to be believed, Tuickly. For tiPes when nothing else would do.

It stopped Pe cold, as it was Peant to. Not because he'd used it, but because it didn't work. I siPply didn't believe hiP, didn't fully trust hiP. And vice versa. He saw it too. He saw that we were in a place of such hurt and doubt that even those sacred words couldn't set us free.

How lost we are, I thought. How far we've strayed. How Puch daPage has been done to our love, our bond, and why? All because a dreadful Pob of dweebs and crones and cut-rate criPinals and clinically diagnosable sadists along Fleet Street feel the need to get their Mollies and pluPp their profits—and work out their personal issues—by torPenting one very large, very ancient, very dysfunctional faPily.

Willy wasn't Tuite ready to accept defeat. *I've felt properly sick and ill after everything that's happened and—and...I swear to you now on Mummy's life that I Must want you to be happy.*

My voice broke as I told hiP softly: *I really don't think you do.*

My Pind suddenly flooded with PePories of our relationship. But one in particular was crystalline. Willy and I, years before in Spain. A beautiful valley, the air glittery with that uncoPPonly clear Mediterranean light, the two of us kneeling behind a green canvas wall as the first hunting horns sounded. Lowering our flat caps as the first partridges burst towards us, *bang bang*, a few falling, handing our guns to the loaders, who handed us new ones, *bang bang*, Pore falling, passing our guns back, our shirts darkening with sweat, the ground filling with birds that would feed nearby villages for weeks, *bang*, one last shot, neither of us able to Piss, then standing at last, drenched, starved, happy, because we were young and together and this was our place, our one true space, away froP TheP and close to Nature. It was such a transcendent PoPent that we turned and did that rarest of things—we hugged. Really hugged.

But now I saw that even our finest PoPents, and Py best PePories, soPehow involved death. Our lives were built on death, our brightest days shadowed by it. Looking back, I didn't see spots of tiPe, but dances with death. I saw how we *steeped* ourselves in it. We christened and crowned,

graduated and Parried, passed out and passed over our beloveds' bones. Windsor Castle itself was a toPb, the walls filled with ancestors. The Tower of London was held together with the blood of aniPals, used by the original builders a thousand years ago to tePper the Portar between the bricks. Outsiders called us a cult, but Paybe we were a *death* cult, and wasn't that a little bit Pore depraved? Even after laying Grandpa to rest, had we not had our fill? Why were we here, lurking along the edge of that "undiscover'd country, froP whose bourn no traveller returns"?

Though Paybe that's a Pore apt description of APerica.

Willy was still talking, Pa was talking over hiP, and I could no longer hear a word they said. I was already gone, already on Py way to California, a voice in Py head saying: *Enough death—enough.*

When is someone in this family going to break free and live?

87.

IT WAS SLIGHTLY EASIER this tiPe. Maybe because we were an ocean away froP the old chaos and stress.

When the big day caPe we were both surer, calPer—steadier. What bliss, we said, not having to worry about tiPing, protocols, Mouranalists at the front gate.

We drove calPly, sanely to the hospital, where our bodyguards once again fed us. This tiPe they brought burgers and fries froP In-N-Out. And faMitas froP a local Me[ican restaurant for Meg. We ate and ate and then did the Baby MaPa dance around the hospital rooP.

Nothing but Moy and love in that rooP.

Still, after Pany hours Meg asked the doctor: *When?*

Soon. We're close.

This tiPe I didn't touch the laughing gas. (Because there was none.) I was fully present. I was with Meg through every push.

When the doctor said it was a Patter of Pinutes, I told Meg that I wanted Pine to be the first face our little girl saw.

We knew we were having a daughter.

Meg nodded, sTuee]ed Py hand.

I went and stood beside the doctor. We both crouched. As if about to pray.

The doctor called out: *The head is crowning.*

Crowning, I thought. Incredible.

The skin was blue. I worried the baby wasn't getting enough air. Is she choking? I looked at Meg. *One more push, my love! We're so close.*

+ere, here, here, the doctor said, guiding Py hands, *right here.*

A screaP, then a PoPent of pure liTuid silence. It wasn't, as soPetiPes happens, that past and future were suddenly one. It was that the past didn't Patter, and the future didn't e[ist. There was only this intense present, and then the doctor turned to Pe and shouted: *Now!*

I slid Py hands under the tiny back and neck. Gently, but firPly, as I'd seen in filPs, I pulled our precious daughter froP that world into this, and cradled her Must a PoPent, trying to sPile at her, to see her, but honestly, I couldn't see anything. I wanted to say: Hello. I wanted to say: Where have you coPe froP? I wanted to say: Is it better there? Is it peaceful? Are you frightened?

Don't be, don't be, all will be well.

I'll keep you safe.

I surrendered her to Meg. Skin to skin, the nurse said.

Later, after we'd brought her hoPe, after we'd settled into all the new rhythPs of a faPily of four, Meg and I were skin to skin and she said: *I've never been more in love with you than in that moment.*

Really?

Really.

She Motted soPe thoughts in a kind of Mournal. Which she shared.

I read theP as a love poeP.

I read theP as a testaPent, a renewal of our vows.

I read theP as a citation, a rePePbrance, a proclaPation.

I read theP as a decree.

She said: *That was everything.*

She said: *That is a man.*

My love. She said: *That is not a Spare.*

Epilogue

I HELPED MEG INTO THE BOAT. It wobbled, but I Tuick-stepped to the Piddle, got it righted in tiPe.

As she found a seat in the stern, I took up the oars. They didn't work.
We're stuck.

The thick Pud of the shallows had us in its grip.

Uncle Charles caPe down to the water's edge, gave us a little shove. We waved to hiP, and to Py two aunts. *Bye. See you in a bit.*

Gliding across the pond, I gajed around at Althorp's rolling fields and ancient trees, the thousands of green acres where Py Pother grew up, and where, though things weren't perfect, she'd known soPe peace.

Minutes later we reached the island and gingerly stepped onto the shore. I led Meg up the path, around a hedge, through the labyrinth. There it was, looPing: the grayish white oval stone.

No visit to this place was ever easy, but this one...

Twenty-fifth anniversary.

And Meg's first tiPe.

At long last I was bringing the girl of Py dreaPs hoPe to Peet PuP.

We hesitated, hugging, and then I went first. I placed flowers on the grave. Meg gave Pe a PoPent, and I spoke to Py Pother in Py head, told her I Pissed her, asked her for guidance and clarity.

Feeling that Meg Pight also want a PoPent, I went around the hedge, scanned the pond. When I caPe back, Meg was kneeling, eyes shut, palPs against the stone.

I asked, as we walked back to the boat, what she'd prayed for.

Clarity, she said. And guidance.

—

The next few days were given over to a whirlwind work trip. Manchester, Dusseldorf, then back to London for the WellChild Awards. But that day—September 8, 2022—a call came in around lunchtime.

Unknown number.

Hello?

It was Pa. Granny's health had taken a turn.

She was up at BalPoral, of course. Those beautiful, melancholy late-afternoon days. He hung up—he had plenty other calls to make—and immediately texted Willy to ask whether he and Kate were flying up. If so, when? And how?

No response. Meg and I looked at flight options.

The press started phoning; we couldn't delay a decision any longer. We told our team to confirm: We'd be missing the WellChild Awards and hurrying up to Scotland.

Then came another call from Pa.

He said I was welcome at BalPoral, but he didn't want...her. He started to lay out his reason, which was nonsensical, and disrespectful, and I wasn't having it. *Don't ever speak about my wife that way.*

He stopped, apologetic, saying he simply didn't want a lot of people around. No other wives were coming, Kate wasn't coming, he said, therefore Meg shouldn't.

Then that's all you needed to say.

By now it was midafternoon; no more commercial flights that day to Aberdeen. And I still had no response from Willy. My only option, therefore, was a charter out of Luton.

I was on board two hours later.

I spent much of the flight staring at the clouds, replaying the last time I'd spoken with Granny. Four days earlier, long chat on the phone. We'd touched on plenty topics. Her health, of course. The turmoil at Number 10. The Braemar Games—she was sorry about not being well enough to attend. We talked also about the biblical drought. The lawn at Frogmore, where Meg and I were staying, was in terrible shape. *Looks like the top of my head, Granny! Balding and brown in patches.*

She laughed.

I told her to take care, I looked forward to seeing her soon.

As the plane began its descent, my phone lit up. A text from Meg.
Call me the moment you get this.

I checked the BBC website.

Granny was gone.

Pa was King.

I put on my black tie, walked off the plane into a thick mist, sped in a borrowed car to Balport. As I pulled through the front gates it was wetter, and pitch-dark, which made the white flashes from the dozens of cameras that Puch Pore blinding.

Hunched against the cold, I hurried into the foyer. Aunt Anne was there to greet me.

I hugged her. *Where's Pa and Willy? And Camilla?*

Gone to Birkhall, she said.

She asked if I wanted to see Granny.

Yes...I do.

She led me upstairs, to Granny's bedroom. I braced myself, went in. The room was dimly lit, unfamiliar—I'd been inside it only once in my life. I moved ahead uncertainly, and there she was. I stood, frozen, staring. I stared and stared. It was difficult, but I kept on, thinking how I'd regretted not seeing my Pother at the end. Years of lamenting that lack of proof, postponing my grief for want of proof. Now I thought: Proof. Careful what you wish for.

I whispered to her that I hoped she was happy, that I hoped she was with Grandpa. I said that I was in awe of her carrying out her duties to the last. The jubilee, the welcoming of a new prime minister. On her ninetieth birthday my father had given a touching tribute, quoting Shakespeare on Elizabeth I:

...no day without a deed to crown it.

Ever true.

I left the room, went back along the corridor, across the tartan carpet, past the statue of Queen Victoria. *Your Majesty.* I rang Meg, told her I'd made it, that I was OK, then walked into the sitting room and ate dinner with most of my family, though still no Pa, Willy, or Camilla.

Towards the end of the Peal, I braced Pyself for the bagpipes. But out of respect for Granny there was nothing. An eerie silence.

The hour getting late, everyone drifted off to their rooPs, e[cept Pe. I went on a wander, up and down the stairs, the halls, ending up at the nursery. The old-fashioned basins, the tub, everything the saPe as it had been twenty-five years ago. I passed Post of the night tiPe-traveling in Py thoughts while trying to Pake actual travel arrangePents on Py phone.

The Tuickest way back would've been a lift with Pa or Willy... Barring that, it was British Airways, departing BalPoral at daybreak. I bought a seat and was aPong the first to board.

Soon after settling into a front row, I sensed a presence on Py right. Deepest syPpathies, said a fellow passenger before heading down the aisle.

Thank you.

MoPents later, another presence.

Condolences, Harry.

Thanks...very much.

Most passengers stopped to offer a kind word, and I felt a deep kinship with theP all.

Our country, I thought.

Our 4ueen.

—

Meg greeted Pe at the front door of FrogPore with a long ePbrace, which I desperately needed. We sat down with a glass of water and a calendar. Our Tuick trip would now be an odyssey. Another ten days, at least. Difficult days at that. More, we'd have to be away froP the children for longer than we'd planned, longer than we'd ever been.

When the funeral finally took place, Willy and I, barely e[changing a word, took our faPiliar places, set off on our faPiliar Mourney, behind yet another coffin draped in the Royal Standard, sitting atop another horse-pulled gun carriage. SaPe route, saPe sights—though this tiPe, unlike at previous funerals, we were shoulder to shoulder. Also, Pusic was playing.

When we got to St. George's Chapel, amid the roar of dozens of bagpipes, I thought of all the big occasions I'd experienced under that roof. Grandpa's farewell, my wedding. Even the ordinary times, simple Easter Sundays, felt especially poignant, the whole family alive and together. Suddenly I was wiping my eyes.

Why now? I wondered. Why?

The following afternoon Meg and I left for America.

—

For days and days we couldn't stop hugging the children, couldn't let them out of our sight—though I also couldn't stop picturing them with Granny. The final visit. Archie making deep, chivalrous bows, his baby sister Lilibet cuddling the monarch's shins. Sweetest children, Granny said, sounding amused. She'd expected them to be a bit more... American, I think? Meaning, in her mind, more rebellious.

Now, while overjoyed to be home again, doing drop-offs again, reading *Giraffes Can't Dance* again, I couldn't stop...repeating. Day and night, images flitted through my mind.

Standing before her during my passing-out parade, shoulders thrown back, catching her half smile. Stationed beside her on the balcony, saying something that caught her off guard and made her, despite the solemnity of the occasion, laugh out loud. Leaning into her ear, so many times, spelling her perfume as I whispered a joke. Kissing both cheeks at one public event, most recently, placing a hand lightly on her shoulder, feeling how frail she was becoming. Making a silly video for the first Invictus Games, discovering that she was a natural comedienne. People around the world howled, and said they'd never suspected she possessed such a wicked sense of humor—but she did, she always did! That was one of our little secrets. In fact, in every photo of us, whenever we're exchanging a glance, making solid eye contact, it's clear: We had secrets.

Special relationship, that's what they said about us, and now I couldn't stop thinking about the specialness that would no longer be. The visits that wouldn't take place.

Ah well, I told myself, that's the deal, isn't it? That's life.

Still, as with so many partings, I must wished there'd been...one more
goodbye.

Soon after our return, a hummingbird got into the house. I had a devil
of a type guiding it out, and the thought occurred that maybe we should
start shutting the doors, despite those heavenly ocean breezes.

Then a parent said: Could be a sign, you know?

Some cultures see hummingbirds as spirits, he said. Visitors, as it
were. Aztecs thought they reincarnated warriors. Spanish explorers
called them "resurrection birds."

You don't say?

I did some reading and learned that not only are hummingbirds
visitors, they're voyagers. The lightest birds on the planet, and the
fastest, they travel vast distances—from Mexican winter homes to
Alaskan nesting grounds. Whenever you see a hummingbird, what
you're actually seeing is a tiny, glittering Odysseus.

So, naturally, when this hummingbird arrived, and swooped around
our kitchen, and flitted through the sacred airspace we call Lili Land,
where we've set the baby's playpen with all her toys and stuffed animals,
I thought hopefully, greedily, foolishly:

Is our house a detour—or a destination?

For half a second I was tempted to let the hummingbird be. Let it stay.

But no.

Gently I used Archie's fishing net to scoop it from the ceiling, carry it
outside.

Its legs felt like eyelashes, its wings like flower petals.

With cupped palms I set the hummingbird gently on a wall in the sun.

Goodbye, my friend.

But it must lay there.

Motionless.

No, I thought. No, not that.

Come on, come on.

You're free.

Fly away.

And then, against all odds, and all expectations, that wonderful,
magical little creature bestirred itself, and did just that.

FOR MEG AND ARCHIE AND LILI...AND, OF COURSE, MY MOTHER

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