
PRINCE HARRY
SPARE

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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 Frogmore gardens, by the old Gothic ruin. I got there first.

I looked around, saw no one.

I checked my phone. No texts, no voicemails.

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

I put away my phone and told myself: Stay calm.

The weather was quintessentially April. Not quite 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 time, this was going to be my forever home. Instead it had proved to be just another brief stop.

When my wife and I fled this place, in fear for our sanity and physical safety, I wasn't sure when I'd ever come back. That was January 2020. Now, fifteen months later, here I was, days after waking to thirty-two missed calls and then one short, heart-racing talk with Granny: *Harry…Grandpa's gone.*

The wind picked up, turned colder. I hunched my shoulders, rubbed my arms, regretted the thinness of my white shirt. I wished I'd not changed out of my funeral suit. I wished I'd thought to bring a coat. I turned my back to the wind and saw, looming behind me, the Gothic ruin, which in reality was no more Gothic than the Millennium Wheel. Some clever architect, some bit of stagecraft. Like so much around here, I thought.

I moved from the stone wall to a small wooden bench. Sitting, I checked my phone again, peered up and down the garden path.

Where are they?

Another gust of wind. Funny, it reminded me of Grandpa. His wintry demeanor, maybe. Or his icy sense of humor. I recalled one particular shooting weekend years ago. A mate, just trying to make conversation, asked Grandpa what he thought of my new

beard, which had been causing concern in the family and controversy in the press. *Should the Queen Force Prince Harry to Shave?* Grandpa looked at my mate, looked at my chin, broke into a devilish grin. *THAT'S no beard!*

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

I thought of Grandpa's strong opinions, his many passions—carriage driving, barbecuing, shooting, food, beer. The way he embraced *life*. He had that in common with my mother. Maybe that was why he'd been such a fan. Long before she was Princess Diana, back when she was simply Diana Spencer, kindergarten teacher, secret girlfriend of Prince Charles, my grandfather was her loudest advocate. Some said he actually brokered my parents' marriage. If so, an argument could be made that Grandpa was the Prime Cause in my world. But for him, I wouldn't be here.

Neither would my older brother.

Then again, maybe our mother *would* be here. If she hadn't married Pa…

I recalled one recent chat, just me 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 missed most was work. Without work, he said, everything crumbles. He didn't seem sad, just ready. *You have to know when it's time to go, Harry.*

I glanced now into the distance, towards the mini skyline of crypts and monuments alongside Frogmore. The Royal Burial Ground. Final resting place for so many of us, including Queen Victoria. Also, the notorious Wallis Simpson. Also, her doubly notorious husband Edward, the former King and my great-great-uncle. After Edward gave up his throne for Wallis, after they fled Britain, both of them fretted about their ultimate return—both obsessed about being buried right here. The Queen, my grandmother, granted their plea. But she placed them at a distance from everyone else, beneath a stooped plane tree. One

last finger wag, perhaps. One final exile, maybe. I wondered how Wallis and Edward felt now about all their fretting. Did any of it matter in the end? I wondered if they wondered at all. Were they floating in some airy realm, still mulling their choices, or were they Nowhere, thinking Nothing? Could there really be Nothing after this? Does consciousness, like time, have a stop? Or maybe, I thought, just maybe, they're here right now, next to the fake Gothic ruin, or next to me, eavesdropping on my thoughts. And if so…*maybe my mother is too?*

The thought of her, as always, gave me a jolt of hope, and a burst of energy.

And a stab of sorrow.

I missed my mother every day, but that day, on the verge of that nerve-racking rendezvous at Frogmore, I found myself longing for her, and I couldn't say just why. Like so much about her, it was hard to put into words.

Although my mother was a princess, named after a goddess, both those terms always felt weak, inadequate. People routinely compared her to icons and saints, from Nelson Mandela to Mother Teresa to Joan of Arc, but every such comparison, while lofty and loving, also felt wide of the mark. The most recognizable woman on the planet, one of the most beloved, my mother was simply indescribable, that was the plain truth. And yet…how could someone so far beyond everyday language remain so real, so palpably present, so exquisitely vivid in my mind? How was it possible that I could see her, clear as the swan skimming towards me on that indigo lake? How could I hear her laughter, loud as the songbirds in the bare trees—still? There was so much I didn't remember, because I was so young when she died, but the greater miracle was all that I did. Her devastating smile, her vulnerable eyes, her childlike love of movies and music and clothes and sweets—and us. Oh how she loved my brother and me. *Obsessively*, she once confessed to an interviewer.

Well, Mummy…vice versa.

Maybe she was omnipresent for the very same 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, astronomers rearranged their biggest telescopes, aimed them at one tiny crevice in the cosmos, and managed to catch a glimpse of one breathtaking sphere, which they named Earendel, the Old English word for Morning Star. Billions of miles off, and probably long vanished, Earendel is closer to the Big Bang, the moment of Creation, than our own Milky Way, and yet it's somehow still visible to mortal eyes because it's just so awesomely bright and dazzling.

That was my mother.

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

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 my family's sake, and for my own—but also for hers.

People forget how much my mother strove for peace. She circled the globe many times over, traipsed through minefields, 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 my older brother, Willy, and my father to talk about the state of things.

To find a way out.

But now I looked once more at my 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 my 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 my heart really started thrashing in my chest. Deep breaths, I told myself.

Apart from fear, I was feeling a kind of hyper-awareness, and a hugely intense vulnerability, which I'd experienced at other key moments of my life.

Walking behind my mother's coffin.

Going into battle for the first time.

Giving a speech in the middle of a panic attack.

There was that same sense of embarking on a quest, 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, Mummy, I thought, picking up the pace, here goes. Wish me luck.

We met in the middle of the path. *Willy? Pa? Hello.*

Harold.

Painfully tepid.

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

The way we simply fell into this synchronous alignment, the way we wordlessly assumed the same measured paces and bowed heads, plus the nearness of those graves—how could anyone not be reminded of Mummy's funeral? I told myself 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 smoke on the wind.

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

Small talk. The smallest. We touched on all secondary subjects and I kept waiting for us to get to the primary one, wondering why it was taking so long and also how on earth my father and brother could appear so calm.

I looked around. We'd covered a fair bit of terrain, and were now smack in the middle of the Royal Burial Ground, more up to our ankles in bodies than Prince Hamlet. Come to think of it… didn't I myself once ask to be buried here? Hours before I'd gone off to war my private secretary said I needed to choose the spot where my remains should be interred. *Should the worst happen, Your Royal Highness…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 moment?

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

Our feet almost on top of Wallis Simpson's face, Pa launched into a micro-lecture about this personage over here, that royal cousin over there, all the once-eminent dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies, currently residing beneath the lawn. A lifelong student of history, he had loads of information to share, and part of me thought we might be there for hours, and that there might 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 explain my side of things. I wasn't at my best. For starters, I was still nervous, fighting to keep my emotions in check, while also striving to be succinct and precise. More, I'd vowed not

to let this encounter devolve into another argument. But I quickly discovered that it wasn't up to me. Pa and Willy had their parts to play, and they'd come ready for a fight. Every time I ventured a new explanation, started a new line of thought, one or both of them would cut me off. Willy in particular didn't want to hear anything. After he'd shut me down several times, he and I began sniping, saying some of the same things we'd said for months—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'm being honest, old.

I thought about Grandpa.

All at once something shifted inside of me. I looked at Willy, really looked at him, maybe for the first time since we were boys. I took it all in: his familiar scowl, which had always been his default in dealings with me; his alarming baldness, more advanced than my own; his famous resemblance to Mummy, which was fading with time. With age. In some ways he was my mirror, in some ways he was my opposite. My beloved brother, my arch nemesis, how had that happened?

I felt massively tired. I wanted to go home, and I realized what a complicated concept home had become. Or maybe 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, Harold.

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 might have been different, but for him to claim total ignorance of the reasons I'd fled the land of my birth—the land for which I'd fought and

been ready to die—my Mother Country? That fraught phrase. To claim no knowledge of why my wife and I took the drastic step of picking up our child and just running like hell, leaving behind everything—house, friends, furniture? Really?

I looked up at the trees: *You don't know!*

Harold…I honestly don't.

I turned to Pa. He was gazing at me with an expression that said: *Neither do I.*

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

Staggering. But maybe it was true.

And if they didn't know why I'd left, maybe they just didn't know me. At all.

And maybe they never really did.

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

The thought made me feel colder, and terribly alone.

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

How 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 Balmoral. The long-ago Queen, for instance. Mad with grief, she'd locked herself inside Balmoral Castle and vowed never to come out. And the very proper former prime minister: 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 Balmoral 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 Balmoral: 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. Balmoral was its own micro-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 Balmoral. And Grandpa. And Willy. And Pa. The whole family, with the exception of Mummy, because Mummy 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 mother's in Paris! Maybe it was Mummy herself who said that. When she phoned earlier that day for a chat? Alas, the memory lies, with a million others, on the other side of a high mental wall. Such a horrid, tantalizing feeling, to know they're over

there, just on the other side, mere inches away—but the wall is always too high, too thick. Unscalable.

Not unlike the turrets of Balmoral.

Wherever Mummy 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 just met him. Actually, we'd been with Mummy weeks earlier when *she* first met him, in St. Tropez. We were having a grand time, just the three of us, staying at some old gent's villa. There was much laughter, horseplay, the norm whenever Mummy and Willy and I were together, though even more so on that holiday. Everything about that trip to St. Tropez was heaven. The weather was sublime, the food was tasty, Mummy was smiling.

Best of all, there were jet skis.

Whose were they? Don't know. But I vividly remember Willy and me riding them out to the deepest part of the channel, circling while waiting for the big ferries to come. We used their massive wakes as ramps to get airborne. I'm not sure how we weren't killed.

Was it after we got back from that jet-ski misadventure that Mummy's friend first appeared? No, more likely it was just before. *Hello there, you must be Harry.* Raven hair, leathery tan, bone-white smile. *How are you today? My name is blah blah.* He chatted us up, chatted Mummy up. Specifically Mummy. Pointedly Mummy. His eyes plumping into red hearts.

He was cheeky, no doubt. But, again, nice enough. He gave Mummy a present. Diamond bracelet. She seemed to like it. She wore it a lot. Then he faded from my consciousness.

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

2.

A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM, going from sun-drenched St. Tropez to cloud-shadowed Balmoral. I vaguely remember that shock, though I can't remember much else about our first week at the castle. Still, I can almost guarantee it was spent mostly outdoors. My family 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 conjure. There's some reporting that we journeyed by the royal yacht from 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 my memory rolls. Dates? Sorry, I'll need to look them up. Dialogue? I'll try my best, but make no verbatim claims, especially when it comes to the nineties. But ask me about any space I've occupied—castle, cockpit, classroom, stateroom, bedroom, palace, garden, pub—and I'll re-create it down to the carpet tacks.

Why should my memory organize experience like this? Is it genetics? Trauma? Some Frankenstein-esque combination of the two? Is it my inner soldier, assessing every space as potential battlefield? Is it my innate homebody nature, rebelling against a forced nomadic existence? Is it some base apprehension that the world is essentially a maze, and you should never be caught in a maze without a map?

Whatever the cause, my memory is my memory, it does what it does, gathers and curates as it sees fit, and there's just as much truth in what I remember and how I remember it as there is in so-called objective facts. Things like chronology and cause-and-effect are often just fables we tell ourselves about the past. *The past is never dead. It's not even past.* When I discovered that quotation not long ago on BrainyQuote.com, I was thunderstruck. I thought, Who the *fook* is Faulkner? And how's he related to us Windsors?

And so: Balmoral. Closing my eyes, I can see the main entrance, the paneled front windows, the wide portico and three

gray-black speckled granite steps leading up to the massive front door of whisky-colored oak, often propped open by a heavy curling stone and often manned by one red-coated footman, and inside the spacious hall and its white stone floor, with gray star-shaped tiles, and the huge fireplace with its beautiful mantel of ornately carved dark wood, and to one side a kind of utility room, and to the left, by the tall windows, hooks for fishing rods and walking sticks and rubber waders and heavy waterproofs—so many waterproofs, because summer 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 crimson carpet and the walls papered in cream, a pattern of gold flock, raised like braille, and then the many rooms along the corridor, each with a specific purpose, like sitting or reading, TV or tea, and one special room for the pages, many of whom I loved like dotty uncles, and finally the castle's main chamber, 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 himself exiled, then came back and annihilated everything and everyone in sight. My distant kin. My kindred spirit, some would claim. If nothing else, my namesake. Born September 15, 1984, I was christened Henry Charles Albert David of Wales.

But from Day One everyone called me Harry.

In the heart of this main chamber was the grand staircase. Sweeping, dramatic, seldom used. Whenever Granny headed up to her bedroom 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 crimson saloon doors and along a green tartan floor, was a smallish staircase with a heavy iron banister; it led up to the second floor, where stood a statue of Queen Victoria. I always bowed to her as I passed. *Your Majesty!* Willy did too. We'd been told to, but I'd have done it anyway. I found the "Grandmama of Europe" hugely compelling, and not just because Granny loved her, nor because Pa once wanted to name me after her husband. (Mummy blocked him.) 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, sexually 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 times, on eight separate occasions, by seven different subjects.

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

Beyond Victoria's statue things got tricky. Doors became identical, rooms interlocked. Easy to get lost. Open the wrong door and you might burst in on Pa while his valet was helping him dress. Worse, you might blunder in as he was doing his headstands. Prescribed by his physio, these exercises were the only effective remedy for the constant pain in Pa's neck and back. Old polo injuries, mostly. He performed them daily, in just a pair of boxers, propped against a door or hanging from a bar like a skilled acrobat. If you set one little finger on the knob you'd hear him begging from the other side: *No! No! Don't open! Please God don't open!*

Balmoral had fifty bedrooms, one of which had been divided for me and Willy. Adults called it the nursery. Willy had the larger half, with a double bed, a good-sized basin, a cupboard with mirrored doors, a beautiful window looking down on the courtyard, the fountain, the bronze statue of a roe deer buck. My half of the room was far smaller, less luxurious. I never asked why. I didn't care. But I also didn't need to ask. Two years older than me, Willy was the Heir, whereas I was the Spare.

This wasn't merely how the press referred to us—though it was definitely that. This was shorthand often used by Pa and Mummy and Grandpa. And even Granny. The Heir and the Spare—there was no judgment about it, but also no ambiguity. I was the shadow, the support, the Plan B. I was brought into the world in case something happened to Willy. I was summoned to provide backup, distraction, diversion and, if necessary, a spare part. Kidney, perhaps. Blood transfusion. Speck of bone marrow. This was all made explicitly clear to me from the start of life's journey and regularly reinforced thereafter. I was twenty the first time I heard the story of what Pa allegedly said to Mummy the day of my birth:

Wonderful! Now you've given me an Heir and a Spare—my work is done. A joke. Presumably. On the other hand, minutes after delivering this bit of high comedy, Pa was said to have gone off to meet with his girlfriend. So. Many a true word spoken in jest.

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 time to worry about things so unchangeable? Who could bother with being bothered by a fate etched in stone? Being a Windsor meant working out which truths were timeless, and then banishing them from your mind. It meant *absorbing* the basic parameters 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 them.

Every boy and girl, at least once, imagines themselves 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 Balmoral 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 quads, the cousin was on a go-kart. It was all fun and games until she crashed head-on into a green lamppost. Crazy fluke—the only lamppost within a thousand miles. We shrieked with laughter, though the lamppost, 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, jumped into our pajamas, settled eagerly in front of the TV. Footmen arrived, carrying trays covered with plates, each topped with a silver dome. The footmen set the trays upon wooden stands, then joked with us, as they always did, before wishing us bon appétit.

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

Mabel, our nanny, who'd once been Pa's nanny, joined us. As we all stuffed our faces we heard Pa padding past in his slippers, coming from 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 him 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 migration downstairs, then the first bleaty notes of the accompanying bagpipes. For the next two hours the adults would be held captive in the Dinner Dungeon, forced to sit around that long table, forced to squint at each other in the dim gloom of a candelabra designed by Prince Albert, forced to remain ramrod straight before china plates and crystal goblets placed with mathematical precision by staff (who used tape measures), forced to peck at quails' eggs and turbot, forced to make 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 made a show of lifting a silver dome—*Yum, wish I was having that!*—and taking a long sniff. He was always sniffing things. Food, roses, our hair. He must've been a bloodhound in another life. Maybe he took all those long sniffs because it was hard to smell anything over his personal scent. *Eau Sauvage.* He'd slather the stuff on his cheeks, his neck, his shirt. Flowery, with a hint of something harsh, like pepper or gunpowder, it was made in Paris. Said so on the bottle. Which made me think of Mummy.

Yes, Harry, Mummy's in Paris.

Their divorce had become final exactly one year before. Almost to the day.

Be good, boys.

We will, Pa.

Don't stay up too late.

He left. His scent remained.

Willy and I finished dinner, watched some more TV, then got up to our typical pre-bedtime hijinks. 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 dozens of dead stag heads. At some point we bumped into Granny's piper. Rumpled, 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 them a "beastly instrument." While summering at Balmoral, Granny asked that the piper play her awake and play her to dinner.

His instrument looked like a drunken octopus, except that its floppy arms were etched silver and dark mahogany. We'd seen the thing before, many times, 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 squeaks. We just didn't have the puff. The piper, however, had a chest the size of a whisky barrel. He made it moan and scream.

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

My bed was tall. I had to jump to get in, after which I rolled down into its sunken center. It felt like climbing onto a bookcase, then tumbling into a slit trench. The bedding was clean, crisp, various shades of white. Alabaster sheets. Cream blankets. Eggshell quilts. (Much of it stamped with ER, *Elizabeth Regina.*) Everything was pulled tight as a snare drum, so expertly smoothed that you could easily spot the century's worth of patched holes and tears.

I pulled the sheets and covers to my chin, because I didn't like the dark. No, not true, I loathed the dark. Mummy did too, she told me so. I'd inherited this from her, I thought, along with her nose, her blue eyes, her love of people, her hatred of smugness and fakery and all things posh. I can see myself under those covers, staring into the dark, listening to the clicky insects and hooty owls. Did I imagine 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 much time elapsed before I dropped off? In other words, how much of my childhood remained, and how much did I cherish it, savor it, before groggily becoming aware of—

Pa?

He was standing at the edge of the bed, looking down. His white dressing-gown made him seem like a ghost in a play.

Yes, darling boy.

He gave a half-smile, averted his gaze.

The room wasn't dark anymore. Wasn't light either. Strange in-between shade, almost brownish, almost like the water in the ancient tub.

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

What is it, Pa?

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

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

I vividly remember that thought flashing through my mind. And I remember waiting patiently for Pa to confirm that indeed Mummy was all right. And I remember him 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 quilts and blankets and sheets. *There were complications. Mummy was quite badly injured and taken to hospital, darling boy.*

He always called me "darling boy," but he was saying it quite a lot now. His voice was soft. He was in shock, it seemed.

Oh. Hospital?

Yes. With a head injury.

Did he mention paparazzi? 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 problem for Mummy, for everyone, it didn't need to be said.

I thought again: Injured…but she's OK. She's been taken to hospital, they'll fix 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 remain in my mind like darts in a board. He did say it that way, I know that much for sure. *She didn't make it*. And then everything seemed to come to a stop.

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

None of what I said to him then remains in my memory. It's possible that I didn't say anything. What I do remember with startling clarity is that I didn't cry. Not one tear.

Pa didn't hug me. He wasn't great at showing emotions under normal circumstances, how could he be expected to show them in such a crisis? But his hand did fall once more on my knee and he said: *It's going to be OK.*

That was quite a lot for him. 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 room, 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 morning I've come to one inescapable conclusion: I must've remained in that room, saying nothing, seeing no one, until nine A.M. sharp, when the piper began to play outside.

I wish I could remember what he played. But maybe it doesn't matter. With bagpipes it's not the tune, it's the tone. Thousands of years old, bagpipes are built to amplify what's already in the heart. If you're feeling silly, bagpipes make 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, maybe *especially* if you don't know, bagpipes can drive you mad.

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. Something 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 memories. Did the minister say anything? Did he make it worse? Did I listen to him or stare at the back of the pew and think about Mummy?

On the way back to Balmoral, a two-minute drive, it was suggested that we stop. People had been gathering all morning outside the front gates, some had begun leaving things. Stuffed animals, flowers, cards. Acknowledgment should be made.

We pulled over, stepped out. I could see nothing but a matrix of colored dots. Flowers. And more flowers. I could hear nothing but a rhythmic clicking from across the road. The press. I reached for my father's hand, for comfort, then cursed myself, because that gesture set off an explosion of clicks.

I'd given them exactly what they wanted. Emotion. Drama. Pain.

They fired and fired and fired.

5.

Hours later Pa left for Paris. Accompanied by Mummy's sisters, Aunt Sarah and Aunt Jane. They needed to learn more about the crash, someone said. And they needed to arrange for the return of Mummy's body.

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

That was my sudden insight. With nothing to do but roam the castle and talk to myself, a suspicion took hold, which then

became a firm belief. This was all a trick. And for once the trick wasn't being played by the people around me, or the press, but by Mummy. *Her 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 realization took my breath away, made me 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 much better.

Then doubt crept in.

Hang 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 my aunts came back first. Their return was reported by every TV channel. The world watched as they stepped onto the tarmac at RAF Northolt. One channel even added music to the arrival: someone mournfully singing a psalm. Willy and I were kept from the TV, but I think we heard that.

The next few days passed in a vacuum, no one saying anything. We all remained ensconced inside the castle. It was like being inside a crypt, except a crypt where everyone's wearing trews and keeping to normal routines and schedules. If anyone talked about anything, I didn't hear them. The only voice I heard was the one droning in my head, arguing with itself.

She's gone.

No, she's hiding.

She's dead.

No, she's playing *dead.*

Then, one morning, it was time. Back to London. I remember 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 might be slightly out of sequence. At times my memory places it right there, in those horrid first days of September. But at other times memory casts it forward, to many years later.

Whenever it happened, it happened like this:

William? Harry? Aunt Sarah has something for you, boys.

She stepped forward, holding two tiny blue boxes. *What's this?*

Open it.

I lifted off the top of my blue box. Inside was…a moth?

No.

A mustache?

No.

What's…?

Her hair, Harry.

Aunt Sarah explained that, while in Paris, she'd clipped two locks from Mummy's head.

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

But then immediately came the reassuring doubt, the lifesaving uncertainty: *No, this could be anybody's hair.* Mummy, her beautiful blond hair intact, was out there somewhere.

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

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

6.

WILLY AND I WALKED UP and down the crowds outside Kensington Palace, smiling, shaking hands. As if we were

running for office. Hundreds and hundreds of hands were thrust continually into our faces, the fingers often wet.

From what? I wondered.

Tears, I realized.

I disliked how those hands felt. More, I hated how they made me 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 Mummy's life had been so sad that she'd felt the need to disappear, to invent this massive charade. But I couldn't squeeze out one drop. Maybe I'd learned too well, absorbed too deeply, the ethos of the family, that crying wasn't an option—ever.

I remember the mounds of flowers all around us. I remember feeling unspeakable sorrow and yet being unfailingly polite. I remember old ladies saying: *Oh, my, how polite, the poor boy!* I remember muttering thanks, over and over, thank you for coming, thank you for saying that, thank you for camping out here for several days. I remember consoling several folks who were prostrate, overcome, as if they knew Mummy, 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 Mummy's apartment, went down a long corridor and into a room off the left. There stood a large coffin. Dark brown, English oak. Am I remembering or imagining that it was draped in…*a Union Jack?*

That flag mesmerized me. Maybe because of my boyish war games. Maybe because of my precocious patriotism. Or maybe because I'd been hearing rumblings for days about the flag, the flag, the flag. That was all anyone could talk about. People were up in arms because the flag hadn't been lowered to half-mast over Buckingham Palace. They didn't care that the Royal Standard never flew at half-mast, no matter what, that it flew when Granny was in residence, and didn't fly when she was away, full stop. They cared only about seeing some official show of mourning, and they were enraged by its absence. That is, they were whipped into rage

by the British papers, which were trying to deflect attention from their role in Mummy's disappearance. I recall one headline, addressed pointedly at Granny: *Show Us You Care.* How *rich*, coming from the same fiends who "cared" so much about Mummy that they chased her into a tunnel from which she never emerged.

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

Standing before the flag-draped coffin, I asked myself: Is Mummy a patriot? What does Mummy 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 family said in that moment, to each other or to the coffin. I don't recall a word that passed between me and Willy, though I do remember 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 some discussion about the next 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 seemed a lot to ask of two young boys. Several adults were aghast. Mummy'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 came the answer.

It must be both princes. To garner sympathy, presumably.

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

So, come morning, bright and early, off we went, all together. Uncle Charles on my right, Willy to his right, followed by Grandpa.

And on my left was Pa. I noted at the start how serene Grandpa looked, as if this was merely another royal engagement. I could see his eyes, clearly, because he was gazing straight ahead. They all were. But I kept mine down on the road. So did Willy.

I remember feeling numb. I remember clenching my fists. I remember keeping a fraction of Willy always in the corner of my vision and drawing loads of strength from that. Most of all I remember the sounds, the clinking bridles and clopping hooves of the six sweaty brown horses, the squeaking wheels of the gun carriage they were hauling. (A relic from the First World War, someone said, which seemed right, since Mummy, much as she loved peace, often seemed a soldier, whether she was warring against the paps or Pa.) I believe I'll remember those few sounds for the rest of my life, because they were such a sharp contrast to the otherwise all-encompassing silence. There wasn't one engine, one lorry, one bird. There wasn't one human voice, which was impossible, because two million people lined the roads. The only hint that we were marching through a canyon of humanity was the occasional wail.

After twenty minutes we reached Westminster Abbey. We filed into a long pew. The funeral began with a series of readings and eulogies, and culminated with Elton John. 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 himself at a grand piano. Is there anyone who doesn't know that he sang "Candle in the Wind," a version he'd reworked for Mummy? I can't be sure the notes in my head are from that moment or from clips I've seen since. Possibly they're vestiges of recurring nightmares. But I do have one pure, indisputable memory of the song climaxing and my eyes starting to sting and tears nearly falling.

Nearly.

Towards the end of the service came Uncle Charles, who used his allotted time to blast everyone—family, nation, press—for stalking Mummy to her death. You could feel the abbey, the nation outside, recoil from the blow. Truth hurts. Then eight Welsh Guards

moved forward, hoisted the enormous 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-mast; not the Royal Standard, of course, but the Union Jack—still, an unprecedented compromise.) The Royal Standard was always reserved for members of the Royal Family, which, I'd been told, Mummy wasn't anymore. Did this mean she was forgiven? By Granny? Apparently. But these were questions I couldn't quite formulate, 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 Buckingham 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 Junction 15a and northwards to Harlestone, before passing through the iron front gate of Uncle Charles's estate.

Althorp.

Willy and I watched most 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 times 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 Graham. Willy and I liked him a lot. We always called him Crackers, as in Graham Crackers. We thought that was hysterical.

When the hearse finally got to Althorp the coffin was removed again and carried across the pond, over a green iron bridge hastily positioned by military engineers, to a little island, and there it was placed upon a platform. Willy and I walked across the same bridge to the island. It was reported that Mummy's hands were folded across her chest and between them was placed a photo of me and Willy, possibly the only two men who ever truly loved her. Certainly

the two who loved her most. For all eternity we'd be smiling at her in the darkness, and maybe it was this image, as the flag came off and the coffin descended to the bottom of the hole, that finally broke me. My body convulsed and my chin fell and I began to sob uncontrollably into my 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 my mother 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 mere idea.

It would just 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, same as I did after every summer holiday.

Back to normal, everyone said cheerily.

From the passenger seat of Pa's open-topped Aston Martin everything certainly looked the same. Ludgrove School, nestled in the emerald Berkshire countryside, looked as ever like a country church. (Come 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 meadows, sports fields and tennis courts, science labs and chapels. Plus a well-stocked library.

If you wanted to find me in September 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 moving, keep busy.

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

That was a tall order, however, at Ludgrove, where more than one hundred boys lived in proximity. We ate together, bathed together, slept together, sometimes ten to a room. Everyone knew everyone's business, down to who was circumcised and who wasn't. (We called it Roundheads versus Cavaliers.)

And yet I don't believe one boy so much as mentioned my mother when that new term 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 mango.

Mummy's favorite.

Birthdays were always a huge deal at Ludgrove, because every boy, and most 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 me.

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 many accounts of my life, as gospel, and I have no idea if it's true. Pa said Mummy hurt

her head, but perhaps I was the one with brain damage? As a defense mechanism, most 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 matrons. Whatever tenderness we got, day to day, came from them. The matrons hugged us, kissed us, bandaged our injuries, wiped our tears. (All except mine, that is. After that one graveside outburst I'd not cried again.) They fancied themselves our surrogates. Mums-Away-From-Mums, they'd always chirp, which had always been odd, but now was especially confusing, because of Mummy's disappearance, and also because the matrons were suddenly…hot.

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

Three times a week, after dinner, the matrons 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 personalized hair-washing. (For older boys who'd reached puberty there were two tubs in a separate room, behind a yellow door.) The matrons came down the row of tubs with stiff brushes, bars of floral soap. Every boy had his own towel, embossed with his school number. Mine was 116.

After shampooing a boy the matrons would ease back his head, give him a slow and luxurious rinse.

Confusing as hell.

Matrons would also help with the crucial extraction of lice. Outbreaks were common. Nearly every week another boy would

come down with a fierce case. We'd all point and laugh. *Nyah, nyah, you've got nits!* Before long a matron would be kneeling over the patient, rubbing some solution into his scalp, then scraping out the dead beasts with a special comb.

As a thirteen-year-old I graduated from matronly bathing assistance. But I still depended on their nightly tuck-ins, still treasured their morning greetings. They were the first faces we saw each day. They swept into our rooms, threw open our curtains. *Morning, boys!* Bleary, I'd gaze up into a beautiful visage framed by a halo of sun…

Is that…could that be…?

It never was.

The matron I dealt with the most was Pat. Unlike the other matrons, Pat wasn't hot. Pat was cold. Pat was small, mousy, frazzled, and her hair fell greasily into her always tired eyes. Pat didn't seem to get much joy out of life, though she did find two things reliably satisfying—catching a boy somewhere 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 headmasters) approached, the sentry was instructed to cry: *KV! KV!* Latin, I think? Someone said it meant: The head's coming! Someone else said it meant: 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 squirt something into it that hurt twice as much. She wasn't a sadist, she just seemed "empathy-challenged." Odd, because she knew about suffering. Pat had many crosses to bear.

The biggest seemed 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 most enthusiasm?

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 mocking her as she came down the stairs. The reward was worth the risk. For me, the reward wasn't tormenting 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, just 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-sizing my sugar rush. I'd take all my Opal Fruits and squeeze them together into one massive gobstopper, then jam it into the side of my mouth. As the wad melted my bloodstream would become a frothy cataract of dextrose. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*

The opposite of grub day was letter-writing day. Every boy was required to sit down and compose a missive to his parents. At the best of times this was drudgery. I could barely remember when Pa and Mummy weren't divorced, so writing to them without touching

on their mutual grievances, their messy breakup, required the finesse of a career diplomat.

Dear Pa, How's Mummy?

Hm. No.

Dear Mummy, Pa says you haven't…

No.

But after Mummy disappeared, letter-writing day became impossible.

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

I probably dashed off something pro forma, saying I missed her, school was fine, so on and so forth. I probably folded it once and handed it to the matron. I remember, immediately thereafter, regretting that I hadn't taken the writing more seriously. I wished I'd dug deep, told my mother all the things weighing on my heart, especially my regret over the last time 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 my cousins and didn't want to stop playing. So I'd been short with her. Impatient to get back to my games, I'd rushed Mummy off the phone. I wished I'd apologized for it. I wished I'd searched for the words to describe how much I loved her.

I didn't know that search would take decades.

10.

A MONTH LATER it was half-term. I was going home at last.

Wait—no, I wasn't.

Pa, apparently, didn't want me to spend the break wandering aimlessly around St. James's Palace, where he'd been mostly

living since his breakup with Mummy, and where Willy and I had lived whenever it was our allotted time with Pa. He feared what I might get up to in that big palace all by myself. He feared I might glimpse a newspaper, overhear a radio. More, he feared I might be photographed through an open window, or while playing with my toy soldiers in the gardens. He could imagine reporters trying to speak to me, shouting questions. *Hi, Harry, 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 home to watch over me. He was at Eton.

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

South Africa, Pa? Really?

Yes, darling boy. Johannesburg.

He had a meeting with Nelson Mandela…and the Spice Girls?

I was thrilled. And baffled. The Spice Girls, Pa? He explained that the Spice Girls were giving a concert in Johannesburg, so they were calling on President Mandela to pay their respects. Great, I thought, that explains why *the Spice Girls* are going to be there… what about us? I didn't get it. I'm not sure Pa wanted me to get it.

The truth was, Pa's staff hoped a photo of him standing alongside the world's most revered political leader and the world's most popular female musical act would earn him some positive headlines, which he sorely needed. Since Mummy's disappearance he'd been savaged. People blamed him for the divorce and thus for all that followed. His approval rating around the world was single digits. In Fiji, to pick just one example, a national holiday in his honor had been rescinded.

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

Not that Pa hadn't always been a bit checked out. He'd always given an air of being not quite ready for parenthood—the responsibilities, the patience, the time. Even he, though a proud

man, would've admitted as much. But single parenthood? Pa was never made 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, minutes later he'd be sitting on the edge of my bed. He never forgot that I didn't like the dark, so he'd gently tickle my face until I fell asleep. I have the fondest memories of his hands on my cheeks, my forehead, then waking to find him gone, magically, the door always considerately left open a crack.

Other than those fleeting moments, however, Pa and I mostly coexisted. He had trouble communicating, trouble listening, trouble being intimate face-to-face. On occasion, after a long multi-course dinner, I'd walk upstairs and find a letter on my pillow. The letter would say how proud he was of me for something I'd done or accomplished. I'd smile, place it under my pillow, but also wonder why he hadn't said this moments ago, while seated directly across from me.

Thus the prospect of days and days of unrestricted Pa time was exhilarating.

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

Beside me was Baby Spice, wearing white plastic shoes with chunky twelve-inch platform heels. I fixated on those heels while she fixated on my cheeks. She kept pinching them. So chubby! So cute! Then Posh Spice surged forward and clutched my hand. Farther down the line I spied Ginger Spice, the only Spice with whom I felt any connection—a fellow ginger. Also, she was world-famous for recently wearing a minidress made of the Union Jack. *Why's there a Union Jack on the coffin?* She and the other Spices were cooing at me, saying things I didn't understand, while

bantering with the journalists, who were shouting at me. *Harry, over here, Harry, Harry, how are you doing, Harry?* Questions that weren't questions. Questions that were traps. Questions that were flung at my head like cleavers. The journalists didn't give a toss how I was doing, they were trying to get me to say something messy, newsy.

I gazed into their flashes, bared my 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 more out-front they were, the more 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 more impossible while it was actually happening. But I saw it with my own eyes, Pa gamely 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 more flashes. This time the Spice Girls weren't there to deflect attention. It was just Pa and me.

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 wizards with a short spear known as the *iklwa*, which was named for the sucking sound it made when pulled from a victim'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 some, among them 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 zoomed in on the bits about manly 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 smash. 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 just let me be, who understood all that I was dealing with and didn't want to give me more. Mr. Dawson, who played the organ in the chapel, was extremely gentle. Mr. Little, the drum teacher, was exceedingly patient. Confined to a wheelchair, he'd turn up for drum 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 drumming wasn't really improving.

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

Day and night, from Mr. Hughes-Games'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-Games cherished them as children. He kept silver-framed photos of them on his desk, which was one reason many boys thought Mr. Hughes-Games a tad eccentric. So it came as a roaring shock when I realized that Mr. Hughes-Games 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—June 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 micro 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-Games was talking about Charles Edward Stuart, or Charles III, as he thought of himself. Pretender to the Throne. Mr. Hughes-Games 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-Games stopped and posited 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 omnipresent bodyguard (armed) and uniformed police scattered across the grounds would be more than happy to remind them. But did Mr. Hughes-Games 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: Pa 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 whom 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 memorize 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—Mummy?

After class I went up to Mr. Hughes-Games'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-Games 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-Games 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, some of us would sneak out, go roaming up and down the corridors. A strict violation of the rules, but I was lonely and homesick, probably anxious and depressed, and I couldn't abide being locked into my dormitory.

There was one particular teacher who, whenever he caught me, would give me a tremendous 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 made me feel bad about myself, bad about the teacher, and bad about the Bible. Nevertheless, the next night I'd go right back to flouting the rules.

If I wasn't roaming the corridors, I was roaming the school grounds, usually with my best mate, Henners. Like me, Henners was officially a Henry, but I always called him Henners, and he called me Haz.

Skinny, with no muscles, and hair that stood up in permanent surrender, Henners was all heart. Whenever he smiled, people melted. (He was the only boy who mentioned Mummy to me after she disappeared.) But that winning smile, that tender nature, made you forget that Henners could be *quite* naughty.

A huge "pick your own" farm 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 some fat, juicy strawberries. We went along, stuffing our mouths, popping up now and then like meerkats to make sure the coast was clear. Whenever I bite into a strawberry I'm there again, in those furrows, with lovely Henners.

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

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

You there! Stop!

Hello, sir.

What are you two doing?

Nothing, sir.

You've been to the farm.

No!

Open your hands.

We did. Busted. Crimson palms. He reacted as if it were blood.

I can't remember what punishment 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 mind. There was no torture Ludgrove could dish out that surpassed what was going on inside me.

14.

MR. MARSTON, while patrolling the dining room, often carried a little bell. It reminded me 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.

Frequently Mr. Marston would feel the need to make an announcement during meals. 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 time the bell failed to bring silence, Mr. Marston's face would grow a shade redder. *Fellas! Will you LISTEN?*

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

He didn't accept this. He seemed suspicious, as if our disregard of his bell was part of some greater coordinated plot. I don't know about the others, but I was part of no plot. Also, I wasn't disregarding him. Quite the contrary: I couldn't take my eyes off the man. I often asked myself what an outsider might say if they could witness this spectacle, a hundred boys chatting away while a

grown man stood before them frantically and uselessly abusing a tiny brass bell.

Adding to this general sense of bedlam was the psychiatric hospital down the road. Broadmoor. Some time before I came to Ludgrove, a Broadmoor patient had escaped and killed a child in one of the nearby villages. In response Broadmoor installed a warning siren, and now and then they'd test it, to make sure it was in working order. A sound like Doomsday. Mr. Marston's bell on steroids.

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

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

The patient merely 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 philosophizing: If this mental patient could be so thoroughly convinced of his identity, no less than Pa, it raised some very Big Questions indeed. Who could say which of us was sane? Who could be sure *they* weren't the mental patient, hopelessly deluded, humored by friends and family? *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 remarkably unfunny joke, given the rumor circulating just then that my actual father was one of Mummy's former lovers: Major James Hewitt. One cause of this rumor was Major Hewitt's flaming ginger hair, but another cause was sadism. 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 "joke," for some reason. Maybe it made them feel better about their lives that a young prince's life was laughable.

Never mind that my mother didn't meet Major Hewitt until long after I was born, the story was simply too good to drop. The press rehashed it, embroidered it, and there was even talk that some reporters were seeking my DNA to prove it—my first intimation that, after torturing my mother and sending her into hiding, they would soon be coming for me.

To this day nearly every biography of me, every longish profile in a paper or magazine, touches on Major Hewitt, treats the prospect of his paternity with some seriousness, including a description of the moment Pa finally sat me down for a proper heart-to-heart, reassuring me that Major Hewitt wasn't my real father. Vivid scene, poignant, moving, and wholly made up. If Pa had any thoughts about Major Hewitt, he kept them to himself.

15.

MY MOTHER LEGENDARILY SAID there were three people in her marriage. But her maths was off.

She left Willy and me out of the equation.

We didn't understand what was going on with her and Pa, certainly, but we intuited enough, we sensed the presence of the Other Woman, because we suffered the downstream effects. Willy long harbored suspicions about the Other Woman, which confused him, tormented him, and when those suspicions were confirmed he felt tremendous 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 warmth and love, in our home.

Now, with Mummy missing, the maths swung hard in Pa's favor. He was free to see the Other Woman, 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 aim was to bring "the boys" into the fold.

Willy went first. He'd bumped into the Other Woman, once, at the palace, but now he was formally summoned from Eton for a high-stakes private meeting. At Highgrove, I think. Over tea, I believe. It went well, I gathered from Willy later, though he didn't go into details. He merely gave me the impression that the Other Woman, Camilla, had made an effort, which he appreciated, and that was all he cared to say.

My turn came next. I told myself: No big deal. Just like getting an injection. Close your eyes, over before you know it.

I have a dim recollection of Camilla being just as calm (or bored) as me. Neither of us much fretted about the other's opinion. She wasn't my mother, and I wasn't her biggest hurdle. In other words, I wasn't the Heir. This bit with me was mere formality.

I wonder what we found to talk about. Horses, probably. Camilla loved them, and I knew how to ride. Hard to think of any other subject we might've scrounged up.

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

At last, with these strained Camilla summits behind us, there was a final conference with Pa.

So, what do you boys think?

We thought he should be happy. Yes, Camilla had played a pivotal role in the unraveling of our parents' marriage, and yes, that meant she'd played a role in our mother's disappearance, but we understood that she'd been trapped like everyone else in the riptide of events. We didn't blame her, and in fact we'd gladly forgive her if she could make Pa happy. We could see that, like us, he wasn't. We recognized the vacant looks, the empty 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 him, based on little things he'd let slip.

For instance, Pa confessed around this time that he'd been "persecuted" as a boy. Granny and Grandpa, to toughen him up, had shipped him off to Gordonstoun, a boarding school, where he

was horrendously bullied. The most likely victims of Gordonstoun bullies, he said, were creative types, sensitive types, bookish types—in other words, Pa. His finest qualities were bait for the toughs. I remember him murmuring ominously: *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 object, with broken arms and dangly threads, holes patched up here and there. It looked, I imagined, like Pa might have after the bullies had finished with him. Teddy expressed eloquently, 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 companion. That was why, when asked, Willy and I promised Pa that we'd welcome Camilla into the family.

The only thing we asked in return was that he not marry her. You don't need to remarry, we pleaded. A wedding would cause controversy. It would incite the press. It would make the whole country, the whole world, talk about Mummy, compare Mummy and Camilla, and nobody wanted that. Least of all Camilla.

We support you, we said. We endorse Camilla, we said. *Just please don't marry her. Just be together, Pa.*

He didn't answer.

But she answered. Straightaway. Shortly after our private summits with her, she began to play the long game, a campaign aimed at marriage and eventually the Crown. (With Pa's blessing, we presumed.) 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 come from 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 Camilla had talked Pa into hiring.

16.

IN THE EARLY AUTUMN of 1998, having completed my 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 must've been part of its original charter, even perhaps a part of the instructions given to its first architects by the school's founder, my ancestor Henry VI. He deemed Eton some sort of holy shrine, a sacred temple, and to that end he wanted it to overwhelm the senses, so visitors would feel like meek, abased pilgrims.

In my case, mission accomplished.

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

Over the centuries Eton's mission had become somewhat less pious, but the curriculum had become more shockingly rigorous. There was a reason Eton now referred to itself not as a school but simply as…School. For those in the know, there simply was no other choice. Eighteen prime ministers had been molded in Eton's classrooms, 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 became undeniably obvious during my very first French lesson. I was astounded to hear the teacher conducting the entire class in rapid, nonstop French. He assumed, for some reason, that we were all fluent.

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

Afterwards I went up to him, explained that there'd been a dreadful mistake and I was in the wrong class. He told me to relax, assured me I'd be up to speed in no time. He didn't get it; he had faith in me. So I went to my housemaster, begged him to put me