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We know
books

PRINCE HARRY

SPARE

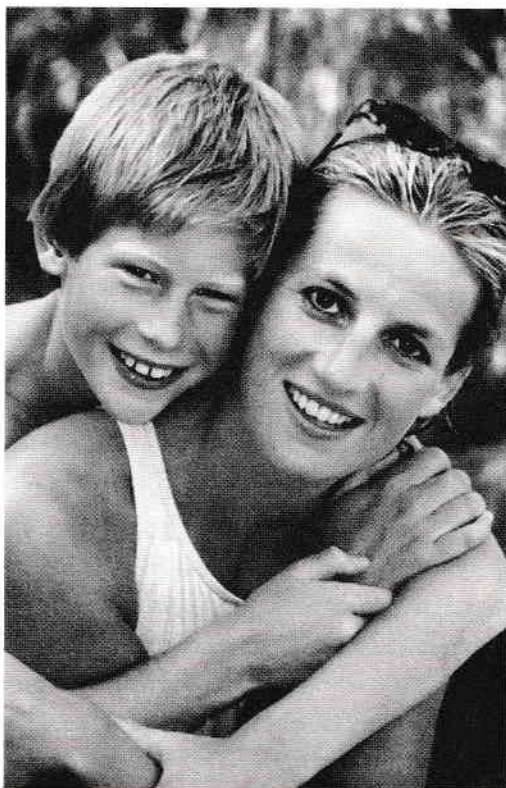


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part 1 out of the night that covers me



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 panelled front windows, the wide portico and three grey-black speckled granite steps leading up to the massive front door of whisky-coloured 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 grey 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 judgement 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 back-up, 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 his girlfriend. So. Many a true word spoken in jest.

I took no offence. 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 honour?

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 pyjamas, 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 high jinks. 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. Rumped, 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 Bal-moral, 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.