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# JAMES THE THIRD

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*To everyone who doesn't know the  
difference between an heir apparent and  
an heir presumptive... yet*

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# 1948

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# 1

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OCTOBER 1948

## THE MORNING ROOM, CLARENCE HOUSE

‘I’m worried, Phillip.’

The Duke of Edinburgh wondered what was coming: he’d been pushing his luck recently on the partying front, which hadn’t gone unnoticed. His Majesty was still not best pleased about the latest report, and that was putting it mildly. Word had it that the King had kicked a corgi across the room, so great had been his anger.

‘What’s bothering you, Lilibet?’ the Duke ventured.<sup>1</sup>

‘I’m worried about Mummy.’

‘That makes a change. It’s usually your father.’

‘I’m constantly worried about Papa, but Mummy’s not been herself recently.’

‘Something to do with her age?’ queried Princess Elizabeth’s husband. ‘Not that I’m an expert. Has she been having these – what are they called? – flushes?’

‘You’re the one who has those, Phillip!’

‘That’s because it’s always too damned hot in most of the palace rooms. Servants are constantly trotting in with more coal. It’s a wonder there’s any left to fuel industry.’

Elizabeth laughed and looked towards her lap. ‘Oh, he’s off

again. See! There's a foot or an arm, or a limb at any rate.'

'It might be a she. Not long to go now before we find out,' said the father-to-be. 'At least you won't have to have the Home Secretary present for the birth, not that Ede's a bad chap – for a socialist.'<sup>2</sup>

'He does seem to be quietly getting on with things,' mused Elizabeth, recalling her parents' horror at the post-war election of a Labour government and the ousting of poor old Winnie, whose inspired leadership had seen the country through the Second World War. 'I think Papa's getting used to the new regime. He seems to quite like Attlee. Not so sure about Mummy, though. Once she's made up her mind, she never budes.'

'You don't need to remind me. I'll always be the dangerously subversive Hun, plotting to overthrow the monarchy.'

'I think the term used was "dangerously progressive"!'

'And here am I,' said the Duke, mock-seriously, 'doing my bit to secure continuity of the Mountbatten line!'<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth, assailed by another kick, winced.

'How are you feeling, Cabbage?'

'Like I've swallowed one whole. A new, specially cultivated variety known as the octopus cabbage. Growing a human being is a rather strange experience.'

'So, what is it about your mother that's worrying you?'

'I gather she had a bit of a rant in the palace kitchen this morning. She can sometimes be rather imperious, but I've never known her to shout at the servants. I've never known her to shout at anyone.'

'A rant about what?'

'Apparently, there's a shortage of brown trout, and she specifically wanted it for dinner.'

'Well, if there's no brown trout, then let her eat red mullet. Or better still, tell her to pack her rods and waders and take herself off to Scotland. She can catch her own.'



‘She often does, but she won’t go anywhere now, for two good reasons. She wants to be here for the birth of her first grandchild. Secondly, the fishing season’s closed until next spring!’

‘Is a downstairs rant all? Shouldn’t think a bit of an outburst is anything to be concerned about, even if it is out of character. Maybe the cold critical stare of disapproval isn’t doing the trick any more?’

‘There’s more to it than that. She was supposed to be having a dress fitting yesterday and refused point-blank to go through with it. According to Margaret, she sent poor old Norman<sup>4</sup> and his assistants packing – though she was all right with the milliner.’

‘Perhaps she thought she had enough frocks, but is possibly in need of another few dozen fluffy hats? I shouldn’t worry about it too much, Cabbage. If you think she’s behaving oddly, take a look at my own mother. She’s got all sorts of – shall we call them unconventional? – ideas. Start fretting when Her Majesty declares her intention to train as a nurse and establish an order of nuns somewhere near Athens.’<sup>5</sup>

‘That is, at least, a worthy cause with some purpose,’ said the Princess.

Just before midnight, on Sunday 14th November 1948, it was announced by Buckingham Palace that Princess Elizabeth had been safely delivered of a prince.

The child was born by caesarean section in the Buhl Room of the royal residence, which had been kitted out as an operating theatre. When Prince Phillip first saw his son, he described him as a ‘plum pudding’.<sup>6</sup>

18TH NOVEMBER 1948

**BUCKINGHAM PALACE**

Professor Eustace Heggarty from University College London<sup>7</sup>, an institution more commonly known as UCL, was a world-renowned historian, who seemingly knew everything about Britain from the Dark Ages onwards. He had a particular expertise in constitutional matters and absolutely no idea why he was at Buckingham Palace. Since yesterday's summons, a few possibilities had gone through his mind, none of which seemed realistic.

Only one other person was in the imposing room. This was no lesser a personage than His Majesty King George VI, who seemed nervous. Eustace took a sip of the rather fine dry sherry, which he'd thought twice about accepting and was now glad he had. He was sure he'd wake up any second to the reassuring discovery that this had all been a dream. Shifting position slightly, he wondered whether it would be impolite to fully stretch out his long legs away from the fire. Would that seem overly casual? The sofa was low slung, and Eustace was a tall, lean man. Were it not for his wife's excellent culinary skills, which ensured there was always a bit of flesh on his bones and some colour in his cheeks, he might have been described as cadaverous.

The man opposite cleared his throat.

'Thank you for coming, Professor. I've asked you here to s-sound you out – informally you understand – about a matter of some delicacy. This conversation is, n- n- naturally, in confidence.'

'Of course, Sir.'

‘It’s about a point of law.’

‘But surely, Sir, might I respectfully suggest that the business would perhaps be better discussed with Sir Hartley Shawcross?’<sup>8</sup>

The Attorney General was the main legal advisor to both Crown and Government.

‘Sir Hartley is at present in the United States of America, and I see no need to recall him. This isn’t r- r- really his field either. I’m hoping it’s something that can be quickly and easily determined.’

‘I’ll certainly do whatever I can to assist Your Majesty. What is the nature of your enquiry?’

‘I’ve been considering making my older daughter Princess of Wales. Would that be possible?’

‘The title – at least that of Prince of Wales – is indeed in your gift, Sir. But it’s reserved exclusively for the heir apparent.’

‘B- but what’s the p- point in having a gift to g- give if there’s no one who’s eligible to receive it?’

‘No point at all, Sir. May I enquire what the Private Secretary’s view is on the subject?’

‘Tommy has no opinion because I haven’t asked him for one,’ said His Majesty, with a touch of belligerence.

This was very odd. Sir Alan Lascelles<sup>9</sup>, generally known as ‘Tommy’, was the obvious source of advice on constitutional questions such as this. Although they didn’t move in the same social circles, Eustace was acquainted with the man and didn’t like the idea of bypassing him. So why was the King doing so? Fear of getting the wrong answer was the most obvious explanation, which meant that the professor had to tread carefully and tactfully. Asking a blunt ‘Why not?’ would seem far too confrontational.

‘Regrettably, Her Royal Highness is only heir presumptive,’ he ventured. ‘There have been Princesses of Wales before, but never in their own right. They’ve only ever held the title by dint of marriage to a Prince of Wales. No queen of England has ever

been regarded as an heir apparent prior to taking the throne, so the matter has never arisen.’

‘N- n- not even Queen Victoria?’

‘Your esteemed great-grandmother was, before her accession, only ever heir presumptive.’

Heggarty, not liking where this was heading, took a larger sip of sherry and glanced towards the decanter, which sat on a side table.

‘How so?’ George asked. ‘I’m afraid this is an area I’ve never properly looked into before.’

‘Queen Victoria’s predecessor, her uncle King William IV, died when he was seventy-one and was definitely still considered capable of fathering a child.’

The King looked startled. ‘Definitely?’

‘Yes. When Victoria became queen, a special clause was inserted into the declaration. This was to the effect that, if the King’s widow was discovered to be pregnant, any living child she bore would be monarch instead. William’s wife, Queen Adelaide, was only forty-four at the time of his death, and therefore regarded as being of child-bearing age – even though she had not produced issue for fifteen years. None of their children had survived infancy, but the possibility had to be accommodated.’<sup>10</sup>

‘I see,’ said George, ‘or I think I see. Is there any point at which – well, to put it bluntly – there is deemed to be no p- p-possibility of further children?’

Eustace, resisting the temptation to pick at the skin around his left thumb, again looked longingly at the sherry decanter. He hadn’t known what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t this. He fleetingly wondered whether it was treasonable to suggest that the King’s consort was past it in terms of her reproductive capacity. There also remained the possibility that if, heaven forbid, Her Majesty should die, the King could remarry. That almost unthinkable scenario could result in a son.

‘Let me replenish your drink, Professor,’ the King offered, rising to his feet. ‘This isn’t going to g- get any easier for either of us.’

A bewildered Eustace accepted a second glassful with humble gratitude, even though his usually clear head was already spinning. It was a more generous measure than the one poured by a footman, before the servant had discretely withdrawn.

His host continued. ‘Let’s approach this by c- c- continuing with our example from the last century. If Wi- Wi- William had lived on to a ripe old age, when would Victoria have been declared heir apparent?’

‘I’m not entirely sure that would ever have happened, Sir. Until his death, the possibility of his fathering another child would have remained.’

‘Even if his queen reached her dotage by then?’

Eustace was reluctant to say more, and there was an uncomfortable silence, which His Majesty broke.

‘Ah, I think I see what you mean. So let us return to the present circumstances. There’s never been any woman in my life, other than my dear wife. And nor, I can assure you, would there ever be<sup>11</sup>. My younger daughter is eighteen. So where does that leave us?’

In just about the most embarrassing situation any person could find themselves, thought the professor. In the absence of any mention of the Queen’s undergoing what would have coyly been described as ‘an abdominal procedure’, he was fairly sure that she had not had a hysterectomy. So how could he possibly enquire into Her Majesty’s fertility? Or, indeed, Their Majesties’ private relationship? One didn’t venture anywhere near such matters with lifelong friends, let alone the sovereign.

18TH NOVEMBER 1948

**DEPTFORD HIGH STREET, SOUTH LONDON**

Lil tucked a gloved hand under her sister Peggy's arm, as the two set off home.

'Thank Gawd for that,' she said. 'You'd fink people were stockin' up for an invasion, instead of just a couple of days. I've never known it so busy on a Fursday.'

'Bedlam,' Peggy agreed. 'The 'ole world's gonna be gettin' vases<sup>12</sup> for Christmas, the rate I was sellin' 'em. Did you get a box of those glass baubles Mum wanted?'

'No. They'd run outta the assorted small ones by the time I 'ad a moment to meself. She said not to bovva if they only 'ad medium or large.'

'Four years ago, 'ood 'ave fought we'd be buyin' ornaments made by the Japs? I got 'er some of that shiny lametta stuff though. Now all we need is a tree. Dad should never of chucked that artificial one out.'

'It was almost bald, but I s'pose it would 'ave done annuva turn. Gawd knows where we're gonna get a proper tree from.'

'The market 'ad plenty, Peg.'

'Yes, but they was all too big to fit on the side table. I bet there's loads of nice littluns at Windsor Castle, what wiv that 'uge estate an' all.'

Lily and Peggy Faulkner both worked at Woolworths on Deptford High Street<sup>13</sup>. Peggy was on glassware and china, and Lil dodged between the broken biscuits and sweets counters. They'd have preferred their jobs the other way round. Peggy had the better head for figures, which you needed for weighing out sweets and dealing with ration books.

‘Are you seein’ your Terry tonight?’ Peggy asked.

‘Yeah, but we’re not goin’ out or anyfin’. I’m too knackered. Run off me feet today. All I want to do is soak ’em in a bowl of ’ot water for a few hours.’

‘I was busy too,’ said Peggy. Not to be outdone, she added, ‘And didn’t get a wink of sleep last night, what wiv your snorin’ and that blessed baby next door screamin’ ’is lungs out. ’ow come you didn’t ’ear ’im?’

‘Dunno. Clear conscience I s’pose.’ Lil could have bitten off her tongue, but the words were out and the damage was done. Peggy went rigid, shook off her sister’s hand and stomped ahead.

‘Don’t be like that.’ Lil hurried to catch up. ‘I didn’t mean it. And it wasn’t your fault.’

They walked in silence. Next-door’s baby could be heard from the end of their street.

‘I bet Princess Elizabeth doesn’t ’ave that problem,’ said Lil. ‘Prob’ly ’as a nursery miles away and a ton of nannies to look after the new prince.’ To her relief, Peggy turned and smiled. These huffs weren’t frequent and never lasted long. Even so, it was a worry to her family that they happened at all, after such a long time.

‘Remember when we sent our clothin’ coupons for ’er weddin’ dress?’

‘Us and the ’ole world. But it was nice, that letter we got. Somefin’ to treasure for ever.’

The sisters had always felt a close association with the King and Queen’s daughters. They were almost the same age as the princesses and, with a bit of a stretch of the imagination, shared the same names. ‘Lil’, actually short for Lillian, was similar to Elizabeth’s family nickname of Lilibet, and Peggy was a form of Margaret. They even imagined they looked like their idols. They studied the latest royal photographs and slavishly curled and styled their dark hair accordingly.

There were a few lifestyle differences. The ‘palace’ in which they lived was a two-up, two-down terrace on Stanford Street<sup>14</sup>, which, unlike others further along, had blessedly escaped the bombings. The house did at least have the luxury of a bathroom. Their parents were called Ron and Joyce. During the war, instead of being inspirational figureheads, Ron worked the river and Joyce had done a three-year stint at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich. In the First World War, she would probably have worked with TNT and been a ‘canary girl’<sup>15</sup>, but the explosive filling there had ceased in 1940, and she was employed instead on making shells. Ron had made her give up when a metal filing lodged in her eye, almost blinding her.

In common with almost every young woman in the country, the sisters thought that Princess Elizabeth’s husband, Prince Phillip of Greece, was wildly attractive. Peggy, especially, often declared that she ‘wouldn’t say no to a bit of that’. Lil, who was courting, felt that to echo such remarks would be a bit disloyal, though she did agree that the Duke of Edinburgh was a rather dashing and romantic figure.



# 2

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18TH NOVEMBER 1948

## HYDE PARK

He had declined the offer of a chauffeur-driven ride to his Bayswater home, in the hope that the gas-lit tranquillity of Hyde Park would soothe his worries. He could still not quite believe that the recent conversation had actually taken place and felt a deep sense of foreboding. ‘I knew you were the right man for the job’ had been His Majesty’s final shot, as the two men parted company.

No matter how often he mentally went through it, the professor still couldn’t work out how the course of the dialogue might have been channelled in a different, and less disturbing, direction.

Back in that sweltering room, and just as the academic was about to drown in the depths of discomfiture, the King had unexpectedly laughed. ‘Are you a married man?’

Eustace nodded.

‘Well then, let me put you out of your misery. It’s been many months since Her Majesty – well, I’m sure I need go no further into the mysteries of women’s concerns. So shall we put that to one side? There’s no real precedent for simply creating a

Princess of Wales. Is that what you're telling me?

'Absolutely,' declared Eustace, pleased to be back on safer territory. 'But, given the right circumstances, the idea is not inconceivable.' (Damn! Unfortunate pun!) He added a hasty proviso: 'Should such unlikely circumstances ever arise.'

'So, in that case, what are the legalities about Princes of Wales, now I have a grandson?'

'Yes, Sir. May I offer my hearty congratulations on that happy event?'

The King beamed with pride. 'Indeed you may. It's not yet been announced, but he's to be named Charles. So tell me, has a statute concerning the title ever been passed?'

'No, Sir. The principle has been established over the years by virtue of a tradition dating back to 1301 and the reign of Edward I. The body of constitutional law is a complicated mixture of customary law, conventions, statutory law and so on.'

(Don't talk down to the King, Heggarty reminded himself.)

'I'm sure you are very well aware of this, Sir. Before we go any further, the exact status of some traditions might forever remain uncertain, simply because they're never challenged. Even if they were, I could guarantee that there would be almost as many differing opinions as there are legal experts and academics. Some would argue that, for traditions to acquire the status of law *sui generis*, there must be a test of recognition.' Eustace stopped abruptly. He was in lecture mode.<sup>1</sup>

'My apologies, Sir. It's always a sign that I've rambled on too long when I start introducing the Latin. To briefly summarise, it's all extremely complex, and it has taken me decades of study to reach my present level of incomprehension.'

“The law is an ass”, eh? I believe we have Charles Dickens to thank for that particular wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Eustace, pleased to note that the King had lost his stammer, considered it prudent not to correct His Majesty.

‘Indeed it is. The Easter Act, passed by Parliament as recently as 1928, has since been totally ignored as a means of calculating when Easter should fall. In favour, I might add, of the method first established by the Christian church some sixteen hundred years earlier.’

‘Perhaps I should explain my, or rather our, thinking on the matter in hand.’

Noting the well-disguised rebuke, Eustace gave his brain a mental kick for shooting off at a tangent.

‘Her Majesty is very keen to lay to rest the ghost of my predecessor, a former Prince of Wales and, all too briefly, a former king. He didn’t exactly live up to his *‘Ich dien’* motto<sup>3</sup>, in that he singularly failed to serve. My wife’s got a bit of a bee in her bonnet about it, but we are both in agreement that a new prince or princess of the principality would help to expunge that whole sorry abdication business. I don’t suppose there are any loopholes we might exploit?’

Eustace took no longer than a second to process the basis of a possible challenge, then decided with equal speed against mentioning it.

‘There are none that would prove straightforward, Sir. Any debate on the subject is likely to take years and, at the end of it all, the outcome may not be the one you wish for.’

‘Well then, what about an Act of Parliament? I presume traditions can be altered by such means? Possibly on an exceptional basis?’

‘Undoubtedly, Sir. For example, male-preference primogeniture, only implied in statute, is one such ingrained tradition that could, in theory, be changed in that way.’<sup>4</sup>

‘I can’t envisage that ever happening.’

‘Neither can I,’ the professor agreed.

‘Though a change to absolute primogeniture would have spared us the present debate. You know, I always found it odd that, had Margaret been a boy, she would have overtaken

Princess Elizabeth in the line of succession. Even as a four-year-old, my older daughter was a monarch in the making. My late father certainly recognised it. She always had that strong sense of commitment and applied it to everything she did. But things are as they are, and I suppose I would have got used to it.'

'May I ask about the timing of any move you might be considering, Sir?'

'I was thinking about my birthday next month, as a sort of very special personal gift to myself – and to the Queen, of course. It would cheer her up immensely. She's a little under the weather at present.'

Heggarty, a kindly man, felt desperately sorry for His Majesty, who had valiantly assumed a role to which he was entirely unsuited. With an unfailing sense of duty, he'd succeeded both in restoring the popularity of a teetering monarchy and in bolstering the nation's morale during six years of war. The challenge had taken its toll.

'I wish there were a clearer way forward, Sir.'

'I should know this, but do Princes of Wales have to have reached a particular age before they can receive the title?'

'No. Your grandfather – ' (Eustace just managed to avoid saying 'Edward VII'; there was no need to remind the King who his grandfather was!) ' – was only a month old when it was bestowed upon him. Indeed, the future George III was just a week old.'

'That's something, I suppose. I know Acts of Parliament take a while to go through the process, but can they be retrospective?'<sup>5</sup>

In favour of brevity, Heggarty dismissed another Latin phrase that came to mind. 'In some exceptional circumstances, yes, it has happened.'

'So what are my options, Professor?'

'As I see it, there are three possibilities. The first two are

better avoided, because both would require some form of, er, regularisation. Firstly, you could create, as Princess of Wales, Her Royal Highness The Princess Elizabeth. This would, as things stand, be both unconventional and unconstitutional. Secondly, you could bestow the title upon Prince Charles. At present, that's again unconstitutional. He will, in the fullness of time, become first in line and certain to succeed, thereby becoming eligible.' Eustace added a hasty, 'But not, God willing, for many years to come.'

Relieved to have uttered the afterthought, the academic continued. 'Thirdly, and by far the most prudent course, would be to wait. At the very least, ask Tommy to informally sound out his fellow Privy Counsellors –'<sup>6</sup>

Heggarty was interrupted. 'And what do you suggest?'

It was clear to Eustace that, by ignoring the strong steer given in favour of option three, the King had already reached a decision.

'So what you're saying is that, by acting in favour of Charles, this would only amount to being somewhat premature?'

'That appears to sum it up, Sir,' Eustace warily agreed.

'I'm not, by nature, an impulsive man, Professor. Nor have I ever been known for being the most decisive. But on this matter I am inclined to the belief that it would be far easier to seek forgiveness rather than to ask permission,' declared His Majesty.<sup>7</sup> 'My mind is made up. By way of endorsement, I shall tell the Privy Council what you've advised and what is therefore to happen. I'm sure I'll be able to out-stand any of them!'

The sovereign always stood at Privy Council meetings, which meant that no one else could sit down. This usually ensured that proceedings didn't last long. Eustace felt his heart plummet. Why hadn't he been more assertive?

'The necessary letters patent<sup>8</sup> will be produced by the Crown Office and, if needs be, a retrospective Act must be passed,' continued His Majesty, now in full and completely articulate

flow. 'I'm sure, once a *fait accompli* has been presented, the whole thing can be resolved. There will certainly be no problem with royal assent, should that be required!'

A troubled Eustace abandoned the path by the Serpentine and began to head diagonally across Kensington Gardens. To his left, he could see the lit windows of Kensington Palace. Would Tommy be at home? Would he be receptive to an unexpected visitor on a dark late-autumn evening? More to the point, how could the matter possibly be broached, given that the King had deliberately excluded his private secretary?

The professor shoved his hands more deeply into his coat pockets and dismissed the idea. He attempted instead to focus on reaching the sanctuary of his own home, where he most definitely wouldn't be sharing with his wife of twenty years any of the astonishing confidences to which he'd been party. Edith was no gossip, but who knew what she might let slip. When she asked what the King wanted to see him about, he would tell her that it was to do with a minor legal technicality, then start spouting Latin. That would ensure she'd seek no further explanation.

By the time he reached Porchester Gardens, the backfriend on the edge of his left thumb nail was bleeding – something which hadn't happened since second-year geography lessons.

On Tuesday 14th December 1948, King George VI marked his fifty-third birthday by bestowing upon his new grandson the title of Prince of Wales. The following day, the child was baptised Charles Phillip Arthur George by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Aside from a handful of nationalists and republicans, the news that they had a new prince of their own was well received by the Welsh, and joyously so in some parts. The *Western Mail* pronounced that the country was 'now again a Principality, in the true sense of the word' but did, however, view as disappointing the fact that none of their prince's names was Welsh.<sup>9</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

On learning of this, the Duke of Edinburgh asked why Arthur, being of Celtic origin, was not sufficient, adding, 'We should have spelt Charles' second name with a couple of 'y's.'<sup>10</sup>

# 3

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15TH DECEMBER 1948

## WINDSOR CASTLE

Once the christening was over, the family moved to Windsor Castle, where they would be spending Christmas.

Four days later, after dinner, the King quietly asked his daughters to go to the drawing room and wait. There was something he and Mummy wanted to discuss with them. The two princesses obliged.

‘What do you think is going on?’ asked Margaret. ‘It isn’t as if we haven’t just spent more than an hour with them. And why just us? It must be something serious, and I don’t like it. Gilliatt was here this morning.’

The Princess was referring to Sir William Gilliatt, gynaecologist to the royal household.

‘That’s because he came to see me,’ Elizabeth said, ‘and all’s well.’

‘Well he saw Mummy, too.’

‘But not Papa?’ Elizabeth was anxious.

‘Not as far as I know. Why would he? Oh oh. Here they come.’

The King and Queen entered the drawing room, and the small family were soon comfortably settled beside a roaring fire, with the girls sharing a sofa, opposite their parents.



‘Just like old times,’ commented George, lighting a cigarette. Margaret followed suit. ‘Only, it would seem, things are about to change.’

For a moment, Elizabeth panicked, fearful that Mummy was seriously ill. But, if that were the case, Papa wouldn’t be smiling. Nobody about to impart bad news would be looking so pleased.

The King patted his wife’s hand and coughed. ‘I have some rather marvellous news. “We four” are about to become “we five”’

There was a pause as his daughters tried to absorb the implications of what he had just said.

Margaret was the first to find her voice. ‘No. Surely not! When? How?’

The King laughed. ‘There would appear to be something of a gap in your education, Margaret. I admit it was a bit of a shock, but we’re not exactly past it. As to the when, well quite soon apparently – in a couple of months’ time.’

‘How could you not know, Mummy? How could you both do this to us?’

Their mother, rather hesitantly, began the delicate explanation. This was not a subject area commonly or easily discussed.

‘I mistook the, er, signs,’ she said, reddening. ‘I just thought, well, at my time of life, there was a much more obvious reason. But, according to William, this can and does happen more often than people might think. He told me about some island in the Pacific where it’s by no means uncommon for women over fifty to have babies.’

Margaret interrupted. ‘We don’t live on an island in the Pacific, Mummy. We live on a chilly island in the north Atlantic. For heaven’s sake, you’re a grandmother. Charles will have an aunt or uncle who’s younger than he is.’

‘Then he will soon have a ready-made playmate of his own

age. Think how lovely that will be,' said the Queen, beaming.

'Did Sir William say anything else, Mummy? I mean about how you are and how he expects the delivery to go? Will it take place at the palace? Or would a hospital perhaps be less risky?' asked Elizabeth.

'I'm sure the palace will be perfectly adequate. The Buhl Room was kitted out for you. It may still be, for all I know. It can be again, if everything has already been removed. He did mention having a backup team of paediatricians present and some extra equipment, just in case they're needed, though I really don't see why they should be.'

'You don't look pregnant,' argued Margaret.

'I shall by tomorrow. I simply thought I was putting on weight. What do they call it? Middle-aged spread? So I took to wearing very strong corsets, but I'm now told that they must go immediately, in case they constrict the baby's growth.'

'Didn't you have any suspicions at all?' Margaret's voice was a mixture of bewilderment and accusation.

'I was beginning to. That's why I requested Sir William to look in on me. But it was still a bit of a shock.'

'That must be the understatement of the decade,' commented the younger princess grimly. Then her mood suddenly switched. 'Ha ha, Elizabeth. Just think, if the baby's a boy, you won't ever be queen! We'll both just end up as pair of spare sisters.'

The King's high spirits seemed to have evaporated somewhat. 'We'll just have to wait and see who arrives. The most important thing is that he or she is strong and healthy, and that your mother gets through it all safely. Nothing else signifies.'

Margaret leant forward to stub out her second cigarette of the session and stood up. 'Good job the Australian tour was cancelled, even though I was looking forward to it,' she said as she left the room.

Elizabeth remained only long enough to tell her parents that she was genuinely delighted ‘for all of us’ and that she was sure everything would go smoothly, because there was no reason why it shouldn’t. Sir William was highly regarded and would ensure the attendance of people with the requisite skills to cover every eventuality.

As she went to seek out Phillip, the weight of destiny, which had been resting on her shoulders for so long, felt a little lighter.<sup>1</sup>

‘What was that little confab all about?’ asked the Duke of Edinburgh. His wife told him. His response to the news was complete silence. For at least a minute, he didn’t utter a single syllable, after which came the admission, ‘Words fail me.’

‘It will probably take a while to get used to the idea.’

‘By the sound of it, we don’t have that long. A couple of months, you say?’

‘Apparently.’

‘Which just about sums things up. A boy would become heir apparent.’

‘Everyone’s already worked that one out, Phillip. You may not be married to the future Queen of England after all.’

‘Would it surprise you to know I’d find that a relief?’

‘No, because I’m already starting to feel the same way myself.’

‘Isn’t there another serious matter to consider? Charles holds the title of Prince of Wales, even though he doesn’t qualify. One short week ago that probably wouldn’t have mattered, because it had not yet been announced and there might have been a chance of backtracking. But what now?’

‘If there’s a little sister on the way, it won’t be a problem. But if it’s a brother, I have no idea, except that it might well give rise to a ghastly constitutional muddle. I’d ask Papa but, firstly, he probably doesn’t know either and, secondly, he may well say, “Let’s cross that bridge if we come to it.”’

JANUARY 1949

## BUCKINGHAM PALACE

There were five of them in the sitting room. Six, if you counted the one whose birth was now imminent. This forthcoming obstetric event had not been publicly announced, though a number of engagements had had to be cancelled on minor pretexts.

Saying first that it didn't matter to her on a personal basis, Princess Elizabeth had raised the question of Charles' title with her father. His reply had not been a model of elucidation.

'I'm sure someone will be able to sort it out. A new statute or something, to clarify what already appears to be a legal uncertainty. In retrospect, I'm afraid I did act a little hastily, but Charles will retain his title. It might result in even more of a mess if I have to rescind something so recently bestowed. Besides, any brother of yours would have plenty of titles in his own right from the moment he's born – Cornwall for one. An heir apparent doesn't have to be made Prince of Wales. Of that much I am absolutely sure.'

With that subject clarified as far as it was ever going to be, the King and Queen, the two princesses and the Duke of Edinburgh had now convened to discuss possible names for the coming child.

'We definitely need to recognise the Welsh somewhere,' said the King. 'We should include David.'

'Absolutely not!' declared his wife. 'Never!'

Elizabeth and Margaret looked at each other, knowing full well the strength of their mother's feelings towards Uncle David, now Duke of Windsor, whose decision to abdicate had propelled

their shy and unassuming Papa onto the throne. Mummy's feelings of resentment ran high and increased a further notch every time their father's health gave rise to renewed concern. Some ill feeling was directed towards the Duchess of Windsor, the twice-divorced American Mrs Simpson, whom she referred to as 'the lowest of the low' or as 'that woman.' There was always an unspoken venomous adjective sitting between the two spat-out words. But, to an even greater extent, the Queen's bitterness was directed towards her brother-in-law. She hadn't forgiven the former king, and nor was she ever likely to.

The princesses did, in fact, have a second Uncle David – their mother's beloved younger brother. But the Queen's fondness for her sibling was trumped by an anger directed elsewhere, so still failed to carry the day.

'I would, however, like the names of two of my other brothers included. Patrick –'

'That neatly ticks off Ireland,' Phillip observed.

'– and Fergus, naturally.'

'Another nod to the Irish,' Margaret said, siding with the Duke in an attempt to lighten the mood. The conversation was threatening to become too serious. 'And to the Scots as well.'

'Fergus certainly,' the King agreed, remembering his wedding day and the moment when his bride had unexpectedly paused to lay her bouquet on the grave of the Unknown Warrior. It had been a poignant tribute to a brother who'd sacrificed his life in the Great War. He chuckled quietly as he also recalled that, much to his relief, the marriage service was not allowed to be broadcast because, as noted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'men in pubs might listen with their hats on.'

Everyone agreed that George would be fitting. But Albert was rejected, even though it was the King's first name and, as such, was used in its alternative form of 'Bertie' within the family. The King's grandfather, Edward VII, had been baptised Albert Edward but, probably predictably, had chosen to reject

his father's name. This was contrary to his mother's dearest wishes, and in all likelihood, she would not have been amused. Edward VIII could have elected to adopt it, but hadn't done so. The conclusion was that it didn't seem to have an especially monarchical sound to it.

'Alfred would fit the bill better,' suggested Phillip. 'That's if we're looking for an "Al" of any sort. Or maybe Alan's more modern?' This earned him a glare from the Queen.

Frederick was considered but, as a regnal name, it had already been taken by Denmark.

Having made what seemed like a reasonable start, they turned to girls' names, a subject upon which the King seemed surprisingly well informed. The truth was that, following his meeting with Heggarty some two months earlier, George had realised that his knowledge of British royalty was sadly lacking. In addition, he hadn't liked any of his wife's suggestions for a third daughter. Mainly drawn from amongst the Bowes-Lyon clan, these had included Violet and Cecilia.

Rose, the name of one of the Queen's sisters, had already been given to Margaret. In consequence, he'd decided to do a bit of preparatory research, ahead of this little conference.

He started by offering Matilda, as someone who would have been a queen had she not been usurped by her cousin Stephen. Next, he tried Eleanor, which had cropped up a few times throughout history. Alexandra was rejected: not only was it Princess Elizabeth's second given name but, more significantly, it had also been bestowed upon the late Duke of Kent's daughter. Charlotte, George IV's heir, who had tragically died in childbirth, remained in the frame, as did Mary in honour of the present King George's mother. The Queen Dowager had been invited to join the discussion, but had declined without giving a reason. She didn't have to give a reason.

The other seven of Queen Mary's generous complement of names were considered in turn. Victoria, Augusta, Louise,

Olga, Pauline, Claudine and Agnes. Margaret quite liked Louise and Pauline, but Olga sounded too Russian, and look what was going on there! Elizabeth thought Augusta might have been suitable had the baby been due to arrive in that month. Going back a further generation produced the option of Adelaide. The Queen thought it inappropriate to name a princess after an Australian city. Her husband reminded her that the city had been named after a queen. He went on to say that William IV's wife also gave rise to the possibilities of Amelia, Louise (again), Theresa and Caroline.

His Majesty strongly favoured his first suggestions – Matilda and Eleanor. Charlotte, along with the twice-mentioned Louise, emerged as contenders, but nothing was firmly decided upon.

'I suppose Wallis is out of the question?' said Phillip, earning another fierce look from his mother-in-law.

On Monday 14th February 1949, an announcement from Buckingham Palace told the world that the 48-year-old Queen had been safely delivered of a prince.

As heir to the throne, he automatically assumed the titles of Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, and Prince and Great Steward of Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

The new prince would forever miss out on the Prince of Wales, plus the associated Earl of Chester titles, because these had already been bestowed upon his nephew.

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'What do you fink of these, Peggy?'

Lil laid out her purchases on the eiderdown.

'Very nice, but 'ow many more tea towels are you gonna

need? That bottom drawer of yours is stuffed full already, and Terry ain't even popped the question yet.'

'He will, and 'e sent me that lovely Valentine's card,' Lil said confidently. 'We've bin goin' steady for two years now. 'e's done his national service<sup>3</sup>, so what's to stop us?'

Doreen Carmichael might, thought Peggy, as she plonked down on her bed. Today hadn't been busy, so there'd been time to stop and chat. Sometimes she thought that people came into Woolies more to gossip than to actually buy anything. That morning, Mrs Bailey had asked, in a confidential whisper and with the occasional covert glance in the direction of broken biscuits, whether Lil and Terry had split up. He'd been seen canoodling with another girl. Peggy sincerely hoped that the tale had been embroidered and that there was an innocent explanation, but Doreen had a reputation for being easy. If the trollop ended up getting pregnant, Terry might well be forced into marrying her – like it or not. Shotgun weddings were far from uncommon in these parts, and the ugly cow was never likely to get a husband any other way.

Peggy didn't know how to broach the subject, but was denied the chance because, at that moment, the girls' mother burst into the room.

'You'll never guess,' Joyce said, 'It's just bin on the news. The Queen's 'ad a baby.'

'Never! You're windin' us up, Mum,' Lil exclaimed.

'onest to God, I'm not. It's a boy. Both doin' well.'

Peggy, all worries about her sister's threatened happiness banished from her mind, flopped backwards.

'ood 'ave fought it. At 'er age, too.'

'Does 'appen,' said Mrs Faulkner, patting her ample tummy. 'Only kiddin',' she laughed.

For want of anything else to do, the girls rushed downstairs, grabbed their coats and dashed out into the street. Everyone, it seemed, had had the same idea. Words were tumbling out of



mouths, barely heard by ears, let alone processed by brains. It all seemed too much to take in. Snippets registered. What a right turn-up for the books! Nobody had known the Queen was pregnant. Well, they wouldn't, would they? Just in case something went wrong. Mrs Salmon from the fish shop was also expecting, and she must be fifty if she was a day. These change-of-life babies did happen. Prince Charles should never have been made Prince of Wales. A right old hoo-hah that was going to cause. Fancy that pretty Princess Elizabeth not being heir any more. She'd have made a lovely queen one of these days.

Just before she switched off the bedside lamp, Lil was musing about whether the King and Queen shared the same bedroom.

'They must've done at some point,' declared Peggy, 'but I bet they 'ave their own rooms as well, in a palace that size. Perhaps they even 'ave their own bathrooms.'

'Bet they 'ave plenty of 'ot water, too. It was all used up by the time I got a look-in this mornin'.

'I 'ope Mum was just windin' us up earlier on. D'you fink they still do it?'

'oo?'

'Mum and Dad.'

'If they do, it's to be 'oped they use a Johnny. Last fink we want is another kiddie. Thered be nowhere to put it. We ain't got enuff room as it is.'

'We'd 'ave to get bunk beds. Baggy me the top bunk!'

Lil giggled.