

DAISY WAUGH

SOLD
SCHOOL
STILES



PIATKUS

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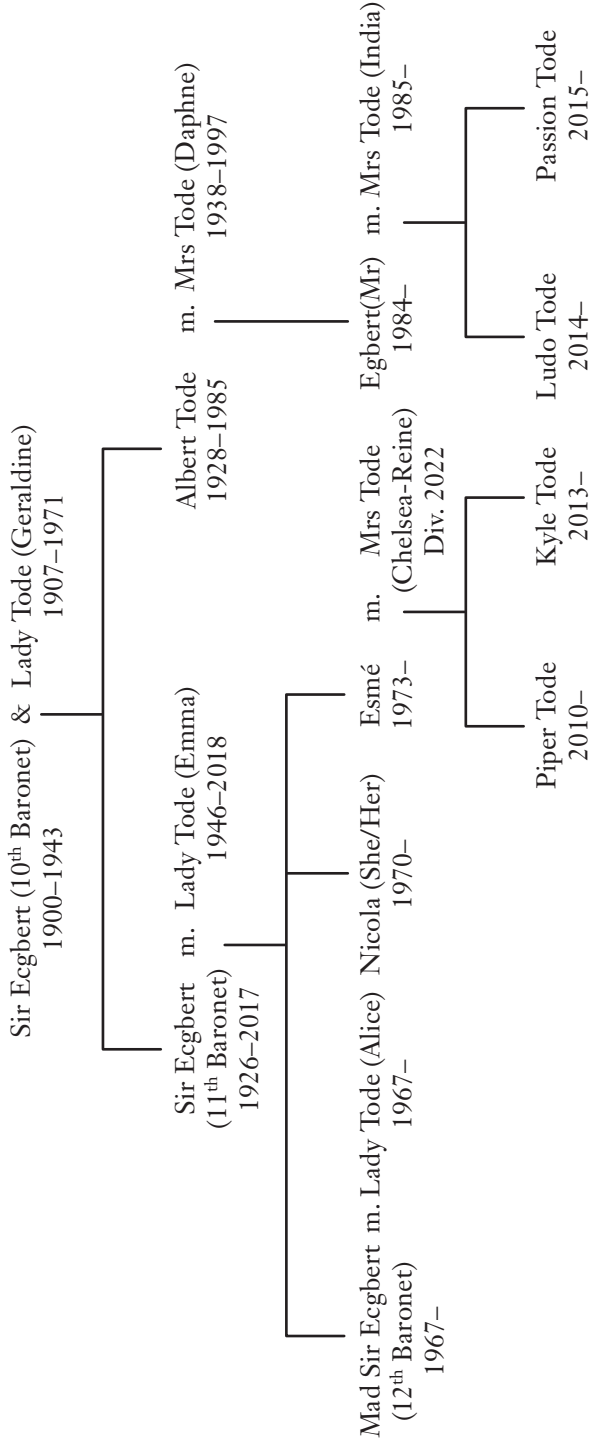
For Peter
with my love



Alium Dime in Jukebox Pone



THE
TODE FAMILY TREE



AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE GARDENS OF NINFA AND THE FICTIONAL GARDENS AT ROSPO NEL BUCO

The gardens at Rospo are geographically and historically based on the Gardens of Ninfa in Lazio, Italy, which are magical, open to the public and easily reached from Rome. I highly recommend a visit.

Built around clear-water springs and the ruins of an ancient city, the city of Ninfa was sacked in 1369 and never quite recovered. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ninfa was transformed into a pleasure garden by English aristocrats. Gardeners working there today still occasionally dig up human bones.

Leonardo da Vinci, of many talents, was sent to the crumbling city of Ninfa by the Duke of Milan to do something about the drainage. It was one of the many tasks he never saw through to the end.

I should add that although the gardens at Rospo are very much inspired by the Gardens of Ninfa, all the characters in my novel and the events that take place are, of course, a product of my imagination.



TODE HALL

YORKSHIRE
ENGLAND

A NICE DAY IN OCTOBER



INDIA TODE'S BEDROOM

8.41 A.M.

‘Well, I must say, Munchie – one thing I will say. We’re jolly lucky with the weather. *What a day!*’ Egbert Tode(Mr), handsome, fit and dressed for sport, gazed in gratitude and wonder over the landscaped parklands of Tode Hall, recently voted ‘Britain’s Eleventh Most Interesting Stately Home’ by the Chinese travel website Wanakhe Zen-Hao! (spelt here phonetically). Egbert’s beautiful wife, India, was sitting up in bed, drinking coffee, and Egbert spoke to her from their adjoining dressing room. His was very much the sort of voice that carried.

‘Amazing for October,’ she replied.

Egbert confirmed this.

‘A perfect autumn day,’ added India.

‘A perfectly perfect autumn day! Crisp and bright. Amazing stuff! We really are lucky. Don’t you think, Munch?’

‘It could almost be Italy,’ India declared obligingly.

‘Yet here we are, in boring old “rainy” Yorkshire ... Lucky us!’

A similar conversation took place between Egbert(Mr) and his wife every morning that it wasn't raining: so at least one morning a week in the summer. Egbert was conscious that life in a massive house in the middle of boring old Yorkshire could be dull for a vivacious woman like India. She was the sort of girl who liked parties and suntans, and Tode Hall, though grand and very spacious, offered neither. With its three restaurants, two cafes, two tourist shops, its twenty-five holiday cottages and forty-six other cottages, its 15,000 acres of fertile farmland, its grouse shoot, pheasant shoot, its archery school, its slowly dilapidating Grade-1-listed mausoleum, its twelve reception rooms (not counting the Great Hall or the Long Gallery) and twenty-seven bedrooms, its pottery arcade, its 'Keep off the Grass' signs, its burglar alarm systems, its 138 pasty-faced estate staff – not to mention its recent influx of tourists from the Orient . . . life as the mistress of Tode Hall offered money and status. And politeness and duty. Egbert(Mr) worried his wife was bored.

She was, a little, too – despite the occasional dramas: two unrelated murders since she and her husband took up residence four years ago; and yet another murder only four months back, which was still to be solved – '*If*,' as Egbert(Mr) like to remind India, or anyone else who was listening, '*if*, indeed, it actually *was* murder.'

Which it was, by the way. Even *if* there was still no evidence to prove it. No obvious bruises. Not a trace of chemicals in the body. Nothing. Egbert(Mr) was relieved that the June murder, though it had taken place on important Tode property, did not, at least, take place at Tode Hall – or even in Yorkshire. The victim's body was found in the famous garden of the Villa Rospo at Rospo nel Buco, about a half-hour south of Rome

(added to the Tode portfolio, via marriage, in 1906), and its discovery had wrecked everyone's holiday. They'd all had to pack up and come home.

But Egbert(Mr) worried too much. Yes, his wife was a little bored, hidden away in boring old rainy Yorkshire. For example – last week – she'd been obliged to host a tea party in the Yellow Drawing Room for seventeen road safety compliance officers from Yorks-Central County Council, to thank them for not obstructing a project involving the Todeister by-pass, and a small turning which would better facilitate coach access to the Hall via the East drive . . . *Wow*, that was boring.

On the other hand, four and a half years ago she and her husband had been living a fairly ordinary, upper-middle-class life in a terraced house in Wandsworth, London.

The Surprise Elevation – the call from Egbert(Mr)'s recently widowed aunt to take over the reins at Tode Hall – had not been 100 per cent quarrel-free. For example, there had been a murder. But luckily that was now in the past. Today, on the whole, with one or two exceptions, people seemed to accept the situation for what it was. Egbert(Mr), who was a decent man and did a good job running Hall and estate, never stopped thanking his lucky stars.

India might well have preferred a more urban existence. But she understood that in life, even in a life as blessed as her own, there needed to be trade-offs . . . and what with the ponies, rowing boats, mausoleums, attics, outhouses, etc., there could be no better playground for her and Egbert to raise their young children, Ludo (8) and Passion (7). Also (not that she'd ever been poor), she was *very* rich nowadays. With so much money and hired help on tap, suntans and parties were never terribly difficult to come by.

In the meantime, the weekend ahead offered potential for some intrigue, at least. Four months after the unsolved murder in the gardens at Rospo nel Buco there was to be a weekend house party: a party that Egbert(Mr)'s older cousin, Ecgbert(Sir), insisted on referring to as 'the Reunion of the Suspects'.

Staying at the Hall this morning and already making their way towards breakfast, was every one of the guests who had been present when the murdered body was discovered floating in the cool, clear waters of the Rospo on that fateful night in June.



Egbert(Mr)'s mind turned from the beauties of the morning to the duties of the day ahead, and for a moment his pleasure dimmed. There was a pheasant shoot scheduled, starting later in the morning than Egbert(Mr) thought appropriate, but there was nothing he could do. Control of this particular weekend house party had slipped from his grasp more or less since its inception – or before then, even, since he'd never wanted the weekend to happen in the first place. He blamed his cousin Esmé.

He left the dressing room and wandered across to the end of his wife's bed. A luxurious, modern divan: it was the only modern piece of furniture in the house. When they moved to Tode Hall India had insisted, amid much local-expert tutting, on dismantling the monumental eighteenth-century four-poster which had stood in the room since rain first fell in Yorkshire, and replacing it with her own bed from Wandsworth.

She lay on it now, propped up by pillows, sipping coffee delivered to the bedroom door by Mr Carfizzi, the butler, and by Egbert(Mr), the husband, from the door to the bed.

Egbert said: ‘I’m still not sure quite how we got corralled into this ruddy weekend, Munchie. It’s a bit ghoulish, isn’t it? I’d much rather we just sort of *got on* with everything and forgot about the murder, like we normally do. It’s going to be awfully tense.’

‘Oh, come on, it’ll be interesting!’ replied India. ‘Where’s your sense of mystery, Eggzie?’

Egbert thought that was a silly question. He didn’t reply.

‘Alice says she thinks it was Piers who did it,’ India continued. ‘Alice doesn’t like Piers *one bit*. Never has . . . But that would be *too* obvious, wouldn’t it? Seeing as Piers was married to her. And also shagging her sister—’

‘We don’t actually *know* that.’

‘Oh my goodness, Eggzie, *yes we do!*’

‘Not for sure. Also—’

‘Anyway, personally, I think it was that creepy little kid with the funny name. There’s definitely something weird about him.’

‘Tippee,’ said Egbert(Mr). ‘Tippee Tysedale. Munchie, it’s a bit much to go around accusing young children of murder, just because they’ve got funny names. It’s not really on . . .’

‘You’re telling me it’s not really on,’ India said. ‘Anyway, *somebody* did it. We better hope it wasn’t you-know-who . . . She’s got the track record, after all.’

‘Nicola?’

‘Your lovely cousin, Nicola Tode. Yep.’

‘*Munchie!*’

‘I don’t know what they did to her in the Arizona Nut

House but whatever it was, it didn't work. I don't want to be horrid – but she's actually *more* bonkers than she was before she went in. Don't you think so?'

'Shhh!' Egbert(Mr) glanced at the door. 'Honestly, seriously, Munch. *Seriously* . . .'

'Maybe it wasn't her, anyway . . . It could've been any one of them, frankly,' India continued, unperturbed. 'That's the fun of it.' She stretched. It was time to get up. 'And I'm looking forward to getting to the bottom of it, even if you aren't.'

'Of course I'm looking forward, Munchie!'

'Even Alice is quite psyched, and she never gets psyched about anything. And Mad Egbert's been making *tons* of notes. It's going to be *fun*. For heaven's sake, Eggzie-Peggz, *live* a little! Stop worrying so much!'

Eggzie-Peggz(Mr) looked doubly forlorn. 'I don't mean to be a killjoy, Munch, I really don't. I'm just feeling a bit . . .' He was not well trained in putting words to his feelings. ' . . . It's not about the murder, Munch, honestly, it's . . . I suppose I just feel a bit *got at* . . . It just feels a bit like everyone wants a piece of one . . . Do you know what I mean?'

'Well,' replied India, who didn't really know what he meant, 'that's what happens when you have so many pieces.'

He didn't know what she meant by that. Neither did she. No one understood what anyone meant, and in any case, it was time to join the guests for breakfast.

Time to crack on. Egbert(Mr) wondered which of the guests he dreaded seeing most. His cousin Esmé, probably. Lately just the thought of Esmé made Egbert's heart sink.



Five years ago, shortly after the death of his father, the 11th Baronet Tode of Todeister – see The Tode Family Tree on page x, Esmé Tode had been asked by his mother, the 11th Baronet’s widow, to abandon a successful life in Australia and take up the reins at Tode Hall. She wanted him to step in for his older brother, Mad Egbert(Sir), now the 12th Bart, who was assumed correctly by everyone not to be up to the job. Esmé had refused.

But how things can change! The bat/non-bat virus, whose name shall never darken these pages, had indirectly decimated a lot of things in Australia, among them Esmé’s affection for the country, his thriving Sydney-based luxury gym business, and his marriage to the Australian former model, Chelsea-Reine. Esmé had returned to the UK just three months ago, leaving everything behind him, including two much-loved children. He was currently living alone in a borrowed flat in South Kensington, putting on a brave face and trying to rebuild his life.

Esmé was broke: or at any rate, broke for a Tode of Todeister. Since returning to England he had been sniffing around Tode Hall in a way that made his cousin Egbert(Mr) feel very edgy indeed. It wasn’t that Egbert(Mr) didn’t sympathise with Esmé’s plight. There was no question Esmé had been hit with a run of extreme bad luck. *But even so . . .* somebody needed to make it clear to Esmé that as far as his inheritance was concerned, he really had, as Egbert(Mr) liked to put it when discussing the matter with his lawyers, ‘*missed the bus*’. As Egbert(Mr) often said to his lawyers, his wife, his biking friends: ‘Obviously I want to do what I can for my dear coz. In the circumstances, one is duty-bound . . . But I mean – you know – *within reason . . .*’

The weekend house party had been organised on Esmé's insistence. He said it would be good to reunite the holiday guests so they could 'blow the cobwebs off the horrid Villa Rospo situation' altogether. This made no sense to anyone, except to his nonsensical older brother, Mad Egbert(Sir) 12th Bart, who for reasons unknown to himself, or to anyone else, had latched on to the idea and would not let it drop. Once the two brothers had joined forces – and between them persuaded India that the weekend might be fun – there wasn't much Egbert(Mr) could do to stop it.

And so here they were. Entertaining a houseful of possible murderers, yet again. Egbert(Mr) wasn't stupid. Esmé didn't give a damn about holiday cobwebs at Villa Rospo or anywhere else. He and Charlie Tysedale (Tippee's father) had a business proposition to make. The three of them had a meeting scheduled before dinner tonight. And Egbert(Mr) was dreading it. *Dreading* it.

It so happened that he and Charlie Tysedale had been in the same house at Eton together, briefly. Charlie had been four years above him, and better at sport, better looking, better at all academic subjects and better at making friends. Also, quite unkind. This did not help.

In fact, reflected Egbert, the Reunion of the Suspects was quite the school reunion too. Esmé had been at Eton, though admittedly long before Egbert(Mr) ever got there. He and Charlie Tysedale had overlapped, though thankfully only by a single year . . . And bloody Piers Slayer-Wilson-Tite, who since the tragedy at Rospo had taken up residence in a cottage on the estate, had not only been in the same house at Eton, but the same year . . . Sometimes, Egbert reflected, there was no escape. No respite. Not from anything.

He looked at his wife. She liked to have a bath in the morning. It would be at least another hour before she was ready for the day.

‘Shall I wait?’ he said. ‘I think I’ll head on down.’

It was a large bedroom. A beautiful room with high ceilings and mahogany doors. Egbert(Mr) padded the 25 feet, across ancient Aubusson, from mid room to exit, pulled back the door, which opened onto what was meant to be a private landing, and walked slap into—

The dreaded Adele.

Like many men before him, Egbert(Mr) had tried and failed to find Mrs Tysedale attractive. There was no doubt she was pretty. Icy blonde. Neat. *Symmetrical*. Not a skin pore out of place. Maybe that was part of the problem? Adele Tysedale could have been aged anything from twenty-five to 163 years old. She could have been a vampire. In fact, she was forty-one, and human, and dressed, on this crisp October morning, in many careful layers of breathable exercise clothing: loose and *tight*, tight and *loose*, each article, hair accessory included, in a complementing shade of fawn.

‘Good morning, Adele!’

Adele looked put out. But not half as embarrassed as Egbert(Mr) did. He hoped she’d not overheard India accusing her young son Tippee of murder. That would have been pretty awful.

‘... How lovely to see you up here!’ he continued. ‘Are you lost?’

She said not. She said she was looking for young Tippee.

‘Ah, yes. Tippee Tysedale! The excellent Tippee!’ exclaimed Egbert fatuously. ‘I haven’t seen him, I’m afraid. But not to worry, he can’t have gone far. It’s not nine o’clock yet, so if he’d

tried to go outside, he would have set off one of the alarms. We'd have police crawling all over the place!

'Scenario: unlikely,' replied Adele, with a symmetrical smile. 'Tippee doesn't like outside. I think he must have forgotten we have the yoga in a wee bit.'

'Right-oh,' said Egbert(Mr), not very interested.

Adele seemed to be expecting something more.

'Gosh. Well . . . Poor little chap!' Egbert added obligingly. 'I suppose one could hardly blame him.'

Adele waited.

'I mean to say . . . I don't suppose when I was twelve – is he twelve?'

'Eleven years and seven months, Egbert. He'll be twelve in April.'

'Well, I don't think, at eleven years and seven months, I would have been leaping with joy at the prospect of an early-morning yoga class with my ma! Perhaps he's hiding somewhere?'

Adele shook her head. 'Oh no, Tippee really enjoys his yoga. We do it together every morning. Usually online, for hygiene and safety reasons. But today we were excited because we had the gorgeous Frederica here in person, to lead us through our practice! She says she's not taught a single lesson since she left Rospo. So – as I said to Tippee, and Tippee said to me – we're feeling a teeny bit blessed.'

'Indeed . . . The wonderful Frederica . . .' Egbert nodded vaguely. Not wonderful. Awful. Beautiful, *yes*. But exhausting. The loudest, most argumentative woman he had ever met. She lived with Piers at Ludo Cottage (which needed its roof insulation looked at. He must remember to tell Mr Kirchsme), another refugee from the Rospo tragedy. They had to be

kind to her, because it was her sister who'd been murdered . . . Egbert secretly thought Frederica might have been the one who did it, but he couldn't say so, for obvious reasons. *Not in the current climate*, as he so rightly observed (to himself). *Being of 'swarthy'/'Italian' appearance and also 'female' as it were – yikes! – it'd be a bit off to suspect her of murder. And quite right, too, no doubt! One couldn't be too careful.* His stomach rumbled. It was breakfast time.

'Tippee finds his yoga very calming,' Adele was saying. 'Especially,' she added, and it sounded slightly reproving, as if Egbert(Mr) might have forgotten, 'after everything that happened.'

It was Tippee who found the body floating face-up in the chilly, crystal waters of Rospo four months back. The water was full of swollen grapefruits because of the citrus orchard upstream. Tippee, under the light of the summer moon, had been prodding the grapefruits with a stick. Apparently. That's what he said.

Egbert(Mr) shuddered. It wasn't a pleasant memory. 'Oh yes, of course,' he said. 'How's he doing? Poor little chap. It must have been such a shock.'

'Well, he loves his yoga,' Adele said again.

'Oh, I'm sure . . .!'

Egbert thought that perhaps, this morning, he might treat himself to eggs and bacon for breakfast. It being a Saturday.

'But he's at that stage, Egbert, where he's dealing with his trauma issues on a sort of "moment-by-moment" basis. So one minute he's saying to his daddy, "Daddy, *you're* a killer!" Next minute he's saying, "Mummy, *you're* a killer!"' She tittered. 'I'm afraid he'll be accusing us all by the end of today. He's already had a little go at your butler chappie . . .'

‘At Mr *Carfizzi*?’ The dreaded Adele certainly had his attention now. Egbert was aghast.

‘Well, there was a chap on the stairs in a uniform, carrying coffee . . . I don’t know his name.’

‘But Mr Carfizzi wasn’t even at Rospo! He was here at Tode Hall the whole time!’

Adele didn’t seem terribly concerned. ‘The best thing to do is ignore him. That’s what I tend to do. And it’s what I said to your butler chappie. “Just ignore him,” I said. Tippee’s therapist says “shocking outbursts” are a very natural response and should be encouraged. And I agree with him. This weekend will be very helpful for Tippee. So . . .’ She crossed her fingers, symmetrically. ‘With a bit of luck we’ll be able to put it all behind us.’

Egbert(Mr) nodded glumly. ‘Absolutely. Of course.’

She was still standing there, though, not moving on.

‘By the way,’ he added (changing the conversation), ‘are you coming out with us this morning? I think Charlie said you were shooting? We’ve got a gun ready for you . . .’ He looked at the clothes. ‘Only I worry you might get a bit cold.’

Adele was briefly flummoxed. She laughed. No, no – this wasn’t her shooting gear! She was dressed for *yoga*, not for *shooting*! Frederica had postponed the yoga class until 10.30 a.m.

‘What’s that? I wasn’t aware—’ Egbert was confused. ‘I thought we agreed yoga at seven thirty.’

‘She changed it. Texted last night.’

‘*Changed it? Texted? Why didn’t she text me?*’

‘I’m sure she meant to.’

‘Honestly, Frederica is infuriating! Kick off’s at ten, Adele. Frederica knows that perfectly well. It’s already later than I would have liked. We really cannot put it back any further.’

‘Not a problem!’ Adele smiled brightly. ‘Tippee’s got tutoring in the p.m., anyway. So that actually works very well for me. I’ll probably just join in after lunch.’

‘What?’ Egbert was quite put out. ‘The thing is that’s not really how we do it. It’s sort of an *all or nothing* scenario. Our lovely gamekeeper goes to a lot of trouble—’ He stopped. From among the shades of fawn, Adele had produced a phone. She clearly wasn’t listening to him, and there was nothing to be gained from making things unpleasant, just for the sake of it. Egbert believed this quite passionately. ‘Well, anyway,’ he sighed, ‘I’ll see you down at breakfast then, shall I? Do you know the way?’

‘I’ll find it! Don’t worry about me!’ she replied. ‘I just need to make a super-quick phone call.’

And at that moment the phone in her hand started to ring. It’s how efficient she was. Her smile vanished. She nodded to Egbert(Mr), dismissing him, and stepped away.



Somewhere along her relentlessly self-improving, upwardly-mobile trudge, Adele Morely of Nuneaton had married Charlie Tysedale of many millions. It was an odd choice – for both of them. They didn’t seem to have anything much in common – except, perhaps, their love of money. And perhaps that was enough.

Twenty years ago Charlie Tysedale, rich from birth, had made himself even richer by founding Mark of Marylebone, a clothes label that sold ‘athleisure-to-workwear’ (according to the Mark of Marylebone sales team) to the sort of middle-aged

men who went to gyms. Adele, meanwhile, had been no less clever. Her book, *The Ape and the Unicorn, Squaring the Me-Him Circle*, was the fourth best-selling couples' therapy book in UK/US publishing history. She wrote it eleven years ago, according to press releases, while simultaneously breastfeeding and suffering from acute post-natal depression. Since then (so far) the book had been translated into 137 languages, and she had squeezed out a further five editions with updated subtitles.

And now, to coincide with the US publication of its long-awaited sequel: *The Ape, the Unicorn ... and then comes Baby Mouse*, Netflix wanted her to present a family therapy show from a US-based studio replica of her own beautiful Oxfordshire kitchen. This was big stuff.

Adele's ongoing search for Baby Mouse, now eleven years and seven months, was paused momentarily, as she stood on Egbert's bedroom landing and discussed with her Singapore agent percentages and terms.

Egbert watched her leave. He shuddered.

He wondered if he dared to duck breakfast with his guests. He thought perhaps he could sneak out and have it at the Gardener's House with Alice and Egbert(Sir) instead? Alice made the best scrambled eggs, and things were always a bit jollier over there . . .

But no. Duty called. The guests would be expecting him. He mustn't be rude. Egbert(Mr) was never a man to duck out of a duty.