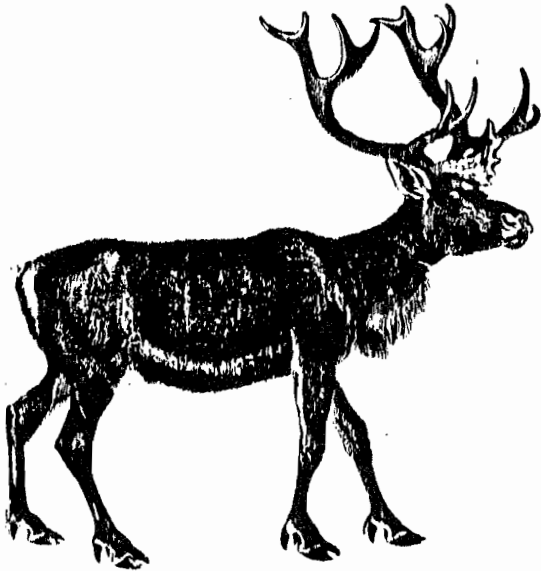


Monarch of the Glen

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Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess. She achieved that rank through marriage rather than by birth, for she was as pretty as a picture and could offer all those background attributes that enable princes to put the crucial question. Her father, an eighth earl, was Eton and Sandhurst and had been an equerry of the Queen, so they knew all about him at the Palace. There was a dissolved marriage in the background, it is true, but his clubs were right and his address was right, for the impressive if cold family home was plumb in the middle of the Shires.

It was there that the Prince had met her. More exactly, it was on a ploughed field within the grounds, for the shooting season was in full swing and the Prince, naturally, was shooting. It says something for the outward charms of the Earl's daughter that despite the not very glamorous attire that is proper to the slaughter of wildlife, the Prince that day only winged half his birds, so taken was he by the winsome presence of his host's charming girl. Normally at least seventy per cent of his birds died within a matter of minutes, for after a short lifetime of aiming guns at most of the socially acceptable targets, he was a better shot than most of the

people who by rank, brains, or inordinate wealth had contrived to stand shoulder to shoulder with him in field and moorland. For two birds to be so poorly peppered as to fly on and become runners on a nearby estate, there to perish slowly from the fangs of non-human predators, was evidence of the degree of his distraction from the business in hand; for a pheasant whangs out of cover like an air-borne tank, usually in a dead straight line at just the right height for sportsmen to be as sure as sportsmen can be of anything that they will return home visibly skillful and manly.

If any more assurance is needed that the Earl's daughter had made a tremendous impression on the Prince, his own words are on record, for as he said to his father within earshot of a servant, without parting his teeth and hardly moving his lips, "I do think she really is, I must say, most awfully pretty." It was probably the most strongly expressed confession of emotional weakness ever to have been forced into the open.

The marriage had the whole nation on the edge of its chairs. In the preceding weeks the country's ailing economy appeared to recover in a flurry of flags, postcards and unspeakably vulgar souvenirs. On the great day the entire populace was glued to The Box, woman viewers revelling in the fashions and the personalities, strong men visibly moved by the bride's shy sidelong glances and dazzling if nervous smile. The bridesmaids were adorable, the weather was splendid,



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no one seriously frightened the horses, and all in all it was a day fittingly summed up in the banner headline of one of the more staid newspapers which announced joyously WE HAVE A FAIRYTALE PRINCESS.

But the intensity of feeling was too strong to last. Even before the honeymoon was over, the nation sank back into sullen acceptance of being a declining power. The Prince returned to his routine of opening, inspecting, reviewing, travelling, and supervising the supervisors of his estates. He led a pretty busy life, even if the end product was somewhat intangible.

Sometimes the Princess was at his side, sometimes not. In certain respects she had been more popular with the media before marriage than after, as in those days it had been possible to portray her as a gentle, tender girl who liked nothing better than to look after small children in a Kensington nursery school. So the media, who can be philosophical in these matters, settled back to wait until history might repeat itself.

It came, therefore, as something of a shock to a section of the nation when the Princess, who prior to marriage had been said to detest blood sports and even the wearing of furs, made a rotten job of shooting a Red Deer stag on her in-laws' estate at Balmoral. The beast, with its lower jaw shot away, made its escape and was not found for some hours. The servant who put it out of its misery unwisely reported its condition to someone who, so to speak, had danced with a man who had danced with a girl who had danced with someone from an animal welfare organisation, and before long that section of the Press which for one reason or another is out of sympathy with the lifestyle of the royals painted a not very pretty picture of a not very pretty event.

Just why any realistic commoner should have been surprised by the Princess's apparent *volte face* is, however, difficult to understand. If not technically obliged to obey her husband, the spirit of any true marriage is that you take it on for better or for worse, and there was nothing in her upbringing likely to prompt rebellion against such sound conventions. As the Prince himself had said without parting his teeth, "I do think, don't you know, that it really would be most awfully appropriate if you were to be seen with me on all, as it were, appropriate occasions." Any small reservation there might have been in his bride's pretty head about staying her soft young hand from the fun slaying of certain species was rapidly quashed by the appeal to duty. Besides, her mother-in-law herself was a notable

destructor of deer life, so it might have been construed as not only disloyal but as positively bad manners for the Princess to have abstained. To those who at this point may cite other values, let them remember that while it may be the prerogative of the great to be merciful, to be a royal is not necessarily or by definition to be great in each and every sense of that word. Is it not the sheer humanity of great people that enables their lesser brethren to identify with them?

In any case, girls reluctant to taste the joys of granting to other species early release from life's vicissitudes do not as a rule appear on ploughed fields in the company of shooters during the pheasant season. Most of them, also, do not go out of their way to marry princes whose chief form of amusement, like that of their families, has long been the pursuit of game. Possibly the Princess had been confused by her father-in-law's presidency of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Wildlife, but then she was a young and rather innocent creature who could not reasonably be expected to know that those who show concern for the survival of sub-human species have it in mind to conserve them for their own use and pleasure, not through any muddled notion that lesser life forms should enjoy some ill-defined right to existence except by courtesy of God's greatest creation.

Love, it has been said, is all. In royal circles this cannot be so. Custom and duty come first. This explains why the Prince and his family had early and thoroughly gone to work to eradicate from the Princess's emotional repertoire any conceivable twinge of sentimentality or reservation about such time-honoured pursuits as healthful field sports. The very idea that some latent spark of squeamishness might have prompted so socially interruptive a gesture as refusal to participate in the wide range of sporting pleasures for which the royal family had for generations done its level and successful best to set the standards, was quite unacceptable. It is easy to see why. Taken to its logical—one is tempted to say illogical—conclusion, any such tendency could extend its tentacles as far even as the royal stables, threatening the whole range of horse-centred activities which had long been the only obvious source of enjoyment for the Queen herself. That, it must surely be agreed, would not have done.

For some while, therefore, the media, quietly conscious of the unspoken rules in such delicate areas, maintained an acceptable balance between the unwise extremes of portraying the Princess either as a trigger-

happy member of an insensitive elite, or as a caring but unrealistically soft-hearted candidate for motherhood and eventual succession. If it could not safely be omitted from a press report that the Princess had accompanied her husband on one of his manly forays, any possibility of public disquiet was stilled by such tactful phrases as that "the Princess was believed to be one of the party." Needless to say, the Leftist papers and the contemptible minority organs that catered to old women and the cranks who raise objections to the sporting reduction of other species were less inclined to join this mild conspiracy, but then it never has been and doubtless never will be possible to do much about the Leftist press and the lunatic fringe. They are part of the cross which the establishment has learned over the years to bear.

Before very long, as might have been expected and indeed was, the union was strengthened by the birth of a son. The media refocused joyfully on the Princess as mother rather than wife. It was easier and more agreeable for the public to identify with her role as parent, so the sportswoman image was given decreasing attention. Besides, little William made a much more cuddly picture than untidy shots of men and women pointing guns at blurred targets against nebulous skylines.

Within a few years William acquired a sister, Louise. She was a bright, bouncy baby and grew rapidly into a mischievous little girl who seemed to be shaping up into an altogether livelier character than her brother who from the word go had been carefully trained to accept all that the royals and their retinue regarded as normal behaviour.

So William and Louise, by now well accustomed to the sporting habits of their elders, were to be seen on a certain memorable day in early winter at their grandparents' estate in the Highlands. As a special treat they had been allowed to accompany their family and friends on a stalking expedition. This was particularly agreeable to little William because that very day his father had told him he was old enough to be entrusted with the air gun whose supervised use had played such a part in giving backbone to his education. A rather fine gun, it was made finer by the box of uncle. The pellets were the air gun manufacturer's answer to the dum-dum rifle bullet that expands as it passes through a body, leaving a wider area of devastation at the point of exit than entrance. As the Duke had said to the Prince, "It'll make the boy feel he's getting somewhere." This was very true, for so many creatures

escape to die in wasteful privacy after being merely wounded by the conventional pellet. As the Prince accurately predicted without parting his teeth, "I do think that William really will be most terribly appreciative of your gift."

So William, of course debarred from joining the actual stalkers, was well content to lag behind in the hope of a chance to pot at any small birds or mammals he might encounter on the fringe of the rearguard party. A splendid feature of his gun was its relative silence.

Then suddenly...excitement! News came through that the Prince had shot a splendid stag. Young William, who so far had only been able to dream of getting in his sights the monarch of the glen, was wild with delight, jumping up and down and thirsty for details of the creature's size and antlers. The servant who brought the news could not supply this data, and it was then that Louise suggested a very naughty thing indeed.

"Come on, William," she whispered, "let's go and see for ourselves."

William looked doubtful. "Do you think we should?" he said.

"Of course we shouldn't," Louise replied impatiently and with that slight lisp that had made her tender years the more endearing, "that's what makes it fun."

By first disappearing behind a Range Rover, they found that it was not too difficult to slip away through the conifer plantation without being seen by the servants or those too aged or uninvolved to be where the action was.

Once among the trees, William adopted the stance and concentration of a stalker, holding his gun low to the ground and crouching as he ran from tree to tree until they found themselves on the far side of the dark plantation and in open ground that ran up to a small peak of rock. They were alone. Gloriously, rarely, alone.

"Come on," William shouted excitedly. "You are slow, Louise."

With sudden inspiration he dropped his gun and ran up to the rocky peak, then bending forward he put his wrists to each side of his head and extended his fingers in puny imitation of the antlers of a stag.

"Look!" he cried. "Look at me! I'm a great red stag."

Louise, following as fast as her shorter legs permitted, giggled and waved.

"Oh, William," she said, "you are silly!" She picked up his gun.

"I'm not silly," William said proudly. "I'm the greatest, finest stag that has ever been seen."

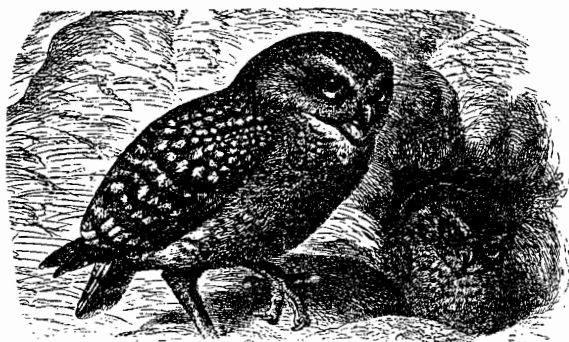
"All right," said Louise, happily entering into the spirit of the game, "you're a huge big marvellous stag and I'm a great wonderful hunter just like Daddy."

She ran towards her brother, waving the air gun and laughing, while William raised his antlered head and emitted the deep bellow of a fine big stag.

In the weeks that followed no one suggested it had been anything but a ghastly accident. And indeed it had not. Louise's devotion to her brother was unquestionable. Had she not tripped on the gnarled root of heather growing from the rock, the media and the country at large would happily have been deprived of one of the most harrowing stories ever sparked off by the private life of the royals. It had been a chance in ten thousand that the pellet that hit William should not only have shot the lad's lower jaw away, but also should have so shattered a main artery that he bled to death before his horrified sister had been able to bring help.

The country mourned. The Prince and the Princess were a little pestered by the media for several weeks, and when once again they were seen returning to the social round they were invariably given the greatest coverage when opening children's homes or hospital wings. The associations were very agreeable to the public mind.

It is some indication of how deeply the tragic incident was felt by all concerned that a spring, a summer and half an autumn passed before the Prince was seen to have returned to the consolation of a sporting life in the Highlands. As for the Princess, another whole year went by before it was even suggested that she might be a member of any of the Prince's shooting parties. These matters can be handled with great delicacy by those who know how to behave.



NO LONGER, MY LOVE

As I dream in my chair, there is hope for you
No longer, my love.

You are the victim of a culture gone mad
As always, my dear.

I can stand to see you in the house of death
No longer, my love.

To prevent your slaughter, I am outcast
As always, my dear.

I can live with you prostituted
No longer, my love.

Your silence in death haunts my soul
As always, my dear.

I am deaf to your cry
No longer, my love.

My brothers wear your baby's skin
As always, my dear.

My species will listen
No longer, my love.

You are in pain
As always, my dear.

I must obey the rule of the mob
No longer, my love.

I am guilty by association
As always, my dear.

I can love your killers,
No longer, no longer, my love.

Justin Reia

[Justin is a sixteen year-old vegetarian. He has won many academic awards and entered the University of Toledo (Ohio) the past fall as a freshman.]