

FROM

The Fall of Princes

BY ROBERT GOOLRICK



More than a decade ago, a lifetime ago, really, I rented a lovely summer house by the sea. Not exactly by the sea, but close enough, and it had a big pool and five bedrooms and a sunroom and an English box garden and you could see the ocean from a widow's walk on the roof. It was owned by these two interior decorators so everything was just so and it was all kind of perfectly done in an English-country-house kind of way and filled with light and shadow. It was everything my apartment in town wasn't and it was just swell.

It was like being in an episode of *Masterpiece Theater*. All you needed was an under housemaid arranging flowers in cut glass vases.

This was just as the great tailgate party was coming to an end, and I had an almost infinite amount of money. Or so it seemed.

I worked on *The Street*, and while I didn't particularly enjoy helping rich people shift money around every minute of every day so that they could get even richer at the expense of people who had no money and never would—I was wracked with guilt at the same time I was insane with adrenaline and raging testosterone—the money was fantastic and the roll, the flow of it, was like mainlining every day. The roll smelled like money. You could feel the poison boiling through your veins. Money was the big news, the lifeblood of the decade, and I was in it up to my elbows.

I worked in a big room that was basically like a casino; there were no windows, no clocks, nothing but the relentless flicker of financial news on dozens of TV sets. It was both timeless and relentless. The days were vicious, but the nights were filled with fat stogies in the cigar room at Frank's and big steaks and then on to clubs where we swaggered in our monogrammed

Sea Island cotton shirts and \$200 scarf ties from Hermès and sat in the VIP section and ran up \$2,000 bar bills and took town cars home at three in the morning when we had to be back at the office at seven-thirty. We did things like write our phone numbers on girls' tits with Mont Blanc pens, and they always called us back. Always.

You could smoke then, that's how long ago it was.

This was life. This was everyday life, and we didn't understand people who didn't live like this. We were the pulse, the heartbeat, of the decade and we were all young and mostly good-looking and we all found time to work out like dogs, weird times like six in the morning, so we had these fantastic bodies, well, not all of us had fantastic bodies, some had the spindly hollow-eyed stares of junkies and some topped three hundred pounds and smoked three packs of cigarettes a day; but I'm thinking about the guys who came to the house that summer, we were all in perfect shape and had the kind of women you get when you have a fantastic body and a wad of cash and the utter arrogance that comes with having the big dog on the leash.

We were the people people wrote about when they wrote about the evils of contemporary society. We made too much money. We spent too much money. We didn't do a single thing to help the less fortunate, which included most of the people on the planet. We drank too much. We did too many drugs. We had eighteen-year-old kids with rasta braids coming to drop shit off in the middle of the day. We went to Alphabet City the minute we got into our black town cars at the end of a stressful day. We felt not one ounce of remorse. We only felt pity for the rest of the gray masses. All of these things were true. But, man, did we have fun. It was like a giant testosterone flambé.

Bonuses were a big thing. Bonuses were given out around Christmastime, in yards, a yard being a million dollars. People would say, sucking on a big fat Cubano, that they got a yard or a yard and a half. Everybody lied, of course, but everybody got a lot and it was a big deal.

I wasn't necessarily the brightest nickel in the bag, but I had the best education, and I was as aggressive as a pit bull, I could trade shit for silk, and so I was good for half a yard at least. I was thirty-one.

After I paid off the taxes and my enormous bills—I owed Bergdorf's \$12,000, which was basically three suits, two cashmere sweaters, and a bottle of Acqua di Parma, the same cologne Cary Grant wore—I still had quite

a pile, and I decided to get my own house in the Hamptons. Not just any house, *the* house.

I had shared before. Little bungalows on Gin Lane. I had gone through the ritual of being a houseguest—my mother once said, when you're a houseguest, don't ring the doorbell with anything but your elbow, so I took cases of champagne and new badminton sets from Hammacher Schlemmer—so I knew what I wanted was a palace of my own, where I could invite people every weekend, and have them bring me lavish and largely unusable stuff.

I looked at six houses. I took the sixth one. It was chintzed and striped and leopard-printed, stuff that would charm women, and it had a grand piano and a deck from which you could smell the sea, and the pool and the garden and service for thirty. It was English aristocracy without the dog shit and the cigarette burns in the upholstery.

Someone witty once said to me that living in a castle wasn't all it was cracked up to be. "Darling," she said, "you still have to wash your hair in the bathtub."

I had never been in an English country house. I thought this was the real thing. I rented it immediately. It cost \$96,000, Memorial Day to Labor Day, and I wrote a check. The house came with a maid, so the owners could feel safe about their fabulous stuff, and she cost another \$800 a week, which I also paid by check, and I leased a car for the summer, a deeply impressive convertible Mercedes, midnight black, with every accoutrement you could wish for and the smell of brand-new leather and a top that slid back with the touch of a button, slid back as silently as a snake through the grass. This was a very nice car. I gave them my platinum card.

I bought sheets in the city for every bedroom, from Frette, since the sheets that were there were the kind of clever pastiche designed to make you think maybe Kmart was a good idea after all. My guests would sleep in thousand-thread-count cotton, white with scalloped borders, so the cool night air could pass over their bodies like a lover's kiss.

I still have the sheets. Quality lasts.

I found a huge Moroccan tent in the city and bought it for \$25,000 and had it put up on the lawn and filled with benches and silk pillows and those low kind of Moroccan tables and hung with chandeliers so it was like being in a fantasy seraglio, all about sex. It was hot as hell in there, like being at a

rinky-dink circus on a July afternoon in Reno, Nevada, but it was lavishly and painstakingly embroidered and dotted with thousands of tiny little mirrors and it was breathtakingly beautiful.

From the second story of the house, you looked down at the roof of it, or whatever tents have, and it was like looking down at the stars, with all the mirrors twinkling and the candles glowing softly through the canvas.

The first weekend, I invited my main buddies from The Firm—George, who was hysterical, and Frank, who was enormous, 6'4", just to show I wasn't filled with self-doubt, and Fanelli and Trotmeier. I took two days off from work to stock the house, bread and desserts from the Barefoot Contessa, \$30-a-pound lobster salad from Loaves and Fishes, and all kinds of salads and hors d'oeuvres and candy and cakes from all over and vegetables from the Green Thumb. And liquor, Jesus. Everything you could imagine. I even stopped by the road and bought tall flowers to go in all those vases, and little bunches in every room, and when I was done the whole thing looked like an at-home *Vogue* shoot showing how some English heiress lived when she was tired of town and longed for the simple life.

Friday night, they all showed up, with the girls, and I picked Carmela up from the Jitney—I had just met her, and had no idea yet that she was the one, the love of my life—and we were a household. The girls, frankly, were the least of it. Everybody assumed they would be beautiful and pliable and enviable and basically disposable. So, all summer, the house was the five guys and whatever the cat dragged in.

And the presents. Like Christmas all over again. George brought a case of 1966 Romanee-Conti Montrachet, God knows where he found it, and Frank brought a picnic hamper from Bergdorf's with real china plates, and Fanelli, who was a thug, brought a Z of really good coke, and Trotmeier brought ten white beach towels with my initials on them, every monogram a different color.

We drank rum drinks that came out of a blender. Frank claimed he'd never seen a blender before and Trotmeier said he'd never tasted rum. His mother told him it was the devil's drink and taught him never to touch it. He got over that pretty fast, and Frank became a whizmaster at making blended drinks because he was mechanically inclined, he said.

The household was perfect. It was a complete universe, all by itself. We ate

butterflied leg of lamb on the Weber grill, and we drank rum and Montrachet until we were silly and did many, many lines of fine white cocaine, but only after we'd eaten the lamb with this ninety-dollars-a-bottle Burgundy I had laid in, and we smoked Cuban cigars until the whole angst of the week had worn away, and we went to bed at two in the morning to sleep with these beautiful girls and the sex was not quiet and every form of human sensuality was redolent in the night air.

The next morning by eleven, everybody was fresh as a daisy. Juices were poured, omelets got made and eaten out on the sunporch, and then Bloody Marys got made and drunk out by the pool, and then the guys went off to play tennis. We knew this one guy, a yard and a half at least, who had hired a tennis pro for the summer to come every Saturday afternoon, so we got to going over there, knocking balls around while the women looked on and read novels, us quick-footed in our three-hundred-dollar Prada tennis shorts and our raggedy old T-shirts from Joe's Stone Crab in Miami, Florida, and places like that, just to show we weren't fashion pussies.

We were the kind of people who got their pictures in *Hamptons* magazine. We were the kind of people who dressed in Nantucket-red linen trousers to go to the Hampton Classic Horse Show. We could get into Nick and Toni's—impossible to get into—on thirty minutes' notice. That kind of people.

The second weekend, we really found the perfect thing to round out the house. We found a pet.

Her name was Giulia de Bosset. She was European. I found her at a party.

She came up to me at the bar while I was getting more drinks for everybody and she looked straight at me and said, "I know *you*." As though we were in the middle of some conversation already.

"I'm sorry. I don't . . . what?"

"I know *you*. I met you when you were still at Hopkins. I was just a little girl."

It turned out she was the baby sister of the college roommate of this extremely thin girl I used to date—we called her the Pencil—and so we rehashed old times, and I asked her where she was staying and she said she was staying at the God-forsaken Maidstone Club, of all places, her father was a member, as was his father and grandfather, with all those old farts, so I told

her to come stay with us, where at least she could get some peace and quiet without somebody whacking golf balls all over the place. Things were different then. We spit at golf.

So she came. We picked up her things at two in the morning, and she came and slept in the little maid's room off the kitchen, which she said was just fine with her, anywhere but that mausoleum.

She was a waif. She was like Audrey Hepburn, not that I knew who Audrey Hepburn was at the time. That was just one piece of information that hadn't been downloaded yet. Later, I kept hearing her name, especially when she died, so I went and rented all these old movies and boy, she was something, and boy, was she ever like Giulia de Bosset. I bet neither one of them ever went to a dance where they had to get their hands stamped if they wanted to get back in.

Giulia was naïve and quiet and had chopped-off hair and lived in the East Village where nobody lived in those days, and she would tell funny stories about finding guys shooting up on her stairs, and she talked about getting mugged by those same guys and she obviously had money and we were all intrigued and we just adored her and so we asked her back. And she came.

She came every weekend, and slept in the little maid's room off the kitchen. I went back to Frette and got sheets for her, too, so she wouldn't feel bad about staying in the single bed in the little room that barely had a bathroom. Her sheets were very fancy, embroidered with vines in periwinkle blue, so her room would seem special in some way.

She wasn't as pretty as the other girls. She wasn't athletic. She didn't like to lie in the sun. But she was slim as a reed and had flawless skin and boy, could she make a great Greek salad. Give her a lemon, some really good olive oil, some mustard, some garlic, and some kosher sea salt, and she could really make a salad into a whole new thing. It took her a long time to do it, but it was worth every second.

She had no interest in sex, and believe me, we tried. Even Trotmeier tried, and he was very fastidious.

She said she was a virgin and she had a kind of quietude as though she weren't even waiting for something and anything that happened was just fine with her.

She'd show up every weekend. We offered to drive her but she said she liked the Jitney, she liked getting the free water and looking at all the faces not looking at one another, and she'd show up at sunset with an overstuffed vintage Vuitton satchel, and out of that bag would come the most fantastic clothes, some all spangled and beaded, some the kind you'd wear to the Queen's garden party, not that we knew what you'd actually wear to such an event, but you get the picture. She had the right outfit for anything we went to, and she looked just fantastic lying in the seraglio in the afternoon in jeans and a T-shirt, reading Jane Austen.

She apparently disdained water sports. We never saw her in a bathing suit.

She was a smackhead, of course. You could tell that right away. All those European kids were, then. But she never did it in public. She never shared. She would just get all winsome and content and dozy and you could tell. We never asked her. She never did cocaine with us after dinner, just sipped her white wine and looked far, far into the future. She was probably twenty-three, so there was a lot of future to look into.

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