

Chapter 8

The Williams Estate of Succulent Epiphanies at Peter's Edge, Just Outside of Edith's Grove, but not the Edith's Grove Where Paul Everton Lost an Eye, But Rather the One Where Cynthia Masters and Charlie Tucker Spent a Joyful Evening Picking the Ripening Fruit Which Subsequently Led to Their Shotgun Wedding.

After much laborious contemplation of which was the more cathartic way to ease if not end his woes: Seppuku or David Carradine-Style, Percy chose neither, feeling them both too passive for his own refined palate. He instead chose to talk about his feelings to his sister Mary, to which he had a lot feelings. Just a lot of feelings. But of course he did so without discussing any real, logistical solutions of course, because Percy just wanted to complain. He was sort of a girl in that way.

The latest discussion between brother and sister found them in the sun room enjoying an early breakfast in which freshly backed scones lined with tart raspberries picked in the brisk fall were accompanied with a heartwarming cup of Early Grey tea.

“Why doesn't she like me?”

“Well, Percy, can you know that for sure?”

He sighed in frustration. “Why do you always have to play devil’s advocate? Why can’t you just give me your sympathy? I knew I should have spoken to the other Mary- she is a far better listener.”

“That is because is a mute.”

“Details,” Percy retorted with irritated flippancy.

“Answer my question, Percy- Hm! Gnom, gnom.... These scones are delicious. Yes, back to the question: Can you be certain that she does not like you?”

“Well..... no.

“Then you can’t really jump to conclusions that way.”

“I just want her to like me, nay, love me!”

“Well....” Mary paused, hinting at owning wisdom.

“Well what? Loose your tongue.”

Mary crossed her legs with a flair of confidence and authority as she began, “You just have to be persistent, patient, caring, thoughtful, insightful, selfless among many other things that constitute an emotionally healthy person.”

“But that is too much work to be emotionally healthy and accountable. Can’t I just be codependent?” Percy whined.

“I suppose, but that is a lot work as well. If you just want a Jerry Maguire codependent relationship, you are going to then have to trick Lucy into believing that you are the only person who could ever truly love her; that she does not deserve to be loved by anyone, especially you, yet you are magnanimous enough to love her back. Then you need her to believe that if she ever were to leave you, you would kill yourself.”

“Kill myself? That wont scare her away?”

“No, not at all. This one strangely works. People eat this one up. But do not be fooled: this is a tough one, but with some practice and a weak partner, it is very efficient. Excelling at the guilt trip is a finely-honed craft: one that pays in dividends as people love a good guilt trip.”

“Indeed? Why have a not thought of it before? Guilt trips are fantastic. On that note, I wonder if I could find them for half-price at priceline.com.”

Mary gave Percy a blank stare, not understanding the syntax just thrown her way, but she continued. “Then... after much work of battering her down emotionally, she will gradually buy into your idea of love. To seal the deal, you finally will need to convince her that having a kid will fix all of your problems and then make you instantly happy.”

“Children! Brilliant Mary! Because everyone knows the kids make all your worries go away!”

“Yes, they are such convenient distractions, are they not?”

“And when they become too much, you just ignore them and leave them with a governess. Lots to think about. In fact- maybe too much to think about,” Percy said as he put down his tea and walked over to the help, a young boy not yet 12, holding up a silver platter.

Percy lightly stroked the help’s face with the back of his hand as he took the powder box from the tray and began to powder his own face, but not before sneaking out a playful dab of powder on the nose of the little helper. Such a good little helper indeed.

“Yes, codependency disguised as true love is a wonderful thing,” said Mary.

“Indeed. But how to begin?”

“Well, I would start by telling Lucy gossip about what other said about her: *She looks fat.*

She is a whore, Your mom said she is a bitch. Someone saw her lift a kit-kat from the store. She checks the money return tray in phone booths as she walks by. That sort of thing. Slander aimed to bruise her ego, yet as it comes from your mouth she will then begin to feel that she can trust you, that you are her only friend for telling her the “truth,” creating a sort of bunker “us against them” mentality, playing on her insecurities.

“It will soon become an addiction to keep hearing the bad things about her body and personality that she craves it more and more. To which you are the only person who then can take away the pain, by giving her assurances. How else would you explain how short guys who don’t know how to wear their hats straight, get all the pretty girls?”

“Ah... that is how they do it?”

“Yes and-”

“Brilliant! And then shortly after the couple no doubt will reach a whole new plateau of love when they begin discreetly checking texts on each other’s cell phones. That is when one can be assured they are in the midst of true love.”

“What is a cell phone?” Mary asked puzzled.

But Percy did not hear the question. “I concede- So simple, yet ingenious. I feel that I am ready to do this, I shall return-”

“No!” Mary interrupted. “You are out of practice. First, we must practice on another girl, using them and playing on their emotions, so that your skills are sharp for the real test with Lucy.”

“Perhaps.” Percy thought. “Perhaps. Yes, I have been out of practice since I stopped attending the Mormon singles ward, after I discovered that the relief society president was

hooking up with the Sunday school teacher behind my back.”

“Yes, that was hard for all of us to watch.”

“Yes. Yes, it was. Life was much easier when I thought we were going to be married, me and.... what was her name again? But then she suddenly without warning stopped sitting by me in church but with the “new” guy.”

Many people fail to realize just how emotionally violent Mormon singles wards are.

“I suppose,” Mary said passively, recalling how Percy came through the despair by routinely walking the gardens every morning while dispersing snow salt through the wildflowers of their country garden. “Such beautiful flowers they were.....”

“Pardon?” Percy asked quizzically.

“Hmmm? Oh, did I say that out loud? Twas nothing.” Mary waved it off as she came back to reality. “Now, there is an exclusive dinner tomorrow night at Lord Bambry’s house, to honor the Duke of Wellington-”

“The Duke of Wellington! But I thought he was dead?!” Percy exclaimed, thinking of the Great Duke of Wellington who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, and passed away in 1852. Or so he thought....

“Didn’t we all?” Mary chimed.

“You mean, he is not dead?”

“No.”

“Well, isn’t that grand? How shall we get in?”

“Oh, but we have already been invited, my dear brother.”

“Splendid!” Percy said as he eagerly fluffed his neckerchief.

The next evening Percy and Mary arrived at Lord Bambry's estate, Bliss' Jubilee of Benevolent Nudgings at Jupiter's Pond. They were without the other Mary who remained behind tied to the front steps of home. They didn't need her embarrassment on such a grand evening.

They entered the beautiful regal mansion, amidst columns of marble busts of philosopher and avatars of old from Plato and Aristotle, to Alexander the Great, to Julius and Augustus Caesar, Charlemagne, Henry VIII, to Sir Francis Drake and Nick Nolte.

As they entered the ballroom, they were greeted with polite and welcoming nods, subtle raises of the glasses from friends, acquaintances and confidants, a high-five from a Duchess and a subtle, yet curiously enthusiastic slap on the butt from the Exchequer.

Percy and Mary took their seats at the table of the great hall, waiting for the food to be served as the guests conversed with great eagerness. It was then that Mary pointed out Anna Cumberland, daughter of the Earl of Rochester. She was rather plain.

But perfect for batting practice, so to speak.

Percy was attentive as Mary shared the details. "... She covers her insecurities with her family name and pedigree, what little that did for her beauty. Her cold demeanor is easily penetrable, for she would have all believe that she needs no man, but like all women, she does. Years back, when she and I were guests in the home of the Prince of Wales, I befriended her and we became close. Well, close as one can be to a girl, so average as her, who keeps intimacy at a minimum. During that time, I found her crying often at nights, to which she would always feign ignorance towards my inquiries as to what vexed her so. I soon discovered that she held a portrait of the son of Earl of Sussex, a love unrequited.

“She wants love, and is read and eager, yet she does not show it easily. Few people do know of it, with being one of them. So, she is capable of love, and most eager, despite her outward appearance. And you will be the man to do it.”

“Cool,” Percy said casually as he tasted a sip of his wine.

“Cool?” Mary gave him a confused look. “All of that, and all you can say is, *cool*? What does that mean anyway?”

Percy did not even hear the question as his mind was now elsewhere as he saw Lucy was now entering the feast hall, arm locked with the Duke of Norfolk.

His love, now in the arms of another man. A pompous man. Percy nearly vomited his recently masticated pheasant breast with a honeysuckle glaze.

His heart bleeding love and sorrow Percy did his best to keep his eyes transfixed ahead of him, a stone monument, shielding himself for further anguish. But had he looked, he would have seen Lucy noticing him as she sat, her heart tearing at her chest as well, for she fancied him, but the social creeds of the time, and her mother, demanded that she assimilate herself to the man who was of highest standing. But she wanted Percy, she longed for him. She did not even notice the envious stares of all the women who wished to now be in her place, for she wanted to be elsewhere: laying on her bedroom floor listening to Bruce Springsteen LP's with Percy, like they had once before. Even though they never had.

Lord Wellington then stood at the end of the long, very long table, which seated over a hundred guests, and tapped at his glass. He was remarkably fit for someone who should be dead, Percy concluded.

“Ladies and Lords, it gives me great honor to host you on this night, and to sit amongst friends. Before I speak further, might I inquire the Duke of Norfolk to educate us on the issue that no doubt is most pressing on our minds: the issue of the mad man who is running about our lands, killing England’s daughters?”

The Lord acquiesced and sat, allowing all eyes to turn towards Norfolk who stood, enjoying the spotlight, as well the trophy that was Lucy by his side. Norfolk did his best to hide his glee with a solemn face of mourning. No one bought it, for they all carried the same faux visage.

Norfolk spoke. “Certainly, your Lordship. Sadly, with grave news, I must confess that today, one more girl has been found. This time, hidden in the bushes outside of John’s Thickets, south of Glaston. She was nigh 14, the daughter of a lawyer.”

“Have you any leads?” Lord Wellington asked.

“At this moment, your Lordship, the answer is no. But, I can tell you, and to you all in attendance tonight, what no others know: is that the man is killing the girls by garroting them with piano wire.”

Gasps echoed throughout the hall, all except Percy of course, who continued to stare ahead of him, never once looking at the Duke, or Lucy for that matter.

Norfolk continued. “The mad man is then tying a ribbon bow around their necks, positioning them in a peaceful posture of eternal rest. We are calling him the “Sleeping Beauty Killer,” which will help sensationalize with the media, as they love a catchy name for serial killers.”

Just then the doors burst and in came a militia a men, led by the sheriff of Warwickshire

who was now wearing black leather chaps with some wrangler jeans.

“Pardon me, ya’ll ladies and gentlemen, but it seems here that I’d might be reckoning to have to break some bad news and spoil what no doubt was fixin’ to be a mighty fine supper for ya’ll.”

“Lord Wellington,” Norfolk said. “Please allow me to introduce to you the Sheriff of Warwickshire.”

Lord Wellington was now on his feet, “Please, speak your mind Sheriff.”

“Alright then, it appears yet another murder has transpire, this time over yonder at them William’s Estate of ‘Brosia Kisses, or whatever they might be fancyin’ to call it.”

The gasps then turned to shock as all eyes turned to Percy, who was now out of his melancholy trance. “What do you speak of? Who has been harmed?!”

The sheriff turned. “Oh, you again. Pardon my oversight, I didn’t make the connection it was yer family.”

“Well!?” Percy barked.

“Well, seems some poor girl was tied to a porch and left like a lamb to the slaughter, and well, she was slaughtered alright.”

“Good God!” Percy exclaimed, too shocked to even notice his sister as she fainted. He didn’t even hear her smacking her head on the corner of the table before she hit the ground.

“WE must get home!” Percy stated as he turned to leave, his guilt and horror now causing a delirious panic to set in. “Come on Mary.”

Mary, who was now bleeding from her temple, somehow managed to get up quite nimbly and followed her brother out of the hall, with many other footsteps behind them. They ran down

the steps into the courtyard to hail their chauffeur. Behind them dozens of couples were doing the same, but Percy and Mary were well off first.

Inside the fast moving carriage, Mary dabbed her head with her handkerchief, in state of shock. “This is all a terrible dream. It is just a dream. We did not tie Mary to the porch. No, it is a dream.”

“Mary!” Percy ordered. “We are never to speak of the truth that we were the ones who left the other Mary fastened to the porch, alone and unattended, and unable to untie a simple square-knot from around her neck. We are never to speak of it! Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” Mary stammered, as the tears began to flow, which then soon turned into a horrendous wail of guilt and sorrow. “I am to blame! My sister! I have killed my sister!”

Percy slid across the carriage to take Mary into his arms and silence her with comfort. “Mary, Mary. Oh, Sweet Mary, my poor sister. You shan’t blame yourself.”

“Yes, yes I can. It is my fault just as it was my fault when our brother Wallace died!”

Percy perked up. “Oh, is now when you tell me the backstory?”

Mary sniffled, “Will there ever be a better time?”

“I suppose not. Well, then, tell me everything.”