

the **Last**
of the
Lutchens

by Will Lorimer



**INKISTAN
.COM**

Dedicated to my mother, and with thanks to Sorcha.

First edition

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I

'LAST BUT NOT LEAST...'

The Last of the Lutchens was a foundling, or so he always believed. A nobleman had sired him. A princess or consort of rank and pedigree abandoned him, wherever his 'mother' had found him. Despite this cruel fate, or perhaps because of it, he was convinced life had befitted him for higher things. On reserve was a plinth in that 'Celestial Hall of Fame', the gallery of plaster busts, Socrates and his platonic pals, that graced the bookcases of his headmaster father's study, where every Saturday he would be summoned for a routine beating on account of all the mischief he would otherwise have gotten away with the previous week. Mischief he felt beholden to commit seeing as he'd be punished for it in the fullness of time, a thousand years away when the weekend finally came round.

As the whacks rained down and the Young Lutchen, draped over his Father's knees looked upwards, from the gallery of inanimate plaster seemed to come a slow philosophical nodding that the tedious routine had embedded in a young mind as 'follow your own dictates not those of others, especially your father. For a son must

always do as he *will* if ever he is to join the ranks of the immortal greats.' Socratic advice the Young Lutchen always felt bound to follow. Indeed 'I will' was his main commandment in life, for, as the family tradition dictated, he was called after his father's father in a game of naming hopscotch, every second square in a diagonal line back to the fifteenth century and the original prick, a lusty Teutonic knight called Dick Head, (or Wil Helm in the parlance of that time).

The documentation of all this – the Lutchen family tree that included the noble pedigrees of also-rans, second sons with a fair scattering of scoundrels counterbalanced by a preponderance of reverends – was contained in the brass studded green chest behind his father's desk, its leather, though ancient and frayed still somehow holding together. This chest the Young Last would inherit on the timely event of his father's demise, an event he looked forwards to with wholesome anticipation. For on that day he planned to auction the family silver service. Forty place settings which could keep the same number of people around a table occupied with eight courses, and each item monogrammed with that original Dick Head's initials. Four centuries of polishing had imparted an almost infinite lustre to spoons that shone like clairvoyants' crystals. Concave surfaces into which the Young Last would peer, desperately scrying for a way out of the family hell, during the interminable silences punctuated only by the female weeping that invariably followed his father's regular dinner-time outburst, directed at colleagues, pupils, God, inclement weather, the National Debt, his

fellow J.P.s, and of course Mrs Lutchen over the inevitable lateness of the meal, which was always served at least twenty minutes after the appointed time of 18.00 hours on weekdays, and 19.00 hours at weekends. He who must be obeyed, but rarely was, had decreed the dinner plates must be pre-heated in the oven hot-box, and so of course tepidity was the best he could expect. But most of all he resented his noisome children – at this late stage in the game, one boy and seven girls, the result of his Catholic wife's insatiable pursuit of the Orgasm, a siren call luring her from over the western horizon and the seductive pen of one Dr Kinsey, the American sexologist obsessed with the overthrow of the patriarchy and the destruction of the Nation State, whose reports she secretly received in brown paper wrapping every month from an old school chum who lived in upstate New York.

Sisters. That was the one subject the Young Last could have gone on about for hours, days, weeks. None of his school pals had the misfortune of so many. Three was the most anyone else would own-up to. Sisters were forever commenting on his scruffy appearance – clothes, fingernails, and hair, always attracting particular scrutiny – even on those rare occasions when, seeking unpredictability – another secret factor of greatness - he scrupulously washed and brushed-up. They envied him his long dark eyelashes and big blue eyes, the apple shine of his rosy cheeks, his thin knees and slender thighs, his easy laugh, his bicycle and his escapes. They were always nit picking whenever he asserted facts, such as the time it

took Amundsen 11 to cross to the Pole – three months two weeks three days, six hours, ten minutes and six seconds. Or when Amundsen eventually reached the invisible point around which the rest of the world rotates it was so awesomely cold the great Norwegian explorer had to fry his frozen great words in margarine over the primus to make himself understood to his husky dog team. Sisters spoiled his jokes by interrupting, not getting it, or preempting the punch line. Worst of all they were cliques with elephant memories. Despite what little they knew of his activities it was usually enough to result in extra strokes on Saturday.

At school, life wasn't much better. Because of his headmaster's father's perverse attitude to patronage – never mind nepotism, something the old pedant always swore he'd bend over backwards to avoid – Young Last was the most heavily policed animal in that zoo. Teachers, knowing it was open season on the boy all year round, took especial pleasure in wielding the rod, scapegoating him for magisterial put-downs received in the headmaster's study which had the best views of the playing fields shared with the girls school across the road.

The Elder Lutchen loathed his job. The fact he had seven hundred and twenty two boys, thirty six full-time and seven part-time teachers, five cleaning ladies, four cooks, three janitors, two grounds-men and one lab technician under his command, meant very little to

1. Roald Amundsen (b.1872 -1928) was Norwegian and led the first Expedition to reach the South Pole. He was also the first explorer of whom it can definitely be said, reached the North Pole. He disappeared in 1928 while on a rescue mission.

him. The perpetual noise of young voices echoing stone corridors forever assailed him. The trivia of exam papers, reports, assessments, school budgets and daily interviews with parents, pupils and teachers walled him in. He had wanted to be a novelist and, avoiding the snares of women, to live in hotels as Graham Greene did; to travel widely and secretly watch people reading his books in trains. Of all the possible futures he could have imagined as a young officer leaving the army this was by far the worst. Nothing could have prepared him, not even Adolf and six bloody years of war. At home as at work, there was no escape from the dreadful barbarity of children.

Each day at 17.45 hours, on the dot, on the button – for if nothing else the headmaster was a man of habits – the Elder Lutchen would pass the red telephone box at the corner of the charming cul-de-sac only fifteen minutes walk from the school. Birds always congregated in the lilac bushes that shaded the small but lovely garden at the end of the little street, where spring always arrived early. The path leading to the porch had tiny alpine flowers growing in the cracks of the crazy paving. There was an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity. As soon as he opened the front door however, the Elder experienced cramps of the stomach, constriction of his veins, sometimes even double-vision at his first glimpse of the chaos inside; coats, bags, boxes strewn across the hallway; in winter, sledges skewed at the foot of the stairs, welly boots at random; in summer, tennis racquets and balls. This wasn't home, it was bedlam. Howling at the kitchen door, a tear-stained, blonde and blue eyed waif ... could that ghastly

child possibly be his? Red jumper over a holed blouse, blue bottom with chapped cheeks ... thumps and bumps from beyond, as his son descended the stairs three steps at a time, surpassing himself by leaping the last four to land beside his little sister, making her howl even louder, this last assault finally grinding sensibilities to dust.

“Bang! Bang! You’re dead!” Yelled the Young Last, standing with legs spread, levelling two fingers at his Father.

“I am not!” retorted the Elder. “And how many times do I have to remind you not to go around pointing guns at people!”

“It’s fingers, not a gun, and I wish it was a gun, all my friends have guns. It’s not fair!”

“Life isn’t meant to be fair. I didn’t go through the War to let my son play with guns, not even pretend guns. Guns are not something you play with! Now, get up those stairs like a ruddy angel. Don’t you have any homework? Must I speak to your form master ... again?”

On opening the kitchen door, the Elder’s depressed spirits slumped further as he beheld his pregnant wife, her pretty head wreathed in steam, lifting the lid of the tureen to see how Wednesday’s economy pig’s head was cooking. At her knees, clutching her skirts, three small children he hardly recognised. Dread and the smell of fresh pig’s brains assailed him. When would this regime of economising end? When would his wife cease have babies? After reluctantly conceding her the first two he’d always insisted on ‘frenchies’ – as he called condoms, and yet there she was again, vastly pregnant. He blamed

the standard of manufacture that had been in spiralling decline since the war, the damned things were perished or something.

The Elder Lutchen never suspected his wife of sabotaging his 'frenchies'.

"Out! Out!" The Elder Lutchen roared at his children, pointing to the door beyond which he wished a precipice lurked. Children were worse than nuisances, they were competitors. Had he been a Muslim, he might have had more choice in the matter, but he wasn't and so only had one wife, and as ever he needed to unburden himself after another hellish day at School. However Mrs Lutchen had taken two tranquillisers that afternoon and another when she realised how late supper was running. She was now experiencing visual difficulties brought on by the swirling steam and Wednesday's pig's head imprecating her from the pot. She needed infant hands clutching her skirts to keep her grounded, certainly not his bellicose outpourings at life's misfortunes that threatened to unstitch her ...

Thus it was in the Lutchen household, year in, year out ... at the end of the day, with the washing-up still undone, all those school uniforms to iron, not forgetting a pyramid of packed lunches to prepare, her naturally optimistic self suddenly overwhelmed by it all, Mrs Lutchen would bury her head in her hands and silently wail, her bosom racked by bitten-back sobs, while upstairs, stretched out on the chaise-longue in his study, The Elder stared at the chubby cornice cherubs. The gas fire hissed and his tummy subcutaneously bubbled, as he dreamed of

how it might have been, if only he'd stayed on in the army after the War. Perhaps he would have made major by now, or even colonel, with a couple of pips on his shoulder, a batman always on hand to blanco his puttees. Never mind he had only made headmaster, he was still a leader, those boys in his charge would one day become men and all the better for his guidance. But his son was a different matter. Lutchen suspected he might be an exception to any rule, most especially his. What then to do with the lad? Perhaps just this once he should set aside first principals, talk to T.B., his former commanding officer, and see if he could wangle the lad a place at Sandhurst?

II

In the great hall of Citadel High, gilded with the names of illustrious former pupils, it was morning assembly. ‘Holy Dan’ – the Reverend Daniel Pollock – had just finished leading the boys in praying “that peace might form a bridge between nations.” The scripture teacher concluded with a routine plea for the “health of the royal family,” before making way for the headmaster to conclude matters with an oration, as was his usual practice.

“Ahem! It has come to my attention,” Dr Lutchen began, “that some boys have been smoking in the air raid shelters. Smoking within the school grounds, or outside for that matter, is expressly forbidden by our school code as we all know. To underline the severity with which I view this matter, henceforth I am making it an expellable offence. Any pupil caught smoking while wearing the school colours, will be expelled, and there shall be no appeal to the board of Governors.”

This was music to Last’s ears, who had recently turned thirteen. Budding male hormones demanded he throw off his father’s yoke, and no time like the present. The beatings must cease, forever. But there were problems. Despite the patriarch’s oft repeated statement on patronage and preferment, he knew fine well his father would do almost anything to avoid expelling him – if only

because such an action would reflect badly on his abilities as a father and headmaster. The old bastard might even lose his job. Then, as the Elder had so often predicted, doom would descend on the family and they'd have to go and live in a council house, in one of the new estates mushrooming at the edge of town where the dustbins were collected but once weekly and the post was always delivered to the wrong address. Perhaps then he could go to a normal school with girls as well as boys where there wasn't such a preponderance of wankers and you could wear everyday gear instead of a uniform that marked you out as a snob wherever you went – that garish purple blazer branded with a flaming-heart badge and the motto *Caritas en Veritas*, (truth lies in the heart: a patent contradiction). The orange shorts made from a rough serge seemed expressly designed to give you blisters at the back of your knees.

About this time, Young Last's big sister Ginnie formed a suspect relationship with a strange looking young man nicknamed Rigor Mortis to give him his full moniker, on account of his dead pan manner. Riggie as he preferred to be called, specialised in dressing cool, wearing polo necked black jumpers, check sports jackets, pink shades, tight jeans and chelsea boots. He was the first hip dude in the area, at least when it came to style, and wanted everyone to know it. He harboured dreams of becoming a famous fashion photographer in London's King's Road, but first planned to seduce Ginnie with his camera lens by getting her to pose in the nude, a proposition surely most acceptable, if Ginnie hadn't been so ashamed of her lower