

My Secret Pen Pal

by John Olson

What if I let it be known that I've been enjoying a heavy correspondence with Queen Elizabeth my entire life? We began the correspondence on the very day she was coronated. February 6th, 1952. I was four years old and working as a bartender in Cheyenne, Wyoming. "Dear John," she wrote, "I'm so pleased to become queen of this this sceptered isle, this earth of majesty, this seat of Mars. I wore a beautiful dress of white satin embroidered with the symbols of England. I don't know how many times my hand was kissed. It's sopping wet. I'll probably get the flu." "I'm so happy for you," I wrote back. "I broke up a fight today. Had a bottle of whiskey smashed over my head. I love you. I hate you. I do not know who you are." "Dear John, what is it to be indifferent, neutral, I don't understand indifference, is it heroin, what is it? Here it is 1955, and I'm already tired of being Queen of England. Most of the time I'm pumped, excited, I write, I discharge, I indicate and exhibit, it feels athletic to be engaged, involved, to point things out to the idiots in parliament. But why? It makes no difference. They don't lesson. I'm just a lousy figurehead." "Dear Liz, I know what you mean. I'm so tired of breaking up barroom fights. Who are we, really? Take our titles away and we're just beings in quest of fulfillment and meaning. I'm fascinated, for example, by what is inside and what is outside. Where does the inside begin and where does the outside end?" "Dear John, I feel better today, I just knighted the Beatles. Do you like their music? They're such silly little men." "Dear Liz, how do you weigh the world? I use a little rumination, a broom, and a can of whipped cream. We got a new jukebox today. It's got some Beatles songs on it. And it's coin-operated. I think the Beatles are fine. But I prefer the Stones." "Dear John, well I do, too. I prefer the Stones. But don't tell anyone." "Dear Liz, I hope we can meet one day. What's Prince Philip like? Is he a good guy? Does he treat you right? Thank you for asking about my new study. I do most of my writing at an old oak desk. It has a flap that is pulled down for a writing

surface. For a long time I had assumed the desk was a relic from the late 19th century and a life on the prairie that had lately been the province of the Assiniboine and Chippewa and endless herds of buffalo but there is a large hollow space inside where a Philco radio was housed. Darkness and sympathy are interwoven with light and joy on the plains of Wyoming. If I think of thoughts as clouds that would imply that the mind is a sky. But what is that? And where? The sky itself has no location. The mind has no location. At what point can one say that one is in the sky? At what altitude? There are phenomena that cannot be described as crowbars or soap. Neuroscientists say that intelligence is really about dealing with uncertainty and infinite possibilities. The human brain has about 86 billion neurons and that each neuron can have tens of thousands of synapses, which puts potential connections and communications between neurons into the trillions." "Dear John, Yes, I would have to agree. There are few certainties in life. Princess Di was just here. I'm actually quite fond of her, but she always acts as if I don't. I don't understand people anymore. It's not easy wearing the crown of a former world power. But oh, that reminds me. I was so happy to receive the Tennessee whiskey you sent. It's been a real life saver lately. Philip caught me doing my Janis Joplin impressions in front of a mirror. Very embarrassing." "Dear Liz, you know you got it if it makes you feel good. I bought a drill today. I hung that picture of you sitting on the throne in that lovely pink dress. You look so dignified, so royal! But we know what you've been up to, you naughty minx! There's always a chair for you here at the Acrobatic Mule."

