

SIX

Guy's very happy because he's landed a placement as Co-pilot to the RAF Falcons (a parachute display team who go around doing their stuff raising the profile of the Royal Air Force). After one minute of free-fall, the team deploy their parachutes and begin a twelve-man canopy (parachute) stack. These boys are Parachute Jump Instructors (PJIs) from the Royal Air Force's Physical Education Specialisation.

"Sounds tasty. Hope I get to meet them," I tell him.

Guy and Rory Spinner share the role of Co-pilot, so that one 'flies' while the other rests. The bonus is that wherever the 'Falcs' appear, Guy will have to go too, so not only can he enjoy working on his ego, posing at air shows throughout the UK and abroad, but he gets to take part in precision flying – which he loves most and has told me umpteen times exactly what they do (funny, he's never that interested in my temping jobs).

They're going to California (San Diego) next week for a month, as they need perfect weather to carry out an intensive training schedule. I did ask why they couldn't practise in the UK, and Guy said it was mainly because it would be a waste of time and money keeping an aircraft ready here, waiting for good enough weather.

He's due up at the Squadron in an hour to meet the crew before take-off, which gives us just enough time for a quickie. As we're about to rush upstairs and rip all our clothes off, Pippa arrives on the doorstep, saying she diverted her route to Devon specially to see us. Guy jokes we're the best motorway

service station in Wiltshire, and kisses me goodbye before cycling off to work.

Pippa says the role of Mrs RAF suits me and laughs at the changes she sees. "You've gone from wild child to serious social standing," she observes.

"I haven't married the job, I've married Guy," I correct (but agree that some see the pilot rather than the man). "At least I didn't marry a house, like Arabella Vancelette," I snap. "Her husband's surplus to requirements – mere puppetry." (Pippa nods; Arabella is the greatest social climber of all time, who hooked a Panache client for his property.)

Guy rings up ten minutes later to say he'll be flying over the Squadron at exactly 1.30pm if we want to come up and see the Falcons' display. Pippa makes two quick calls and delays her meeting, saying she wouldn't miss it for anything.

"Obviously you aren't impressed by his job either," I tease her.

Around lunchtime, bright blue skies are replaced by dark clouds, and at one o'clock the heavens open. We drive up to the Squadron to avoid getting completely wet and notice visiting veterans have the same idea, staying inside their cars to watch. A coach-load of old boys peer out through steamy windows in the comfort of their nice dry bus as ground crew shiver together outside, trying to light marker flares.

Pippa seeks refuge under the umbrella of one of the crew (who is extremely good-looking) and we swoon as he explains what's happening. "Once airborne, the crew plan to arrive overhead at the DZ, or Drop Zone, fifteen minutes prior to the display. This gives everyone a chance to assess the weather conditions and confirm the drop height," he says. "On command from their Team Leader, the Falcons take up positions on the ramp at the back of the Hercules, ready to jump out." (Neither Pippa nor I are listening, but we let him continue.) "Red on then green on signals time to exit the aircraft."

As he's speaking, Guy establishes radio contact with our man on the ground, the Drop Zone Safety Officer (DZSO), and

we get really excited hearing him say, "Falcons Drop Zone, this is Falcons Hercules aircraft. We are running in for live drop in two minutes. Request ground flare indicator."

Our hunky interpreter replies, "Falcons Hercules, this is Falcons Drop Zone – you are clear for live drop. Surface wind is three-zero-five degrees, fourteen knots."

"Oh my God, shag me now you beast," Pippa mouths at him, as the deafening roar of the aircraft passes overhead and he can't hear a word she's saying.

Sad that there aren't many spectators outside, we run into the middle of the field (can't let Guy and the crew fly over an empty show). As we watch Guy's colourful cargo free-fall, amazed they can see where to aim for through driving rain, they deploy their parachutes and begin their trademark mid-air stack, eventually landing on target. Hearing the drone of Albert approaching for the low-level finale has us running about like mad things, waving umbrellas as Guy flies over. The Hercules descends low and accelerates to 300mph, flying right over the DZ to execute a spectacular fly-past in time with the Falcon Team Leader's salute.

"Wow, that is so sexy," shouts Pippa. "I've suddenly become very patriotic."

"That's my husband," I shout to her, bursting with pride.

"I'm soaking wet, you daft mare," she shouts back over the deafening roar of engines above us.

Convinced he's seen us, we're gutted to hear that all he could see through the weather was a coach next to the field and that he presumed everyone was sensible enough to watch from there.

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Guy's due home tonight, so I painstakingly prepare a huge meal for him (throwing away warm slops after trying to mash potatoes in the food processor). He never eats vegetables or anything vaguely healthy when away, just curry and beer, so I slog away trying to roast anything that'll fit into our poxy second-hand oven.

The Squadron calls at 7.30pm informing me of a one-day delay to Guy's trip. Apparently, it's too foggy to land at Lyneham, so he's stuck in Cardiff for a night. I stare at my two roast dinners.

The Navigator he's gone with lives two doors up and I ring his wife to ask if she's already eaten.

"Not had a chance yet," she yawns. "Been putting the kids to bed."

I offer to bring the meals over and walk across the Patch in the dark carrying two plates of roast lamb, boiled potatoes and carrots topped with gravy – delicious! Meet TLSP out for an evening stroll with his black Labrador (he got promoted) and nod as he walks past, saying, "Evening," as if it's perfectly normal to be out walking roast dinners instead of a dog.

Guy creeps in at 10pm (so much for the delay) and makes himself a peanut butter sandwich, occasionally glancing at the two empty plates.