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Fred

There's an old joke about a mother watching a column of soldiers pass by. Her son is in the ranks. All those men out of step, she says, except our Fred.

I don't know if my mum ever thinks something similar, but I do know that if I was in the trenches I'd want Fred at my side.

I don't march in step. I don't ask people to trample all over me just because it might make them feel better. That's not who I am.

Those qualities (or flaws, if that's your view) have brought me many good things in life. And lots of trouble.

Fred doesn't try to march out of step. He just follows a different drummer. I don't set out to go against the flow. I don't

enjoy trouble. Like most people, I want to be happy. If I don't understand you, though, and I don't see the logic of what you tell me to do, then I am going to ask you questions.

I won't sit down and be told to bat this way or train that way without asking why. I have one career. One shot. I have to make the most of whatever talent I have. If I do that, it's good for your team. Our team. If all the guys around me do that, it's great for your team. Our team.

But if all you want is to see your team marching in step, if you are just trying to impress the generals above you, I will call you on that.

A Monday in February 2014, and I am walking into the Danubius Hotel right by Lord's, to meet with the three wise men. Alastair Cook will be there. James Whitaker, the chairman of selectors, will be there. And Paul Downton will be there. He is the brand-new managing director of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). He's hardly been a wet day in the job.

The three wise men have decided that the disastrous Ashes tour was all my fault. Take me out of the picture and all will be good again.

I know what's coming.

I only met Paul Downton properly a few days ago.

I had previously discussed the tour with Angus Porter, chief executive of the Professional Cricketers' Association, and we had decided that Downton would be the next stop. I had to Google him to discover his background: international, but not world class. I hoped that as an administrator he would be better.

I called Downton up and said that I thought we should meet. There would have to be debriefings after all that had happened in Australia, and as a senior player I felt the need to be in that loop.

He said okay, so I arranged to see him in the ECB offices. On the morning of the meeting he texted me to say that James Whitaker would be sitting in. I had a little history with Whitaker but I said, okay, no worries.

But I did have worries about Whitaker.

In August 2013, during the Old Trafford Test against the Australians, my family and Jonathan Trott's parents were sitting together at a table in the players' family enclosure. There was one other person at the table. An older man.

Leading up to that Test I had torn my calf, but the rehab had gone well and the day before I'd pronounced myself fit. It had been between me and James Taylor. I was fully recovered, though. I was fine. I got picked and scored a hundred. All good.

Mum, Dad and the Trotts were sitting there, chatting away with their strong South African accents, and this older man was just hammering me. My century – which had saved the match – hadn't gone down well.

They all just nodded. They sat and they listened. Exchanged glances. Let's not get defensive, don't make a scene. But the man didn't stop after one or two stabs in my back; he didn't seem to notice how uncomfortable his audience were.

After a while they asked the man what brought him to Old Trafford.

James Whitaker had given him the tickets.

Aha. So it was reasonable to suggest that Whitaker might agree with what he was spouting. My parents told me all this the next day. We wondered about the arrogance – or stupidity – of somebody sitting in the players' family enclosure with four middle-aged people with strong South African accents and feeling free to run down a player who was most likely the son of one or other of the couples.

A few days later, James Whitaker was behind my net while I was training. I asked for a quick word, and told him that my parents had had an awkward and embarrassing experience with somebody he had given tickets to. I said that I would really appreciate it if he could apologise to them, or if the man he gave the ticket to would apologise.

Whitaker mumbled something about the man, how he'd done this and that.

Very interesting, I said, because a lot of the views he was expressing at the table sounded like they might have come from you. Was it really right for him to come out with that sort of thing when he was sitting at a table with the parents of two players?

Things have been frosty between us ever since. And now James Whitaker would be sitting in on my meeting with Paul Downton.

I went anyway. Turned up on time. Downton asked me to tell him about the tour to Australia. We had brought the Ashes with us, having won them in the summer of 2013, and we left them behind. Whitewashed. Five–nil. I gave Downton my views on how that happened.

How honest was I? Really honest. Brutally honest. I didn't

want to tell him a story that might help or protect me. I wanted to tell him the truth. I knew there were stories being told against me, so I had said to myself when I asked for the meeting that I would tell the guy everything. Whatever happened afterwards, I would be able to look him in the eye.

I wanted to speak to Downton about my relationship with Andy Flower, the team director, which had been a huge issue. It had been played out in the media and refreshed day after day with a steady stream of leaks.

With that in mind, I said to Downton, let's make sure that the discussion we are having here doesn't leave these four walls.

He seemed offended by the very thought. How dare I even suggest such a thing?

Aw, none of that, I said. I've been in meetings and the next day I'll read a version in the media.

Then we talked about the tour.

Look, I said, I didn't bat as well as I could. I did okay.

I had averaged 29 in the Test series. I'd got past fifty just twice in ten innings. I'd carried a knee injury and lived through various problems off the field, but I was disappointed with the numbers. Still, I was the team's leading run-scorer on 294.

Downton said he had seen the way I had played – I hadn't batted well. Careless.

Really? I looked at him, my mouth hanging open. I didn't mind that Paul Downton, according to Google, was a lower-middle-order batsman with a Test average of under 20. But I did mind that as an administrative employee of the ECB he felt free to critique the performances of players, indeed that he had a right to do so.

Sorry? Are you my batting coach?

I have scored over thirteen thousand runs for England, I said. Do you think I am proud of the way I got out sometimes? No, of course not. But I must have been doing something right to score all those runs. Did you see me bat in Melbourne?

No, he was flying. He was 'in the air'.

Interesting.

No, he went on, but he saw the way I got out. Reckless.

I just said, wow.

Two thoughts entered my head. One, Downton was possibly trying to wind me up so that we would have a bad meeting in front of Whitaker and he could use that later. So I stayed polite, careful in what I said. Second possibility: I am interviewing for my own job here. I have played 104 Tests and now I am interviewing for my job.

Next question from Downton: where do you see yourself in the future?

I would love to get ten thousand Test runs, and I still think I can offer that. I want to pursue that dream.

Hmm, he said, I would have preferred you to have said, I would like to help England win matches.

If I score ten thousand runs the way I am batting, England will win matches.

Well, he said, I still would have preferred you to have said the other thing.

I left, and phoned my wife.

'All these years, Jess, and I think I've just interviewed for my own job.'

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So for this second meeting I am to go to the Danubius Hotel, just across the road from the ECB.

I am glad that we are doing this in a hotel. As I walked past all the desks in the ECB offices for my first meeting with Downton a few days ago, I felt like the school troublemaker on his way to the headmaster's office.

The media was already full of speculation. Who would go, Flower or Pietersen? Just one person tweeting 'Pietersen at ECB #SkySports' would start the media cavalry charge.

They have taken a suite here in the Danubius, where they are waiting for me. The Grace Suite.

I'm not sure how it will go. When I left Sydney my relationship with all but one of the players (Matt Prior – you'll find out why) was absolutely fine, and I'd chatted with many of them since then. They had spoken very favourably about me in the media. I knew that I didn't want to burn any bridges between myself and future England teams. Why would I? But while I was getting on fine with individuals, there were problems in the dressing room that needed to be addressed. I'd not mentioned these in my first meeting with Downton, but I wasn't going to be the first to air them.

There were major issues. Prior, for instance, was a massive negative influence on the dressing room, and when I said that to Andy the night before the Sydney Test, the head coach didn't disagree.

Downton has told me that, as well as having Whitaker present at the meeting, he has also asked Alastair Cook to join us. I'm not optimistic about how it's all going to go down.

Alastair Cook knows that on the Ashes tour there were

absolutely no problems with me in the dressing room. Alastair Cook knows that I scored the most runs for England on that tour. Alastair Cook knows that I had his back 100 per cent. Any advice I could give, I did. I opened the door and said to him, listen, I am here to help you. I want you to be successful. I told him that again and again. If he needed me at any time, I would be there.

I know, though, that while Cooky is a nice man, he is also a company man. A safe pair of hands; he won't rock the boat.

A woman meets me in reception and takes me up to the Grace Suite.

Cook shakes my hand, but he doesn't want to look at me. He looks at the floor. I feel sorry for him; it must be one of the most uncomfortable experiences of his career.

Whitaker shakes my hand. Downton shakes my hand.

I say, what's up?

Well, says Downton, we have come to the decision that we are at a bit of a crossroads. We believe you are not going to be part of the process going forward so we would just like to tell you that now.

Right. So you are sacking me?

Oh no. The squad that was selected for the World T20 won't have you in it.

That means I'm done?

No. We haven't convened for the summer but you are not part of our plans going forward now.

Silence. Whitaker nodding, Cook still looking at something really fascinating on his shoe.

So that's it. Basically, I am being sacked: you guys have finished

with me. I'm putting two and two together and I'm getting four every time.

No, no, no, no.

I just sat there.

Then Downton spoke: You can go speak to your people and then we can discuss things.

Okay. Is that it?

Yes. Thank you very much.

My agent, Adam Wheatley, had arranged for a driver to take us to the hotel. I'd told them that I'd be gone for an hour or so, and Adam and the driver were still in the lobby, wondering how to kill the time, when I came back down.

Adam, I said, I am gone, buddy.

Those words exactly.

What? he said. So quick?

Yeah? How long was I in there? Five minutes?

From getting out of the car to getting back into it now, five minutes at most.

I had hoped to go home, but instead we told the driver to go across town to my lawyer's.

I said to Bob Mitchell, my lawyer, when he greeted us, okay this is what has happened. We need to get moving sharpish.

We began making arrangements for severance. It was over. That was all that I could think. Over.

Paul Downton has since repeated his criticisms of my performance in the Sydney Test. He's been forced to admit that

there was no smoking gun. The only charge seems to be that Paul Downton, watching his very first Test in his brand-new job, opted to study me exclusively and concluded that I looked ‘disengaged’.

Downton said he ‘watched every ball of the Sydney Test live and I’ve never seen anyone as disinterested or distracted as Kevin’. I would love to know how any cricketer facing Aussie bowlers on their home turf could look ‘disinterested’. Or does it have nothing to do with my batting? Is Downton claiming that he was watching me when I was in the outfield? Why would he do that, if not in order to gather evidence to strengthen a case that somebody must have already made to him?

‘I was quite frustrated watching him as a fan, and there was a feeling he wasn’t engaged as he should be as a senior player.’ If there really were signs of a lack of engagement from a player who walked through a minefield of stress just to play for England, a player competing in his 104th Test for England, a player known to be still troubled by a knee injury, shouldn’t Paul Downton have been asking Andy Flower what the hell was going on? Why does England’s highest run-scorer in history seem disengaged? What have you been doing?

Following the decision to exclude me, Paul Downton said ‘the time is right to look to the future and start to rebuild not only the team but also a team ethic and philosophy’. He later said, ‘The team had to grow and be rebuilt and we couldn’t do that with Kevin in the side . . . We couldn’t trust him as a senior player to build the side around.’ I was going to impede this rebuilding of team ethic and philosophy, was I?

They know the truth. They know why we ‘fell apart in

Australia under immense pressure'. They know the pressure we were under.

They know that a clique choked our team, and that Andy Flower let that clique grow like a bad weed.

Flower could never stop its growth, so he focused instead on managing upwards. He did this well.

In the end, when we didn't have success as a distraction, they needed a scapegoat. Preferably somebody big, boisterous and annoying. Somebody with a little history. Somebody who left colourful footprints on the pristine white carpets.

I didn't always tread wisely. I was often naive and sometimes stupid. I was no villain, though.

And I'm not prepared to accept I will never play for England again. Cricket is politics. Bad politics. Things change overnight. I believe that the governing body of English cricket could change; I believe it should change. I am happy for now, but I would be happy to come back. Anything can happen in cricket.

English cricket provided me with an amazing opportunity to fulfil my dreams. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for the ECB. And I love this country, I really do. It's a special place, and I will be forever grateful for what English cricket has given me.

The stories you've been told over the last few years, especially over the last few months, have left a lot of gaps. I want to tell my side of the story now, and I believe that in trying to fill the gaps we might be able to face up to some of the problems facing the game and the team I love. I care about cricket. I care about youngsters coming into the game.

I don't remember every word of every exchange, so I won't be quoting conversations word for word. I'm just going to state them as I remember them. But it all happened.

All I ask is that you read it. Then you can judge.

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Last Batsman Standing

Where is the rap sheet? Nobody has handed me a rap sheet. I've had to put it together myself from all the rumours and innuendo. It's like swatting flies in the dark: you think you have killed one off and another one starts buzzing near your ear.

I've read that there is a 'dossier', a four-page document that lists my crimes in Australia. Fifty crimes. A nice round number. Fifty of them spread over four pages. I would love to see a copy of this dossier. The problem is, it doesn't actually exist.

I know this for two reasons. First, people from the ECB have told me so. And second, there would be nothing to fill a dossier with.

If a dossier did exist the ECB would have reason to sack me, simple as that.

News of the crimes I am supposed to have committed comes to me drip by drip. Even the small stuff gets twisted and lied about.

Here's one. After the Ashes finished I left Australia a day earlier than the rest of the team. The tabloids claimed that I had organised my exit from Australia while the Test match was still on. I'd told the team in the middle of the Sydney Test that I was heading off as soon as possible. Just like that.

A fabrication. A total lie.

When the cricket is done I never hang around in Australia. Once the job is finished I am out of there like a bat out of hell – there's just too much abuse. I contacted the ECB on the night we lost the fifth Test and asked them to get me back to London as soon as possible.

There was no request or message to that effect before the last Test had ended. The ECB couldn't get me out the next day but they booked flights for the day after that. The rest of the team left the day after I left. I was one day ahead of everybody else: shoot me. I had checked with Andy Flower, and he'd no problem with me going as long as I saw the team physiologists for my skinfold tests before I went.

My wife, my child, my mother-in-law and my parents were all in Australia. We needed to get out. I'd had enough abuse.

Is abuse too strong a word? Maybe. The Aussies think it is all good fun, but when you are at the end of a long and disastrous tour, when you have people you love around you and you're being called a wanker ten times a day, the joke wears thin. I was in a bad place and it was time to go.

So we had one great day on Bondi as a family and then we were on our way.

We had a layover in Dubai, where the English papers were available. My name was on the back page of every one of them: Pietersen or Flower. Flower or Pietersen. Showdown. Gunfight at the OK Corral.

Interesting timing. When the journalists had been writing their copy, I was, as Paul Downton might say, in the air.

I rang Rhian Evans, the ECB media manager. Rhian said that she didn't know where it had all come from, but she did know that some people had been out with certain journalists at the end of the tour. It might have come from there.

I could name names here, but I won't. That was what I heard then. That is what I have heard ever since.

Rhian said she would try to get to the bottom of it.

I laughed and told her, well, we have been down this route before with the ECB. Him or me? It doesn't work like that.

When I had the England captaincy the papers wrote up the ending of that business as a him-or-me showdown as well.

It was never like that. And in the end, it wasn't him or me. Both of us went. Having the captaincy was a short, sharp lesson about the way things work in the rooms and corridors far away from the crease. I got sucked in to those places. I was a cricketer stuck in a world of small-time politicians and bluff merchants, where nothing ever turned out to be what it looked like.

I bang my head against a brick wall sometimes and ask myself why I ever accepted the England captaincy.

I came to England in 2000 as a wide-eyed little off-spinner from Pietermaritzburg.

Five years later I made my Test debut in the first Ashes Test

at Lord's. I'd got the call from David Graveney: one of the best phone calls I ever had from the authorities at the ECB in my career. I became the 626th man to play for England, and hit half-centuries in my first two Test innings. It was such an overwhelming, exhausting experience; I didn't even make it through dinner the night of my debut. I was eating at the team hotel with Mum and Dad, and had to excuse myself and go upstairs. As soon as I put my head on the pillow I was a goner.

I came in at the best moment of Duncan Fletcher's revolution of English cricket. We won the Ashes for the first time in eighteen years. We rode around London in an open-topped bus, and had the best of fun.

By the spring of 2007 Duncan had gone. Peter Moores came in as coach and things changed. Where Duncan had given us freedom, Moores was tapping on our heads like a woodpecker all day, every day.

The captaincy dropped into my gloves the following year. Too much too soon, but it was too good to turn down. The night I got given the job I went out with Jess, my brother and his partner and we had the most incredible celebration. I was so excited. I thought I might be able to influence things.

Before it happened, it hadn't even crossed my mind that I would captain England. But then, anything can happen in cricket . . .

The story?

Somebody got a ban. Somebody else had had enough. I was the last man standing.

First, as punishment for a slow over rate in a one-day international in June 2008, our ODI captain Paul Collingwood was banned for four matches.

With Colly gone, I was asked to fill in as the one-day captain. My experience of being a captain? Zilch. Zero. Nothing.

Since I'd left South Africa, though, everything I'd touched had turned to gold. I was bulletproof. Twenty feet tall. Captain an England team? Was I going to turn it down? No chance.

I consulted with my old mentor Clive Rice, who's a cricketing legend in South Africa, and who'd brought me over to play for Nottinghamshire. Clive said to make a big impression from the start. Ask a lot of questions and pick out the best idea from the answers. Then, if that idea doesn't work, pick the second-best idea and so on. Suited me.

Our main summer Test series of 2008 was at home to South Africa. Michael Vaughan was still Test captain when the series began. On the first day I hit 152 at Lord's. A standing ovation and huge emotion under blue skies. Ian Bell hit an incredible 199 for us – all good.

We drew that first Test, but then had a big defeat at Headingley.

Edgbaston brought more crap: poor Michael Vaughan had been struggling with the bat, and was out for a duck before we collapsed for 231 all out on the first day. The second innings was better, but I had one of those moments: I was on 94 and wanted a six to land the century in style. I hit a ball from Paul Harris straight into the paws of AB de Villiers out near the boundary. Reckless, they said. Reckless and bloody typical.

We lost by five wickets. The series was dead before we reached the final Test at the Oval, and Michael Vaughan's role as captain was being questioned. All the while, Peter Moores was pecking away.

Duncan Fletcher had been a quiet facilitator. He had the ability

to quietly influence, and the humility to act as a consultant. I loved the man. He would be your coach when he needed to be, and he would be your mate when you needed that. You could express yourself.

Peter Moores was the coach: full stop, 24/7. He's a nice guy, but like a human triple espresso – so intense. Big things and small things. He loves statistics, and would always go on about them. Averages, strike rates: it was as if a player's worth all came down to the numbers. It drove me up the wall: you play so much cricket and have so much pressure, then there's some guy in your ear setting silly little targets every day.

As the South Africa series went on, Vaughan struggled and Moores seemed to want to expand his influence all the time. He was everywhere.

And nobody was happy. A team needs to be happy if they want to play well. After we had lost the third Test, and the series, Vaughan got the usual kicking in the media. He hadn't been playing well, and England were losing matches. Everything good that he'd done in his five years as captain, everything he had been part of, seemed to have been forgotten.

Vaughan resigned and made himself unavailable for the final Test. It was an emotional farewell, and the skies were less blue now.

With Michael gone and one Test left to play, the ECB were in a bind.

Hindsight: cricket coaches aren't the same as football managers. You might win football matches from the dugout, but you don't win cricket games from the balcony. The cricket

captain calls the shots on the field, so the captain and the coach must work out a balance between their jobs. It's best to sort that out at the start.

When Vaughan went, Paul Collingwood was the obvious replacement as Test captain, even though he still had three one-day matches of his ban left to serve. However, about an hour after Michael's resignation Paul made himself unavailable for the final Test. He also resigned the ODI captaincy.

The Oval Test was in five days' time. The ECB were sweating: they needed a captain, and they wanted to unite the captaincy of the Test team and the ODI team. Andrew Strauss, who might have been the conservatives' favourite, hadn't been playing one-dayers for some time, and he'd been dropped for the previous winter's tour of New Zealand.

That didn't leave many options. One morning, I was lying on my sofa watching TV when Sky Sports News told me I was favourite to be the next England captain.

I sat up and said, what?

I was the only real candidate. I was playing all forms of cricket, and playing them well. So I was elected. Or handed the poisoned chalice. Whatever. Even now, I sometimes wake up at night and ask myself, how did all that happen?

It was all very weird. Peter Moores called me and said, I want you as captain. I wondered if he was in a phone box with a gun being held to his head. It was no secret that my relationship with Peter Moores wasn't a happy one.

We went to a hotel in Northampton on a Sunday afternoon to discuss things. The papers said we had 'clear-the-air talks'.

We looked at each other and said, well, we don't have a great

relationship, do we? The coach and the captain should really have a good relationship but we don't.

In real life, that's where people say goodbye, isn't it? It's not you, it's me. Have a nice life.

Well, he said, I want you to be captain.

Okay, cool, yeah, I said. Well, we can work on it.

I wanted Moores to sit in the back seat. To facilitate. In hindsight, I don't think he is actually capable of doing that. Moores told everybody that everything between us was great, that KP would be his own man, but he never took his hands off the steering wheel for a moment.

The Test series against South Africa was dead. The last game was just for pride, so I was allowed to pick the team. Might as well be hung for a sheep as a bloody lamb. I replaced Michael Vaughan with Steve Harmison, and gave the first over to Harmison too. I wanted him to know that he had my full confidence as a bowler.

It went well: I hit a century at the Oval in my first Test match as England captain and we won by six wickets. We went on to thrash South Africa 4-0 in the one-day series and won ourselves a trophy. Steve Harmison came out of ODI retirement.

This captaincy business? Nothing to it.

The Ashes were a year away. I had a feeling we had to be thinking long term. We had to start moving in a different direction from the one Peter Moores was pulling in. We had to build towards the Ashes, but I was afraid that Moores was going to run us into the ground before a ball had been bowled in the series.

We had started off well with the last Test against South Africa,

but the upcoming winter tour to India would be the real challenge. The first time Moores and I would be together 24/7 would be in India. The honeymoon would be over.

Before India, however, there was the show for dough. In October 2008 we went to the Caribbean to play in the Stanford Super Series. Twenty20 for \$20 million. Winner takes all. The games were backed by the now-disgraced billionaire Sir Allen Stanford.

Looking back, Stanford was a sleaze and the series became a farce. We managed to win our two exhibition matches, but in the big one, the \$20 million match against the Stanford SuperStars invitational XI, we were a mess. No dignity. We got a ten-wicket hammering from a team that had been together for a fortnight.

Shortly after that humiliation, we were off to India. We lost the one-day series five–nil. The bowlers, apart from Freddie Flintoff, were struggling.

I was feeling the strain. I thought we were sliding towards mediocrity. Moores and I were out of step.

I needed guidance.