

PRESS COVERAGE

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OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

DEERFIELD IN THE DESERT

A king brings a boarding school to the Middle East.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

At Deerfield Academy, an elite boarding school in the hills of western Massachusetts, sneaking out of a dormitory at night is considered a relatively mild form of malfeasance. It doesn't carry the dishonor or the opprobrium of cheating or vandalism, or require sex, alcohol, or drugs, although, of course, it precludes none of the above. In the days when Deerfield was a boys' school (it went coed in 1989), one late-night destination was a girls' boarding school down the road, whose name—Stoneleigh-Burnham—seemed a happy parody not only of prep-piness but also of the mischief that can occasionally accompany it. Regardless, midnight rambles can be magical—giant elms casting strange shadows, the night playing tricks as you prowl the grounds or slip into the woods. There is nothing quite like being a teen-ager outside at night in a forbidden place. Your mere presence is transgressive: an exaltation of adolescence.

One night, twenty-seven years ago, four Deerfield boys bolted from their dormitory and gathered on a green in the middle of the campus. They had an old Army flare. One of them, George Faux, known as Gig (pronounced "Jidge"), was the son of a National Guard pilot, and had occasional access to ordnance, as well as to fireworks. None of them had handled a flare before, and it was too dark to read the instructions. "What if we just pull this thing?" another boy said, indicating a cap on the flare. He was Abdullah, the eldest son of King Hussein of Jordan; Faux and the two other boys, Perry Vella and Chip Smith, called him Ab. His bodyguards, who usually accompanied him everywhere, were likely asleep in their quarters, in the basement of his dorm; they also had a house off campus. Without waiting for an answer, Abdullah pulled the cap, and the flare shot skyward in a blaze of sparks, bathing the campus in spectral pink light. The boys' presence was suddenly very conspicuous. They

scattered. But then the flare, held aloft by a parachute, began to drift toward the gymnasium, and the boys ran after it, their fear of getting caught trumped by their fear of burning down the school—a gallant ordering of priorities. The flare floated past the gym, over an expanse of playing fields, in the direction of a stretch of woods. They followed the flare past a copse of trees and into another field. Finally, it dropped onto the grass and sputtered out. The boys retreated in darkness to their dorm rooms. No one got caught.

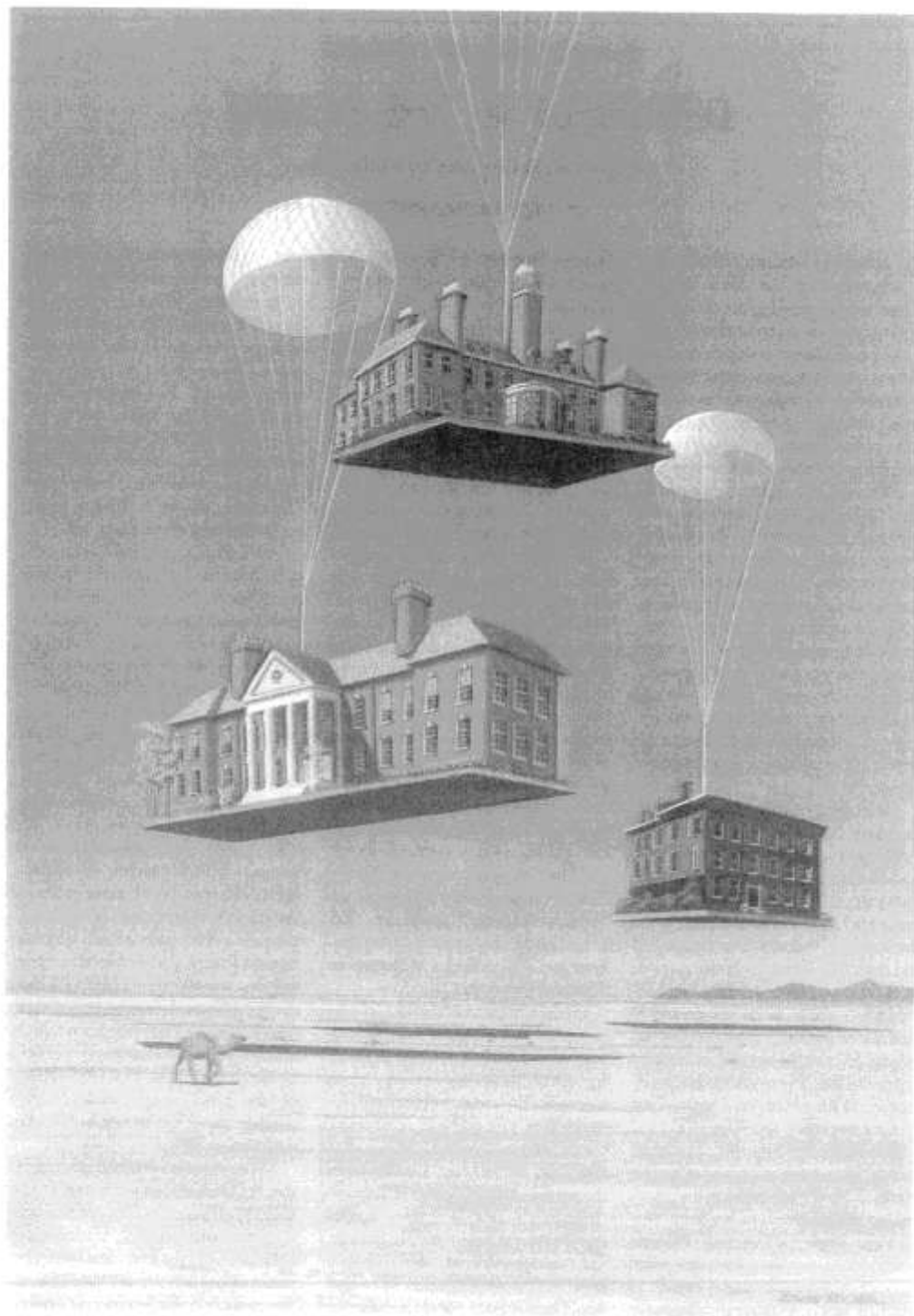
Abdullah and Faux had met as sophomores, after being assigned to the same table in the dining hall. (Vella had noticed Abdullah earlier, on the soccer field, playing in tennis shoes.) Ab and Gig quickly discovered that they had similar interests: sports, airplanes, hunting, guns. As seniors, they served together as proctors of their dormitory. "We ruled the dorm with collegiality but certainly with a lot of fear, too," Faux recalled recently. "Kids that age can be evil geniuses." Abdullah's friends came from a range of backgrounds: in addition to Faux, who was from southeastern Massachusetts, there was Vella, a Maltese hockey goalie from Queens, and Smith, from Darien, Connecticut—"kind of the quintessential prep-school guy," Faux said. Vella referred to them as the Fearsome Foursome.

Abdullah loved Deerfield. He has often said that his years there were the happiest of his life. It was his third boarding school. At the age of seven, he was sent to St. Edmund's, in Hindhead, England; then, to Eaglebrook, a school just up the hill from Deerfield, where, as the first Arab student (and a small one) in the school's history, he was chum in the treacherous waters of dormitory life. During five years at Eaglebrook, he got into a fight almost every day, until he became captain of the wrestling team. By comparison, Deerfield was a placid and dignified place. He arrived in 1977, for tenth grade. In Abdullah's eyes, Deerfield was the op-

posite of posh, its code of Yankee self-reliance a signal not of entitlement but of its renunciation. Whoever you are, you sleep in the same quarters, eat the same mystery meat, and run the same wind sprints. No one has a car (even if your bodyguards do). The longtime head of the dining hall, Jim Smith, used to tell a story about Abdullah's genial complaint that bussing tables, a chore for all Deerfield students, was beneath him. Smith replied, "Your father may be the King of Jordan, but I'm the king of the dining hall."

After graduation, Abdullah enrolled, as his father had, at Sandhurst, the British military college. (Hussein had attended boarding school at Victoria College in Egypt.) He studied at Oxford and in the foreign-service program at Georgetown, and entered the Jordanian military. Although he was Hussein's eldest son (by the second of his four wives, a British officer's daughter named Toni Gardiner, who took the name Princess Muna), he was not the crown prince; his uncle Hassan, Hussein's brother, was next in line. This arrangement enabled Abdullah to pursue a military career, as well as a princely life style, free of undue scrutiny or the burdens of statecraft. He became a pilot and a major general in the Jordanian Special Forces, and developed a reputation as something of a playboy, before marrying Rania Al-Yassin, a Palestinian from Kuwait, in 1993. Still, he was able to indulge plebeian inclinations—he had a cameo, for example, in a 1995 episode of "Star Trek: Voyager"—until Hussein abruptly named him his heir, in 1999, two weeks before dying.

When Abdullah attended commencement at Deerfield, on the occasion of his twentieth reunion, in 2000, he had been king for sixteen months. He arrived by helicopter, and his classmates veered between calling him Ab and Your Majesty. He bunked in the headmaster's house, with his security detail, and for the banquet requested his favorite dish: cheese-



"These tables should be round. The tables at Deerfield are round," the King said. Illustrations by Bruce McCall.

burgers. The next morning, the headmaster and some other administrators asked whether Deerfield could help him in any way. "Interesting you should ask," he replied. "I'm thinking of replicating Deerfield in Jordan. What do you think?"

Prep school: the phrase, taking its place next to "country club" and "trust fund," curdles in the egalitarian mind. New England boarding schools are often considered fortresses of exclusion, perpetuators of stratification and snobbery. In Abdullah's view, however, Deerfield was a diverse place. "It's that atmosphere that he wants to duplicate," Vella said. "Where race, color, and financial status don't matter." That's a funny thing to say about a prep school, but Abdullah felt that Deerfield's secular curriculum; its emphasis on critical thinking, camaraderie, tolerance, and sacrifice; and its commitment to the well-rounded boy (and, later, girl) were key elements in the creation of leaders—especially those comfortable with the ways of the West, not least its college-admissions offices and its network of business and government grandees. Leaders, and therefore Deerfields, were what he felt his country and region needed.

Jordan, a creation of the British after the First World War, has no natural resources to speak of—no oil or gas, and very little water. To survive, it must devise other ways of seeming indispensable. Traditionally, as a neighbor or claimant to disputed territories, it has employed diplomatic guile to attract support, and it has long cultivated an educated populace; its greatest asset may be its so-called "intellectual capital," its expatriates—"the workforce in the Gulf, the doctors, the engineers, the airline pilots," as the King put it. He has made education and technology top priorities, and he intends King's Academy, as his Jordanian Deerfield facsimile came to be called, to be a showcase for both. It is scheduled to open in September, 2007.

There have long been Western secondary schools in the Middle East, most of them for the sons and daughters of expatriates and diplomats. Some of them take a limited number of boarders and embrace, to varying degrees, certain values that may subvert or contradict those of their hosts. They tend to have been

built on the British public-school model or by missionaries, and to have a colonial disposition. And there are esteemed Western universities, such as the American University of Beirut. But no one has sought to emulate a New England boarding school, or seen in one, as Abdullah does, a seed of regional salvation.

In the United States, boarding schools can be a refuge—from commercial culture, from the city, from the suburbs, from parents, or (put another way) from reality. Presumably, a Middle Eastern version would be, for better and worse, doubly remote. Abdullah is not the first or last Arab leader to recognize that many of the problems afflicting the region arise out of disenfranchisement and desperation. One of the most vexing challenges facing the Arab world is what to do about its throngs of unemployed young men (to say nothing of the women) who have few prospects, no political recourse, and an increasing susceptibility to radical talk. Yet his school is not really meant for them. A sumptuous and insular institution like King's Academy could possibly compound this state of affairs, even if only symbolically, and a skeptic might find his dedication to it risible, in a time when the region may be on the verge of a wider war. To be fair, the school is just a part of a grand strategy. He and Queen Rania have launched a campaign to reform the entire education system in Jordan, especially its public schools, which make New York's look like Sweden's. Still, the King maintains both his faith in the remedial powers of a secular elite and his heartfelt attachment to the place that helped instill this faith. Deerfield (and not, say, Stuyvesant or Choate) is the model, because it is where he went.

In 2004, Abdullah, who as a member of the Hashemite dynasty claims direct kinship to the Prophet Muhammad, delivered to the world's Muslims a call for moderation and tolerance. The address was called the Amman Message, and was essentially a high-minded gloss on his effort to involve his countrymen in a modern world that Islamists wish either to repudiate or to destroy. He is considered an enlightened monarch, insofar as he is part of a young generation of leaders in the region who say things that Westerners like to hear and are eager to be in business with the West.

You might say that King's Academy is

a pedagogical component of the Amman Message. Abdullah hopes that the student body will eventually number six hundred and will comprise kids from all over the region, including Israel, and some exchange students from the United States. Thirty per cent of them will receive at least partial scholarships. The rest will likely come from wealthy families, mostly in Jordan and in the Gulf; the tuition is high—twenty-eight thousand dollars a year—even compared with other elite schools in Jordan. There will be girls as well as boys. Although it may be hard to picture a coed boarding school in a land where honor killing is still tolerated, the families who are inclined to send their sons and daughters to King's Academy will presumably be those who are comfortable with the school's founding precepts. Nonetheless, six hundred mostly well-to-do boys and girls from the Middle East will behave differently from a similar number of mostly well-to-do East Coast Wasps. Student life can often resist engineering from above.

To have a New England boarding school, you need a New England headmaster. Two years ago, Eric Widmer, who had been the Deerfield headmaster for a decade, announced that he planned to retire this year. Shortly afterward, an associate of the King's asked Widmer if he would consider being the founding headmaster at King's Academy. "His Majesty is a very persuasive person," Widmer told me, when I visited him at Deerfield last fall. In June, he and his wife, Meera Viswanathan, moved to Jordan.

Widmer, who is sixty-six, is tall and amiable, with a large head and a wide, flat smile. He dresses, as you might expect, in gray flannels or wide-wale corduroys, striped oxford shirts, tweed jackets, and school ties. He has a slight limp that suggests a man who played football in the days before arthroscopy. He likes gin Martinis and Garcia y Vega cigars, and speaks slowly, in long, self-consciously complex and punch-line-bound sentences that are a cause of occasional half-serious exasperation to his wife. He exhorts his students to use, in place of profanity, such phrases as "Oh heavens" and "Gracious me."

Despite the country-scholar mien, he seems more worldly than his predecessor Frank Boyden, who served as Deerfield's

headmaster and patriarch for nearly seventy years, and who pretty much built the school, in his own flinty and idiosyncratic image. Although Deerfield is more than two hundred years old, it was a one-room schoolhouse, with an enrollment of fourteen, when Boyden took over, in 1902. The story of his transformation of the place, told in these pages forty years ago by John McPhee (Deerfield '49), is Deerfield's Pentateuch, and, among prep-school-founder legends—a crowded, if parochial, category—Boyden's may stand tallest of all. Boyden was a stubborn and vigorous oddball: he sometimes played on the students' sports teams or worked the switchboard; he was opposed to the teaching of calculus and art. But he had a knack for turning boys into young men. He kept them busy, demanded a great deal, and forgave them nearly everything but remorselessness. "His school evolved naturally, gradually, and surprisingly," McPhee wrote. "He had no plan and no theory, but he proved himself to be an educator by intuition." It is no small thing to create a school, with its own values and traditions, its pedagogical peculiarities and munificent alumni. And, unlike a lot of American prep schools, Deerfield wasn't built on a preëxisting (that is, English) model; it was, as McPhee wrote, an "indigenous institution."

Deerfield has long been considered one of the better New England boarding schools, in terms of selectivity, facilities, S.A.T. scores, college placement, and endowment. It has a list of distinguished alumni: among them are John Ashbery, Gilbert Grosvenor, Budd Schulberg, David Koch, David Childs, Robert Morgenthau, and Steve Brill, as well as various Rockefellers and countless lesser viscounts from the pages of the *Social Register*. Tuition for boarders is thirty-six thousand dollars a year. The school has six hundred or so students. In addition to academics, it stresses athletics and interaction with faculty, and is known for turning out well-mannered, obliging young men and women; independence and rebellion are not as integral to the culture as at some other schools.

"You'll notice that there are no signs indicating where anything is," Widmer said as he took me around. "Visitors have to ask where to go, which gives students an opportunity to be nice to them, so that word travels back to Greenwich about this

wonderful place where the students have such nice manners." Although Widmer has introduced modifications to the Boyden way, he is an unabashed disciple; he has never sat down at Boyden's old desk, which occupies the entrance hall of the main school building. "That would be too presumptuous," Widmer said.

"At the new school, even though '2007' will be on the seal, we'd like to convey that there's a past to it, a history that's very important," Widmer said. "It won't look old, but it will feel like it's on historical ground. We will make use of the Deerfield narrative." He added, "This world gives the new school its content."

It was a sweet fall day, leaves skittering, the air crisp. Walking past students on the way to the dining hall—boys in baggy khakis or shorts, blazers, and ties, their hair turtled forward as if from weeks spent under lacrosse helmets; girls in bright sweaters and varsity windbreakers, not a nose ring or flash of goth to be seen—Widmer exhibited his knack for names, provoking demonstrations of fine manners. He told me later, "Sometimes I wonder if we're turning out a generation of freaks: well-dressed, well-mannered kids who can relate to people twice their age."

Widmer graduated from Deerfield in 1957 but has roots in the Middle East. He was born in Beirut, where his father taught at International College and his mother was a dean at American University. His great-grandfather founded Robert College, a secondary school in Istanbul. Wid-

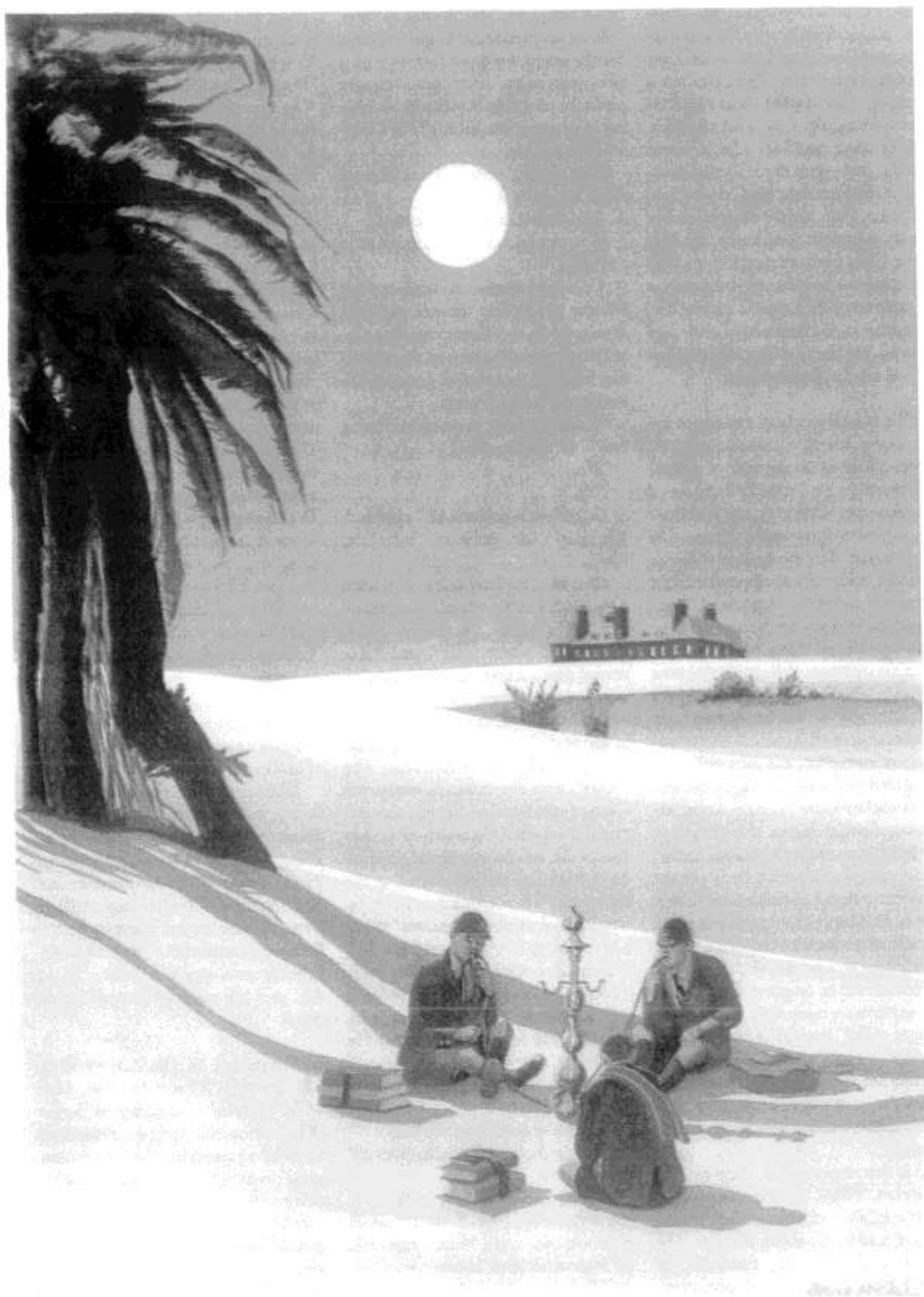
mer went to Williams and earned a doctorate in history and Far Eastern languages at Harvard. He spent twenty-five years on the faculty at Brown, fifteen of them as a dean. His wife, who was born in Madras and grew up in Los Angeles, is a professor of comparative literature and East Asian studies there. Widmer speaks six languages, but Arabic is not one of them, so last year he took an introductory course at Deerfield, flailing gamely at his *b'aa*s and *ghayn*s, alongside his teen-age charges. At commencement last year, each graduate gave him one Jordanian dinar.

A core ritual at Deerfield is the sit-down meal—a sort of assembly, chapel, and family dinner all in one that convenes eight times a week, for lunch or dinner. Eight or nine students are assigned to a faculty member's table in the dining hall for three weeks, before rotating to a new one. The tables are round. (When Abdullah was shown the first series of architectural renderings for his King's Academy, the dining hall had roughly the same dimensions as Deerfield's, but the plan called for rectangular tables. "This will not do," the King said. "These tables should be round. The tables at Deerfield are round.")

Lunch was brisk but civil. Widmer kicked off the conversation ("O.K., how's everybody?") and then let it flow and sputter. At Widmer's table, many states were represented, with a bias toward the Northeast. There were two African-American girls: one from New Orleans, who had lost her home to Katrina, and one from



"I love this reading group."



To succeed, the school will need to convince American families of its safety and Middle Eastern families of its rectitude.

Stowe, Vermont. Over dessert, Mr. Morsman, a Deerfield master for forty-six years, stood at a lectern and issued a few edicts and reminders—"The weather is changing. That doesn't mean the dress code is changing. I see a lot of people wearing fleece, and I see a lot of people avoiding me"—then m.c.'d a series of student announcements: the Outing Club, the Jujitsu Club, the debating team, the literary magazine, and, finally, the Etiquette Club, the mere mention of which prompted two long-haired young men at my table to roll their eyes. "That's it," Mr. Morsman said. Hundreds of chair legs moaned over the tiled floor, and the dining hall filled with exit chatter.

The boarding-school experience includes school, of course, so that afternoon I sat in on a couple of classes, half pretending (to myself) that I was a fourteen-year-old first-year boarder from the Emirates: how would the material speak to me? The curriculum at King's Academy will be essentially an American advanced-placement program, designed to prepare students for the best universities in the United States, but it must also meet the standards of Jordan's education ministry, which are rigid. In a sense, the students will be attending two high schools at once. English will be the language of instruction, and there will be the usual array of foreign languages, but students will be required to study Arabic, including classical Arabic. (As it happens, Abdullah is no master of classical Arabic, and, perhaps as a result, he is not the mellifluous orator his father was.) There will be an Islamic-theology requirement as well, which must be taught in Arabic, in addition to a world-religions course. Literature will be taught in English, but the students are more likely to encounter "Cities of Salt" than "A Separate Peace." As Viswanathan, who is in charge of designing the curriculum, told me, "You'll want the students to be familiar with Shakespeare, but also with Mahfouz and Rushdie."

My first stop was Ms. Hannay's English class, "50/50: Literature and Culture of the 1950s"—fifteen seniors seated around a table, discussing Cheever. The text was "The Country Husband," in which Francis Weed, a disaffected commuter in the fictitious Westchester town of Shady Hill, dreams of seducing the

family babysitter. Ms. Hannay, in wide-wale corduroys and a lichen-green sweater, had the ardent, wry expression of a teacher who wants to lead her students toward a particular revelation but who is also tolerant of tangents. She began, "The Country Husband is about . . . ?"

"My parents," a boy said. Ms. Hannay raised her eyebrows.

"People you know," another said.

"I have a friend—it's his parents," a girl said.

Once the students had established that the story dealt rather squarely with their demographic, they began venturing narrative and thematic observations, and before long the conversation turned to the notion of the midlife crisis.

"Are any of you planning on having one?" Ms. Hannay asked.

"No."

"No."

"My friend's dad had one," a girl said. "He bought, like, synthesizers and a Euro van."

Over the next forty-five minutes, the class tackled debutante parties, conformity, and rebellion ("Is there anything shady about Shady Hill?"), and I suspected that Cheever, in all likelihood, would not be making the trip to Jordan.

But Machiavelli might be. The seniors in my next class—political philosophy, with Mr. O'Donnell—had read "The Prince"; with that uniquely adolescent blend of cynicism and naïveté, they engaged in a spirited discussion of the lion and the fox, and the morality of power. A quote from Lao-tzu was written on the blackboard: "Do you want to improve the world? I don't think it can be done." Without revealing any political bias, Mr. O'Donnell, a stocky and sardonic prep-school graduate (Brooks) with a ponytail and Blundstone boots, had them apply Machiavelli to the events of the day. For homework, they were to write a one-page letter from Machiavelli to President Bush.

"Double-spaced?" one boy asked.

"Can we throw a little Italian in there?" asked another.

Early that evening, I met with Widmer at the headmaster's house, a Colonial saltbox known as the Manse. Parts of it are more than three hundred years old, and Widmer can seem like a giant, stooping through its low-slung doorways into small, creaky rooms. The doors are never

locked, and traffic can be brisk, especially with students seeking the counsel of Viswanathan, known to all as Ms. Vis. "Privacy is an illusion," Widmer said. "Our spaces belong to all of us." Widmer fixed a Martini, went into the library, and put his feet up on the coffee table. (Ms. Vis was in Providence.) "My big assignment next year will be to inculcate the idea of a boarding school in the Middle East," he said. "I have to assure American families of the safety of it. For an American, safety means not being blown up, but for a person in the region it may mean that certain traditional values are protected and genders are kept separate, and so forth." He added, "The hard part, of course, will be persuading parents in that part of the world to turn over their daughters to us." This fall, he and Viswanathan will begin travelling around the region, giving presentations at the best elementary schools. This summer, they also presided, with the assistance of several recent Deerfield graduates, over a Prep-for-Prep-like program in which fifty-two underprivileged but overachieving Jordanian public-school students spent two weeks at the King's Academy campus (which is still under construction) studying English and learning to use computers, to prepare them to compete with their more cosmopolitan and polylingual counterparts in the fall of 2007.

Widmer and I set off for dinner. He rode a mountain bike, swerving a bit, thanks to the pace, not the gin. At the dining hall, we loaded up our trays and joined a table of faculty members and their families. A teacher began talking about a course he was planning, on the literature of confession. One of the high-lights, he said, would be "Lolita." That, too, probably wouldn't be making the trip.

The palace of His Majesty King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan ('80), consists of a complex of buildings on a hill overlooking downtown Amman. I went to see him there last spring, passing through a series of checkpoints manned by unsmiling, mustachioed royal guards. I was driven to the royal offices, which resembled a low-slung Four Seasons hotel, and then was asked to wait in an anteroom. I would have felt like a troublemaker who had been summoned to see



"He rubbed your belly and it felt good—that doesn't make you gay."

the headmaster—a familiar enough experience, and one that forever colors others like it—were it not for the fact that Circassian guards in traditional dress stood sentry, while a Bedouin attendant dropped by with coffee and bakhoor. Attendants of various rank and station dashed back and forth in the hallway leading to the King's chambers.

After a while, I was escorted down the hall and into a large office, where the King was waiting by the door. He is not a tall man, but sovereignty, footmen, shiny boots, and a good suit can give a man stature. Still, he was disarming and easygoing. We sat down, and he began speaking quickly, with a clipped, faintly British accent and an occasional blinking twitch: "It's called the Deerfield experience, and it's very hard to quantify—the way teachers are with you, the camaraderie, the way they allow you to mature, the values that they instill in you. I wanted to give other people that opportunity."

In Abdullah's view, the Deerfield experience could serve as a kind of foil in the so-called clash of civilizations. "I'm sure it's going to be a challenge for the first couple of students because of the tension in the area—as you know, Israeli students are going to be accepted into the school," he said. "But we need examples like this

to show that, actually, we can all get along—and to build a younger generation who can take on the responsibilities of the world with a more open mind." He noted that fifty per cent of the population of the Middle East is under the age of eighteen. "If you look at Egypt or Saudi Arabia, and some of these other very large countries, they're a bit slower in trying to get education reform moving in the right direction. And it's going to impact very negatively on a young society."

Abdullah has four children—two boys (aged twelve and one) and two girls (nine and five). So far, he foresees his eldest, Hussein, going to King's Academy for a couple of years (he has the grades to get in), and then perhaps to Deerfield for two more, in part to protect him from the corrupting effects of his patrimony. "I don't want to see my kids leave the house until the last possible moment," he said, "but the more they go into the regular school system here in Jordan, the more they are going to be treated differently. It's just the way society is."

The King was attuned to the problem of snobbery. "I can cite a couple of secondary schools here in Jordan, one that is known as an extremely elite school, which I refuse to send my kids to, because every kid's got a mobile, and a BMW comes to

pick him up after school. And we just don't want that."

Traditionally, Arab élites have sent their sons and daughters to the West for college and graduate school, but they have been reluctant to send them so far for secondary school. King's Academy would be a kind of way station on the road to the West, especially for girls. "With all the freedom a university has, it's a culture shock, and a lot of students lose their way," Abdullah said. "For people who are going to send their daughters to the States, wouldn't it be better for them to get acclimatized in a somewhat rigid high-school system, where you have that one-teacher-to-ten-student ratio, and you have ethics being put in place by a small community, a family community?" He went on, "I think initially it's going to be more conservative. I think it has to, because a lot of parents are going to say, 'O.K.—I'm sending my young daughter to a high school in Jordan that has boys in it?' Well, yeah. But you're going to have to do that sooner or later if you're thinking that your girls are going to go to the United States for college."

I asked him what kind of trouble he had got into during his time at Deerfield. "We always got into teen-age trouble, whatever kids do at that age," he said. "Let's put it this way: I never got into drugs as a young kid. Kids can be susceptible at that age, but everything at Deerfield was sports-oriented. We knew that the people who were doing that kind of stuff were the nerds, which was only five or ten per cent. Those were the A-plus students. The rest of us, everyone wanted to be on the top team. You want to be clean of body as well as clean of spirit, if that makes sense for a fourteen-year-old."

The protocol chief ducked in to end the interview, but Abdullah waved him away. He seemed to be enjoying himself. Like any prep-school guy with a sentimental streak he is susceptible to glory-days talk, but also it was an easier matter for him to address than Hezbollah or Hamas.

Abdullah holds a relatively moderate stance on Palestine (Jordan has a peace treaty with Israel) and has cooperated with the United States in the Iraq war (and, reportedly, in the rendition and interrogation of suspected Al Qaeda terrorists)—positions that have earned him en-

munity throughout the region. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian terrorist who was killed in Iraq in June, repeatedly called for his death. Jordan is an autocratic state, albeit a much gentler one than its neighbors to the north or south; criticizing the King is a crime, and journalists and academics go to jail for it. Even so, you hear complaints about rampant corruption and a political system where the people have no real power. As a State Department official told me, "The regime is really good at practicing the discourse of reform without enacting real reform." He added, "It's neither an Arabian police-state nightmare nor 'morning in Amman.'" Abdullah's particular blend of tolerant talk and grudging reform mollifies neither his radical critics nor his more enlightened ones.

Early in the conflict this summer between Israel and Hezbollah, Abdullah, moved both by moderate impulses and by wariness of "the Shia crescent" (Jordan is mostly Sunni), made statements implying that Hezbollah deserved a portion of the blame. As the bombing intensified, and the civilian casualties in Lebanon mounted—and with them outrage in the Arab world—Abdullah became openly critical of Israel. Abdullah declined to say anything himself about the conflict's effect on the school. Still, according to Widmer and a palace spokesperson, the war in Lebanon has not affected Abdullah's commitment to King's Academy, even if it has complicated the effort. "If anything, the school is more critically important now than ever," Widmer said.

Early in the planning for King's Academy, it became clear that you could no sooner duplicate Deerfield in the desert than you could Jerusalem in New Jersey. There are no maple trees in Jordan, to say nothing of Rockefellers or Choates. What's more, the village of Deerfield, into which the school spills without fences or gates, is one of the older settlements in the country: the school grew up over time among three-hundred-year-old clapboard houses. In Jordan, a rough equivalent would be a boarding school set in the caves and tombs of Petra. In Dubai, perhaps, you could imagine an emir buying up a colonial village and having it reassembled under an air-conditioned dome: a preppy Potemkin. But in Jordan the academy's planners will try to approxi-

mate Deerfield rather than replicate it. The question is to what extent the New England boarding-school experience depends on such components as field-hockey skirts, rotting apples, townies, quarries, blackflies, and booze runs to Boston.

In the summer of 2002, King Abdullah invited a Deerfield contingent, including Widmer, Viswanathan, and its director of development, David Pond, to Jordan to talk about the school. Among the guests was a Jordanian expatriate named Safwan Masri, a vice-dean at Columbia Business School. One morning, they took off in a helicopter, with the King at the controls, and scoped out potential sites. When they stopped for lunch, Abdullah announced that Masri was his point person on the school. This was news to Masri, but, as he told me recently, "when the King asks you to do something, you do it." Masri eventually became chairman of the board. (Last December, he stepped down as vice-dean at Columbia—though he'll continue to teach—in order to devote himself to King's Academy.)

Masri did not go to Deerfield. His father was a Palestinian, from Nablus, on the West Bank, who attended boarding school in Jerusalem in the thirties (and had a Jewish roommate). Business took him to Amman, where Safwan was born. At the age of sixteen, Masri went to America to study engineering at Purdue. He stayed on in the States, collecting degrees, including a doctorate in engineering from Stanford, which allowed him to avoid military service in Jordan. (His mother successfully lobbied the Jordanian parliament to have the military-service laws changed so that young men pursuing their doctorates abroad could postpone their service.) Eventually, he wound up at Columbia.

One of the people he got to know in New York was Rania, the future Queen, whose brother was pursuing a master's in public affairs at Columbia. After she and Abdullah took the throne, Masri became her unpaid adviser.

One of the first things Masri did, after being enlisted by the King, was solicit advice from Henry Kravis, who is on the board of Columbia Business School. Kra-

vis urged him to raise money first in the Middle East. The King put up seven million dollars, as well as the land, and attracted money from young princes in the region, such as Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, and Sheikh Salman Bin Hamad al-Khalifa, the crown prince of Bahrain. Various Arab and Gulf banks contributed, as did civilians like the Saudi investor Ghassan Shaker and the Jordanian bankers Isam and Rajai Salfiti. The political pitch (imagine a wellspring of moderate, secular, worldly young Arab men and women) was gilded by a gearhead pitch (the campus will be a technological marvel). The first American whom Masri solicited was Peter Weinberg, a former Goldman Sachs partner and a Deerfield trustee, who gave two million dollars, through his family's foundations. Weinberg led Masri to the private-equity investor and former Harvard oarsman Dick Cashin, who has been involved in the Boys' Club of New York and the American University of Cairo. Cashin and his wife gave a million dollars. The goal is a hundred million dollars by 2008. So far, about sixty million has been raised.

In the fall of 2002, Masri went to Massachusetts with the King's architect, a London-based Egyptian named Khaled Azzam, who designed Abdullah's private residence and a huge new state mosque. Azzam and Masri spent two days at Deerfield, observing the layout of the buildings, the behavior of the students, and the correlation between the two—the

way, for example, students and faculty spilled onto the pathways, in the five minutes between classes, and engaged in conversation and horseplay. Azzam, who had built four well-fortified schools in Saudi Arabia, had never seen one that fit so effortlessly into its natural environment.

"He took in the open spaces, the way the land and the buildings and the people interacted," Masri said. "And he transported it to this kind of environment." Azzam even thought of little nooks where students might go to sneak cigarettes. On Christmas Day, 2003, Masri met Abdullah at the King's mother's palace, in Amman, and they drove to a hundred-and-forty-acre plot of land that the King



had been buying up, on the outskirts of the ancient city of Madaba, about a half hour south of Amman. The terrain was lush, by Jordanian standards, but to Pioneer Valley eyes it might still qualify as desert. Not far to the west was Mt. Nebo, where Moses is said to have died, after looking down from the mountaintop over the Jordan Valley: his first and final glimpse of the Promised Land.

During Deerfield's spring break, I spent a week in Amman with Widmer, Viswanathan, and Masri. Viswanathan is spirited and congenial; her ability to maintain a cheerful air and fervent intellect, in the face of ceaseless social and professional obligations, suggests an aptitude for higher office. On formal occasions, she wears a sari. Where her husband is droll, she is keen. Although she will serve as the first lady, of sorts, at King's Academy, she will also occupy its Sheikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa Distinguished Chair in the Theory and Practice of Knowledge while on extended leave from Brown.

The road to King's Academy cuts west from Jordan's main artery, the Desert Highway, into the hills east of the Dead Sea, passing wheat fields, greenhouses, carrot venders, and signs advertising condominium developments. (Amman has been enjoying a growth spurt, owing, in large part, to an influx of middle-class Iraqis, who have fled the violence in their country. Private and government contractors have also been using Amman as a base of operations in the Iraq war.) The first thing you see of the school is the concrete wall around it. Eventually, vines and shrubbery will serve as camouflage, but for now the wall is a stark sight; it brings to mind a medium-security prison. At one point during our visit, Masri asked Gabi Gildeh, one of the project managers, "How high is the wall?"

"Two and a half metres," Gildeh said.

"Impossible to jump over?"

"For students, nothing is impossible."

"I'm not worried about the students," Masri said. "I'm worried about trespassers." Cameras along the perimeter will point out, not in. "The presence of security cameras would kill school spirit," Widmer said. "We don't want to give students the impression that we're spying on them."

The campus, still unfinished, was a

PATERSON

What do I want in these rooms papered with visions of money?
How much can I make by cutting my hair? If I put new heels on my shoes,
bathe my body reeking of masturbation and sweat, layer upon layer of excrement
dried in employment bureaus, magazine hallways, statistical cubicles, factory stairways,
cloakrooms of the smiling gods of psychiatry;
if in antechambers I face the presumption of department store supervisory employees,
old clerks in their asylums of fat, the slob and dumbbells of the ego, with money and power to hire and fire and make and break and fart and justify their reality
of wrath and rumor of wrath to wrath-weary man,
what war I enter and for what a prize! the dead prick of commonplace obsession,
harridan vision of electricity at night and daylight misery of thumb sucking rage.

I would rather go mad, gone down the dark road to Mexico, heroin dripping in my veins, eyes and ears full of marijuana,
eating the God peyote on the floor of a mud hut on the border

scene of extravagance and desolation. It resembled an abandoned capital city—Celesteville, minus the elephants and the palms. The architectural style is Mediterranean: terra-cotta roofs and bleached limestone outer walls, with giant pine beams, more like Stanford than like Deerfield. There were nearly two dozen buildings, many of them as large and grand as an individual school. Between them were vast tracts of baked dusty earth, traversed by a windswept network of stone pathways. The only inhabitants were six hundred Turkish construction workers, who spent their nights in trailers down by the gymnasium. By day, they crawled about, hard-hatted, in the rafters of the buildings, as they raced to finish the interiors. They had built nearly everything in twenty months, at times outpacing the board's ability to raise funds. (Construction is budgeted at sixty-two million dollars.)

The campus is on a slight incline, with the classroom building at the crest and the sports facilities at the base—swimming pool; soccer stadium; squash, handball, tennis, and basketball courts; and thirteen acres of playing fields. In between are the dining hall, a seven-hundred-seat theatre, the library (fifty thou-

sand volumes), the student center (future home of the school radio station and newspaper), the headmaster's house, a guesthouse, the administration building, and a fleet of dormitories. "These are the dorms His Majesty requested," Gildeh said. They were two stories high, each floor consisting of a long hallway with a dozen rooms on each side and a faculty apartment at the end.

One of the boys' dorms had been set up as a showcase. (Donors who give between one and six million dollars can have a dorm named after them.) Our delegation shuffled in. The stairway was grand, the hallways broad, the rooms spotless but snug, all of them singles opening onto a communal balcony that ran the length of the building—an unthinkable luxury, by Yankee standards. One of the rooms was fully furnished, with standard-issue wood-composite furniture from Turkey and some schoolboy props: a basketball, a poster of a 1932 Plymouth sedan, a shelf loaded with calculus textbooks and fiction by Nicholas Griffin. On the desk, a biology textbook lay open to a chapter on organ transplants.

Despite the speed at which the project had come together, every detail had called for deliberation, and, of course, meetings,

or laying in a hotel room over the body of some suffering man or woman,
 rather jar my body down the road, crying by a diner in the western sun;
 rather crawl on my naked belly over the tincans of Cincinnati;
 rather drag a rotten railroad tie to a Golgotha in the Rockies;
 rather, crowned with thorns in Galveston, nailed hand and foot in Los
 Angeles, raised up to die in Denver,
 pierced in the side in Chicago, perished and tombled in New Orleans and
 resurrected in 1958 somewhere on Garret Mountain,
 come down roaring in a blaze of hot cars and garbage,
 streetcorner Evangel in front of City Hall, surrounded by statues of
 agonized lions,
 with a mouthful of shit, and the hair rising on my scalp,
 screaming and dancing in praise of eternity annihilating the sidewalk,
 annihilating reality,
 screaming and dancing against the orchestra in the destructible ballroom
 of the world,
 blood streaming from my belly and shoulders
 flooding the city with its hideous ecstasy rolling over the pavements and
 highways
 by the bayou and forests and derricks leaving my flesh and my bones
 hanging on the trees.

—Allen Ginsberg

on several continents. Masri and the board had presented the King with a list of a dozen possibilities for the name of the school, among them Madaba Academy, Royal Academy, and Hashemite Academy. The King had checked off the last one, but there were reservations about it, because it identified the school too closely with Jordan, the monarchy, and the Prophet Muhammad. The board thought of King's Academy, which had a pleasing Cantabrigian resonance, and it stuck. The board hired graphic designers and consultants from Istanbul to devise school colors, and, after several months, they came up with light green and light brown—Deerfield green with a desert tint. Everyone was pleased except the King, who said, "I don't like them." He chose red, blue, and gold. The dress code will be stricter than Deerfield's: blue blazers (with the school crest), tan pants (tan skirts for girls), and white shirts. The boys will wear ties. Viswanathan's solution to the head-scarf question for girls was to introduce a mandatory school scarf, which girls may use to cover their heads.

Viswanathan and Widmer were eager to see the house where they'd be living for the next several years. It stood, unguarded and incomplete, in a plaza be-

tween the administrative building and the dining hall. The injunction against privacy had been heeded, but, with doors of steel and glass, limestone walls, and an open plan inside, it had little in common with the Manse. For some reason, there was a pile of toilets in the future living room. The house had no back door, which troubled Viswanathan, because if she and Widmer were entertaining guests and a student came seeking her counsel, as often happens at Deerfield, the student would have to muster the courage to barge in, rather than slipping unseen into a homey kitchen. (Widmer later arranged for side and rear entrances to be added.)

Down at the nursery, at the far end of the campus, a crew of Turks was unloading six shipping containers full of Italian jacaranda trees, which had been trucked in that afternoon from Aqaba. There were also hundreds of olive trees, Lebanon cedars, acacias, and oleanders. "When the school opens, there will be a sense of verdure," Viswanathan said. Azzam, the architect, had told me that he intends to grow an olive forest inside the walls. A boarding school without woods is no boarding school at all.

The sun was setting near Mt. Nebo.

Some Turks had struck up a game of soccer near their trailer park. On the way out, we stopped at the spiritual center—the smallest structure on campus. There had been talk of a mosque, but the King insisted that the school be nonsectarian. The spiritual center at King's Academy consists of a small cloistered garden, with a fountain in the middle and benches along the side. Viswanathan wondered whether there shouldn't be a place—at the fountain, or perhaps a faucet along the wall—for Muslims to wash before prayer. Gildeh and Masri thought not. "It is not a mosque," Gildeh said.

That night, Masri hosted a dinner party at his apartment—a modern duplex in the Deir Ghbar section of Amman. He had spent the afternoon rounding up gin, vermouth, Martini glasses, and olives for Widmer, a task that, thanks, perhaps, to the British Mandate, had proved far from impossible. After the Jordanian guests—among them a newspaper editor, a senator, and two women from the royal court—had left, Widmer began to talk about a different kind of challenge: the compartment of some wealthy Jordanian adolescents. A few he'd met at an elite local high school that morning had struck him as apathetic and ill-mannered. Widmer said, "Let me tell you this: if we can't stem that tide, we will have failed."

"The issue isn't just with the children," Masri said. "It's with the parents."

"Especially if the parents are used to their kids being sassy," Widmer said. "It will be an interesting dynamic, to say the least. Maybe we should put that on the application to King's Academy: 'How spoiled are you?'"

While I was in Jordan, Widmer, Viswanathan, and Masri organized a conference, inviting two dozen educators from prep schools in and around the region, as well as a few from the United States, to introduce themselves to their peers and rivals, and to solicit ideas and opinions about how to make King's Academy work. There were representatives from the local private schools, and from some venerable boarding schools, including Robert College. One morning, a bus took everyone down to Madaba to see the campus, and the group shuffled along the pathways, like mothers inspect-

ing the mansions of super-rich new sons-in-law.

"Wow."

"Wait till you see the wow inside."

"You're treating them very well. Very well."

"Six hundred kids. Jesus. I've got twenty-six hundred kids in a space the tenth of this."

For three days, Widmer, Viswanathan, and Masri held talks and roundtable discussions. "One big difference between us and you is that we don't have students yet," Widmer said in his introductory remarks.

"We're not going to be approaching your teachers," Masri said, when his turn came. (By August, they had recruited a dozen faculty members, from schools in America and in the region.)

Other participants asked questions and offered advice. The headmistress of Qatar Academy, a coed boarding school in Education City, outside Doha, remarked that people in the region tend to think that boarding school is only for "broken families or families with a Hollywood style of living, where the parents are too busy to take care of their children." She had forty-two boarders at Qatar Academy, and, she said, "We get forty-two calls a day. Jordan is not Qatar, but similar. God help you."

On May 28th, Widmer presided over his last Deerfield commencement. An hour before the ceremony, he, Viswanathan, and Masri joined a fleet of black S.U.V.s and pickup trucks and an array of security men on the sideline of a lacrosse field. The day was hot and clear, and the air smelled of mud. After a while, three helicopters appeared, flying north in a line. They flew past the school, and then reappeared, coursing south over the campus, on a trajectory similar to the one that Abdullah's flare had taken, a quarter century before. The helicopters landed, one at a time, and out of the last stepped Abdullah and Faux, to applause from well-wishers congregated along the edges of the field. Widmer, Viswanathan, and Masri greeted them, then joined a convoy up to the Manse. Children waved little Jordanian flags.

The King was the commencement speaker. When Widmer had mentioned this possibility to the seniors, earlier in the school year, the class president had pushed

instead for his uncle Steve Carell, the star of "The Forty-Year-Old Virgin." "Carell turned out to be unavailable," Widmer explained. "So we were left with His Majesty, which was our wish all along."

Still, it was unlikely that Carell would have required as much security. Various forces—U.S. Secret Service, Jordanian security, and the state and local police—had mustered forty men. Abdullah and Widmer took part in a procession down the road that cuts through campus, a ritual that Widmer introduced some years ago. Accompanied by bagpipers, the underclassmen marched past, boys in blazers and white shirts and pants, girls in white dresses. "I don't think we did this," the King said. He had originally opposed the idea of coeducation at Deerfield but had warmed to it after talking to some of his old teachers. I asked him about Stoneleigh-Burnham, and he said, with a smile, "Is that place still going?" It was.

An older woman, catching sight of Abdullah, motioned with a crook of her finger for him to come over, and he obeyed. "Must be an old teacher," Masri said under his breath. "Only an old teacher can get away with doing that to the King."

"That was my French teacher," the King said, after she released him. "She always used to give me a hard time."

A fife-and-drum outfit, in Colonial costume, stepped forward and led students, faculty, headmaster, and King into a large green-and-white tent. The King's security men nudged students out of the way to improve sight lines. "I'm picking up ideas for the graduation at King's Academy," Masri said, as he took his seat. "The bagpipes would work, but not the fife and drum." The night before, Masri had attended a traditional gathering of the graduating class with Widmer and Ms. Vis, a session known as "the senior cry," during which the students talk about their time at Deerfield. "I was overwhelmed by the culture and the feeling," Masri said. The spirit, as well as the ritualized expression of it, was something he thought worth emulating. "If we can do that, the rest will be easy."

The graduation ceremony was unremarkable (school song, senior speeches, partisan cheering sections), and the King's speech was fairly ordinary (knowledge is the best kind of wealth, your brain cannot overflow, we still remember Norm in the

stockroom). The graduates made Widmer and Viswanathan honorary members of their class, and Widmer conferred a Deerfield diploma on Abdullah's half brother Ali, who had come along on the trip. Prince Ali had spent two years at Deerfield in the early nineties, at the time of the first Gulf War, but it was decided that he would be better off elsewhere. He finished up at Salisbury, a less prestigious boarding school, in Connecticut.

Afterward, the class of 1980 had a luncheon under a tent at the Manse. Forty-five classmates had come, some with their wives, and they all gravitated to the King, who had changed out of his jacket and tie into a black polo shirt. The class has contributed a million dollars to King's Academy. Abdullah, at their reunion last year (everyone wore green-and-white Hawaiian shirts), had said offhandedly to Faux that they should all come to see King's Academy; a few weeks later, he learned that a hundred classmates had signed up for a trip. He arranged an itinerary for them, and they travelled by bus all over Jordan—a big lunch at the academy, a night on the Dead Sea, a banquet inside the canyons of Little Petra. Abdullah joined them for a few hours in Wadi Rum, a desert in the south, and later, while some of them were swimming in the Red Sea, at Aqaba, a helicopter swooped in and hovered for a minute overhead, blinding them in a mini-typhoon of salt water. They found out later that, as they'd suspected, the pilot was Ab.

Widmer stood up during lunch and mentioned that Abdullah had met the previous evening with President Bush and that that afternoon he was flying to Wyoming to have dinner with Dick Cheney, who several months before had accidentally shot a hunting companion. A murmur of jocular disapproval passed through the crowd. Widmer then presented the King with a gift: an 1815 New England officer's rifle, in a glass-and-wood case. The King took it and said, "So, I guess I *am* prepared for my meeting tonight." Then he began reminiscing about the class's trip to Jordan. "I didn't think Phil could get in any more trouble until I saw pictures—"

"A video!" someone called out.

"—a video of him wearing women's clothing at the bar!" When the King was done with his speech, Prince Ali slipped out of the tent for a cigarette. *