A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

On 20 December 2010, Julian Assange signed a contract with Canongate Books to write a book – part memoir, part manifesto – for publication the following year.

At the time, Julian said: 'I hope this book will become one of the unifying documents of our generation. In this highly personal work, I explain our global struggle to force a new relationship between the people and their governments.'

In the end, the work was to prove too personal.

Despite sitting for more than fifty hours of taped interviews and spending many late nights at Ellingham Hall in Norfolk (where he was living under house arrest) discussing his life and the work of WikiLeaks with the writer he had enlisted to help him, Julian became increasingly troubled by the thought of publishing an autobiography. After reading the first draft of the book that was delivered at the end of March, Julian declared: 'All memoir is prostitution.'

On 7 June 2011, with thirty-eight publishing houses around the world committed to releasing the book, Julian told us he wanted to cancel his contract.

We disagree with Julian's assessment of the book. We believe it explains both the man and his work, underlining his commitment to the truth. Julian always claimed the book was well written; we agree, and this also encouraged us to make the book available to readers.

And the contract? By the time Julian wanted to cancel the deal he had already signed his advance over to his lawyers to settle his legal bills. So the contract still stands. We have decided to honour it – and to publish.

What follows is the unauthorised first draft. It is passionate, provocative and opinionated – like its author. It fulfils the promise of the original proposal and we are proud to publish it.

Canongate Books,
September 2011

JULIAN ASSANGE

The Unauthorised Autobiography

'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.'

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

1

SOLITARY

I consider myself lucky to have been born to curious people who filled the air around me with questions. One day I would meet my enemies and they would hate me for wanting the truth. You could almost forget your own name in all the name-calling. Yet I know well enough who I am and hoped I could tell you myself. My name is Julian Assange. And one day the police wanted me in London. The story could end there, were it not for the complications of time and history and personhood. They say the past is another country, but so is the future if you'll only let it be: speeding along in the back of an English police van you begin to see the world.

They were shouting my name. Shouting slogans. And the press photographers were scrabbling around the windows like crabs in a bucket. It felt like the van was being beaten and that it might turn over, but it was just the press trying to get pictures. I crouched down and held my head between my knees, not wanting to be cast as a criminal. At one point I looked up and saw the cameras being thudded against the

tinted glass and angled so as to catch me. I covered my head with my arms. Then suddenly the vehicle gathered speed and was off. Some of the other prisoners shouted out in their own cubicles, unaware of who I was, evidently shocked at the smashing of the van. Others laughed at the commotion. The show was over. It took about forty minutes for us to reach the gates of Wandsworth Prison. It was 7 December 2010.

I felt weirdly confident at the entry point. I suppose some of that came from knowing my predicament was being scrutinised. I knew the world was watching and that made my plight worthwhile: it serves the cause to be the one visibly taking the flak. Some part of me was horrified at the idea of being branded a criminal for doing our work, but I knew enough to appreciate it could only highlight the issue of justice. There's no bravery involved in such a position, only cunning. I was asked to sign in my personal belongings, which amounted, on this good day, to a single Biro pen and about £250 in cash. I was instructed to strip, which I did, immediately donning prison garments of a grey pullover and grey pants. Oscar Wilde, when he was transferred to the same prison in 1895, created a noble stir when he found that his waistcoat was missing. 'Pray pardon my ebullition of feeling,' he said to the warder. I'll try to keep the words 'like Wilde' out of this, and say nothing about my own poor stock of waistcoats, but the Irishman couldn't fail to come to mind in that rank Victorian slammer. My lawyer later said I had been languishing in Oscar's cell: I'm not sure, but the spirit of the man, his fight against prejudice, was indwelling. He was treated horribly and kept in conditions as inhumane as they were heartbreaking, and I have to say it was other prisoners, past and present ones, who were on my mind at Wandsworth.

I thought a lot about Bradley, the young American soldier who was suffering harsh treatment in an American jail, summarily condemned, in my opinion, for allegedly raising the alarm on an illegal war. He was on my mind a great deal in the confines of the cell.

One of the things that happens almost automatically is that you begin to pace up and down. Like a panther in a cage, you have to find an outlet for constrained action. I walked up and down and was sort of planning what to do, trying to get attuned physiologically to this small space. I knew it was ugly and terrible in there, but it wouldn't be for long. You tell yourself these things and try to focus. On the outside world, as they call it, my lawyers were working overtime to get me out, but their world seemed light years away as I walked in circles and felt, like never before, the meaning and the substance of the word 'solitary'.

To reduce the noise, and maybe the cold, my cell's previous occupant had covered the air-vent with a piece of A4 paper. Later, when the warders turned the lights out, I realised that the worst thing, after all, was to be out of communication. I live for the arts of connection, and I suddenly knew how hard it was going to be in there, not hearing, and not being heard. Especially hard given the position of WikiLeaks: we were engaged in communications warfare with a number of opponents, and these were situations that needed directing on an hourly basis. When the light came up in the morning, I knew the first thing I had to do was discover how to make calls. Surely they'd make allowances and give a guy some Internet access? I know, not likely. But my default position is always to hope that the impossible is only the impossible until your imagination proves otherwise. So I kept thinking

and kept hoping and eventually I pressed the emergency button.

They allowed me to see the Governor. He decided I should be in the Onslow Wing with the 'at risk' prisoners. Several storeys high and several cells deep, the wing has its own culture within the prison. It seemed I should go there because, in the Governor's opinion, I was at risk of being attacked by other prisoners. It was a strange assumption, because the prisoners I met were quite clearly on my side. In Onslow, the landings were filled with rapists and paedophiles, crime bosses, the occasional celebrity. I was alone in the cell and still had no phone allowance. No phone and no writing materials and no chance of talking with my colleagues. I stood in the cell feeling defiant but ill equipped.

The cell was down in the basement, about two metres by four, with a bed, a washbasin, a toilet, a desk, a closet and off-white walls. Much of the wall space was taken up by a drab grey plastic structure that formed the water and ventilation system for the washbasin and toilet. These were designed to minimise the possibility of self-harm, but this also meant that everything was dull, smoothed off, and hidden. There were no taps in the washbasin, no flush handle on the toilet, no cistern. Everything was automated or operated by touch. There was a medical emergency button on the wall by the bed and a curtain to pull around the toilet. At the top of one wall was a small window, with bars across it at four-centimetre intervals, that looked out onto the prison exercise yard, a small space enclosed by a high mesh fence, topped with layers of razor wire. Sometimes in the mornings I would see the legs of prisoners in the yard passing by the window, hear shouts, snatches of

jokes and conversation. Above the cell door an infrared surveillance camera looked into the room, armed with a bank of LED lights that glowed a dull red throughout the night, constantly watching. The cell door was unmarked apart from a single spyhole in its centre, covered on the outside by a metal flap.

The other prisoners were curious about me, so the metal flap on the cell door was constantly being flipped up as they looked in to see what I was doing. There's a film of Robert Bresson's called *A Man Escaped*, a beautiful film, but really a feat of sound engineering, where a spoon struck against brickwork can seem orchestral. Every sound was like that in Wandsworth: full of echo and emptiness. The metal flap scraped as it was lifted and I sensed an eye. Yes. They wanted to see what I was up to in my cell. Or what I was like. No situation nowadays can be considered immune from the celebrity-seeing eye, and soon there were whispers at the cell door. Whispers at volume. 'Be careful who you speak to.' 'You'll be okay.' 'Don't trust anyone.' 'Don't worry about anything.'

I felt I was in a kind of deviant's *Barbarella*. I wanted to be out doing my work as a journalist, not stuck here playing the martyr, and my life's training had made it impossible for me to stomach the bureaucratic hell of prison and the stigmatising horror of being reduced by blind authority. Every hour of your time in prison is a kind of guerrilla warfare against encroaching paperwork and stultifying rules. In just applying to buy a postage stamp you risk hypothermia in a snowstorm of forms. After they moved me to the separation unit, I continued with my campaign to make calls. It was Stalinist. It took me most of my time there to win a phone call to my lawyer. To make such a call you had to be

calling an approved number on a previously submitted list of numbers and you had to have phone credit. There were two types of credit, domestic and foreign. Different forms for that. And the forms were both hard to get hold of and hard to get attended to. I filled in the same forms so many times that the process became like the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House*. Unending. I then had to supply the name, telephone number, address and birth date of the person I wanted to call. You had to fill out a form to get a PIN corresponding to your domestic telephone account and another PIN corresponding to your foreign account. It went from being a farce to being a nightmare to being a form of torture. The forms kept coming back and forth or being lost. Once you finally get to the phone you're only allowed to speak for ten minutes. Then you can't make another call for five minutes. They record all the calls except the ones made to lawyers, but further steps have to be taken to prove the speaker is a lawyer. As part of this approval effort the prison will only accept office numbers, not mobiles, despite the fact that lawyers spend their lives on mobiles. And so it goes on, a Kafkaesque miasma of passive aggression and hindrance.

In the end I got to speak to my mother and to my lawyer. I also tried to speak to Daniel Ellsberg, the man who brought the Pentagon Papers to the world. He wasn't in. Turns out he was off chaining himself to the gates of the White House. (They removed his handcuffs to make it impossible.) 'G'day, Dan,' I said to his voicemail. 'Just dropping you a note from the bottom of a Victorian slammer. The message is to other people: "Wish you were here."'

As the days wore on documents began to appear under my cell door, some of them delivered at night, ushered in

by whispers. A lot of them were newspaper clippings or articles downloaded and annotated by the prisoner. 'Is Rape Rampant in Gender-Equal Sweden?' said one article. Conspiracy abounds in the confines of a prison, but so does lawyerly empathy: the incarcerated ones have experience, obviously, and many are tough on themselves and tough on the system that surrounds them, taking it for granted that the prison culture can seek to exploit you. Many among my traffic of correspondents – my placers of things under the door – were veritable experts in the miscarriage of justice, which soothed me in the wee small hours. It would be an indulgence to think that all prisoners are innocent, but some of us are, and I felt the documents and letters were a kind of solidarity. There's a lot of anger, too, and I felt angry as I tried to exercise in that small space, walking in a figure of eight like a demented bee.

One morning an envelope arrived with nothing inside. I stood at the window and saw it was still snowing. I think it was 10 December. I later found out the envelope had originally contained a copy of *Time* magazine. My face was on the cover with an American flag covering my mouth. The leader article called me 'an exceptionally talented showman'. Maybe I am, but I didn't feel like it at that moment. Instead of reading *Time*, I had to do time, and to break the monotony I continued to look for other things in the draughty space beneath the door, the stuff meant for Prisoner Number A9379AY. That's how it works, keeping you quiet, keeping you in the dark, reducing you to a serial number, while you look for the light that's beneath doors and beyond walls.

One of the most enlightening articles posted under my door came from a prisoner called Shawn Sullivan. It was a

copy of 'the Extradition Treaty Between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United States of America', signed by David Blunkett and John Ashcroft in March 2003. Article 7 related to Capital Punishment, suggesting that a state of whom extradition is requested might refuse if the requesting country considers the offence to be punishable by the death penalty. American politicians had already called for my extradition to face charges under the espionage act. Congressman Peter T. King wrote to Hillary Clinton to say that I was at the head of a 'terrorist organisation' and should be treated as such – the same Peter King that used to shake his little collection tin up and down the streets of New York City raising money for the IRA, the self styled 'Ollie North of Ireland'. It amazed me to think about how these guardians against 'offences' were themselves so offensive. I read the document and realised again that I was, no matter what they said of me or invented about me, merely a figure in something much larger than myself. I could only keep my head clear, absorb the flak and the caricaturing of my nature and my motives, and continue working.

Letters arrived, and I sent some, too, but always with difficulty, as the bureaucratic machine ground on. A jail is like an island, on which the inmates can seem unreachable; it is also a concrete, living idea of abusive power, and the letters helped me to feel cared for during those difficult days in Wandsworth. The letters showed another country from this England of slopping out, where people realised that they themselves must embody the arguments for their own liberty. From Hampshire: 'Dear Julian, You will not know me. I am just one of millions of citizens around the world who know what is going on, and are not blinded to the

political games of which you have become a victim.' From Tulse Hill: 'You must always remember that the achievement of WikiLeaks is vital for the development of our world. P.S. Sending a puzzle book to keep you thinking.' From Basingstoke: 'I support your stand and feel you are being victimised and harassed by powerful forces.' From Yorkshire: 'Can you hear the sound of falling masonry? Keep up the good work. You are welcome in North Yorkshire any time. Excellent broadband in this part of the world, too.' From Essex: 'I think your case has made many people sit up and think a little more deeply about power, politics and corruption.' From Merseyside: 'We thought about you last night and hoped you were safe in that unpleasant place. When you are released, can you come up to the North West and explain to people the importance of freedom of thought, speech and information?'

Some of the mail came in the form of Christmas cards, simply signed 'An Old Lady', or 'A Friend'. Perhaps less friendly, though delivered around the same time, was a cutting from the *Washington Times*, 'Assassinate Assange?' The author of this alliterative pleasantry, one Jeffrey T. Kuhner, placed a chill on the warm cards. 'Mr Assange is not a journalist or publisher,' he wrote; 'rather he is an enemy combatant – and should be treated as such.' If there could be any doubt as to Kuhner's meaning he dispelled it in his concluding sentence: 'We should treat Mr Assange the same way as other high-value terrorist targets: Kill him.'

I suppose I should have been shocked to find myself subjected to this sort of rhetoric from a fellow journalist, but I had learned long before that too many journalists are nothing more than stenographers for the powerful. Why should I be surprised to read that Jeffrey Kuhner wanted

me dead when I had already been called 'an anti-American operative with blood on his hands' by the TV star and governor-impersonator Sarah Palin? And if the Attorney General Eric Holder thought I was 'an enemy of the US', why be shocked to read that the Fox News neocon Charles Krauthammer wanted me looking over my shoulder every time I walked down the street? Former Bush advisor Jack Goldsmith may have thought he was praising the US media when he said that their 'patriotism' made it easy for the government to work with them, but if I ever received such a 'compliment' I think I would resign.

On my way from exercise yard to cell, or from library to cell, I found my fellow inmates staring at me. The authorities were paranoid about the possibility of a prisoner taking a picture on his mobile phone. They're not supposed to have mobiles, but many do, and it seemed likely that a picture would end up in one of the newspapers. So the Governor appointed a guard who accompanied me everywhere. 'They think everyone is out to get me,' I said to him.

'Who?'

'The authorities.'

'Well,' he said, 'everyone has a price and these people have nothing.'

I met with a Catholic chaplain in one of the meeting rooms. There wasn't much in the way of spiritual guidance, not that I'm the perfect candidate, but the man was from Uganda and I felt a connection and we laughed as we talked. On the way back through the hallway I spotted Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* on a bookshelf. I took it back to my cell and got lost in it, just the old wisdom about inhumanity and the solace of the gracious book. An educated, middle-class woman appears in the story; her husband is in a labour

camp and she wonders what she should tell their son. "'The truth's enough to sink a grown man, isn't it?" she says. "It's enough to break your ribs. Or should I hide the truth and bring him to terms with life? After all, the boy's got eyes of his own, he can see."

"Burden him with the truth!" declared Oleg.'

On the outside there were acres of press coverage. I heard as much from my supporters, and it gave me pause for thought: Cablegate now represented the biggest release of classified material in history. And I paused too over the costs and causes of the Swedish affair. By not ringing those women back, had I really left the door open for hatred? Time may unfold sequentially but experience does not always. I was thinking in prison about the shape of my life, about these opportunities, these crises, and in the end my mind was taken up with the world beyond them. Had I made an error of judgement, or was it all proportionate in terms of what I was trying to achieve? Had I kicked the Yanks in the shins too hard? The case would pass, after much tribulation for all those involved, I supposed, but it would pass, and I would learn from what had occurred that shocking year. Yes. In solitary confinement I felt I had enough anger to take me through a hundred years, but my task was to get on with our publishing work and to watch the world respond.

My bail hearing took place at the City of Westminster Magistrates' Court on Horseferry Road on 14 December. The court was packed and so was the street outside as I approached in a police van. Someone said the roads around Victoria were treacherous, and I smiled, thinking, 'I've known treachery, so let the roads be at peace with themselves.' The Prosecution was keen to oppose bail under any circumstances and to portray me as some kind of James

Bond villain, well connected and full of computer wizardry, likely to outfox the forces of surveillance. It was implied by them that I would hack into the system of tagging. I'm sure we could, but, as usual, the Prosecution, like much of the press, was falling for the lesser kind of fiction. They needed a villain with silver hair, some kind of cat-stroking nutcase bent on serial seduction and world domination. It was interesting – it was alarming – to see how much they allowed a sense of justice to be confused by the many fantastical headlines surrounding me. There was no point opposing it. An impression had been created, and I had neither the skill nor the will to outflank it. But I always knew my lawyers would have to struggle with a Prosecution, and a press, who thought they were watching a movie as opposed to trafficking in a person's life.

The judge at one point berated the public gallery for using Twitter. That seemed symbolic enough. When it comes to the British courts, it is often contempt that breeds Contempt, and there was always what you might call a generational refusal at the heart of my case. (Eventually, a council of elders at the High Court decided, after the fact for us, that the use of Twitter was permissible in court.) There was a lot of fuss about bail money, too. Although I'm an activist and head of a not-for-profit organisation, the film-script headlines encouraged them to set my bail at an eye-watering £240,000. I was still thinking, 'I'm not going to be a victim of this situation. I am not a criminal.' That same feeling had been very strong as I arrived in the van that afternoon. The cameras were banging again on the glass and I looked up, holding my fingers in a 'peace' sign. That photograph made all the papers, but it was just an impulse, an attempt by me to say, 'You will not turn me into a cowering criminal.'

They had tried to crush me in that little prison, but I came to the court that day sure that the narrative was coming together, not on their terms, but on those of my supporters and me.

I was still in danger, though. I was beginning to realise that danger was probably where I lived now. But I stood in the dock pitching my sense of decency and truth against theirs; in my own mind this was a show trial and where they couldn't pick holes in our arguments they would drive horses and carriages through my character. I was learning the game. But I stood there in the dock with a certainty they didn't know me. Maybe I was a figment of their own fearful imaginations; the Prosecution, like many a politician in many a country, saw in me a threat, where a great many ordinary people saw in our organisation an opportunity. I looked at my supporters in the gallery and waved.

I was granted bail on the 14th only to be told that the Swedish authorities had appealed against the decision and that I would have to be sent back to Wandsworth. It was hard to take, having to leave my friends and supporters behind once again, having to leave the talking to my lawyers, having to sit inside the prison van once more as it crawled through the media scrum. It was hard to enter my cell once more and hear the door shut behind me. But as I had told my mother before the hearing, my convictions were unfaltering and my ideals were not shaken by my circumstances.

After two more nights in jail I was back in court, the High Court this time, on 16 December. Those two days in court became about technical requirements. I have nothing profound to say about the judge, except to suggest that he behaved throughout as if there was a correspondent from

the *Times* perched on his shoulder. It was hard otherwise to see why he reckoned my bail should be so high and my tagging so severe. In his mind I was some kind of shadowy, movie-style kingpin, likely to disappear at any minute in a puff of smoke, a souped-up helicopter, or a hail of laser-fire. In fact, my circumstances were more ordinary than he could have known. I had no home and no car, I had hardly any possessions, and a bag of phones. He just didn't get it, and meted out punishment as though it might be pre-emptive. I had no charge against me and was wanted for questioning in a country whose motives I presently had no reason politically to trust. That was it.

Finally, the money raised for bail by my supporters came through, and the Swedish appeal was rejected. I was about to be free. How long that freedom would last was questionable. I was to be kept under a kind of house arrest at the home of a supporter in Norfolk pending the extradition hearing in February. But at the High Court the moment was for jubilation. In a private way, I felt the time in jail had been traumatic, emboldening and instructive; I finally saw the size and the scale of what WikiLeaks was doing. The experience sent me reeling back into my own past, and it confirmed the future. We were now officially up against the power of the old order, up against its assumptions, up against its power to silence people, up against its fears.

I appeared on the steps of the court just before 6 p.m. This would be good for the live feed to the evening news. My lawyers beside me, I immediately heard the cheers and saw a mob of photographers and journalists. It was dark but the whole scene was bright with camera flashes. Such a lot of people, and you couldn't see beyond about ten feet because of the dark and because of the snow that was

falling heavily. I stood there, and everything eventually quieted down, and I thought of what to say. I had a lot of people to thank and, in a way, while it was a time for celebration I was also thinking of those men and women around the world still in jail, still in solitary confinement, ignored by the media, with no one to put up bail money and with no prospect of release.

Doesn't snow have a way of softening things, of calming the rush of life and muffling the sound? I definitely thought so as I stood there and clarity came. The snow was backlit with hundreds of cameras flashing. I just looked into it for a few seconds and it occurred to me on the steps of the court that I had travelled a very long way to see such snow.