“*A woman’s life can really be a succession of lives, each revolving around some emotionally compelling situation or challenge, and each marked off by some intense experience.*”  

Wallis Simpson 1956

Adultery! Espionage! Gambling! Ménage a trios! Drug dealing! Fascism! Abortions! Sexual Domination! Nazi Sympathizing! These are but a few of the explosive rumors that plagued the notorious Wallis Simpson throughout her adventurous lifetime. Was this modestly attractive, middle class debutant from Baltimore capable of igniting all the intrigue for which she was accused or was she simply an unwitting ingénue whose life was characterized by epic upheaval? As a young girl with her nose pressed against the window of Baltimore’s elite upper class, Wallis Simpson longed for a life of luxury and fame. By 1936 she had exceeded even her own expectations. No longer a smaller player at the edge of society circles, Wallis took center stage as the American divorcee who captured the heart of England’s dashing prince and future king. While some saw her as the unlikely starlet of a fairytale romance, many others reviled her as a scheming opportunist who brought disgrace to England’s royal family and caused a constitutional crisis within the British government. By all accounts, Wallis Simpson remains one of the world’s most scandalous women.

Wallis Simpson, born Bessie Wallis Warfield in 1895, grew up in Baltimore with her widowed mother and wealthy uncle. Wallis attended Oldfields School, paid for with her Uncle’s money. Oldfields was a private, all girls boarding school from which she
graduated in 1914. Wallis learned from a young age that initiative and determination were essential qualities in a young woman who hoped to better herself. As Simpson noted while reflecting on her youth in her autobiography, “A young lady, it appeared should also harbor a desire to win…and a certain aggressiveness, including free use of the elbows was encouraged along the way.”¹ This life lesson marks the beginning of a long line of motivated and well-executed plans by Simpson to battle her way to the top of the social hierarchy of which she so longed to be a part. The debutant lifestyle that she coveted was just beyond her reach and she was determined to become a success. Her grandparents and cousins were all wealthy, but due to her father’s early death, her mother could not provide the type of lifestyle that Wallis saw all around her. In his annotated collection of letters written between Simpson and Edward VIII, Michael Bloch analyzed Simpson’s internal angst, “There was the root of her ambition, a desire to avenge early struggles, to prove herself in the eyes of her rich and snobbish cousins, to restore herself to a social and material level which in her heart, she felt was rightly hers.”²

Wallis was not completely destitute though, and her wealthy Uncle Sol financed her coming out at the Bachelor’s Cotillion. Wallis remembered Sol’s kindness in her autobiography, “I want you to know the kind of life your father would have given you if he had lived.”³ Wallis’s strong desire to be presented at the Bachelor Cotillion marks her love for social recognition and acceptance. Gleefully recalling, Wallis noted, “To be presented at the Bachelor’s Cotillion was life-and-death for Baltimore girls in those

³ Simpson, 37.
days…I was one of the fortunate forty-seven invited that year. From that moment until
the cotillion on December 7, I was lost to all other earthly considerations.”

The people closest to Wallis deemed her a clever schemer and an ambitious
planner, “The person who knows me best, my Aunt Bessie…insists that I have always
had a plan germinating in the back of my mind for everything I have done.” Though her
Aunt insisted, Wallis did not see herself as having such a driven nature. Reflecting on her
personality, Wallis claimed, “…No one who has succeeded in getting into as much
trouble as I have managed to do…could ever be credited with having a clear-cut
objective.”

In 1916 at the tender age of twenty-one, Wallis married Earl Winfield Spencer, Jr,
commonly known as “Win.” Wallis was quite taken with the handsome aviator and was
impressed by his standing in the United States Navy. Remembering her first meeting with
Win, “The world’s most fascinating Aviator- or so he appeared to me at the instant of our
meeting-was lieutenant Earl Winfield Spence, Jr., of the United States Navy…there was a
suggestion of inner force and vitality that struck me instantly….His was the most subtle,
complicated, and dramatic personality I had known until then.” As a U.S Navy pilot,
Win traveled around the world and Wallis had the opportunity to join him and visit
Shanghai and Hong Kong. Although the marriage lasted for ten years, Wallis endured
much physical and mental torment from Win. Win was an alcoholic and Wallis found his
volatile and often times cruel behavior insufferable. Wallis recounted the saga of their
relationship in her autobiography, “Win’s drinking was also growing worse, and this

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4 Ibid., 38.
5 Ibid. vii.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. 47.
intensified the jealous and sadistic streak in him. As is often the case, he turned on the person he loved and made me the victim of his own inner aggressions…One of his favorite diversions was to lock me up in a room while he went out—often for hours on end.\(^8\) Though Wallis and Win remained married, the couple separated in February of 1923, after having lived in Boston, San Diego, and Washington D.C. Win moved to Hong Kong and Wallis stayed with old friends in Washington D.C. While in Washington, Wallis did not stay faithful to Win and had two affairs with high-ranking foreign diplomats, Gelasio Caetini, and Felipe Espil.

Wallis first met Prince Gelasio Caetani during a reception at the Italian Embassy in Washington. Caetini’s wealth, connections, and high rank attracted Wallis and she, “Set her cap for and won the attractive Italian ambassador himself.”\(^9\) Caetini was a keen supporter of Mussolini and he may have been the first person to introduce Wallis to fascism and dictatorship. As Charles Higham noted in his biography of Wallis, “Caetini…deeply involved Wallis in an interest in his Italian dictator master and in the Italian system of government.”\(^10\) Clearly Wallis was not afraid of trying to enter the diverse diplomatic society of Washington. The affair did not last long and Wallis found another distraction quickly. Felipe Espil was the first secretary to the Argentine Embassy, and the “Biggest catch in Washington.”\(^11\) Wallis worked hard to snag Espil before his eye turned to the more attractive, but far less determined Washington socialites. As Higham noted, “She was determined to try; nothing and no one, not even the most shapely

\(^8\) Ibid., 71-72.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid., 40.
Washington Belle would stand in her way. This ugly duckling set out to get Felip Espil into bed with all the determination of Wellington planning the battle of Waterloo.\textsuperscript{12}

By the summer of 1924 Wallis was on her way to Hong Kong in hopes of reconciling with Win. The couple united, but Win was often away on ships along the Chinese coast and received orders to leave in October of that year. Wallis subtly refers to having affairs in Hong Kong in her autobiography, “There was a dashing military officer and a gallant Italian naval officer who whirled briefly in and out of my life.”\textsuperscript{13} In November of 1924, Wallis boarded the Empress of Russia and traveled to Shanghai. After falling mysteriously ill, she traveled back to Hong Kong for treatment, but would not fully recover for another year. Wallis returned to the United States in 1925 where she met Win in Chicago. Win then accompanied Wallis to her mother’s apartment in Washington D.C. As Wallis remembered, “He was on leave, staying with his parents in Highland Park. Having learned of my illness he insisted upon boarding my train in Chicago and accompanied me all the way to Washington. I never saw him again.”\textsuperscript{14}

After a few months, Wallis made up her mind to file for a divorce, “…in Virginia, I could apply for a divorce after one year’s residence and could obtain a decree on the grounds of desertion at the expiration of three year’s separation from my husband…my advisor recommended the little town on Warrenton [Virginia], which possesses a small, but comfortable hotel where I could live on my Navy wife’s allotment.”\textsuperscript{15} Wallis’s family did not approve of divorce and they pushed her to try to and ameliorate her marriage. Wallis described her family’s reaction as one of shock and dread, “My mother, Aunt

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Simpson, 106.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
Bessie, and cousin Lelia Barnett all had a horror of divorce…Throughout my family, and all of its ramifications, there were deep-seated religious scruples against divorce, no matter what the grievance.”\textsuperscript{16} Wallis remained firm and did not give into her family’s staunch opposition. Displaying her headstrong personality, Wallis counteracted her family’s consternation and asked Win for a divorce. Wallis claimed that, “…people’s ideas about divorce are changing. It’s the only solution for a marriage that has become unbearable.”\textsuperscript{17} Wallis cared about her future and did not want to be stuck with an alcoholic abuser for the rest of her life. As Wallis noted, “We’re both young. We still have a chance to make something of our lives…if ideas like these [Divorce] are common enough today, they were revolutionary in the early 1920’s. Nevertheless, I had to take my courage in my hands…”\textsuperscript{18} The independent way in which Wallis handled her first divorce reveals a courageous, self-sufficient, and determined nature that she would rely on in future hardships.

While in Warrenton, Wallis frequently traveled to Washington and New York to see her mother and friends. At the home of Jacques and Mary Raffray in New York, Wallis met the already married, English shipping executive, Ernest Simpson. According to Mary, Ernest’s marriage was on the rocks. Wallis wrote about her first meeting with Ernest in her autobiography, “Reserved in manner, yet with a gift of quiet wit, always well dressed, a good dancer, fond of the theatre, and obviously well read, he impressed me as an unusually well-balanced man. I had acquired a taste for cosmopolitan minds,

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 78.
and Ernest obviously had one. I was attracted to him and he to me.” 19 Wallis visited New York more often, but did not focus her energy on Ernest. She decided to try and become a career woman and went job hunting in New York. While career searching, Wallis decided to take an afternoon off and visit an astrologer. Though Wallis was not completely convinced of the astrologer’s authenticity, the prediction came eerily true. Wallis remembered the astrologer’s key points, “You will become a famous woman…You will lead a woman’s life, marrying, divorcing, marrying again, with several serious emotional crises. The power that is to come to you will be related to a man.” 20 Perhaps Wallis believed in the prophecy from the start, because after hearing the astrologer’s prediction, Wallis lost her drive to become a career woman and began seeing a lot more of Ernest Simpson. As she recalled, “Something much more easily identifiable did undoubtedly contribute to the sudden deflation of my ambition. I was seeing a good deal of Ernest Simpson. He and his wife had decided on a divorce…Ernest asked me to marry him after we were both free.” 21

Wallis and Ernest married in July of 1928. The couple moved to England and honeymooned in France and Spain. Wallis remembered her early marriage as a time of peaceful indulgence, “This was a blissful existence; and, for the moment, I felt a security that I had never really experienced since early childhood.” 22 While Ernest worked, Wallis tried to assimilate into English culture, “Being endowed with strong powers of assimilation, I succeeded in time in mastering enough of these Anglicisms to be able to

19 Ibid., 113.
20 Ibid., 119.
21 Ibid., 119.
22 Ibid., 127.
communicate with my British friends.” Attempting to uncover the “British riddle,” Wallis religiously read all of the London newspapers. Britain’s obsession with the royal family amazed Wallis, “It surprised me, an American, that an entire nation should follow with such rapt attention the purely formal goings and comings of a single family.”

Aside from the close following of the royal family, Wallis was also struck by the difference between herself and other Englishwomen. According to Wallis, “…the great root of my difficulty of adjusting myself to English ways was my habit of speaking my mind…by contrast, English women, though formidably powerful in their sphere, were still accepting the status…of a second sex. If they had strong opinions they kept them safely buttoned up; confidences were seldom given or encouraged.”

Perhaps the contrast of Wallis’s frank and direct personality attracted Prince Edward who was accustomed to polite and withdrawn Englishwomen.

Wallis and Ernest befriended Lady Furness, then mistress of Edward, Prince of Wales. Lady Furness introduced the couple to Prince Edward in 1930. Wallis was struck by Edward’s apparent sadness, though: “I had been fascinated by the odd and indefinable melancholy that seemed to haunt the Prince of Wales’s countenance; his quick smile momentarily illuminated but never quite dispelled this look of sadness.” Wallis never forgot the loneliness that she saw in his eyes on the first day she met him. The Prince’s brooding undercurrent, noted by Wallis during their first meeting, was reminiscent of Wallis’s first husband, Win.

23 Ibid., 130.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 132.
26 Ibid., 160.
Wallis and Edward met again only six months after their weekend hunting trip, but they simply exchanged pleasantries and both of them continued on their separate ways. Two years later, Wallis and Ernest received an unexpected invitation to spend the weekend at Fort Belvedere, Edward’s favorite residence, located in Surrey. Ernest and Wallis both felt honored that the Prince remembered them, and they immediately agreed to the weekend sojourn. Edward surprised Wallis with his calm nature and unique hobbies. Wallis noted after her first encounter with the Prince, “I could scarcely believe my eyes—the Prince of Wales doing needle-point...he paused...I find it relaxing and more useful than detective stories.” Instead of feeling repelled by this young, innocent, effeminate man who practiced needlepoint in his spare time, Wallis was “fascinated” and “impressed” by Edward’s hobby. She decided, “then and there that he must have a really sweet and even tender side to his nature.” Unlike Wallis’s previous husbands, Edward was her direct opposite and contrasted her unfaltering confidence and outspoken, decidedly American, character with his innocent lonely nature.

Edward continued to invite Wallis and Ernest to Fort Belvedere for frequent weekend visits. The Prince enjoyed their company so much that over the next few years he began to extend invitations to the Simpsons to spend longer weekends and even weeks at Belvedere. As her familiarity with the Prince deepened, Wallis ruminated on the Prince often and longed to gain a fuller understanding of him. As Wallis reflected years later in her autobiography, “What kind of man was this Prince of Wales who seemed so endowed with so many contradictory sides, at once charming and yet aloof, so quickly responsive

27 Ibid., 171.
28 Ibid., 172.
to lightness and gaiety, yet with so much of his nature hidden in a shadow."\textsuperscript{29} The Prince’s mysterious character captivated Wallis unlike any man had done before and therefore she worked hard to endear herself to him during their increasingly frequent social soirees, “I was brought up to believe that one should be as entertaining as one can at a party.”\textsuperscript{30} Wallis believed that Edward enjoyed her company, because,

\begin{quote}
He was amused and diverted by my wholly American outlook on the subjects under discussion and was somewhat surprised by my independence of view…The only reason to which I could ascribe his interest in me …was perhaps my American independence of spirit, my directness, what I would like to think is a sense of humor and of fun, and, well, my breezy curiosity about him and everything concerning him.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Wallis did not, however, initially suspect that Edward noticed her any more than his other lady friends that frequented the Fort.

The relationship between Wallis and Edward continued to strengthen in 1934 when Lady Furness left London for an extended period. According to Lady Furness, “Three or four days before I was to sail, I had lunch with Wallis at the Ritz…She thanked me and said suddenly: “Oh, Thelma, the little man is going to be lonely.” “Well dear, dear,” I answered, “you look after him for me while I’m away.”\textsuperscript{32} Only days after Thelma left, the Prince telephoned Wallis directly for the first time.

Edward soon began visiting Wallis at her London residence during the week. As Wallis remembered, “He picked the evening when Ernest had brought home some work from the office…during weekends he increasingly singled me out as his dancing

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 181, 191, 192.
\textsuperscript{32} Gloria Vanderbilt and Thelma Furness, \textit{Double Exposure, a Twin Autobiography} (London, Frederick Muller, 1959)
partner.” With Wallis spending so much time with Edward, her relationship with Ernest became strained and felt more dutiful than loving. “During my absence he had made a trip to the United States. I had the feeling that more than business was now drawing him back to America. We were both going our separate ways; the core of our marriage had dissolved; only a shell remained—a façade to show the outer world,” recalled Wallis. She did not appear to be overly concerned about her disintegrating marriage. She frequently vacationed with Edward and a few select friends. Ernst politely declined these invitations, causing the void between him and Wallis to grow even bigger. Edward became more and more the center of Wallis’s life.

Wallis was thrust deeper into the role of the Prince’s confidante when Edward’s brother married and no longer spent his leisure weekends with the Prince and his coterie, “The gap in the Prince’s life caused by his brother’s marriage was not easily filled…after I felt I somehow had become part of this search.” Wallis relished the fact that Edward trusted her with his private thoughts and she realized that she could fill that empty void she noticed on the first day that she met him. By February 1934, Edward had become an all-consuming presence in Wallis’s life. In a February 18th letter to her Aunt Bessie, Wallis wrote, “Am also behind on my letters to you on account of the Prince who is here most of the time or telephoning two and three times a day.”

Edward’s infatuation with Wallis was obvious to others. Upon her return to London in late March, Lady Furness noticed the cooling of the Prince’s affection towards her and his growing intimacy with Wallis. In her memoirs she wrote of discussing with

33 Simpson, 183.
34 Ibid., 209.
35 Ibid., 29.
36 Bloch, 115.
Wallis Edward’s coldness toward her and observing the interaction between Wallis and the Prince,

When I got back to London I told Wallis about my talk with the Prince…But the only answer I got was a saccharine assurance, “Darling, you know the little man loves you very much. The little man was just lost without you.”…At dinner, however, I noticed that the Prince and Wallis seemed to have little private jokes. Once he picked up a piece of salad with his fingers; Wallis playfully slapped his hand…Wallis looked straight at me. And then and there I knew the reason was Wallis…I knew then that she had looked after him exceedingly well.37

Wallis’s instinctual Aunt Bessie was also alarmed by the attention that the Prince showered on Wallis. Intuitively questioning, “Wallis, isn’t the Prince rather taken with you?”38 Wallis reassures her Aunt in a May 22nd 1934 letter that “…if Ernest raises any objections to the situation I shall give up the prince at once.”39 However by October of the same year, on a yachting trip down the Spanish and Portuguese coasts, Wallis recognized that her feelings for Edward were not simply platonic. Romantically remembering, “Perhaps it was during these evenings off the Spanish coast that we crossed the line that marks the indefinable boundary between friendship and love. Perhaps it was one evening strolling on the beach at Formentor in Majorca. How can a woman ever really know? How can she ever really tell?”40

Wallis’s dominant position in Edward’s life garnered the attention of royal watchers and international newspaper and magazine correspondents. Many people saw the cunning, competitive, and dominating side of Wallis and condemned her as a social climbing opportunist who controlled Edward. Others saw her as a clever and endearing socialite. In 1936, a young Londoner described Wallis to Newsweek magazine as, “One

37 Ibid., 118.
38 Simpson, 190.
39 Bloch, 122.
40 Ibid., 187.
of the wittiest most resourceful hostesses ever to preside over a gathering of smart Londoners.”\textsuperscript{41} Clearly Wallis was a successful host and had learned enough of British culture to keep up with the London elite.

That same year, Nancy Dugdale, the wife of Stanley Baldwin’s parliamentary private secretary, showed a sheet of Simpson’s handwriting to the German graphologist Gusti Oesterreicher in an effort to understand Wallis more fully. Ms. Oesterreicher spoke no English and had no idea who the writer might have been. Her analysis described Wallis as, “A woman with a strong male inclination in the sense of activity, vitality and initiative, she must dominate, she must have authority, and without sufficient scope for her powers can become disagreeable…she is ambitious and demands above all that her undertaking should be noticed and valued.”\textsuperscript{42} In Phillip Zeigler’s biography of Edward, he describes Wallis as a pushy, competitive, social climber. Agreeing with Ms. Oesterreicher’s assessment of Wallis, Ziegler wrote,

\begin{quote}
In society she was ruthless and voracious, the fact that a boy belonged to some girl was a challenge to secure him for herself. One of her oldest friends and admirers, Herman Rogers, is quoted as saying that she was the most selfish woman he had ever known-“Even men that she didn’t want, she didn’t want anyone else to have.”\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Oesterreicher’s and Zeigler’s harsh prognosis reflect a common belief that Wallis was interested in Edward solely for his wealth and fame. Although Wallis did control her relationship with Edward, she truly loved him and would not later have endured such scrutiny from the press if she did not truly care for him.

\textsuperscript{41} Mrs. Simpson, 	extit{Newsweek}, 24 October 1936, 10.
\textsuperscript{42} Phillip Ziegler, 	extit{King Edward VIII}, (Alfred a Knopf, 1991), 196.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
By late 1934, Wallis became completely entrenched in Edward’s life. She was his constant companion and advisor. She often ran errands for him and even bought two-hundred and fifty Christmas presents for his servants. The closely documented interactions between Wallis and Edward perpetuated Wallis’s control of the relationship and her overbearing personality. As reported in Time magazine, “She has called him, “boysy” to his face in brilliant London ballrooms, spoke of him to their British hostess as, “the little man” when he was King and Emperor, kept him waiting two hours in her car outside her dressmaker’s.”

Reflecting on the relationship, Time magazine stated, “Consider him simply as The Boy Who Didn’t Grow Up and Mrs. Simpson as the mother.” Clearly Wallis controlled most aspects of the relationship and had a huge influence over Edward.

According to Michael Bloch, “…the Prince yearned for a happy home life and especially for a mother’s sympathetic attentions; and he was starved of these. Throughout his first forty years he sought…an ideal mother figure; and this he at last found in Wallis.” Wallis did treat Edward with motherly concern. In her letters to him, she referred to Edward as “boy” and “peter pan.” In a condescending letter written in April 1935, Wallis scolded Edward for not leaving her house soon enough and calling her more than once when Ernest was at home. Complaining to Edward, Wallis wrote,

The evening was difficult as you did stay much too late. Doesn’t your love for me reach to the heights of wanting to make things a little easier for me. The lovely things you say to me aren’t of much value unless they are backed up by equal actions…I was upset and also very disappointed in a boy and that nothing you said could help me in the least.

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44 King who was, *Time*, 26 May 1967, 37.
46 Bloch, 140.
47 Ibid., 149.
Wallis wrote many such authoritative and on occasion belittling letters to Edward. In contrast, Edward’s correspondence was simply filled with words of love and adoration and request for guidance. For example, on July 23 1935, Edward wrote under his nickname David,

A boy is holding a girl so very tight in his arms tonight. He will miss her more tomorrow because he will have been away from her some hours longer and cannot see her till Wed-y night. A girl knows that not anybody or anything can separate WE-not even the stars-and that WE belong to each other forever. WE love [twice underlined] each other more than life so God bless WE. Your [twice underlined] David

Wallis took on this role with vigor and as Michael Bloch noted, “Theirs was no adult love affair of any sort. It was, overwhelmingly, a mother-son relationship. His letters to her are infantile, adoring, trusting; they plead for affection and protection. Hers to him are sensible, affectionate, admonishing, and possessive.” Edward’s need for protection fed Wallis’s need to dominate and control; they were the perfect match. The complexity of their union and its affect on Edward was noted by Winston Churchill who wrote, “He delighted in her company, and found in her qualities as necessary to his happiness as the air he breathed. Those who knew him well and watched him closely noticed that many little tricks and fidgetings of nervousness feel away from him. He was a completed being instead of a sick and harassed soul.”

At age thirty, and still married to Ernest Simpson, Wallis became known as the Prince’s favorite. According to Michael Bloch, “Suddenly everyone wanted to know her.

48 Ibid., 158.
49 Bloch, 139.
50 Ibid., 137.
She was the talk of London.” Wallis clearly enjoyed the Prince’s company and appreciated his private personality. She described Edward as having a, “Perceptive and imaginative spirit not ordinarily associated with the hard-riding, night-clubbing Prince of Mayfair gossip.” Wallis also basked in the luxurious lifestyle of the royal family, “Over and beyond the charm of his personality and the warmth of his manner, he was the open sesame to a new glittering world that excited me as nothing in my life had ever done before.” The attention that Wallis received from being the “Prince’s favorite” flattered her and she claimed that the high society of the English elite, “stimulated” and “excited” her. As Wallis joyfully remembered, “I became aware of a rising curiosity concerning me, of new doors opening… I was stimulated, I was excited; I felt as if I were borne upon a rising wave that seemed to be carrying me even more rapidly and even higher. Now I began to savor the true brilliance and sophistication of the life of London.” Wallis knew that without Edward she would not be able to sustain her glamorous life and she planned to enjoy it as long as it would last. The upper class society that Edward introduced Wallis to was exactly what she had yearned for when she was younger, and in an effort to take hold of this lifestyle, she tried her best to keep Edward’s attention on her at all times.

Not surprisingly, by the fall of 1935, Ernest and Wallis became estranged. Although it was clear that Wallis no longer loved Ernest, she blamed him for the break in

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51 Bloch, 136-137.  
52 Simpson, 164.  
53 Ibid., 192.  
54 Simpson, 202.  
55 Bloch, 137.
their relationship. She wrote in her autobiography, “It was now made unmistakably clear to me that he had found a new emotional center for his life. There was another woman.”

Wallis and Ernest remained married but lived apart and Wallis became the public, “lady friend” of Edward. On January 20th, 1936, George V died and Edward ascended the throne as Edward VIII. Against protocol and to the consternation of the Royal family, the British government, and the British citizens, Edward kept the company of the still-married Wallis Simpson. Eager to bring legitimacy to her union with the Prince, Wallis filed for a divorce from Ernest in the summer of 1936, accusing Ernest of the only misdeed on which a divorce could be obtained in England: infidelity. In a 1936 letter, Wallis wrote, “Dear Ernest; I have just learned that while you have been away, instead of being on business as you led me to believe, you have been staying at the Hotel Bray with a lady…this only confirms the suspicions I have had for a long time. I am therefore instructing my solicitors to take proceedings for divorce.”

The Prime minister of England, Stanley Baldwin knew that if Wallis was granted the divorce, then she would be free to wed Edward who was obviously infatuated with her. In an effort to dissuade Edward from marrying Wallis, Stanley Baldwin sought a private meeting with the King. As Wallis explained, “The prime minister’s purpose in seeking the interview was to express his concern over the divorce and to suggest pointedly that the king use his influence to persuade me to drop the proceedings…David wanted to marry me and he wished to foreclose such a possibility.”

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56 Simpson, 214.
57 Wilson, Edwina, Her Name was Wallis Warfield, The Life story of Mrs. Ernest Simpson, (New York, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1936) 110.
58 Simpson, 232.
Once the world heard of Wallis’s plan to divorce Ernest, the rumors that had been circulating about the possibility of a marriage between Edward and Wallis bloomed with ferocious intensity. “He has lost it to a commoner, American-born, a woman who has been married and divorced”; “Fate of a Monarch, Course of an Empire, Destiny of one-half billion Souls Depend on Mrs. Simpson of Baltimore”; ‘The World’s Greatest Romance,” screamed headlines around the world. The relationship between Wallis and Edward fascinated the public, because the King of England was actually considering marrying an American divorcee. Newsweek magazine reported that Wallis Simpson was, “An American woman who by sheer force of personality rose from genteel nothingness to within a step of the mightiest throne on earth.”

The Church of England objected to Edward’s plan to marry Wallis, because it did not recognize divorce and, therefore, would not agree to acknowledge a marriage between Wallis and Edward. In the winter of 1936, the Archbishop of Canterbury stated in regard to Wallis and Edward, that it was his, “desire that, in the case of any person previously married who has been separated by divorce from a husband or wife who is still alive, the marriage should not be solemnized in church.”

Although there was no definitive laws that forbade Edward from marrying Wallis, observers at the time claimed that, “there are barriers that can be stronger than laws. Barriers of tradition…the slender threads binding around the crown.” British tradition dictated that Edward could not under any circumstances marry a twice-divorced, or even

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59 Higham, 271.
60 Fate of a Monarch, Course of an Empire, Destiny of one-half billion Souls Depends on Mrs. Simspn of Baltimore, Newsweek, 12 December, 1936, 7.
61 Ibid.
62 Wilson, 115-116.
once-divorced American woman. Edward’s relationship with Wallis threatened his standing in British society and the royal family’s reputation throughout the world. According to a memo written by government officials, “The value of the work done by HRH (Edward) from 1918 to 1925, both in this country and in the dominions, and also in foreign countries has been incalculable, but during the last six of seven years, entirely on account of his private life, it is beginning to be realized that he is no likely to be a fitting monarch.”

Much like the rest of British society, the royal family never accepted Edward’s affection for Wallis. Edward’s mother was so against the idea of her son marrying a divorcée that Edward claimed, “My mother was set … No reconciliation… she never forgave.” Wallis met cold stares and obvious contempt from the royal family. As Time magazine reported, “Her royal in-laws, numerous enough to fill a banquet hall, never approved of the marriage and have never sat at her table.” The press also emphasized Wallis’s romantic history. A Newsweek article written in 1936 stated, “There are many daughters of America whom he might have married… but the lady in question has already two former husbands living… a formidable objection in the case of any man… an overwhelming objection in the case of the sovereign.”

Although the Royal family deeply disapproved of Wallis because she was a divorcée, they also rejected her because she was a commoner. and an American. As quoted in Newsweek magazine, “Did this mean that King Edward would marry a

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63 Ziegler, 192.
64 Once Upon a Time, Time, 19 March, 1965.
66 Fate of a Monarch, Course of an Empire, Destiny of one-half billion Souls Depend on Mrs. Simpson of Baltimore, Newsweek, 12 December, 1936, 9.
commoner, an American, a divorcee? Could he make her Queen if he wanted to? Die hard...shuddered at the presence of a divorcee at the royal table."\textsuperscript{67} According to English tradition, Edward should never have even considered marrying Wallis, "Tradition, but not statute, enjoins a British King from marrying below royal rank."\textsuperscript{68} The hierarchy of British society also had some say in what type of lady would be wedding their handsome prince, "In theory, he has absolute say as to whom he shall make his Queen. In practice, he must think of the United Kingdom’s ruling clans: these will never curtsy before an untitled, twice-divorced foreigner."\textsuperscript{69}

The common people of Britain strongly objected to Wallis and believed that she was unfit to be Queen. As stated in a Newsweek article, "The Empire disapproved of Mrs. Simpson. Edward must give her up, or abdicate."\textsuperscript{70} Average British citizens, when asked their opinion on Wallis were all quick to draw negative conclusions. As quoted in a News week article, "Suburban housewife: I go all hot when I think of it-our King going about with that awful woman! Movie usherette: Don’t think much of the King’s taste...Anyhow, what’s the matter with English girls!...Bus driver: King or no King, I’d want to know what my missus was doin trottin around with another man!"\textsuperscript{71}

Aside from inciting a constitutional crisis, the British government viewed Wallis as a distraction to the King and the Nation. According to Newsweek magazine, "What the King cannot and will not afford -- and what the nation and Empire cannot afford -- is

\textsuperscript{67} Mrs. Simpson, \textit{Newsweek}, 24 October, 1936, 10.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Fate of a Monarch, Course of an Empire, Destiny of one-half billion Souls Depend on Mrs. Simpson of Baltimore, \textit{Newsweek}, 12 December, 1936, 10.
\textsuperscript{71} Mrs. Simpson, \textit{Newsweek}, 24 October, 11.
that the influence of the great office he holds should be weakened by a conflict between
the King’s personal desires and the cabinet.”\textsuperscript{72}

Britain’s disapproval of Wallis did not go unnoticed by Wallis. She described her
experience with the British as one of scrutiny and quiet criticism, “As so often before in
the company of those in power and influence, I was conscious of the assaying glance, the
unspoken probing question beneath the polite surface of the conversation.”\textsuperscript{73}

In hopes of gaining government acceptance and winning the approval of the
British people, Edward suggested a morganatic union; he would marry Wallis, but Wallis
would not be recognized as Queen nor have the right to inherit any of his wealth. Prime
Minister Baldwin, along with the ministers of Australia and South Africa rejected this
proposal and threatened that if Edward chose to marry Wallis, the entire government
would resign. Edward’s private secretary advised Edward to leave Wallis if he wished to
remain on the throne. He wrote to Edward in November 1936,

\begin{quote}
The only other alternative remaining is a dissolution and a General
Election…I cannot help feeling that even those who would sympathize with Your
majesty as an individual would deeply resent the damage which would inevitably
be done to the crown, the corner-stone on which the whole empire rests…there is
only one step which holds out any prospect of avoiding this dangerous situation,
and this is for Mrs. Simpson to go abroad without further delay.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Wallis grew increasingly doubtful of the possibility of marrying Edward. “I knew
that between David’s world and mine lay an abyss that I could never cross, one he could
never bridge for me,” she wrote in her autobiography.\textsuperscript{75} Yet Edward was firm in his
resolution to marry her and began to consider abdicating the throne. Once the possibility

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\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Simpson, 217.
\textsuperscript{74} Alexander Hardinge, Personal letter to Edward VIII, 13 November 1936.
\textsuperscript{75} Simpson, 236.
of abdication surfaced, Wallis felt that Edward’s Kingship was more important than their relationship. In her autobiography, Wallis claims that she tried to leave Edward,

“Summoning all the powers of persuasion in my possession, I tried to convince him of the hopelessness of our position…I’m going to tell him that if the country won’t approve of our marrying, I’m ready to go.” Edward would hear none of her pleading, and as a “woman in love” Wallis decided to stick by him if that is what he truly wanted. “David was determined that I stay; he insisted that he needed me, and as a woman in love I was prepared to go through rivers of woe, seas of despair, and oceans of agony for him,” she wrote in November of 1936.

On December 11th 1936, Edward ended his conflict with the government and announced to the world his decision to abdicate the throne and marry Wallis Simpson. Edward stated in a radio broadcast,

…You must believe me when I tell you that I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love. And I want you to know that the decision I have made has been mine and mine alone. This was a thing I had to judge entirely for myself. The other person most nearly concerned has tried up to the last to persuade me to take a different course.

Shortly before the abdication, Wallis had fled to Villa Lou Viei at Cannes with her friends the Rogers. Immediately after his abdication, Edward traveled to Austria where he took refuge with his friends, the Rothchilds, in their castle near Vienna. In adherence with the law, Edward and Wallis remained apart until Wallis’s provisional decree of divorce from Ernest was made absolute. Wallis tried to remain in hiding in Cannes, but came under virtual siege from the press. She also received abusive letters

76 Ibid., 236.
77 Ibid.
78 Edward Windsor, Radio Announcement, 12 December, 1936.
from strangers all over the world accusing her of forcing Edward to abdicate the throne. As Wallis recalled, “During my first week in Cannes I must have read several thousand letters…the enormity of the hatred I aroused and the distorted image of me that seemed to be forming in minds everywhere went far beyond anything I had anticipated even in my most depressed moments.”79

While Edward expressed relief, joy, and anticipation of his pending life with Wallis, her emotional state was one of sorrow and regret. In Edwards first post abdication letter he wrote, “It’s all so lovely Wallis and so dear and sweet and sacred…and I’m really happy for the very first time in my life.”80 Wallis realized that she would face the blame for Edward’s decision and felt exhausted and abused by the whole experience. In a 1937 letter to Kitty de Rothschild, Wallis wrote, “I have fallen back exhausted from the struggle to prevent this great tragedy.”81 Though Wallis found the experience harrowing, she wrote back to Edward with love and tenderness. “My heart is full of love for you and the agony of not being able to see you after all you have been through is pathetic. At the moment we have the whole world against us and our love…”82

On May 3rd 1937, after five anguished months of separation, Wallis received news that her divorce decree had become absolute. Edward and Wallis were reunited a day later. Edward’s brother, George VI, wrote to Edward that month letting him know that due to his abdication, Edward had also forgone all royal titles. Wallis remembered the letter in her autobiography, “David would henceforth be known as His Royal Highness,

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79 Simpson, 271.
80 Bloch, 271.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 273.
the Duke of Windsor, and I would be simply the Duchess of Windsor…” Edward and Wallis married as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor on June 3rd, 1937 in Tours, France. “Our wedding day, the third of June, was beautifully warm and sunny…here I shall say only that it was a supremely happy moment…” wrote the new Duchess of her Spring wedding.  

After the scandal of the abdication had died down, the Windsors’ were yet again the center of a shocking narrative. Newspapers in Britain and the United States reported that Wallis and Edward were the catalysts for a Nazi conspiracy plot. Many of these rumors started when the couple visited Germany in the fall of 1937. According to Wallis’s biographer Greg King,

Wallis and the Prince were…guests in the home of the German ambassador Leopold Holsch, who, on Hitler’s orders, lavishly entertained the pair and tried to press German interests and policies…she [Wallis] became a paid conduit to ensure that Hitler’s policies and proposals were given an audience to the heir to the throne.

Rumors claimed that Hitler wanted to negotiate an agreement with Edward. According to historian Mark Gaulding, “His [Hitler’s] plan was to put King Edward VIII back on the throne once he defeated England. He even said he thought Wallis would have made a great queen. This was based upon the very brief meeting the two had with Hitler on their visit to Germany.” However, there is no solid evidence to support that this conversation actually took place. As U.S News and World report stated, “The British

83 Simpson, 290.
84 Bloch, 342.
85 King, Greg, The Duchess of Windsor (Secaucus, New Jersey, Citadel Press, 1999), 129.
Foreign office has branded these rumors false, the Duke has denied them with the contempt they deserve."\textsuperscript{87}

Edward did visit with Hitler in Germany however, and many people saw their friendly relationship as an indicator of Edward’s political leanings. Yet according to Wallis, “David was well aware of some of the sinister aspects of the Nazi regime and of the growing concern with which the world regarded Hitler’s jingoistic gestures…it never occurred to David that this purely private trip could become a cause of public concern.”\textsuperscript{88}

Although Edward and Hitler spoke privately, Wallis met him as well. She discussed her impression of him in her autobiography, “I could not take my eyes off Hitler…under his mustache his lips were fixed in a kind of mirthless grimace. Yet at close quarters he gave one a feeling of great inner force…his eyes were truly extraordinary-intense, unblinking, magnetic, burning with the same peculiar fire I had earlier seen in the eyes of Kemal Ataturk.”\textsuperscript{89} According to Wallis, Edward would not disclose the particulars of his conversation with Hitler, so it is possible that Hitler may have offered to negotiate with Edward.

The United States government so strongly believed that Wallis and Edward were in collusion with the Nazis that when the couple visited America, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ordered a report on their activities and a substantial file on Wallis and Edward’s visit to the United States still exists today. In one memorandum, an agent transcribes a women’s convictions about the Duke and Duchess’ pro-Nazi behavior, “She considered the Duke and Duchess as being pro-Nazi, that their

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 295.
\textsuperscript{89} Simpson, 300.
presence in the United States was dangerous, and that some control should be maintained by the United States government over their activities while they are in the United States.™ The report was not considered legitimate, and no action was taken. Another internal document recounts a letter or telephone call received by a federal agent, who accuses Wallis of all sorts of atrocities, but the last paragraph states that, “This information is merely being made a matter of record and no action is contemplated regarding the same view of its non-specific nature.”™ It seems as if the federal agents did not take the evidence against the Duke and Duchess seriously, because they did not feel the need to initiate any investigation without direction from the director, J. Edgar Hoover. In an internal memorandum FBI agent A.Bosen wrote, “I have advised all of the supervisors that we would not institute investigations unless written memorandum are received from the department making the request for such investigation.”™ If Hoover believed the Duke and Duchess to be a serious threat, he would not have allowed Edward to be made aware of his investigations. A memorandum directed to J. Edgar Hoover said,

The Duke was very, very impressed with the information obtained. As a matter of fact, XXXXX stated he almost fell out of his chair three times when he realized what he had almost become mixed up with. He wanted to be sure you understood how much he appreciated this information…the Duke plans to drop in to see you before leaving the country.”™

Although the federal file is filled with allegations of the Duke and Duchess’ involvement with the Nazis, many of the letters are bizarre and there is no solid evidence to back them up. According to historian Mark Gaulding,

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90 Mr. G.P. office memorandum to Mr. D.M. Ladd, 19 July, 1944.
91 Internal memorandum
92 A. Bosen, internal memorandum to Mr. Tamm, 18 April, 1941.
93 Mr. Tamm, internal memorandum to J. Edgar. Hoover, 14 September, 1944.
I would summarize the file’s content as: a file that documented the various unfounded and sometimes quite outlandish letters that were written to the FBI, often J. Edgar Hoover himself… The inclusion of these accusations and documents are not proof of fact…I don’t think that many of the more salacious assertions about Wallis and Edward and the Nazi connection were ever supported by Hoover.\textsuperscript{94}

Due to the malicious rumors that surrounded Wallis and Edward, Winston Churchill, the new prime minister of Britain, offered the Duke a post in the Bahamas away from the politics of Europe. Edward accepted the offer and served as governor in the Bahamas from 1940 to 1945. After World War Two ended, Wallis and Edward returned to France and remained at their estate just outside of Paris until the Duke died of throat cancer at age seventy-eight in 1972.

After Edward’s death, the Duchess of Windsor rarely ventured out and her social life diminished to a rare dinner or quiet afternoon tea. The once glamorous, witty, and adored Wallis Simpson lived the life of a lone widower as she suffered from coronary artery disease and deep heartache. After an interview with Wallis, Time magazine claimed that Wallis was truly a woman in love because, “Every night the duchess comes to his [Edward’s] bedroom before retiring to her own. She makes sure that everything is in place, then says aloud, “Good night David.”\textsuperscript{95} Wallis passed away in her Paris home on April 25\textsuperscript{th} 1986.

The infamous Wallis Simpson, wife of Edward, Prince of Wales, continues to invite speculation, stir controversy and fascinate the public today. With Numerous books, movies, and magazine articles documenting her life, the Duchess of Windsor lingers in the hearts and minds of people across the globe. While little corroborative evidence

\textsuperscript{94} Gaulding, 15 February, 2009.
\textsuperscript{95} Widow of Windsor, \textit{Time}, 19 November, 1973, 56+. 
suggests that the countless and scandalous accusations against Wallis are true, she remains one of the most vilified women in modern history. Historical documents and interviews suggest that the worst of her crimes was a series of affairs before her marriage to Earnest. Yet Wallis’s legacy rightly contradicts her vision of herself; an innocent young girl who simply fell in love with three different men, and loyally endured “seas of despair and oceans of agony” for the men she adored. Wallis is remembered correctly as a calculating schemer who set her sights on and won the man she considered to be the most glamorous bachelor in the world.

Denied the dignity of the Royal Highness title bestowed upon her husband, allowed to enter England via invitation of the royal family only, and shunned by people and nations across the globe who believed her to be a Nazi spy, Wallis played out the final act of her inglorious life as the adored wife of the Prince of Wales. She achieved the fame and fortune she longed for, but lost the respect and acceptance she relished during her early days as the Prince’s close friend and frequent travel companion. In a letter to Edward begging him not to abdicate, Wallis wisely foretold, “You are going to put me in the wrong light to the entire world.” 96 After Edward’s abdication, Wallis settled into the dominating mother figure role, which afforded her husband such comfort. A good friend of the couple, American author Gore Vidal summed up their marriage when he noted, “The last time I saw them, she suddenly said, ‘Pull up your socks David.’ He said, ‘Yes, dear,’ very meekly.” 97 Despite wildly held views to the contrary, the marriage between

96 Bloch, 300.
97 Higham, 237.
Wallis and Edward was hardly a romantic fairytale. As Wallis explained, “You have no idea how hard it is to live out a great romance.”

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98 Simpson, 325.
Bibliography


“Fate of a Monarch, Course of an Empire, Destiny of one-half billion Souls Depend on Mrs. Simpson of Baltimore.” *Newsweek* 12 Dec. 1936: 10.


