

## A WORD FROM WALLY

When I finished writing *Gone with the Windsors* in 2004, I thought I was done with Wally Simpson, but the continuing saga of Harry and Meghan brought her to mind again. A great love story that ends in estrangement and exile? A hapless prince seduced by a savvy American divorcée? I felt I just had to get the Duchess of Windsor's take on Megxit.

**LG:** I'd like to talk to you about the Sussexes.

**DW:** Tell me again, who are they?

**LG:** Prince Harry and his wife Meghan. She's American.

**DW:** I see. And where do they fit into the scheme of things?

**LG:** He's the Queen's grandson. Sixth in the line of succession.

**DW:** Sixth? So not terribly important. David was King, you know?

**LG:** I know. Edward VIII. Proclaimed but never crowned. To get back to the Sussexes, they've withdrawn from royal duties and gone off to live in Canada.

**DW:** Canada? How extraordinary. But if that's the kind of place they enjoy, why not? I'm sure the Royals have quite enough ribbon-cutters. They'll manage without them.

**LG:** They've been stripped of their HRHs.

**DW:** Of course they have. That's what they do to you. As a matter of fact, they wouldn't even give me one, which made David terribly bitter. Not that

it bothered me. I've made my own way in life without an HRH. This Meghan Sussex, who dresses her?

**LG:** You mean who's her maid?

**DW:** No! Who *dresses* her? What labels does she wear?

**LG:** She mixes it up. High Street with couture. She seems to like Givenchy.

**DW:** She has some taste, at least. Dear Hubert. Is he really still designing?

**LG:** No, he's dead, but his fashion house lives on.

**DW:** I wore Givenchy to David's funeral. They put me up at Buckingham Palace. So threadbare, so shabby. Why don't they fix it up? This Sussex girl, does she watch her line? I never put on an inch. The Windsors tend to run to fat. It's their German blood. I had to be very strict with David about his regime. Now what about jewels? Did the Sussexes manage to spirit away anything worthwhile?

**LG:** She has some Cartier pieces. But her wedding tiara was only on loan.

**DW:** That's no great loss. Tiaras can be tiresome. Anyway, I guess she won't be needing one in Canada. Don't they wear blue jeans over there? So, if I have this right, a minor royal, Harry, has married an American and relocated. What is the problem, exactly?

**LG:** The public are worried he's making a mistake, that he's been blinded by love and will live to regret it. That he's only done it to please her, because royal duties weren't her cup of tea. She was used to a more exciting career.

**DW:** A career? What do you mean?

**LG:** She worked.

**DW:** Why?

**LG:** That's what women do these days.

**DW:** I see. It sounds as though things have really gone to the dogs.

**LG:** Meghan was an actress. People are afraid she'll get bored with Harry.

**DW:** She very well might, if he's dull or slow. Is he slow? David was as dim as a Toc H lamp, but I didn't allow that to drag me down. I kept myself stimulated and she must do likewise. Travel, shopping, that kind of thing. I've always put my best foot forward. You see the whole abdication mess, it was so badly managed. They should have kept him under lock and key until he came to his senses. David would have made a perfectly adequate King. Monarching doesn't require a lightning brain. Rather the opposite, in my opinion. Their lives can be so tedious, probably better if they don't have a lot of wit and imagination. And you know, the Yorks never forgave him. Especially her. The Scotch Pudding.

**LG:** You mean the Queen Mother? I've heard it said she blamed you for her husband's death. That the stress of becoming King sent him to an early grave.

**DW:** That's nonsense. It was smoking three packs a day of Navy Cut that killed him. Still, David should have stayed put. He was hugely popular. There was certainly no need for him to abdicate because of me. It was too silly and I begged him not to do it. It quite ruined my life for a while.

**LG:** But didn't you love him?

**DW:** Love him? I don't know about that. I was fond of him. He was like a little dog who'd attached himself to me and it can be nice to be adored, but

not day in, day out. No, I didn't love him. I stuck by him. He was happy enough with that. But it would have been so much better if he'd carried on kinging. We three could have remained chums. He and Ernest got along well enough.

**LG:** Ernest didn't mind you having a lover?

**DW:** He never enquired. Ernest had very good manners.

**LG:** Do you think you and Ernest would have stayed married if you hadn't taken up with the Prince of Wales?

**DW:** I didn't 'take up' with the Prince of Wales. *He* took up with *me*. And yes, I'm sure Ernest and I would have stayed together.

**LG:** He did remarry quite soon after your divorce.

**DW:** Twice, actually. Ernest didn't have a lot of luck with wives. But of course he remarried. He wasn't the kind of man who could live alone. Now, these Sussexes? How are they placed for money?

**LG:** I think it's still being hammered out.

**DW:** Too late. They should have finished the hammering before they left. The money is crucial because to live *comme il faut* is ruinously expensive and it's such a bore having to get friends to take up the slack.

**LG:** You mean getting friends to bankroll you?

**DW:** That's a rather vulgar way of putting it. Let's say certain people were more than happy to smooth one's path in exchange for the company of a King.

**LG:** I suppose the other question is, what will Prince Harry do with his time?

**DW:** It's her job to give him direction. There's nothing worse than a lovesick puppy under one's feet all day, as she will soon discover. She'll have to establish a routine, find him little projects.

**LG:** For instance?

**DW:** When we lived at Chateau La Croe I had our decorator create a nautically-themed snug for David. It was sound-proofed, so he could play his bagpipes up there or his ukulele. There was green baize on the floor so he could practice his putting, and there was a little terrace with a telescope, so he could scan the horizon for interesting ships. He'd occupy himself for hours in there. Tell her from me, she must manage her husband with a rod of iron.

**LG:** I think she already does. And finally, my readers would love to know, did you stay in touch with Maybell Brumby?

**DW:** Who? Oh Maybell. She remarried, after the war. Courted by another millionaire with heart problems. Or was it his kidneys? Something indicative of an early death anyway. Maybell had the luck of the devil. But money was quite wasted on her. She had no style, no taste. All that jingle in the bank and she used to buy her gowns in Derry and Toms. No, we didn't stay in touch. What on earth would we have found to talk about?