

The Kings Mistress

(A high-fiction look at the famous abdication crisis of 1936)

Theodore Goddard is down in the south of France on what boils down to a mission of state. He is largely there at the behest of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who is hoping that Theodore will persuade the famous, or is it infamous, Wallis Warfield Simpson to withdraw her divorce action in Ipswich Court.

Goddard is well aware he has only got the job of divorce lawyer in charge of the Simpson action due to his old friend, Walter Moncton being just too close to the King. He has shied away from giving King Edward the VIII the bad news. He brought in Theodore to do this. Old Theo is a dry old stick on the face of it. He is dourness personified; a smallish grey man perhaps typical of the more successful members of the English legal system, but underneath it all, has a surprisingly irreverent streak.

He sits sipping his whisky and soda, just he and Wallis in her host's fine sitting room; she sipping one of her inevitable cocktails that, as usual, has enough stuff stuck into the top of the cocktail glass to start a fruit salad. As they sip, he reflects back on his conversation with Prime Minister Baldwin. Old Stanley is clutching at straws really in giving Theodore permission, certainly encouragement to make the long car journey across France to talk with Wallis Simpson.

Realizing, as the target of all this unusual encouragement to make this, a trip that is an anathema to King Edward VIII, who is vehemently opposing the light of his love being harassed, Theodore has used the occasion, once the trip was agreed on, to out a blunt question to Old Stanley; not the sharpest tool in the rack, but a master manipulator of the House of Commons.

"What are you doing about Hitler, Prime Minister?" he asks. "It seems that the fellow intends to let the Four Horsemen loose on the world."

"Ah, not my field, Theodore," he says, "not at all; it's Foreign Affairs really."

Theodore looks the Prime Minister in the eye. "Might I suggest that while the Government of England can talk of nothing else, but Edward and Mrs Simpson, these latter two are just a storm in a teacup? In just three years, Hitler has turned Germany into an armed camp with a very doubtful social agenda."

"What do you know about it all?" Baldwin asks.

Goddard handles the English end of legal work for Haeuffer and Brandt, German lawyers of note. He has been eyeing with concern now for the last twelve months, the contracts he has been presented with from the German end for completion and signatures. All of them without exception, for material and supplies that are linked to war-like usage.

"I suggest, Prime Minister," he continues, "that our Government may indeed be fiddling while Hitler is setting the scene for some burning."

"I think not, Theodore," Baldwin says. "Now...turning to your trip, the Government will supply a good sized car and driver and we will send a detective along with you to get you through the media throng besieging the home that is harbouring Mrs Simpson. I suggest you get cracking at dawn tomorrow. A destroyer will take you over from Dover to Calais. Good luck with this, oh so important, mission."

Part Two

Theo sips his single malt whisky, runs what we have set out through his mind and has a good look at Wallis Simpson; possibly the most famous or at least notorious woman in the world at the moment. She is pretty strung out; the situation is getting at her. He realises she's not so young, the bloom of youth is long gone, but she's beautifully dressed and made up. The frock is very likely Chanel and she is sporting a matched set of diamond earrings, necklace and on her slender ring finger, a square-cut stone of the same family, but big, quite big.

"Mrs Simpson," he says, "The King has two choices at this time. He can have his Kingdom, or a bit further down the track, he can have you as his lawful wedded wife, but rest assured he can't have both."

She sips demurely at her over-loaded cocktail. "Mr Goddard," she says, "this has been a fraught time and I have been incessantly on the phone to David. I have only reached the same conclusion you have spelt out this afternoon and I really do not know what to do."

"It's simple," the lawyer says. "Just withdraw your divorce proceedings; they can easily be reinstated later."

"Hmm," she says, "hard on dear old Ernest."

"Ah," he replies, "but easier on the nation. It is always a plus to delay a catastrophe. It's very important to never cross the line of no return."

"I fear the King has made up his mind to go," she says.

"Ah," says Goddard, "I have an injunction ready to go if he looks like signing anything of that nature. It's against Baldwin of course, it will stay his hand."

"It all still seems impossible," Mrs Simpson says.

"Not at all," Goddard says. "Now just at the moment, I'm suffering from an overnight very long car trip and have a bit of a headache. What say, Wallis...if I may call you Wallis?"

"Surely," she says.

"Ah...and you must call me Teddy; my mistress calls me that."

She is staggered. "You?...You, of all people, have a mistress?"

"Oh yes," he says, "the same one for twenty years and of course, also a wife of thirty years."

"Does your wife know of the mistress?" Wallis asks.

Theo (Teddy) laughs. "I'm a very successful lawyer," he says. "I keep the bread of both partners well-buttered. It's in neither's interest to jump up or down. Now, Wallis," he continues, "having done the stern lawyer bit, what say we call an adjournment for three hours and regroup at six pm to look at some good alternative ideas that may make life much easier all round? Can we perhaps organise a light dinner, say soup and some sandwiches and leave the hour of serving that open for the moment?"

Wallis realises this dour little man is not so dour after all. "Agreed, Teddy," she says, "I look forward to our six pm meeting."

Theo looks for and finds the car driver; gives him some money and says, "This is what I want you to fetch for me."

Theo arrives back in the same room at six pm; the curtains are drawn and a nice small fire enlivens the ambiance. Wallis has changed into a beautiful black dress, while Theo is the star turn in cords, Italian shoes, a beautiful light wool Edinburgh Mills jumper and cravat. He is carrying a brown paper bag with him. Wallis's host and hostess are in the room to meet Theo. He apologises for upsetting

the meals program and says that they will call for refreshments a bit later on. They accept this and go. Wallis sits comfortably back with a host provided cocktail on a small occasional table near her. Theo picks this up and pours the colourful contents into a flowerpot.

“Wallis,” he says, “in the course of a long life, I have never underestimated the helpfulness of alcohol in human affairs.” He plucks a couple of wine glasses off the tallboy and pours a long glass of pale white wine into the glasses. “Let’s sink bottle one,” he says, “and then we’ll examine the possibilities of the situation.” And they proceed to do so. Halfway through the second bottle, Theo starts the ball rolling.

“What I want to do is run the flag up and see who salutes,” he says. “It is the question of happiness; your happiness, the King’s long term happiness and also that of the Empire. King Edward has been sort of poking a stick in the eye of the tiger, but if he proceeds, there will be bitter times ahead. He’s a very good king; he has had outstanding training for his role and if he tosses it all down the river, it will be just so sad for all those close to him and for that matter, for you. Let’s get down to taws. His brother will only be a pale shadow of King Edward as King. He is dyslexic, diffident, has trouble stringing words together and in any case, has filled his role in history by ensuring the line of succession to the throne. Elizabeth is barely a child, but with her parentage and her serious mein, will, in time, be a great Queen, way down the track. That’s the question of succession done and dusted. Don’t ever underestimate the intelligence and sense of purpose of the Lady Bowes-Lyon. Let’s just say,” Theo continues, “the lady has done what was necessary to see the line of royalty continue. She didn’t knock back his marriage proposal twice for no good reason. Now,.....to the hard facts.”

Wallis swigs a hefty swig of white and holds her glass out for a refill.

Part Three

“Moving on,” he says, “do you imagine for one moment that a marriage with the present king would produce a line to the throne? After all, you are much married, yet no children.”

Wallis looks at Theo, looks at the ceiling and shakes her head.

“Progress....progress,” Theo says. “If the King abdicates and you marry when free to do so, it will bring down the curtain on any chance of a life in Great Britain. The hierarchy will turn on you like Rottweilers and you will be welcome nowhere in that green and sceptred isle. Having demolished the main reason for marriage, let us now look at the alternatives. I know of a beautiful small country house in Hereford that you could move into. You can continue with the King as is, he can weekend with you in the country and get on with being King during the working week. He will be occupied; you will have a pleasant and cosseted life and all will be well in the world.”

She says, “This leaves a lot of questions outstanding and a lot of detail to cover.”

“That’s purely lagniappe,” Theo says, “in other words, loose ends to snip.”

They start on their third bottle of white. There is silence in the room; dead silence, but an amiable silence.

“I shall have to ring David,” she says.

“No,” says Theo, “We’ll drive back to England in the morning and we should have a happy ending by the following morning”

Christmas is just around the corner – the chilly Christmas of 1936. The street singers are soon blithely carolling ‘Hark the Herald Angels sing, Mrs Simpson hasn’t got our King’. Well she has of course, but the nation is glad at last to turn a blind eye.

Easter 1939 rolls around. Wallis and Winston Churchill are sitting in water-colour sunshine on the sweeping front lawn of Pangbourne House in deepest Herefordshire. They are listening on a portable radio to the BBC broadcast of King Edward’s Easter speech (an innovation first brought in in 1937).



King Edward is saying, *“We have listened over this Easter, ending in this Easter day, to the saddest story ever told; a story that has shaped our Christian world.*

With His help, we may yet avert the catastrophe that Herr Hitler seems to be promising us, but we must bear ourselves to meet this dire challenge, if and when it comes.”

Winston says, “Um...it will come no later than September 1 in my opinion. Hitler won’t want to miss the best campaigning weather.” He looks at Wallis. “What will you do?”

Wallis sips her white wine. “Winston,” she says, “There is an old folk song often sung in Hereford. It’s called, ‘Stand by Your Man’. I intend to move in to Buckingham Palace for the duration and do just that.”

“Hmm,” Winston says, “and what of the Duke and Duchess of York and the heirs to the throne of England?”

“Cut and dried,” she replies, “David will tuck them away as Governors of the Bahamas.”

Winston pulls on his big Cuban cigar; his eyes twinkle as he has near to the last word in the famous drama. “You have done well, Wallis,” he says.

She laughs. “Yes,” she says, “and it’s entirely due to old Teddy Goddard. David (King Edward VIII) is going to give him a gong in this year’s Birthday Honours.”