



Gone with the Windsors

By Laurie Graham
ISBN: 9780060872724

Introduction

When Maybell Brumby, frisky, wealthy, and recently widowed, quits Baltimore and arrives in London, she finds that her old school chum, Bessie Wallis Warfield, is there ahead of her. Impoverished and ambitious as ever, Wallis is on the make. Hampered by plodding husband number two, but armed with terrific bone structure and a few erotic tricks picked up in China, Wallis sets her sights on the most eligible bachelor in the world: the Prince of Wales, heir to the throne. Maybell, with her deep pockets, makes the perfect ally, and her disarming dimness makes her the most delicious chronicler of the scandal that rocked a monarchy and changed the course of history.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you think having real-life historical figures mixed with fictional affects the plot of the story? What are the benefits and disadvantages of historical fiction? What might the author have found constraining in writing about real characters? What might she have found inspiring? Are there ethical problems with fictionalizing the lives of real people? Do you see any ethical issues in the way the characters in *Gone with the Windsors* are depicted?
2. How does the diary format affect the way you read the novel, i.e., Did you feel like you were reading something deeply personal? Did it feel more intimate? Why or why not? What do you miss by having the story told to you in diary form? What do you gain? Did you find having missing entries difficult?
3. Look at the way the author uses humor—Maybell's skewering of Edna Piaf, Alfred Einstein, and Cole (Coal) Porter among the many. Are we laughing with Maybell or at her? Name some instances when Maybell is inadvertently witty. Maybell witnesses the courtship of the twentieth century and the scandal that rocked a monarchy—recording all in her diary. How does her dimwittedness affect your opinion of her? What is Maybell's opinion of herself?
4. What kind of friend is Maybell to Wally? How does Wally repay Maybell's generosity?
5. Maybell's niece Flora renames her stuffed animals as the story moves forward. What is the significance of the names she gives them? What is Maybell's relationship with her niece and nephews? What are their feelings toward her? When you read the letter from Susan, the grandniece of Maybell, are you surprised at her description of Maybell? How is her perception of Maybell different from the picture that is painted through Maybell's diary entries?
6. The abdication of King Edward VIII is depicted as a kind of bedroom farce, the childlike Prince of Wales easily manipulated by the cunning Wally. How well does this book re-examine and satirize the well-documented abdication crisis? Does it try to exonerate Simpson or merely damn her further?
7. The early 1930s was a time of great global turmoil and upheaval. It was the beginning of the Great Depression, the end of American prohibition and saw the rise of Fascism in Europe. How does the book explore these issues?
8. When Hitler is storming across Europe, the Duchess (Wally) is upset she didn't get a particular diamond pendant for her birthday. What does this reveal about all the characters of the "inner circle"? History shows that the Duke (as he is known after abdication) and Wally had a controversial relationship to the Nazi regime. Why did they think Hitler was an acceptable leader and dinner companion? Does Maybell's cluelessness to the extraordinary events that were occurring all around her ever become unbelievable? If so, when? What are other instances of her misunderstanding or dismissing major political or otherwise significant events?
9. Both Wally and Maybell are social climbers of varying degrees. Of the two, who is more conscious of social status? Why did you choose her? Would you rather go to dinner with Wally or Maybell, and why? What is the difference between social status and class? Could an American ever truly break through the constraints of England's class system? Do you think Violet, Maybell's sister who married a Lord, is accepted in English society?
10. Why did the Prince of Wales fall in love with Wally? At what point did Wally begin to seduce Edward? Was it always on her agenda? Do you think Edward and Wally's relationship was similar to how it is depicted in *Gone with the Windsors*? If King Edward VIII's abdication for a twice-divorced American woman had not happened in real life, would you believe it? Name other instances when truth is stranger than fiction.
11. What does the novel say about the relationship with America and Britain? Is the Wallace-Edward relationship in this book a representation of the deeper political and social ties between the two countries? If so, how?
12. How well does this book re-examine and satirize the well-documented abdication crisis? Does it try to exonerate Simpson or merely damn her further?
13. The title of the book alludes to the film *Gone with the Wind*. What comparisons can be drawn between the film and the book, and in

particular Wallace and Edward and Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler?

About the Author

Laurie Graham is the author of *The Future Homemakers of America*, *The Importance of Being Kennedy*, and other novels. She lives in Venice, Italy.