That Woman

The Life of Wallis Simpson,
Duchess of Windsor

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Becoming Wallis

'She has the Warfield look'

Choosing your own name is the supreme act of self-creation. Wallis, the androgynous and unusual name she insisted on for herself, is a bold statement of identity. 'Wallis' is saying not only this is who I am but you will know no one else like me. Take me on my own terms. It was a credo she lived by.

From the start this woman fashioned herself as something strong, intriguing, distinctive. In taking such a name she was constructing an identity, giving herself from a young age freedom that women of her era could not take for granted. She was displaying a contempt for tradition and the ordinary which would be so crucial to her destiny. Having chosen her own name she had to work hard to live up to it, to create a strong relationship with it. Although her surname changed many times, this name was one of the few constants in her life. 'Hi, I'm Wallis,' she would say when she entered a room.

The name her parents chose for her was 'Bessiewallis', to honour both her mother's beloved sister Bessie and her grandfather's illustrious friend Severn Teackle Wallis, an author and legislator and, in Baltimore, an important man. The latter had been imprisoned for a time during the Civil War, along with Wallis's grandfather, for supporting a call for secession from the Union, but was later appointed provost at the University of Maryland. Her own father, too, bore this man's name. His statue stands today at one end of Mount Vernon Square, the city's main plaza, overshadowed though it is by the imposing 178-foot-high monument of George Washington in the centre, the first erected in the first President's honour. But she soon jettisoned 'Bessie', describing it as a name fit only for cows.

'Wallis', however, was a man's name for a woman who could hold her own with men.

Wallis was never a woman's woman. She wanted to be something out of the ordinary for a woman. She was funny, clever, smart – in both the English and American uses of the term. She wanted to pit her wits not against other women but against men in a man's world. With her sharp understanding of appearances, she always knew the importance of a name. Of course she had seen her mother change from 'Alys' to 'Alice'. But that was subtle, gentle, barely noticeable. Choosing Wallis in her youth was as much part of her armour as the carefully selected designer clothes and decor of her middle years. When inviting friends to her third wedding, her husband-to-be, the ex-King, a man with even more names to accommodate, suddenly started referring to her as 'Mrs Warfield'. This was a name she had never owned, nor could claim any right to. She encouraged it to shield the man she had dragged along in her wake.

Defining herself by her name was one of the first acts of a young girl intent on controlling a cold and often unfriendly world. Whenever Wallis succeeded, she felt most at peace. But for much of her life she was dependent on the charity of others and this led to long bouts of unhappiness to which she responded in a variety of ways.

There is no birth certificate for Wallis. It was not a legal requirement at the time to have one in Pennsylvania, where she was born amid some secrecy and scandal probably on 19 June 1896. Nor was there a newspaper announcement of her birth. The place where she was born, however, is not in doubt: a small wooden building known as Square Cottage at the back of the Monterey Inn in the summer resort of Blue Ridge Summit. The Blue Ridge Summit community, at the top of the South Mountain at Monterey Pass, was in its heyday as a fashionable spa and holiday area at the beginning of the twentieth century, after the introduction of the railroad in 1872. Blue Ridge Summit strays into four counties – two on the Pennsylvania side of the line and two on the Maryland side – and straddles the historic Mason–Dixon line, significantly giving Wallis aspects of both the

South and North of the United States in her make-up. This was something she was to make much of later.

Her parents had gone there ostensibly to escape the heat of a Baltimore summer and in the hope of improving her father's health, but also because they were in flight from disapproving families. In her memoirs, Wallis is vague about the marriage of her parents, the consumptive Teackle Wallis Warfield and the spirited if flighty Alice Montague, a marriage neither family wanted.

'Without taking their families into their confidence, they slipped away and were married, according to one story in a church in Washington, according to another in a church in Baltimore,' Wallis wrote sixty years later. She would have us believe that Teackle and Alice were married in June 1895 when both were twenty-six years old. But, more likely, the marriage had been solemnized just seven months before her birth on 19 November 1895, as a monograph on the Church of St Michael and All Angels in Baltimore states. According to this account, Dr C. Ernest Smith, the Rector, was called upon to officiate at a quiet marriage which attracted little attention at the time. 'On that day Teackle Wallis Warfield took as his bride Miss Alice M. Montague, a communicant of the parish. The ceremony took place not in the main church itself but in the rectory at 1929 St Paul Street in the presence of several friends.'

This version makes it seem that the marriage was arranged as soon as Alice realized she was pregnant, that the first and only child of the union was most probably conceived out of wedlock and that neither family attended. Perhaps, more significantly, it also indicates there was never a time in Wallis's life when she did not have to harbour secrets.

Wallis, with an attempt at insouciance, wrote later in her own account of how she once asked her mother for the date and time of her birth 'and she answered impatiently that she had been far too busy at the time to consult the calendar let alone the clock'. But the child may also have arrived prematurely, as the family doctor was not available and the twenty-two-year-old, newly qualified Dr Lewis Miles Allen received an emergency call from the Monterey Inn and delivered the baby in Alice's hotel bedroom.

The Warfields and the Montagues, although both shared impeccable Southern credentials and both were supporters of the Confederacy during the Civil War, did not get on. Both came from ancient and respected stock and traced their arrival in America to the seventeenth century. There is a much trumpeted mention of the Warfields in the Domesday Book and one of Wallis's ancestors, Pagan de Warfield, is said to have accompanied William the Conqueror from France and fought in the Battle of Hastings. The Montagues, similarly, hailed from an old English aristocratic family that arrived in America in 1621 when one Peter Montague left Buckinghamshire and settled on land in Virginia granted him by King Charles I. Wallis always felt proud of her ancestry and had reason to. 'For those who are prepared to accept that there can be class distinctions of any kind in the United States,' wrote the social commentator Alastair Forbes in the mid-1970s, 'she can be said to come from a far higher stratum than say Princess Grace of Monaco, Jacqueline Bouvier or the Jerome or Vanderbilt ladies of the nineteenth century. By present English standards of birth she might rank rather below two recent royal duchesses and rather above two others.' But the Montagues, whatever their past prosperity as landowners, were no longer prosperous. They were much livelier than the politically and commercially active Warfields, whom they considered to be nouveau. They believed that their beautiful and vivacious Alice could have held out for a much better match than marriage to Teackle Wallis. The solemn Warfield clan in their turn not only looked down on the Montagues, they worried that Teackle Wallis would never be strong enough to support a wife and therefore should not seek one.

T. Wallis, as he styled himself, was the youngest of four brothers (the first, Daniel, had died young) and two daughters born to Henry Mactier Warfield and his wife Anna Emory. The Emorys were physicians and, like so many upper-class Marylanders, slave owners whose sympathies were Southern. Dr Emory joined the Confederate army as a surgeon and was stationed in Richmond, Virginia until the end of the war. The eldest surviving son, Solomon Davies Warfield, was a successful and prominent banker, president of the Continental Trust company (the premier investment

company in Baltimore in that era), and a millionaire bachelor who kept an apartment on New York's Fifth Avenue where he was said to entertain his mistresses. The second son, Richard Emory Warfield, lived in Philadelphia and was thriving in the insurance business, while the fourth, Henry Warfield, had a farm at Timonium in Baltimore County.

Teackle was always frail but at eighteen, when he fell ill with consumption (tuberculosis), it was decided that, instead of sending him to recuperate at a sanatorium or in a more favourable climate, he should work as a lowly clerk in his uncle's Continental Trust in Baltimore, an environment not chosen to assuage his illness but which the family presumably hoped would draw attention away from such embarrassing debility. Little was known in the nineteenth century about cures for or reasons for contracting consumption, although its bacterial cause was eventually isolated in 1882. There was no definitive treatment for the disease until the mid-twentieth century. At the time of Wallis's birth, it was not only widespread but considered shameful, partly since it was thought to be a disease of poverty. Death was the likely outcome for at least 80 per cent of patients. Usually, after a horrific period of night sweats, chills and paroxysmal coughing, the disease spread to other organs of the body, leading to the wasting away which gave the disease its name. It was not surprising therefore that Teackle Wallis, a charmingly sensitive but melancholy consumptive, should have appeared a disastrous prospect for the Montague parents – William, who worked in insurance, and his wife, Mary Anne. Indeed medical advice at the time, which must surely have been offered by the Warfield doctor, was to avoid cohabiting with women for fear of spreading the disease. Those around TB patients were exposed to danger with each breath, as the bacillus is spread by droplet infection, mainly by coughing and sneezing, and inhaled droplets lodge in and infect the lungs.

Yet something powerfully attractive about T. Wallis Warfield must have appealed to the courageous and headstrong young Alice Montague. According to their only daughter, the deep-set staring eyes suggested a handsome poet, but they may instead have been indi-

cative of the far-gone ravages of his disease. By the end of the summer of 1896, Teackle was a deeply sick and weak man. But he decided to move his family back to the centre of Baltimore and installed them in a residential hotel, the Brexton,[1] where he hoped if the worst happened they might be able to fend for themselves. This red-brick building containing eight small apartments was the only home Wallis ever shared with her father and mother.

As a frail, wheelchair invalid Teackle was allowed one photograph with his child. He died five months after her birth on 15 November 1896. According to family lore his last words were 'I'm afraid, Alice, she has the Warfield look. Let us hope that in spirit she'll be like you.' Her penetrating blue eyes, always said to be her best feature, came from her mother, and perhaps her spirit did too. From her father she inherited dark hair but no capital and an embedded fear of insecurity.

Baltimore at the time of Wallis's childhood was one of the fastest-growing, most economically vibrant cities in the United States. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, northern Baltimore attracted many wealthy families who lived in substantial three- or even four-storey houses that were being built around Mount Vernon when this was still a relatively rural fashionable residential district. As a port city, located on the northern Chesapeake Bay, Baltimore was well positioned to make a rapid recovery from the physical and economic damage inflicted by the Civil War, embarking during the reconstruction era on the period of its greatest prosperity. The city, attractive to both immigrants and investors between the 1880s and 1914, was home to large and complex populations of Italian, Polish, German, Irish and Chinese immigrants, as well as many thousands of East European Jews fleeing pogroms, political turmoil and poverty. Most Jews settled in East Baltimore, especially the Lombard Street area, and remained economically marginalized for at least one generation. Here, among

1 In 2009 this newly restored building reopened, trading on its connections with Wallis Warfield but refurbished in a splendid style which she would not have recognized.

the dozens of chicken coops with live chickens on the street, the aroma of pickling spices and the noise of clanking buckets, Yiddish greetings and kosher butchers, the Warfields and Montagues would have been most unlikely to venture.

But living in a city where at least one-third of the residents are foreign born reinforces notions of separation, especially among those who see themselves as poor relations, which Wallis and her mother clearly were. In addition during Wallis's childhood, forty or so years after the abolition of slavery, racial segregation was still practised in Baltimore, as it was in many Southern American cities. So deciding where young Wallis Warfield would live and would go to school was a matter of deep concern to her wider family.

Within a few weeks Anna Emory Warfield, the sixty-year-old matriarch of the family, invited her daughter-in-law and granddaughter to live with her at 34 East Preston Street, a large and solid four-storey brownstone in the centre of the old part of the city, near the Monument. This staid and peaceful house of adults became home for the next four or five years. Wallis recognized later what a disturbing influence she must have been there. Her grandmother, whom she loved, took her shopping every Saturday to Richmond Market, 'as exciting as a trip to the moon'. Going to market was an important outing for the rich matrons of Baltimore. They dressed up for it and wore white gloves – after all they would not be touching anything. The servants who walked a discreet distance behind them carried out the purchasing.

Her grandmother – 'a solitary figure in a vast, awesomely darkened room, rocking evenly to and fro . . . and so erect that her back never seemed to touch the chair' – was, as Wallis recalled, in mourning and wore black dresses with high collars and a tiny white linen cap on which were stitched three small bows of black ribbon. '"Bessiewallis," my grandmother would say severely, "how will you ever grow up to be a lady unless you learn to keep your back straight?" Or "Bessiewallis, can't you be still for just a minute?"'

But her uncle Sol, a more terrifying presence for the young and not so young child, lived there too. Solomon Davies Warfield, the financier and politician whose hopes to become mayor of Baltimore

were not realized, had to make do with the locally prestigious but lesser position as postmaster. He funded Wallis's childhood but in a cruelly controlling manner, the lessons of which cannot have been lost on this young girl given that she took the trouble to report his behaviour in her memoirs. Every month he deposited a sum of money in his sister-in-law's account at his bank. 'The trouble was that the amount was almost never the same. One month it might be quite enough to take care of the important bills, the next month barely enough to cover the rent.'

Uncle Sol's bedroom was at the back of the third floor with a private bath. Alice had a room on the same floor at the front, and connecting with it was a small room for Wallis. The arrangement was awkward for Alice and her daughter, who had to use her grandmother's bathroom on the floor below. But the idyll, if idyll it was, did not last. 'A subtly disturbing situation seems to have helped precipitate the separation,' Wallis wrote. She speculates that her uncle fell in love with her mother. 'She was young and attractive, living under the same roof, and she and uncle Sol were inevitably thrown much together.' At all events he must have made overtures that either Alice or old Mrs Warfield considered inappropriate.

So the pair returned to the Brexton residential hotel. There followed a deeply unhappy period for Wallis of meals alone with her mother 'and rather forlorn afternoon excursions to the house on Preston Street about which had so suddenly descended a mysterious and disturbing barrier'. Funds were now sometimes so low that her mother sold embroidery at the local Women's Exchange shop. But her mother's newly widowed sister, Aunt Bessie Merryman, then stepped in and invited the pair to live with her. Her own husband, Uncle Buck, had also died young and, childless herself, it suited her to have company. Wallis grew to love Aunt Bessie as a mother. Yet, although the sisters got on, Alice was determined to make one last stab at independence. She moved into the Preston Apartment House, a less than sumptuous set of rooms in the shadow of her Warfield family, and this time tried to make money inviting the other tenants in the block to become paying dinner guests. It was a disastrous experiment in every

way. The prime sirloin steak, soft-shell crabs and elaborate pastries were never costed, but the damage this venture did to the reputation of mother and daughter, now branded as boarding-house keepers, was incalculable. These years of struggle and insecurity, when 'mother had the café and was forever working herself to death to give me things', were implanted so deeply in Wallis's psyche that she never entirely shed her worry and fear of what might lie around the corner. Once again it was her aunt Bessie who came to the rescue by insisting on disbanding the dubious operation.

Wallis went to her first school while living with Aunt Bessie. It was called Miss O'Donnell's after its founder, Miss Ada O'Donnell. Next, aged ten, she attended Arundell Girls School on nearby St Paul Street, neither the most exclusive nor the most expensive educational establishment, but a place of calm routine for girls of good backgrounds. There she would have learned, as every Baltimore school girl learned, the story of Elizabeth (Betsy) Patterson, a local girl from a wealthy family who married her prince but was not allowed to remain married to him. On a visit to America in 1803, Jérôme Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, met and married Betsy. But Jérôme was a minor and his brother refused to recognize the marriage. When Jérôme returned to France in 1805, his wife was forbidden to land and went first to England, where her son, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte, known as 'Bo', was born. In 1806 Napoleon issued a state decree of annulment to end his brother's marriage, and Betsy was given a large annual pension but, rather than return to 'what I hated most on earth – my Baltimore obscurity', she lived unhappily in exile in Paris for the rest of her life. Wallis never referred to the story in her memoirs.

Wallis had to take her monthly school reports to Uncle Sol for inspection – a further reminder that her dependence on his charity was not to be taken for granted. However, he did oblige with her next important request – that she be allowed to go to Oldfields for her final two years of education, the most expensive school in Maryland. Oldfields, just beyond the Gunpowder River in Glencoe County, was founded in 1867 in the hills beyond Timonium where Wallis had already spent many happy summers with her Warfield cousins. Although she had been parcelled out to all her cousins at various

times, Pot Spring, the home of her uncle Emory and her aunt Betty Warfield, not far from Oldfields, was a favourite summer refuge. The school's 200-acre site was beautiful and today remains largely undeveloped countryside. For many years, a handsome coach and horses took students back and forth from Glencoe station, past the *ante bellum* white clapboard mansions and large plantation houses which had once housed hundreds of slaves.

The legendary co-principal of Oldfields was Anna McCulloh, called Miss Nan by all the pupils, a woman not unlike Grandmother Warfield who rigidly upheld her notion of the correct way to behave. Wallis had become a keen and athletic basketball player in her teens, encouraged by a young teacher, Charlotte Noland, who offered afternoon basketball session three times a week in a rented Baltimore garage. Miss Noland was, for the young Wallis, an ideal woman, 'a mixture of gay, deft teasing and a drill sergeant's sternness . . . cultivated of manner, a marvellous horsewoman and a dashing figure in every setting'. Miss Noland's sister, Rosalie Noland, also taught at Oldfields, which was noted for its sporting and equestrian facilities, and Wallis, like Charlotte Noland, was a skilled horsewoman not afraid to tackle jumps nor to challenge others with whom she was riding. At Oldfields, basketball was deeply competitive, the girls keen to go out before breakfast to practise. Yet in these sports, as in everything else at the school, the competitive spirit was to some extent reined in by the simple expedient of dividing the girls into two teams, one named 'Gentleness' and the other 'Courtesy'. 'Gentleness and Courtesy' was the first rule in the Oldfields handbook, as the sign on the door of each child's room proclaimed. Wallis represented 'Gentleness', who flourished a white banner with green lettering; 'Courtesy' had a green banner with white lettering. In addition to sport and etiquette, acting and drama was encouraged and in one surviving photograph Wallis is dressed as a New Jersey mosquito, alongside a classmate impersonating Governor Woodrow Wilson, echoing a hot political issue of the day.[2]

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2 In 1912, Governor Woodrow Wilson signed the country's first mosquito-control law which declared malaria a reportable disease.

The school fostered an aura of old-fashioned calm anchored by a set of old-fashioned rules. These rules were concerned with how to stand as well as how to behave. There was a Bible-reading group, and the school imposed an honour system on the sixty or so girls whereby each was meant to report her own misdeeds, such as talking or visiting each other's rooms after lights out or communicating by letter with a boy.

Wallis is said to have misbehaved by smoking, which was seriously frowned upon, and by jumping from a balcony to meet a boy. Such misdeeds are not recorded in the school annals and it just may be that rumours arose through what she later became. However, at the time she was clearly audacious, a daredevil ringleader never afraid to set the pace, a tomboy. She had at least one boyfriend by the time she went to Oldfields. He was Carter Osburn, son of a Baltimore bank president, who later gave an account that may have been the source of the rumours. His father owned a car which he was allowed to borrow. 'At a certain point in the road I'd stop, she spotted it. She'd slip out. I don't know yet how she managed it but as far as I know she never got caught; she not only got out [of Oldfields] but she also got back in without being observed. She was very independent in spirit, adhering to the conventions only for what they were worth and not for their own sake. Those dates were all the more exciting for being forbidden.' At the same time Wallis was writing to another boy telling him she hoped to go into town from time to time but how lovely it would be if he could come and visit. This was striking behaviour for a refined young lady with aspirations to enter society in the early part of the twentieth century. For a teenager at an elite establishment like Oldfields it was shocking. Some parents at the time believed that there was something extraordinary about Wallis Warfield and that her influence was malign.

By contrast, another student of that era described a rather more typical day as one that involved:

> Getting up as late as possible … starting our dressing modestly under both nighties and kimonos. Then we dashed out of our rooms to wash, crowds of us all trying to use the basins … invari-

> ably the water stopped running completely whereupon we banged loudly on the pipes to notify the bold souls who had descended to the first floor and were getting all the water that they must stop. Then back to our rooms where we continued dressing still under cover of the kimonos.

Such rampant modesty is hardly a surprise in a girls' boarding school of the time. But the desire to be thin is more surprising and Miss Nan thought it dangerously unnecessary. She told the girls she knew they were taking doses of cod-liver oil in order to lose weight and ordered all those who had some in their possession to turn it over immediately to the infirmary. (This is according to a book Wallis later accused her best friend of having written under a pseudonym.)

Going to Oldfields in 1912 was especially important for Wallis. In the first place her mother had recently remarried and now lived part of the time in Atlanta. Alice Warfield's second husband was John Freeman Rasin, the wealthy but somewhat indolent son of the Democratic Party leader of Baltimore. The thirty-seven-year-old Rasin, who had not been married before, was already suffering from a variety of alcohol-induced ailments. Although he delivered financial security at last to mother and daughter, he could never replace the lost father figure that Wallis permanently mourned. And for a girl who had hitherto been the centre of a small adult world – her mother, grandmother and aunt – to find that someone else had replaced her in her mother's affections was a bitter blow. Aunt Bessie, always a more suitable figure as far as Baltimore society was concerned, now became her closest adviser.

Secondly, Oldfields was where her best friend Mary Kirk, a girl she had just met at Burrland, an exclusive summer camp near Middleburg, Virginia, was already a pupil. Mary's parents, Edith and Henry Child Kirk, were well born if not exactly rich, with a house full of servants. Samuel Kirk and Son were the oldest silversmiths in the United States, established in 1817, descendants of English silversmiths in Derbyshire and also of Sir Francis Child, Lord Mayor of London, who in 1669 founded the Child Banking House. The firm was known

for its ornate repoussé silverware and a set of its heavily embossed flatware was, by the late nineteenth century, to be found in most well-to-do Baltimore families. Kirk and Son dominated the competition and set the style for decoration on fine silver throughout the nation.

Mary was the extremely pretty middle daughter, born the same year as Wallis and sandwiched in between an elder sister Edith Buckner, always known as 'Buckie', and a younger, Anne, born in 1901. The girls' grandfather had paid a release fee in order not to have to fight during the Civil War. This was a not uncommon practice but according to Anne, 'all my life I have been ashamed of this act of my grandfather's . . . I am sure that our social status was greatly reduced by my grandfather's act which might be construed as bribery or (even worse in those days) cowardice.'

Mary and Wallis, just a few months apart in age, became close friends immediately. Buckie, being three years older, took a more measured view of her sister's new friend and remembered her as 'the amusing, vivacious girl who so often made us laugh and was always on tiptoe for any gaiety that might be forthcoming. She had a special talent for describing a person or an incident with a twist or a wisecrack that almost invariably made it entertaining.' She added, 'Both girls were boy-crazy, and both were far more interested in clothes than in school. Also, each girl had discovered at teenage parties that she had only to enter a room to be instantly surrounded by boys in droves.' Wallis, aged fifteen, was already aware of her magnetic power to attract boys and her first real beau was Lloyd Tabb, a boy she had met at summer camp who drove an exciting red Lagonda sports car. For him, she forced herself to be interested in football and he never forgot the effect. Her ability to make others feel how talented they were was a technique she honed over the years. Helpfully, Lloyd was always accompanied by his slightly older brother, Prosser Tabb, which meant that Wallis and Mary could go out on double dates, a practice that may have been intended to calm the adults and that set a pattern for the future.

The Kirk parents, far from being calmed, were from the first wary of this intense new friendship. Wallis was in and out of the

Kirk house as if she were a member of the family, as even the extended Kirk family could not fail to notice. She took to telephoning her new friend constantly – the telephone still something of a novelty and using it regularly a daring activity for a teenager. Wallis used it so recklessly that, as Anne recalled, her parents would mutter whenever she called that her motives were suspect. Mary's family clearly saw Wallis as an instigator of trouble, even if they could not quite pinpoint what sort of trouble. 'Sometimes when "old black John" announced to "Miss Mary" that "Miss Wallis" was on the phone he would grin and steal a sympathetic look at the frustrated expressions on the faces of our parents,' wrote Anne. Father would then say in a helpless kind of way to Mary, 'Won't you tell John to tell her that we are eating dinner?' John, a loyal servant in the Kirk family for generations – so loyal that he did not live with the Kirk household but walked twelve miles a day to arrive in time to serve breakfast – did what he could to pacify Miss Wallis and the Kirk parents. But the calls usually went ahead and the Kirk dinner hour was deprived of its serenity. 'As my parents discussed the problems of Wallis Warfield it always seemed that you (Mary) were in the midst of some plot with Wallis. She was a problem and no fun for anyone except YOU!'

Wallis had undertaken a campaign of persuasion begging her uncle Sol to pay for her to go to Oldfields. In doing so she was already making a clear choice without necessarily understanding the consequences: she would depend for the rest of her life on a man for security rather than pursuing a career for herself that would earn her money. She said later that she did not give a moment's thought to further education 'as not a single girl from my class at Oldfields went to college'. That was not exactly true. Oldfields did prepare some girls for careers and for limited independence and from its earliest days prided itself on its curriculum almost as much as on the social standing of its pupils. Miss Nan's school was one of the first to offer a high school degree to women. Nor is it exactly true to say that no one in her social circle went to college. Both Mary Kirk's sisters did: Anne to the Peabody Conservatory, graduating with a teacher's certificate in piano, Buckie to the prestigious Bryn Mawr, afterwards

becoming an art editor and published writer who worked all her life as well as bringing up a family.

But Uncle Sol may have needed little persuasion. The Warfield clan no doubt hoped that a spell at this prestigious boarding school, which attracted daughters of wealthy industrialists as well as those descended from a select group of early Dutch settlers such as Julia Douw, daughter of John Douw, Mayor of Annapolis, Maryland at the time, might quell some of the young girl's more rebellious and dangerous attributes. Julia became a friend of Wallis and, like her, was to marry a naval officer. But Wallis's best friend remained Mary Kirk. Mary and Wallis were room mates 'and at school we swore eternal friendship . . . in contrast to the usual boarding school loyalties ours did indeed continue'. That is Wallis's later version for public consumption. Mary, in private, was to have a dramatically different story to tell. What is not in doubt is that the two teenage girls did everything together, especially gossiping – everyone commented on that. Buckie recalled that even then the girls' main topic of conversation was 'the absorbing subject of marriage. On this score I remember very well a remark that Wallis made a number of times, even I think at our family dinner table – it was memorable because so unconventional. She would announce that the man she married would have to have lots of money – the kind of thing that "nice girls" did not say.'

In the spring of 1914, Mary and Wallis graduated from Oldfields following a traditional May Day ceremony which included a maypole dance on the vast Oldfields lawns presided over by a May queen – a role filled that year by their friend, Renée du Pont, heiress of the famous chemical family whose wealth, principally derived from the manufacture of gunpowder, had expanded dramatically during the Civil War years.

When Wallis signed the Oldfields leavers' book she wrote auspiciously 'All is Love' against her name. The remark jumps off the page. Other girls scribbled: 'It's the little things that count,' 'Three cheers for Oldfields,' or similarly prosaic pronouncements. But, whatever they wrote, the graduation class of 1914 was largely oblivious to the looming war in Europe, preferring to concentrate on matters

closer to home: their high hopes for an exciting future with a handsome man.

Mary and Wallis both became debutantes, an essential prerequisite in the hunt for a suitable husband from the right social background. But by December 1914, when they made their official debut into Baltimore high society at the first Monday German – the name for the coming-out balls given by the exclusive Bachelors' Cotillion Club – the war in Europe was impossible to ignore. Baltimore's debutantes that year were asked to sign a public pledge that they would abstain for the duration of the war from 'rivalry in elegance in respective [sic] social functions'. Such a pledge almost suited Wallis since by this time she and her mother were living together once again in somewhat straitened circumstances in a small apartment near Preston Street following the sudden death in 1913 of Alice's husband John Rasin. He and Alice had been married for just five years. Released from school to attend the funeral, Wallis was pained to see her mother reduced to 'a dark shadow': 'enveloped in a black crepe veil that fell to her knees she looked so tiny and pathetic that my heart broke'. Now it meant looking once more to her Warfield relations if she was to be launched with any style at all and, although Uncle Sol pressed $20 into her hand – two crumpled ten-dollar bills, as she graphically recounted – for a dress, many of her clothes were made by her mother or by a local seamstress called Ellen according to Wallis's own designs.

'If you don't go to the Cotillion, you're nothing. And if you do, it's so boring,' Wallis said later. 'The thing about Maryland is . . . they're the biggest snobs in the world. They never went anywhere outside of Maryland.' Yet go to the Cotillion she must, and she had to follow the rules; wearing white was *de rigueur.* But the dramatic style chosen by Wallis was a copy of a dress she had spotted being worn by the popular Broadway star Irene Castle – white satin covered with a loose chiffon knee-length tunic which respectably veiled her shoulders and ended in a band of pearly embroidery. It was made by Ellen and in between the endless rounds of debutante lunches, teas and chitchat, Wallis and her mother made several visits by street car to Ellen for fittings. For her escort at the ball she safely chose a cousin. Henry

Warfield, aged twenty-seven, came to collect her in her uncle Sol's Pierce Arrow, lent for the occasion, and presented her with a magnificent bouquet of American beauty roses; and after an evening being whirled around by a variety of partners she was officially 'out'. But where exactly was 'out'?

If she wanted her own party, customarily given for a debutante by her father, Uncle Sol would have to fund that. She asked. He refused, citing the war in Europe as an excuse. He told Wallis he had no spare money to spend on frivolities and that every dollar he could spare had to go to help the British and the French in their struggle against the Germans.

Devastated, she accepted whatever invitations came her way, wore whatever corsages were sent her and made a splash wherever she could, for example being the only one in the room on one occasion wearing a blue dress. Wallis, never classically pretty but always well dressed and charming, was widely agreed to be one of the most popular debutantes of the season. But the inevitable anticlimax around the end of the year was made worse in her case by the death of her Warfield grandmother, which demanded a period of serious mourning just when Wallis intended serious party-going. So, when an invitation arrived from one of her mother's cousins, the beautiful Corinne Mustin, suggesting that Wallis come and stay with her in Pensacola, Florida, Wallis seized on the suggestion. Corinne and her sister, Lelia Montague Barnett, the latter married to the general commanding the US Marine Corps at Wakefield in Virginia, had both extended frequent invitations at critical times to Wallis to come and stay. Lelia had even hosted a debutante party for Wallis in Washington. Wallis felt warmly towards them both and vividly remembered Corinne's wedding to the then thirty-three-year-old pioneer air pilot Henry Mustin in 1907 as one of the most glamorous events of her childhood. Now the Mustins had three children of their own and Henry, a captain in the US Navy, had recently been appointed commandant of the new Pensacola Air Station. There were family conclaves to decide if Wallis could accept or if her acceptance would be perceived as typical Montague gaiety in the face of Warfield mourning. Eventually it was agreed she could go on the grounds that she

needed to see more of the world than Baltimore. After all, everyone knew the place was swarming with virile young aviators.

She arrived, aged nineteen, in April 1916 and within twenty-four hours had written to her mother: 'I have just met the world's most fascinating aviator.' The day after her arrival cousin Corinne had organized a lunch with three fellow officers. Wallis got on well with Corinne, who always referred to her younger cousin as 'Skinny' – a nickname she liked. Later she suspected that Corinne, herself married to a strong and silent older man, may have deliberately selected these men for her:

> Shortly before noon, as Corinne and I were sitting on the porch, I saw Henry Mustin rounding the corner deep in conversation with a young officer and followed closely by two more … they were tanned and lean. But as they drew closer my eyes came to rest on the officer directly behind Henry Mustin. He was laughing yet there was a suggestion of inner force and vitality that struck me instantly.

Lieutenant Earl Winfield Spencer Jr at twenty-seven was eight years older than Wallis. He had film-star good looks set off by a close-cropped moustache and had already spent six years in the navy after graduating from Annapolis. Wallis was instantly smitten. She wrote that over lunch the gold stripes on his shoulder-boards, glimpsed out of the corner of her eye, 'acted like a magnet and drew me back to him. Above all, I gained an impression of resolution and courage. I felt here was a man you could rely on in a tight place.'

Previously Wallis had dated boys, but now she was in the company of men. Win Spencer was strong, confident, virile – and experienced. He suggested they meet the next day. By the end of that day Wallis was hopelessly in love. Until Pensacola, Wallis had never seen an aeroplane – the art of flying was so new that the navy had only one air station, the one at Pensacola – so everything she discovered that spring was exciting and new. And there were only a handful of pilots. Win Spencer was the twentieth naval pilot to win his wings. According to a limerick in the US naval academy yearbook:

On the stage, as a maid with a curl
A perfect entrancer is Earl
With a voice like Caruse
It's clearly no use
To try to beat him with a girl

Other epithets applied to him in the yearbook included 'fiery and able' and 'a merry devil'.

Win and Wallis started seeing each other at every opportunity. He tried to teach her to play golf – one of life's games at which she never succeeded. But with Win, she always pretended that at least she enjoyed the attempt. She was blind to the bitter streak in him, the jealous and brooding quality deeply embedded in his nature, let alone the cynicism that she came to know painfully well later. But on the day he asked her to marry him, within weeks of their meeting, she replied that of course she loved him and wanted to marry him but would have to ask her family. He countered: 'I never expected you to say yes right away … but don't keep me waiting too long.' Such a response indicates a man already weary of the games lovers play, telling Wallis he has seen it all before and not to bother with such sham. She promised to let him know in the summer – a decent interval – when he came to Baltimore for his final leave. But he knew that her answer was never in doubt. The next stage was meeting the parents.

Earl Winfield Spencer Sr was a successful and, by the time his son met Wallis, socially prominent Chicago stockbroker. Until 1905 when the Spencers moved to the exclusive suburb of Highland Park, Chicago, the family had lived in Evanston, Illinois. In August 1916, when Wallis went to visit them just before her marriage, they were living in a large clapboard house with a veranda and front lawn at Wade Street. The family was moderately religious and in 1906–8 Spencer Sr had served as a vestryman of Trinity Episcopal Church in Highland Park, where his wife undertook various charitable commitments. They had six children – four boys and two girls – all of whom were by 1916 in active service. Two daughters, Gladys and Ethel, had trained for Red Cross work and Gladys went to serve at a

hospital in Paris. When America entered the war Mrs Spencer was quoted in a local newspaper as saying: 'I believe I am the happiest woman in the world. I could not be happier unless I might have a few more to offer for the cause of the nation.'

On 19 September, five months after Wallis and Win had met, Mrs John Freeman Rasin announced the engagement of her only daughter Wallis to Lieutenant Spencer. He might not have offered the sort of marriage to old money and ancient lineage to which the Warfields aspired, but catching a naval lieutenant was the height of excitement for many an Oldfields girl. Wallis had not only caught a handsome one but at just twenty she was one of the first of her group to be married. This was an important race for her to win. Mary Kirk, unattached and sad to see her best friend leave Baltimore, generously hosted a tea with her mother in honour of Wallis at the Baltimore Country Club. She agreed to be one of Wallis's bridesmaids.

The wedding took place on a cold autumn day, 8 November 1916, against a highly charged political background. It was the day after the US presidential election which had been fuelled by constant discussion about the war in Europe that had been raging for the last two years. Britain and France were deeply embroiled, suffering heavy casualties, but, while public sentiment in the United States leaned towards showing sympathy with the Allied forces, most American voters wanted to avoid active involvement in the war, preferring to continue a policy of neutrality. Hence Woodrow Wilson was returned to the White House on the campaign slogan 'He kept us out of war'.

The ceremony which saw Wallis marrying into a heavily involved military family, where sacrifice and duty were top priorities, took place at Christ Protestant Episcopal Church in Baltimore, the local church on St Paul Street which she had attended for so many Sunday services with her grandmother. The ushers were all naval officers and flyers in uniform. The *Baltimore Sun* described the evening wedding as 'one of the most important of the season . . . performed in front of a large assemblage of guests'. The church was decorated with palms and white chrysanthemums while lighted tapers and annunciation

lilies decorated the altar. The bride entered the church on the arm of her uncle Sol, who gave her away. She had designed her own gown of white panne velvet (an unusual fabric for a wedding dress at the time) made with a court train and a pointed bodice elaborately embroidered with pearls. The skirt tumbled over a petticoat of old family lace and her veil of tulle was edged with lace arranged coronet fashion with sprays of orange blossoms. She carried a bouquet of white orchids and lilies of the valley.

But with US involvement in the war felt to be imminent, the mood at the wedding was slightly sombre and there followed only a small reception for the two families and members of the wedding party held at the Stafford Hotel. The *Baltimore Sun* commented: 'since being presented to society two seasons ago the bride has been a great favourite and has spent much time in Washington with her aunt, Mrs D. B. Merryman, and her cousin Mrs George Barnett, wife of Major General Barnett USMC'.

The Spencer family had arrived from Chicago earlier in the week. Win's younger brother, Dumaresq Spencer, was best man and his sister Ethel one of the bridesmaids. Wallis was always a man's woman and was never close to her sisters-in-law let alone to her new mother-in-law. She was not looking for intimate friendships with her new family, in fact was slightly stunned by them, and considered her place at the centre of the family she already had quite enough.

Win had just two weeks' leave, so the honeymoon was spent partly at the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia and partly in New York. Win never wrote about his marriage to Wallis – he found the way his subsequent life was made public as the ex-husband especially painful – so we only have Wallis's account. She describes how on their first night he revealed what she had failed to notice in the previous few months, 'that the bottle was seldom far from my husband's thoughts or his hand'. Win fell into a rage as soon as he saw the hotel notices declaring that alcoholic beverages could not be bought on the premises as West Virginia was a dry state. Although nationwide prohibition was not yet enforced, the issue was already deeply controversial. Various progressive groups believed that a total ban on the sale of alcohol would improve society, as

did many women's groups and Southerners. There was a frequently quoted joke told about the Southern pro-prohibitionists: 'The South is dry and will vote dry. That is, everybody sober enough to stagger to the polls.'

So when Win revealed a bottle of gin packed between the shirts in his suitcase it was clear he had known there was likely to be difficulty in finding enough alcohol to fuel his needs over the coming days. Wallis, having grown up in a household which had strong convictions about the evils of alcohol, was shocked. She must have noticed during the previous few months that drinking was a habit of many men in the navy. But, in her hurry to marry, she was blind to the consequences. Only half jokingly, Win accused her of being a prude – and quite possibly the tone of their marriage was set. But Win had a redeeming sense of humour and after two weeks they moved back into government accommodation at Pensacola where Lieutenant Spencer was an instructor at the Aviation School.

Wallis spent her days painting the inside of the small bungalow white, putting up chintz curtains and enjoying the luxury of having a cook and a maid while she embarked on the ritual of socializing with navy wives. The cook was a fortunate addition to the household since Wallis knew nothing about the important art of cooking but, recognizing the need to please her husband in all ways, set about learning to master it. Cooking was easier than learning to play golf and perhaps easier than having sex at this stage in her life. And so Wallis began to develop her talents as a hostess, deciding that some of the top naval brass needed to be entertained.

Four months later, in April 1917, the US joined the war and the couple moved for a short time to Boston, where Spencer was in command of the Naval Aviation School at Squantum, Massachusetts, training other men to go overseas or undertake dangerous missions. While Win brooded over what he perceived as a demotion, perhaps even punishment for his heavy drinking, Wallis had taken to playing poker. Both were gambling with their futures.