



WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE ONCE-GAY GIRL WHO HAD TO RENOUNCE HER ILL-FATED LOVE FOR PETER TOWNSEND?

by Isabella Taves

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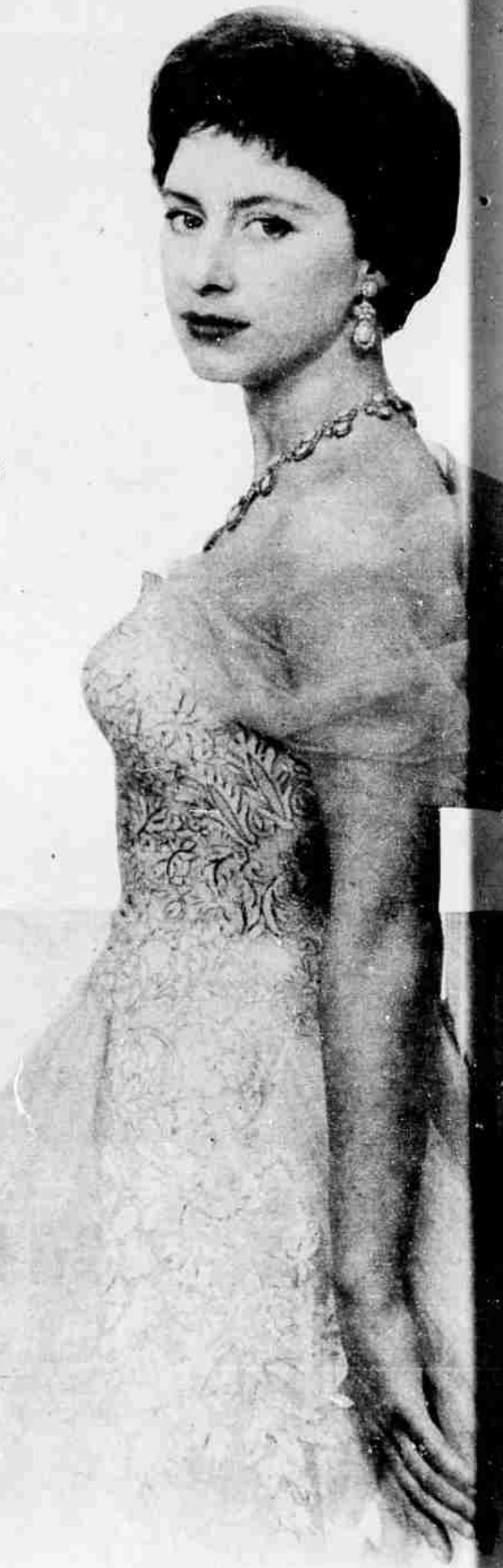
WILL PRINCESS MARGARET EVER MARRY ?



PRINCESS MARGARET was like the little girl who wanted to have her cake and eat it, too. She tried to be both a princess and an ordinary human being. The result: indigestion. She loved the trappings of royalty, the applause of the crowds, the robes and diamonds, the respectful "ma'am" she rates even from her circle of intimates. But she also liked American jazz, show people, pink champagne, and her own way. This conflict made her more interesting than her one-dimensional sister, who is the perfect picture of a Queen of England. But it has caused her many troubles.

Elsa Maxwell, who is one of the American entertainers Princess Margaret finds amusing, tells a revealing story about Margaret. Elsa was once invited to sit in the royal box at a London concert. The music, according to Elsa, was awful. Afterward the Queen and her husband smiled and applauded as usual, bowing graciously to artists and audience. So did Princess Margaret, except that while she was beaming and bobbing, she was muttering, not quite under her breath: "Booooo—Booooo."

Few people in the United States realize how little is really known



Billy Wallace



Duke of Rutland



Earl of Dalkeith

about the British royal family. Although a valet or governess occasionally turns blabbermouth and tells all he or she knows, the royal family as a rule is kept under thick and discreet wraps. Close friends don't dare talk to reporters for fear of ceasing to be close friends. The Queen has a public-relations officer, Commander Colville, who has his office at one end of Buckingham Palace, but his major official function is to say, "No comment."

In 1947, I went over to London with the naive American idea of interviewing Princess Elizabeth for an American publication. I looked up Buckingham Palace in the telephone book and called for an appointment. I didn't see Princess Elizabeth, but I did get inside the palace and talk to the young woman whom Commander Colville had hired to handle the Princess' press relations.

She was eminently qualified for the job by having been a wartime employee in Winston Churchill's top-secret, hush-hush Map Room. I didn't find out anything about the Princess from her. But the English journalists gave me "A" for brassy American enterprise. Even the ones who are officially attached to the palace are

expected to keep their distance and ask only polite questions. It is only around the pubs in Fleet Street, where the journalists gather and exchange rumor and speculation and gossip, that the royal family is discussed as freely and irreverently as our Presidents and their families.

Since Margaret's troubles have piled up, her personal inner circle is as tight-lipped and grim as Commander Colville could hope. Her Highness retires more and more frequently from public view with her cases of royal sulks. Yet it wasn't always so.

In happier, younger days—Margaret will be 28 in August—we in the United States and the common people in London goggled at her newspaper pictures, showing more cleavage than any royal torso had ever exposed—at least, in print. She smoked cigarettes in long black holders.

Even run-of-the-mill reporters saw her and her friends at the Bohemian restaurant in Soho, and overheard her giving imitations of Louis Armstrong. Ordinary tourists passing by Clarence House, where she lives with the Queen Mother, could hear the piano playing late at night, often repeating Margaret's favorite, "La Ronde d'Amour." Records of the song, subtitled "By a Royal Personage," were bootlegged in London at \$20 each.

Margaret then gave little indication of fearing reporters, and some authentic news leaked down direct from her inner circle to Fleet Street pubs. At a private party in Paris, she sang for an audience which included Garbo. When she came of age and into \$18,000 a year from the Civil List and a lump sum of \$60,000 under the will of an old family friend, she celebrated by buying a \$21,000 Rolls Royce and a white strapless Dior evening dress (which later, when she came back to England, quietly acquired straps).

While Margaret was in Italy, photographers disguised as improbable fishermen followed her into the surf at Capri and got pictures of her in a bathing suit. Not a bit daunted, she came back to England and danced a can-can at another private party.

Reports of these activities filtered down to Fleet Street, and English journalists shared gossip and tidbits with American reporters. A friend of mine from a London tabloid once asked a male member of Margaret's inner circle: "If you tried to kiss Margaret good-night after a party, would she pull her rank on you?" And the fellow replied, without a trace of a smile: "Indeed she does—like frozen lightning." Even then, there were solid indications that the gay young Princess wanted to have

her fun without the consequences.

Speculation about whom she would marry was a good game for newspapers all over the world, and Margaret's dozen-or-so fairly steady escorts became for a time almost as well known as leading cinema stars. Today all except faithful, well-heeled Billy Wallace have slipped back into comparative obscurity.

NOBODY NOTICED the quiet figure of Group Captain Peter Townsend in the background; he had been around too long, equerry to the King since Margaret was 14.

On her 21st birthday, which she celebrated at the family's Scottish castle at Balmoral, a Fleet Street photographer caught pictures of Margaret riding with a man, then apologized to his editor when he discovered "it was only Townsend."

It is possible that for a while Townsend himself did not suspect that the young Princess had a "crush" on him. He was 16 years older than she. He was married, and King George was godfather to his second son. Although the marriage was dissolved late in 1952, not even malicious gossip has ever hinted that it was for love of Margaret. Reporters close to the palace think that Townsend's affection for the whole family, particularly King George and Queen Elizabeth, simply relegated his marriage to second place.

Margaret called him Peter. Townsend always called her "ma'am" in the presence of the press. When the royal family toured South Africa in 1947, Townsend was with them as acting manager of the royal household. He and 17-year-old Margaret swam together in the Indian Ocean, rode horseback together, visited the Victoria Falls. When Elizabeth married, Margaret seemed to depend more and more on Townsend, and chose him as her companion and administrator on her first important solo mission abroad, to the Netherlands.

After her father's death and Elizabeth's coronation in 1953, Townsend was chosen as comptroller of the household when the widow and Margaret moved from the palace to Clarence House. The stigma of divorce, still strong in court circles, made no difference in the case of the royal family's favorite.

The first rumors of the love affair started in newspapers in the United States, a few days after Queen Elizabeth's coronation. Margaret and her mother were about to fly to Africa—with the inevitable Townsend. Overnight, Townsend was sent with the Queen and Philip to Ireland, then

rapidly posted to Brussels as air attaché, a job which was almost an insult to a man wearing the Distinguished Service Order (next to the Victoria Cross), Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar, with 11 German aircraft to his credit during the Battle of Britain.

In Africa, Margaret retired with a "diplomatic cold." When she came back to London, she cut out nearly all her public engagements, and started going to church frequently. She wasn't seen in night clubs or fashionable restaurants. Her old inner circle kept mum; it is possible that only a few of them saw very much of her. For 28 months Townsend stayed put in Brussels. How many times Margaret talked to him over her green telephone is one of the royal mysteries.

But after she returned from a very successful tour of duty in the West Indies, reliable word came from the inner circle that Margaret had been talking to Townsend on the telephone. Her 25th birthday, when she would be free to marry without consent of her sister and the Privy Council, was only a few months away. The newspapers promptly descended in force on Townsend in his Brussels flat, and the Queen extended his royal posting until the end of September, a month after Margaret's birthday.

IF the Queen and Philip (who is said to have a great deal of influence with Margaret and dislikes Townsend) hoped to change Margaret's mind in six months, they failed. The Princess began going out more socially, even "stood in" during rehearsals of a fashionable socialite amateur play, and was reported to show her old enthusiasm and wit. Then Townsend came back to London on Oct. 12, 1955.

The couple met for an hour and a half the next day at Clarence House, the first of a series of meetings which they tried to keep secret. The meetings went on for 19 days and were reported in sometimes fictional detail in papers all over the world. Everyone pretended to have the inside track on the question of whether Margaret would marry Townsend. It was never a question of her sacrificing a penny (her grandmother, Queen Mary, had also left her a sizable sum) or, necessarily, her right of succession to the throne.

The pertinent point to a devout girl



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