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PROLOGUE

The Stars Were Aligned

I was aware of Rachel Meghan Markle long before Prince Harry was on the scene. In the legal drama *Suits* she exuded a charisma that made her stand out, stealing every scene she appeared in, while beyond her acting she was also making a mark for herself as a campaigner for gender equality. So when I heard that she was dating the Queen's grandson, I honestly felt no surprise, and when their relationship deepened, as a biographer, I found myself in the right place at the right time. My wife Carolyn is from Southern California and for some of the year we live in her hometown of Pasadena. It also happens to be Meghan Markle Central. Her old boyfriends, schoolfriends and teachers all live in the area. It is such a close-knit community that one day I was even stopped in my driveway by a neighbour and told to speak to a local storeowner who had a Meghan Markle memory to share. In a cynical and chaotic world, this is at its heart an old-fashioned story of local girl makes good. Of course, it is also much more than that, because when on 19 May 2018 Meghan Markle walks down the aisle at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle she will be making history.

In the last important royal wedding for a generation, Prince Harry's glamorous bride will be the first bi-racial divorcee ever to marry a member of the British royal family. Their union, blessed by Her Majesty the Queen, will make the monarchy seem more inclusive and relevant in an ever-changing world.

During the service, the 800 guests at the grand affair might hear a low hum competing with the singing of the choir. It will be the sound of the Duke of Windsor, who gave up his throne in 1936 so that he could marry a twice-divorced American, spinning in his grave, located nearby at Frogmore, in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

He was prevented from making the love of his life his Queen because Wallis had two former husbands still living. The only time Wallis was admitted into Windsor Castle was in her coffin in April 1986 for her funeral service at St George's Chapel. In the 1950s, the Queen's younger sister Princess Margaret faced the same predicament, choosing duty before the love of her divorced paramour, Group Captain Peter Townsend.

If nothing else, the wedding of the second son of Prince Charles and the late Diana, Princess of Wales, shows how much and how far the royal family – and the British nation – have changed and evolved during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. It is a union and an occasion redolent with symbolism.

Since the romantic traumas surrounding Edward VIII and Princess Margaret, the royal family, like the rest of the world, have accepted, albeit reluctantly, the fact that divorce no longer carries the social stigma it once did. Yet even in the early 1980s when Prince Charles was scouting the shires for a bride, the notion of a divorced American marrying into the royal family

was unthinkable. Then, the priority was to find a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant aristocratic virgin.

He found one in the winsome shape of Lady Diana Spencer, and the constitutional catastrophe of their marriage – and rancorous divorce – has caused the older generation of royals and their supporters to take pause before commenting on the chosen companions of the younger members of the family. Nor was the parting of the future king and queen a unique occurrence inside the royal family. The Queen's sister Princess Margaret, her daughter Princess Anne and her beloved second son Prince Andrew divorced their marital partners. All were enveloped in varying degrees of scandal, most notoriously when Andrew's wife, the Duchess of York, known as Fergie, was photographed having her toes sucked by her so-called financial adviser next to a swimming pool in the south of France.

That Meghan divorced after a brief two-year union with a film producer has hardly raised an eyebrow, let alone created a constitutional crisis. After all, the future king, Prince Charles, is a divorcee who married his former mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles, also divorced, in April 2005 in a civil ceremony just over the road from St George's Chapel. All very modern. Divorce, race and a racy past – the House of Windsor now welcomes all comers. As Prince Harry succinctly put it during his and Meghan's engagement interview: 'all the stars were aligned'.

It is an observation that Harry's uncle, Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, may reflect upon as he watches Meghan Markle make her stately procession down the aisle. For Prince Andrew it was not just the stars but the decades that were out of alignment. Just thirty-six years ago the prince, a red rose between his teeth,

ran down the gangway of his ship, HMS *Invincible*, to be greeted by his proud parents, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Back then, he was the world's most eligible bachelor and a fully certified war hero, having risked his life during the Falklands conflict between Britain and Argentina which left more than nine hundred dead and thousands wounded.

A few weeks later, in October 1982, he secretly flew to the private Caribbean island of Mustique, where the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, had a property, Les Jolies Eaux. He and his American girlfriend, Kathleen 'Koo' Stark, the daughter of Hollywood producer Wilbur Stark, had, according to first reports, flown under the assumed name of 'Mr and Mrs Cambridge'.

When she first arrived in London in 1975, Kathleen wanted to be an actress and starred in a tepidly erotic rite-of-passage movie entitled *Emily*, directed by arty aristocrat the Earl of Pembroke. As pictures were circulated of Koo in various stages of undress, hysteria gripped the mass media and even some members of Parliament.

Their romance continued long after their holiday and the early revelations about her film role. She met the Queen, and Princess Diana considered her the perfect match for Andrew. She told me, 'Sweet Koo adored him. She was terribly good to have around. Very gentle and looked after him . . . all her energies [were directed] to him. [They] suited each other so well.'

Yet the stigma of that movie, one of her first, poisoned her relationship with Andrew. With her being forevermore known as a 'porn actress' – nothing could be further from the truth – her love affair with Andrew was doomed. But for a fifth-rate movie,

Kathleen might have been the first American to marry into the royal family since Wallis Simpson.

By contrast, Meghan Markle has taken acting roles in which she has been filmed snorting cocaine, teaching housewives the art of striptease, and having sex in a storeroom. She appeared semi-naked in so many scenes in the long-running TV drama *Suits* that she complained that scriptwriters were deliberately crafting scenarios to show off her body.

(Meghan might note that while the palace have ordered her website, The Tig – which contained intelligent and well-written essays about gender equality and race – to be scrubbed from the World Wide Web, videos of her very unprincess-like behaviour remain for all to see.)

While Meghan is not the first mixed-race woman to marry into European royalty – that honour goes to Panamanian-born Angela Brown, now Princess Angela of the tiny but wealthy country of Liechtenstein – she is the first divorced bi-racial American to take her place in the House of Windsor.

Though race has aroused plenty of debate in her own country – inevitably, because of America's past as a nation practising slavery and segregation – race relations have been largely ignored in conjunction with the royal family.

Ironically, when the engagement was announced in November 2017, moviegoers were enjoying *Victoria and Abdul*, the story of Queen Victoria's friendship with an Indian attendant, Abdul Karim. His presence at Court excited so much animosity that when the queen died in 1901, her successor King Edward VII personally supervised his eviction and deportation back to India. Victoria's daughter Beatrice erased all references to