

## Prologue

“*Winning with Nixon!*” The silver-haired gentleman grimaced at the newspaper headline. *Here’s hoping the man lives up to his slogan.*

He sipped a glass of water to wash away the taste of the antibiotics. Sir David Griffiths wasn’t a good invalid at the best of times - but the result of the presidential election in America three days ago had affected his already bad mood.

The bout of bronchitis, his second that winter, had weakened him, and David Griffiths hated the feeling of weakness, especially when there was so much to do. He didn’t trust Nixon - the few times they’d met, the man had come across as self-serving and dishonest even. Shaking his head David wandered across to the window and looked out at the landscape.

His house, *Fairweather*, was located in fifty acres of rolling Sussex countryside. In the distance he could see the undulating grey of the English Channel. The days were turning colder. A log shifted in the fire and sent sparks flying up the chimney, causing him to glance inwards. *Fairweather*, he knew, would not survive his death. A family of twenty could be accommodated there quite easily, along with the necessary servants needed to keep such a place ticking over. A mausoleum, he thought - only the foolhardy few could afford to maintain such a house these days.

Already he had received an offer to sell some of the ground for housing development. His reaction had been a vehement no. Fortunately his wife, Madelaine, had agreed.

David tented his fingers, seeing visions behind his closed eyes. This room, his study, had been the scene of so many interesting and exciting events over the forty years he had owned the estate. The house had been lucky to survive the Second World War. If you knew where to look you could still see where the bomb had landed.

Sighing, he turned away from the window and glanced across the book-lined study to his ornate desk, which dominated the room. Many far-reaching decisions had been taken at that desk. He looked at the glass of water on its gleaming surface and then at the discreet but well-stocked bar. He considered pouring himself a whisky but thought better of it. There would be hell to pay if Madelaine caught him drinking, especially on top of the blasted antibiotics he was taking.

A knock on the door brought him out of his reverie. ‘Come in.’

The door opened and the reporter Tim Hunter stepped into the room. Sir David was gratified that *Time* magazine had sent one of its rising stars to interview him. Their conversations, recorded by Hunter, would eventually form the basis for a history of the Griffiths family - a story which encompassed the events of the entire twentieth century - warts and all. So far he had enjoyed the reporter’s company, found his questioning incisive and intelligent. Hunter was a handsome young fellow, Canadian by birth. In the time they had spent together Sir David had asked some questions of his own; Hunter had lived in Boston with his mother and maternal grandparents, since the death of his father at sea fifteen years earlier following a severe storm off the coast of Newfoundland.

‘I hope I’m not disturbing you, sir?’

Sir David waved a deprecating hand. ‘Not at all, Tim, come in, do. I could use some company. Help yourself to a drink.’

‘Thanks, sir, but it’s a bit early for me.’

‘Oh?’ Glancing at the clock, Sir David saw it was still a few minutes before five o’clock. ‘So it is. With the dusk falling, I thought it much later. What can I do for you?’

‘I wanted to ask a few more questions about the Duke of Windsor.’

‘I thought you might. That was a black affair. If the real facts had emerged

about our ex-king there might well have been civil war - we'd have fallen right into Hitler's trap.'

Hunter nodded. 'I surmised as much. You couldn't have been very pleased to act as nanny to a man you despised. How on earth did Churchill convince you to shadow your ex-king?'

'Winston,' Sir David smiled, the memories lighting his eyes, 'had a most persuasive personality.' Although David was eighty-seven years old his memory was as sharp as ever. 'At the time I thought I was too old for the job but Churchill waved that argument away. I suppose, in view of what happened, he was proved right. Befriending the Duke of Windsor was the reason I was knighted, of course.'

'I hadn't realised. I haven't gotten to that part of the archives yet.'

'You'll enjoy it. Now, young man, you've been seeing a lot of my granddaughter, Sian. Don't you think it's time you told me your intentions?'

Much to Hunter's relief there was a knock on the door and the butler appeared. 'Excuse me interrupting, sir, but the Prime Minister is on the telephone. He says he needs to talk to you urgently.'

Sir David strode across the study and into the hallway. He was away for several minutes. When he returned he was looking pleased with himself. Hunter watched as he walked straight to the bar, found a bottle of Islay malt whisky and poured himself a stiff drink.

'Anything wrong, sir?'

Adding a dash of soda, Sir David looked at him and smiled. 'I think you'd better have one as well.'

'Why? What's happened?'

Whatever the reporter was expecting it wasn't Griffiths' next statement. 'The Prime Minister has threatened us with a "D" notice. It would prohibit us from publishing the book. He was very apologetic. Ingratiatingly so. But he argues that the material is too damaging to the Crown. To the House of Windsor.'

'What did you say, sir?' Hunter poured himself a drink too. The same malt, less soda, plenty of ice.

'I told him that our Queen is loved, revered even. That the sins of the uncle would not tarnish her reign, or that of her father. That the electorate was sophisticated and intelligent enough to recognise the actions of one selfish and egotistical man for what they were. But he was adamant. The papers covering the period are still locked away under the fifty-year rule.'

'How did he know about the book?'

'I told a friend in passing a few days ago. I expected the PM to learn about it.'

'What shall we do?'

Sir David took a mouthful of whisky. It slipped down like nectar, not burning his gullet, as it would have done in recent days. He grinned, determination and enjoyment reflected in his smile, 'I love a good fight. And if I can't win fairly, I cheat.'

## David's Story

## Chapter 1

Autumn 1939

And so the darkness of war has fallen yet again. Hours after we declared, in fulfilment of our promise to Poland, the French followed suit. Conciliation was available right to the end, but Hitler would have none of it. To my fellow politicians, the situation was clear. There could be no wavering, no shadow of doubt. But we were very aware of the huge responsibility we bore. The British were still coming to terms with the inhumanities of the last war.

For years Germany had come to be seen by many as a victim of the dictates of the Treaty of Versailles. Appeasement was disguised as mercy and forgiveness. The view that Germany had suffered too came to dominate our policies. Had Hitler been a normal, nationalist leader, committed only to restoring his country's pride, that view would have held. But Hitler and his Nazis were far from normal.

As Member of Parliament for Eastbourne, I was in the House of Commons when the joint Anglo-French declaration was made. Decisions followed swiftly. Our two governments agreed we would avoid bombing civilians and refused to countenance using poison gas or germ warfare. We asked Germany to give similar assurances. No such declaration was received and I left the Commons with a heavy heart.

My heart would have been heavier still, were it not for Churchill's news. I was overjoyed when he was made First Lord of the Admiralty, the post he had held twenty-five years earlier at the outbreak of the last war. We were deep in discussion, debating the creation of the new war cabinet when he received the phone call telling him of his appointment. He hung up the receiver with a chortle and said, 'I'm back, Griffiths, I'm back!'

Two days later he collared me in one of the bars in the House. 'David, I need a word.'

I looked at his scowling, wrinkled features. 'You appear to be less than your usual sunny self, Winnie.'

'This is no time for frivolity, damn you. We have a problem of amazing delicacy, which urgently needs attention. If I recollect correctly during the last lot you worked in Military Intelligence.'

I nodded. 'More by accident than design. But I did my bit. Why?'

'We have urgent need of you again.'

'I don't understand. As an MP I'm hardly in a position to contribute to the intelligence services.'

He nodded slowly, then gripped my arm. 'I'll get us a couple of whiskies. What I have to tell you is of the...utmost importance,' he paused and then added, 'and not to be repeated.'

We sat in a corner, away from prying eyes and ears. While we waited for our drinks, Churchill lit one of his foul cigars.

'So what's this all about?' I asked once the drinks were placed before us. I took a sip of my malt while Churchill gulped at his.

'I appear to have made a grave error of judgement, David, and I need your help.'

I raised an eyebrow, but he missed the irony as he always did when it was directed at him. Taking another mouthful of whisky he swallowed loudly. His next words came as no surprise. 'As you know, I have always been highly supportive of

His Royal Highness, the Duke of Windsor.'

My hackles rose immediately. 'You know my views on our ex-king, Winston - the man is a Nazi sympathiser. Look at the way he was received in Austria and Germany. Good God, man, he's even been known to give the Nazi salute in public. The adulation he's been receiving across Europe was bound to affect an ego the size of Windsor's. And Wallis revels in it too. Loathsome woman.'

'Steady on, man - information has come to light *proving* what you say. I fear the worst, frankly. We can't ignore the situation any longer. Windsor's actions and opinions have been kept very much out of the public domain until now. But unless he returns to Britain soon there will be no escaping where his true loyalties lie and that could spell disaster for the war effort.'

It was well known in certain circles that our ex-king was a fascist at heart. He openly said he believed the *true* enemy of world peace was communism. Since his exile to France he had been courting Hitler and his regime at every opportunity. Indeed he had become friends with many of the ruling party of Germany. His close friend Charles Bedaux had facilitated his entry into German society. A Frenchman who also enjoyed American citizenship, Bedaux was immensely wealthy and a known supporter of Hitler. The relationship between Windsor and Bedaux had been giving the British government sleepless nights for some years. As the bags under Churchill's eyes testified.

'If, God forbid, the Duke declares that a truce should be called for and that he will negotiate with Hitler, then this country will split right down the middle, Griffiths. There are enough right-thinking people who recognise Hitler's regime for the evil that it is, but many others believe fascism is what is needed to counteract communism.' Taking another mouthful of whisky Churchill looked in surprise at his empty glass. 'We cannot allow fascism to flourish otherwise we will lose the liberties we have fought for and cherished all these years. Democracy is the true bastion against totalitarianism, whether the regime comes from the left or the right of the political spectrum. It is the *only* safeguard.'

'So if Windsor comes out in support of Hitler, you fear there could be a civil war?'

'Easily. Mosley's Blackshirts have plenty of support from people who are not currently active members but could be persuaded. Mosley fervently supports Windsor, as you know. If the Duke openly declares for fascism, for *peace*, millions could flock to him. Blast it, where's that waiter?' The man appeared and took Churchill's barked order for another large malt. When he had left, Churchill lowered his voice. 'Civil war could possibly be avoided, but the collapse of the monarchy would be inevitable,' he said with a weary shake of his head. 'That is unthinkable. The monarchy must be protected at all costs. Our King and Queen are too important to this country and the Dominions. So Windsor has to be stopped.' He glared across the table at me.

My own fears were confirmed by what he had said. 'I admit he's a danger, but I don't see where I fit into all this. Nor why you asked about my Military Intelligence connections.'

'As you know Windsor hasn't returned from France since the abdication. We are trying to bring him back. To that end we have offered him one of two positions. Either Deputy Regional Commissioner in Wales under Sir Wyndham Portal or an appointment as a Liaison Officer with the British Military Mission in Paris. With a suitable rank, of course.'

'It's obvious which one he will choose. Paris.'

'We think so too. Wales is a make-believe post, which he should see for himself. But we have a real task for him in France.'

'I still don't see where I fit in.'

'If he goes to Paris, as we expect, we want you to go with him.'

'What!' I sat up straight, jerking my glass, which would have spilled if there

had been more than a drop left.

‘I thought that would get your attention,’ Churchill said dryly.

I beckoned to the waiter for a refill, buying time while I considered his preposterous suggestion.

‘If this is your idea of a joke...’ I finally managed, the words sounding inadequate even to me.

‘Of course I am not joking,’ he replied indignantly. ‘This is not the time or place for humour. We face desperate times, believe me. The conflict won’t be over before Christmas, either this year or next. We must prepare for the long haul and we must ensure with all in our power that we win.’

‘Damn it all, Winston, I still don’t see why you want me with Windsor. I can’t abide the man.’

‘Which is precisely why we want you with him. You have no loyalty to him. We want you to report back everything he says and does.’

I shook my head. ‘I’m a Member of Parliament. I’m with the War Committee. I have work to do here.’ I gestured about me.

‘Humbug, Griffiths. Parliament will argue and debate while the War Cabinet decides. The only laws we will be passing in the House will be to tighten our security, all of them repressive and restrictive, but necessary in wartime. Most of the MPs’ workload will involve giving moral support to their constituents. The only big debate will be about the war effort. Do we fight, surrender or sue for peace? The latter two are unthinkable. Now that Australia, New Zealand and Canada have given their instant support to the Mother Country we cannot hold back. The real democrats in the world recognise the dangers. Our course as a parliament is set.’ He paused, puffed on his cigar and added, ‘Trust me, you will serve your country better by doing as I ask. Your age is no obstacle. You look years younger than you are. You’re well known in the right circles. You’ve met Windsor before. Toady up to him a bit. That’s all we want.’

‘All?’ I was flabbergasted. Windsor was anathema to me. ‘I need to think about it.’

‘Pray do. Only make the right decision. This is of huge importance to the country. You could have no more vital a task right now. And it may not be for long.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I am working on a plan to spirit the Duke away for the duration.’

‘Where to?’

‘Bahamas? Kenya? Anywhere. It will have to be a suitably gilded cage but we’ll find one.’

‘Tell me about the position you have for Windsor in France.’

‘Ahh! In two days we are sending one hundred and fifty-eight thousand men to France. They will be known as the British Expeditionary Force. Their role is to bolster the French defences under the command of General Gamelin, the French Supreme Commander. We are also sending twenty-five thousand vehicles and any number of RAF squadrons.’ He paused ruefully. ‘It means we will be issuing a general call-up. Everyone over twenty. No exceptions, except those in reserved occupations and the clergy. Those who don’t wish to fight can have their names placed in a register of conscientious objectors. We’ll use them in other ways.’

‘Winnie, stick to the point,’ I said exasperatedly.

‘We know all we need to about the British Expeditionary Force but we have no real intelligence about the state of the French Forces.’

‘Why don’t you ask them?’

‘We have - and been told precisely nothing. We’ve requested permission to send British officers to inspect the Maginot Line, as well as the French lines. But we were refused point-blank.’

‘What has that to do with Windsor?’

‘His contacts at the top level in France are legion. We’re sure he’ll be allowed to visit the places we can’t access. Once there he is to note everything he sees and report back to our Imperial General Staff.’

‘Will he do it?’

Churchill nodded. ‘The Duke is a vain, egotistical and, I am sorry to say, very shallow man. I’ve come to realise it was a good day for the country when he abdicated. We now have a stalwart King and a wonderful Queen. So matters, to date, have turned out for the best. Windsor will do as we ask because we will appeal to the very traits which make him unsuited to be the Head of State. In spite of his failings, don’t underestimate his intelligence. He can be witty, charming, and has an amazing capacity for remembering facts. He’s not to be taken lightly. Do so at your peril.’

I stifled a sigh. Everything Churchill said made sense. But did I really want to go gallivanting around France with the Duke of Windsor? Analysing my emotions, I made an astonishing discovery. I was excited by the thought. A last adventure before it was too late? Before I was *really* too old?

I think Churchill sensed the change in me for his eyes twinkled in my direction. I thought of my wife, Madelaine, and my responsibilities - the bank, my constituency - and sighed, shaking my head. ‘I don’t know, Winston. I really don’t.’

‘Say nothing for now, David. Come and see me tomorrow with your decision. I’ll be at the Admiralty. Eleven sharp suit you?’

I nodded. ‘All right. But don’t expect me to say yes. I don’t want you to be disappointed.’

Lumbering to his feet Churchill waved his cigar in the air. ‘You’ll make the right decision. I know you will.’

I waved my hand distractedly. Damn Churchill! I knew I should talk to Madelaine but she was visiting friends and wouldn’t be home until late. There was nothing for it. With a sigh I heaved myself out of the wing-backed leather armchair and headed for the door. Fresh air and a drive south would help clear my head.

I was soon on the road. I had recently indulged myself with a new car, a Triumph Dolomite roadster made by British Leyland. The balmy autumn night meant I had the roof down with the heating on full. The steady throb of the six-cylinder engine and hum of the wheels gave me a feeling of power. For a short while I forgot about the perilous state of the world and the part I might have to play in it. On an open stretch of road I put my foot down and took the car over 75mph before being forced to slow down for a bend. As my headlights cut a swathe of white across the landscape I remembered the parliamentary debate we’d had. Within days new rules were to be introduced regarding light. Headlights were to be reduced to mere slits, all street lights switched off, windows of houses to be covered with blackout curtains and the edges of the windows painted black to ensure no chink of light showed. Heavy fines would be imposed on those who transgressed a myriad of petty rules, which were, on the whole, fairly useless as far as the war effort was concerned.

I was halfway home when a sudden thought shattered my peace of mind. By mercy of a late birth my son Richard was safe. But my nephew, Alex, was twenty-two years old! He’d be called up! The lad had come down from Oxford that year after studying aeronautical engineering and had joined my brother Sion, in his aircraft manufacturing company. Was his a reserved occupation? Did he serve the war effort better by designing planes or flying them? Goddamn it all to hell! Fear left my mouth dry and my palms wet. Not for myself but for the youngster, and all those other young men who still had so much to live for. The Great War should have been a salutary lesson, so why was this happening now? Should it not have been our duty to save the younger generation this horror? We would have to answer the history books for our failure.

The Windsor situation was forgotten as I thought about the future. Once again I said a silent prayer thanking God that Richard was too young.

The gates of *Fairweather* appeared and I swept into the drive. Arriving home always gave me such pleasure, even under these circumstances. I took the car around the back and into the converted stable block. Madelaine's car wasn't there yet.

It was nearly 11pm and I expected the household to be in bed as I let myself in through the kitchen door. To my surprise I found Susan sitting in the kitchen, a cup of hot chocolate cooling on the table in front of her. I stood for a moment, watching my darling girl. She had been through such a lot in recent years. The death of her beloved Phillipe during the Spanish Civil War had scarred her terribly. Their tiny son, John Phillipe, born after his father's murder at the hands of the fascists, was a constant reminder of her loss, as well as her greatest joy. In recent months she had recovered, both physically and emotionally. Despite my paternal bias I knew her to be beautiful. What lay ahead for my wonderful, brave daughter?

When she smiled at me her whole face lit up. 'Dad! We weren't expecting you! What brings you home?'

'Something's come up that I need to discuss with Madelaine.'

'Sounds intriguing. What is it?'

'I'll tell you when Madelaine gets home. Ah!' At that instant her car came sweeping round the back and she came into the kitchen moments later.

'Darling, what a lovely surprise!' She kissed my cheek. 'I wasn't expecting you for at least another two days.'

'I was just telling Susan that I had something to talk to you about. Shall we go into the study and get a drink?'

'It's cold in there, darling, there's no fire. We're better off staying here,' said Madelaine. 'Susan, would you be a dear, and fix us some drinks?'

'Right away. What would you like?'

'After an abstemious evening, a gin and tonic would go down rather well.'

'Dad?'

'Whisky and soda, please.'

'Coming right up. Only don't start until I get back.'

I smiled at her retreating back. 'She seems more like her old self.'

Madelaine nodded. 'Yes, thank goodness.' Madelaine's relationship with Susan was a source of constant wonder to me. Susan had been born twenty-nine years earlier in America. When her mother died, she came to live with us in England. As she was illegitimate it had been necessary to adopt her, so that she was legally recognised as my daughter, and she had changed her name by deed poll to Griffiths. Thankfully Madelaine had been very fond of her from the beginning.

Madelaine stood at the fireplace, her figure still slim and youthful, and let down her hair. It was long and wavy, reaching just beyond her shoulders and framed her beautiful face. I loved the way she looked - her wide mouth, dark green eyes and fair complexion. After all these years I still found her enchanting. I knew I was one of the luckiest men alive to have such a contented marriage.

Susan returned with the drinks and we sat at the kitchen table while I recounted my conversation with Winnie. Our drinks sat untouched. When I finished I took an appreciative sip of my whisky and looked from one to the other. For a few seconds neither spoke.

Then Madelaine asked, 'What do *you* want to do?'

I shrugged. 'I'm torn, I must admit...' I broke off and looked into the distance for a second. Madelaine broke the spell.

'The adventure of it all appeals to you. Is that what you were about to say?'

I looked into her eyes, acknowledging her astuteness.

'A last adventure? To show you aren't too old?'

I squirmed. That was too close for comfort. Susan came to my rescue.

'Dad's not old!' she protested, but stopped when I shook my head.

'Madelaine's right. It's nonsense. They need to send someone younger and



fitter. No. I'm needed in Parliament and at the bank.' As I spoke, the words felt like a hollow excuse. I was Chairman of Griffiths, Buchanan & Co, Hill St, Mayfair. The bank was the cornerstone of a business empire I oversaw. But the fact was, apart from major strategic decisions taken every few months, my best friend Angus Frazer ran the operation smoothly, thanks to the senior managers we had in place. Much of the decision-making within our companies was done as low down the totem pole as was reasonable. We were interested in results; how they were achieved was up to the line management. It was a good philosophy and one taught to me by my dear friend and mentor, John Buchanan. We operated on the lines of command found in naval vessels, both Royal and Merchant. To date it had stood us in good stead and allowed me enough time to devote to my parliamentary duties.

Was I really needed or was I merely making excuses? Looking at Madelaine's face my mind was made up. I would decline Churchill's offer.

I arrived at the Admiralty with time to spare and paced the pavement outside for a few minutes. As I went in through its imposing doors, a commissionaire checked my name on a list, glanced at my newly issued identity card and sent me through. A messenger led me up to Churchill's office. The young fellow was prattling on about some VIP or other but I took no notice, busy with my thoughts. Which was a shame really. Listening to his nervous excitement I would have been better prepared for what lay ahead.