

“As the family fled from the press, David, age 7, made a game of how the paparazzi would follow them in thrilling games of car chase. Before he arrived at boarding school, the headmaster and staff lectured the other boys against mentioning the Profumo Affair to their new classmate; newspapers were withheld from the school library on days when mention of Jack’s misfortunes again made the papers.”

— Excerpted from *Why They Stay: Sex Scandals, Deals, and Hidden Agendas of Nine Political Wives* (Ogunquit-NY Press, 2017) by Anne Michaud. All rights reserved.



Valerie Hobson throws a ball during a game of bingo at a Conservative fete on the grounds of Stansted Hall, Essex, July 25, 1959. Looking on is her husband John Profumo (right) and Home Secretary RA Butler with his daughter Sarah (left). Credit: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Valerie Hobson & Jack Profumo

Bringing Down the Party

British actor Valerie Hobson had no advantages of birth. Her father was an impoverished naval officer and her mother a hat-maker's assistant. The family of five lodged for long stays with better-off relatives. Valerie's parents invested in dance lessons for her beginning at age 4 and encouraged her wish to become an actor.

At 15, she was a chorus member in London's West End theater district when up-and-coming director Oscar Hammerstein approached her to audition for his forthcoming stage musical, *Ball at the Savoy*. It was 1933, and Hammerstein had two Broadway hits in the United States to his credit. His invitation to Valerie opened doors for the young dancer to show off her comedic talents, and soon, film scouts came calling.

Valerie was blessed with large, expressive eyes, classic features, and an aristocratic manner that fetched her leading-lady roles. She played opposite celebrated actors such as Conrad Veidt, Alec Guinness, and Laurence Olivier.

One obligation of her stardom was to mix in London's nightlife. Valerie was 29 when she met Jack Profumo in 1947. For a fancy party at the Royal Albert Hall, she borrowed an Empire dress from the set of one of her films and went as Madame Recamier, a famed 19th-century Parisian host. Valerie hadn't been at the party long when a police officer muscled in on her dance partner to tell Valerie she'd have to move her car because it was obstructing traffic. As she danced with the officer, she learned that he wasn't a police officer at all but another guest in costume — Jack Profumo, a war veteran, rising political star, and heir to a noble title and fortune, looking for a way to introduce himself to the performer he'd first noticed in her recent film *Blanche Fury*. Valerie was, at the time, gritting her teeth to withstand a marriage to a serially cheating film producer. She and Jack danced, and finished the evening, in a private corner, drinking champagne. He pursued her for the next seven years, through the end of her marriage, even as other suitors tried to win her heart.

From modest beginnings Valerie achieved the pinnacle of feminine independence. In 1953, all of London was talking about her in the lead of *The King and I* when she finally agreed to give marriage a second chance and wed Jack. He was the 5th Baron Profumo and a popular member of Parliament who could flatter and jest in a way that set people at ease. His background and smooth personality had won him a post in Prime Minister Winston Churchill's cabinet. When they married, Valerie and Jack made a celebrated golden couple, but her renown was so ascendant, Jack was often referred to as "Valerie Hobson's husband."

After the honeymoon, she returned to the Drury Lane Theatre and fulfilled the grueling performance schedule the hit show demanded, even as she was carrying the couple's first child. Four months into her pregnancy, Valerie fainted onstage, and finally, she agreed to her husband's urging to give up acting. Valerie's decision to choose marriage over career reflects the strict patriarchal thinking of the time. With two sons to care for from her previous marriage, she was certainly attracted to Jack's stability and money. Her elder son, Simon, had a severe form of Down's syndrome that left him unable to speak. He needed institutional care for the rest of his life.

Valerie likely was making a White Queen calculation. In upper-class circles in 1950s England, acting was *déclassé*, and Jack was a man on the rise politically. Valerie's continuing to perform would drag the couple down, whereas receiving guests into the gracious home they shared would enable Valerie to climb the social ladder more readily with her husband. What's more, at 37, Valerie was at an age when thespians, even today, fear the dwindling of that patriarchal hallmark of a woman's worth: beauty. Valerie believed she would "retire" to a life of parties, mixing with high-ranking and influential Brits and foreign diplomats, and giving interviews about her personal style to glossy women's magazines.

But the package of her life was not to be tied up so neatly. Within a couple of years, Jack was named Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and then promoted to Secretary of State for War — a top cabinet post in Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's government. In early 1960s Britain, a so-called gentlemen's agreement kept press representatives silent about reporting on adulterous affairs. When rumors surfaced that Jack was sharing a mistress — a "call girl" — with a Soviet Embassy attaché, the brew of sex, power, scandal, and Cold War spy mastering boiled over. These were the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when a wrong turn could have led to nuclear war, and paranoia and espionage seemed to lurk around every corner. Central to the scandal from which he could not recover was the exposure of Jack's lie about the affair to his colleagues. He resigned June 5, 1963 from the House of Commons.

Jack's resignation damaged the credibility of his mentor, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan who barely survived a Parliamentary vote of no confidence. Within months, he too resigned, precipitating a loss for Conservatives in the next election. Jack's affair quite literally toppled the government. His lie and cover-up have gone down in history as the greatest political scandal of 20th century Britain.

Valerie and Jack are the first of our modern White Queen couples to face live press scrutiny. Unlike the Roosevelts and the Kennedys, whose infidelities were revealed many years after their time in office, the Profumos suffered their downfall and humiliation in real time. They struggled with the glare of publicity on political couples. First, Valerie and Jack retreated into the bunker of the private space they had constructed together. The day after Jack's resignation, hundreds of reporters around the world were looking for him. In an attempt to stay ahead of and away from the press, he moved around the English countryside to the homes of various relatives and friends, with Valerie and their sons David, 7, and Mark, 12. They stayed at the Suffolk home of Winston Churchill's son Randolph, who referred to the

Profumos' visit as "operation sanctuary." Back in London, Jack's secretary Pam Plumb fended off the media. Journalists posed as private detectives hired by the Profumos to get her to reveal their whereabouts. The editor of the *Daily Telegraph* invited Plumb to lunch.

During this time, one imagines that Valerie and Jack were in urgent discussion about how to choose their moment and method for a public resurfacing. Future couples would call press conferences to declare their positions, but the Profumos didn't have role models to steer by. Instead, true to Valerie's training on stage, they planned an elaborate pantomime of marital support.

Nearly two weeks after Jack's resignation, the couple returned home to their high-ceilinged town house in the tony neighborhood of Chester Terrace, overlooking the tranquil grandeur of London's Regent's Park. A police escort led Valerie and Jack through the cluster of news reporters. Looking composed, Valerie wore a headscarf and white gloves. They made their way through the silent crowd. Soon the mob jostled and called out. Valerie turned, looked at her husband, and clasped his hand in hers as they made their way to their front door. It was an image of solidarity inspiring both sympathy and admiration.

Looking back from our era of regular public revelations of adultery by political leaders, it's hard to understand how incendiary the Profumo scandal was to the western world. Just a month earlier, in May 1963, sexy starlet Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday" at Madison Square Garden to President John Kennedy, marking what we now know was a yearslong series of liaisons between the two — but that relationship was relegated to whispers among press reporters, not scolding editorials published in the country's leading newspapers.

The Profumo Affair profoundly altered British society, emboldening the press and rocking people's faith in their leaders. It gave lie to the belief that those born into the ruling class were inherently superior and destined to lead, making room for lower-born folks to rise through the political ranks on merit. Sixteen years later, a grocer's daughter, Margaret Thatcher, became Prime Minister. David Profumo, the only biological son of John and Valerie, wrote that it has become an article of faith that "my father's behaviour was instrumental in changing the heartbeat of our society."

Valerie's White Queen Quotient: 8

Valerie's rise from poor parents to become the celebrated wife of a political star gave her remarkable tenacity in clinging to her White Queen role. She knew what it felt like to scramble for a living and could visualize her potential descent into obscurity if she left Jack. Her gesture of support outside their Chester Terrace town house earned her the approval that many modern White Queens seek — she's a rock, we public say: he doesn't deserve her. The actor cast herself as the supportive, long-suffering wife, a stiff-upper-lip role that the patriarchal royal family would reward, in five years, by accepting Jack and Valerie back into their company.

Valerie's unstable personal history caused her to prize the financial security of marriage to a man who had inherited great wealth. Up from her insecure childhood, she built a career on talent and will. Having had many setbacks before winning the lead in *The King and I*, she knew how precarious success could be. Her first husband, Tony Havelock-Allan, had all but abandoned her when their first son was born with Down's syndrome. Yet she didn't release her grip on that marriage until she was guaranteed a safe landing with Jack, one of several men she was dating on the side. Holding out for the arrival of another lifeboat is a further measure of her tenacity. As bad as the relationship with Havelock-Allan had been, Valerie briefly considered returning to him after Jack's downfall and resignation from Parliament. When Havelock-Allan rejected the idea, Valerie, 46, could not envision herself living independently.

The Profumos did what their elevated social group considered proper at the time. They retreated to near seclusion at a country residence. In time, and with the prompting of astute upper-class friends, Jack volunteered at a prison and a social service agency. Valerie turned to philanthropy, which fulfilled two White Queen purposes: restoring dignity to the family's legacy and exercising her patriotic and social impulses. Valerie became the first show-business mother to talk publicly about Down's syndrome. In a measure of how groundbreaking it was for her to speak out, a heckler interrupted Valerie during her address at Oxford town hall to shout that the Nazis had been right: disabled children shouldn't be allowed to live. Later, Valerie was instrumental in founding Three Roses, England's first charity to support families with Down's children. Demonstrating emotional caretaking, Valerie visited her son Simon at his school for the disabled every two weeks until he died at 46.

Valerie's dalliance with the idea of returning to her first husband cements my view of her as a woman leaning on patriarchal supports. She even criticized her daughter-in-law, David's wife Helen, for working after the couple had children. This seems like a defense Valerie erected to justify abandoning her acting career just as she was becoming established. I wouldn't rate Valerie higher as a White Queen due to her loss of faith toward the end of life. Lonely and despondent, she fell into depression and ignored her first girl grandchild, Laura. A more determined, less self-reflective White Queen would have found ways to thrive and exert her influence through the generations.

Valerie had every reason to succumb to depression. Repentant at first, Jack soon met with temptation through his restored social life and began affairs with other women. Over the years, Valerie received "helpful" letters from people informing of her husband's new liaisons as if it were still 1963, the year of the Profumo Affair. Valerie's White Queen bargain came at a heartbreaking cost.

From Poverty to Hollywood: The Woman at the Center of the Scandal

Valerie was born Babette Hobson in April 1917, on a boat newly hit by a German torpedo. Her mother was crossing the Irish Sea, and the boat set in at Larne, Northern Ireland. The

baby girl was born with a fetal membrane, or caul, around her neck, which in Irish folklore means the child is destined for greatness. Her superstitious father, Bob, wore it in a pouch around his neck as a charm against drowning.

Bob Hobson was the youngest of 13 children and family funds were scarce. His parents chose the Navy for his career. He was a dreamer who lacked judgment or luck. He turned down a chance to invest in Cellophane, predicting that housewives would never use it. Instead, he dealt in bric-a-brac antiques and opened a card-playing club. He and his wife shifted about with their daughters, staying in the spare rooms of relatives, or as paying guests with others.

The temporary lodging arrangements could be humiliating. Once, while staying with Bob's sister, Babette picked a pear from a tree in their walled garden. The gardener spied her and collected the pear to weigh it and bill her father for the fruit. To make ends meet, her mother, Violet, worked in a hat maker's shop. To settle a gambling debt, Bob paid with his wife's favorite brooch: two coral cherries with jade leaves. Once when Babette went with her nanny to the dentist, they overheard two ladies in the waiting room discussing their plans to audition for a play. The 7-year-old Babette begged the nanny to take her, and when she did, she asked the pianist to play Anton Rubinstein's "Romance." The year was 1924.

Impresario Charles Cochran admired her dancing enough to ask her to return with her mother. When they came, he recommended that the girl begin acting classes at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. To afford tuition, Violet and Bob moved from their lodgings as paying guests to stay with aunts rent free. It was the first of many investments the family made to further Babette's career, always with the hope that her talents would guide them to financial stability. These early lessons in thrift guided Babette through life.

At 16, she won a part in a low-budget film, *Eyes of Fate*, which was shot in a week. Babette was paid 20 pounds. To save money, she slept in the dressing room. She told her father she wanted to change her name to Valerie because it would sound better when she became famous. In *Eyes of Fate*, Valerie played "a sad-eyed dreary drip," she wrote in her memoir. In person she was so strikingly beautiful — with classically proportioned features, milky skin, and raven hair — that she caught the eye of casting directors. At a coffee bar in Piccadilly, Oscar Hammerstein approached her about playing an English wife at the Drury Lane theatre in his *Ball at the Savoy*. She landed the role. The male romantic lead invited her to work on a film he was making at the same time, *The Path of Glory*. She filmed during the day and played on the stage at night. In February 1934, one newspaper critic wrote of the film's release, "I should think Valerie Hobson is our youngest star-to-be... able to look at sixteen as sophisticated as last year's debutante."

The next month, just before her 17th birthday, she signed a contract with Universal Pictures. Her mother accompanied her across the Atlantic to California. Ever the itinerant, Bob Hobson followed a few months later. By contract, Universal paid Valerie only for the weeks she worked, and so she racked up several small parts at Universal Studios. Her break came in *Bride of Frankenstein* when she was cast as Baron von Frankenstein's wife. Valerie

saw Boris Karloff dressed as the monster for the first time on the set — and let out a memorable scream that became “quite bankable.” At 18, Valerie had appeared in 10 films.

A year later, on the set of the forgettable *Eunuch* starring James Mason, Valerie met Anthony Havelock-Allan, a tall ladies’ man, 14 years her senior, with slicked-back hair and dark, penetrating eyes. Valerie professed that she fell “instantly” in love.

Smooth-mannered and handsome, he was a producer for the English branch of Paramount Pictures, which was in the business of turning out “quota quickies.” The short films were shot in six days, giving English cinema an even worse reputation than it had previously, but they served as excellent training for would-be directors and camera operators. To Valerie, Havelock-Allan was powerful, successful, and magnetic.

When they met, Havelock-Allan was engrossed in an affair with Enid Walker, and chasing another woman as well. Then he turned his affections to Valerie, 19, a virgin. Valerie’s father Bob heard through his card-playing friends that Havelock-Allan was a womanizer and had been living with a married woman, Countess “Babe” Bosdari. He confronted his daughter, who said Havelock-Allan’s affair with the Countess was over. Bob was not convinced, and when Havelock-Allan and Valerie married in April 1939, he refused to attend the ceremony. Was he an overly possessive father? Or did he perhaps see in his future son-in-law a streak of future cruelty and neglect that Valerie should have heeded?

Within months, 22-year-old Valerie was pregnant. Their prospects for starting a family were grim. Neither she nor Havelock-Allan was working, and war was brewing in Europe. Valerie gave herself a homemade abortion by an unlikely combination of jumping off chairs, pummeling herself, drinking a bottle of gin, and climbing into a hot bath. It worked. By the time her husband found her, she was miscarrying. Afterward, she wandered into the woods behind their home, threw herself to the ground and wept. Her parents came to stay with the couple and to look after Valerie while she recovered.

Three years later, Valerie became pregnant again, and in May 1944 gave birth to Simon Anthony Clerveaux Havelock-Allan. The baby had Down’s syndrome. At that time, children born with Down’s were considered an embarrassment. There were no special homes, support groups, or parents’ associations. Children with Down’s were considered unable to learn and were excluded from school. Instead, they were often confined to institutions. One doctor offered to give the baby a fatal injection of meningococcal meningitis — not an uncommon way out for parents of Down’s babies. Valerie refused.

Unsympathetic to Simon’s disability and to Valerie’s pain, Havelock-Allan withdrew from both of them. “I’m sure his masculine pride was offended at having sired such an inadequate creature,” David Profumo, Valerie’s third son, wrote. Havelock-Allan went to Hollywood and returned to tell Valerie he had fallen for a starlet but refrained from sleeping with her out of loyalty to his wife. Naïve and idealistic, Valerie was horrified that the thought had even crossed his mind.

With her husband mentally absent from the home, Valerie realized that she and Simon were on their own. During a doctor's visit, she met a nanny, Nanny Moth, in the waiting room. She'd just been dismissed by the distraught parents of a baby who died. Valerie hired her to watch Simon and to provide tenderness and physical help in the home. Deciding that the boy was in good hands, Valerie considered a return to work.

The preceding months left her volatile and nervous. Her father had died; she developed a severe case of adult acne. "She had become socially withdrawn," her son David wrote, "in an industry where gregariousness was essential." She refused a call from studio executive David Selznick to honor a contractual obligation and return to Hollywood, using the excuse that she needed to remain near her baby son. Valerie did not want to go back to Hollywood. She saw an analyst about her anxiety, and after six sessions, her skin cleared up.

Having dodged Selznick, Valerie next received an invitation from British director David Lean to play Estella in *Great Expectations*. He told her, "You are exactly right for the part. Estella is a woman without a heart, dead, unable to feel." This observation shook her, but she accepted the role.

Her timing was bad. Soon, another support fell from Valerie's life: Nanny Moth died in her sleep. Valerie began to look for an institution that could keep Simon. At one place where he stayed, she arrived unannounced to find him strapped to a chair. Horrified, she began her search again.

Eventually, she settled on a residential school for people with disabilities modeled after the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, an early 20th century philosopher and social reformer. School, he taught, should be a place of fun and creativity, where older children would teach the younger ones, and discipline was not needed. Simon began to be happy, and at age 16, he learned to speak.

After settling Simon in the Rudolph Steiner home, Valerie took the advice of her doctor and traveled to Lucerne, Switzerland, for a vacation rest. She hiked the Swiss mountains, but fear and anxiety caught up with her, and she spent several hours splayed motionless against a rock face, paralyzed by vertigo. She had to be rescued. About this time, Havelock-Allan began an affair with another woman and told Valerie about it. He and Valerie moved to separate London apartments around the corner from each other, where he could stay with his new conquest, and Valerie could pursue her next act, cultivating a string of male admirers. The Havelock-Allans apparently felt they had to keep up appearances by sharing an address even as Tony indulged his affair. Valerie, by this time a well-traveled actor if not exactly a star, may have felt that both of their careers depended on this façade. She also apparently felt that she couldn't jump out of one marriage without something else to jump into.

Shortly after her panic in the Swiss Alps, Valerie met the vastly wealthy aristocrat, John Profumo, at a New Year's Eve costume party on the last day of 1947.

A Noble Family and Every Other Advantage

Jack was 31, two years older than Valerie, and had recently lost his seat in Parliament, which he'd held for five years. He was born the 5th Baron Profumo in the nobility of the Kingdom of Sardinia, an island off the coast of Italy. He was descended from Giuseppe Profumo, who had moved to Britain in 1875 and married an Englishwoman, anglicizing his name to Joseph. Two years later, Joseph founded the Provident Life Association, which helped people without means buy homes — one of the first mortgage financiers on record. The company made a fortune for the Profumo descendants. In 1885, Joseph became a British citizen. He bought a mansion in the English countryside, and by 1915 when Jack was born, the family had become fully assimilated. In 1937, their estate and pedigree were included in *Burke's Landed Gentry*.

Jack's father Albert ran for office twice as a Tory, both times unsuccessfully. This likely put the ambition into Jack's head. He went to the best schools for the British upper class, attending the Harrow School for boys and Oxford. Jack was a so-so student, but an excellent rugby player with a passion for flying. He joined the Oxford University Air Squadron and kept his own Gypsy Moth (a 1920s British two-seater aircraft) at Midlands airfield. While still a college student, Jack traveled the world with stops in Russia, China, Japan, and the United States. With his trim build, likeable face, and quick wit, Jack Profumo was going to make the most of his birth into society's fortunate circles.

After college, he pushed eagerly into politics, serving as a ward chair in the East Fulham Conservative Association as well as chairing the West Midlands Federation of the Junior Imperial League. Jack cultivated the connections these posts brought his way. He put people at ease, recognized faces, nodded encouragingly at people's remarks and made appropriate responses. Within three years, he was nominated to run as the Conservative candidate for the Kettering Division, though he had little in common with his working-class, factory steelworker constituents. He charmed the voters and at 25 became the youngest MP in Parliament at the time.

Still, Jack understood that he stood apart from the people he represented. "He and his family always clearly believed in the ruling class," said one Conservative official who knew him at the time.

While serving in Parliament, Jack was employed as an Army air intelligence liaison officer and then as a general staff officer. He was posted abroad in 1942. He fought in the battle of Tunis, the invasion of Sicily, and the conquest of Italy, and received both British and American decorations. In 1945, he lost his Parliamentary seat in a general Conservative upset. Through helpful connections, Jack was assigned to the British embassy in Tokyo as second-in-command of the British military mission in the Far East, where he met Gen. Douglas MacArthur. By the end of 1946, Jack returned to England to try his chances again at elective office.

Valerie and Jack's courtship was tempered by his political ambitions. He invited her to appear at a charity event and other innocuous rendezvous. Valerie was still married, and any scandal would have scuttled Jack's chance at election. For Easter 1949, they got out of town together, to Paris. Valerie's memory of the trip was her most ecstatic written documentation of her feelings for Jack. She wrote in her memoir, never published but excerpted by her son David, "Love like that, any woman! If you get the chance, even if it may be a passing thing; even if the void seems all-encompassing when it comes; even if the heart bleeds almost to death, passionate love is worth it, it is worth it, it is worth all of it."

For his part, Jack seemed to hold the view that people in the theatrical world were slightly forbidden fruit. Their son David wrote that early on, Jack felt Valerie was "acceptable for a risqué affair, but not to be introduced into polite society." The result was that Valerie felt little power in the relationship. In 1949, with an election looming, she became pregnant with Jack's child. This time, she had an abortion with a physician's help. Jack dreaded what would happen to his political career if he were named in a divorce case involving an actor. Valerie, still married, broke off the affair.

After that, Valerie seemed to drift from one dalliance to another. She dated Orson Welles and considered a marriage proposal from the recently widowed Robin, the 8th Marquess of Londonderry. After an evening at the opera with Havelock-Allan, she invited him to stay the night, and became pregnant with the boy who would be her second son, Mark Havelock-Allan, born in April 1951. Another baby was the last thing Tony wanted, and the pregnancy ended their relationship. Valerie vowed to keep the baby and raise the child on her own. They agreed to divorce.

On her own again, Valerie mustered the courage to make a daring investment in her career. Composer Richard Rodgers saw her dancing at El Morocco in New York, and approached to ask if she'd seen his new show, *The King and I* on Broadway. She confessed she hadn't, and since she was flying to England the next morning, she wouldn't have the opportunity. Rodgers asked her if she could sing. "A little," she replied. He planned to open the musical in London in months and wanted her to try out for the part of Mrs. Anna. Valerie read the script on the plane home.

She'd hardly sung at all, and had never played a part on stage for longer than a week. The role she coveted, playing Anna Leonowens, required her to be on stage for nearly the entire length of every four-hour performance. Valerie borrowed money to fly Elsa Schreiber, a leading acting coach, to London for three weeks. Playing the part of the king, Gregory Peck rehearsed with them in a service flat. In March 1953, Valerie flew back to New York to perform for Rodgers and his writing partner, Oscar Hammerstein. She sang "Getting to Know You" and "Hello, Young Lovers," then played the final scene of the first act, which ended with her lying face down on the stage. Rodgers and Hammerstein rushed onto the stage to raise her up and hug her. They told her she had more than won the role — she had embodied Mrs. Anna.

Jack attended opening performances in October 1953 at the Drury Lane Theatre, even though he and Valerie weren't seeing each other. Valerie wanted marriage, and Jack did not.

Watching Valerie ascend the next pinnacle of her career, did he perhaps feel he must commit or lose her? Valerie had pushed herself hard to win and own the role of Mrs. Anna. One night during the first year of the musical run, she collapsed on stage and was taken to the hospital for tests. Jack visited her room with bunches of mimosa flowers. After nearly six years of off-and-on again, Jack asked Valerie to marry him — and she said yes.

Jack was 39 and had a real shot at becoming Prime Minister though some wondered about his perpetual bachelorhood. Was he a serious person? His public sexual identity wasn't at risk — his name had been linked with actresses Glynis Johns and Ava Gardner — but his reputation was as a playboy. Upon winning Valerie's assent, Jack sought an audience with Prime Minister Winston Churchill to ask his permission — or, more accurately, to boast a bit of his new, politically desirable status as a family man. Churchill was pleased.

Valerie and Jack were the toast of London. On Dec. 31, 1954, they had what one gossip writer called “an almost ostentatiously Quiet Wedding — no film stars, no producers, no directors, no political names.” They were married at St. Columba's in Pont Street, Knightsbridge, a discreet yet fashionable church, with Valerie wearing a gray suit of vicuna, a new material from Paris, with a high collar and cuffs of sapphire mink. On their flight to Paris, the head of Heathrow Airport ordered free champagne for the Profumos and their fellow passengers. The couple stayed at the Ritz and left the next morning for Monte Carlo with a motorcycle escort. The British Department of Transport gave them the number plate PXH1 (Profumo and Hobson are one). The couple was a magnet for press photographers, hotel managers, and others among the image-conscious.

Soon after their wedding, the couple fell into a dispute. Valerie wanted to return from her honeymoon, replace her understudy Ann Martin on stage, and finish playing Mrs. Anna for however long the play continued to draw audiences. Jack assumed she would quit; he thought he had made it clear he needed a full-time political wife. He couldn't understand her commitment to *The King and I*, either contractually or emotionally. “I was in love with my husband and my work — why should I not be able to have both?” Valerie wrote in her journal. Why not, indeed? From her father to her first husband, men had shown Valerie they would let her down financially and emotionally. Why not take this moment to bank on her own hard-won success? She stood her ground for several weeks, and then in February, fate intervened in the form of a pregnancy. Valerie soldiered on in the play's lead, saying nothing. But Jack forced her hand by spreading the good news among his MP friends. The news that Valerie was expecting a baby made it into the newspapers on March 21. In April, Valerie fainted following her waltz scene. She received a doctor's certificate releasing her from the show. Their son David was born in October.

At the time, Valerie professed that she preferred to quit while she was at the top, and that she was unlikely to ever again be offered as good a part as Mrs. Anna in the *King and I*. Putting aside her career for her role as a wife was in keeping with Valerie's new social set. Bronwen Pugh, for example, perhaps the highest-paid model in England, gave up her career in 1960 after she married Lord William “Bill” Astor and became mistress of Cliveden, a massive Buckinghamshire estate.

Marriage Agrees with Jack's Political Career

Now that he was a married man and a father, Jack's Conservative Party began to take him more seriously. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan appointed him Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in 1959, which launched the Profumos into a fabulous life of entertaining foreign ambassadors, banquets at Buckingham Palace and tea with the Queen. Valerie was busy with clothes fittings, salon appointments, and lunches. She liked Italian couture, bought an array of stiletto-heeled shoes and trend-setting hats, and owned a skirt made from python skin. A newspaper interview from around this time quoted her describing her style as never "cute," and avowing, "I wear my clothes, they don't wear me."

A year later, Macmillan promoted Jack to Secretary of State for War — a high-profile position that resurrected talk about his potential as a future Prime Minister. This was a less glamorous post for entertaining — not as much fun for Valerie — and it kept Jack working late at night. It was around this time that Valerie compiled a list of complaints about their marriage, which the couple's son, David, quoted from her private papers. She resented that Jack seemed to find all pretty women fair game, kissing women he hardly knew good-bye, stretching "manners, at any time, to do this." He seldom stopped scoping the room, even when they were dancing together. He had his pants tailored to show off his penis.

Among members of Parliament, there was ready acceptance of extramarital affairs — so long as the men did not get caught. They even covered for each other when needed. However, as Jack ascended from regular member to war secretary, his indiscretions drew more notice. He and another minister were regulars at Murray's Cabaret Club, which featured show girls working as dancers, singers and waiters. Christine Keeler, the woman Jack would lie about to Parliament, was among them — although their first meeting was off-site, at Cliveden, the country estate of William Waldorf Astor II, which was famous in the 1920s and '30s for hosting political salons.

Keeler was staying at one of the estate's cottages with osteopath and man-about-town Stephen Ward, who had befriended Bill Astor by treating his back. Keeler was swimming nude in the pool behind the main house when Bill Astor and Jack Profumo wandered along, taking an after-dinner stroll in full evening wear. She hurriedly threw on a towel, and was dripping wet when Valerie and the other guests caught up and were introduced. Jack offered to show Keeler around the mansion, and he groped her, which she later said was "just a bit of fun." It probably amused her that Jack's wife was a famous film star, and Keeler did nothing to discourage his advances. They met a few times after that to consummate their attraction, and then Jack ended the affair.

Unfortunately for him, however, Keeler's name had also been linked with Russian Capt. Yevgeny Ivanov, an assistant military attaché with the Soviet Embassy. This was the height of the Cold War, and the press and government circles spun with rumors that the British war minister shared a mistress with a Russian agent. A detractor of Jack's, Col. George Wigg, a Labour MP, claimed he was motivated by national security to allude to Jack's entanglement on the floor of Parliament, which opened the door for Jack to respond

publicly and put the rumors to rest. Even as Wigg was still speaking, five ministers arrived at 3 Chester Terrace after midnight on a Thursday night and woke Jack from sleep, helping him draft a response, which he gave after 1:30 a.m. when Wigg finally ceded the podium. The entire focus of the speech was on whether Jack had allowed a security leak, which he could truthfully deny. However, he carelessly included the statement that there was “no impropriety whatsoever in my acquaintanceship with Miss Keeler.” And there was his bald-faced lie.

He arrived home just before 5 a.m. People said that Valerie must have known the truth about Jack’s affair and must have seen through his denial, even if at the time Parliament and the Prime Minister did not. Their son David said he’s certain, at this stage, that she believed Jack in spite of everything. She waited up for him and wrote him a note saying she was proud to share his name.

Jack subsequently sued two publications for libel for printing the Christine Keeler story — and he won in court. But the rumors wouldn’t die. Prime Minister Macmillan asked an ally, Lord Dilhorne, to conduct an internal investigation. Dilhorne called to schedule an appointment with Jack, who realized his game was up. On a holiday weekend in Venice, he confessed to Valerie about the fling with Keeler, and the two returned to London a day earlier than planned.

Events unfolded quickly over the next several months. Keeler posed nude for a British tabloid and sold her story for 24,000 pounds. Jack resigned from Parliament; Macmillan stepped down as Prime Minister; and Stephen Ward committed suicide during his trial for the crime of procuring a woman for Jack. The Astors had a Catholic exorcist visit Cliveden to drive out the evil that had given rise to the Profumo Affair.

An Austrian sociologist doing research at King’s College, Cambridge, Heinrich Belzinger, asked the English in interviews which aspect of the scandal they thought most important: that Jack had risked national security, that he had cheated on his wife, or that he had lied to the House of Lords. An overwhelming majority — nearly 80 percent — thought the lie was the most troubling. The security aspect was a distant second, and only 8 percent thought Jack’s having a mistress was the main justification for the furor and his resignation.

Hiding the Scandal from the Children

On the day Jack resigned, in June 1963, Mark was away at boarding school, and David was told to excuse himself early from school, saying he had a dental appointment. “I could tell something not quite right was happening,” he wrote. Later that day, his mother sat him down for a talk. She explained, “Daddy’s decided to stop being a politician. He told a lie in the House of Commons, so now we’re going to have a little holiday in the country. All together. Now, doesn’t that sound fun?”

As they fled from the press, David made a game of how the paparazzi would follow them in thrilling games of car chase. Seven months later, in January, he went away to boarding

school at Sunningdale where Mark had been a student. Before he arrived, the headmaster and staff lectured the other boys against mentioning the Profumo Affair to their new classmate; newspapers were withheld from the school library on days when mention of Jack's misfortunes again made the papers.

David passed his grade school years in ignorance of his family's disgrace. His parents didn't talk about it at home. When he turned 13, David was sent to Britain's most exclusive private high school, Eton College. As his name was called for roll call, another boy mentioned the Profumo Affair. David had no idea what he was talking about, and so the boy explained, beginning, "there were these two tarts..." Writing about this later, David describes it as a moment of falling from "my nest" into the sharp light of reality. Valerie's care to keep David from the scandal until this time was admirable evidence of her maternal thinking. But it's odd that she and Jack didn't think to head off this confrontation as David switched schools. Perhaps in a bit of wishful thinking, they believed that by 1968 enough time had passed that people no longer cared.

Even after awakening to this truth, David never felt he could talk directly to his parents about the scandal and his father's resignation. Nor did he speak to his brother Mark, who was five years older and more of an introvert. Mark wasn't confronted as directly as David about the family history because he had the good luck of retaining the surname Havelock-Allan; the boys were raised together by Valerie and Jack, but Jack never adopted Mark.

Mark studied law and grew up to become a fearsomely tough Senior Circuit Judge. He married and divorced, and married again, apparently happily. The couple has three children. David turned to writing fiction — short stories and two novels. In the second, a mystery called *The Weather in Iceland* (Picador, 1993) a son discovers his father's infamous past. David married young — he and his wife Helen Fraser were both 23 — and happily folded into the Fraser clan. They were "accessible and attractive... this was indeed the sort of family I'd wanted to have." He describes his father-in-law, Alasdair Fraser, as one of his best friends. The older man shared David's love of fishing and literature, and encouraged David's writing. His most recent work is a family biography *Bringing the House Down: A Family Memoir* (John Murray Publishers Ltd, 2007). David prepared the book with the consent of his parents, and with full access to their papers, including his mother's journal and unpublished memoirs. They agreed that *Bringing the House Down* would be published only after both parents died.

Deciding Whether to Stay

After the shock of Jack's resignation began to wear off, Valerie wondered whether she should stay in the marriage. She telephoned her ex-husband Havelock-Allan, the filmmaker, to ask his advice. She offered to leave Jack if Havelock-Allan would have her back. Striking out on her own, without a man, didn't seem to be an option for her. Valerie was 46 and hadn't worked as an actor in a decade. Havelock-Allan said if she walked out on Jack, she wouldn't be given any credit, and people would look at it as betrayal. But if she stuck by him, people would say, what a wonderful woman. Perhaps it was only a graceful way for

Havelock-Allan to extricate himself, but his observation proved prescient. So much of what happened in the coming years was driven by the family's effort to preserve their dignity and name.

The blow to the family reputation cut deeply with Jack's sister Maina, who believed she was now vindicated in her opinion of Valerie — a glamorous, self-made divorcee from a profession known for its lax morals. Maina turned on her sister-in-law and coldly blamed her for everything that had befallen the family. None of it would have happened, Maina told Valerie, if she had been the right woman for Jack, whom she clearly could not fulfill or satisfy. Valerie was wounded — perhaps fearing there was too much truth in this accusation.

Saving face became the order of the day. The family moved from London to a country home in Hertfordshire in time for Christmas 1965. Valerie luxuriated in the privacy of her own sitting room and wrote to David at school almost daily. Valerie and Jack were fiercely determined to make a go of it, David wrote, with a "like-mindedness, which was more than tinged with defiance." Sadly, he felt there was not much "mental room for others" in their countryside seclusion. Jack took stock. At 48, he felt his career and his life were in ruins. Fortunately, as when he lost his Parliamentary seat in 1945, his well-placed connections again came to his aid. The mother of an old Oxford friend, the Dowager Marchioness of Reading, got in touch to suggest that Jack approach Toynbee Hall, a slightly moribund charity in London's East End named for Arnold Toynbee, a Victorian social reformer and economist. The Marchioness had been assured that Toynbee would turn nobody away who offered help. Jack began volunteering there as a sort of repentance, dancing with the old ladies at teatime. Cynics said it was a publicity stunt, but Jack continued at Toynbee until he was 92, eventually moving into managing the organization and expanding its mission to address education and domestic violence. Jack also volunteered at Grendon Prison, a psychiatric institution. By 1971, the family's image had been rehabilitated to the point that the Queen, attending the opening of a new social welfare center, made sure to be photographed speaking to Jack.

For her part, beginning in about 1971, Valerie began to suffer periodic depressions, like the debilitating mood that befell her after Simon's birth. Her children were away most of the time, and her husband was so busy she had too much time alone. One of her diary entries from this time reads, "How often have I written — My family is my only life?" Her statement of familial devotion, David believes, was tinged with regret. This ambivalence about her narrowed horizons rose again when David and his wife Helen had children. While their son and daughter were still young, Helen returned to work as an executive producer, implicitly raising the possibility that Valerie might have also continued her career. Valerie criticized Helen, insisting that mothers should stay home. If Valerie had felt more at peace about her own choices, she wouldn't have needed to judge Helen's.

In her depression, Valerie cast about, briefly delving into charismatic religion. She also investigated Catholicism, visiting the Holy Land, Lourdes, and Iona.

Periodically, a new book penned by a Profumo Affair participant or a fresh sex scandal in government — eliciting comparisons in the press to Jack’s downfall — would reopen old wounds. In 1989, a movie about their lives, *Scandal*, came out in the British cinema, leaving Valerie and Jack feeling re-exposed. “They were bewildered that things could have come to such a pass that, even after so much time, there was apparently not a stage where people might decide enough was enough,” David wrote. Several years later, against medical advice, Valerie suddenly stopped taking her medication and had a fatal heart attack in 1998 on the steps leading to their home.

In keeping with their defiant isolation, neither Valerie nor Jack granted reporters another interview for publication. Jack did speak off the record at Toynbee Hall in 1969 to the *Daily Mail’s* Michael Thornton. When Jack died in 2006, Thornton felt freed from his promise to keep the conversation secret. He wrote in a newspaper story that Jack blamed his wife for his downfall. “Valerie, he told me, was the greatest single factor in causing Jack to lie to the House of Commons in the first place. He was in absolute terror that she would leave him. She had caught him out in a number of affairs... He was terrified she would walk out on him publicly, and that would have been the end of his career in any case.” Thornton quotes a relative saying that Valerie was “a fiercely ambitious and dominant personality” — a maddening if not unusual case of turning the blame back on the victim. The *Daily Mail* account is also eerily reminiscent of the way Hillary Clinton was characterized as controlling, manipulative, and power-hungry, three decades later, for her decision, on the other side of the Atlantic, to stay in her marriage.