



**T** HIS STORY ALWAYS HAD everything, didn't it? The blushing young innocent who transformed herself into the most adored – and most hunted – woman in the world. The Cinderella who found her Prince Charming – or thought she did – and then entered the palace via the golden carriage. The fairytale but fraudulent wedding of the century, followed by that grim parable of death in the Paris tunnel. The romance, the adultery, the royal intrigue, the eternal, hopeless quest for love, the media's crazed preoccupation and pursuit.

In her lifetime, Diana was the People's Princess who, in death, became the Sleeping Beauty and the Lady of the Lake. She was the stuff that myths are made of and, like her or not, believe it or not, hers was a tale of epic, monumental proportions, that mesmerised the world for 16 years – from the time she walked down the aisle in St Paul's Cathedral to the time of her funeral in Westminster Abbey, witnessed by, what was it, a quarter of the world's population?

Think of Marilyn Monroe, Princess Grace, Greta Garbo, Jackie Onassis, perhaps even Mother Theresa, and roll them into one iconic figure, and you might approach the fame, the celebrity of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales. As Martin Amis, the writer, once said, "Madonna sings. Grace Kelly acted. Diana simply breathed."

Now, 10 years after her death, after all that's been said and speculated upon, after all the biographies and hagiographies and documentaries devoted to her life, Diana has, in a sense, begun to breathe again, courtesy of Tina Brown, a woman once hailed as the "best magazine editor alive", the "hardest and hottest act to follow in journalism".

It is quite a match, really, Diana Spencer, the Queen of Hearts and Tina Brown, the so-called Queen of Buzz. The result is suitably controversial – a sensational rollicking page-turner that explores everything from the queen's emotional

permafrost and the duke's Teutonic coldness to Diana's single-minded pursuit of Prince Charles and her elder son, William's, interest in becoming governor-general of Australia.

The Diana Spencer that emerges from the pages of Tina Brown's *The Diana Chronicles* is at once childish, scheming, manipulative, vain, spiteful at times, tempestuous, confused, neurotic, endlessly kind and hopelessly romantic. And Tina Brown had an extraordinary time of it trying to assemble this portrait, interviewing more than 250 insiders for the book, many of whom had never spoken publicly before.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done," she tells *The Weekly* in an exclusive interview in London. "I consider it harder than editing four magazines. It was tenacious stuff in the sense that I would have to – as one does – spend a lot of time getting people to say yes [to being interviewed]. That was very, very hard, particularly having been an >>>

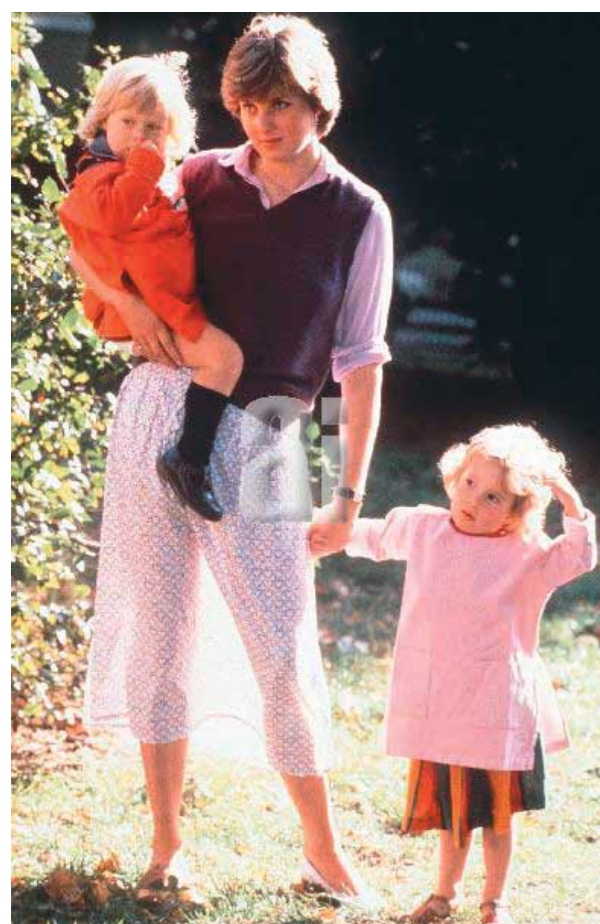
Celebrated editor Tina Brown's sensational new book *The Diana Chronicles* reveals Diana as the princess has never been seen before. In an exclusive interview, David Leser talks to the author about her controversial portrait of the princess and the royal world she loathed so much.

# DIANA

*The life and death of an icon*

Caption Intro to go here is nulla amet wisi. Faccum ver se facil ute core core tie modiam, conulla feugait am, vullut

PIC CREDIT



“I sea bewty  
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editor for 20 years ... you're used to sending writers off to do that.”

**TINA BROWN WAS JUST 20** years old when, in 1973, she was named Britain's best young journalist of the year and given *The Sunday Times* drama award for her one-act play *Under the Bamboo Tree*. Five years later – at the age of 25 – she was the editor of the 270-year-old British society journal, *Tatler*, whose circulation she managed to quadruple within three years, much of it thanks to the growing fame of Diana herself and *Tatler's* obsession with her.

It was during her time as *Tatler* editor that Tina Brown first met Diana, once briefly when the princess was turning on the Christmas lights in Regent's Park, the next occasion at the American Embassy, where she left playwright Tom Stoppard speechless with her ethereal beauty and Tina Brown deeply impressed by the visible sparks of her humanity.

Searching for something to say to the “tall, soft-cheeked English rose”, Tina Brown informed the princess she'd just returned from a wonderful trip to Venice by train. “I can't sleep on trains, can you?” Diana replied breezily, in itself an innocuous reply, but to the rising star of magazine-land an early indicator of Diana's acute emotional antenna. “She broke through by offering a shared little experience of her own that immediately communicated she was human,” Tina decided.

By 1984, Tina Brown had become editor-in-chief of *Vanity Fair*, where, over the next eight years, she was to again quadruple circulation with a tantalising mix of celebrity interviews, fashion and in-depth foreign

affairs stories. (Think of the famous cover photo of a naked and very pregnant Demi Moore. Think of the Dominick Dunne dispatches on O.J. Simpson. Think also of Tina Brown's own story on Diana, *The Mouse That Roared*, which rocked the palace in 1985 because of its revelations of the full extent of the marital disharmony between the Prince and Princess of Wales.)

In 1992, Tina moved to the editorship of *The New Yorker* and proceeded – much to the horror of her detractors – to transform America's most venerable literary institution into a magazine more resembling, well, *Vanity Fair*.

“Once, [*The New Yorker*] was a church,” wrote one of her critics. “Suddenly, it is nothing more than a cheap booth on a sidewalk.” Tina's response was that she had no interest in being the “curator of a stuffed bird”.

Tina Brown has always had a way with words. Daughter of a film producer father and a mother who once worked as Laurence Olivier's press agent, the young upstart was expelled from three English boarding schools, once because she had the temerity to describe her headmistress' bosom as an “unidentified flying object”.

Long before she became the most talked-about editor in Britain and America, she was one of the most talked-about journalists in England, a fetching blonde prepared to work as a stripper in Soho or a go-go dancer in New Jersey in order to get a story. She was fearless and she possessed, as one so aptly put it, “a wickedly accurate pen”.

She was also extremely well-connected, a priceless gift for any ambitious young scribe. In the 1970s, she dated columnist

Auberon Waugh, actor Dudley Moore and writer Martin Amis, among others, before marrying the legendary *Sunday Times* editor, Harold Evans, in 1981, at the Hamptons summer home of Sally Quinn and Ben Bradlee, the then even more legendary executive editor of *The Washington Post*.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Tina Brown and Harold Evans (now Sir Harold) became one of the most talked about couples in America, the subject of endless speculation and Manhattan gossip, as well as a spiteful book entitled *When Harry and Tina Come To America*. At one time, both of them were touted for positions in Tony Blair's cabinet, such was their power and reach.

In 1999, Tina left *The New Yorker* to start a new magazine called *Talk*, owned partly by Miramax Films, which in turn was owned by the Disney company. The ill-fated venture folded after three years, but reinforced Tina's ties to – and fascination with – Hollywood. Tina then went on to write a *Washington Post* column and host a weekly talk show on politics and culture called *Topic (A) With Tina Brown*. Her contact book was so exhaustive she could – and did – have virtually anyone she liked on the show: Tony Blair, George Clooney, Cate Blanchett, US Senator John McCain, Patrick Jephson, Princess Diana's former private secretary ...

Then, in 2005, she departed the job – with the help of a purported \$2.4million advance – to begin work on the Diana book. “It sat on my head like a whale,” she tells *The Weekly* now, laughing with the palpable relief of having finished it. “[Diana had] been so covered by so many journalists and it had all been so turned over, and I

wanted to be able to see through it, to get right back to the human that was there.”

And despite what, at times, is a savage assessment of Diana, Tina Brown was to find herself deeply sympathetic to the late princess, not least because of Diana's boundless sorrow, her huge capacity for empathy and – at least in the early days leading up to her wedding – her breathtaking naivety.

On the eve of her wedding to Charles, she'd ridden a bicycle through Clarence House, the Queen Mother's home, singing out, “I'm going to marry the Prince of Wales tomorrow, I'm going to marry the Prince of Wales”.

For Tina Brown, it was one of those emotional epiphanies. “It really went straight to my heart,” she says now. “I really found that a tragic, joyful, sad, endlessly sad, vignette ... I cried for her on the bicycle that night.”

Not so Camilla Parker Bowles, who comes across in Tina Brown's estimation as, well, *horsey*. “Women who love horses usually love sex,” Tina ventures about the current Duchess of Cornwall. “The adrenalin, the fresh air and the tally-ho exhilaration are all big libido boosters, to say nothing of all that throbbing, galloping animal vitality between one's thighs. Camilla Shand loved horses all right.”

And, in fact, contrary to all the tabloid accounts of Camilla's first meeting with Charles, where Camilla is supposed to have said, “You know, sir, my great-grandmother [Alice Keppel] was the mistress of your great-grandfather [Edward VII], so how about it?” Tina Brown has another take on it.

“What Camilla actually said that day spoke more deeply – and more arousingly – to Prince Charles than that oft-quoted and apocryphal come-on. Sizing up his horse with an expert eye, she told the prince in her warm baritone, ‘That's a fine animal you have there, sir’. The fine animal in Charles responded with a leap of intimate recognition.”

Today, sitting with Tina Brown in her impossibly chic hotel in the centre of London – just one-and-a-half kilometres due north of Buckingham Palace and Clarence House, home to Charles and Camilla – it is clear she is delighted with this choice revelation, among others.

“I love it. I love it,” she enthuses. “I love the whole thing. I've always known she just never said, ‘I'm the great granddaughter of Alice ... how about it? That's just so naff, you know. She would never have said that.’”

How did she come to regard Camilla then? “A piece of work. I like her. She's fun. I have [met her] several times and she's fun. And I see exactly why he [Charles] finds her attractive. She is really fun and sexy in her own way, but she's also a piece of work and tough as old boots. Tough, tough, tough.”

**TINA BROWN'S FIXING** moment on Diana Spencer came in the early hours of the morning on August 31, 1997, when she was at her Long Island house with husband Harry. “I got the phone call,” she recalls now. “I was woken up by an NBC reporter saying, ‘Would you like to share your memories of Diana?’”

“It was like 5 o'clock in the morning.

“What are you talking about?” And she said, “Your memories of Diana. The Princess of Wales is dead”, and I thought she was kidding. I thought she was out of her mind. It was like ... I couldn't believe it.”

Tina and Harry sat bolt upright in bed, turned on the television and sat glued to it for the rest of the day. The editor in Tina was also savvy enough to set in train a special *New Yorker* commemorative issue, which she decided to bring out the day before the funeral, on a Friday instead of a Monday, thereby causing the magazine's more traditional readers further apoplexy.

“I could see immediately it was going to be a huge thing,” she recalls now. “That it was going to be massive. It's probably fair to say that the death of Diana was [at that time] the biggest media story the world had ever seen.”

Eight years later – at the urging of her American publishers, Doubleday – she began researching the phenomenon that was Diana. Her over-arching objective was to try to find the real person, to try and sort out the human being from the confection of media impressions and images that had bombarded the world for so long, especially given the fact Diana had become – in Tina's considered opinion – the most artful practitioner of playing the media game the world had ever seen. And if anyone would know, it would be Tina Brown.

At Tina and Diana's last meeting – a lunch in July 1997 at New York's *Four Seasons* restaurant which included *Vogue* editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour – Tina Brown, the then unrivalled magazine superno, had been struck by how much celebrity had actually transformed >>>



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Diana's physical appearance. The tall, soft-cheeked English rose had become "as phosphorescent as a cartoon", a towering "Barbarella-like" figure. At the same time, ironically, she'd also begun to shake off the more "toxic elements of celebrity culture" for a daring social activism.

"In the course of writing the book," Tina tells me now, "I'd begun with the departure point of thinking perhaps I was going to wind up not liking her. I came to like her enormously. I came to see her as such a human, brave, courageous, muddled, heart-felt, vain ... all of these things. She's a great big mix of things, but ultimately, a woman of great aspiration, a woman of great moment, if you like. An important woman, someone who genuinely did achieve a great deal."

"I think that when Diana did her landmines thing at the end, it was not in any way a stunt. It was the bringing together of everything that was important to her. She had found a cause that was an overlooked cause, that had been disregarded. She brought the full beam of her celebrity to it and she threw her heart into it."

"And she did something very, very brave, which was to walk in an uncleared minefield [in Angola] and she did it for the press because she knew she could bring her celebrity to bear. It was like a snapshot of the woman she was becoming. She was growing up."

**LET IT BE ADMITTED** here that it is one of life's more surreal – and charmed – experiences to fly to London to meet arguably the world's most famous living editor for the purposes of talking about arguably the world's most famous dead woman.

In other circumstances, it might be a little intimidating, given that Tina Brown has been called many things in her career, including "Stalin in high heels". Today, in black pants, crisp white shirt, soft leather jacket, pearl earrings, she is nothing if not elegant and arresting company.

It helps, naturally, that we are discussing her book, analysing the psychology of an endlessly fascinating woman who – in

Tina's own words – could turn sceptics around with "her porous quality of empathy". Diana Spencer mightn't have had too much intellectual firepower, but on the emotional front, she was in a class of her own.

"I still feel that the great root of her issues was no education," Tina says in her dulcet Manhattan-soaked, Oxford-schooled tones, "but she was thrown into a situation for which she was so ill-equipped and the only thing that could have saved her was if she had had an education, or acquired one."

"But she was really very intellectually limited and then had absolutely zero education on top of it. I mean leaving school at 16 to become a cleaner, a nanny, is so incredible today when you think about it."

"But the thing that was interesting about her was that, in the end, what we call EQ in America, the emotional quotient, was enormous. It was her biggest thing going. She had it in spades. I mean she really did have this incredible intuition. And, in a way, it was her inferiority complex that made her so good at identifying with the weakest in the room."

**"I came to see her as such a human, brave, courageous, muddled ..."**

The most revealing early indicator of Diana's acute emotional intelligence came when she was a 14-year-old schoolgirl visiting a mental hospital with her friends. Diana would dance with the patients in their wheelchairs.

"The other girls," Tina says, "were intimidated by the patients, scared of them and bored ... but Diana struck everybody by the fact that she seemed to come into her own in the mental hospital."

"She found a way to dance with them, facing them, so she could look at the patients. She did it by dancing backwards, which was a hard thing to do. It was a wonderful thing and I was so touched by it."

And where did this moral imagination

come? From the "luminous pain" of her own life says Tina. "Diana would have always been a beautiful, warm and empathetic woman, but her tribulations gave her the incentive to become extraordinary. And what made her so riveting to the British people is the way they saw this transformation happening before their eyes."

Tina Brown's portrait of Diana reveals a catalogue of loss and longing, some of which we knew already, some of which is now revealed for the first time. We knew, for example, that Diana's parents had an acrimonious separation – and bitter divorce – when Diana was six years old. We didn't know that Diana used to sit on the steps of her Norfolk home "week after week, forlornly imagining her mother's return to live with them again".

We knew that Diana's maternal grandmother, Ruth, Lady Fermoy, was a woman of outrageous pretension. We didn't know she was quite the "manipulative, self-absorbed snob" she proved to be. She had one main priority in life – to advance her own cause and to marry off her two daughters (including Diana's mother, Frances) to the best-connected men in the kingdom.

To Tina Brown, she was the worst of the women in Diana's life. "When she [Lady Fermoy] was told that her son had committed suicide," Tina says now, "she was having dinner at the Queen Mother's house and she received the news and went back and finished dinner, and then went to mourn in her room. I just thought, 'Who are you?' I mean, what is that thing that they can do – the English classes – where form has such an iron grip. Where does the emotion come into play?"

And, of course, there was the hated stepmother, Raine, Countess of Dartmouth, who, ironically enough, happened to be the daughter of Barbara Cartland, the "queen of swoons", whose romantic fantasies

enraptured Diana's impressionable mind from an early age. It was practically the only form of literature Diana ever read.

One of Diana's favourite Cartland books was *Bride to the King*, prose which, Tina says, rotted her brain and became, for the future Princess of Wales, a "diabetes of the soul", leaving her "spiritual bloodstream permanently polluted with saccharin".

Had there been some secure female figures in Diana's life to ground her dreams in reality, who knows what might have happened?

For Diana, there was emotional loss at every turn. Her mother showed up for only one dress fitting in the lead-up to her momentous wedding, a fact Tina Brown still finds incredible. >>>



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“This is a dress that was going to be seen by 60 million people and it was a wedding to the Prince of Wales ... and she never even came to the last fitting [to say], ‘Oh darling, let me look at how wonderful you look ...’ I mean, my mother would have been there the whole way.”

In the absence of strong, loving support, Diana Spencer was left to pursue her hopeless fantasies. When she met Prince Charles for the first time at the age of 16 – at a shooting party weekend in Althorp – she came home radiant with excitement. “I’ve

## “I’ve got no fillings in my teeth and no O-levels. Do you think that matters?”

met him,” she squealed with delight to her piano teacher. “I’ve met him at last.”

Three years later, when the palace was casting around for a suitable bride for the heir to the throne, Diana was desperate to impress the prince-of-her-dreams. At a party in Sussex, she had, according to one eyewitness, sat on his lap, looked up at him and said, “I’ve got no fillings in my teeth and no O-levels. Do you think that matters?”

It did to Diana’s mother, Frances Shand Kydd. Tina says now that, for all Frances’ shortcomings, she at least managed to show some good sense prior to the wedding announcement by whisking her daughter away to a remote hideout in Australia, where she warned her against the union. She could see the parallels between her own disastrous first marriage to Diana’s father, the 8th Earl Spencer, and the decision Diana was about to make.

“Too young, too hasty, too incompatible, too great an age gap, with too many responsibilities,” she told her.

Diana apparently responded, “Mummy, you don’t understand. I love him”, to which Frances replied, “Love *him*, or love what he is”. And Diana said, “What’s the difference?”

It is tempting at this juncture to join Diana’s many critics in wondering aloud how Diana could ever have been so stupid. Didn’t she know what she was getting herself into? Tina Brown disagrees with this view. “At 19, you have no idea what

you’re getting into. You know, you fall in love and you’ve got your prince and you’re mad about him, and you think it’s all going to be marvellous.”

What then of the notorious royal train story, in which Diana was reported, in 1980, to have had two secret assignations with Charles prior to the wedding. Was it her on the train or, as later reported, Camilla? Tina believes it was Diana and that she colluded with the palace to present a false picture of a virginal maiden leading up to the wedding.

“Who knows actually what went on in the royal train,” she says now. “Maybe everything ... but I’m convinced that it was her. I became really good at figuring out, I think, where Diana was telling the truth and where she wasn’t, because like everybody, she mythologised her own story.”

**TINA BROWN HAS NEVER** been to Australia, despite a hankering to come and despite the fact that her film producer brother, Chris, has been living on the Gold Coast for the past 12 years. Still, she might as well have been here, given what she’s been able to serve up to us about the British royal family’s relationship with its sometimes restless former dominion.

In March 1983, Charles and Diana left for a six-week tour of Australia with a specific brief – to extinguish the still-burning embers of discontent following the dismissal in 1975 of the Whitlam government. (Not that Prince Philip ever had much truck with Gough Whitlam. As Tina discovered, much to her fascination, the Duke of Edinburgh’s attitude towards Whitlam was so hostile that, when a member of the royal household once tried politely to temper his views, the duke flew into a rage, called him [the retainer] a “socialist arsehole” and refused to ever speak to him again.)

Charles and Diana were given the enormous challenge of turning the mood around in Australia. The country’s new Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke was epitomising well the churlishness of the populace when he said, “I don’t regard welcoming them as the most important thing I’m going to have to do in my first nine months in office”.

*Continued on page 258.*



PIG CREDIT

Continued from page xxx.



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“There was a real chippiness – as we say – in Australia because of this [1975] coup,” Tina tells *The Weekly* now, “which you would know more about than I would, but that really scuppered Charles’ chances of having that job [of governor-general]. Charles really wanted that job because he saw it as a way to get the hell out of the grip of Prince Philip and the queen.

“There is also something else that you might like to know for your audience which hasn’t been said, which I happen to know, and that is that it has been thought up in regard to William, too.”

What, that he might become the governor-general of Australia, I ask? “Yes, they would like that and he would like that very much. It has been discussed.”

Between the Australian government and the palace? “Can’t tell you any more than that. What I’m told is that it has been discussed in terms of ‘This is something William would like to do.’”

The 1983 Australian tour, of course, was a sensation that Tina Brown likens now to “the tiara version of Beatlemania”.

“They just poured out onto the streets. And she was at her absolute best. She showed how she could respond to crowds. She learnt it all in Australia really. And at

the same time, behind the scenes, she was throwing up. She was bulimic. She was having the most awful rows with Charles because he felt hugely left out.

“Australia was supposed to be his turf. This was the place he really wanted to be governor-general of. He had this Australian girlfriend, Dale [‘Kanga’] Tryon, who really had always made him feel Australia was his place. He was always being photographed at Bondi Beach with a pretty girl. He had done his gap year in Australia and loved it.

“So he felt very kind of mortified and started to write letters home to people saying, ‘I spent the time retreating into Jung’. He couldn’t understand what was happening. Suddenly, this girl, this young girl, had become this major superstar and when she danced with him at Government

## “Suddenly, this girl, this young girl, had become a major superstar ...”

House, those famous pictures, she looked so ravishing. I mean she even got Bob Hawke’s wife to curtsy.”

To Buckingham Palace, she might as well have been invisible, given the royal cold shoulder she received on her return. The queen, according to Tina Brown, was clearly far more threatened by Diana’s popularity than had previously been supposed. “Here, from the outset, was a rival,” Tina believed. “Here was the embodiment of the way ahead.”

Yet it was more than that. The royal family was so stuffy, so hidebound, that Diana had begun to “shrivel into silence” in their presence. And it was a silence which incensed the Queen of Great Britain. On one occasion at Balmoral, she cornered a dinner guest and erupted, “Look at her sitting at the table glowering at us! The only time she bucks up is when Charles speaks to her.”

The guest ventured, “If you look around the table, Ma’am, they’re all so much older than her.” Queen Elizabeth’s reply was like an icy blast from the North Sea. “I don’t care. She’ll just have to buck up.”

Diana was by no means the only recipient of the British monarch’s particular brand of tough love. When the queen’s sister, Princess Margaret, suffered a series of strokes and was seriously depressed towards the end of her life, a friend went to see the British monarch to suggest a therapist be brought in. “Perhaps, when she’s better, we could consider that,” came Queen Elizabeth II’s reply.

As Tina Brown says, “Buckingham Palace was – and probably still is – tailor-made for a bulimic outburst. It is suffocating and empty at the same time, and everyone is trained to look the other way ...

Bulimia, in a way, is the polite girl’s hunger strike. First, you please your host by eating with gusto, then you purge your sin by sneaking off and throwing up.

“After a time, it’s the purging, not the eating, that’s the craving. Diana always said it made her feel ‘quieter’, almost sedated, afterwards.”

**IN RETROSPECT**, it was always going to prove an impossible task for Diana Spencer to shoulder both the burden of her own childhood dream with that of the nation’s. What pressure on a young woman, especially when the prince to whom she was betrothed wasn’t really in love with her.

As we all came to learn in graphic detail, Camilla Parker Bowles was, from the outset, the ghostly presence in the

Charles-Diana marriage. She was the woman inside whom Charles wanted to – *yes, it’s still so hard to say* – re-incarnate as a tampon. She was his mistress within two years of him saying “I do” to Diana.

And Diana knew this before, during and immediately after the wedding – that in her husband’s heart-of-hearts he was married to another. Yet how silly to let this bother her, especially given her own mother’s adultery and the fact that her maternal grandmother, Ruth, Lady Fermoy, had married a “committed philanderer”. Lady Fermoy had never been able to comprehend why her grand-daughter was always so “childishly unwilling” to accept a similar arrangement with her own husband.

Similarly, Camilla’s tolerance for unfaithfulness had already been tested and fine-tuned. In 1973, she’d married Andrew Parker Bowles, always the true love of her life, according to Tina Brown, as opposed to Charles. Parker Bowles was a major in the prestigious Household Cavalry and a man, Tina suggests, who seemed to have had the gift “of bringing out the delicious worst in every woman”. One of his earlier distractions had been a young Princess Anne, whom, Tina says, had “in her stern way”, always enjoyed a roll in the hay.

Throughout the Parker Bowles marriage, Andrew remained incapable of monogamy and this had the effect of making adultery part of Camilla’s way of life. Match that with Charles’ own proclivity for bachelor girls who were as “fast as cars”, as well as a “willing cadre of married women”, and Diana didn’t stand a chance.

Was Tina Brown titillated by all these peccadillos, one wonders? “Oh no, I >>>

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wasn't. In the sense I thought, 'What a randy lot they all were'. I mean the English upper classes are such a louche lot. They were all going at it like rabbits in that circle. It still blows my mind how married couples can conduct themselves.

"And I mean, from Diana's point of view, here was this modern girl who wanted to live in a modern, loving marriage and she was surrounded by this kind of *les liaisons dangereuse* and that's where I did feel enormously sympathetic to her. She was like the only one not in on the secret."

One of the more tantalising, but also pathetically poignant, moments in Tina's book was her reference to the times Diana attempted to dance her way into her husband's heart. On one occasion, she put on sexy lingerie and low music, and tried to arouse him with a striptease. It didn't seem to much work. Charles' sexual interest in Diana had begun to decrease in direct proportion to how desirable she was becoming around the world.

In March 1981, Diana had shown up at a London musical recital wearing that "nipple-busting black taffeta eye-popper", which Tina Browns describes as "the greatest moment of sexual theatre since Cinderella swapped her scullery clogs for Prince Charming's glass slippers." It was a taste of things to come.

At a White House dinner four years later, Diana danced her way into social history with her idol, John Travolta. Diana had informed America's First Lady, Nancy Reagan, that she had only one wish that night – to dance with Travolta. Travolta had duly obliged. At the strike of midnight the star of *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever* had approached the princess and said, "Would you care to dance?" Diana had blushed and tilted her head. "Of course, I would love to," she'd replied.

Travolta then led the Princess of Wales onto the dance floor for what he said was one of the great moments of his life. "I want it to go off well," he recalled to Tina in a gripping moment-by-moment account, "and show her I am in control and she doesn't need to worry, and knows I'll lead. I bring her hand from a higher position and gracefully position it lower so she knows I can run the dance. No talking. Talking during a dance is difficult when 75 people are watching you. And I look her in the eyes and reassure her with my eyes, to say, 'We're okay'."

They danced for 10 minutes. It felt like 20. Travolta could feel how seductive Diana was. He could also feel that she was aware of him. He didn't know that anyone was taking photos, but commonsense told him that, if they were, they'd be recording a slice of history.

"You could feel the awe in the moment from people in the audience," Travolta said. "It was dense with life, filled with life, and you'd have had to have been dead not to feel the joy around it. At the end, she curtsied and I bowed and, well, I guess I turned back into a pumpkin."

For Tina Brown, it was one of the joyous epiphanies of her journey through Dianaland. "That moment of Diana dancing at the White House was an iconic moment, a magical moment," she tells me. "That was the stuff of fairy stories.

**WE KNOW WHAT** happened next, though, don't we? The fairytale was in truth always a figment. The separation, the divorce, the adulterous confessions, Diana's desperate search for love, the hounding of her by an out-of-control media.

According to Tina, the "rat pack" had felt jilted ever since Diana allowed her story to be told to a Fleet Street outsider, Andrew Morton, in 1992. That's when she became prey. "She became objectified," Tina says, "and she played a role in that. She let it happen in many ways. A lot of people have tried to tame the beast of the media and she always thought she could tame the beast, she thought she could play to it and control it.

"But unfortunately, as people learn time and time again, there is no controlling the beast once it is out of its cage. And the beast was fully out of its cage. There is no doubt that there is a real misogyny about that paparazzi core. They are all men, mostly, a couple of women, but mostly men.

"They regarded it as a hit, you know, almost like comeback. I was shocked actually at how they would talk about Diana. They would refer to her as 'the loon', when she would tear up or scream. It was so heartless and I think, by the end, when she was no longer royal, there was a real sense that her defences were off. She had lost her protectors ... and she was up for grabs."

By the end of her life, she was continuing to scour the world for a dashing new prince. She was still calling Hasnat Khan, the Pakistani-born surgeon who had rejected her in July 1997, but whom she still adored. She was seriously weighing up possibilities with the super-wealthy New York financier Theodore Forstmann, to the extent that she'd even suggested they get married, more so – it seemed – so he could run for US President and Diana could become First Lady. It was more "Barbara Cartland" fantasy stuff, according to Tina. "I mean it was a preposterous idea, but she thought it was great."

Then there was Gulu Lalvani, the 58-year-old Hong Kong-based >>>

entrepreneur whom Diana was planning to see on her return to London from that fateful trip to Paris. (It was Lalvani's appearance in Diana's life in January that had caused the final breach with her mother. Frances had reportedly exploded on the phone because of her daughter's predilection for Muslim men. Lalvani was a Punjabi Sikh, not a Muslim, but to Frances Shand Kydd he was still "unacceptably brown".)

That left Dodi Al Fayed, the feckless playboy son of Harrod's owner, Mohammed Al Fayed, who was summoned to France in August 1997 by his father to spend time with the lonely and jilted former princess. Like Prince Charles, Dodi Al Fayed was a man cowered by his father, but unlike Charles, he had a distinct preference for Middle Eastern cooking and, according to Tina, snorting lines of coke.

Not only was Diana never in love with him, says Tina, but Dodi was never going to get the nod from a crucial figure in Diana's life, Prince William. According to sources which Tina won't reveal, the heir to the throne had a furious telephone row with his mother a day or two before she died. The argument was over Dodi and his unsuitability for her.

Was this partly why, on her last evening, she was seen quietly weeping at dinner in full view of the clientele of the Ritz Hotel's L'Espadon restaurant? Tina Brown believes so. "I came to see that her last night on earth was just a total, horrible mess – that it brought together all the damaging forces of media that had so distorted her life up 'til then, the heartbreak of the men, the fact that she was with Dodi, who she wasn't in love with, that she was only with him because she wanted to make Hasnat Khan jealous, the fact that her kids weren't with her ... all of those things put this poor woman into extraordinary turmoil."

In other words, the "charade of eternal betrothal" between Dodi and Diana that Mohammed Al Fayed has been foisting on the world since their death was just that. A charade. So, too, the idea that there was some kind of conspiracy to kill her. According to Tina Brown, it was a traffic accident, pure and simple.

"He [Al Fayed] made his own fairytale," she insists now, "that has had very malign consequences for everybody else – especially her children. I think it had a terrible psychic effect on those boys. They wanted this thing [the inquest] closed because they couldn't bury their mother [properly]."

"In the same way we used to pore over Diana's clothes and love affairs and dresses, we pored over autopsy results

and the descriptions of whether she had her period or not. I mean it was all so terrible. It was their mother."

**SO WHERE DID IT** come from, "the immense reach of this sorrow" for Diana's death? What "mysterious transfusion of glamour, suffering and exposure" turned Diana into such an idol of the masses, created such convulsions of grief in Britain and around the world.

Part of the explanation, the former *Vanity Fair* editor-in-chief decided, lay in the fact that Diana "was the first great glamour icon to live and die in the age of round-the-world, round-the-clock multi-media". Part of it lay in the fact that people in life who normally received little or no affection reacted by shutting down emotionally. Diana did the exact opposite.

As Tina tells *The Weekly* now, "She just seemed to have this huge, bottomless well of this emotional sympathy and sensitivity, which ultimately just has to redeem her, whatever her other questions were, and they were manifold. *That* you just can't take away from her."

"I found again and again that she would do things that nobody really knew about – like continuing to stay in touch with the families of the people who died in hospices. She was so caring in her responses to people, the endless letters she wrote. She would leave patients who were ill sometimes transformed. This was a girl with a very, very big heart."

And then, of course, there was the primal myth itself that so tapped into the collective unconscious. "She literally was the shy girl who became the princess and then was trapped by the palace walls, and surrounded with ugly sisters and the wicked witch."

It is a breathtaking story that Tina Brown readily admits she will find hard to trump. Already, she misses Diana and is doubtful she'll ever find another writing project to rival it. "Let me know if you think of something," she says by way of closing our interview and, as I return to the colonies from the heart of the empire, I decide that she could do far worse next time than write her own story. The Tina Brown story.

It has a lot of the same ingredients as Diana's – celebrity, class, high society, media, glamour, interesting early lovers, a famous husband and, depending on your point of view, a blonde, blue-eyed heroine to boot.

Were she alive today, even Diana would probably read it.

*The Diana Chronicles by Tina Brown is published in hardback by Century, rrp \$69.95. Copyright © Tina Brown 2007.*