



DIANARAMA



The Betrayal of Princess Diana



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To my dear family, patient listeners.

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'. . . we want to open up our journalistic processes so people can see how we work; radical transparency driving increased trust.'

– Tim Davie, BBC director-general, speaking on 14 May 2025

'. . . trust is the most vital quality necessary in our journalism . . .'

– Lord Hall, former BBC director-general, speaking during the cover-up of the Bashir scandal, 25 April 1996

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Prologue: What Saddens Me Most

On an overcast spring day four years ago Prince William looked straight into the TV camera, at all of us, and said, 'It brings indescribable sadness to know that the BBC's failures contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation that I remember from those final years with her.' He was speaking, of course, of his mother, Diana, and reflecting on the report which had been published that day, 20 May 2021, dealing with the biggest scandal in BBC history. It had been promised that this document, the Dyson report, would reveal after an inquiry lasting six months how the BBC had hoaxed Princess Diana into appearing on the *Panorama* programme on 20 November 1995. The interview which Diana gave reporter Martin Bashir was damning of the royal family and especially William's father – in fact, so damaging that in less than a year Diana had been stripped of her royal status and, newly untethered, was dead once another year had passed.

What William said next was startling: 'But what saddens me most is that if the BBC had properly investigated the complaints and concerns first raised in 1995, my mother would have known that she had been deceived. She was failed not just by a rogue reporter but by leaders at the BBC who looked the other way rather than asking the tough questions.' It is those words which tell us that what happened to Princess Diana thirty years ago is still a matter of burning intensity for her son. Because here William goes considerably beyond the verdict of the inquiry report, which looks

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at the conduct of those leaders at the BBC and decides that they were not guilty. They were, in William's judgement, not hapless and blameless stooges plagued by ill fortune. Instead they 'looked the other way'.

When the *Panorama* programme threatened in 1995 to erupt into an enormous scandal, key people at the BBC had to make a crucial ethical choice: *Do we cover things up, or do we come clean?* The person who has taken the rap for the scandal, pretty much all of it, is the hoaxer, Martin Bashir. If this were a cowboy movie, he would be wearing a black hat, the blackest hat of all, to signify his villainy. Bashir's boss, the man who was running the BBC at the time, Lord Birt, has said, 'Unless you understand that this was a serial liar on an industrial scale you simply cannot understand the story . . . in 100 years of BBC journalism can we think of anybody else who behaved in that kind of way?' But though Bashir is a villain, he is not an interesting villain. His motivation is plain. The people who might have explained to Diana that she had been the victim of a hoax, who might have stopped the runaway train that Bashir had set in motion, were what William calls the 'leaders at the BBC'. And so the concern of this book is to consider their likely motivation. Were they all truly taken in, like Diana, by the man in the black hat?

Lord Dyson's report, though compiled at a cost of more than £1 million, does not tell us how Bashir hoaxed Diana. It says simply that in the autumn of 1995 Diana was bursting to have her say on TV and that Bashir, a charming rogue, was lucky to catch her at the right time. Dyson says that when, the following year, BBC bosses looked into what Bashir had done, they bumbled and they faffed and they failed to get an answer yet nobody can be blamed for their failure. Lord Dyson does not tell us how the BBC then covered up the

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scandal for twenty-five years, nor who was in charge of the cover-up. And the malign effect of Dyson's report is more serious than even these omissions about what happened long ago. It is in 2025 being used by the BBC as both a deterrent to further inquiry and as a shield by those people who, as William put it, looked the other way.

This book will present evidence to answer the questions which the inquiry ought to have settled, but did not, and it will also explain William's most poignant words: 'what saddens me most'. Consider the sadness of this man whose life has been shaped by what the BBC did to his mother. How William, as a thirteen-year-old schoolboy, had to watch Diana talk of sex with a lover, then trash his father, on television – *on television on the BBC*. The news that Diana and Charles would divorce followed exactly one month after the *Panorama* interview. For a youngster desperately hoping, as kids do, that Mum and Dad will fall back in love, that will have been heartbreaking. The effect of learning that this wrecking ball set swinging by the BBC might have been grabbed, should have been grabbed, before Diana died is beyond imagining.

The story of Diana's life between autumn 1995 and her death two years later will also be of enduring historical interest, and so this book may serve, I hope, as at least a first draft of history. I sometimes think that even thirty years on we are still too close to those surreal-sounding events to properly see how bizarre the circumstances remain. Can it really be true that the woman who was supposed to now be our queen, our Queen Diana, had been assured by the BBC that her husband was a potential killer? Did she, because of that assurance, really set off on the crazy strategy described later in this book, merely to keep herself alive?

The answer to both questions is yes – and it is a story

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more lurid, more fantastical, than anything that happened at the Tudor court of Henry VIII, which so fascinates historians today. Indeed Diana's last two years sound rather like a twisting Shakespeare plot, written as soap opera. A beautiful princess is betrayed by a heartless husband, pining for his own lost love. A character sidles up, whispering sinister warnings of murder and betrayal, but our heroine cannot see that she is being duped by a worm-tongued villain. Cast out, her own destiny now linked with a feckless ne'er-do-well, only a tragic death awaits them both. It is Shakespearean but it is horribly true, a story which will be picked over by historians and retold for centuries.

For that reason alone it is a story which deserves to be told in a way that is more complete than the Dyson report, a document studded with omissions and marked by its apparent failure, in at least one case, to grasp the importance of critical evidence. I believe that inasmuch as the report has established a temporary orthodoxy it will be rapidly dismantled by historical researchers. But consider right away that the *Panorama* interview, the most controversial broadcast ever made by the BBC, is not at all what you think it is. It is in reality not an *interview* but a *performance*. A double act, devised, rehearsed and delivered with a specific object in mind. There was a quite separate interview, carried out seven days earlier, but which has passed under the radar. *That* is the important encounter, the one which reveals the truth about these extraordinary times.

Many journalists have looked at the Bashir scandal over the last thirty years. I can say without being too swell-headed that something I did five years ago, described later in this book, finally brought it to light. I have studied these matters for something close to twenty years and have confidence in

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my judgement because it is made, I believe, from a unique position. As you will see I have been able to obtain formerly secret documents, despite enormous opposition from the BBC, and at the same time I have had close inside access to those who knew Diana best at this critical moment in her life, especially her brother Charles Spencer. He has shared with me his archive showing how he tried, and failed, to get the BBC to admit what they had done to his sister.

As you will also see, as the story unfolds, the revelations I was able to make have had a profoundly personal effect on many people who were shabbily treated by the BBC. Some were handed hundreds of thousands of pounds in reparations; for others the knowledge of the BBC's duplicity has at least provided some comfort in explaining why Diana behaved as recklessly as she did, harming not just herself but those she loved. Prince William's speech of May 2021 can be regarded as a victim impact statement which, it seems to me, might have caused Lord Dyson to think a little deeper had it been delivered, as usually happens, *before* sentence was delivered, rather than after.

William concludes with a sentence which is itself remarkable when the implications are fully considered. The BBC, perhaps the world's most respected journalistic enterprise, one that should be shouting loud for truth and honesty, instead worked furtively to prevent people like me uncovering the BBC's misdeeds. As William put it: 'These failings, identified by investigative journalists, not only let my mother down and my family down; they let the public down too.'

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Introduction: The Million-Pound Question

In June 2024 I did something I had not done for thirty years. I drove to a nearby shopping mall, went into what used to be called a gentlemen's outfitter and bought a dark suit, a white shirt and the most sober tie I could see. It felt like choosing kit for a sports event, or, more exactly, determining my look for a gladiatorial bout. Swords and shields here, nets and tridents across the aisle. At the very least it would prove that I was serious about my upcoming two days in court and I needed to grasp every small advantage I could.

My summons to court came three years after I had used the Freedom of Information Act to put to the BBC a very simple question, but a question which it turned out people there were determined not to answer. And I mean *really* determined. The issue would come to occupy not only the most highly paid lawyers inside New Broadcasting House but also the most expensive lawyers from London's elite legal chambers. People who charge upward of £5,000 per day. As my request was repeatedly denied for those three years, I had been forced to run a solo guerrilla campaign from my kitchen table. I had to become my own lawyer, trying to match the constantly shifting legal manoeuvres of the pros being paid, to my intense annoyance, by me, from my BBC licence fee. And the BBC would clearly spend whatever it took to make sure I did not win this case when it finally came to court. The BBC's bill just for *external* legal fees would come

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to a staggering £646,694.95. In all, considering likely internal costs as well, something well over £1 million.

So what was this million-pound question, one which required such extraordinary legal might to prevent it being answered? The question was simple, the circumstances which prompted it a little more complicated. Looking back from our viewpoint today, thirty years on, it is clear that the BBC managed to cover up the worst elements of the scandal concerning their infamous *Panorama* interview with Princess Diana in November 1995. It is now clear beyond doubt that Martin Bashir used forged documents to get his foot in the door, to gain his first introduction to Diana, six weeks before the interview took place.

But these facts did not emerge until 2020. As described in more detail later, it was only when I was able to get hold of a formerly secret document from the BBC, after a thirteen-year struggle, that the scandal burst into the open and Bashir's duplicity was revealed for the first time. Fully twenty-five years had elapsed from the moment the BBC cover-up was first devised, in 1995, to the point where it collapsed in ruins, in 2020. It seemed to me that during that time certain BBC managers must have actively sought to keep matters secret for as long as they possibly could. And so to test my theory I had used the Freedom of Information Act to demand sight of emails which passed between the likeliest suspects at a critical period in 2020. If they had been trying to keep things under wraps, to sustain the cover-up, perhaps an incautious email would betray them? My question to the BBC, posed on 4 June 2021, said, 'I would like to request all documents that exist relating to email or other correspondence between BBC managers and the BBC Information Office, between September 2020 and November 2020,

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which has any bearing on the November 1995 *Panorama* programme with the Princess of Wales.'

It sounds simple enough. But what would happen over the next three years would involve the most astonishing twists and turns, the mysterious disappearance of certain documents and the miraculous appearance of thousands more. The case would become, at least in the BBC's own estimation, the biggest Freedom of Information case there has *ever* been. And the weirdest, altogether hardest-to-believe moment came roughly halfway through, eighteen months after I had made my initial request. The BBC had declared, in a statement signed by one of its lawyers, that the total number of emails relevant to my request was eighty. *Eight zero*. A short time later a different BBC lawyer said, in effect, 'Scratch that. The correct number is 3,288.' *Three thousand, two hundred and eighty-eight*. They had lost 3,208 emails, this lawyer said, through a computer error. Now, instead of a fistful of documents, it turned out that there were 10,336 pages, enough to fill twenty bulky lever arch folders. A page count equal to *War and Peace* ten times over. And that, as you will see, provided just one of the tricky questions to be decided. How do more than ten thousand pages of documents go missing, from one day to the next? Especially ones which might implicate senior BBC managers in a cover-up?

It was at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 18 June 2024 that the court was scheduled to convene, in a workaday modern building in London's Bloomsbury. The BBC had a legal team of seven, including a thoroughly terrifying KC, the topmost grade of lawyer, described, on her own website, as 'the silent assassin of cross-examination'. But I did have my new suit.

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PART ONE
Mindset

'I was so fed up with being seen as someone who was a basket case. Because I am a very strong person. And I know that causes complications in the system that I live in.'

– Princess Diana, *Panorama*, 20 November 1995

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1. Take Two

My court case was a question of peeling back three layers of history. Could we, in June 2024, discover something that a particular set of BBC bosses had done in the autumn of 2020 to hide what another set of bosses had done way back in 1995? Had the *first* cover-up, thirty years ago, perhaps inspired a second one? Complicated, yes, but I knew that somewhere underneath these layers the truth must lie. As a journalist it is that feeling that the answer has to be right there, maybe in the very next document you flip open, that is thrilling. Friends often asked me, considering the years of work involved in this court case, 'Why do you care so much?' But the answer always seemed to me perfectly obvious. Here was a story with real historical resonance, something which will be debated when juicy scandals about newsreaders, handsy ministers and disgraced DJs, the things which reporters so often become obsessed by, are long forgotten. Indeed, when I am long forgotten.

The BBC would like all of us to believe that this is old news, done and dusted. I suspect if it were, the people running the BBC today would not have scrambled quite so quickly to throw those lawyers a million pounds, your money and mine. But there is also a personal factor. Through the pure coincidence of a family connection I was granted, more than thirty years ago, a unique insight into the fractious sparring between Prince Charles and Princess Diana, what was called in the late 1980s and early 90s the 'War of the Waleses'.

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That phrase, evoking a 'war', was used in a thousand and one tabloid headlines to describe the way that the royal marriage was pulled apart, before being finally sundered by the BBC. And there was one remarkable day, in June 1994, which constituted a huge set-piece battle in this war, a day that is familiar from TV clips played endlessly ever since. Looked back on now it seems to be one of those sliding-doors moments when had one of the characters acted even the tiniest bit differently then all that followed would have been vastly altered. Because this was the day on which Prince Charles went on television to admit that he had not been sexually faithful to Diana.

To understand how this event set so many other things in motion, consider where he and Diana were, where the royal marriage was, in June 1994. What had begun in 1981 as a fairy tale, the sun-speckled wedding of the twenty-year-old bride and her thirty-two-year-old prince had seemed blessed at first, with baby William arriving in 1982, Harry in 1984. But then year by year the happiness slipped away. By the end of the 1980s the prince and princess did indeed seem to be engaged in a war, greedily chronicled by the tabloids and the broadsheets, in books and on TV. Queen Elizabeth chose the famous phrase '*annus horribilis*' to describe 1992, her especially horrible year, the one in which Charles and Diana's formal separation was finally announced.

Charles's confession, two years later, seemed to put an end to something which had been slowly dying, privately at first, then for everyone to see. But what is remarkable is that, in reality, Prince Charles had not been prepared to make that critical admission of adultery until the very last minute. It is not widely known that at first he simply refused, but then he

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buckled, setting history on an entirely new course. And, as so often in the Diana story, this single extraordinary day, 29 June 1994, yields drama so unlikely that it might have been conceived as a soap opera season finale. An air crash, an agonizing twist in the sex saga, and all in the space of just a few hours.

Shortly after 11 a.m. on that June morning, in the sky over Islay, a rugged scrap of island off Scotland's west coast, a BAe 146 airliner in the red and white colours of the Queen's Flight swung into view. Islay's distilleries produce a rich, peat-stained malt whisky, and Prince Charles, also titled Lord of the Isles, was scheduled to visit one of them. Another title Charles carried was that of RAF Group Captain, and he was indeed a trained pilot, qualified to bring the jet and its eleven occupants safely to earth. Charles had agreed with the aircraft captain, Squadron Leader Graham Laurie, that he would take control once the aircraft began its descent to the miniature airport at Glenegedale.

The weather that day was typical for the Hebrides in June: cloudy, the wind thirty miles an hour. As Islay grew larger below, Charles asked which of the two landing strips, designated RW13 and RW31, he should aim for. Laurie advised RW13, aware that this would mean landing with a troublesome tailwind, though that should present no danger if all went according to plan. But as the plane began its approach, a little under four miles out, people on the ground could see something was wrong. The plane was approaching too fast, at too steep an angle. In pilot's jargon, she was coming in hot. Voice recordings from the cockpit have not been made public but we can imagine the barely restrained terror of the next few seconds as twenty-five tons of aircraft thudded down on the twin nosewheels.

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The main wheels locked and smoke billowed as the tyres melted with the friction. Five hundred metres from touchdown a tyre in the right main undercarriage exploded, sparks flying as the metal rim screeched across the tarmac. Then a tyre on the left undercarriage burst, the plane still careering forward with just 150 metres of runway remaining. As the airport fire truck raced towards the scene, Laurie, wrestling the controls from Charles, tried to veer the aircraft on to a taxiway to his left. Instead the aeroplane slid from the runway, the undercarriage biting deep into the soft ground before collapsing. The aircraft slewed to a halt, its jet turbines still whining as the fire truck arrived.

As Charles, deeply shaken by the ordeal, was hurried to the small terminal, he may have looked back to assess the damage. The tangled wreckage beneath the aircraft, the smashed undercarriage, crumpled nose cone and radar array, would cost more than £1 million to repair. Charles was never called to explain his role in what accident investigators would coyly term a 'mishandled approach'. But had the prince been required to enter a plea in mitigation he might fairly have offered: 'Well – I did have rather a lot on my mind that day.'

In London, 600 miles away, Princess Diana steeled herself for an ordeal of a different kind. Not the sudden prospect of extinction in an air crash but a challenge that had been threatening for nearly two years. Because she knew that tonight the eyes of the world, and in particular the lenses of scores of photographers, would be trained on her even more closely than usual. She knew that almost every TV viewer in Britain would be anxious for a particular programme to begin, a documentary film which had been hyped for days in the press, its contents guessed at, debated, disputed. At 8 p.m. ITV would finally unveil the contents of a two-and-a-half-hour

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film, *Charles: The Private Man, the Public Role*, a programme without which it is doubtful that Diana would have agreed to talk with Martin Bashir at all, far less agree to discuss her own history of adultery in public.

The big question dangled by the tabloids before the programme aired was, essentially, would Charles cough? Would he admit that he had been playing away, and with his former girlfriend, Camilla Parker Bowles? Because what could there be to say over the space of two and a half hours, longer than most Hollywood epics, if not that? In many ways the question was already redundant. By June 1994 anyone with an interest in these matters could have read what sounded suspiciously like the truth in their favourite newspaper; if the two were not an item, it damned well looked like it. And so the thrill that night for the 13 million people who tuned in was rather: How will Charles play this? Will he confess, and take his whacks? Will he lie? Or will he sidestep the issue altogether?

Diana understood her part in the drama perfectly. Instead of watching the show, curled privately on a sofa in Kensington Palace, she would put on a public display of insouciance, her stage a glittering *Vanity Fair* gala at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park. But what to wear on this night of nights? The answer Diana came up with is clear from the astonishing photographic record of that night, the most memorable of all Diana's fashion gambles. This was the night of the so-called 'revenge dress', the cleavage- and shoulder-baring cocoon of black silk by Christina Stambolian, perfectly projecting allure and defiance, body language raised to a holler. Events unfolded perfectly for the TV crews and photographers. Backlit in the soft evening sunlight, Diana bounded from a black Jaguar, smile radiant as she double-kissed her

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host, Lord Palumbo, startled and beguiled, half a head shorter but standing proxy for every red-blooded man watching that night. The *Sun* captured it the next morning: **'THE THRILLA HE LEFT TO WOO CAMILLA'**.

The headline writers judged Charles's big moment on TV much more harshly. Yes, he made a halting admission of adultery, with an unspecified partner, but when two and a half hours of unwrapping revealed such a trifling gift, the prince won far less sympathy than he may have felt was his due. What emerged was less mea culpa than woe is me, bemoaning the utter beastliness of a foundered marriage, leaving one forced, obliged almost, to take up with an old flame. Would not anyone? Charles had squirmed and contorted, straining for the mot juste in a way which seemed intended to make what he said appear especially profound, that extraordinarily he had been singled out to face an ordeal which few had experienced and few could possibly comprehend. I talked about this with Sir Max Hastings, the distinguished writer, former newspaper editor and an acquaintance of Prince Charles at that time. He said, 'With the Prince of Wales, you can always see this poor man asking himself, "How do I feel about this? How do I see this?"

'He spent maybe an hour and a half at the dinner table, with just me and Nicholas Soames, banging on and on, quite soon after the separation from Diana, about how ghastly everything was. How nobody understood it. After literally an hour and a half of uninterrupted monologue I said, "Look, sir. All three of us around this table have broken marriages. But there comes a moment when we have to recognize that we're all, even you, sir, deeply privileged people. And we've just got to shut up and get on with it."

'He didn't like this at all. Banged his fists on the table so

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that all the china rattled. He did not like anybody contradicting him. And he said, "Nobody but me can possibly understand how utterly bloody it is to be Prince of Wales!"

'Nicholas Soames behaved wonderfully on that occasion. Nicholas was always accused of being a courtier who sucked up to him, but on that occasion Nicholas said, "No, sir, no, sir. Max is absolutely right, sir! We must box on, sir, box on!"

'And he didn't like that either!'

The truth is that Prince Charles was far more conflicted during that interview than even his tortured delivery conveys. I was given special insight into the making of the ITV documentary because it was my father-in-law, Christopher Martin, who spent two years at the prince's side, filming roughly 180 hours' worth of material, whittled down to the film's 150 minutes. The unseen footage, surrendered to the prince's people at the end of the process, is today held in a vault at Windsor Castle and would provide fascinating material for any future historian lucky enough to study it. For what we see on-screen is only half the truth. Take *two*. When first challenged to confirm or deny his adultery Prince Charles refused.

So what changed his mind? To answer that we need to look at the genesis of the television film, in those years when the 'War of the Waleses' was at its height. Remarkably, the wrecking ball which was ultimately to strike Diana was set swinging by her husband's profound concern for architecture. Charles's belief in TV as a potent weapon stemmed from a rare moment when he'd discovered that a deeply held personal belief could actually win him admirers rather than mockery. Constantly derided for what most of the papers portrayed as hippy nonsense, homeopathy, talking to the

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Highgrove shrubbery, Charles discovered that when he talked about architecture people seemed happy to listen. More than that, his pronouncements had a dramatic effect – plans for buildings he considered inappropriate were magically swept away. Here, if only in one aspect of life, was what it *should* be like to be king.

Charles's partner and enabler in this field was Christopher Martin, a long-time producer and director in the BBC department of Music and Arts. In the early 1980s Christopher picked up on Charles's sparring with architecture's avant-garde, whom he saw as wanton destroyers of a precious heritage. This was the time of Charles's famous denunciation of the proposed extension to London's National Gallery, a 'monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend'. Amid a huge media fuss the public sided mainly with the prince. Christopher spoke with Charles, offering prime airtime if the prince cared to put his case on BBC1. The resulting film, *HRH The Prince of Wales: A Vision of Britain*, aired in October 1988 and was an enormous success. The prince spoke wisely, informedly, and the papers loved him for it. Buoyed with this success Christopher proposed broadening the scope, to show Charles's concern for the environment. In 1990 the BBC broadcast *HRH The Prince of Wales: The Earth in Balance*, warning of an unfolding ecological horror story. Again, a hit with the public, a second proud feather in Charles's cap.

And so negotiations began for a far more ambitious project, difficult now not to imagine under what would have been a much simpler title: *Charles: The Movie*. It would go much further than the previous films, offering Charles the opportunity to do more than simply bat for elegant buildings and nature. This time he would be batting for himself,

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demonstrating his desire to make the country he would one day rule a somewhat better place than he'd found it. And this new film would be an independent production, with Christopher quitting the BBC after more than twenty years' service, offering the prince to the corporation's main rival instead. Three decades ago royals on TV were a much rarer sight than they have become, and ITV jumped at what they judged would be a ratings triumph in the UK and sell briskly abroad. Christopher assembled a team to trail the prince right around the world, from Mexico to the Middle East, Scotland to Australia, with the celebrated journalist Jonathan Dimbleby, then compiling his authorized biography of the prince, called in at key moments to conduct the interviews. The entire budget for such an undertaking? At today's prices, perhaps £2 million.

The aim was to portray the prince as a serious man, doing serious things, a broadsheet blast against tabloid sniping. But as the team gathered material on a vast range of lofty subjects, events from the tackier side of life began to intrude. On 16 June 1992 a book appeared which was very different from the usual stream of lightweight gossip. Andrew Morton's book *Diana: Her True Story* was published amid a colossal media storm and clearly offered something in a wholly different category from simple tabloid rumours of a rift between the royal couple. Here was a book, rumoured to be endorsed by Diana herself, describing a life so wretched that she had tried to kill herself. And there was another character now in the cast. Charles's lover, Camilla.

At first the documentary makers were as horrified, as unbelieving, as the rest of the population. Talking soon after with Richard Aylard, private secretary to the prince, Christopher expressed his astonishment that something so

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outrageously false could be published at all. 'Yes,' came the reply. 'The problem is, it's all true.' In December 1992, at the end of that *annus horribilis*, Charles and Diana announced their formal separation. And by now the commissioners at ITV had begun to twitchily enquire whether the time spent with Charles, two years at the battlefront, would yield something more than monologues about racial harmony, youth clubs and organic fertilizer. What about the shagging?

It was these hard-faced commissioners, £2 million in the hole, who ultimately tipped the balance and brought about the public confession which, certainly in its secondary effect, changed history. In late 1993 Jonathan Dimbleby had been called to conduct a major set-piece interview with Prince Charles, in St George's Chapel close to Windsor Castle. Here is where Charles revealed his view that the historic title of the British monarch as 'Defender of the Faith', current since the days of Henry VIII, was outdated. Rather than '*the* Faith', implying a staunch defence of the Established Church, Charles said that he would prefer 'Defender of *Faith*', a kumbaya-ish embracing of all things spiritual from Anglicanism to Zen. And then, with one good story in the bag, Dimbleby shifted tack, with words to this effect: 'There has been speculation about your marriage, about your difficult relations with the Princess of Wales. How much of that is justified?' I have only a summary of the encounter, never having viewed the actual footage. But at this point Charles paused, for rather a long time. The pause endured. And then he replied, to the effect of: 'These are personal matters. The speculation you have talked about is not a helpful thing.'

He knew where Dimbleby wanted to take him, but he would not follow. Adultery was off the table. Dimbleby, Christopher and the crew packed up their cameras and lights.

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Reporting back to their ITV commissioners, their paymasters, they had good news and bad. The good? A humongous kerfuffle over governance of the Anglican Church. Probably screaming headlines in the *Church Times*. Back of the net.

And Camilla?

Dimbleby and Christopher knew they were powerless on how far Prince Charles could be pushed. Royals do not do contracts, guarantees of revelation. But when the filmmakers were told by ITV's executives to go back to Charles's people, to lean on the flunkeys one more time, they knew there was at least a glimmer of hope. Did Charles seriously believe he could be allowed more than two hours in the nation's ear without telling it the single thing it was yearning to hear? This made for a powerful argument, but there was an additional strand, one which appeared sensible at the time but proved fatally mistaken. If the tabloid machine ran on the fuel of speculation, then why not cut off that fuel, in order that the machine would stop?

Christopher and Dimbleby returned for talks with Aylard and put forth just such a case for confession. Only say yes, adultery happened, with Camilla Parker Bowles, and from that point on there will be nothing for the horrid journalists to speculate about. Aylard reported this fresh approach. But Charles was receiving conflicting advice, some of it from one of the wisest journalists in the land. Max Hastings told me, 'I wrote to the Prince of Wales at some length about the whole Dimbleby project. And I said, "You are potty if you think that telling all could possibly do you personally, or the monarchy, any good. The only sensible way to behave in these situations is to say nothing, say nothing, and let the other side make mistakes."

'Throughout this whole ghastly drama all the parties

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involved kidded themselves that telling their side of it to newspapers or television companies was somehow going to make things better. All it did was, at every turn, give the story new legs. And, of course, it was great for newspaper sales and television audiences. I think it was pretty awful for the monarchy.'

The prince pondered, knowing that the way he was perceived for evermore would now hinge on this single decision. He reflected further. And then the fatal deal was done. As Aylard told Christopher, surprised but hugely relieved, regarding the tabloid newshounds on Camilla's scent: 'We've decided to shoot their fox!'

The setting decided upon for this final critical encounter was the place where Charles would feel most comfortable, literally at home, Highgrove, the prince's eighteenth-century estate in Gloucestershire. In the film we see Dimbleby and Charles stroll amiably through the garden, nonchalant, talking flowers but clearly headed to conduct important business of some kind. Once indoors, the mood of the interview is set from the beginning.

> DIMBLEBY: The most damaging charge that is made, in relation to your marriage, is that you were, because of your relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles, from the beginning, persistently unfaithful to your wife and thus caused the breakdown. What is your response to that persistent criticism?
>
> CHARLES: Oh, that's the persistent criticism, is it?

The prince's retort comes across as petulant, a final squeak of defiance. It establishes the tone which runs throughout

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the interview, building to its unsatisfactory climax, the clip which fuelled headlines then and has been replayed countlessly over thirty years.

DIMBLEBY: Did you try to be faithful and honourable to your wife when you took on the vow of marriage?

CHARLES: Yes. Absolutely.

DIMBLEBY: And you were?

CHARLES: Yes. Until it became irretrievably broken down. Us both having tried.

Dimbleby adopts the tone of a legal inquisitor, his questions precise and unrelenting. But this is the gentle probing of the defending silk, the friend who has got your back, not the prosecutor drawing the net slowly tighter around his prey. Patrick Jephson, Diana's private secretary at this time, told me, 'What is significant is the prince uses this term "irretrievably broken down". That's a piece of legalese. It's not a natural thing to say. What was glossed over was the question of whether the marriage was broken by the adultery, or did the adultery happen because of the breakage? And I would say, having observed these people over a long period at close range, the adultery came first.'

The who, what, why, where and when remained unexplored, leaving Dimbleby's client unchallenged, allowed to fill the void with a facial pantomime evoking by turns pain, wisdom, sorrow and regret, but for what we are never entirely clear. The impression is of a man who is certainly sorry for himself, regretful of where life has led him, but faintly shifty, faintly weird. In Max Hastings' words: 'This

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was the absolute reverse of Diana. When you went to see Diana she was brilliant at pretending to be a normal human being. Every time I came out of a conversation with her, I'd always think she's brilliant at simulating frankness. She appears to be really telling it like it is, which is quite a gift. None of the rest of them know how to pretend to be normal human beings.'

The film finally wound to a halt at 10.30 p.m. On a day which saw Charles come close to death on a remote Hebridean landing strip, a story which would normally have claimed top spot on the front pages was beaten by his own television appearance. But the *Daily Mail* forged a link between the two, carrying a photograph of the crippled airliner and asking: **'ANOTHER ERROR OF JUDGEMENT?'** Charles has never since piloted an aircraft.

Tabloid editors appear to have presumed that their readers would condemn Charles's boldness. The *Daily Mirror* next day carried the banner headline **'NOT FIT TO REIGN'**, while the *Sun* declared readers had jammed its switchboard because 'they did not want an adulterer on the throne'. But by the weekend it was all change, an indication perhaps that those editors had misread the tea leaves. Opinion appeared to have swung through 180 degrees, the *Mirror* revealing an opinion poll which showed 61 per cent support for the prince, the *Sun* reporting that 'thousands of *Sun* readers flooded our hotline with calls of support'. Charles appeared to have pulled off a victory – if not the six–nil virtuoso triumph he had expected then at least a hard-won one–nil, after extra time. But as history has shown, the response of millions of newspaper readers was inconsequential, set aside the reaction of a single individual.

The most important of the 13 million viewers was the

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one who had not watched the programme at all that night. Viewed on tape, Charles's halting half-confession – the public embracing of Camilla as a 'great friend' yet with no explicit admission that she was his lover – put Diana into an icy rage, oddly tinged with a sense of exultant relief. Suddenly, after two years of Palace disdain for having briefed Andrew Morton, Diana felt herself to be back on the moral high ground. Patrick Jephson told me, 'She was vindicated. She said to me, "Patrick, now people can see what we've been dealing with." And, of course, for Diana's divorce lawyers, it was an absolute gift because at that stage the lawyers were engaged in a protracted legal dance to gain advantage in the litigation. This was a spectacular own goal.' In a way that is intriguing considering what came later: Diana had learned just how damaging a television interview could be. Jephson said, 'I think it was a huge mistake and rebounded badly against the prince. But her main concern was for William and Harry. This was something that had not been previously discussed with them and it was a terrible thing to discover in that way.'

Charles's decision to ignore his instinct for discretion, to allow take two and admit adultery, would reap a bitter harvest. Diana's revenge would come, on 20 November 1995, certainly not determined by Charles's interview, though perhaps somehow *permitted* by it. And what a difference there would be in the delivery. Where Charles had struggled with each agonized sentence, Diana would sparkle and dance through almost an hour of candid-sounding eloquence. But she would leave out, as we will see, almost all that she believed to be *truly* important, *truly* scary. The secrets which she had been told by Martin Bashir.

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2. How Much Is True?

The long road leading to Martin Bashir's *Panorama* interview, in turn to the horror of Paris's Pont de l'Alma tunnel in 1997, can be traced back to a far more prosaic setting, a junction on the A1199 at Snaresbrook, in the eastern suburbs of London, on a rain-drenched night eight years earlier. There, where Hermitage Walk joins the Woodford Road, a little after 10.15 p.m. on 14 May 1987, blue ambulance lights played over a small scene of tragedy.

A red Ford Fiesta, dented and slewed sideways in the road; an overturned Suzuki GS400 motorbike with the body of its helmeted passenger lying close by. 'The man appeared to be dead when I reached him. There was no movement,' said a GP who had been driving past and stopped to help. The mundane horror of just another dreadful road accident was in this case far more. The man lying dead on the wet tarmac had been, in Princess Diana's words, 'the greatest love I've ever had'. And because of that, she said, he had been murdered.

The dead man was thirty-nine-year-old Barry Mannakee, who only nine months earlier had been Diana's police bodyguard. He was a plain-clothes sergeant, married, good-looking in a TV detective kind of way, appointed in April 1985 to guard William and Harry as well as their mother, a job which involved shadowing the princess both in the UK and on tours to Italy, Australia and America. At that point in time the royal marriage was less than five years old. The

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evidence on the exact nature of Diana's relationship with her bodyguard is mixed and it would be unfair to dwell on whether he offered merely emotional support or something more. Either way, in July 1986 Sgt Mannakee was abruptly switched to other duties after rumours of what was called 'over-familiar behaviour' began to spread from palace circles to Scotland Yard.

It is Diana's response to Barry Mannakee's death which matters. Andrew Morton, the journalist she briefed, secretly over a long period, for his revelatory book published in June 1992, told me, 'When I was first involved with Diana back in 1991, the first question she asked me was, "Was Barry Mannakee murdered by the security forces?" You could say it was him that got me the gig. And she asked me that question because she'd had an affectionate relationship with him, and she'd always had suspicions. It showed you what was brewing inside her mind on a daily basis.'

When in 2005 police came to investigate claims that the bodyguard had been done away with, perhaps by British secret services, to prevent a scandal emerging, they recorded that Diana many times had expressed her belief that this was murder. Detectives noted how Diana had reported her suspicions to Inspector Ken Wharfe, Sgt Mannakee's successor as bodyguard; to Paul Burrell, her butler; to two subsequent boyfriends, James Hewitt and Hasnat Khan. But most remarkably we can hear Diana's own words; we can see her describing the relationship and outlining her belief that her former minder had been taken out.

In late 1992 Diana had set out to improve her public-speaking style, to do away with the slightly daffy voice of the Sloane Ranger. Diana decided that in future all public pronouncements would be delivered in a way that commanded

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respect and inspired belief. And so she hired an expert, a former *Coronation Street* actor turned voice coach called Peter Settelen, part of whose method involved shooting clips of his pupils on the clunky video recorders available thirty years ago, to watch and analyse later. He recommended that Diana choose subjects which were deeply personal, drawing out emotion and honesty. Recorded in the sitting room at Kensington Palace, Diana had no idea that what she put on tape would ever go beyond those walls. The material was indeed kept under lock and key within the palace, only reaching the public domain seven years after Diana's death. It is remarkable to study the grainy footage, Diana relaxed, laughing occasionally, sharing what it is impossible to believe is anything other than the truth, at least as she saw it.

'I'll tell you one of the biggest crushes of my life, which I don't find easy to discuss. When I was twenty-four or twenty-five I fell deeply in love with someone who worked in this environment. And he was the greatest friend I ever had. I was always wandering around trying to see him. I just, you know, wore my heart on my sleeve and was only happy when he was around. I was like a little girl in front of him the whole time.

'It got so difficult. People got so jealous and bitchy in this house and eventually he had to go. It was all found out and he was chucked out and then he was killed. Charles said to me, "He was killed in a motorbike accident." And that was the biggest blow of my life I must say. I think he was bumped off.

'I used to have really disturbing dreams about him. And he was very unhappy wherever he's gone to, and so I went and found out where he was buried and I went to put some flowers on his grave. And the day I did that the dreams stopped. It's strange, isn't it?

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'I should never have played with fire and I did. I got very burned.'

Diana did in fact question the terrifying prospect that Barry Mannakee, the father of two young daughters, had been murdered, all because of her, and it is uncomfortable to imagine Diana's fear, curdled with guilt. In 1991 she asked Andrew Morton to discover what he could about the incident and a short time later the reporter relayed his findings: the motorbike had collided with a car being driven by trainee beauty therapist Nicola Chopp, a seventeen-year-old who had passed her driving test only six weeks earlier and caused the motorbike to swerve by performing a dangerous right turn. Admitting dangerous driving, she was fined £85 and surely sounded the least likely agent to be involved in a secret service-inspired assassination. Nonetheless, Morton said, 'I told Diana that. And whilst the logic of it was there, and whilst the evidence was there, she never really believed that. She always felt that some unseen forces had engineered that death.'

Barry Mannakee's death remains just one of the extraordinary events in Diana's story which provide rich material for conspiracy theorists. In a parallel to the notorious 'blinding white light' said to have disoriented chauffeur Henri Paul on the night of Diana's deadly crash, police investigators themselves suggested that the bright lights of a mystery vehicle could have been a factor in the collision in east London. Miss Chopp, at the wheel of the Ford Fiesta, would say in 2003, 'I do believe that accidents can be arranged and that something suspicious happened that night.' Barry Mannakee's brother-in-law, Richard Emmins, spoke in 2017 about his continuing doubts: 'First, my brother-in-law has this accident, then Diana dies in a Paris car crash. But trying to get

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to the truth will probably be impossible.' There, that lingering doubt, even from people who attended Sgt Mannakee's inquest, who will have studied the police reports line by line.

So what did Diana truly believe? Someone whose judgement counts is Patrick Jephson, Diana's private secretary between 1988 and 1996, who spent virtually every working day with the princess during those turbulent years. I have discussed these things many times with him. In his view it is only possible to understand how Diana and Martin Bashir came together, in fatal combination, by looking at the extraordinary build-up to autumn 1995. Patrick said to me, 'Who could have predicted half the things that had happened in the preceding five, ten years? It was hard work to decide what was real, what was unreal, what was believable, what was malicious. So it may seem naive of her, but in the context, it's not so far-fetched. It may seem strange that she would believe these things, but let me tell you, from my own experience, you didn't know what was coming from day to day.'

I have talked about these things too with Diana's brother, Charles Spencer. He told me, 'Diana didn't start off her adult life in an unhappy place, or one verging on paranoia. But I think repeated extraordinary revelations in public had left her very vulnerable and very suspicious. She was not academic, but she had a very clever mind, she had a very high emotional intelligence. And I think it really played on that clever, alert mind. There was a feeling among all of us who cared for, and loved, Diana that she was very beleaguered and was up against a big opponent and we felt beholden to help.'

Another person Diana confided in at this time was the then thirty-eight-year-old *Daily Mail* journalist Richard Kay, who told me, 'I knew her socially as a friend, as well as being a

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