*The Palace Papers: Inside the House of Windsor- the Truth and the Turmoil* by Tina Brown

A group of people posing for the camera

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**Tuesday Night Book Discussion | 2/14/23 @ 7pm | Adult Program Room**

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**Author Bio**

Tina Brown is an award-winning journalist, editor and author. Between 1979 and 2001, she was editor-in-chief of Tatler, Vanity Fair, The New Yorker and Talk. For her services to journalism, she was awarded the honor of Commander of the Order of the British Empire by H.M. Queen Elizabeth in 2000. She was inducted into the Magazine Editors’ Hall of Fame in 2007. In 2008, Brown launched and edited the digital news site The Daily Beast which won the news website of the year award in 2012 and 2013. She founded Women in the World in 2009 as a live journalism platform for female leaders, CEO’s, celebrities, and global activists and hosted ten sold-out summits at New York’s Lincoln Center from 2010 to 2020.

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**Book Summary**

The gripping inside story of the British royal family’s battle to overcome the dramas of the Diana years—only to confront new, twenty-first-century crises. “Never again” became Queen Elizabeth II’s mantra shortly after Princess Diana’s tragic death. More specifically, there could never be “another Diana”—a member of the family whose global popularity upstaged, outshone, and posed an existential threat to the British monarchy. Picking up where Tina Brown’s masterful *The Diana Chronicles* left off, *The Palace Papers* reveals how the royal family reinvented itself after the trau­matic years when Diana’s blazing celebrity ripped through the House of Windsor like a comet.

Brown takes readers on a tour de force journey through the scandals, love affairs, power plays, and betrayals that have buffeted the monarchy over the last twenty-five years. We see the Queen’s stoic resolve after the passing of Princess Margaret, the Queen Mother, and Prince Philip, her partner for seven decades, and how she triumphs in her Jubilee years even as family troubles rage around her. Brown explores Prince Charles’s determination to make Camilla Parker Bowles his wife, the tension between William and Harry on “different paths,” the ascendance of Kate Middleton, the downfall of Prince Andrew, and Harry and Meghan’s stunning decision to step back as senior royals. Despite the fragile monarchy’s best efforts, “never again” seems fast approaching.

Tina Brown has been observing and chronicling the British monarchy for three decades, and her sweeping account is full of powerful revelations, newly reported details, and searing insight gleaned from remarkable access to royal insiders. Stylish, witty, and erudite, The Palace Papers will irrevocably change how the world perceives and under­stands the royal family.

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**Book Reviews**

[LA Times](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2022-04-25/royal-chronicler-tina-browns-prescription-for-william-kate-dont-ever-change)

The story of Britain’s royal family, in the hands of Tina Brown, is a sort of high-spirited tragedy. As its sprawling sloth and dwindling defensibility make it more vulnerable to tides of public feeling, the House of Windsor seems doomed to repeat its errors until it either unravels or assumes a new form. The tension between the dynastic demands of the crown and the mortal foibles of those charged with its survival does no one any good — royal noses are ever bloody. “Can the monarchy survive?” asks the back cover of Brown’s fifth book, “The Palace Papers.”

Brown’s bestselling “The Diana Chronicles” was an empathetic but unsentimental biography that subjected the Firm to a forensic examination of its limitations. Now, in the year of Queen Elizabeth II’s platinum jubilee, its sequel, subtitled “Inside the House of Windsor — the Truth and the Turmoil,” delivers an updated prognosis.

Things don’t look good.

Although the queen, 96, occupies a position of near-invincible high esteem, there is, per Brown, a “low-grade fever” of uncertainty about what will happen once “London Bridge is down” (the code words expected to be uttered upon her death). Recent scandals, including allegations of racism in the royal family and the revelation of ties between “coroneted sleaze machine” Prince Andrew and serial sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, raise urgent questions about the monarchy’s viability in the 21st century.

New and resurfaced claims uncovered by Brown are sure to fan the media firestorm: “resentments greater than is widely known” between Princes William and Harry; Prince Andrew snubbing his hosts to watch porn for two days on a private trip to Palm Springs; Harry calling his future father-in-law, in the hospital after a second heart attack, to berate him over his media-management style.

“The Palace Papers” depicts a crown single-minded in its survival drive, with the queen its ruthless instrument. Her determination to avoid a second Diana-like strike on her authority and credibility underpins every major maneuver of the last quarter-century. As of now, Prince Andrew and the California-based Sussexes, whose recent actions have all represented potentially existential threats to the monarchy, have been largely frozen out, while the family members who have thrived in “the Windsor fishbowl” are those most closely aligned with its safe passage.

Brown’s admiration for the people in this latter category, notably Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, is rooted in their temperaments rather than their ancestry. Diana, though of noble birth, had been too volatile, too big for the brand. “What a pity that the Queen,” Brown writes, “so gifted at reading the bloodlines of horses, misread so profoundly the Spencers’ suitability to join with royal stock.”

The mistake would not be repeated when Prince William married Kate Middleton. Though some questioned “whether a girl of such unexalted origins could ever successfully evolve into a future queen,” Brown writes, “[n]ow the only question is how the House of Windsor could survive without her.” She has become, in the last decade, “a savvy dynastic strategist who wholeheartedly buys into both the monarchy’s mission of duty and its priority of survival.”

Of course, the monarchy’s survival is in the interests of not just the Windsors and their more loyal subjects but also the media. It’s unsurprising, then, that Brown’s position should seem instinctively conservative. Palace politics has been one of her beats since she resuscitated Tatler in the ’80s; Diana was a subject of major scrutiny when she edited Vanity Fair. Brown is part of the palace-press industrial complex.

That’s not to say she pulls her punches: Brown is notably (and rightfully) pugnacious in chapters on Prince Andrew, the “Duke of Hazard,” and completely undazzled by the idea of royal life — “like being a battery hen in the Waldorf Astoria.” Nevertheless, there’s no republican fervor animating her prose, no questioning that success for the royal family will come through continuity rather than upheaval.

This is perhaps why the reforming Meghan Markle, a Hollywood outsider uncharmed by the Windsor way, receives such opprobrium. As Brown accurately observes, in the wake of the “ballyhooed” Oprah Winfrey special in 2021, “the younger generation was ardently on Team Meghan for saving her sweet, sexy husband from his crusty, clueless relations.”

Brown is not on Team Meghan. In her portrayal, Markle is a ruthless social climber, a maker of “strategic besties” whose wedding guest list was “a portrait not of Meghan’s intimate circle but of the friends she most wanted to recruit.” Brown is sharply, unfairly skeptical of Meghan’s complaints to Oprah about the prison of royal life: “Even in London, it’s possible to disappear. Isn’t that what the private dining rooms at Soho House are for?” In one of the book’s harsher analogies, she compares the Sussexes’ decision to step back as senior working royals to the military withdrawal from Afghanistan — “a necessary end executed with maximum chaos.”

The message for Meghan is clear: “Celebrities flare and burn out. The monarchy plays the long game.” So too, it seems, does the establishment commentariat.

Still, Brown is a deft and wily royal chronicler, marshaling a heavy arsenal of details into a wickedly edible narrative. Her cynical eye and free indirect narrative sustain and synthesize a range of viewpoints, and she’s retained the editor’s knack for devastating capsule descriptions: “Princess Michael of Kent, the Silesian interloper and former interior designer”; “alligator-faced despot Robert Mugabe”; Prince Andrew, a “divorced horndog eternally on the hunt.” There are some juicy new bits, not least the sinister moment when Epstein sneaks vaporously into the offices of the Daily Beast to threaten Brown over the publication of stories about him.

On balance, though, the snappy title, which riffs on other notorious papers (Pentagon, Panama, Paradise), insinuates an intensity and frisson this chunky volume doesn’t quite earn. Royal watchers won’t be much fazed by the new material, and all the “I am told”s in the world can’t match the thrill of a devastating on-the-record scoop. With its large, ensemble cast, the book lacks the focus that made “The Diana Chronicles” so satisfying; it also lacks historical distance. This story has no meaningful end — not yet.

The next act in the Windsor tragedy will bring with it seismic change. While “The Palace Papers” doesn’t necessarily offer fresh insights into how the crown — or the country — will cope, it is nevertheless an excellent primer for the unpredictable years ahead. The season finale awaits.

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[The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/apr/23/the-palace-papers-by-tina-brown-review-the-good-the-bad-and-the-indefensible)

The fascination of monarchy is that its themes repeat themselves because its protagonists are earthly,” is Tina Brown’s conclusion to The Palace Papers, her latest book about the British royal family. This is a very Tina Brown way of saying – after more than 500 exhaustive pages of Windsor arcana – “Oh well, we’re all human.” In fact, I think the fascination of the monarchy is that no matter how many books are written about them, and no matter how hagiographic they intend to be, there’s always some new information within that proves they’re even more repulsive than you originally thought.

This is genuinely impressive – superhuman, even – given that the Windsor’s shenanigans are about as unexamined as the assassination of JFK. I’m no royalist – after all, I do work for the Guardian, which Brown describes as “mercurial” and “sour” due to its rude republicanism – but hey, I watched The Crown. I’ve even read Brown’s previous royal book about that similarly untapped subject, The Diana Chronicles. I’m up on the royals, OK? Or so I thought until I read in The Palace Papers about Charles’s other mistress in the 1970s and possibly 80s, Dale Harper, who was dropped by Charles for being too keen on him. Later she fell out of a window and was paralysed below the waist. When she “frantically pursued Charles in her wheelchair” at a polo match in 1997, he issued “a chilly statement saying they were no longer the friends they once were”. Or how about this one, which was told to Brown by “an American media executive” about the time he had lunch with Sarah Ferguson in 2015: “Andrew came in and sat down and said to me, ‘What are you doing with this fat cow?’ I was so stunned by his level of sadism. She has to sing for her supper.” In other words, Brown concludes: “He bails her out when she’s in trouble, and she backs him up when he’s assailed by scandal.”

Brown gets in an even more satisfying dig at Andrew by making good use of the unpublished memoir of Virginia Giuffre, who claims she was forced by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell to have sex with Andrew three times. The first of these encounters, Giuffre writes in her memoir, was “the longest ten minutes of my life”. (Andrew, famously, denies he ever met Giuffre.) Even the revered Queen is diminished by some of the claims. Most people know she went away for weeks at a time when she was a young mother. But I did not know that, after a six-week trip to Malta when he was 12 months old, “instead of rushing straight back to see Charles at Sandringham as one might expect, she lingered in London for a few days, catching up on admin and attending an engagement at Hurst Park Races where she had a horse riding,” Brown writes. She missed both Charles’s second and third Christmases and his third birthday. Really puts that modern parental guilt about going out two evenings in one week into perspective, doesn’t it?

Yet Brown doesn’t want her readers to hate the royals, which is always the problem with books about them. The royals, like celebrities, only matter as much as people believe they matter, and a book just about Andrew’s awfulness and Charles’s pettiness would be true,but would also make the reader question just why they are reading about this absurd, irrelevant family. Current events, however, are in Brown’s favour as they have enabled her to play a double game. So in The Palace Papers there are the Good Royals – the Queen, Prince Philip and the Cambridges – who are written about in prose worthy of Mills & Boon (“There’s a Mona Lisa quality to Kate,” Brown writes, presumably without throwing up on her own keyboard). Then there are the Bad Royals – Prince Andrew, Sarah Ferguson, the Sussexes – who get a thorough kicking. Prince Charles is neutral, the others non-existent. In other words, she’s pretty much sticking to the script of the palace’s current PR strategy, which has cut the deadwood adrift and focused the spotlight entirely on the Queen and the Cambridges.

In regard to the Sussexes, Brown is assisted in her endeavours by Meghan Markle’s father, Thomas, who adds Brown to the long list of journalists to whom he has trashed his daughter. Brown duly rewards him by defending his indefensible behaviour, insisting that Prince Harry made Thomas feel “disempowered, perhaps even emasculated” when he asked his father-in-law to please stop talking to the press. And that’s another interesting thing about the royals: as bad as they all are, the bottom-feeders around them are even worse.

For those who haven’t encountered Brown’s writing before, The Palace Papers provides all the greatest hits. There’s her fondness for introducing people with often baffling descriptions: “the galloping Major Shand”; “a blonde dazzler with amazing legs”; and – my personal favourite – “With her tumbling mane of red curly hair and vulpine networking skills, Rebekah Brooks was lethally successful at penetrating the political and media corridors of power.” There’s also her usual balancing act of being both an insider (one person is introduced to the reader as “my pew mate at Lord Lichfield’s memorial”), but also enough of an outsider to describe Prince and Princess Michael as “low-boil, money-grubbing embarrassment[s]”. It’s a pose she perfected as editor of Tatler, that monthly annual of poshos that alternates obsequiousness with objectivity, and as with Tatler, it’s not hard to detect where Brown’s sympathies ultimately lie: the sad state of the British upper classes in the early 2000s is exemplified, Brown suggests, by the sight of “Brigadier Parker Bowles on the London tube, strap-hanging in his morning suit”.

You can’t write as much about the royals as Brown has without taking them seriously, and she absolutely does. Her writing becomes positively orgasmic when describing Kate’s alleged triumph in bagging William: “Kate did not wait eight years for any rich, connected man. She waited for the man – the future King William V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her Other Realms and Territories King, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith – Your Majesty to the rest of us.” She gives poor Prince Philip a death scene that would have made even Charles Dickens say: “Tina, mate, come on. Dial it down a bit.”

But Brown is also an absolutely dogged researcher. A significant part of The Palace Papers seems to be gleaned from earlier, very well known books (Diana by Andrew Morton, The Insider by Piers Morgan, Diary of an MP’s Wife by Sasha Swire). Even so, she dredges up enough colour to enliven the outlines of this all-too familiar story. And by God, it’s familiar. Are there really any readers out there with the stomach to wade through details of Megxit again? More people still agog for the alleged fairytale of Prince William and commoner Kate? Anyone on the planet desperate for another rehash of Charles’s cruelty to Diana? The answer, of course, is yes. And that, really, is the most fascinating thing of all about the royal family.

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