

## Schadenfreude

by MaryPat Campbell

She climbed out of the limousine into the wet, dark evening, lights and cameras clicking and flashing all around her. An aide opened a large black umbrella to shelter her from the rain. Photographers and TV reporters clamoured to get the best shot, hoping in vain for a few words, or at least a smile for the camera, while warning their viewers at home in their living rooms about the flashing lights.

Reporters attempted to describe her designer clothes to us, their viewers. Her jewellery and her make up, comparing her to the last time she was seen in public. Their questions went unasked but were there just the same. Had she lost weight? Was there any sign of vulnerability, what would it be if we could see it – a slight wobble as she stepped out of the car in her impossibly high heels, a faint glimpse of nervousness around her eyes. Perhaps she was not as delighted to see everyone queued up to see her as they thought she would be.

Everyone loves her. We all think we know her, she is royalty of sorts, after all. But then again, very few of us are what we seem. We long to see a tiny shard of fragility, will she allow it. Another part of us wishes her well but mostly we long to know the inside story, and as we don't know it, we make it up.

The eldest in her family, or is she the youngest? She comes from privilege and wealth and has married into an even more privileged, wealthy dynasty. When life gets complicated, she hides away and tells no one where she is. She has many names, all of them roll off our tongues with ease. The child in us longs to be her, to have her wealth and her fame and the love we imagine everyone bestows on her. We wonder who she talks to, who she confides in when times get tough. A part of us thinks times don't get tough for these glittering princesses, and if it does, it serves them right.

If she was my friend, I would sit for hours listening to her. Listening to the enviable life she leads with her glamorous people, ever curious as to who she loves, who loves her, who she feels at ease with. I would long for her to confide in me, and to tell me all her woes. Especially the woes. If we became friends, she might even listen to mine.

I could tell her of the time I spent working behind the scenes in the theatre, happier to be invisible among the props and the costumes than centre stage. I could tell her what it was like to grow up in the shadow of someone who always took centre stage, be it for big or small achievements or no achievement at all.

I wonder if she would understand what it feels like to long to be at the centre of someone's love and attention, while at the same time knowing it was never going to happen.