

# The Princess Diary

*It's an ordinary story – during the 2000 Olympics, a young Australian woman, Mary Donaldson, goes to a pub in Sydney, where she meets and ultimately marries a man named Fred. In this case, however, Fred just happens to be His Royal Highness Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark, heir apparent to the Danish throne. In this exclusive interview, Vogue editor Kristie Clements visits Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Mary in Copenhagen and talks with the newest member of the Danish Royal Family about love, destiny and a fairytale journey that is just beginning.*

Photographed by Regan Cameron

It's a brisk autumn day in Copenhagen, as my taxi heads towards Amalienborg Palace, the Danish royal residence, which is, in actuality, four exquisite palaces grouped around an octagonal courtyard, and situated in the heart of the city.

Of the four, one (Christian IX) is the home of Denmark's reigning monarch Her Majesty Queen Margarethe and her husband His Royal Highness Prince Henrik, while another (Christian VII) is an official palace, used for ceremonial and state purposes. It was here on May 14, 2004, that the Danish people cheered and celebrated as a newly married royal couple appeared on the balcony, the handsome and much loved Crown Prince Frederik and his beautiful new bride, Crown Princess Mary, formerly Mary Donaldson of Tasmania.

By now the world knows the story – on a September evening in 2000, Mary makes a visit with friends to an upmarket pub in the center of Sydney and is introduced to a young man who introduces himself as Frederik. Four years later, the pretty former account manager is now addressed as Her Royal Highness and is destined to become the future Queen of Denmark. It's a remarkable feelgood fairytale, a story of love, a romantic and charming respite from grim world news. It also has every woman in Australia wondering why she wasn't at that bar that evening.

I admit to having a minor obsession with Crown Princess Mary since I sat on the sofa with my mother and watched the royal wedding. Here was an unknown young woman, a commoner so to speak, who looked and behaved so regally, it was as if she were born royal. Her poise, her manner and her calm in the face of such a public wedding were astonishing. The couple appeared to be so much in love, my mother and I had to fetch the tissues, especially when Crown Prince Frederik turned to see his bride walk up the aisle and his eyes welled up with tears of pure joy. I got lost in the romance of it all and the journey she must have made, both mentally and emotionally.

Now, four months, and much correspondence later, I am on my way to the palace to meet with the Crown Princess, accompanied by *Vogue* stylist Trevor Stones and a suitcase full of clothes. As the taxi swings into the courtyard, the Crown Princess's personal assistant rushes forward to meet us, clutching her mobile phone. "Quickly," she says. "Come with me, the Crown Princess is arriving in two minutes."

We leave the car and the clothes to security and bound up the red-carpeted stairs of the palace, this one being Christian VIII. The couple currently lives at Fredensborg Palace, 40 minutes drive north of Copenhagen, while the fourth Amalienborg Palace, Frederik VIII, is being renovated for their future use. We are ushered into a salon, and are just catching our breath when the Crown Princess enters the room and extends her hand with a friendly hello.

Dressed in a beige sweater, tweed pencil skirt and elegant high heels, she looks undeniably chic and relaxed. Her thick auburn hair is loose and shiny, her make-up natural, making the most of her luminous skin. She chats easily; her manner is warm and inclusive. We decide to begin by browsing through the clothes we have chosen for the shoot. Like any woman, the Crown Princess's eyes light up as we go through the fashion, pulling out shoes and jackets and dresses and decides she would like to try absolutely every piece on. I can sense this is going to be fun.

"I've never really thought that much about fashion," she confides to me later over coffee and sandwiches. "My style and work environment was reasonably casual, apart from client meetings. I spent most of my free time pretty much going around in sneakers! Now, obviously the situation has changed quite a bit. It is important that I look smart and elegant and appropriately dressed for every occasion. I'm still developing my style to fit with my new role." Her personal style veers naturally toward the understated: Prada is a current favourite, as are Celine, Alexander McQueen, and designs by Danish designer Marlene Birger, all of which are enhanced by the fact that she has a knockout, sample-size figure and great legs. She also has a clear understanding of how crucial the fashion element is, especially in this day and age. "In the beginning, and it is still the beginning, I was definitely self-conscious. With the cameras on you, you do tend to shrink back a bit, but I'm getting better at it. It's very important when you walk out the door that everything is as it should be, your hat, your skirt, and that you've thought about the wind factor! You need to feel safe, and good and comfortable in what you're wearing."

By all accounts from the young Danish people I spoke to, she's doing a fine job. The Crown Princess is perceived to have a very modern style and her presence front row at the recent Danish Fashion Week helped win favour with the local designers. "I like clothes that are simple with beautiful details. It is good to have fun with clothes, experiment a little," she explains, mentioning Birger and her whimsical, feminine collections with their vintage touches. Being a princess also

comes with its own set of singular challenges, and occasions that would rarely occur in Australia. “Like what do you wear to a lunch, at a hunt, when it’s minus three? Or what do you pack for a royal tour of Greenland?”

Being a modern princess must come with its own set of challenges, full stop, and it’s a subject I broach with the Crown Princess later in the day. Once she realized that marriage was on the horizon, was she ever daunted by the fact that she was about to join a monarchy, and leave behind her previous life? Crown Princess Mary looks reflective. “I’m the sort of person that takes things as they come,” she answers thoughtfully. “I never look too far ahead of myself. The way I came into this situation was gradual. By the point marriage was a consideration, I was too far gone on the personal side to turn back. I was beyond the point of return. I knew I could deal with this because I was in it for all the right reasons. I am with the person that I love.

“But of course there were times when my best friend and I used to joke about it. ‘How did I get myself into this mess?’” she laughs. “It was almost to surreal to actually think about at times. The word surreal is probably one of my most commonly used words right now! So I am lucky that I am of that nature where I tend to take things as they come, otherwise I may have run away from it. Maybe? But I wasn’t in his world, I didn’t see him in his everyday world. I was in Australia. So it came about from a pure place, from love. You really don’t know exactly how you’re going to react in a situation until you’re in that moment so it’s important to focus on that moment.”

I suggest that as one of the world’s oldest monarchies, the Danish Royal Family seems to be very popular, and that she appears to have been very much embraced by the people. “The Danish Royal Family is a part of the Danish identity,” she agrees. “They are extremely well loved. One of the reasons why they are so popular is that they’ve stayed in touch with the people. They’ve meant something. The way I have been received by the people has been overwhelming. One thing what I have done to deserve this? But I have been accepted with such warmth, because they love Frederik and his family.”

I ask her if she believes in destiny. Surely hers is a story that illustrates it more than most? “Destiny is a very big question, I think it’s a comforting and helpful thing have some belief in. It gives you some comfort, that there’s some reason behind why things happen the way they do. Not only the good but also the bad. If you experience a large grief in your life, in order to understand and accept it, you have to believe that here is a reason behind this, something bigger.” I note silently to myself that grief is something the Crown Princess has already experienced, with the death of her mother, Henrietta, in 1997. I glance out into the street below us and see the crowds of tourists staring up at the palace where her younger daughter now lives, and think about fate.

Crown Princess Mary was born in Hobart, Tasmania on February 5, 1972, to parents John Dalgleish Donaldson, a professor of mathematics, and Henrietta Clark Donaldson, and executive assistant at the University of Tasmania. The youngest of four children (there are two sisters, Jane and Patricia, and a brother John), she was always a sporty girl, and excelled in fields such as hockey, swimming, basketball, and horse riding. After graduating from The University of Tasmania in 1994 with a Bachelor of Commerce and Laws, she began working as a graduate for advertising firm DDB Needham in Melbourne. She lived in Melbourne for three years, before resigning from an account manager position with Mojo Partners to follow a dream to travel. Returning to Australia, she was offered an account director role with Young & Rubicam in Sydney. But one visit to an inner-city bar for a drink with friends altered her life forever. "I nearly didn't go that evening," she confesses. "The taxi arrived, and I said, 'Oh, all right' at the last minute and I got in." Crown Princess Mary was working as a sales director at the Belle Property group, which is why she is sometimes referred to as a "former real estate agent" when the decision was made to move a very long way north.

The next day blows cold and blustery as the *Vogue* team gathers into a grand ballroom in the Christian VII Palace. The Crown Princess has driven down from the Fredensborg and is sitting in the make-up chair, joking and laughing with her make-up artist, a large, witty and charismatic man, who looks a lot like Oliver Reed, and is clearly close to her and immediately puts everyone at ease. The Crown Princess is wearing a simple blush-pink sweater with Sass & Bide jeans and loafers, and happily acquiesces when the hairdresser suggests trimming her hair. When the shoot begins, I notice that she has wonderful posture – she has a natural way of standing very straight, and tilting her head back slightly, and to the side, making her look very proper, and very much in control. Her accent is slightly clipped, a sort of upper-crust Euro-English that is common to many expatriates. This is most definitely not a woman who had to undergo "princess training" as many would like to think.

"Ah, the 'grooming school' I supposedly went to," she says with more than a hint of exasperation. "The whole idea that I went to a school of grooming, learning how to walk, learning how to say, 'How do you do'. That didn't happen. I heard that I went to some military school of etiquette." While she was out of the public eye for some months before the wedding, she says time was spent, like any bride, in planning the big day. "There was so much preparation. But most of my time was spent on Danish lessons, and learning the language." While she is now fluent, conversing with all the palace staff in Danish, there are more lessons to come. "It's still frustrating sometimes with the language. I can't get across that extra 20 per cent in some discussions. But there are, luckily for me, many similarities between Australians and Danes so the mental distance has been easier to travel. The Danish have that dry sarcastic sense of humour that Australians have; they don't take themselves too seriously. They really enjoy life."

On set, dressed in a drop-dead-gorgeous black Prada dress, the Crown Princess is starting to feel at ease in front of the camera. There was a moment of tension in the shot before, when as she posed near the balcony door, a crowd of onlookers began to gather below. "I'll have to send the police down," jokes Linda, the housekeeper who is standing by making sure we don't damage any of the royal upholstery with our equipment. "Your Highness, could you please zshoosh your hair," says photographer Regan Cameron in a contemporary take on royal etiquette. I take this opportunity to walk from room to room, drinking in the chandeliers, the carpets, the tapestries, the art, the porcelains. Then I hear someone call my name. "Come look," says the Crown Princess, opening a window in the hallway and looking out into the courtyard. "It's time for the changing of the Guard." I look out with her, and I have to admit the word surreal pops into my head.

The Crown Prince has agreed to be in a photograph with his wife, and at midday he suddenly arrives. We all make reasonably clumsy attempts at bowing as he strides forward and shakes our hands. Handsome and friendly, Crown Prince Frederik also has a habit of winking and laughing as he speaks, the combination of which is devastatingly attractive. He has come equipped with a boom box, as the *Vogue* team had previously requested some background music. Some BB King starts and Cameron suggests the Crown Prince dance with his wife. There is a definite magic in the room, as he spins her around deftly. By the time he plants a kiss on her forehead, it's like no-one else in the room exists. By all accounts, he is a much respected and well-regarded member of the royal family, a modest man at ease with his role. The fact that he chose to marry someone as unpretentious and intelligent as the Crown Princess makes him only more impressive.

Ah, the romance of it all. For at the very heart of this, lies a good, old-fashioned story of falling in love, as though it were written by Hans Christian Andersen. A fairytale wedding, complete with a coach and horses and streets lined with a cheering populace. A teary, love-struck groom. A glowing princess. A proud father of the bride (who also happened to give one hell of a good speech to a television audience of millions). It's every little girl's dream, the stuff of Hollywood movies. Did it all pass in a blur?

"The weeks, actually the months, leading up to the wedding were very full on and the week before we had events on pretty much every day and night. Although the last week before the wedding passed like a blink, it was not a blurred blink," recalls the Crown Princess. "On the day, I had a very relaxed breakfast with all of my family. My sisters, three nieces and my best friend and I all got together and really enjoyed the morning. But when the tiara and the veil went on, well, there were a few tears." I comment that she seemed very composed throughout the entire service.

“There was one point in the church where I got very teary, but perhaps you couldn’t see. It was during the hymn of *Eternal Father* which was included during the ceremony for my mother.

“Driving up to the church and there were all those people cheering...it was...” She breaks off. “It’s a hard thing to explain, to understand that people are celebrating with you. Growing up you always feel that you have to do something in order to deserve people’s admiration and support. I don’t really feel I’ve done so much, all I’ve done is say yes and love the person that I love. I hope to prove worthy of the acceptance I have received from the Danish people.”

I’m still unbelievably impressed. Was she not nervous, or indeed, terrified of all the attention? “My dad was such a comfort, he was fantastic, he was very strong. Just before the doors opened to the church, I had a moment where I had to take some deep breaths and squeeze his hand hard, but when the doors opened the music was so incredibly beautiful, so amazing, it was ethereal. It was like being carried by the music as I walked. A lot of brides say they forget this part, but I remember every step. It made such a huge impression.”

The shoot continues the following day, this time at Fredensborg Palace, where the royal couple is in residence at the Chancellory House. Built in 1720, the palace is surrounded by the most spectacular baroque gardens, 10 hectares of which are private, 90 that are open to the public. The *Vogue* team begins to set up on a sweeping tree-lined avenue leading up to the main palace, the lake behind us. Deer dart through the forest, as the Royal Cavalry arrive for official purposes and station themselves in a courtyard near the palace. The Crown Princess is a keen horsewoman, and we have decided to depict this in the first photograph. The horse arrives in a trailer, a huge muscly beast called Milano, which is kicking impatiently at the doors. The Crown Princess arrives on set, dressed in a floor-length Jean Paul Gaultier couture dress with a sweeping black cape, huge black hat and crocodile Hermès boots. Striding straight over to the horse, she speaks to him in soothing tones, leaning in and showing him her hat which he eyed with suspicion immediately. (I, in the meantime am hovering behind a tree, trying not to show my mortal fear of horses, especially large, irritable ones.) As usual, the Crown Princess is perfectly in control of the situation, despite the freezing wind and a skittish stallion, and the shot is pulled off without a hitch.

A small crowd of onlookers has started to gather behind us, women pushing strollers full of blonde-headed toddlers, who all stand and stare in amazement. The look of delight on their faces is quite touching, as the Crown Princess gives them a little wave and a slightly timid smile. “It’s amazing when I go somewhere and the little kids see me, they get so excited!” she says incredulously. “They jump up and down and call out ‘Mary, Mary!’ which sounds awfully like Marwe, Marwe! Or when an older person takes your hand, covers it with their own and just looks at you. It is just so heart-warming.” She waves her hands at her eyes,

making the gesture of holding back tears. She doesn't know what she has done to deserve this attention, but I get the distinct impression she intends to earn it.

As we know, not all princess stories are a perfect fairytale. While the superficial luxuries of being royal may seem alluring, the role itself comes with enormous pressures, and intense personal scrutiny, even for a monarchy as seemingly low-key as the Danish one. I ask Crown Princess Mary how she would define the role of a modern princess.

"I have asked many times 'Is there a job description please, I'd like a job description, otherwise I can't work!'" she jokes. This makes perfect sense to me, given her previous years of being a career woman. "But seriously, I believe monarchies today are flexible and open enough to allow a modern woman to combine her aspirations with a traditional monarchy," she continues. "There is no pre-defined role for me. Of course, there's the obvious one that everyone is commenting on, that we deliver an heir. That's one role and yes, we want that to happen." The gossip magazines have been speculating endlessly about an imminent pregnancy since the wedding. She doesn't look like she's expecting, and I extend her the courtesy of not asking the question.

"There is a fundamental description of my role – to be a good and effective representative of Denmark and its people, and its interests outside of the country, in culture, arts, education, research, humanitarian projects, to raise interest in societal issues that need to be discussed. As a public person, you have a responsibility on your shoulders to be a good role model, to show good, strong values." I comment that this seems like a very serious and gargantuan task for one young woman.

"I have to believe that I wouldn't be here if I couldn't do this," she answers softly. "But I'm a thinker, I won't say yes to one thing unless I know how it fits into the overall puzzle. There is a lot to weigh up but my biggest hope is to be able to make a difference somewhere. It's a privilege to have this opportunity.

"It's important to look historically, to consider the perimeters and framework in which you're working. It's important to look to and talk with other members of the family about how they have created their role and how they fulfill their role. I have an opportunity to choose and to influence what my role becomes. I'm in a very fortunate situation because I can choose with my heart. I want to take my time with this."

This is something she has clearly given a great deal of thought. "There are so many factors to consider," she says, warming to the subject. "There are the inherited patronages, and then there are the offers that are on the table today and not least, my own wish list. It's not easy to go quickly through all these things. It's important to look at the overall picture – to be sure there is symmetry and meaning across all of it. I don't want to be nothing to everyone. I need to be

committed to an organization, so I can make a difference. It has to be something solid, for Denmark and for me.

“There also has to be a space, that allows me to grow as I develop and become more experienced, so that I can take on new things. I must make sure that from the beginning it’s not too full. Because once you choose, it is pretty much for life. There has to be a percentage left for future development. It is very much like starting a new job or project. And right now I’m in the strategic planning phase!

“Part of me wants it to be done right now, but it is important not to rush. I want to choose carefully, I want to investigate where I can give the benefit of my experience, and my background. Of course, I’ll cut ribbons and so on, that’s important too, but my altruistic nature wants to work for something that will really make a difference. If I have too many patronages that won’t be possible. That’s what I mean about being nothing to everyone. We all want to work on something we’re passionate about, because then you’ll do a damn good job.”

As our afternoon shoot in Fredensborg progresses, more and more people appear in the park, joggers making their daily run, children on bicycles, middle-aged women strolling together. They hang back, keeping a respectful distance as they watch the Crown Princess being photographed, while her two security men stand discreetly nearby. She starts to seem a little self-conscious, a little exposed and is happy when we call it a wrap. As we pile into the Range Rover and drive back to the palace, a group of women wave at the car, beaming with the thrill of seeing the Crown Princess. It is certainly not an anonymous life. How does she cope with all the attention?

“The biggest pressure in my new role is becoming a public person. I’ve never been a person who craved the spotlight. Being a public person takes some getting used to, if one can ever get used to it. Being judged and compared in a way you’ve never experienced is also hard. But one grows stronger from these sorts of pressures. And I have truly wonderful friends, family and support around me.”

Back at Chancellery House, with the session over, we begin to load the equipment into the vans and prepare our departure. The Crown Princess has changed into casual drawstring pants and a cardigan and calls for champagne to toast the shoot. The Crown Prince joins us, offering around a plate of Tim Tams (“Arnotts sent us quite a lot for our wedding!”).

It’s a very relaxed scenario, and as I watch the Crown Prince take Cameron over to the garage to show him his car collection, I marvel at the normalcy of it all. Are they able to behave like any young, newly married couple?

“Yes, we can,” says the Crown Princess hesitatingly. “We do go out for dinner or go to the movies. When we leave there may be a photographer waiting, but not

always!” I ask her if she cooks dinner, for example. “Well, I’m not a great cook, but Frederik cooked last night. Our house is not a palace – it’s palatial in some respects but it’s also *hyggelig* – a Danish words which means a lot more but it best translated as cosy. It is important to keep doing the everyday things, it’s your decision to do them. One could easily get caught up in thinking ‘Oh, if I go there it will be just a hassle’ and deciding therefore not to go.”

But despite all the staff and the royal trimmings, it appears the biggest luxury for a royal is privacy. “That is definitely a luxury,” agrees the Crown Princess. “Not to have people around all the time. We need to be together.” I sense they need some time together now, so for a final question, I ask her which part of this journey has been the most memorable.

“This whole year has been so overwhelming for me.” Then she looks at her husband. “Standing side by side with Frederik in the church. That was the most memorable.”

As we head down the drive to return to Copenhagen, I glance back at the vast and imposing palace, flanked by uniformed guards. I’ve been fortunate enough to get a glimpse of what it’s like to be a princess, and it is extraordinary. But then, Crown Princess Mary is not n ordinary woman. She had exactly what it takes to be modern royalty all along. Crown Prince Frederik just had to go to Sydney to find her.

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