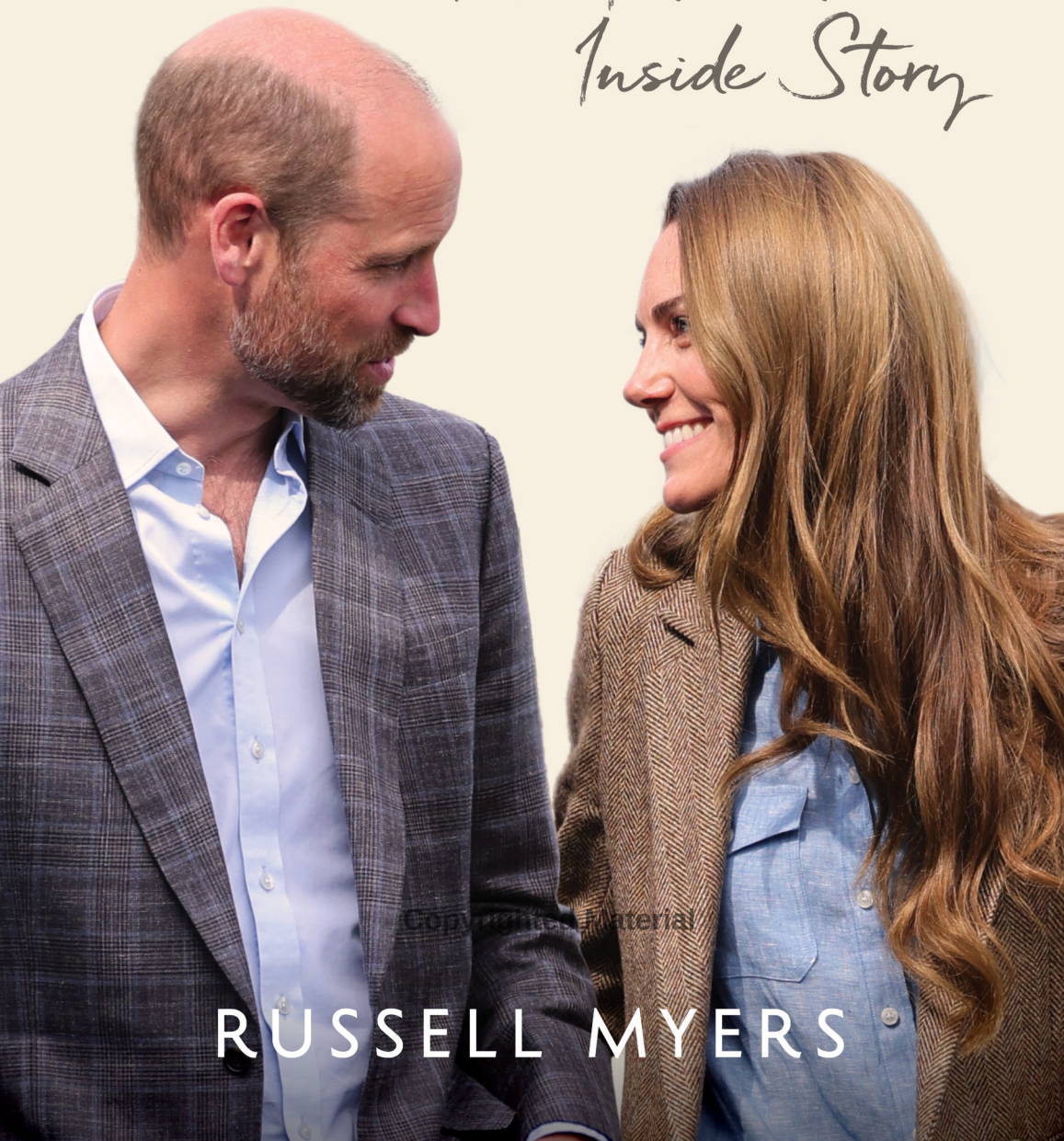
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The Intimate Inside Story



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To Katie,

Always x

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Prince and Princess of Wales as two of the most prominent and popular figures of the British royal family comes at a crucial time in the monarchy's history. William and Catherine embody both the weight of centuries-old tradition and the momentum for modern change. Together, they represent both continuity and the opportunity for the renewal of a one-thousand-year-old institution.

But who are the people behind the titles and what will their legacy be in such a rapidly changing world?

The royal family is in a state of flux not seen for nearly a century. The abdication in 1936 of King Edward VII changed the course of history and laid the foundations for Britain's longest-serving monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, and her family to write their own story. A tenure spanning seven decades may have brought with it a certain level of cohesion and stability, but recent years have seen such infighting and scandal at the heart of the monarchy that questions have been raised as to what purpose the institution really serves.

In producing a comprehensive portrait of the Prince and Princess of Wales, I have sought to reveal the most intimate insight ever documented of their lives as individuals, as well as their time together. Like many, I have been aware of the royal family for as long as I can remember. I was born in the same year as William and Catherine, and we have grown up in a world

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marked by the rapidly evolving values and pace of the twenty-first century.

I have been a journalist for two decades, and for the last eight, as a royal correspondent, I have been fortunate enough to be given a front-row seat to witness these dramatic changes. In that time I have spoken to members of the royal family, prime ministers, private secretaries, courtiers and friends of both the couple and their extended network. What I have since discovered in documenting the lives of two of the most famous people in the world, a sentiment that is almost universally shared by those that know them best, is that the Prince and Princess of Wales have formed a formidable partnership based on love, mutual respect and understanding. Their desire to create a monarchy in their image, that is fit for the modern age and that aligns with their desire to prepare their children for life amid unparalleled public scrutiny, is balanced with their dedication to public service, personal conviction and global visibility. However, in their two decades together, they have been forced to tackle challenges within their relationship, contend with pressure from those closest to them and periods of self-doubt as they have striven to forge their own path.

Despite this, both William and Catherine steadfastly believe that their lives, while anchored in service, must be responsive to the needs and concerns of the people the monarchy seeks to represent. History and duty will of course always be central to the roles they carry out, but amid uncertainty at home and throughout the Commonwealth on the future of the monarchy, questions remain over whether they can learn from the mistakes of the past and convince the public that humanity is at the heart of their mission.

The deaths of Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth II brought a seismic shift, representing the loss of a generation for whom reverence was almost guaranteed. With King Charles III as the

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head of a slimmed-down monarchy, something that has brought its own pressures, the family has had to further contend with the departures of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and the exile in disgrace of the former Duke of York. William and Catherine's personal experiences of these moments are revealed here in great detail, as are their reflections on decisive periods in their lives, in particular their tour of the Caribbean in 2022 and the subsequent health battles faced by the King and the Princess of Wales. All of this has contributed to a renewed outlook on their future and the ways in which they intend to face the challenges of preparing for their roles as king and queen.

While he has spoken of wanting to create 'change for good', William's long-standing commitment to mental health advocacy, environmental conservation and supporting vulnerable communities reveals a consistent focus on causes that transcend national boundaries. In turn, Catherine's thoughtful approach to duty, and her dedication to initiatives centred on early childhood development, family well-being, and mental health have been emboldened by a reverence for life informed by her personal experiences of an existence beyond the institution they both serve.

I am in huge debt to the numerous sources who have been beside William and Catherine for key moments in their lives, and who have so generously given their time and understanding to convey knowledge of many situations unknown to the public before now.

This biography traces the couple's paths from childhood, and the experiences that shaped their lives before they entered the national and global stage. It is a portrait not only of two individuals, but of a partnership at the heart of an institution that is continually striving to define its relevance in a changing world.

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I

THE BOY WHO WOULD BE KING

From the moment Prince William entered the world on 21 June 1982, his life has been governed by the weight of immense privilege and tremendous expectation. As the firstborn son of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, his destiny as a future king would be shaped by the traditions of a thousand-year-old institution and guided by those responsible for navigating his upbringing. The weight of such certainty from early childhood, and the pressure he experienced from knowing that one day he would be expected to rule, inevitably influenced his sense of duty, identity and personal development. The era into which he arrived would also offer the sorts of obstacles that none of his ancestors would have had to face. Not only his life but the lives of those around him would become intensely scrutinised in an often polarised world; and questions would be asked about who the royal family really served and even whether it was suitable in a modern society. Yet, perhaps even more defining than his royal role was the environment of his early years. Born into a world marked by both deep affection and painful conflict, William was forced to grow up in the full glare of his parents' very public struggles within their marriage. The young prince has navigated love and turmoil in equal measure, experiences that would profoundly shape the man and the leader he has become today.

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As heir to the throne, Prince Charles had grown up under a similarly intense spotlight. His life, perhaps much like that of his two sons, has been distinguished by numerous sliding-door moments, not least in his courtship of, and eventual marriage to, Diana. His adolescence was typified by isolation and his own reluctance to accept his public role. A somewhat awkward and reluctant bachelor, the Prince of Wales would go on to have several high-profile relationships with a string of aristocratic girlfriends, as pressure from his family and the outside world led to mounting questions concerning his capacity to find a suitable royal bride and his suitability to rule.

By his mid-twenties, the much-maligned prince would be characterised by the burden of his bachelorhood. A three-year relationship with Lucia Santa Cruz, the daughter of the Chilean ambassador to London, ended in 1970 although with the benefit, in his eyes, of an introduction to Camilla Shand. Jonathan Dimbleby, in *The Prince of Wales: A Biography*, noted how Charles would pursue Camilla relentlessly with 'elaborately worded love notes' and late-night telephone chats. By the end of 1972, Charles considered proposing marriage to Camilla, but was hesitant about taking the next step. The result was heartbreak the following year. While serving overseas with the Royal Navy, Camilla, who had serious reservations about becoming involved with Charles, and little intention of joining the goldfish bowl of the royal family, would announce her engagement to glamorous army officer Andrew Parker Bowles.

Charles's inability to hold down a partner would create the almost inevitable situation in which the decision was taken out of his hands. In the 1970s, Lady Diana Spencer was a shy teenager from an aristocratic family; she was also struggling for direction. The Spencers were long-time friends of the royal family. Diana's father, Earl Spencer, had served as an equerry to

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both King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II, marking her as a potentially suitable option to marry the future king in the eyes of Queen Elizbeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh. The pair met for the first time in 1977, when Diana was 16 years old. Two and a half years later they would begin a courtship characterised by Charles's fleeting affection as he struggled to come to terms with his feeling of rejection and what he saw as an obligation for him to marry. At just 19, Diana was considered in royal circles to be the perfect candidate for Charles. Young enough to be moulded into what was expected and naive about the world she was about to enter. Pressure was applied to the prince from all directions. His father, Prince Philip, had urged him to stop playing the field and settle down, leading to a knee-jerk reaction from Charles, who believed he was about to be forced to marry. As the press got wind of the relationship, Diana was caught in a whirlwind of interest, the subject of acres of coverage in the national media and harassed by paparazzi as she struggled to go about her daily life. On 24 February 1981, after meeting just 13 times, having spent barely any time together and certainly not having discussed a combined future, Charles and Diana were engaged.

Their wedding five months later, on 29 July 1981 at St Paul's Cathedral, was a wedding for the ages. A beautiful young bride marrying a prince and future king, cementing the end to his own forlorn pursuit of happiness. The Queen and Prince Philip had given the relationship their blessing, believing their son 'would grow to love Diana' and begin to dedicate himself to the role he was born to do. The British public had been willing participants in the construct of the 'fairy tale' relationship. 'Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made – the prince and princess on their wedding day,' said the Archbishop of Canterbury during the service. And Diana was soon dubbed the 'People's Princess'.

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However, soon after the marriage of these two poorly suited people who barely knew each other, cracks in the relationship started to appear. Diana was already beginning to suffer as she battled with life as part of the family known since the time of King George VI as 'The Firm'. Taken from everything she had known and placed in private apartments in the overwhelming environment of Buckingham Palace, Diana soon became tormented by her very existence. With incredibly little life experience, Diana was still troubled by having grown up in an unhappy household; her parents had separated when she was six. Diana's mother, Frances Ruth Roche, was deemed unfit to care for her and her three siblings after engaging in an affair and losing custody in extremely acrimonious court proceedings, where her own mother had given evidence suggesting she was incapable. At just seven years old and completely unaware of the court battle, Diana was left in the sole custody of her father, leading to significant feelings of abandonment and a hidden and immensely damaging eating disorder that would hurt her mental and physical health. In tapes made in answer to written questions from Andrew Morton, who wrote the best-selling book *Diana: Her True Story*, the princess spoke of her unhappy childhood. She recalled how she was forced to watch her mother cry after her father, John Spencer, slapped her mother, Frances, across the face, and how she was told by the family – including her mother, brother and even Charles – that she was stupid.

Having been thrust into the spotlight as Charles's hand-picked bride, and barely 20 when she walked down the aisle, Diana's feelings of abandonment would once again surface in the infancy of her marriage as Charles struggled to create the safety she so craved. In Andrew Morton's book, Diana would later admit how, pregnant with her first child and with her mental state spiralling out of control, she threw herself down

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the stairs at the royals' Sandringham estate in Norfolk. She had lost all sense of reality, and also any fear of the consequences of such actions. The couple should have been basking in the glow of their wedding, which had brought joy to the country, but behind the curtain of their public life their marriage was already beginning to crumble. The royal family were ill equipped to deal with Diana's escalating emotional crisis, especially after her bulimia took hold as soon as they left for their honeymoon on board the royal yacht *Britannia*. Penny Junor's book, *The Duchess: The Untold Story*, gives an account of how blazing rows were followed by Diana destroying Charles's personal artwork and the painting materials he had packed for the trip. The honeymoon would be further marred by furious arguments following Diana's discovery of a pair of cufflinks Camilla had sent to Charles before they boarded the boat. Two intertwined Cs, the iconic symbol of the Chanel brand, which also carried a deeper meaning, threw Diana into a jealous rage that could not be calmed by the poor excuses offered by Charles. The trip ended as it had started, with tension and unhappiness. What had started as a means to be seen to be moving on with his life had soon resulted in Charles having to focus his efforts on trying to save his marriage from complete destruction.

Charles and Diana resolved to at least attempt to meet in the middle to rescue the relationship. There was, of course, no way of backing out, and soon the pressure would be on both of them to secure the royal bloodline. Diana consoled herself with the thought that having children would provide a focus to distract her from the troubles in the relationship. But neither she nor Charles would dare to seek mediation from family members, who would no doubt have little sympathy for their experience.

In June 1982, less than a year after they were married, their first son, Prince William, was born. Diana's pregnancy provided

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little in the way of enjoyment or respite from the intolerable situation that had manifested. Besieged by sickness, she would also have to contest with opposition to her decision to have her child in hospital, doing away with centuries of tradition – royal babies were typically born within the confines of Buckingham Palace. The Queen and Queen Mother were aghast and quietly appealed to Diana – through aides that the princess would later describe disparagingly as 'the men in grey suits' – to rethink her course of action. Diana's choice of a hospital birth whipped the media into a frenzy. For days on end, dozens of reporters and photographers camped outside the Lindo Wing of St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. Finally, Diana decided she could not bear the pressure any longer and elected to be induced early. She later revealed that it was the impact of the media's attention, not medical advice or intervention, that stripped her of her desired delivery, saying, 'William had to be induced because I couldn't handle the press pressure any longer, it was becoming unbearable. It was as if everyone was monitoring every day for me.'

Under the direction of the Queen's own surgeon, gynaecologist George Pinker, who had looked after the princess throughout her pregnancy, Diana safely delivered William Arthur Philip Louis, weighing 7lb 10z (2.65 kg), at 9.03pm on 21 June 1982. It later emerged that Diana had chosen to employ birthing methods espoused by the renowned childbirth educator, anthropologist and feminist icon Sheila Kitzinger. Diana's decision was considered by those in royal circles to be a sign of modern rebellion, but Kitzinger praised the princess, saying in her 2015 memoirs:

> The late Diana, Princess of Wales, may have been much criticised by some, but her contribution to reclaiming birth for women actually kick-started radical changes in

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> hospitals … When she was pregnant with Prince William, I was asked to advise the private Lindo wing of St Mary's in Paddington, London. It was the first active royal birth – a complete contrast to the Queen's reflection that, with modern anaesthesia, birth had become 'a sleep and a forgetting'.

For Charles, whose own father had opted to play squash with his private secretary instead of attending the birth of his son, instructing an aide to deliver him the news when it occurred, the occasion had been overwhelming. Diana was delighted that he had decided to break that antiquated tradition by being by her side for the birth of their son. The prince was overcome with emotion. 'When you look at the early days of their relationship, it was incredibly testing for both of them. But he was absolutely riding high on the emotion of bringing his son into the world. That was undoubtedly the happiest he had ever been in his life at that moment,' a friend said. Excitedly, Charles told friends he was 'utterly elated', remarking on 'an astonishing experience and one that has meant more to me than I could ever have imagined'.

In his biography of Charles, Jonathan Dimbleby quotes a letter Charles wrote in 1982 to his closest friend and confidant Hugh van Cutsem and his wife Emilie: 'I got back here just before midnight – utterly elated but quite shattered. I can't tell you how excited and proud I am. He really does look surprisingly appetising and has sausage fingers just like mine.' Charles had certainly graduated from the sensitive, shy and introspective character who had once struggled to display his emotions. His exuberance at sharing in William's birth was further demonstrated in a letter to his beloved godmother Patricia Knatchbull, the Countess of Burma and the daughter of Charles's beloved great-uncle Earl Mountbatten, announcing, 'I am so thankful I was beside Diana's

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bedside the whole time because by the end of the day I really felt as though I'd shared deeply the process of birth and as a result was rewarded by seeing a small creature which belonged to us even though he seemed to belong to everyone else as well!'*

At the age of just 21 Diana had, in the words of the Queen Mother, 'fulfilled her duty'. A child, she believed, would provide her the opportunity to focus on something other than her loneliness and the state of her marriage. Diana, who was ready to bask in the glow of motherhood, would later tell journalist Andrew Morton that the period following William's birth, up until the arrival of their second son, Harry, in 1984, was the happiest the couple had together. But no sooner had the couple celebrated in their shared joy of their new baby than the reality of their situation was laid bare. Not long after the delivery, an elated Charles, flanked by his personal protection officer, made his way outside the hospital to speak to the press pack. Buzzing with emotion, he told them he was 'relieved and delighted' at the safe arrival of his son, adding that the boy was 'in marvellous form'. Faced with quickfire questions from the media, Charles revealed the baby boy had a thatch of 'fair hair, rather than blondish', before he was promptly whisked away by officers from Scotland Yard. The heir, and indeed the country, was on a high. But the young princess, who was left shattered by the long and arduous labour, at once became filled with dread at the thought of having to face those same reporters, camera lenses and members of the public outside the hospital doors.

Within a few hours, Diana's fears were realised: the world was waiting for the first pictures of the future king. Having barely slept, somewhat delirious from exhaustion, and still in excruciating pain from a 16-hour labour, Diana mustered the energy to dutifully pose for a few minutes before being driven

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* *The Prince of Wales: A Biography*, Jonathan Dimbleby, page 480.

away to the couple's Kensington Palace home. In what was, perhaps, a sign of the troubles that would besiege their relationship, as Charles went about his business and continued to spread news of his joy, Diana immediately shut herself away with her baby. Central to Charles and Diana's reconciliation had been the prince opening up to his wife about the nature of his upbringing and the torment that had marked his childhood. Even if he didn't know how, he was determined to bring his children into a world where they would not suffer the same absence of love and affection that he had endured growing up.

Almost at once Buckingham Palace courtiers began making plans for William's christening, arranged to coincide with the Queen Mother's 82nd birthday. Diana would later say that she was not consulted about the occasion, with her role limited to turning up to the 'ghastly' photoshoot. 'She was just expected to get on with it,' a former palace aide suggests. 'It was part and parcel of the process, and while she didn't quite understand why she had to perform as such, there certainly wasn't much discussion over how she was coping or how she was feeling as she was left to her own devices.' Now, six weeks after giving birth, sitting in the ornate Music Room at Buckingham Palace and already suffering silently from the early stages of post-partum depression, the princess knew the latest public ritual she was being forced to perform was a sign of things to come. Like Charles, Diana, whose own childhood had been scarred by loneliness and abandonment, was determined that history would not repeat itself.

Despite their apparent happiness, the couple's tour to Australia and New Zealand in March 1983 would expose the jealousy and self-loathing at the heart of their relationship. The visit, which had been postponed due to Diana's pregnancy, was hurriedly put together to take advantage of the princess's worldwide appeal as the young and glamorous face of a modern

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monarchy. Diana would cause further dismay from palace aides when she insisted on taking nine-month-old William on the trip. According to courtiers around at the time, the Queen appealed to Charles to 'talk some sense' into his wife, although the prince decided to adhere to Diana's demands, to 'keep the peace'.

In the lead-up to the tour, the palace had been rocked by the press interest in Diana's mental state, exemplified by a sensational story by James Whitaker of the *Daily Mirror* regarding the princess's worsening eating disorder, under the headline 'Concerns for Di's health'. The front-page article had enraged the palace and set courtiers on a quest to enquire where such information had been garnered from. In an interview years later, Whitaker, the paper's royal editor – known as the 'doyen' of royal reporters for the number of royal scoops he secured during his 40-year career – revealed his sourcing had been the stuff of Buckingham Palace's nightmares. Recalling the 'absolute furore' over his story, he later claimed the story had been told to him directly by a Spencer family member.

Diana would go on to describe the six-week trip to Australasia as 'utterly traumatic', while Charles's jealousy over his wife's popularity exposed his juvenile desire to always be the centre of attention. Despite their tentative closeness, Charles had been angered by Diana's refusal to toe the party line and leave William behind, just as he had been left behind when his own mother went on royal tours. In Diana's eyes, this wasn't consistent with his description of his unhappy childhood, and was at odds with his ambition to create a different future for his children. Diana, for one, was not prepared to put the 'rules' of the Crown ahead of her own family's happiness. As she told one friend before the tour, she was a 'mother first and show pony second'.

Following the tour, which back home and across the countries they'd visited had been marked as a resounding success,

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the couple became ever more distant. They split their time between Kensington Palace and Charles's Highgrove estate in Gloucestershire, though were rarely under the same roof at the same time. While William would spend the week in London, living at Kensington Palace with Diana, his weekends would be spent in Gloucestershire. His parents kept out of each other's way by only staying at Highgrove on alternate weekends. Despite Diana describing her relationship with Charles as 'nonexistent', the pressure to have another child, a 'spare' as she would later remark, was all too present and she fell pregnant by the end of 1983. According to those close to Diana, while the relationship did have its happy moments, the problem was that Charles's desire to be a present father, to be different from his own parents, did not materialise in his actions. Diana's second pregnancy would once again be dogged by sickness, forcing her to cancel engagements, which further infuriated her husband. Sources describe how Diana's mental health deteriorated, while she clung to the hope that the introduction of a second child would repair her marriage.

Diana had kept the sex of their baby secret from her husband in an attempt to surprise him at the birth. Charles had made no secret of wanting more children, nor of his preference for a daughter. Again he was present for the duration of the nine-hour labour. But the heir to the throne's initial reaction to the arrival of their second son would cut Diana to the core. When the baby was delivered, weighing 6lb 14oz, at 4.20pm on 15 September 1984, Charles somewhat foolishly forgot himself, crying out 'Oh God, it's a boy', then commenting with unsubtle surprise on the fact his son had a mane of red hair. The outburst was another devastating blow to their already fractured relationship. The media and the public celebrated the arrival of the new baby, named Henry Charles Albert David, but in the tapes that Andrew Morton later used in his book, Diana would say of that

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moment: 'something inside me closed off. Our marriage, the whole thing went down the drain.'

A year later William was enrolled in Jane Mynors' nursery school in west London. Before she married into the royal family, Diana had been a nursery assistant at the Young England Kindergarten school in Pimlico, south London – a school that taught using the Montessori method, an approach to classroom learning that emphasises pupils' independence and choice. She wanted her son to be enrolled in a nursery that followed similar principles. Charles had been the first heir to attend school rather than be solely educated by a private tutor, but had not joined the education system until he was nearly eight. Diana's choice was yet another break from tradition and further evidence of her desire to give her children a more rounded upbringing outside the confines of the institution they had been born into.

However, the young prince couldn't escape the influence of the institution entirely. Dozens of photographers and reporters gathered outside to witness William, decked out in new bright red strapped shoes, matching red shorts with white ankle socks, and a red and white checked shirt and a red, blue, white and green striped jumper, arriving promptly at 9.30am on his first day. Those journalists present to witness the occasion filled column inches by somewhat playfully noting the young royal's eagerness to get into the classroom, and no doubt away from them, by scurrying down the school steps on his own. More snarky commentators observed that the other parents dropping their children off were not afforded a curtsy from the teachers.

Those same members of the media would capture William walking out of the school later that afternoon, his hair slightly ruffled, a creased jumper under his arm, and clutching both a drinks bottle and a handmade finger puppet. Photocalls like this were a carefully managed operation, with palace press officials

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and Scotland Yard police officers on hand to curate the historic occasion. It would come to signify a new order between the royals and the press. While the royal family understood that there was interest in William and Harry's lives, and accepted that occasions such as this would be chronicled, they also wanted the young princes to be left alone to continue their education away from the spotlight.

William moved to Wetherby School in Notting Hill in 1987. Wearing the school's distinctive double-breasted red blazer and matching cap and red tie, the prince, by now used to the typical royal photocall, duly obliged the waiting press with a smile and a wave at the school door on his first day. William quickly adapted to the structured environment, taking a keen interest in reading and writing from a young age. Known for being courteous and sensitive as well as showing a proficiency for his early academic studies, he delighted in accompanying his younger brother to the same ritual two years later, guiding Harry through the process while helpfully instructing him how to greet his teacher and wave to the gathered media. Until he had started school, William was not given an indication of what his future would look like. Charles and Diana had both been cautious, agreeing that he should be allowed to explore as much as possible and live without burdens weighing on him.

But in the intervening years, Diana and Charles had once again been at loggerheads. Diana's mental health had deteriorated after Charles engaged in an affair, from 1986 onwards, with Camilla Parker Bowles. Charles and Diana's marriage had crumbled to the point that they only communicated when they needed to discuss their children's location and welfare. Aside from their deep marital issues, this time there was a distinct difference of opinion over the direction of their children's education. The princess, with her background in the early-years development of children,

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which William's future wife would also be drawn to, was adamant in her desire to give her boys a more 'normal' upbringing. She took both boys on trips to theme parks, the cinema and even the fast food restaurant chain McDonald's. While the British press lapped it up, Charles was horrified. He questioned her motives to a former aide, asking, 'does she do it just to spite me?' He also believed Diana's displays of normality served to drive a wedge between him and the general public. But her natural unwillingness to bend to conformity meant she wanted to give her children real life experiences that they might not have received if they'd stayed bound by royal protocol. Visits to hospitals and homeless shelters followed, some in private and others with a small, handpicked press pack. Diana's actions only caused more difficulty in her relationship with Charles, who responded by refusing to involve himself in his children's education, and making references to his wife's 'hysterical' nature. 'He was at a point where he didn't see the relationship progressing or even surviving,' said one former aide. 'So he threw in the towel and allowed Diana to go about her business. If it was going to be a battle of popularity with the public he was astute enough to know he wasn't going to win by taking the boys to fast food restaurants, so he maintained his relationship with them in private.'

By the late 1980s, such was the fevered and continued press speculation as to whether Charles and Diana's relationship would last, Charles could no longer hide the failure of his marriage from his parents. Instead of accepting equal blame, he raged at being forced into a marriage with a 19-year-old he had barely met, and in whom he had lost interest. By 1986, he was also fully engaged in his extra-marital affair with Camilla, refusing to stop seeing her even when questioned by his own father. It fell upon Queen Elizabeth, keen to keep things inhouse, to try and shore up the pretence of family union.

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As a result of Diana's growing influence over her children and, at the time, Charles's lack of it, the Queen set about subtly constructing her own authority over the future king. Together with Charles, she delicately introduced William to the concept of his destiny, while also making clear that the family was supposed to be dedicated to its people and not to serving one's own purposes. However, while this rather unique education could perhaps be classed as favouritism, and none of the other grandchildren received this attention, both the Queen and the Queen Mother were intent on instilling in William the tools that would be essential for his future as a monarch.

The Queen Mother, in particular, doted on William, sending him small gifts and letters of encouragement throughout the years, and early on became the biggest enforcer of William's concept of his destiny. During family occasions, the Queen Mother would insist William be seated beside her, further reinforcing his position as heir and sowing the seeds of the unspoken difference between him and Harry. William's craving for normality throughout his life can perhaps be drawn back to these very moments. While he has certainly grown into his position and place in the world, his understanding of his destiny was marked by internal conflict over choices that he perceived as being taken away from him before he had the chance to explore a future of his own.

Diana smothered the boys with affection, equipping them with her sense of humour, her appetite for fun, and her appreciation for the privilege she enjoyed – the qualities that she became renowned for throughout the world. Diana believed this sense of normalness, no matter how small the gestures, would equip these boys for what lay ahead when they became central figures within the institution. The brothers already shared a deep bond, with William forging the protective instincts he would display for decades. As an understanding of the slow death of their parents'

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relationship crept up on them, William made sure he was always accessible to Harry. Former BBC royal correspondent Jennie Bond told how Diana wanted the boys to be brought up in a way no royal princes had been in the past. 'She set up what she called "work days and play days",' Jennie said,

> On work days she totally accepted that they should wear suits and ties and behave like royalty. But on play days she wanted them to be as normal as possible – wearing jeans and baseball caps, eating burgers and enjoying go-karting. She wanted them to see what life was like outside the ivory tower of the palace, which is why she took them to meet the homeless and to hospitals to comfort the sick and dying. She also wanted them to be able to express their emotions freely. She told me: "I shower my boys with cuddles and love, because I didn't have any as a child."

For a brief period the boys would be separated when William enrolled in Ludgrove School in Berkshire, a boarding preparatory school for boys aged 8 to 13. Harry followed him three years later. The boys' time at Ludgrove coincided with Charles and Diana's worsening marital problems, which were widely covered in both the print and broadcast media at the time. Diana's mental state was crudely splashed over the newspapers as the media exposed cracks in their relationship, but Charles and Diana's households were equally responsible for briefing against one another. Ludgrove's headmaster, Gerald Barber, banned newspapers in the library and ordered all pupils' television viewing to be restricted and monitored to save William and Harry the embarrassment of being confronted by daily headlines about their parents' marital woes. 'Ludgrove was extremely good at protecting him and later Harry,' a palace source said. 'It took them out of troubled waters.'

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A year after starting at Ludgrove, William would summon that same maturity to protect his younger brother from the realisation that, after years of speculation, their parents' marriage was all but over. The boys were spending weekends with just one parent at a time, either at Highgrove (as Charles and Diana shared the property) or with visits to Diana's sisters' homes in the country. Despite the acrimoniousness of the breakdown, both Charles and Diana attempted to shield their children from the furious rows that were tearing them apart, often with little success. The following spring, Andrew Morton would publish *Diana: Her True Story*, his blistering tell-all of the collapse of the Waleses' marriage, Charles's relationship with Parker Bowles, and Diana's own mental health struggles. It set the royals on a collision course. In December 1992, a month after a disastrous royal tour to South Korea, where the couple barely acknowledged each other, leading to the British media labelling them 'The Glums', British prime minister John Major announced that the couple had formally separated. The announcement unleashed a tsunami of bitterness, dubbed 'The War of the Waleses' by the tabloid press. In the summer of 1994, Charles gave a bombshell television interview to Jonathan Dimbleby on ITV, in which he devastatingly admitted infidelity, leading Diana to collude with BBC *Panorama* journalist Martin Bashir to deliver her own broadside, where she famously decreed that 'there were three of us in the marriage, so it was a bit crowded.' A year later, the couple's fairy tale was over and they were granted a divorce. In 2021, Diana's torment would be laid bare in an investigation into Bashir's methods of gaining access to the princess. Lord Dyson, the retired judge who led the inquiry, found Bashir 'deceitful', concluding that he seriously breached BBC rules by mocking up fake bank statements to gain access to the princess. Bashir also showed the fake documents to Diana's brother, Earl Spencer, to gain his trust so that he would

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then introduce Bashir to Diana. This was how the journalist was able to persuade Diana to agree to give the interview, which led to what was then considered to be the scoop of the century.

Throughout this time of intense turbulence, in 1995, William, aged 13, became the first senior family member to be sent to Eton College in Windsor. A stark difference from Gordonstoun, the Scottish school both his grandfather Prince Philip and his father – who described the harsh educational environment as 'Colditz with kilts' – were sent to. Again, this was under Diana's direction, driven by her belief that Eton's more relaxed environment would better suit her son. William was already a dashing and confident young man, given the right company. Those close to him, however, suggest he had been scarred by his parents' battles and relished the opportunity to leave for school.

Eton gave teenage William his first taste of freedom. Away from his family and the feverish press attention on Charles and Diana's split, which he was increasingly conscious of, he developed close bonds with a group of young men his age, such as Guy Pelly and Tom Inskip. They became part of a protective inner ring, maintaining a distance from those outside their tight circle that would remain constant into adulthood. Those same friends would prove invaluable when, on 31 August 1997, William and Harry's world changed irreversibly. The brothers, then just 15 and 12, were staying at Balmoral Castle with Charles and the Queen when the news came of their 36-year-old mother's tragic death, along with her lover Dodi Fayed, following a high-speed car crash in a Parisian tunnel. William later described feeling 'completely numb' with shock when his father delivered the news to him. The true effect of his grief would not be felt for many years.

By the turn of the millennium, both William and Harry had learned to lean on each other as their father adapted to life as a single parent. While Charles's personal conduct would draw

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criticism and commentary, those close to him relay a sadness that 'he never really got the credit he deserved'. One friend said:

> There were all sorts of stories about how he abandoned the boys, which was absolute nonsense. Of course he was finding his feet, as anyone in that situation would be, but there was a closeness with his sons that never really cut through. I think in their adulthood both William and Harry really came to have a newfound respect for the way their father did step up in an extraordinary situation.

On a holiday in the summer of 1998, William developed his deep, enduring love of Africa. It would provide the solace he had been craving as he struggled to come to terms with life without his mother. It was also the first time he met the beautiful Jecca Craig, daughter of the British businessman Ian Craig and his wife Jane. The trip provided two pivotal moments in his life: first, Jecca would become a lifelong friend; and second, the time William spent on the Craigs' 55,000-acre game farm led years later to his becoming heavily involved with the Tusk Trust, a charity that partners with leading and emerging conservationists across Africa. Activities like rhino spotting or joining anti-poaching patrols offered an experience, craved by William, that was a world away from school and the palace.

In 2000, with his A-levels completed, William expressed a desire to take a year out before starting university. Whereas Charles had previously encouraged the following of traditions, he was now highly supportive, believing it would be a chance for William to spread his wings away from home. William enrolled in a programme with the charity Raleigh International, setting off to join a project to build accommodation and teach English in southern Chile. 'He mucked in like the rest of us,' a fellow

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volunteer recalled. 'If anything, he was the first to make tea when we were freezing.' Mixing with other young people from different backgrounds provided William with his first real taste of life beyond the palace walls and his well-heeled aristocratic set. After Chile, William spent more time in Africa, the continent that would go on to become one of the pillars of his future working life. Members of the royal household at the time said he returned from Kenya 'full of life' and yet 'no doubt questioning what his life could have been like' outside the confines of his future responsibilities. 'He was bright enough to realise what life could be like for a senior member of the family, although took little interest in what his father or family members were specifically up to,' said one former palace aide. 'But his craving for normality, whatever that was for someone of his position, probably did make him stop to think "What if?" around that time.'

In the year 2000, William's first serious relationship blossomed when he began dating Rose Farquhar, an aspiring singer who would later appear on the reality show *The Voice* in 2016. She was also the youngest daughter of Captain Ian Farquhar, a close friend of Charles and former equerry to the Queen Mother. Friends recall their relationship as 'sweet', rather than a love affair. 'It was a break from the constant expectation that weighed heavily on him,' recalled one associate. 'He was a young man having fun, without worrying about saying or doing the wrong thing with people looking at him all the time.' The pair belonged to the same close-knit friendship group, one that appreciated the sensitivities of William's life. Though their romance was brief, lasting little more than a summer, this period cemented something William had long understood: anyone he loved – or married – would need to navigate the rarefied, scrutinised sphere of the 'royal set'. It was into this world that Catherine Middleton, years later, would step with remarkable poise.

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KATE FROM BERKSHIRE

When Carole and Michael Middleton walked out of the Royal Berkshire hospital in the winter of 1982 to begin the drive back to their modest three-bedroom semi-detached home, their only thought was of the enveloping joy of welcoming their firstborn child into the world. Thoughts of princesses, castles and dashing young princes would be reserved for lighting up the bedtime stories of their darling daughter Catherine, born on a cold grey day on 9 January.

Life for the Middletons in the quaint village of Bradfield Southend within the Royal County, named as such due to its significant connections to the British monarchy and nearby Windsor Castle, hardly epitomised what life was like for millions in 1980s Britain. Great societal upheaval and cultural change was being orchestrated by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's government, resulting in rising unemployment, inequality and social disruption in places like London, which was just an hour away from Carole and Michael's home. Despite coming from very different backgrounds, the couple had pursued the typical quiet rural life of Britain's middle class, away from the turbulence and division experienced around the country.

Carole Goldsmith was born on 31 January 1955 into a distinctly working-class family, with roots connecting them to generations of steely coal miners from County Durham. Her father, Ronald, was a hard-working and mild-mannered decorator, while her

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mother, Dorothy, joyfully known as 'The Duchess' in local circles because she always looked so impeccable, worked as a part-time sales assistant in a jewellery shop. When Carole was a child, she lived in local authority housing with her family in Ealing, before moving to a small home in Southall, west London. She and her brother, Gary, who was born a decade later than her in 1965, studied at the local high school and lived a happy life, with the self-employed Ron and Dorothy doing the best they could in often difficult circumstances. There were various bouts of financial hardship. Carole was inspired by her parents' work ethic, instilled in her from a young age. She had grown up watching both her parents work hard to make ends meet and ensure that, even though money was not abundant, the children grew up in a safe and loving home.

In contrast, Michael, born in Leeds, Yorkshire, on 23 June 1949, came from a wealthy family with ties to the British aristocracy. His father, Peter, served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and later worked as a commercial pilot. His mother, Valerie Glassborow, was the daughter of a bank manager and served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse with the British Red Cross during the Second World War. She also famously worked at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, an agency that played a crucial role in helping Britain to win the war. Michael's paternal grandmother, Olive Middleton, was an Edwardian society beauty and daughter of wealthy Yorkshire wool merchant Francis Martineau Lupton, a prominent lawyer, justice of the peace, and member of Parliament for the Liberal Party. According to the city's archives, the family represented 'landed gentry, political and business dynasty'. During the Victorian era the family boasted connections to industrialists, solicitors and civic leaders, as well as prominent merchants and ministers. Their endeavours as

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