

*London*

*September 6, 1997, 10:00 a.m.*

He cannot bear to look at his sons. Not now, not as they stand with him in the blazing late-summer sun in front of Kensington Palace, waiting for her coffin to pass before them. No matter that they are only a few feet from him, clearly craving tender words of encouragement or at least a comforting touch. Prince Harry, who, at just twelve years of age, barely comes up to his father's shoulders, is positioned to Charles's immediate right—so close that all his father has to do is reach out and place a hand on the boy's shoulder. But Charles does not. So Harry stands in solitary silence, ramrod straight, his small fists clenched at his sides so tightly that his fingernails dig into his palms. The youngest prince is dwarfed by the Prince of Wales and the three other men walking behind his mother's coffin: his grandfather Prince Philip, his brother, William, and his uncle, the six-foot-four-inch-tall Earl Spencer. Were Charles to turn and look at Harry and fifteen-year-old William, he would see the fixed expression on his boys' stricken faces—a look blending their mother's famous upward “shy Di” glance with undertones of dismay, grief, and no small amount of molten fury.

So much had happened and would happen in the years to come, but for the men destined to carry the monarchy into the twenty-first century, the thirty-minute march behind Diana's coffin would be the most indelibly painful memory of all—one that, they would reveal two decades later, shaped them not only as men but also as torchbearers of the monarchy. At the very moment when they so desperately needed to share their feelings, they were commanded to walk in stony silence while the rest of the world wept over the loss of the “People's Princess.”

For all the undeniable heartache they were experiencing, William and

Harry were not the only men in the Windsor family being tested that day. In truth, the young princes were in some ways better equipped than their father to handle the grenade of sorrow, shock, and rage that had been tossed in their direction. It was a sad commentary on the strangulated psyches of the Windsors that, precisely because Diana had infused her now-motherless boys with a measure of humanity, they could at least *sense* that it was wrong to suppress their feelings.

Charles, like every other male and female member of the royal family who preceded him, was raised to regard any outward expression of emotion as conduct unbecoming a member of the ruling class. Yet the last five days had put that famous stiff-upper-lip resolve to the test, forcing him to cope with more mental anguish and inner turmoil than he had faced in his lifetime. At times, even for the preternaturally passive Charles, it was simply too much.

The Keep Calm and Carry On approach personified by Charles and his mother the Queen had, in fact, begun to soften in recent years—thanks almost entirely to Diana’s humanizing influence. After fifteen tempestuous years spent trying to force his strong-minded wife to fit the royal mold, Charles now harbored a new respect—even affection—for the Princess of Wales. She felt the same. They had been divorced for only a year, but, during that short time, they had finally, miraculously, made peace with each other. Gone was the jealousy, deep resentment, and anger that had defined their lives as a married couple both in public and in private. Charles and Diana saw each other in a new, more sympathetic light, and both finally realized that they were inextricably bound together by one thing: the profound love they shared for their two young sons.

Sadly, it was too little, too late. Charles’s life—and the history of the British monarchy—was changed forever on August 31, when the black phone next to his carved-mahogany four-poster bed jangled him awake shortly after one o’clock in the morning. The phone rang a half dozen times while the Prince of Wales, a notoriously heavy sleeper, clung to Teddy, the stuffed bear of his childhood. At forty-eight, Charles still traveled everywhere with Teddy, insisting that when the toy animal lost a

button or began to fray, the Prince's childhood nanny, Mabel Anderson, be called in to sew Teddy back to health.

When he finally did pick up the phone, Charles heard the Balmoral Castle switchboard operator announce in her thick Scottish brogue that Robert Janvrin, the Queen's deputy private secretary, was on the line. "I'm sorry to awaken you, Sir," Janvrin said, quickly explaining that he had been called only minutes earlier by the Court of St. James's ambassador in Paris with news that Princess Diana had been injured in a car accident there.

"An accident in Paris?" Charles answered groggily. "Diana?"

"The facts are still coming in, Sir," Janvrin said. "But it appears it was a very serious accident. The Princess's friend Dodi Fayed was killed, as well as their driver."

Once he had finished hearing what few details Janvrin could supply, Charles called the one person he relied on most in the world: his longtime mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles. Camilla, unflappable to her core, did what she always did when she detected genuine worry in her lover's voice: offered soothing words of reassurance. Diana always wore her seatbelt. She was young and fit, and likely to bounce back quickly if she was injured at all. The press, Camilla reminded him, had a way of grossly exaggerating things. It remained to be seen if there had really been an accident at all.

Charles's next call was to the Queen's bedroom, on the far side of the castle. She had already been briefed by Janvrin, and told her son that she had decided there was no point in waking William and Harry until they knew more about Diana's condition. In the meantime, Charles went into the sitting room adjacent to his sleeping quarters and turned on the radio. As of three thirty in the morning, London time, BBC Radio 5 Live was re- porting that an eyewitness to the crash in Paris's Alma tunnel saw Diana walk away from the accident scene. Sources at Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, where she had been taken, were being quoted as saying the Princess had suffered nothing more than a fractured arm, a concussion, and some cuts and abrasions to her legs.

When he heard these reassuring reports, Charles had no way of know-

ing that Diana had, in fact, been pronounced dead thirty minutes earlier. Neither did the Queen's private secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, who also happened to be married to Diana's sister Jane. Sir Robert picked up the phone moments later and was told the devastating truth. The Princess had bled to death, a British embassy official at the hospital told him, on the operating table. Ashen and trembling, his hand clutching the telephone, Fellowes repeated the news to Charles.

What happened then shocked Fellowes and the Paris embassy official still on the line. The Prince of Wales let out a "cry of pain that was so spontaneous and came from the heart," said the embassy official. "The howl of anguish," as one witness described it, was heard down the hall, loud and stressed enough to bring Balmoral staff scurrying to Charles's room to find the Prince collapsed in an armchair, weeping uncontrollably.

Charles was not alone. The same switchboard operators whose impenetrable Scottish brogue Diana had affectionately mimicked were so upset that they had to be replaced at their posts. Footmen, maids, and uniformed members of the Queen's Scots Guard sobbed openly or choked back tears. The same could not be said for Charles's parents. As shaken as they undoubtedly were by the news, the Queen and Prince Philip were not about to be overcome by the emotion of the moment. They calmly addressed the most pressing matter at hand: how to break the terrible news

to William and Harry.

Charles's initial impulse was to wake them up immediately. The Queen, however, convinced him that it would do no good to deprive the boys of one last good night of sleep. "I just don't see the point," she said almost matter-of-factly. But one of the children wasn't sleeping at all. William said later that he had tossed and turned incessantly, unable to shake the inexplicable feeling that "something was wrong. I kept waking up all night."

As the moment when he would have to break the news to his sons approached—unquestionably the hardest thing he would ever have to do—Charles went for a stroll on the Balmoral grounds. On his return to the castle an hour later, he made no effort to conceal his feelings; as

one staffer recalled later, “the Prince’s eyes were red and swollen from weeping.”

At seven o’clock, Charles knocked on William’s door, sat down on the edge of the boy’s bed, and, within minutes, the two princes were sobbing in each other’s arms. Once they had pulled themselves together, they went to the adjoining room, where Harry was sound asleep, and the heartbreaking process—“Harry, I’m afraid there’s been a terrible accident in Paris”—was repeated.

Sad as the moment was, this ability to share their deepest feelings of grief—previously unheard of among members of the royal family—came naturally to Charles and his sons. Although the world was well aware of Diana’s undying devotion to “mah boys,” as she jokingly called them, it was less familiar with the fact that Charles had always been the sort of dad who had pillow fights with his sons on the living room floor, read them bedtime stories, and, despite the fact that they were now adolescents, still kissed them good night.