



Game of Crowns: Elizabeth, Camilla, Kate, and the Throne

By Christopher Andersen

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A moving and compulsively readable look into the lives, loves, relationships, and rivalries among the three women at the heart of the British royal family today: Queen Elizabeth II, Camilla Parker-Bowles, and Kate Middleton—from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Good Son*, *These Few Precious Days*, and *The Day Diana Died*.

One has been famous longer than anyone on the planet—a dutiful daughter, a frustrated mother, a doting grandmother, a steel-willed taskmaster, a wily stateswoman, an enduring symbol of an institution that has lasted a thousand years, and a global icon who has not only been an eyewitness to history but a part of it.

One is the great-granddaughter of a King’s mistress and one of the most famous “other women” of the modern age—a woman who somehow survived a firestorm of scorn to ultimately marry the love of her life, and in the process replace her arch rival, one of the most beloved figures of the twentieth century.

One is a beautiful commoner, the university-educated daughter of a flight attendant-turned-millionaire entrepreneur, a fashion scion the equal of her adored mother-in-law, and the first woman since King George V’s wife, Queen Mary, to lay claim to being the daughter-in-law of one future king, the wife another, and the mother of yet another.

Game of Crowns is an in-depth and exquisitely researched exploration of the lives of these three remarkable women and the striking and sometimes subtle ways in which their lives intersect and intertwine. Examining their surprising similarities and stark differences, Andersen travels beyond the royal palace walls to illustrate who these three women really are today—and how they will directly reshape the landscape of the monarchy.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[Combines] the scholarship of a dissertation with the dishyness of a tabloid. Readers will feel like a palace insider... With gasp-worthy and laugh-out-loud moments revealing scandalous and sympathetic details of the royal family, Andersen humanizes this privileged yet embattled group." (Kirkus)

"Catnip for royal watchers." (Vanity Fair)

About the Author

Christopher Andersen is the critically acclaimed author of seventeen *New York Times* bestsellers, which have been translated into more than twenty-five languages worldwide. A former contributing editor of *Time* magazine and longtime senior editor of *People* magazine, Andersen has also written hundreds of articles for a wide range of publications, including *The New York Times*, *Life*, and *Vanity Fair*. Andersen has appeared frequently on such programs as the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Dateline*, *CBS This Morning*, *Extra*, *Access Hollywood*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Fox & Friends*, *Hardball*, *Larry King Live*, *E!*, *Inside Edition*, and more.

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Game of Crowns

1

“THE QUEEN IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE KING!”

We think we know what will happen—as earth-shaking events go, this is one of history’s most well rehearsed. But when the inevitable scenario is finally played out, it will still have the power to mesmerize, and even to shock.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

These are the familiar sounds of life here—hurried footfalls on plush red carpeting, whispered conversations magnified as they echo through high-ceilinged hallways adorned with the world’s masterworks. It is not unusual for chamberlains and chambermaids, ushers and footmen and ministers of state alike to scurry when summoned to attend to their sovereign.

Not Paul Whybrew—the man Her Majesty simply calls “Big Paul.” In all his many years as Page of the Backstairs and Sergeant-at-Arms to the Queen, the preternaturally calm Whybrew—at six feet four inches he towers over his five-foot-three-inch boss—has never appeared rushed or flustered, even in times of crisis. No one appreciates Big Paul’s typically British stiff-upper-lip attitude more than Elizabeth II, who has made Whybrew one of her closest friends and confidants. So comfortable is their personal relationship that Whybrew and the Queen often spend cozy evenings watching television together in Her Majesty’s sitting room.

It isn't difficult to see why the Queen might gravitate to someone like Big Paul. With his high forehead, close-set eyes, thinning hair, aquiline nose, and haughty aristocratic bearing, Whybrew could be Prince Philip's younger brother. In the famous 2012 London Summer Olympics video, it is Big Paul who introduces James Bond actor Daniel Craig to the Queen before they are depicted parachuting into the opening ceremonies together.

As he approaches the Queen's bedroom on this particular morning, the only other person who can claim to be equally close to Her Majesty stands in the doorway, ashen-faced and trembling. Starting more than a quarter-century ago as Her Majesty's personal dresser, Angela Kelly worked her way up to the vaunted station of "Personal Assistant, Advisor, and Curator to the Queen." In the process, the thrice-divorced Kelly, whose decidedly lowbrow Liverpool accent betrays her upbringing as a dock worker's daughter, has so endeared herself to the monarch that she is consulted about everything from affairs of state to baby clothes. (Among other assignments, Kelly supervised the team of British and Italian seamstresses who made the baptismal gowns for the Queen's great-grandchildren Prince George and Princess Charlotte.) During long weekends at Windsor, where Whybrew and Kelly have been given "grace-and-favor" apartments of their own on castle grounds, the Queen invariably indulges her passion for backstairs gossip over tea with the woman she simply calls "Angela."

Kelly, eyes welling with tears, shakes her head as Big Paul approaches. He takes his first tentative steps into the room. Fittingly, the plaintive wail of a bagpipe wafts up from the courtyard below. Each morning at nine the Queen's Piper, David Rodgers of the Irish Guards, stands outside the palace in full Royal Stewart tartan regalia and plays from a list of the monarch's favorite tunes. Wearing the two feathers in his cap that distinguish him from all other pipers in the realm, Rodgers is the fourteenth soldier (and first Irishman) to hold the post since Queen Victoria decreed that every monarch should start each day to the sound of Scottish bagpipes. Wherever she is in residence—be it at Windsor, Sandringham, Balmoral, or Buckingham Palace—this is how the Queen begins each day.

But not this day. The heavy red velvet curtains that surround the royal bed have been drawn back to reveal a small, still figure. The Queen's personal physician rushes into the room, and within moments the shadowy figure of Sir Christopher Geidt materializes in the doorway. Burly, bald, suave, shrewd, and more than a little mysterious, Her Majesty's private secretary usually conceals his emotions behind a fixed, deceptively benign smile. Sir Christopher never tips his hand—a skill honed during years spent with British intelligence before being tapped to serve as an aide to the Queen.

At this moment, however, Geidt's defenses are down. Like those around him, he is wide-eyed with shock and—despite the fact that this event had been anticipated and planned for decades—utter disbelief. The first call he must make is to Clive Alderton, his counterpart at Clarence House, official residence of the Prince of Wales. Blond, boyish-faced Alderton, private secretary to the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, cannot conceal the emotion in his voice when he is told the news. Alderton must now maintain his composure as he prepares to make the single most important phone call of his life.

"What is it, Charles?" Camilla pulls back the draperies that encircle her husband's massive, ornately carved Georgian canopy bed. Like her mother-in-law, the Duchess of Cornwall has always preferred to sleep in a velvet and damask cocoon, closed off from the outside world. Unlike the Queen, who hadn't shared a bedroom with her late husband, Prince Philip, for more than a half-century—in part because of Philip's habit of sleeping with the windows wide open no matter the weather—Camilla and Charles make it uncomfortably clear to members of their inner circle that they still enjoy an active, even adventurous, sex life.

"It's Mummy . . ."

He does not have to go on. Camilla recognizes the look immediately. She has seen the dazed expression cross Charles's face only three times in all the years she has known him. The first time was in 1979, when the small fishing boat belonging to Charles's great uncle and surrogate father, Louis Mountbatten, was blown up by IRA assassins, killing Mountbatten and three others. Camilla saw that expression of boundless grief again when, in 2002, the Queen Mother died in her sleep at age 101. Charles had been on a ski holiday with William and Harry at Klosters in Switzerland when it happened, but when he flew back to London Camilla would recall that "the look of great sadness was still there."

And then there was August 31, 1997—the day Princess Diana was killed in a Paris car crash. Charles was vacationing with the rest of the Royal Family at Balmoral Castle at the time, and Camilla was the first person he called with the terrible news. She could hear the anguish in the Prince's voice as he, along with everyone else on the planet, tried to process what had happened.

Yet this moment—as fraught with historical importance as it is with deep shock, confusion, and grief—transcends all the others. It is the moment Charles has been both dreading and eagerly anticipating all his life—the moment when he loses the most important person in his life and, at the same time, at long last steps out of the shadows and into the part he was born to play.

At Anmer Hall in Norfolk, the Duchess of Cambridge is walking the family's black English cocker spaniel Lupo when the housekeeper, Sadie Rice, strides briskly toward her with a cellphone in her hand. "It's Prince William," the housekeeper tells Kate, handing the phone to the Princess with one hand as she takes Lupo's leash with the other.

The Duke of Cambridge is still in the middle of his shift piloting an Airbus H145 search-and-rescue helicopter for the East Anglian Air Ambulance, and Kate knows instantly that something must be terribly wrong; William has never interrupted his work to call her before. Moments earlier, the Prince was in the skies over Bedfordshire, transporting the victim of a motorcycle accident to Addenbrooke's Hospital when his private secretary, Miguel Head, was patched through to the cockpit. Once Head told William his beloved "Granny" had passed away in her sleep, he continued piloting his helicopter to the hospital without saying a word to his fellow crew members.

Now William is flying back to his air ambulance home base at Cambridge Airport, and sharing the terrible news with Kate. There is silence on the other end—all Kate can hear is the pulse of helicopter blades as William struggles to compose himself.

"It's Granny," he manages to say. "She's gone."

At Buckingham Palace, Geidt and the other "Men in Gray," as Diana called them—the shadowy, behind-the-scenes figures who have always actually run the monarchy—have been carefully preparing for this inevitable event for decades. Only a handful of palace officials, along with their government counterparts at Whitehall, have been given access to details of the secret succession plan code-named "London Bridge." More frequently referred to in palace corridors as simply "The Bridge," this ostensibly referred to the funeral itself—but also to the momentous yet precarious transition from one monarch to another.

Once a year every year since the late 1970s, practice funeral processions for senior members of the Royal Family, such as Prince Philip, Prince Charles, and the Queen, have taken place in the streets of London under cover of darkness. Prince Philip, whose funeral plans were code-named "Forth Bridge" after the span over the Firth of Forth in Scotland, wanted only a private, military-style service at St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle. Had Prince Charles predeceased his mother, his funeral plan, code-named "Menai Bridge"

after the bridge that connects the island of Anglesey to the Welsh mainland, would have had all the pageantry of a royal funeral. But it would not have been a state funeral, for state funerals are reserved for the monarch. For her part, the Queen planned her own funeral down to the most minute detail—from the guest list, flowers, readings, and musical selections to which regimental units would participate and the color of their uniforms.

The media have long been preparing for this, as well. Every six months, they also practice announcing the death of the Queen. BBC anchors, remembering how newscaster Peter Sissons was upbraided for announcing the Queen Mother's death wearing a light gray suit and a red tie, now are careful to keep a dark change of clothes at the ready, just in case.

Over the past two hours, the Palace has notified the Queen's children and grandchildren. Geidt also places a call to 10 Downing Street, where an ashen-faced Prime Minister, whose weekly tête-à-tête with the Queen had taken place less than twenty-three hours earlier, immediately summons his ministers for an emergency cabinet meeting.

It is the cabinet's job to convene an Accession Council—an assembly that includes privy council members, lords of the realm, high commissioners of Commonwealth countries and the Lord Mayor of the City of London—to formally proclaim the new monarch. The formality is just that, since the new sovereign takes over the moment the old one has died. The Accession Council will also formalize the new monarch's name. As Charles Philip Arthur George, the Prince of Wales weighs several options, including being known as George VII or even King Arthur I. He has waited too long to make his own mark; as expected, he will go down in history as Charles III.

“Queen Elizabeth II is dead.” Although the Palace has made use of social media to promote the image of the monarchy, it uses a more traditional medium—television—to break the news to the British public. Despite all the speculation, the planning and preparation—or perhaps because of it—this new reality is hard to accept. After all, fully 98 percent of the earth's population has only known a world with Queen Elizabeth in it.

The London Stock Exchange suspends trading. Flags around the world are lowered to half-staff. British television launches round-the-clock coverage, with all stations halting their regular programming to carry BBC-1's live news feed. The BBC will not resume its normal broadcast schedule for days—the network has already announced that all comedy programs will be barred from its airwaves until after the state funeral. In their place will be several prerecorded packages on the life and times of the woman whose life spanned more than eighteen prime ministers, eight popes, and sixteen U.S. presidents.

For three days before her funeral, the Queen lies in state at the Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall. The magnificent Imperial State Crown sits atop the coffin, which is draped with the blue, red, and gold harp and lions of the Royal Standard. An arrangement of carnations, the Queen's favorite flower, also rests on the coffin, bearing a note with a single hand-lettered word: *Mama*.

Hundreds of thousands of mourners, many of them openly weeping, file past as Charles, his brothers Prince Andrew and Prince Edward (who assumed the title of Duke of Edinburgh on Philip's death), and William and Harry all take turns standing guard by the Queen's coffin in full dress uniform—what has come to be known as the Vigil of the Princes.

The day of the funeral is declared a national day of mourning, and an estimated 2 million people flood the streets of London to witness it. Never in recorded history have so many world leaders appeared in one place

to pay their respects to a head of state. They fill the front pews of Westminster Abbey—where Elizabeth II is the first monarch to have a funeral since George II in 1760—solemnly listening to the service being led by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After the service, the gun carriage on which the sovereign's casket rests is pulled not by horses, as would be the case for anything less than a state funeral, but by sailors of the Royal Navy—a tradition that began when, during Queen Victoria's funeral, the horses bolted and sailors stepped in to pull the coffin along the processional route. Now, with the Queen's equerries flanking the casket and members of the Royal Family walking behind, sailors pull the caisson carrying Her Majesty's coffin from Westminster Abbey to Paddington Station for the trip aboard the Royal Train to Windsor Castle.

Once at Windsor, Great Britain's longest-reigning monarch is interred at St. George's Chapel alongside her husband, Philip, her father, George VI, the Queen Mother, her sister Margaret, and nine other sovereigns, including Henry VIII, Charles I, George III, and the last king to bear her grandson's name—William IV.

Around the globe, an estimated 3.5 billion people are glued to hours of live coverage on television and the internet—a record-smashing figure that far surpasses the 2.5 billion viewers of Diana's funeral in 1997 and the 3 billion people who watched William and Kate's historic royal wedding in 2011. As was the case with Diana, the mood this time is one of deeply felt grief mixed with shock and disbelief. It is as if the entire planet is suddenly awakening to the fact that modern history's most enduringly famous figure—a player on the world's stage for five generations—has vanished.

There will be other, inevitably jarring changes to mark the dawn of a new era. At sporting events, British subjects will now sing "God Save the King." The Royal Mint and the Bank of England, as well as the Royal Mail, gear up to place Charles III's likeness on all coins, paper currency, and stamps. Wherever the Queen's likenesses have been displayed throughout the Commonwealth—from government offices and embassies to pubs, department stores, and souvenir shops—there will hang a photograph of the new king.

For Charles and Camilla, Elizabeth's death also means a change of address. After several weeks, they move out of Clarence House to take up permanent residence in Buckingham Palace. William and Kate remain in Kensington Palace, leaving Clarence House to Prince Harry and his future wife and family. For those who have served the Queen at Buckingham Palace, in some cases for generations, it is not just her absence that weighs heavily. Something else is missing: Her Majesty's corgis. She owned more than thirty during her lifetime, all descended from Susan, a Pembroke given to Princess Elizabeth on her eighteenth birthday. Over the years, several of the Queen's corgis mated with Princess Margaret's dachshund Pipkin to produce "Dorgis."

The noisy, notoriously willful animals were always underfoot; at the Queen's direction, they slept in wicker baskets just outside her bedroom door (occasionally they slept at the foot of her bed) and moved freely about the palace whether or not they were completely housebroken (footmen always carried blotting paper with them to do a quick cleanup in case one of the corgis had an accident).

The Queen went so far as to mix the dogs' food herself whenever she could (they ate only when she gave the royal command) and carefully prepared Christmas stockings for them every year. Ever mindful of the potential hazards to her pets, the Queen even carried a small magnet in her purse so she could pick up any stray pins or needles that might have been left on the floor after a dress fitting. Before any toys were given to the corgis, they first had to be personally inspected by the sovereign, who was known to pry a bell from a rubber ball or a noisemaker from a squeaky toy on the grounds that it presented a choking hazard.

To practically everyone but their owner, the Queen's canine friends were the hazard. Paul Burrell, a footman who later became Diana's butler and confidant, was knocked unconscious when nine leashed corgis tripped him up on the steps at Sandringham. "They're yappy, snappy, and we bloody well hate them," another footman declared. Diana, who made no secret of her dislike for this particular breed, called Her Majesty's ubiquitous pets "the moving carpet."

Now only four of the Queen's dogs remain: corgis Willow and Holly, and dorgis Vulcan and Candy. Philip and Charles always despised the "yapping dogs," and William made no secret of his distaste for their "constant noise. They're barking all the time. They drive me mad." In fact, none of the male Windsors are fans of the Queen's corgis—a feeling that was apparently also shared by Princess Anne. In the end, members of the household staff who had cared for the dogs volunteer to adopt them, and within a week the Queen's beloved corgis and dorgis are gone from the palace.

All of this is simply prelude to the coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey. Viewed by a global audience that obliterates the record set only months before by the Queen's funeral, the crowning of the new king takes place amidst the pomp, pageantry, grandeur, and splendor that only the thousand-year-old institution of the monarchy can provide.

Clad in their own royal regalia, William and Kate—the new Prince and Princess of Wales—look on as the Archbishop of Canterbury begins the elaborate ceremony. Seated on a chair slightly below Charles and to his left is Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall.

After the Archbishop of Canterbury leads the communion service and prayers are said, the Lord Great Chamberlain removes Charles's crimson robe, and the new monarch is seated in King Edward's Chair. Every anointed sovereign since 1308 has been seated in St. Edward's Chair, encasing the legendary Stone of Scone, at the moment of coronation. "Sirs," the Archbishop of Canterbury declares to the assembled throng before anointing the monarch, "I here present unto you King Charles, your undoubted King, wherefore all of you who are come this day to do your homage and service, are you willing to do the same?" Their answer thunders through the abbey: "God save King Charles!"

Charles is then invested with two coronation robes—one white and the "great golden mantle," the Imperial Robe—while the Lord Great Chamberlain touches the king's heels with St. George's Golden Spurs (no longer actually buckled onto the monarch's ankles since the coronation of Queen Anne in 1702 because Anne's ankles were too thick to fit them). Then he is handed two swords by the assembled bishops and archbishops—the Great Sword of State and the Jeweled Sword of Offering—which he passes to a cleric who lays them on the altar.

The Archbishop then hands Charles a "Golden Orb" encrusted with diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies symbolizing "the world under Christ's dominion" before slipping the coronation ring onto the fourth finger of the new king's right hand. This ruby and sapphire ring represents the sovereign's "marriage" to the nation.

Still seated in St. Edward's chair, Charles hands the Golden Orb to the Bishop of London, and is then presented with two more symbols of royal power. The Royal Scepter, symbol of regal power and justice, is placed in the sovereign's right hand. It is mounted with the largest cut diamond in the world, the 530-carat Star of Africa. In his left hand, King Charles now grasps the dove-topped "Rod of Equity and Mercy."

It is at this point that a memory from Charles's childhood surfaces—the moment when, as a very bored-looking boy of three, he stood in the gallery between the Queen Mother and his aunt, Princess Margaret, to

watch his mother become queen. The night before her coronation, Elizabeth, then just twenty-five, had practiced walking with the heavy crown on her head in front of Charles and his sister Anne, dissolving in giggles as she struggled to keep her balance. This would be one of his fondest memories of a mother who, from that point on, had little time to dote on her lonely, emotionally isolated eldest son.

Now, at last, it is Charles's turn—the moment in history that has defined his entire life, his *raison d'être*. His eyes widen perceptibly as St. Edward's Crown is brought to the Archbishop of Canterbury on a red cushion. It is especially fitting that this, the traditional coronation crown, was actually made for the crowning of the last King Charles—Charles II—in 1661.

The Archbishop carries the crown slightly above his own head as he walks toward St. Edward's Chair. Once he reaches it, the Archbishop raises the crown high and pauses for a moment before bringing it down and placing it firmly on Charles's head. His eyes are vacant; he is utterly expressionless. It is the classic out-of-body experience. At precisely this moment, the male peers of the realm in attendance place their coronets on their own heads in unison—the only time this is ever done.

“God save the King!” Kate, William, and Camilla shout loudly with everyone in the Abbey. “God save the King! God save the King!” There is a fanfare of trumpets, and the Archbishop raises his right hand to speak. “God crown you,” he intones, “with a crown of glory and righteousness.” While the orchestra and choir launch into William Walton's soul-stirring “Coronation Te Deum,” church bells ring across the kingdom and guns thunder in the royal parks—from Hyde Park to the Tower of London.

In full regalia, the crown very literally weighing heavy on his head, Charles rises from St. Edward's Chair and moves to another royal throne closer to Camilla. While the choir sings, William kneels before his father and pays homage to the King, followed by the other “Dukes of the Blood Royal”—Prince Harry, the King's brothers Andrew and Edward—and then a long procession of “Lords Temporal”: lesser dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, and barons.

Kate is smiling—not the unfettered, natural smile she willingly bestows on the flower-bearing children and awe-struck housewives who flock to catch a glimpse of her at ribbon cuttings and walkabouts, but the slightly pursed grin designed to keep reporters and the all-powerful Men in Gray guessing. The new Princess of Wales, bearer of the title that once belonged to her late mother-in-law, Diana, knows that all eyes will be on her for some faint glimmer of disapproval, or even anger.

Once the parade of peers kneeling in homage to their king is completed, Camilla rises from her seat and kneels in prayer before the altar. Then she rises and moves several steps to the “Faldstool”—an ancient ceremonial prayer lectern—and again kneels in prayer, this time beneath a canopy held by four duchesses representing the four corners of the kingdom.

As he did with her husband, the Archbishop of Canterbury anoints Camilla, and then slips the queen's coronation ring on the fourth finger of her right hand. Once again, one of the most treasured of the Crown Jewels is brought to the Archbishop on a red velvet cushion. This crown is a national treasure in its own right, as laden with memories and sentiment as any single object in the realm can possibly be. It is the Queen Mother's Crown, made especially for the coronation of Charles's grandmother as queen in 1937. The first royal crown to be made of platinum, it is set with twenty-eight hundred diamonds, including the heart-stopping 105-carat Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light).

The Queen Mother's crown was placed on her coffin following her death in 2002, and has been displayed with the other Crown Jewels in the Tower of London ever since. Now the Archbishop raises the crown and

gently settles it atop Camilla's head. All the peeresses—the viscountesses, the baronesses, the duchesses—simultaneously follow suit, crowning themselves with the glittering coronets that denote their rank in Britain's aristocracy.

Now “God save the Queen” reverberates through the archways of Westminster Abbey, and Queen Camilla is handed her own two royal scepters. She then takes her place on a throne of her own next to her husband's—a smaller throne, but a throne nonetheless.

It is the scene that Charles, in his effort years earlier to sell Camilla to the public as a suitable replacement for the adored Diana, repeatedly vowed would never take place. By tradition and by law, Camilla has been for all intents and purposes Princess of Wales—among all women in the realm second only to the Queen in rank. But Charles's wife settled for a lesser title that had also been held by Diana—Duchess of Cornwall—ostensibly as a “wedding present” from the Queen.

The Palace went to considerable lengths to downplay Camilla's status in the royal hierarchy, but the instant Camilla married Charles she became Her Royal Highness The Princess Charles Philip Arthur George, Princess of Wales, Duchess of Cornwall, Duchess of Rothesay, Countess of Chester, Countess of Carrick, Baroness of Renfrew, Lady of the Isles, Princess of Scotland, Dame Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order. This panoply of titles aside, Charles had repeatedly vowed that, upon his ascension to the throne, Camilla would become princess consort—never queen. He would not press to have her crowned—and, he insisted to a wary public, Camilla herself had absolutely no interest in rising above her station as duchess.

In truth, Camilla automatically became queen on the sovereign's death. Only a “morganatic” marriage would have prevented this—a strict legal arrangement in which Camilla would have been expressly forbidden from acquiring any of her husband's many titles and privileges. That far Charles was unwilling to go.

There are those who feel this was never Charles's decision to make. But preventing Camilla from becoming queen would take an act of Parliament, followed by the passage of identical laws in the other fifteen Commonwealth countries (out of fifty-three) where the British monarch is head of state—an unwieldy process at best.

Nevertheless, there is no doubting that resentment toward Camilla is deeply ingrained in the British psyche. The reason: For decades the notorious Mrs. Parker Bowles carried on a torrid affair with Charles that sent his naive young bride into an emotional tailspin that ended in scandal, divorce, and death. In the immediate aftermath of the Paris car crash that killed Diana, Camilla became England's—and arguably the world's—most despised woman. “Mrs. PB,” as she was known by palace operatives, rightly believed she would never earn the public's acceptance, much less its affection.

In the weeks leading up to Camilla's 2005 wedding to Charles, Diana's friend Vivienne Parry declared “there is only one Princess of Wales in people's minds. And only when Prince William gets married, perhaps many years from now, will it be time for another one.” Another Diana ally, Joan Berry, publicly called on the Queen to call off their wedding “even at this late date.”

Berry and Parry had public opinion solidly behind them. A poll in the Daily Telegraph showed a majority of Britons were convinced marriage to Camilla would cripple the monarchy, and that fully 69 percent of British subjects wanted William, not Charles, as their next king. The Sunday Times did its own poll one week before the wedding. Similarly, it revealed that 58 percent of the public wanted William to succeed Elizabeth on the throne, and that 73 percent emphatically opposed having Camilla as their next queen.

Nor did it help matters that, in order for Charles and Camilla to wed, the Church of England—of which the monarch is titular head—had to hastily rescind its centuries-old ban on second marriages for divorced couples. Back then, the Queen refused to attend the awkward civil ceremony at Windsor Guildhall, but she did show up at the forty-five-minute-long Service of Prayer and Dedication that followed at Windsor Castle. At the time, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was so distressed at having to conduct the service that he insisted that an act of contrition be part of the wedding ceremony—that they expressly confess their “manifold sins and wickedness” and offer a public apology for their rampantly adulterous behavior.

Now, more than a decade after her 2005 wedding to Charles, public opinion seems to have changed little. Some 58 percent of Britons still remain adamantly opposed to Charles as their next monarch, with a staggering two-thirds of those aged eighteen to thirty-four wanting Charles and Camilla to step aside for William and Kate.

In the few months since Elizabeth’s passing, Buckingham Palace has slowly fed the press and public details of the coronation ceremony. Yet it has only been a matter of days since palace officials confirmed that Camilla would indeed be crowned queen alongside her husband. There has been the expected initial public outcry, but Charles’s courtiers assure him that this will quickly subside as the country is caught up in the excitement of the coronation.

To be sure, few things can be counted on to stir the souls of the British people as much as a royal procession through central London. On April 29, 2011, for example, more than a million people lined the route from Westminster Abbey to Buckingham Palace to cheer Prince William and his beguiling and popular bride.

Now Charles and Camilla will take the same five-mile route, giving the public its first glimpse of the new king and queen. Before they leave the Abbey, Charles exchanges St. Edward’s Crown for the Imperial State Crown. With its 2,868 diamonds, including the 317-carat Cullinan II, the 104-carat Stuart Sapphire, and the legendary Black Prince’s Ruby (not to mention four other major rubies and eleven emeralds), the Imperial State Crown symbolizes the sovereignty of the monarch. The last time Charles saw it, the crown was sitting atop his mother’s coffin.

Riding to the palace in the extravagantly ornate, twenty-four-foot-long Gold State Coach pulled by eight white horses, the royal couple waves and smiles, but the reaction of the crowd is oddly muted. Nor can Charles and Camilla fail to hear the odd catcall, or to spot the occasional placard echoing the same sentiments expressed years earlier at their wedding: ILLEGAL, IMMORAL, AND SHAMEFUL.

Still, the people have come for spectacle and pageantry, and on that score the Royal Family never fails to deliver. The procession includes more than twenty thousand troops from around His Majesty’s Commonwealth, marching to the strains of “Rule, Britannia,” “The British Grenadiers,” and of course Sir Edward Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance” as they make their way past Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, Pall Mall, Hyde Park Corner, Marble Arch, Oxford Circus, and Regent Street before heading down The Mall.

Finally reaching Buckingham Palace, King Charles III climbs out of the carriage, still wearing the Imperial State Crown and somehow managing to juggle the golden orb and scepters. Camilla, the Queen Mother’s crown firmly in place on her head, trails a respectful few steps behind.

More than a million people are jamming the mall in front of the palace and the adjacent streets—a sea of humanity stretching across St. James’s and Green Parks to Whitehall and beyond. Some are perched on the heroic bronze statues representing justice, agriculture, progress, and industry that ring the eighty-two-foot-

tall Victoria Memorial in front of the palace, and three teenagers have managed to find a purchase atop Victoria herself. Dozens more, camera phones in hand, splash in the memorial's fountains.

Yet crowds in the past have been even larger—notably for the wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton in 2011 and Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee the following year. Still, as he watches the tumultuous scene on a television monitor inside the palace with the rest of the Royal Family, Charles cannot help but be moved by the size of the throng and his subjects' obvious enthusiasm.

"Isn't it incredible?" he says, shaking his head as if it has come as a major surprise. True to form, he gazes at the image on the TV screen, not bothering to turn around and look out the window at actual people. "Just marvelous." Camilla's trademark toothy grin disguises whatever doubts she may harbor.

England's new queen—the first queen consort since Charles's beloved grandmother—has never been particularly fond of this room just inside the huge glass doors leading to the palace's famous balcony. This space, known as the "Centre Room," is one of the most intriguing spaces in the palace—an exotic oriental hodgepodge of dragons, Chinese murals, gargantuan cloisonné vases, lotus-shaped chandeliers, and other examples of priceless chinoiserie brought to the palace from the Royal Pavilion in Brighton.

Camilla has always considered the Centre Room as too closely resembling an upscale Chinese restaurant—an opinion shared by Princess Diana, among others. As a practical matter, it serves as the garishly appointed anteroom in which the family gathers before facing the music—both literally and figuratively—on the Royal Balcony. In the role of supporting player, Camilla has always been uncomfortable at moments like these. Today, cast in the female lead, she is plainly terrified.

Palace footmen throw open the twelve-foot-high glass doors, and the muffled roar of the throng outside now becomes clear. "We want the King!" the multitudes cry. "We want the King." Clive Alderton gestures toward the balcony. "Your Majesty," he says, "I believe the people wish to see their King."

Charles, still wearing the Imperial State Crown and his hand-woven silk velvet coronation robes trimmed in Canadian ermine, takes a deep breath and walks toward the door. Outside in the palace courtyard, the musical director of the King's Guard band has been gazing up at the balcony draped with gold and red velvet bunting, waiting for the cue to come over his headset. Now it does, and the trumpets burst into a royal fanfare.

As King Charles III suddenly comes into view on the balcony, the crowd cheers wildly. He is, for the first time in his long life, finally stepping out from his mother's shadow. No one understands this better than Charles's Queen, who hangs back, allowing the love of her life to savor this moment that has eluded him for seven decades.

Charles waves to the sea of humanity, letting their adulation wash over him. But within thirty seconds, he turns to beckon his wife outside. To the cameras recording from a distance, it is not evident that Camilla, who at times of stress frequently suffers from what she calls "the shakes," trembles visibly as she joins her husband on the balcony. Then it happens: William and Kate and their adorable children, Prince George and Princess Charlotte, step into view. In an ear-splitting instant, the decibel level doubles as the crowd ramps up from joy to hysteria. The band quickly segues into "Rule Britannia," and as Prince Harry and the rest of the Royal Family drift in behind William and Kate, the din continues unabated.

Just as it appears the noise has finally reached its apex, there is a roar overhead. All heads tilt skyward to see the traditional flypast of RAF aircraft overhead. Still wearing their crowns, the King and Queen shield their

eyes to look up as squadrons of Red Arrows, Hawks, and Tornado GR4s scream past.

While the Royal Family files back through balcony doors, Kate, smiling broadly as she holds Charlotte in her arms, turns to give a final wave to the multitude. One last, deafening roar goes up from the crowd. William, who has never sought to eclipse his father in any way, looks mortified; he gently takes Kate by the elbow and steers her inside.

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOW the coronation of King Charles III, the British tabloids question whether “The Bridge” from one monarch to the next stands strong or will buckle under the weight of public sentiment. New postcoronation polls indicate that the public, feeling betrayed that Camilla has been crowned Queen despite Charles’s repeated pledge that this would never happen, now more than ever want William as their sovereign.

The effects are felt more quickly abroad, where Charles’s ascension to the throne is causing a rupture in the Commonwealth. Fifteen of the fifty-three former British colonies and dependencies that make up the Commonwealth had held on to the British monarch as their queen even after winning their independence—an arrangement that survived over the decades almost entirely because of the personal affection the people in those countries felt for Elizabeth. Without her, Australia and Canada now quickly vote to oust Charles as their head of state, opting instead for republicanism. Other Commonwealth member nations soon follow.

Charles and Camilla are also unpopular in Scotland, and the death of Elizabeth removes any impediment to independence. There are calls for a new referendum; within a few months, experts say, Scotland will probably become a republican state and join the European Union.

In Great Britain itself, where in the aftermath of Diana’s death Camilla had been called a whore by passers-by in the street (“They’ve got to blame someone,” Camilla said then), the new Queen is costing the monarchy dearly. Poll after poll shows that, while the public has fallen increasingly in love with Prince William’s young family, the average Briton chafes at the idea that Camilla has replaced Elizabeth as their Queen.

King Charles does nothing to mollify his critics. In fact, he privately lectures the Prime Minister on a wide range of policy issues—something his politically savvy mother would never have done—and publicly pushes for sweeping urban and environmental reforms.

Having successfully alienated even the monarchy’s staunchest allies in the government, Charles endures one humiliating setback after another. Parliament votes to slash the budget of the royal household dramatically. Certain properties from which the crown derives hundreds of millions of dollars in annual income are confiscated. Antimonarchist republicans, whose efforts have been kept in check by the people’s love for Elizabeth, make huge gains in the polls.

There is one bright spot for the monarchy: Britons remain as smitten as ever with the Prince of Wales and his young family, although given the Windsors’ storied longevity, William will be well into his sixties before Charles’s death puts him on the throne. The Prime Minister suggests to the king that he might stave off the inevitable by bowing to public pressure and abdicating in favor of William, but he refuses. William himself, King Charles points out, has vowed he will never be party to such an unprecedented “scheme.”

In a breathtakingly short time, the love and respect the British people harbored for their sovereign all but vanishes. It becomes glaringly obvious there may be no future King William V, no King George VII. The

monarchy is crumbling under the weight of the King's intransigence. Charles could well be the last to wear the crown.



AS SCENARIOS GO, THE FALL of the House of Windsor is scarcely far-fetched. "As her reign nears its end," observed Scottish journalist and historian Neal Ascherson in the *New York Times*, "the emphasis on person, not Crown, becomes ominous. The British increasingly fear that Charles may be a weak, unpredictable king. If they are right, will the 1,000-year splendor of the Crown outweigh people's impatience with an elderly, melancholy man?" More to the point, will they lose patience with an elderly, melancholy King who broke a solemn promise to his subjects not to make his controversial wife their Queen?

Camilla has told friends that, despite her famously easygoing and self-deprecating nature, she has spent countless sleepless nights pondering all the variables. "Don't make the mistake of thinking Camilla is dumb," said the comedian Joan Rivers, who, surprisingly, was a longtime friend of both the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. "She is a very smart lady. She knows exactly what she's doing, what people think of her, and what can happen if she makes one wrong move."

Doubts about the impact she may have on her husband's standing in the eyes of his subjects clearly gnaw at Camilla. "She has always been so in love with Charles," said a former lady-in-waiting to the Queen Mother, "and at the same time she has always been absolutely determined not to come between Charles and his people. Of course, in reality, Camilla has done just that on many occasions."

For members of the Royal Family both old and new, few occasions are more inherently stressful than the monarch's official birthday celebration—and the one marking the Queen's ninetieth birthday in 2016 will be no exception. On the morning of the big event, Camilla does not wake up next to her husband in their giant canopied four-poster at Clarence House. Charles has already been up for more than an hour, and is in his dressing room being attended to by his valet.

Normally, Camilla would not be spending a summer weekend at Clarence House at all. She would be happily ensconced at Ray Mill House, the gray stone mansion in Wiltshire that she purchased for \$1.3 million after finally divorcing her spouse of twenty-two years, Andrew Parker Bowles, in 1995. It is no accident that Ray Mill House is conveniently situated just sixteen miles from Highgrove, Charles's lavish country estate west of London.

As the Duchess of Cornwall and the wife of the heir to the throne, Camilla has at least three official residences of her own—Highgrove, Clarence House, and Birkhall, the fourteen-bedroom residence at Balmoral that had once belonged to the Queen Mother. Yet her undisputed favorite is Ray Mill House, a comparatively cozy sanctuary from the pressures of royal life. It is also the one place where she can spend time with her rambunctious tribe of grandchildren and away from the increasingly curmudgeonly Charles.

Critics point out that security measures at Ray Mill House alone cost British taxpayers upward of \$3 million a year, but it is worth it to this royal couple for yet another reason. After decades spent chasing stolen moments of passion in country getaways or the homes of mutual friends, Charles and Camilla have concluded that cohabitation is anathema to their relationship. They cannot keep their love alive without the excitement that comes from the carefully planned illicit rendezvous, the furtive liaison at their favorite trysting place.

By 2016, Charles and Camilla are no longer living together in the traditional sense. Instead, he divides his

time primarily between Clarence House and Highgrove, while she spends as much time as possible with family and friends at Ray Mill House, waiting for her prince to show up at any time of the day or night—all just as it was during his marriage to Diana.

“You have to understand that Camilla loved being a royal mistress and all the intrigue that went along with it,” a Wiltshire neighbor said. “Without all the sneaking around, it just wasn’t as much fun as it used to be. So they just set the clocks back and pretend they’re still secret lovers. I’m not really sure they’d know how to do it any other way.”

Yet on this Saturday morning in June, sex may well be the farthest thing from Camilla’s mind. Instead, as the wife of a future monarch and the daughter-in-law of the current one, she will be called upon once again to play an important part in one of her nation’s most colorful spectacles. Today the annual Trooping the Colour will take place on Horse Guards Parade by St. James’s Park—the ceremony that has marked the sovereign’s official birthday since 1748. Full of pomp and pageantry, this is always one of the most important and colorful public dates on the royal calendar. Edward VII, who was born on November 9, 1841, permanently moved the Trooping the Colour ceremony to its current date because June seemed like a more temperate month for a parade celebrating his birthday.

During sixty-four years on the throne, Elizabeth II has missed Trooping the Colour only once—in 1955, when a rail strike caused the cancellation of the event altogether. For thirty-six of those years, this occasion also offered the Queen, an ardent equestrienne, the opportunity to ride sidesaddle from Buckingham Palace down The Mall, resplendent in the medal-bedecked red uniform of her royal regiments. In 1981, a young man in the crowd fired blank rounds from a pistol and startled her horse, nearly pitching the Queen to the pavement. Undaunted, Elizabeth continued to attend on horseback for another five years before finally opting to make the journey in a royal carriage. No longer wearing the uniform, she nevertheless always wears the Brigade of Guards badge, a large jewel representing the regiments that participate—the Coldstream Guards, the Welsh Guards, the Irish Guards, the Scots Guards, and the Grenadier Guards.

This year, Trooping the Colour is even more fraught with historical significance than usual. Although the Queen actually turned ninety on April 21, this Saturday in June is the day that her grateful subjects will mark the occasion with yet another carefully choreographed, but still genuine, mass outpouring of affection.

It is also one of the two days each year when the Queen releases her annual Honors List. This list, submitted by the Prime Minister but always subject to the approval of the sovereign (with added guidance from the Men in Gray), bestows MBEs (Members of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), OBEs (Officers of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), CBEs (Commanders of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), and knighthoods on a thousand or more artists, academics, civil servants, scientists, diplomats, politicians, business leaders, and humanitarians. By 2016, the Queen had conferred on her subjects more than four hundred thousand honors and awards.

No less for members of the Royal Family, Trooping the Colour affords the opportunity to gauge where one stands in the eyes of the monarch—and in the royal pecking order. During the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2002 celebrating the Queen’s fiftieth year on the throne, Her Majesty allowed Camilla to be seen publicly with the Royal Family for the first time—with some important restrictions. At the classical and pop concerts held at Buckingham Palace that year, Camilla could be viewed on the giant Jumbotron, nervously playing with her hair and trying to spy on what Charles and the Queen—Her Majesty’s bright yellow earplugs firmly in place—were up to from two rows behind.

THINGS WERE VERY DIFFERENT DURING the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee a decade later. Eyebrows

raised when Prince Philip was hospitalized with a bladder infection and, rather than going solo as she usually did under such circumstances, the Queen chose Camilla to take his place next to her in the royal carriage. “She was sending a very strong message,” observed longtime royal commentator Robert Jobson, “that the Duchess of Cornwall deserved to be there.” Camilla, more stunned than anyone at that turn of events, could scarcely contain her glee.

Camilla’s good fortune—“pride of place next to the queen,” the Times of London called it—was no accident. For years now, Charles had pleaded with his mother to make a more public show of her acceptance of Camilla, however grudging it might have been. When his father fell ill, he wasted no time in pressuring the Queen to invite Camilla to sit next to her in the 1902 State Landau. Even more important than his personal entreaties to the Queen herself was the deft lobbying with senior Buckingham Palace officials undertaken by Charles’s staff on Camilla’s behalf. In matters of protocol, the Queen almost always acquiesced, albeit sometimes reluctantly, to the Men in Gray.

The situation regarding Philip was back to normal in 2013, when the ninety-four-year-old Duke of Edinburgh not only rode next to his wife in the royal carriage, but did it wearing the full uniform and unwieldy bearskin hat of the Grenadier Guards. This was particularly impressive given the fact that Philip now officially ranked as the oldest living male member of the British Royal Family—ever. Camilla and Kate actually rode side by side in a separate carriage with Prince Harry, unsmiling and clearly ill at ease as they waved stiffly to crowds lining the streets.

Whether the Queen is again convinced to publicly sidle up to her daughter-in-law as she did during the Diamond Jubilee or decides to give another Royal the nod, Camilla must look as polished and presentable as humanly possible for the occasion. To say she had undergone a Galatea-like transformation in recent years would be a gross understatement. For decades, Camilla’s fashion sense was akin to her taste in furniture—decidedly English shabby. She favored torn riding pants or dirt-stained jeans, boxy sweaters, scuffed, mud-caked boots, frayed scarves, and frumpy tweeds. Her fingernails were dirty and jagged, her crooked and chipped teeth stained by decades of smoking. Her hair was a brittle tangle of straw, from which one might at any given moment pull out an actual piece of straw.

That began to change dramatically in late 2002, when, at Charles’s urging, Camilla subjected herself to a complete makeover. Despite their shared love of gritty country pursuits like gardening and riding, Charles was also a man of refined tastes who spent well over \$100,000 annually on his own bespoke wardrobe. His unwavering conviction about how even the smallest things should be done had servants scrambling. They were instructed that lunch must be served on plates marked with the Prince of Wales crest precisely at twelve o’clock. A cup and saucer were to be placed to the right with a silver spoon pointing outward at a twenty-five-degree angle. The royal toast was always served on a silver rack—never on a plate—with three balls of butter (no more, no less) chilled in a small dish.

Even if His Highness merely asked for a cold drink, staffers knew they were in trouble if he looked into his glass and scowled at what he saw. “He preferred round pieces of ice,” a former valet said, “because he thought the angles made regular cubes ‘too noisy.’ We heard that quite a lot.”

Prince Charles’s valet, Michael Fawcett, was all too painfully familiar with his boss’s idiosyncrasies—and his insistence on being catered to in every conceivable way. Fawcett’s duties included squeezing the toothpaste from a silver dispenser bearing the Prince of Wales crest onto the Prince’s toothbrush, lathering his shaving brush, slipping on and tying the Prince’s shoes, zipping up the royal fly, and even holding the specimen bottle while the Prince of Wales gave a urine sample during regular check-ups.

Things were no different on the road. Charles traveled with his own hand towels, cushioned toilet seat, and toilet paper embroidered with the Prince of Wales crest. There were even written instructions to be passed on to hotel chefs stipulating the “dimensions and texture” of royal sandwiches. Prince Charles’s childhood teddy bear, which always resided in a place of honor amidst the pillows on his canopied four-poster, was also packed up for every trip and then taken out to be tucked under the covers of His Royal Highness’s bed wherever he happened to be. For more than six decades, the only person allowed to mend Prince Charles’s ancient, unraveling teddy was his beloved nanny, Mabel Anderson.

Pampered and demanding—at his own dinner parties he often ate a different meal from his guests, on Prince of Wales plates and using Prince of Wales utensils—Charles grew up being told that, as far as the Royal Family was concerned, appearances were everything. The Prince knew Camilla would have to streamline her look and adopt an entirely new style if she wanted to be a worthy front woman for what members of the Royal Family wryly called “The Firm.” With Charles’s then deputy private secretary and resident media Svengali Mark Bolland overseeing the entire process, Camilla submitted herself to a handpicked team of dietitians, fitness experts, plastic surgeons, dentists, and cosmetologists.

Over a six-month period, Camilla underwent a series of face and neck peels, Botox injections, and laser treatments to erase the wrinkles and lines in her face and neck. She also had her teeth whitened and capped, and even hired a full-time hairdresser, Hugh Green of Belgravia’s swank Hugh and Stephen salon, to tend to her champagne-colored tresses.

Shrinking from a size twelve to a size ten, Camilla also began wearing sleek gowns and chic suits by British designers like Anna Valentine, Antony Price, Bruce Oldfield, and Vivienne Westwood. Each morning, royal dresser Jackie Meakin laid out the day’s wardrobe for Camilla. And each day, Meakin and the Duchess considered how she would look in photographs standing next to the most stylish woman on the planet: the former Kate Middleton.

IN APARTMENT 1A OF NEARBY Kensington Palace, Kate sits cross-legged on the nursery floor, feeding a bottle to Princess Charlotte while her big brother plays noisily with a toy dump truck. If anyone needed proof that even the adored Duchess of Cambridge is not entirely immune to criticism, it is embodied in this Beatrix Potter–inspired room with its cheerful periwinkle-blue walls decorated with drawings of Peter Rabbit. After more than \$7 million was spent to refurbish the nursery along with the Cambridges’ royal apartment—more accurately, twenty rooms spread out over a four-story wing of the palace—the couple ran afoul of the press when it was announced they would actually be spending most of their time at Anmer Hall, their mansion on the grounds of Sandringham in Norfolk. Sandringham and its twenty thousand acres, along with Balmoral Castle (another fifty thousand acres), are the only two royal residences privately owned by the Queen and technically not held in trust for future sovereigns.

Still, whenever the Cambridges’ presence is required in the city—as it always is during Trooping the Colour ceremonies—they make Kensington Palace their base of operations. Soon, Kate hands off both Charlotte and George to their Spanish nanny, Maria Teresa Borrillo. She, too, must now be tended to by her full-time hairdresser, Amanda Cook Tucker, and go over wardrobe choices with her personal assistant-turned-stylist, Natasha “Tash” Archer. Although Kate Middleton’s innate sense of style rivaled that of Diana from the very beginning, it was Tash Archer who urged the young wife of the future king to add more polish to her look by wearing Jenny Packham, Alexander McQueen, Emilia Wickstead, and Erdem.

Not surprisingly, what she is going to wear today is of far less concern to Kate than it is to Camilla. Camilla has come along light-years in terms of her appearance and public image, but she cannot compete with a supremely poised natural beauty who also happens to be thirty-five years her junior.

Nor could anyone, for that matter, hope to compete with the newest stars in the Windsor firmament. At the end of last year's Trooping the Colour ceremonies, when the Royal Family gathered on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, the loudest cheers rose up from the throng when William stepped onto the balcony carrying George. It was a rare official outing for the twenty-two-month-old prince, who wore the same powder-blue outfit that William wore when he made his balcony debut in 1984. George waved at the crowd and played with the gold braid on his father's uniform, easily upstaging everyone—including the Queen.

George's appearance was, in fact, historic. It marked the first time that four generations of present and current British monarchs—the Queen, Charles, William, and George—were seen together on the royal balcony.

"ALL EYES ON GORGEOUS GEORGE!" trumpeted the next morning's Daily Mail—although his mother got more than her fair share of kudos. Words like "amazing," "slim," and "radiant" were used in the press to describe how Kate looked as she stood on the balcony, just six weeks after giving birth to Charlotte.

The Little Princess stayed home then, but Kate and William fully intend to have her join them on the balcony this year. Charles will be especially thrilled. A doting grandpa to George, the Prince of Wales is, according to William, "positively obsessed" with Charlotte. At a gathering of RAF pilots who flew during World War II, he boasted that his granddaughter was not only adorable but "already sleeps through the night, and is much easier on Mum than Prince George."

Although Camilla had grandchildren of her own and fully appreciated Charles's affection for George and Charlotte, she also realized that the little Cambridges were the newest pawns in an ancient and very public game. "It can be subtle or it can be very obvious," Harold Brooks-Baker, the longtime publishing director of Burke's Peerage, once observed. "But everyone on that balcony is to one extent or another jockeying for position. Being seen up front, and close to the monarch, is everything."

Certainly, each Royal's team of handlers took care to examine the video and the stills, analyzing every position, motion, and gesture. Last year, unable to do anything about the commotion being caused by George's debut, Camilla made an effort to be seen up front in her oversized cream-colored hat and celadon-green silk suit. Kate, dazzling in an ice-blue-and-ivory silk Catherine Walker coat dress and one of the white fascinators for which she had become famous, became so engrossed in keeping an eye on George that for much of the event she was completely out of sight. While Camilla stood up front next to Charles, William, and George, her chief rival for the public's affection—Kate—was hidden behind the sovereign. The Prince of Wales, who still complained bitterly over perceived slights to his wife, laughed at the next day's photographs. They showed all the Royals smiling and waving, but in Kate's case only her fascinator was visible, sailing above the Queen's head.

WHILE TWO QUEENS-IN-WAITING FRET ABOUT their futures, the current one stirs awake on the morning of her special day. It is seven-thirty, and a chambermaid is gently rapping at her door. Elizabeth, like her daughter-in-law Camilla, has always been sensitive to light and wears eye shades even though her bed is also encircled by heavy curtains. She sleeps more or less bolt upright, propped up on a pile of down pillows with custom-designed Porthault linens bearing the royal insignia. It takes only a minute or two for the Queen to pull back the curtains and arrange herself in bed. She then beckons the chambermaid in with the words she uses every morning without variation. "Yes, yes, come in!" she chirps. "I'm ready for you!"

The maid enters a room that, save for its occupant, seems wholly unremarkable. Neither Kate nor Camilla have ever been in the Queen's bedroom, and it is certainly nothing like Camilla imagines it; there is not the slightest resemblance to the regal boudoir she has conjured in her dreams.

True, the Queen's bedroom is located in the east wing not far from the Throne Room, where tourists can pay to see the high-backed velvet chairs bearing the initials E.R. II and P (for Philip) and the seat cushions bearing the imprint of the royal derrieres. For those who know where to find the secret latch hidden in the oak-paneled wall, there is actually direct access from the Throne Room into the Queen's private chambers. On other floors of the east wing, guest rooms have the name of the occupant posted on the door: Prince Charles, Prince Harry, Princess Anne, and so on. There is no such name tag on the Queen's bedroom door.

Although the ceilings are twelve feet high, it is roughly the size of a bedroom in any suburban American home—about sixteen by fourteen feet. The furnishings can only be described as spartan. Instead of a king-sized bed or even the more obviously appropriate queen-sized bed, Elizabeth has always preferred to sleep alone in a double bed—granted, a bed surrounded on all sides by a curtain. There are also two small nightstands, and a sturdy, functional, but undistinguished mahogany dresser.

The chambermaid maneuvers the heavy tray onto one of the small bedside tables and the Queen, who unhesitatingly describes herself as “a real morning person,” chatters brightly about the weather. On the tray is a tea service for one: two small silver pots, Royal Crown Derby bone china teacup and saucer decorated in one of Her Majesty's favorite floral patterns, a napkin bearing the monogram EIIR (Elizabeth II Regent), and a few biscuits.

Her Majesty always serves herself this all-important first cup of Darjeeling or occasionally Earl Grey (two lumps of sugar with milk trucked in fresh from the royal herd at Windsor Castle), then savors it while listening to the news on BBC Radio 4. The maid throws open the bedroom curtains, then draws the Queen's morning bath.

The Queen, who has a fondness for knee-length, floral-print Liberty of London nightgowns, puts on her favorite chenille robe and pads to the bathroom in bare feet. While she bathes, the maid lays out her wardrobe for the day—all preselected and tagged by her dresser and confidante Angela Kelly, who also chooses which one of the Queen's two hundred purses will best go with her outfit. What is actually in the Queen's handbag, along with those magnets for picking up stray pins that might injure her corgis? Since she routinely powders her nose at the dinner table—a practice that some people find surprising—the Queen always carries a treasured metal makeup case Philip made for her as a wedding gift. She also carries lipstick—in 1952 Elizabeth II commissioned her own shade called “the Balmoral Lipstick” to match her coronation robes—which she applies frequently throughout the day. In addition to a small selection of family snapshots and a number of good luck charms from her children—the Queen is unapologetically superstitious—Her Majesty's handbag includes a small tube of mints, several crossword puzzles to while away the time spent traveling from one appearance to another, doggie treats, a fountain pen (she refuses to use a ballpoint), sunglasses, reading glasses, a small mirror, a diary and address book—and often a tiny camera she might suddenly whip out to take photos of other world leaders. To keep from having to place her purse on the floor, the Queen also carries a small white suction cup with a hook on it. When the occasion arises, she sticks the suction cup to the underside of a table and hangs her purse from it. “Very handy, don't you think?” she said to one startled guest at a luncheon in Yorkshire.

Almost as revealing is what she doesn't carry in her purse: credit cards, car keys, cash, or a passport—she has never required one because, as the Queen, she issues all UK passports. Every other member of the Royal Family, including Prince Philip and Charles, requires a passport to travel abroad.

At eight-thirty, Elizabeth joins Prince Philip for breakfast in the first-floor dining room overlooking the palace gardens. Often Philip, who gets up an hour earlier than his wife, has breakfast alone in his own private dining room down the hall. (Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh maintain separate dining rooms, sitting

rooms, bedrooms, and bathrooms.) But today he is here to wish his wife of sixty-eight years happy birthday with a peck on both cheeks.

The Queen's breakfast menu rarely varies: Special K or oatmeal brought to the table in Tupperware containers, crustless whole wheat toast with orange marmalade, a single boiled egg, and small bowls of prunes, apricots, and macadamia nuts. While Elizabeth sips her tea, she scans the papers piled on her breakfast table. On top is her favorite publication, the *Racing Post*, followed by the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *Mirror*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Times*, and *Thoroughbred Owner and Breeder*.

She reads them all. "I don't read the tabloids," the Duke of Edinburgh said. "I glance at one. I reckon one's enough. I can't cope with them. But the Queen reads every bloody paper she can lay her hands on!"

Philip does not even attempt to speak to the Queen when she is immersed in her racing results and the day's tipsheets. He drinks his black coffee—the Prince is not a fan of tea in the morning—and proceeds to down a full English breakfast of fried eggs, fried mushrooms, bacon, sausages, scones, and oatcakes with honey. At one point, he breaks a tiny piece off a scone, crumbles it, walks over to the window, and places the crumbs in a bird feeder just outside the window.

At 9:00 a.m., the Queen's Piper marches to his customary spot in the garden just beneath the dining-room window and begins to play a strained rendition of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "People Will Say We're in Love" from the 1943 Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* It has been one of the Queen's favorite tunes since she was a teenager.

Elizabeth puts her papers down and walks to the window. To Major Rodgers's undisguised delight, both she and Philip are smiling down at him. Unfortunately, the Queen's Piper cannot hear her gamely humming along, trying to keep up with his wheezing bagpipes.

Oklahoma! opened on the West End in 1947, and she and Philip saw it when they were dating. According to Elizabeth's governess and friend Marion Crawford (who, like the Queen Mother, never stopped calling her young charge "Lilibet"), "People Will Say We're in Love" was Elizabeth and Philip's song. "After he started taking her out," Crawford remembered, "Lilibet would often ask the band at restaurants where they dined to play 'People Will Say We're in Love' for her." Elizabeth and Philip fell in love while slow dancing to the tune, and were married that November. At the time, long before Charles and Diana and William and Kate, theirs was the Wedding of the Century.

For a few blissfully free moments, Elizabeth is lost in her memories. Such moments of queenly reverie are rare; Her Majesty's hectic schedule aside, she has never been one for introspection. But since the death of the Queen Mother, friends and royal household staff alike have noticed what her cousin Margaret Rhodes called "a change in the Queen's mood . . . a kind of serenity. I think in a funny way, perhaps, the death of the Queen Mother had quite a huge effect on the Queen . . . in a way that she could come into her own as the head of the family and as the senior royal lady."

If the Queen felt more than a little intimidated by her mother, Elizabeth was always—to borrow Diana's nickname for her mother-in-law—"Top Lady" in everyone else's eyes. Now, as the world celebrates her ninetieth birthday, she knows precious time is running out. The Queen may not share Camilla's night terrors about what lies ahead for the monarchy once she is gone, or Kate's deceptively guileless sense of youthful optimism—in short, the firm if unstated belief that William will prevail, and sooner rather than later. But the Queen is keenly aware that to preserve the institution that she has embodied longer than anyone, hard choices must be made—and that royal egos will be badly bruised in the process.

The Queen's Piper ends with a flourish, then marches off. Her Majesty claps in appreciation, then turns from the window and heads back down the hall. As she walks toward her bedroom, she beckons to her "moving carpet" of corgis and dorgis to come along. Willow, Holly, Vulcan, and Candy all swarm at their mistress's feet, yapping happily.

It is time to get dressed for the Trooping the Colour parade, and for all the celebrations that will follow. Perhaps more than at any time in her life, she knows who she is, what she represents, the power she still has to stir the world's imagination, and what she must do with that power. She also knows that, after spending more time on the world stage than anyone in history, male or female, she has achieved an almost mythic status that transcends mere fame.

Milestone events like this official birthday, overflowing with pageantry and pomp, are an important part of the royal equation. "I must be seen," Elizabeth has always been fond of saying, "to be believed."

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