

Prince Charles: Man or wimp?

When Prince Charles married Lady Diana in 1981, I was in London for the royal wedding. Even then it seemed to me that things might suddenly get tough for Charles; on his way to a wedding rehearsal he tripped walking up a flight of steps, and the trip was captured on videotape and broadcast all over the world; it seemed to me that the stumble was a symbol of what lay ahead.



Bob Greene

Now it seems to have happened. Prince Charles, as everyone knows, was once regarded as the "action man" of British royalty. If he wasn't playing polo he was flying jet planes; if he wasn't flying jet planes he was shooting birds.

But the public perception of Charles is undergoing a drastic revision — or at least it will if the publishers who put out those supermarket tabloids have their way.

You know the publications I'm talking about. They feature articles about Elvis Presley giving concerts in heaven, or Princess Grace sending cookie recipes to Earth from the great beyond.

I happened onto one of the tabloids the other day. It wasn't reporting on Elvins or Princess Grace or even gorgeous aliens from Saturn landing on Earth. Instead, it featured a major "investigation" of Prince Charles.

The headline was:
"DI TURNS CHARLES INTO ROYAL WIMP"
 The first paragraph was written with all the authority of Woodward and Bernstein:
"Princess Diana has turned Prince Charles from a

fun-loving sportsman into a henpecked wimp, palace insiders reveal."

The "palace insiders" were specific in what they reportedly told the tabloid:

"They say she's used her womanly wiles to persuade Charles to give up his favorite 'blood sports' like fox hunting and bird shooting — and to even take up jazz-ballet exercises with her, wearing 'his-and-her' leotards!"

An unnamed "friend of Diana" is quoted as telling the tabloid:

"Poor Charles is like putty in her hands. She may look sweet and innocent on the surface — but when it comes to scheming, devious Di makes Alexis on *Dynasty* look almost guileless."

That same "friend" reportedly laughed and said:
 "His brother Prince Andrew makes slightly barbed jokes about Charles being so badly henpecked he is too weak to carry a shotgun."

Another "friend of the royal couple" is quoted as telling the tabloid:

"Wimp is the word you hear being mentioned in connection with Charles all the time these days.

There is hardly any trace of the man who married Di three years ago. His father and brothers are stunned by the changes in him, and the Queen is also becoming concerned."

And "a source close to Charles" is quoted as saying:

"He is only half the man he used to be. We no longer see him as 'the action man Prince.' That tough, go-getting image has been replaced by a new, rather wimpish character."

The tabloid said Charles had refused to go pheasant hunting with his father, Prince Philip, and quoted that same "source close to Charles" as saying:

"He made the feeble excuse that he preferred to stay with Diana and his son, William. Charles' father was furious and told me: 'It appears that the future King of England would rather change nappies (diapers) than take part in a day's sport.'"

And Prince Philip is quoted as telling a "confidante":
 "That woman (Princess Diana) has undone 30 years of royal tutelage in just one-tenth of that time. She ought to stick to dressing up and having babies — and leave Charles alone to act like a man!"

So Charles is faced with a dilemma. Being accused of embezzlement or criminal wrongdoing is one thing; public officials explain their way out of those accusations all the time.

But this? Should Charles call a press conference to bravely proclaim: "I am not a wimp?"

Should he contemptuously toss his son's diapers into the air, yank the needle off Diana's jazzercise record, rip off his leotard and leap out the palace window onto the back of his polo pony?

It's a tough one to figure out. The tabloid approvingly ran two pictures of Charles "the way he was": one in which blood streamed from a wound in his lip, and one in which he carried a shotgun in the crook of his arm. Another picture — this one obviously disapproving — showed "wimp" Charles "the way he is now" holding his baby instead of his gun.

Regardless of how Charles decides to deal with this criticism, his reputation is bound to suffer. I'm usually not a reader of the supermarket tabloids, but this story has got me hooked. I'll be buying next week's issue to see what happens.

Who knows? Under pressure like this, marriages have been known to fall apart. I want to see if Prince Charles starts dating a gorgeous alien from Saturn.
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