

***So is Fergie trying to show Andy what he is missing?;
As he reaches 40, a new Prince is emerging -- one no longer in thrall to his
former wife***

DAILY MAIL (London)

February 12, 2000

Copyright 2000 Associated Newspapers Ltd.

Section: Pg. 18;19

Length: 1630 words

Byline: Richard Kay;Geoffrey Levy

Body

THE wines have been chosen, the table plan drawn up. No doubt the dining room will ring with laughter and nostalgia.

But the Duchess of York is likely to be feeling an undercurrent of insecurity when she gives a 40th birthday dinner party for her former husband Andrew next weekend.

One question has been gnawing at her for weeks: Could she be finally losing him?

Friends say there is a new spring in his step, and that Fergie is uneasily aware that she is not the cause. He is, they say, 'a new man'.

So what has changed? The answer can be summed up in the one-word response by one of his close friends, who was asked if there were any women in his life. The answer: 'Lots.' For the first time since Fergie and he got to know each other properly 15 years ago during Royal Ascot week, sailor Andrew appears to be slipping anchor and moving out into open romantic waters.

Ever since their 1992 separation and subsequent divorce, Fergie has kept a wifely watch on his social life, almost as though they were still married.

For the past two years she has been back in the marital home, Sunninghill Park, near Windsor, on the grounds that she could not afford a house of her own - grounds which his many friends consider spurious.

Her constant presence, they say, has put a brake on his social activities.

'If he did meet a girl, Sarah would always find fault with her and put him off,' says one. 'Because of this, he has not become serious with anyone since Sarah. In fact, he may be 40 but she's the only girl with whom he has ever had a serious relationship.' Throughout this period there has been incessant speculation that but for opposition from his family, who froze her out because of her excesses, the Yorks might one day remarry. Certainly, they are adoring parents of Beatrice, 11, and Eugenie, nine, and are very happy together as a family.

Andrew has hinted at remarriage several times - once even to the Blairs, over lunch at Chequers last year. 'I'm going to remarry Sarah, you know,' he told them. But even they are unsure just how serious he was.

On another occasion, he confided the same intention to fellow guests at a dinner party at Highgrove, his brother Charles's country home.

So is Fergie trying to show Andy what he is missing?;As he reaches 40, a new Prince is emerging -- one no longer in thrall to his former wife

FOR FERGIE, remarrying Andrew has never been the issue, even though her father, Major Ronald Ferguson - who, with the Duchess's stepmother Susan, will be among the guests at next weekend's birthday party - continues to hope that it will happen.

For Fergie, it is claimed, the key has been to secure for herself a permanent place as the only enduring woman in Andrew's life. That place, for the first time, looks ominously vulnerable. For the Andrew who always hurried back to her, whoever he was seeing, has changed.

'He is rather tight-lipped about Fergie these days,' says a friend, 'and he appears to me to be rather hands-off in his attitude towards her, almost as though he is putting up with her. Of course, he is still very fond of her, not least because she is the mother of his daughters, but I doubt if it's romantic any longer. He is definitely no longer interested in marrying Fergie again.' The transition has its roots in new friendships he made at a dinner party in London's Mayfair, which have drawn him into a lively circle of society figures and beautiful women.

The dinner took place in Mark's, the private dining club off Berkeley Square, and that night he found himself enjoying the company of two couples.

One was property man Rupert Cordle

and his wife Camilla, and the other Robert Sangster's son Ben and his wife Lucy.

The wives are 32-year-old identical twins, and Andrew quickly discovered that one of their great friends is the Countess of Derby, the former Cazzy Neville with whom he stepped out briefly before, his friends claim, Fergie stepped in to disrupt the romance.

Cazzy, happily married to the Earl of Derby, 37, for five years, joined her friends in taking it upon themselves to introduce the Prince around.

Before long, the naval officer with a reputation for spending long evenings watching TV and videos found himself being invited to dinner parties all over London.

'Fergie always seemed to be away on business in New York or in Italy with her friend the Count and they felt sorry for him,' says one of their circle.

'So they brought him into their set and he took to it like a duck to water.'

Frequently at dinner parties he would find himself seated next to a beautiful and unattached young woman. 'Cazzy likes to make sure he is in good company,' says one friend. 'And Andrew goes shooting with Teddy (the Earl).' Most of the Prince's social activities take place during the week, when he is working at the Naval Staff Directorate in Whitehall, using Prince Charles's old apartment at Buckingham Palace as his base. At weekends he likes to be with his daughters at Sunninghill Park.

He was back yesterday from another social excursion with yet another new and perhaps surprising friend - the late Robert Maxwell's business consultant daughter Ghislaine, 40, after whom the crooked tycoon named the yacht from which he fell to his death.

For almost a week Andrew had been a guest of 'A' list party girl Ghislaine at the Manhattan apartment on the smart Upper East Side she shares with New York property developer Jeffrey Epstein, 50.

While in New York, Ghislaine took Andrew to a fashion show, at the headquarters of designer Ralph Lauren. The Prince even went backstage afterwards and chatted to models.

HE LOOKED remarkably comfortable among the willowy creatures, especially as the once-portly Prince - privately known among Buckingham Palace staff as 'three puddings' - has shed some weight. All in all, it is hardly surprising that Tatler, the glossy social magazine, recently named him the most sought-after dinner party guest.

So is Fergie trying to show Andy what he is missing?;As he reaches 40, a new Prince is emerging -- one no longer in thrall to his former wife

It had been almost two decades since anyone had really noticed him socially, so long since his bachelor days of dating Koo Stark and Vicki Hodge, when he earned the sobriquet 'Randy Andy'. In the intervening years, his standing as a dinner guest was anything but good since he had a reputation for having limited conversation and for sloping off before the end of the evening to watch television.

'He loved being top of the Tatler list and couldn't stop talking about it,' a friend says. 'He was boasting about it, even.' For some time a lapel badge given to him at the Staffordshire factory making Massey Ferguson tractors was pinned to his office door at the Palace. It said: 'I love my Fergie.' Recently, it disappeared.

Meanwhile, at Sunninghill Park, where she has separate quarters and shows no sign of leaving, the staff continue to call her 'Ma'am'.

The shedding of Fergie as his prop - even though she is organising his birthday party - must have taken a great act of will because of his practice of always turning to her his

practice of always turning to her for advice. Some friends think it may well have something to do with his thoughts about reaching the crossroads of his 40th birthday and, as he says, 'learning from the failures and building on the successes'.

'Sarah has been by far the stronger of the two,' a family friend says, 'almost a mother-madonna figure to him, especially as his father is a bully and his mother hates confrontation.

Nothing was ever Sarah's fault, whatever the problem. Taking her side in her battles with the Palace was always the course of least resistance.

'He lived in denial of her infidelities.

He has leaned on her for years, even when she found his apparent weakness a sexual turnoff.'

BUT THERE is another theory about Andrew's new-found self-reliance. The longer he is linked domestically with Fergie, but not married to her, he is prevented from one quiet ambition that he chose not to mention in the formal interview to mark his birthday which was issued by Buckingham Palace on the internet last week.

'He loves his daughters and is a terrific father to them,' says a friend, 'but I believe he would love to have a son one day - a brother for them.'

That, of course, would mean a second marriage, though this is a topic which he never broaches.

But as he reaches 40, his family is worried about him. There is anxiety about the long-term effects of Fergie's constant presence in his home and they worry about his professional future - his appointment as a GBP 45,000a - year commander responsible for strengthening contacts between the Royal Navy and services overseas ends in two years.

After this he could leave the Navy, but to do what?

Talk of his earning a living from golf is absurd, although he is a good amateur with a single-figure handicap (currently seven).

LIFE with Fergie has, of course, left a mark. Whenever he feels 'stressed', Andrew likes to visit a bio-energy healer. From time to time he has his cards 'read' by psychic Maureen Conway. He was much impressed after one such encounter when she told him he was two people - 'on the outside brash, hale and hearty, on the inside shy, lonely and looking for a proper role'.

Prince Charles has always been baffled by his younger brother's curious domestic arrangements and although the two are not particularly close he will be relieved that Andrew seems to be asserting his independence at last.

So is Fergie trying to show Andy what he is missing?;As he reaches 40, a new Prince is emerging -- one no longer in thrall to his former wife

What this means for Fergie no one can be sure. After all, she and Andrew will put on their usual show of happy families when they jet over to Switzerland for skiing later this month. But there has been a fair amount of amused comment in Palace circles since those photographs of her whirling at a charity ball in Italy last week, showing off her stocking tops.

'What was she trying to do,' runs the banter - 'show him what he's missing'?

Classification

Language: English

Subject: BRITISH ROYALTY (90%); COOKING & ENTERTAINING (89%); STEPPARENTS (67%)

Person: SARAH FERGUSON (79%)

Load-Date: February 14, 2000