

Life after Di: Can Camilla be queen?

Reuter

LONDON—It must be one of the biggest regrets of Prince Charles' life.

He lost his chance for happiness with one woman, married the wrong one and now has an uphill struggle to get the public to accept his one-time girlfriend, the only real love of his life.

Fresh out of university in 1970, the shy young prince was instantly attracted to the exuberant Camilla Shand, introduced by an ex-girlfriend at a polo match as "just the woman for you." But he let her slip through his fingers.

In a glorious wedding 11 years later he married blushing, inexperienced Lady Diana Spencer, the perfect fairy-tale princess for the nation but, it turned out, a disastrous match for him.

"The pity is, the Prince of Wales had to marry a virgin," said Lord Charteris, the queen's former private secretary, referring to the unspoken rule that men of the inner royal circle at all costs avoid women with a past.

But other factors led Charles away from Camilla, an upper

class country woman who shared his love of hunting, polo and country life, after their first affair in the early 1970s.

"She was pretty, bubbly and she smiled with her eyes as well as her mouth. He lost his heart to her almost at once," said his biographer last year in the first authorized account of the prince's love for Camilla and their later adultery.

"His taste for the absurd was complemented by her down-to-earth irreverence," the book by Jonathan Dimbleby added.

Answering people who wonder how Charles could prefer the older woman to the younger, more glamorous Diana, Camilla's friends say, "you need to know her."

"She's great fun, she oozes sexuality and she has a dry and wicked sense of humor. She can be positively bawdy which appeals to Charles," one friend told a biographer.

But in his early 20s Charles, who considered asking her to marry him, was in no hurry and lacked the confidence to tell her what she meant to him before a stint in the Navy took him away.