

# The Unfortunate Mrs. Middleton



How about a change of pace? Iraq, the neocons, Iran, Hillary—it's all bad news for the foreseeable future. As far as I can tell, the only two things

that haven't changed are Wall Street greed and English snobbery. I am not an expert of the former, but when you think that 25 years ago the Dow stood around 1050 and now is over 13,000, it does tend to show that human nature does not change. People look out for number one.

English snobbery, of course, has been around far longer than Wall Street. Perhaps some of you have read about the breakup of Prince William and the lovely Kate Middleton. The two youngsters had been stepping out—and living in—for some four years. They met at university, took holidays together, and Kate sat next to the queen on a few official occasions. The British press, which in reality should be called the Murdoch media, declared the couple unofficially engaged and the great Kate photography hunt began.

She was snapped leaving the house in the morning and returning to it after work. She was photographed shopping, going to and leaving restaurants and nightclubs, and was followed by a yelping mob of paparazzi when she went to her parents' modest home in the country.

Entrepreneurs manufactured William and Kate engagement crockery, hoping to be first in line when the official announcement came through. They are now selling them at cut-rate prices or giving them away at charity events.

I write all this because living part time in London, I knew as well as anyone that the wedding was something dreamed up by the media and nothing more.

Now comes the good part. Murdoch's minions are no fools. They always have a back-up story once the one they invented goes the way of the Hindenburg. The hacks had their line ready. If the romance crashed, it was to be blamed on the establishment's snobbery. Love takes second place to breeding, class war being the best news seller of all time.

As far as I know, no courtier or friend of William's ever said "Doors to manual" in reference to Kate's mother's career as an airline hostess. But those three little words were quoted as if engraved in stone by every tabloid and repeated *ad nauseam* on every chat show by the smiling wallet-lifters who make up the British tabloid and trash-TV world. In

napkin a serviette. The biggest *faux pas*, according to snobs who take such things seriously, is calling a sofa a couch or a settee.

See what I mean by snobbery? In all the years I have lived in Britain, I have yet to see an eyebrow raised over someone's use of a non-U word. (Nancy Mitford famously wrote a book back in the fifties outlining U—or upper class—and non-U terms.)

People to the manor born simply do not disapprove of those born in lesser circumstances than themselves. To the contrary, a duke is much more at ease with his dustman than with a hedge fund vulgarian who tries to ape the duke's manner of speaking. It was the media, not the royals, who had a field day when Kate's mother used the word "toilet." (For any snobs out there, toilet is a no-no, lavatory is middle class, and loo is upper.)

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other words, Kate was dropped because the royal family and the courtiers who run royal lives objected to the fact that Kate's mother was not to the manor born. How could they tell? Easy.

Unlike in America, where one's pocketbook is taken as one's worth, an Englishman's accent counts for more. Or used to, anyway. Even if one learns to fake it, like the great Lady Thatcher, who took elocution lessons and spoke la-di-dah English, there are still all sorts of giveaways. For example, a drawing room is never called a lounge, except on a boat. A mirror is a looking glass, except in a car. Wireless is upper class for radio, and one simply never calls a

The William and Kate love affair ran its normal course. They are both 25 years of age, and neither was ready to take the plunge—William, mind you, much less than Kate. In my opinion she has dodged a bullet. But the Murdoch in us all has turned her poor mother into something vulgar and grasping, a harri-dan who stood next to the queen and saw herself as a quasi-royal.

What rubbish! Most journalists will certainly rot in hell, but British hacks have the ninth circle reserved all to themselves. The next time you hear "doors to manual," please spare a thought of Mrs. Middleton and don't buy a British tabloid. ■

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