

THE VERDICT

THIS TIME THEY GOT IT RIGHT

Couple, family, Queen and country came together in a ceremony that is being called the saviour of the monarchy and marriage

SHE WORE A tiara borrowed from her new grandmother, and diamond drop earrings, a wedding gift from her beloved parents, and *that dress*, which so perfectly captured the spirit of the day: a confluence of the modern and the traditional; a sense that the monarchy, the country and the couple were moving forward, with a fond look back. And at the altar of Westminster Abbey her husband-to-be turned, and became what seems like the last person on earth to see his bride in her finery. “You’re beautiful,” he said, as many a nervous groom before him has said. While every aspect of this day—the union of a future king and queen of Britain, Canada and the rest of the realms—would be weighed, debated and analyzed for deeper meaning, there was no arguing that heartfelt statement of fact. And, briefly at that moment, lost in each other’s eyes, this grand spectacle—1,900 guests, and two billion more watching over their shoulders—shrank to a universe of two.

Then, before the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams, Catherine Elizabeth Middleton and William Arthur Philip Louis Wales gave each other their “troth” in the archaic language of the Church of England, to love and to comfort and to forsake all others—pledges honoured more in the breach than the observance by generations of Britain’s royals. But maybe this time they’ll get it right. At least that is the hope of Queen and country. With that they became husband and wife, and, at the behest of their granny, Queen Elizabeth II, they were granted the titles duke and duchess of Cambridge and a mouthful of others.

Like any royal event, the wedding had ele-





ments of the absurd: headgear, for example, which Britons of a certain class embrace and treat with such seriousness that even fashion disasters are elevated into art forms. And so it was that Princesses Eugenie and Beatrice, the daughters of Prince Andrew and the uninvited Sarah Ferguson, entered the abbey looking as if they'd been dressed by a blind quartermaster of the Ministry of Silly Hats. In this they were not alone. When television cameras in the abbey swept the bonneted crowd, it resembled the haphazard cluster of dishes and jury-rigged antennae you'd find on the rooftops of a Third World slum.

Into this strange world were thrust the Middleton family, who comported themselves with style and class, middle or otherwise. Michael, father of the bride, guided Catherine down the aisle, with the requisite mixture of pride and *gravitas*. Mother Carole, determined not to cry, was elegant and understated in her ice-blue outfit, one deliberately chosen to upstage neither her daughters nor the Queen. Brother James gave a wonderfully plummy reading of the lesson from the Book of Romans. "Live in harmony with one another," he intoned, "do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are."

Then there was Pippa Middleton, who was both the exotically sleek caboose at the end of her sister's 2.7-m bridal train, and a driving force unto herself. Both sisters wore, to great effect, creations by Sarah Burton for the British design house of the late Alexander McQueen. The reviews were in before the two women glided back out the abbey doors. "She is the Grace Kelly of our age," designer Graeme Black gushed of Catherine. As for Pippa, the Internet was aflame with male admirers who conferred their highest honour, an HRH—Her Royal Hotness.

Later that night, at a dinner reception in the Buckingham Palace ballroom, William gave a moving tribute to his bride, calling this the happiest day of his life, praising her beauty and calling her "my rock," for the security and normalcy she has given him, guests reported. In that rare spirit of egalitarianism, the royals in the crowd were scattered among the 30 round tables of 10, intermingled with friends of William and Kate and the rest of the Middleton clan.

Guests at the reception, strip-mined later for details by the Sunday papers, would disagree as to who was the star speaker of the evening. Some said Michael Middleton, who

Kate's grand entrance: Her father guided her down the aisle with pride and *gravitas*



Brothers in arms: *William and Harry grinned and whispered, their bond of friendship obvious*

hardly seemed overawed by a crowd that one female guest called “surreal, like the pages of *Hello!* magazine coming alive.” He described his daughter’s childhood antics and William’s unconventional courtship, including the time he landed in hot water with the military by touching down his helicopter in the Middletons’ back garden, almost blowing the roof off the house. “I did wonder how William was going to top that if they ever got engaged,” he said.

Other guests picked William’s brother, Harry, a natural performer and gifted mimic, who had the guests whooping with laughter as he described the long “inspiring” courtship of his brother, “the Dude,” and Kate. He even included a falsetto rendition of her phone chats with “Billy.” He described an email she’d received during the couple’s brief breakup in 2007. It came from an American who trapped ermine and was “a huge fan,” Harry deadpanned. “Could he put himself up as a replacement?” At another point in his pitch-perfect speech, Harry’s glowing tribute to his new sister-in-law moved Catherine to tears. Her father-in-law, Prince Charles, affectionately welcomed Catherine into the

family, saying the Windsors were “lucky to have her.” It was a sentiment, this day, much of the nation seemed to share.

Perhaps it was always Catherine’s dream to become a princess, so much sweeter sounding than duchess. Walking among the thousands outside Buckingham Palace one saw dozens of them, of all ages, in fancy frocks and bargain-store tiaras. Such is the enduring hold of fairy tales. Or perhaps she loved her man *despite* the fact that he is second in line to the throne, requiring her to join *The Firm* and live over the shop. Regardless, almost a decade after their first meeting as students at St. Andrews University, they fit together as snugly as the band of Welsh gold William wrestled onto her finger at the abbey.

As with any good tale of kings, castles and beautiful maidens, there is tragedy as well as triumph. It goes without saying that the last time the abbey overflowed with royalty, and the streets thronged with people, and the world’s attention focused here, it was a sunny Saturday in September 1997, to mark the funeral of Diana, the turbulent, troubled, loving mother of William and Harry.

**‘WILLIAM AND HARRY,’
DIANA ONCE SAID,
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ACHIEVEMENT.’ SHE
WOULD BE 50 NOW.**

For those who witnessed both events, almost 14 years apart, the contrasts could not be more stark. The Queen, in those dark early days after Diana’s death in a Paris car crash, lost touch with her subjects. Her allegiance to protocol, always her comfort and strength, angered a public that could not understand why she and the family remained secluded at her Balmoral estate in Scotland, why she didn’t address the nation, why there wasn’t a flag flying at half-staff at Buckingham Palace. Belatedly, she would address all these things, under pressure from her advisers and her son Prince Charles, Diana’s ex-husband. The day before the funeral, Elizabeth made her first live address in 38 years, conceding “there are lessons to be drawn from her life and from the extraordinary and moving reaction to her death.”

Throughout London then, the air was heavy with the scent of dying flowers, women wore black, and the nation sank ever deeper into a grief that bordered on the edge of madness. David Hutt, a canon at the abbey, walked outside the evening before the funeral and paused to consider a city and a country he could barely recognize, and the woman who had inspired such catharsis. “I think the church has lost its way in many respects,” he admitted, speaking softly and perhaps including the monarchy in his reflections. “It doesn’t touch the hearts of people. It is very much to do with the head, and people experience life here,” he said, putting his hand over his heart, “and in the guts. Maybe we’re having to learn from this because people are teaching us.”

So different a time. Yet in many ways the feel and form of this wedding, and of the confident young man at its centre, are rooted in that event. Standing beside him at the abbey was red-headed Harry, third in line



ANDREW MILLIGAN/GETTY IMAGES; HUGH PERALTA/TA/REUTERS; PREVIOUS SPREAD: DOMINIC LIPINSKI/REUTERS



Would-be princesses: There were lots of crowns and tiaras among the crowds that came out to watch. No one seemed to begrudge the monarchy.

to the throne, but the hair apparent among balding Windsor men. They grinned and whispered—two soldiers in dress uniform, brothers in arms—their bond of friendship obvious. William was 15 and Harry was 12 when they’d made the painful, public walk to the abbey behind their mother’s coffin, forming a ragged black line with their father Charles, their grandfather Prince Philip, and Diana’s brother, Earl Spencer, smouldering at his perception of Diana’s treatment by the royal family.

She would be 50 years old now, and it is impossible to speculate how the passing years, or the senior royals, would have treated her had her life continued its erratic course of good deeds and failed romances. One needn’t have been a psychic to have predicted that her presence would be everywhere at the wedding. It was in the relative informality of the service, and in the guest list, which included some of the charity workers, artists and other non-royals she’d introduced her sons to. It was in the loosened leash of procedure that even the Queen, resplendent in sunny primrose, seemed to endorse.

‘I DON’T THINK THIS IS ABOUT THE MONARCHY,’ SAID ONE WITNESS. ‘IT’S THE SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS.’

Diana was present in her two sons, who, for all the hardships they’d faced, from their mother’s broken marriage to her death, were given the space and freedom and a childhood that their father could only imagine. “William and Harry,” their mother once said, “are my one splendid achievement.” She was there in the bride William chose. He may have given Catherine Diana’s diamond-and-sapphire engagement ring, but he decidedly did not marry a version of his mother. This was a union of equals; he chose a confident, accomplished and grounded non-royal, the kind of love match Diana died still searching for.

Most certainly she was at the reception. Both of her sons paid their mother tribute in their speeches, wishing she could see this day. After dinner, the guests filed into the palace throne room converted into a disco this night, under the supervision of Pippa. William led his bride onto the dance floor as 24-year-old British pop star Ellie Goulding and her band opened with a cover version of Elton John’s long-ago hit ballad *Your Song*. While some of the lyrics (“I don’t

have much money, but boy if I did / I’d buy a big house where we both could live”) seemed a tad ironic, the prevailing sentiment was lost on no one. Elton John was one of Diana’s dear friends. He sang at her funeral. He was a guest, with his husband David Furnish, at her son’s wedding. As the *London Times* would opine afterwards, “The wedding was final confirmation that Diana changed the monarchy forever, and for the good.”

Certainly that was the view on the street. In the early hours of the wedding day, a group of young friends up from Southampton planted themselves on the royal procession route, finding a prime piece of sidewalk on Whitehall, near the entrance to Downing Street. They dressed for the occasion in middle-class casual, the young men wearing sport coats. They sipped wine from plastic cups, watching the passing scene as the crowd swelled behind them.

Well, yes, they supposed they were monarchists, agreed Richard Clarke and Claudia Pack, both 23, Nikolas Wyeth, 22, and his 19-year-old sister Zoe. “But I don’t think this is really about the monarchy,” said Clarke, who’s just finishing a master’s degree. “It’s the sense of togetherness.” You don’t even need to like the royals to share a moment

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The kiss seen around the world: Two billion watched the newlyweds smooch on the balcony

that will form part of the national memory, said Zoe, in her first year at Cardiff University, the prestigious school they all attended. “We don’t really see the monarchy as oppressive,” added Nikolas, training to be a doctor, “It brings a lot of toys, and it brings days like this, so why not have them? They don’t cost us much.”

Pragmatically, the wedding is a net profit centre, they agree, one with less up-front expense and more long-term potential than next year’s London Summer Games. “Kate Middleton as a brand,” said Nikolas, “is worth more than the Olympics.”

They credit William and Harry with making the monarchy relevant to a younger generation. Although they are not upper class, they said, they all know people who attended Eton with William or Harry, or Marlborough College with Catherine. It makes the monarchy seem more accessible, they said. But when Nikolas and Clarke suggested the wedding marked a decline in the class system, Pack issued a fiery rebuke. With university tuitions climbing in the face of government cutbacks, soon only the wealthy will attend, she said. “Unless you’re like super, super gifted as a poor kid, you’ve got no chance,” she said. “It’s just going to put the class divide back into our society.”

So much—too much—has been asked of

one wedding. At various times, William and Catherine’s union has been seen as a social leveller, the saviour of the monarchy, the turning point for a stagnant economy and a revival of the institution of marriage, which in Britain is at the lowest rate since modern records were first kept in the 1800s.

Maybe the event was merely a chance for people like 19-year-old Blioux Kirkby to don a pretty sapphire-coloured gown and put a tiara in her hair and spend the day in the crowd outside Buckingham Palace, dreaming a little dream. Yes, her mother, Rebecca, read little Blioux *Cinderella* and *Snow White* and all the fairy tales, and what’s wrong with that?

“Of course I did,” says Rebecca. “It’s my job.”

After the service, outside the abbey, Catherine settled into the horse-drawn landau with her new husband for the ride to the palace. “I’m so happy,” she said, if the lip-readers are to be believed. “Are you?” asked William. “Yes,” she said. “Good,” he replied.

It was a sweet exchange. One hopes they have it often, for marriages aren’t fairy stories; they have to live in the real world. Perhaps it’s appropriate, then, that the couple delayed their honeymoon; that the duke of Cambridge donned his flight suit Tuesday and went back to work. What could be more real than that? **KEN MACQUEEN**

‘WE’RE LUCKY TO HAVE HER,’ SAID PRINCE CHARLES OF CATHERINE AT HIS RECEPTION PARTY THAT NIGHT

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