

**READING 1: WHAT IS THE SILLY SEASON?**

Britain in August. The tourists are plentiful, but Prime Minister Tony Blair is in the Bahamas, and most MPs of Parliament have gone to Cornwall, Tuscany or Sardinia for their annual 80-day vacations, creating the condition known to Fleet Street journalists as the “silly season.”



Daily Mirror

With British Airways grounded by a strike at London’s Heathrow Airport, the London Daily Mirror gave the story a share of Page One with Keira Knightley’s views on the opposite sex.

Faced with nothing much to write about, they scramble to fill news space with stories about Prince William and his girl friends, horses with hay fever, wife-swapping weathermen and astronomers who detect the faces of well-known BBC television comedians in the stars.

Journalists have to make the most of a bad situation. That doesn’t mean making up stories, but they do tend to relish certain kinds of odd news more than at other times of the year. In 2005 Jude Law’s dalliance with his children’s nanny kept a lot of the tabloids happy for a week or two.

Others have had to work with less racy fare.

Even The Times has to deal with the silly season. This summer it ran a story about a drunk who fell down a cliff and spent two days in a gorse bush until he was found, and another about a new footbridge over Gladys’ Leap, a stream named after a postal woman who used to leap over it to save time on her route. And another about whether people are still sending postcards instead of text-messaging.

The 2005 silly season was less silly than most because of the London bombings July 7, and the 24-hour walkout by British Airways workers which stranded 70,000 passengers.

In August, the silly season got off to a good start over a report in The Spectator Prince William and his girlfriend Kate Middleton were planning to move into his flat at Clarence House, Prince Charles’ official London residence, with the full approval of Charles and the Queen.

The report unleashed speculation about a pending royal marriage and provided much grist for silly season. Kate Middleton, who has been dating the future king since 2001, when they met as students at St. Andrew's University in Scotland, is by all reports an emotionally sturdy, super-sensible girl, athletic; bright, but not too bright; pretty, but not beautiful; and, most important, discreet. But Middleton, 23, represents something of a departure in the annals of royal marriage-making, given her non-aristocratic background. Unlike William's mother, Diana, a high-strung blue-blood from one of England's oldest families, Middleton's mother is a former flight attendant, her father owns a mail-order business for children's birthday parties and her lineage is undistinguished. Kate Middleton's ordinariness is part of her fascination and the newspapers have gone wild. "Cowgirl Kate is Fit to Rein" shouted The News of the World after Middleton showed up at Princess Anne's Gatcombe Park horse trials wearing a Stetson hat. Bookies slashed their odds on a royal wedding, offering 3-1 against a marriage before 2011.

#### **Late silly season**

In September, the silly season continued with coverage of sneezing horses, the World Hen Racing Championships and Jude Law's philandering. With terrorist issues outrages dominating the main news, more upbeat news, however silly, provided some relief.

That meant blanket coverage of Prince William's love life and more on the royals in general. In spite of his distress at the scrutiny of his girlfriend, William, will always face the limelight, especially in the silly season. As the next in line for the throne of England, he has nowhere to turn.



News that Kate Middleton would move in with Prince William unleashed a torrent of speculation. Here, the prince's sweetheart watches events on the second day of the Gatcombe Park Festival of British Eventing on Aug. 6.

[Adaptation from Mackenzie Carpenter article, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 14 2005]

## **READING 2: SNIPPETS FROM THE MONITOR, KAMPALA, UGANDA**

### **BIRD SPEAKS TO HUNTER**

Game trapper Gabriel Malaika of Buhimba village in Hoima district got a jolt when a guinea fowl in his trap ordered him to free it. It had fallen into a trap in Malaika's groundnut garden. When he attempted to get it, the fowl reportedly spoke in a human voice and ordered him to free it because he would be in danger if he harmed it. Malaika ignored the bird and took it home. As he was looking for a knife to slaughter it for supper, a swarm of bees attacked him and forced him to flee into a nearby banana plantation. He ran with the fowl held under his arm, strangling it inadvertently. After killing it, Malaika ran berserk through the village shouting in a foreign language which sounded like Chinese or Greek. He sent people at the Buhimba trading centre fleeing for safety. Police handed

him over to his parents. By the time of the news report, Malaika's relatives were consulting local witchdoctors about a cure. Rumours say that Malaika trapped the guinea fowl which owned the village and the stream called Rwenkondwa. [14 December 1996]

#### **GIRL REFUSED TO MARRY CAT**

People of Ikoba village in Masindi district were surprised when a girl called Nyamaizi claimed a cat had asked her to marry it. Nyamaizi and her sister were in their house on the night of 24 January when there was a knock. Nyamaizi opened the door and found a black cat which proposed marriage to her in a human voice, speaking fluent Lunyoro. She was speechless with shock and the cat repeated its offer when Nyamaizi's sister joined her at the door. "Nyakiliza ha bibero byawe [Lift me and put me on your lap]", the cat reportedly told the girl. The two girls fled, but the cat pursued them. Next morning, the cat was caught and burnt by an angry crowd in a local school. Its ashes were later removed and taken to a river. The correspondent for the Monitor found out that in Lunyoro this kind of thing is called "Kifoka", meaning something which can change to anything and anyone who welcomes it dies. The person only lives if it is killed and burnt. [16 Feb 1997]

#### **CORPSE CANED**

A porter with the Re-Raghwani Construction Company, known only as Alaani, died in Kampala on 10 January 1995 when three cement blocks fell on his head. Arrangements were made to transport the body to Butiiti for burial. The vehicle broke down at Kaloonga, but mechanics could find nothing wrong. The mourners escorting the body spent the night by the roadside. The next day, the vehicle started up without difficulty, but it stopped again in Mubende town. An elderly relative then decided that the trouble lay with the deceased, who didn't want to be buried. He removed the corpse from the coffin and caned it with all his strength. When he had finished, the vehicle started up and the body was transported to Toro at 4pm on 14 January. [20 Jan 1995]

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### READING 3: SAD SNIPPET

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## Hippo eats dwarf

**B**ANGKOK: A hippopotamus swallowed a circus dwarf in a "freak accident" in northern Thailand, according to a columnist in the *Pattaya Mail*.

The Grapevine column reported: "A circus dwarf, nicknamed Od, died recently when he bounced sideways from a trampoline and was swallowed by a yawning hippopotamus waiting to appear in the next act."

"Vets said Hilda the Hippo had a gag reflex which caused her to swallow. More than 1000 spectators continued to applaud wildly until they realised there had been a tragic mistake."