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The Wedding Season

No tedious presentation of long-winded arguments, nor any dull marshalling of notorious, and as one may add, perhaps, without conscious exaggeration, obvious and indisputable facts, is needed (nor even, so to speak, suggested by the dialectic exigencies or etiquette of the situation) to prove that, if there are to be, in the month of June, enough encounters at the hymeneal altar to justify the common, or perhaps it would be better to say universal, assumption that June is, par excellence, and as it were, by some fiat or necessity of nature, as mysterious as it is irresistible, the month of weddings—no straining, as I have observed, of the resources of argumentation is needed to demonstrate, beyond all reasonable, or even unreasonable doubt (which demonstration, indeed, and alas! may be actually supererogatory, as that of a self-evident corollary must needs be) that, if the notion we have been discussing is true; if the assumption in a word, that June is the month of weddings, as it indubitably is of roses, is humanly speaking valid and sound; then there must be, it follows almost without saying, a good deal of courting, not to say a copious negotiation with milliners, modistes and florists, an incessant and exhausting series of consultations with caterers, victualers, vintners and such other public ministers to the festive mood, during the period immediately contiguous to and preceding the incidence of that month; or, to come to the point at once, and to have done, as it were, with the side issues, spores, consequences and implications of the main assertion, during the month of May.

The Card of Invitation

There is, indeed, abundant empiric evidence for the conclusion we thus reach, as it were, by a purely academic excursion into the interstellar spaces of logic.

With almost every visit, at this season, of that silent but assiduous invader of our area-way, the postman, there comes to each of us a familiar-looking but portentous square of thick white paper, which, on inspection, reveals the character or complexion of an envelope and on being slit along the edge or border, by hair pin, stiletto or lack-knife (or even, perhaps, by table fork) disgorges another square of paper, more dazzling still in its almost incredible whiteness, upon which appears a series or succession of black script or pseudo Old English characters (elevated, or rough, as it were, to the sweep of the experimental thumb) bidding us make ready, on such and such a day, at such and such an hour, there set down plainly, to attend without fail, in the bleak, comfortless habiliments of the ruling caste, the nuptial mass or other such ecclesiastical ceremonial, at such and such a resort of public worship, whereby, and by virtue or force of which, one Miss Mary Genevieve Roe, the daughter, so to speak of Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Roe, her parents, is to be joined in holy wedlock, as the world has it, and theoretically at least, for the term of her natural life, to a gentleman appearing under a mysterious and strangely grandiloquent appellation—a name, one cannot help reflecting, with a sneaking, subconscious snicker, that would be much not to say greatly more meet for some romantic hero of extinct, and let us add, barbarous, ages, than for one who, no doubt, wears creased trousers and blue lingerie and has no iota of romance in him, save that faint trace

predicated by the impulse to woo and win a young woman of obviously opulent parentage and in consequence, of glorious fiscal prospects and possibilities.

The Disguised Bridegroom

Who, then, is this Mr. William Guernsey de Belleville Snodgrass? Is there, indeed, any such person in the world? Is there not, in the very lusciousness of those sounding syllables, with their haunting sibilants, a guarantee, as it were, or at least an implication, of utter unreality?

The problem puzzles, and even, perhaps, seems to have about it some obscure trace or element of inherent or inevitable insolubility: but suddenly, as if by some unaccountable freak of the memory, some bestirring or rising up of the subconscious, some flash of intuition, we begin to connect the male of the preposterous name, vaguely at first, but, as it quickly appears, more and more certainly, with Bill Snodgrass, that familiar, not to say tiresome master of the Wiener waltz: that virtuoso, diligent and insatiable, of the brisk two-step, the sinister schottische, the querulous quadrille, the geometrical german, and other such conventional posturings.

It is, indeed, Bill and none other than this Bill, that abnormal consumer of abominable cigarettes, that incorrigible roisterer, that loud laughter, that extremely commonplace and unbeautiful person, with the oval, xanthous freckles on the back of his neck, the pale, blond flora on his upper lip, and the look of vacuity in his dull eyes—it is Bill, that beast, who is to lead the fair, and let us hope, charming and modest, daughter of the ancient house of Roe down the aisle of that bedizened, and almost, one may venture, perhaps, without giving offense, rakish-looking church, through that inevitable jungle of white roses, flapping ribbons and stray hairpins, and to the time-honored craning of innumerable necks, wrinkled more or less palpably: the deafening bellowing of Elsa's fateful wedding march, played out of tune upon a mammoth but wheezy organ by a gentleman far gone in liquor: and the simultaneous and startling emission, as from one gigantic esophagus of inarticulate but none the less eloquent gasps, buzzes and huzzahs.

Thoughts of The Ceremony

Aha! Say we, from the remote height of our heaven-kissing Matterhorn of emotional immunity...aha! say we, there we shall see the Human Comedy played shamelessly and with unction! There we shall see if we but look with open eyes, the maid of honor and the bridesmaids, on their farings up and down that fatal aisle, with their white satin swishing and crackling and the talcum upon their noses shaken off by the vibrations of the sacred edifice in white, suffocating clouds....there we shall see those dear girls turn their bold eyes, without effort at subterfuge and as a matter, as it were, of some obscure right inherent in the occasion upon best man and ushers. There we shall gasp for breath in a dense, zymotic fog of mutually antagonistic perfumes and essences—the unearthly, mortuary, God-rest-our-lodge-brother scent of orange blossoms roses, carnations, geraniums, dahlias and the other customary and conventional wedding blooms: the pungent, acrid savor of camphor in the upholstery of the pews, and in too, perhaps, the vestments of that good man, the clergyman: the dim suggestion of potent and brain-benumbing distillations and elixirs, perhaps even of downright Manhattan cocktails and gin fizzes, in the aura of every last usher. And there we shall snick our snicker at the crocodile tears of the nascent mother-in-law, as she burst from her chrysalis of expectation into rapturous realization in her crude ambush behind the potted palms: and snick another snicker, also and similarly, at the worried look of her lord and master, the good father of the bride, tortured as he is, and must of needs be, by abstruse and maddening mental

calculations of the ceremonial's cost or expense. And there again and finally, we shall laugh (if perchance only in, as the saying has it, our sleeves) at the elderly female celibates in the pews, with their necks of resilient and elastic gristle: the officious and expectant sextons, pew-openers, vergers and other such humble flunkies and functionaries of the sanctuary: the emotional nurse-girls on the sidewalk, bribing the gendarmes for front places with soft glances and significant winks, their jejune charges abandoned heartlessly to the hazards of life in a large city: the liquorish church organist, struggling with those felonious sharps and flats: the bellows-blowers, policemen, back-drivers, news-boys, street musicians, the gaping proletariat!

The Rift In the Lute

But cease! We forget something. It is not sufficient to attend in person at that tedious and vapid ceremony, with cheeks shaven overclose, collar overtight, coat overthick and countenance frozen into a fixed, mechanical smile. There are, indeed, yet other implications, and their mutual interimplication implicates itself finally, and as it were, by a supreme effort, into one master or super implication, the which it may be well to say, with no further evasion or exploration of the subject leads us, inevitably and as if in obedience to some mysterious but irresistible cosmic impulse, to thought of that infernal thing—the wedding present we must send to the bride!

In other words, and not to put too fine a point upon the thought, it is easy to write like Henry James, but it is a task of appalling magnitude to raise money enough every spring, to buy 40 or 50 wedding presents.