

Baltimore Evening
Sun May 30, 1910

In the Vestry Room

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

A Bridegroom
A Best Man

SCENE.

The vestry room of a Baltimore church. A pile of dog-eared hymn books in one corner. In the centre a decayed walnut table, with a green baize top—vintage 1876. Four chairs of unearthly and mutually antagonistic design. A clergyman's plug hat on the table. A cracked mirror on the wall. Beside it are half a dozen hooks for hanging clothes and beyond them a thermometer. The latter registers 87-1/2 Fahrenheit.

TIME.

A suffocating afternoon in early June.

As the curtain rises the Bridegroom and Best Man enter by the street door. They are dressed in hot, uncomfortable wedding coats, with high, glossy collars and white Ascot ties as thick as door mats. Beads of perspiration shine upon their foreheads. For a minute or two they stand there, regarding each other stupidly, saying "Whew!" "Oh!" and "Good Lord!" Then, with one accord, they take off their silk hats, tight gloves, frock coats and waistcoats and sink into chairs.

THE BEST MAN—Well, you picked out a scorcher for a wedding dat.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*in bad humor*)—Who picked it out? *I?* Not on your life. *I* had nothing to do with it.

THE BEST MAN—All the same, you stood for it.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*growing excited*)—What could *I* do? Such things are managed by the women. The Old Lady insisted on this week, and so I had to fall for it. As for me, I wanted to have it done and over in March.

THE BEST MAN (*philosophically*)—Well, you've had your warning. Keep an eye on that mother-in-law. I don't like her looks. I rather think she believes in slavery?

THE BRIDEGROOM—In what?

THE BEST MAN—In slavery. And if you don't look sharp you'll be the slave. She'll have a clothespin on your nose before you know it.

THE BRIDEGROOM—Not on your life! You know me pretty well, I don't eat out of anybody's hand! (*He goes to the mirror and begins to struggle nervously with his collar.*)

THE BEST MAN (*chuckling*)—You don't, don't you?

THE BRIDEGROOM—I certainly do not.

THE BEST MAN—Well, then, how do you account for your presence here today?

THE BRIDEGROOM (*oratorically*)—See here, what difference does it make whether I am married in March or married in June! In the long run what are the odds?

THE BEST MAN—True enough! What is the difference between dying of smallpox and dying of yellow fever? None at all!

THE BRIDEGROOM—Oh, very well! Go ahead! But let me tell you, if you have any curiosity about it, that in *my* house I am—(*the organ in the church begins to sound. Apparently the organist is taking a hack at Mendelssohn's "Spring Song."*) What's that?

THE BEST MAN—Goodness knows. It sounds like a waltz.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*in a sudden panic*)—Waltz, your grandmother! It's the wedding march! They are here! Come on! Get on your coat! (*He jumps into his own waist coat, claps on his hat and tugs at his gloves. His complexion turns to a bluish white.*)

THE BEST MAN (*jumping up and laying hands on him*)—Be calm, old fellow, be calm. What's the hurry? That isn't the wedding march.

THE BRIDEGROOM—It isn't?

THE BEST MAN—No of course not. That's just the little tune that the organist plays while the crowd is coming in. The wedding march starts with a loud smash. It goes like this: *Bing, bing, debing!* You can't miss it. Trust me.

THE BRIDEGROOM: But suppose they were to come in and we didn't start out in time! What an appalling mess it would make!

THE BEST MAN: Well, there's no law against it. Nine-tenths of the people out there would be tickled to death. It would give a comic touch to the show. Ordinarily, it's pretty dull.

THE BRIDEGROOM: Well, let that happen at somebody else's wedding. As for me, I want everything to go off smoothly, and without unnecessary humor.

THE BEST MAN—Just trust to me. I am the old, original professor. Some call me the greatest living master of wedding technique. I never make a mistake.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*mopping his brow*)—Whew! How hot! I am dying!

THE BEST MAN (*maliciously*)—It'll be 10 times as bad at the reception. It *always is*. Just imagine a small room packed to the doors with fat women and old maids! What are they going to have to drink?

THE BRIDEGROOM—Nothing, I suppose. (*Apologetically*). The Old Lady, you know, is one of those anti-rum fanatics.

THE BEST MAN—Stung! And that's to be my reward for all this torture!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*virtuously*)—Oh, well, it won't kill you. On the level, I think it would do you a lot of good to put the soft pedal on the rum. You talk as if alcohol were actually a necessity.

THE BEST MAN (*pricking up his ears*)—Har, har! So the fair young bridegroom has turned over a new leaf! On the wagon now, are you?

THE BRIDEGROOM—My own idea, I assure you. It seems to me that when a man takes on responsibilities he should give up bad habits. In fact, it goes without saying.

THE BEST MAN—All the same, I venture to bet that it has been said.

THE BRIDEGROOM—What do you mean?

THE BEST MAN—I mean that ma-in-law has been whispering into your shell-like ear.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*hotly*)—Ma-in-law be d---!

THE BEST MAN (*interrupting*)—Sacilege! Treason!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*defiantly*)—Let me tell you this: If that excellent lady ever attempts—

(The first notes of the wedding march are heard and the sound of general rustling comes from the church. The Bridegroom and Best Man jump to their feet, struggle into their coats, tug at their collars and go to the door. The Bridegroom rushes back for his hat and claps it on.)

THE BEST MAN—Here, you ass, take off that hat!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*nervously*)—What am I to do with it?

THE BEST MAN—Leave it on the table.

THE BRIDEGROOM—But how am I to get it again?

THE BEST MAN (*humorously*)—You never *will* get it, if the preacher sees it first.

THE BRIDEGROOM—Hang it all, I'm going to take it along.

THE BEST MAN—Leave it, I tell you! The sexton'll bring it around to the night hack.

THE BRIDEGROOM (*growing more and more agitated*)—Where is the ring! (*He plows through his pockets in alarm.*) I can't find it.

THE BEST MAN—We'll, we'll use a cigar band.

THE BRIDEGROOM—Cigar band nothing! (*Distracted*). Where is that ring? (*He begins to go through all of his pockets again.*)

THE BEST MAN—In your hand.

THE BRIDEGROOM—Aha!

THE BEST MAN—Now, just watch me and keep your nerve. Start off with your right foot and walk slowly! Now, then, here she goes! (*He opens the door and the two start out. The Bride's party, which has just started up the aisle, has monopolized all eyes. Only the preacher casts a kindly glance at the two neglected wayfarers. Both trip upon the carpet. The Bridegroom drops the ring and the Best Man reaches down for it, like a cowboy picking up a handkerchief from horseback.*)

THE BEST MAN—You pie-faced chimpanzee! You disgrace to the human race!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*the cold perspiration running down his nose*)—Go to the devil!

THE BEST MAN—Fool!

[CURTAIN]

(Source: Iowa State University, Parks Media Center, microfilm collection)