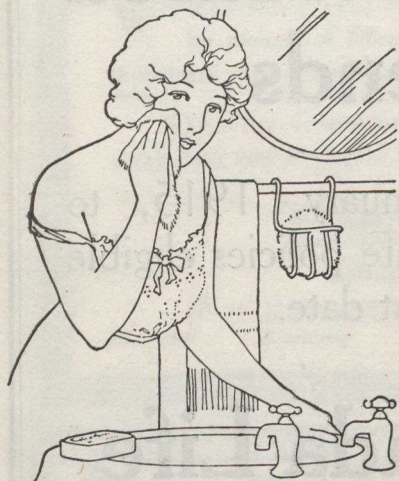


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bridegroom ever wants to go to a wedding. For a wedding, he has to go to the expense of buying clothes he cannot use at any other function. That is a dead loss to begin with, for a man cannot get married often enough to wear out his wedding suit. There ought to be some way of arranging a marriage ceremony without dragging the bridegroom into it. The girl could have her wedding dress, retinue of bridesmaids and procession down the centre aisle. The man who gives her away, might do his duty. Someone could be engaged who, free from excitement, might be trusted to produce the ring without a fumble. The clergy, the organist, the verger, the bellringers, the job master, could do their usual work and draw their fees. Tearful old ladies, smelling strongly of gin, who make a hobby of weddings and funerals, would not be deprived of the spectacle. Poor relations would still have a free junketing, two helpings of lobster and carte blanche at the champagne. No one would really miss the bridegroom. He might remain at his club over his last game of pool, or snooker. And when the wedding was over, someone could easily undertake the task of tapping him on the shoulder, and breaking the sad news to him that he is married. Then he could just catch the 5.25 p.m. and take his seat in the specially reserved compartment.

The Bridegroom's Farewell.

IN all essentials, weddings are alike, whether they happen in cottages or palaces. Everyone forgets the bridegroom for a week or two before the event. They leave him alone and he is the only happy man in those all too brief days before the ceremony. You will find him attending select little Bohemian functions, drinking unwisely, and making apt speeches in return for presents of fish slicers, marble clocks which never go, and pairs of bronze ornaments. Then he gives little farewell banquets on his own account, and makes more speeches. In his attitude to life at this moment, he reminds one of the palmy days at the Old Bailey, when gentlemen of the road, booked through for Tyburn Tree, filled in the interval of grace by holding a series of levees and delivering last dying speeches to the admiring multitude. Before a wedding, no bride can be expected to remember the man whose presence is necessary to make the completion of the ceremony possible. A girl confronted with her wedding has to think hard about clothes all the waking day, and to spend at least eight hours of each twenty-four enjoying the mysterious process of trying on. The old man who is naturally glad he will not have any more dressmakers' bills to pay on her behalf, becomes mighty generous. He feels inclined to open his purse strings, do the thing well, and see that Laura or Kate has at least a gown and a going-away costume worth describing to the reporters in language no one ever understands.

The Day Before.

AS for the wedding itself—well it runs the usual course. Really, the ceremony begins the day before with the house turned upside down. Laura spends the best part of the day completing the "trying on" process with the dressmaker. The rest of the house is filled with empty boxes and a litter of packing material—the contents of the boxes, wedding presents, being exhibited on the sideboard, and every other available table. I never think of wedding presents without seeing houses full of fish slicers, salt cellars, and butter knives. A wedding seems to cause a snowstorm of these electro-plated tributes. And ah! the sadness in the appraising eyes of the bride, as she searches amongst the litter in the vain hope that at least one set of salt cellars will bear the silver hall mark. Years ago, a bride dropped dead on the eve of her wedding. One of the salt cellars turned out to be of solid gold. The shock killed her.

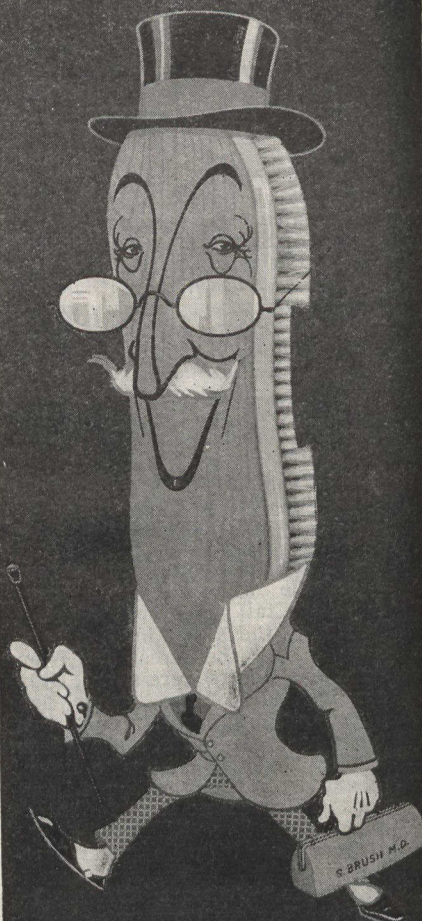
All the members of the family assemble on the evening of the wedding to catch a first glimpse of the wedding dress, the moment it has sur-

vived the last "trying on" process. All the bride's girl friends call—and giggle. Two sips at a glass of port wine and a nibble at the sultana cake of middle-class hospitality, reduce the bride's friends to the giggling state. Uncle Albert—with money and an atmosphere of opulence capable of exciting expectations—arrives from a distance. Travelling not less than fifty miles always starts his gout, and makes him bad-tempered. And Aunt Martha, who lives about twenty miles down the line, has buried two husbands and six children, comes to sniff aloud and hope the bride will be very happy, though you feel she regards matrimonial happiness as the most remote of the miracles. Everyone comes, everyone talks, everyone opens parcels, everyone prices the wedding presents. Even the bridegroom comes late in the evening. He just drops in, so to speak, as a guarantee of good faith. No one takes any notice of him, but if there are any thirteen-year-old children in the house, he is allowed to play with them in the basement or the hall passage. About ten o'clock, overcome with trying on, making an inventory of all the presents, and a mental valuation of each one, down to the last butter knife—the bride faints or becomes hysterical. Uncle Albert, displaying slight inflammatory symptoms, tries to quarrel with the bridegroom. Uncle Albert's anger is diverted by another glass of whisky, and the bridegroom is sent away by the rest of the party, the final impression left on his mind being that all regard him as a man capable of child murder or petty larceny.

What the Bridegroom Remembers.

The rest is confusion—so far as the bridegroom is concerned. Remembers being asked between the hours of ten and twelve whether he has the ring, by forty different people. Remembers all his clothes looked sartorially grotesque, and the crease of his trousers would run away from the correct line. Remembers carrying on a whispered conversation with his best man over a last brandy and soda. Does not remember driving to the church but has vivid memories of arriving there. Recalls the church was very full. Shivers when he thinks of the hour he spent wandering about the steps of the altar. Remembers waiting. Remembers hope revived when there was a bustle signifying a new arrival. Recalls the words he said—with sorrow—when the arrivals turned out to be Uncle Albert, Aunt Martha, a brother-in-law to be and the girl who was contemplating a similar ceremony for the man she accompanied. Remembers waiting again. Remembers still more waiting. Remembers a church full of people seemed to be saying rude things about the cut of his morning coat. Remembers hearing a buzz of conversation—the carriages had arrived. Recalls he took an indelible impression of the approach of the bride, as cool and as triumphant as if she were the first strawberry out of the ice-chest. Remembers confusion, mumbling, a fumble for the ring, ah!—"here it is;" a slip and a jingle as it fell to the floor; a giggle sternly suppressed; wedding march; register signing, the bridegroom laughing at every joke, without listening for the point, and wondering whether the vicar really liked marrying people; showers of confetti; banging of carriage doors; handshaking galore; slow realization on the part of the bridegroom that he was not a criminal; chicken salad, champagne and trifle; Uncle Albert on his legs, gout forgotten, debonair, looking as if he intended leaving his money to everyone; bride's health and speech by bridegroom. "All I can er—er—er—(cheers). That is to say—(more cheers). No one could be prouder than (more cheers). Kindness I have always experienced—(tears and cheers). And finally—" Splendid chap, lucky fellow, be kind to her and all the rest of it. More cabs, tears, cheers, jeers; old slipper on the handle of the carriage; family send-off at the station and showers of confetti; big tips for grinning porters—and then they both waken up in the reserved railway compartment.

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