

The Father of the Bride

Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall

The opening stage direction says, ‘The father of the Bride stands by a table on which there is a large wedding cake. He wears morning dress and holds a glass of champagne. He is proposing a toast at the wedding reception.’

As the father of the bride I would now like to reply to the best man’s toast and propose the health of the happy couple. This indeed is a proud day for me. I have often dreamed of the moment when Marlene would come to me and say, ‘Daddy, I’m in love with George Witherspoon. He’s been promoted to manager of the bank and now he wants my hand in marriage.’

As things turned out George Witherspoon married the chief bridesmaid, but then you can’t have everything.

What we do have is Rodney, and it is with humble pleasure that I welcome him to our family circle. We represent a number of honorable professions in my family. My father was a respected retail tobacconist, my brother is a distinguished solicitor, and as you know I have the honor of being manager of a chain of grocery shops. We have not had a window cleaner in the family before and I sincerely welcome this new blood.

It’s true that Rodney has had some bad luck lately and is temporarily out of employment owing to that unfortunate misunderstanding over Mrs Parkinson’s jewelry. I myself entirely accept his explanation that the brooch and necklace must have fallen into his pocket when he knocked them with his chamois leather. In any event my brother assures me that he has a good chance of just getting off with a heavy fine, which will be my small wedding present to the happy couple. They have a fine start in life — a fine home and fine prospects. My Marlene should learn a great deal from living in one room over a plumber’s shop, and of course it will be very handy for the radiant couple if they ever think of getting hot water installed. Both Marlene and Rodney know that my house is at their disposal whenever they want a bath, and the sooner Rodney avails himself of the invitation the better.

Now I want to recall a conversation which I was having with Rodney’s father in the vestry before the vicar separated us. Rodney’s father reckons that in the heat of the moment I referred to his son as a half-baked twit. Let me assure Rodney’s father that I never speak in the heat of the moment, particularly on such an auspicious day as this. The way I look upon it I am not losing a daughter but gaining a son. In fact I am also gaining a grandson. The credit for that is entirely Rodney’s. He admits it and she admits it and we won’t go into all that again thank you very much Rodney’s mother.

I admire Rodney for the way in which he has stood by my Marlene. ‘When the paternity case came up a lesser man would have skipped his bail. Not Rodney. He came all the way back from holiday in Dublin to face his responsibilities like a man, and also gave myself, my brother and my three Sons an opportunity of visiting the great Irish capital.

Finally, before proposing the toast, I have a message from the catering manager about twelve fish-knives and a silver-plated cruet. He says that Rodney’s family will know what he means and that he is prepared to accept it as a joke if the missing items are on the table when we leave.

Now I ask you all to charge your glasses, and be upstanding for the happy couple. Marlene — could you help Rodney’s father to his feet, there’s a love. The happy couple.