

How To Stay Married



DICK HILLS

SUMMERSDALE

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Summersdale Publishers Ltd
46 West Street
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1RP
England

www.summersdale.com

ISBN 1 873475 32 2

Original illustrations by Sophie Sitwell.

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PROLOGUE

Very few people have ever read Prologues so I haven't written one.

Dick Hills

INTRODUCTION

Very few people read Introductions either but it doesn't really matter.

How To Stay Married? That doesn't seem to be the modern problem. How to persuade people to get married is the present dilemma.

It's the modern practice for the girl and her 'live-in' boyfriend to rent a flat, hire a television set, and bonk themselves into oblivion, happy in the knowledge that if the bonking turns out to be a case of a left hand screw trying to get into a right hand thread, they can wave goodbye without going through the blender of a divorce.

Only if an offspring arrives, with another one on the way, do they have to make the decision either to get married or buy a television licence.

Usually the television licence wins, because such are the laws of our land after 2000 years of Christianity, that possessing a television set without a licence carries a heavy fine, but possessing a family without a marriage licence carries no fine at all. (In fact, they pay *you*.)

Against such odds I surrender, and confine my hints to those who have taken the mystical step into matrimony.

1. SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE (AND AFTER IT)

RULE 1

Whether you have already (or intend to) practise either, it's just as well you know exactly what sex is in scientific terms. Sex has its origins in primordial biology . . . if an organism became damaged it would seek union with another in order to create a new, healthy organism. This has led to an awful lot of damaged bishops seeking union with actresses; but it doesn't mean you have to go out and break a leg before intercourse. Thinking about it is often damaging enough.

RULE 2

If as a married man or woman your sexual relationship takes a plunge, take a regular mixture of Benzedrine and Valium. This makes you randy, but if you don't strike lucky you don't give a damn.

RULE 3

Sexual potency is at its peak somewhere between two dozen oysters and a jar of 'Delay Cream'.

PERSONAL CASE HISTORY

There was more than the usual number in the psychiatric ward of the *Anchor and Hope* last week because it was rumoured that the landlord was having an affair with the new barmaid and the vultures were gathering to see what scraps could be picked up.

'Stolen fruits always taste sweeter,' pronounced a mild-mannered sweet sherry in the corner; which gave rise to a

snort from a pint of bitter leaning on the bar, who expressed the view that some people thought once married, the sexual fruit-bowl was always available on the dining room table to help yourself whenever you felt like it (so to speak), which assumption in his experience was far from the case.

‘What did he say?’ asked an elderly mutt and jeff whiskey and water.

‘He said,’ shouted his companion winking at us all, ‘that he always has it on the dining room table.’

‘That’s the proper place for it,’ replied the deaf one, ‘but now we watch the telly a lot, we have it on our laps.’

‘I’m not talking about food,’ said the pint of bitter, ‘I’m talking about having sex.’

‘So am I,’ retorted the other.

Without a chairman the debate veered all over the pond like a mechanical toy motor boat without a rudder.

‘... do you remember those ghastly Dutch caps? My God! You needed five days’ notice to get yourself ready ...’ ‘... no central heating in those days dear, you had to have it in bed or in front of the fire because everywhere else was freezing ...’ ‘... when they got bored they used to do it in risky places like on the top of buses or in the public library ...’ ‘... if you didn’t use a condom you just hoped the wife’s dates were right ...’

Attention was restored when the gin and tonic gave her husband a cuff and said, ‘You never told me you had sex before we were married.’ Her husband grinned sheepishly and stage-whispered, ‘I mean with you dear, of course. With you.’ This made his good lady even more irate. ‘You certainly didn’t have sex with me before we were married. I was brought up properly. I didn’t believe in sex before marriage then and I don’t believe in it now. You’d better think again. It wasn’t with me you had sex.’

‘Well I certainly had sex with someone,’ he said.

‘It wasn’t with me I can assure you,’ she concluded with some satisfaction and she wondered why everybody laughed.

The popular view always seems to be that sex before marriage can't be compared with sex after it; a Bacchanalian feast compared with a meal in a works canteen. Congreve likened the two to a pretty piece of dialogue followed by a very dull play. Free sex embraces the thrill of a challenge, the variety of the quarry, and the mystery of the outcome - all of which adds to the piquancy of the sexual pursuit. Whereas married sex to the contrary has no surprises and soon becomes a matter of routine. 'Monogamy' as the school boy howler puts it 'is doing the same thing over and over again until you get bored.'

I can assure all those who wish to stay married that this needn't be the case. 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments . . .' wrote Bill the bard as a sonnet opener, and let not me either. There are enough impediments in the way of true love, and monotony isn't one of them: which carries me and any of my readers who are interested to the Park Chambers Hotel on 6th Avenue and 52nd Street in New York in the summer of my life, where my business partner and I had been ensconced some three months. Following this period of enforced celibacy, we had accumulated enough capital to bring our wives over for a flying visit, primarily to relieve our concupiscence.

'I suppose we ought to do something about getting some preventatives,' I observed. 'I'll try that drug store down the block and see what they've got.'

'Oh - let me know how you get on,' returned my companion.

It was a typical American drug store composed of a chemist shop and a food counter dispensing coffee and Danish pastry and milkshakes. A scattering of customers were lounging on stools. Over the next few minutes I experienced what it was like running full tilt into a language block. A polite assistant approached with a 'Yessir - can I help you?'

'Yes. Do you stock preventatives?'

'Sorry sir?'

'Preventatives. You know . . . preventatives?'

'Oh! You mean like for colds and flu. You want capsules or liquid? We have . . .'

'No I don't mean for colds. I mean - we call them Durex. Have you a packet of Durex?'

'Durex? I don't remember the brand. Hey Joe!' he called over to the soda jerk. 'Have you heard of Durex?'



"Have you heard of Durex?"

Joe shook his head. 'The gentleman's English, Nick. May be it's a different brand over here. Ask him what it is.'

'What is it exactly, sir?' Nick asked.

'Don't you call them French letters over here?' I asked. By this time the customers had become interested and swivelled round on their stools.

'Is that the brand name, French letters?' inquired Nick.

'Let me explain, you see, I haven't seen my wife for a long time and she's coming over this week.'

'That's great for you sir. She'll love New York, it's a wonderful town.'

'Yes I know it is, but . . .'

'Don't forget to take her to the Rockefeller Center,' called out a male customer, 'There's a noo exhibition there this week.'

'Thanks,' I called.

'Shall I fetch the manager sir?' Nick suggested.

'No, I don't need the manager,' I said in desperation, 'I need - you know - a preventative to wear for the wife . . .'

'Oh! You mean RUBBERS sir! I gotcha.'

The customers gave us a round of applause.

I need hardly add at this point that the word condom had scarcely been invented let alone passed into universal usage at the time, and that the American word 'rubbers' was entirely new to me. Being American made, the smallest pack the assistant produced was the size of a small shoe-box, which I could hardly refuse after his services, and cost me twelve dollars.

'Have a nice day,' said Nick as he presented me with the wrapped bulk.

'With these I could have a nice year.' I said.

Several days went by and the time came to re-arrange our rooms in the hotel to accommodate our wishes, as my colleague and I had been sharing a suite.

'By the way, how did you get on at the drug store? I'd better fit myself out.' I related the whole incident while he dissolved into fits of laughter.

'So what do they call them here?' he asked at length. I can say that in all honesty the word 'rubbers' completely escaped me. It was such an odd usage it refused to come back. I agonised to recall it.

'It doesn't matter anyway,' he said, 'I'll get Sam to get them for me.'

Sam was the elderly hotel bell-hop and a typical New York fixer. For a dollar tip he could fetch you anything. ('Any time you guys want a couple of broads let me know'). For our entertainment he gave us a running commentary on all the dudes in the hotel, who was sleeping with whom, and what scams were going on. Over the months of our prolonged stay he had become our bosom pal and confidante. My friend called down for him and he duly arrived.

'Sam,' opened up my companion, 'can you get me a packet of preventatives, I think they're about twelve dollars.' He counted out some bills.

'Sure Mr Baker,' said Sam. 'You got a cold coming on? It's the air conditioning.'

'Not for colds, I mean Durex, French letters.'

'Sorry sir?'

'He knows the right name,' said my friend pointing at me accusingly, 'but he says he can't remember it. You see - my wife is coming over for a few days -'

'Oh, I'm happy to hear that. She'll love New York.'

'Yes, I know she will but . . .'

'Don't forget to take her to the Rockefeller Center . . .'

'I know, there's a new exhibition there,' interrupted the other. By now I was starting to giggle.

'You did this deliberately!' said my frustrated friend. 'You don't understand Sam, my wife is coming over. We haven't seen each other for a long time, as well you know, and we love each other very much.'

'I guess you must. You two guys are the talk of the hotel the way you behave yourselves.'

'We love each other very much and we want to do what husbands and wives always do,' pursued my friend. I was lying on the bed with tears of silent mirth in my eyes. He was on the point of physically giving a demonstration of the act when as bad luck would have it Sam cottoned on.

'You want some rubbers sir?'

'That's the word!' I spluttered.

'Well get some of those Sam.'

'Hold it!' I suddenly realised. 'What are we bothering for?' I grabbed my own packet. 'There's a thousand of them in this packet. You can take half of these. I forgot all about it.' My room-mate threw me a disgusted look. From that day to this he is still convinced that I knew they were called 'rubbers'.

If nothing else, perhaps this incident records for posterity a moment in the history of sex, for it would never have arisen without some lingering gentility even among men. I'm sure in these days when folk are more brutally direct, our needs could have been lucidly expressed in four words.

HELPFUL HINT

Don't underestimate the power of sex. It has brought down governments. It brought down Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher, in my view, because neither appeared to have any.

2. NO CONFETTI?

RULE 1

This subject brings us to the church and your intended bride. Marry a plain girl rather than a beautiful one. When a woman's beauty fades with age she invariably blames it on her life with you. A plain girl, however, has nothing to fear from the advancing years.

But don't let her spend £50 on a perm: for that money the perm deserves a better face!

RULE 2

Before saying 'I do', be wary of, and make allowances for, religious differences. (His religion might be Manchester United, and hers the Argos catalogue.) Also remember that for Jews, circumcision has a deeper religious significance, but for Gentiles it is just a way of getting rid of dick heads . . . See Shakespeare 'There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hewn though it be.'

RULE 3

Compatibility in your pursuits, outlook and interests is more important than sexual attraction, and it takes time to acquire assurance. However, if you're short of time, a quick compatibility test is to stare fixedly at her breasts for five minutes, and if her nipples stand up, it means you're in with a chance.

PERSONAL CASE HISTORY

A very influential critic, reading my rough notes on the snares and pitfalls encountered by those who wish to stay married, expressed the opinion that my advice was outdated and irrelevant to the lifestyles of modern marriages. Normally I pay no attention to the critics, but this particular critic happens to cook my food, iron my shirts, bear my children and weed my garden. Ignoring her comments can sometimes result in a week long loaded silence signifying inner pain, for which not even an apology is an abirritant. So, dutifully I re-read my notes to see if I had allowed the odd neolithic slip to show beneath the skirts of my observations. I detected none. I hadn't once called the movies 'the pictures', the radio 'the wireless', or referred to a dress as a 'frock'. I resisted the temptation at one time to allude to Glenda Farrell and Barton McClaine movies in case it dated me. I pointed this out to the duchess.

'You used the word *confetti*,' she sniffed. 'That dates you. Half the married kids today have never heard of confetti. Most churches banned it years ago.' I gazed at her hollow-eyed and disbelieving in much the same way that Queen Isabel must have looked at Columbus when he told her the world was round. 'No confetti!' I croaked. 'There must be. It was a clue in *The Times* yesterday.'

'What young couples read *The Times*?' she rejoined. 'You prattle on about marriage but when did you last go to a wedding?'

'I went to ours,' I said defensively.

'Only just,' she reminded me. 'Your body turned up but the rest of you was lying on the floor at the *Anchor and Hope* where you left it the night before.' Then she gave me a peck. 'Still, I'm glad you made it. But my advice is to go to a wedding and bring your advice up to date. If you can find one. Half the couples these days don't bother with marriage at all.'

Statistics of course prove the duchess to be right, although to judge from the scene at our local church the following Saturday, the opposite was the case. There were three weddings

all going on at once; one wedding coming out and two queuing up to go in. One Best Man was going berserk because his photographer was taking pictures of the wrong wedding. I soon discovered that a wedding party today falls into two groups. There is the mums-and-dads group who wear dresses and hats and suits with carnations. And then there are the others who wear anything as long as it doesn't look like a dress or a suit. The groom emerged from the church wearing a sort of oatmeal safari jacket and the bride was wearing a more eccentric version of the gear Barbra Streisand wears when passing through London Airport on her way to Paris.

'Oo she's beautiful,' sighed a highly painted nymph, who looked as though she'd quickly tarted up after cutting a lesson at Grange Hill School. 'Crinkled cotton!' The crinkled cotton explained why the bride looked as though she'd spent all night in the wedding car; an effect I'm sure she strove to achieve.

I groped my way into the church hoping to find that I wasn't on Mars after all but on the earth I knew and loved. No hushed voices inside whispering against the muted tones of the church organ. It was more like a rehearsal of a television show. Video cameras were being aimed, flash cameras blinked everywhere. Noise and laughter. I staggered into a pew and grasped a copy of the wedding service. Ah! That was better. Hymn 520 . . . 'Love divine all loves excelling. Joy in heaven on earth come down.' So we were on earth after all! A good old traditional English hymn. I stood up, diaphragm pumped up ready to belt out the familiar tune. My mouth was already open when a scruffy pop group leapt to its feet, plucked guitars and launched into a rendering of Hymn 520 which sounded more like *Hey Jude*. I stared around aghast. Nobody seemed to mind. A few old ladies started to swing their frames in a mild disco style and smile at each other as they sang, in the way that old people do. The stained glass window above the altar started to whirl slowly round and round . . .



“Hey Jude, don’t make it bad . . .”

I can hardly remember the wedding service. I knew that it was supposed to start with something like ‘Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God . . .’ but I can’t remember God being mentioned at all. Maybe he decided not to turn up, and I don’t blame him. I learned afterwards at the reception, my shock further unstrung by cheap sherry, that couples today can dictate more or less what they want to be contained in the marriage vows. To judge from the present

divorce rate, the favourite seems to be, ‘for richer for poorer, for better for worse, but not for long.’

I weaved my way home and collapsed into my favourite chair.

‘So what do you think?’ asked the duchess. ‘Did you learn anything?’

‘I don’t know,’ I mumbled, ‘if weddings aren’t so popular these days, it’s probably because the parents talk them out of having them. I know I would.’

‘But what about the confetti?’

‘Confetti?’ I murmured. ‘What’s confetti?’

HELPFUL HINT

Confetti is messy, and gets everywhere. It has the nasty habit, when in the final throes of orgasm, of dropping out of your ears on to your beloved’s face. Seek the vicar’s sanction to have rice thrown: your bride might turn a little peckish during the act.