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Unholy Matrimony

We shall attempt with great trepidation and with suitable reverence to touch on the most delicate theme of all: marriage between men. We use the adjective «unholy» to refer only to the world's intolerant attitude on this subject; we understand that in the happiest cases of homosexual marriage a devout attitude does obtain. In the early stages of most relationships which the two parties hope will be of marital permanence, there is an atmosphere of holy bliss. Whether the marriage can survive beyond the period after this begins to fade, when there is no legal bond to hold the two parties together, is another and not so holy consideration.

If we may, to start, let us go back to the age of fourteen or fifteen and try to recall the images of love-fulfillment which came into the minds of all of us when we first apprehended that we were sexual outsiders, yet still hoped to find some partner for our lives. Did we not then fancy that life actually owed us and would therefore surely bring us some rapturous experience of mutual male love that would teach us what is called «the meaning of life»? We counted on having this happen fairly soon, but at the latest we expected it to occur within the ten years following upon puberty's joyous arrival.

In that idealistic dawn, we did not, if we were romantic, think of such a coalition as a passing affair, the first in an ever-extending series, but as an enduring marriage for life. It was to be Damon and Pythias reborn in the twentieth century. It was to transpire with someone of just our own age, with just our own sympathies and interests, and would be an everlasting idyll of happily shared books, paintings, plays, films, symphonies, parties, picnics, vacations, and, naturally, beds. We are vowed not to be cynical or «witty», so we shall not mock at this visionary dream, or say that it never happens. We shall only wonder to how many youths anything even approaching this idyll does occur and does last for even as long as three years?

Occasionally, hither and yon, one does see such lovers, who look to be ideally mated, who are lost in a cloudland and unaware of the competitive strife of the gay world around them; one would like to light candles that would keep them in this enchanted state, but one fears for them all the same, especially if they live in a metropolis where the sex life is, in the words of William Shakespeare, a «restless ecstasy.»

It is the undocumented suspicion of this observer that when such a good mating does happen and does endure, it persists because of one of two situations. The first is that the lovers inhabit a relatively small community and have little chance of escaping from it. Each has considered himself a sorry misfit and each is wonder-struck and deeply grateful to discover the other. They do not have a multiplicity of potential partners from whom to choose as they would in a city, and they know it. They realize each other's scarcity value and are ready to be more patient and make a greater adjustment to each other's whims and defects in order to avoid the abyss of loneliness into which each must fall if they divorce. Such a mating could last an entire lifetime, and we sincerely hope that, scattered in our provinces, there are many such loving couples.

The second situation is the one in which the lovers are united by a common economic bond as well as by personal attraction. They are involved in the same line of creativity or else they start a business together. It can be anything from a ballet studio to a pottery factory; but it is their baby and holds them together.

They have pooled their energies and their pocketbooks to build their little fort, and it can consequently hold them together even when fidelity begins to lapse. Each has too much to lose by striking out for himself.

Both of these situations can take place between youths of approximately the same age, and so fulfill that original adolescent vision of love; but they may also present themselves as possibilities when there is a discrepancy of age between the lovers. The younger man may still be a business partner of the older man, and they may remain united over a considerable span of years, again even when fidelity lapses. However, they probably stand a better chance if they are not situated in a large city where if a quarrel arises, each of them can think, oh, well, there are plenty of others swimming around, I'll get by.

Where there is a difference in ages, there may be also a greater problem of adjustment on both sides. The older man may be disconcerted, embarrassed and even wearied by the strain of trying to bring his young partner's knowledge and culture up to his own level. The younger man may be disturbed, after his first mesmerization, by the precise older appearance of his friend's face and body. It can also, ironically, be true that in some such marriages the older man is more fascinating and more of a flirt than the younger one, creating constant opportunities for jealousy. It is not always a case of youth calling to youth; maturity also calls to maturity, seeking a mind that is more challenging, seeking an intellectual equal. If the older man is in a professional position to give opportunities to the young, he will also be the subject of ambitious aggressions he may not find himself able to resist. The young lover may lose out simply because some other, quite cold-blooded youth would like to take his place in that pleasant penthouse, and manoeuvres to sew discord and snake his way in.

This brings us logically into the subject of the disrupting factors that cause gay divorces. What are they? Some of them are identical with the factors that disrupt heterosexual marriages.

Money is said by sociologists to cause more divorces than infidelity. Disagreements as to how the family budget should be expended have brought many men and women to Reno. In the gay world money difficulties between lovers can occur regardless of whether there is an age difference or not. If things are supposed to be fifty-fifty and one party or the other starts gradually trying to exploit his mate, there will eventually have to be a showdown. Sometimes, where there is a difference of ages, it is understood from the beginning that the older person, if he is able, will assume the greater share of the financial burden. But the older person is not *invariably* so much better fixed than the younger one. Whether he is or not, he is apt to become dubious of the sincerity of the younger one's alleged affection if too great a demand is steadily made on his pocketbook. «He's always wanting me to take him out and spend money on him,» is a common complaint heard from older lovers about their young partners. Am I being loved or am I being used — that is the question that is rubbing them the wrong way.

If one party is being hypocritically used by the other party, he will detect it in time and will then have to decide whether he thinks the relationship is worth maintaining on these terms. Pride is involved; so is peace of mind. How much is he going to enjoy even the most blissful of embraces if his mind is tormented by the suspicion that the other party no longer has his heart in it? The greatest shrewdness, the most skillful of reassurances by the deceitful lover, will not suffice if the exploited one is smart enough, for he can sense even in the dark of night the glow of treachery.

Every reader of any maturity can tell examples of this sort of dissension and its inevitable progress toward divorce. The basic cause of incompatibility is the money trouble; other factors enter, naturally, and obscure the issue, but the real root of disagreement lies in the fear by one party that the other one no longer wants a loving husband; he wants a Sugar Daddy. It is likely that after the divorce, the opportunistic one may live to regret his attempt to play both ends against the middle; but no warning, either from his husband or his friends, will stop him if he is bent on a percentage angle.

The second main cause for discord need not involve a discrepancy of ages either, but it does involve a discrepancy in backgrounds. In this case, one party is apt to be more educated than the other and able to move in circles which are not open to the other. Can he successfully take with him into these circles a crude and untutored mate, and still keep his friends loyal to him? He does not wish to ruin his social life for good; neither does he wish to lose his partner; but eventually again a showdown has to come. If the cruder one, out of inferiority, seeks to separate him from his refined friends and restrict him to less polished circles in which he himself is at home, there is not much hope for an enduring partnership.

On the other hand, there will be just as much trouble if the polished one is reluctant to introduce his lover to his friends. There is then going to be entirely justified resentment on the part of the unlettered one, who feels he is being partially rejected, that he is not «good enough». In some cases, he will make a diligent effort to improve himself in order to be «good enough»; he will study to learn how to hold his own in conversations about cultural matters. In other cases, he will stubbornly refuse to make this effort and adopt the attitude of Dostoievski about the Russian peasants: «Love us while we are dirty. Everyone will love us when we are clean.»

The sad part of such situations is that the uncouth person may have qualities of loyalty, sweetness and honesty that could make him a good partner over a long span of years; but if he refuses to acquire any patina of social graciousness he runs the danger of creating an incompatibility that will lead to divorce. He does not realize intelligently that whereas he can, given determination, assume a culture if he has it not, his lover cannot successfully coarsen himself and be happy about it.

Infidelity, of course, is the third major cause of gay divorces, though it should be said that the infidelity often grows, not out of actual physical discontent, but out of one of the two causes already mentioned. The infidelity will not inevitably be that of the younger party in marriages with an age differential. An older husband who has been a night-prowling Casanova before marriage, may find it tiresome to be restricted to one partner, may, out of vanity, wish to prove to himself he is still attractive to others. He will go to parties with his lover and flirt openly with other men, perhaps not intending to go any further than rouse the fire in them. The young partner, hurt and resentful, may flounce home alone, or around the corner to a bar; then the husband, peeved, will try to «teach him a lesson» by committing adultery. And again they are headed for *The Big Split*.

Some sort of mutual attitude about infidelity probably should be reached between a male married couple as soon as they realize the first fine careless rapture of their love is past. Each must decide whether he is willing to forgive the other those little flings which «don't count», or to go even further and

overlook temporary passions which do count, but which are likely to pass over, because of circumstances. Sometimes, if there is such an agreement, a marriage can weather a surprising number of crises of this kind; but this still does not mean it is not capable of suddenly splitting open on some Inchcape Rock.

There are also in the gay world as in the normal world malicious souls of an envious disposition who could be called professional «marriage breaker-uppers.» They are not happily married themselves or married at all, and envy makes them unable to endure the sight of happiness between others. Thus, while claiming to be the dearest of friends to one party or both, they will slyly seek, by a hint here and there, to sow distrust of infidelity in the minds of the lovers until a real wedge can be driven between them. They are not always operating this way to obtain one of the lovers for themselves; but only out of devilry based on personal frustration.

Even if such an envious sliver is disregarded by the lovers, the marriage may still dissolve because of persistent infidelity by one party. It is a question which sort of infidelity hurts more — the secret betrayal which it is hoped will not be discovered and then is discovered — or the unfaithfulness which is frankly confessed to the mate. We regret to say our observation has been that, no matter how truly the lovers originally plighted their gay troth, infidelity does take place with as high an average in gay life as in square life, perhaps higher because there is less at stake in the way of public opinion. Generally, however, if there is a liberal attitude on both sides, and a real desire for the marriage to persevere, it can survive this peril more readily than it can either money discord or social incompatibility. It probably requires an inordinate amount of patience on the part of the one who is the Lover toward the one who is the Beloved.

A fourth case of discord is alcoholism. No matter how sorry one may feel for an alcoholic as a «sick» person, the fact is that he submits any lover to a constant and wearing nervous tension of fear on his behalf as well as to a great deal of public mortification over his behaviour in the presence of others when he is drunk. His private demeanour at parties may be bad enough to stomach, but he is also capable of wanting to spend all his evenings in bars, getting stoned, and finally coming home in no condition to consummate the marriage.

In short, a real alcoholic can be a mess as a husband. Alcoholism is probably not any more common among gay people who want to be gay than it is among straight people. It will more frequently be met among hidden queens who are resisting the dread desire to be gay, but resisting it in vain. This is presumed to have been the background of the unhappy man in «The Lost Weekend».

A most deplorable source of trouble can be a lack of agreement on physical methods. If the two parties cannot satisfy each other because of individual penchants, they may endeavour to create triangular situations which will satisfy them both; that is, one of the mates will try to lure home a third party who is innocent of the fact that a session *à trois* is intended. Disastrous scenes can take place which will lead to bitter quarrels. If the two lovers cannot be gratified by each other as they desire, it is wiser for each to seek his gratification by himself, rather than to think it is smart to frame up a three party deal.

A genuine companionship as friends is no doubt the secret of the success of most gay marriages which last. The desire to share life together outside the

hours in bed is probably the best binder of all. This returns us to our original premise that the meeting of kindred spirits is the best guarantee for success in gay marriages as in straight ones.

Alas, this meeting is a sheer matter of luck. Even in a huge metropolis, the roulette wheel may never turn up your right opposite number with whom you can be truly content. A theatrical director commented lately in an interview: «The young performer should never lose sight of the fact that the breaks are the largest ingredient of the success story.» The young homosexual could afford to apply this statement to his love life. He will not believe it when he is fifteen or twenty five or even thirty, any more than the young performer will believe that his talent alone cannot win him fame and fortune; but the wearing down process of the seeking years will eventually force him to realize that he is not one of the lucky ones who get the breaks in true love. Perhaps he has never wanted to be promiscuous, only to be faithfully married to one lover; but wishing won't make this happen, and he then has to decide whether he is going to remain celibate or whether he is going to make the compromise of taking love where he finds it — if only for the sake of his health.

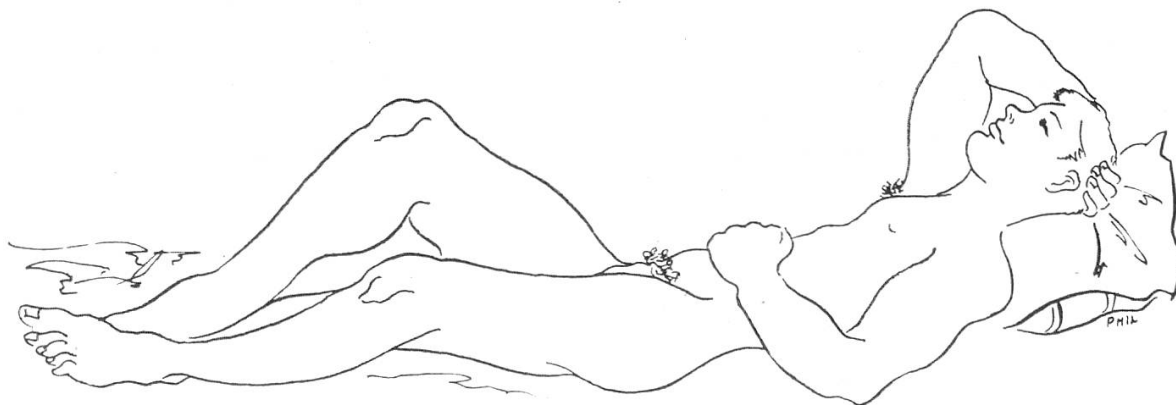
It will do him no good to moan to his friends about his bad luck in affairs of the heart. The competition is too keen to make many gay people, even the friendliest and most loyal ones, go out of their way to do matchmaking for others. In this respect straight people, we sadly admit, are more public-spirited than gay ones. They do, especially the women, persistently try to mate the unmated. Why do gay people do this so rarely? Because in the main one suspects they simply do not have enough compassion for each other. If there is one single quality we have found the most lacking in gay life, it is compassion.

Maybe it is the presence of it between the relatively few happily married gay people which accounts for the survival of their marriages. Both have known enough of «the tears of things» to make them understand and value the luck which brought them together; and so each one tries to keep that compassion shining in his treatment of his mate. In such matrimony there can be said to exist an element of the holy.

It is the lack of it which makes so much gay matrimony unholy.

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by Hadrian.



We are led to believe in a lie when we see with - not through our eyes. Blake