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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Molière  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle  
Baum Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis  
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain  
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato  
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Harte  
Kant London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse  
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# **Their Wedding Journey**

William Dean Howells

# Imprint

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# **THEIR WEDDING JOURNEY**

By William Dean Howells



**Contents:**

The Outset

A Midsummer-day's Dream

The Night Boat

A Day's Railroading

The Enchanted City, and Beyond

Niagara

Down the St. Lawrence

The Sentiment of Montreal

Homeward and Home

Niagara Revisited Twelve Years after Their Wedding



## I. THE OUTSET

They first met in Boston, but the match was made in Europe, where they afterwards saw each other; whither, indeed, he followed her; and there the match was also broken off. Why it was broken off, and why it was renewed after a lapse of years, is part of quite a long love-story, which I do not think myself qualified to rehearse, distrusting my fitness for a sustained or involved narration; though I am persuaded that a skillful romancer could turn the courtship of Basil and Isabel March to excellent account. Fortunately for me, however, in attempting to tell the reader of the wedding-journey of a newly married couple, no longer very young, to be sure, but still fresh in the light of their love, I shall have nothing to do but to talk of some ordinary traits of American life as these appeared to them, to speak a little of well-known and easily accessible places, to present now a bit of landscape and now a sketch of character.

They had agreed to make their wedding-journey in the simplest and quietest way, and as it did not take place at once after their marriage, but some weeks later, it had all the desired charm of privacy from the outset.

"How much better," said Isabel, "to go now, when nobody cares whether you go or stay, than to have started off upon a wretched wedding-breakfast, all tears and trousseau, and had people wanting to see you aboard the cars. Now there will not be a suspicion of honey-moonshine about us; we shall go just like anybody else,—with a difference, dear, with a difference!" and she took Basil's cheeks between her hands. In order to do this, she had to run round the table; for they were at dinner, and Isabel's aunt, with whom they had begun married life, sat substantial between them. It was rather a girlish thing for Isabel, and she added, with a conscious blush, "We are past our first youth, you know; and we shall not strike the public as bridal, shall we? My one horror in life is an evident bride."

Basil looked at her fondly, as if he did not think her at all too old to be taken for a bride; and for my part I do not object to a woman's

being of Isabel's age, if she is of a good heart and temper. Life must have been very unkind to her if at that age she have not won more than she has lost. It seemed to Basil that his wife was quite as fair as when they met first, eight years before; but he could not help recurring with an inextinguishable regret to the long interval of their broken engagement, which but for that fatality they might have spent together, he imagined, in just such rapture as this. The regret always haunted him, more or less; it was part of his love; the loss accounted irreparable really enriched the final gain.

"I don't know," he said presently, with as much gravity as a man can whose cheeks are clasped between a lady's hands, "you don't begin very well for a bride who wishes to keep her secret. If you behave in this way, they will put us into the 'bridal chambers' at all the hotels. And the cars—they're beginning to have them on the palace-cars."

Just then a shadow fell into the room.

"Wasn't that thunder, Isabel?" asked her aunt, who had been contentedly surveying the tender spectacle before her. "O dear! you'll never be able to go by the boat to-night, if it storms. It 's actually raining now!"

In fact, it was the beginning of that terrible storm of June, 1870. All in a moment, out of the hot sunshine of the day it burst upon us before we quite knew that it threatened, even before we had fairly noticed the clouds, and it went on from passion to passion with an inexhaustible violence. In the square upon which our friends looked out of their dining-room windows the trees whitened in the gusts, and darkened in the driving floods of the rainfall, and in some paroxysms of the tempest bent themselves in desperate submission, and then with a great shudder rent away whole branches and flung them far off upon the ground. Hail mingled with the rain, and now the few umbrellas that had braved the storm vanished, and the hurtling ice crackled upon the pavement, where the lightning played like flames burning from the earth, while the thunder roared overhead without ceasing. There was something splendidly theatrical about it all; and when a street-car, laden to the last inch of its capacity, came by, with horses that pranced and leaped under the stinging blows of the hailstones, our friends felt as if it were an ef-

fective and very naturalistic bit of pantomime contrived for their admiration. Yet as to themselves they were very sensible of a potent reality in the affair, and at intervals during the storm they debated about going at all that day, and decided to go and not to go, according to the changing complexion of the elements. Basil had said that as this was their first journey together in America, he wished to give it at the beginning as pungent a national character as possible, and that as he could imagine nothing more peculiarly American than a voyage to New York by a Fall River boat, they ought to take that route thither. So much upholstery, so much music, such variety of company, he understood, could not be got in any other way, and it might be that they would even catch a glimpse of the inventor of the combination, who represented the very excess and extremity of a certain kind of Americanism. Isabel had eagerly consented; but these aesthetic motives were paralyzed for her by the thought of passing Point Judith in a storm, and she descended from her high intents first to the Inside Boats, without the magnificence and the orchestra, and then to the idea of going by land in a sleeping-car. Having comfortably accomplished this feat, she treated Basil's consent as a matter of course, not because she did not regard him, but because as a woman she could not conceive of the steps to her conclusion as unknown to him, and always treated her own decisions as the product of their common reasoning. But her husband held out for the boat, and insisted that if the storm fell before seven o'clock, they could reach it at Newport by the last express; and it was this obstinacy that, in proof of Isabel's wisdom, obliged them to wait two hours in the station before going by the land route. The storm abated at five o'clock, and though the rain continued, it seemed well by a quarter of seven to set out for the Old Colony Depot, in sight of which a sudden and vivid flash of lightning caused Isabel to seize her husband's arm, and to implore him, "O don't go by the boat!" On this, Basil had the incredible weakness to yield; and bade the driver take them to the Worcester Depot. It was the first swerving from the ideal in their wedding journey, but it was by no means the last; though it must be confessed that it was early to begin.

They both felt more tranquil when they were irretrievably committed by the purchase of their tickets, and when they sat down in

the waiting room of the station, with all the time between seven and nine o'clock before them. Basil would have eked out the business of checking the trunks into an affair of some length, but the baggage-master did his duty with pitiless celerity; and so Basil, in the mere excess of his disoccupation, bought an accident-insurance ticket. This employed him half a minute, and then he gave up the unequal contest, and went and took his place beside Isabel, who sat prettily wrapped in her shawl, perfectly content.

"Isn't it charming," she said gayly, "having to wait so long? It puts me in mind of some of those other journeys we took together. But I can't think of those times with any patience, when we might really have had each other, and didn't! Do you remember how long we had to wait at Chambery? and the numbers of military gentlemen that waited too, with their little waists, and their kisses when they met? and that poor married military gentleman, with the plain wife and the two children, and a tarnished uniform? He seemed to be somehow in misfortune, and his mustache hung down in such a spiritless way, while all the other military mustaches about curled and bristled with so much boldness. I think 'salles d'attente' everywhere are delightful, and there is such a community of interest in them all, that when I come here only to go out to Brookline, I feel myself a traveller once more,—a blessed stranger in a strange land. O dear, Basil, those were happy times after all, when we might have had each other and didn't! And now we're the more precious for having been so long lost."

She drew closer and closer to him, and looked at him in a way that threatened betrayal of her bridal character.

"Isabel, you will be having your head on my shoulder, next," said he.

"Never!" she answered fiercely, recovering her distance with a start. "But, dearest, if you do see me going to—act absurdly, you know, do stop me."

"I'm very sorry, but I've got myself to stop. Besides, I didn't undertake to preserve the incognito of this bridal party."

If any accident of the sort dreaded had really happened, it would not have mattered so much, for as yet they were the sole occupants

of the waiting room. To be sure, the ticket-seller was there, and the lady who checked packages left in her charge, but these must have seen so many endearments pass between passengers,—that a fleeting caress or so would scarcely have drawn their notice to our pair. Yet Isabel did not so much even as put her hand into her husband's; and as Basil afterwards said, it was very good practice.

Our temporary state, whatever it is, is often mirrored in all that come near us, and our friends were fated to meet frequent parodies of their happiness from first to last on this journey. The travesty began with the very first people who entered the waiting-room after themselves, and who were a very young couple starting like themselves upon a pleasure tour, which also was evidently one of the first tours of any kind that they had made. It was of modest extent, and comprised going to New York and back; but they talked of it with a fluttered and joyful expectation as if it were a voyage to Europe. Presently there appeared a burlesque of their happiness (but with a touch of tragedy) in that kind of young man who is called by the females of his class a fellow, and two young women of that kind known to him as girls. He took a place between these, and presently began a robust flirtation with one of them. He possessed himself, after a brief struggle, of her parasol, and twirled it about, as he uttered, with a sort of tender rudeness inconceivable vapidities, such as you would expect from none but a man of the highest fashion. The girl thus courted became selfishly unconscious of everything but her own joy, and made no attempt to bring the other girl within its warmth, but left her to languish forgotten on the other side. The latter sometimes leaned forward, and tried to divert a little of the flirtation to herself, but the flirts snubbed her with short answers, and presently she gave up and sat still in the sad patience of uncourted women. In this attitude she became a burden to Isabel, who was glad when the three took themselves away, and were succeeded by a very stylish couple—from New York, she knew as well as if they had given her their address on West 99th Street. The lady was not pretty, and she was not, Isabel thought, dressed in the perfect taste of Boston; but she owned frankly to herself that the New-Yorkeress was stylish, undeniably effective. The gentleman bought a ticket for New York, and remained at the window of the office talking quite easily with the seller.

"You couldn't do that, my poor Basil," said Isabel, "you'd be afraid."

"O dear, yes; I'm only too glad to get off without browbeating; though I must say that this officer looks affable enough. Really," he added, as an acquaintance of the ticket-seller came in and nodded to him and said "Hot, to-day!" "this is very strange. I always felt as if these men had no private life, no friendships like the rest of us. On duty they seem so like sovereigns, set apart from mankind, and above us all, that it's quite incredible they should have the common personal relations."

At intervals of their talk and silence there came vivid flashes of lightning and quite heavy shocks of thunder, very consoling to our friends, who took them as so many compliments to their prudence in not going by the boat, and who had secret doubts of their wisdom whenever these acknowledgments were withheld. Isabel went so far as to say that she hoped nothing would happen to the boat, but I think she would cheerfully have learnt that the vessel had been obliged to put back to Newport, on account of the storm, or even that it had been driven ashore at a perfectly safe place.

People constantly came and went in the waiting-room, which was sometimes quite full, and again empty of all but themselves. In the course of their observations they formed many cordial friendships and bitter enmities upon the ground of personal appearance, or particulars of dress, with people whom they saw for half a minute upon an average; and they took such a keen interest in every one, that it would be hard to say whether they were more concerned in an old gentleman with vigorously upright iron-gray hair, who sat fronting them, and reading all the evening papers, or a young man who hurled himself through the door, bought a ticket with terrific precipitation, burst out again, and then ran down a departing train before it got out of the station: they loved the old gentleman for a certain stubborn benevolence of expression, and if they had been friends of the young man and his family for generations and felt bound if any harm befell him to go and break the news gently to his parents, their nerves could not have been more intimately wrought upon by his hazardous behavior. Still, as they had their tickets for New York, and he was going out on a merely local train,—to Brook-

line, I believe, they could not, even in their anxiety, repress a feeling of contempt for his unambitious destination.

They were already as completely cut off from local associations and sympathies as if they were a thousand miles and many months away from Boston. They enjoyed the lonely flaring of the gas-jets as a gust of wind drew through the station; they shared the gloom and isolation of a man who took a seat in the darkest corner of the room, and sat there with folded arms, the genius of absence. In the patronizing spirit of travellers in a foreign country they noted and approved the vases of cut-flowers in the booth of the lady who checked packages, and the pots of ivy in her windows. "These poor Bostonians," they said; "have some love of the beautiful in their rugged natures."

But after all was said and thought, it was only eight o'clock, and they still had an hour to wait.

Basil grew restless, and Isabel said, with a subtle interpretation of his uneasiness, "I don't want anything to eat, Basil, but I think I know the weaknesses of men; and you had better go and pass the next half-hour over a plate of something indigestible."

This was said 'con stizza', the least little suggestion of it; but Basil rose with shameful alacrity. "Darling, if it's your wish—"

"It's my fate, Basil," said Isabel.

"I'll go," he exclaimed, "because it isn't bridal, and will help us to pass for old married people."

"No, no, Basil, be honest; fibbing isn't your forte: I wonder you went into the insurance business; you ought to have been a lawyer. Go because you like eating, and are hungry, perhaps, or think you may be so before we get to New York.

"I shall amuse myself well enough here!"

I suppose it is always a little shocking and grievous to a wife when she recognizes a rival in butchers'-meat and the vegetables of the season. With her slender relishes for pastry and confectionery and her dainty habits of lunching, she cannot reconcile with the idea (of) her husband's capacity for breakfasting, dining, supping, and hot meals at all hours of the day and night—as they write it on the

sign-boards of barbaric eating-houses. But Isabel would have only herself to blame if she had not perceived this trait of Basil's before marriage. She recurred now, as his figure disappeared down the station, to memorable instances of his appetite in their European travels during their first engagement. "Yes, he ate terribly at Susa, when I was too full of the notion of getting into Italy to care for bouillon and cold roast chicken. At Rome I thought I must break with him on account of the wild-boar; and at Heidelberg, the sausage and the ham!—how could he, in my presence? But I took him with all his faults,—and was glad to get him," she added, ending her meditation with a little burst of candor; and she did not even think of Basil's appetite when he reappeared.

With the thronging of many sorts of people, in parties and singly, into the waiting room, they became once again mere observers of their kind, more or less critical in temper, until the crowd grew so that individual traits were merged in the character of multitude. Even then, they could catch glimpses of faces so sweet or fine that they made themselves felt like moments of repose in the tumult, and here and there was something so grotesque in dress or manner that it showed distinct from the rest. The ticket-seller's stamp clicked incessantly as he sold tickets to all points South and West: to New York, Philadelphia, Charleston; to New Orleans, Chicago, Omaha; to St. Paul, Duluth, St. Louis; and it would not have been hard to find in that anxious bustle, that unsmiling eagerness, an image of the whole busy affair of life. It was not a particularly sane spectacle, that impatience to be off to some place that lay not only in the distance, but also in the future—to which no line of road carries you with absolute certainty across an interval of time full of every imaginable chance and influence. It is easy enough to buy a ticket to Cincinnati, but it is somewhat harder to arrive there. Say that all goes well, is it exactly you who arrive?

In the midst of the disquiet there entered at last an old woman, so very infirm that she had to be upheld on either hand by her husband and the hackman who had brought them, while a young girl went before with shawls and pillows which she arranged upon the seat. There the invalid lay down, and turned towards the crowd a white, suffering face, which was yet so heavenly meek and peaceful that it comforted whoever looked at it.

In spirit our happy friends bowed themselves before it and owned that there was something better than happiness in it.

"What is it like, Isabel?"

"O, I don't know, darling," she said; but she thought, "Perhaps it is like some blessed sorrow that takes us out of this prison of a world, and sets us free of our every-day hates and desires, our aims, our fears. ourselves. Maybe a long and mortal sickness might come to wear such a face in one of us two, and the other could see it, and not regret the poor mask of youth and pretty looks that had fallen away."

She rose and went over to the sick woman, on whose face beamed a tender smile, as Isabel spoke to her. A chord thrilled in two lives hitherto unknown to each other; but what was said Basil would not ask when the invalid had taken Isabel's hand between her own, as for adieu, and she came back to his side with swimming eyes. Perhaps his wife could have given no good reason for her emotion, if he had asked it. But it made her very sweet and dear to him; and I suppose that when a tolerably unselfish man is once secure of a woman's love, he is ordinarily more affected by her compassion and tenderness for other objects than by her feelings towards himself. He likes well enough to think, "She loves me," but still better, "How kind and good she is!"

They lost sight of the invalid in the hurry of getting places on the cars, and they never saw her again. The man at the wicket-gate leading to the train had thrown it up, and the people were pressing furiously through as if their lives hung upon the chance of instant passage. Basil had secured his ticket for the sleeping-car, and so he and Isabel stood aside and watched the tumult. When the rash was over they passed through, and as they walked up and down the platform beside the train, "I was thinking," said Isabel, "after I spoke to that poor old lady, of what Clara Williams says: that she wonders the happiest women in the world can look each other in the face without bursting into tears, their happiness is so unreasonable, and so built upon and hedged about with misery. She declares that there's nothing so sad to her as a bride, unless it's a young mother, or a little girl growing up in the innocent gayety of her heart. She wonders they can live through it."

"Clara is very much of a reformer, and would make an end of all of us men, I suppose,—except her father, who supports her in the leisure that enables her to do her deep thinking. She little knows what we poor fellows have to suffer, and how often we break down in business hours, and sob upon one another's necks. Did that old lady talk to you in the same strain?"

"O no! she spoke very calmly of her sickness, and said she had lived a blessed life. Perhaps it was that made me shed those few small tears. She seemed a very religious person."

"Yes," said Basil, "it is almost a pity that religion is going out. But then you are to have the franchise."

"All aboard!"

This warning cry saved him from whatever heresy he might have been about to utter; and presently the train carried them out into the gas-sprinkled darkness, with an ever-growing speed that soon left the city lamps far behind. It is a phenomenon whose commonness alone prevents it from being most impressive, that departure of the night-express. The two hundred miles it is to travel stretch before it, traced by those slender clews, to lose which is ruin, and about which hang so many dangers. The draw bridges that gape upon the way, the trains that stand smoking and steaming on the track, the rail that has borne the wear so long that it must soon snap under it, the deep cut where the overhanging mass of rock trembles to its fall, the obstruction that a pitiless malice may have placed in your path,—you think of these after the journey is done, but they seldom haunt your fancy while it lasts. The knowledge of your helplessness in any circumstances is so perfect that it begets a sense of irresponsibility, almost of security; and as you drowse upon the pallet of the sleeping car, and feel yourself hurled forward through the obscurity, you are almost thankful that you can do nothing, for it is upon this condition only that you can endure it; and some such condition as this, I suppose, accounts for many heroic facts in the world. To the fantastic mood which possesses you equally, sleeping or waking, the stoppages of the train have a weird character; and Worcester, Springfield, New Haven, and Stamford are rather points in dream-land than well-known towns of New England. As the train stops you drowse if you have been waking, and wake if you have

been in a doze; but in any case you are aware of the locomotive hissing and coughing beyond the station, of flaring gas-jets, of clattering feet of passengers getting on and off; then of some one, conductor or station-master, walking the whole length of the train; and then you are aware of an insane satisfaction in renewed flight through the darkness. You think hazily of the folk in their beds in the town left behind, who stir uneasily at the sound of your train's departing whistle; and so all is a blank vigil or a blank slumber.

By daylight Basil and Isabel found themselves at opposite ends of the car, struggling severally with the problem of the morning's toilet. When the combat was ended, they were surprised at the decency of their appearance, and Isabel said, "I think I'm presentable to an early Broadway public, and I've a fancy for not going to a hotel. Lucy will be expecting us out there before noon; and we can pass the time pleasantly enough for a few hours just wandering about."

She was a woman who loved any cheap defiance of custom, and she had an agreeable sense of adventure in what she proposed. Besides, she felt that nothing could be more in the unconventional spirit in which they meant to make their whole journey than a stroll about New York at half-past six in the morning.

"Delightful!" answered Basil, who was always charmed with these small originalities. "You look well enough for an evening party; and besides, you won't meet one of your own critical class on Broadway at this hour. We will breakfast at one of those gilded metropolitan restaurants, and then go round to Leonard's, who will be able to give us just three unhurried seconds. After that we'll push on out to his place."

At that early hour there were not many people astir on the wide avenue down which our friends strolled when they left the station; but in the aspect of those they saw there was something that told of a greater heat than they had yet known in Boston, and they were sensible of having reached a more southern latitude. The air, though freshened by the over-night's storm, still wanted the briskness and sparkle and pungency of the Boston air, which is as delicious in summer as it is terrible in winter; and the faces that showed themselves were sodden from the yesterday's heat and perspiration. A corner-grocer, seated in a sort of fierce despondency upon a keg

near his shop door, had lightly equipped himself for the struggle of the day in the battered armor of the day before, and in a pair of roomy pantaloons, and a baggy shirt of neutral tint—perhaps he had made a vow not to change it whilst the siege of the hot weather lasted,—now confronted the advancing sunlight, before which the long shadows of the buildings were slowly retiring. A marketing mother of a family paused at a provision-store, and looking weakly in at the white-aproned butcher among his meats and flies, passes without an effort to purchase. Hurried and wearied shop-girls tripped by in the draperies that betrayed their sad necessity to be both fine and shabby; from a boarding-house door issued briskly one of those cool young New Yorkers whom no circumstances can oppress: breezy-coated, white-livened, clean, with a good cigar in the mouth, a light cane caught upon the elbow of one of the arms holding up the paper from which the morning's news is snatched, whilst the person sways lightly with the walk; in the street-cars that slowly tinkled up and down were rows of people with baskets between their legs and papers before their faces; and all showed by some peculiarity of air or dress the excess of heat which they had already borne, and to which they seemed to look forward, and gave by the scantiness of their number a vivid impression of the uncounted thousands within doors prolonging, before the day's terror began, the oblivion of sleep.

As they turned into one of the numerical streets to cross to Broadway, and found themselves in a yet deeper seclusion, Basil began to utter in a musing tone:

"A city against the world's gray Prime,  
Lost in some desert, far from Time,  
Where noiseless Ages gliding through,  
Have only sifted sands and dew,  
Yet still a marble head of man  
Lying on all the haunted plan;  
The passions of the human heart  
Beating the marble breast of Art,  
Were not more lone to one who first  
Upon its giant silence burst,  
Than this strange quiet, where the tide  
Of life, upheaved on either aide,