

**Only Hindsight Is 20/20**

It is one of those large events with waiters in black and white serving something French off of large silver platters. Music plays in the background as smartly dressed gentlemen ask women in long gowns to dance on a perfectly polished wooden floor. The rhythmic modulations of conversations are perfectly attuned to the pitter-patter of shiny black shoes as groups of people migrate back and forth across the large room. Snippets of conversation slowly disseminate in the cool, evening air.

“But you have to understand the necessities of an economic recession,” says a blond-haired man to a beautiful young woman in a turquoise dress, animating the importance of his words with a flick of his Rolex-adorned wrist.

“Of course every conflict is the product of natural human desire,” a be-speckled man in a three piece suit says to a group of young entrepreneurs, “all human actions are a product of necessity.”

The large tables of food outline the edge of the room with platters of three types of roasted chicken, dishes of filet mignon and bowls of caviar. The servers, at attention and with utensils poised over the trays, stare with a mixture of disbelief and disgust at the excess in front of them. A bitter man with buck teeth and a stained shirt, a sore thumb in the crowd, stands near the desert table and mutters, “What excess, what terrible people, give it all to charity, what terrible people....” Nobody actually hears what he says, but they know to avoid him.

Slowly everyone gravitates toward his or her assigned seats. There seem to be no discrepancies to the untrained eye, but I have been to too many of these parties. A woman in black, originally seated next to two girls just over 20, is quickly switched with a handsome 40-year old man, to the great dismay of his wife. The wife of the banker, arms full of golden bracelets, eases slowly into her chair while giving her companions a cold stare. The two men next to her, one of them her husband, promptly begin conversations with the young women sitting next to them. The newlyweds, members of the “next generation,” decide to switch seats (how *revolutionary*). Eyes roll as the married men and women must now shuffle their seats in

order to re-alternate the genders (how could it be any other way?). Table nine, home of the eternal bachelors and bachelorettes, is deserted for a couple of minutes because none of the men and women “past their primes” wants to be the first one to sit down alone. That poor 18-year old at table 11, sacrificed to the ooo's and awww's of the elderly, looks furtively around for an open seat, but his friends avoid eye contact.

“Ding, ding, ding,” the large red dress, with a hostess inside, rises to address the crowd. “I'm so glad you all could attend this humble soirée for close friends and family.” It takes a moment for her guests to recognize their benefactor (give them a break, there was no picture on the invitation). “I can't believe the new year is finally here, but I am so happy I will be able to embark on another fresh start with so many incredible people by my side.” Most eyes are drifting towards the food. “I wouldn't have it any other way.”

And now the host, a shock of white hair, springs out of his chair. “Thank you Margery, I'll keep this short and sweet because I know *my* stomach is rumbling.” Ha.....ha.....ha. “We can only hope that next year will be better, am I right?” Ha.....ha.....ha. “But let's just take a moment to appreciate the last 365 days. Your children have grown, you just can't seem to make them stop, can you!?” Ha.....ha. “I mean, just think, if we never stop to ponder the past, where does it go?” Wow.....*profound*. “Anyways, I won't keep you from that mouth-watering aroma any longer, happy new year to all of you!” Off beat claps envelop the room as people try to get to the buffet before the line becomes too long.

When I first described the people who are attending this party, I left out one key character. I didn't do it on purpose, I actually didn't notice him, but now he is hard to miss. Our offender is a small brown haired and brown eyed little boy with glasses and a baby-fat build. He was the only child at the party, and it showed. An air of self-importance and individuality prompted him to continuously bombard the adults around him with a ceaseless flow of attention-seeking questions. “How do you make silver?” “Where do bananas come from?” “Did you know that 8 squared is 64?” “Where do you think the idea for the fork came from?”

The reward comes when one of the women sitting across from him leans over to her husband and, in a voice just loud enough for him to hear, says, “He's such a smart and inquisitive

child, isn't he." I've seen too many of these children to be surprised by his reaction. Upon hearing the compliment, the 10-year old thrusts out his chest and increases the amount of q/m (questions per minute), sometimes interrupting answers with another question (who cares about answers?). The adults right next to him are starting to look annoyed, but I feel no sympathy. Like creates like, right? They were that child at one point in their lives, everybody at this party was.

I don't know if I enjoy dinner or dessert better. Although dessert means an exhibition of half-drunk men trying not slur their words while they engage in "intellectual" conversations, dinner's "small talk" is almost just as comical.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it?" says the man in a cashmere jacket to his sparsely-dressed fiancée. The woman makes a gallant attempt to look for a window in the venue, of which there is none, before turning back to her partner and agreeing.

"Do you think it is possible to be both objective and logical when engaged in acrasia," the be-speckled man from earlier says to a woman in a long, deep green dress.

"Of course," she says.

"I guess what I really mean is: Can one be deceived and well-informed at the same time? Can I lie and also tell the truth, in a sense?"

"What an interesting idea, I'm not sure, what do you think?" And on and on and on.....

"You know I've heard Ms. Errugabea is seeing ----- (what does it matter)" says the token gossip to her all female table (I wonder why).

"Nooo waaay," is the collective response.

"Oh, I feel so terrible for all of those pobres in South America," remarks the world traveler, showing off his Spanish. "Don't you Alfred?"

"Yes, that country really needs to improve its economy."

"How are you enjoying school?" asks a woman with a bemused smile permanently plastered on her face.

"Well, right now I'm learning about Greek columns and math and reading and arts and crafts and....." Even I lose focus as the little boy uses every large word accessible to his fifth grade mind (regardless of their meanings) to ramble on and on. The woman, however, keeps the

verbal diarrhea flowing with more questions; she enjoys the recognition she is receiving from other adults for her “way with children.”

After dinner has ended, the real party begins. And by that, I mean a few men waddle to the bar, form a close knit circle, and begin to talk politics. The game they play is called “Are you with the times?” and is played by quoting random sections of the newspaper with a “ I think it's so interesting” at the beginning and a “Don't you agree?” at the end. Extra points are earned for coming up with the most general ultimatum possible, and you lose if you forget the “I think.” You win when you become too drunk to talk.

On the other side of the room sit the older women. They play the same game with people. But there is no alcohol, so nobody ever wins.

The center of the room is occupied by constantly shifting groups of socially adept youth. This is the part of the story in which I apologize for my limitations as a narrator; a bird on top of the chandelier could provide you with a more insightful analysis of the patterns that underly the forming and re-forming of social circles in this mass of people. To me it just looks like a bunch of restless, fickle, young adults with very small attention spans.

Eventually, the dinner party comes to a close. Everybody shakes the hand of the host on their way out, most of them carefully avoiding his name (they still don't know it). A few stragglers are making their final attempts to leave a lasting impression on the rich surroundings, but their comments about the beautiful glass chandelier are lost on the receding mass of guests. Outside, men start to call taxis and say goodbye to their friends and enemies in an equally amiable tone. And by the time the church tower clock strikes ten the curb is empty except for the small child and his mother and father.

“You did great today, Justin.”

“Thanks mommy, I really wanted to make a good impression.”

“I think they really enjoyed your company,” his dad says.

“I want to go to more of these parties, daddy, I like them.”

“One day, after you've worked hard, maybe *you* will host a party like this one,” they say.

“I would like that,” says the little boy.