

THE MASTER OF WIT AND REPARTEE

A glazed look overcame his ever widening eyes.

The Master of Wit and Repartee was, for once, lost for words.

The calmness in the set of his jaw and the relaxed skin of his perfect complexion belied the forces at work behind the peaceful tableaux of his visible features as the last of the water thrown from The Clown's bucket, until now caught up in his hat and lustrous hair, chose this moment to gather itself for one final trickle of insult.

There was...

...

... a pause.

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“Heave hoe boys, get them gear cogs turning, pump them bellows, bilge and away me hearties” Tens of weather-worn, battle hardened “scullers” dipped their hips into driving wheels which lead to gears which turned especially large wheels which channelled situations into computations and derivations which in turn provided the complex and ever developing infrastructural neural pathways that controlled speech. It was what the bosses called ‘the Foreign Installation’. This was one of those moments in your chosen career that most Chief Mind Elves only dream of, dreamed the Chief Mind Elf as he ‘oversaw’ proceedings, that elusive, mystical ‘moment of truth’. To hear of one was rare and exciting, always leaving one however with a nagging doubt as to the veracity of the story heard owing to the miracles allegedly performed without the structure of verifiable, supporting data. But there it was unfolding in front of him – on – his - shift. I will NOT be found wanting, this is MY tale! This was HIS Master of Wit and Repartee” which HE had been bonded to serve and with a retirement plan that included an easy three-day week operating a breakfast television presenter.

The understanding of the situation and his response were neither realised a moment too soon.

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Having succumbed to pressure from his friend Joey, a small boy of perhaps 9 or 10 years old, 9 or 10 difficult, lonely years with little love or concern from his family, The Master of Wit and Repartee, not finding their relationship incongruous in the least given the level of wisdom one must achieve to hold such an esteemed position as his in society, agreed conceptualising that a trip to the circus (the subject to which the aforementioned pressure may be attributed) would not only lighten young Joey's heart somewhat, it may also serve as a reminder to himself as to the nature of the masses, the dear people whom he served and who treated him with great reverence, each according to their own, relative position.

The trip was arranged and The Master of Wit and Repartee assured Joey that, as a day out, it would rank amongst the most memorable and sweet of any ‘day's out’ he would subsequently experience in his life.

How prophetic and yet fitting that this admonition be given; so cheaply and yet, ultimately, at such a cost.

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The day arrived. Some time was shared buying sweetmeats and shooting pop-guns at impossible targets. As always, at times like this, The Master of Wit and Repartee's charming swagger and general 'presence', notwithstanding his elegance of wardrobe and particularity in choice of moustache, opened all the VIP doors; the best of the candy floss, the *best* of the guns at the shooting arcade and, of course, the BEST of the seats in the one and one half ring circus tent for the matinee performance.

It was... well, it was, simply put and without shining it up to be something else, something perhaps more and certainly not less than... well... it was, according to little lonely Joey...

“AWESOME!!!”

Yes. His face beamed it, his eyes radiated it, his spirit glowed with it. Joey was happy. Happy beyond measure, beyond happy AND he was in the personal company of his dear friend, the voluptuously attired Master of Wit and Repartee.

The show commenced after a little music had been piped in through an ageing PA system and the voice of the Ring Master came over clearly despite the indifferent quality of the system speakers.

He introduced in a flamboyant yet controlled manner which appealed to The Master of Wit and Repartee. It reflected his own grace and control and he approved with a genuine, conspiratorial look of approval to indicate this to the Ring Master every time that master of ceremonies was gazed in his direction.

The Ring Master received his looks and paused then to bow fractionally and smile at The Master of Wit and Repartee, a smile of welcome and cognisance.

Then he introduced The Clowns.

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By this time The Master of Wit and Repartee was, I can tell you, for I myself was there and am perfectly placed therefore to bare my witness, The Master of Wit and Repartee was having fun.

Fun!

He had relaxed. He was with a 9 or 10 year old boy to whom he felt a responsibility but also a warm feeling of, well of superiority really. Nice to be able to share his grown-up-ness in a positive way for the little fella and also let his own hair down, although he hardly ever wore it 'up' if he was going 'out'.

The Clowns entered “The Ring”.

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“It's the logic valve sir, it just won't budge. We had a new one but the old one has been so extraordinarily successful that boffins reckoned we could construct a complete, mirror image, 'hot-standby' in some storage area which had been freed up when HIMSELF got rid of that last...”
aherrm... “sorry sir, became single again, begging your pardon. The new one is in testing on the left side and it'll be too late for use by the time we uncouple it from speech and put it back ...” Speech? It was actually hooked up to speech now? *Confounded luck! “Good man, good man, let's get there and see if there's some way of reaching at least 90% before he blows.”* There was hope, there always is if you think you can fix anything. *THIS Chief Mind Elf was not going to let “opportunity” pass him by without saying hello and getting at least a handshake!*

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All at once, The Master of Wit and Repartee came to his senses. He had made a foolish apprentice's mistake and become relaxed, complacent. Clowns! He caught himself in the act of practically spitting the word. He cursed inwardly as he looked to regain control of the situation, preferably with a flourish, something he was well practised in. Aware now of the extent of the problem, it was something he could deal with.

[ED. Dearest reader, allow me to explain as I feel that at this point, some explaining is appertaining!

Much to The Master of Wit and Repartee's distaste and annoyance, one of The Clowns, Clown #2 took a particular shine to Joey (perhaps because of his apparent intimacy with The Master, who can say) a confederate in the audience. He'd taken to him in way that may only be described as clownish. Overbearingly, self-obsessively and pre-judiciously clownish!

He'd confer with Joey before his car blew up AND after...

He'd confer with Joey before and DURING the pie fight and not one pie hit Joey... oh no!

He'd confer before a spoof, behind the scenes and in plain sight.

He'd confer as pants were falling, others calling, and it seemed there'd be a fight!

He'd confer and he'd obscure and he'd discombobulate

He'd define what made you laugh when you were seven or even eight...

But not nine or ten. By nine or ten you need to be getting your grown up hat on, you're ready now.

We taught you to be wary of fools and strangers, now understand that not every stranger is a fool and not every fool... is one.

One of the fools observed and calculated ...

...

"Joey? Joey, come away from that clown"

...

We rejoin the scene as the buckets filled with water.

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Water.

Clear water. Capable of heating or cooling, to comfort and to refresh.

Clean. Clean, clear water. Life giving, energetic and elemental and occasionally, very, very funny. [In this narrator's humble opinion water, in the hands of a gifted water operator, can be one of the funniest things there is].

Imagine the gasp, the awe, the surprise and the profanity! as Clown #2 conspired with little, brave Joey only to decide that his next victim would be the grand duke of town night life, that doyen of the local glamour scene whose outpourings could force you to your knees or raise you to the highest of heights with their eloquence and simplicity, the Master of Wit and Repartee.

Watch the water flow from the bucket as in a slow motion sequence in an indigent foreign movie. See single droplet's appear occasionally as if from nowhere around the sides of the main body of water but that body remaining, on the whole, complete. A mass of liquid seeking release from outside forces and giving itself to gravity, seeking to form a union with the next object, to take it's form on it's ultimate goal of reaching a body of water - the sea, a lake, a cloud - where it could once more become complete and formless.

As that first bucketful landed and went to work on the physical appearance of The Master of Wit and Repartee, Clown #2 was quick to replenish his store of water filled buckets to the tune of "one more". This duly dispatched and to a crescendo of approval from the, by now, frankly, rabid ringside audience, a third bucket filled with water was presented to that bravest yet most foolish of all men. All his training had led him to this moment; the hard hours at clown seminary learning the five sacred jokes, the four lines of funny bones, the three classes in imperfect spot welding, the two weeks in Sister Garibaldi's clinical wing after earning your first 'slap' stick... all leading to this one small moment of triumph that is "The Bucket Throw(Water)".

The Clown proceeded once more through the position "bucket empty" to "bucket ready", the first position of the classic manoeuvre simply known as "The Bucket Throw(Water)".

The silence which overcame that moment (and the silence came in *a moment*) was the sort of silence that reminds you of the feelings you have when your dropped keys slip away toward a water drainage grid in a main street in town with no chance of retrieval. Your arms are just too fat and short and the loss and resignation lead to fascination... you just must watch as the keys fall.

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"We've done it sir! All the linkages are ready for a burn, we'll hold on if only by a thread but I promise you sir, we'll hold." The Chief Mind Elf shone with pride, in his knowledge, his ability, his faith in this The Master of Wit and Repartee. He had been offered some very lucrative work on a future prime minister but wanted a challenge being young and eager to impress the lesser Gods with a show of non-obligatory penitence, very good to have on the CV.

The Chief Mind Elf breathed in for 4, held that for 8, breathed out for 7 and ordered warm reboot...

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The time had come, it was show time.

The Master of Wit and Repartee stood up, hardly impaired at all by his, now soaking, clothing... and cape. He drew one deep breath and unhurriedly eyed Clown #2.

This costumed clown, this man who's job was to help people forget the meaninglessness of their miserable lives; a beacon of relief to the pain and suffering of the weak and the simple. Clown #2 was now the subject of The Master of Wit and Repartee's concern.

The Clown was now subject to damnable genius.

With all the life sustaining breath left held in his body The Master of Wit and Repartee screamed...

“FUCK OFF - RED NOSE!”

The dying note of “NOSE” was a hoarse and gravelly affair, cracking at the end having rasped out the very last of any breath which could be held in those impeccable lungs. The Master of Wit and Repartee’s distorted smile ended in a bloated, red, rictus, eyes bulging and at an extreme peak of dilation.

Without drawing a breath, The Master of Wit and Repartee casually turns his back to his Nemesis and the ring.

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The Chief Mind Elf boggled as the noise around him calmed to a murmur then ceased completely, his career in tatters and his service ending not with glory but ignominy.

...

The Ring Master watches, satisfied.

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The Clown has seen it all before.

The Master of Wit and Repartee stretches his long legs into a slow, deliberate but above all, dignified, exit.

At the edge of the arena, his body, starved of oxygen now for some 50 or 60 seconds since his lungs collapsed, collapses itself - leaving a conundrum for all.

Epilogue

Joey attended the funeral of The Master of Wit and Repartee. It wasn’t easy, he’d had to show near indifference to the death of this man, a man who had listened, really listened and was interested in the childish things Joey expounded upon in an excited gush of enthusiastic chatter brought about by his proximity to this Master of Wit and Repartee.

He had been forbidden from attendance. He had promised that he understood the whole “friendship” thing was The Master’s invention and “yes” he realised now how foolish he’d been, he could have gotten himself in real trouble and “yes” he did know why they told him not to talk to strangers and... Good God, they treated him like a child! So he lied and obfuscated and gained a whit of freedom, all that was needed to attend this funeral, this service of remembrance for a great man. Surely on of the Best.

The Master... The Master of... Wit! Wit AND Repartee? What even is Repartee?!

They would find out that he had lied and had gone anyway. He’d be found, taken home, beaten a little and a more secure regimen would be imposed but he didn’t care about that. He had had to pay his

respects to the memory of the man who was “The Master of Wit and Repartee” and Joey’s friend, the only one he’d ever had.

The Master of Wit and Repartee, who’s name in fact was Gareth Saurbrig, 53, from Crawley, near London, was, as it turns out, worth a few bob. An early start with a biscuit factory as an engineer had ensured a sizeable pension for Gareth which alongside the untimely departure from this earth of a well to do uncle and the discovery of several dozen more than vanity sized bars of gold, each one weighing over one ounce and worth over a thousand pounds, all contributed to an estate worth half a million.

This had been, in totality, willed to Joey.

Joey’s family tried their best to get their hands on it of course but The Master of Wit and Repartee had willed the lot in trust for Joey to grow into. Payments at 16 and 18 years old allowed the family to get some compensation for all their efforts in feeding him and keeping him in clothes but his 21st birthday was his escape and his homage to The Master of Wit and Repartee.

That was the day he joined the circus...

...as a Clown.

A Clown