

Choices Sometimes Matter

If only he hadn't bought the red one. Because selection is everything; it can disguise, it can reveal, it can diminish, and it can enhance. Powerful stuff. Selection is everything in choosing something as important as a profession, or as mundane as a clothing accessory. In this case, the latter. My friend Roger learned this lesson. Excuse me, rather his fiancée, Meredith, learned this.

It all started when Roger had stumbled about the upscale men's clothing store at the Mall, trying to find something new and different in headwear. Roger checked out a number of different hat styles. The young clerk trying to assist was not much help. Too young to be of any help, Roger surmised, and probably didn't care much anyway. Nope, naw, nada, not this one; nothing seemed to be right. Then he saw it: a red tam. Bright red. A ghastly red for some, as it turned out, but did not seem to deter him. He put it on and checked the nearby mirror. He looked at his reflection and wondered what it was that possessed him to make this pick. Didn't matter. He saw himself as looking rather jaunty.

"I'll take it," he called to the young clerk, who by now had drifted away to another section of the store.

"What do you think?" he asked the boy as he neared.

"Very nice, sir, kinda sporty."

Roger thought that, too. He never dreamed of what judgmental repercussions would occur when it was seen by his friends. Or Meredith, his adoring fiancée. These reactions became brutally

apparent the following weekend after the fated purchase. He and Meredith would be attending a party in honor of a friend who had just started a new job. It would be the first chance since the purchase for Roger, sporting the tam, to see Meredith. When she opened the door to her apartment, the shock was immediate. She grimaced, and then stifled a laugh. He winced, his disappointment in her reaction palpable, and she quickly realized her error.

“I’m sorry, honey, but...”

She could not contain herself. She laughed out loud, an unladylike, almost cruel display. And then, gained control. She made a motion across her face, as if by magic the laugh was wiped away.

“That’s an unusual...what? A hat?” she offered with mock seriousness, as if she were analyzing a biology specimen.

“Nooo, it’s a tam. Short for Tam o’ Shanter. Scottish cap.”

Oh, yes, her reaction. Devastating, but not fatal to him. In fact, her first reaction, the facial revelation, steeled him for what was to come. It would be worse than he thought, but nonetheless, he remained seemingly unfazed.

“You aren’t Scottish,” she offered, “are you?”

Roger confirmed that his lineage did not extend back to Scotland, rather both of his parents and their forbearers originated from Germany and Austria. As if that mattered. As Meredith droned on about the various, in her words, negative aspects of the tam, he was dumbfounded by her superficial, inane comments. Confused and surprised, really. How could this beautiful, otherwise intelligent young woman carry on such as this. His choice for marriage. Did I miss something about her, he thought? Maybe I've been fooled. Maybe I've made a mistake?

Her verbal barrage ended with an, 'oh, gosh, I suppose I might be making too much of it' kind of shrug off for being unkind.

"But I assume you wouldn't wear it to the party," she said.

"I don't see why not," Roger replied. "I bought it because I liked it, I'm sure as hell going to wear it."

He was going to be firm about his resistance to her suggestion. Meredith was exasperated. And so, they left for the party; he the jaunty one, she the pouty one. When they arrived at the party, they learned it was being held on another friend's patio. Roger would not have to remove the tam for propriety's sake, much to Meredith's chagrin. She refused to exit his car at first, but then, as other guests approached, she relented while glaring ferociously at him. The daggers look

continued when others were not watching, as they moved to the patio. That look would continue throughout the evening whenever Meredith sensed she was not being watched by other guests.

Now a party can have complex dynamics, sometimes almost chaotic, sometimes slightly hysterical in its semblance, and have a rough and tumble aspect to the banter when close friends get together. So, Roger did not anticipate what was to occur. However, this real surprise of indignity came quickly with the guffawing, and somewhat ribald comments of two male friends who first saw him and Meredith come on to the patio. Meredith's criticisms of the tam were bad enough, but he was not prepared for the monumental, overwhelming negative blast from his friends. Or thought were his friends. What was wrong with these people? Are they all devoid of manners? Have they all had such a bad day that they were looking for an excuse, a target to release their own anger? It was a puzzle to him. There were numerous other guests at the party whom he did not know well, others not at all. No comment from them. But from his friends, a cadre of five couples, the criticisms were excruciating. Meredith suggested it several times, but he refused to take off the tam. Eventually, the pseudo joking and fatuous commenting faded away, but the hurt and disappointment remained with Roger.

Near the party's conclusion, when guests were saying thank you and good-bye, Meredith struck a blow which really resonated with him. In retrospect, her words probably formed a tipping point for his feelings and consideration for the future.

“I think you should take that thing back. I really mean it. I want you to return it to the store, get your money back, and be done with it. I don’t want to be embarrassed by that thing again.”

Tough words indeed. He considered his options. He could resist and reject her demand or he could cave. The stinging words of criticism from his friends were part of his consideration. Not much less so the unsubtle rebuke from Meredith. Careful deliberation directed him back to the men’s store at the Mall. Roger did not look forward to the seeming derisiveness of the I-could-care-less teenager who had sold him the tam. However, when he entered the store, the young man was not to be seen. Instead, there was a very attractive, smiling young woman who approached.

“May I help you?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’d like to return this,” he said, barely looking at her.

Yes, he felt foolish, but he knew she did not know how he felt. He looked up at her as he handed her the store-branded bag containing the tam. Their eyes met, and that wham factor took place as if lightning struck. He laughed, self-consciously. She laughed, too; not hearty, not a giggle or a chuckle, just a soft, almost sweet laugh. Ah-ha, lightning had indeed split the scene.

“No problem,” she said, as she took the bag and removed the tam and receipt. “Not right for you?” she asked, and cocked her head slightly.

It all sort of spilled out of him. He did not know why; to this stranger it felt okay to unload. And she listened. Not just politely, but with real interest. He could tell. He explained how the tam had been condemned. A bit of chit-chat about Meredith and his friends nixing the tam turned into serious, full-blown conversation, which resulted in a dinner date being arranged. This was tempered with laughter when she told him her name was...Tammy. They both had instantly understood the irony. That chance meeting was about a year ago, and the date turned into many dates, which blossomed into a close, loving relationship.

Well, you probably guessed it by now, but sure enough, Roger and Meredith are no longer a couple. On the other hand, Roger and Tammy were married last Saturday. Rather fitting don't you think? Shows you how important a decision can become.