

Ballad: The Modest Couple

"The Modest Couple" from "The Bab Ballads" humorously portrays the extreme bashfulness of a couple, Peter and Sarah, from their betrothal in infancy until their exceedingly modest marriage. Their relationship is characterized by excessive shyness, with both parties fainting and blushing at mere introductions. This shyness persists despite the Baron's (Peter's father) attempts to normalize their interactions, which both Sarah and Peter find coarse and alarming.

Their modesty reaches a peak when, at the legal age for marriage, their wedding ceremony is conducted in separate churches via telegraph to avoid any direct contact, showcasing an absurd level of timidity and propriety. Even when it comes time to leave together post-ceremony, Sarah refuses to ride in the same carriage as Peter, leading to them leaving in separate vehicles, followed by a third carriage for the coachman, emphasizing their determination to maintain decorum at any cost.

The ballad contrasts their behavior with that of Peter's brother, Alphonso, and Sarah's sister, Em, who exhibit a direct and unabashed approach to their relationship. Alphonso's straightforward proposal to Em, who readily accepts, serves as a stark juxtaposition to the main couple's overly cautious courtship and marriage.

This story highlights the absurdities of adhering too strictly to societal expectations of modesty, suggesting that there's a balance to be struck in matters of love and marriage. While Peter and Sarah's actions are presented as more honorable compared to the brazenness of Alphonso and Em, the poem ultimately critiques their impracticality, offering a comedic take on the virtues of modesty and the social rituals of courtship.