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were mostly made of iron and could withstand all sorts of abuse, whereas nowadays beds are designed for comfort rather than endurance. You ask any hotelier or guesthouse-keeper and they will tell you that weak beds make no battle with honeymoon couples whereas with older people's beds have a far longer lifetime. Also beds made from lightweight materials soon turn rickety and are only fit for sleeping in. This is why it is so important to get a good bed when you marry. It should be a bed for all seasons, if you follow, not just for the halcyon honeymoon days nor for the maturing years but one for the full round of a lifetime: a bed, in short, capable of coping with the whims, storms and flurries of a pair who have contracted to weather out the remainder of life's years together. You need a most reliable barque for such a long and comprehensive voyage so that the best available in good double beds is a sound investment and one which will pay juicy dividends on wet nights and dry, humid and frosty, windy and calm. Young married people expect too much from their beds. Those who possess normal expectations can be assured of bright bedtimes till the old grey reaper doth them part.

TOO LATE

Few people fail to realise, until it is too late, that family histories have been written in bed and if double-beds could talk they would a tale unfold to make *Gone With The Wind* read like a bedtime story. To me there is no sight so sad as an empty, second-hand double-bed with a "For Sale" sign tagged to one of its extremities as it stands sundered and exposed against the wall of a colourless auction room. The more worn and decrepit the bed the more

interesting the story it has to tell.

It is indeed an unfitting end for a vehicle which so often transported its loving occupants on journeys of exalted bliss. Every double-bed has its own tale to tell. Of this you may be certain and a wide audience awaits the author who puts his name beneath the title "The Life and Times of a Double-Bed." Here surely is a natural bestseller if ever there was one.

The double-bed is the last refuge of the fractured marriage, the sole haven of nightmare stricken children, the only place on this earth where silence wins every battle in the finish and the proper place to end all wars until the next one. It is the hatchery of every family plot, the blueprint board for designing the utters of every offspring and a good place to hide under if you are a man who shuns violence. It is a place to retire to when debts mount and survival seems impossible. There is no better sanctum to weather out bad publicity and if you are a man who has fallen foul of the law, who needs time and rest to gather wits and muster courage, the bed is your man while your solicitor is applying for an adjournment.

A SOONER

The first bed we bought was a sooner, that is to say a bed which would sooner squeak than induce sleep. It would sooner creak than comfort a body. It would sooner creak than comfort a body. It would sooner be groaking and groaning all night than fulfilling its true role of consoler and comforter. I once leaped from it in despair thinking I would never sleep again. In the process I badly barked my

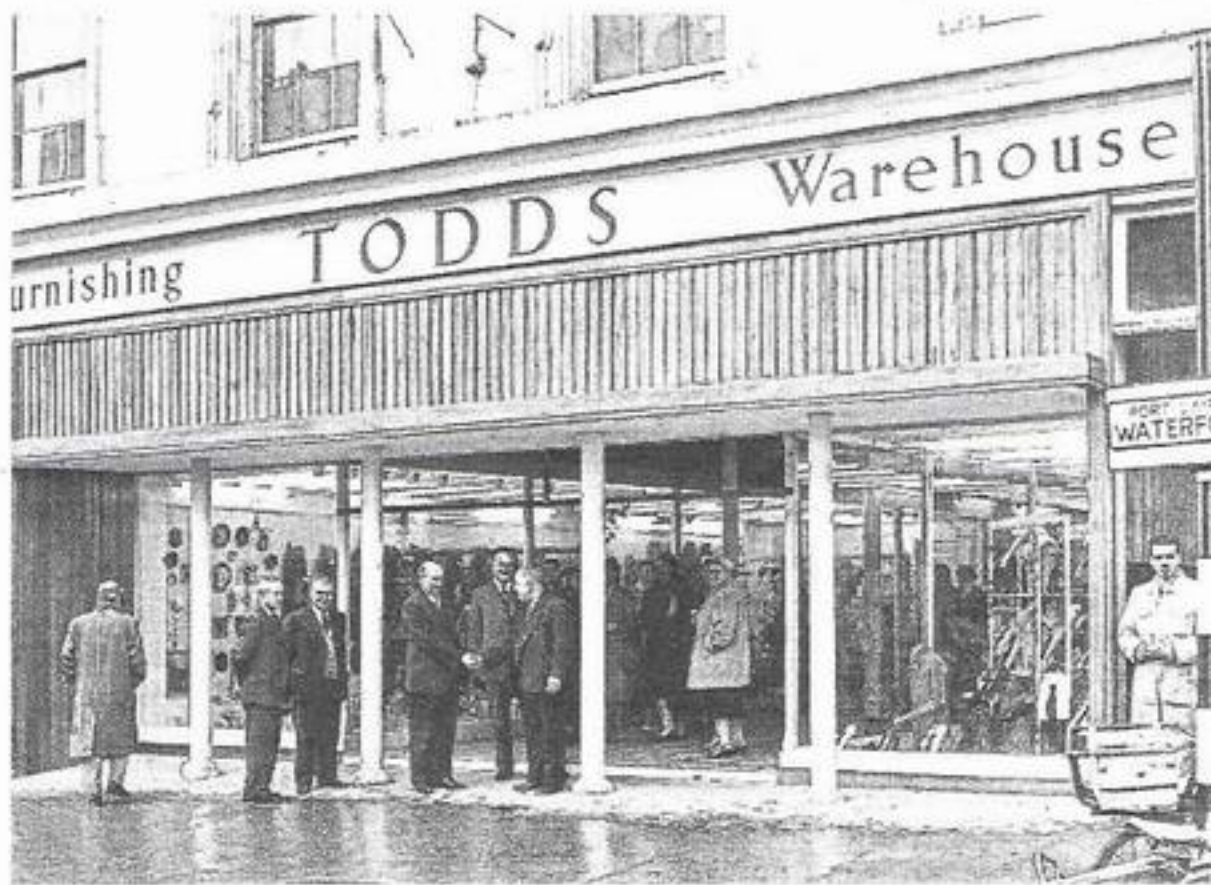
astragalus and was confined to it for several days. At the slightest movement of either of our bodies it protested in the most irritating way possible. It never stopped. You couldn't breath without a responding creak. Neighbours could hear it plainly and one made so bold as to ask sarcastically if our honeymoon would ever end. Still and for all it served its purpose, for noisome and ill-made is it was it indentured us partly in the mastery of double-beds. It taught us that young married couples starting out in life should never be trusted with a new double-bed no more than apprentice drivers should be presented with new motor cars.

We sold this bed to a relation of mine who was ever on high alert for bargains. It didn't matter whether he wanted the bed or not. So long as

it was well under the market price he couldn't resist no matter what the object for sale was. He now keeps it in his spare room and invites visiting couples to spend the night in it. Those that lie absolutely still, since the slightest movement is advertised by squeaks and protestations which can be heard in the farthest corners of the house.

GROANS

Our next bed was a firmer, stouter, stronger couch and it was given to an occasional long-drawn-out groan rather than endless squeaking. It was comfortable too, and it hadn't cost us much. Then one night I turned over and it collapsed. The missus thought we were being assassinated and all my protestations did not succeed in stifling the chilling



The new facade of Todds department store pictured in 1959

but its occupants ever know what goes on in it and this is the sine qua non of your worthwhile bed. This bed is wide and deep and its only fault is that one tends to oversleep in it. On the credit side it is a bed which throws people out who do not belong in it and whenever the missus and I are away should one of the offspring decide to sleep in it he will find himself on the floor before morning.

Contrary to widespread belief big people are no danger to the life of a bed. Neither are fat people nor those who possess both ingredients i.e., bigness and fatness. No. Your thin, wiry individual, whether male or female; is the liveliest and most restless in bed. The big and the fat move rarely and when they do their movements are ponderous and predictable. Not so with your lightweight. He is forever twisting and turning and jumping up and down and kicking the clothes off. This man is better off sleeping on the floor. Imagine, therefore, what effect two of the same ilk would have on your ordinary bed. Surely the bed is doomed from the beginning.

The missus wants me to buy a new bed once more. She brings up the subject from time to time. I'll keep putting her off because I'm just getting used to me after a confrontation which has lasted most of my married life.

There are people reading this who may be tempted to ask if this treatise is worth all the trouble. They may say a bed is just a bed, an intimate body of springs, timber, stuffing and cloth. But I say look to your bed as you would your house, for you will spend one-third of your lifetime lying down and unless you're a donkey you'll do your lying down on a bed.

This article by the late and great John B Keane first appeared in the *Limerick Leader* on August 20, 1977.

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