



The Robe

The author acquires a heavenly garment and tells the reason why

JOURNALISM does have its compensations, and I'm wearing mine right now—a silk bathrobe, Neiman-Marcus's finest, or so the beaming saleslady assured me, acquired on the expense account of a magazine publisher even more generous than this one's. I will wear it to my grave.

That's why I got it, as a matter of fact. Appalling as it may sound, this gown will be my death shroud—not that I plan to put it to that use anytime soon. Some might say we Sedgwicks have a morbid obsession with death, but I like to believe we are simply well-prepared for the inevitable. We have our own family graveyard, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the so-called Sedgwick Pie, where generations of Sedgwicks are laid out in concentric circles around the soaring granite obelisk that marks the grave of Judge Theodore Sedgwick, my great-great-great-grandfather.

John Sedgwick, at ease in his really expensive silk robe.

We also have our own funeral ritual, in which the body of the dearly departed is carried by horse-drawn cart, in the manner of a dead president, down the street from the local Episcopal church to the grave site. And we have our own burial vestments: Eschewing the usual Sunday-best getup, we Sedgwicks customarily take our heavenly rest in our pajamas.

I detailed all this in a magazine article about my family's quaint burial customs, and the next thing I knew I received a call from the publication's photo editor, asking me if I'd mind being photographed for the story standing in the graveyard in my jammies. After a long, thoughtful pause, I said okay, but only on one condition: I got to pick the pj's.

So I marched down to Neiman's and bought some rather nice ivory-colored silk pajamas with pale-blue piping. But when I checked myself out in the mirror, I decided that, pretty as these nightclothes were, they left me feeling, for the purposes of a national-magazine photo spread, a little exposed, as though I had been caught napping. I needed a bathrobe. A silk bathrobe. A really expensive silk bathrobe.

This is when the saleslady started to beam. She escorted me to the bathrobe rack, and I picked out a truly handsome \$400 number, deep blue, with a discreet floral pattern of red, green and creamy white. I slipped the robe on, and the material fluttered in the breeze as I swung it about—so unlike its limp and ragged terry-cloth predecessor back home. Now I knew why Lawrence of Arabia had been willing to give up his Western clothes. In my silk robe, I felt cloaked in air—warm, paradisaical air. I stole another glance in the mirror. Not bad. For my date with the Hereafter, I thought I looked rather natty.

The photographer was impressed with my selection. In fact, I think I detected an air of envy as he ran his hand down the robe to check out the garment's filmy thinness and its subtlety of hem. Nevertheless, he wouldn't let me bundle up in the robe as tightly as I might have liked for the self-possessed, Noël Coward look I had in mind. He insisted instead that I drape it over my shoulders like Superman's cape, exposing the silk pajamas underneath.

Oh, well. A bit of embarrassment is a small price to pay for such heavenly raiment.

Since then, I have been quite free with my robe around the house. Working at home as I do, I find that there really isn't much need to get dressed in the morning anymore and have been known to lounge about like Hugh Hefner (sans Pepsi and bimbos) for hours on end. Both elegant and spare, my silk robe makes me feel overdressed and underdressed simultaneously. All the same, when it comes time to meet my Maker, I won't feel any need to change. For mine is a bathrobe to die for. And in.

—JOHN SEDGWICK