

Taming Groomzilla

E.N. Holland



Bristlecone Pine Press

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by

E. N. Holland

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*To My Parents
who would have been married for fifty-six years
on October seventeenth of this year.*

I miss you, Daddy.

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One

It all started innocently enough.

Luke and I were unpacking boxes in the kitchen. We had just moved into our new condo, the movers had left, and we were itching to get settled. Luke just wanted to shove the dishes into the cabinet but I insisted on washing them—the newsprint had left dirty smudges on everything—so I was alternately loading up the dishwasher and washing glasses in the sink, while he unwrapped our stuff and carted the boxes away.

“What if we got married?” I asked.

He stopped stock still and I was afraid he was going to drop my great-grandmother’s antique glass pitcher on the floor. “Married?” he said, like it was a foreign word.

“Yeah,” I replied, “you know, married, that thing that couples do when they are in love and decide to spend the rest of their lives together. Doesn’t that describe us?”

He put the pitcher down on the counter and I snatched it away, glad it was still intact and immersing it in the sink of soapy water. I suddenly reconsidered what I had said. Maybe I had made a huge mistake. Maybe bringing up marriage twenty-four hours after buying our first home together wasn’t the smartest move on my part. But the words were out and I couldn’t take them back so I just waited on Luke, hoping that he wasn’t going to tell me to start re-packing the dishes and get the hell out of the house.

Finally, after what seemed like an hour, but was probably only a minute, he said, “Are you proposing to me, Joel?”

I stopped, my hands still in the sink. Luke had a way of doing that—turning the tables on me. Was I proposing? I thought I was just asking a question, and maybe I was, but maybe I just phrased it wrong. So I decided to try again. I took my hands out of the water, rinsed them under the faucet, dried them on the towel and then turned to my lover of two years.

“Will you marry me, Luke?” I asked.

He rewarded me with a beautiful smile, then a laugh. “I always thought I’d be the one to do the proposing,” he said.

“Well, you just dilly-dallied a little too long, I guess.”

He smiled again. “Yeah, I guess I did.”

“So,” I asked, now impatient. “Is that a yes?”

“You could be a little more romantic, you know. What about getting down on your knee and taking my hand?”

I walked around the counter and looked into his eyes, then moved close and felt his arms come around me. I’m a few inches shorter and about twenty pounds lighter, and I’ve always liked the way we fit together. I rested my head on his shoulder, and raised my hand to his face, rubbing my finger along the edge of his jaw. Then I looked into his dark brown eyes.

“I love you, Luke, and I want to be with you forever, building a life and sharing our commitment. And... I want the world to know how I feel about you and that you are the man I intend to honor for all my days. So, for all those reasons, I’ll ask you again: will you marry me?”

He kissed me on the top of my head and I could feel his lips, tender on my scalp, moving in my hair as he said softly, “Yes.”

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That night we made love and it was hard and fast and more intense and passionate than it had been in awhile—and I loved it. He pounded my ass into the mattress, then we got up and took a shower and I fell to my knees and gave him one of my world famous blowjobs—drinking him down completely and not spilling a drop. We went back to bed and took a little rest, then he fucked me again and after that time, finally, we fell asleep, exhausted. Luke thought it was the excitement of being in our new home but I think we just wanted to prove to ourselves that we weren't turning into fuddy-duddies. We were living in a condo in the suburbs, for God's sake, and were probably the youngest people by about thirty years in the whole place. And now we were getting married? Talk about staid and respectable! No wonder we had to have mind-blowing sex to prove we were still young—and we did.

When we woke up the next morning, the first thing Luke said to me was, "You know, you can change your mind."

"Change my mind about what?" I said, still half asleep. "Being the bottom? Getting fucked?"

"No," he laughed. "Getting married."

I sat up, more awake now. "I was the one who asked you," I said. "Obviously, my mind was pretty made up about this."

"I thought you asked me on a whim. Or maybe just as a rhetorical question."

I looked at him, trying to figure out what he was getting at. "Are you changing your mind? Is that what you're saying?"

He shook his head no. "Not at all. In fact, I woke up in the night and was thinking about it. My parents have been married for forty-two years. I'm only thirty-six—in forty-two years, I'll be seventy-eight. I think we can make it at least as long as they have. Maybe longer."

I smiled. "When I'm seventy-eight, we'll be celebrating our fiftieth anniversary. Which one is that? Silver?"

"Golden, I think. Silver is for the twenty-fifth."

"Mr. Trivia," I said, reaching out and caressing his nipple. I watched it perk up under my touch. I've decided I like nipples. They're cool—and erotic. "So it's decided?" I tweaked his nipple again, a little harder this time, and heard the hiss of his breath.

"Yes... let's get married." He hitched up in the bed and pulled me towards him and I leaned in and kissed him... deeply and fully, ignoring my morning breath because frankly, he tasted the same. "Just one thing," he mumbled against my mouth.

"What's that?" I asked.

"I want to have a wedding—I mean a real wedding, not just some quick stand up thing in front of a justice of the peace."

"A wedding?" I squeaked, pulling back from him. "In a church?"

"Not necessarily a church," he said. "I know you're Jewish, Joel. Maybe in a hall, or some sort of non-denominational place. But what I mean is, I want a real wedding, with friends, and family, and flowers and a cake—the whole nine yards."

"Why?" I asked.

“Because... well, I’m not exactly sure. Maybe it’s to have fun. Or to make a statement... or... well, it’s the way it’s done. Hell, I had a few girlfriends way back when who talked about their weddings like it was the dream of a lifetime. Maybe we need to do the same thing.”

I paused. I knew Luke had dated girls back in high school and college, before he finally came out at age twenty-four, once and for all, when he fell head over heels with his first male lover, Sean. “You had girlfriends that talked about getting married? You were that serious?”

He shook his head. “I wasn’t that serious with them, no. But they liked to talk about it, in a general way, or more specifically when friends got engaged.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m just saying that if we’re going to do this... and I think we’ve agreed to do this... I’d like to make it special, and have a real wedding, with all the trimmings. Or at least a few of them—like friends and cake, and maybe dancing.”

I raised my eyebrows at him. “All right,” I said slowly, “I think I’m okay with that...”

“Good,” he said, smiling happily at me. “I guess the first thing to do is to pick a date.”

And in that moment, Groomzilla was born.

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## Two

A few days later, Luke came to pick me up at the salon.

One of the disadvantages to moving to the wilds of Scarborough, as we call it (not really the wilds, just six miles from downtown Portland), was the fact that I had to rely on Luke for transportation. I didn't own a car and when we lived in the gayborhood, I could walk everywhere. Now, suddenly I was exiled. I suppose I could take the bus, but as Luke is fond of telling me, I'm not the bus type, and it's true. Who knows what sort of germs lurk on the seats and handrails. Ew. It makes me queasy just thinking about it.

Anyway, I usually walk to Luke's office, but on this particular day, he finished early and I was running late, so he came to pick me up at my place of employment: the fashionable and oh-so-chic Gallery Avant Garde, otherwise known as GAG, which is about how Luke feels about the place.

To my surprise, he actually came into GAG, rather than waiting at the curb and tooting the car horn impatiently. Naturally, this had to be a day when Rochelle Levesque and her best gal-pal, Lisa Lemieux, were in attendance.

Just so there is no confusion on this point: I can't stand Rochelle and Lisa. They have a standing appointment for a cut, foil, and mani-pedi so we have to put up with them for four hours every month—four very long hours. I swear I don't know how Adam manages to juggle them, but he does. They talk, talk, talk and no one can get a word in edgewise—which might be how Adam *does* manage to stand them. He just shuts up and does their hair, sticks them under the dryer, and eventually Darlene does their nails. I run their credit cards, charging them one and one-half times as much as anyone else (this is per Adam, since they are lousy tippers) and off they go, giggling and gossiping, until they come back and torture all of us again the next month.

On this particular day they were more obnoxious than usual because—surprise!—Rochelle had gotten engaged over the weekend. Oy vey, was there something in the water on Saturday? Anyway, she was sporting a diamond the size of a gumball on her left hand and spouting off about her fiancé, Mr. Kent Quint. Last month he was a boyfriend, now he's a fiancé. I sort of wondered what this was going to do to her friendship with Lisa, since Lisa seems to run through boyfriends like the rest of us run through tissues. She has yet to have a romance last more than six months, much less get to the point of an engagement ring, or even one of those dorky pre-engagement rings that kids gave each other in high school. Rochelle had her in her bridal clutches, however: Lisa had already been tapped for—and agreed to be—the maid of honor.

Luke came in, gave me a small wave, and sat down in an empty chair, which happened to be right next to Rochelle. She was blab-blabb-blabbing about wedding favors for her guests—the woman had only been engaged for three days!—and I saw Luke's ears perk up.

"You're getting married?" he asked.

"Oh yes," answered Rochelle, flashing her ring under his nose. "My fiancé proposed on Saturday."

"That's a beautiful ring," said Luke, and Lisa chimed in, "It should be. It's a Lazare."

"Lazare?" asked Luke.

"The world's most beautiful diamond," said Rochelle, and I wondered to myself which salesman had sold her on that bit of advertising copy, hook, line and sinker.



“How big is it?”

“One point five carats,” said Rochelle. “I wanted two but... well, Kent didn’t want to spend *all* his money on my engagement ring. We needed to have a little bit left over for the wedding ring... and the wedding itself.” She laughed as she said this. I threw up a little in my mouth.

“How much did it cost, if you don’t mind my asking... that is, if you know...”

“Well, I don’t know exactly, but I know Kent got a very good deal... I think he spent about twelve thousand dollars.”

I watched Luke blanch. I knew he had never priced diamonds and had never hung around a salon and listened to women talk about them. I, on the other hand, realized that Kent *had* gotten a pretty good deal—if that is what he really spent and it was really a Lazare. Maybe he was making that part up.

“Oh my...” said Luke.

Rochelle smiled at him. “What about you?” she asked. “Are you married?”

“No, but as a matter of fact, I just got engaged this weekend, too.”

“Oh really!” said Rochelle. “Then you must know all about buying diamonds. What did you get your fiancée? Square cut? Pear?”

“Actually, I didn’t buy him a ring. I’m not sure he’s the engagement ring type. Besides, he proposed to me.”

I could see Rochelle’s face crumple in disappointment and I smiled to myself. The old adage is once again true: all the good looking guys are either gay or married.

Then, to my horror, Luke called out to me. “What do you say, Joel? Do you want an engagement ring?”

I wanted to conk him on the head with the broom I was holding. It wasn’t a big secret in the shop that I was gay—Christ, I’ve been told enough times that I’m adorable—but I don’t like to advertise my personal life to clients and certainly not to Rochelle Levesque, of all people!

Her head whipped around and she looked at me with new, fresh eyes. “You’re marrying *Joel*?” she said, as if I was some sort of vermin that had just crawled out of the sewer.

“I certainly am,” said Luke. “We haven’t set a date yet but I expect it will be sometime in the next six months.”

“Well isn’t that terrific. Joel, sweetie,” she said, raising her voice over the din of the dryers and radio, “you never told me you had a boyfriend. And such a good looking one, too.” She had the nerve to wink at Luke.

“You never asked,” I answered, and marched into the utility room to shove a load of towels in the dryer.

I finished straightening up and grabbed my jacket from the hook in the closet. I came back out and stood in front of Luke. “Ready to go?” I said.

“Sure, you’re all set?”

I nodded and said goodbye to Adam and Darlene, pointedly ignoring Rochelle and Lisa. Luke, on the other hand, very politely said goodbye, and thanked Rochelle for the interesting conversation.

Out on the sidewalk, Luke pointed up the street. “The car is in the parking garage,” he said, and we headed up the hill. “That girl... what’s her name?”

“Rochelle,” I said, through clenched teeth.

“Rochelle... she had a ton of information.”

“About what?”

“Weddings, and planning for them.”

“When did you talk about *that*?” I asked. “I only heard you discussing diamonds.”

“When you were in the back room.”

“I was in the back room for about two minutes!”

“Yeah, well, in two minutes, she spouted off a lot. Florists, catering, hiring a hall, invitations... I think she is one of those women who has wanted to get married since she was twelve and has just been waiting for the right man to come along and play the part of groom.”

“Yeah... poor Kent,” I muttered.

“Have you met him?” Luke asked.

“Who?”

“Her fiancé.”

I shook my head no. “I feel like I know him, since I’ve heard enough about him, but he doesn’t seem like the kind to hang around beauty parlors. He’s a big-necked football type.”

Luke smiled. “You hate jocks, don’t you.”

“That’s not true!” I protested. “I love you and you have a jock background.” Luke had been a star pitcher in high school, and played varsity baseball for two years in college, until a torn rotator cuff ended his pitching career. I gave him what I hoped was my most beguiling smile, trying to convince him that I really don’t have a thing against jocks.

“By the way, you never answered my question,” he said.

“Which question?” I was truly perplexed.

“Do you want an engagement ring?”

I looked at him, astounded. “Good God, no. Besides, why should I be the one getting a ring? I thought we had parity in our relationship.”

Luke smiled at me and laid his hand on my arm. “We do, babe, we do. Relax. I only suggested it because—well, because if you did want some sort of an engagement present, I am in a better position to afford something, rather than vice versa.”

I tensed, and I could tell Luke picked up on it. Money was an issue, although we had managed to work things out—mostly. Luke makes way more than I do and at first it rankled—but he is generous and giving and I have learned to accept it. It was part of learning to live together and I realized we’d probably never be on an even playing field, moneywise, so it isn’t worth getting upset about. At least that’s what I keep telling myself, and most of the time I believe it.

“If we had a spare twelve thousand dollars lying around, I can think of plenty of things we need a whole lot more than a ring for my finger.”

“Such as?”

“Well... a car. It’s pretty clear that with our new living situation, having two cars would make getting around much simpler.”

“Hm,” he said, “that’s not a bad idea.”

We were at the parking garage by this time and he pushed the remote, the lights flashing on his Toyota. “What sort of car do you want?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t thought about it,” I said. “I haven’t had a car for years.”

“I can sort of picture you in a mini-Cooper,” he said. “Or maybe one of those new Fit cars from Honda.”

“Hm, maybe. What about a Volkswagen?”

“A Beetle?” he said. “Those are cute, too.” We got in the car and he leaned over and gave me a kiss. “We can do the research and figure out what’s best and then I can buy it from an Internet dealer and get a good price.”

“I don’t know, Luke,” I said, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by his generosity.

“Tell you what... we’ll plan on a honeymoon we can drive to—maybe go up to Quebec City—and we can take your new car. So then it becomes a practical expense and not just an engagement present.”

“Well, if you say so,” I said, still feeling dubious.

“I say so,” he answered.

And that is how I got my little silver mini-Cooper convertible.

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### Three

Luke and I were on the couch—supposedly watching a movie but actually engaged in a good old-fashioned make-out session, which I really enjoy (and I suspect he does too). We have a rule that we have to keep our hands above our waists and if possible keep our shirts buttoned. Makes for some tantalizing fun. Anyway, in the midst of this, the phone rang. Luke glanced at the TV—the caller ID shows up on the TV screen, talk about living in modern times!—and saw the name Virginia Harfner.

“It’s your mom,” he said, dragging his lips away from mine.

“The machine will get it.”

“No, go answer,” he said, pushing me off the couch. “It might be serious.”

I sighed. Luke comes from a family where the phone is only used for dreadful emergencies and even then, talking is cut short. Do they think we still pay for phone service by time and distance? My family, on the other hand, calls for every little thing. I can’t think of the last time I had an emergency phone call—thank God for that! But even so, Luke hasn’t caught up with the Harfner ways and insists that we take personal calls when they come in—no matter what we are doing.

I stood up, heading into the kitchen, giving my erection a quick rub and hoping that mom didn’t feel like chatting for too long. I liked the amorous mood Luke was in.

“Hi, Mom,” I said, as I picked up the receiver.

“Joel, honey, hello! How are you?”

“I’m fine, Mom, how are you?”

“This isn’t a bad time, is it? I didn’t catch you in the middle of something, did I?”

I sighed again to myself, thinking of Dan Savage and his advice that there are certain things you never tell your parents, including details of your sex life. This was one of those moments.

“No, Mom, Luke and I were just watching a movie. What’s up?”

“I was just thinking about you and wondering how you are settling in to your new home. How is everything?”

“It’s great, Mom. We love it.”

“Is everything unpacked?”

“Mostly. We still have a few more boxes of stuff to put away.”

“I can’t wait to hear all the details.”

I groaned inwardly. If I let myself, I could be on the phone for an hour with her and I really didn’t want to go there on this evening. “We’ll need to get together soon and have a long talk. When are you due to come into the salon?”

“Oh Joel, you know I don’t like to talk personal to you at work. That’s why I was calling. Maybe you and Luke could come over for dinner sometime soon. Next Tuesday?”

“Tuesday should be okay. Hang on, let me go ask him.”

I put the phone down and padded back into the den, where I discovered Luke had broken all the rules of our evening fun. He was spread-eagled on the couch, zipper open and his cock in his hand—hard and erect and leaking at the tip. I groaned and then glanced at the TV. He was still watching the Alfred Hitchcock movie. Funny what turns people on.

“You want to go to my parents’ house for dinner next week?” I asked.

“I want you to eat me right now,” he said, licking his lips.

I groaned again and took that for a yes, realizing as I walked back to the kitchen that I didn’t ask him what day. Oh well, our social life was pretty non-existent at the moment. If he had something going on on Tuesday, he could change it.

“Tuesday would be great, Mom,” I said, as I picked up the phone again.

“Wonderful, honey... I can’t wait to see you and hear *all* the details.”

And then, in one of those colossal moments of pure stupidity, I said, “Yes, all the details... and we have some other news, too.”

Why didn’t I just say goodbye and hang up? Why did I tantalize with the tidbit of other news? Because she’s my mom, I suppose, and I can’t keep anything from her, even when my boyfriend is half-naked in the other room and my cock is straining against my fly.

“News? You have other news?”

“Yeah, I’ll tell you on Tuesday.”

“Oh, come on, Joel, you know I hate surprises. What is it?”

“Really, Mom, let’s wait ‘til dinner. It’s not a big deal.”

“It must be a big deal. You never tease me unless it is something important. Come on, spill.”

I sighed again, glancing at the doorway of the den, wondering what Luke was up to and if he’d kill me for getting into a gabfest with my mom at nine o’clock on a Saturday night. But my mother... I can never resist my mother.

I clutched the receiver, kicking myself for opening my mouth in the first place, then said, “Luke and I have decided to get married.”

“Oh, honey... wonderful!” My mother sounded thrilled—genuinely thrilled—but I heard in that pause the tiniest bit of regret, the tiniest little thought that magnified in my brain to be, *Well, that’s it, he’s really gay, he’ll never marry a girl, and I’ll never have any Harfner grandchildren. It’s all up to the girls, now.*

“We’re excited, Mom,” I said.

“I’m sure you are,” she replied.

I sighed yet again. It’s so complicated with parents. My mom has known I’m gay since forever. I think she knew even before me. I came out—officially came out—in high school, but started figuring it out when I was about ten or so. My mom must have known when I was five, flouncing around with my sisters, dressing up in pink satin gowns and always pretending to be Cinderella at the ball.

Mom has been nothing but supportive, going to PFLAG meetings and learning how to stand up to my stupid aunt (her sister) and her homophobic husband, being sad with me when I couldn’t go to the prom because I couldn’t take my then secret boyfriend with me as a date and I refused to take a girl as a beard.

As I look back on it, things were pretty good in high school. It was afterwards that I fucked up—deciding not to go to college, even though I had the grades, and setting my sights no higher than Pierre’s School of Beauty and Culture (“It’s so stereotypical, Joel,” my mother said at the time, and she was right). I compounded my mistake by dropping out of beauty school halfway through to follow Keith—oh, excuse me, Mr. Keith—to Atlanta. Funny, he loved me in Portland but south of the Mason-Dixon line I became an embarrassing little twink from the north woods of Maine.

And then—and then, I added insult to injury and instead of getting myself on some decent path, I drifted around, picking up one odd job after another, sleeping around and becoming a complete and total slut. I got as far south as Key West and slowly worked my way up the east coast—tending bar, working as a dancer (I could never be a bouncer—too small), sweeping hair in salons (my current glamorous occupation)—and finally, at age twenty-four, I ended up back home, broke, depressed, lonely, and thankfully, not HIV positive. I am grateful for that particular blessing.

Mom asked very few questions and just took me in, gave me my old room back, and helped me find a counselor to do the hard work of putting my life back on track. After a year or so I was ready to venture forth. I got my job at GAG, moved into a small apartment with an old friend from high school, and started saving money to go back to Pierre's. I met Luke one evening when I was bar hopping and we hit it off immediately. Even though I wanted to blow him right then and there in the bar bathroom, we resisted temptation, and we dated—actually *courted*—for three months before we ended up in bed together. By then, I was crazy in love with him and he with me, which probably explains why we want to do something as corny and traditional as get married.

All this flashed through my mind in two seconds. “I need to marry Luke,” I said. “He’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“He certainly is, sweetheart. That’s the truth. Have you picked a date?”

“Not yet, but we’re thinking about October.”

“How about the seventeenth? It’s on a Saturday this year.”

“We talked about that date, but... it’s your anniversary.”

“So?”

“You wouldn’t mind?”

“What’s to mind, honey? I’d be honored, and so would your father.”

“Really?” I was genuinely surprised at this. I always thought people didn’t want to share “their” special day. “I’ll tell Luke that.”

“Have you decided where to get married?”

“No, that’s still up in the air, too. Maybe Massachusetts.”

“What will you do? Just go to a city clerk or something?”

“Actually, Luke wants a real wedding with a cake and dancing.”

“Luke does?” She sounded surprised. “I would have thought that would be you.”

I laughed. “No, I proposed, but he’s the one with all the big plans.”

“You proposed? Oh, sweetheart, you’ve always been such a romantic.”

I blushed at that and was glad she couldn’t see me. My mom knows me so well. “Listen, Mom, I need to go. We’ll fill you in on all the details Tuesday night.”

We said goodbye and I hung up the phone. I could hear the TV in the other room, but I really wasn’t in the mood for a movie anymore. I went to the refrigerator and got a bottle of wine, thinking that if I was a romantic, I might as well live up to my reputation.

I tiptoed upstairs and poured the wine. I lit a few candles, folded down the bed, and wished I had a few rose petals to scatter over the sheets. Oh well, maybe next time. I debated changing into my skin-tight leather pants which drive Luke wild, but are a bitch to zip, especially when I have a hard-on. I settled on my grey raw silk pajamas, instead, which I think bring out the blue of my eyes and contrast nicely with my dark hair.

Thus suitably attired, I went back downstairs to begin the hard work of seducing the love of my life.

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## Four

Two weeks later, I was standing outside of Street & Co. waiting for my two sisters, Luke, and his friend Cindy. We were meeting to have dinner and to discuss clothing for the wedding party.

Marital plans were proceeding apace. In fact, I was amazed at just how quickly things were moving forward. I felt like I had gone from a laid-back, low-key sort of guy whose biggest decision every day was what sort of latte to have on my mid-morning coffee break, to a whirling dervish of planning and organization. And if I was a dervish, what was Luke? A Tasmanian devil? I think so. The description seems apt.

Once we had decided on the date, a whole chain of decisions suddenly presented themselves. Where to have the wedding? How elaborate? How many guests?

We started with location. Since same-sex marriage is not legal in Maine (yet—we are ever hopeful) we decided to get married in Massachusetts. We tossed around ideas such as Canada, Spain—even Iowa—but really, I don't do cornfields well. Massachusetts made sense: it is familiar and almost local so it wouldn't be an onerous trip for friends and family.

Luke liked the idea of Provincetown, the gay mecca at the very tip of Cape Cod. While I love P-town, I wondered if it might be a little too “in your face” for some of our guests, especially his parents. But that was precisely why he wanted to force the issue. “I’ve been out for twelve years,” he said. “They need to realize this is not a ‘lifestyle choice’ or phase I am going through.”

I shrugged. Whatever. If he wanted to have a family showdown at his wedding, I wasn't going to argue. I just hope they take the fisticuffs outside at the reception.

The next obstacle was finding a venue.

We discovered that planning a wedding on a six-month timeline is, at least in the eyes of event managers, akin to planning the invasion of Normandy in three days—in other words, were we nuts? I had a few memorable phone conversations, such as this one with the wedding coordinator at “The Dirty Gull” (name changed to protect the guilty!).

Wedding coordinator, in a faux British accent: “You are scheduling your event for October seventeenth, I assume that would be next year? Eighteen months from now?”

“No,” says I, “October of this year... in the fall.”

“Surely you jest,” says WC. “Don't you realize that The Dirty Gull is booked at least two years in advance for all events of significance?”

“If I realized that, I wouldn't be calling now, would I?”

WC sniffed. “Next time, sir, plan better. Propose sooner.”

“I am not planning on proposing again. This is one of those ‘for now and forever’ type deals.”

“Hmmpfh,” he said. “I’ve heard that old saw before.”

I hung up on him.

“The Bitter End” seemed promising: they had availability on our selected date and they could accommodate our proposed number of guests. I felt my pulse speed up. “What's the process for making a reservation?” I asked.

“Easy,” said the bubbly, chirpy young woman on the other end of the line. “First, we confirm the date.” She whispered to herself as she did this and I could picture her writing the



information in big loopy handwriting in a spiral bound notebook. I wondered if she used a purple pen and dotted her i's with hearts. "Now, do you want a three-course or a five-course meal?"

"Actually, we want passed hors d'oeuvres and champagne."

"Sorry, no can do!" she said brightly. "Luncheon or dinner only, three or five courses."

I paused. "Well, let me discuss that with my fiancé. He might be open to the idea of a meal."

"While we are on the topic of what you can and can't do, let me outline the rest of our policies: you will use our chef, our baker, our florist, our tables, our chairs, our linens, our silverware, have our bartenders serve only our top-shelf liquor and the event must not go longer than four hours, otherwise we begin charging by the minute. No exceptions. We have a list of approved DJs that you can choose from who will ensure that the music is not played louder than one hundred decibels so that the neighbors aren't disturbed."

Quite a list, I thought. "Is that it?"

"Will you be having out-of-town guests?"

"Yes, of course. None of us live in Provincetown."

"Well then, we require your guests to stay at The Bitter End."

I looked at the phone like she was a lunatic. "How can you possibly enforce that?" I asked.

"We have our ways," she said mysteriously.

I hung up on her, too.

I was beginning to despair of finding anything on the Cape and was starting to toy with the idea of Boston, when I made one last desperate call to the Blue Door—desperate, because I think it's the nicest place in P-town and I never imagined that it would be available at this late date. But, nothing ventured, nothing gained as my mother always says so I called them up.

First, the date. "You're in luck!" said the manager. "We were booked on the seventeenth but just had a cancellation. I can pencil you in." Wow. Next question: fifty to seventy people? Oh, yes, we have the perfect size space for that number. Hors d'oeuvres? Absolutely. Bring our own cake? Of course! Our own florist? You even have to ask? Certainly!

I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. There had to be a hitch. Can we get married there? Bien sûr! Dancing? Champagne? Let the party go on into the wee hours of the morning if we want? Yes, yes, yes!

She laughed at my litany of questions. "You sound like you've had some bad experiences. The Blue Door tries to bend over backwards to accommodate our guests and make your special day be more than special... we want it to be sublime. All we ask is for a fifty percent deposit and final payment in full two weeks before the event."

"Okay... this sounds really good. I need to confirm with my fiancé but I can get back to you before the end of the day. One last thing... you do realize we're gay, right? That's not an issue?"

"GAY!" she shrieked. "GAY!" So this was the hitch—until she laughed. "Honey, this is P-town. I would have been surprised if you weren't gay."

All right, she had a sense of humor. I could work with this woman.

~~~

Luke started buying bridal magazines—much to my horror—until he pointed out that *Groom & Groom* didn't yet exist in print. He signed up at TheKnot.com, started designing our

wedding website, and began reading all the same sex wedding announcements in the archives of the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Ideas,” he said. “I need ideas!”

I picked up a copy of *Modern Bride* he had left on the kitchen table and flipped through the pages, glancing at the dozens of pictures of happily smiling couples. “I’m not wearing a dress you know.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to—not in public.” He gave me a wink. “How about a white tuxedo?”

“And look like a Good Humor man? No thanks.” I winked back.

We discovered that a popular trend for gay guys was to have a bevy of pretty women serve as their attendants. Luke laughed. “The ultimate prize for a fag hag! Be loyal and true to your fag through thick and thin and maybe... just maybe when he decides to get married, you can be in the bridal party!”

I looked at him. “Bridal party?”

“What else would you call it? A groomal party?”

He had a point. In case you are wondering, I did a little research and found out the most popular terms seem to be “honor attendants” and “wedding party.” Now you know.

Luke liked the idea of female attendants. “I can ask Cindy,” he said and I nodded, not surprised. Cindy Blake had been a good friend of his in college. They drifted apart when she moved to Boston but renewed their friendship in the past few years when she moved to Brunswick to live with her hunk-of-good-looking lobster fisherman boyfriend and work in the admissions office at Bowdoin College.

I, on the other hand, was sort of fag-hagless at the moment. In my years of drifting around down south I had disconnected from several of my close friends and still hadn’t renewed many of those relationships. It was Luke who suggested my sisters might be my attendants and it was a good idea. Like my mother, they were the ones I tended to turn to in times of trouble and had never let me down.

And thus we ended up at Street & Co., for dinner to talk about wedding plans, dresses in particular. Speaking of clothing: my oldest sister Judith is a clothes-horse, Rachel is a jock, and Luke’s friend Cindy is an inveterate L.L. Bean catalog shopper. I really wondered if it was possible to find something to suit all three. I was beginning to have an inkling of what all the brides-to-be in the shop were always whining about.

On the sidewalk, I looked up and saw Luke and Cindy hurrying towards me, my sisters following close behind. I waved and within five minutes we were comfortably seated at a round table in the corner of the restaurant, a bottle of wine open before us, glasses raised in a toast. Luke blushed and I smiled, giving his knee a squeeze under the table. Have I mentioned lately how much I love this man?

Rachel took a sip. “I can’t believe my baby brother is getting married before me!” She stuck out her tongue but I knew she was kidding.

I smiled at her. “For a long time, I never thought I’d be getting married. I never even dared to believe that I’d meet someone I’d want to spend my life with.”

“Are you happy?” she asked.

I nodded. “Very.”

“So,” Judith jumped in. “Tell us about the plans.”

Luke and I gave a quick rundown on details that had been decided to date, then Luke launched into a lengthy monologue about invitations, waxing rapturously about one hundred

percent cotton stock, engraved versus laser, and which font was more romantic but at the same time masculine: Edwardian Script or Garamond. Finally I nudged him. “We need to talk about dresses,” I said. “That’s why we’re here.”

“Right.” He looked at me and I swear his eyes were unfocused. I didn’t fully realize the depth of his invitation obsession.

“By way of starting the conversation,” said Cindy, “do you have a color scheme?”

I shook my head.

“Linens for the tables?”

I shook my head again, wondering what I’d actually been doing for the past two weeks. I *thought* I had been working hard on all this planning stuff. All we had decided on was a place?

“Since it’s October, you could go with a fall theme. Oranges and yellows, deep red...”

I wrinkled my nose. “It seems sort of trite and overdone, don’t you think? Pumpkins and dried leaves and all that?”

“Just a suggestion...”

“Actually,” Luke interrupted, “I was sort of thinking that maybe Joel and I could wear kilts. We could choose the colors off of that.”

I almost dropped my wine glass onto the table. “Kilts?” I said, stunned. “You’ve never mentioned that to me.”

“I just got the idea in the past day or two,” he replied. “I saw a couple of pictures.”

I could hardly believe my ears. Kilts? “Luke,” I said, trying to sound patient, “I can’t wear a kilt. I don’t have a drop of Scottish blood in my veins. All my ancestors are from eastern Europe—Russia, Bohemia, places like that. A far cry from Scotland.”

“I don’t think that matters. Besides, my great-great-grandmother was a MacDougall. And you’re marrying me.” He said this as if it made perfect sense.

“I think it is a great idea,” said Cindy. “I love a man in a kilt.”

“I know,” agreed Rachel. “And Joel, you have such a great ass. You’d look fabulous up there at the altar...” Her eyes got a distant faraway look.

I shuddered. Once I got over the shock of my sister talking about my, ahem, rear assets and regained my voice, I whirled on her. “What are you saying, Rachel?”

“Just the truth. Your butt looks good. Right, Luke?”

Luke winked at me. “Joel knows I love his ass,” he said with a smirk.

I couldn’t believe the turn this conversation had taken. I was sure my face was red as a beet. “Can we please change the subject?” I croaked.

“As a matter of fact, I have a kilt in my closet,” said Rachel. I peered at her. I wasn’t sure if this was a change of subject or not.

“No big surprise, women wear them all the time,” I retorted. “Especially here in Maine. It’s sort of a look for a certain segment of the horsey set.”

“No... no,” she shook her head. “It’s a man’s kilt. Remember that guy Giles I went out with for awhile? When one of his fraternity brothers got married, they all wore kilts. Somehow it ended up in my closet.”

“That’s perfect!” said Luke. “Would it fit Joel? Then we’d only have to buy one.”

“I am not wearing a hand-me-down kilt to my wedding!” I almost shouted. “In fact, I’m not wearing any kilt to my wedding!”

Luke went on, oblivious to my outburst. “What tartan is it?”

“Black Watch,” answered Rachel.

“Oh, nice,” said Luke, appreciatively, as if he was suddenly a connoisseur of fine Scottish woolens. “Although I do like the ones with red, like the MacKenzie.”

“Isn’t there a law or something... that you have to belong to the clan to wear the kilt?” I interjected. “You have to be a member of the brotherhood... or regiment... the Hussars...” My voice trailed off.

“A law? I don’t think so,” said Rachel. “Certainly not here in the US. I’m sure nobody gives a hoot about who wears what.”

“I really don’t want to wear a kilt... Luke, please?” I tried to give him my most plaintive puppy dog look. Anger was next in my arsenal if he kept pushing the issue.

“But you would look so sexy...” He rubbed my knee with his hand. I narrowed my eyes.

My sister Judith interrupted all of us. “How about a compromise? What if you wore tuxedos with plaid cummerbunds? I’ve always liked that look.”

“Cummerbunds?” I said. The transition from kilts to cummerbunds was too abrupt. I was having trouble following. But not Luke.

“That might work,” he said.

My sister continued, “We could wear black sheaths, sleeveless, a square neck, with princess seaming, and matching sashes.” Her hands drifted across her body as she mentally sketched out the design.

“You don’t mean those plaid things that cover over our shoulders, do you?” piped up Cindy. “I’ve always hated those. They look like those merit badge things that Girl Scouts wear.”

Judith laughed. “No, absolutely not. I mean a sash, around our waists, with an interesting detail in the back. To divert people’s attention away from Joel’s—and Luke’s—erm... rears.”

She pinched my cheek but I was willing to forgive her for that. This was one of the moments I was profoundly grateful that my sister has tried to single-handedly keep the US garment industry alive; it meant that she was full of ideas about dresses, sashes, and cummerbunds and hopefully pushed the stupid kilt idea off the table forever.

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We finished dinner without further ado, trying to chat about work and friends but always coming back to the wedding plans. I found that I didn’t mind it—it was fun being the center of attention and Luke was happy and animated. He made me smile.

We finished our meal with cappuccino and a delicious wild blueberry cobbler. After lots of hugs and promises to keep everyone updated on the plans, Luke and I headed home. Back at the condo, I felt sated and full, and very content—even the kilt conversation was fading into a funny memory.

In the bedroom, Luke pushed my pants off, running his hands over my back and down along the muscles of my butt. “You do have a nice ass you know. I really wonder how you’d look in a kilt.”

“You’ll just have to keep that as a fantasy,” I replied. “You are not going to see me in one anytime soon.”

“What about that one your sister has? Maybe you could borrow it.”

“I doubt that it would fit. She goes for big muscular guys.”

“They’re adjustable,” he said, pulling me into his arms and trailing kisses down my neck. “All those buckles. And you aren’t supposed to wear anything underneath them.” He reached for my crotch, cradling my balls in his hands, running his hand up and back, staying tantalizingly away from my cock which was hard and erect and jutting out from my body at an angle. “Think how it would feel... rough wool against this soft skin...” He said this as he was thumbing my scrotum.

I groaned. “Your fantasies are piling up,” I murmured. “I thought you wanted me in a white dress.”

“Screw the dress,” said Luke. “Now I’m obsessed with a kilt.”

I laughed and pushed him down onto the bed, pulling at his shirt. “Screw me,” I answered, “and I’ll see what I can do about the Mel Gibson/Braveheart look and bringing your fantasy alive.”

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## Five

A fresh new day, and it is ours,  
a day of happy beginnings

Joel David Harfner  
and  
Luke Fitzgerald Townsend

Request the pleasure of your company  
when they pledge their love as one  
and will be married  
at The Blue Door Inn  
Provincetown, Massachusetts

Saturday October seventeenth  
at two o'clock in the afternoon

Reception immediately following  
with dancing and hors d'oeuvres

Straightforward, isn't it? Classy, nice? Can you believe it took more than a week of heated debate to come up with those sixty-one words?

It's funny—the things I thought would be easy took ages to decide while the things I expected to be a matter of debate and discussion were a cinch. The invitations, for example. I thought it would be a simple matter: “We’re getting married. Come join us.” But, oh no... there are protocols for wording, the order of the names, what to say, what gets capitalized and what doesn't. What is included—or more importantly, what is not—conveys secret information to those who speak fluent “Invitationese.” Until we decided to get married, I never knew such a language existed.

First, our names. I wanted to leave out my middle name because frankly, I think it is boring. But it is an all or nothing proposition: two names or three, for both of us, no halvesies, and never just an initial. Since Luke's middle name is from his mother, that was important to him. Okay, I understand family. I caved easily on that one.

Speaking of parents, should we include their names? Sure, if you want to let people know that mom and dad are footing part of the bill. Since they weren't, we left them off.

The poetry sort of stuff Luke found online from an Australian invitation and I liked it, too, so that was mostly easy—except for the “and will be married.” That wasn't on the original and I wanted it included—I wanted people to know that this wasn't a commitment ceremony, civil union, or sand-pouring joining ritual. We were getting married, dammit, no question about it! Luke wanted to say, “at their wedding,” but I stood firm and eventually got my way.

The last little quibble was the “dancing and hors d'oeuvres” line. We both felt it looked a little tacky, but we wanted people to know we wouldn't be serving a meal. You'd think that with

having a wedding at two in the afternoon that would be obvious, but we have both discovered that nothing is obvious when it comes to wedding planning. “Dancing and hors d’oeuvres” was designed to communicate, subtly, in three words: *Look, we’re going to have some great hors d’oeuvres, cake, and champagne, along with dancing, but when it is all over you may still be hungry and given that this is Provincetown, even in the shoulder season, you might want to think about making a dinner reservation if you want to go out to eat afterwards.* Luke and I have read enough “wedding from hell” stories to know that many guests expect a meal and when they don’t get it, they turn into a pack of ravenous dogs. We decided to opt for tacky rather than incur the wrath of our guests for the rest of our lives.

I mentioned earlier that Luke was all over the paper and engraving like white on rice. He was still on his plaid/tartan/kilt kick and actually found an invitation with a dark green border and a plaid ribbon; while I had envisioned something a little more classic, I decided I could live with his choice. It could have been much, much worse. How about the one that has a Massachusetts license plate at the top that says HITCHED? Argh.

~~~

One very hot Saturday in July, I suggested to Luke that we go ring shopping. “We can cross another thing off the list and spend some time in air conditioning.”

Luke allowed that this seemed like a reasonable idea. “Where shall we go?” he asked. “The mall?”

“No, let’s go to Page Jewelers,” I said.

“Page’s? Aren’t they a little snooty in there?”

I laughed. “Not to me. Come on.”

Thirty minutes later we were mounting the steps to the “downtown upstairs jewelry store.” An attractive, middle-aged woman greeted us as we came through the door. “Good morning, gentlemen. How may I help you today?”

“Is Mrs. Page in?” I asked.

“Of course. And your name is...?” Her voice trailed off.

“Joel Harfner.”

The saleswoman nodded and disappeared through a door into the back of the shop. Luke and I moved over to one of the glass display cabinets and began idly looking at the jewelry arrayed there. It appeared we had selected the case that featured Maine tourmaline. “Pretty stuff, isn’t it?” I said to Luke. “I wish I liked jewelry more—I might buy something.”

Luke touched my elbow and guided me over to the wedding ring case. He’s like me, unfortunately: rather plain in the jewelry and adornment department.

A few minutes later, an older snow-haired woman emerged through the door. I knew Mrs. Page was pushing ninety, but I swear she didn’t look a day over seventy. I hope I have her variety of good genes.

“Joel, darling boy!” she said as she came over to me, pulling me into a hug. “How are you? It’s been so long... too long!”

“I’m great, Mrs. Page. I’d come in more often if I had more money to buy stuff. Everything here is so tempting.”

“Ah, Joel, you flatter me. You know you always receive a generous discount.”

Bingo! Discount secured. Number one shopping hurdle overcome.

"But you are here today, clearly to look for something. How may I help you?" she asked.

I turned to Luke. "Mrs. Page, this is my fiancé, Luke Townsend. We're getting married in October. We came in to choose our wedding rings."

I saw a slight shadow flicker across her face, a tiny look of disapproval in her eyes. I couldn't really blame her. She was older, from a different generation. Men didn't marry men in her day. Instead, they got thrown in jail.

But just as quickly as the look appeared, it disappeared, and she smiled at us. Ever the consummate professional, she pointed to the case. "I am honored that you would choose Page's for the rings that will symbolize your union and lifetime commitment." She laid a velvet display board on the counter. "Have you thought about what you would like? Platinum or gold? Something with a stone?"

"Gold, I think," said Luke. "Something simple."

She nodded and reached for a display of traditional bands in a red velvet box when I asked, "Do you still make the sailor ring? The one that looks like braided rope?"

"Darling boy, do you have to ask? That is a Page trademark for more than fifty years." She moved to another display case and we followed. "These are our custom pieces, our signature styles." She unlocked the case and pulled out a display box, setting it down in front of us. "Often imitated, never duplicated. Page's Sailor's Yarn."

Luke picked up the ring. "Oh my God!" he said. "This is the one I've always seen advertised—in *DownEast* and *Yankee Magazine*."

Mrs. Page nodded. "That's right. It was designed by my husband when he was discharged from the Navy back in the forties. He intended it for Veterans, to remind them of their service, but it has turned into one of our most popular and enduring wedding band styles."

"Do you like it?" I said to Luke, softly.

"Yes, I've always liked it—ever since I was little."

I nodded. "I remember those ads in *DownEast*, too."

"You will notice, gentlemen, that the inside of the ring is lined with a layer of smooth gold. This makes the ring comfortable to wear and ensures that it will last a lifetime."

"Can it be engraved?" asked Luke.

"Of course," she said. "We do the engraving here in the shop. We are the only jewelry store left in Portland with our own personal engraver. All the other stores send their items to us."

I smiled to myself. What a saleswoman!

"Would you like to see any other rings?"

"I'm perfectly happy with this one," said Luke. "What about you, Joel?"

"It's the one I wanted. I'm so glad you like it, too."

Luke raised an eyebrow at me. "You had this planned all along?"

I laughed and gave him a little punch on the arm. "You're not the only one with tricks up your sleeve," I said.

Mrs. Page sized our fingers and we decided on the engraving—our initials and the date, plus a line from the invitation: *A fresh new day*. She wrote up the order and took a deposit, telling us the rings would be ready in two weeks. As we prepared to leave, she asked, "Anything else I can help you with today?"

"Yes," said Luke. "Tell me... do you have any Lazare diamonds?"

She sniffed—literally sniffed! Her voice was dripping with disdain as she said, “The only named pieces in the shop are those we have designed and manufactured. If you want a commodity diamond, you’ll need to go to *the mall*.”

The mall—the seventh ring of hell as far as Betty Page was concerned.

“I heard Lazare diamonds are supposed to be nice.” Luke sounded truly puzzled.

“They are nice if you don’t want to do the work on educating yourself on how to buy a diamond.” She sniffed again. “Certainly they are fine stones. But you will get a better value—and better quality—if you buy a loose diamond from Page Jewelers.”

“Well thank you,” said Luke. “I’ll keep that in mind the next time I’m diamond shopping.”

“I certainly hope you do.”

Out on the sidewalk, I elbowed Luke. “That was mean of you... getting her going like that on Lazare diamonds.”

“I didn’t mean to,” said Luke. “It was a sincere question.”

“Well now you know. I think Mrs. Page gets her diamonds direct from the Hasidic diamond merchants in New York City. Probably drives down there herself to pick them up.”

“What’s the scoop with you and her, anyway? ‘Darling Joel, darling boy.’ Where did that come from?”

“She and my grandmother were best friends,” I said. “Grandma was a salesclerk in the haberdashery department of Porteous, Mitchell, and Braun and Mrs. Page was working at Page’s... she was Betty LeGrand, then. She and Grandma met one day at the lunch counter at Woolworth’s, hit it off and became friends for life.”

“Well, I’ll be.” He looked around Congress Street. “There used to be Woolworth’s here?”

I nodded. “Yup. And what used to be Porteous is now the Maine College of Art.”

“But Page Jewelers is still here.”

I nodded. “That’s right. Betty married the owner’s son and the rest is history. She owns the business, now, since her husband died several years ago, and still goes in to work five days a week. Sort of unbelievable for a woman her age. Once Grandma met her, the Harfners have never bought a piece of jewelry anywhere but Page’s. I really had no choice of where we could go.”

Luke smiled at me. “I can understand that. Did she give you a discount?”

“Of course. Didn’t you notice?”

“No, she wrote it up so fast, I couldn’t tell.”

“Forty percent.”

“Forty percent! Holy shit, that is a deal. Maybe I *will* go back and price some diamonds.”

“If you do, you’ll have to take me with you.” I smiled sweetly.

Luke laughed. “Babe, I’m stuck to you like glue, for better or for worse.” And with that, we headed off to the car.

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Six

If Luke was obsessed with invitations, my personal obsession became the cake.

I'm not sure why. Cake was never a big deal in my family. Whenever we had a birthday or other special event, my mother would just call the bakery in our neighborhood, place an order and two days later, pick it up. When the bakery closed a few years ago, she just started buying cakes at Hannaford. Like I said, no big deal.

But for some reason, I suddenly had to have the absolutely perfect cake at our wedding. A run-of-the-mill three-tier cake with white frosting and two guys standing on top just wouldn't do for me. Oh no, I needed something spectacular.

I started scouring the web. Do you know how many pictures of wedding cakes there are online? Thousands. Probably millions. And I think I have looked at all of them.

Round cakes. Square cakes. Three, four, five tiers. I saw a few with ten! Every color frosting you can imagine, including black—which frankly, didn't look all that appetizing. Novelty cakes, such as Louis Vuitton bags and Chanel purses, which are probably more appropriate for a bon voyage party, or maybe a divorce, rather than a wedding. Wedding cakes made out of Krispy Kreme donuts! I saw one that looked like a woven basket and the top was covered with strawberries. I sort of liked that one until I realized that strawberries in October probably wouldn't be quite as bright and juicy as if we were getting married in June. Oh well.

I found a few plaid cakes and Luke was pushing for those. "It will go with our plaid theme," he reasoned.

"Plaid is not a theme," I said. "A theme is something like *Springtime in Paris* or *Moon Over Maui*."

"But we have the plaid cummerbunds," he said. "And the invitations."

"Yeah, well, we're not having a plaid cake. It just looks dumb."

He just shrugged. "Whatever makes you happy, Joel. I'll leave it up to you."

Thank you.

I printed out dozens of pictures of cakes that might be contenders. There were plenty I liked but they all lacked a little... something. I'm not sure what but they just didn't zing me. In fact, I was beginning to think I might go along with a plaid cake, only because it would make Luke happy and I was starting to feel overwhelmed. Why did I care so much?

Then... I found it. My cake, the cake of my dreams: a Mad Hatter cake.

It is a variation on what cake *artistes* call a "carnival cake." Topsy-turvy with irregularly shaped tiers and fondant cutouts in the shapes of diamonds, dots, and stripes. It was frosted in pastel shades of purple, yellow, and green, with a little topsy-turvy topknot of purple and rose. I loved it!

I discovered it was custom designed by two guys who got married in—you guessed it—Provincetown! I took this as a good omen. If the baker could get this cake to P-town once, she could get it there a second time, right? I sure hoped so.

I googled the guys' names and found out they lived in Boston. Deciding to be bold, I picked up the phone and called them up. After introducing myself, I dived right into the reason for my call. "Listen," I said, "I really love your wedding cake. I am getting married in Provincetown in October and I was wondering if I could steal your design?"

The man, who was named Eric, laughed. "I'd be flattered," he said. "Maybe when it is over you could send me a picture?"

"Sure thing." I pressed him for details. Who was the baker? Did she deliver to the wedding? Did she assemble the cake onsite? Did she have a refrigerated truck?

Eric laughed. "You've been doing your research, haven't you?" He answered all my questions and said he was mostly happy with everything... except the price. "That cake did cost a small fortune," he said.

I steeled myself. How bad could it be? Six dollars a slice? Eight?

Try twelve. Twelve bucks per slice of cake, times fifty guests, plus ten (just to be safe)... seven hundred and twenty dollars! I almost dropped the phone.

Could he have paid that much? "How many guests did you have at your wedding?"

"It was small... we had fifty-three people, all told."

"So you paid over seven hundred dollars for the cake?"

"Actually, it was eight hundred, in the end, because we rounded it up to tip the baker."

"Holy cow..." I breathed.

"I know. Absurd, isn't it? I still can't believe we paid that much for the damn cake. Our tuxedos were cheaper... they only cost seven-ninety-five!"

I laughed at that. "But it really is a great cake."

"Yes, it was, and it was a spectacular centerpiece. It was the talk of the reception and I am so glad we had it. Even though it was outrageously expensive, I still think it was worth it."

I wrote down all the details and thanked Eric for his time, then hung up. I clicked online to my bank account and looked at my savings. Eight hundred bucks would pretty much wipe me out—I guess going back to beauty school will have to wait another semester. But something about that cake spoke to me. I had to have it.

I picked up the phone and called the baker. "My name is Joel Harfner and I want to order a Mad Hatter cake..."

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Once the invitations were in the mail, Luke announced that we needed to go register for gifts. "People will want to start buying us stuff. We need to let them know what we want."

He suggested we register at Williams-Sonoma and Macy's. "Can't we just do it online?" I asked.

"Do you want to choose china from a picture online?"

"We're getting china?" Was he nuts?

"Of course we're getting china. And crystal, too."

"Why?" I asked.

"Joel, we have a bunch of cheap plates and glasses from Target. Has it ever entered your head that we might want to entertain? Have the family over for Thanksgiving, or Passover? Have some nice dishes to serve the meal?"

Now I really thought he was losing his mind. "You expect me to prepare a Seder?"

"Sure. Why not?"

I just shook my head. Next thing I knew, I was in the china department at Macy's.

There were dozens of designs from all different makers: Lenox, Royal Doulton, Villeroy & Boch... I thought we'd never be able to decide but we both zoomed in on Nantucket Basket from Wedgwood. Yes, it's plain white, but something about the basket design appealed to our New England sensibilities. Plus, it reminded me of our wedding rings—and, it was affordable. I'm sorry, I just don't have it in me to eat dinner off a twelve-hundred dollar plate. Twenty-four-fifty is more my style.

Once we finished at Macy's, we headed off to Williams-Sonoma. "What do they have that Macy's hasn't got?" I asked.

"A few exclusives that I want to put on the list," answered Luke.

"Such as...?"

"Waffle maker. Cuisinart food processor. Special anniversary KitchenAid mixer."

Once again, I thought my beloved was losing his mind. "Why do we need all this stuff?"

"Come on, Joel, this is the one time in our lives when we can be legally greedy. We might not get all these gifts but, hell, it doesn't hurt to ask, right?"

In the store, I found myself admiring the candy apple red, ninetieth anniversary KitchenAid mixer. It was a thing of beauty with a price tag to match—three hundred and fifty dollars! "Luke, we can get a plain white one for a hundred dollars less," I pointed out, trying to be reasonable.

"We just registered for a dozen place settings of plain white dishes," he countered. "Let's be a little jazzy with the mixer."

"Do we really need a mixer?" I asked. "I don't even bake."

"You could learn," Luke replied. "Maybe having a beautiful mixer will inspire you—or even me."

I sighed. Clearly this was an uphill battle and resistance was futile.

After registering for a whole lot of things I wasn't sure we needed, we headed out into the mall, where, to my surprise, we ran into my sister Rachel. Turns out she was buying a new pair of running shoes. After a hug and a kiss, she asked us what we were up to. "Registering for wedding gifts," I explained. "Dishes and glasses and a bunch of small appliances."

"Oh great," she said. "Now I can be sure to get you something you want. Anything in particular?"

"Joel has his heart set on a new KitchenAid mixer—the special anniversary edition," Luke replied. I gave him a hard poke in the gut with my elbow. "Ouch!" he said, and gave me a hurt look. Sigh... now on top of feeling guilty about being greedy, he made me feel bad. I needed to figure out something nice to do to make it up to him.

"Luke, sweetheart... why don't you go check out one of the massaging recliners over at Brookstone?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"Just for a second... I have something I want to discuss with Rachel."

"Well all right," he said, and ambled off.

I turned to my sister. "Do you still have that Black Watch kilt you were talking about? The one from your old boyfriend?"

"Sure," she replied. "It's not going anywhere. Why?"

"I was wondering if I could borrow it. Do you think it would fit me?"

"Probably. What do you want it for? To make a surprise appearance at the wedding?"

I laughed. "No... for the honeymoon. Luke has become a little obsessed with plaids and kilts and I thought it might be fun to have... sort of as a joke."

“Sounds a little kinky, Joel.”

I rolled my eyes. “A kilt is hardly kinky,” I said. “Leather is kinky. Handcuffs are kinky.”

Rachel raised her hand. “You can stop,” she said. “There are certain things I don’t need to hear from my gay brother.”

I chuckled. “True, that. So, can I borrow the kilt?”

“Oh, sure. It’s just hanging in the closet, being eaten by moths.”

“Maybe I can pick it up sometime in the next week or two. Or you could drop it by the shop? I want to keep it a surprise.”

“Sure thing,” she replied. “I can do that.”

I gave her another hug and got ready to go find Luke when she pointed to the store. “Do you really want a KitchenAid mixer?”

I laughed. “It’s nice, but expensive. I wouldn’t expect you to shell out that kind of money.”

“Thank you for that!” She smiled. “Is there something on your list that is more affordable?”

“How about a place setting of china? Nantucket Basket, from Wedgwood. We’re registered at Macy’s.”

“Oh my,” she said. “You’re so domestic, Joel.”

I shrugged. “We all have to grow up sometime.”

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## Seven

A month before the wedding I had a meltdown.

I felt like everything finally got to me. The phone had been ringing off the hook: caterers, florist, baker, photographer, tailor—you name it, these people were calling. Why? I don't know. We paid our deposits, the checks hadn't bounced—I thought they would just show up on the appointed day and do what they were hired to do. But no, they had to call and confirm and reconfirm what we had already agreed to. When I was feeling optimistic, I tried to convince myself that this was the ultimate in customer service. When I was pessimistic, I was convinced that they were trying to drive me bananas. On meltdown day, I believed the latter and nothing could change my mind.

Probably the straw that broke the camel's back, however, was when the UPS guy arrived with a giant box. It wasn't wrapped so I knew what it was: a candy apple red, ninetieth anniversary KitchenAid mixer. Never in my wildest dreams did I think we'd receive this as a present. The plastic sleeve for the packing slip just said, "With love from Aunt Harriet and Uncle Leo."

I was pissed. More than pissed, I was livid. This was the aunt who, when I came out in high school, suggested to my mother that I might benefit from a stint at military school to learn how to "straighten up and fly right." Her husband, my uncle, was more blunt. He suggested my parents wash their hands of me and kick me out of the house. Nice guy, huh? I was fifteen.

And now they send me an über-expensive mixer. Did they really think I would use this thing? That they could buy my affection? I'd let Luke see it but my plan was to figure out how to return it ASAP and never let the damn thing touch a drop of pancake batter in my house in my entire life.

Once I got over that initial burst of anger I was depressed, and tired. I meandered through the rooms of the condo, looking at Luke's lists, the bridal magazines scattered about, the TV that was permanently set to the Weather Channel and... I cracked. I called my mom and twenty minutes later, I was sitting at her kitchen table, drinking lemonade and eating oatmeal cookies. I love my mom.

"Joel, honey, everyone has pre-wedding jitters," she cooed in my ear. Probably it is obscene that my mom coos to me, but it makes me feel better.

"It's more than jitters," I said. "I am sick of everything... it is driving me out of my mind! And this mixer from Aunt Harriet, but she can't even enclose a card?" My anger boiled up again. "What a fucking slap in the face." I reddened at that. I don't usually swear in front of mom.

She patted my hand. "I don't think she meant it that way," she said. "I think she was trying to make amends."

"And just send a gift without a note or card or anything? Seems a little rude to me."

My mother shrugged. "She's just my sister, Joel, so I can't speak for her. I can say that she seems to have... softened in her attitude since you were in high school. I'm not so sure about Leo, but Harriet is... coming around."

I snorted. "Well, if you say so. I haven't seen her ages... since she moved to... where?"

"Seattle."

"Yeah, there."

My mother patted my knee. "Seattle is a pretty liberal and open-minded place. It might have changed her viewpoint, a bit. All I am saying is... don't see her gift in a completely negative way."

I frowned. I was totally prepared to be in a bad mood and my mother having explanations of her sister being kind and loving didn't fit into my immediate mental paradigm.

I sighed, and she rubbed my knee again.

"So, Joel, tell me what's going on?"

"It's everything... the phone calls, the lists, the constant worrying about the weather..."

"Worrying about the weather?"

"Haven't you been paying attention? New England is in the midst of the worst hurricane season in decades. Luke is convinced that Hurricane Ida, or Mindy, or Odette is going to come in and blow P-town off the map."

My mom smiled at that. "But sweetheart, you aren't having an outdoor wedding so what does it matter?"

"We are having a *destination* wedding, Mom. What if people can't get there?"

She shrugged. "What if they can't? The only important people are you and Luke, right?"

I sighed. "I am just beginning to think this whole big wedding thing is a mistake," I said.

"It's not such a big wedding, really, in the scheme of things."

"What do you mean, not a big wedding?"

"How many guests are you having?" she asked.

"Fifty."

"Fifty guests... and hors d'oeuvres and cake, some dancing and champagne. That's not so elaborate."

"You're missing the point, Mom!" I was so frustrated that I could feel my anger building again. "It's still costing thousands of dollars, Luke is strung tighter than a string on a violin, and I am ready to wash my hands of the whole damn mess. Maybe I should never have proposed—maybe *that* was my first mistake."

"You don't mean that, sweetheart," she said, patting my knee again. "You want to be married."

"I do? We were living together. That was enough. Why did I have to go and wreck it?"

"You didn't wreck it, Joel." She stood up and got the carton of lemonade from the refrigerator and refilled my glass. "Being married is different than living together. You make a commitment to each other to stick it out, through thick and thin—and you make that commitment public, so your friends and loved ones can help you when the going gets rough—and it will get rough. Every relationship has its ups and downs. The good ones have more ups than downs, but no one is immune."

"That's why people get married?"

She nodded. "I think so. That's the way I see it, at least."

I thought about what she said and realized she made a good point. "Okay, I'll concede being married... that part was right. But the wedding?"

"A trite answer would be that you are too far in to cancel—if you did, look at all the money you'd lose. You might as well go ahead, even if it is stressful. But, I think there is a deeper reason for why we have weddings and why you, in particular, want to have a wedding."

I raised my eyebrow at her. "And that is?"

"Have I ever told you about when my mother got married?"

I shook my head. “Not too much. Just that Grandma eloped, or something.”

She nodded and then got up. She disappeared into the living room for a minute and came back, holding a small, worn, photo album. She opened it to a black and white snapshot of my grandparents: Grandma in a plain dress with a corsage pinned on the lapel; Grandpa in a dark suit and tie. They both looked very serious.

My mother tapped the picture. “I didn’t hear the story for a long time, either,” she said. “Apparently, Mother started dating a young man in high school—a good Jewish boy—everyone in the family was crazy about him. They were talking about getting engaged and then World War II interfered. They decided not to get married before he left because...” she shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess people really didn’t believe the war would go on as long as it did.”

“Let me guess,” I said. “He got killed.”

My mother nodded. “Yes, in the South Pacific. Mother was heartbroken and never thought she’d fall in love again.”

“But she did, because she married Grandpa.”

“That’s right,” my mother nodded.

“And she met him when she was selling ties at Porteus.”

“Everyone knows that part of the story.” My mother laughed. “He came in to buy a tie every week, then twice a week, then every other day and finally, Mother said, ‘You can’t possibly need this many ties!’ and Dad said, ‘No, I don’t, so can you give me another reason to see you?’”

I chuckled. It seemed so sweet... and so old-fashioned.

She sighed. “You know he was Catholic, right?”

I nodded.

“When they got serious, her family, especially her father, was furious. No way would they allow her to marry out of her faith. But mother was adamant—she had a second chance at love and wasn’t going to throw it away over religion. So they married, in a very small, private ceremony. Mother always told me that she hated doing that—as if she was ashamed of her love, and her husband. She told me once that if she had married Lev—her first boyfriend, the one who was killed—she knew her parents would have spared no expense to throw the most elaborate wedding they could afford. As it was, she was married by a justice of the peace with only her best friend in attendance.”

Mom absent-mindedly rearranged the cookies on the plate, then looked at me again. “Her father didn’t speak to her for years. I never met him until I was five, and I never saw him and my father in the same room together, if you can believe it. It wasn’t until I was older, and getting married myself, that I realized how unspeakably cruel that was.”

I paused, letting the words sink in. “So, what does this have to do with me, Mom?” I asked softly.

“Well, this is the way I see it... there are people who think that same-sex marriage is wrong... an abomination. You don’t need me to tell you this... you read the news.”

I nodded. Of course I knew.

“But there’s another group of people who... while they might not approve, won’t actively fight to prevent you getting married. They ‘tolerate’ you... go ahead and get married, but do it privately and quietly. Don’t put wedding announcements in the paper, don’t have a big, splashy ceremony... and I think those people are just as wrong. Joel, you are my son, and I love you. You are not someone to be ‘tolerated.’”



I twisted my hands in my lap. I could see they were shaking and I wasn't sure why. Something about what my mother was saying just hit me really hard, deep inside. It felt like a punch to the solar plexus.

"More than sixty years ago, my mother took a stand because of what she believed. You are doing the same thing. Go for it, I say. And do it in such a way that's there's no mistaking who you are, what you're doing, and why."

"So that's what it's all about?" I said softly.

"I think so," she answered.

"I never thought of it quite that way..."

"I know," she said. "That's why I needed to explain it to you. That's what mothers do."

I stood up and hugged her. "Thank you, Mom," I said. "I hope that if the day ever comes that I have a son—or daughter—and I need to explain things, I am as wise and thoughtful as you."

She pulled back and looked at me, a bit of terror in her eyes. "Children?" she said. "Are you and Luke talking about children?"

"Well, no," I said, "but it could happen. I know of gay couples who adopt kids."

"Joel, please," she said, putting her hand on my shoulder. "Let's get through the wedding and honeymoon and maybe a year or two of married life before we start talking about *the next big thing*, okay?"

I smiled and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Sure, Mom," I said. "That's a promise."

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When I got back to the condo, I saw Luke's car in the driveway, and my heart gave a little lurch of happiness. My mother had gotten me through my mini-crisis and I was ready to dive back into the final weeks of wedding planning, full of confidence and purpose.

All that dissolved, however, when I walked into the kitchen. Luke had opened the mixer and was rearranging the kitchen counter to find it a new home.

"You opened it!" I gasped.

"Sure," he said. "I guess I could have saved it but I was excited. Why?"

"I was going to return it," I answered.

"Return it? But we both wanted it. Why on earth would you return it?"

"Because... well, because it seems like a spite present from my aunt. I don't want it in the house."

"Oh," said Luke slowly. "Well, we can wrap it up again, if you really don't want to keep it."

I was about to grab the box when I paused. "Let me think about it. Maybe I'll feel differently in the morning." I saw the mail on the table and flipped through, ignoring the junk and pulling out a large envelope. "Surprise, surprise," I said, noticing that the return address was Seattle.

I opened the card.

Dear Joel and Luke,

Sometime in the next few days you should be receiving a KitchenAid mixer. It is being shipped directly from Williams-Sonoma. If there is any problem with the delivery, let me know and I'll follow up.

I was so excited to see the mixer on your registry. When Leo and I were married, 35 years ago, we received a top-of-the-line KA. It is still going strong and has become one of my most beloved gifts. Beloved because 1) we still have it; 2) it's practical and I use it all the time; and 3) it reminds me every day of my happy wedding all those years ago. I hope that our gift becomes as important in your lives as ours is to us.

Joel—I need to offer you a long overdue apology. I said some hurtful things many years ago and I realize now how very, very wrong I was. I am not going to elaborate—you know what I am talking about—just know that I sincerely regret my words and hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.

I am so sorry we won't be able to attend the wedding. Leo has had some health problems over the past few months and I don't think he is up to a cross-country trip at this time. Hopefully he can travel next summer and we can all get together for a long visit then. I want to see your home and Luke, I look forward to meeting you in person.

Have a wonderful day and I'll be thinking of you on the seventeenth. I hope you'll be able to send me a few pictures so I can enjoy your wedding vicariously.

With lots of love and affection,

Aunt Harriet and Uncle Leo

I looked up at Luke and knew my eyes were bright with tears. “I guess we'll be keeping the mixer,” I said. I handed Luke the card, but he didn't look at it, instead, carefully watching me.

“We will?”

“Yeah,” I nodded. “Now I need to learn how to bake.”

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Eight

Have I mentioned that my beloved is a bit of a Type A personality? Not as bad as some, but he is a little hyper and rather obsessive with his lists and making sure all the details are always taken care of. That's why I was surprised that he waited as long as he did to get our marriage license.

In Massachusetts, a license is good for sixty days once it has been issued. Since we were getting married on October seventeenth, we could have gotten our license as early as August twentieth. I figured Luke would be dragging me down to the Bay State on the first available opportunity, but he didn't. He kept putting it off, acting all nonchalant, like it was no big deal. I didn't get it.

Finally, after my little meltdown, I began to press a bit more. "Why wait?" I said. "It will be one more detail we can cross off the list, one less thing to worry about."

Luke nodded. "You're probably right." He pulled out his iPhone and looked at the calendar. "How about if we file our intentions on Monday, the twenty-eighth, and go back to pick up the license on October seventh?"

"File our intentions?"

"Yes, you need to do that three days before they'll issue the license."

"Why wait more than a week to pick it up?"

"Well," he said, tapping his calendar. "Monday is your usual day off. If we went on October fifth, that would only be two days, so we need to do it the week before."

"All right, that makes sense, but what's so special about the seventh?"

"It's just that right now, the day is wide open, so I can block it out and not worry about any inconvenient appointments."

"And where are you thinking we'll get this license? Provincetown is a long drive to go back and forth twice in a week."

"We can get it anywhere in the state. It doesn't matter what city issues it, we just have to be married in Massachusetts."

"Well then, I suppose we can just go to Lawrence, right over the state line."

"I was thinking of Newburyport," said Luke. "Make a day of it. Ride down with the top down on the convertible, go out to lunch, have a little fun. Forget about all the stress and worrying about hurricanes for a few hours."

I shrugged. "Well, okay, I guess... it's not that much further away. Still, it seems like a lot of effort just to pick up a piece of paper."

"A very important piece of paper," Luke said with a smile.

I smiled back. "Yes... very important."

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We woke up on the twenty-eighth to pouring rain and cold temps. So much for a scenic drive, I thought. To make matters worse, I noticed a leak around the chimney in the living room, and the stain on the ceiling seemed to be enlarging quickly. "We can postpone," I suggested, trying to sound helpful. "Go down tomorrow or the next day..."

Luke shook his head. “This is your day off. Better to get it done and over with, rather than waiting. Who knows what else might come up.” I smiled a little to myself. The old Type A personality shows itself once again.

We made it a quick trip and found out that the mini-Cooper, while not ideal on the interstate in the rain, still handled passably well, even with all the trucks throwing up giant sprays of road wash on the car.

We found the Newburyport City Hall without too much trouble (a lovely restored brownstone building, by the way, if you happen to be in the neighborhood). Even though we grabbed a parking place just a few hundred yards from the entrance, we were still completely soaked by the time we got inside—and then, to our dismay, saw a line with at least fifteen people ahead of us in front of the city clerk’s counter.

“There are this many people getting married?” whispered Luke and I shook my head.

“It’s the end of the month... probably people rushing to re-register their cars, pay taxes, stuff like that.”

Luke sighed and I shrugged. Nothing to do but be patient. He pulled out his iPhone and played Hangman while I listened to the rain pound against the windows.

Finally, it was our turn. The clerk, Rich, seemed a little harried but was still pleasant, instructing us how to fill out the form, checking our IDs, and taking our money. He paper clipped the forms together. “This will be ready on Thursday,” he said. “You can pick it up anytime. We’re open nine to five but only until noon on Friday, so keep that in mind.”

Luke nodded. “We’re planning on coming in next Wednesday.”

“Wednesday is fine. Both of you don’t need to come in again—it is just when you apply that the two of you need to be present.”

Luke seemed surprised at this. “Well, we’ll see,” he said. “Maybe the weather will be better than this for a drive.”

And it was better. We woke up on the morning of the seventh to a beautiful, glorious fall day. The sky couldn’t be bluer if it tried and there was not a cloud in sight. The sun was warm but there was a tang in the air... the type of weather that makes you feel like gamboling in a pumpkin patch or picking a few bushels of apples—not that I’ve ever gamboled in my life, but it was that sort of day.

I lay in bed, being lazy, watching Luke dress. God, he’s handsome—six feet, one hundred and seventy pounds, not a spare ounce of fat on his body. He has chestnut brown hair and brown eyes. He keeps his hair fairly short—sort of a corporate look, but then he is corporate, so he has to play the part. He reminds me a little of Jim Palmer, the Orioles pitcher. Luke was a pitcher, too, so I suppose it is natural that I would make that connection.

He put on olive green chinos with a muted plaid shirt. “You look nice,” I said and Luke smiled at me.

“I want you to look nice too... no jeans today. I made reservations somewhere special for lunch.”

“Tell me where?”

He shook his head. “Nope. It’s a surprise.” Luke rummaged in the closet and pulled out a pair of khaki twills. “Wear these,” he said.

“Yes, sir!” I answered. “And a shirt?”

He looked again and pulled out a blue oxford cloth. I chuckled. “You’re so conservative,” I said. “Can I at least wear the pink one?”

“Okay,” he conceded. He looked at the pants. “These are the trim ones, right? The ones that make your ass look good?”

“All of my pants make my ass look good,” I said with a wink, as I rolled out of bed.

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We decided to mosey on down Route One instead of the interstate, this time with the top down, stopping at the liquor store in New Hampshire to buy a case of Brancott Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand—my favorite. At the city clerk’s office there was no line and Rich remembered us. “Your license is good for sixty days,” he said. “Are you getting married here in Newburyport?”

“No,” I said, “Provincetown—in ten days.”

“Well, if you change your mind, I think our city is a good luck place. I was married here twenty-six years ago and still love my wife as much as I did on the day I proposed.”

I smiled and thanked him, and Luke tucked the license in his wallet.

Back out on the street, Luke pointed towards the water. “The restaurant is that way... a short walk. Let’s stop at the car and grab a bottle of wine. It’s BYOB.”

I raised my eyebrow. “I thought you said it was fancy?”

“It is,” he said. “Trust me.”

We headed off, down Pleasant Street, across Green, and onto Water Street, eventually stopping at a large brick tower attached to a house. “Here we are,” he said.

“Where?” I asked, looking around. There was a Thai restaurant in one direction and a fried seafood place in the other, but neither seemed to me to be what Luke would have in mind for ‘fancy.’

He pointed to the tower. “The Rear Range Lighthouse. It’s ours for the next four hours. Lunch will be served at the top.”

My eyes widened and they must have been as big as saucers because he laughed. “I’ve never heard of such a thing,” I said, totally flummoxed.

“Come on.” He tugged my hand and pulled me through the door.

We climbed the fifty-five step winding staircase, then the six foot ladder at the end, pushing through the trap door into what had been the lens room when it was a working lighthouse. There was a table set for two, laid with crystal and linen and a vase of fresh flowers. Two waiters stood off to the side and God, were they cute! I was beginning to think I had just died and gone to some sort of gay nirvana.

“Like it?” asked Luke.

“How could I not?” I answered. “It’s magnificent!”

“Let me show you something else.” He handed the wine to one of the waiters and asked him to put it on ice, then pulled my hand—again—through another small door out onto the catwalk that encircled the tower for three hundred and sixty degrees.

If the inside was magnificent, this was spectacular—a panoramic view, up the Merrimack River in one direction, out to Newburyport Harbor in the other. Looking west we saw the whole town at our feet and I swear, it was clear enough that I thought I could see the White Mountains of New Hampshire off in the distance, but maybe I was hallucinating that part.

“This is unbelievable,” I breathed. “How did you ever find out about this?”

“When I started doing research for wedding destinations, this kept popping up as a romantic spot.”

“Romantic is right,” I said. “I think you’ve outdone yourself... outdone even me.”

He chuckled, then took my hand. “Joel,” he said, suddenly serious. “Will you marry me?”

“You know I will,” I answered. “In ten days, in Provincetown.”

“No, I mean, now. Here.”

I blinked. “Right now? Get married today?”

He nodded.

“But what about P-town?” I asked. “All of our family and friends?”

“Well, we could have a renewal of our vows... or maybe get married again. Is it illegal to get married twice?”

I started. “Who knows? The question has never come up.”

“So,” he asked, persistent now. “Will you?”

I paused. “We don’t have our rings,” but before the words were barely out of my mouth, he was reaching into his pants pocket and pulling out a small velvet box. “Or our vows...”

“We’ve memorized them, remember?”

I paused again. “I suppose you are going to tell me that one of those good looking waiters in there is also a Justice of the Peace?”

“Not one of them,” said Luke with a smile, “but you didn’t notice the woman in the corner?”

If I ever needed proof that I was gay, this was it. There was a woman in there?

He looked at me again. “Listen, if you don’t want to, that’s fine. I don’t want to pressure you. It’s just that I thought... with all the hubbub and all the planning, I know we’ve been stressed. We can make this our own private wedding—keep it special and sacred, just for us.”

I turned my head again, looking at the view, seeing the harbor and thinking of the great Atlantic Ocean that lay beyond. I’ve never been much of a sailor, beyond the few summer sailing camps I took when I was a pre-teen, but the ocean has always been elemental to me and I have always felt a deep connection. I looked at the lighthouse and thought of it flashing its light, a beacon in the dark, bringing sailors and fishermen home safely to their loved ones. Then I looked at Luke’s dark eyes and realized that was what I was doing too—coming home to the man I loved. What better place to make a lifetime vow than here, in a lighthouse? “Yes,” I said softly, “yes, let’s get married. Right now.”

The smile that Luke gave me was probably as bright as the light that used to shine from the windows behind us. “Outside or in?” he asked.

“In, I think... I’m getting a little dizzy.” Plus, I’m not crazy about heights.

We ducked back through the little door and found the Justice of the Peace waiting for us, front and center. “He said yes?” she asked, obviously noticing Luke’s dazzling smile. He nodded happily.

The ceremony itself was pretty quick. We had memorized the vows we had written for ourselves and managed to get through them without a mistake. I’m not going to repeat them here because, frankly, they are pretty personal and I had been fretting about actually saying them in front of a roomful of people on the seventeenth. Now we can just keep them private, a secret among Luke, me, and the lady Justice—and, well, the two waiters, whom we invited to stand alongside us. The room we were in was about the size of a postage stamp—we really couldn’t

ignore them. Besides, maybe we'll inspire them to get married someday, too. They certainly were busy making goo-goo eyes at each other.

The Justice finished with, "By the powers vested in me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," and blah-blah-blah and then we were married. I grabbed my new husband by the face and pulled him towards me, devouring his mouth with a passion that made me feel like everything that had gone before was just a rehearsal—and maybe it was. This was definitely the real thing.

Lunch was delicious. I'm sure I'll eat pan-seared sea scallops, risotto, and asparagus again in my life, but I'm not sure the scallops will ever be as sweet, the risotto as creamy, or the asparagus steamed *just so* to the point of crisp perfection. We drank the wine and gazed adoringly into each other's eyes, not caring if we looked like a pair of lovesick fools. We had invited the justice to join us, but she declined, but to our surprise we found she had left behind a bottle of champagne, and we toasted each other with it over our dessert of flourless chocolate cake.

We stretched out lunch as long as we could, until there was not a morsel of food left on any of the plates or a drop of wine in any of the glasses. Finally, it was time to say goodbye. We thanked Ben and Glen (!) for their wonderful service and gave them a generous tip, then shimmied back down the ladder and the fifty-five steps to the landing.

Luke suggested that we might find an inn or a motel, but I shook my head. I wanted to go home and sleep in my own bed with my new husband at my side. The honeymoon could wait until after the event in Provincetown, whatever that turned out to be.

That evening, we ate warm brie on crackers and drank another bottle of the Brancott, and eventually I grilled a steak. We put on a romantic CD and danced in the living room, holding each other close and stealing kisses, playing our favorite game of "hands above the waist." It was tough because my cock had been hard for hours and leaking in my pants, but I knew the wait would be worth it.

This time I *did* have rose petals to scatter on the bed. Luke and I slowly undressed each other, marveling in our caresses, the touch of our hands on our skin. After many, many long slow kisses and explorations of my tongue on his ass he let me penetrate him—not our usual routine but we both knew we wanted this on this night, to seal our union and join our souls as one.

We finally fell asleep, spooned together, his strong arms holding me close and my last thought as I drifted off into unconsciousness was, *I hope every couple who ever desires to be married can achieve the perfection that we have had today.*

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Epilogue

I suppose you want to know what happened in Provincetown on the seventeenth. Well, I'll tell you.

It was a wonderful party—we decided not to call it a wedding, since we had gotten married on the seventh. All our friends and family tell us they had a marvelous time—tell us, that is, because we weren't there.

Once we actually got married, it was suddenly as if a giant weight was lifted from our shoulders. Since we no longer had to worry about whether or not the wedding would occur, all the stress that we had been experiencing flew out the window. Every last minute detail fell into place. The Mad Hatter cake was baked, flowers arrived from wholesalers all over the east coast—even the ever-present threat of hurricanes disappeared when the weather finally cleared after eight weeks of non-stop hysteria on the Weather Channel.

We had a rehearsal dinner the week before the wedding/party on Saturday the tenth. We had always planned to have that locally, since our families and the one non-family member attendant—Cindy—lived in Maine. We figured, what was the point of making everyone schlep down to Massachusetts and pay for an extra night in a hotel? A dozen of us celebrated at Fore Street, ordering our meals off the menu. My parents paid for the whole thing, much to my surprise. Thanks, Mom and Dad.

At the dinner, Luke and I confessed about our impromptu wedding at the lighthouse. I found out then that he had actually scheduled it months in advance. The lighthouse is in high demand for luncheons and dinners, which is part of why we ended up there on a Wednesday. He had always planned on the luncheon/license scheme; the actual wedding idea came to him a little later when we were researching officiants to perform the ceremony.

Fortunately, we had had the presence of mind to take pictures with Luke's iPhone and we had printed them off and made a small photo album from the day, which we shared with everyone at the dinner. My mother seemed a little hurt that we had done this, but when she saw how happy I looked in the pictures—and how happy I was *now*—she smiled and said she understood.

We were still barreling full speed ahead to the event on Saturday when, at four a.m. on Thursday morning, Luke awoke with a shout and a scream. I had never heard anything like it and was terrified that he was having a heart attack. He was pale, clammy, and sweaty—nothing like the healthy man who normally slept at my side.

He tried to tell me it was nothing—maybe an attack of indigestion—but I was insistent, helping him into a pair of gray sweats and a sweatshirt while I threw on jeans and a polo shirt. We zoomed off to Maine Med, Luke getting paler by the minute while I grew more frantic. Fortunately, the emergency room wasn't real busy at five in the morning and Luke was seen relatively quickly—we only had to hang around for four hours instead of the usual twelve.

It turns out that he had appendicitis and as the surgeon was fond of telling us, we caught it “in the nick of time.” He ended up in the OR, of course, and two nights in the hospital, but all-in-all his illness and recuperation was uneventful.

My moment of pure joy—amidst the hysteria—came when the admitting clerk asked me my relationship to the patient. “He’s my husband,” I said, holding up my hand and showing off my gleaming gold ring. “I can show you my license if you need proof.”

“That won’t be necessary,” she answered, turning the stack of forms towards me and indicating where I should sign.

Of course, then we had the dilemma—what to do about the party? We couldn’t really postpone it; the Blue Door only had two weekends left in the season and they were booked. If we cancelled, we’d lose all the money we had already spent. We decided to let it go ahead without us—we were married after all—and I think that was the right decision.

Back at home, on Saturday, I baked a batch of devil’s food cupcakes with vanilla frosting, using the candy apple red KitchenAid mixer—thank you Aunt Harriet! At the time we would have been saying “I do” to the assembled crowd, we connected to the party with the webcam in the laptop and dialed in with Skype. We said “hi” to all our guests, smooched a little which elicited lots of ooohs and aaahs, then fed each other a bit of cake.

That was about all the energy Luke had and he went back to bed, but I stayed online for another hour or two, chatting with our guests and enjoying the party. The Mad Hatter cake was spectacular—that was the one thing I wish I had seen in person—but my sister did a terrific job cutting it and saved the top layer for us, which we enjoyed a few days later. I know you are supposed to freeze it to have on the first anniversary but what can I say? We’re impatient.

We did have to cancel our honeymoon—Luke needed time to recover and certainly wasn’t up to driving in the car for hours up to Quebec City. In the end it worked out well—we realized that our six month anniversary falls sort of near St. Patrick’s Day—I say that with a smile, knowing how we changed things around—so we have decided to spend a week in Ireland to celebrate. Luke tells me that the Irish wear kilts, too... it’s not just a Scottish thing. We’ll see. Either way, I’ve packed the Black Watch—just to be prepared.

~The End~

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Author's Notes

While most of the businesses and locations mentioned in the story are fictitious or are used fictitiously, three are not. Street & Co. and Fore Street are two wonderful restaurants in Portland, Maine and are highly recommended. Dinner only; reservations strongly suggested.

<http://www.streetandcompany.net/home>

<http://www.forestreet.biz/en/Home>

The Rear Range Lighthouse in Newburyport, Massachusetts is only lighthouse in the world where you can eat at the top: a private, romantic location for two to four people. Reservations required; cost includes a membership in the Lighthouse Preservation Society. To learn more, visit <http://www.lighthousepreservation.org/dining.php> or call 1-800-727-BEAM

Thank you to Richard B. Jones, city clerk in Newburyport, Massachusetts, for information on obtaining a marriage license in Massachusetts.

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About the Author

After spending thirty-five years learning the craft of writing as a scientific and technical writer and editor, author E.N. Holland finally decided to pursue a lifelong dream to write fiction. She serialized two novel-length fanfiction stories online; positive feedback from readers gave her the confidence to tackle stories with original characters and settings. *Taming Groomzilla* is her first published novella. It was inspired by her belief that all people have the right to be married, no matter who they happen to fall in love with. A portion of the profits from the sale of this book will be donated to **Maine Freedom to Marry** and **EqualityMaine**, organizations that are fighting to keep same-sex marriage legal in Maine.

A second novella, *Our One and Only* will be published on Veteran's Day (November 11, 2009) as part of a four-novella anthology, *Hidden Conflict: Tales from Lost Voices in Battle*. It was inspired by visits to World War I and World War II cemeteries in Belgium and France in 2007. Ms. Holland has two other novels underway and dozens of ideas lined up in her brain. She lives in an antique cape (built in 1803) in southern Maine with her husband, two children, dog, and cat.

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