

A Trip To The Moon On Gossamer Wings

Getting Married



The date was Sept. 1, 1963. John F. Kennedy had two and a half more months to live. Richard Nixon had retired from politics the year before. John Lennon and his mates were playing a sleazy nightclub in Hamburg with a drummer named Pete Best. Timothy Leary was teaching at Harvard. R. Crumb was designing greeting cards in Cleveland. J. Edgar Hoover was head of the FBI.

Me, I was getting married.

What one wore to one's wedding was a tuxedo. Since hardly anybody actually owned one, they had to be rented. I got mine out on Pico, one of those long, palm-cluttered streets that plod monotonously from central Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean. My jacket was a shade of dusty cream, white being correct from May Day to Labor Day. Black was for winter, the more serious season, when treaties are signed and cabinet officers die.

For a flat fee, you got the jacket

(the shoulders were always too big and the coat hung from the pads like a tablecloth), shirt (stiff as formica), pants (with the black silk stripe running down the leg), clip-on bow-tie, suspenders, cummerbund (the ridges were definitely supposed to go either up or down, I forget which) and studs (little jeweled dumbbells which required the fingers of a surgeon to urge them through the tiny starched holes). You also got the proprietor chuckling over your upcoming marriage as he measured your inseam, using the same insinuating paternal tone that flower shop owners affected when you purchased a corsage.

Everybody looks terrible in a tuxedo except Cary Grant and people who look like Cary Grant. But looking good wasn't the point. The point was to look *dressed up*.

My father-in-law-to-be took me to his own barber the day before the wedding. I got a haircut, a shave (staring at the ceiling, my face covered with hot foam, the practiced strokes of the straight razor like a feather across my neck) and a manicure while the barber and my father-in-law-to-be talked about when my wife-to-be was just a little girl. Other customers joined in with tales of their children and how they grew up fast, too. A few of them brought out pictures and passed them around. Nobody spoke to me at all, which was just fine.

They looked into the mirrors reflecting mirrors reflecting summer Saturday, and they said the things they were supposed to say, *because* they were supposed to say them. Back



Decisions About Furniture

by Jon Carroll



shown fucking on a table for some minutes. The man kept his tennis shoes on throughout. The film was very scratchy. We ran it frontwards a few times, then we ran it backwards a few times (sperm retreating into the penis), then we tried to project it out the window onto the building across the street. Then one person threw up, and several more went to sleep, and Bob Carr and I took all the ice cream left over from dessert and threw it on the tiled walls above the bathtub and watched the pistachio and strawberry slump down the wall into the tub, leaving a sticky green and pink trail on the wall.

Bob Carr now works for the U.S. State Department in Afghanistan.

The wedding was called for one in the afternoon. "Called for" is one of those phrases that people seem to save in their minds from Big Event to Big

then, nobody had to make up his own lines.

The wedding was at the Airport Marina Hotel, a boxy structure off Sepulveda near the LA Airport. Lots of stewardesses stayed there. It was very new (indeed, construction had not been finished, and if you opened the wrong door you were likely to find yourself outside in a maze of boards and sawhorses) and the reason we were there, as opposed to the Beverly Hilton or the Bel Air, was that the Airport Marina had hired away the best caterer in town. At least, the mothers' underground (a mysterious and powerful organization, akin to the CIA but more ruthless) said he was the best caterer in town.

He made Chicken Kiev for 175 people, and it was very good. Maybe he was the best.

I'd had a stag party two days before the wedding, in a room we had rented at the Hilton Hotel in downtown LA, a comfortable distance from our parents. We had dinner in the room, 12 jovial college students playing at life, and lots of booze—bourbon and vodka mostly, mixed with a progressively peculiar procession of fluids. The high point of the evening was a stag film which my best man, a tall, pear-shaped fellow named Bob Carr, had purchased in Tijuana at great personal sacrifice.

The movie was called *The Shiek*. The alleged Arab and his lady were



Event. Called for. It sounds very classy.

We had to be at the hotel at nine. That was so we could put on our tuxedos, grease our hair down (somebody gave me a small tin of some super hair grease from Europe that retailed for \$5 an ounce; it made my hair look like a wet tire), get our pictures taken, and still have two hours to stare out the window.

So we sat there, me, Bob Carr, my father, her father and the three ushers. Conversation was hindered by the solemnity of the occasion and the chasm of the generations. My father talked to her father about the Dodgers. Bob Carr made a few jokes about misplacing the ring. Eventually, the rabbi arrived, said some professionally humorous things—the old veteran relaxing the rookies—and then drew me aside to sign the license. Then the ushers went out to usher and her father



went to his daughter and Bob Carr and I were taken up the back stairs to the kitchen, where we assumed casual poses near a cart full of dirty breakfast dishes crusted with scrambled egg juice and bacon grease. Bob Carr told me a dirty joke, but neither of us laughed.

When I was up in Monterey visiting my mother, a few weeks before the event, an older man had taken me aside at a cocktail party and told me a joke about a groom who didn't want his new wife to hear him pissing so he pissed down a hose into the toilet. I didn't understand it and when, some years later, I finally comprehended the assumption—that it's embarrassing to have a woman hear you piss—I was stunned.

The groom is the least important member of the wedding. He sneaks in

from a side entrance, looking like a waiter without a table, and shifts about uneasily while everyone stares at his back. There is nothing else to look at. None of the other principals have put in an appearance. I stood gazing at an EXIT sign on the left of the hoopa, which is that awning-like affair that covers the participants in Jewish weddings. Four violinists creaked away at lush arrangements of love songs from operettas. After a suitable interlude the procession began. One of the bridesmaids smiled at me when she reached the platform, and I looked at her legs as she went by. She had good legs.

Then the doors at the back of the



A Wedding Band for Brad

BARON WOLMAN



room closed and the music stopped. Dramatic pause. Then the doors were flung open again and here came the bride. Down the aisle, holding her father's arm gently, past the rows of bubble-headed women and crew-cut men, smiling at me. She didn't look so good—big weddings are a strain on everybody, and I could see the small nerve lines around her eyes — but it was still nice to see her.

That's the last thing I remember, except for breaking the glass. In Jewish weddings, the bride and the groom drink out of the same glass and then that glass is broken. Nobody else is going to get a taste of that sweet, sweet wine. The symbolism gets a bit muddy. I had a terror of failing to

break the glass—cuckolded at the altar!—so I really stomped on it, rattling the whole platform and alarming the rabbi. The glass broke, though.

After the ceremony came the reception line. I don't remember it very well either, except that I kissed a lot of women I had never kissed before and would never kiss again—courtesy aunts, wives of my old teachers, my mother's college chums. I don't remember much, I suspect, because I was acting and, like all amateur thespians, I was concentrating on my own lines. "Thank you, nice of you to come, thank you, I'm sure we will, thank you, I thought so too, thank you, thank you." Wet kisses and manly handshakes.

My grandfather-in-law, a Russian gentleman who speaks seven languages, kissed me on the mouth. His lips were dry and old.

We sat at the head table on a dais, looking at 175 people eat Chicken Kiev. We made conversation between the rituals. Mostly we talked about what other people had told us about how they liked the wedding so far. It was kind of like sitting at Sardl's and discussing the first reviews.

The photographer came, and we fed each other pieces of cantaloupe. Click click. Then the orchestra came back and we were asked to dance alone. Somehow we did it. Then I asked her mother to dance and she asked my father to dance. Then she danced with her father while I danced with my mother while my father and her mother danced with each other. It was a waltz. *One two three, one two three.*

Then we sat down and Bob Carr read the telegrams. Then we got up again and cut the cake. After dessert, the dancing began again. Uncle Sol, who plays the mandolin, sat in on bass for a tune or two. Waiters passed through the crowd with cigars and more champagne. Then the orchestra switched to a hora, and everybody ran around and sweated a lot in their tight collars and heavy dresses. The hora circle eventually extended out among the tables, moving right around the aunts and cousins who were busy stealing the flower arrangements.

Then we changed our clothes, separately; she threw her bouquet and everybody else threw rice and then we left. We spent the night in another hotel, ordering a full dinner from room service and watching television. Later we made love, because we were supposed to, but living together for a year before the wedding had taken some of the glamour out of the virginal mysteries.

We didn't have much fun. We weren't supposed to. Weddings are for parents. Because, no matter what they say, they *are* losing a daughter. They're *not* gaining a son. And if they want rituals they can understand . . . well, why not? We owe them a sacrifice or two.

And maybe someday your children will get married barefoot under the trees with guitar music wafting in the wind and extra-super dope to smoke at the reception. Just the way Mom and Dad wanted it. 🐾