

# *Delicate Limen*

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My companion and I decided to get married. He put the ring on my finger—a jeweler crafted it from other pieces of jewelry I already owned. Then we sat in an herb garden built high atop a mountain, watched a thunderstorm roll in, through, and past, and drank a bottle of Languedoc. There was a banana magnolia in lascivious full bloom behind us. Does time move in a spiral? We debated.

Coming down the hill, I slipped on my wet flip-flops and sprained my ankle. Was this a sign?

“Women are throwing themselves down the aisle. Our chains are made of daisies, I suppose.” This from a feminist Internet blog.

Well, I’m a feminist, but yes, I do like daisies.

At the precipice is fear. This is not profound. Of course it is much easier to speak of fear than of love.

The nineteen-year-old in me believed in signs. Now I believe in years of day-to-day contentment already shared; admission, concession and forgiveness; slowly changing to suit each other over the course of time; that is getting closer to talking about love.

To prepare, I read some wedding books.

Paraphrasing Martha Stewart: The bride stands at the center of the wedding, but the wedding doesn't belong to the bride. Everyone who sees her dressed in snow smiles quietly to him or herself. The bride affirms the movement of time, of life, of ritual.

Paraphrasing *Sacred Threshold*: The regal bride declines heavy beading and lace and opts for simplicity. Strip away what is superfluous: lavish flower arrangements, opulent modes of transportation. Take your place with dignity and grace.

The *New American Wedding* is all about expressing the unique heritage of the couple.

Did you know that expressing your unique heritage can lead to confusion? In the absence of a stated hierarchy, no one knew who they were or where they were supposed to stand. They became frustrated. People stood at the wrong times. One even walked back down the aisle after he had already processed. I wanted my brother to stand by my side during the ceremony, and to hand the officiant the rings. He agreed, but lamented – he knew he'd get comments, he said. What kind of comments? Oh, you know, I'm sure I'll get called a bridesmaid at least once. Or be told I'm the cutest ring bearer anyone ever saw.

Don't worry about it, people tell me. There is always some degree of confusion in a wedding. There are too many variables at hand for one couple to manage.

Your sister is having problems with the wedding. She is having problems with her sister getting married.

Weddings are very stressful. I never heard of a wedding that

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wasn't stressful.

This ship has sailed. You're locked in now.

My sister is an ungrateful – not once did she call and ask what she could do, or tell me she was happy for me.

The best thing you can say to a bride is Yes, And How Can I Help?

We have no money. The funds will come out of our parents' retirement savings. They want it that way. They want The Day. They want to witness the transition.

They can't witness the transition, it is not for them to see. But they want to celebrate it, they want memories to savor, airbrushed photos to hang on their walls. Fair enough.

How can we know to pledge a lifetime? An adviser told me: that's your goal. Will they feel cheated if our marriage lasts only, say, 10 years? Will I?

Every day is a choice. I might have taken it slower.

How much slower can I take it? Only a few years from 40. I want grandpa to be there. Our essentials are already intertwined. No harm in making it official.

I tremble to look at my groom sometimes. He starts stony and determined and his stubbornness makes me go cold. He pales at tears and consternated pleas. Then he rubs my chest and nuzzles at my lips. He fingers my shoulder blades and neckbones. He holds and whispers until I go soft, and melt.

Stubborn is only half the story. The other half is flexible and forgiving.

We bounce between the halves. I hurt him, but I wonder if I don't hurt myself more thinking about it.

Are we working out our problems, or stumbling upon fundamental incompatibilities? We are enacting classic gender dynamics. Playing our roles to the perfect pitch of cliché.

Honey, this shirt is full of holes. I like that shirt. Please, honey. OK, I'll change.

Your cousin is very anxious. He has never worn a tuxedo.

Tuxedos are like monkey suits. You only get one at the prom and at your wedding. What a racket. Time to buy a suit. A man should own a suit. It doesn't make him a man, but it announces that he is making the gesture to be a man.

I remember tuxedos at all the momentous occasions. Bar Mitzvahs, opening night at the theater, any Saturday night at the opera, my sweet sixteen.

Suits are for holidays, job interviews, and funerals. Tuxedos mean there is something to celebrate!

You mustn't even hint that your wedding is a mere performance.

Ritual is performance, and it can be quite sacrosanct. Do you think the pope is not performing? That you are not performing?

More from *Sacred Threshold*: The do-it-yourself wedding is the most authentic. Her aunties did all the baking, her mother made her dress, her sisters grew the flowers. The bride made the invitations from handmade paper recycled from scrap paper.

Lace indicates sensual undertones. Clouds of gold and mica dust stimulate the imagination. Beads pick up the light and throw it around the room in delightful specks. Scattered rose petals are the stuff of fairy tales.

Swarovski crystals are sold at the Disney outlet store.

The quest for diamonds maims their miners. It was De Beers

who marketed the diamond as the wedding jewel. Traditionally a sapphire indicated an engagement.

But I don't want a sapphire. For one thing, that's my birthstone. For another, who will know I'm engaged and not just wearing some random ring with my birthstone in it? Chalk this one up to a victory for De Beers—a very successful marketing campaign.

And what if your mom and aunties are well-kept women who gave up domestic arts long ago? What if your sister has problems with your wedding and won't answer her phone, much less grow a flower in your honor? What if your guests are staunchly leisure-and-luxury-class consumers who would be uncomfortable without their creature comforts and would see handmade paper as a sloppy amateur endeavor? (Mom and aunties are partial to Crane and William Arthur.)

We are all working together to make sure your sister gets through the day OK. She's very fragile right now, you know.

You must keep in mind, that even though she's 30, your sister has the maturity of a 13-year-old.

I have 13-year-old cousins who behave better than she does. It's more accurate to say that my sister has the maturity and psychology of a 30-year-old alcoholic, because that is what she is.

Why did we not notice it until now?

Why is everything, even my wedding, about her?

We thought she'd grow out of it. I guess it was just hope. You know, everyone parties, until a certain age. It's just that everyone else stopped partying, and she didn't.

Do you remember when she stole money from Uncle Bob's coat that one Thanksgiving? When she took all Dad's pain medication on Christmas Eve? The night she was blacked out, passed out smashed on the front steps of Mom and Dad's house, and they thought for

one hair-standing-on-end, anal-tightening moment that the worst might have – then there was that time she punched Lily. They'd been best friends for years. Challenged her in a bar fight? Threatened her with a broken bottle? Never saw Lily again after that. She was a nice girl. Loved your sister. It's a sad thing.

Until Sister moved back home, Mother flinched every time the phone rang. She got used to that kind of life, the one where every phone call might be the one that—

At first I imagined cotton dresses, bare feet, gray suits, a catered buffet, an extended cocktail party, my hair wild and long under a puddle of moonlight.

Now it will be eggshell colored pastel gowns, tuxedos, a plated, served dinner, my hair pulled up and pinned.

If I lived 150 years ago and I was upper class, this is all I'd be doing, day-in and day-out, planning parties and functions: invitations, dresses, music, entertainment, food, guest lists ... horror beyond my grasp until this experience.

Won't you be formally announced? Don't you want to make an entrance?

We didn't want gender-specific titles for our wedding party. We wanted to call them ceremony attendants and ceremony participants. I didn't want to choose who was most important, an old friend, a new friend, a family member. I didn't want to rank people. Gender-neutral, non-hierarchical. Except it was all blown to pieces when the bouquets arrived. Big, medium, small. Then everyone knew where they stood.

This from a ceremony participant: You got engaged the same year as me so that you could steal the attention back towards you.

Your brother can't come to your engagement party. He has a poker game. What? I know he's in your wedding party, but there was a mix-up with the dates. Well, I know he planned the game, but ... just

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try to be understanding, will you? People aren't perfect.

I find the beaded satin quite captivating.

We are so out of money.

You are so impossible, I can only talk about the weather with you. I will stick to the weather.

What's on that sheet is just a bunch of numbers.

A wedding is only a few hours of your life. Some folks just find a field and surround themselves with wildflowers.

Will you wear a crown of flowers?

No thanks. I'm not going for the Germanic Princess look.

Why did an adult commitment ritual get mixed up with a childhood fantasy? Maybe because women used to be married off as children? Now we have Tiffany-themed weddings and Disney-themed weddings?

If I was allowed to wear heels, Sister complained over the phone, I wouldn't have to alter my dress. But you won't let me wear heels. You're so old-fashioned.

That's right, Sister. No heels. They aren't good for women's feet. Chignons and ballet slippers. Put your hair up and like it.

I don't want your sister in the wedding party.

If she is not in the wedding party, I no longer want any part in planning this wedding. The one thing that matters to me is that she is involved in the ceremony. I'll get married, but you'll know that what I wanted wasn't honored.

Your sister is still drinking. No one in your family wants to face that.

What did your mom say when you told her?

That we're family. That we'll get through it together. That all she can do is hope that some good can come from it.

We will *not* get through it together. What is Sister doing to be part of the family?

Sister has promised that she won't drink the night of the wedding. She says that she doesn't want to look back several years from now and realize that she was the kind of alcoholic who ruined her own sibling's wedding. That's good news, isn't it?

You don't believe that, do you?

Do you feel a little creepy that our wedding is splitting your family apart?

This has been a long time coming, you know.

What tipped me off about Sister? She is thirty years old and has no relationships. She keeps in touch with no one. Everyone she has ever been friends with has let her go or told her to fuck off at one point or another. That tells you something about a person. She isn't thinking of you, or herself. She's slave to her drives. Her drives are capricious, whimsical and destructive. She's a liar. The worst thing about it? She's predictable, like a little pattern repeating itself, tripping itself up, starting over again, like a skip in a CD that always comes at the same moment in your favorite song, 3 minutes 42 seconds into it, you know it's coming, how can you enjoy the length of the song leading up to the inevitable disruption?

Your mother will never see it that way.

I know. That's because she remembers when they were One. When they shared a body. When the infant Sister was merely an extension of herself. Those boundaries are broken down during pregnancy, childbirth, infant-care. But they must be redefined when the infant

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grows, walks, develops a sense of self. Mother wasn't interested. Mother likes the feeling of Merge – without it, she feels vague, blurry, ill-defined. She can't get it from me anymore. So she gets it from Sister.

Sister cannot be in the wedding party. It isn't fair to knowingly give her more responsibility than she can handle.

I know.

Did you tell her?

I didn't have to. She's never been to a wedding. She didn't even know that she'd be standing if she were in the wedding. She'll process with Mom and Dad , then sit down throughout the ceremony.

Does it make you sad?

I can't think of that now. All I can think about – is that I am happy to be marrying you.

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