

The Marrying Kind
By
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Adam More, a successful wedding planner, has been having nightmares featuring members of the Bush family and characters from *Gone with the Wind*. His partner, Steven Worth, a columnist with the *Gay New York Times*, and even their cats, Vincent and Theo have been understandably concerned.

In the following excerpt from the comic novel about a gay couple that boycott weddings, Steven spends a typical Saturday and discovers what's at the root of Adam's horrible nightmares.

Chapter Six: Adam More and Guest

I felt that Adam's switch from Hattie McDaniel to Butterfly McQueen in his nightmare was a sign of a worsening condition. He could not recall whose child he was supposed to be *birthin'* but I guessed from his terrified response, it wasn't a friend's.

In the morning, when Adam crawled from our bed and stumbled into the kitchen, he reminded me of my typical waking self: he was groggy and unrefreshed. I begged him to call his assistant, Vanessa and tell her he was unable to come in. But it was a Saturday, they had a wedding, it was out of the question. After a long shower, a pot of coffee, and the Taleggio, porcini mushroom and sun-dried tomato omelet I made him and insisted that he eat, he assured me he was fine and that he'd check in with me from the reception. It was an afternoon wedding so at least he wouldn't be having a late night.

For me, I assumed it would be a typical Saturday.

Because my schedule is, to put it mildly, so much more flexible than Adam's, I do most of the household tasks. I grocery shop, I cook and I clean. Well, we have a cleaning

lady, but I usually end up cleaning after she leaves. I hate to perpetuate ethnic stereotypes, but it's been my experience that other people don't clean like Romanians do.

Fondly, I recall the Saturday mornings of my youth spent cleaning our bathrooms. My mother would mix a highly toxic mixture of Mr. Clean and Clorox, a combination so potentially lethal that I believe the Office of Homeland Security now officially bans it. She'd then give me the volatile concoction to scrub the grout in our tubs with. My mother would always open a window for me. "If you think you're going to pass out, run and get some air. I've pulled up the screen." She'd yell this down from the ladder where she was Endusting some mahogany moldings.

Fighting for air, keeping my head low to the ground, I'd make the bathroom sparkle. My brother usually got out of this chore because he always had an activity—first cub scouts, then boy scouts and later track and field practice—but I didn't mind. I actually loved it. I was conquering filth. True, the skin was burning off my fingers and my tender young eyes were watering as my lungs constricted, but you could eat off the floor when I was through. My mother prided herself on the fact that we could eat off her floors. Not that she ever let us do it, but if the dining room table ever broke or was stolen, we were set.

Now I use non-toxic, organic and safe-for-the-environment cleaning supplies. I feel good about the planet-saving choice I've made. But I must confess, the bathroom always seems a little dirty to me.

Saturday is when I do most of the chores. In addition to the bathroom, I run errands, go to the gym and basically do anything I can think of to put off working on my column. Fortunately, I have a large desktop computer at home, which is far too heavy for

me to throw out the window, or hide in a closet. So eventually—usually about fifteen minutes before I know Adam will be coming in and I’ll be able to stop—I sit down to write.

The sitting does not actually guarantee that writing will take place, but it’s a good first step and worthy of a reward. Sit for fifteen minutes with the *thought* of writing and I allow myself a cookie; twenty minutes equals two cookies. At the other end of the reward spectrum, I get a trip to Bermuda if I *work* six hours without a break (no trip has ever been awarded). Between the two cookies and the trip to Bermuda there are hundreds of potential treats, but off the top of my head I couldn’t tell you what any of them are. It’s been quite a while since I’ve actually sat in front of the computer more than twenty continuous minutes with the intention of writing. If I also included time spent sitting and aimlessly surfing the web, I’d have been rewarded with dozens (oh, all right, hundreds) of trips.

My diversion of choice, at this moment, was sorting through the mail. This minor assignment, which I thought might take two minutes, ended up sending me into an emotional tailspin.

I like to stack the mail into three neat piles: Mine, Adam’s and Ours. On this day, my pile included letters from People for the America Way, GLAAD, The Anti-Violence Project and Human Rights Campaign, all groups I’ve done volunteer work for (although, come to think of it, it’s been a while).

Adam’s pile had a notice about a sale at Barney’s and an ad for laser teeth whitening. The Our pile contained a copy of *Us* magazine. We both get a big kick out of the fashion police column.

There was a thick, hand calligraphied envelope that appeared to be an invitation. I was about to toss it on the Our pile, when I noticed it was addressed to:

ADAM MORE & GUEST

I stared at the envelope. Odd, I thought. Adam and I had been together for over six years. Who knew him well enough to invite him to their wedding, but wasn't close enough to him to know about me? I tossed the invitation onto his pile. I walked away and sat at my computer.

'Adam More and guest,' I typed on the screen. Good start. Eleven minutes more and I'd be having a cookie. But I didn't want a cookie; I wanted to know who had the nerve to invite Adam to their wedding without me.

Certainly, I thought, I could move the offending piece of mail to the Our pile and open it. That would not in any way count as opening Adam's mail. I would never do such a thing.

This was a completely different situation. I mean I *am* the *guest* in question. It's not as if he'd bring someone else. So technically the envelope was addressed to me. I'm sure you see my logic.

I ran and tore open the envelope. I glanced at the bride and groom's names, wondering who these strangers were. When I saw the bride's name, I dropped the invitation to the floor, dramatically (knees buckling, arms flailing) made my way to the sofa and collapsed. It was probably best that only Vincent and Theo were present to witness my performance.

I was angry—not my best emotion—but mostly I was just utterly confused.

It was yet another invitation from one of Adam’s cousins, one of Arlene’s endless brood of daughters. She was a woman who I’d talked with, danced with and had to our apartment for dinner. I was the one who went to Tiffany’s and bought the sterling silver cheese servers for her engagement gift. Apparently, she didn’t remember my name.

I began making a mental list of all the things she might have done, if in fact she had somehow forgotten it:

A) Call Adam, and say: “Hey, I’m really embarrassed but…”

B) Call Margaret, and ask: “What’s Adam’s boyfriend’s name?”

C) Call either of them: “We’re confirming spellings.” Only awkward if my name turned out to be John Smith.

D) Write to *Miss Manners* and find out what to do.

E) Think to herself: “Screw it, they’re just fags, who cares about them anyway?” and address it to ‘And Guest.’

I myself, in a similar situation, would have gone with option C. And it’s the choice she should have made because she would have lucked out. “Steven, yes. Just wasn’t sure if it was a v or a ph.” No one would have been the wiser.

The great thing about working for a paper that no one reads is that I can write about family and friends without threat of nasty confrontations with people when they learn my true feelings about them. Even Adam doesn’t read my column unless I put the paper in front of him. Not that I write anything bad about him, but he doesn’t need to read about every aspect of his personality that I find odd or quirky. I am particularly fond of the series of articles I wrote on Adam’s unique relationship to food. Most specifically his

view on the ideal temperature at which foods should be consumed. Aside from ice cream and watermelon, Adam doesn't believe anything should be eaten cold. For example, he loves rice pudding, but only if it's served room temperature.

'And Guest' would be a two-part story.

Week one: The invitation's arrival and the feelings of Steven Worth-lessness that it brought up for me.

Week two: My acerbic literary "regret" to the happy couple. Most of week two's column would have to be pure fiction, because I knew I would never actually confront them. I'd suck it up and attend the event as Adam's date.

I was at the computer, writing, not thinking about snacks, when Adam bounded in. He was very early. Too early. He must have forgotten something, and been forced to return home for it.

"Sweetheart, I'm Prissy!" He shouted with glee.

In my opinion, if one is presented with a set up as sure fire as *I'm Prissy* it's absolutely a sin not to deliver the punch line. My mind raced through a list of pithy retorts: *No kidding, Dr. Smith* was just about to trip from my tongue when Adam barreled on.

"We have to talk," he said. He was animated, completely energized. I hadn't seen him like this in weeks. Or had it been longer?

Filled, as I was, with *And Guest* outrage, I was in no mood for upbeat. "Yes, we do." I said, barely above a whisper. "Take a look at this." I threw the offending invitation at Adam, a gesture I immediately regretted. It was a little more Joan Crawford than I'd intended. "Read it."

He did. “My cousin Jessica is getting married. You knew that.”

“Yes, I knew that.” Was he blind, I thought?

“So, what’s the problem?” Adam said.

“Who are you taking to the wedding?”

“What?” Adam didn’t have the slightest idea what was upsetting me.

“Look at the envelope,” I said, but by this point I had completely lost my voice.

Adam had averted his glance when I spoke so he’d failed to read my lips.

“What?”

“En-ve-lope!” I mouthed, slowly.

He turned the envelope over and read. “Adam More and...oh.”

“Who’s your guest going to be? Because it won’t be me.” My voice had returned long enough for me to make this little jab.

“That’s weird,” Adam said.

“I think so, too.” I said. I thought to myself that I would have chosen a stronger word than weird—but Adam never swears. He’s told me on many occasions that the use of obscenities is a clear sign of civilization’s decline. He only uses the word “fuck” when he actually feels like fucking, and even then he’s more likely to opt for the phrase, “do it.”

I took the invitation from him and marched into the kitchen.

I generally post invitations on the refrigerator with a set of magnets that I picked up in a shop in Vegas. It’s a whole store with nothing but refrigerator magnets. I chose a series of mini Van Gogh prints—all the others were either tacky or vulgar. When I got

back from the trip, I showed them to Vincent and explained that his namesake made them. He purred loudly. He definitely understood. He's surprisingly intuitive.

There was only one available magnet on the refrigerator. The three others from the set were already affixing wedding invitations to the freezer. I placed the fourth invitation using *Starry Night*. "We know way too many straight people." I muttered, as I surveyed my refrigerator, now completely obscured by wedding invitations.

Adam came up behind me. He massaged my concrete shoulders and nuzzled into my ear. "I'm sorry this happened to you." He continued rubbing and caressing me. I wondered why he put up with me. He hadn't sent the invitation, his cousin had. I had acted like this was his fault. It's a pattern with me. I do this because he's the only person I trust will still love me if he sees my not-so-well-concealed dark side. Pathetic, since even with him I don't express my emotions well.

"Sorry for being a brat." I said. I should have said something more, swore that I'd reform. Be less moody and sarcastic. But I didn't. I was silent. At least I'd managed to get an apology out. I looked at Adam closely. I realized that he was excited, and had been from the moment he'd walked in the door. He was practically bursting out of his skin. "Why are you home?" I asked, aware he wasn't due for hours. "What do you mean you're prissy?"

"Not prissy," he said with a sibilant S. "Prissy like the character in *Gone With The Wind*. And I'm home because I'm no longer a wedding planner!"

Just as the word *what?* began forming on my lips, the phone rang. I hesitated, but habit made me grab it.

"Hello."

“*STEVEN?*” Vanessa’s voice was filled with dread. She was shouting so loudly I felt my eardrum ring. I pulled the phone several inches from my head to achieve a more sufferable volume. “I don’t want to terrify you,” she was still yelling. “But Adam never showed up today. Do you have any idea where he might be? Is he there?”

Adam tapped my shoulder, shook his head at me and mouthed, “No. Tell her no. I’ll explain later.”

I found Adam’s behavior baffling. I stared at the phone; I stared back at Adam. The last time I was this confused I was watching a Fassbinder film. My eyes pleaded with Adam to take the phone, but he kept shaking his head.

“Vanessa, he’s not here. I’ll have him call you if I hear from him.”

“Really?” She paused, sighed heavily. “He’s not there?”

“No.”

“Liar.”

“Vanessa, I’m not—”

“I call you. *You*, the definition of alarmist, and tell *you* Adam is nowhere to be found. And your response is not gasps, sobs or screams, I do not hear the sounds of breaking glass as you hurl yourself from the window onto the funeral pyre that I’m sure you have on hand for such occasions. No, you rather blasély respond, ‘I’ll have him call you if I hear from him.’ Steven, I don’t buy it. Put him on the phone, right now!”

I handed the phone over.

When Vanessa finally stopped yelling about the truckload of doves that instead of being perched at the ready on the rooftop of the St. Regis, awaiting their you-may-now-kiss-the-bride cue, were stuck in traffic somewhere between Stamford and Greenwich on

I-95, Adam spoke: “I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. I can’t explain now. Handle today, please. And I promise I’ll call you tonight.” He hung up the phone.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“I’m not going to plan weddings anymore.” He said this with intense passion and conviction. The statement was so strong that it would have been better suited if the words “plan weddings” had been substituted with “smuggle drugs” or “overthrow governments.”

“Why aren’t you going to plan weddings anymore?”

“Honey, I already told you. *I’m Prissy.*”

I was beginning to feel like I was playing Costello to Adam’s Abbott.

“I was on the subway this morning and I was sitting there dreading going to work and not really sure why. And I looked up and noticed a print add. A series of photos of beautiful beaches with equally beautiful couples, men and women, strolling arm in arm, kissing. The caption read: *All Your Dreams Come True In the Bahamas.*

“And suddenly it hit me. *Finally*, it hit me. I thought where are we in those pictures? What about our dreams? That’s what the nightmares have been all about. I’m a matrimony slave.

“Actually, I can’t say that. That’s not right. I’m not a slave. I was not forced into this. I did this, willingly. I’ve designed my life in such a way that nearly every waking moment I’m making dreams come true for other people. For straight people. Not that I have anything against straight people; some of my best friends are straight. But they’re not the only ones who dream about getting married. It’s a dream I have for myself, for *us* I mean.”

I felt tears running down my cheeks.

“I was practically at the reception; I was already over on the East Side. I got off the train and walked home through the park. And all I kept thinking was, how have I done this job, been so happy doing this job, for all these years? How could I have been so disconnected from myself? Well, I’m not doing it anymore. I absolutely refuse to spend another ounce of my energy creating events that I am *by law* not allowed to participate in. No more wedding planning. Not until we can get married, too.”

I was stunned. I don’t know why I hadn’t been able to figure out that this was at the root of Adam’s recent distress, but I hadn’t. Maybe it had never occurred to me because Adam wasn’t a particularly political person. I mean, he voted, but he’d never been a ‘take a strong stand on the issues’ kind of guy. That was more my thing, or it used to be, I had been a bit complacent in the last few years. Don’t ask me why, but I’d never once given a thought to his occupation and it’s obvious conflict with our lives as a gay couple.

I wept. I wept big, ugly, snot-down-the-face-and-gasping-for-breath tears.

Adam had seen this before, but it had been awhile. “Why are you crying?”

“Be-cause I’m—so—pro-proud—of—you.” It was messy but sincere.

I didn’t want the moment to become about me. But it happened. He got me Kleenex, held me tightly and told me everything would be fine.

“What are you going to tell Vanessa and Max?”

Adam shrugged. “Not sure. I’m thinking of changing the name from More Weddings to More Bar Mitzvahs. What do you think?”

We laughed and my tears subsided. I held Adam in my arms. As we separated, I noticed all of the wedding invitations looming large on our fridge. “Now if we could only get out of attending weddings.” I joked.

One should always be careful about what they say in jest.