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Nebraska's Wedding Crasher

LINCOLN, NEBR.

LAST summer I attended more than a dozen wedding receptions they were held in the vicinity of my apartment building. This was not by choice. In the aftermath of my divorce, I moved to Lincoln, Neb., and I certainly did not have the idea of "starting over" in my head. Of course this required renting a fantastically expensive apartment that had nothing in common with the suburban house my ex-husband and I had just put on the market.

The one I found was gorgeous (20-foot ceilings!) and quirky (it used to be the federal building — I'm living in what used to be the city's mailroom!) and seemingly perfect for the young, hip, professional single person I was turning into. And it was perfect, until the first weekend I was there. That's when the weddings started.

My building thinks of itself as Lincoln's premier wedding venue. I was not told this when I signed the lease. A glint of duck work sends the sounds of every single party straight through the exhaust fan of my apartment's bathroom, so loud and clear that I can hear the names of everyone in the wedding party as they are announced — not just in the bathroom, but from the living room. I can hear when people are clapping, can hear the claps as individual sonic events: I can almost always make out the crisp echo of the last person clapping.

About a third of the time with these weddings, there is a moment deep into the reception when the D.J. stops the party to say that the groom would like to dedicate a special song to his bride, and that song is almost always Sir-Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back." This, too, has happened several times: A bridesmaid and her boyfriend or a groomsman and his girlfriend stumble without even knowing the common doorway is a safe place to sit and have the conversation she needs to have with him right now, and the news of the people involved is named Taylor or Tyler. In each of these instances, Taylor or Tyler wants to know where this is going, and her mate partner is very confused as to why they have to talk about this right then when they were not even five minutes ago having a great time on the dance floor at their big sister's brother's wedding reception.

The girl every time has been tears, her careful eye makeup obliterated, face patchy with red. Both have been drinking; their words are stammered, the points and evidence they each try to bring up poorly argued. I can hear their entire conversation word for word, from my bedroom, as clear as if they were in bed with me.

The cake at these weddings is pretty basic. I know because I started going to eat the cake. I considered it fair compensation for hearing "Baby Got Back" twice a weekend and having to ask Taylor or Tyler to talk somewhere else. From my place, I could make out when it was cake time, and after hearing everyone either laugh (because the bride and groom had shoved cake in each other's faces) or saying "Awww" (because they'd chosen not to), I would throw on a black dress and head down the hall.

I decided I was subconsciously contributing to the event. In grabbing a slice of cake and eating it calmly while standing near some great-aunt as she tried to place this short, dark-haired, definitely-too-brown-to-be-a-relative guest standing before her, I was part of the Unique Package, "unique" being the quality every couple aims for because on what they're told is the most special day of their life, no one wants to believe they're a type.

This March, the reception space in this Lincoln's premier wedding venue was host to a wedding fair. At this point "Crocodile Rock" came on over his speakers. "Whoo, that's weird," he said to me.

"You say the same thing at every wedding," I said. "Sometimes you even play the same songs in the same order."

He said, "Yeah, well..." and then dropped his eyes to his laptop, as if there had suddenly been some iPhones emergency.

There is nothing like having a wedding D.J. ignore you to the tune of "Crocodile Rock" to make you realize how different your life is from what you thought it would be. Behind me, a runway show was starting to the tune of Pitbull's "Fireball." I turned around, and whether I liked it or not, they shimmered: a gaggle of young Nebraska women turned into princesses, each floating by me toward some interchangeable prince.

According to my bathroom door, Lincoln's wedding season is in full swing. I've been back for cake only once. My boyfriend went along with me. We left without eating anything — the cake, upon our inspection (red velvet), just not worth the calories. Instead, we wandered through the reception, waving to guests as they tried to place us. We signed the guest book as we left, hoping the newневeds would puzzle over our one-of-a-kind parting gift for many years to come.

"Industrial Modern or Bohemian Classic?" She added, "We're seeing a lot of unique things come out of those themes."

I overheard vendors asking brides the same questions and feigning the same excitement when the women said that whatever they did, they wanted it to be unique. Yet all the receptions I've witnessed in this building so far — despite every bride's best efforts — looked pretty much exactly the same.

At the wedding fair, I confronted one of the D.J.s — the cheesiest looking one, who'd set up all his lights and was using a microphone even though it wasn't turned on. He was why I was really there. He was the one filling my bathroom with the crisp echo of the last person clapping, and so

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