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Nebraska's Wedding Crasher

OPINION

BY JENNINE CAPO CRUCET

The author of the novel "Make Your Home Among Strangers" and an assistant professor of English and ethnic studies at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.

LINCOLN, NEB. **L**AST summer I attended more than a dozen wedding receptions without ever leaving the comfort of my bathroom. This was not by choice. In the aftermath of my divorce, I moved to Lincoln, Neb., with the idea of "starting over" in my head. Of course this required renting a fantastic 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 glitch of duct 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

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 in tears, her careful eye makeup obliterated, face patchy with red. Both have been drinking; their words are slurred, 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 com-

'Baby Got Back' kept playing. I deserved cake.

pensation for hearing "Baby Got Back" twice a weekend and having to ask Taylor/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 "Awwww" (because they'd chosen not to), I would throw on a black dress and head down the hall.

I decided I was subtly 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.

learned quickly not to say was that I was divorced, as this got me politely shunned from whatever free sample they were offering. "You only get married once!" they reassured me. Divorce threatened the very angle that has made weddings a \$60-billion-a-year industry.

"The Mason jar thing is so over," another vendor told me. My mouth full of bacon-wrapped dates, I asked what, then, is the new thing.

"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 bachelorette pad with a cacophony of reminders that lots of people were in love and happy, reminding me that I, too, was a type, a sad little rat scurrying around the fringes of a wedding reception, picking at leftover cake in an effort to throw myself against the glass-jar-wall of my new life. The life of a divorced woman who suddenly found the institution of marriage troubling but who didn't want to be *that type* and so started doing this *unique* version of crashing weddings that was actually not unique at all.

"Do you do a lot of weddings in this building?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, I do most of them, actually. I'm in high demand."

"That's great," I said. "Do you realize that everyone on the west side of this building can hear every word you say inside their apartments?"

At this point "Crocodile Rock" came on over his speakers. "Whoa, 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 iTunes 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 duct work, 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 newlyweds would puzzle over our a one-of-a-kind parting gift for many years to come.

times: A bridesmaid and her boyfriend or a groomsman and his girlfriend stumble down my hallway, thinking my doorway is a safe place to sit and have the conversation she needs to have with him *right now*. Typically, one of the people involved is named Taylor or Tyler. In each of these instances, Taylor/Tyler wants to know *where this is going*, and her male partner is very confused as to why they have to talk

This March, the reception space in my building was host to a wedding fair. I went in my pajama pants. "We make sure every wedding is unique," one vendor told me while gesturing to a Mason jar with a candle in it. I'd wandered over because she was giving out chocolates.

When asked, I told most of these well-meaning vendors I was a bride-to-be or the sister of a bride-to-be. What I

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