

7- A Wedding Blast

Every wedding has its own special feeling, its own brand of nuptial magic. John and I had all that and much more the day we were married, March 29, 1943. It was only a few days after his divorce from Carol had become final, and the month the film *The Moon is Down* came out. I do not believe there was or ever will be a wedding quite like it.

Carol had finally agreed to give John a divorce, and, just after a couple of days, as we were talking in our New York apartment, John casually informed me, "Well, Carol has finally made up her mind; she's going to get a divorce so I presume some day we will be married." Apparently, he had known for some time but had decided not to tell me until then. In March, in the duplex at 330 East 51st Street, John asked me to marry him. He was staring at the fire, with a drink in his hand. Suddenly, he said, "Honey, I guess now we can get married."

A few of John's friends, including the Howard Hunters, decided the wedding would take place at the home of novelist Lyle Saxon in New Orleans' French and Spanish Quarter. Originally, Lyle's home was an old Spanish army barracks. He had broken them up into two-storey apartments centred round a courtyard. He wasn't a friend per se of John's, just an acquaintance, you might say. Howard and Marge Hunter lived in one of the largest apartments. Howard was then Under Secretary to Howard Hopkins.

And so the wedding day was set for March 29, 1943. I was deliriously happy. Mother was very happy. All our friends were happy - even John was happy. We picked out wedding rings at Tiffany's. John wanted an antique ring, an old fashioned ring. We settled on two semi-round twenty-two carat gold rings- absolutely hideous. They would have made a fine set of brass knuckles! But that was what John wanted, and when he wanted something, he got it.

I went to New Orleans a few days ahead of John, and was a houseguest of Roark and Mary Rose Bradford. Roark was a well-known American writer. He did "Green Pastures" with Mark Connolly, and used to write the "Little B Plantation" in the old Collier's magazine. I stayed with them for my so-called "brideship." Meanwhile, Jed Harris, the producer-director, had latched onto John and was trying to get a piece of property for him to do a play. John called me every day from New York, usually around seven at night. He would be stinking drunk with Jed. "Well, we're on our way!" The next evening I would get the same call and the same message.

Lyle (Saxon) wrote John and told him that in the State of Louisiana a man had to be tested for venereal disease to get married. A woman does not. John was insulted. "It's only women who have venereal diseases," he told Lyle. He resented the test, and demanded that if he had to have one, then I did, too. His macho character again.

Anyway, after a whole week of bachelor dinners with Jed, John arrived, hung over but sober. He flew down after obtaining a special permit through President Roosevelt, because in those days you were bumped off a plane for the Army, Air Force or Navy. John arrived in New Orleans and then it was just one big party after another. Everyone entertained us. It was truly quite fantastic.

At that time, Higgins, the boat builder, was involved in making landing boats for American troops. Part of my wedding present was driving the bayous in one of those boats. We crowded into one and had a ball; it was one of many pre-wedding parties.

Every party I went to I started out with a beautiful dinner dress, usually a full-length and low-necked dress and with slippers to match. At one of the first, at the Sheflins (John's friends), no sooner had I entered the house than a drunk came over and poured a whole glass of Scotch down the front of me. As I sat in a chair, someone else came over and dumped champagne on me, vintage at that. The next party, I forget where, someone spilled a dish of shrimp jambalaya on my lap - all that shrimp and tomatoes and beans and rice. Yuk!

It seemed like everyone was giving us a party; it was one round of moving from house to house, and everywhere somebody spilled something on me, champagne, shrimp jambalaya, Scotch, Gin, all kinds of drinks all kinds of food. Personally, I do not take to champagne very well, always been a Vodka martini fiend, and I was allergic to seafood, and I am not particularly fond of crepe suzettes. My dresses got them all, and everywhere we partied we got roaring drunk. John did pretty well for himself, too. When John drank, he drank. And he sure could hold his liquor.

At one party I remember he sat down in a place of honor reserved for me, the blushing bride-to-be, (blushing?), and, hell, if it didn't happen again. This time, someone spilled a whole plate of crepe suzettes into my lap. My poor dress was a mess. We kept going, we kept drinking and eating, which was perfectly fine since it was a pre-wedding party, although a rather long one. We ended up on Bourbon Street, then a great wonderful place back in the forties, full of so much life. We hit a bar and I got on the piano, high up behind the bar, and sang with a bunch of colored people. They were wonderful. My dear dress continued to get sloshed with drink; all I seemed to do was to have my damned dress mopped up!

Naturally, all that eating, drinking and partying took its toll of the poor old human body system. "I've got to go home, John, I don't feel well," I finally said. An understatement. We headed back to the Bradford's house on Toulouse Street in the old French Quarter. That was another haunted house, yes, haunted. Like all Southern houses in New Orleans you have to reach it through an alleyway that's very small. We were staggering down the alleyway and I began to feel faint. When you're going to be sick you get a certain feeling. I did.

"My God, John, I'm going to be terribly sick." I managed to stumble out the words.

"For God's sake, let's go, kid," he said.

"What, and get stuff over the front of my dress!"

He broke up. "You gotta be kidding," he laughed. We both stood there and laughed, and then I started to faint. He carried me the rest of the way into the house and I let go in the courtyard fountain. That was an event in itself, a wild climax to the night before our wedding day.

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