

At a Welsh Wedding

by Finnegan Flawnt

The groom's grandfather was called 'Captain Cat'. Before his illness he had been the best friend of the bride's long-dead grandmother. Because of the Captain's former legendary sexual prowess there were rumors that moved the relation between the two families into the unchaste neighbourhood of a murky, primitive melange.

The wedding reception was held at the bride's parents' house before the ceremony. Visitors were slowly pouring in. Various family members worked together to set up the buffet and erect a pedestal where a couple of distant cousins were going to play Baroque music.

The groom was the Captain's spit'n'image: tall as a larch, large head spiked with black hair, deeply set yellow eyes the size of small oysters and secret as mussels behind long lashes some gone white already from heavy dreaming, some rainbow colored, making the upper part of his face sparkle in the right light, his cheekbones indicating an inclination to dominate and brood.

The bride was petite, blonde and busty, with a broad mouth full of happy teeth, given to chatter and chirping away all day long, her quick intelligence both cushioning and belittling her man's heavy impact, and though she was much smaller than he, she never had to look up to him: it was one of those miracles of close relationships, a reversal of the laws of the physical world, a rebellion of love against the lame truth of objective fact, a letdown for science.

The two had little in common apart from being Welsh - as was everyone else except Woshinsky, the only one of the groom's foreign writer friends who'd shown up.

I wonder what their kids will look like, thought Woshinsky in a thick Russian accent, which made the resulting image hard to

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translate even for him, who had gone from daunted to defender of the English language and the Anglo-Saxon way of life. As a poet, he savoured the fact that one's mother tongue could acquire an accent in one's head.

"I give traditional Soviet toaster", Woshinsky said to the bride, handing her a grey metal box covered with large, red Cyrillic letters and the picture of a happy socialist couple touching a silvery toaster as if it was an N-1 rocket. "Plug no good, sorry."

"Thank you so much", said the bride with a smile that lit a memory in Woshinsky so that he hastily added, "...and I write poem for you, Sonya."

"But my name isn't Sonya", she said, and her fiancée, who'd joined them to keep an eye on Woshinsky, whom he knew to have an unpredictable temper and a desire for infinity, said: "I think a poem by you would be wonderful, Woshinsky".

The Russian nodded. "Sonya - love of my life." The corners of his mouth dived towards the collar of his shirt. "She dead."

"Oh, I am so sorry", the bride said.

"You remember me", Woshinsky said, trying to explain. "Sssonya", he hissed like a sorrowful snake, who sees a tasty rabbit disappear in the underbrush.

Then he saw Captain Cat sit in a corner, his eyes closed, his head trembling slightly, clutching his wedding gift, a small laced up dusty linen bag filled with fifty pebble-sized diamonds.

The Captain was now considered a human liability. Doctors from London to Lima had pronounced their diagnoses with the common certainty of psychiatrists. According to them, he was manic,

depressive, schizophrenic, bipolar, paranoid, cyclothymic, borderline, or a genius.

They thought they had tamed him with the help of heavy sedatives.

"I really wished people had looked at our wedding list", the bride said to the groom. "We've got three toasters now and two pairs of leather handcuffs." She shot him a questioning look.

The musical twins had arrived and were tuning their instruments. When they heard that, the mother and father of the groom, who had met at Woodstock and conceived their son at Yasgur's farm, clasped their hands and looked in each other's eyes for images past.

Drinks were brought round by another set of cousins, this time from the groom's side, known to be practical jokers.

"I hope these aren't spiked", said the groom's father smiling, more to himself, with a mixture of hope and regret.

Woshinsky grabbed a couple of filled glasses, swayed over to the Captain, pulled a chair and placed one of the glasses on the edge of his wheelchair.

"You not look fun", he said to him. "Why they call you Captain Cat?"

The Captain opened his sallow eyes. He had once been a fierce dancer. He'd picked up physically unlikely moves in many ports and showed them off at his famous parties back home: events that usually ended with the local police in attendance, though more than once the neighbours, who had called law enforcement, were disappointed to see the sheriff himself take a turn with the Captain's wife and compete with the Captain on who could drink harder in an

atmosphere charged with untold stories from the world's farthest shores and memories that ridiculed suburban life because they were as stylish as sunsets overlooking a whale cemetery.

In the Captain's mind, affected by drugs, mental disease and family martyrdom, a synapse misfired at that moment, rendering the tranquilizers useless and reconnecting pathways that had lain unused in his brain for decades.

He knew what a proper party was supposed to look like, and this wasn't one. He eyed the man, who had brought him a drink that he wasn't supposed to consume. The Russian looked like someone who knew how to have a good time. And he smelled like a man who had lost his wife, too. He felt brotherly towards him.

"They call me Captain Cat because I had a woman in every harbor once", he said, enjoying the timbre of his own voice.

"Budem zdorovy", his companion exclaimed, raising his drink. They quenched the thirst of a lifetime and threw their empty glasses in the direction the music came from.

"Oh my dead dears", Captain Cat said, "what happened to you, my friends, my foes, my love at the bottom of a green bottle ship? What happened to the years swum by biddydum down the drains? Diddly diddly, set at nought." His head was raised high now. From his chair he surveyed the whitened room with narrowed eyes, breathing fast, a chained predator. Woshinsky crouched next to him like a wheel bug, his eyes bulging, drinking in every word, an ungainly sight.

"This music is shite", shouted Captain Cat, "shuddering shite, and this whole party is shite, too!"

He lifted the bag of diamonds and turned it upside down with one surprisingly swift movement: like little cockroaches, the jewels escaped and beetled off in all directions: "There, ya snuffling swine, truffles fer ya!"

The cousins stopped playing. It took the assembled a while to understand where the hollering came from and why the whole floor was suddenly twinkling with tiny stars. Then, like a well-trained platoon, they dropped to the ground, reached for the sparkling stones, their faces twisted, performing an ugly, unplanned choreography, man against man, apples and oranges rumbling among them after the buffet table had broken down.

"Stop!" cried Woshinsky, who alone stood now among the contorted, wiggling bodies, pulled a French Apache revolver out of his jacket and shot in the ceiling: "Fuck money!"

The happy couple did not hear the discharge. In the chaos following the old man's outburst they snuck out, holding hands, glad to desert the rubbish. Between their legs, the groom had gone hard and the bride had gone wet: their bonding had begun. They were abandoning the shadows of doubt for their own place in the light.

And Captain Cat, sunk back in his wheelchair like a submarine without torpedos, mumbled, with the voice of a preacher, "We are not wholly bad or good, who live our lives under Milk Wood."

