

THE WEDDING

by Ron Burch

I am at a wedding with a new girlfriend. The bride is her old college roommate. I don't really know anyone else here.

The wedding is being held at a huge estate, located on the edge of enormous cliffs that overlook the ocean. Despite the danger of this precarious situation, no barriers have been put into place along the cliff's edge. A mother holds on tightly to her impatient three year old son. The wind off the ocean occasionally whips through the wedding party, upsetting the arranged flowers and wildly ruffling the purple satin dresses of the patient bridesmaids.

The priest stands with his back a few yards away from the cliff and ocean. The bride and groom nervously face him, slowly reciting their vows. The groom fumbles the ring but catches it before it hits the ground.

Behind the priest, the sun, in glorious colors, begins to sink towards evening. A photographer in a black suit is quickly snapping his camera to capture this picturesque moment.

We sit in metal lawn chairs watching the ceremony. To our right side, an older matronly woman, in a plain beige dress and straw hat, plays an organ. A couple of women are sobbing. One man, the bride's father, sits, looking grim, the fingers of his hands knotted together. Next to him, his wife cries into a white handkerchief.

The bride and groom kiss. The spectators politely applaud.

Suddenly, the bride and groom break away from the priest and run towards the edge of the cliff, flinging themselves off.

I stand up and shout but the others look at me quizzically. My girlfriend even pulls on my sleeve to get me to sit down. Without any concern, the wedding party begins to gather around a buffet table, piling food on disposable plates, gathering plastic silverware, quietly conversing about how beautiful the ceremony was. The organist grandly plays sentimental songs.

I walk to the edge of the cliff and apprehensively peer over the edge. I can't see if the bodies of the bride and groom are on the rocks below.

My girlfriend playfully surprises me by giving me a small push from behind. She grabs me and entwines her arm around mine. Looking at me with expectant eyes and a smile, she leads me back to the wedding party.

The organist plays on.

