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WEDDINGS

Run Away, Groom! Prudie's advice for how to tame the bride from hell.

By Emily Yoffe

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When did getting married become an exercise in acquired situational narcissism? This is a recently named psychiatric disorder, generally striking celebrities, characterized by grandiosity, lack of empathy, and rage. Based on the wedding-related mail I receive for the "[Dear Prudence](#)" column, an engagement appears to be another trigger for this adult-onset malady. Before entering into holy matrimony, brides seem to think it's acceptable to spend months—sometimes years—giving holy hell to everyone. Abused bridesmaids, perplexed grooms, and appalled parents complain endlessly about the personality changes that otherwise lovely young women undergo when they start arranging "my day."

Is there anything more revealing than the phrase—uttered with a stamping of the foot and a rising of the voice—"my day"? Of course it's not "our day," because the groom is merely an accessory, like a cake topper. The first time a bride-to-be utters the words "my day," I recommend potential bridesmaids and grooms respond, "Mayday."

The "my day" syndrome has become so extreme that some brides seem inspired by dictators who declare holidays in honor of themselves. Take this bride, who after more than a year of planning her wedding—still months away—was told one of her bridesmaids and the best-man-to-be were getting married, too. Outraged that her friends had chosen a wedding date three weeks before hers, she wrote, "I am not one of those brides who think that I 'own' the whole summer—but three weeks before? And their wedding is going to be bigger, fancier, and include roughly half of the same guest list." When she's ready for children, will this bride instruct her friends to stay on the Pill, lest they give birth to a baby—bigger and prettier—weeks before she does?

Weddings were once the place for loved ones to witness the union of the bride and groom. All guests—be they halt, lame, blind, or colorblind—were welcome. But now some brides see themselves as auteurs and their guests merely extras on the production set. How else to explain the letter I received from a groom-to-be who signed himself "Under Moral Siege." His dear female friend, who wears thick glasses, had been selected as a bridesmaid. But the bride insisted this bridesmaid leave her glasses at home because "glasses are an inappropriate accessory for women's formalwear, and the bridal magazines have convinced her that there can be no exceptions to the no-glasses rule." It makes me hope that as the groom tries to explain this to his friend, he'll find himself looking deep into her Coke-bottle lenses, suddenly declare, "Why, Miss Keeler, you're beautiful!" and run away with her.

Then there's this woman who received these instructions in a wedding invitation: "The bride respectfully asks all guests to please dress in either dark blue, forest green, or black ... so no guest will stand out against the tablescapes." The letter writer explained she had no dress in those colors, nor the money to purchase one. I say let your cerulean gown provide a memorable accent. After all, while I have seen people leave formal events with the centerpieces, I have never been to an event in which the guests *were* the centerpieces.

Someone else's wedding rarely encompassed more than one or two entries on your calendar. Today's wedding has more acts than "[The Ring Cycle](#)." One guest wondered whether she needs to attend all six (yes, six) of her friend's showers and bring a gift to each (answer: No!). And the "honor" of being a bridesmaid is akin to signing enlistment papers. The bride's equivalent of, "Drop and give me 40, maggot!" is to whine, "You aren't there for me" [see also: my day]. One recruit, I mean bridesmaid, who has been through two years of planning for her friend's wedding says, "We have already thrown her an elaborate shower and I think she's anticipating an equally festive bachelorette party, and enthusiastic attendance at at least three other wedding functions besides the actual ceremony and reception." But

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what truly signaled that things had spiraled out of control was the bride's asking "why I was still breastfeeding my 8-month-old, if it was going to be a problem to leave her for 12 hours on the wedding day."

In other words, "Stop breast-feeding, maggot!"

In *A Short History of Rudeness*, author Mark Caldwell describes how a proper wedding, as detailed in etiquette books at the end of the 19th century, was "a simple, practical, and dignified rite, veering into impropriety as soon as it became too obsessed with getting the details 'right' or slathering on a too-thick layer of pageantry." One manual looked dubiously at wedding gifts—the ritual "has now degenerated into a very bold display of wealth and ostentatious generosity, so that friends of moderate means are afraid to send anything."

Fortunately, modern couples can put friends of moderate means on a payment plan. Couples now ask for wedding "gifts," via PayPal, for their honeymoon, house down payment, and student-loan funds. One letter writer said the couple specified they were looking for \$30,000, preferably paid in increments of \$50 or more. Perhaps for guests who are short on cash, they can offer services for, say, installing drywall in the new house or scrubbing the toilets for a month.

Unfortunately, a bride's acquired situational narcissism doesn't necessarily recede after "my day." One bewildered husband of two years says, "Some of our friends did not give us wedding presents. My wife believes it has affected her relationships with them, and also thinks that maybe they are feeling guilty about it, as well. I suggested she e-mail them and say she is finishing up her 'thank you' notes and wasn't sure if we got a present from them. Or perhaps something more direct is in order? Or maybe she can just forget the whole thing?"

Oh, how this man is struggling. He wants to be sensitive and supportive. He hasn't read the bridal magazines, so he's thinking maybe, just maybe, it's acceptable to send dunning letters, like a debtcollection agency, to your friends asking where their gifts are. But he also suspects the right answer is "forget the whole thing." To him I say that being a good husband (or a good wife) means telling your spouse when she (or he) starts sounding like a nut job. That becomes harder to do when you realize you are married to someone who resembles [Miss Havisham](#), condemned to forever be psychologically trapped reliving "my day."

There is something positive in this wedding mania: It provides a warning system, like one seen on the African savannah. When approached by lions, certain gazelles engage in a strange practice called "stotting." Instead of running away, they jump stiffly in place. Animal behaviorists interpret this as a signal from the gazelle to the lion that means, "I am so fast that if you chase me, you won't catch me, so chasing me will be a waste of your time." I'd contend that the most egregious brides engage in a sort of prenuptial stotting, signaling to the groom: "You can go ahead and marry me, but observe my behavior now and don't ever say I didn't warn you that I'm a lunatic."

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