

Celia Laskey

Spring Snow

Sharon and Renee, our friends who had just gotten married, invited Jules and me over for dinner. I told them to come to our place; we'd cook for them since we had to miss the wedding and all. But they wanted us to see the new house and all the pictures so we said okay, we'd go to their place. We'd bring dessert and a nice bottle of wine or few. It was a couple months after the ceremony when we finally ended up going, when they were back from their honeymoon and we were back from Argentina. Where did those couple months go? God, I don't even know where the time has gone since.

I remember the night when Renee came to the bar and held her left hand out like a straight woman, almost poking my eye out with that hunk of diamond as she jumped up and down. Sharon had popped the question at their favorite restaurant the night before. I always thought that was a weird expression, to *pop* to the question. Like a gun was being held to the person's head who had to say yes or no. I'd also always thought that Sharon and Renee would take some liberties with the whole marriage process, saying no thanks to churches and tradition, since they never any interest in either. But they went right along following in the predictable footsteps of a bunch of people who would rather see them marrying men instead of each other. I gulped down some whiskey and told her yes, the proposal sounded just right, and boy, was that ring something.

The day before dinner, running in the park with everything green and blooming, I asked Jules what kind of dessert we should make.

She let out a tight laugh and I couldn't tell if it was because we were nearing the hill or because she was pissed. "Oh, what dessert should *we* make?" she asked, her tone jokey but now I knew she was a little mad.

"I'll help," I said, and when she responded just by looking at me, her eyebrows raised, I revised. "I'll make it," I said.

"Okay," she said, pulling the corners of her mouth down and then sticking out her bottom lip, her gesture that meant "I doubt it."

"So what should *I* make?" I asked, squeezing her shoulder and putting my face close to hers, our heads bobbing incongruously as we ran at different paces. "What about some jell-o? Or some flambéed bananas?" I joked. She broke out into a real laugh.

"You're right, you're right. I'll make dessert," she said, taking my hand from her shoulder and kissing it. "Now let me focus on hating my life for the next few minutes," she said as we neared the hardest part of the hill. I watched her as she exhaled in long streams, making an O with her mouth. Her cheeks got redder, her chestnut ponytail swung in wider arcs, her small breasts bounced subtly. Six years and I still loved looking at her. Loved being with her. Our friends constantly asked us when we were going to "tie the knot." Again, what an expression. I pictured Boy Scouts running around us, wrapping our bodies in twine and tying knot after knot until we were trussed up like a pork tenderloin headed for the oven. We weren't married because we didn't want to be married. We hadn't made a hard and fast rule about it or anything, but we were content. We saw friends emptying out their measly savings accounts, running down the altar after being together for less than a year, and

for what? To maybe stay together forever or to maybe split up, the same outcome as before. Maybe it was because we were gay, but I guess we thought we were a little above all that hubbub.

Sharon and Renee had bought an old townhouse in Windsor Terrace a few months before the wedding, and had it gut renovated so that it was ready by the time they officially became Mrs. and Mrs. Brennan-Fields. Their parents, of course, had covered the down payment and renovation costs. As we walked over from our one bedroom in South Slope, we wondered to each other what it would look like from the outside. San Francisco-style pastel with a front porch? Ultra modern with natural wood paneling? Classic brick with white shutters? We turned onto their street, Windsor Place, and our eyes scanned the buildings, trying to find the one that stood out as Sharon and Renee's. As we got closer to the address that I had scribbled on a post-it, none of the buildings seemed to be newly renovated. Finally we stood in front of 211 Windsor Place and looked at each other.

“Maybe they gave us the wrong address,” Jules said.

“Yeah, or maybe I misheard them or wrote it down wrong,” I said.

We stood there, taking in the house. It had a porch, but it sure wasn't San Francisco style. It was covered in that faux-stone siding that was falling off in huge fleshy peels to reveal black rotten wood underneath. In the front “lawn” sat a pea-green toilet.

The door opened and Renee stepped out, a potholder over her right hand as she waved. “Hi guys, you've got the right one! It looks like shit from the outside, I know,” she said, waving us inside. We tried to hide our judgment as we walked up the sagging front steps. But as soon as we stepped past the front door our impression flip-flopped.

“Jesus, was HGTV here?” asked Jules, smacking Renee's arm.

Renee laughed. “Yeah, we kind of blew our whole budget on the inside of the house.” It did look pretty nice, but something about it was off-putting. Jules was right; it was like an HGTV model house. A shade of gray paint on the walls, red throw pillows, stainless steel this and that in the kitchen. I didn’t see anything about it that seemed to be Sharon and Renee. Maybe they hadn’t put their own touches on it yet, or maybe it was exactly what they wanted.

Sharon came downstairs holding what looked like a small white dog, until I heard it snort. “Meet Eugene,” she said, holding the tiny pig out to us.

“Is this one of those teacup pigs?” I asked, holding my pointer finger out to touch its moist snout.

Sharon nodded and set him down on the floor. “Watch this,” she said, pulling a baby carrot out of her pocket. “Sit.” She held the carrot slightly above the pig’s head. “Sit, Eugene.” And then he sat. She gave him the carrot and he crunched it happily.

“That is too weird and cute,” said Jules, squatting down and scratching under his chin. I didn’t see the point. If the pig was going to act exactly like a dog, why not just get a dog?

“Well come on in,” said Renee, taking the paper bag I was holding. “What do we have here?”

“A few bottles of Malbec, and a rosemary olive-oil pound cake with chocolate chips, baked by yours truly,” I said, looking at Jules mischievously.

“Yeah right!” said Renee. “Thanks, Jules. Now, first things first.” She pulled out a bottle of Malbec and we all sat at the marble bar that separated the kitchen from the living room. She poured four glasses and I was about to take a good glug of mine until Jules raised her glass.

“To the newlyweds,” she said. We all clinked and I tried to look happy for them. I was happy for them, but I would have been even if they didn’t get married.

“Oh my god, this is nice,” said Renee, puckering her lips happily and swirling the wine in her glass.

“We drank so much of it in Mendoza,” said Jules. “It was good to take a break from it for a couple months before having it again.”

“Mm, I don’t think I’d ever get sick of this,” said Renee, almost guzzling her glass.

“We’ll bring you more the next time we hang out,” said Jules. “It was dirt cheap down there.”

Renee poured more wine and Sharon stood up to go stir the pots on the stove. “I wish we had this malbec when I was cooking the coq au vin,” said Sharon. “I used a crappy pinot noir from the place on seventh ave.”

“You guys have a Le Creuset?” Jules squealed, watching Sharon as she removed the thick top from the dutch oven.

“Wedding gifts,” said Sharon. “They’re the best.”

“Well I guess that’s the only way I’d get one of those things. I couldn’t bring myself to spend my own money on it,” said Jules. I watched her admire the dutch oven. It was a pot, for Christ’s sake. I didn’t see what was so special about it. She had never mentioned wanting one before, but the way she was looking at it, you would have thought not having one was the thing holding her back from the good life.

Sharon announced that the food was ready and we all moved to the table. Renee opened another bottle of Malbec and Sharon served huge portions of coq au vin over egg noodles. As soon as we settled into eating, Jules said, “Sooooo. Tell us about the wedding!”

“It was a whirlwind,” said Renee, shaking her head, her eyes floating to rest on some point on the ceiling.

“A whirlwind?” said Sharon through a mouthful of chicken. “More like a tornado!”

“But a perfect one,” said Renee. They looked at each other and smiled, and Sharon reached over to squeeze Renee’s hand.

I felt something cold and wet on my ankle and jumped. I looked under the table and the pig squealed at me, jamming his nose into my shin.

“Sorry about Eugene,” said Sharon. “You’re in his chair.” Sharon looked at Renee like she was the one to blame for it.

“You let him sit at the table?” I asked Renee, pushing the pig away with my foot.

Renee leaned down and titted at the pig to get him to come to her, then picked him up and put him in her lap. “Yes, I let him sit at the table, don’t I?” she said to him. He snorted happily as she fed him another carrot from her pocket. Sharon shook her head and looked at us as if to say sorry.

“So you were telling us about the wedding,” said Jules.

They pondered for a second, and then Renee laughed. “My brother got wasted and made a ridiculous speech, of course,” she said.

“Bobby,” I said smiling, “How is he doing?”

“Oh, you know, he’s in the process of getting his fifth MFA for god knows what,” said Renee, absentmindedly twirling her ring with her thumb. “I don’t know if he’ll ever settle into something.”

“He always seems happy though,” I said, chasing an egg noodle with my fork. “I’m sad we missed that speech.”

“I’m sure we have a recording of it somewhere,” said Renee.

“What about pictures?” asked Jules. “Or should we wait until we’re finished eating?”

“Naw, go ahead and look at them now. They’re all on the iPad,” said Sharon, getting up to grab it from the couch. She swiped it a few times and then handed it to Jules. Jules scooted her chair closer to mine so I could see the pictures too. I reluctantly leaned in to look. At the first picture, I almost burst out laughing. Now, Sharon and Renee were our dear friends. But why, when they were both some of the biggest butches we knew, did they insist on wearing white wedding gowns? Sharon, with her elvis hair, round face, and broad shoulders, looked like a two-year-old boy that had been whisked out of the bathtub and stuffed into a wedding dress. And Renee, with her twiggy frame and hint of a moustache, was like a pre-pubescent 13-year-old boy forced into a dress as a joke by the football jocks. Jules had a saying for when a lesbian wearing a dress just looked wrong: Dyke in a Dress. And boy, was this picture the epitome of that. I couldn’t wait to crack up about it with Jules back at home. But at that moment, I caught my laugh and turned it into a cough.

“Aw, look at you guys, all married and stuff,” I said, knowing they were waiting for some kind of reaction.

After a few seconds, Jules said, “You both look so happy.” She was good at knowing what to say, unlike me. It was nice having her at my side. Sometimes when I went to get-togethers and she wasn’t there, I found myself standing silently after people asked me questions, waiting for Jules to swoop in with just the right answer.

The rest of the night passed with more wedding talk, and then us telling them about our vacation to Argentina. I showed them a few pictures from my phone, of us driving through watercolor-drenched mountains in Salta, walking through vineyards with red-stained lips in Mendoza. I couldn’t help but notice how naturally happy we looked in our vacation photos. After the big topics were out of the way, we moved on to the fun menial stuff like our new food discoveries, what embarrassing tv shows we were hooked on, and the lesbian

gossip within our circle of friends. We went through four bottles of wine and it was a nice time. I even got to liking that pig a little bit.

On the walk home, Jules kept giving me love looks, and I gave her some right back. It was strange the next morning when I realized that our looks had meant different things. Jules woke me up with a stack of blueberry pancakes, each of them the size of the plate they were on, and when the top one said “WILL,” I knew what the next three would say. I ran to the bathroom and puked. It was red from all the Malbec. I sat with my head on the toilet and wished I could disappear, and then I came out and told Jules I must have a bad hangover.

Later, when we were wedding planning and Jules had had it up to here with the crumbly cake at the tastings and the forgetful florists, she would look back on that night at Sharon and Renee’s like it was to blame. I should have known that she was wishing for what they had for a long time.

“Stupid Sharon and Renee, with their house and their pig and their Le Creuset,” she’d say after slamming down the phone with a printer or a caterer. We told each other that our wedding would be different, but the closer we got to it, the more we would buckle and say, well wouldn’t it just be easier to do it the way everyone else has done it. Before we knew it we were walking down the aisle in white dresses, stuffing dry cake in each other’s mouths, and dancing to a budget wedding band’s version of “My girl.”

After the wedding, we were so relieved not to be on diets that we stopped running together in the park. We put on weight and we cut our hair. We still have dinner with Sharon and Renee every few weeks, and the pig must weight about 75 pounds now. “We had no idea he was going to get so big,” they say. None of us had any idea how things would change after that night.

Sharon and Renee got us a red Le Creuset as our wedding gift. It sits in the back of the cabinet next to the stove, never used. Every now and then I’ll see Jules crouching down, peering into the cabinet and sighing,

scowling at the pot like she'd like to break it into a million pieces. But then she'll stand up and give me an absentminded kiss and ask me if I want to order some thai food. Sometimes she still gives me a love look, but they come further and further in between. I still remember the walk home that night. The reassuring way her hand felt as she squeezed my side right above my hip. The apple tree we passed under that was losing its white petals as the breeze blew. Spring snow, Jules called it. And the long brown eyelash on her cheek that I stuck to the tip of my pointer finger, holding it out and saying, We don't even need a wish.