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Country Wedding

By EDWIN LANHAM

She had agreed to have the ceremony at the country house—and it was there she was to learn that, for better or for worse, a wedding soon becomes a marriage

THE flat salt marshes of the Connecticut shore line rushed past the train window, and Edith sat looking out at glistening mud flats and the brown October hues of the marsh grass, aware of Harvey sitting close beside her, and wishing he would take her hand in his again. But they both felt constrained, with Joe and Florence Brill seated facing them, and her gloved hands remained in her lap.

Edith was a gentle, reserved girl, very pale in the sparkling sunlight, with deep-set shadowy eyes and full lips that today kept becoming dry and hot so that she had to keep moistening them with the tip of her tongue. She felt unnaturally shy, and it brought little comfort to assure herself that all brides must feel ill at ease on their wedding day; must feel, as she did, that they had been caught up in some powerful centrifuge and hurled into space, into a land of strangers.

She glanced at Harvey's lean, serious profile to assure herself that she was not making the journey alone, and sighed, and thought of the apartment they had found on West Twelfth Street. The thought of the apartment was a satisfaction to which her mind returned again and again; the finding of it and the furnishing of it seemed a symbol of security. The apartment was her handiwork and would be her home, and once they were there together, as man and wife, strangers could be shut out.

She glanced at Harvey again, but he was giving his full attention to Joe Brill, who had not let the conversation lag. Joe had disappeared into the grill car soon after the train left New York and had come back only when New Haven was behind them, and by then his face had become somewhat flushed and his speech had thickened perceptibly. But when he talked, Edith tried to listen and answered with small, tight smiles, reminding herself that he was Harvey's boss, the art director of the magazine where Harvey worked, and that before this day ended she would be Mrs. Harvey Newton.

"I promise you kids," Joe Brill was saying now, "everything will go off fine. You can count on Rita Clark for that. She's a manager, that girl is, a great little manager." He grinned at Harvey. "But you two have to share the honors today with the judge. It's Greg's debut as a justice of the peace, and what I'm waiting for is to see Parson Clark up there reading the service."

Edith murmured, "It's awfully good of them to do all this, when they hardly know us."

"But they'll love it, Edith, every minute of it," Florence said, with a reassuring smile. "Especially Rita. She loves to do things for people. She's like a little red hen always on the lookout for motherless chicks. You don't mind being Rita's chick for a day, do you?"

"She's my favorite little red hen," Edith said. "I'm happy about it."

She was cheered by the thought that even though Rita Clark was inclined to manage other people's lives there was a warmth in her nature that made the interference unimportant, or even welcome, as it had been the day she had first met Rita at a publisher's cocktail party in New York. The young assistant editor who had arranged to meet Edith there had been held up in conference, but Rita, who

had seemed to know everyone, had taken the unescorted girl under her wing and introduced her around. Florence's simile was apt, she thought; Rita was like a busy little red hen, forever scratching after something.

"Rita sure knows how to throw a party," Joe Brill was saying. "They used to have some dillies in New York, and I guess that's one reason they moved out here in the country, so Greg would have time to get some work done. And," he added with a wry twist of one side of his face, "so he could keep an eye on Rita."

"Rita doesn't need an eye kept on her," Florence said. "That's no way to put it."

"Greg thinks she does, though. He's a pretty jealous guy."

"That's no way to put it, either," Florence said, but the rebuke was milder.

"Okay, then, let's say watchful," Joe said. "He's a pretty watchful guy. Who wouldn't be, married to a girl like Rita? She's worth watching. But Greg carries it pretty far. I wouldn't be surprised if he opened her mail."

"If he did," Florence said, "—and he doesn't—he wouldn't find anything."

Edith had not yet met Gregory Clark, although she had heard a good deal about him and was familiar with his work, since hardly a month went by without a Clark cover on some magazine. But he was a stranger, and apparently a difficult man; and listening to Joe and Florence Brill discuss him made her feel she was not at ease among sophisticated, older people.

But it was too late now to wish she had insisted that they be married at the Municipal Building in New York as they had first intended. The decision had been made the day Harvey telephoned her to say, "Edie, how would you like to be married in the country?"

"Country or city, darling, on land or at sea," she had told him. "It's all the same to me."

"Well, look, Rita Clark came into the office today to deliver a picture of Gregory's, and Joe Brill told her we were getting married. It seems that Greg Clark was elected a justice of the peace up where he lives in Connecticut, and Rita says he wants to perform one official act before his term is over. Edie, she insists that we go up there and let Greg marry us. And you know how Rita is. It's hard to say no, so I said I'd leave it up to you."

EDITH had hesitated, thinking of the dismal chapel in the Municipal Building, and how far they both were from home, with no family and few friends. And Harvey had said, "Rita is all excited about it. She wants to do it up brown. And the point is, she wants to do it. Joe and Florence Brill will go up with us, and Joe will be best man. And there'll be just a few people in—no crowd. Just people I've met up there week ends—"

"All right," Edith had said quickly, thinking that if Harvey was pleased by the offer, she was, too. "All right," she had said. "Whatever you say."

Then, unexpectedly, he had put Rita on the telephone; warm, impulsive Rita, who must have been standing by, listening to Harvey's side of the conversation. And Rita had cried, "Baby, I'm so glad you said yes. After all, I introduced you two, and it's fitting or prophetic or something to have Greg marry you. I've already called him about it and he's delighted. Just set the day, and I'll take care of everything."

It had been a mistake, Edith knew now; it made her feel like a guest at her own wedding. But here she was on the train, on her wedding day, and a voice was booming on the loud-speaker, "Old Saybrook." The train slowed and Joe Brill said, "Well, this is us," and as they crowded into the aisle Florence gently patted Edith's shoulder, as if she had read her thoughts.

There was a glimpse of headstones in a churchyard, then rows of parked cars, and a platform shed. As the train came to a stop Edith saw a man standing on the platform, leaning against a wooden pillar. He was bareheaded, and his black hair was wind-blown; he looked chilled and disagreeable, but when Joe Brill jumped down from the steps ahead of Edith and the man came forward he was smiling, and the smile changed his face.

AS SHE was introduced to Gregory Clark, Edith thought that his was the ready, insinuating smile of a man who presupposed a friendly disposition in another person as a matter of tactics, and definitely, she thought, it made a quick footing possible. He had a firm handclasp for Harvey and a pecking kiss for Florence, and then he led the way to his car, carrying Edith's suitcase.

"We'll have to hurry," he told her. "The town hall closes at four sharp."

The town where Gregory Clark lived was not far from the Connecticut River, but several miles back from Long Island Sound. They reached it over a winding blacktop road that flowed through woods glorious with October leaf, and the beauty of the day helped Edith to relax. Gregory Clark carried on a friendly conversation all the way from the station, and said as he stopped the car before a Victorian brick building, "The judge of probate is waiving the five-day waiting law. Rita arranged that."

"Is there anything Rita can't arrange?" Joe Brill asked. "Did she arrange to get you elected, too, Greg?"

Gregory Clark said—rather stiffly, Edith thought—"It's no great feat to get elected. They nominate eight justices, four from each party, and elect them all. There are hardly enough Democrats in town to fill out a slate, so they go begging for candidates." His laugh was soft and self-deprecatory. "Actually, a Democratic justice in a small Connecticut town has about as much power as a tadpole in a frog pond. But at least I can perform a marriage service, which a tadpole can't, so far as I know."

He put a hand on Edith's elbow and conducted her up the steps of the town hall, where the judge of probate signed a waiver of the five-day law, a document that contained imposing phrases such as *since the public policy requires it*, and Edith felt nervous and embarrassed and not in the least involved with public policy.

This marriage of hers, she thought as they supplied names and ages and places of birth to the clerk, was a pretty private matter. When she had said yes to a blond young man with a hauntingly anxious face she had hardly expected that she was to become a matter of public policy in a neighboring state. This was a matter between Harvey and herself, and she wished fervently for the time when the public could be excluded from it. Undoubtedly, she told herself, all brides must feel the same.

As they returned to the car, with the license tucked in Harvey's pocket, she thought that it was another step on the way; (Continued on page 71)

Harvey was far across the room, talking to Rita, bending his head and smiling; Edith thought it was like watching a stranger



Conductor Charlie Kincaid (left) and head brakeman Johnny Osteen take time for chow in caboose 2098 at end of run in Albuquerque, New Mexico



Cliff Jacobsen kids passing Diesel whose crew has no stove, no coffee



Telling engineer to bring train in more, rear brakeman rotates wrists as he guides coupling of cars in a yard



Skipper checks watch constantly during run. He is responsible for keeping train on time

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