Sex Talks to Girls

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Our friend Chris said we could use her place. What could be better than Brooklyn in June? Dogwoods and magnolias, a block from the El? It had been ten years since I’d attended one of my own weddings—a long fraught decade for which I deserved a nuptial reward. And it was a first for Mars. She was practically psychotic with anticipation.

My parents had flown in from Illinois to attend the wedding of one of my cousins that same weekend. The times didn’t conflict, but coming to ours wasn’t an option for them. They declined politely. Mars’s mother was not so polite, which surprised us. She wouldn’t even allow D. J. to attend and told us that what we were doing was a disgrace. No offense, she added.

What we did: We wrote our own vows; we put together an altar with Mars’s sculptures, one of my poems in a frame, and dozens of white roses; and we invited a sober lesbian minister from the MCC Church to preside.
The whole event rocked.

We went a little nouveau-Christian (we hadn’t come across options yet), choosing Ruth and Naomi as our biblical role models and sharing bread with our guests, who bawled through most of the ceremony. Earl manned the camcorder, and lots of friends took stills. We both wore silk and went extreme butch and femme, at least in looks. (Mars deftly braided my hair, and I drove the rental car from Manhattan.) My kids beamed the whole time. We danced our butts off and opened presents.

Mars’s sister Rose came for the reception with her two little ones. She made a big splash arriving late and seemed genuinely happy for us. We found out the next time we visited her in Far Rockaway, through Rosalie, her little girl, that she thought we were disgusting, but she showed up, as Mars pointed out. That’s something.

There were 75,115 legal marriages in New York City in 1990 and 25,734 divorces. Who wants to be a statistic, Mars said, with a bridegroom’s bravado.

Mars and I talked about divorce at various times over the years. How would lesbians do that? she’d say, kind of wild eyed. The prospect of divorce always panicked her.

Finally we decided, if it ever came to divorce (and it wouldn’t!), we’d jump backwards over the broom, like the Africans who found themselves on foreign plantations without human much less legal rights. Forward, you’re hitched; backward, you’re not.

That day, we leapt over the broom, then hopped back on it and flew tandem home to the Bronx where ordinary things awaited us: milk in the fridge, toothpaste in the medicine cabinet, our names on the mailbox, a futon that doubled as a couch and a bed with an extra thick mattress. We’d bought it downtown in the Village in 1989. I’ve still got it.

Mars says I’ve still got everything.