

## My Ill-Omened, Mid-Life, First and Last, Southern Wedding

I had a hunch it might happen while collecting our licence.  
Why else wear his boxer shorts beneath my blue dress  
and new coat, Nana's ring on a finger that didn't count?

Glass window paperwork at City Hall — our mothers' first  
and middle names the same. *Unusual*, said the clerk.  
*The judge is in. Would y'all like to do it now?*

I ran outside in deep winter to pluck any bouquet,  
returned with a sprig of holly berries, pricking,  
praying myself blind to symbolism.

From a waiting room like some old dentist's,  
a policeman delivered us to the judge. I hung  
back. The officer la-la'd *Here Comes the Bride*.

It went like in the movies, but I stumbled at the part  
about parting: *To* death do us part, more like a toast.  
Wanting to believe not the same as believing.

Signed, stamped, embossed, entered. His mother's ring  
loose on my finger. *Are you saying my mom has big hands?*  
Into the car to a pizza bar for a guestless, giftless dinner.

Arriving, my left hand on the door — bare! Panicked  
scramble through foot-well trash, the sunset rush  
back to City Hall's gutters, luckless muddy grass.

All that looking down instead of up. We tried a  
better restaurant. A Georgia Peach, then I was served  
the wrong meal; the right one late, lukewarm, lacklustre.

Across town to his buddy to beg weed and moonshine.  
The wife, post-surgery wan, took our wedding photo  
in the basement den, silhouettes against dim light.

Left to right: her unfaithful husband; mine grinning harder  
than before or after; me, ringless; and, soon-to-be-dead,  
the lodger — best man there, turns out — holding a shotgun.

Found the ring in the car next day, wore it on my thumb.  
Left it behind in the bathroom when I flew home to Mum.  
He lost his job and hocked it before a year was done.

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