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My Wedding Was Shaping Up to Be a Disaster. Would it end well?

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BY RYAN E. SMITH

People love to talk about storybook weddings, but the lead-up to mine was more like a horror novel. If Stephen King ever writes a book about wedding planning, he should give me a call. My wife and I had everything he'd want: an explosion, a trip to the hospital, even whispers of a curse.

It started romantically enough. Jen and I had decided to get married on New Year's Eve 2007, hoping to start our new life together with a bang. Unfortunately, our venue -- a gorgeous, historic theater in downtown Toledo, Ohio -- took that a little too seriously. Five weeks before the big day, a boiler blew up, blowing out windows, rippling the sidewalk around the complex, and destroying all of our careful planning in a matter of seconds. When we heard the news, we couldn't even cry. We were too stunned.



ILLUSTRATION BY KIM ROSEN

Suddenly forced to start over, I called every banquet hall and hotel in the phone book looking for somewhere, anywhere, still available for New Year's Eve. I even tried the local zoo. A few days later, when I visited a former hotel building in the midst of major renovations, it was only as a last resort. Wires dangled from the open ceilings. One wall was covered in graffiti, and the unfinished floors were coated with sawdust and featured a mosaic of a giant, fire-breathing dragon. In the men's room, there were toilets but no stalls. I walked out thinking, it's perfect.

True, it could not have been more different from our original choice, the plush theater with its glass elevator that we planned to use for our grand entrance. Here, the elevators in the lobby didn't even work. I saw something else, though: the high ceilings, the beautiful windows, the ample space, the potential. It was raw and unfinished, like our burgeoning lives together. It was a place we could fill with our love. So with a building representative promising, "We can fix this" and "We can paint over that," we decided to give it a shot.

Just as one difficulty resolved itself, however, another arose. Four weeks before the wedding, I had surgery to repair a double hernia. The doctors didn't think I should wait until later. "We have to get you better for your honeymoon," they said with a wink. "You know? For your honeymoon?" More winking. I blushed and let them take care of business. The painful procedure left me stuck on the couch for more than a week and unable to lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for even longer. To be so useless at such a critical time was both emasculating and liberating (though I'm sure my overburdened fiancée would have simply called it maddening).

The good news, we thought, was that nothing more could go wrong. That's when the building representative stopped returning our calls and we got nervous all over again. There were graffiti markings to be painted over, toilets to be enclosed, a dragon to be covered with carpet (sorry, buddy), and he was responsible for all of it. Or rather, he was until he disappeared without explanation a week before the wedding.

Friends joked that all of this was an omen warning us not to get married. Some even raised the possibility of a curse, Old Testament-style. After all, this had happened to me before: When I was 13, the reception hall my family had reserved went up in flames a month before my bar mitzvah.

I think all this was a different kind of omen, though, a good one. It showed my future wife and I exactly what it was like to live a married life, complete with its stresses, heartaches, and unexpected challenges. And even though everything worked out perfectly in the end -- the building was miraculously transformed almost overnight -- it taught us to keep things in perspective and remember what's truly important . . . in something as broad as life or as small as a wedding ceremony.

I know that our wedding will always be linked to the explosion and all the other bad luck we endured, but years from now those won't be the first things that come to my mind. Instead, I'll remember the feel of my wife's hand as I squeezed it during the ceremony. I'll remember dancing with her under twinkling lights as midnight approached. And I'll remember that no matter what happens, there's nothing we can't do together.

Ryan E. Smith works for The Blade newspaper in Toledo, Ohio. He previously was a correspondent for the Globe. Send comments to coupling@globe.com.

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