Anne's Wedding

story of the month

By Richard W. Jennings, the author of Orwell's Luck
"The Master of Middle American Whimsy"

On Tuesday morning, Valentine's Day, Sandy, Aubrey's Octopus bimaculoides, after a long night of dining on snails, crawled back into her underwater cave, and Porchie, her former neighborhood stray cat, slept at the foot of the four-poster, quilt-covered bed side-by-side with Cupid, her mother's spotted Ocicat. Aubrey was awakened by music outside her window.

Now a sixth grader, Aubrey was no longer the smallest kid in class. She had passed that honor on to the new girl, Christine. Christine was one of those cute little blond-haired girls that in every neighborhood in America are as common as stray cats.

Dressed, as always, in faded Care Bears pajamas, Aubrey raised the blinds on the window to see her backyard neighbor Bean with his three singing dachshunds, Owen, Sophie and Jozie, standing on the sidewalk.

Bean's dogs were wearing black sunglasses (called Doggles) purchased from the Doctors Foster and Smith Dog & Cat catalog. The dachshunds looked like the Blues Brothers plus one.

What they were singing was a far bark from the blues, however. Instead, they were singing a famous Stephen Foster lonesome love song adapted by Bean for this very special day.

I dream of Aubrey with the auburn hair

Borne, like a vapor, on the springtime air

I see her dancing where the bright streams play

Happy as the daises that dance on her way

Many are the sweet notes that her voice doth pour

Many are the carefree birds that warble them o'er

Oh, I dream of Aubrey with the auburn hair

Floating, like a vapor, on the soft springtime air.

Wow! thought Aubrey as she rushed to put on her robe to invite Bean and his songsters inside. That's a first!

MORE STORIES

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It was a busy household that Bean, Owen, Sophie and Jozie entered, for today was not just Valentine's Day, it was Aubrey's mother's wedding day.

On bended knee, with a diamond ring in a small velvet-lined box, Reverend Gordon, a widower, had proposed to Anne on Christmas Eve.

Anne, a devoted single mom for more than eight years, with tears in her eyes said, "Yes."

Now, at last, the day had arrived.

Coming in behind Bean and his canine entourage was Mrs. Rivard, a neighbor, bringing a huge, hearty breakfast that would feed a forest full of bears.

Aubrey's mother was in the kitchen having her hair done by Mrs. Burgan, a friend from church, while Mrs. Liddle, another church friend, carefully ironed Anne's new three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar wedding dress.

Reverend Gordon was staying at Aubrey's uncle's house on nearby Tree Street. Interestingly, Aubrey's uncle's first name was Gordon. With that in common, Uncle Gordon and Reverend Gordon hit it off immediately.

"So there you are," Aubrey's mother said to her yawning, tousled-haired daughter. "And just in time, too. We'll do your hair next, right after breakfast," to which she added, "Hi, Bean, please join us."

Bean presented Anne and Aubrey with Valentine's Day cards that, of course, he'd forgotten to sign.

Meanwhile the two cats had discovered the three dogs. All five ran to Aubrey's room where the sound of yelps, thuds and clumps soon shook the house.

Reverend Gordon, whom Aubrey and her mother met when they spent a summer as volunteers at Reverend Gordon's Ranch for Troubled Dachshunds in Fosterville, Kansas, had made arrangements to turn the daily management of the unique operation to the town's retired veterinarian and dear friend with the memorable name Race Faster, DVM. Except, of course, for the annual summertime event when the entire newly expanded family would return to Fosterville to help save discarded, disabled, lost and runaway pets.

It's important to have a calling.

Reverend Gordon had no doubt about his.

This was one of many things that Anne loved about the gentle gentleman whom she was about to marry.

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It was an afternoon wedding held in the chapel of the non-denominational Eaglebrook Church and presided over by popular pastor G. Rhine Magee, DD, a young man with the experience and wisdom of a person twice his age. He was Aubrey's mother's first choice and Reverend Gordon immediately liked him when the starry-eyed pair met with him for pre-marital counseling.

One-by-one and two-by-two the guests began to arrive. Mr. Zwettler from the pet store. Miss Pone, the librarian. Mr. McMahon from the bank. Mrs. Hartmann, principal of Sunflower Middle School.

Music was provided by the locally famous guitar duo of Stetler and Koser. As the arrivals took their seats, they strummed Pachelbel's Canon in D. When they began Mendelssohn's Wedding March, the bridesmaids and groomsmen were already in place. Not surprisingly, the prettiest bridesmaid of all was Aubrey with the auburn hair.

Reverend Gordon was standing nervously up front with Pastor Magee when Aubrey's mother appeared at the end of the aisle looking like Diana, the Roman goddess of love. She wore a simple ivory A-line dress with open back, an empire waist and thin spaghetti straps decorated with crystal raindrops crisscrossing her bare tanned back. Matching crystal raindrops sparkled in her hair.

She looked so elegant; in fact, it took your breath away.

Slowly, and smiling like sunshine, she walked up the aisle with Uncle Gordon gently holding her arm.

Aubrey had never felt so proud.

At least she did until Bean showed up ten minutes late wearing a red silk tie whose skinny back strip dangled six inches below the wider front.

But that was not the worst part.

Not by a long shot.

Accompanying Bean was none other than the new girl Christine looking cute as a button in a short, flouncy Shirley Temple dress carrying a tiny, shiny red purse.

Silently, Aubrey fumed as the unlikely pair took their seats.

It gets worse.

Christine had seen many weddings on TV. In some of them, white doves were released into the air as the newly married couple said, "I do," then kissed longingly for the camera.

This part always made Christine cry. Christine thought it a

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beautiful romantic custom, although if she'd had a lick of sense in her pretty head she would have realized it was a cruel way to provide an easy meal for red-tailed hawks and other airborne predators.

Stupid is as stupid does, Aubrey thought, as Christine opened up her purse.

Since Christine didn't know how to get white doves she'd brought her personal pet, a blue parakeet named Budgie (a word, unknown to Christine, that means parakeet).

Budgie flapped up toward the ceiling, pooped on Miss Pone's head, then landed on Aubrey's shoulder. Immediately, Reverend Gordon plucked off the unwanted bird and tucked it into the vest of his rented tuxedo.

During the reception that followed, Reverend Gordon passed the bird off to Uncle Gordon who promptly took it home as Christine and Bean wandered around the chapel searching hopelessly.

After the reception, the happily married couple departed for a ten-day honeymoon in Tuscany, Italy, and Aubrey, Porchie and Cupid went to stay with Uncle Gordon for the duration.

Uncle Gordon had placed the parakeet in an upturned colander with food and water in a spare room closed off from the cats. It wasn't the best of habitats for parakeets but would do until a modestly priced cage arrived overnight from the Doctors Foster and Smith Pet Birds catalog.

"We'll return it to its owner," Uncle Gordon explained. "But not until she's learned her lesson."

"I think Christine may be a slow learner," Aubrey replied. "And so, I'm sorry to say, might Bean."

"Birds of a feather," concluded Uncle Gordon.

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