

Love, they say, can move mountains. Less romantically, love has also been known to move mountains of crap. My college friend Logan and his mountain of crap arrived in New York City from Boston in a twenty-three-foot U-Haul truck, complete with the same six wooden peach crates of aging vinyl I had helped him pack and unpack at least three times through the years. He was moving in with his fiancée, Jerri. He came to New York the same year I moved out of my Boston condo and into my parents' ancestral Manhattan apartment to help care for my ailing father. Our friend Michael also moved to New York that year, to pursue his girlfriend, Susi. We would all end up living within walking distance of each other for the first time since college. We'd all moved for love.

Two years later my dad is dead, Susi is history, and Logan and Jerri are getting married. Love is moving us once again, just for the weekend this time, to a beautiful Cape Ann farmhouse in Massachusetts. It is my tenth wedding in two summers, and it isn't even August yet.

Michael and I take the bus up together.

"Weddings are good places to meet people," Michael says.

"I used to think so, too," I reply, still single in spite of all the recent wedding-going. Kitschy Chinese opera crackles from the speakers overhead. We're taking the Fung Wah "Chinatown bus." Just a few weeks ago a Fung Wah bus was firebombed, and the driver of another was shot by a hit man hired by a rival Chinatown bus company. But for ten dollars each way, we're willing to take our chances.

Michael is seeing someone, but they're not yet close enough for him to invite her to the wedding. I imagine they soon will be. That's how he is: devoted to each new girlfriend until about two years in, when he finds he "just isn't feeling it." He'll agonize over it but eventually break up with her. He'll go solo for a few months, then find another. Lather, rinse, repeat.

"At weddings," Michael continues, "the numbers, at least, are in your favor. You've got a large sample set of new women, with a good percentage of them in the prime age range."

"And everyone's drunk and full of hope," I say.

"And staying in hotels."

Twenty-four hours later Logan and Jerri are exchanging their vows. Or maybe they're about to. Or already have. I can't quite tell. The vows seem to be secretly embedded in the Hebrew ceremony, like numerological symbols woven into the Kabala. I'm sitting a few rows back, in yet another white wooden folding chair in yet another beautiful garden behind yet another farmhouse — or wine-country villa, or seaside gazebo — on yet another gorgeous summer day.

I lean over to a friend of the bride and whisper, "You know, this is my tenth wedding in fourteen months."

She raises her eyebrows. Her eyebrows say, *Jesus, you poor thing.*

I shake my head. My head says, *No, no. I love weddings.* And it's true. In spite of my own reluctance to tie the knot, I



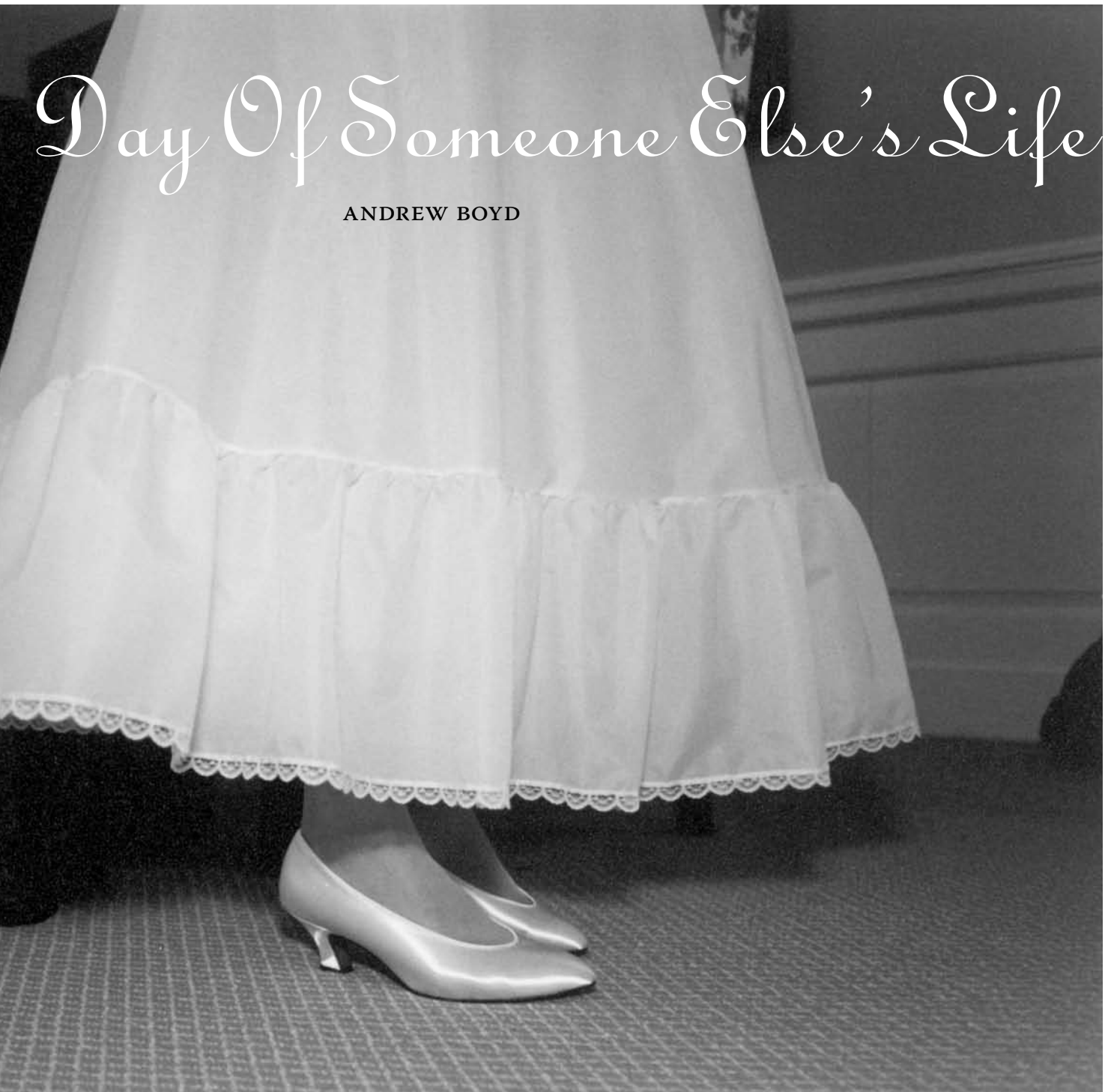
enjoy seeing two people announce to the world that they love each other, regardless of some mother-in-law's insistence that every guest have a certain kind of soup spoon.

But don't you get depressed? the woman's now severely contracted eyebrows ask.

At any other wedding I would smile a serene, beatific smile that would say to the woman's eyebrows: *Not at all.* And it would be true. During this marathon of ten weddings in two summers, I've felt genuinely happy for each couple, the kind of

Day Of Someone Else's Life

ANDREW BOYD



SHARON SELIGMAN

happiness that comes from a love of love. But today it has all caught up with me. Today I am depressed. I've been betrayed by one of my best friends. It's not so much that Logan didn't choose me to be his best man. (In a nepotistic move, he chose his actual brother.) It's more that my comrade in arms and roommate of three apartments is getting married. (Or maybe has just gotten married. Is the breaking of the glass the end of the ceremony?) Not only that, the only single women here are sixty-five-year-old divorcées. And three — yes, three — of my

ex-girlfriends are here, all either married, pregnant, or now of the lesbian persuasion. One of them, in fact, is married, pregnant, *and* of the lesbian persuasion. And I still love them all.

The vows must be over, because we're moving to the barn. I catch up with Mary, the married, pregnant, and still decidedly sexy lesbian. She and I had an affair in college. She was student-body president and had a steady boyfriend; I was a campus troublemaker. She came on strong late one night in the student-government offices. Her boyfriend did the heavy lifting; I got

the adventurous interludes — with no commitment.

I greet Mary and give her partner, Julie, a hug. They're both lawyers. Incredibly, her partner's full name is Julie Justice.

"You guys are a two-oven household," I say to Julie, patting Mary's six-month-pregnant tummy. "How come you make Mary do all the cooking?"

At the barn there's more ceremony and more Hebrew. I don't understand the words, but I like the scratchy, singsongy sound of them. I'm standing next to Alison, ex-girlfriend number two. As with Mary, I was mostly a side affair for Alison in college. She was with an absurdly tan, tall, blond guy who had sailed around the world solo — or, at least, he looked as if he could have. The blond sailor is long gone. In his place is her husband, Steve. They live in D.C., and I stay with them when I'm there on business.

Ex-girlfriend number three is Ellen. Brilliant. Passionate. Outspoken. Charismatic. Soon to be a professor and one of the most respected labor organizers and political campaigners in the country. We were together for three years in our late twenties. We'd go hiking in lightning storms, get drunk and drive to the beach, and stay up till 4 A.M. editing her grad-school papers. She taught me to drive a stick; I taught her to rein in her temper. We split up and got back together more than a few times during those three years. She wanted to get married; I wanted to see other people.

"Hey, Ellen," I say.

"Hey, sweetie."

I like that she still calls me "sweetie." The sexual tension is gone, but in its place is a fierce, loyal friendship. When I've got work in Boston, I sleep on her couch, have a beer with her husband, and play with her kids. I am happy to briefly be a part of their loving family. But I'm also happy to walk out the door.

Can we see a pattern here with these ex-girlfriends? I think we can: they're all great, they all love me, and they're all married to somebody else.

We've lifted Logan and Jerri up: in their chairs, into the air. The crowd surges around them; the band plays the jaunty "Hava Nagila." They're each holding one end of a handkerchief, Jerri almost tipping over.

Seeing these three ex-girlfriends straining to hold Jerri aloft inevitably gets me thinking of the ones who aren't here. There's the convenience-store clerk in Ann Arbor to whom I deliberately and lovelessly lost my virginity at the end of freshman year. There's the first woman I fell in love with, until navigating the new emotions around sex got the better of us. There's the frighteningly intelligent man twice my age who mentored me in expressionist poetry, Nietzsche, and radical politics, when he wasn't falling into drunken, suicidal rages. There's the pale redhead who talked to ghosts. There's the woman I spent a Michigan winter with in a barely weatherized extension to a friend's garage — the only woman I've ever managed to live with. We'd knock the snow off our boots, light the kerosene heater, strip off our clothes, and jump under the covers, shivering and holding each other until we warmed up. There's the Southern

girl I had an on-again, off-again obsession with through most of my thirties. Whenever we were both single, we'd track each other down for a liaison. But in spite of our emotional — she would have said "spiritual" — connection in bed, I didn't love her, a fact she found painful and inexplicable. These relationships were the crucible of my adult self. Through them I grew up emotionally and came into my own sexually. They taught me who I am.

And then there was Liz. I had been in love before, but never so completely. I admired her gutsy way with a video camera, and her career as a media activist was an inspiration to my own. When I first met her at a party, her long brown hair and hazel-green eyes were so beautiful that I ran away. I bravely chatted with her for a bit, then went and hid in the host's study. We were together for a year and a half, and even as things started to fall apart, we were still on a sexual honeymoon. With Liz, alas, I had crossed some invisible line: in bed, and in my heart. I never got down on bended knee, but she was it for me. Sure, we had our problems: My sense of humor set her on edge. Our conversations went awry when we tried to talk ideas. And when I asked why she'd never been in therapy, she said, "Because I have no issues." In spite of all this, I wanted it to work out. For once I was not the ambivalent one. I wanted to be with Liz, whatever it took, even counseling and unhappiness. I fought for her. And I lost. On July Fourth, Liz called and said she wasn't coming to the holiday beach party we'd planned to attend. She felt lonely in the relationship. It wasn't working, she said. It hadn't been working for months. It was over.

Less than six weeks later, in desperation, shame, and bewilderment, I started up another relationship, this time with a woman who'd been a friend and colleague for years. She was smart and complicated, and I could talk to her about anything, but it was too soon. Something primal was amiss; she would always smell wrong to me. I broke it off with her, and the friendship was destroyed. She never quite forgave me; I never quite forgave myself.

A month after that, David, my only brother — my poor, sweet, hapless, lost, funny, heroic brother — overdosed in a cheap hotel room.

(end of excerpt)