

## News From Home 9

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Well, the wedding went off pretty well under the circumstances. Our beloved nephew Keanu married his sweetheart Brandi in our very own back garden, and we did feel proud! Brandi's an English girl of course, in the States on a Dental Hygiene course, which is how they met, Keanu being a Mould Inspector, and they literally bumped into each other in the rather run-down surgery of Dr. Frankl of Culver City. A lot of Brandi's family managed to come over from Rotherhithe for the event, and colourful they were, especially as the evening wore on. The disco was a disappointment – I did my best with the classics – Baccarat, Brotherhood of Man, Tony Orlando – but nobody was dancing. I even threw in a few novelties – “I'm a Pink Toothbrush”, “Colonel Bogie”, “Tijuana Taxi” – but the dance floor remained sadly empty. I was replaced after a couple of hours by young Les – Brandi's half-brother – and he seemed to have his finger much more on the cultural button, to my humiliation. On they came, in their bizarre parodies of popular dance, and as the champagne flowed, the inhibitions retreated, and, as so often happens at weddings, we saw rather more, physically and emotionally, than we would wish to of grannies, pillars of society, Church-going conservatives, model teenagers.

At about 10:30, someone let out the weasels. I say somebody – I know exactly who it was – that lanky, spotty youth in the absurdly outgrown tuxedo and his cohort, the pretty little girl in the yellow satin frock and the eye-patch. I've never seen such blind panic,

heard such screams of mortal terror, seen the arthritic, the lame, the profoundly large move so fast and in such confusion. It was as though confetti was anthrax, as though the wedding cake was ticking. The weasels had the time of their lives, of course, probably assuming all the mayhem was for their exclusive amusement. It took Mavis over an hour to round them up, tired but happy, after the greatest day of their lives. Meanwhile the wedding reception resembled post-eruption Krakatoa. Chairs strewn everywhere, food dropped, smeared or thrown in panic, clothes torn, ripped, shredded, abandoned, disco equipment and records toppled and trampled, bunting and strings of lights wrapped around ankles or necks and being dragged hither and thither, like fishing line attached to a marlin. And everywhere people screaming, adults, children, pensioners, from throaty roars of horror to soprano squeaks of phobic dread, the noise was sickening. At one point, several tables were circled in the middle of the lawn like covered wagons, and a dozen or so smartly dressed guests with tufts of icing and tomato sauce in their hair were taking shelter from three delirious and speedy weasels. Strangely, in spite of the bedlam, no neighbour complained, no policeman stopped by to truncheon the revellers— I later learned from Mr. Trewell across the road that, from his perspective, he assumed it was some rather risqué party game, and didn't like to interfere. Mr. Alphonso spent the entire hour laughing uproariously at the spectacle, but I couldn't share the joke, especially after his earlier antics on the dance floor. He had asked me about 30 times to play "Wheels Cha-Cha", so that he could show off a few nifty turns of his wheelchair, but I thought this was tasteless (I also thought he'd been at the champagne, against strict AA orders), and refused point blank. He finally talked Les into playing it, and off he went, showing an exhibitionistic side I never knew existed. "Wheels Cha Cha, Boyo - It's traditional, is it?" he said in his unique Argentinian/Welsh-accented English, as he rolled, turned, spun, and hammed it up for the admiring crowd.

Then the rain started. Just as the Flanders front line in World War One was turned from a scene of mere devastation into a moonscape from a nightmare by torrents of rain, so it was with our little party. The cloudburst may only have lasted twenty minutes, but it was coming down hard as a monsoon. To the indignity of all that had gone before was added the gay, paramilitary spattering of mud, mud, mud. I thought the bridesmaids'

dresses improved quite a bit, the hideous lilac reduced to a more everyday utilitarian beige. The bride herself did not escape the impromptu fashion purge, her entire lower half seeming to blend rather organically with the garden, giving the impression that she was a new shoot, a Sci-Fi pod, a Triffid, sprung from the moist earth. Having professed herself an animal lover at the pre-nuptial get-togethers (she keeps a budgie) she was the shrillest of the hystericals and eek-a-mousers; for a while there, Spats, the acknowledged ringleader, was tangled in the copious netting, wiring and general undergarmenting of the wedding dress, and with the inquisitive nature of weasels everywhere, decided to check out an escape route in an upward direction, causing screams of childbirth intensity, and our Brandi swooned like a felled tree. Sad to say, all the Chinese lanterns simply disintegrated, leaving, for a few minutes, just the bare bulbs to light the way, until they too were vandalized by the rain shorting the circuit. A few torches were found to help folk stumble through the darkness, but it really put the kybosh on the evening, and things wound down several hours earlier than anticipated. The guests cleaned up as best they could, the newly-weds drove off to their honeymoon at the Disneyland Hotel, and soon all was silence and devastation. I decided to clean up the mess in the morning, but went back to check that Mavis had got the entire menagerie under lock and key. I met her coming out of the shrubbery - she was covered from head to foot in mud, and resembled a member of a just-discovered Brazilian tribe, the kind beloved of National Geographic Magazine – it took me a few seconds to realize that she was clothed in mud only. I didn't like to ask what happened to her party frock, but she told me anyway – she said it was too muddy and sticky to wear, and probably ruined, so she had to ditch it. This didn't seem to completely explain the situation, but never mind. I was too tired to think, and after a hot bath I retired to face the big clean-up tomorrow.