

A Married Man



by
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Chapter 1

Thursday

FLYING TO VANCOUVER to marry another man under a full moon in October was either folly or inspiration, only time would tell, but after 22 years of submitting to each other's ardent thrustings, Bobby proposed and I accepted, what the hell. We tried to get married in Amsterdam in 2001, but they required one partner to be Dutch. No dice. Now Canada, or precisely Ontario and British Columbia provinces, will marry any two souls at least 19 years old regardless of origin, citizenship, or perceived genital preference and Bobby said, "Let's do it right away, before they change their minds."

"What's the point?" said B's 87 year old father in remarking that such matrimony would be unrecognized in these United States but you know what, we didn't care a fig for that as we are only nominally citizens of any political structure, and given a choice would not be American.

And marriage, what's the use of that exactly? The merest peek at the divorce statistics informs that marriage is a legally tenuous position. I was married and divorced once, it was a mistake, we had a lovely son and needn't have legalized the matter but being married forced us to get divorced, and brother, that's no picnic.

Friends even suggested that with our rap sheet of 22 years of monogamous domesticity – shit, we spent a week apart only three times in that span, and never had a lover's spat last more than a single night in the guest bedroom before blubbering reconciliation, it might be a disastrous mistake to get married. A fatal blow. I was scared.

But he proposed and I said yes and so we flew Icarus Airlines to the frozen tundra in search of the legal high.

The taxi from Long Beach to LAX seemed to terrify my fiancé. He was trembling and blushing and coming down with SARS as the cholo driver hurtled through the carpool lane of the 405 as if bent on combustive impact, it was only two days after Governor Arnold overthrew the throne, and California was feverish.

The shoe-security man at the airport was incomprehensibly rude, a mean motherfucker, not content to search our bodies and bags but needed to accompany every sweep with a snarling insult, I wondered what he gained from such anger. There must be some motivation for that much resentment. Obviously, every passenger was innocent, but this guy acted like we were all potential Evil Scum of the Universe. Fortunately, after he advanced me to the upper echelons of security, the next taskmaster was a kindly 60 year old Filipino gent with gray hair and a calm affect. “You’re clear!” he cheered, after looking into my pants.

Okay, now the truth comes out, we had free tickets. Almost. After spending countless thousands of dollars, we’d earned “miles” on Delta but not exactly enough to avoid a nasty \$143 charge for the extra, still a cheap fare for two heading to the altar. And the hotel was reasonable, \$90 a night Canadian which is, what, \$70 American, who can ever keep track, but not a king’s ransom for a downtown location in a respectable early 20th century landmark building renovated by a chain.

The wedding itself costs \$100 for the license, which you can buy at many convenient banks and insurance offices, \$75 for the marriage commissioner’s fee – the person who does the ceremony -- and five dollars and twenty five cents tax. You need two witnesses, who are not

officially paid anything but if you're from out of town the marriage commissioner will line them up and it's polite to give a tip. So, it's like 200, 250 Canadian and you're legal. We bought lighthearted thank-you cards at the Sav On Drugs in Long Beach and figured to stuff them with Canuck cash from the ATM at the Vancouver airport.

Because the seats were allegedly complimentary, we had to fly to Salt Lake City with a four and a half hour "layover," suggestive but despairing. There, we learned the local youth are hunky, white, crew cut, dollboys curiously sporting nametags as "Elder" this or that when they couldn't have been more than 20. Unnh, unnh, unnh. It was unsettling to find ourselves suddenly plopped into a world without homeboys, bangers, slant eyed gooks, working girls, gangstas, hos, pimps, or fruits – just toothy, all-American Mormon type Thanksgiving Day turkeys.

At LAX I'd purchased a copy of Dennis Lahane's novel, "Mystic River," although I never read trashy crime fiction, because the book's been made into a movie by Clint Eastwood that opened to stellar reviews and I'm in the movie business, specifically the matter of transforming my old book "Famous Long Ago" into a modern cinema epic from the studio that brought you "thirteen." So I was curious about how exactly a book becomes a movie and figured I'd better read the novel before seeing the film, although it was so scary and violent that now I'm not sure I want to see it acted onscreen.

The plane from Salt Lake to Vancouver was an afterthought, one of Delta's out-of-wedlock children "operated by" SkyWest with NO alcoholic beverages excuuuse me, the stewardess looked like she'd about to kill me when I asked for wine. But we landed in Vancouver around ten o'clock and after a minimal wave at customs, cabbed it swiftly in the raining October night to

the heart of town – a room in the once fashionable Hotel Georgia, across the street from the ornate city art museum and ten blocks away from the infamous Green Zone of cafes with names like New Amsterdam, Doobie Central, and Blunt Brothers.

The city was eerily quiet. Ten p.m. and nothing open. The whap whap whap of the cab tires on the rain slickened streets. Oh, Christ, I'm starting to sound like Dennis Lahane. The bar, restaurant and even room service all closed for the night at the hotel. All we could do was sleep and dream. Tomorrow we'll be married. Could it be? Could it really happen? Would it be an empty gesture, a trip to the moon, or a knife in the heart?

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TOMORROW: TUNE IN next time and find out if a minister named Hickey and two paid witnesses from the Mob can marry a couple of guys from the Down Low in some kind of a "Play Misty for Me" melodrama. A surprise development sends our would-be newlyweds on a Buddy Movie chase.

Chapter 2

Friday

THE LAST TIME I saw Vancouver British Columbia was in 1971 while waiting for a rusty freighter to ship my 110 pound, nicotine stained body across the wild tossing Pacific to Kobe, Japan and a new life. I was 25 and never cute, but when you're that age and weight and actually like getting fucked in the ass by strange men in dark, steamy rooms, you can have some fun and I cleaned my plate.

The sea voyage to Japan led to a yellow fever of lust for young Japanese guys and need I add my fiancé on this return engagement in Vancouver is of undiluted Samurai blood, by way of Fairfax High in Hollywood. We met in 1981 following a pen pal correspondence between me in Carmel (with Clint as mayor) and Bobby in Tokyo (with some French Canadian boy named Brent). Our first *in vivo* encounter was at a Japanese sushi bar in Carmel and from that evening forth, we shan't be parted.

Some things never change and Vancouver is still rainy and windswept, fueled by oceans, ringed by mountains, brooding and dark in the October demilight, home to beggars in mufti, rich refugees from Hong Kong and all the loosely psychotic human shards of Canada drawn to its relatively warmer climate (snow is an aberration) and anything-goes ethos. Vancouver is dangerous. Freedom is always a risk.

We woke to this bizarre reality. We knew the steps. First we'd need to get a license to do this thing, this legal marriage we had in mind and you have to pay the fee to be free. Then

we'd need to find this woman Ms. Hickey whom I'd contracted via the Internet to perform the formal deed. She held the power invested in her by the province of British Columbia to do the impossible, to wed two people with penises until death do us part. Rings would be exchanged, vows uttered, and all of this be down on paper and sealed in the magistrate's official coffers, whom Hickey has joined let no guy render asunder. We might travel the universe but somewhere in! Vancouver, the evidence would lie like Davy Jones' locker.

And then? Just what then? Would it make no difference? Would we ever be the same?

We braced ourselves with raincoats from Florence, umbrellas from Paris, DayQuils from Vicks. Bobby was sniffing, phlegmatic, feeding a cold with pea soup for breakfast. Ms. Hickey advised us to get licensed at the Capital Savings three blocks down Georgia Street from the hotel, and we ran the gauntlet of polite, elderly panhandlers, unreconstructed Sixties hippies in parkas, ruddy cheeked youths on bikes and swarms of comfortably Oriental faces in the gloaming-at-dawn. Nine a.m. We'd like to buy a marriage license, please. We'd like to. Please.

It was no problem of course, despite the small anomaly of a printed form in which one of us was to be designated "groom," and the other "bride." Seems this homo marriage legislation is so recent, the province had yet to produce new forms listing "spouse" and "spouse," but the giggling bankgirl promised we'd get a corrected license in the mail two months later. In the meantime, I became the groom and Bobby the blushing bride, ten years younger. The clerk grabbed a ballpoint pen and scrawled "spouse" over our names.

With a few hours before the noon nuptial rendezvous, we strolled over to the dope arrondissement, a neighborhood of funky cafes, Rastafarian dreadlocks, grungy spare-change

artists, old European mansard rooftops, blackened sidewalks, storefronts for lease, junkies crouched in alleys, wayward youth. Ah, wilderness. Amsterdam without the Dutch. Canada on the slide. Nothing opened before 11 a.m., of course, every establishment shuttered tight and the park where we'd been told to find the dealer was chain linked and paved with broken glass and butts. Hmmm. Oh, my. "Oh, Canada."

We stand on guard for thee.

Ms. Hickey'd told us she had a plant lined conservancy and an outdoor gazebo "weather permitting," so we imagined some Victorian cottage with bluebirds and wisteria, but when the taxi dropped us at her address, it was a high rise steel and glass apartment complex. No matter, the vegetative atrium in the lobby was picturesque enough for a wedding, and clever Bobby brought matching silk boutonnieres for the happy couple, the ministrator and the witnesses.

Johanna was a tiny, soft spoken, kindly looking lady of a certain age with straight whitish blondish hair, her wrinkles a testimony of her wisdom and her sense of humor intact. The witnesses she scared up were middle aged gay men – David, a Canadian government immigration officer, and Steve, a bed-and-breakfast entrepreneur. Before the formalities could even begin, I cornered the latter and asked about the Buddy. "Oh, you want some B. C. Bud?" he beamed, not referring to an Anheuser Busch product. "Please don't buy it on the street, I'll take care of you." Oh, mother of God, who taketh care of thy boys, merci.

Let the ceremony begin. We solemnly declared there was "no lawful impediment" to our marrying each other. Then she asked me if I did "undertake to give to this man the love of your person, the comfort of your companionship and the patience of your understanding? To share with him the necessities and pleasures of life; to respect the dignity of his person; and to

recognize the need for communication and compromise in your marriage?” I did. And so did he.

Out came the rings we’d haggled for at the Los Angeles Jewelry District a week earlier. They were identical white gold bands, and Bobby’s fit too tightly for me to slip it on him. He scrunched it on all right as I intoned “With this ring, as a symbol of my love and commitment, I call on those present to witness that I RAYMOND do take you ROBERT to be my lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold, from the day forward, through all our life together.” And he replied, “In receiving this ring I give you my promise of love, of honour, and of commitment.”

(We had to “honour” each other in the Canadian spelling.) We went back and forth like that until Ms. Hickey asked us to address each other extempore. “I love you forever honey,” quoth I. “I love you forever and after,” he retorted.

She declared us legally married and burst into a smile that warmed the room like klieg lighting, breathily concluding “United in love, united in life, and now – united in law. Congratulations!” And everybody cried and cried.

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OH SHOOT, OUT of space. You’ll have to come back next time to hear about the wedding banquet, the Buddy Chase, the scarlet fever, the consummation and the consumption. October ghosts and goblins descend on the moody city. Foreshadows of the shroud. Reckless abandon in the wake of our binding alignment, a full moon blood red over Georgia Straight. Nothing else straight about it.

Chapter 3

Friday *(continued)*

THE WEDDING BANQUET we had in mind was straight out of Hong Kong as my fresh-ringed husband loves dim sum and then some, and recent years have seen Vancouver swell with refugees from the newly Chinafied HK. Word on the street (well, in the *New York Times* travel section actually) was that Vancouver boasted the most authentic chashu bow and har gow (pork and shrimp dumplings) this side of Beijing.

Vancouver led me to Hong Kong back in 1971 as well, that rusty freighter to Japan brought on six months' tumultuous unrequited love for a Tokyo artist named Bin-chan, who gave me an antique sword when I wanted his manly penetration so badly that I cried, and he died – literally. I still don't know what killed him, but Bin killed me and I got on another boat (Polish in origin) and wound up doing heroin on Lantau Island (off HK) with a crazed American ex-pat named Dr. Archibald Yow, who traveled with a trunk full of his unpublished manuscript, "The Book of the Cosmos."

Newly married in bliss on this earth, a lifetime partner to my love, I remembered how difficult it was to find such a mate, gay men have a hard time settling down with a single soul, hell everybody gay or straight finds trouble with that one, and even when you meet the right person and he loves you back, you still have to endure those compromises and understandings and sacrifices of personal will in order to keep your man, and never let him go. When I met Bobby in 1981, he was a college student, still gassing his car on Mom's credit card, I was a grizzled 35 year old veteran of the counterculture wars, I took the boy by cosmic force, even

when his female (platonic) roommate jumped into bed between us drunk off her fanny at three a.m. screaming “No, Robert, No! Don’t go gay! No, no!!” and I booted her out saying “Celia, get the fuck out of here and don’t come back.”

We moved into our first apartment three months after Opening Night, we sublet the home of author James Leo Herlihy (“Midnight Cowboy”) in Silverlake LA so James could go to Greece and renew his creative juices and survive the breakup of his long-term relationship with Bill, but even after we moved into the grand house with views, pool, and pool boy, James and Bill continued living in the servants’ quarters below us, fighting and screaming. Over 50, Jimmy Herlihy still cut a dashing figure, I remember thinking it was remarkable for a man of such advanced age to look that good. A few years later, we read in the *L. A. Times* a short obituary stating that the coroner’s office found James’ body with a plastic bag tied over the head in a motel in Hollywood. Good night, brave spirit... and AIDS, well...

I’m sure that AIDS affected our ability to remain embedded if not until now wedded, as friends and former lovers succumbed and we knew, testing negative, that we were each other’s only reliable lifeguard. So we choose other ways to slowly die. Death by chardonnay, death by obsessive compulsion, even death can’t part us now.

I do remember Fritz, fresh out of Yale, a blond young god who took my frail virginity in a hayloft in a barn in Massachusetts that the late Marshall Bloom had fashioned into a boudoir. And Brian the college roomie and film major turned swain of the Philadelphia brotherly love association, he used to moan “Oh, baby, oh, baby” when he was doing me, and “Go ahead baby, it belongs to you” even in public. And Michael the Portland photographer who endgame went straight. I remember them and others with names and those without names and those without

faces who had me in the dark but all that history ended the day Bobby took me home for chop suey.

And maybe it's true, maybe gay men are just naturally promiscuous and our case a big exception to the rule, hey maybe straight men would be just as wild if they didn't have lawful married spouses to pin 'em down, kids and mortgages and guilt.

The wedding was over and we were rarin' for the banquet, but although our witness Dave (the immigration official) called for a taxi three times and waited with us in the freezing rain in his shirtsleeves for half an hour, no cab appeared and Dave said, "Oh, it's just because it's Thanksgiving," and we went "Hunnnnh?" It was October 10. In Canada, that's Thanksgiving. Well, okay, we're grateful. Dave also recommended a restaurant downtown, a Must-Dine experience of phenomenally rude waiters (as French people, we can appreciate that) but we still wanted to get to dim sum heaven and clomped off in the downpour with marriage certificate tucked under B's ! armpit and silk boutonnieres no worse for the weather.

As by magic, a gypsy cab materialized and the Bombay driver found our Chinese banquet emporium and didn't even apologize when I called him on short-changing us ten bucks. In Bombay itself, they not only short-change you but vehemently deny the size of the bill you *claim* to give 'em. In Vancouver, they smile and grudgingly make up the difference. So be warned. God loves clever thieves and so do I, but don't try to kid a kidder.

This dim sum palace was everything the *New York Times* had promised, a grand, clattering Genghis Khan experience of delectable treats we hadn't known, who knows what it was, they kept parading strange steam carts of exotic toads' testicles and eels and squishy things

in shells and we kept pointing to these delicacies, ordering with our digits since our tongues speak no Cantonese. They smacked, umm umm.

Back to the hotel and on the horn to the second witness, Steve, who promised the Buddy and so that Chase began and ran into the night, which arrives much sooner than you'd think in Vancouver BC, and suddenly it's dark and wet and the comforter on the bed looks like real down and why be down if we can't be high, tomorrow's soon enough. Steve never returned our calls and time slipped away. My husband reached for his antihistamines, mellowtonin, Atavan, and eyeshades as ten p.m. arrived without the weed.

Guess I'll have some, too. Oh, rats, we didn't consummate. Well, tomorrow then.

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SICKNESS AND LIGHT grow exponentially tomorrow, Saturday, as our honeymooning couple plumb the depths of the ocean and death rattles of SARSian proportion. Will they finally meet their Buddy? Will they consummate their pact? Will they look mortality squarely in the eye? Will they do the boogaloo?

Chapter 4

Saturday

COME AGAIN MORNING although not exactly sunrise in Vancouver, too far north and too late in the year, but hell we were ready to begin our first full day as married men despite Bobby's cold or flu or whatever it was turning downright scary, he was living on a steady diet of pills and I thought, no, no, fate would not be cruel enough to rob me of my husband just finally wed. On arrival in Vancouver two days earlier, we were given a health warning flyer about SARS that read, "Are you feeling sick? Keep this form for ten days!"

Propped up in bed, we drank lukewarm coffee from the in-room drip, ate cookies and dim sum leftovers from the wedding banquet, read the fat weekend edition of the Toronto Globe and Mail (headline: "Call Him the Governorator!" with photo of a grinning Arnold) and waited patiently for some evidence of a dawn.

By 9 a.m. the black skies turned a mauveish purple, the color of a dead person's skin, and we set out to walk around the perimeter of Stanley Park, by all accounts the most beautiful site and number one tourist attraction in the town, famous for its gardens and tea house and views of ocean, mountains, islands, bridges, and hunky tanktop boys in running shorts. I don't know who Stanley was, but his park is the largest urban wilderness in North America and not to be missed even at the risk of certain fever and death.

The first gust of wind on Georgia Street inverted my cheap green umbrella from the Florence train station and we briefly considered seeking one of those trolleys or buses that take callow tourists around Stanley Park, but we love perambulating in the rain and air and loathe being treated like children, led around and patronized. The walking trail circles the park in just

five miles and clever Bobby had located all the various landmarks, statues, roses and points to hit in what we thought might be a 90 minute stroll.

It was more like leaning into a hurricane. Great penitential sheets of Pacific Northwest teardrops soaked our panties and blustering gales whipped our cheeks but we were married and nothing could stop us. After you get wet enough, after the water drenches through every layer of haberdashery, there's no wetter to get enfin mes vieux. We soldiered on.

Oh, the beauty. Ah, the danger. The sheer violent forces of nature, the tininess of our bodies in its face, no hunky tanktop boys, nobody crazy enough to do what we were doing, we laughed maniacally and splashed through. Mother ships at sea plowed the waves, we parted the briny depths and, curiously, planned our deaths and readied them. We don't believe in God but if there's a pearly gate, the first of us will wait for the other before going in and I don't think the wait will be long, what's eternity when you're in love?

After an hour or so, we came upon an impossible bonsai tree lonely perched atop a tall island rising from the sea, a symbol of shipwreck and hope. Two hours into the odyssey, we found the Japanese teahouse of fame – closed and wind-whipped. By the time three hours had elapsed, we kept going like Eveready bunnies because we couldn't turn back but were weepingly grateful to hit the beach at English Bay and reenter the city. The final stretch back to the hotel called for our deepest inner resources, but the ensuing reward – the flailing, tempestuous consummation on the Victorian matrimonial bed, was as sweet a triumph of man over nature as the heavens could have deigned. No two guys ever did it so decisively. Oh, brother, we spent.

Lunch at the art museum was uncommonly delicious after all that exercise, we didn't bother to see any art but devoured the jumbo shrimps and slugged down the fruity chardonnay, we have a tradition of eating in museums everywhere in the world, Dutch pea soup at the Van

Gogh, brie omelettes at the Louvre and so forth. Museum food is always reliably cheap and better than the campus cafeteria variety because it invariably comes with little ponies of decent wine and after that you can see the Mona Lisa or not, who cares.

Steve the marriage witness and gay travel entrepreneur came through, and we zoomed over to visit his palatial homo overlooking the beach and smoke some of his legendary horticultural produce, ripped our heads off and at last we understood the golden reputation this stuff's earned, Vancouver reminded us of Lugano, Switzerland in its civic pride in marijuana cultivation, of course it's "decriminalized" as well, leading to public consumption and a perceived issue at the U.S. border. We weren't brave or stupid enough to attempt any export trade but Steve gave us enough to fly through the remainder of our stay, and anyway we were already importing to the States a far more dangerous drug – fag marriage.

Traditionally and for the ages, any marriage legally recorded in Canada has been "recognized" in the U.S. and what are they going to do now as couples return from this royal dominion and demand the courts to consider them wed, oh it's going to be a fight I can see, with paranoid solons in Washington actually trying to get a Constitutional amendment saying no fairies can get married – not to each other, anyway – and we simply don't know why they're so terrified of our dicks squared. Is it really the end of the civilized world when love conquers ancient prejudice?

Steve sent us off to a neighborhood Indonesian restaurant, summoning memories of the daze when I lived on the beach at Penang and ate goopy stuff served up on banana leaves, the food at this Vancouver establishment was authentic enough but Bobby got a metal staple in his flatbread, leading the proprietor to such profound embarrassment and apology that he kept plying us with free wine and delicacies unknown outside Kuala Lumpur, we thought oh my, these Canadians

have the bland government but the hot cuisine, the wet blanket but the soft caress, the weak dollar but the rich life, let's go back to the hotel and play hide the salami again and spark up the doober in our smoke-free room with our free smoke. And mirrors.

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GOTTA RUN, AND tomorrow gotta go home but who wants to leave the land of court sanctioned sodomy and civicy tolerated bombalinos? Come back and I'll tell you how it ended and how it started something big.

Chapter 5

Sunday

SILENCE IS GOLDEN on Sunday morning in Vancouver, just as in Europe all of civilization disappears, traffic is light, businesses closed, the daily newspapers don't publish, originally because people went to church although this quaint notion has been dispelled in modern reality. There's no practical reason for the whole city to shut down like a sepulcher, just *comme d'habitude*.

It was time to go home. But it was hard to imagine where home is – in California with Arnold where they think we're "single," in Paris with Chirac where B. will teach next year and I'll ride shotgun, in Canada where solely our union is recognized, in our heads, in our one indivisible heart? Home is something more than a political conceit, yet our marriage does constitute a powerful national threat and hope because it's been announced in the Boston Globe that Republicans intend to make gay marriage – or the so called defense of hetero marriage – the principle issue in the 2004 presidential campaign.

No doubt because they figure that the enormous overwhelming majority of the moron...., er, of the voting population, will agree that GOD (there's that word again) created nuptial rites strictly between a man and a woman and we are living proof that God is Love and love conquers all, and while this is going to be a phenomenal struggle I have never been so utterly certain of victory and moral high ground because you cannot besmirch the purity of the love and commitment we two men share and protect and cherish.

So "Fuck Bush," as the cute bumper sticker said, if these guys want a fight they have chosen the wrong couple of fags to pick on, that's Mr. Fag to you Ashcroft, if you thought we kicked

some ass in the Sixties over Vietnam and the draft and women's rights and pot, oh brother watch out when you attack my husband, you ain't seen homeland security yet.

Halloween is right around the corner but baby, I'm not scared as long as we're one.

B. wanted to bring home our leftover dim sum pastries, I thought why the hell not, they'll stop us at the airport border and sift through our pitiful few belongings sans noticing the one thing we're bringing in that will burn down the house, our matching gold bands, and when they find the chashu bow buns, I can say "best damn dim sum we ever ate, try a bite!" No law against it. So we took off hours early for the Delta flight because it takes so long these days when they gotta act like any diminutive 57 year old social worker from Long Beach just might be Attila the Hun.

Killing time at the Vancouver airport, we picked up a Sunday *New York Times* (more Arnold coverage) (and they now include same sex couples in their wedding announcements) (did anything happen that week other than Arnold and the perennial collapse of the Red Sox?) and passed up McDougal's and Pizza Nut and Starfuck's and all those other American chains *ewwww* until finding at the end of the concourse a massive Hong Kong family style Sunday morning dim sum joint, and so had a second wedding banquet just as fine as the first.

The foil to that was in Salt Lake City for our second lengthy layover, where we were obliged to endure the Dick Clark's American Bandstand diner although the waitress gave us plenty of time to nurse drinks in the only place in Utah where you could order one on the holy Lord's day. And B. got a terrible earache as the jet landed in L.A., but we got back in one piece, looked at each other and said Honey, I'm sure glad I married you.

Because darn it all, we did feel different, how to put it, we felt a new sense of responsibility – for our health, for our safety, for the rights of other gay people everywhere, like we left home

as two men enmeshed for 22 years, a domestic partnership, and returned three days later as one whole and sensible union, a social unity that no earthly force external to us can separate. I do, baby, I do.

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