

ABBY

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Chapter 55 - Wedding

"Do you Kittie, take Cindi, as your life long partner and lawfully wedded sister-husband?"

"I do."

"Do you Cindi, take Kittie, as your life long partner and lawfully wedded sister-wife?"

"I do."

We had invented the phrases "life long partner", "sister-husband", and "sister-wife" for our vows.

Our four sister-wives had divided themselves up now that same-sex marriages were legal of Kim with Sheri, and Peggy with Megan. We collectively decided to hold their marriages a few weeks later after we had returned.

Kittie and my hair had been permed and shaded the day before. My long hair over my right shoulder had become my image as a dyed blond. Kittie's auburn hair curled in down to her jaw line. She didn't want us to look like "two peas in a pod". We had matching cultured pearl necklaces. She had a gold ankle chain on her right, mine on my left, to be close together as we held hands. Her perfectly white satin shoes had heels raising her height. Mine were especially flat keeping my height down. We visited a Dental Tech at the nearby hospital who whitened our teeth 'til our gums bled.

We became so confused over groomsmen and bridesmaids, and which friend could be who for whom, dressed as what gender, we simply dispensed with the whole mess. Instead of having separate attendants for bride and groom, we had ten friends from among the Mansion House residents as witnesses. Time had been scheduled in the ceremony for them to make a show of arranging themselves. They made quite a skit of moving themselves around for who stood on which side of us to the amusement and delight of the audience. Best of all there were both men and women on both sides of us.

We had 'No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here' printed on our Order of Service. We had that slogan printed big enough for everyone to know that Kittie and I meant it right here; right now.

Kittie and I had separated in a traditional way that morning as we were driven in separate cars the short distance to church. Good thing, too, as little hints of nervousness kept showing themselves. I managed to trip on a doorsill at the church and barely avoided giving the calf of my leg a nasty scrape.

One of the nurses from our medical facility came with Kittie, and another nurse came with me. The nurse with me changed my diaper. She said they would have all felt slighted or even insulted if one of our people hadn't had that care taking task.

When I stood up I forgot myself and had my own lipstick in my hand. The nurse with me playfully slapped my hand stopping me and called in the team for spraying on my makeup. I stayed safely put in a chair with a sheet over my chest until they stepped back and beamed at their work on me. They made my fingernails and lips pleasant colors. Only then did the nurse put me in new panty hose over my fresh diaper and plastic pants with padding for my butt and midriff. They struggled getting that close fitting gown on me. They fussed all over again about my hair after the gown messed it up. They draped it over my right shoulder. When they beamed at me again, they put that gold chain on my ankle, and tilted their heads as they fit my bridal veil on me. That gown had such a close fit I needed a hand to stand up before lifting my skirt for climbing the stairs from the basement to the main floor. No trails and no puffy shoulders as somehow that seemed too fancy and not right for Kittie and me. Our gowns had sleeves as my masculine arm muscles were a little too big for showing off that way.

We even had a fresh blue flower pinned near our right shoulders. The witnesses each had a red corsage on their left with a little red comma for our forgiving God is still speaking. The fresh blue flower served as the something new, something blue. But we couldn't think of anything old. Christina lent us each a bracelet at our combined bridal shower that had been her grandmother's. When the nurse clicked the bracelet on my wrist I had wonderful electric feelings zip through me. I wished Kittie could have been the one giving me those feelings.

Tara intervened about the gift list. We had guests beyond the Mansion House especially from the Church and the immigrant community. Guests would insist on sending us wedding gifts of matching china, towels, kitchen appliances, and housewares. But we didn't have a house, nor even an apartment, to call our own. "Do something!" We confessed we hadn't a clue. The Mansion House Art Group designed a new logo for us and converted the design to a lovely blue on white for our private use. Kittie loved those towels and dishes. The Art Group gave the six of us a big oil painting duplicate by Renoir for our sitting room. It had two women in a boat. That painting seemed too much to me, but they insisted we put some class in our lives. When our boards and task forces visited our little sitting room they became astonished at first. Then they admired it and became envious.

None of us dared to invite our parents. No one wanted to explain anything. Christina's husband and adult-baby Mike collected a total of six guys in Tuxedos. I relented and invited my parents.

My Dad and I waited at the church narthex entrance at the last moment, and nervous as cats of what to do with each other. We were trying to be on good behavior and hadn't a clue we were doing it right. My anxieties were working their way up to washing over my back, or worse. He diverted his attention from the last witness walking away from us in the center aisle. He grinned at me with a new thought he liked. "You are a wonderful eyeful, Cindi. Delightful. Stunning."

I froze for a moment realizing I had succeeded so well that I had made myself into eye candy for him.

I worried about my lipstick so much I had a delayed reaction to such a wonderful loving sentiment. Whatever trauma had happened to me at age 7, 8, 4th grade, or 7th grade had been long forgotten. If God can be forgiving, I had to try too.

His grin became an even broader smile. "You radiate happiness. If you were going to do something so totally out of bounds, then your changing your face and your voice for appearing as a girl is the thing I am glad you did. Everything about you sparkles with success and energy. Successful businesses. Hiring preference for the destitute poor. Choir. Hospital Foundation. Emergency responders. President of the Jaycees. The Men's Lunch Group can't praise you enough and the speeches they say you gave. They said they went out of their way to insist you attend and they are so glad they did. You made it with them all on your own. You made their lives better. They say that water and sewer district is another major accomplishment. You blew us away with your singing. Wow. We are very proud of you."

Kittie and her choice of a stand-in for her Dad arrived rescuing me. Kittie's parents and family had refused to attend. She had left them and their tight knit little proud-of-their-stupidity alcoholic abusive gun toting family, and that had to be that. They were outraged at her marrying someone with a woman's name, and sent no money for their daughter's wedding.

This crises for Kittie didn't last long when she announced she would get someone else. She worked with the Church's Deacons and she would ask one of them to stand in for giving away the real bride as she styled herself. She had been comfortable with them as she had walked the sanctuary aisle with them in collection, communion, baptisms, ushering, and announcements. She asked the Deacon with the pony tail and the ready smile, who served on the Caring Ministry, and had been one of the Sunday Head Ushers. He attended the Men's Lunch Group. He wouldn't escort Kittie without my blessing. I added my "yes please" to him, and said how envious I felt that Kittie had him to go with her down the aisle. He gave me a hug for that and made me laugh.

My Dad and I watched how Kittie and her pony tailed escort did it. He seemed handsome in his suit with only the pony tail being out of the norm for fathers at their daughters' weddings in a mainstream church. He flipped his head a little at the sanctuary with just the right touch of fun in his voice. "Ready to meet your new family out there?" Kittie's chin went up as she caught a snuffle. In a white glove and white sleeve she slipped her arm inside his elbow.

They played "Here Comes the Bride" all the way though as Kittie and her Deacon went proudly down the aisle slowly and stood together. They had to play it all again for my Dad and me.

Our turn had come. He held up his left elbow radiating joy. In a white glove and white sleeve I slipped my right arm through his left in the terrific blue suit the seamstresses had made for him. He walked on the right as the fatherly power person. He had never looked nearly so handsome to me before until I became his faux daughter. We walked the aisle together arm in arm, with a cadenced pace, heads up, without arrogance, and humbly before our forgiving God.

The lead hymn had to be, of course, the measured *Nearer My God To Thee*. Next came the peppier *Joy To The World*. Pastor Stephanie later said she had *Jeremiah Was A Bullfrog* going through her head all the way through that hymn. We were charmed with the thought. *How Great Thou Art* had been chosen for the third hymn for its soaring refrain. My Choir mates had suffered my mastering my voice and then my becoming the soloist had upset them. We knew each others' singing strengths and the things that drove the Music Director nuts. Out of the corner of my eye the 88 year old woman Peggy on the Choir breathed in extra deep just before that refrain. Why in the world did she come having recently lost her 95 year old husband? For her to take that extra time meant the organist and the whole Choir had taken that time too. They gave that soaring refrain everything they had to give - just for us.

Something had to go wrong. The regular organist caught the flu just before rehearsals. The University Music Department became so pleased to be asked that five students volunteered. Each one of them had hurriedly practiced a different piece of organ music. They made quite a show of themselves in orchestra tuxedos or black gowns hovering around that organ consol. The organ broke down during the rehearsal with only one full day before our ceremony. One of the guys from the Men's Lunch Group and also on the Property Board took it on with tools, parts, and electrical wire. He arrived ready for anything and everything, but became greatly relieved the problem turned out to only be a defective circuit breaker. The student musicians all had to practice on the actual organ. Music had wafted pleasantly outside the church from early that morning.

The church sanctuary became packed. The church bus ran relays around the shopping center parking lot. In attendance were every Mansion House resident who could escape their duties, plus car, truck, and railway mechanics, immigrants, State Police, truck drivers including Shannon and her crew, train crews, hospital staff,

volunteers, church members, Jaycees, Chamber of Commerce, and stores in the shopping mall. The lawn service people had doubted they would be welcome as they didn't have any proper clothes. We had their grandmother lay down her edict they would come or else. The dress code became wear clothes and come as you are. Christina had members of her new therapist peer group.

No alcohol would be allowed out of respect for patients in treatment and Kittie. The Pastor joined with us on this little secret. She had even told us "once you make up your mind to have fun, you don't need alcohol." That worked for me, but Kittie appeared stressed at that. We had more visits with Pastor Stephanie than usual organizing our unique ceremony. We were in one of those pre-marital visits with her when Kittie broke down and wept. She had never thought she could be lovable, be so loved, have someone to love so deeply, and could never ever be married. Having such a caring partner in her life had been beyond her imagination. And never in her wildest dreams in a big formal ceremony with flocks of friends. Never allowed herself to even imagine being in a gorgeous white wedding gown going proudly down the center aisle of a real church.

I had never thought of myself in a white wedding gown either, of course. I think Pastor Stephanie had tears in her eyes too. Kittie and I had tears all over again when we wrote the honorarium check for Stephanie's services.

At a pre-marital counseling session with Stephanie she challenged us. "You two are both such unique people would you consider something very special?"

Kittie and I turned to each other with that deer in the headlights look of not having a clue.

"What had been the faith of Jesus?" She let that hang there. "Jewish. Christianity hadn't even been invented in his tragically short life. He became an itinerant teacher and healer in an illiterate society; not a creed and dogma guy. The two of you Deacons are so strong about everyone should be welcome here, how about having a Rabbi of Jesus' faith stand beside me? You are making a vow of marriage. We could reach back to the most ancient fundamentals of religion in your wedding by honoring our Jewish and pre-Jewish faith backgrounds."

One of my cheeks came up with a little hint of an impish squint. "For a more complete welcome, could you invite a Buddhist Monk, a Moslem Imam, and an atheist discussion leader?"

She smiled.

"Make it so. And have at least one be a guy."

Kittie looked at me with an expression of this had become too weird, but when her face softened, I knew that she got it.

Up front on the chancel the witnesses made a wide space in the center for all those clerics and spiritual leaders assembled there for us. Pastor Stephanie had even found a spiritual healer from a Native American Church who came in colorful tribal regalia. Although I didn't understand her words, she sang a beautiful love song during our ceremony.

The Men's Breakfast Group and the Church Men's Lunch Group were the ushers which made for too many ushers at the beginning. Every one of them came who could. Our two resident former police officers stood with the police. For security they checked people had their invitation, or were listed by name, or Mike sent a message to me. He sensed a man should not be attending and kept questioning him. Security signaled for the police. Something he said didn't seem right and they found a pistol on him. When they detained him they found in his car that he had been sent by the mob to assassinate us. The police felt very pleased with their success, but they didn't tell us until later after we returned.

What would have been a comfortable ceremony became packed with all the church friends. All those extra Ushers were busy finding seats for everyone and bringing out more folding chairs. They didn't tell me they erected tents outside with video repeaters until after Kittie and I had arrived.

The Ushers all insisted on hugging me that morning and for some of them that had to be a first with me. They had given me a discrete private bachelor party with my Dad and had gone out of their way welcoming him. They had whisked him away from the women's hubbub and out to both lunch and dinner just with the guys for two straight days. I still wonder what they told him about me and about my attending their lunches besides what he told me. What had been said in spirituality groups had to remain confidential. They honored that and wouldn't tell me which annoyed me.

The older guy with the pony tail who would escort Kittie made me laugh that morning. He had always been the best at that. He had always been special to me for having pestered me into attending their lunches in my skirts, bust, long hair, makeup, painted nails, feminine voice, and lipstick. They helped me with an occasional graceful hint on how I came across to them as a woman. Most certainly that could not be in any church manual for spirituality groups.

The Cap'n Jackies kitchen hosted the reception and insisted on making the huge cake themselves. They didn't have to do that. They grinned. "Oh yes we do for the top ornament." They made a drawn-sugar edible decoration of two brides dressed all in white. The two brides faced each other holding hands. We were charmed and the women beamed. It seemed almost translucent. Our in-house lawyer Danielle wanted us to copyright it.

Judge Wagner sat discretely in the back with the Hospital Chancellor, but declined to send a traditional gift out of respect for any political implications. Instead she encouraged the police to have three of their cruisers on duty outside with their

lights flashing. The local region seemed safe as their radios kept crackling on the police circuits. Each mischievously had a huge red bow on top. They reported later a few cars of angry men drifted by but didn't stop. The police did catch their license plate numbers and passed those on to their shift supervisor.

Fire and rescue had an ambulance outside with the police cars. Men and women first responders in their various uniforms of police, fire, ambulance, and emergency med-tech had the back pews. They sat on the side opposite the Judge and Chancellor.

Mike and Christina stood outside at the entrance checking late arrivals. A police officer we knew served as the head of the security staff. She had been promoted to Sergeant. From up front, Kittie and I could see her up in the balcony at the back of the Sanctuary next to the camera and audio crew. She had her new shoulder mounted miniature police phone. Standing next to her in full dress blue uniform with all her military medals and overseas combat zone hash marks stood Major Edith Williams of the National Guard. Next to her stood a small stooped elderly lady. Her grandmother had climbed those narrow steep stairs back there. With pursed lips she counted her brood. Afterwards Sergeant Schlieker claimed she just *had* to coordinate with the police as she carried reception cake, Deacon's punch, and munchies out to their patrol cars. She had recently made an "A" in her first college course which had been on police investigations.

The truth came out the Associate Pastor who led our service had always been a Lesbian. She even had her new partner at our reception. They didn't say, but church friends whispered the partner only came to be in solidarity with our Transsexual wedding. She liked us, hugged us, and glowed with us. We eased a painful hole in her life with our acceptance of her. Other churches had accepted her standing alone, but never with the two of them together side by side. After our ceremony she attended on Sundays with the PonyTail Deacon and others taking on the task of having her feel welcome. Welcome her in her own person that is, not just as a Pastor's spouse.

We discovered an advantage of my keeping my original sex. Change my voice, yes. My bra filling all natural lactating breasts, yes. But the law allowed us to have that wedding license. The Deputy Clerk of Court looked askance at us when we applied saying the new procedures for a same sex marriage had been stalled by politics. I took that as a compliment, but Kittie became crestfallen. We had a copy with us of the Court Order for my new name. I showed them my driver's license with my girl name, girl photo, and that "M" for gender. We asked her to ask Judge Wagner which she did. The Judge came out, greeted us warmly, and wanted a file padded with copies of our drivers' licenses as proof of gender. Not much later we joyously departed with our wedding license leaving a very relieved Clerk of Court and a happy Judge in our wake.

On Pastor Stephanie's signal Barbie-Doll came forward with a traditional pillow in her hands bearing two rings and four earrings. Kittie's and my wedding became Barbie-Doll's big growth step of owning and accepting herself. Now she could grow from there. She made a seldom heard statement of "we all preach all the time; sometimes we use

words." How true.

Exchanging rings had seemed foolish to Kittie until Danielle showed us a gold one with turquoise blue inserts. The Exquisite Fit fashion shop knew an artisan shop. They made another and had dangling earrings done the same way.

Both of us in turn said "with this ring I thee wed" as we slipped a ring on the other's finger. At the magic moment Kittie lifted my veil as I lifted hers. Our hands were appropriately nervous as we slipped the hooks for those earrings in each others' ears. Kittie puckered up and couldn't go on as planned with a long sensuous kiss in front of everyone. Instead, we just stood there feeling awkward as Kittie's tears got me going.

We hadn't turned to face the sanctuary when the witnesses started applauding. Kittie and I held hands as we sniffled and the sanctuary reverberated with a standing ovation. A cloud moved sending sunlight streaming through the big clear windows. God really is still speaking.

I remember our stumbling as we walked down the aisle together holding hands. But there were no stumbles visible on the video as we alternated brave smiles with our sniffles from our wet faces.

At the reception in the church's Community Room my Dad proudly asked for my hand to be the first on the dance floor. I let him lead with my right hand high in his left. My left arm lay on his right all the way to my hand gently rested on his shoulder. My left hip scandalously touched his right. We were gliding across the floor to the traditional Blue Danube waltz when he twirled me around showing me off to the audience. Applause erupted. By the third pirouette I had become the happiest trans-girl in the world with my feminine figure on full display in my well fitting gown.

There were so many people the reception overflowed onto the shopping center parking lot.

That Deacon with the pony tail led Kittie out onto the dance floor. I envied what a fabulous looking pair they made.

Near the door Pastor Stephanie had set up a small table. It had a small wooden cross of olive tree wood, flowers, and on each side were a pair of photos of Kittie and myself. The photo pair on the left showed our old selves and we each looked downright unhappy, stressed, and despondent. The other pair on the right showed our new selves and our smiles and eyes glowed. Turned out Peggy the 88 year old woman on the Choir had gone out of her way being tolerant of me. She had disapproved of me and didn't really want to be accepting. She towed us by the hand to those photos making the shortest, simplest, sweetest, simplest, most deeply loving sentiment I have ever heard in just three words. "Now I understand."

At our reception the pianist started playing *Nearer My God To Thee* on his own

unprompted by us. I strode to the middle of the dance floor and raised high my white gloves and gowned arms. My enlarged natural bust in a correctly sized well fitting bra came up by my movement. I motioned for everyone to stand. I brought Kittie beaming to my side. Her radiant smile was a strong statement she was allowing herself the fun that had been elusive from her for so long. The pianist played that song again. The second time the whole room joined in singing at full volume.

Tara boomed from somewhere out of sight across the room. "Cindi; sing How Great Thou Art."

People made space as Carmen pushed at them.

My new voice gave that song all I had to give.

Kittie's and my day became complete with the Mansion House audio crew filming us. They filmed from Pastor Stephanie arriving in her robes at the chancel in front of the sanctuary before the first witness walked down the aisle. They caught her in a big broad smile up front and kept filming way too late with our twirling around the dance floor. They even caught our explanation demonstration of how we quick switched who led. There wasn't time for Kittie or I to dance with everybody whether boy and girl. If someone wasn't dancing, we figured their hesitancy was lack of confidence, so we gave group dancing lessons.

My eyes watered when the Pastor's partner asked us to teach them. Wow. No time like the present as I took the partner's hand and out there on the floor we went. "When I move my left foot forward you move your right foot back. Ready?"

The video caught our Pastor with her mouth wide open and a shocked surprise written across her face. They also caught her pointing at us and laughing in the same scene. I quailed at the thought of teaching anyone so powerful with God as my Pastor how to dance. Timid little Deacon Kittie over came all and asked her instead as they had worked together on the Board of Deacons. An image made the monthly church electronic newsletter of Kittie holding the Pastor's hands as Kittie looked down at their feet explaining the box step movements. The caption under the photo had to be, of course, 'God Is Still Speaking' with that little red comma. Kittie had a smile in that image for having fun.

The PonyTail Deacon asked for my hand on the dance floor. He led all the way to the side of the dancing area. He helped me up those steps with my wedding gown restricting my knees and ankles. Kittie held me in a hug for what seemed nearly forever.

When she backed off just a little from me while still holding my hands by just a finger the PonyTail Deacon interrupted. "Kittie; at Deacons' meetings you have mentioned several hymns from time to time as your favorites. At this moment just for you, what would you most like the Choir to sing? Just for you."

Kittie scrunched up. She did a perfect version of a country singer's hand to an eye. "You've opened the flood gates. But honestly, when Cindi stood with me for our Baptism, she said it seemed silly to her. I didn't agree then, but it did. Then that family asked for me to be the Deacon for their new daughter's baptism they named Cindy. That grew on me and I've been volunteering to be the Deacon for baptisms every since. It's that promise of 'love, support, and care', and that song we sing. This moment feels like that. That this is my rebirth and all of you are promising Cindi and me your 'love, support, and care'. Right? That this moment launches me on a whole new life. Launches us. Would you sing that baptism song; the long one; just for me? Please."

A Choir member flipped pages in the Hymnal. "Hymn 75 *I Was There To Hear Your Boring Cry*. Hymn 75, please."

Kittie's tears flowed.

When they had finished that hymn one of the Choir's members spoke up. "We have a few ideas for joyful celebration. One hymn and two take offs. May we?"

Kittie nodded.

"The man with the bagpipes please. We'll do *Amazing Grace* slow and careful and everyone join in."

Kittie wept as I sang that in classical orchestral music style.

They sang *A Boy Named Sue* as *a Boy Named Cindi*. They had invented that on their own. Then they sang *Oh God Our Help In Ages Past* as *Oh Cindi Our Help In Ages Past*.

Kittie joined right in radiating joy.

I asked her for a favor. "Let's do *Coal Miner's Daughter*, and you give it everything you can with that accent."

She did.

I held her hand. "Sing with me up here, and sing with me all the way."

We, the Choir, and the audience sang and sang some more. We sang it all.

That evening of our wedding we went way past the planned time as the singing continued. Pastor Stephanie didn't stop us as she wasn't preaching in the morning. We heard later there was a major unplanned announcement in the Sunday Service about us the next day. It happened in the Prayers and Concerns section with spontaneous praise. Out of somewhere in the pews a man called out loud for *How Great Thou Art* in our honor. The organist played the first bars. They canceled the next hymn for the

unplanned one.

At our reception, the audio film crew stayed with us all the way. A few people asked how to buy copies of the video, and the University cable channel ran a link from the church website. Gay Pride paid for copies on how to conduct same sex weddings. An unattended collection basket near the door from some other event grew money. The church council asked us to host a quarterly tea dance. But the Congregation wanted more singing at a Saturday or Sunday afternoon monthly charity performance. We put new copies of *Wisdom Jesus* and *Saving Jesus From The Church* in the back for sale. "If you want our singing, we want you to know us. We're just a little different from the country music we love so much."

All of our ceremony was in our quietly elegant, perfectly fitting, pristine white, nearly ankle length, matching gowns from Exquisite Fit.