

Holly-Jane Rahlens



Extract:

Mazel Tov in Las Vegas

Harold Bellamy was lounging on a bench with the other chauffeurs taking in the hot desert sun when we stepped out of the downtown Marriage Bureau. He jumped up when he saw us, raced over to our pink Cadillac limousine and flung the door open with a flourish. Obviously he was pushing for a generous gratuity. PLEASE TIP YOUR DRIVER, read a little sign in the limousine. MAKE THE HAPPIEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE, HIS TOO.

“Well, that was mighty quick,” Harold said congenially once we were all settled in nice and comfy. “About twenty minutes, was that?”

“The Marriage Bureau is not even asking for my pass,” Benno remarked, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Passport, honey,” I said.

“You don’t say?” Harold remarked, turning on the motor.

Actually, if it hadn’t been for Madelaine Brady, our bureau official, it would have taken no more than ten minutes max, for there was nothing to do save fill out a license application with our names, dates of birth, parents’ names and dates of birth and a few other minor details.

“Oh, you’re from Berlin!” Madeleine Brady had exclaimed. “Well, hertsli—hertsli—Oh, darn it, I always forget how to say ‘Congratulations!’ in German.”

We told her, but she was having a hard time repeating it, so I spent a few minutes tutoring her, writing the phrase out on a piece of scrap paper in easy-to-understand American spelling.

“Herts-lish-a glick-voon-sha tsor hohch-zyte,” Madeleine read with a thick midwestern accent. After a few tries she got the gist of it. “Well, this will certainly come in handy,” she said, waving the piece of paper. “You’re the third German couple today, and my second Berlin couple this week.”

“Really?” I replied. I wanted to remind her that I was American, but decided it might have been too much for her to handle at the moment. “That many? I had no idea.”

“Oh yes, indeed, this place is jumpin’ with Germans. During the busy season we have at least five deutsch couples a day. Nevada’s quite popular with your type. Do you folks happen to know ...” Her voice tapered off for a moment while she reached again for her glasses which were conveniently resting on the top of her head, stuck into her teased hairdo. Madeleine flipped through some files. “Oh, here they are! Do you happen to know Peter Weinecke and Marianne Rathsack from Berlin? They registered here on Tuesday.”

I shook my head. “Berlin’s a big city.”

“Well, of course!” Madeleine agreed, securing her glasses back in her hair. “But then again, you never know. It’s such a small world. And besides, the Weineckes looked just like the two of you. Kind of artistic. Dressed in black. And the same generation, if you know what I mean.”

“No, not really,” I said.

“Oh, you know, the middle-aged European rebel type. We seem to attract your kind like a magnet.”

“Middle-aged?” I gulped down some hot air.

“Of course you don’t look it for a second!” Madeleine replied quickly. “And neither did the Weineckes. But I do see your dates of birth here.” She reached again for her glasses.

“What do you mean by rebels?”

“Believe you me, I have a trained eye. Before I took the civil servant

test I was a detective in the casinos. I know all kinds. I'm willing to bet that when you were in college, you swore you were never going to get married. Am I right or am I right?"

She was correct.

We thanked Madeleine for her help and turned toward the cashier to pay the thirty-five dollars for the license.

"Actually," Benno said when we were out of earshot, "I do know Peter Weinecke."

"You're joking!"

"No! We studied together."

"Really?"

"We were both in the Red Artists Brigade. Nineteen hundred seventy."