

A Rugby Wedding

The next week is an off week. Like ruggers everywhere, our lives are shoehorned into the rugby schedule. Lug, who has patched up with Nancy, is getting married. I guess it had been just a case of the pre-wedding jitters. Not only have they patched up, but Lug has found a job, sales for an office supply company. He is what you might call a smooth talker, when he wants to be, so yeah, he can probably sell copiers and paper-clips. Things are back on the up and up for him.

The wedding is to be in San Antonio. To our way of thinking, this is just a chance for another road trip.

We are all in a somewhat deficient state of transportation at the time. No one has a car that can make, with any certainty, the three hour trip to San Antone. What to do? We put our various heads more or less together and applied all of that rugby gray matter to the problem. In no time we come up with a solution – rental!

Jumpin' Jerry, one of the few of us who has an actual credit card, was designated as point man. He will procure the rental on Thursday. We will split the cost and leave after practice. It is a good plan. Or, so we think.

Come Thursday, Jerry has the car. Being a back, he goes for style. He gets a Cadillac, which would have been all well and good, except that with the upgrade in the marque, and to keep cost within our meager budget, he has to downgrade the size. It is a Cadillac *coupe*. This is not so good. There are seven of us going in the one car: Michael T; Geoff; Geoff's wife, Carrie; Derrick; Darryl, our huge prop; Jumpin' Jerry; and myself. Thank god Ben "Lug" Lugan, the groom, has to go early to meet the bride's family, or he surely would have been included as well.

Derrick, Darryl and I, as the meat and potatoes of the crowd, take the front seat, where there is a little more room for the legs. I opt to drive. The rest take the back. It is (How shall I say it?) full. The space and, just to mention, oxygen are fully consumed. The back seat crowd will be very friendly for the next three hours. It is worth it, though, to us. What is saved on transport expense can be directly applied to entertainment this weekend. As I said, it is a good plan.

We depart directly after practice. Carrie had come to meet Geoff, so we are all there. The key thing is to minimize the time spent in transit. It's Thursday and the bachelor party has started. We need to be there.

The foot is lead and the drive, fast. We have only one piss stop, which I think is some kind of record for this many ruggers on a road trip. The wedding gods must be watching out for us, speeding our journey to the delivery and completion of the vows, to another match made in heaven, to the propagation of the species – *ruggerus humanus*.

So I had called Tina a few times since our San Antonio game, just trying to kindle the fire. She was receptive. As soon as Lug and Nancy had announced the wedding date, I called back to let her know I'd be coming to town. She was all over it and agreed to be my date to the wedding.

That would have to wait, though. This is Thursday, and in wedding-speak, that means bachelor party. We get in town about 10:30 and go straight to the party. Of course, it is being held at one of the local strip clubs.

I pull into the parking lot and we disgorge from the Caddie. Poor thing, it has been bursting at the seams for a hundred and eighty miles, three hours, no relief. I'm sure I hear a sigh coming from somewhere deep in the mechanicals as its shocks and springs relax at the relief of pressure. We have to leave the windows open, though, as six ruggers straight from training and unshowered can leave a devastating olfactory effect. Some relief is just not immediate. The Caddie will have to wait for the beneficial airing effects of the San Antonio night. Poor Carrie, she never complained once, even though she didn't carry any defensive stank herself. Rugger's wives – the things they have to put up with.

We all had managed to pull on some reasonable street attire somewhere along the journey, so we make a direct assault on the door and pile inside. It is a typical Texas tittie-bar. Lot's of glitz and polish, flash in the low-light, but you wouldn't want to see it in daylight. It takes us no time to find the bachelor party in question. They are off in the far corner where the dancers are queued-up waiting their turn to do a table-dance for the guest of honor.

Ah, the table-dance, that time-honored Texas tradition. It is the primary, tittie-bar method of separating the suckers, er, customers, from their cash. The mark sits in his chair, presumably at a table, and the dancer dances, tits out, in his face. This is sometimes called a "lap-dance", as the table is really only an

unnecessary extra. It is proximity to the lap that becomes the all-important criterion of quality. The dancer is “tipped” for the performance, although the rate is set, and I don’t think it is quite acceptable to withhold the “tip” for a poor, or otherwise lacking, performance.

The bachelor party is the pinnacle of this cultural pursuit. At the bachelor party, the groom’s cronies willingly stand in as surrogate suckers, vying with each other to buy dances for the bachelor, giving him his last experience of unfamiliar female flesh before he enters into blessed matrimonial union. The dancers know this, so they flock to the scene where the spigot is open and the cash flows freely.

Lug is there with some of his friends from Vandy that have made the trip. One guy is particularly noticeable. He goes by the nickname “House”. His real name is Frank. Frank Thompson. He is a football player, nose-guard by position and square in shape. He was Lug’s teammate at Vanderbilt. He and the others are already in quite good form. Cy and Dopey are there, too. They had skipped training and made the drive directly after work. Bryan’s there. He had arranged his own transportation. We join the fray and catch our stride quickly.

I could see that the rest of the customers, scattered in ones and twos at tables about the rest of the room, are rather put off by the whole bachelor party thing. We are monopolizing the talent and leaving just slim pickings for them. They look askance at us as they sip their drinks in jealous boredom. I say, let those dogs have their day some other time, when, and if, it might ever come. Regardless, here and now, this is Lug’s party. Let’s get on with it.

The Doc and I are checking the talent and sending those that pass muster on over to see Lug on his throne. We notice that Carrie has found a seat for herself over on the fringe of the festivities. Geoff joins the crowd and is intently searching out dancers for Lug’s edification. Michael decides that Carrie needs a little entertainment herself. The next dancer that passes, he corrals for a little chat.

When done, she nods, goes over to Carrie and pushes the table out of the way. The top comes off, she steps in close and the dance begins. Now, at first, Carrie doesn’t quite clue in to what is happening. When she does, though, about the same time as the top comes off, she turns about twelve kinds of the deepest red I’ve never seen before. To her credit, and as the stoic, rugger’s wife she truly is, she sits and takes it. I don’t think, however, that she opens her eyes

once to see those boobs shaking inches from her face. Geoff sees the whole thing, even if Carrie doesn't. I think he is going to rupture from laughter. His expression changes after the dances ends. Carrie shoots him the "laugh if you want, but I'm going to make you pay later for my pain now" look. Geoff's face goes pale and I think he worries a bit for his near-term matrimonial equanimity.

All the while, Jerry, our token back, is doing his own thing – one dance for the groom, one for himself. It only seems fair. The girls don't seem to mind. Jerry, as a back, sees himself as a natural leader of men. He has the air of confidence, sense of self-worth, coolness under pressure that just drives women to the wild side. It is a kind of magnetism. And it works. There is now a little knot of dancers around Jerry. His little enclave is starting to rival Lug's, with Lug only holding sway because his group is fed from so many more sources, including Jerry's.

The night spins on, the cycle repeating, spending the money we don't have for something we've already seen. It doesn't matter. It is always fresh and new to us. Maybe our memories are just short. Whatever the reason, we stay. We stay until the money runs out, which conveniently, happens to be the same time that the club is closing. The girls seem to have disappeared as the management helps us out the door.

All but one, that is. She is *the* one we all lusted after and she is giving Jerry a ride. Go figure. I already have the keys so Jerry just instructs me to be careful with the car. It is his responsibility and on his card. I respond, soothingly, "Relax, it's a rental."

This doesn't seem to truly placate him, but for now, he has a different focus. He isn't going to be distracted by minor, pecuniary details. Down to six now, the rest of us get into the relieved car and drive to the hotel.

The next day, Friday, is the golf outing. How rugby and golf go together, I'll never understand, but it seems that there is always golf involved when the game's not on or the drinking takes a holiday. Sometimes they are all combined. And, that can get ugly.

There are some omens of ugliness. To start with, we are all hung over. A few baby-steps at breakfast, read that Bloody Marys, will help get the day going. And it does. We are just getting our buzz back on as we leave for the links.

Nancy's dad has arranged the tee times at a local course. It's a bit of a drive, so on the way we decide to get a little beer for the day. Once the buzz is

humming it would be a shame to let it fade. We get plenty, for everyone, to make the round interesting.

There ends up being four foursomes. That is all that could be mustered following the stag festivities. Michael T and I are teamed with Lug and Dopey. There is no formal competition. We'll do a scramble. It will be a relaxing day touring the fairways, and maybe a little bragging at the end about individual expertise.

Let me tell you, there will be nothing to brag about. Skills we have not. Enthusiasm we have plenty.

Carrie and Nancy are given a separate cart. They will traverse the course and make sure every one is kept in beer. Bryan, Geoff, Jerry and Cy, the back division, the speedsters, the guys that look like they belonged on a golf course, will lead off. Michael, Lug, Dopey and I will bring up the rear, where we duffers can least interfere with the serious players.

And we are off. The first few holes are relatively uneventful. The wedding party is still waking up. Most of our tee shots stay on, or near, the fairway. Putting is an adventure, however. At least we don't have to chase the errant puts too far. The girls are doing a fabulous job with the beverages and hospitality. We find, though, that we need to double order as they may not get back before we finish the first round.

On the fifth hole, Dopey goes into the water hazard. His ball is only a couple of feet from the edge and he is determined to retrieve it. He takes off his shoes, rolls up his pant legs and takes an exploratory step into the hazard. He's brought a wedge with him and tries to hook the ball back along the bottom to where he can grab it. No luck. It rolls in a little deeper.

So, Dopey, who doesn't get his name for nothing, takes another, fatal, step. There is no purchase for this second step. He slips in the ooze under his toes. The first foot decides to join the second. Dopey lays out, submerged, in the hazard.

Why was he born so beautiful?

Why was he born at all?

He's no fucking use to anyone,

He's only got one ball...¹

Well, that kind of says it all, doesn't it?

When he comes up, he's still got the wedge in his hand, which he's waving toward the shore. Lug grabs it and reels him in. Not much of a catch, but we do find that he managed to grab his ball while in the hazard. Mission, sort of, accomplished.

Dopey plays on, unfazed. Courage in the face of adversity, that's what we always extol. And, speaking of it, Carrie and Nancy make a timely arrival with a new round of courage.

After the clubhouse turn, Lug is apparently riding Dopey pretty hard. Dopey has taken on the aroma of the swamp thing and it is offending Lug's delicate sense of smell. The mistake here is that Dopey is driving. And, he's beginning to get a bit peeved at the treatment he's receiving due to his one, innocent misstep.

Dopey takes a hard left in the cart and we see Lug, who is unprepared for the sudden change in direction, begin to come out of the side of the cart, torso and butt hanging over the abyss. He manages to grab hold of the hand rail on his way out of the cart. This only temporarily rectifies the situation as his massive bulk is now cantilevered outside of the diminutive cart.

The imbalance in weight distribution brings the cart up on two wheels, but still gamely continuing on its path, performing its appointed duty. Lug's great buttocks are bouncing along the fairway, leaving massive craters in the manicured grass. Lug hangs on for oh-so-dear life.

It seems an eternity. Dopey, trying to maintain stability and momentum, makes an instantaneous decision. He reaches over and gives Lug a friendly shove in the solar-plexus, detaching him from the vehicle. Lug takes a role down the fairway, leaving a few more minor divots.

But, all is for naught. The correction occurs too late. The cart is already on its side and takes a slide into the rough.

Michael and I arrive immediately behind, suppressing our laughter for fear that Dopey is actually injured. We've dealt with Dopey in these situations before. The man is made of rubber. I'm sure that he can't be hurt. He is

¹ Anon., Born so Beautiful, chanted.

extricated from the overturned cart and shows no signs of being worse for the wear, other than a little embarrassment at his current predicament.

Quickly we set the cart back on its wheels and make a survey. No damage done. Right as rain. That is, unless you count the ten yard gouge out of the fairway, a furrow waiting for the next season's plantings, or maybe just to collect the next foursome's balls.

Michael looks at me and winks, "Greenskeepers got kids."

Lug has gotten up by this time and is fuming. We defuse the situation a bit with some light banter.

Michael starts, "Lug, that was at least a 10.5 on the Richter when you bounced back there. And the after shocks. Wow!"

I chime in, "And those craters where you hit! This hole is going to have a whole new set of water hazards next time it rains. I think it will be a great improvement."

With his attention deflected from Dopey, he says to us, "Goddamn it! He could have killed me."

"Ah, Lug. You're too big to kill. And you bounce so nice. I wish you could have seen it the way we did. Beautiful!"

Dopey is still in a fog. I'm wondering if he hit his head or it's just the level of beer consumption?

Up and up went the level of <i>steam</i>	[read beer]
Down and down went the level of <i>cream</i> ²	[read sanity]

Speaking of beer, Carrie and Nancy make a timely arrival.

"Another round, boys?"

"Don't mind if we do."

Nancy attempts to give Lug a pre-conjugal hug, but even she can't penetrate the fuming Lug's mood. She takes it in stride, rolls her eyes at Carrie and they're off to the next set of parched hackers.

Pleasantly refreshed, we finish the hole and move on to the next tee. Refreshment, or no, Lug is still feeling a little chagrined at his treatment and surreptitious exit from the cart. He's also thinking, apparently, that we didn't

² The Engineer's Song, op. cit.

show enough concern or interest in his well being. He is the groom, after all.

Lug's got honors and channels all of this ill feeling into his drive. Unhappily, he doesn't notice that the foursome in front of us hasn't cleared the fairway yet. Lug's buddy, House, is standing about three hundred yards from our tee, surveying his next shot. Lug smacks the drive of his life – all his massive strength and pent up frustration, and maybe a little edginess due to his impending matrimonial union, going into it – and plants the ball square between the shoulder blades of the unsuspecting House.

“Oyyyyeee,” we hear him scream from the distance.

House extracts the ball, planted six inches deep in his back, and hurls it three fairways over. He then goes into a St. Vitus' dance on the grass, including various quaint and arcane gestures directed our way.

Lug turns to us, the situation and his anger defused at last, and says, “I think I'll be taking a mulligan on that.”

We finish the round and all the hackers gather at the clubhouse to compare their cards and prowess. House, who only required minor surgery to repair his back, is over it now and performed creditably on the course. Apparently, he's not one to hold a grudge, unlike some of the present company. He's a big man in more ways than one.

It comes down, finally, to Bryan's group on top with Lug and us only a stroke behind. House's four are just out of the running. Or that's the report, anyway. We'll never know if the mulligan counted in the total or not. Lug, while inspecting Bryan's card, decides to eliminate the proof and eats it. We hear that it goes well with a nice lager. With no evidence to the contrary, Lug claims bragging rights on the day. As well he should, being the groom and all.

I called Tina after the golf outing. We'd have lunch, go to the rehearsal dinner and continue the festivities together. I invited Michael to go with us, since Ana hadn't made the trip. She was busy studying for mid-terms, or some such tests. Her commitment to school, and her future, sometimes made it difficult for the two of them to spend a lot of time together, especially in our social pursuits.

Ana, of course, is my ideal – gorgeous, smart and focused. But, as my best friend's girlfriend, untouchable. So I keep looking for a suitable facsimile.

Michael and I had dated the same girl once before, in high school. It was kind of an accident, really. Her name was Carol and she hung out with our

crowd. At first, she was dating another guy. Michael really liked her, and I, imitating my buddy in everything, developed a similar affection.

When she split with her boyfriend, I happened to be the one there. Michael and family were out of town. I was available. Carol and I went out on a few dates, but both of us saw it was going nowhere. We both knew inside that she really liked Michael.

After Michael got back into town, I could see that he wasn't real happy about the situation. It was the only time I can remember any friction between us. It was one of my first dating experiences. What did I know? I saw that Michael liked Carol, so figured I should, too. Then, when the opportunity arose, I just followed through. I learned from that. In the end, Carol and I had a talk and I stepped aside. Michael and I had a talk and smoothed things over. They dated the rest of the way through high school, then split when they went off to college. Like I said, it was a learning experience.

Tina was wonderful, though I hardly knew her yet. Pert, cute and sassy. I'd only seen her the one time for a few hours after our game with the Vatos. I wanted to explore more and it would start today. Was she the one? I don't know. With every girl I met, I always thought it could be. I'm an optimist that way. I'd have to try the waters and find out.

Lunch is late and casual. The three of us go down on the River Walk. Tina isn't too yazzed about this idea, "That's where all the tourists go," but she acquiesces. We take our time and laze in the afternoon, relaxing before what we know to be the coming storm.

For the rehearsal dinner, Lug's parents had secured the banquet room at a country club on the edge of town. It seems that they were actually a golfing family and had connections.

We all arrive in our rugby finery, which isn't saying a lot, but it's certainly better than the t-shirts and shorts we wear to most rugby parties. That's one thing that never seemed to have made the trip across the pond from England – the blazers and ties. It's always been my impression that rugby in the U.K. is the establishment itself. They always look the part. Here, it's the opposite. We're the outcasts. Dressing the same, *looking* like a team, is anathema to the misfits that come to the game in this country. We have to maintain our individuality, express ourselves. So, we keep it casual, asserting our independence. Maybe that's really the flaw in our game. We haven't come to

the point where the fifteen play as one because we've got too many separate inclinations. Whatever. When it comes to a wedding, though, we do our best, even when it pinches.

The rehearsal dinner is good. It goes well and for the most part is unremarkable. There is, of course, much toasting of the bride and groom; much, too much, food for the entire party; and then more libations to seal the rehearsal in our memories so that the event itself would come off flawlessly on the morrow. Off to the Riverwalk where the taps are still open. No time to stop now, is it?

After a binge, it's time for a purge. Saturday, the interlude, is the perfect time for it. We arise late, in pain and remorse for our errant ways. Michael and I head for the hotel bar. A flush of the system would seem in order. Purge the toxins and kill them with alcohol. Baby steps. Soon all would be right with the world again.

We while away the day taking baby steps, chasing the demons from the previous night and honing an edge on our mood and wit. Tina came at about 6:00. The wedding was at 7:00. Plenty of time.

I ask her if Michael can come, too. Can we save him from the cramped rental? She agrees readily and we are off.

The wedding is to be at a church on the northwest side of town, followed by a reception back at the hotel. We had been advised that the 7:00 pm start time meant 7:00 pm. No rugby time tonight. Nancy's mother was adamant, "The bride walks down the aisle at 7:00." We arrive well early and find some seats in the chapel. Not everyone got the message, though. I'm sure I hear ruggers creeping in the back door as Nancy walks down the aisle: late to a ruck, late to a wedding.

It's a beautiful wedding as well it should be. They are two well-heeled families performing one of the sacred rites of our culture. This is something they are good at. There is only one small snafu. The priest, at the end of the ceremony, presents the newly wedded couple to the congregation as "Mr. and Mrs. Ben Gibbons, ..., er, Lugan!"

I think, maybe, he is overcome by his long relationship with the Gibbons family and his personal acquaintance with Nancy's mother and father. After all, the Lugans aren't native San Antonians. They have come all the way from Tennessee. And, they haven't come to save the Alamo this time, only to steal

away with a local maiden. It is a forgivable error.

Ben, however, isn't so forgiving. He knows that this gaff, in front of the assembled rugby multitude, is going to cost him dearly. It will never be lived down. It will never be forgotten.

He swallows hard, still red-faced, and escorts his bride back down the aisle to matrimonial bliss.

The reception is in one of the hotel's banquet rooms. We wander over to the hall while the wedding party are getting their photos done.

The Gibbons were doing the reception right – a sit-down dinner for the entire crowd, plus, best of all, an open bar. We check to make sure it is open at the moment. It is. (What an educated gentleman Mr. Gibbons is!) And, we go to work.

By the time the wedding party and family arrive we are well on our way, primed and lubricated for the events of the night. Seating for dinner is almost immediate, and a good thing it is, too. It draws us away from the bar and provides an interim return to sobriety. Lug, however, fresh from the endless rounds of photos, feels the need to catch up. He carries several rounds with him to the wedding party's table. House, who is best man, did the same.

“Beef or chicken?” The eternal question. I go for the beef. Tina takes chicken. We eat with gusto while Lug and House drink at pace. The meal is completed, the speeches said and on to the cake.

The cake bears mentioning as a small incident takes place during the cutting. The bride, Nancy in all her glory, while positioning herself to make the cut, also positions her sleeve over a candle set next to the cake. The sleeve immediately erupts in flame. Could this event foreshadow the character of the coming marriage?

Dopey standing near by, and ever-vigilant, douses the sleeve with his drink – alcohol content nearly as high as that of Dopey's blood at the moment. Luckily, there is still enough mixer to choke the alcohol and drown the fire. It is out nearly before it started. The bride is unscathed, but the gown will bear the scars. And, the cake, let's just say it has become slightly sodden while still taking on a ninety-proof nuance. All the better for the ruggers in the crowd.

The party moves on to dancing. A deejay is providing the best of his repertoire and the crowd is responding. Somewhere, some of the ruggers have decided that a serenade for the bride and groom is in order as well. I could hear

their voices, providing a basso counterpoint behind the dance music:

If I were the marrying kind,
And I thank the Lord I'm not, sir,
The kind of man that I would be
Would be a rugby... scrumhalf, sir.

Because I'd put it in,
And she'd put it in,
We'd both put it in together.
We'd be all right, in the middle of the night
Putting it in together...³

It is more of the same, all over again, until the wee hours. Eventually, the rice is thrown and the bride and groom retire to their room upstairs. The intelligent wedding guests, one by one and two by two, retire as well. That leaves the Caballeros, making the best of the remnants of the open bar and cavorting in the banquet room where most of the tables have been cleared away.

Before nary a moment of party time can be wasted, who should return to the fray but the groom himself. It seems that he is not quite ready to put this party to bed. He comes in, tie missing, shirt-tail out, and looking just a bit disheveled. He has the glow in his eye, though, and the intensity of purpose to consummate the party before completing the marriage. Nancy, strategically, has not reappeared with him.

Now, House, who has been indulging us and our wanton ways, perks up at the sight of Lug.

“Lug,” Frank ‘House’ Thompson starts. Obviously he was Lug before he ever found ruggerdom. “What is this rugby stuff, anyway?”

“Aren't you guys just a bunch of soccer fairies playing at a man's game? Or what?”

The gauntlet is thrown down, most definitely. An assault has been made on the machismo of ruggers everywhere. Gridiron is challenging the ‘other’

³ Anon., [The Marrying Kind](#), rugby traditional.

contact football to the rightful place atop the pinnacle of macho. It's a challenge that can't be ignored.

Lug, who has become a full and whole-hearted convert, defends his new found sport with gusto.

"Oh, you uninitiated dilettante, you need to just try it to find out how wrong you are."

It seems that House has had a plan to go along with stirring the macho pot.

"I would like that. I'd like that very much. How about if you show me now?"

"What?" replies Lug. "You want to go outside now and play some rugby?"

"We don't have to go outside. There's plenty of space here," House asserts. Then he grabs an empty two-liter soda bottle and goes on, "This can be the ball."

In our deficient state, this actually seems like a good idea. Not only can we have a little fun playing our chosen pursuit, maybe we can make a loyal convert out of this man called House, built like the brick-shit variety.

We instantly divide into teams. One side has Lug, Darryl, Bryan and Jerry. On the other side is Michael, Dopey, me and, the instigator, House. We spread out in the open room. House still has the bottle in hand, so we kick-, or rather throw, off.

House throws it directly to Lug and sprints after the bottle. The rest of us, in slow, non-sober motion follow the play. Lug, in best rugby form goes high for the ball-bottle and catches it at apogee. Maybe we should have laid out the finer points of the law to House before starting. Or, maybe it wouldn't have mattered anyway, as he seems to have an ax to grind. Either way, microseconds after Lug catches the ball, House's shoulder implants itself in Lug's ribs with what seems to be a predestined impact of biblical proportions. The two of them continue, on the same freight-train line of House's run, and with the same momentum. They hit the back wall of the room, which slows them not, and travel right through the sheetrock, leaving nothing visible but the cartoon silhouette of Lug's body and four appendages. We hear the clatter of the two of them coming to ground in the next room.

We all stand slightly agape and undecided as to how to proceed. Luckily for us, they've gone out of play, so no action is required.

Then we hear, coming from the far side of the wall, "We're okay."

Shortly, the two return to the main hall through a side door, rather dusty

ONLY A GAME

from their passage through the sheetrock. The ball-bottle has been lost somewhere in the process.

Both are smiling, as House says, “You know, this rugby’s not all that bad after all. I could do some more of this. I think I’ll stay off the golf course, though, at least when you’re on it.”

And that was the end of the shortest rugby game on record. It ended in a nil-nil tie, both sides satisfied.

Maybe it’s time to consummate.