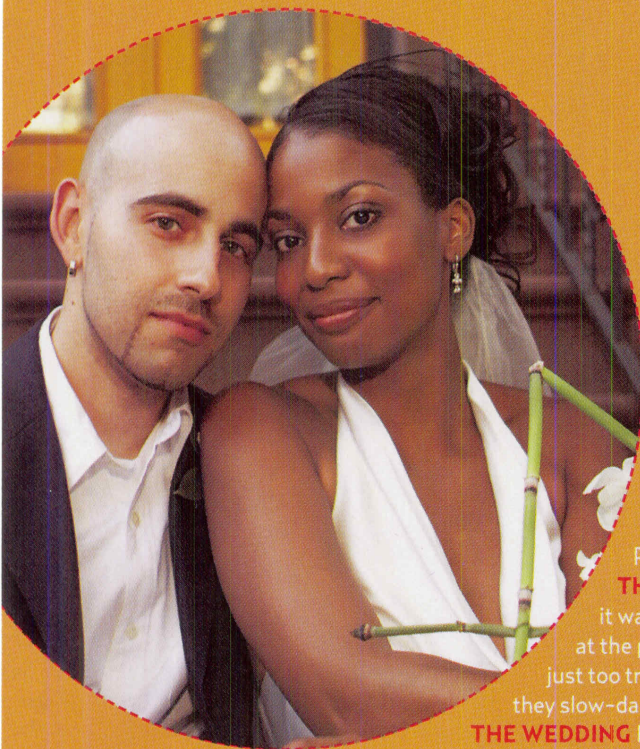


boy

meets

girl

THE JOURNEY TO THE ALTAR STARTS WITH ONE
LIFE-CHANGING MEET-AND-GREET. NEWLYWEDS
OF EVERY AGE TALK ABOUT THEIR DATES WITH FATE.
BY HILLARY QUINN ILLUSTRATION BY LULU



Finally Getting It Write

Kelli Bagley, 31, and Peter Rubin, 31

HOW THEY MET After years of going-nowhere relationships, Peter, a magazine journalist, finally caved to the notion of cyber-dating. The caveat? He limited his looking to sites that catered to singles in the media and arts. That's when the "you've got mail" icon brought him Kelli, an assistant editor at a publishing house. They seduced each other via keyboard.

THEIR DATING DAYS After their first in-person date, Peter went home and told his roommate, "I think she might be the one." Within six months, Peter got a place of his own and invited Kelli to move in.

THE PROPOSAL When Kelli landed a plum promotion at work, Peter knew it was time to pop the question, and he took her to dinner—but chickened out at the prospect of getting on one knee among curious diners. (He claims "it was just too trite and conspicuous.") Instead, he asked for her hand later that evening as they slow-danced in their living room.

THE WEDDING Peter comes from a long line of justice-of-the-peace marriages, so the couple continued the tradition by making things official at city hall. A more romantic celebration—in the garden of a local restaurant—took place later, when an interfaith minister brought friends and family together in September 2005 to hear them renew their vows.

Well Versed in Romance

Meridith Rohana, 36, and Justin Marks, 31

HOW THEY MET Real life can be stranger than fiction, especially when you're majoring in the latter at New York's New School. It was there that Meridith crossed paths with Justin at a poetry reading in November 2003. "We couldn't stop stealing glances at each other while pretending to pay attention," says Meridith. "To this day neither of us can remember who was reading!"

THEIR DATING DAYS Literature ruled their relationship, so it was poetic justice that things really clicked for Meridith when Justin recited Denis Johnson's poem "Sway" to her over the din of a book party. After a year of dating, the pair received their degrees, landed good jobs, and began thinking about a future together.

THE PROPOSAL No formal "Will you marry me?" here, nor an engagement ring (Meridith finds it an antiquated tradition). Instead, the couple put their energy into planning nuptials that would suit their simple, academic style.

THE WEDDING Guided by 10-page programs written by Meridith and Justin, guests watched the couple's candlelit exchange of vows in November 2005 at the National Arts Club, a historic 19th-century mansion where the Poetry Society of America used to meet.





The Picture of Happiness

Paula Trotto, 39, and Greg Kessler, 29

HOW THEY MET Paula, a freelance photo editor, went to an exhibit in upstate New York featuring Greg's work. She liked the photographs on the wall—and the guy who snapped them—so she took his card.

THEIR DATING DAYS The pair began cultivating a friendship, meeting for dinner over several months. Greg even prepared a few at-home dinners for Paula. Unaware initially of their 10-year age gap—"I assumed he was in his thirties because he could cook and his apartment was nicely furnished"—Paula took him to a friend's rustic compound in the Hamptons, hoping that the romantic setting would cement the relationship. He fell in love with Paula; her friends fell in love with him.

THE PROPOSAL The spot was Spain, but getting there with a hidden ring was no easy feat. Airport security asked Greg to dump the contents of his carry-on photo bag not once, but twice—yet he still managed a surprise proposal.

THE WEDDING The couple returned to their friends' 100-year-old barn to officially seal their love. Despite just two weeks of planning and an unexpected rain shower before the ceremony, Paula and Greg's June 2005 wedding went off without (or, rather, with) a hitch.



Togas to Toasters

Keri Michael, 26, and Cace Tyler, 27

HOW THEY MET Keri, whose sorority had closed for the summer, had just settled into her temporary frat house digs when in popped Cace Tyler, a biceps-bulging senior. She loved his body. He loved her smile. Conversation flowed. "We learned we had lots of weird things in common," says Keri, including birthdays one day apart and a first name for a last name.

THEIR DATING DAYS Both students broke up with their steadies the next day; Cace took Keri home to meet his family a week after they met. But while the two were made for each other, their parents weren't: Cace's folks sport ponytails, tie-dyed shirts, and Birkenstocks; Keri's family unit includes a straitlaced, ex-military father. "I'll never forget the first time they met," recalls Keri. "Cace's father went in for the hug and my dad stuck out his hand for a manly shake."

THE PROPOSAL During a hike, Cace asked Keri to sit with him on a rock, and reached into his pocket. "I thought he was getting sunflower seeds, but out came the ring!"

THE WEDDING The pair married in an 18th-century Port Townsend, Washington, church in August 2005.



The Luckiest Losers

Shari Pais, 31, and Victor Pittaro, 37

HOW THEY MET Shari, who had undergone gastric bypass surgery in 2002, caught a glimpse of Victor, who had the same procedure done in 2003, in a local hospital support group. At that point, she'd already lost over 200 pounds; he'd just begun his transformation. Later, when this "hot new guy" showed up at the group's favorite post-meeting diner, her friends invited him to sit at their table.

THEIR DATING DAYS Later that week, Victor sent Shari an e-mail, asking her to be his "angel," his support buddy in the program. Shari gladly accepted the role—and a dinner date. "We were comfortable together from that very first night," she says.

THE PROPOSAL Though the pair had talked marriage since their second date, Shari burst into tears when Victor presented her with a ring tucked inside an Easter basket just five months later. "He said, 'I asked you to be my angel when we first met. Now I want you to be my angel for life.'"

THE WEDDING It was an unusually warm afternoon in February 2005 when the pair married at St. Luke's Church in Whitestone, New York. But their honeymoon was even warmer: Shari became pregnant with baby Ronald, born exactly nine months later.



Not Quite Ready at Prom Time

Maryann Healey, 47, and Terrence Fagan, 47

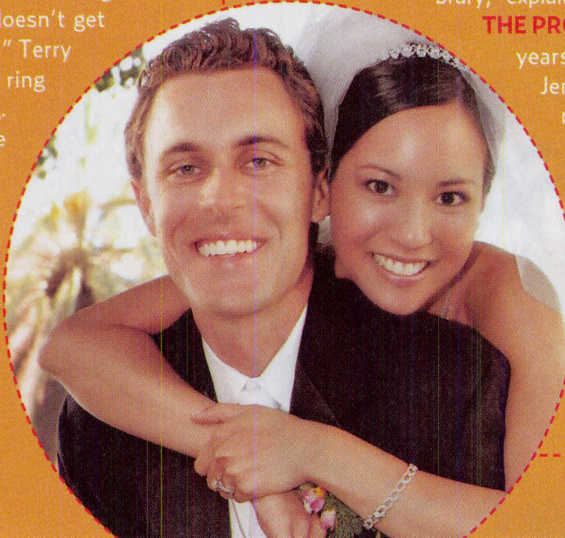
HOW THEY MET Thirty years ago, these two schoolmates went to the junior prom together "as friends." Afterward, Maryann began dating Terry's buddy Ray, and married him four months out of high school. The platonic pair stayed in touch, corresponding by mail when Maryann and her military spouse were stationed in Germany, but then lost contact until running into each other at their 25th high school reunion. When Ray passed away two years later, Terry paid his respects at the wake.

THEIR DATING DAYS Six months after that, a friend thought Maryann needed some cheering up, and organized a date with Terry, who'd remained a bachelor. "We dislike the whole 'soul mate' cliché," says Terry, "but we were so instantly comfortable around one another that it was like our souls looked at each other and said, 'Hey, what took you so long?'"

THE PROPOSAL On the deck of a sailing schooner off the coast of Maine (both are passionate about lighthouses), Terry asked Maryann if she was having fun.

When she said "It doesn't get any better than this," Terry took out a diamond ring and proved her wrong.

THE WEDDING The invitation for their September 2005 vineyard celebration featured their 30-year-old prom photo.



A Solid Foundation

Sheryl Bridgeford, 51, and Marty Bower, 43

HOW THEY MET She needed a new rock wall in her backyard; he was the landscaper who was recommended for the job. The project went so well that she brought him back for another one the next year, and the two became friends. Sheryl reports that she "continually made excuses to ask Marty questions about the retaining wall he was building; it became the 'foundation' for our relationship." When the yard projects were finally completed, she did what any good Seattleite would: She invited him out for coffee.

THEIR DATING DAYS With a relationship quickly brewing, the pair spent their second date touring the famous 10-acre Olmstead gardens.

THE PROPOSAL In February 2005, Marty got down on bended knee at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show and, when Sheryl said yes, he pulled a bottle of champagne out of a man-made stream that flowed through one of their favorite exhibits. "Our love developed in a garden—there couldn't have been a more perfect setting for the proposal," she explains.

THE WEDDING A year later, the couple tied the knot at the same show, in the center of a "wedding garden" that Marty's best friend had built just for the occasion.



Prescription: Marriage

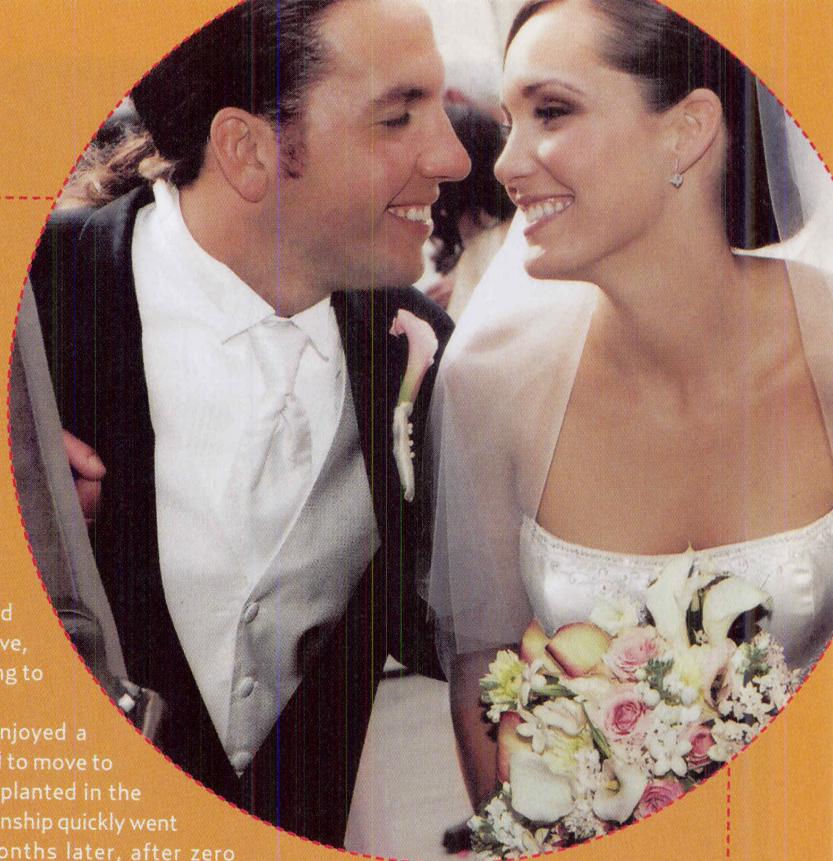
Jennifer Jocson, 26, and Curtis Duffield, 27

HOW THEY MET The scene was medical school—the University of California at Davis, to be specific. Curtis, having spotted Jennifer at an orientation barbecue, figured out how to join her anatomy group, knowing full well that the pair would have to work closely together.

THEIR DATING DAYS Cadavers and coffee breaks (actually, it was more like Boba tea for this pair) did not a romantic setting make, but that didn't stop the two from doctoring their new relationship. "We usually saw each other in scrubs, we always smelled like formaldehyde, and our dates were in the library," explains Jennifer.

THE PROPOSAL No—not in the operating room. Three years after they met, Curtis suggested that he and Jennifer go for a hike in a redwood forest near Sonoma. Though he intended to propose during the hike—he'd brought the engagement ring along—the right moment to pop the question kept eluding Curtis. Later, when the two stopped at a nearby beach for a picnic, Curtis unpacked a blanket and food, and finally got the words out.

THE WEDDING As a tribute to their love of nature—and to the site of Curtis's intended proposal—each reception table at their May 2005 wedding was named for a tree.



The Ball's in His Court

Gina Dinisio, 27, and Brian Spallina, 27

HOW THEY MET It's a classic story. Two 19-year-old lacrosse players meet on the collegiate field, fall in love, and become the perfect all-American couple, vowing to stay together forever.

THEIR DATING DAYS For five years, the pair enjoyed a wonderful relationship. But eventually, Gina wanted to move to Manhattan to pursue her career, and Brian, firmly planted in the suburbs, declined to go with her. The "perfect" relationship quickly went south. Both started dating other people. Six months later, after zero contact with one another, Brian saw Gina at a local lacrosse game and decided to wave the white flag by picking up the phone—on Valentine's Day. Game on.

THE PROPOSAL On yet another February 14th—this time, in Florida—Brian suggested a walk on the beach. He handed Gina a bag that he'd filled with candy—and a diamond ring. "We always talked about how there was never a perfect time for anything in life," says Gina. "But when he handed me the ring, he asked, 'What if I told you now was the perfect time?'"

THE WEDDING In keeping with their preppy past, the couple went with a summery pink and apple-green theme for their July 2005 wedding on the glistening shores of Long Island.

Summer Lovers

Lauren Kourakos, 28, and Erik Stephens, 28

HOW THEY MET All single folks in New York City know that the best way to spend the summer is to get out of New York City. Which is why Erik and a few of his buddies decided to escape the heat by renting a weekend house on the Jersey Shore. To fill the last room, the guys posted a classified ad on Craigslist and found a group of friends, including Lauren, who were interested in a share. The girls fit the bill and got the room. A rockin' summer house was born.

THEIR DATING DAYS There was instant attraction between Lauren and Erik, and a first-night kiss, but Lauren, realizing it would be a very long, awkward summer if things didn't work out, decided to pull back. Not one to be deterred, Erik persisted in wooing his housemate. "I would e-mail her—usually under the guise of some logistical thing regarding the coming weekend. But I'd always throw in some flirtatious comment." At first, Lauren hardly responded, but eventually she succumbed to his advances and became more than a weekend roomie.

THE PROPOSAL They met at the beach and he proposed at the beach—with a champagne picnic in Hilton Head, South Carolina, six months after they met. She cried... they giggled... and then they promptly called their parents with the happy news.

THE WEDDING They exchanged vows at a black-tie ceremony at New York's famed St. Patrick's Cathedral in October 2005.



COMING next issue

BRIDES

The September/October
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Annual Flower Spectacular!
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The Etiquette Bible
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new generation

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And more!

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In addition to designing our fashion, travel, and registry pages, BRIDES Art Director **DONNA AGAJANIAN** (far left) and Deputy Art Director **ANN MARIE MENNILLO** had their hands full with this issue's 32-page section on real weddings. "We chose images that made each of the ten weddings stand out," says Agajanian. "It's important for us to get it right because it's such a special day for each couple," adds Mennillo. This duo's tribute to American weddings is the soul of the issue.

Photographer **SUZY CLEMENT**'s approach to great wedding shots? Blending into the background, allowing brides and grooms to experience their day without being aware of her camera. "I don't take many staged pictures or rely on postproduction techniques," she says. For this issue, Clement shot real-life nuptials in Berkeley and St. Helena, California. A look at the "love letters" on Clement's Web site proves that couples adore her photos. Her work has appeared in *People* and *InStyle*.



The day before Associate Fashion Editor **ELLEN HEISLER** was set to fly to Mexico for the "Ruffles" shoot, two feet of snow hit New York City. Also booked on her flight: the hair and makeup artists and the wardrobe crew. Uncertain if getting to the airport was feasible, Heisler spent hours on the phone, keeping everyone in the loop. "We decided to go for it and trek to JFK," she says. Thanks to her tenacity, they all made the flight, and you can view the results on page 388.

Writing "Boy Meets Girl" was a heartwarming task for **HILLARY QUINN**, who was reminded of her own love story: She met her husband, David, on a blind date—only he wasn't the man she was supposed to fall for, but one-half of the couple who'd arranged the evening. "David pretty much elbowed in on my date, and the rest was history," she recalls. Four and a half months later, David proposed over an airplane loudspeaker. Quinn has written for *Redbook* and *Self*.—Amanda Thomas

