



2-15-2018

## For Mother's Wedding

Norbert Kovacs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kovacs, Norbert (2018) "For Mother's Wedding," *Westview*: Vol. 33: Iss. 2, Article 6.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol33/iss2/6>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



# For Mother's Wedding

by Norbert Kovacs

**When Denise Antoine recalled her father,** the great writer, she pictured him, her mother, and herself chatting in the living room of their family's slender row house in Greenwich Village. She had her father sitting tall and confident in his armchair; herself standing beside him, an arm resting on his shoulder; her mother, the personable, intellectual historian, leaning from the couch and sharing a story colored by her usual good humor. Denise thought that much of her family's home life had enjoyed the intimacy of this portrait: their quiet walks around the neighborhood, their dinners with literary friends. When Denise was twenty, her father died in a car accident, and the picture of her family in the living room set within her as if fixed and final. However things might change, she cherished believing they were that family gathered around her father in his chair.

Denise searched for signs that her mother remained as attached to her father's memory. Mrs. Antoine showed some hint of it, Denise found, especially in the time right after Mr. Antoine's death. The elderly woman had kept home on the excuse of finishing a new book but made little progress at it. "I keep thinking of your father," she told her in those first months of mourning. Even when her mother returned to normal life—visiting friends, taking her late afternoon walks—Denise trusted that she recalled him at times. Denise believed that somehow these memories of him were what helped her mother become happy again. She considered both of her parents in a brighter light for it.

Then her mother started a personal tie with Len Schwartz, a successful businessman living in Brooklyn. Len was charming, sociable, and witty, her mother said. She confessed, "I like him very much." Denise listened to her mother discuss Len's latest joke or story about his family when they met for their mother-daughter get-togethers at a favorite café near Fifth Avenue. At times, Denise tried to discourage her from discussing him. She would bring up an older friend or the condition of the old row house to divert the conversation. Denise thought her mother had not known Len long enough to be sure he was actually her type. However, she discovered that her mother's relationship with Len deepened over time. Her mother brought him to evening parties of the friends she had known with Denise's father. Mrs. Antoine took a break from teaching at her college uptown and went on an extravagant two-week trip with him to Belize.

Mrs. Antoine then announced she would marry Len Schwartz. Preparations ensued, passing in a great blur. Thoughts of the marriage occupied Denise as she arranged paper flowers in the boutique that she owned. The wedding was set for tomorrow. Denise realized her mother would be another man's wife. She

pictured her mother—at fifty-one and with creases in her face and grey in her hair—re-marrying. She asked herself what it would mean for her as a daughter. She was her father and mother's only child, and she would remain so, even when Mr. Schwartz would be her mother's spouse. *How strange it makes me feel*, Denise thought as she headed out the door from her apartment on the morning before the wedding.

Denise went out to prepare for the event the next day. From Chelsea, she took the train to Fifth Avenue, then entered the store where she had bought her dress for the wedding. She had asked the store to alter the outfit to fit her. The dress she had bought was light yellow and made of soft cotton. The blouse was simple with modest but elegant lace ends on the short sleeves. The lower half was pleated and showed its color softly in the light. She thought it a neat, quiet dress that would make her appear neat and quiet as she thought she should for an older parent's remarriage. Denise had only needed the neck widened two inches since it had clutched too close. In the store, she asked the clerk for the dress, and he brought it to her. Denise looked at the yellow dress for the first time since she had purchased it. The store had opened the neck neatly to fit her just as requested. The dress was ready to take. But now Denise, disliked the idea of wearing it. She felt wearing the simple, plain yellow to watch her mother go to Len Schwartz at the altar would be somehow unnatural. The yellow did

not belong on her. She paid for the alteration but asked the clerk to hold the dress behind the counter while she shopped for another.

Denise walked to the racks where the dresses hung and searched for an outfit she could accept wearing. In the first rack, she found one she believed right. This outfit had a purple suit jacket of thick, hard polyester. The jacket's lapels met in a hard "V" at mid-torso where two buttons held them. The blouse that came with the jacket was solid white. The hard fabric of the dress covered the thighs in a tapering bell, white but marked every few inches by small, dark purple squares.



A black leather belt bound this dress at the waist. Completing the outfit were shoes with purple high heels and a flattish, wide-brimmed hat. On a tilt, the hat

easily covered Denise's forehead and dark eyes. She tried the outfit on in the fitting room and believed it worked. The outfit bound her; she felt insulated in its folds. *To everyone else*, she told herself, *it would be presentable*.

After purchasing this second outfit, Denise exited the store, large bag with the clothes and accessories in hand. She did not walk half a block when a short woman with flowing brown hair and very green eyes approached. The short woman's face was hard and somehow off-putting, though she did not seem angry. Denise recognized this woman: Hannah Schwartz, Len's niece. The two had met when Mrs. Antoine, several months ago, took Denise to meet Len at his Brooklyn apartment. Len had hosted some relatives there the same night and introduced Denise to them in his lounge. Hannah, who was in the group, froze and stared at Denise when she had entered the room. Denise, pretending not to have noticed, went up to Hannah as Len Schwartz led her inside. She saw Hannah's lips straighten, then curl with amusement.

"So you are Mrs. Antoine's daughter," Hannah said, once they were face-to-face.

"Yes," Denise answered quietly. She did not know whether it was because of her mother, her appearance, or something else that Hannah had reacted to her as she had. But the young woman continued to seem amused with her whenever they saw one another again that night.

The two now drew together in the street. "Very good to meet you again," Hannah said. Her hard face did not relax, and it put Denise on edge. "I didn't expect this before tomorrow."

"It is a surprise."



"So, how is it you're out and about?"

"I was getting some last minute things for the wedding." Denise lifted the bag with the outfits.

"The wedding has kept us both busy, it seems."

"You have been getting ready for it, too?"

"I am right now. Going to the hairdresser. I've had the appointment for a month. I like to look my best for these events. I assume everyone does." Hannah said then, "My boyfriend, Steve, will be with me at the wedding tomorrow. He's a Wall Street trader. They say he's a wizard of finance. He earns quite an income." She studied Denise as if to see how this affected her before adding, "I'm sure he'll be glad to meet you and your friends."

"Actually, I'm going alone."

Hannah stared. "Really? You didn't ask to bring anyone?"

"No, I decided against it. I'm sitting with my mother and your uncle at their table. It'll be enough just to talk with them, I think."

"Well, there's nothing wrong with sitting and talking with the bride and groom at a wedding."

"No, there isn't." However, Denise felt awkward admitting it.

Hannah gave Denise a weak smile. "I'm sure my uncle and your mother will make you feel welcome. But, I have to get going. We'll see each other tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow." As Hannah walked away, Denise felt relieved. However, she knew she had not settled any of her gnawing differences with Hannah. She considered as she continued down the avenue if she might have any new problems with the rest of the Schwartz family once she got to know them. *Would there be more unfriendly encounters at Len's apartments?* she thought, her lips curling toward a frown.

Denise walked a few blocks and reached an open-air café. The café sided a pedestrian square and had thin frame tables and chairs half way out onto the sidewalk. Denise and her mother had eaten at the café many times. Denise entered the café and ordered a slice of marble cake and black tea. She went back outside where she took a seat at the table farthest from the street; the waiter came soon with her order. Denise dipped a spoon into her hot tea and stirred it slowly. *Will mother and I talk anymore at this café once she is married?* she considered as the tea leaves spun. *Will we even see each other? He has moved for business before. He was in Boston for a couple of years, I heard. She might go with him there. Or elsewhere. Everything could be different with tomorrow.* A clack of high heels sounded to her. She stopped stirring the tea and looked into the square before her table. The limestone and glass building across the café shone with the sunlight. The air was fresh and mild, and the sky showed clear above the people's heads in the open square. Denise heard their steps strike and tap the square's inlaid brick. The people passed in the shadows thrown by



the buildings behind her. Two women in spring outfits went by chatting quietly. Denise saw a man with blue eyes pass, looking at the sunlit building across the square. *The scene is beautiful*, she thought. *But how can I think it when I've been worrying about tomorrow? I shouldn't in my mood, should I?* The light showed bright from the limestone across the square. *It is very strange*, she thought. She finished the last of her tea and cake and walked from the café.

A few blocks down, Denise went to the subway station, connected to one train, then a second that took her to Midtown, where she went to see the wedding planner. Her mother had told her about the planner, but Denise had not listened. *The man has nothing to do with me*, Denise had thought with a hurt feeling at the time. She felt the planner was relevant now. When she arrived at his office, she introduced herself as Mrs. Antoine's daughter and, on being shown to him, asked to see the layout plans for the wedding ceremony. "I'd like to be sure of where everything will be before I go," she explained. "It might help me be more ready."

The planner fetched the plan laying among the many on a small table and handed the large scroll of paper to her. He stood beside her and explained it. The plan showed the chairs for the guests arranged in two lobed wings. Where the bride and groom were to meet and be married, there would be a tall, rose-clad trellis with a cragged rock beside it, tall as a man; an artificial spring from it would flow into a marble basin. The water collecting would create a soothing sound while the rites were read.



"It's a good arrangement, I think," Denise said after studying it.

The planner said, "Do you know your mother was here this week to make some changes to the ceremony?"

"Oh?"

"The backs of the seats are to have these bows on them, for one thing." He handed her a done-up bundle of fine, blue ribbons laying on the corner of his desk. She turned the bow, studying the dozen or more loops bound in a small knot. The ribbon reflected brightly in the window light. *But why had her mother*

*chosen this?* she wondered. It did not seem like her mother's usual taste.

The planner continued, "She's also changed the traditional wedding march to something else. The new music is classical, sort of soft and gradual. I have the CD of it if you would like to hear."

"Yes, I would please."

The planner started the sound system. Music filled the room. It was all violins, slow leading notes followed by a long, round, swelling section. The long notes expanded and stretched with a gentle, fine sound. Beneath it came the sound of violins moving in a steady march. The music fell and resumed the slow lead of earlier. Denise listened, picturing a dawn scene set to the music. The scene built in her mind a piece at a time. With the lead-in, she saw the darkness in some early morning pass into shadow. The long swelling note brought her the sun breaking the horizon. The violins beneath the long note revealed a field growing light from which the dark grass and flowers stood forth. The music repeated, and Denise pictured dark woods beyond the fields grow light. The light came through the trees to small birds in their nests. The birds awakened and stirred. The music seemed beautiful, suggesting these things of the dawn to her. However, the piece could have suggested any beginning, anything new and with promise. Denise realized then that her mother must have felt happy and confident to have chosen this music, Bach's "Air," for the ceremony. Denise imagined her mother absorbed in its fine, gentle sound, loving the long notes in the music as they expanded with the violins beneath them. Denise listened to the music's end. She thanked the planner and left his office.

Denise walked several blocks through Midtown to a large jeweler's shop on Fifth Avenue. The shop had a large glass window, bright with watches and necklaces. She entered and browsed carefully in the aisles among the glass cases. She came to the broaches and noted, near the floor, several priced within her budget for a wedding present. One had a thin silver body and shining links in the band. A second featured a gold-tinged body with a handsome clasp. The broaches were all attractive and high quality, and any of them would have made decent presents. Nevertheless, she dismissed these and turned to examine the broaches on the case's top shelf. These were finer objects, their bodies like lace, the bands delicately forged. The items cost more, too. *However, she thought, I'm giving the present to my mother for her wedding. If I try to save money on the broach, I won't give the finest I could. I'd know it was second or third best. But I can't shortchange Mother on her wedding day.* She is my parent, and she loved my father. So, Denise studied the broaches on the top shelf and chose one of flattened gold with a large pearl and a snapping clasp. She had the counter clerk wrap the broach in a small box with blue and gold striped paper.

Denise left the jeweler's, bags of goods in hand, and connected to a train going toward Chelsea. She got out at the stop before the one near her apartment and, after exiting to the street, walked to a tavern. The tavern stood below street level and narrow windows faced it. She had heard of this tavern from friends

but, busy at her boutique most days, never had managed to visit. She decided that, since she had spent most of the day out, she would have dinner there today rather than cook at home. She went inside through the oak panel door. She saw the room of the tavern was long and narrow, crowded by dark pinewood tables and chairs. It was early for dinner, so only two tables had patrons. She was shown to a small table near the bar and set her bag on the extra chair, glad to sit. When the man came, she ordered roast beef and mashed potatoes, then looked around her, taking in the room. She thought the dim environs good and comfortable. Without checking herself, she listened to a man at the other table tell a joke and his friends laugh. At the other table, young adults in black blazers talked intimately, leaned toward one another. The eyes of a young man flickered as he spoke, sensing, it seemed, the value his words had for his friends. High above the tables, the horizontal, skinny windows let in a coolish white light from the street. The tavern slowly filled with newcomers. The dark brown flats of the heavy tables drew the people to them. The new faces showed pale in the room's shade. Talk kept low at first, but soon the place filled with a busy hum. Denise followed threads of conversation. One eager man told of meeting a girlfriend for a date. A smartish woman spoke of setting her friend straight. The waiter brought Denise her food, and she ate with the appetite she had built since the café. The roast beef was juicy and cut well. She dipped the potatoes in the brown gravy before eating them and liked it. As she ate, Denise looked again about the tavern. It had become dark outside, and the small overhead lamps had turned on. They lit each table in a pale circle but left the gaps and alleys between them dark. The people spoke intimately. A few small groups had sat down at the bar near her. The bartender turned on the wall TVs, and soccer games and comedy reruns poured from the screens. A sense of familiarity and ease entered the room. Denise observed everyone, and she had no self-consciousness. She mellowed and relaxed. When she had finished eating, she sat quietly in her seat. She remembered the wedding and the reception tomorrow and told herself that both would be happy events if they were like this evening in the tavern. She felt she even could be as happy with the marriage as she believed her mother would be. Her trust in this possibility rose as she listened to the room's buzz rise, fall, and begin again around her.

