

*The Rev is Here*

*WDR 4.15*



*JWR 4.15*

## **The Rev is Here**

Scott's and my birthdays are a week apart, so when we turned thirty, we planned on meeting some friends out at a bar. He asked me if I wanted to get dinner beforehand, and, not suspecting anything, I said yes. Well, that night it rained like mad, that was when we got about nine inches of rain in something like three days. We were at some bar/restaurant I had never been in before. The satellite signal was out so the TVs all played blue screens. It was very dim in the dining area and the rain outside fell like hammers.

We had been teasing Scott over a couple things concerning his upcoming wedding (well, we tease Scott all the time, probably more than we should – if he were a weaker person, he may have tried to kill himself by now). His wedding was still over a year away, and he and Alison had already been engaged for over a year. Plus Dan, Jon, and I would make comments to each other in front of Scott wondering who he'd make his best man.

At dinner Scott asked me if I would officiate their wedding.

I know. I was shocked, too.

Frankly, I didn't know what to say. I asked him if it was okay with Alison. It was; it may even have been her idea. I told him I'd like to think about it. Their wedding was fourteen months away, we had time.

I didn't really think about it. I told some people. Their reactions were all pretty much the same: "You?"

Yes, me. Assholes.

I'd been an usher at Lynn and Zach's, and Jon and Tiffany's weddings. I was a groomsman at Jeff and Vony's wedding. I was best man at my brother Dan and Sue's, and my one friend Dan and Dawn's weddings.

I know some girls who complain about being in so many weddings what with all the dresses they have to buy, and I suppose I might feel differently if I was a part of more weddings (I guess I'd need more friends), but it's humbling and an honor to be asked to be part of someone's wedding. It's a big day, you know?

Scott asked me a few weeks later if I thought about it. I hadn't, not really. I thought about it abstractly, like if you're faced with a problem, you might go about solving it by not directly looking at the problem, but more by looking at its peripheries. That's what I did.

My hesitation was due to doubts about myself. All I could think about was Dan and Dawn's wedding where I gave the best man's speech. I thought I did a horrible job. I winged it. I should have written it out. I don't even remember what all I said, but I do remember babbling and not remembering all the bridesmaids' names. For some reason, I felt compelled to name them all. It was just awful.

So I have that in my head, plus I'm not a religious person. In fact, I think people who believe in God are a bit... fruity. Yet, I'm being asked to perform the wedding of spiritual-but-not-religious Scott and Alison, who I know doesn't like me.

I got an extension.

I talked to the husband of a lady I work with who became an internet minister and performed his niece's wedding ceremony. I found out what exceedingly little you had to do to get this totally legal-in-Wisconsin certification.

I did a little research and upon reading the Wisconsin law, I found out that you don't even need someone to perform the ceremony. The bride and groom can do it themselves. When I tell people that, they say, "No, that can't be right." But it's true. My boss and his wife did their own ceremony. He said all you need are witnesses and someone to sign the marriage license, but it can be any one of a bunch of people, from a judge to a police officer to a notary public.

It was about this time that I was reading You're a Lebowsky: Life, The Big Lebowsky, and What Have You. Among the many interesting anecdotes (This is what happens when you find a stranger in the Alps), I learned about a little religion called Dudeism, or the Church of the Latter-Day Dude. Apparently you can get ordained as a Dudeist Priest and perform your very own weddings.

I began to warm to the idea.

I agreed.

Later I told Scott *and* Alison about Dudeism. And they were cool with it. Let me repeat that: they were cool with it.

I became an ordained Dudeist Priest a couple months later by filling out a form online. I sent a copy of my ordination certificate to Scott and Alison. She responds with something to the effect of: "Is this a joke?" I assured her it was not. Then I didn't hear from her, but Scott called me several hours later when he was on his way home. The conversation went something like this:

Scott: Alison's freaking out about the email you sent.

Me: Why?

Scott: I don't know. She doesn't think it's legitimate. She doesn't think you're taking it seriously.

Me: I told you—I told both of you, in fact, that I was going to get the Dudeism certification.

Scott: She probably thought you were joking.

Me: The word you want to use is "probably."

Scott: *Silence*.

Me: *In a monotone*: Hello? Hello? Are you there? (*"The Prisoner" reference.*)

Scott: She's worried about what her mom is going to think.

Me: Why?

Scott: Well, she wants her mom to think you're a real minister.

Me: I am... now. Didn't you see my certification?

Scott: She was talking about getting a judge to marry us instead.

Me: *Silence.*

Scott: I think that's the best idea, too.

Me: I work for free.

Scott: That's something to consider.

Me: Why don't you go home and tell Alison to relax. I signed up for the Dudeism thing because I thought both of you were fine with it. If someone said differently, I wouldn't have done that. Tell Alison that I *am* taking this seriously and I understand that this is her, and *your*, wedding... mostly hers. Maybe we should get together like we planned, have a discussion, and then you can decide who you want to officiate your wedding.

Scott: Fuckin' A.

Me: Fuck a B, it's got two holes.

I had finally warmed to the reality that I was going to perform my friends' nuptials and suddenly that whole thing was in danger.

The next day I took about two hours to craft an eight sentence email to Alison apologizing for any anxiety I caused her, reassuring her I wasn't taking her wedding lightly, and explaining that I wanted to give them the wedding ceremony they wanted. I think that worked because she seemed to be back on board to the idea of my performing the wedding.

A couple weeks later I had them over to my house for lunch. I made this potato and andouille sausage soup; it's the one thing I can make from scratch that is delicious (she thought the meat was a little too spicy). We all made nice and then talked about the ceremony.

I was back in. She told me she wanted me to get my certification from Universal Life Church Monastery. Dot com. So, I did. I filled out another form and suddenly it's Reverend John at your service (again).

This all happened several months out from the wedding. I think it was probably around the same time we straightened out the ordainment issue that I found out Scott made Dan, Jon, Noah and me all his best men. Alison made three of her friends her maids of honor. I now wonder what I would have been doing that day if I wasn't going to be the one performing the wedding.

The best men and the ushers started planning the bachelor party which became golfing in the morning, tailgating and a Brewers game in the afternoon, and drinking and burning stuff at night (Guitar Hero, too). Trying to get twenty-plus people to each respond if they are going

to participate, what portion(s) of the day they wanted to participate in, do they want to pitch in for a van or if they'd be willing to drive, do they need a ride anywhere, etc., is a lot like trying to corral a bunch of pigs.

Seriously, how fucking hard is it to reply "yes" or "no?" I mean, we gave everyone ample time to decide what they were going to do, and yet there were about a half dozen guys who either didn't respond at all or were like, "Why don't you tell me right before you buy the tickets and I'll give you my answer then?" Because I already gave you the date we're buying tickets, moron, and it's tomorrow.

At any rate, the bachelor party went off just fine, aside from having to scramble to find someone who would fill in the place of a last-minute douche cancellation and Scott's dad hassling Dan about how to cook a brat.

I was then confronted with having to write a ceremony. I hadn't started yet. I knew the progression of the service, and had an idea of the overall tone, but hadn't written word one. Actually I hadn't written on paper or computer, but I guess I had been writing it a piece at a time in my head for weeks and weeks because it all came together pretty quickly. I reworked, mainly reworded, much of the sentence structure keeping in mind I was going to have to say it clearly in front of a hundred people or so.

I guess I work better with a deadline because Scott and Alison came over two days after I sat down to write it. They sat in my kitchen and I read them the ceremony, told them where the readings from Scott's sister were going to be, where the song from Alison's uncle was, and what the vows and ring exchange promises were. To my surprise, Alison really liked it. In fact, she said she loved it. Not surprising was Scott's unenthusiastic, "I like it," response given only when prodded.

Whatever. I had my suit at this point, my expensive, expensive suit, and I reworked the ceremony a couple more times, minor changes. That was it. I was ready. Just had to wait a couple weeks.

Jon says to me, "Oh, I still have to tell my dad you're doing the ceremony." Jon's dad is a real minister. I say, "Oh, right... he's going." I was more nervous about doing my seat of the

pants ceremony in front of someone who would simply know I was full of shit than the dozens of others who would only suspect it.

All the boys gathered at my house a couple hours before the ceremony to get dressed, have a couple Bloody Mary's, and, surprise, a couple shots of Patron – thanks, Noah. We arrived at Wustum Art Museum with a slight buzz. Perfectly tipsy, I think.

Considering it was August first, it was a beautiful, cooler-than-usual day. It had rained earlier, but by the time the ceremony began, the rain had stopped and the sun even came out. I mention this because the wedding was outside.

So, I talked. Did my thing. It was kind of a blur. I kept reminding myself before and during the ceremony to speak slowly. I'm not a public speaker, so my initial desire was to get through it quickly. But the people paid for a show, so they got a show. My initial thoughts of having a White Russian in my hands and dropping a few f-bombs were kiboshed when the Dudeism ordination was overruled, but I had a few minor, not-inappropriate jokes in there about the absurd length of Alison and Scott's engagement. Everything else I said was sweet, kind, optimistic, and romantic: things not usually associated with me, for better or worse.

Afterwards, I was simply relieved. I don't think I made any mistakes; I only slightly deviated from the written word once or twice. Many people came up to me throughout the rest of the day and told me that I did a good job, which was really nice to hear. Even the real pastor said I did a good job. Later Alison told me it was perfect, which was the most important review from one of the two people from whom I really cared to hear their thoughts. Scott said something like, "It was all right." Jeff and Vony came up to me after the ceremony and told me I did a good job, but that they thought I was going to faint at the beginning. I told them I felt more nervous in the middle, during the important stuff.

People often don't believe me when I admit to being shy. That's probably because I'm not shy with those I feel comfortable around, but I do tend to be quiet around new people. Some can find that intimidating, that I'm unfriendly, which is fine with me. Getting up in front of a group of people to assist in joining two others in marriage could be a nerve-wracking situation for a lot of people. Having a little alcohol in the blood helps, like most situations.

A few minutes after the ceremony ended, the bride, groom, a maid of honor, a best man, and I were taken inside a building to fill out the marriage license. I have to say, when I was filling out my section of the form, in my head I was thinking, "There's no way this is legal."

But it was.

The limo bus took us to four or five places to take pictures on the way to the reception in downtown Milwaukee. As soon as the bus started moving after the reception, Alison and Scott were bitching at each other. I don't know what about, but I said to them, "You know, if you want, I can officiate your divorce, too." We had more Patron and beers, and some champagne in the bus. Then we stopped at a bar (!) before finally going to the reception.

The reception was a lot of fun. The food was probably the best I've had at any wedding. And I did my thing where I left the party to have a cigar. In this case, I got to sit at the bar on the ground floor of the restaurant. I think I must have pushed it and been away from the party for too long because I started getting threatening looks and a countdown to get back to the party from Scott's sister on the staircase. Between my desire to avoid some people who wanted me to dance and others who wanted to pour a honeyed potion in my ear, I don't think you can blame me for leaving the party.

Republic. Republic.

But it was a lot of fun. I have no doubts that everyone had a wonderful time. It was also strangely devoid of any real (noticeable) drama with the exception of Noah, who was insanely drunk, repeatedly trying to convince Aaron to ask one of the bridesmaids out.

I went home and straight to bed only to wake up after the sun had come up to a voice mail from Scott that he left probably only ten minutes after I got home saying that Noah never showed up at his hotel. When we all left, Scott and Alison got in a cab and Jon drove Aaron and me home, but Noah refused our offers of a ride and said he'd walk back to his hotel.

The story I got was Scott texted Noah's mom, who was also in from out of town and was staying with Noah at the hotel, to make sure Noah made it back safely. She said he hadn't arrived at the hotel yet. This is probably when Scott called me. Scott goes out looking for Noah because Noah's phone doesn't work at sea level (he lives in Colorado now). Noah did

make it back around 2:30 after stopping for another drink or two at Rock Bottom Brewery. Scott checked there but must have just missed him stumbling off in the other direction.

The important thing is everyone eventually made it home safely. And that I didn't fuck up. And that Scott and Alison got married and had an amazing day.

They're no different now that they're married. That's probably a good thing. I wouldn't know, but my imagination tells me that if you're with someone for like four years and things change noticeably after you get married that would be a red flag indicating someone wasn't being honest, that they were waiting to get married to finally act like their true self. That's a red flag observed too late, more like a crimson flag.

Later I began to think perhaps my biggest hang up about performing a wedding ceremony should have been due to my lack of knowledge of what a long-term, loving, romantic relationship is. I don't know how to get past a big fight. I don't know how to comfort someone through a close death. I don't know how to care for someone if they get sick. I don't know how to live with someone. I don't know what it's like to take care of each other. I don't know how to simply be there.

Strange, whenever I think I've found reciprocal love, after it ends, I stop believing it was love and learn that I don't know a thing.

I know what I want. I know what I can't have.

That's pretty much all about which I'm certain.

- John