

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/3

Tom Meyer
Premarital

I.

The first time she brought up marriage, he thought she'd been joking. Marriage? he'd asked. But we've barely been together for four years, we haven't even lived together for two!

Actually, last month was our two year roomieversary, she'd countered.

You see! he'd nearly shouted. Practically still in the honeymoon phase!

I didn't say we actually needed to get married, I just said I thought we should start discussing it.

Ok, I hear you. But just think, if we get married now we'll miss out on years of premarital sex!

And she'd laughed.

II.

The second time she brought up marriage, she thought he'd been joking.

What? she'd stumbled.

Surely she'd misheard. Or maybe he had. All she'd asked was if they could discuss marriage in the next month or two.

I said, we can't miss out on all that great premarital sex, he'd repeated.

She'd stared back at him.

That's what you said last time. Like, verbatim.

And I stand by it, he'd replied proudly. I love coming home to you and asking if you're up for a little premarital. Honestly, it doesn't even matter if you say yes or not, what I really look forward to is getting to call it premarital. It's one of those little things that keeps me going.

And it was true.

Nearly every day, he'd burst through the door brimming with excitement at the possibility of calling it premarital. On nights when she was working late, he'd whisper no premarital for me tonight as he crawled into bed alone. And when they'd booked a lavish Punta Cana trip, he'd even titled the planning spreadsheet Premarital in Punta.

You don't even like the sex? she'd asked incredulously.

That's not what I said at all. I just mean... you've got admit, it's a great bit. Calling it premarital, I mean.

Yeah, I guess, she'd responded.

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III.

When they started couples counseling, the therapist had thought they were both joking.

I appreciate that this can be uncomfortable, and that humor can help break the ice, but let's leave the jokes at the door, the therapist had said. What's the real reason you're hesitant to take the next step?

I just told you, he'd said. I can't bear the thought of no longer being able to ask her for a little premarital. It would destroy me.

And do you feel the same way? the therapist had asked.

I mean, obviously I don't, she'd replied. I genuinely still can't tell if he's fucking with me.

Right, the therapist had said. I think there's something else going on here.

And the therapist had stared at him. He'd looked around the room frantically, desperate to find another reason. What if he said there was another woman? No, they wouldn't believe that. Maybe another man would be more believable? But no, he was supposed to be honest here.

I just, he'd stammered, I just think we'd be sacrificing such a major part of our happiness for something so silly.

You know, the therapist had said, you could very easily still refer to your intercourse as premarital sex even after marriage. If it's just a joke you'd like to keep going, there's nothing stopping you.

No, he'd said somberly. That wouldn't be honest. The bit relies on honesty.

IV.

After she'd moved out, he'd kept the joke going on his own.

Welp, tonight woulda been a great night for a little premarital, he'd say to the walls.

Hey boys, day 12 with no premarital, he'd texted the groupchat. I don't know how monks do it!

Once when he'd brought a pair of particularly luscious cantaloupes home from the grocery store, he'd tried to make the joke to them – you keep looking at me like that and we might just need to have a little premarital! – but it had fallen flat.

It just didn't work alone. So after a little over three weeks, he'd texted her. She agreed to meet, agreed that this time apart had been clarifying.

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V.

So now, with just hours until he'll see her, he sits at the computer, asking internet strangers what to do.

How could he get her back without sacrificing that one thing he loved so much? How could he make her see how much the bit meant to him, without making her feel less than?

And from the depths of his favorite men's forum, user wifeguy024 offers up the answer he'd been waiting for, the one that had – in hindsight – been staring him right in the face.

Extramarital.