

Gathering

AB.: Many animals go through perilous journeys to gather in large groups. Sea turtles use the magnetic fields of the Earth to swim hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles across oceans to gather on the beaches where they were born. Amphibiosa travel with their smizmars back to their ancestral swamps. Salmon travel up to 900 miles upstream to gather in their original rivers. There is also a humble type of goby fish which grows to less than 8 inches long and travels less than a mile. These fish need to find fast-moving freshwater streams where their young will be safe from predators. To get there, they climb waterfalls several hundred feet high using their mouths.

M: Yes, you heard her, they climb rocky waterfalls with their mouths. They are known as the nopili rock climbing goby. When they get to the top, the males get dressed up for the occasion—their scales darken and they don sporting iridescent racing stripes. The females attach their eggs to the rocks in the fast-moving water so they will be safe until they hatch and are washed downstream, where they will live until it is their turn to make their journey to gather in the stream.

ML: T and J have gathered all of you here, the people who matter most to them, to witness the joining of their lives. They have already chosen each other for their family, and today we are here together to celebrate what has already begun, and will continue to grow for years to come. Typically, gatherings happen at a pre-established location. Sea-turtles go back to where they were born, bats roost in the same trees every year, and you all received an invitation to gather at a location that just happened to have a bunch of chairs, a gazebo, and an officiant, and so here we are, celebrating T and J's wedding. They lacked such a pre-established time and place, so how did they get together? Was it by chance on a crowded street? Were they seeking love while inebriated in a bar? No, for them, their gathering place was a virtual one. Like many others in their millennial generation, they met online.

Selection

L: There are plenty of fish in the sea, right? So how do animals pick a partner in a crowd? Some take an unusual approach. Male dromedary camels know just how to attract a lady. The secret to their seductive charms is frothing at the mouth, and a large inflatable sac in their throat called a dula. They inflate it so it hangs out of their mouth like giant swollen tongue, and the lady camels go nuts.

G: Others play it traditional. Male kakapos, which are giant flightless parrots that live in New Zealand, serenade females by singing all night long. Male peacock spiders show up with a jaunty dance, and male nursery spiders bring females gifts of tasty little morsels-- a bug wrapped in silk for their paramour.

ML: T and J took a different approach. J took notice of the humor, interest in animals, and super cute face-parts that T displayed in her profile, and signaled his interest through a message. T was intrigued by J's thesis work, his enthusiasm for animal cognition, and thought his face-parts were equally appealing, and indicated her receptivity to a date.

Courtship

T: Some animals pick their partner quickly, but not Western Grebes. A pair of Grebes swim alongside each other, they dip their heads backwards, sometimes in unison and sometimes taking turns, and then gaze at each other. One of them lowers its neck along the water's edge and lets out a call, and then it is time! They rise up out of the water, their wings spread out to the side, and sprint across the surface of the water together. They have wide, splayed feet and run so fast that they actually run on the water, side by side. For the Western Grebe, this pas-de-deux is the ultimate romantic gesture, and with it the pair is bonded.

ML: Being unable to run that fast, J and T instead employed the ultimate tool of amorous endeavors-poetry. After their fifth date, J, ever the romantic, sent the following poem:

J: A Handkerchief

A winning of all the blessings, a sample not a sample because there is no worry.
-by Gertrude Stein

ML: T, with an eye toward less abstract poetry, sent back the following:

T: Litany, by Billy Collins

You are the bread and the knife,
the crystal goblet and the wine.
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white apron of the baker,
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
the plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.

And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,

but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show
that you are neither the boots in the corner
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,
the evening paper blowing down an alley
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees
and the blind woman's tea cup.

But don't worry, I'm not the bread and the knife.

You are still the bread and the knife.

You will always be the bread and the knife,
not to mention the crystal goblet and--somehow--the wine.

ML: That bond was further cemented with a simple conversation. The scene. H-town, New York. A town with lots of cows and the occasional roaming donkey. An apartment above a sandwich shop on the edge of downtown. 15 days into their relationship. J was supposed to drive to S-city for a date, but was feeling sick, so T borrowed a car from a friend to visit him. They are talking in front of J's bookshelf:

T: So...when we move in together, would you want to combine our books or have separate shelves?

J: Combine them, of course.

ML: And 14 months later, they did just that. The act of merging their book collections and giving away duplicate books was arguably a larger commitment than signing the lease. Though their collection of books has combined--as has their collection of cats--they are coming into their marriage as individuals, with individual personalities and histories.

T and J, you have known each other from the first message on OKCupid to this point of commitment. At some point, you decided to marry. From that first moment of "Yes, we can go to lunch since you're not a creeper" to this moment of "Yes, I will marry you," you have been making promises and agreements in an informal way. All those conversations that were held riding in a car or over a meal or during long walks — all those sentences that began with "When we're married"

and continued with "I will and you will and we will"- those late night talks that included "someday" and "somehow" and "maybe"- and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, "You know all those things we've promised and hoped and dreamed- well, I meant it all, every word." Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment, you have been many things to one another- acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, dancing partner, and even teacher, for you have learned much from one another in these last few years. Now you shall say a few words that take you across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you. For after these vows, you shall say to the world, this- is my husband, this- is my wife.

Vows

1. I promise to honor our partnership and work with you to keep our love strong
2. (I promise the same to you) I promise to be the best person I can be for you, and to support you in being the best person you can be.
3. (I promise the same to you) I promise to do my best to help you reach your goals and to support you through good times and bad.
4. (I promise the same to you) I promise to give you room to grow and change, and grow and change with you as our relationship evolves.

(ML backup version, if we're not looking like we can get through these:

1. Do you both promise to honor your partnership and work together to keep your love strong? We do
2. Do you both promise to be the best person you can for each other, and to support the other in being their best? We do
3. Do you both promise to do your best to help each other reach their goals, and to sustain each other through good times and bad? We do
4. Do you both promise to grow and change together as your relationship evolves? We do)

Rings

ML: In many species of animals, the male brings the female a gift. Male Adelle penguins bring rocks. Eurasian Jays bring their mates' favorite food. Male six-spot burnet moths give their females the gift of cyanide... which they use to defend themselves against predators. But these are all one-sided gifts. In contrast, human couples give each other rings to signal their love and dedication. Unlike the short-term gifts brought by non-human animals, these rings are worn for life, and are an unbroken circle representing a promise of devotion with no end.

T/J: (A couple individual sentences, then)- Wear this ring as a symbol of my love, and our bond. With it, I claim you as my husband/wife.

Nest-building

T mom: Termites, unlike other species of Hymenoptera, are monogamous, and termite colonies are founded by a king and queen. These two mate for life, and will spend time grooming each other's antennae before finding the ideal spot to live.

T dad: Some kings and queens settle into trees, building nests made of dirt, clay, and wood fragments in the branches. Others start by digging a hole in the ground just big enough for the two of them, which they eventually develop into an underground palace with a complex maze of corridors and chambers.

J mom: Once they have found their life partners, beavers look for an idea location for a home. They start by building a dam to create a moat and small pond. The flooded area creates a refrigerator to store food through the winter and, more importantly, creates a safe space for them to live and play.

J dad: Then they build their lodge out of wood and mud, lining it with reeds and bringing in wood chips for comfy bedding. Once their home has been built, the couple works together to maintain it. They gather fresh materials for bedding, and patch up holes in the dam.

ML: When a pair of Picathartes choose each other, they choose each other for life and begin building a nest. Every nest begins as a potential, just as we all began. It's the people who love us, and in turn the people we love, that make us who we are. They support us and provide the raw materials of humor, wisdom, and love upon which we build our lives. T and J carry with them, and build upon, what they have learned from and shared with each of you, just as the birds pack mud and fiber together for strong walls, and furnish the inside with moss and twigs for comfort. Thus, they build their home together.

Kiss

as Everything is Awesome from the Lego movie plays, and we all file out.