They planned their wedding under the shower.

Sudsing her breasts, Frank ruled out Las Vegas.

Soaping his back, Annie suggested her backyard.

Frank toweled her off. "It's too small for chairs."

"There won't be any chairs."

"How will the guests eat their cake?" He sounded incredulous.

"Standing up." She giggled.

The big man’s face turned red and he jabbed his finger in the air. "And let me tell you about that cake. None of those silly-ass layers and piers and absolutely no midget bride and groom. I don't want to turn our wedding into a big show."

Annie slipped into her robe. "Wouldn’t you like our friends and family to share our joy?"

He sighed. "Anything you want."

Every time Frank said that, Annie felt strange. He was so kind that nothing seemed real.

She suggested a string quartet. He looked pained. "I don't want a big show."

Annie ruled out musicians.

Frank agreed to help, but drew the line at calling caterers. "I wouldn't know how to find one or what to say. No, you call, and don't worry about money."

Annie phoned caterers, but Frank agreed the prices were exorbitant. They would hire helpers to cook, heat and serve reception tidbits.

They budgeted a Saturday to hunt the perfect cake. Annie stalked out of bakeries that refused to give samples. Frank turned on his heel when a baker mentioned tiers. After three hours and forty miles, they found a small French bakery in Santa Monica which seduced Annie with a single-layer Chambord Classique covered with vanilla butter cream.
"There is inside chocolate mousse, almond paste, genoise," the French baker’s wife recited.
"Sounds delicious," Annie said.
"You sure those lovebirds won't be too big?" Frank asked.
Annie waved off his hesitations.
"For how many guests?" the woman asked.
"We have fifty-two acceptances," Annie cut in. "But a third of them will say they’re dieting and can't eat cake. Let's buy one for thirty-five people."

On Monday, the baker’s wife called Annie. "I have told my husband about your order. He worries that you will offer a cake for thirty-five people to fifty guests. He will add at no charge a second tier."
"My fiancé wishes to avoid anything showy,” Annie said.
"We will not offend the modesty of your fiancé. The second tier will be off-center, in the French manner. The cake will be very discreet."

A discreet cake, it would make Frank laugh.

The month since then passed in a blur of teaching, layouts and seeing Frank every other night. Today was their wedding day, but nothing about it seemed real. She rose at eight and spent three hours at the drawing board just as usual.

The helpers arrived. Juana rooted out champagne and soft drinks, Sofia dotted cucumber slices with red caviar, and Maria rolled out dough for dollhouse quiches. Annie returned to her work.

Two hours later, her friend Daisy arrived with the cake. All five women marveled over the baker's masterpiece, the bottom layer edged in butter-cream swirls and the top layer set off-center with frosting lovebirds nuzzling among roses.

Daisy tapped her watch. “It's one o'clock. Are you getting married in shorts?"

Getting married, even the words sounded strange. Nothing seemed real about this wedding. Annie felt as though she were viewing the world through a veil of gauze.

She stripped for a shower and covered her hair with not one shower cap but two. Yesterday she had spent an hour and a wad of money having her messy hair styled. She towed off and fretted. Who was this man she was marrying? True, she could never imagine a future without him, but marrying now? How long ago had they met, was it six
months? Only a week or so more. Who could tell if the marriage would work? Would he miss his late wife? Would she file for another divorce? Why was she here? Was she honestly getting married?

Annie was applying her second coat of make-up when the doorbell rang and Frank boomed hello. His family arrived soon afterward. Annie led the contingent out to the backyard. They deposited pots of asters next to the poppies, between the pittosporum, around the birds-of-paradise, covering every bare spot.

Other guests arrived. "So glad you could come," Frank intoned suavely to each one, even the psychologist in kimono and thongs and the artist who turned up in turban, dashiki and jeans. This can't be a wedding, Annie told herself. No one's dressed for a wedding but the two of us. Gauze veiled everything.

At two-thirty on the dot the minister took his place under the persimmon tree. Frank’s nephew Scott was best man. Annie’s best friend Barbara should have been maid of honor, but she had flown to Philadelphia to tend a sick sister so her old chum Tom stood next to her. A male matron of honor. She couldn't be getting married.

After the ceremony, the kiss and Scott’s toast to the bride and groom, a long line of guests filed past. "You look terrific, even your hair," said the fourteen-year-old son of her next-door neighbor. “I can’t get over it.”

"Hush," said his mother. "Annie, never mind this kid. I'm sorry Koko barked during the ceremony."

"Koko barked?" Annie had heard nothing but the minister’s words.

Betty nodded. “When the minister said, ‘Speak now or forever hold your peace,’ Koko really let go. Everyone laughed.”

The helpers passed around trays of tidbits. After an hour or so of healthy munching, the guests cried, "The cake, the cake! Annie and Frank have to cut the cake!"

The couple obliged and set about mingling with the guests. Annie’s friend Bill exclaimed, "You have to stage another party with the same cake in ten years. There's never been a wedding cake like this." Frank winced.

Dan, Annie’s lead client, slapped Annie on the shoulder. "Any marriage that begins with a cake like this has got to succeed." Frank winced again.

"Where did you find such a glorious cake, Frank?" his friend Janine asked.
Frank smiled thinly. Sofia approached. "That lady there in the blue dress, she want to take home a piece of cake. I tell her, I ask you and she say, don't bother. I do right?" Annie nodded.

Frank shook his head. "Some discreet cake. That was my boss's wife." He went off to circulate.

A smile pasted to her face, Annie moved among the guests and nodded at appropriate intervals while she kept on thinking, I actually got married, even though she still saw everything through a veil of gauze. It was almost like a dream in the movies, where feet never quite touch the ground.

Three hours after the ceremony, Frank and Annie climbed into his weathered Ford. After getting lost just once in Stone Canyon, they found the Bel-Air Hotel. An attendant drove the car past Jaguars and Bentleys to the Siberia of the parking lot.

The couple whizzed past the lake with its stately swans, not stopping to admire the ferns, the flowers or the trees. Frank made short work of registration and instantly hung the Do Not Disturb sign on the doorknob. "If anyone opens the door, I'll break his arm."

They made love as never before, napping just enough to gather strength for their next go. All the sex made the marriage feel still more unreal. This is a lover, Annie thought. He's not really my husband.

The next morning, driven by hunger as usual, Annie woke early. After perusing the menu, she kissed Frank awake and suggested breakfast in their room.

Frank muttered his usual "Anything you want." Then he looked at the room service bill of fare. "Ten bucks for one egg! Let's skip out of here and find some place cheaper."

He drove five miles from their Eden to a Valley street clogged with cars and buses belching diesel fumes. He scanned menus at a half-dozen coffee shops while Annie went from hungry to ravenous. Comparison-shopping a honeymoon breakfast? It was cheap, it was inconsiderate, it was outrageous.

Finally, Frank found a menu to his liking. "This is much better." The couple split two eggs, two strips of bacon, three hot cakes, $3.99. He looked pleased.
Comparison shopping on their honeymoon? Annie was furious. “I never again want to stay in a hotel where we can’t afford to eat breakfast.” Frank looked contrite and agreed.

Suddenly her anger spent itself. Such economy bore the stamp of a dyed-in-the-wool husband. The veil of unreality had vanished.