



Happy Is the Bride  
*the Sun Shines On*

WEDDING BELIEFS,  
CUSTOMS, AND TRADITIONS

LESLIE JONES

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***Contemporary Books***

*Chicago New York San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City  
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Jones, Leslie, 1959–

Happy is the bride the sun shines on : a collection of American wedding beliefs /  
by Leslie Jones.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-07-141864-4

1. Marriage rites and ceremonies—United States. 2. Weddings—United  
States—Folklore. 3. United States—Social life and customs. I. Title.

GT2703.J66 1995

392'.5'0973—dc20

95-5084

CIP

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 AGM/AGM 2 1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-141864-4

Illustrations by Edgar Blakeney

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sales promotions, or for use in corporate training programs. For more information, please  
write to the Director of Special Sales, Professional Publishing, McGraw-Hill, Two Penn  
Plaza, New York, NY 10121-2298. Or contact your local bookstore.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

# Acknowledgments

Much of the research for this collection of wedding superstitions was done with the aid of the collections of the late Professor Wayland Debs Hand, which form the archives of *The Encyclopedia of American Popular Belief and Superstition*, edited by Donald J. Ward, a project of the Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology at UCLA. These collections cover all fifty states and focus mostly on the superstitions of Americans of European and African descent. Thanks to Professor Ward and my colleagues, Dr. Frances Cattermole-Tally and Dr. Christine Goldberg, for their support and assistance.

# Introduction

Because consistent logic is not a feature of folk belief, reading collections of superstitions can make your head spin. For each person who swears that something is bad luck, there's someone else who swears it's good luck. So even if you accidentally do something that's supposed to be bad luck, don't worry. Just call yourself part of the group for whom it is lucky.

Of course, if it turns out that it *was* bad luck, you'll have a convenient excuse: it wasn't your fault, it was Cosmic Misfortune, over which you have no control.

Superstitions invariably focus on things over which we have no control—the weather, death, the fertility of plants, animals, and people—but especially matters of the heart. There's just so much at stake, so much that can go wrong, and so much hope that things will go right. For these reasons, that major rite of passage, marriage, generates thousands of superstitions and beliefs.

Many wedding superstitions are intensified forms of beliefs found in everyday life. It's usually considered bad luck to come into a room or house by one door and leave by another; it's even worse to do so on your wedding day. The idea that it's lucky to get married on some days and unlucky to do so on others comes

from ancient and medieval astrology, which pronounced lucky and unlucky days for *everything*, including getting your hair cut.

People getting married are often anxious to ward off the attentions of malicious spirits and the Evil Eye. The Evil Eye is a glance that causes bad luck, either deliberately or accidentally, because the glancer is jealous of the person she or he is looking at. People who are exceptionally beautiful or happy—like babies and brides—are said to attract the Evil Eye. You can divert the malignant effect of the Evil Eye by wearing amulets or taking other traditional precautions—many of which are listed in this book.

Of course, most people don't believe in the Evil Eye any more—or they don't *really* believe in it, but they don't mind taking precautions just in case! This brings up another aspect of modern-day superstition: cultural lag, a fancy way of pointing out that people who have never been any closer to livestock than their pet goldfish are still passing on beliefs originally meant to increase the fertility of cattle. All these things are supposed to be lucky, and in marriage luck is usually defined as lots of money, lots of food, and lots of children, whatever your personal beliefs about diet and population control may be.

The largest number of wedding superstitions has to do with the bride's clothing. Marriage mythology assumes that people marry only once and forever. This is common in rituals, which take place in a "time out of time." All good rituals require a uni-

form. Putting on the gown makes you a bride, and you'd better be serious about it. There must be a complete break between the married and unmarried state. This is why the groom can't see the wedding gown before the wedding. Because by the wedding day the gown is actually on the bride, the groom is forbidden to see the bride before the ceremony. Some people go so far as to say that *no one* should see the wedding gown before the wedding. (Some people say that no one should see the *bride* from the time the engagement is announced until the wedding itself, but this seems rather hard on the poor girl.) The practical effect of all of this is that the bride spends the hours right before her wedding cooped up somewhere with a couple of bridesmaids in a situation very much like the ritual isolation that is practiced, worldwide, by participants in all rites of passage.

Some superstitions, of course, are just plain loony. It is easy to understand why it's considered bad luck for the bridal veil to catch on fire. The idea of having a piece of flaming cloth draped around the head will strike almost anyone as being potentially unfortunate. But why is it bad luck to find the best man sleeping under the wedding bed (and how often does this happen)? Why does a rainy wedding day doom a bride to a life of uncontrollable snacking? Why does going to the theater on your honeymoon mean that you'll have twins? Who comes up with this stuff? Tradition truly has reasons that reason knows nothing of.

# Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction ix

- 1 Brides with Their Showers Sweet 1
- 2 A Weepy Ring Foretells a Weepy Marriage 7
  - 3 With This Ring . . . 11
  - 4 Ring Around the Baby 17
  - 5 The Glitter of Jewels 21
- 6 Marry in White, Everything Right 25
  - 7 Dress for Success 29
- 8 The Single Most Widely Known  
Wedding Superstition in America 35
  - 9 Pass the Veil On 39
  - 10 Lucky Garter 43
  - 11 Stocking Up 47
- 12 A Lump of Sugar in Your Glove 49
  - 13 A Bridal Posy 51
- 14 Warming the Threshold 59
  - 15 Jumping the Broom 63
  - 16 Good Housekeeping 67
  - 17 On Pins and Needles 71
- 18 Awakened by Birds Singing 73



- 19 Lucky Gifts 77
- 20 Marry Under a Full Moon 81
- 21 Marry on Monday for Wealth 85
- 22 When December's Snows Fall Fast . . . 89
- 23 Happy Is the Bride the Sun Shines On 95
  - 24 Always a Bridesmaid 99
  - 25 Ruling the Roost 103
- 26 Putting the Right Foot Forward 107
  - 27 Kiss the Bride 111
- 28 A Weeping Bride Makes a Laughing Wife 115
- 29 Something Old, Something New . . . 119
  - 30 White Satin Slippers 123
  - 31 Rice Toss 129
- 32 Perchance to Dream . . . 133
  - 33 Cutting the Cake 137
  - 34 The Food of Love 143
- 35 First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage . . . 147
  - 36 Delaying Tactics 153
  - 37 Avoiding Hard Labor 157
  - 38 Breaking Glass 161
  - 39 Dance Every Dance 165
  - 40 Just for the Groom 167
  - 41 Good-Luck Pieces 171
  - Further Reading 177

1

*B*rides with Their  
Showers Sweet

*B*ridal showers first became popular in the cities of turn-of-the-century America. In rural areas of Europe and America, the local community and extended family contributed gifts to help a new couple set up house.

When those traditional ties began to break down, an engaged woman's friends stepped in to take up the slack, "showering" the bride-to-be with the small items that everyone needs in a new house, but that add up to a lot of money if they have to be bought all at once.

It's because the shower takes the place of family contributions that etiquette writers are so adamant that relatives cannot throw showers—traditionally, it's the maid of honor or the bride's best friend who throws the party.

*E*verything the bride says as she opens her shower gifts will be repeated by her on her wedding night. Someone should be assigned to write down these comments for the amusement of the others.

*T*he first gift the bride-to-be opens should be the first gift she uses.

*I*f single, the person who gives the first or the seventh gift to be opened will be the next to marry.

*T*he person who gives the third gift to be opened will soon have a baby.

*I*t's good luck for a married woman if her present is the first one opened.

*T*he bride should guess what the present is before she opens it, and at the same time make a wish for the person who gave it. If she guesses right, the wish will come true.

*M*ost brides-to-be save the ribbons from their shower gifts and make a mock bouquet out of them to carry at the wedding rehearsal. Just like the real one, the ribbon bouquet is tossed at the end of the rehearsal and the girl who catches it will be the next one to marry.

*T*he ribbons may be tied in the bride's hair to be taken out later by the groom, who gets a kiss for each one.

*A*nother thing to do with the ribbons is use them to stuff a special pillow, which will bring the bride luck all her married life.

*F*or every ribbon you break while opening shower gifts, you will have a baby. Each blue ribbon broken indicates the birth of a boy; each pink ribbon means the birth of a girl.

*I*f the groom is present at the shower, drape a few of the ribbons around his neck to ward off bad luck.

Carefully untie the ribbons (don't break any of them!) and then tie them together in a long string with the bride's engagement ring tied to the end. All the guests stand in a circle, holding their hands behind them, while the bride-to-be wraps the ribbons around them. The person who gets the ring at the end will be the next one married. Every knot a guest gets in her right hand indicates that she will give birth to a girl; every knot in her left hand signifies a boy. Or everyone who gets a knot in the right hand will be married within a year.



*D*on't cut or untie the ribbons at the shower, but untie them all the next day and then retie them into a long string and save it. The first time you quarrel with your husband, untie the knots until you make up.

*S*ave all the ribbons to be untied by the groom before you go to bed on your wedding night.

2

*A* Weepy Ring  
Foretells a Weepy  
Marriage



*A* diamond engagement ring's hardness and brilliance symbolize eternal and singular love.

*T* rue-blue sapphires are popular, but jealous green emeralds are thought to be unlucky. Opals and pearls are bad luck in engagement rings, but they're bad luck anyway. Opals are treacherous because they change color, while pearls are said to be the oyster's tears, and a weepy ring foretells a weepy marriage.

*I*t's good luck to have your birthstone in your engagement ring, even if that stone is otherwise thought to be an unlucky gem.

*T*he number of diamonds in your engagement ring is the number of children you'll bear.

*I*t's good luck if the first person to see the engagement ring is the bride-to-be.