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Sex Y LA

Now that I've been writing this column for over a year, my friends have asked that I no longer use their romances and relationship hang-ups as fodder. Yeah, right, like that's going to happen. ~~But~~ **[//Note: Suggest keeping "But," as next sentence contradicts previous one—DR//]** I do decide to give my put-upon friends a break by jumping at an invitation to socialize with four other couples who are virtual strangers. Not only will I be able to mine for material, but I will be partaking of the newest social trend: an old-fashioned, ~~the~~ formal, intimate, all-couples, sit-down dinner party.

Not that keggers and fondue parties don't have their place in this world, but I am approaching a station in life at which a civilized meal without flat beer or the possibility of scalding the roof of one's mouth on arbitrary food products dunked in molten hot cheese, sounds—dare I say—romantic. My head swirls with Merchant-Ivory-esque visions of loving couples donned in their best attire, sitting at an elegantly long, white-linen-clad banquet table, and emitting the unmistakable cadence of witty banter sprinkled with spontaneous uproarious laughter.

First I have to convince the **[//Note: or "my"; if we don't use a pronoun, suggest capping "Significant Other" as if a nickname—DR//]** significant other, Sam, to accompany me. No easy task, since he equates anything involving the word "formal" ~~with~~ makes him think of root canals and unnecessary trips to Costco at peak hours. I show him the refreshingly un-Evite-y embossed invitation we receive via snail mail, thinking that hoping it will excite him, but his only remark is: "Sit Sit-down dinner parties make me feel trapped." *Trapped?* Does he not remember the last "dinner" party we went to attended? My cousin played music from the trunk of his car, the "hors d'oeuvres" consisted of taquitos, and singletons were either groping each other in dark corners or throwing up on my knock-off Jimmy Choos, aka Jimmy Choo Choos. choos (no, not Jimmy Choos—that's actually how my cousin pronounces *shoes*).

-The party is a beautiful affair. The hostess, Jenna, has seen to every party detail, including some we could do without, such as place cards. Here is the problem with assigned seating: -unless you are the life of the party or seated next to the life of the party, you spend the entire evening wondering why the host seated you next to Note: “between” instead of “next to”? DR//—in my case—a Paris Hilton—like heir-head, whose size zero makes me feel like a size 18, and her husband, ~~who and who~~ feels compelled to ~~inform~~ confess to me that he and his wife ~~have issues they are working on in counseling~~ are seeing a marriage counselor and have not had sex in six months.

——— I turn to Sam for some relief, but he is busy sipping the contents of his finger bowl, which I can only assume he has mistaken for a soup course. When Sam is done with his “soup,” I ask him about the ~~adjacent~~ couple adjacent to him, who are what we refer to as “cellholes”—people who talk incessantly on their cell phones even when in public together.

“Have they said a word to you?” I query.

“Not a word. -Isn’t it great?” he adds, giddy with relief.

I spend the rest of the dinner engaging in uncomfortable discussion with strangers about the intimate details of their unsatisfactory relationshipsmarriages, with an occasional break to watch one couple bicker under their breaths, or another hash out their marriage-relationship problems, using the rest of us as a panel of judges. What was that word Sam used? *Trapped*. To make matters worse, after two courses with portions designed for people like the 90-~~loud~~lb. Paris-ite to my right, I am still so hungry that I jump up on the table, wielding a candelabra like a Molotov cocktail, and shout: “If one more person quotes their therapist or tells me an inappropriate fact-detail about their sex lifeves, I swear I will light myself on fire! -Now *please* pass the bread!” -Actually, I only imagine saying this aloud— except for the bread part.

By the fifth course, I have realized ~~that~~ why intimate, all-couples dinner parties went out of fashion in the first place. ~~They are~~ is less a chance to revel in the romance of coupledness than a chance for couples to air their dirty laundry before what they assume to be sympathizers. It’s like couples therapy times five. It turns out that the singletons whom~~that~~ I took for granted are a much-needed buffer zone, neutralizing conflict between couples. -With them around, couples are on better behavior, perhaps so as not to

scare the unattached away from commitment. Or maybe it's just to sucker them in. After all, misery loves company, especially when cheap beer and fondue are nowhere to be found.

LONGER VERSION:

— Now that I've been writing this column for over a year, my friends and family have made me promise that I will no longer use their romantic fantasies, sexual encounters, and relationship hang-ups as material for this magazine. That is one reason why, when I receive an invitation to a dinner party with four other couples, I jump at the chance. Not only will I be able to mine for material, I surmise, but I will be partaking of the newest social trend: the formal intimate all couples sit-down dinner party.

Not that keggers and fondue parties do not have their place in this world, but I am approaching a station in life at which a civilized meal without the possibility of scalding the roof of one's mouth on arbitrary food products dunked in molten hot cheese, sounds, dare I say, romantic. Merchant Ivoryesque visions of loving couples donned in their best attire, sitting at an elegantly long white linen clad banquet table and the unmistakable cadence of witty banter sprinkled with spontaneous uproarious laughter dance in my head.

First I have to convince significant other, Sam, to accompany me. No easy task since he equivocates anything with the word "formal" before it with root canals and unnecessary trips to Costco at peak hours. I show him the embossed *unEvitey* invitation we receive via mail, as in snail not e-mail, thinking that it will excite him, but his only remark is, "Sit down dinner parties make me feel "trapped." Trapped? Does he not remember the last party we went to? My cousin played music from the trunk of his car, the hors d'oeuvres consisted of taquitos and singletons were either groping each other in dark corners or throwing up on my knock-off Jimmy Choos, aka Jimmy Choo Choos.

When the big day arrives I don a new cocktail dress, with spaghetti straps and, more importantly, a 90 day no questions asked return policy, and we head to the party. It is a beautiful affair. Jenna, whom I met while jogging on the treadmill at the gym well,

she was jogging, I was walking at a brisk pace so that I could talk to her—is the host and as party organizing goes, I see that when she is not outrunning me on a treadmill, she might as well be Martha Stewart—**on crack**.

She has seen to every party detail, including some we could do without, like custom-printed place cards. Here is the problem with assigned seating. Unless you are the life of the party or seated next to the life of the party, you spend the entire evening wondering why the host seated you next to, in my case, a Paris Hilton-like *hairhead* whose size zero makes me feel like a size 18. When I ask her if she has read any good books lately, she merely says, “I don’t read.”

“As in you’re illiterate?” I ask.

She gives me an impatient sigh, “No books. I read scripts and an occasional maga...” Her voice trails off and I panic, wondering if something I’ve said has only just now registered with her and pissed her off, then I realize that what’s really happened is that she’s used up her last calorie. Her husband, who makes Mel Gibson seem like a teetotaling Zionist, leans across her and informs me, “It’s something we’re working on in counseling.”

I turn to Sam for some comic relief, but he is busy sipping the contents of his finger bowl, which I can only assume he has mistaken for a soup course.

Across from me, a couple is arguing over something so infinitesimal that I can’t help but laugh out loud. When Sam is done with his “soup”, I ask him about the couple next to him, who are what we refer to as “cellholes,”—those people that talk incessantly on their cell phones even when they are in public together.

“Have they said a word to you?” I query.

“Not a word. Isn’t it great?” he adds, giddy with relief.

I spend the rest of the dinner engaging in uncomfortable discussion with people I have nothing in common with about the intimate details of their unsatisfactory relationships with an occasional break to watch a couple bicker under their breath or another hash out their marriage problems, using the rest of us as a panel of judges. What was that word Sam used? Trapped. For once, typical L.A. diet talk is a relief. At this party, everyone is in The Zone, but me. The entire dinner is minus “bad carbs,” or what I refer to as comfort food. Even after two courses, I am still so hungry that I jump up on

the table, wielding a candelabra like a Molotov cocktail, and shout, “If one more person quotes their therapist, rolls their eyes at their spouse, or tells me an inappropriate fact about their sex lives, I swear I will light myself on fire! Now *please* pass the bread!” Actually, I don’t say this aloud, I just imagine it.

By the fifth course, I have realized that an intimate all-couples dinner party is less a chance to revel in the romance of coupledness than a chance for couples to air their dirty laundry before what they assume to be people who sympathize. It’s like couples therapy times five. It turns out that the singletons that I took for granted at parties are a buffer zone. They neutralize potential conflict between couples. In a crowd of singles, couples are on better behavior so as not to scare the unattached off of commitment. It is as if we are saying, “Hey, look at us...” and asking, “Who needs those great first date butterflies, the fantastic make-up sex, and the keg parties when you’re a happy couple like us?”

Answer: I do.