

An Easter ride to remember

Tony Rocha owned fishing boats working out of Newport and had a brand new blue, 1962 Lotus Elan, the same shade and shape as a Jordan almond. Mr. Belmont, a tall, gentlemanly fellow, told me that he would arrange to have Tony Rocha take me for a ride in it on Easter Sunday.

The Belmonts and the Rochas lived next door to each other and that's how I spied the Lotus. Sandy Belmont, the Belmont's younger daughter and I were fifth grade classmates and secretly betrothed.

Never having spoken a word to Tony Rocha, I now smiled ingratiatingly in his direction whenever, with meaty fisherman's hands, he yanked the car into his gravel drive.

"When we get married, if you find yourself temporarily short of funds, I'll buy one for you," Sandy told me.

"Good deal," I said. Sandy and I had agreed to get married several months before, not long after we'd kissed for the first time. She was the first girl I'd ever kissed, and I, the first boy she'd kissed. There was a natural logic to it and we really did like being together.

It was Lent, and I did my best to suppress my Lotus lust, but one afternoon I slipped up. I asked Mr. Belmont if he'd talked to Tony Rocha lately, and he replied,

"Don't prod me, young man. You must be patient." And with a big grin added, "Have faith! You're a papist, after all."

I had no idea what this last comment meant, but his delivery gave me confidence. Little did I know what little I did know.

Easter morning came and Easter morning went, and nothing! After church (we were Catholic and the Belmonts, Episcopalian) I bicycled over to Sandy's. The family was getting ready to head out for a restaurant lunch. Amazingly, nothing was said about the Lotus ride. Sandy looked trapped in the backseat of the big, black Oldsmobile.

Returning home, I went ballistic, ranting to my older brother.

"Her father told me he was going to take care of this!"

"Think," commanded my brother. "Why would he arrange a ride on Easter? It's just goofy. He must have been pulling your leg."

"Why would he do something like that?"

My brother shrugged.

"Self-amusement?"

"Sandy and I are getting married!" I screamed.

"Maybe he doesn't care for the idea of that. Why don't you just tootle over and ask Tony Rocha yourself for a ride. He's a Portagee, like us; the mom half of us. He ain't no WASP. The worst he

can do is tell you to scam."

"Raah!" I biked back to Sandy's house and crossed the lawn to Rocha's driveway. I scuffed the gravel until he came out the back door.

"Looking for your fiancé?" He asked.

"What?"

"Never mind. You've come for a ride in the Lotus, am I right?"

He threw the top down and took me for a ripping spin around the Ocean Drive. Wow! It was Grand Prix time flying through curves and blasting down the straightaways!

"It was sure good of Mr. Belmont to ask you to give me a ride," I beamed.

"What? That stuffed shirt wouldn't give me the time of day. You've been admiring this car ever since I got it. I was wondering when you were going to ask for a ride. I was a kid once too, you know."

I thanked him and bicycled home standing on the pedals. A girl in a white dress ran in uncontrollable circles across her front lawn. Daffodils waved, the trees glistened bright green with new leaves. Nature was rising up and I was part of it. It was, at last, springtime!

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