

## Toast

[Woman giving a toast at a wedding, standing with a glass of champagne, etc. She is drunk.]

Okay, okay... thank you. I promised Jennifer I'd say something, even though I knew I'd be nervous up here. But I'm not that nervous right now, really, in front of so many friends' and relatives' faces, friends from all over. Thank you all for coming, I know how much it means to Jennifer. And Ryan.

[She glances down at a notecard in her hand. Reading from the card:]

Most bridesmaids' toasts all start the same. The bridesmaid is supposed to talk about how she met the bride, and tell some funny stories about when they were young, and then about how she met Ryan. Well, I have plenty of funny stories about Jennifer, and a lot of them I can't tell here! [laughs, hoots] I think if I just say "Cabo," I've said enough! [more laughs] And I should have had time to write something, since they've been engaged for THREE YEARS! [laughs] But I also do remember Jennifer bringing Ryan back to the dorms our sophomore year, and boy, she was so into him! He was her real first boyfriend, you know. It was "Ryan this" and "Ryan that," it was all we heard after he'd drop her off at night. And because I'm her cousin, I had to hear about him on school breaks, too! [more laughs]

[As she goes on, she glances less and less often at the card, and finally is just adlibbing without looking at the card at all.]

Well, here's a story I can tell here in front of Jennifer's mom and dad! Don't worry, Jennifer, it's not that bad! [laughs] Anyway, it was right at the beginning of our senior year and a bunch of us had driven up to Northwestern to see a football game, and I believe it was ALREADY snowing, even though it was like October, but anyway . . . Ryan was supposed to meet us there with some of his friends, and on the way all we heard was "Ryan this" and "Ryan that" and "How do I look?" Jennifer was driving, she was singing in the car, and throwing her hair around like in a music video. As soon as we parked, Jennifer was out of the car and just totally gone – we didn't see her again until the end of the game when we were standing around freezing and waiting to go home, but of course, it was Jennifer's car, so we had to go find her. I think I was wearing a skirt, too, or something, I was so freezing.

[She is acting drunker and drunker.]

Well, you can guess what we expected to find Jennifer doing . . . [laughs, hoots] but actually, she was by herself under the bleachers on the Northwestern side. She didn't even look cold, she was just sitting there on the – the metal things, you know – the things that hold up bleachers? [she looks at the audience as though waiting for someone to tell her] anyway – she was sitting under the bleachers in her coat, and I was like, "Um, where were you? you have four freezing friends waiting to go home!"

She looked really surprised to see me, I think she'd forgotten she'd brought us with her. "Ryan asked me to marry him," she said. She didn't sound that excited, or happy, or anything. She sounded like something had been decided for her.

Of course, I was freaking out with excitement, and I wanted to know the date, and if she had a ring, and if they were going to wait until they graduated. I think Ryan didn't even have a ring then, not yet [some laughs, not as loud or as many] Not like that rock she has now! [a few more titters]

[A pause, as though she is considering sitting down.]

I really love Jennifer. I mean, we grew up together, our moms even lived on the same street when we were kids, on Cleveland Street not far from here. We had a wading pool . . . I wasn't even that mad that she made us all wait outside in the snow while she was sitting under the bleachers, even if it was pretty damn cold there for October.

The rest of senior year was different. Jennifer and I moved into an apartment with Lisa and Joanne [indicates they are in the audience] and I saw her all the time, but it was different, too. Jennifer – she's smart, you know, even if she seems a little flaky sometimes, and when she makes a decision, she sticks to it no matter what, she is the most dedicated person I know – the most honest. She is really trustworthy, and once she's committed to something, that's it. So that was it, that night after the football game.

[Silence. Woman sits down quietly, still visibly drunk and unstable in her movements.]