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VOWS

Janeen Saltman and Alden Levy

By ALEX KUCZYNSKI

CALL it a love story from the annals of the dot-com recession.

When Janeen Karen Saltman and Alden Ben Levy met face to face for the first time, adoring fireworks did not go off, nor did hearts instantly melt into a puddle of love-addled goo. No, Mr. Levy yelled at her.

In May 1999, Mr. Levy, known among his friends for his cool sense of humor and elegant manners, had just helped to found an Internet company, iConnect.com, and had hired Ms. Saltman to plan the company's opening-day party for June in downtown Manhattan. Ms. Saltman, a tall, slender brunette with a giddy lilting laugh, had just started her own party-planning firm, JKS Events.

Mr. Levy, with allergies so intense they can require frequent medication, had only two requests: no shellfish, no fragrant flowers. Somehow the signals got crossed. When Mr. Levy, now 35, arrived for the party, he found lushly blooming, heavily fragrant bouquets of gardenias scattered around.

"The first thing I said to her was, 'The flowers stink!'" Mr. Levy recalled. "I had to run home and take an allergy pill." He added, "Janeen thought I was going to fire her on the spot."

Ms. Saltman, fearful of losing a new client, offered to remove the flowers immediately. Mr. Levy growled at her to come around the next day to pick them up. And that was when he knew something other than a wheezing cough was stirring deep within him. "I could tell that he was feeling some chemistry," said Nick Patnaik, a college friend of Mr. Levy's who attended the party.



ESSEX HOUSE, MARCH 10 The bride and the bridegroom had a few angels, a k a the bridesmaids, watching over them during their wedding.

It was with some trepidation that Ms. Saltman, now 29, stopped by the offices that day. But Mr. Levy, emboldened by antihistamines, had softened his approach. He asked her out for dinner and she said yes — on the condition that he hire her to plan more parties for him. Things moved quickly from there. They went out the next night, and the next. They had brunch with her parents. Ms. Saltman still remembers where they went and what she wore on their first three dates — a major sign of feminine infatuation. ("On our second date, it was a little black sweater set and open-toed shoes," she said.)

About a year after they met, Mr. Levy built a Web site asking her to marry him. While Mr. Levy, who said his company "is on its last legs," switched

to working as an Internet consultant, Ms. Saltman planned their wedding as a masquerade ball on March 10 at Essex House in New York.

Ms. Saltman, who loves theatricality, asked the 150 guests to wear masks with their ball gowns and tuxedo jackets, and so the couple exchanged vows before an audience of plumed swans, clowns, a pig, a gorilla and sequined butterflies. The bridesmaids wore white, with feather wings affixed to their shoulders "ethereal birds," Ms. Saltman called them. The bride, who said she was dressed as Queen Esther, the Jewish heroine from the Purim story, wore a light green dress with a tiara. At the ceremony, Mr. Levy threw on a velvet cloak and a "Phantom of the Opera" mask for the reception.

Ms. Saltman said that part of what drew her to Mr. Levy was that even though he can be intense about his own work, he is also enthusiastic about her career. "Alden is behind me all the way," she said, waving her hand at the room of costumed guests. "Most guests would think this was just too crazy."

At the wedding, Curtis Houghland, a friend of the couple, who wore his eyeglasses awkwardly over his mask, said, "The most important thing to remember is that it is a testament to her great love for him that she stuck by his side through the dot-com bust."

The bride mused that there is something about a man with terrible allergies that "brings out nurturing qualities" in a woman. "Anyway, now we don't have to deal with it," she added, noting that while Mr. Levy is still her most difficult client, he always watches his medication during allergy season.

"And I only bring home nonfragrant flowers," she said with a laugh. "Tulips. He likes tulips."