

Tongue in Cheek: Stetsons and Tiaras

On a flight to London, the older man next to me leaned over and told me knowingly, "I like traveling to London, because they speak a version of English over there."

"I suppose they do," I replied, "being – you know – English and all." And quietly I hoped he never uttered that line to a Brit.

But now, in addition to being a great place to speak some version of English, the British Isles are going to be known for another thing: gay civil unions. Yes, first they invented our language, and now they're way ahead of their national American brethren in the civil rights arena. The first civil unions were, appropriately enough, being granted in

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planning a small ceremony. However, George revealed that he is singularly un-romantic. He noted, more or less, to the press that he didn't really care about the civil union thing, but that at least this way his poor partner will get something if George dies.

When I read this, I thought, "What? He couldn't have just

rights to queer couples, that leaves only three major version-of-English-speaking countries without them: Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Shall we place bets on which one will be next?

As a consolation prize here in the U.S., our big gay Christmas gift was a little movie called *Brokeback Mountain*, a story with two major Hollywood stars, talented director Ang Lee, and a script based on a Pulitzer prize-winning novella. Oh, and it's about two cowboys who are in love.

Not that it's a happy story, but it does play out in a period of time when there wasn't, say, gay civil union in Britain. It will be a new experience for a lot of middle-American theatergoers, and that can only be a good thing. It's also a beautiful movie.

I cried when I read the book years ago, and it never occurred to me that it would be brought to the big screen – ever. But the times are changing (did I mention gay marriage rights in South Africa?), and they seem to be changing ever faster. Perhaps *Brokeback Mountain* will be a hit. And then similar stories will make it into big-movie production. Who knows?

When I met the gentleman who uttered the "version of English" line, I was on my way to my best friend's wedding in England. She happened to be getting married a week after Prince Charles and Camilla. So when my mother mentioned to a friend that I was going to England for a wedding, the friend's son exclaimed, "I didn't know Kevin was so close to the royal family!"

Maybe not, but with Sir Elton getting married at Windsor, I suddenly feel just a little bit closer to them. I just hope he breaks out the tiara. ▼

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December – sort of a big gay Christmas present to British queendom.

Elton John and his partner David Furnish announced plans to wed in Windsor and have already set a date. Theirs will be a dignified ceremony, held in the same place that Prince Charles wed his longtime lover, Seabiscuit – er, Camilla.

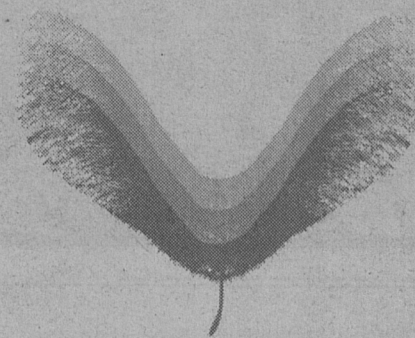
Not bad, I thought, when a queen can get married in the same place as a prince. And yes, I'm sure that Sir Elton's ceremony will be nothing but tasteful. After all, isn't tasteful what he's always been known for? I do hope, though, that somehow tiaras are involved. I mean, when you've waited a lifetime to marry the man you love, isn't now finally the right time to be over the top?

George Michael has also announced plans to civilly unite. Again, he and his partner are

drawn up a will instead? I'm sure he could afford the lawyer." It was definitely not a *When Harry Met Rodney* sort of moment.

Meanwhile, further south – much, much further south – a South African judge recently ruled that same sex couples must be afforded the same rights as married straight couples. You see, the South African constitution, which is particularly progressive, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. So the judge ruled that the government must provide a mechanism to extend the same rights to gay couples – civil unions or marriage – within a year. Not bad, I thought, for a country that not so many years ago had an institutionalized system of racial discrimination.

So with Britain, South Africa, and Canada all granting



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