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PAGES
6-7

Wedding pows!

Inside \$1M Waldorf nups
that ended with a bang



OUR 'SHOT' GUN

EXCLUSIVE

By **DOREE LEWAK**

A NNA Goldshmidt wanted a wedding that would leave people talking. Boy, did she get her wish.

On June 13, 2015, she and her groom, Elan Stratiyevsky, were to be the stars of an extravagant ceremony and reception at the Waldorf Astoria, with 350 guests in attendance. Then a gun, carried by a cousin of the groom, accidentally went off, injuring at least four people.

The fairy tale was called off. Now the Brighton Beach couple is suing the cousin, Vladimir Gotlibovsky, with the Waldorf named a third-party defendant by Gotlibovsky's lawyers.

"The damages will far exceed a million dollars," says the plaintiff's lawyer, Ben Brafman. "This was a million-dollar wedding."

GOLDSHMIDT, 24, had dreamed about a lavish wedding since she was a little girl — a Ukrainian émigré who moved to Bensonhurst at age 3. "I wanted the Waldorf my whole life," the nursing student tells The Post. "I always loved it. It's the biggest hall in New York City."

She was still in high school when she met her future husband, who grew up in Brighton Beach.

"We pretty much clicked right away," says Stratiyevsky, now 26 and a hedge-funder. "It just felt right; when you know, you know."

Famed fashion designer Pnina Tornai — whose creations cost around \$40,000 — flew in from Israel to custom fit Goldshmidt's lavish, 20-pound gown.

Up until the wedding day, things had been running with military precision. The Bloomingdale's registry — including a \$440 Nespresso coffee maker and a \$495 Waterford vase — was largely fulfilled. The nuptial hashtag #goldstrattwedding was established. And guests from Israel and Moscow had safely arrived.

The couple had rented out the entire 35th floor of the Waldorf, complete with private security detail. They would spend their wedding night in the 2,245-square-foot suite where every president since Herbert Hoover has stayed.

The night before the June 13 wedding, Goldshmidt and her



BRIDE & GROOM: Anna Goldshmidt and Elan Stratiyevsky (above) "felt like a million bucks" at their Waldorf wedding before a gun went off and injured guests, including Maya Rafailovich (below).



Dimitrios E. Kambouris



Photo Courtesy

How a pistol-packing bozo ruined \$1M nups

seven bridesmaids decamped for the Waldorf. Of sleeping on the luxe Anichini sheets, she says, "It was very magical. Everything I dreamed of."

The next day, ignoring superstitions about the groom not seeing the bride before the wedding, the

couple trotted off to Central Park for a photo session.

"She looked like a princess. You couldn't wipe the smile off my face," Stratiyevsky recalls. "People were taking pictures of us like we were celebrities. We felt like a million bucks."

The bride slipped up to her suite at 6:30 p.m., a half-hour before guests were to descend upon the Waldorf's Vanderbilt Room for cocktails. "I was making my way around the room greeting people," Stratiyevsky says. He remembers seeing his second

cousin, liquor-store owner Vladimir Gotlibovsky, arrive.

About 100 guests were mingling when there was a startling bang.

"It sounded like a chandelier fell," Stratiyevsky recalls. "The last thing I thought was a gunshot. Who thinks 'gunshot' at the Waldorf at a black-tie wedding?"

IT took a few seconds before Stratiyevsky saw the first injury. "The lady started screaming that she's bleeding, and her husband started screaming, 'Help my wife, get an ambulance.' And then there was panic."

Maya Rafailovich, who works in the medical-staffing office of the bride's parents, was grazed by the ricocheting bullet on the side of the head.

"There were whispers," the groom says. "Some people said the chandelier fell, some people said it sounded like a gunshot. No one knew for sure, at that point, what happened."

Indeed, Gotlibovsky had discharged his 9mm Ruger into the crowd. Sources have previously said that another guest may have bumped into Gotlibovsky, triggering a single shot from the gun that was in his pants pocket. His lawyer says surveillance video shows Gotlibovsky didn't have his hand in his pocket and that it was an accident.

As the bullet ricocheted around the room, three people were injured, and Goldshmidt's mother was grazed on the foot by debris.

Within minutes, ambulances responded to the scene, and Stratiyevsky was whisked upstairs so he and Goldshmidt could sign their ketubah (the Jewish wedding contract). Before he got there, the bride's father pulled him aside with a firm directive: Don't tell Anna anything.

"He said, 'She can read you like a book — you have to hold it together,'" Stratiyevsky remembers.

Goldshmidt remembers noticing hotel employees yelling into walkie-talkies, and that her friends who served as witnesses for the ketubah signing were "kind of whispering among themselves and looked really pale," but she didn't dwell on it. "Everything felt perfect," she says.

"Looking back at pictures of the ketubah signing, she's extremely happy and smiling, and I look very serious," says the groom.

Meanwhile, the wedding planner provided by the Waldorf was reassuring him that "the show will go on."

WEDDING

Instead of taking the elevator down to the Empire Room for the ceremony, the planner insisted that the bride take the stairs.

"I thought something was weird," Goldshmidt says. "They told me a chandelier broke and they closed off that area." In reality, everyone was trying to keep her from seeing the active crime scene, where yellow police tape and neon cones were now crowding out the orchids and roses.

"I was hoping that by the time the ceremony ended, it would all be cleared out and she would never find out until the next day," Stratiyevsky says.

BUT as soon as the doors opened to the lobby, Goldshmidt noticed something weird: a whole table of name cards untouched in the lobby.

Then she saw the police tape. "One of the sergeants said, 'You can't come here,'" the bride says. "They start pushing everybody back. My mom literally fainted."

The sergeant broke the news that guests would be quarantined in the Empire Room, where the ceremony had been held.

"All the guests are just pushing through these doors. You can't keep 350 people in one room — not my guests!" Goldshmidt recalls. "Everyone's saying, 'I'm a lawyer!'"

Then the wedding planner told the bride — who had spent a year fashioning this million-dollar affair — "I'm sorry, [the reception's] canceled."

As she remembers it: "I'm looking at [the planner], and I'm screaming, 'What's going on?' He's looking at me, he's shaking his head. I lost it. I was hysterical. I couldn't believe it was happening and I couldn't believe it was happening to me. You don't see things like this in movies."

Up until this point, Goldshmidt still thought a light bulb had fallen from a chandelier.

Finally, an officer explained there was a shooting at her wedding — and that it was committed by one of her guests.

"I asked Elan who it was, and he refused to tell me. I turned to my mom — not realizing she had been grazed — 'and grabbed her and said, 'Tell me who it was!'"

Finding out that it was her new husband's relative left her "extremely upset and distraught."

"It felt worse than if someone would have died in [my] family. It was a tragedy," she adds. "I don't even remember myself scream-

ing, but everyone says it was blood-curdling."

BY this point, the police had apprehended Gotlibovsky. But the gun was nowhere to be found. The Post previously reported how, according to authorities, the shooter — who a source said was drunk (his lawyer denies he was drinking) — allegedly slipped the Ruger to his brother, Felix, who turned it over to their mother. The mom gave it to Gotlibovsky's wife, who left and locked it in the family safe.

Gotlibovsky has since been charged with criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, tampering with physical evidence and six counts of assault in the third degree. His lawyer reports that the gun was turned over to police the night of the wedding.

Stratiyevsky claims that police didn't have a problem with the reception happening, but told him that the decision was up to Waldorf management.

"Somebody [at the hotel] panicked," plaintiff's lawyer David Jaroslawicz says. "Once they told the guests to go home, there was no other recourse." (A spokesman for the Waldorf Astoria declined to comment, since litigation is pending.)

Meanwhile, a feast fit for a czar was going to ruin in the ballroom. A private caterer had been hired to work with the Waldorf staff to create a custom menu.

"Obviously the traditional Russian black-caviar station at the smorgasbord, all sorts of different finger foods — it was lavish," says Stratiyevsky, detailing the raw bar with lobster and shrimp and crab legs, as well as the meat-carving station, never to be touched.

There was also to be a performance by Russian pop star Kristina Orbakaite, whom the couple had flown to New York and put up at the Waldorf. But even if the party had gone on, she was too scared to leave her room.

"She's the daughter of the Beyoncé of Russia," Goldshmidt says. "She was like, 'This is Russian mafia or something. I don't understand what kind of wedding I came to.'"

Eventually, the couple returned to the Presidential Suite — ironically equipped with bulletproof windows. The dutiful bridal party tried to get them to hit a club in a last-ditch effort to salvage the night. "They said, 'We don't care if you're going in a tank top and shorts!' They said, 'We'll close

down any club — let's go! We're not going to stop this party!'" Goldshmidt says. "We have the best friends."

She did indeed slip into a tank top and shorts, but ended up having her first dance with her father in the middle of the hotel room, with the whole family crying.

The bride and groom never had their dance, though.

There was a half-hearted lifting of the bride on a chair by the gathered guests, but no one took any photos to document the moment.

And when they called down to claim the food from their reception, they were told, "Sorry, it's already in the garbage."

Once everyone cleared out, the couple considered staying overnight in their honeymoon suite, but Goldshmidt felt too defeated. At 4 a.m., she got an Uber car to shuttle her and her new husband home to Brighton Beach.

On the way out of the Waldorf, she took one last glance into the Empire Room, only to see her hand-built *chuppah* being broken down by hotel workers.

"I'm still traumatized," Goldshmidt says. "This will affect me for the rest of my life, and my children." She is now nearly six months' pregnant with the couple's first child.

THE newlyweds say neither Gotlibovsky nor anyone in his immediate family have reached out to them — to apologize or otherwise.

"It caused a little bit of a rift between [Stratiyevsky's extended family] and the bride," says Jaroslawicz.

Arthur Gershfeld, Gotlibovsky's attorney, says it's not that his client doesn't want to speak to the couple, but "they should not have contact with one another except through counsel. There's no question that he feels bad."

Gershfeld adds: "It seems like the bride and groom are living their lives and doing just fine. If she were so emotionally disturbed, she'd have a problem getting pregnant."

The lawsuit describes "extreme emotional distress, mental anguish and severe embarrassment."

Goldshmidt says those feelings aren't going away anytime soon. "I was depressed for the first five months. The only pictures I have are from the park. We'll never have a wedding video. This is as bad as it gets."



THE HOLE STORY: Groom Elan Stratiyevsky's cousin Vladimir Gotlibovsky has a telling hole in his pants as he's taken into custody after his 9mm Ruger (inset) fired in his pocket.

Christopher Sotgiu