

The Eye of the Beholder

As the car pulled up outside the church I could hear the bells heralding our arrival. Their joyful peals sent a frisson of excitement, or was it nerves, down my spine. My father took my hand in his and we sat for a moment. We didn't speak. We didn't need to. I could feel his emotion as he breathed heavily, staccato, almost. He kissed my cheek gently, got out of the car and opened the door for me.

"Oh, doesn't she look beautiful," a voice gasped. I recognised it as my parents' neighbour, Violet.

"Absolutely stunning. What a special day this must be for her parents," whispered her friend, Glad, in sympathetic tones.

"And I thought it was the bride and groom's special day," I said quietly to my father. He chuckled and squeezed my hand.

I embraced the sun on my skin as my attendants fussed over my skirts and veil. They rearranged me as I collected my thoughts and concentrated on my breathing, before being ushered excitedly forward. The bells chimed 3 o'clock. It was time.

Having enjoyed the warmth of sun-drenched courtyard, I was a little shocked by the coolness of the entrance to the church. There was a slightly musty smell but I could also detect the pungent aroma of melting candlewax and a dozen or more different perfumes and aftershaves from the congregated guests. But as I began to walk down the aisle, it was the overwhelming sweet scent of freesias that helped to calm my bubbling nerves. I tried to walk in time to the 'Wedding March', clinging to my father for some sense of rhythm, but in my excitement, I got a little ahead of time.

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“We’re here,” he breathed, as we stopped and the organ music faded. Our gathered guests began shuffling as they took their seats and the occasional stifled cough broke the church’s sacred silence.

I couldn’t keep the smile from spreading across my face as my bridesmaid lifted my veil from my face and whispered ‘good luck’. My groom took my hands in his soft grasp and I noticed he was trembling slightly as the vicar began to speak, with his strident yet comforting voice. The ceremony was over in what seemed like an instant and as we turned to walk back down the aisle, the cacophony from the guests seemed to hang in the air along with the triumphant notes of the ‘Trumpet Voluntary’ and again those joyful bells.

“Congratulations, love,” mum’s simple words hit me as we stepped outside once more. We were actually married. What a buzz!

“I love you so much, Mrs Stevenson,” Daniel whispered as he guided me through the throng of friends and relatives. I could feel the soft flutter of confetti falling over me.

The afternoon was a whirling and dizzying rush of champagne, seafood, speeches, music and dancing. I was aware of the constant clicks and flashes of cameras and of the omnipresent camcorder that seemed to follow our every movement. Our guests had us forever holding hands and kissing for their photographic mementos, the photographer barking his orders to pose this way and that in order to capture the essence of the day.

I was ecstatically happy, but I know I will never look at the photos or watch the video. I have no desire to marvel at the intricate beauty of the

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hand-sewn beads on my Thai silk wedding dress, or recollect the simple lines of the bridesmaids' gowns, or watch as the guests greet us in the receiving line.

My memories will always be precious, but will remain in my heart. I can instantly recall the delicate smell of the roses in my bouquet, the fresh perfume of the freesias in the church, my husband's aftershave as I kissed him after we had taken our vows.

I will smile as I remember the feel of the silk of my dress against my skin, the shush of my skirts as I was led around the dance floor, the laughter of the guests as the best man reeled off his jokes at our expense.

I can still savour the tender texture of the smoked salmon and the fresh, locally grown asparagus, the salty tang of the calamari. I can still feel the fizz of the champagne bubbles dancing over my tongue and my mouth waters instantly, at the thought of the richness of the Belgian chocolate mud cake.

I don't need to gaze at photos to recapture the pure, unfettered joy of that day. I have those memories in my mind's eye as a constant reminder of the love I have for my husband.

At times when I am reminded of my difference, my limitations, my disability, I just rub my finger over my wedding band and feel peace. I simply cannot imagine that I would feel any happier, more loved or more whole had I the gift of sight.