

ON GLENNIE'S WEDDING DAY

The wedding party stood motionless, young faces as bland and beautiful as a detail of an Italianate frieze. Father Bledsoe intoned, "Speak now; or else for ever hold your peace."

Out of the darkness came a voice. "Just a minute here. I have something to say." Oh God. Margo forced herself not to turn around to look at Philip. Glennie's own father was trying to ruin the wedding after all. She should have known it would end this way after that weekend four months earlier when Philip had first met Hari. She should have known.

It was just an informal lunch at Margo's house in Acton, Massachusetts, a quiet suburb thirty miles west of Boston, where she lived with her husband of four years, Mike. She'd been in the kitchen taking the rolls from the oven when she heard Philip's voice, querulous, floating in from the dining table, "What's in this dish?" Glennie answered, "Dad, that's couscous." "Oh, coo-coo? Never heard of it. So we're having coo-coo in honor of..." And he paused. He tried again. "Coo-coo in honor of...." He'd forgotten the name of his daughter's fiancé, whom he was meeting for the first time. The silence rolled around the corner from the dining room and into the kitchen carrying with its weight of sorrow. Margo stood at the open oven as the silence steadily filled the corners of the big house.

“Coo-coo?” Philip was unfazed. “How do you pronounce it, is it ‘coo-coo’?” Glennie exploded. “Dad!” It’s ‘couscous,’ not ‘coo-coo’ which is a Middle Eastern food, and not Indian, and Hari’s name is ‘Hari.’”

That evening things got worse. They sat in a quiet corner of the lobby of the Meridien Hotel in Boston waiting for Hari’s parents, newly-arrived from Bangalore, to join them for a celebratory, get-to-know-each-other dinner. “Ya know, I never wanted to travel to India - too much poverty,” said sixty-four- year-old Philip, settling his lanky form into the chair across from Hari’s. His hair was gray and dry, like leftover ashes in the fireplace, but his jowls were smooth and flush and he exuded a thick aroma of an expensive aftershave. The studied innocence in his demeanor put Margo on the alert. She smoothed the skirt of her beige suit and braced for the unpleasantness to come.

“Yes,” said Hari agreeably. “India is a third world country of 900 million people. You’re right. There’s a lot of poverty there.” Hari was a winsome, slender man of thirty.

“And that democracy stuff - that’s a sham.” Philip uncrossed his leg and leaned forward with a power stare. Both men wore Brooks Brothers suits and wing tip shoes. Hari stared back.

“Dad! What are you talking about? We aren’t here to discuss politics.” Glennie, a redheaded beanpole with keen hazel eyes in a hunter green wool suit, was sprawled on the arm of Hari’s chair.

“Oh that’s okay, Glennie,” Hari said, looking up at her with a wry smile. “I don’t mind discussing politics with your dad.”

“Yeah. We men are talking politics.” Philip’s bared his teeth in a grin. “Now you listen here, Harry.”

"Dad, it's 'Hari,' rhymes with 'par,' as in golf."

"Hari?"

"Yes, Dad. Har-ee, as in har-de-har-har-har."

Philip settled back into his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. Margo's stomach contracted. Why couldn't Philip just be pleasant? Why would Philip actually try to insult his new son-in-law at the first go-round? She looked over at Mike. He was gazing down at his shoes. Philip's wife, Candy, an athletic, pudding-faced youngster of 43, quietly leafed through the Ski magazine she'd brought with her.

"Okay, Glennie. Now look, Haaah-ree, it's simple. It's clear that Hinduism is the cause of the poverty in India. They don't slaughter the cows; the cows run all over spreading disease, and Hindus don't eat meat so there's not enough protein there, and they starve. India will never rise above third-world status and it's because of Hinduism."

Margo spoke up with the familiar ease that divorced couples retain with each other long after they've separated. "Philip, what on earth are you talking about? You've just made an outrageous statement which doesn't make any sense." She glanced at Mike for help. He gave her a don't-bring-me-into-this look and Candy turned a page of her magazine. "It's okay, Margo" said Hari, "I don't mind discussing India with Philip while we're waiting for my parents." Hari spoke with exaggerated calm, a world-weariness that he must have developed working with his more difficult patients at Columbia Presbyterian. He and Glennie would finish their residencies the following June.

Hari checked his watch, then ran his fingers through his shiny straight black hair. "Now, Philip, you were trying to connect Hinduism to the poverty in India?"

"Yeah, " said Philip, scowling. "Look at Bhopal. There was a sacred rat got loose in the plant, chewed something...." Margo gasped. "That is the most absurd thing I have ever heard, Philip." Philip turned to her, shrugging, "... that's what a Union Carbide VP told me last week in Duxbury. I'm not kidding!"

Margo stood up. "I can't believe this. If you'll excuse me, all of you, I'm taking a walk." As Margo examined the reception desk before touring the various furniture groupings, including the bell captain's station where she managed to make a friendly comment about the weather, she couldn't place the exact moment when Philip had turned into this pompous, aging stranger. Their marriage, granted, had been in turn romantic, glamorous, tumultuous, then ultimately frightening, but she recalled having married a charismatic charmer who may have been an operator, but he wasn't malicious. She returned to the little gathering in time to hear Philip proclaim in a loud voice, "Well now, Harry, you're being a smart ass."

"Philip. I'd rather be a smart ass than ignorant."

Just then, an elegant Indian couple approach from the elevator bank. "Oh, there's my mom and dad." The woman wore a navy silk sari, the man a gray wool suit. Hari stood. "Philip, I'd like you to meet my mother, Anja and my father, Umang Anantha." Margo embraced Anja. "So glad to see you again, Anja and Umang. Welcome to Boston."

That night at dinner, the conversation inevitably came around to Hinduism again. Glennie tried to explain. "There are many gods, Dad, each a manifestation of various parts of one God." Uman spoke up. "That's correct. For example, Shiva is the destroyer of the universe, but in our religion, destruction implies reproduction and regeneration, so

Shiva also perpetually restores that which has been destroyed. And Durga is a goddess who rides a tiger, which represents the subjugation of ego and arrogance." He spoke crisply with a British cast to his lilting cadence, and glanced at Philip upon pronouncing the last word.

Margo said, "I've become attached to Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, protector of new beginnings, during the ceremony the Ananthas had held during an earlier trip to New York, to bless our kids." Margo had enjoyed that exposure to the strange culture of her new son-in-law, her first introduction to the Hindi pantheon. She remembered the cool, barren sweep of marble in the temple, the intimidating lineup of gods in his or her own small cell, each represented by an exotic statue adorned with necklaces or pieces of cloth redolent of a culture far removed from that of New York. There had been a bare-shouldered priest wrapped in a diaper-like garment, sandaled, who used incense, flowers, and fresh fruits to aid his incantations in a rapid Sanskrit. The strange sounds had inundated Margo's ears in a flood of vowels and consonants, the occasional "Glennie," "Michigan," "January" bobbing up at unexpected intervals in his incantations.

Glennie said, "Anja, isn't there a Lakshmi? I know a Lakshmi on the pulmonology staff."

"Yes, she is also known as Padmavati, and is the consort of Vishnu in all his incarnations. She is one who brings prosperity. Her four hands signify her power to grant the four goals of life, one of which is *dharma*, you've heard that word, which means righteousness." Anja's English was beautifully enunciated. She rolled her "r's" to make them sound like "d's" and she pronounced every "t."

The waiter appeared to clear away the dinner plates.

Philip said, "Aren't we here to talk about the reception?"

Anja turned toward him, folding her hands. "As I understand it, Philip, you have your own ideas about having the wedding reception in Duxbury?" She pronounced it "Dux-bry."

"What d'you mean my own ideas? As far as I know, nothing's been decided, has it? I hope to God I get a chance here. Or has Margo already gone behind my back and made all the decisions?"

"Philip, don't be obtuse," said Margo. "Nothing has been decided except that the kids definitely want to be married at Trinity Episcopal, in Concord." The waiter appeared and poured coffee. "Is that decaf?" The waiter nodded. "Please." She turned back to Philip. "What Anja means is the reception, Philip. The kids want to keep the reception in Concord so we don't have to travel forty miles to Duxbury after the ceremony just to get to your house."

Glennie spoke up. "Dad, we love your place, we really do, the landscaping is beautiful and it's next to the seashore and all, but Hari and I want the reception close to the church." She poured cream into her coffee.

Philip picked up a teaspoon. He waggled it between two manicured fingers. "Look, that's all well and good but who's going to pay for this shindig? I had a caterer come in and do a survey. My house is a beautiful place for a reception. He said he could do a tent and serve a snack for thirty people for about \$3,000."

"Dad, first of all, we'll have well over a hundred people, not thirty, so your figures aren't right."

“One hundred? Why that number? That’s just tacky – and expensive too. I thought we’d do this tastefully, keep it down to just family, have the reception at my place, and your mother and I will go 50-50 on the cost. As I said, I think a large wedding would be tacky.” Philip exhaled loudly and swiveled his large head around as if to conclude the conversation.

“Dad, Anja’s going to bring a lot of people from India. All of Umang’s brothers are coming too. Hari’s the first born son of a first born son and it’s an important day for the family.” Hari’s parents were sitting up straight, expressionless. Anja’s gold wedding necklace, the *mangala sutra*, glittered. (Margo had learned that Glennie herself would receive one at the wedding). Glennie continued, “And we want to invite our college and med school friends. That brings up the numbers. And don’t you and Candy have some people you’d like to invite?”

“Nah, we don’t have any people...just a few in Duxbury... and remember, they’re all in their late sixties now, and I don’t think they can travel all that far. That’s one reason we need to have the reception in Duxbury....” Philip took a sip of his coffee and finished his sentence, "...so my friends will come.”

Hari said, “You mean to say your friends won’t drive forty miles to Concord?”

“Ya know something, Harry? You’re bordering on insulting.”

Glennie said quickly. “I can’t believe your friends wouldn’t come to the wedding, Dad. What about the Simpsons, for example, or Tom, or your old Exeter buddies?” She turned to Candy. “Candy? How many people would you and Philip be having to the wedding? And would they come up to Concord?”

Candy looked up from the packet of Equal in her hands. "Actually we don't have any friends. Nobody would come. So I'd say zero."

The waiter appeared. "Would anyone like more coffee?"

"Glennie," said Philip, reaching over to tap her arm with his spoon. "Where did you get the idea I would agree to all these people at your wedding?" He paused, pursing his lips into a pout. "It's your mother interfering again." He turned to Margo. "If you hadn't butted in, Glennie wouldn't have gotten these ideas that she could invite everybody she'd ever known."

"Don't be ridiculous, Philip."

"I'll tell you who's being ridiculous. You are." The teaspoon moved closer to Margo's face. "And I'll tell you right now, if you don't do this wedding my way, you can count me out. I'm not paying for a penny of it and I'm not coming at all if the reception's not in Duxbury."

"Philip, now you're being a jackass."

Anja and Umang darted looks at each other. Anja's diamond earrings sent sparkles across the table. Umang cleared his throat. He was a professor of biology at the University of Bangalore. "Now I'm sure we can work this out..."

Philip banged his hand on the table. He turned to his daughter. "It's your decision, Glennie. We're gonna do it my way or I'm out."

"Dad!"

"I mean it. You can take it or leave it."

“Dad. We're having the reception in Concord for the reasons I've given you. We'd hoped you and Candy would understand and see your way to being a part of the wedding but....” She paused and looked over at Hari, her face tight. “If you can't, well, you can't.”

“That suits me fine.” Philip stood up and said, “Come on, Candy, let's get out of here.”

Margo won the fight for the check with Umang. It's only money, she kept telling herself, and it was the least she could do. She could divorce Philip but she couldn't make him a better man.

On the morning of Glennie's wedding day, low September sunlight broke through the blinds. It was a miracle Margo's head wasn't splitting after the two martinis she'd had at the rehearsal dinner. She sneaked into the bathroom. A shower would help. As the warm water poured over her head, the wedding dominated her thoughts as it had for the last six months. Everything was ready. At the stroke of 6:00 p.m. a perfect wedding would begin. She was counting on Philip not showing up. Philip was capable of ruining things - he enjoyed ruining things as a matter of fact if it brought attention to himself - and this was one big event to ruin, with 180 guests and \$30,000 sunk into the food and music alone. The ceremony would be a blend of Hindu and Christian rituals and vows that Glennie, Margo, Anja and Hari had carefully scripted over the months and had won the approval of the Episcopal priest. Margo scrubbed a heel with a pumice stone as translucent bubbles surfed down on the flat ribbons of water coursing over her middle-aged stomach. Once flat and inconspicuous, her stomach was now an offensive pouch. It was a perpetual annoyance to her, a holy grail of wishing for which she compensated by spending money at the Estée Lauder counter on small expensive jars of white cream.

Towelings off, Margo felt a niggling sense of unease she couldn't identify. It wasn't her stomach and it wasn't the hangover. And it wasn't Philip. Something else was nagging at her, just below the surface. But she couldn't put her finger on it.

She looked at a hag in the mirror. Margo was petite, round, with blond, blunt cut hair and large blue eyes. These days Margo only saw the damaging effects of Age the Intruder who mocked her daily in some new way: the graying hairs she covered with the foil treatment; the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes; the slight wattle in her neck. Nothing she could do about the bags under her eyes short of surgery. And of course her stomach. She thought of the time back in high school when she'd hugged her high school Spanish teacher on graduation day and been shocked to feel the flab around the woman's waist. She'd vowed never to have flab around her middle: Never. She fished in the drawer for aspirin to swallow along with her weekly calcium pellet. A few months ago, Glennie, her Daughter-the-Doctor, had run Margo through a machine that printed out a colorful graphic of a skeleton. Margo had an image of her future self in a coffin. Glennie had explained in her professional voice, "You're showing a 3% loss in bone density. This is common among post-menopausal women, Mom, and I don't want you to get osteoporosis."

"What's this blue line here?" said Margo pointing at the chart.

"That? That's your calcium. See what I mean?" The line plunged vertically, like a steep decline in the stock market.

The aspirin got stuck in her throat on its way down and its citrusy fumes seared her nasal cavities. Margo thought of her mother, who had died two years earlier, and how, back in Michigan long ago, she'd administered aspirin to Margo in a teaspoon with

sugar mixed with a few drops of water. She'd poke at the aspirin with a toothpick to break it up in a bit of motherly performance art that Margo loved to watch. "Down the hatch," her mother would say, and Margo would swallow the gritty sweet-acrid mixture as if receiving Holy Communion. Margo missed her mother these days and still cried at odd times. Just yesterday she was driving the gift baskets to the hotel for the out-of-town guests and a commercial came on the radio about dogs in heaven. When it registered that the talking dogs were dead, out burbled a sob, right there on Center Street in front of the florist shop.

Margo tiptoed back into the bedroom wrapped in her bath towel. She passed the gray taffeta floor-length skirt and beaded silver sweater set from Saks hanging on the closet door, her wedding outfit being a conscious rejection of fusty mother-of-the-bride uniforms of pastel silk or weighty brocade. Mike was still snoring on his side of the bed. Mike was a bassoonist with the Boston Baroque orchestra and he taught at the New England Conservatory. He was on his second marriage too, his own three children having married long ago. He'd given Margo a wide berth during the planning and execution of this affair. Margo went into the closet and Walter, the family cocker spaniel, followed her, hoping for attention. Walter rolled onto his back, spread his mutton chop legs and wagged his tail in ecstasy.

"Hello my little man." She sat down on the little boudoir chair in the closet and hoisted him up for a hug. He wriggled free and ran from her toward the door with his tail signaling left / right, left / right. So adorable. As the wedding day approached, furry little Walter had grown more important to her, as if he were a substitute for the child she had borne who would soon marry and with crushing finality, leave her for good. The other

night Margo caught herself cradling Walter in her arms and talking baby talk to him as she watched TV, as if she were lulling a baby to sleep. Good thing Mike hadn't been home.

Margo's mind wandered as she examined the hangers of dresses, sweaters, slacks and blue jeans on her side of the closet. What if Philip actually came to the wedding today? She couldn't imagine him pulling something, but he wasn't the same man she'd married twenty years earlier. Something had gone haywire in Philip since then. When they'd married, Margo'd been nineteen, Philip was thirty-five; she'd been looking for the father she never had; he'd wanted a trophy wife. At the time he'd been irresistible: charming, handsome. And wealthy. She realized she'd sold out, on some subconscious level a few years into the marriage. They had married in 1969, around the time the term "sexism" entered the national consciousness via a Time magazine article she'd never forgotten. She'd read the word and discussed the concept of sexism with friends who scoffed. Then came the epiphany and she was forever liberated. If she'd been less liberated, would that have made a difference in her marriage? Could she have hewn to Philip's demands and perhaps, helped him avoid becoming so evil?

Before the divorce she'd wanted him dead. A painless death of course, perhaps a fall down the stairs. She imagined putting her foot out as he strode by at the top of the stairs, or better, he'd just trip on something accidentally left there. She imagined him tumbling down, breaking his neck in the fall, dying instantly and solving all their problems. Instead, they'd had a contentious divorce and Glennie had ended up living with her, the two of them against the world, through junior and high school until Glennie'd gone off to college.

Margo's towel slipped as she rummaged for shoes. Sandals or sneakers today? It was warm for September, an Indian summer. She chose sneakers for the support. Mike opened the closet door. "Hey, Ruben," His pet name for her, from "Rubenesque," the term Margo had used unimaginatively to describe herself when she had first talked to Mike on the phone before their blind date. Mike loved her bulk, unlike Philip who nagged her over the years to "do something about that weight."

"Good morning, you gorgeous hunk of womanhood." Mike's hands had found her breasts. He was warm from the bed.

"I want your body. Hmm, you're delicious." Mike's erection poked against her stomach through his pajamas.

"Mike, are you crazy? Glennie and Gillian are asleep just a few feet down the hall." Mike pulled back. "Well, all right, but remember, it's your loss."

"Honey, we've got plenty of time for that kind of thing later. The kids will all be gone by tomorrow at this time."

"I know." He stood there, downcast, frumpy and tousled and suddenly Margo put her hands in his hair, stroking it back off his face. She kissed him and then kissed him again. She said, "Guess what? I love you."

Margo finished dressing. Her depression was creeping in again, and she still wasn't sure what was the cause of it. Dr. Dressler had recommended Prozac for a few months. Margo was resisting such a drastic step, her current belief being that maybe depression was a part of life to be accepted and managed. She had been going to the psychiatrist for several months and still wasn't clear: was she depressed because she was getting old? Was it because her marriage wasn't always perfect? Was it because she felt

Glennie no longer needed her? She'd had two husbands and now she was old, out of chances, and no longer useful to her independent daughter. How had Glennie been lucky enough, smart enough to find such a wonderful man to fall in love with? It was a miracle.

Nobody like Hari had ever married into the Yarrow family. When Glennie had chosen Hari Anantha, it had been gratifying to Margo to know that Glennie was going to fling in Philip's face all his sneaky little prejudices. "That fucking kike," (applied to Margo's current husband, Mike) or "She's a Black!" (whispered, referring to Glennie's best friend in high school.) In great poetic justice Glennie had fallen for a man neither Christian nor particularly white. Philip used to say he'd never liked Indians - couldn't trust 'em. Such poetic justice.

Margo had not warmed to Hari at first; in fact she'd felt an ill-defined hostility when they'd first met in the lobby of the hospital during one of her visits in New York. He was only an acquaintance of Glennie's then, a good friend. Yet when she saw how he looked at Glennie, she knew, before Glennie did, that he was the one who would claim Glennie, the certainty of this knowledge had flooded her veins in a kind of limbic early warning system. And when over the months, Glennie had slowly introduced Margo to the fact that she was falling in love with Hari, Margo's prejudices had surfaced in spite of her liberalism, as if she were marshalling anything to give her a reason to reject Hari. Unrelated images swirled in her head: "Elephant Walk," with Elizabeth Taylor as the plantation owner's wife in taboo love with Richard Burton in blackface. And the Masterpiece Theater rendition of E. M. Forster's "The Jewel in the Crown" about the politicized young Indian rebel. Come to think of it, that guy's name was Hari too. Shiva the god with many arms; erotic statues of southern India where rock-carved deity couples

enjoyed timeless coitus; Hare Krishna, Ravi Shankar, the “Kama Sutra;” curried rice and chicken tandoori; Mother Teresa, the stinking holy Ganges; global computer programmers, “Mississippi Marsala.” Too confusing a culture; too ethnic. Not what she had counted on for Glennie at all.

She’d discussed her reservations with Glennie frankly. “And think of the prejudice in this country. It will hound you, hurt you. You didn’t live during the civil rights movement but I did, and I remember, even though I was a little girl, how much prejudice there is in this country. And even now. Glennie, I can’t stand the idea of someone making a racial slur against you.”

“Mom, in the medical profession there are all kinds of mixed couples. We’re nothing. These are the people we’ll socialize with; today there is nothing to worry about as far as racial slurs go – I just have fallen in love with a universal brown man. This is the man I want to spend the rest of my life with. I want to grow old with Hari.”

It turned out that Margo’s resistance was not about Hari’s skin tone but about letting go of Glennie, of allowing someone else to be the most important person in her life. Once she knew Glennie was in love with the gentle man with the big eyes, Margo gave in. She took a real look at Hari and found him modest, witty, and accomplished. And he adored Glennie. He cooked well, was squeaky clean, could make her laugh, and he was so intelligent that Margo started to tell Glennie he was too good for her. The people Margo had met just last night at the rehearsal dinner (newly-arrived from Bangalore and Bombay and Toronto and Sao Paulo) only confirmed what a catch Hari was. They didn’t look like stereotypes but rather like well-dressed versions of her own friends wearing silken saris or elegant *salvar camise* pantsuits and Brooks Brothers suits.

They wore good jewelry. They drank scotch and spoke with clipped English accents, told witty stories and published their various scholarly writings in technical journals; they belonged to organizations like the Civil Liberties Union and the Modern Languages Association. If only Philip knew how lucky the Yarrows were that the dignified Brahmins accepted them, and not the other way around.

Margo headed downstairs to the kitchen. Time to make pancakes. The phone rang.

"Hello Margo?"

It was Candy.

"Margo, (she was whispering and talking fast) I just had to phone you. Philip has gone for the mail so I have a minute."

"Yes? What is it?" Margo's head started to ache again.

"I just wanted to give you a heads up. We're coming to the wedding today."

"What?"

"I thought you should know."

"I thought Philip said he wasn't going to come."

"Well, this morning he woke up and said he was 'coming by God.'" She giggled.

"What does this mean - is he going to try to stop the wedding?"

"I don't know. I hope not, but he's determined to come. He's so...oh oh, I have to hang up now. He's coming up the driveway."

"Can't you stop him?... Candy?" The phone went dead.

Margo put down the receiver. It was all she needed - the Jackass was planning to stop the wedding. he made breakfast and tried to think of a solution.

"Pancakes are ready!" called out Margo and soon the sleepyheads came downstairs stretching and yawning; Mike, Glennie, and the maid of honor, Gillian, a slender blonde with a baby duckling hair cut. The chatting and laughter stopped when Margo broke the news about Philip.

"Oh, shit." Glennie said. "Mom, you and I both know he's insane."

Mike said, peering up from the *New York Times* over his reading glasses, "Do you think we should get Cousin Jugdeesh to rough him up if he shows his face?"

Everybody laughed. (Jugdeesh the imaginary, amusing name Glennie had taken to referring to their future firstborn, now applied to an imaginary cousin.) Gillian said, "I can just see it now Jugdeesh giving Philip the bum's rush out of the church. Yeah, right!"

Glennie stood up from the table and went to gaze out the kitchen window. Margo went over to her and put her arm around her shoulder. "Honey, I don't think he'll try anything."

Gillian put down her fork and pushed back her chair. "Glennie, don't worry - he won't do anything. And I'll take care of him if he comes to the reception."

"What do you mean 'take care of him?'" said Glennie, an eyebrow arching.

"Oh, you know. Talk to him, flirt with him. I know how to handle men."

"I'll bet you do."

"Mee-oww," said Gillian, making a little clawing motion with her hand.

Mike said, "Look, if he does make trouble, we're going to ignore him. That's all we can do I don't think we can keep him out of the church. And maybe he just wants to see his daughter get married." He was right. Some things were out of her control.

Everybody suddenly had things to do and left the kitchen except for Glennie who helped clear the table.

"Oh, Mom, I just wanted to thank you for all you've done; and you've paid out so much money; just to give us a wedding. You've been wonderful! Here, let me do that skillet."

"It's been my pleasure every step of the way, Honey." Margo picked up a dishtowel. "And you'll be the most beautiful bride there ever was."

Glennie made a face. Her hair hung in auburn ropes around her freckled, pale face. She had dark smudges under her eyes.

"Mom, whatever happens today - I mean if Dad shows up - I don't want you to worry about it. Dad can't spoil things no matter what his sick mind thinks up. Because Hari and I love each other too much. We're in this for life and nothing Dad does could wreck today."

"That's how I feel too."

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do"

"You know something? I feel sorry for Dad. It's like he can't help himself. Was he a good dad to me when I was little? It's funny but I can't remember." Glennie handed Margo a skillet to dry.

"Yes, Bunny, he was a good dad and you know he loves you. " Margo had an image of Philip rushing out to the backyard after Glennie had fallen from the little apple tree. He'd scooped her up, kissed her knee, and within a few seconds had Glennie laughing, her tears forgotten. Yes, Philip had been a good father. "But something

changed him; whether it was his own unhappy childhood or some bad Yarrow genes kicking in, I don't know. But he changed."

"Mom, he can't hurt any of us. But I just don't want you to worry, okay?"

"Thanks for worrying about me, Honey. I have a hunch we'll both be fine."

Glennie glanced up at the kitchen clock. "Oh my God what time is it? I have to get to my massage. Mom can you drive me? I'll be right down!" She dashed out of the kitchen, her flip flops going slap slap as she ran, and Margo saw a thin little six-year-old with red hair in a turquoise cotton bikini, running away from her down the beach with a seashell in her hand. The house fell silent. She hung up the dishtowel and picked up Walter and carried him to the living room couch. She kissed him on the back of his head and breathed deeply into his black fur.

Glennie had been a darling baby. Margo remembered the ferocious grip of labor – back then natural childbirth was in - then seeing Glennie for the first time, bloody and crying and wrinkled. Then Glennie was in her arms wrapped like a stuffed grape leaf in tight white cotton, a tiny knitted acorn cap stretched over her skull. Margo lowered her face to Walter's fur and breathed in his doggy smell and thought of Glennie's newborn smell. Glennie had been curious right away, looking out through marine blue eyes with a Yoda expression at once wise and empty. Descartes and the *tabula rasa* idea; Glennie an empty slate, a projection of hopes and dreams. What had this baby been looking at as she had gazed first at Margo and then looked around at the room, then looked back into Margo's eyes, then out at the room again. Glennie had continued to switch her focus back and forth every few moments as if imprinting images onto her brain. Did anything register? Was she writing on her own *tabula rasa*? Or was Glennie just exercising her

optical muscles? Margo had been awestruck, and had loved her new baby absolutely, joyously. Margo absently petted Walter. That somber little newborn, so pure and perfect. Her heart swelled. Suddenly Philip's face swam into view out of nowhere and Margo stood up, dumping Walter on the floor. She'd need some backup today.

She called her sister, Ellen, the practical one in the family.

"Ellen, Philip's coming to the wedding."

"No! How could he after what he said the last time?"

"Well, he's coming. What should I do?"

"If it were me, I'd have the police on the scene."

"I can't do that and you know it."

"He just wouldn't dare do anything, would he? He's an idiot but I don't think he'd ruin the wedding."

"I don't know. I'll see you later. Call if you think of anything. Gotta go"

Glennie had appeared from around the corner of the kitchen door, her eyes wide, pointing frantically at her watch.

Margo drove Glennie to the massage therapist then home, then back to pick up Glennie and drop off Gillian for her massage. The hairdresser and make-up woman arrived. Margo answered a phone call from one of the out-of-town guests who had called to chat. She picked up Gillian and paid the delivery man for the pizza the bridesmaids were to share upstairs as they had their hair done. Hari's mother called again - did Margo possibly have a brass or pewter bowl to hold the flower petals for the parental blessing? She found two bowls in the basement and put them by the door just as two bridesmaids arrived to have their hair done. It was getting late. As she tried to get upstairs toward the

shower, the doorbell rang again. It was the photographer and her teenaged assistant, his eyes agog.

Sounds of hilarity rang out from behind the door to Margo's and Mike's bedroom suite where the bridal party were dressing. Margo planned to use the guest bath to shower and dress, but she had to enter her own room to get underwear. Murmuring and followed by raucous laughter, the dirty joke kind, stopped when she entered. "Don't bother about me," she said, feeling sheepish, rummaging in her lingerie drawer. The chattering resumed. "Oh, no, how are we going to attach that flower to this buzz cut?" "Here, I've got some crazy glue!" "No, Here! I'll wear the flower in my teeth." "Where's my shoe?" "Ohhh, that shade is trashy, try this lipstick."

Margo showered in the guest bathroom, then dried her hair and poked it into shape, using lots of spray. She did her makeup remembering to go easy on the foundation; today she could overdo it if she didn't watch out. She sidled back into the master suite through the merry throng to grab her Saks outfit before scuttling back into the guest bathroom with its old woman's unguents and colored greases.

Then they were all in the kitchen: the bridesmaids, the photographer, the young assistant who couldn't stop gaping, the hair stylist, the makeup friend, the limo driver and Glennie. Margo said, "Oh, I forgot to offer wine - would anyone like some?"

"I thought you'd never ask. Yes!" Gillian bounded over to the cupboard to get glasses. Margo poured wine all around. "Well, kids, here we go." As Glennie and the bridesmaids rustled around the small area, they transformed themselves into nymphs straight out of an illustrated fairy tale come to life. Glennie stood laughing near the refrigerator. In eleven layers of puffy tulle, a satin bodice and a veil sprinkled with

sequins flowing from a pearl-and-rhinestone tiara, she had become a fairy queen, materialized out of the ether to bless their humble cottage.

The more laughter there was; the more the perfume of the satin-gowned young bodies filled the house with an electrifying vitality, the more unexpended energy drained away from Margo. She started to deflate, now marginal to the activity, an unnecessary appendage, a leftover. She'd recently gone into the women's room while shopping at Filenes perhaps a month earlier, and while there, she'd smelled the tang of fresh blood, emanating from the metal receptacle for discarded pads and tampons. The pungent odor had not been unpleasant; rather, it had been fresh and tangy, filling her senses. She could understand how a tiger would kill for blood; how a dog would gnaw at his own wound for the taste of it. She realized she'd forgotten about the peculiar ritual of menstruation that had once been so much an intimate fact of life, before menopause had freed her from its constraints. Her menses had often brought muscle cramping and in her later years, an inconvenient gushing until she'd had a partial hysterectomy. She'd never associated bleeding with fertility back then; there was no gratitude for the monthly cleansing and renewal, preparation for new life and yet. Was she missing it now?

The bevy of fairies chugged their wine and headed for the door. Margo said without thinking, "Should I ride in the limo with you, Glennie?" and Glennie answered too quickly, stifling the annoyance in her voice, "No, Mom, you ride with Mike." Of course. What was she thinking of? The door closed and then they were gone. Margo stood alone. It was silent in the kitchen. Walter lay on the carpet in the living room, thumping his tail. Walter would never betray her; Walter would never leave her. Margo finished her wine as Mike came downstairs in his dark suit with a crisp burgundy tie.

They went out together to the garage and drove to the church with little conversation.

"Those girls are gorgeous," the limo driver told Margo later at the church when she pressed his tip envelope into his hand, "Just gorgeous!"

The photographer and her assistant posed groups before an ivy-covered wall of the church. Glennie and Hari; Glennie and Hari and Hari's parents; Glennie and Hari and Margo; then the whole bridal party; then all of Hari's family, all of Glennie's family, all the women, all the men, and multiple shots of relatives. Glennie moved in a glass bubble of isolation, her attendants surrounding her in a perfumed unit, first moving across the courtyard to mingle with the lounging ushers, then into the church kitchen en masse, only to reappear moments later, bouquets in hand. Their muffled bursts of hilarity seemed strangely alienating to Margo, as if the young people were mocking her, although how could that be? It was worse. They were ignoring her. Why was Glennie avoiding her? Margo's feet started to feel the pinch of her shoes. "I'm going in to the kitchen for some water, Mike." She managed to stay hidden next to the refrigerator until a few minutes before six o'clock when Mike came looking for her.

People were arriving. Jewel-toned silks mingled with muted New England wool, pumps with sandals. Leather, linen, tweeds and silks flowed into St. Martin's Episcopal Church leaving an aromatic aftermath in their wake. Margo's family, her sister's, her brother and his wife from California arrived and entered the church. And there, getting out of his black Continental, with Candy wearing a pink short-skirted number, was Philip.

"Margo, there he is," hissed her sister Ellen, who had come over to wish her well before entering the church. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to tell him that he's not going to ruin Glennie's day." Margo started across the lawn, small jets of pain shooting up from the balls of her feet with every step. Damn those dyed-to-match shoes. She plunged forward. Philip just couldn't be a jerk, not today; she wouldn't allow it. But Philip marched up the walk before she could get to him, his chin jutting, looking comfortable in gray cashmere, white shirt and a red Sulka tie, with Candy trailing behind. They melted into the side entrance of the church before Margo could reach him. Candy had looked at Margo with a helpless shrug before following Philip inside. Mike signaled to a couple of the ushers. Margo started to walk over to him with some piece of useless advice but stopped, unable to think of anything to say.

Then everyone was inside and silence descended outside the carved doors like a weather change at sea when the wind dies and the air hangs heavy and still. Glennie detached herself from her bodyguards and took her place next to Margo, who, it had been decided when Philip abdicated, would give her away. The music started and Hari and his parents entered. The very first part of the ceremony was Hindu, the blessing of the groom by the parents, and it involved flower petals and water. The Hindu priest was a woman in a bottle green sari with a braid longer than waist-length, a professor of English who had flown in from the West Coast for the occasion.

From just outside the large double doors of the chapel, standing next to Glennie, Margo could hear the priest speaking the Sankalpa Mantra, or, "Invocation of blessings from God and all God's creation" in a fast Sanskrit. Her voice was muffled and rhythmic, the cadences punctuated by responses of Anja and Umang. There was at least one instance of polite chuckling from the congregation as well, and Margo recalled, as

explained in the order of services, that this prayer spoke about married love as timeless and selfless. Margo shifted her weight from one aching foot to the other. After a pause, the organ and the trumpet struck up the announcement of the bride's entrance, and Glennie's three attendants started their walk into the church, spacing themselves a half aisle-length apart as they had practiced.

With Glennie uncharacteristically silent at her side, Margo waited and remembered all the times Glennie had left her. Glennie the four-year-old off to kindergarten, a shrinking little tyke in blue jumper with white blouse and little white tights and mary janes on her feet. Glennie going to summer camp when Glennie was nine. Glennie a plump, fifteen-year-old who went off to the island of Saba for the summer to plant trees and help run a children's nursery, and who'd returned in the Fall newly-slim, smoking cigarettes and suspiciously savvy about Rastafarian culture. Glennie driving to college, granting Margo along with the sharp pain of separation, a surprising freedom and a tidy house. Then there was the time Glennie graduated from medical school, sweeping past Margo and the other families in the river of crimson-robed student/doctors with their predictably fulfilling futures laid out ahead of them like a red carpet. Margo had felt flat and empty then too, as if she weren't smart enough to talk to Glennie any more. But still she had not really lost Glennie because Glennie always came home for holidays. But she would have a new home now, and a husband who would come first from now on. Things would be different from now on.

The organ switched key, a trumpet sounded and it was time to move out. Crowds on both sides of the aisle craned toward Margo and Glennie with loving grins. The wedding had been a year in the making. It had involved dozens of meetings and a

multitude of decisions. Many checks had flowed from Margo's strangled bank account. The cast of thousands swam in her head: the caterer, the florist, the stationer, the K-Mart clerk (sixteen fake ficus trees and sixteen strings of white lights;) the party store clerk, the fabric clerk (five yards of white netting for the almonds-in-silver-cup favors,) the Chamber of Commerce secretary, the U.S. Post office clerk who had become a friend with all the mailing of invitations and other related missives, the organist, the musicians, the DJ, the baker, the limo service manager and most recently, the reception hall administrator, a lovely woman whose own Caucasian daughter had married a Chinese doctor, just last year too, a serendipitous coincidence that had thrilled Margo. It was the biggest party Margo would ever throw. It had all come down to this moment. And it was anticlimactic

"Here we go, Honey,"

Margo took Glennie's hand and fixed her eyes in a middle-distance stare. Philip and Candy were on the left side toward the front and near the aisle, Philip's face porcine and shiny. She wanted to reach over and slap him as they went by. Glennie's grip tightened and they safely lockstepped past Philip. When they reached the front of the church Margo was supposed to hand Glennie over. For a moment Margo hesitated. There was a kind of danger in letting go, as if she needed to keep Glennie from harm by hanging on to her. They were now near the altar, close to Hari, his groomsmen, the attendants and the two priests, and inundated all at once by a cloud of incense and flowery perfumes, Margo felt woozy and threatened. A long time ago, she recalled, she'd been at the dentist's office and they were going to put Glennie to sleep for a minor extraction. Glennie had been six. Margo had held Glennie's hand during the

administration of the anesthesia and one moment Glennie's little hand was alive and the next it had gone limp as she'd dropped off into sleep. It was as if Glennie had died, and it took all Margo's will power to walk back out into the waiting room.

Margo handed over Glennie exactly as they had practiced the night before, her smile held firm. Glennie turned to Margo as she started to back away, and said, "Bye, Mom," in a soft voice.

The Hindu priest struck a match and lit the fire of the *Saptapadi*, the candle nestling in Margo's old brass fruit bowl on a small table in front of the altar. Hari and Glennie walked around the flame and stated their vows with each of seven steps.

Glennie said: "I will not transgress the rights of my spouse in duty or *dharma*, in love or behavior." She took one step.

Hari: "I will not transgress the rights of my spouse in duty or *dharma*, in love or behavior." Hari took one step.

Glennie: "We have traversed one step together. We have become friends."

Hari: "We have traveled two steps together. May you provide me with strength."

Glennie: "We have traveled three steps together. May you bring me good fortune and happiness."

Hari: "We have traveled four steps together. May you bring continued happiness in our lives."

Hari stopped. Glennie's gown was too close to the flame. Hari patted down the layers of fluffy tulle of Glennie's skirt and steered her away from the fire, then they continued circling.

Glennie: "We have traveled five steps together. May we be blessed with a happy family."

Margo's throat constricted. In that one gesture she saw the promise of an entire lifetime of caring and protection in store for Glennie. She didn't think to ask herself whether she wept with happiness for Glennie or a yearning for such devotion she'd never found in either of her own marriages.

Hari: "We have traveled six steps together. May we love each other and fulfill each other in all seasons."

Glennie and Hari together: "We have traveled seven steps together. This seals our relationship and our love in holy matrimony. May we provide sustenance and inspiration to each other." Glennie looked in Hari's eyes as she spoke, proud, decisive and loving.

The Episcopal part of the ceremony came next. Father Bledsoe peered down at the open prayer book in his hands.

"Dearly Beloved, We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony."

Margo took Mike's hand. She'd forgotten about Philip. Would he actually make a scene? The tip of Glennie's veil trembled.

"If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace....."

And yes, Philip was speaking! Margo squeezed her eyes shut as if she could make him go away. And then a miracle happened. As if Ganesha himself had flown down out of an ancient Indian sky to enact a miracle that could otherwise not be explained, Father Bledsoe kept right on talking, overriding Philip's voice. Yes. Ganesha and his

squadron of flying gorgons had deafened Father Bledsoe to the disruptive voice of Philip. Those hands had covered the priest's ears and removed the intrusion. "I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of you know any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully, and in accordance with God's Word, you do now confess it. Glennie, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage?"

Everybody in the hushed chapel heard Glennie say, "I will."

Margo exhaled. Her heart danced, and Philip faded into insignificance.

Another god, less famous than Ganesha but no less powerful, one named Subrahmanya, came into Margo's imagination somewhere during the last of the Christian prayers. This deity of war and guardian of right and destroyer of evil arrived on his peacock to remind Philip not to let pride and egotism get the better of him, his spear representing the sharpness of the intellect. She saw Subrahmanya slicing Philip in half with the spear and riding away in splendor, leaving Philip's cloven body on the floor.

The wedding ceremony concluded with a mix of Hindu prayers and the staid Christian liturgy, drawing the people in the chapel closer and closer together, weaving a magic web around them all. The candles, the incense, the brass lamps and the flower petals brightened the old place of worship as a ray of sunlight illuminates a forest, with Glennie and Hari like pilgrims, displaying their pristine, untarnished love for all to see. "I now pronounce you husband and wife." When Hari kissed Glennie, Margo smiled. She knew the wedding had been perfect because the love that radiated from the young people confirmed what weddings are all about: an affirmation of honor over dishonor, hope over despair, life over death.

The next morning Margo was up early for the wedding breakfast she was hosting. Washing up in the bathroom, she breathed a small prayer of gratitude, then leaned into the mirror. The hag looked back at her with a new, tranquil expression. It was telling her to wear less makeup from now on; a simpler haircut; go for more workouts at the health club; get more sleep. Margo knew she was slipping the bonds of her old self-image as a dog plunges deep into the woods to follow the scent. Age and decrepitude beckoned and she would follow. She had done her best, launching her only child as best she knew how. Now to let go with style. That was the key - letting go.

"Hey, Mom, get your butt over here! Can you come here a minute?"

Margo was replenishing the bread basket at the post-wedding breakfast in her home from which Glennie and Hari would soon leave to catch the 2:30 plane for Hawaii.

"Glennie! Did I raise you to talk like that?" Everybody laughed.

Margo went over to stand between the newlyweds, her arms around their waists. .

"Mom, now when do you and Mike get back from Maine?"

"We'll be back ..let's see ... three weekends from now."

"That's so awesome, you guys going sailing at your age."

"Well we aren't quite over the hill. Why do you ask?"

"We just want to make sure we set up a date for you to come and visit us in New York. We want you to come down and help us pick out furniture."

Margo started to answer but her voice caught. "Of course, if you'd like. Excuse me, kids, but I'd better see about the coffee cake." In the kitchen, Margo brushed back her hair and breathed out a long sigh. She felt at peace. Maybe she hadn't lost Glennie, not completely. Not yet.