

# *Sinful, not Tragic*

I was so nervous on the morning on my wedding day. The festive black and white decorations were drooping a little in the stifling heat of the sanctuary. Like the decor, I was sweating from the heat as well as with nervousness. Any minute the ceremony would begin.

*Any minute now.*

*The ceremony will begin very soon.*

*Where is she...?*

I try to stand still but out of nervousness I begin to pace. I plunge my hands into the silk lined pockets of my tuxedo and look around. The guests on both sides of the isle are getting restless as well. In my pacing I can't help but to hear an exchanging of words: "What a beautiful wedding!" says a bridesmaid in black to the man beside her. The man dabs sweat off of his mustache and shakes his head in agreement, but in his reply he says that it's just such a shame that "the poor groom!" His bride has a history of being rather loose.

*Gosh! Why can't anyone let go of the past! That's all over now. She's getting \*married\* for crying out loud! Haven't these people ever heard of closing the door on the past?*

I hold my tongue and strut back to the altar because the last thing this occasion needs is an argument in the pews.

She should be here by now. The ring bearer is crying, poor boy; he hasn't had a nap today. He chews on his little white tie and wails. Slobber dribbles down his chin.

There are more murmurs in the pews. Everyone knows that something is wrong. I look around at the sea of faces awaiting my bride's entrance. This is how I noticed the empty seat on the back of the bride's side of the pews. It was occupied earlier. By a... A cousin? A family friend?

Now I'm worried.

I can't stand the hushed chatter or the stifling suspense anymore. After excusing myself to the priest, I walk back up the aisle and out of the Sanctuary. I feel everyone's eyes burning a hole into the back of my black jacket. Five steps

into the hall I hear a muffled sound coming from a door at the end of the hall: The women's room.

I enter it assuming that my bride is alone and nervous. I find her fixing the makeup around her puffy, tear stained, beautiful eyes. Besides the evidence of tears, she looks stunning. Her white lace dress hugs her perfectly and flows from her hips in soft waves.

"It's alright, sweetheart." I say as I approach her and put my arms around her slender waist, "You look amazing, Darling" I say.

She looks up at me with those red-rimmed, green eyes and reaches for my hand with one of her satin gloved ones and puts the other behind her back. After some gentle encouragement she says she's okay and together we walk out of the ladies room toward chapel.

"Are you ready?" I ask in a soft tone as I cup her chin so I can see her heart-shaped face clearly. She nods. I smile at this and give her pink lips a peck. We walk into the hallway together and only drop hands when I get to the door of the chapel. Then I re-enter the chapel and wait for her at the altar.

When she enters a moment later all eyes turn to her and the pianist plays the wedding march. My soon-to-be-wife's eyes are dry and she smiles confidently at me as she takes my hand again at the altar. The ceremony progresses as it should have and after earlier, after our "I do's", we kiss.

We take many classic wedding photos in the garden outside the church before going to the hall where our reception is being held.

Greeting our family and friends for the first time as a married couple I realize again how much I love her.

While I'm talking to my portly new mother-in-law I learn that she is very happy that her little girl married me. She goes into a story about my wife's childhood and I glance around the room to wink at her so she knows what her mother is doing.

But I don't see her.

After the amusing story that involved dressing pets up as a wedding company, I excuse myself to look for her.

As I walk among my guests I overhear the bride's maid and a waiter. The bride's maid, my wife's best friend since high school, is talking about my brides past *again*.

This time I can't stand it. She's having a hard enough time being around all these people. So I chime in with: "Haven't you ever heard of closing the goddamn door on a subject?"

I know it's much better to face these kinds of things with a sense of poise and rationality but I just can't help it. This "friend" of the bride is being a jerk and turning other guests against my wife.

The bride's maid is taken aback at my reaction to her rude remark and she feigns shock at my having heard her. But Instead of apologizing she starts telling me lies about how unfaithful of a girlfriend my wife had been and how she is currently pregnant with another man's child. And that morning sickness was what delayed the ceremony. I can feel myself trembling with anger at the ridiculous accusations the woman was making. In a last futile attempt at preventing a fight at my wedding I take a deep breath and walk away.

Instead of going back to looking for my wife I go outside to get a little air and to calm myself down.

Once outside I sit on the curb and try to calm down. Pulling a Camel out of the inside pocket of my jacket I realize that I haven't a lighter. I sigh and return the cigarette to its silver case. I don't usually smoke; I guess I brought the case because I knew that it would be a stressful day. As much as I wish it hadn't, what the brides made said made some sense. It would account for the frequently canceled dates, reluctance to stay the night, recent irritability, and secrecy.

After a few deep breathes I feel placid enough to return to my wedding reception I go back to looking for my wife.

I find her in a hall speaking quietly with a man. As I get closer I see that he's the guest who was missing from his seat during the ceremony.

Although we have a privacy policy in our relationship that allows for secrets from the dead past, I feel that this

is a new enough development that it would require my knowledge of it.

I put my arm around my wife's white satin waist and greet the man she is talking to. He stops talking mid whisper and congratulates me on my marriage in a voice that is too loud. Then he smirks at me and walks out without another word.

My wife looks like she is about to say something but she changes her mind. All she says is that we should return to the party. We join hands and walk back into the reception hall to have dinner.

When dinner is over we cut the cake and feed it to each other the way newlyweds do. Our photographer takes another thousand pictures of us and soon the guests are all eating cake and it's time for the toasts. My best man gave us a toast that was thoughtful and funny, and then it was time for the bride's maid's toast.

My heart pauses in anticipation of what that woman might say but since our quarrel she had calmed down, I guess, because her toast was civil enough. I took a deep breath of relief.

All was going well, finally, when the man from the hall burst into the room drunk and shouting. "Congrats to the happy couple!" he laughed drunkenly and added, "And the soon to be family!"

Gasps came from all around the room and my dad and best man rose to escort the man away, but they hesitated just for a moment. That pause allowed the man to stagger up to the table. "Well, this calls for a toast!" The man said as he picked up my Champagne glass, looked around the room glazed eyed, and said, "pour the champagne!"

Coming up to him I lift my arm to punch that jerk in the throat but I am stopped by the sight of my beautiful bride rising from her seat in protest. She shouted, "No!" jumped over the table, landing on the ground between him and me.

The hall had gone quiet. Not a soul dared move or speak in the silence. I looked into her eyes and felt a piercing pain stab at my heart. They were full of despair. Just by her eyes I knew that his words were true; my wife is pregnant with another man's child. His child.

*Who is he anyway?!*

Beyond tears, beyond pain, all I felt was rage. Red-hot and burning inside of me. I punched her baby daddy in the face with all my might, picked my bride up by the arm, and lifted a glass from the table.

"I guess technically our marriage is saved!" I half shouted, an ironic toast. I drained the glass and stormed out of the reception hall. As the door slammed shut behind me a great cacophony of noise erupted from the wedding guests.