

# The Wedding Party

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It had been a wonderful day but now Grace was exhausted...that tiredness that comes from sheer happiness and joy to be alive.

The wedding had been perfect. Her youngest grandson, David, had looked so handsome in his morning suit. So tall! So strong! She had felt proud and elated as she sat in the small village church, beautifully decorated with flowers and ribbons.

Her mind had flashed back sixty years to when she had stood in the same church next to her childhood sweetheart, Harry, the only man she had ever loved. Things had been different then with the wartime restrictions still in place. Her flowers had been picked from the local woods and neighbours gardens and Harry had worn his demob suit. She had borrowed her dress from an aunt and altered it herself.

As she watched the ceremony unfold with its traditional responses, she thought again how much David looked like his grandfather. The same colour hair, eyes, even the same mannerisms! When David had been three years old they had shown him a black and white photograph of Harry at the same age. The likeness was uncanny, and David had thought the picture was of him, as did his older sister Elizabeth.

Grace thought of her granddaughter, Lizzie. She hated the nickname and always insisted on calling her by her proper name, Elizabeth. Such a beautiful name, why did it have to be shortened to something so common as Lizzie!

She had been surprised that Elizabeth had come to the church service, considering that the baby was two days overdue.

“Mind you, doctors never quite get it right with the first baby”, she thought to herself.

Her first great grandchild! How she wished that Harry could have been there to share her excitement when she got the news of the pregnancy.

Harry....how she missed him. They had had a wonderful life together, fifty years with her best friend. But now he was gone...peacefully in his sleep four years ago. Such a shock! It was the loneliness that had been the worst, and the silence that even the radio couldn't fill.

But the family had been marvellous, moving her into a smart retirement flat, all mod cons, live in warden and lots of activities to keep her occupied. But every day she missed him...his smile, his laugh, his silly outbursts of irritated anger at spelling mistakes and grammatical errors in the daily newspaper. He had been her rock, calming her down when she became 'emotional', the name he gave to her over sensitivity to events. She would cry at film endings, he would laugh and calm her down. She would cry if a light bulb failed or the cat brought in a mouse and he

would make a cup of tea and calm her down. He would tease her when she took packs of paper hankies to school nativity plays or family reunions. Yes, she missed his calming influence.

Another wave of tiredness swept through her.

“It’s OK, Harry”, she whispered, “they won’t be long and then they will drive me home.” Soon after his death, Grace had gotten into the habit of talking to Harry every day, sharing with him her fears and worries. These conversations were whispered, mostly in her head, rarely aloud, except for one very embarrassing time in the checkout at Sainsbury when a woman had jumped the queue in front of her! She sometimes thought she could hear him answering her, but she knew it was a dream. But believing he was still with her helped her through the days, and more especially the long nights, when she would have long discussions with him on every subject imaginable.

“Such an eventful day!” she thought. The reception at the smart hotel, the funny little sweet boxes on the tables, the large photo of the bride and groom which decorated one side of the dining room, so different from her reception in the local pub when she had married Harry.

And then the rush to the maternity unit at the local hospital, as Elizabeth had gone into labour in the middle of the evening disco.

“Hardly surprising, Harry,” she had said, “all that jiggling about, enough to send any baby into the world, especially one that was two days overdue!”

The party had carried on but she had opted to go with her daughter to the hospital. She wanted to see her new great grandchild at the earliest opportunity. But she was also conscious of the fact that she was relying on her daughter for a lift back to her flat.

“Such excitement, Harry!” she thought, “and how wonderful to be a part of it.” The wedding, the speeches, then the dash to the hospital in a convoy of cars, it was like being in an episode of her favourite soap opera. She would have so much to tell them at the next coffee morning in the retirement flats.

But the best was yet to come! A baby boy and the nurse had let her hold him, this tiny bundle of life...so small, so perfect. In her day, no-one had been allowed anywhere near her daughter when she was born. Even Harry was only able to see his new daughter through a glass window, and there had been several cribs in the room so that he had no idea which child was his!

“How times have changed, Harry” she whispered. Today it was like going to the supermarket. You checked in through the main doors, had the baby, and then you were out again within a few hours. Not the fourteen days she had spent in the maternity unit, being shown how to bath and feed her new born daughter. She would have been terrified to bring such a young baby home so soon. But Harry would have helped.

“You were always so practical”, she said.

“Sorry Mum, what did you say?” Her daughter’s voice brought Grace out of her thoughts with a jump! She mumbled a reply about being tired, falling asleep and dreaming aloud.

“It shouldn’t be much longer that you have to wait. They are going to keep Lizzie in overnight, so we are just finalising details for tomorrow. But I had to come and tell you that they have decided on a name. Your great grandson is to be called Harry! I knew you would be pleased. We won’t be long, ten minutes at the most!” And as quickly as she had arrived, her daughter disappeared back through the doors of the waiting room, into the maternity corridor.

“Did you hear that Harry, they are naming him after you!” Grace was ecstatic, so happy she could hardly breathe. She felt utterly drained by emotion, yet full of life at the same time. Her heart was thumping in her chest. She wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. The waiting room began spinning around her as she struggled to catch her breath in the happiness of the moment.

“Steady girl, “said Harry. “All this happiness isn’t healthy you know. I always warned you about being too emotional. But I’m here now.” He took her hand gently in his and smiled that warm smile that always calmed her down when she felt too emotional about things.

When her daughter returned, she thought her mother was asleep. She looked so peaceful and happy, that she did not want to disturb her. Quietly she left to go back to see the new baby.

“I’ll come back in ten minutes” she thought, “Mum looks better than she has looked in weeks, I’ll let her sleep a little longer.....”