

*The
Wedding
March*
Mickey Pfarr

"DEAR, SWEET JESUS — I LOOK LIKE THE MICHELIN MAN."
I pressed my fingers into my sleeves, indenting their storybook "poof." If you took away the snowballs of sparkling, scratchy fabric on my shoulders, and one of the three heavy skirts, maybe I could stand to look at myself in my mother's wedding dress. The sweetheart neckline and corset-styled bodice did nothing to hide my belly, which was beginning to swell.

Outside, the "Wedding March" began to slither out of the speakers. My feet moved automatically, as if they belonged to someone else, and I dragged myself to the shining wooden doors with the Virgin Mary carved so deeply into them, it almost felt invasive. She stared at me with heavily shadowed eyes, looking sorrowfully at the pregnant woman blanketed in white.

I straightened my bodice one last time, the same one my mother wore twenty-three years ago. She had always told me as a child to look for something "true" when it came to relationships, although I never really knew what she meant by that. "Men are horrible, ugly beasts," Mother used to tell me. It was her mantra, and oftentimes, I just ignored her. Boys were gross, but I didn't think they were animals. Still, I used to sit in the back room with her, running my fingers over the rhinestones and longing for the day that the dress could be mine and I could do whatever I wanted with it. She had a chair by the door — a simple foldable chair that she brought out whenever her husbands wanted to play poker — and she would sit there and watch me caress the dress, telling me again and again how she and my father met, although it changed a little each time. She told me I just had to look for the right one... The man I could "zing" with, and who treated me like I was the sun and the moon and the stars.

For a brief moment, the carvings of Mary seemed to smirk, and with a violent swoosh, the judgmental doors swung open, revealing somber faces. I couldn't see beyond their harsh gazes; it was like God was staring directly at me through these people that I didn't even know. I took a step, and the sound of my too-small shoes over the thinly covered aisle sent shards of glass prickling through my toes and up my spine, where they banged away at my ears.

My mother used to throw her fits and shatter glass in her rage — from shot glasses to fancy pitchers — they all committed suicide, slipping from her shaking fingers and crashing into the linoleum. She would clench her floral shift, try to peel it off her as if it was her skin, and curse the day God gave her the life she lived. She yelled at God a lot, especially when she was drunk. I was always busy watching the glass shards dart under the table — trying to get away from her and their life with her. I would dart after them, begging them to take me along on their journey far from her, and spend the rest of that evening picking glass out of my arms, wincing

against the sucking sound of blood and glass.

Halfway down the aisle, I realized that there were people at the end of my somber march: my nearly-husband, Damien, in a suit that was too big for him — his shoulder pads jutted out like he had glued triangles to his jacket. He had a small smile on his face, which caused his rosy cheeks to bunch up like strawberries. Beside him, the minister was staring at me — or rather, my pregnant midsection — down with a fire-and-brimstone glare that had his forehead wrinkling an excessive amount and his cheeks redder than Satan's ass, like he was trying to hold in a prayer of purification.

At the end of my walk, in the front row, sat my mother. She wore a white dress that outshone mine, and was leaning towards inappropriate even for my senior prom; you could see so much of her that it made me blush. She sat with her thigh pressed up against her newest husband, and her hand snaked up his leg every couple of seconds. I scowled, and focused my attention on the cross hovering above the minister's head at the altar — because she made me sick.

She had always made me sick. I was only five when my father died — when my mother burst into my room wearing a sheer kimono and clutching at her heart as if it could explode from her chest at any given moment. She looked pretty, even then; a picture of Old Hollywood coated in the colors of modernity. Her hair was perfect — even in her distress, her raven curls were smooth and pinned perfectly. She had knelt down and, in the calmest voice her smooth throat could muster, she told me that Indigo, my father, wasn't the right man, that he wasn't the Prince Charming to her princess. When she wrapped me in a plush blanket and pressed me against her chest, I knew he was gone, but when the police showed up — a herd of black cloth and muscle — and my mother's make up stained my blue blanket as she blubbered about the accident, I knew it was her who made him go.

The priest was speaking. First, to Damien, who was clutching my hands, in the smiling, grandfatherly way that ministers do when they're marrying a couple. When he turned to me, his smile disappeared, and he droned on. He mentioned love and sacrifice, dedication and determination, and I stood with my feet aching in small shoes, waiting for him to give me my line.

No more than two weeks ago, I met a woman with letters from the alphabet tacked onto the beginning of her name — so many letters, in fact, that I was suspicious of their authenticity. It was a one-time thing; she listened to me and I paid her enough to fuel the collection of cat figurines sitting proudly on her paper-cluttered desk. She sat me down on a dark blue sofa, the kind that swallows you up and doesn't let you out until she's done with you. She sat herself in front of me, directly underneath a painting of a pink-nosed Persian with a lazy eye. The therapist had an ever-present squint — but that was her face, her superpower: she could see everything inside of me that I couldn't. So I told her about my mother, and about the sheer kimono and the make up. I told her about the husbands to come after Indigo, and how they became richer with each pair of vows. I told her about Damien, a man I had known since I was little — the friend of my mother's third husband. I told her about the baby, and my mother's drug addiction. I spilled my entire life out to her like vomit, covering everything in my problems. And when I was done, she leaned forward, balancing her elbow on her skinny knee, and asked me how I left about all of this. At first, I didn't have an answer, but what it all came down to was this: I didn't want to live a life like my mother's.

“Do you, Violet Ivy Day, take Damien Sergei Petrov to be your lawfully wedded husband?”
There are some things that just can't be helped.
“I do.” Δ