

A Perfect Day

I never expected to wake up in a honeymoon suite with my newly wedded husband beside me – but here we are – Mr and Mrs Lewis. And who would believe that I would still be smiling this morning – after yesterday. The guests probably thought I was just putting on a brave face. Either that or I'd had one too many glasses of champagne!

I leave my Mr Lewis asleep for a few more minutes while I phone room service and ask for two full English breakfasts to be brought up with fresh orange juice and a pot of tea.

I look around our lovely room; French doors open on to a pretty balcony but despite the cloudless sky, I suspect the autumn sunshine is not warm enough to breakfast alfresco. Even so, it's too bad we didn't have cloudless skies and sunshine yesterday, I think, as I look over at my mud-encrusted wedding dress hanging on the wardrobe door.

My bouquet lies on the dressing table. I didn't like the idea of throwing it over my head for the sake of tradition - it took me hours to make and I'd like to keep it. I'm planning to have it dried and preserved.

I have my own floristry business called Pretty Petals. It's what I always wanted to do since a child. I studied floristry at college and got my own shop at the age of twenty-five.

My friends used to joke that I would never get a boyfriend due to my totally unsociable work hours. I was often up at the crack of dawn to get to the flower markets which meant early nights too, and often being the first one to leave the party. I have no idea where the last ten years have gone but for the last couple of them, I started to think maybe my friends were right and perhaps the only wedding flowers I would ever create would be those for other people.

One of the things I love about flowers is their absolute perfection. And also their infinite versatility. You can design a classy bouquet to be formal and elegant or create

something entirely different like a wonderfully natural bunch of flowers picked straight from a meadow.

After Pete proposed, I tackled the arrangements for our wedding day like a precision engineer. I met Pete at a flower market, he had his own floristry business – it couldn't be more perfect. I drew up a schedule for the following twelve months; arranging viewings, making bookings, tasting cakes and choosing music. Pete was a marvel; uncomplaining, he accompanied me wherever I wanted to go. He was patient and enthusiastic and very diplomatic at the times we didn't exactly agree – mostly letting me have my way. I think Pete would have been happy to get married in a bus shelter and wouldn't even have minded jumping on a double-decker to get to the reception. But he knew how important it was to me to have the perfect day.

There was a certain irony in the fact that I didn't get to design my own wedding flowers. Aside from my bouquet, Pete said he would take care of everything floral. He said he was planning something spectacular and I knew it would be – Pete's floristry skills were an inspiration to me.

"Good morning Mrs Lindsey Lewis," Pete says laughing playfully and kissing the top of my head.

I look up into his handsome face; deep brown eyes that make me feel like I'm swimming in liquid chocolate and that stunning smile that would make a dentist envious.

"Good morning husband! Breakfast will be here in a minute." He pulls on a complimentary hotel robe over his pyjamas.

I swept through the wedding arrangements with ease. Everything was in the planning I convinced myself. And my planning was meticulous. I planned for the sun to shine, and of course for the rain to stay away. And for everyone to be in their place at exactly the right time and for the whole day to glide by without a hitch.

Not being the youngest of brides, I decided not to go for the full ball-gown style dress and full-length veil sweeping the ground as I'd always imagined. Instead I chose a

long, slim-fitting dress in a rich cream silk with long buttoned sleeves for warmth and a v-neck, front and back. A short veil, made from the finest, most delicate lace would literally balance on my head.

With all the lists ticked, people primed and everything double checked, I slept peacefully the night before my big day. But in the morning, Mum had a worried look on her face when she brought me a cup of tea in bed.

“It’s looking rather overcast Lindsey dear. Not much sign of any sunshine yet.”

“Oh, we’ve got hours to go,” I said, sounding more hopeful than I felt as Mum pulled back the curtains to reveal a sky full of heavy grey clouds that didn’t look like they would be moving on anytime soon.

“As long as it doesn’t actually rain, we’ll be ok,” I said, just about managing to convince myself. Visions of my dainty veil stuck like tissue paper to my wet face did not bear thinking about.

Mum cooked me breakfast just like I knew she would. I smiled to myself as I sat at the table – all laid out with my favourite things. A soft boiled egg and soldiers, warm croissants with apricot jam and a pot of tea.

The phone rings and I listen to my Dad pick up and answer in his solid, mellow voice. I assume it’s a relative travelling down and checking the best route to take. I look up surprised when Dad pops his head round the door. “It’s for you, sweetheart. Your photographer. He probably wants to check what’s your best side!” he says, grinning at his silliness.

“Everything ok?” Mum asks as I return to the room after the call.

“No, it’s not ok. My photographer is stuck in Scotland. He’s supposed to be flying back this morning but they’ve had severe snow storms and the airport is closed.”

“Oh yes, that’s right. I saw it on the news,” says Mum and then quickly realising that she’s not helping she stands next to my chair and gives me a squeeze. “Now don’t you worry.”

“But I am worried – I’ll have no photos.”

“Of course you will, silly. Everyone has one of those digital cameras these days and their phones can take pictures too. We’ll just ask them all to take as many photos as possible and email them to you.”

I had no idea where my Mum had got all this IT techy knowledge from but this wasn’t the time to go into it.

“But I won’t have all the formal ones, you know, with everyone in their proper groups.” We’d chosen a package which provided an album for us and one each for mine and Pete’s parents. I’d already imagined bringing it out in future years, sharing memories with family and friends of our wonderful day.

“My sister studied photography, a few years ago, she’ll be able to help,” said Dad chipping in.

“Geraldine,” confirms Mum. “Yes, she’s a bossy so and so, she’ll get everyone organised.” I couldn’t help but grin when I caught Dad trying to give her a stern look, but she wouldn’t concede. “Well, she is!” she insisted. Poor Dad, he couldn’t think of anything else to say and begrudgingly muttered his agreement.

Feeling a little better, I go upstairs to get dressed. Pleased that this actually went without a hitch, I was also anxious – thinking of the saying that things always happen in threes. I’d reconciled myself to doing without any sunshine and now having to do without my photographer. What next?

Even though I’d planned the day meticulously, I was also fortunate to have lots of help from friends and family which made the day even more special. My cousin Maria had made the wedding favours; small handbag shaped gift boxes containing silver and gold coated almonds. A friend of Dad’s had a Rolls Royce that he was chauffeuring for us on the day. And my darling sister Alison had offered to make our cake. I didn’t want to put her to too much trouble; she had two young, very energetic boys to look after. But what started as a single cake, with a simple but elegant design, has since turned into a three-

tier work of art with a beautiful display of hand-made apricot roses on the top and variegated ivy tumbling all the way down to the base. I was very lucky, I thought, as my mum and sister prepared to leave the house, to be surrounded by such kind and generous people.

My mother opened the door and immediately turned back to me. "Oh my dear," she said, "it's raining!"

"Oh never mind," I replied, not wanting her to worry about anything, but at the same time, anxiously looking past her, searching hopefully for a patch of blue sky.

Me and Dad were alone in the house, waiting for the return of the Rolls Royce. We had both calculated that it should have been here some time ago already but we made silly small talk to cover our anxieties, as we watched the rain get heavier and heavier.

Dad's friend, George, finally ran up the garden path, bustling in the door, apologising for being late and mumbling something about the engine making strange noises. Huddling together under Dad's huge golfing umbrella, we jostled along outside and hurled ourselves into the car, a little damp but otherwise ok.

At some distance before the church, the car began to make the most awful scraping metal noise and then even more worrying, smoke began to erupt from beneath the bonnet. Poor George; red-faced and flustered, he quickly pulled over to the side of the road and switched off the engine, jumping out into the now torrential rain before disappearing under the bonnet to investigate.

After a couple of minutes waiting, with George popping up occasionally to convey his heartfelt apologies, I made a decision.

"Come on Dad," I said. "We'll have to run for it." Like a trooper, he was out of the car and opening my door, the umbrella sheltering me as I got out, holding as much of my dress off the wet ground as I could. We ran in the direction of the church, quickly observing that the narrow pathway would take us the very long way around, whereas if we crossed the small field, we would be there in no time. Holding my dress up with one hand

and my bouquet in the other, Dad held the brolly as we stumbled our way over the bumpy, muddy field. The rain was catching the bottom half of my dress, making it heavy. It slipped from my fingers a number of times and by the time we reached the other side, it almost wasn't worth holding it from the mud any longer. I dreaded to imagine what I looked like.

The look of horror on my Aunt Geraldine's face said it all. She was poised to take photos as we entered the church and she paused as if to ask – did I really want my picture taken? I bravely smiled in her direction, confirming that I did indeed want this moment captured for all time. I was sure that a helpful someone was bound to tell me that I would look back and laugh at this moment – although I wasn't convinced myself.

Dad took my arm gently in his and straightened his stance. I could feel his pride beaming out as he walked me down the aisle. Pete smiled at me as I arrived at his side but was unable to hide his confusion at the sight of his bedraggled bride.

"The car broke down," I whispered, trying to smile but feeling like breaking down myself.

"You look beautiful," he said, smiling broadly and giving my hand a tight squeeze. The wedding service began and flowed by perfectly and I completely forgot about my muddy dress; becoming lost in the emotion and solemnity of the occasion.

Pete and I hitched a lift to the hotel reception with my cousin Maria. We arrived on the hotel forecourt and mingled with the guests for a few minutes, marvelling now at the blue sky and bright sunshine and exclaiming "How typical!"

I saw my sister and her husband pull up with the masterpiece of a wedding cake in the back. Presumably they hadn't wanted to bring it earlier in the pouring rain. I watched from a little distance as they carefully lifted the cake from the car. It was truly beautiful; she'd put so much work into it. I even felt a little tearful as I noticed that the bride and groom perched on top of the cake actually looked like me and Pete.

They continued shuffling awkwardly along, my sister walking backwards. Concentrating more on keeping the cake balanced, she wasn't really paying attention to where she was going. I could see she was heading for a small step up, just behind her, and I could sense she hadn't seen it but there wasn't even time enough to call out and in the next moment – it was all too late. She'd tripped and was falling backwards, desperately trying to recapture her balance, the mini wedding couple teetering on top. In the next second it was all over; Alison landed, sitting heavily on her behind in the mud. I couldn't believe this was happening; how much more of my planned perfect day could go wrong? I was closer to her by now and she looked up at me, her eyes imploring for the last few seconds to be undone.

"Oh Lindsey," she said as she continued to stare up at me, making no effort to move from her muddy seat, willing me to say something.

"It's ok," I reassured her, happy beyond belief myself, as I pointed out that miraculously the cake had survived. We looked down at it sitting safely in her lap.

"My goodness, that was a bit of luck," she said, holding the cake steady and immediately recognising the irony in her words. I smiled and she smiled back and then we started to giggle.

Gently Alison touched the wedding couple still perched safely on top of the cake. "They survived. That's got to be lucky, right?"

"Definitely," I agreed as she carefully lifted the cake for her husband to take. She reached out her hand and I helped to pull her back upright.

"Oh no, look at your suit, it's covered in mud," I said, looking at the sorry state of her new outfit.

"It doesn't matter," she said cheerfully. "And anyway, you can't talk!" Alison looked me up and down, smiling encouragingly, as we put an arm around each other and walked into the waiting reception.

Our breakfast arrives and is laid on our table as I think about my perfect day, which is what it was, despite the lack of photographer and the rain and the car breaking down and the near destruction of the wedding cake. It was perfect because I got to marry the man I love. I look across at Pete as he's tucking into his breakfast, some trickles of bright yellow egg yolk dribbling down his chin – I smile at my lovely husband who's absolutely perfect in every way.

© Jennie Alexander 2013