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Mr. Bryan Oesterreich

ENG 111

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WEDDING

My son, Kenny, is escorting me down the aisle on February 28, 2003 at 7:00 PM at our church here in Washington N.C. I am to be the last one seated before his and Candace's marriage takes place. He is walking tall with a confidence that makes me proud. Our arms are entwined and brought close to his chest. He places his hand over mine tenderly patting me for added strength, assurance and comfort. He sits me in the front right pew and leans over whispering eloquently into my ear, "Mom, the way you look tonight is how I've always envisioned you in my heart. You're my Guardian Angel sent from Heaven, glowing with a light of strength and wisdom that has guided me so tenderly all these years. You've always protected me with your fierce sense of devotion, loyalty and love. I'll always remember how radiant you look tonight. I love you and I thank you for all that you do for me." Then he kisses me gently on my cheek and goes to stand at his place at the altar. As I sit peacefully in the pew looking up at my son, I wonder how my physical transformation could elicit such emotion from him. I think of the prior two weeks of preparations that I had undergone that would evoke such poetry from my only child.

I smiled to myself remembering when I got the phone call that would throw my life into a tailspin. My mother, Glenda, called and told me with her undeniable tone of authority, "Cheryl Lynn, I want you to get in your car and come over right away. Everything is fine so don't worry, but don't ask me any questions, just come now." So, of course, all I could say was "Okay, I'm

on my way” and I hung up the phone wondering what was going on. When I arrived at her home, my family and some of my closest friends were huddled together in the living room. There was no doubt this was a conspiracy of some sort because they all got quiet when I arrived.

At first, nobody said a word. They just sat or stood and stared. So I had to be the one to ask, “What’s going on?” To which my father quietly replied, “Come on and sit down. We’d all like to talk to you about something.” So I sat and waited. Finally, my sister, Kathy sighed and meekly asked, “Cheryl, what are you planning to wear to Kenny’s wedding?” “Well” I said, “I thought I would wear my black dress cowboy boots, my good jeans and my antique coat with tails.” Everybody began to yammer amongst themselves saying things like “See I told you”, and “I knew it” and “She ought to know better.” It seemed, much to my dismay, that my family and friends had collectively decided that I needed a makeover from head to toe. Of course, I argued with them using my age-old reasoning of “clothes do not make the person”. Only this time it didn’t work. My Mom threw the low blow by saying, “This, God willing, may be the only time that Kenny will get married and it should be one of the most memorable days of his life. Do it for him.” He wasn’t even present for this set-up, but I knew at that moment they had me hook, line and sinker. They had made up their minds and had already devised a plan to make me into the “traditional” Mother of the Groom.

My mom, sister and one of my oldest friends, Debra, had laid out my life for the next two weeks, which included: finding a dress, shoes and all the necessary accessories. For the next three mornings in a row, Glenda and Kathy picked me up at 8:00 AM and drove me to (I really couldn’t keep track there were so many) twenty to thirty dress shops all over Eastern NC to try on every dress they had that came close to my size. They were in their element and having the time of their lives. They had waited forty some odd years to put me in this position and they

wallowed in it like pigs in mud holes. I don't believe I had ever seen them so happy. They drug me from one place to another, purposefully striding in and asking the salespeople, "Where are your dressing rooms?" Then they would grab my hands, drag me into the room and tell me to get undressed. As I was not allowed to help pick my dress out, I made myself comfortable and pulled out my trusty books to read and wait endlessly for them to come back with their finds of the hour. I tried on one after the other, while they poked, pulled, and snatched at me in a flurry of activity, all the while "tsking" and "muttering" to one another. Not once was I asked what I might think or feel about any particular dress. My job was to stand still and be quiet, so they could work their magic.

Finally on the third day, late in the afternoon in a shop somewhere in Elizabeth City, they began to jump up and down clapping their little hands together with glee. It seemed they had finally agreed this might be the one. They described the dress as a classic, pale, blush, and peach-rose of flowing silk. It just looked pink to me, which, wouldn't you know, happens to be my last color of choice. At this point I would've worn a paper bag, so even I started to get a little excited. That is, until they looked at me and said, "All we have to do now is take it to a seamstress for it to be custom fitted just for you."

We arrived at the seamstress's home early the very next morning, not even giving me a chance to recharge my batteries. This woman jumped into me with both feet. She was ancient, stooped over permanently from her work, and had the "no nonsense attitude" of a drill sergeant. I like to relax by being silly when put into situations that I'm uncomfortable or bored out of my mind with. So, when I began to goof off a little, she would stick me intentionally with one of her pins that she had hanging out of her mouth. I came to dislike this woman a great deal and proceeded to do anything that I thought might aggravate her. When she hobbled out of the room,

Glenda whispered furiously at me, “Cheryl Lynn, you had better behave yourself. This is the best seamstress in town and we are lucky to have her at such short notice. If you piss her off and she tells us to leave, we won’t be able to have your dress ready in time!” I thought to myself, “Hmmm, to behave or not to behave?” But, I remembered why I was going through all of this and decided to walk the line. To be sure, there couldn’t be too much more left to do. Boy, was I ever wrong.

My mother had the seamstress cut a piece of the fabric off of the inside of the dress so we could have shoes dyed to match. This was unbelievable and totally getting out of hand. Now, I had to go to a specialty shoe shop for “all your occasional formal needs”. I felt like Cinderella want-a-bees as I tried on one shoe after another, with none of them fitting quite right. They all had high heels with little straps and little narrow toes that no woman in her right mind would want to put her feet into. What is it with the narrow width of women’s shoes? I’m sure there are women out there that have those dainty little feet, but I’m not one of them and neither are most women I know. They finally chose a pair with a three-inch heel, one toe strap and one ankle strap. They felt like cinderblocks held onto my foot with a piece of thread. I could not believe they thought I would be able to walk in these things. I looked at my mom in disbelief and asked, “These are pretty and all, but won’t people be expecting me to walk around at the wedding or is someone going to tote me on their back the whole time?” To which she replied with a note of exasperation, “Don’t give me that nonsense, you can practice walking in them before the wedding. You’ll do just fine.” Kathy put her arm around me reassuringly and said with her impish smile, “I’ll help you sweetie and I promise it will be like riding a bike, nothing to it.” I was glad to hear they had so much confidence in me; however, I remained skeptical. I looked down at my sturdy, trustworthy feet and silently apologized for my betrayal of them. The shoes

were to be dyed to match and ready to go in three days. In the meantime, we met Debra down at out local women's spa/beauty parlor.

They, of course, had a game plan even here. My mother had brought a snippet of the fabric from the shoe shop so they could match up my makeup and polish for my fingers and toes. They introduced me to a woman who was going to be instrumental in creating my hairstyle. She immediately tuned out my entourage and focused all of her attention on me. She took both of my hands in hers and gushingly told me, "I've been looking forward to meeting you. You've got the one of the most beautiful heads of hair I've ever seen. It's going to be an honor to assist you and we're going to have such fun together!" I liked her right away. She was just a little bit spooky, though, invading my space. She got right up in my face grinning while animatedly playing with my hair and going on and on about the endless possibilities of the perfect do. Would we put it up, leave it down, a little of both, curl it or leave it straight? Her enthusiasm was infectious. She seemed to really enjoy her job, unlike the no-nonsense seamstress, so I thought this might be fun after all. She got the general idea for the hairstyle, introduced me to my manicurist who looked at my nails, snorted with disdain and then made some under her breath comments about them being a filthy wreck of some sort.

Lastly, I was introduced to my makeup woman, Tammy Sue. This girl looked like she had just stepped out of a Southern Living magazine. She began by asking me what kind of makeup I wore. Glenda, Kathy and Debra began to giggle, telling her, all at one time as if rehearsed, "She's a makeup virgin." Astonished, but with her charming composure intact, she replied with a deep southern drawl, "Lordy Lordy, I ain't never in my life. Ya'll are just pulling my little ole leg aren't ya?" Noticing the look on our faces, she continued with, "Well ya'll, she won't be when I'm through with her." Taking my hand in hers, she patted it and told me, "Don't

you worry bout a thing honey chile. I'm going to take real good care of you." She led me to her area in the corner of the spa and began to experiment with the different shades of her makeup. After everyone was through with the preliminaries, we thanked them and said we would see them again the morning of the wedding.

The day of the wedding finally arrived. I got up bright and early so I could have some quiet time. But, this was not to be. I had been back to the seamstresses on two occasions for what they called fine tune fittings, so my dress was good to go. But, my shoes were still not ready as of yesterday afternoon. They could not get the dye just right for my mother's critical eye. They had to re-dye them one more time, which made me anxious because I had not had the opportunity to practice walking around in them. So, Glenda arrived an hour earlier than expected with a mock dress, hose and a pair of shoes similar to the ones I would be wearing. She smiled at me and said, "Good morning honey, look what I've brought you. You can wear this today while you're getting your hair, make-up and nails done. By the time the wedding starts, you'll be a pro." She was extremely proud of herself, but the thought of having to go about town dressed like this made my face burn bright red with embarrassment. So I took a big breath and said, "Mom, it's going to be a long day. I think I'd rather just wear my jeans so I can be comfortable, but thanks anyway." She smiled at me again and told me that if I wanted to make a fool out of myself at my son's wedding, well so be it. She had changed her tactics using the reverse psychology on me! So, without further ado, I donned the ridiculous apparel.

I should tell you that I had avoided wearing hose my entire life and after getting a quick lesson on how to put them on from mom, I realized why. Hose have to be one of the most unpleasant things to put on your body. They are too tight, itchy and very fragile. By the time I had them positioned in the right place, I had managed to pop my fingers through them in three

different locations. I felt certain they would be in shreds before the day was through and thought that I would never be able to pull this off after all. By this time, Kathy and Debra had arrived. The three of them took a few minutes to laugh uproariously at me stumbling around in my getup before we left for my daylong makeover.

It was 8:00 AM when we arrived at the spa. They started by washing my hair and giving me a facial. Spas, I thought, were meant to be quiet and relaxing. This place was writhing with noise. Everyone was running to and fro, gossiping about kids, husbands, sex, jobs, and the latest fashions. I sat quietly listening and watching as if I had been let into a secret society and thought if they realized I didn't fit in, they might boot me out. After my hair began to dry a little and my facial was complete, I was told I could remove my hose and heels. What a joy! I kicked the shoes away, and as I stood up to peel the hose off, there arose this funky odor. I wrinkled up my nose, looked at mom and asked, "Do you smell that?" She burst out laughing and said, "Cheryl Lynn, you are just too funny. That smell comes from your feet sweating inside the hose. It's perfectly normal. All women's feet smell like that." And I thought to myself, "How romantic." Then I was told since we didn't have much time, whenever possible, everybody would work on me as a team. I said, "But we've got all day." They all said, "Yeah with the shape you're in, it will take all day." I immediately shut my mouth. I had two people combing and rolling my hair, while another had put my feet in a bucket to soak (thank goodness for the little things) while still another was working on my hands.

When they finished with my hair and nails (the color perfectly matching my dress and shoes), the make-up lady arrived. My make-up took two hours. She looked at me pitifully at one point, and said, "Sweetie pie, you've got the prettiest blue eyes but the good Lord just didn't give you nare a bit of eyelashes, so I'm going to have to make you some." She pulled out a box

of fake eyelashes, held them up one at a time until she got just the right match, put glue on the rims and pressed them unto my lids. They were so enormous, that I thought if I batted them real fast, I just might take off and fly right on outta that place. This makeover continued throughout the day until about 4:00 PM at which time I was taken to the church to get dressed.

When I arrived, most of the women were already there getting dressed and taking care of my future daughter-in-laws last minute needs. Everyone was amazed at how I looked and I wasn't even dressed yet. The room was filled with an air of jubilant excitement. My beautiful, calm, self-assured daughter-in-law looked stunning as she came over to me. With tears in her eyes, she took my hand and told me she loved me. I hugged her neck and told her how beautiful she looked and that I loved her too and that I was so happy she would be part of our family. We talked quietly among ourselves for a few minutes, and then I began to dress with everyone's help, of course. When I was done, my mom took me by the hand to a full-length mirror to see what I had become. I couldn't believe my eyes. Who was this woman? I saw myself as a mature, sophisticated, elegant woman. My hair was curled and piled up on top of my head with long delicate tendrils framing my face and hanging down my back. My dress clung to my body, accentuating my curves and long legs. It hung to the floor where just the tips of my painted toes peeked out of my translucent hose. My feet were perched upon the delicate, sassy high heels. I was standing there in shock, at how utterly different I looked, when someone knocked on the door.

My mother went to the door, asked who it was, told Candace (my daughter-in-law) to hide behind the screen and then she let my son in. I watched him come through the door and noticed right away that he was nervous and tense. He held his head up as far as it would go on his neck with his jaw set rigid on his face giving the illusion he was made out of stone. I've seen

this look before and knew he was feeling very emotional and that he was trying to hide it. He immediately barked at everyone saying, “All of you need to get out there and get seated, now. Where’s my mother? It’s almost time for the ceremony and I need to escort her down the aisle.” I started walking toward him while simultaneously thinking about what I could do or say that would relax him a little, when he asked again looking right at me, “Where’s mom?” I said quietly, “I’m right here honey.” His stone façade crumbled; his body relaxed with a jolt and his jaw dropped opening his mouth, while his eyes grew wide with wonder. As he looked me up and down, tears began to well up in his eyes. He began to show his true emotions as he unsteadily walked toward me. Visibly shaken he took my hands in his and asked, “Mom is that really you?” As I told him with a lump in my throat, “Sure it’s me”, the tears began to form in my eyes, too. We smiled, looking at each other with that special intimacy that’s rewarded to single parent only child relationships. I thought of my son and how he had grown into an admirable young man and the tears began to roll down my cheek at the sweetness of it all. My sister rudely interrupted my reverie. She ran toward us frantically saying over and over again, “No crying, no crying. You’re makeup will be ruined and your eyelashes will come off!” I looked around the room at all my loved ones to see that they too were crying and I could hear their snuffles as they blotted their eyes with their tissues. I began to laugh. It was going to be a joyous wedding. My son told everyone to git, asked me sweetly if I was ready, told me to hang on tight, hollered to Candace that he loved her and away we went.