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So Much To Lose

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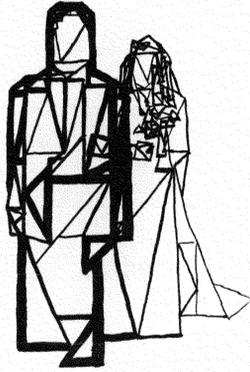
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Abstract

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So Much To Lose

by Della Weems

English, Senior

LORRAINE Robinson stared blankly at the two men as they walked toward her, unrolling the long white aisle runner. For an instant she wondered why she was standing there and had an impulse to turn and walk away, but a third usher already had his arm laced in hers.

Lorraine glanced toward a closed Sunday school room door only a few feet away where she could hear whispers and nervous giggles. Behind that door were her two daughters, Kathy dressed in white lace, and Sally in mint green crepe. Two girls waiting for their turns to walk down the church aisle.

“How many times do I have to tell you two not to play dress-up? You always make such a mess and never put a thing away.” Lorraine looked down at the two little girls dressed in her party dresses. The shoulders of the dresses hung to their elbows, the waists to their knees, and the material of the skirts lay in folds around their feet. In spite of the scolding they held their lipsticked faces proud and looked at their mother with all the innocence of grown-up children. “Get those dresses off and put them back where you

found them. Don't you know you'll be old before you know it."

Lorraine wanted to walk into the Sunday school room and shake Kathy to her senses and tell Sally to take off her maid-of-honor's dress and go home. Instead she felt the usher's arm tighten and he led her down the aisle toward the first pew on the left side.

Lorraine's mind wandered and the man by her side had the face of her father as she remembered it on her wedding day. The blue suit she was wearing changed into a sequined white gown and she thought of how wonderful it had been to be young—to not see wrinkles and gray hairs when she looked in the mirror. She had been radiant the day she was married, but the years since then had changed her features and taken the beauty that had been within her. What had her husband and children done to her? Why couldn't Kathy understand the mistake she was making?

The usher stopped beside the pew and stood at attention till Lorraine was seated. She looked at the altar with its maroon carpet, oak communion rail, and space-age designed pulpit. A huge golden cross hung from the rafters and the stained glass windows were only a foot wide, extending from ceiling to floor. Even the church had changed since she was young, and Lorraine was glad she had quit attending when the children were little.

The music from the organ swelled and Lorraine knew the wedding was about to start. The door on her left opened and Kathy's husband-to-be and the best man walked in front of the pews to the right side of the aisle. Lorraine's eyes focused on the tall, nice-looking second man, and her son Tom. But instead of the twenty-four-year-old man she saw the short, stocky seven-year-old Tommy when he was ring bearer in her sister's wedding. "Tommy, I want you to stand down there like a nice little boy. Be just as still as you can. If you don't Mommie will be very angry." All through the wedding Tommy, in a white jacket had hardly blinked an eye and afterwards people told Lorraine he looked and acted like a perfect little man. "He's only a child, you know. Just seven. Don't make him older than he is."

Turning her head slightly, Lorraine glanced toward the back of the sanctuary. Sally was halfway down the aisle. She looked more relaxed in her formal than when she'd worn one

to the Junior-Senior Banquet last spring. Sally hadn't had a date and was so disappointed, but Lorraine had been pleased. "Sal, it's not that bad. You and your girlfriends can go to the Banquet and not stay for the dance. I'm sure you'll have more fun than the girls who are tied to dates. Besides, if you want to go on to college you don't want to get tied down. What good is a college degree if all you do is get married?" And Lorraine still didn't understand why Sally didn't want to go to the Banquet again this year.

The organ music swelled even louder and Lorraine stood. Kathy had started down the aisle. Lorraine wished she could smile at Kathy, so the congregation could see her, but she knew and Kathy would know that the smile wasn't genuine, so she just stood with her mouth tightly closed. She felt like this wedding was robbing her of something, not her daughter, but something that she couldn't explain, that horrified her.

Lorraine watched as her husband and daughter passed her and walked the few feet farther to the altar. Kathy looked nervous and afraid, the same way she had looked only a few days before when she and her mother had been sitting at the kitchen table making nut-cups for the reception.

"Mom, what's it gonna be like—the first night, I mean?"

"Huh?" Lorraine deliberately ignored the question, hoping Kathy would be too embarrassed to ask again.

"I—well, I need to know some stuff about the first night. Can't you tell me somethin' about it?" Kathy was red and each word trembled.

"It's gonna be rough. The first night and every night." Lorraine's voice had a finality that shut off the conversation and sent Kathy to her room with tears in her eyes.

Looking at Kathy's narrow shoulders between her father's and Mark's, Lorraine almost felt guilty for what she had said. But was it her responsibility? Wasn't it an eye for an eye, and Kathy was hurting her?

Lorraine sat through the ceremony unmoved. She noticed that the candles on the altar burned at different speeds and that the hem in the minister's robe was sagging on the left side. She decided that Kathy could have picked a better soloist because this one's voice cracked, on the high notes, but that the florist had done a beautiful job. By the time the ceremony was over and Kathy and Mark and Sally

and Tom had walked out Lorraine was happy. She was tired of sitting.

Kathy's parents were the first to be ushered from the sanctuary. Lorraine extended a hand to Mark along with a cool, "Congratulations." She gave Kathy's hand a squeeze and positioned herself for the receiving line. Only at the photographer's request did Lorraine hug her daughter. She hadn't held Kathy, or Sally either for that matter, close to her for years and she felt strange doing it now.

Lorraine remembered when Kathy had fallen off her first bicycle and come crying to the house.

"Hold me, Mommie. I hurt all over."

"I'll get some band-aids for your knees, but you're too big to be held. If you think you're old enough to ride a bicycle, then you're not little anymore and only little girls deserve Mommie's hugs."

The picture was taken and the wedding guests walked along the receiving line. "Kathy certainly looks beautiful." "You're very lucky to get a son-in-law like Mark." "You're not losing a daughter, but gaining a son." "How does it feel to have a married daughter? Aren't you happy?"

Lorraine shook hands like a robot, only recognizing faces enough to put a name with a greeting. How does it feel? How does it feel? How does it feel? Aren't you happy? Aren't you happy? The questions repeated over and over in her mind until her whole head pounded with confusion. Lorraine felt defeated and unhappy. The failure of her twenty-year battle against growing old had shown itself in only a half hour.

The last guest passed. Kathy, glowing with the happiness of a new bride, linked one arm in Mark's and extended the other to her mother. Lorraine turned away.

Della's story deals effectively with a setting that is so often overworked. Certainly the organ music, lace, and congratulations are there, but with an undercurrent of irony so strong that the happy bride fades into the background. Although no biographical information is given on Lorraine, her feelings come through so well that I seem to know her and the disaster of her own marriage.—E.B.