

## HEARTSONG'S MOTHER

The ceremony had been sedate and only mildly religious. An Episcopalian priest and a rabbi cancelled each other out, and the music—Bach and Mozart—had long ago lost its association with a paternalistic godhead. But this reception! Mona stood gaping at the entrance to an immaculate white tent. Hanging baskets trailed fresh flowers and vines above the heads of the seated guests as waiters in formalwear handed around glasses of champagne and a string quartet played. And the buffet. There was enough food over there to feed three villages in Bangladesh.

The very idea of their son even *having* a wedding was absolutely ridiculous. She and Loam had never seen the need to cover their union under a government document. She'd said, "Listen Loam, our boy has had so many long-term and short-term women how does he know this total deviation from his usual taste for strong-minded feminists is the one to be announced by these heavy ivory non-recyclable invitations!"

Loam had only muttered something under his breath. It was just like him to go soft in the face of a real opportunity to make a statement. At least *she* could hold her head up. Here in the midst of all this wanton extravagance she was wearing canvas sandals and a skirt and ribosa she had woven herself—all in all animal-friendly, non-exploitive, eco-nurturing and sure to horrify that hypocritical, right-wing, surgically belabored mother-of-the-bride.

Loam had made her promise to hold her tongue, and she had thus far restrained herself, but she couldn't help observing that these people were the target audience for her message. She was tired of preaching to the choir of their tight circle back in New

Hampshire. This crowd, on the other hand, undoubtedly abounded with stockholders in fossil fuel companies, gas-guzzling auto manufacturers, and rapacious pharmaceuticals. If she could get their attention for only five minutes, she could accomplish more than a lifetime of letters-to-the-editor and protests.

Once she told them about the deal Chevron had made to drill in the rain forest— Or maybe she should just concentrate on the fact that Inuit mothers had been told not to breast feed because of the mercury pollution in their diet. She didn't want them to tune her out too soon. It had to be a one-two punch of info, then slip away. Loam had nagged her a thousand times about going on too long. Besides her promise to him, she didn't want to overly antagonize the bride who couldn't help what she had been born into.

Steadying herself on a table edge Mona stepped up on a chair then stooped to ring a spoon on a water glass. It took a bit of ringing, but finally she could hear people begin to shush each other. "Shh, it's Heartsong's mother." Silence settled and warm gazes turned toward her. She made a little smile. How to begin?

"I'm Heartsong's mother." She paused trying to organize her thoughts. A pitter patter of claps began to ripple across the crowd. She nodded, unused to any kind of welcome. Every time she spoke in a town meeting, she could hear the grumbling. The five-minute time limit was always enforced on *her* whereas others got to go on and on about the school library or the senior citizens' needs. *Listen, you, if you want to live long enough to become senior citizens you need to wake up to what is being done to our water supply!* She had used that line often but no one had ever clapped. But tonight, she'd said nothing, yet all across this tent everyone, absolutely everyone was clapping. For her. And she was beaming. She could feel it on her face—a great big silly smile she couldn't

wipe off. She spotted the bride sitting next to her son, and her heart pounded. The applause was growing like a wave that lifts the swimmer. She had never experienced anything like this. “Good job, Mona,” the bride shouted.

Mona teetered on her chair. The applause rose even more, and her smile spread farther squeezing tears over her lashes and down her cheeks. The room was now a blur, but Mona could tell that it was Madison, the bride, who popped up from her seat joined by Heartsong. Then everyone else rose. Children were lifted to see this woman who had raised the groom. Loam, standing between the Heatherington’s, pounded his hands together and gazed at her.

She *had* done a good job with their boy, carrying him on her back in civil rights marches, teaching him to love all mankind, and if he easily assimilated with people she had never thought of as deserving special consideration, so what? Mankind was mankind.

She wiped her eyes and raised her hands to quiet the crowd. They obeyed, eager for her message. She could see the fear strike Loam’s face. Serve him right for always shushing her.

She opened her mouth. At first nothing but breath came out. Finally, softly, she managed, “Thank you.” Then, a little louder, “I’ve got quite a reputation as a speaker back home in New Hampshire. But tonight I just want to thank Mr. and Mrs. Heatherington for their darling girl.” Not another word came out and the applause began all over again.

Mona bent to climb down and felt the jostling around her to help. “Thanks, no thanks, I’m fine.” She sank onto the chair. *Darling!* She never used the word *darling*.

And calling the bride *a girl* was politically incorrect beyond words. Was she channeling Martha Stewart? She'd blown her big chance. She'd gone soft.

"Mom, come sit with us." Beside her were Heartsong and Madison. They guided her through a field of smiling faces to the table in the center of the room where she was seated beside the mother of the bride.

"That was so beautiful," Mrs. Heatherington crooned. "We're going to be one big happy family."

Mona smiled back and raised a glass of champagne. Just wait, she thought. Just you wait.

THE END