

Women have done some stupid stuff in the name of love, but Dodo was stuck on stupid. First, she'd spent Lord knows how much money tracking down Mack, the man who'd left her at the altar 25 years ago today. Then, she'd let him waltz back into her life like nothing had happened, and had convinced herself he'd returned for the love of her. Even Stevie Wonder could see that all Mack loved was those newly-minted dead presidents lining her wallet.

We waited in the second-grade Sunday-school room of the Thornwood Episcopalian church. Dodo wore a Bo Peep gown from the Mother Goose bridal collection. What had looked cute at 20 looked curious at 45.

My matching purple taffeta bridesmaid dress had more frills than Liberace, a hoop skirt that encircled the globe and a matching bonnet, the likes of which I hadn't worn since I learned to dress myself. For this alone Mack deserved to die.

And Dodo deserved better. No one knew that more than me. A lifetime ago couldn't nobody tell me nothing neither. I switched my happy butt right down the aisle of this very church and fell in a hole I still hadn't climbed out of. Somebody should've stopped me. I'd stop Dodo. But I'd have to be quick about it. The wedding started in an hour.

“It’s almost time,” Dodo said.

“You can still bail.”

“No way.” Dodo adjusted her flowers for the umpteenth time. “Did you know a woman in her forties is more likely to get hit by lightening than get married?”

“Take the lightening strike. We can hop a plane. Two hours, we’re in Florida, lightening capital of the world.”

Dodo glanced at the Jesus clock on the wall. “In less than an hour, I’ll be Mrs. Mack Black. Everything is just like it was 25 years ago. Except, this time, I’m getting married. Twenty-five years is silver you know. Did I show you my something old?”

“This whole thing is old. Pathetic excuse for a man marries rich woman.”

Dodo pulled a square of paper from her bosom. “I’ve kept it close to my heart so I’d never forget.”

The paper had a soft feathery feel and smelled of baby powder just like Dodo. The creases were permanent, like it’d been unfolded and refolded a thousand times. I read the note Mack had scribbled on the back of a collection envelope all those years ago. ‘Sorry Babe. Lost my head.’

And Dodo had lost her mind.

Dodo smiled. “Mack sent little Tommy with this note and a bottle of scotch, remember? The bottle was so heavy, Tommy could barely carry it. It was good scotch.”

“Good scotch that you paid for.”

“Mack knew I’d be upset. The scotch was thoughtful.”

“Why are you doing this? Did you even read the report I had the detective send?”

“It was so thoughtful of you. Of course I read it.”

“Did you understand what it said? What it meant? The danger you’re putting yourself in? Mack beat the other women he was with. He put one of them in a—”

“Hospital, I know.”

“I was going to say wheelchair. He broke the woman’s back Dodo.”

“I know.”

Dodo plied on yet another layer of blood-red lipstick. “You can find almost anything you want on the internet. I know everything Mack’s done.”

“Then you must know he’ll eventually start hitting you too.”

“He already has.” Dodo rubbed her arm and revealed a dark bruise hidden under a thick layer of makeup. Now that I knew what to look for it seemed like she’d taken a bath in makeup.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I have to. Don’t you see? It’s the only way to make him stop.”

“Just because he says I do, doesn’t mean he won’t hit you again or worse.”

Dodo painted on yet another coat of lipstick.

I grabbed her arm. “Will you stop with the lipstick?”

Dodo pranced away. “Can’t. Once Pastor tells Mack he can kiss the bride, I want to leave a big red lip mark. I want everyone to see that he’s finally mine.”

I stared at the makeup staining my hand. The Jesus clock played His Banner Over Me is Love. I’d wasted thirty minutes talking. No more.

“Let’s take a walk,” I said.

“Not now. I’m staying right here until it’s time for the ceremony.” Dodo leaned against the wall. The hoops made it impossible to sit down.

“Mack has a surprise for you.”

Dodo's eyes lit up. I thought I'd hurl.

"What is it?" She squealed.

"If you want to know, you have to come with me."

"And Mack won't see my dress?"

"I promise you he won't. I know a back way."

We negotiated our hoop skirts through the narrow passageways of the church's service corridors and down the steps to the basement. The musty smell that comes from decades of storage enveloped us. Once we reached the bottom of the stairs, I heard them going at it. I'd hoped I wouldn't have to do this, but she'd given me no choice. No matter what kind of fuzzy logic Dodo tried to use, she'd never be able to justify what she was about to see.

Despite her hoops and heels, Dodo sprinted through an obstacle course of discarded church hymnals, pews and choir robes. The sound led her to the place where old nativity scenes go to die, right in front of the broom closet door. From all the banging and moaning and oh babys drifting out, the woman I'd hired seemed to be earning her money.

"I think that's Mack," Dodo said.

"Sorry you had to find—"

"Having a good time Babe?" Dodo called.

"Good time? Don't you know what he's doing in there?"

Dodo giggled. "Of course I know. He's enjoying himself. Right Babe?"

The thrashing stopped.

"You spying on me Dodo?" Mack asked.

"Of course not," Dodo said. "I'm here for the surprise."

"Surprise," Mack said. "I'll be out soon as I finish."

“Wait till I’m gone. It’s bad luck for you to see me before the wedding.”

“Your luck can’t get much worse,” I said.

Dodo twirled around not seeming to notice when she sent two wise men and a headless baby Jesus crashing to the floor.

“I’m on a lucky streak. The best luck of all was finding Mack again. You go on and finish up now Babe so we can get married okay?”

Mack moaned his answer.

We walked back upstairs in silence. I was in shock, and Dodo was in...I don’t know what Dodo was in.

Anybody else who’d caught their fiancé in the act, on their wedding day, would have cried or thrown things or called him everything but a child of God... What they wouldn’t have done is bounce back to the second-grade Sunday-school room, ply on more lipstick, and wait to marry said fiancé. But that’s exactly what Dodo did.

“What a great surprise,” Dodo said. “Sex always makes Mack so happy, especially sex with other women. I want this to be the happiest day of his life.”

I massaged my temple. “Please tell me you made him sign a prenup?”

“Don’t need one.”

“You so do need one. I can have my lawyer here in 20 minutes. If you must marry him at least limit how much of your money he’ll get in the divorce.”

“Why? He wants my money. I want to marry him. That’s fair.”

“No it’s not. You just caught him in the church with a prostitute for God’s sake.”

“How do you know she was a prostitute?” Dodo asked.

Crap. Where was a good lie when you needed one? I looked to the Jesus clock for help. None came.

“You set the whole thing up didn’t you?” Dodo tried to hug me, but our hoops collided, so she patted my hand instead. “Thank you for making Mack so happy. You’ll see; it really doesn’t matter who else Mack is with or where. All that matters is in five minutes, he’s marrying me. I hope he’s not late.”

Okay. Dodo was certifiable. If I could stop her from walking down that aisle today and get her to a competent psychiatrist, they’d put her away. She needed therapy. Months and months of therapy.

And I needed a rope. All I had to do is trip her. Those hoops would make her roll like a barrel. Then I’d hogtie her and cart her off to the nearest shrink. Before I could even start looking for rope, someone knocked on the door.

“It’s time,” they said

Dodo clapped and jumped up and down. “Let’s go.”

I should have locked her in the basement when I had the chance.

I helped Dodo straighten her train and handed her her flowers. The huge bouquet was much heavier than I thought it would be. Then again, what do I know about how much flowers should weigh.

To enter the sanctuary, we passed through a tunnel of connected arches covered with pink carnations. Dodo had told me carnations meant, I’ll never forget. They looked beautiful, but the carnation’s overpowering scent put me more in the mind of a funeral than a wedding.

Ode to Joy played.

“That’s your cue,” Dodo said. “Meet you on the other side”

Somehow I managed to put one foot in front of the other and make my way through the tunnel. It's all I could do now. I'd failed.

The church was packed. None of Dodo's friends or family had come, but she'd generated a lot of press about Mack standing her up and her quest to find him again. What disgusted those of us who knew her drew the curious.

Mack waited at the front of the church. He'd missed a button on his tuxedo, and his hair was a mess, but there he stood, on time, grinning.

I took my place on the altar as far from Mack as I could. The rent-a-ushers rolled out the white runner; the music changed to Here Comes the Bride. Dodo emerged from the carnation tunnel looking happier than I'd ever seen her. I felt like an executioner watching a condemned woman take her final death march.

The ceremony moved quickly. Dodo had opted for the standard vows with two exceptions; there'd be no opportunity to object to the marriage, and she'd insisted that Mack couldn't put the ring on her finger until after he'd kissed her. At that point, she'd hand me her bouquet.

The pastor pronounced them man and wife and declared Mack could kiss the bride. Dodo held her bouquet to the side while Mack pushed in past her hoops to claim his prize. The back of Dodo's dress went out like a bell stopped in mid peal.

Dodo's kiss made Mack's lips look like they were bleeding. She planted another big red kiss on his cheek. Everyone but me applauded.

Dodo nodded to the usher responsible for the music. Total Eclipse of the Heart probably seemed like a strange music choice to some, but Dodo had played this song obsessively the 25 years Mack had been gone.

Dodo handed me her flowers so that Mack could slide the ring on her finger. The flowers felt considerably lighter. Minus the silver pistol Dodo now held, they'd have to be lighter.

Mack dropped the ring.

I dropped the bouquet. "Dodo don't," I cried.

My ears rang from the shot. People screamed as they pushed their way to the exits. Mack stared at the growing red stain on his silver tuxedo then pitched forward.

Dodo looked perfectly at peace as she stood over Mack's body.

"Twenty-five years is silver...bullets," she said.

THE END