

Excerpted from *Getting the Important Things Right*

by

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The Honeymoon

It was almost eleven o'clock when Garth said, "Let's get out of here."

It had been a long day, and as wonderful as it had been, I was ready to call it a night, too. We made a broad sweep of the reception room, thanking our guests for coming and telling them all to stay and enjoy themselves until The Colonel shooed them away.

As we stopped to talk with Garth's fraternity brothers, they all clapped Garth on the back, winked, and said, "Ready to get on with the honeymoon, right?"

Garth winked and clapped them back while I stood aside and blushed.

We left the room to loud cheers and well wishes.

Actually, we couldn't afford a honeymoon, so we were going straight to our apartment. Garth had gotten us a small place in graduate student housing with a bedroom, a bath, and a

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combination living room/dining room/study room/kitchenette. To reach it we had to descend a flight of stairs from ground level. The only two windows in the entire apartment were in the combo room, tiny little squares at the ceiling that peeked out onto the concrete sidewalk. And even though we moved in during the summer, our little subterranean home was quite cool. Ma'am had given us some of her mismatched cast-off furniture, rugs, and lamps to furnish the place, and we had made it quite cozy, despite the cramped space and minimalist lighting.

Since The Colonel had sent wedding invitations to everyone he had ever met, Garth and I had received an obscene number of wedding gifts. We had twelve place settings of our formal china and sterling flatware, as well as eight place settings of everyday dishes and stainless. We left the good china and silver stored at Ma'am's and furnished our little place with the everyday stuff. We also had cookware, utensils, and cookbooks. (It looked like I was going to be expected to learn to cook something that didn't involve Twinkies.) We also had a linen closet full of new sheets, blankets, pillows, and towels. And Ma'am had given me Percy's and my favorite ratty old quilt. Garth and I were ready to be a married couple.

When we reached the car, the silence was deafening. Garth wouldn't say a word. I chattered endlessly, but he wouldn't respond. So I just filled up all the empty spaces until we arrived at the apartment.

When Garth pulled into our parking space in front of our apartment, turned off the engine, and got out of the car, I waited

for him to come around to my side, open the door, lift me, and carry me over the threshold of our first home. Instead, he slammed his car door and headed for the apartment, leaving me sitting in the car. I jumped out, ran after him, and asked what was wrong.

Again, his response was, “Nothing!”

Once we were inside the apartment, Garth went straight to the bedroom, ripped off his tie and jacket and dropped them on the floor, kicked off his shoes, and fell across the bed. This was my wedding night and I’d never had sex, but from what I had seen in movies and read in books, wedding nights weren’t supposed to be like this. I thought there would be dim lights, romance, whispering, touching, tenderness. Perhaps Garth hadn’t had sex either—I hadn’t asked—and he was just as nervous as I was.

While Garth lay face down on the bed, I went to the chest of drawers where I had stored my clothes and removed the white see-through nightie that Suzanne and Mary Sue had given me at my lingerie shower. I grabbed a coat hanger from the closet and tiptoed to the bathroom, shutting the door behind me. Once I had turned on the light, I took one last look at myself in my wedding gown. The vanity mirror was small, so I had to stand on tiptoe just to see to my knees. I did look like a princess. I didn’t want to take off my dress, but I did want to get into bed with my husband. I slid out of my dress, hung it carefully on the hanger, and hooked it over the shower curtain rod. I washed the make-up from my face and brushed my teeth. I pulled the sexy nightie over my head and, once again, looked at myself in the small vanity mirror. Not bad.

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I was nervous, so I took a few deep breaths, turned out the light, opened the door, and took the two steps to our bed. I crawled in beside Garth, my heart beating in my throat. Garth's back was to me, so I draped my arm over his side.

He grabbed my wrist, pushed my arm aside, and snarled, "Leave me alone!"

I cried, "But, Garth, this is our wedding night. Aren't we going to make love? We've talked about this night for so long. We've both looked so forward to this."

Then he yelled at me, "Well, if that's what you want, that's what you'll get!"

And before I knew what was happening, he rolled over on me, unzipping his pants and ripping my nightie. He pinned me with his forearm and entered me angrily. The pain was like none I'd ever experienced, but Garth covered my mouth with his hand to muffle my screams. In a matter of seconds, it ended, and Garth rolled off and away from me.

He spat, "Is that what you wanted?"

Through my sobs, I said, "No, Garth," and reached out to touch him.

Once again, he swatted my hand away.

I rolled off the bed, holding my sides, and limped to the bathroom, where I saw my beautiful Audrey Hepburn gown hanging from the shower rod. I moved it to the hook on the back of the bathroom door, then turned on the shower and waited for the water to turn to scalding. I stepped under the stream and scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed until my skin was red and raw. Then I

stood in the spray of water until it turned cold. I stepped from the shower and dried myself with a big fluffy butter yellow towel that someone had given us as a wedding gift. Once I was dry, I wrapped the towel around my wet hair and went to the chest of drawers to rummage for my old flannel nightgown. Once I had slipped my gown over my head, I eased my pillow from the bed where Garth was sleeping (or feigning sleep) and retreated to the combo room sofa, where I wrapped myself in my ratty old quilt and cried myself to sleep.

The following morning I awoke to an empty apartment. I had not heard Garth leave, but he was nowhere to be found. And he had not left me a note. When noon came and he had not returned, I began to worry. I didn't want to call friends and family, though—didn't want anyone to know that my husband had abandoned me the day after our wedding.

I was so sad, so frightened, but mostly I was confused. What had happened? Had I done something to make Garth behave that way? Was my behavior so abominable that he could no longer stand the sight of me or the thought of being married to me?

I was still sitting on the sofa, wrapped in my quilt, when Garth returned to the apartment around ten o'clock that night.

I said, "Where have you been? I was worried."

He said, "I'm a big boy; you don't have to worry about me."

"But why didn't you tell me you were leaving, where you were going?"

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His eyes became angry slits as he said, “Because you are not my mother, and I don’t have to tell you shit.”

And, with that, he stormed into the bedroom and slammed the door.

I continued to sit and stare into the dark in my confusion. I don’t know when I finally dozed off, but I awakened with a jolt to find Garth sitting on the floor beside the sofa, his face buried in my quilt.

And he was sobbing, “I’m so sorry, so, so sorry. I don’t know what came over me, Baby Girl. I was so horrible. But I was so scared. So much happened so fast. All of a sudden I had the responsibility of a wife and a home. On top of that, I would be starting dental school in a week. And then I saw you laughing and dancing with all of your friends. You looked so happy with them, happier than you have ever looked with me. But when I saw you dancing with your old boyfriend, I just lost it. I was so afraid I was going to lose you just when I had found you. Oh, Babe, please forgive me. I promise it will never happen again. I spent yesterday sitting in the back of the library, crying. I was so scared. Oh, please, Baby Girl, don’t ever leave me.”

As he cried, I put my arms around him and assured him that he was the only one and I would love him, and only him, until the end of time. And I assured him that I would never again give him reason to doubt my love.