

Daisy Chain

by Judith Horth

She was such a darling child – blonde and blue-eyed, the perfect daughter. Mother said she was like me when I was little. The only thing that disappointed Mother was that Daisy could be rather wilful at times. “Just like her father,” she said, when Henry left. “It’s a good thing he’s taken himself off, Marguerite. You must allow him as little contact with Daisy as possible. He’s a bad influence.”

She was right, of course - Mother always was, but she needn’t have worried; the car accident saw to that and from then on it was just Mother and me and Daisy. A bouquet of three, Mother called us, owing to our names - she was Greta, so all three of us were named for the same flower. “The symbol of purity,” Mother said, “and innocence, and happiness.” She certainly did her best to make sure that I lived up to the first two of those qualities - I was never allowed to play with the local children nor, as a young woman, was I permitted a boyfriend. I had no idea what went on between a man and a woman until that time with Henry.

We had met at a church picnic, which was why, I imagine, Mother trusted him. When he asked if he might take me out she agreed, with the proviso that I was home by ten. I was home at ten, but that evening had changed me. Now I had, for the first time, a secret - Henry said he loved me, and he proved it on each date. It was thrilling - and shaming too, because I knew Mother would be horrified if she found out.

She did find out, of course, when I began to put on weight. I had no idea what was happening - all I knew was that I was sick every morning and my monthly events had ceased. Mother was so cold towards me - I couldn’t bear her disapproval. “You will marry Henry,” she said, “I shall see to it.” I would have done anything to please her and win back her love.

I wore Mother’s wedding dress, altered to fit. She insisted it was a family tradition. I loved that dress - it had been my Great-Grandmother’s and was covered in expensive, exquisite lace, patterned all over with daisies. It was a small wedding, just Mother and Henry’s immediate family were present. There was no reception. Afterwards we lived with Mother, but she and Henry soon began to butt heads and he left before Daisy was born. He visited occasionally, but Mother never made him very welcome.

Daisy grew up so quickly. One minute she was a little girl, playing with her dollies, and the next she was a young woman with such a temper - and so disobedient! That side of her, rarely glimpsed when she was small, became increasingly evident as she reached her teenage years. Mother and I tried so hard... Thank goodness Mother didn't live to see what happened after Daisy went to that school. That was when she changed for the worse, asking impertinent questions about her father, insisting that she had a right to know about him and becoming insolent when I refused to discuss it. She sat in her room for hours listening to that ghastly noise she calls music, and her make-up! Black lipstick - I ask you! She cut her own hair so that it was short and spiky and dyed it black - I could have wept! And her clothes! Always black, pins and rips everywhere and so revealing! What the neighbours must have thought!

She left school early and took a job at a local hairdresser's. Not what I would have wanted for her - she could have done so much better - and began seeing Rick. He's a nice boy, although he is only a plumber and he drops his aitches. Still, he seemed to be a good influence and I was relieved when they decided to marry and settle down.

That was when we had the row about the dress. "I'm not wearing that thing," she said, "Honestly, Mum - me, in lace? You must be nuts."

It hurt, and I'm afraid I raised my voice. That beautiful lace dress with its daisy embroidery - so suitable for her! "Just for once, will you do as I ask?" I shouted. "I've put up with your rudeness and bad behaviour for long enough. It's the least you could do for me after all the disappointment and hurt you've caused me these last few years!" I was screaming at her because I was so angry - my heart was thudding and I couldn't breathe properly but I don't know what happened after that until I woke up in the hospital.

Daisy was at my bedside, tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry, Mum," she said. "I'll wear the dress if it means that much to you, but it's my wedding and I'll do it the way I want, OK?"

And she did. She let me have nothing to do with the preparations. "You've been ill, Mum," she said. "You don't need to worry. Just be there on the day."

It wasn't a church wedding. They got married in an orchard, of all places, on a bright September day. I sat on that prickly hay bale, waiting to see my daughter. When the music began I looked round, longing to see my daughter as I'd always imagined her on her wedding day, with her - my Daisy again, blonde and blue-eyed, smiling, happy, and dressed in white. It had been so long since she'd worn anything but black.

Her hair was still black and spiky and the dress was pinned up in front to show off her black boots and fishnet tights. It was still white, but there was something different about it. The embroidery had been added to and the white daisies were outlined in black stitching. It was beautifully done. She glanced at me as she passed by, and I saw how happy she looked. So much happier than I had been at my wedding. And I realised that that's what really mattered after all.