

The Wedding  
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Chava's thoughts wandered, as her sister and friends dressed her for the wedding procession. She thought of all she would be leaving behind in the small town where she had grown up. Friends who had shared her youth, brothers and a sister who coddled and petted her as the baby of the family. She thought of her mother who was everything Chava hoped someday to be to her own family: wise, prayerful, clever in finding the best ways to accomplish her household tasks and supporting her family. And she thought of her father, gone to his rest years since, but always when she was growing up giving her small treasures to amuse her and letting her watch him at work as he turned raw wood into sturdy benches, tables and utensils for the home. Lastly, her thoughts turned to the one brother, her favorite, who had gone away, but who had been her special joy growing up. When she turned to him with her childish sorrows, he was always ready with a hug and just the right words. He knew better than anyone how to turn grief to joy, and the fact he would not be present to celebrate her wedding to Eli left a hole in her heart.

Eli, soft spoken and self-effacing, yet always finding his way to her side at family gatherings. Trained as a potter, Eli was already having some success with selling his work. She loved that the useful things he created were also beautiful, and though it took him longer, his work was popular enough in the marketplace that he could now afford to pay for a wife and to start a family.

Soon now, Eli and his friends would come for her, he in his colorful wedding clothes that would complement the fine linen and wine-red silk interwoven with gold that her friends were just now finished draping on her. She touched the intricately carved gold earrings and bracelets that were a gift of her betrothed and choked back tears of emotion at the generosity and love of her family and her family-to-be.

“Arise, come my darling, my beautiful one, come with me!” came the call from the street beneath her window. “My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” The wedding song never grew old for Chava, though she had heard it dozens of times before, sung for others. Even so, she treasured it this time, as though sung only to her. Her friends led her to the street, where Eli and his friends had gathered, and as though she were made of glass, he carefully helped her to sit on the back of the donkey, which had been richly adorned with blankets, bells and tassels for the short procession to Eli’s village. Chava bowed her head shyly, as gaily dressed villagers lined the road, thankful for the opportunity to celebrate amidst the mild weather after the hard work of the harvest. “Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?” they sang.

Once at Eli’s father’s house, his parents helped her dismount, and she bowed with Eli before them to hear their blessing, and joined them in prayer for a fruitful and joyful marriage. Twilight was falling and stars were beginning to sparkle in the clear sky, but torches pushed back the

shadows and highlighted the games and dancing that always accompanied a good wedding. As the guest of honor, Eli reluctantly parted from Chava to participate in the festivities, and Chava withdrew with her bridesmaids and friends to a room that had been set aside for them. They gossiped and shared stories about marriage, trying to reassure and prepare the excited but anxious bride.

Late to bed that night, Chava still slept little, thinking over the final journey that she was now on to womanhood. The next day would be the wedding feast, a special time with family and friends, and with rejoicing and a holiday atmosphere in the village. She wished again that her wandering brother could somehow know of her nuptials and be present to complete her happiness.

In the morning, her mother led Chava, in her white linen dress, and her bridesmaids to a canopy set up for them, while songs and blessings were sung and recited. When Eli joined them, the traditional words came easily to her lips. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you! Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers,” said Chava, blushing. Eli held out his hand to her and the others now joined them for the final blessing before the wedding feast.

The tables groaned with celebration food, and the groom’s father brought out all the wine that had been gathered for the occasion, poured from pots made especially by Eli for the occasion.

Chava's mother flitted about, helping the hosts to keep the wine flowing and plates never empty of food. Chava, at Eli's side, basked in the the happy talk and good wishes that flowed over and around the couple. Well into the celebration, her mother stopped by her side and bent as though to ask a question. Suddenly she stopped and gasped. Chava looked up to see what had startled her, and also caught her breath, her hand flying to her breast. Her wandering brother, along with a bunch of friends, had just showed up at the wedding feast. Unerringly, he made his way through the tangle of people toward the bride, his hug and whispered words a blessing on her heart that cleared away the last vestige of shadow from her joy. Her mother, however, had other things on her mind.

"They have no more wine," she whispered to her firstborn, knowing that somehow he would solve this problem that threatened to cast the wedding hosts in such an embarrassing light. "Quick! Do whatever he tells you!" she said, turning to the servants. Tenderly, ruefully, he touched her cheek. "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" Then he also turned to the servants who were awaiting his direction. "Fill the jars with water," he said, and when they had done this, he directed them to serve the contents, beginning with the host. Eli's father's eyebrows shot up when he tasted the wine. Never had the wine from his stock tasted so good. Chava and her mother exchanged glances, small smiles playing on their lips.

Long before the food and the new wine was gone, and long before the guests had begun to rise from the tables to make their way home, Eli found his way to his beloved and led her away, under the smiles and blessings of their family and friends.

Tomorrow, Chava thought, she would be different. Tomorrow she would begin the journey with Eli to the home they would make together. Tomorrow her wanderer brother would be gone again, but she would cherish in her heart his whispered words and the miracle he had so lovingly given her on her wedding day.