

Excerpt from **Murder at the Wedding**

The parking lot at St. Andrew's Episcopal was filled almost to capacity. Despite a recent visit to the car wash, my Jeep looked out of place next to all the Mercedes, BMWs, Range Rovers, Jaguars, and Porsches.

I took out and quickly scanned the engraved linen cream invitation. It read:

*Matrimonial Ceremony of
Charlotte Alexis Whitaker
and
Brooks James Hawthorne IV
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Langford, Massachusetts
Saturday, the eighth of June, at two o'clock in the afternoon*

As I approached the massive church, I saw all the pink plantings and railings wrapped in white tulle with pink peonies at precise intervals. It was a floral tour de force that must have taken an army of gardeners and florists a few days to accomplish. Inside there were pink roses, peonies, and hydrangeas everywhere. The scene was right out of *InStyle Magazine*. I wondered, *were there any pink flowers left on the East Coast? On the West Coast?*

As I squeezed into the last row, a large choir serenaded the full house in the loft above the congregation.

The choir began to sing "My Spirit Sang All Day" as Mrs. Whitaker, resplendent in a strapless, rose silk Carolina Herrera with a vibrant pink cabbage rose behind one ear and a necklace of marble-sized, green South Sea pearls, was ushered to the left front pew. *Really? Strapless for the mother of the bride? Well, she does look amazing.*

A hush fell over the crowd. The stained-glass doors closed, and the groom and his men filed to the altar.

Did one have to be six feet two, gorgeous, and ripped to be in this wedding party?

As the first strands of Wagner filled the air, the doors opened, and down the aisle came Anastasia Bleeker. She was one of the bride's four-year-old charges at Miss Bloomfield's School, where wealthy, pregnant women enrolled their offspring-to-be to claim a coveted spot. Anastasia was wearing a white tulle fairy-tale gown with a dark rose-colored sash. A circle of petite, light pink roses and baby's breath crowned her chin length, straight, white-blonde hair. She carried a small, white wicker basket in one hand, and with the other, she started to drop pale pink rose petals down the long aisle.

Channeling Lady Di, I thought.

Next came the ring bearer, Barrington Cabot. He was another nursery school trust-fund-baby-in-the-making in white linen shorts and jacket and a head of black, curly hair. Then six breathtaking models, or rather bridesmaids, dressed in rose-colored tulle skirts and pale pink lace wrap blouses, floated down the aisle carrying white and pink hydrangeas wrapped in rose-colored ribbons. They looked like an upscale version of an ad for the United Colors of Benetton.

After a slight pause, the stained-glass doors parted again, and Dr. Whitaker appeared in his morning suit, standing at Charlotte's right side. She was breathtaking in a Vera Wang white silk ball gown glittering with thousands of tiny seed pearls. A deep rose satin ribbon wrapped around her bouquet of white peonies. Her Belgian lace veil trailed behind her down the aisle.

The ceremony went on amid candlelight, roses, and organ music. It was like being in a dream, albeit a very, very expensive dream.

Finally, vows were exchanged, there were no objections, and Charlotte and Brooks were off to the photo-taking session in a vintage, white Bentley. As they left, the guests milled about outside the church for a bit and then headed to the reception.

Evelyn Greyson, the sixtyish director of Obstetric Nursing, stood at the top of the church stairs as I exited. She was dressed in a powder blue suit with a short jacket with peplum and knee-length, fitted skirt. A pearl necklace, her ever-present pearl brooch, and small pearl stud earrings completed the look. Her graying hair was, as usual, in her trademark chignon.

"Beautiful wedding," I said.

"Magnificent," Evelyn replied. "Dr. Whitaker wouldn't have it any other way. See you at the reception, dear." And then she strode off to her car.

Evelyn always agreed with everything Dr. Whitaker said and did. She worshipped him. Did she also have an unrequited crush on him?

I quickly greeted a few colleagues but didn't linger because I wanted to see how Will was doing.

The Country Club was buzzing with activity when I drove through the porte cochère, pulled up to the main entrance, and handed my keys to a valet. The grand foyer was glittering with hundreds of candles and still more massive floral arrangements in blush pink. A string quartet played Pachelbel's "Canon in D" beside the grand staircase.

Out on the veranda, the wedding party was taking pictures before an expanse of green lawn and brilliant blue sky and sea. It would be a wedding album worthy of its own issue of *Town & Country*.

Large silver serving trays were circulated among the guests, offering tiny crab cakes topped with dill aioli, mini beef Wellingtons, smoked salmon pinwheels, and tomato and goat cheese on toast points. There were massive silver bowls of fresh shrimp on ice on round marble tables.

"Maeve! Maeve! Over here!" one of the midwives called. Looking around the ballroom, which held table settings for six hundred guests, I saw that the Creighton Memorial staff was on the right side of the room while family and friends were on the left. I waved to the midwives but

walked over to the table where Grand, Will's grandmother, was sitting with Will's parents, Will's sister, Eloise, her husband, Taylor, and Will's younger brother, Teddy.

"Hello, Maeve." William stood and extended his hand. Never a hug, never a kiss on the cheek, just a handshake.

"Hello, so nice to see you all," I replied, shaking his hand as I nodded to the table. I saw that Lydia, my mother-in-law, was outfitted in a mint green silk cocktail dress with a large diamond necklace and matching drop earrings. She tilted her head toward me and smiled but said nothing.

"The Country Club is such a perfect wedding venue," I offered.

"Quite lovely," she replied.

"You look beautiful, Maeve," Grand said.

"Thanks, Grand."

"Sweet dress," Lydia said.

Sweet dress? What, am I five years old? Lydia was a master of the backhanded compliment, and she was not my biggest fan. Keep it together, Maeve.

Eloise was in a sleeveless, pale green and cream striped dress with an emerald and diamond pendant and earrings. Like mother, like daughter.

"Well," I said, "enjoy the meal. Will has been creating a masterpiece." I saw William's and Lydia's smiles tighten. They did not respond. They were not pleased with Will's chosen profession.

"I can't wait," Grand said.

I gave a little wave and headed over to find my table.

Scanning the room, I saw my sister, Meg, cross her eyes and raise her wine glass in a mock salute. Meg was the Langford real estate agent of choice for the wealthy and had been invited along with other top business leaders of the town. She knew I had just navigated a minefield with my emotionally distant in-laws. As soon as I reached my table, I quickly sat down and took a long drink of chardonnay.

Herend Chinese Bouquet china in pink, Gorham Newport Scroll sterling, and Baccarat crystal decorated each setting.

My gosh, they'll have to pat everyone down before they leave.

Murray Alfond, the famed orchestra leader, turned on his mic and said, "Please be seated while the bridal party arrives."

There was sustained applause as Charlotte and Brooks triumphantly paraded into the ballroom. "The bride and groom will dance to a classic personally chosen by Brooks," Alfond announced.

"The Very Thought of You" wafted through the room as Charlotte and Brooks took to the floor. They obviously had attended many ballroom dancing classes in preparation for this moment, and they danced impeccably.

Then the entire wedding party sashayed to "Fly Me to the Moon." It was like watching *La La Land*. They were all perfectly coiffed, dressed, and ready for filming. Plus, they could dance.

When they were done and returned to their seats, Alfond intoned, "Please bow your heads while Reverend Lucas Mathers says grace."

The Episcopal pastor of St. Andrew's, Reverend Mathers, was slightly rotund with flushed pink cheeks. He ran his hand through receding black hair, obviously feeling the weight of this moment. Then he bowed his head.

"Dear Holy Father, thank you for this glorious day! What a wonderful celebration! We ask you to bless Charlotte and Brooks, as well as their families and friends, and we beseech you to grant this special couple a life together that is happy and blessed. We further ask you to bless this fabulous repast and grant your blessings on all present. Amen."

Gee, that was short. He must be hungry.

A phalanx of waiters served the first course of spring green and white asparagus spears with shaved red onion. As we started in on the delicate vegetables, the best man, Ry Farmington, took the microphone and asked all to raise their glasses in a toast to the couple.

"Brooks has been like a brother to me since our first day at Hollis in Harvard Yard. We've seen many adventures together—none of which, out of respect for your patience and his reputation, I will go into here."

He paused for applause and a few knowing hoots.

"In the words of the Bard,

No sooner met but they looked;

No sooner looked but they loved;

No sooner loved but they sighed;

No sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason;

No sooner knew the reason, but they sought the remedy;

And in these degrees have made a pair of stairs to marriage

Please rise and toast to their lives together."

Six hundred guests rose and toasted the couple.

Then came truffle-scented tenderloin with dauphinoise potatoes and tender baby carrots. I snuck a look first at the Whitaker table and then at William and Lydia. They all seemed to be enjoying the meal, and I prayed that all the reviews would be excellent.

For dessert, a chocolate mousse with a crème brûlée center was placed at each setting. I knew the wedding cake would be cut and served later.

Just then, the wait staff re-entered the room. They set a Baccarat champagne flute filled with pink champagne at each place. A hush came over the ballroom. Dr. Whitaker was standing at the head table, staring the crowd into silence. Then he picked up his glass and smiled adoringly at Charlotte.

Everyone listened as he gave a long, loving toast to his daughter. Finally, he took a moment to gather his thoughts before saying, "Charlotte, your mother and I found this magnificent champagne in France a few years ago and had it shipped in for your wedding."

Mrs. Whitaker stared at Dr. Whitaker with a huge Miss America smile.

Dr. Whitaker continued, "Would everyone please rise and toast my lovely daughter Charlotte and her husband, Brooks." He lifted his crystal flute to his lips and took a sip while beaming at Charlotte.

Immediately, his cheeks turned scarlet, and he started to wheeze. The crystal dropped from his hand and shattered on the ground. He clutched at his throat while making extensive gasping attempts to pull in a breath. Then he went limp and collapsed to the floor. The room erupted into pandemonium.