



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Trapped on the violent border', *The Australian online*, 08/04/06.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [celebrations](#), [husband/wife](#), [disenchantment](#), [plants](#), [seasons](#)

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I wanted Asian lilies, the dark burgundy ones, mixed with the palest pink cherry blossom. It took ages to get it right, and in the end the peach blossom had to be flown in from a greenhouse in Adelaide because it was out of season. I'm not sure exactly what the foliage was, but it was a bright green, with delicate serrated leaves.

They were for my wedding.

I paid considerable attention to the flowers—more than to anything else. So it was only when I was walking up the aisle on my father's arm, that I realised I shouldn't be marrying Dale at all. True, the flowers were right, but I didn't really know Dale. I didn't really like what I knew. And I actually had the feeling he didn't really like me very much.

It appeared perfect, which was why I hadn't seen it. Also, I'd been paying attention to the wrong things. Like the fact that he was handsome and I was pretty. I think it is fair to say he admired me. He liked the way I looked. He approved of my work as a physical therapist. 'When you have children,' he said. 'It's the sort of job where you could work part time.'

'When you have children.' I didn't really notice that until later. Nothing about us having children.

'Dad,' I said. 'I don't like Dale.' We were about a third of the way up the aisle.

My father kept on walking, step by step, measured, like a dance. We could have simply raised our arms together, done a turn and walked gracefully back out of the church. But he pulled me, his reluctant partner, back into the forward march with him.

'Dad,' I whispered, stopping again. 'I really don't like Dale.'

'It doesn't matter,' he whispered.

'Why not?'

'It just doesn't.' We were getting a few looks with this whispering, and I could see Dad wasn't going to give in. And he was pulling me closer and closer to the alter. So I stopped, dug my spiked heels into the red carpet. He tugged on my arm, but I didn't move. Dale and the best man were looking at us, impatient. I think Dale was trying to give an 'I'm longing to get married' look, for the benefit of the congregation, combined with a 'For God's sake Sally' look for my benefit.

But I stayed stalled. The flower girls, my little nieces, were fussing. They had no instructions on what to do if I

stopped walking. One tried to sneak past me. My sister had to come out of her pew and pull her back into formation.

'I don't like your mother,' Daddy whispered. 'And it's been a perfectly fine marriage.'

I still stalled.

'I never liked her,' Daddy hissed. 'Right from the start.'

I looked into the faces in the crowd. There was a sort of impatience in some faces, but in others there was a softer longing. They were probably the romantics. They were taking everything out of me. With their misty eyes on my flowers, their soft smiles willing me down the aisle, I succumbed to my father's grip on my arm, to Dale's impatience and to the scuffling flower girls. I moved forward. In a few minutes it was all over.

A year later, I ordered white lilies and white blossom, with dark green magnolia leaves. Again, I had to get the blossom especially flown in, this time from Western Australia. The florist told me the blossom was grown in the fields, on the edge of an orchard, a blossom orchard, for those of us who need out of season flowers. My bedspread was thick, white embossed linen, with just the tiniest touch of green and my nightdress was white ruffled cotton, with eyelet cotton lace. It was perfect.

But when I woke up, all I could smell was my own sick and all I could see was the red of the ambulance light, flashing in the street outside. The nurse was putting a tube down my throat which was incredibly painful and someone was rubbing my legs. Dale was standing near the dressing table with that same impatient look, trying to look like love. I knew it wasn't love. More like hatred.

But then, I had always known.

Just as my mother knew that Dad had never loved her. Or liked her. And that she had never liked or loved him. They had hated too.

And my lilies were all crushed and the branches that had carried the blossoms were bare. And there were petals on the floor, mixed up with the sick.

I was sick for a long time after that, in hospital, ironically, where flowers arrived every day, because the things that people want to say to patients on suicide watch are too complicated and too difficult to say in words.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Townsend.*