Mortal Vow

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Shannon breezed into the house, her arms laden with various packages."

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol1992/iss1/41
Shannon breezed into the house, her arms laden with various packages.

"Mother! I'm home! Mother?" Shannon winced as a brief flash of pain darted through her head. "Damn this headache—today of all days," she thought to herself. Realizing that no one was home, she climbed the stairs to her room and set the packages down on her bed. Her eye was immediately attracted to the gleam of sunlight reflecting off of the silver picture frame that held her beloved Timothy's picture. He was so handsome....he was everything to Shannon, everything she could ever want in a mate. His bright blue eyes sparkled at her from under his dark brown hair. Timothy's earthy good looks were what had initially attracted Shannon to him, but his kindness and generous nature had kept her in love with him. They had been dating through high school and then things had become serious when they decided to attend the same junior college just so they could be near each other. Their parents had tried to make them wait until college was finished to get married, but halfway through their sophomore year, they knew they couldn't wait. Their love was so perfect and true that it seemed like agony everyday they were not together. Now, in the summer before their junior year, they would finally solidify their love, and then continue through college together. Their lives would be perfect. "Just like a fairy tale," Shannon said to Timothy's picture. She couldn't wait until that moment when they would make their vows to "love, honor and cherish each other until death do us part...."

"Such a shame—he had his whole life ahead of him," Mrs. Bennet, the town mayor's wife said to Mrs. Goldstein.

"Yes, and right before the wedding, too," Mrs. Goldstein replied, shaking her head in lament.

The United Pentecostal Church was filled with people dressed in black, milling about in small groups, discussing the latest tragedy to strike Bakersfield. Because the town was so small, almost everyone knew each other, if not personally, then through the town's thriving grapevine.

"Did you know him personally, Widow Perch?" Mrs. Easton asked the elderly but fiesty woman.

"Eh?"

"I said, did you know him personally?" Mrs. Eaton said again, slightly louder.

"Know him? I slapped his bottom when he was born!" the widow Perch replied indignantly.

Conversation in the church ranged from the deceased's first football game in which he was captain, to his favorite dessert. While the mood among the clusters of people was sad, only a small gathering near the casket seemed to be openly crying.

"I don't understand why...." Mrs. Halleck's voice trailed off. Her eyes were red and puffy, and held a look of despair.

Mrs. Solomon shook her head. "There are no answers in situations like this. It all seems so cruel. They were going to spend their lives together....that's what should have happened, not this."

Remembering, Mrs. Halleck said in an unsteady voice, "How is Shannon?"

"She's doing better. The doctor told us she would
have to stay a few days until they understand the full extent of her head injuries, but he said it was probably just a concussion." She saw Mrs. Halleck’s questioning look and added, "No—she doesn’t know. She was still asleep when I left her."

Mrs. Halleck closed her eyes and shuddered, then turned to accept the sympathies of her friends and fellow townspeople. Mrs. Solomon went over to the pay phone in the church’s lobby and dialed the hospital’s number. After being transferred to her daughter’s room from the switchboard, she let the phone ring for quite a while before replacing the receiver back in its cradle.

“She’s probably still sleeping,” she thought to herself, but her mind wandered through various other possibilities, which she quickly put out of her head.

“Ouch!” Shannon was hurriedly dabbing flesh-colored concealer over the scrape on her right cheek. The bruise on her forehead, she noticed, also needed make-up. She glanced over at the clock on her nightstand. “If I don’t hurry, I’m going to be late for my own wedding!” she thought, but paused nonetheless to gaze at Timothy’s picture once again. “In just one hour I’ll be Mrs. Timothy Halleck,” Shannon thought dreamily. She waltzed over the walk-in closet and pulled the door open. Her lace-edged gown hung gracefully from its padded hanger, and Shannon ran her fingers over the satin bodice. Suddenly, a dizzy spell almost made her fall to the floor. She stumbled over to her dressing table and sat down with a thump. Her thoughts suddenly became clouded, and in the back of her mind, she could sense an unpleasant memory trying persistently to surface. However, she couldn’t quite remember what it was, and she quickly looked over at the picture of Timothy for reassurance.

“Whatever it is, it won’t matter in an hour,” she thought to herself. When the dizziness subsided, Shannon went again to her wedding gown and slid it carefully off its hanger.

Pastor Hillman strode quickly across the room and motioned Mrs. Solomon aside. “Catherine, there’s a phone call for you or Phil from the hospital. You can take it in my office.” Mrs. Solomon looked for her husband, but couldn’t find him.

“If you see Phil, please tell him where I am,” she said to Pastor Hillman.

“Of course,” he replied.

Running wildly down the hall to the office, Mrs. Solomon tried not to think of why the hospital would call her.....here. They wouldn’t bother her unless it was important......

“Hello?”

“Is this Mrs. Solomon?”

“Yes, yes. What’s wrong”

“Did you pick up your daughter in the last hour?” the voice on the other end of the telephone asked.

Mrs. Solomon’s eyes widened. “No—did the doctor release her?”

“That’s the problem. He didn’t release her, but she’s not in her room, and all of her personal items are gone,” the voice said.

“Oh my God. Why weren’t you watching her? Oh never mind. We have to find her. Has anyone seen her? Did anyone see her leave?”

“No. but we’re searching the hospital for any possib—”

Mrs. Solomon hung up on the voice and ran back into the room. Frantically, she scanned the crowd for her husband and finally located him speaking quietly to Mrs. Hillman. She hurried over to him and said, “Phil, Shannon left the hospital—we have to find her...she could be anywhere—she might be hurt. We have to find her!”

Mr. Solomon tried to think of where Shannon would go. “Let’s check the road from the hospital to our house and then Timothy’s house—she might have gone there.”

Mrs. Solomon ran over to Mrs. Halleck and told her what had happened. “We’ll try to be back for the ceremony,” she said, and then raced out the door with her husband.

The Solomons drove to the hospital and then to their house, all the while looking for Shannon, who might have been walking along the side of the road. They didn’t even notice when a yellow taxi with their daughter inside drove by in the opposite direction. Reaching their house, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon rushed inside and began calling Shannon’s name to no avail. “I’ll check upstairs,” Mrs. Solomon said breathlessly. She ran up the same stairs her daughter had just come down minutes before. Walking slowly down the hall, she felt a funny, almost giddy feeling come over her.

“Shannon honey? Are you in your room? She pushed at the halfway open door and looked inside. Strewn all over the room were empty boxes that had once contained Shannon’s wedding shoes, veil, and stockings. Her makeup table was a mess, with bottles of liquid foundation overturned, and eyeshadows tossed carelessly aside. As if in a dream, Mrs. Solomon slowly drifted over to the closet door and grasped the door handle. Taking a deep breath, she pulled the door open. The hanger rattled vacantly on the single hook near the top of the door.

“I think it was a head-on crash.”

“No, I heard they hit a tree.”

The church was still buzzing softly as the town gossips made their rounds to each group of people, that is, each group except the one gathered around the coffin at the front of the room. The precise details of the accident were still sketchy among the groups, but they all held the same conclusion—this had to be the most tragic event in Bakersfield since the O’Connor twins’ disappearance two years before. Never before had anyone ever heard of an accident claiming
the life of a future groom the night before his wedding. It was awful, simply awful, they all agreed.

"And what about Shannon, the poor dear," Mrs. Sidney asked, clutching her handkerchief to her chest.

"I think she has a fractured skull," Miss King, the third-grade teacher in the Bakersfield Elementary School, answered.

"No she was just shaken up a little. The other car hit them on the driver’s side, so Timothy got most of the impact," Mrs. Lang volunteered.

"Yer all wrong—she has to have a brain transplant," the Widow Perch piped up in a crackled voice. The other women looked at each other and shook their heads silently.

"Would everyone please be seated. We are about to begin," Pastor Hillman’s voice boomed solemnly from the altar.

There was an increase in the crowd’s buzz as seats were taken, and then the room became silent. All eyes were either on Pastor Hillman or the Halleck family.

"We are gathered together today to mourn the untimely passing of Timothy Michael Halleck." Pastor Hillman moved to where the casket stood. "It is always tragic when the life of a youth is so cruelly taken, but it is especially tragic when it happens the day before that individual is to enter into the institution of marriage. We sorrowfully grieve not only for Timothy’s family, but for his finance, Shannon Solomon.”

The crowd heard the door to the vestibule open. There was a slight murmur as they questioned each other softly... who would show up late to a funeral? Even Pastor Hillman paused, looking over the crowd and waiting for the door leading into the church to open and expose the rather rude individual.

Shannon Marie Solomon opened the door wide and stood smiling and happy at the end of the aisle. The crowd gasped at her appearance. Her face was a swollen mass of cuts and bruises; even those which she had tried to conceal glared painfully. And she was wearing her wedding gown.

The crowd stirred in confusion and sympathy for her. Pastor Hillman let the arm holding the Holy Bible drop limply to his side. Shannon started down the aisle.