

## Romancing the Wedding

Bright lights glistened and a thousand and one conversations were progress. It was a happy occasion for two of my friends on their wedding day. Everyone in their best attire seemed to be enjoying themselves with the free flowing booze and the gossip. I felt an unbelievable sense of loneliness even in the midst of a large group of my friends, their husbands, wives and fiancés, sitting around a table drinking and talking.

Uninterested in the day to day trials of their married lives, I looked around to see what else was happening in the party. My eyes scanned the occupants of the other tables stopping at a table of a group of young men who were making a kind of rumpus with loud cross talk. As my eyes ran through it's occupants I noticed one individual to be particularly outstanding.

My attention was probably drawn to the person because of the very animated conversation he was having with his friends and particularly to the beaming smile on his face. He exhibited a strong and extrovert personality. His eyes, highlighted by a pair of very thick eyebrows, spreading across a tall forehead, shone with excitement. The young fair, clean-shaven face had very sharp features enhanced by a long sharp nose, high cheek bones and long jaw. The almost permanent smile enabled him to display a small set of white teeth framed by a pair of full blown crimson lips. All of which combined to create a strikingly beautiful face supported on a long slightly muscular neck and strong wide shoulders that complimented the blazer wore.

Obviously concerned about his appearance, he kept adjusting his long hair divided in the middle, shining with an excessive application of hair gel.

Captivated by his appearance, I continued to watch him. During a brief interval in their conversation, he too started looking around the party. Then turning in my direction, he caught me watching or rather I believe staring at him. I quickly looked away in embarrassment.

But after sometime I couldn't resist taking another look at this very attractive young man. He was again engaged in conversation. Maybe he felt he was been watched, because, our eyes met again as he turned and looked again in my direction. Again I looked away. But the next time I turned my attention towards him I found that he too was watching me. His response was also to quickly look away. So, started a series of glances, exchanged in quick succession. By then all activity of the party was beyond me. I became more and more mesmerized by this person. After sometime I gathered enough courage to smile with him. I was rewarded with a shy but seemingly warm smile.

Then the whole group sitting with him got up and started walking towards the dance floor. As he was getting up I saw him glance in my direction with a smile. Was it an invitation? I wondered.

He was soon on the dance floor and his tall lean body moved well to the fast music that was been played. I saw an opportunity here to get closer to him and suggested to my friends at the table, that we join the dance.

I approached the dance floor at the furthest end from where he was dancing. As we started grinding to the music I saw him watching me. Again glances and friendly smiles were exchanged but he kept his eyes on me for longer periods now and I too did not look away. The interest apparently was mutual.

Slowly, with time, I found him moving towards me on the dance floor. First I was worried but soon we were dancing very close to each other.

Suddenly he spoke "Hi, are you guys, Rakitha's friends or Deepika's?" he asked over the sound of the loud music.

"Both, we all studied in the CIMA classes", I replied. I was worried about the risk I maybe taking when I was told that he was my friend Rakitha's cousin, when I asked what his connection to the couple was. We continued to dance within striking distance of each other. I lost him momentarily to his other friends who wanted to dance with him. But he kept making his way, back to me. I felt a slight smell of alcohol in his breath as we danced very close to each other.

"Would you like to get a drink?" he asked after a few minutes of silence. I agreed and we got off the dance floor and went to the table he had been sitting previously. He offered me a beer. I refused saying that I don't drink. Then I realized that we didn't even know each other's names and I introduced myself. He introduced himself as Kavinga and I noticed the long beautiful fingers that wrapped around my hand and held it in a firm but warm grip.

"Are you working somewhere?" he asked and began an introduction session. The usual "Where did you study?"

followed by "When did you do your A/Levels?" questions came up in estimation of each other's ages. I found that he was only 22 years old and six years my junior.

"Are you married?" he asked.

"No. You're not, either right?" I asked.

He smiled "Of course not. Did you come alone or with your girl friend?"

"Alone. I don't have one" I replied smiling.

He asked me where I lived and when I answered, he wanted to know whom I was living with "Alone" I answered. He said that he was living with his parents. So with that we had both established each other to be single, and available.

He continued to finish his bottle of beer and I felt the conversation was getting more animated as he seemed to have lost his normal senses. I had no problem in continuing my conversation with him since we seemed to have many interests in common and he was by nature, a very friendly individual.

Suddenly, during a pause in the conversation, I found him staring at me and I smiled back. A romantic song was being played by the DJ. This led me to say "beautiful song." Which, drew the very surprising response "beautiful company" to which we both smiled more in embarrassment than anything else. Although one of his friends approached us and asked him to join them on the dance floor he refused. His refusal made me extremely happy as this meant he really was enjoying my company.

"Shall we go out to the beach, otherwise I'll have to go with my friends to dance" he said afterwards.

We walked out of the banquet hall and on to the hotel lawn. The sky was clear with an almost full moon. We could hear the sound of waves crashing on to the beach and see the moonlight glisten on the surface of the sea. We were alone.

"Wonderful night" he said and I agreed. We were standing side by side, very close to each other and I could almost feel the warm naked skin of his right hand against my left. I moved my hand towards his until the sides of our palms touched. We remained silent. He too seemed to be increasing the pressure of his hand on mine.

A strong cold gust of wind blowing across the sea hit our faces and both our bodies shuddered in reaction and I took his hand, clasped it in mine and held it in a firm grip.

Then suddenly without any warning he turned towards me, turned my face towards him and kissed my lips. I gasped at the suddenness of the incident and we parted, quickly turning away in embarrassment.

"I...I'm...I'm sorry...really sorry. I think I'm drunk. I didn't mean to do it." he muttered.

"Hey, it's o.k." I said after sometime, placing my hand on his shoulder. "I kind of liked it"

"So your....your...I mean your into this stuff, Aiya?" he asked with a kind of expectant look in his face. I nodded rather hesitantly. "I thought so the way you were looking at me." He continued smiling

"Why aren't you?" I asked. He smiled again in response.

After a few minutes of silence he spoke "Have you ever been in love Aiya?" he asked "I mean with a guy?"

"Yes." I replied. And upon his request, shared my experiences in a long term relationship. He wanted to know all the details including why I broke up.

"Aiye, would you like to have a relationship again?" he asked.

"Perhaps" I said. "If, I find the right guy."

"I...I got something to tell you." he said. "Please, please don't tell that I told this to you to Rakitha Aiya. Promise?" I promised. "Look, I have ...hmmmm.....err...I don't know....I had something with Rakitha Aiya. We have been together for a long time."

I was dumbfounded. I couldn't believe it. I had known both Rakitha and his wife for sometime and never guessed the possibility.

"Then why is he getting married?" I asked.

"I don't know Aiye, he has been seeing Deepika Akka during classes and never told me." he replied. "I mean he has introduced me to her, we had even gone to movies together. He told me she was kind of a cover up, which I never thought was a good idea." He told me how that he always felt a strong bond with Rakitha and with time, how he had fallen madly in love with him and how Rakitha had only told him a only two months back that he had to get married due to his parent's pressure and that he still loved Kavinga and wanted to continue seeing him. But apparently Kavinga, after much discussion had told him that they cannot continue their relationship if he married.

Kavinga continued to talk about Rakitha, how as a kid he had admired him and how he enjoyed the older cousin's company. So much so, that he had convinced his parents to arrange Rakitha for tuition in Accountancy for his Accountancy exams. "I always felt he treated me special, better than my brothers anyway. I was very happy to get that kind of attention from him and I wanted to get closer to him. But I never expected we would get this close"

They had developed a close attachment to each other during the long hours they spent together studying. He smiled as he said "I guess the only good thing to come out of it was that I got very good grades for Accounts. But now he says that we can't be sure of these relationships and one day we will have to die alone, if we don't get married." Kavinga said.

I now saw tears in his eyes. "Aiyo, Aiye, I still love him."

I did not know what to say. I put my hand on his shoulder turned him around and hugged him.

"Aiye, do you love me?" he asked suddenly, continuing to hold on to me tightly.

I pulled us apart look at him and smiled. I felt that since he had lost the person he loved, he may be trying to fill the void fast with whoever that came his way. "Hey, kiddo. You can't fall in love with someone just like that. I mean you can get attracted and you are extremely good looking. Besides you just said you still loved him."

He let go of me, wiped his tears away and said "Aiye, I think we better join the party before they start to look for us."

We walked back to the hall in silence and spent most of the remaining time together. A good actor he changed his mood and behavior according to the environment. He was back in his party mood smiling and waving at his friends. But this time we avoided all our friends, sitting in a corner away from the crowd.

He left me for a few minutes for the family group photograph, where he stood next to Rakitha who seemed emotionless, with only a rather uncomfortable smile when Kavinga approached him to stand next to him for the photograph. After the photograph was taken Kavinga approached the couple prostrated in front of Rakitha in traditional form of offering respect to an elder. Rakitha, bent down slightly and touched Kavinga's head as the traditional acknowledge of the respect shown. He held Kavinga by his shoulders lifted him off the floor, and embrace him. I saw clearly that although Rakitha held him in a strong grip Kavinga did not seem hold on to Rakitha with the same enthusiasm. As they parted Rakitha smiled at Kavinga who smiled back slightly and moved away emotionless as Rakitha watched him.

He returned to our table with a smile, but again his mood seemed to have changed. He asked "Did you see me worshipping him" I smiled in response. "That's my last good bye to him."

As we sat he kept glancing back at Rakitha and I pretended not to notice him.

Then, a girl came over and informed Kavinga that the couple was leaving for their honeymoon and his parents were looking for him. She also handed over some confetti to throw over the couple and asked Kavinga to join them. He agreed. But as the girl went away he looked at me and said "I don't want to go Aiye. I don't want his weird looks. Can we just go out of the hall?"

I agreed and we went out through a side entrance to an empty corridor. As soon as we were out he looked around to see if any one was around and hugged me hard and cried. He let go after a few minutes and tried to wipe his eyes. As he was doing so he noticed that he had something in his crunched fist.

"Confetti." he said. Smiling he looked at me and threw the confetti in the air so that it fell on us. He turned his face up at the falling confetti with smile. At that moment I fell in love with him.