

## A BIG STEP

One satin slipper on the jigsaw of a flagstone floor, followed softly by another. Printed hymn sheets scored with oblique italics, the calligraphy of angels, encrypted, ready to take wing, take flight, soar, be sung, heard on the Downs, deep in the Dales, listened to in Oxford, where she grew up, in and out, and in between those eternally asleep spires.

The arrival of this most special of days, and here a scuffle of scrubbed-up page boys, in clumsy patent shoes, polished jet, like large lumps of coal. Following behind an elegant, luminous, distant cousin, planet faced, trailing a train of sharply snipped anemones. Blowsy bows knotted on the neck of each pew. Upright panels, a row of fascias, like wooden men in white ties standing to attention. Lilies and phlox draped on the golden bow of the brass rail of the high altar.

Soft satin slippers beating softly with each step like the wings of gentle moths, two small silk chariots transporting her, with ringlet ribbon reins, and a bell on each heel.

Past faces from her childhood, past faces from her past, all smiling best smiles under best hats. Stone cherubs with filled-in plaster eyes, blind to it all, but all-knowing like Tiresias, they've witnessed it before.

He takes her hand, all rise. Singing from the heart finally breaks hers. Through the veil suddenly seeing a compound-eye view, like a wasp frantic in a jar, a stained glass window glowing red, like jam.

Glad of the veil now, billowing and gathering around her head as she runs away, it's like fleeing in a fog, like drawing a soon to be discarded veil over everything. One satin slipper on the chancel steps, she wears the other.