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## The Orange Grove: Mother-of-the-bride blubbering

Mom looks for help  
 keeping her composure on  
 daughter's big day

By **KATHLEEN CLARY MILLER**

The former San Juan Capistrano writer now lives in Montana

This Mother's Day, I find myself in the midst of several motherly experiences. My oldest daughter has moved to New York, my youngest to Arizona, and I from San Juan Capistrano to Missoula, Mont. My father lives faraway in an Alzheimer's facility – the staff has accepted my handoff of the the eldest-daughter mothering torch.

To heap emotion upon emotion, I am preparing to become the Mother of the Bride. Just finding the dress is enough to make any grown, menopausal woman cry. And cry I have. My daughter isn't walking down that

chapel aisle for months, yet already all it took was for the organist displaying keyboard capability in order to procure an advance deposit for me to know that I am in for some serious maternal trouble.

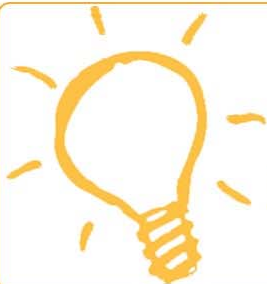
By the third note of "Here Comes The Bride," I was turning my back in order to wipe copious tears and squelch slobbering sobs. Danger. And tranquilizers aren't the answer; once I had to ingest one prior to surgery. I drooled while sitting erect and stared until my eyeballs were as dry as pingpong balls. Red ones.

I'm not pretty when I cry. Some women weep gracefully; they dab a lovely handkerchief to the outside corner of the eye and don't even sniffle. My complexion gets splotchy, my mouth curls downward, and my lips quiver and turn blue. In fact, my entire face contorts so that I resemble something feral. This happens to me at funerals. I must not let it occur at my dearest darling's happiest day.

"What is the matter with me?" I asked Kathy, the Mother of the Groom-Who-I-Adore, who accompanied us on our interview with the musician.

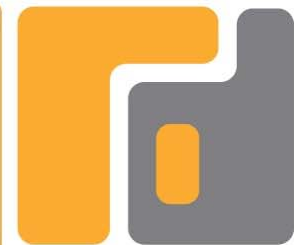
"I'm having trouble myself," she empathized. It's true; I did notice her pivot and twist away as we listened to the organist. She's marrying off her youngest son, so it's entirely possible we both might need

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intervention.

After driving back to Missoula from Seattle, where the big day will dawn and the vows will be recited, I still struggled to get a grip. In the car while running errands, I was ambushed by country Western songs on the radio, especially one by a father and daughter, about her "starting out the rest of her life." I had to pull over.

Time to get help. I couldn't hope to entirely squelch my emotions on the big day, but I could at least figure out how to camouflage the horror that is my face at such times and the guttural growl that becomes my voice. I had to think of something for my daughter's sake, as well as every guest in attendance.

Mr. Manners is Missoula's own "Prince of the Proper." Short of medication, he was my last, best hope. In between bouts of effusive emotion, I managed a quick phone call.

"What is the protocol for such maternal meltdown? Do I pocket Kleenex to camouflage catastrophe?" I queried.

Mr. Manners considered the formality of the occasion. "Always a handkerchief, because Kleenex leaves behind debris. An especially special handkerchief," He replied.

How wise.

Perhaps, as opposed to sifting through my mother's linen lovelies, an act that would only serve to trigger more nostalgic musings and more crying, I could go hankie shopping. Shopping never fails to be therapeutic.

"I would take medication so as not to overdo it or be carried away," Mr. Manners also advised.

I hadn't clued him in as to my catatonic reaction to simple sinus remedies, let alone anti-anxiety aids. He continued to offer solace, as I remained somewhat skeptical of my ability to hurdle my wedding-day weakness.

"Emotion [to a degree] on that day is expected of the Mother of the Bride. Even the bride subconsciously expects a show," he pointed out.

She'd get one, all right. Just as I was beginning to wonder if Mr. Manners could help someone as hopeless as me, he uttered the words that soothed my agitated soul.

"The moment is to be remembered, and memories are attached to emotions. The handkerchief should be made known to the bride beforehand as something just for the occasion. Then afterward, it will be set aside until she attends her own daughter's wedding. Passing on good wishes through

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generations of worthy women."

I liked that notion immensely. "Something old," as the saying goes. Perhaps I *will* dig out that delicate lace-trimmed hankie that my mother had wept into.

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