

## Wrapped in Black; Wed in White

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I didn't cry on my wedding day—just my wedding night. I'm not easily tempted to tears, especially when I'm so excited I can't sit still, but when I had to give up the dress? Whoa to those who would part a girl and her gown.

My husband will tell you, not-so-silent tears slid down my morning after cheeks as I hung up the dress of my dreams. I loved that gown so much, if I were to get married all over again—to the same wonderful man, of course—I would wear it once more. If I could get into it.

No matter what a bride's style, I've never met one who didn't spend a good portion of her nuptial planning praying for the Fairy Gown-Godmother to lead her to that one dress with the power to transform her into the belle of her own ball.

And Emirati women are no different. Despite the fact the national women of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) daily face the world swathed in black, they say "I do" to white when it comes to their weddings.

Taking you back where I left you last column, you might recall the buffet of beast had been laid before us at a local wedding in Abu Dhabi. And that the "beast" was camel and the "us" were womenfolk because segregation doesn't stop at the school ground in Arabia. While Emirati men and women exchange vows together before their families, when it comes to the reception, there's no mixing—and I don't just mean of drinks.

When I first arrived at the "women's wedding", I wanted nothing more than a crisp glass of Gewürztraminer but because Muslims do not drink alcohol, there was an absence of bar, along with the unmistakable missing of men.

A friend and I were seated with a few other western women, along with a couple of Christian ladies from Lebanon and while I didn't care for the camel and got a bit grossed out by the goat, the deserts were divine and the coffee crazy strong.

If the Arabian java didn't wake me up, the wailing of women might have. They took to the stage like divas to the dance floor. About twenty of them swarmed



Photo Paul Linden

to the spot lit runway, whipping their waist-long hair around and i-yi-yaying at the top of their lungs. Eyebrows raised as high as our necklines, my friend and I exchanged looks of bewilderment, not only at the drama before us but also at our conservative selves.

Unsure what to wear to such an

occasion, we'd opted for the safe route, donning long-sleeved suits, while up on stage beautiful women whipped more than their hair around. Full-figured femme fatales in daring dresses danced a part of a dizzying cultural ritual.

"This looks like a mating dance," I mused, to which my Lebanese colleague replied, "It is. There might not be any men here to see it, but there are potential mother in laws. If a woman sees something her son might like, she'll seek information about the young lady in hopes of setting the couple up."

There was merriment and music, more food and fun, until at long last an excited hush descended upon the tent as the bride's relatives took to the stage bringing—gasp—men with them.

Fathers of the family, the men danced as deftly with camel sticks in hand as rhythmic gymnasts waving their wands.

And then, because it was her day, the bride finally appeared. She shimmered like a star, the beautiful beadwork and sparkling sequins of her gown glittering in the spotlight as she shyly sashayed down the runway. An elephant-sized emerald hung from her neck, held by platinum claws on the dazzling diamond necklace she wore. It's hard to say whether her head was slightly stooped so that she might be deemed demure or because she was secretly struggling to keep it aloft with the weight of the jewels at her neck.

Her makeup was equally heavy, the thickly applied green eye shadow matching the teardrop emerald in colour and weight. But when the groom gallantly grasped her hand, leading her to the front of the stage before whisking her away, she was light as air and all smiles.

I can't help but wonder though if the emerald wasn't the only teardrop that fell when she hung up that dress.