

What happens... After 'I do'?

Writer and author **CHARLOTTE WARD** had to call 999 twice on her big day – but was still sad when it was finally all over

I'd planned our wedding day and happy-ever-after with fine-detailed precision. After swishing gracefully down the aisle with my new husband I would make the dreamy transition to married life. In reality as I shuffled awkwardly out of the church, hindered by the heel of one of my sparkly silver shoes (it had got caught on the delicate lace of my wedding dress) it was the start of a good life lesson that things rarely go to plan.

Following our ceremony, we made the five-minute journey back to my parents' house for the reception. After posing for our newlywed shots we gathered the rest of the family for photos. Only my husband's parents were nowhere to be found.

Worryingly, one of the guests recalled seeing my American in-laws hire car taking a wrong right turn at one of the roundabouts my father-in-law so dreaded. A search party was dispatched.

Time ticked on and my new husband paced anxiously up and down while my father alerted Wiltshire police. After two hours the time had come to get the guests into the marquee and the food could be held back no longer. Just as we were considering cancelling the wedding breakfast, a red Ford Fiesta rounded the corner and there were my in-laws smiling sheepishly. They were keen to tell us all about their magical mystery tour, but we bundled them into the tent for the first course.

We'd had more than enough drama for one day, but later in the evening I noticed that one-by-one members of my family were disappearing from the marquee. I found everyone huddled in the kitchen looking worried. It transpired that my mum's knee had given way on the dance floor. She was awaiting a taxi to take her to the hospital. I spent my wedding night unable to sleep and texting my sister, who had accompanied Mum to hospital, for updates. They eventually returned home at 4am, Mum hobbling on crutches.

What no one tells you about being married is that you'll miss your wedding day dreadfully once it has gone. You've spent months



building up to it, painstakingly planning the flowers, dresses, food, music and décor then in a few hours it is all over. It sounds silly but it was several weeks before I could look at my photos without feeling sad.

The other surprising sense of loss I experienced was my surname. I expected to be excited to change it, but updating it on Facebook felt strange, like I was bidding a part of me goodbye.

When I scroll through the Facebook snaps of my happy day, there is one picture I cannot miss – a photo booth shot featuring five of my friends holding up a chalkboard sign. It cheekily reads: 'Next stop, babies!' Two months later, as friends and relatives probed me for 'news', it was actually my little sister who surprised everyone by announcing her pregnancy. I was convinced it wouldn't happen for me and drowned my sorrows with sangria on a night out.

It seems silly to have worried so much, especially when within a year of our wedding – and just a month after my sister – we welcomed our baby into the world. He was born in the USA where we returned to start a new life after our wedding.

I hardly notice that I have a husband (and now a son) of a different nationality. But living in a conservative, highly religious town in the MidWest, rarely a day goes past without the reminder that I'm an 'alien' living in a place far from where I grew up.

This includes constant excitement over my accent, (and now my name thanks to Princess Charlotte) people asking me which church I go to and the fact that my husband often has to translate for me (in my mother tongue!) in restaurants.

When I first got engaged, my wedding felt like the final destination. Now I know it was simply the first stop on an exciting, joint adventure into the unexpected. Not least now the seasonal experience of being forced to hunker down in the basement during 'tornado warnings' when the weather sirens sound...

A sign cheekily read "Next stop, babies!"