

everything
but the
groom!



The Big Day!

In the morning, I wake up for my big day, only to look in the mirror and see that my eye is red and oozy with conjunctivitis. In the hotel lobby I meet Natsumi, who pretends not to notice. We take a taxi to a fashionable part of town, where we meet wedding stylist Mayumi Hayashi and wedding photographer Yuhino Suzuki.

I rarely dress up – in fact, putting a brush through my hair is a big occasion. Mayumi is up for the challenge, though, and places my hair in curlers before beginning to apply my makeup, expertly covering my weeping eye. I put on my dress and look in the mirror ... the reality is matronly, I look like ... the Queen!

We make our way to the Shugakuin Kirara Sanso Japanese garden, where I am photographed getting out of the car, walking in the garden and standing beneath the blossom. I pose for the customary wedding shots. No shots with the groom, sadly. I personally would have liked a fake husband in my photos.

There is no actual solo wedding ceremony, which is a shame, because I had imagined promising to love myself for richer, for poorer. But Natsumi says clients are often surprised by the self-confidence they gain from it. 'A solo wedding is a celebration of yourself. Many women have given up on getting married, and this makes them realize marriage isn't the only goal in life.'

Back home

Upon my return from Japan, I started dating someone. I wondered if my luck with men would now change. Sadly, this relationship also ended abruptly. Perhaps I'll find someone one day – but I don't need to have a big wedding. I already have my photo album. I am surprised to find that I love showing it off – I happened to meet Oscar-winning actress, Marion Cotillard, so I showed her my wedding pictures. 'It's depressing,' she said. 'These photos are very sad.'

**spinster = an unmarried woman
(very old-fashioned)*



- 5 Read *Getting ready for the Big Day*. Read the summary below. It has seven mistakes. Correct them.

Cerca Travel has been run by **Natsumi Akai** for the last five years. Natsumi started the idea of solo weddings because she was stood up by her boyfriend. Over 100 Japanese women have since paid for the experience. Natalie has always dreamed of looking like a princess in a beautiful wedding dress and is excited by the idea of choosing one. She tries one on and is surprised by how lovely she looks. She chooses the eighth one she tries.

- 6 Read the rest of the article.

- 1 In what ways was Naomi disappointed by her Big Day?
- 2 What was disappointing when she returned home? What was a pleasant surprise?

What do you think?

- Do you agree with Marion Cotillard that the photos are sad? Why/Why not?
- Why do you think Naomi uses the old-fashioned word 'spinster' to describe herself? What is a more modern description?
- Do you believe a solo wedding could increase self-confidence? Why/Why not?
- Do you think a man would ever want a solo wedding? Why/Why not?

▶ **Watch** a video about the amazing things the magician, Martin Rees, has done.

