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Vows: I Choose You...

You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving. The great acts of love are done by those who are habitually performing small acts of kindness. We pardon to the extent that we love. Love is knowing that even when you are alone, you will never be lonely again. And the great happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved. Loved for ourselves. And even loved in spite of ourselves...— Les Miserables by Victor Hugo

Krystal Tatiana Chong wed Lasse Hamre on Saturday, May 27 at The Trident Castle, Port Antonio. Vows shares the journey to the altar, as told by the bride.

Lasse and I had our fourth date in August 2013 at the Trident Hotel in Port Antonio. It was just us, with no distractions or New York flashiness, and having nothing but our raw selves to share with the other, it's where we really fell in love and knew we had found something we had been looking for our whole lives the ability to fit with someone so well, you not only feel you can be yourself, but you become a better, more comfortable version of yourself with that person. I remember he whispered to me that weekend, as we lay in a hammock, under the blue sky with the crashing waves, "I just feel at home with you," and I knew for the first time I had felt the same.

Four years later, on Saturday, May 27, we were married at the exact location, far from alone this time but flanked by 95 of our closest friends and family. Fifty of the guests travelled from Norway, Australia, Vancouver, Switzerland and all over the US.

When we began planning the wedding, Lasse, a usually very easy-going guy, was adamant about only one thing: that he wanted to have it in Jamaica. So when I knew we were going to invite people to travel, 48 hours in some cases, to come to my home country, the only thing I was adamant about was that I wanted to show them the very best of Jamaica.

And for me that's the place where Las and I fell in love, my favourite part of Jamaica: Portie. I wanted to show them the multi-dimensional depth of our island, that you can find in no other place in the world but Jamaica. So for Thursday, we planned a hang out with patties and Red Stripe beers at Blue Hole followed by chic cocktails at the Trident Hotel bar. On Friday, a beach party at Frenchman's Cove with jerk chicken, reggae band and fresh coconuts. And on Saturday, the wedding day, we planned a mystical black-tie wedding in the forest of the Trident Castle.

When planning the wedding, I knew for certain that I wanted it to be true to who Lasse and I were. I would rather not have had a wedding, than have one that I felt didn't represent us. I wanted it to be filled with meaning and a warm and embracing love. I wanted it to feel magical and uplifting. I wanted our guests to get to know us, and each other and to have the time of their lives. And every decision I made was based on that.

For instance, I remember saying to Aiesha Panton, the event designer, "I want the chairs in the ceremony to be placed in a semi-circle around us, so it felt like we were all part of one big hug." I wanted to use a spiritual guy instead of a priest and I remember saying to him, "I don't want anything long, drawn out or preachy. I just want it to be relaxed, inspiring, warm, love-filled and full of depth."

Instead of *Bible* verses, which make me feel stiff and constricted, I chose excerpts from *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo, *Marriage is Love* by Gloria Matthews and *Mandolin* by Louis de Berniere, that demonstrated the magnificent power of love. We read vows, but we used our own, which held meaning significant to us and what we have been through in our relationship. There was no cake-cutting, because that held absolutely no meaning for us which made time for more speeches — which was what Lasse and I were looking forward to the most — to hear from the people who have shaped our lives and are so responsible for our happiness and where we are now. For the same reason, there were no toasts to the parents. We asked our parents to make speeches, instead.

True to who Lasse and I are — tradition was not the name of the game, but only when it lent a hand to making the experience better for us and our guests. For example, I made my entrance to the classical, *Canon in D* instrumentals because it felt right, but mixed the ceremony songs with ones I thought were meaningful to us.

All in all, I wanted it to feel sophisticated but warm. Ethereal, mystical, magical, but natural and organic. I wanted everyone to feel fluid and connected. I wanted people to feel grounded and uplifted. We wanted it to be intimate, which is why we kept the guest list under 100.

The element of sophistication was brought in with the dress code, the castle backdrop for ceremony, the live jazz singer and pianist and certainly the food. The elements of 'magical organic' were brought in with the reception in the forest and the hanging lights. We used colours that make me feel peaceful yet energetic, like white, forest green and beige. We used simple, soft, romantic florals and lots of rich greenery. Lots of loose hanging lights, birch wood, candles etc.

There is really only one decorator who could have captured the essence I wanted the evening to have, and she certainly did: Aiesha Panton. And as an over-thinker, and someone who likes things to be done well, there is only one wedding planner who could have ensured that things went as smoothly and perfectly as they did: Kimberly Wong.

If I tried to have imagined 'wedding perfection' I would not have been able to envision the level of perfection that this day was. Not just because of the décor, and the seamless, though that helped, but because of the people who were part of it, including my now husband. It was true magic. Real, true, magic.









