

PRAISE FOR

**The
Wedding
Forecast**

'The Wedding Forecast is the definition of feel-good fiction. A romantic delight from cover to cover.'

Rachael Johns

'A fresh voice, and a charming story.'

Kylie Scott

'Lusciously romantic, big-hearted and life-affirming.'

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'The best rom-com I've read this year.'

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Big Issue

The Wedding Forecast

ALSO BY NINA KENWOOD

It Sounded Better in my Head
Unnecessary Drama

The Wedding Forecast

NINA KENWOOD



An Aria Book

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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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*For Mum and Dad,
the first people who believed in me as a writer*

PART ONE

MARCH

1

I WILL NOT cry this weekend. Not even happy tears. This is my mantra, the one thing I am determined to stick to. I am going to seal off my heart and my tear ducts and dehydrate myself and take a double dose of antihistamines, because I don't want to risk even watery eyes.

I am not, under any circumstances, going to give anyone the chance to see me, standing at the altar, dabbing my eyes as I listen to Luke and Hayley's vows, and have them think, *poor thing, she's not coping*. Because they'll assume it's about Joel. They'll assume I'm not over the breakup, or that I'm still pining for him, or that the wedding is dredging everything up, or that I'm sad about being single when he has a new partner. People project all kinds of ideas onto bridesmaids, and crying is like waving a big red pity flag.

So, no tears.

Mum seems to have the opposite goal in mind for the weekend though, because she's almost made me rage-cry twice on the drive here.

'The speed limit is eighty,' she says.

'I know. I'm doing eighty.' I am also keeping my voice very calm and neutral.

'I thought I could see your speed creeping up a bit, that's all,' Mum says.

'Let me focus on the driving, and you focus on the navigation.'

She is quiet for an ominously long time as she looks at her phone.

'Well,' she says. 'We've missed the turn.'

'What! When?'

'We needed to turn left back there.'

'How far back?'

'A little way.' This could mean anything from a few hundred metres to half an hour.

'Okay. Okay. Fine.' I swallow the urge to yell at her while doing a U-turn. This is not a big deal. This is a blip. I am remaining calm even if my head is hurting. And my back. And my neck. And my knees. Is it possible to hold tension in your knees?

I'll feel better once I'm out of the car.

Breaking up with Joel after eight years together forced me to confront a lot of things quite quickly, and the first one was the fact he did most of the driving. Early on in our relationship, the idea took hold that he was a good driver and I wasn't, and I'm not sure if there was any evidence for this belief, but we treated it like a fact, and he drove everywhere.

So this three-hour car trip to Hayley and Luke's wedding is the longest I've ever actually driven. When I mentioned this to Mum, she decided that Dad could drive to the wedding on his own and she'd keep me company. Which is

sweet. Except her presence is probably the most likely thing to cause me to have an accident.

'This is the turn,' she says.

'You're sure.'

'Yes. Wait. No.'

'Mum!'

'No, I am sure. This is it. Turn, *turn*.'

Mum reaches into the large tote bag at her feet and pulls out a packet of chocolate-coated almonds, offering them to me. She's reverting to our childhood dynamic—calming me down with treats.

'Thank you,' I say, taking a handful.

Will the sugar improve my mood or increase my anxiety? We shall soon see.

'I have something else for you,' she says, reaching down again and pulling out a package wrapped in tissue paper.

'What is it?'

'Something really nice.'

I stay silent, waiting for more.

'Something I saw and thought you could use,' she adds.

'Why are you being mysterious and weird?' I say.

'Because I don't want you to *react* or take it the wrong way,' Mum says.

I don't like where this is heading.

'Okay. I won't react. Just show me.'

Mum carefully unwraps the tissue paper and holds up a bra with a flourish. It's pretty. No, it's sexy. It has see-through, barely-there black lacy cups and a tiny satin bow in the middle. I glance at it, look back at the road, then back at the bra.

'Oh. Wow. That's very...' I say. 'Are you buying me lingerie now? Because that feels inappropriate.'

'It's just a simple black bra, darling.'

'Where is it from?'

'That doesn't matter.'

'It looks expensive.'

'It was. The lace is French.'

'Well. Thank you, I appreciate it. But I'm thirty. I can buy my own bras.'

I can't tell if this gift is about her concerns for my finances or her concern for my dating life. Probably both.

'Have you bought any lately? Because the last time I was at your place, all I saw was old sports bras on the line.'

'Mum,' I say. 'I don't want to have this conversation.'

'I just think you never know who you might meet this weekend. Or anytime. Lana's daughter met someone the last time she went to the doctor.'

'I'll make sure to do a lap of the waiting room before my next appointment.'

'All I am saying is maybe it's time for you to get back out there. And it won't hurt to have a nice bra on hand when you do.'

'I have plenty of nice bras.'

I've never really been a sexy-lingerie person. I like plain and simple underwear. I like comfortable and functional. Or maybe I'm still stuck in long-term-relationship thinking. The 'nice' bra I packed for this weekend is beige and strapless and decidedly ugly, but it works under my bridesmaid dress so that doesn't count.

'Anna, sweetheart, I just want this weekend to be fun and stress-free for you,' Mum says, putting the bra back into the tissue paper and balancing it on my overnight bag on the backseat.

'It is. It will be. Look at me. Totally stress-free.' I have sweat trickling down my back now.

'But Joel—'

'I don't want to talk about him.' She can have bras, but this is a boundary I am holding firm. I can't talk about Joel. I need at least the rest of this car trip in a nice state of denial of his existence.

'Honey, it's okay to feel emotional about this weekend.'

'I'm not emotional. Why would I be emotional? I'm extremely happy with my life.'

'Good. You should be.'

Why does this sound so patronising?

'I know. And I am.' I never sound less happy than when I am insisting I am happy.

Mum starts rifling in her bag again, and I glance over, scared of what she might pull out next. I catch sight of something green.

'Mum. Is that what I think it is.'

'I'm just putting in my eye drops,' she says, brandishing the bottle.

'I mean, the book in your bag.'

'What book?'

'You know what book.'

'Oh, your book?' She gives me a suspiciously innocent look.

'Yes. Why do you have?'—I pause and strain my neck, taking another quick look into her tote—'five copies of it in there?'

'My daughter wrote a book. Obviously I want to show it off.'

'This is *Hayley's wedding*. It's not an appropriate time to be doing that.'

'Anna, calm down. Bobbi has some family who will want to see it, that's all. And Jean's best friend from high school is coming, and she still needs to buy a copy. And Luke's family—they don't strike me as readers, but you never know.'

'Sorry. Did you say *buy* a copy?'

'Not buy *buy*. She'll give me cash and I'll give her a copy.'

'That is traditionally what it means to buy something. Mum, you can't *sell* my book at a *wedding*!'

'You are overreacting. I just know some of the people here haven't had the chance to read it yet. I've got five copies, just in case. That's all. When I talk about the book, honey, people always say "that sounds fantastic, I'd love to buy it" and this way, I can just offer them a copy on the spot.'

My headache has instantly deepened.

Is it nice to have a mother who is so proud of you she travels with a box of your books at all times? Yes, it is. Of course it is. I am very grateful. I have a grateful headache.

The book in question is *The Hike*: my debut novel, released six weeks ago, a darkly comic psychological thriller about two couples who go on a hike in New Zealand and accidentally kill someone, and then the stress of how to handle the situation leads to other secrets and tensions between them all unravelling.

This is not the best pitch. I'm still very bad at that part. But talking about your own book is an entirely different prospect from recommending someone else's book. You can't say, 'It's brilliant, trust me', or 'It's like Sally Rooney, but funnier' or 'It's a bit Ann Patchett with a touch of Curtis Sittenfeld', which are the kinds of things I say about other people's books. I can't use any adjectives about mine

without sounding arrogant. A simple ‘what’s your book about?’ question and my mind spins. My mouth starts moving and words flow out in the most disjointed way. I’ll get halfway through describing the plot (‘they accidentally kill this guy’) and backtrack to explain the main character (‘she’s unlikeable but in a good way’) and then circle around to a random part of the book that doesn’t really matter (‘oh, there’s a scene in these caves, have you ever been to New Zealand?’). I’ll start talking about *themes* (‘it’s about, like, what it means to love someone’). I’ll reference it being similar to a show they’ve never heard of (‘Do you know *Search Party*?’). And then I’ll just end by saying something like ‘It’s better than it sounds!’ and laugh weakly.

Mum has no problem with the pitch. ‘There are secrets, lies and dead bodies,’ she’ll say. ‘You’ll love it.’ Sometimes she says, ‘What’s your favourite TV show?’ and no matter what answer they give, she replies, ‘Anna’s book is like that but better.’ She has sold copies to her hairdresser, her neighbours on both sides, her dog groomer, six different people from the dog park, the barista at her local cafe and three strangers in line at the post office in the first two days of release. Her hustle is unmatched. Hayley’s mother Bobbi owns a bookshop and even she can’t match Mum’s sales tactics.

The Hike is dedicated to Mum and Dad, which in hindsight was a mistake, because I think it gave Mum too much stake in its success. She’ll flip to the dedication page at the front and say (often to a total stranger), ‘Look at this, will you,’ with her hand over her heart.

But at least I didn’t dedicate it to Joel, which I was considering at one point. It’s bad enough there are two whole

sentences mentioning him in the acknowledgments. We had broken up not long before I sat down to write them, and it was very hard to know what to do. I had four sentences about him that I deleted, then reinstated, then cut down to two, because even though we were technically broken up, I couldn't be sure we wouldn't get back together—we'd been a couple for *eight years*, he still loved me (I assumed) and that felt like it mattered. Imagine if we got back together and he wasn't mentioned at all.

In the final paragraph it says: *Thank you to Joel, for supporting me, encouraging me, and taking me on adventures. This book would not exist without you.*

At the time I thought it was quite restrained. I thought it was mature. Now it just makes me feel a bit sick. *Adventures?* The man never took me anywhere he wasn't already travelling for work.