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The Wedding Diaries

Written by Sam Binnie

Published by Avon

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SAM BINNIE

The Wedding Diaries

AVON

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1

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For J,

Bringer of sunshine

August 15th

Here's who knows about weddings: Abba. The Dixie Cups. Alfred Doolittle. All masters on the theme of matrimony, whether it's the oaths (I do), the venue (Chapel of Love) and the punctuality (on time). But can they tell me: what happens when you ruin the proposal?

It was the final night of our long weekend in Bath, an early birthday gift from me to Thom, and I was getting suspicious. Thom had been strange with me for the previous week – silent, jumpy, and staring at me when he thought I wasn't looking – and had been in an odd mood for most of the weekend. He seemed twitchy and insistent on going out for dinner when all I wanted was to sink into our hotel bed with room service and some TV, so I put two and two together and decided that five = looking for somewhere public to break up with me. I'd had passing concerns every now and again since February, when I'd ruined a Valentine's meal at a tapas bar by rifling through each dish looking for a ring that wasn't there. In the taxi to the restaurant my nerves were noticeable.

Me: Are you sure this is the restaurant you want to go to?
Thom: [silence]
Me: Oh Jesus. Please can we just go home?
Thom: [silence]
Me: Look! There's a homeless man. Are you sure you wouldn't rather take him?
Thom: [silence]
Me: Brilliant. This is *just* how I hoped my holiday would end.

I'd whipped myself up into a frenzy by this point, dizzily chattering away as we were shown to our table. All I could see was that we were tucked into a corner, out of earshot but still in eyeshot should a court case demand it. As we settled into our chairs I realised that, having been eyeballing me for the last week, Thom now wouldn't even look at me, and I began to panic. I started reading out the menu, describing each item in my cheeriest voice and making comments on the dishes with a joyful tone that kept sticking in my throat. Hurray! I was becoming my mother. When I summoned the courage to look at Thom again he was staring at me, apparently about to speak. At that moment someone started tapping a knife against a wine glass, and the restaurant went silent. A handsome, happy man rose to his feet.

Handsome Man: Sorry everyone, sorry. I'll let you go back to your delicious meals in one moment. I just need your attention for a minute. This beautiful woman here [gestures to woman apparently trying to eye-laser an escape route through their table] has made me so happy over the last two years. In front of all of you here tonight, I would like to ask her: Jen, will you do

me the great honour of becoming my one and only wife?

Jen: [blanching] Oh, Steve . . .

HM: Come on, stand up, darling! Will you join with me in holy matrimony, and finally make an honest man out of me?

Jen: I'm sorry, Steve. [picks up handbag] This isn't going to work. [walks out]

HM: [after a long silence] Sorry everyone. Sorry. Please . . . [sitting down] carry on.

I turned to Thom and he was paler than poor Steve. He actually looked as if he was going to be sick. At that moment the waiter arrived to take our order, attempting to plaster over the dreadful event the entire restaurant had just witnessed. Thom blindly ordered for both of us, which was unusual but fine by me as my stomach seemed to be about to crawl out of my throat. He couldn't break up with me now, could he? He opened his mouth to speak, his tongue dryly clicking.

Thom: Kiki, we've been together a while, and I've started thinking about where we're going—[voice disappears]

Me: [gibbering] No! Don't think about it! Although you did say that you wanted to go to Berlin, didn't you? Let's go to Berlin! That's where we can go!

Thom: [touching my hand, looking at me] Keeks. Please will you marry me?

Me: Is that a joke?

I didn't intend to say something so horribly unromantic, and a better story will definitely have to be devised for the grandchildren, but after I realised that he was serious and

Thom realised that he wasn't about to relive the Steve and Jen Story from the sharp end I couldn't stop crying. Thom moved his chair next to mine and hugged me for a really long time. Every time I'd almost calmed down, he'd say something like 'This will be brilliant' and I'd start off again. The manager was so delighted that someone would actually have a positive experience of the restaurant that night that he sent over a bottle of champagne. When we staggered out of the restaurant arm in arm and quite definitely tipsy, I kept thinking over and over: I could get used to this.

August 16th

So this is why I've started this diary. It will be a lovely keepsake of the wedding as well as a handy one-stop notebook for everything that needs to be done; all of it will live here. This organisation thing will be a lark. I've also signed up to receive a lovely inspirational email each month; a wedding from great literature. Not bad, eh? This wedding will be the making of me.

After work, we rang Thom's parents in Australia, who squealed down the phone at us and promised not to call my parents for at least an hour or two, giving us time to break the news. Alan and Aileen are dream in-laws-to-be: funny, thoughtful, kind and on the other side of the world, having emigrated there on retirement three years ago. Thom's an only child, and Alan and Aileen said they knew they didn't have to worry about him so would go and warm their bones for a while, just outside Sydney. They love it over there: the weather, the food, and their neighbours, but they say they miss us.

Mum and Dad were over the moon when they heard our

news. They've always loved Thom (a little bit more than they love me, if my suspicions are correct) and jumped from their armchairs when Thom announced our engagement. Well, I say jumped: Mum leapt up and started kissing everyone while Dad's face glowed, then he carefully lifted himself from his chair to pump Thom's hand up and down and envelop me in a lovely Dad-hug. Mum was already crying, and when Dad whispered, 'Well done, my girl – he better look after you or he'll have me to deal with,' I was laughing and choking up a bit too. Dad might be six foot four and solid as an old brick shed, but he's the kindest, most gentle person you could ever wish to meet. He retired early from a very dull senior job in a law firm and, while all his cronies were perfecting their golf swing and talking about running for parliament, Dad saw a TV programme about fine-working silver, took a short course and was such a natural that he now teaches Jewellery Making at the local sixth-form and adult college. He produces such beautiful, delicate pieces, necklaces and rings and gorgeous Christmas ornaments for the Twins, all of which seem impossible until you see his long, fine fingers, and all of which go with his brilliant, lovely mind, and all of which make you wonder how he managed to spend all those years in a legal office. A girl couldn't wish for a better dad.

Once Mum had mopped her eyes a bit, she found a dusty old bottle of pre-mixed Buck's Fizz from some party back in 1987 and we all toasted one another.

Mum: Congratulations to you both!

Dad: We're so proud of you two. We wish you every happiness.

Thom: Tessa, John – if we can spend one day of marriage as happy as you have always been, I'll consider us truly blessed.

Me: I'm not particularly comfortable with public displays of emotion, but I will raise a toast to that. To my mum and dad, and the giant wedding extravaganza that will make their daughter as happy as they are!

Mum rolled her eyes a little at that but Dad chuckled, and on cue the phone rang: Thom's mum. Leaving the mothers to discuss hats (or whatever), Thom bundled me into the car to go and see Susie, just around the corner, after swearing Mum and Dad (Mum) to secrecy for the next half-hour. Susie's been my sister for about as long as I can remember, being two years older than me, and – if I block the time she cut all my hair off when I was four – has been my best friend for pretty much the entire time. Susie, Pete and the kids live in a lovely old terraced house, extended almost into oblivion by the previous owners, so although the front is tiny, it opens out into a huge warehouse space once you get inside. The front door is tricky to get through, though, being jammed with children's boots and coats, Pete's souvenirs from around the world and a huge window seat that doesn't fit in the hallway but Susie insists is necessary, glamorous hallway furniture. She's going through a Sunset Boulevard stage at the moment, so thinks a lilac velvet chaise longue is exactly what a terrace in North Finchley requires.

She opened the door to us in her apron (not only her apron, obviously) with hands covered in flour and her six-year-old twins Lily and Edward scampering around her.

Lily and Edward: Thom! Hurray!
Thom: Susie. Children. [picks the Twins up by their ankles and carries them off upside down to the garden]
Me: [faintly] Hi . . . children . . .
Susie: Come and have a drink.

Oh, Susie, so good with the drinks offers. After Mum's ecstasies, I could have murdered a Band on the Run. She held up her floury hands and kicked a foot towards the fridge for me to help myself. After rummaging around for a while, I gave her my most disgusted look.

Me: You don't have anything to drink, do you?
Susie: Ooooh . . . funny you should say that. I bought some vodka a few months ago—
Me: [snatching up a pair of kitchen tongs and brandishing them in her face] *Susie* . . .
Susie: No. We probably don't. Sorry!
Me: Is Pete around to do an alcohol run?
Susie: Since it's neither Christmas nor the Twins' birthday, I think it's safe to assume he's not.

Also, Susie: not so good with *possessing* the wonderful drinks she offers. But the few times she has, combined with the frequency of her offers means she is somehow still seen as a glorious homemaker. I blame Lily and Edward. Their charm and beauty distract from the true horrors of their mother's hostess talents. And since Susie's husband Pete is almost never at home to ease her household burden, frequently away with his glamorous travel agent job, the fact that her children still have their full complement of fingers/legs/heads ought really to be enough for us.

We chatted for a minute or two, until I reminded her of my weekend away with Thom. I knew she wasn't really paying attention when she asked for details since she was so busy rolling out scores of pastry cases for some school event; I repaid her with a mind-numbing parody of our mother's anecdotes, in the style of a particularly dry shopping list.

Me: . . . And then we looked at the baths, so that was five o'clock, then we went back to the hotel, then we changed and went to dinner, at seven . . . no, eight . . . no . . . was it? . . . No. Eight o'clock. Then we were at the restaurant. Oh. And then he proposed.

Susie: [stunned] Is that a joke?

And they say we Carlows are unromantic. Besides our inability with languages (Susie and I once took a trip to Italy in our teens and when our passports were stolen, discovered that the only Italian we'd picked up was seventeen different kinds of pasta) it seems we also face romantic situations with the same facial expression and tone of voice of someone asked to kick a piglet.

When she realised that I wasn't joking, she lifted a floury hand to her throat, then clasped my hands between hers. As she warmly expressed her joy and excitement with little giggles and happy sighs, and clutched my arms, I suddenly twigged what she was up to, and looked down to find myself covered in flour up to the elbows. She started backing away, chuckling, but I held up my hands – Peace – and promised that I only wanted to wipe the mess off her neck. When she gave me that fatal moment of trust, I grabbed as much flour as I could from the counter and ground it into her hair.

Thom came in with the children moments later to find me bent over the worktop as Susie held my ponytail and rubbed my face in the flour, both of us weak with laughter. Susie called the Twins over.

Susie: [sternly] I don't ever want to see you doing this to another child, do you understand?

Twins: Yes, Mummy.

Edward: [thoughtful] But can we do it to adults?

Susie: No.
Lily: But we can do it to Aunt Kiki?
Thom and Susie: *Yes*.

TO DO:
Dress
Venue
Food
Honeymoon
Find out if I absolutely *have* to invite own sister

August 18th

My colleagues at Polka Dot Books were exactly as supportive as I'd expected: Alice was excited, Carol suspicious ('And how long will you be expecting to take for Honeymoon?' Me, to self: Why is she making that sound like a disgusting illness?) and Norman apathetic. Carol's our Commissioning Editor at Polka Dot and one of the grumpiest people I've met, but she speaks with such a beautiful tone, like a cross Joanna Lumley, that I never really mind her irritable pronouncements, while Norman, Head of Accounts and taciturn to the point of muteness mostly, would be newsworthy if something caused him to react at all. Alice is my closest friend there, and a member of the Hamilton family, of Hamilton Industry fame, the tooth-achingly rich owners of 60% of the world's chalk mines. I still can't tell if Alice works here for a dare, or if she's trying to prove something to her parents. She got the job through connections, of course, her father being the godson of our boss's mother (this is what Alice's whole life is like), so I was tempted to tip her off the fire escape when she joined the company. She's always immaculately dressed in DVF or modern Chanel with

a few choice pieces of Whistles and Topshop thrown in, and I've never, ever seen her with egg on her blouse or a large bump of hair sticking out the top of her ponytail. Her handbags alone would be enough to make a grown woman weep, but combine that with the face of an angel and the wallet of a Trump and Alice completely terrifies most of our authors (while others are completely in love with her – one a little bit of both), so she turned out to be a great guard dog for the office. It also gradually became clear that like many of those lusciously maned ex-Edinburgh Uni girls, she was great at publicity, pulling on her spiderweb to get our authors into great magazines and media slots, so we all had a meeting behind her back and decided we'd let her live. She's incredibly posh but undercuts it all with a deadpan humour that took me three months to get but now is my favourite thing about going to work each day. She can say anything – literally, *anything* – to our authors and to Tony, the boss, and they might blink for a second but will never, ever disbelieve her or question quite how filthy/offensive/untrue what it is she's saying.

But it was a surprise for my boss to be so gleeful. He doesn't really approve of personal lives.

Tony: What's all this fuss about?
Me: [nervous] Oh . . . It looks like I'll be getting married next year.
Tony: Fine. [suddenly paying attention] Really? That's brilliant! Brilliant! What great news!
Me: Ummm . . . yes?
Tony: No, that's great! Have you got much planned?
Me: Well, it's still pretty early, so—
Tony: Brilliant stuff. Good. Well, this couldn't have come at a better time. I've got a new book for you!

New book was selling it somewhat short. Through some hideous Machiavellian scheming that I definitely don't want to know about, Polka Dot Books have somehow landed model/soapstar/popstar Jacki Jones's book – and it turns out that since she too is getting married next year, it's going to be a wedding book.

I'm a humble editorial assistant at Polka Dot Books, a smallish publisher of very commercial titles (the books you'd see at the supermarket mostly) which was opened in the eighties by Tony's parents. They kept their small family firm under the radar by publishing nothing arthouse, nothing controversial, nothing groundbreaking, just making cheap populist paperbacks available to a hungry public. Tony's father died when he was young, but his mother, Pamela, is still around, and Tony lives in awe and terror of her. She, in her turn, has rewritten the importance of Polka Dot into something comparable to the Gutenberg press, defending the honour of her publishing house by criticising most of what we publish. She also holds the family purse strings, and is the majority stockholder here (rumour has it she gave Tony 10% of the company on his 21st birthday, certain – and correct in her certainty – that those shares would keep him attached to the Polka Dot where mere maternal threats might fail). He's worked harder than his 10% would warrant, some might argue, doing a fairly good job (although the office hasn't been repainted in almost a decade, at least it's still open) with little from her but an occasional visit to snoop at the books 'she's' publishing.

Since arriving here four years ago my duties have officially been limited to office diary management and author care (patting the authors on the head, making sure they know how to get in and out of a taxi, taking them to the BBC and showing them where the door is for them to walk through, giving them a snack and carton of squash when they get

fractious) with a little bit of editing on the side, although actually I've done so much 'editing on the side' that Tony's been promising me my own titles for almost a year now. So I should be excited that I've finally got one, and such an exciting one at that. But the fact that Tony's given me a book to work on at all (and such an exciting one, etc.) has rather set alarm bells ringing. What's so wrong with this author or this book that Tony is happy – and I mean *happy* – to hand it over to his assistant? The thought that this is finally a charitable move on his part is quite literally incredible, so I shall have to wait and see why *Jacki Jones's Perfect Wedding* is so monstrous that Tony Cooper, big fish in this small Polka Dot pond, has washed his hands of it. At least I might be able to pinch something from the photo shoots, I suppose.

When I came out of Tony's office, Alice was smiling wistfully.

Alice: I was engaged once.
Me: [shocked] Were you?! When? How?
Alice: Thank you for your incredulity, Kiki. I was engaged when I was seventeen, to the first man I ever slept with. Mummy and Daddy didn't really like him, and it didn't last long. After we broke up, he kidnapped a girl who looked exactly like me but he got off on an insanity plea.

Her tale was so awful, but Alice's straight-faced delivery and shrug – what? Doesn't that happen to everyone? – meant that I couldn't stop laughing for fifteen minutes. She came out as gay in her early twenties, to everyone except her parents. She now lives with a man she describes as 'so dim it hurts to talk to him', sharing a two-bed flat and moving into one room when her parents visit. Soon after I met her, I asked her why she was with him. She said, 'I'm

not *with him*, with him. Anyway, he's really kind, he has an amazing collection of obscure science-fiction novels and my mother loves him. It keeps them off my back.'

It's not a large company – Tony, Editorial Director; Carol, Commissioning Editor; Norman, Accounts; an Art team of three, Dan, Mark and Nayla; a part-time Sales team of five; Alice and two others, one freelance and one part-time, make up Marketing and Publicity; a marvellous Production duo; whichever intern we've signed up for the month (currently Judy the Intern, who, now I think about it, seems to have been here for*ever*); various other freelancers; and me. In the early glory days of Polka Dot Books there was talk of moving to a building with a reception desk where guests would be warmly greeted and actually assisted, rather than bumbling up the stairs until someone recognises them, but one thing after another meant we're still in this sad office block off Baker Street – a lovely location, but a structure that is surely only standing because the developers haven't decided what to build on top of its shattered wreckage. The office itself is some odd hybrid of Dickensian lair and supermarket warehouse: books are piled on every surface, blocking windows and propping open doors, but each book usually has either glitter or a sexy-looking weapon on the front and back (each with a heavily airbrushed author photo). These are not Booker winners. But they keep people reading, and they pay for a roof over my head. I'm a fan.

TO DO:
Venue – location?
Dress – book Suse to come
Investigate how cross Mum will be if I don't ask her to come dress shopping too
Honeymoon – New York? Berlin?
Buy bridal magazines

August 20th

Tony's very kindly ordered a pile of wedding books For Reference Purposes before I get to work on Jacki's book. I am indeed referring to them, not least to work out the things I need to get done over the next few months. Some more for the list:

TO DO:
Announce our engagement – email? Newspaper? Rooftops?
Engagement party – usual gang? usual place? Friday night?
Sort wedding date – August? (nice weather)
Choose a colour scheme – blues? Nautical but Nice? Pinks? Like a big bruise? Or . . . all green. The Wedding of Oz.
Ask Suse about colour schemes
Dress – decide what shape I want (fishtail, strapless, A-line, column, empire, spherical, whatever)
Find magazine images of veils, accessories I like (who has *veil* preferences?)
Music for reception – see if Thom would be happy for Jim to find local band?

August 23rd

Here, for the record, is how we met.

One day, seven years ago exactly, I'd come to stay with Susie and Pete during a university holiday, and was working at a terrible data-entry job, typing in the details of vacuum cleaner warrantees for seven hours a day. Susie – young, carefree, albeit recently married – had called me up and said, 'Stop moping over your horrible lists. No one should have to care about vacuum cleaner purchase histories. If you haven't met

your quota, you can hang yourself later. You're coming dancing with us tonight.'

There was a big gang of them going out, a group from Susie's radio station, all impossibly cool to someone still not quite officially in the big wide world, even though most of them were only a couple of years older than me. One of them had a birthday so they were all heading east to some super-chic bar, and Susie was insisting I join them. It was either that or an evening in with Pete (he was exhausted from his new job at a travel company) so I bolted back to the flat, threw on Susie's favourite dress, pinned up my hair, and was out the door before Pete could regale me with a hilarious double-booking anecdote. When I got to Bar Electric – a bar so cool they simply put their records on shelves along the walls, so their hipster crowd could help themselves – Susie's original gang had swelled to include other friends of friends, so I was tucked into the booth next to someone Susie didn't know, so couldn't introduce me to, while she went to get drinks. I had no eyes for the company though, because I couldn't take my eyes off a guy I'd spotted the second I walked in. He had to be the best-looking human being I'd ever seen in my life. Piercing blue eyes, a half-smiling mouth, thick, perfectly-not-styled hair, and (from what I could see) a killer body: this was the full cliché. He was amazing. I couldn't believe that not only had he not had me thrown out for looking at him, but he'd actually been looking back at me, talking to his friend, looking at me, turning back to the friend but constantly seeing if I was still looking at him. He was *amazing*. Susie arrived with my drink shortly after, which I necked in my nervousness.

This went on for a while, until, after chugging four drinks and ignoring everyone else at our table, I'd gained enough confidence. I told Susie I was going over. She goggled her eyes at me and told me to take care and to

be careful; she was pretty hammered too by that stage. I strutted over to where he was sitting by a wall of vinyl, and flicked through one box of records for a while. I could see a better lot higher up, and reached up as far as I could to access the Whitney Houston winking to me from its heavy wooden box. I stretched up past Handsome Man to show off my body at its best ('Look how slender and supple I am,' etc.) and just got my fingertips to it, pulling, lifting it down – and it teetered, overbalanced, tipped off the edge and punched its full weight directly into my eye socket. I screamed: 'Mother*fucker*!' and doubled over, clutching my hand to my face, while bar staff hurried up to pick up the box and check the records were OK. Susie rushed across to take me back to the table where she could check me over, and I got a quick glimpse of the exquisite discomfort on Handsome Man's face. As Suse sat me down, I saw him getting his coat and pals and leaving the place, unable to look in my direction. Susie was drunkenly flustering a bit, but out of nowhere came a pint glass full of ice and a bar towel. I looked up and saw a guy turning away, sitting back down at the other side of the booth and continuing his conversation with some of Susie's gang.

I poured a handful of ice into the towel and put it to my face. I watched him as he was talking. He was so *good* looking: not hip, not breathtaking, not someone who would stop you in your tracks as you walked down the street, but with a face that looked *good*. Someone you would trust with your dog, your grandma, your handbag, your life. 'When did *he* get here?' I asked Susie. She looked at me, laughing. 'Cuckoo, he's been here all night.' Just at that moment, he turned to me and smiled. And my heart disappeared somewhere out the top of my skull.

(Just for the record, turns out the Twins were conceived that night. *Who* had to be careful, Susie?)

Seven years ago today, Thom was out with his new work colleagues for his birthday. Happy birthday, you good man.

August 26th

I love our flat. It's tiny, absolutely tiny, but I like it. Our landlord is totally brilliant – he lives in Canada so if anything goes wrong he just sends us money to fix it – and you get brilliant light in the living room in the summer. The kitchen is big enough for one (two if someone gets a chair and sits on the landing) which is just how I like it, the bathroom has a bath *and* a shower, and the bedroom has a king-size bed in. This is everything anyone could need in a home. Add to that our neighbours downstairs – a couple in their forties always offering us their lovely cast-offs, including a beautiful enamel casserole and an Art Deco glass jug recently – and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Thom, I think, could stand to live a little further from my family; Susie's five minutes' walk away and my mum and dad three minutes' drive, but it's not like she's one of those creepy mums who keeps a key to all her children's homes and lets herself in to do the laundry and washing up. Although if I could guarantee we'd always be out when she came, that wouldn't necessarily be the worst thing in the world. I've lived in a few places since leaving home, but we all ended up in the same neighbourhood, which still surprises me.

We had a tough Sunday afternoon in the flat, dealing with all the various key points. Organising weddings is hard work.

Me: I was thinking about the wedding party. Susie and Eve for my bridesmaids?
Thom: Do you even like Eve?
Me: Thom! She's my oldest friend.
Thom: I thought as much.
Me: Have you sorted out your best man yet?
Thom: I thought Rich.
Me: Of course. And when shall we do this thing? August?
Thom: Why not? If we do it near my birthday I'll have no excuse for forgetting our anniversary.
Me: Right. Done.
Thom: Another beer?
Me: Sure. We've earned it.

TO DO:
Relax. This stuff basically organises itself.

August 28th

Christ. Who knew you had to make an appointment just to try a dress on? Alice asked me where I'd booked, then had to explain it to me two or three times before I'd believe her. Not to be measured, not to be fitted, just to pull on a dress to see if you like it. Jesus. I've now made appointments at two wedding dress shops nearby for early September. Susie's booked Pete to be at home for once so she can leave Lily and Edward with him, and we'll have lunch and cocktails either side of the fittings. Is it wrong to feel like I'm doing charity work when I manage to take Susie out without the children? Giving her a window back into Living as an Independent Adult? Anyway, I'm led to believe the dress will be the trickiest bit of this whole wedding; Mum has demanded photos of everything I try on. I wonder if she bothered with all this for Dad?

Or did she find a dress in her local shop, get a matching hat and let the pub know there might be more of them than usual for lunch? I rather think he might have encouraged the latter.

TO DO:
Honeymoon – get guidebook for Indonesia
Think about ceremony and reception
Food – don't forget a veg option
Buy some more bridal magazines
Hen night?

August 29th

For the sake of posterity, I shall explain who some of the people in this wedding are.

Me: Bride. Full name Katherine Joan Carlow. Editorial Assistant at Polka Dot Books. Likes: almost all food, books, picnics, *Elle Deco*, Thom Sharpe. Dislikes: capers, oppression by the patriarchy, being made to watch snooker into the small hours.

Thom: Groom, Thomas William Sharpe. Accountant at corporate accountancy grindstone. Likes: twentieth-century literature, Kiki Carlow, snooker. Dislikes: most of his colleagues, anchovies, spending over £10 on three wedding magazines.

Susie: Sister of the bride, bridesmaid. Mother of the Twins, wife of Pete (a man whose passport has more stamps than a child's tantrum, and whose children have been known to confuse him with a delivery man, such is the frequency with which he arrives bearing a large parcel for them). Former leading light in radio production, now a stay-at-home mum. Incorrigible.

Rich: Best Man. Thom's oldest friend, boyfriend of lovely Heidi, computer programmer and expert pizza maker. Always welcome at our house. Especially when bearing homemade pizza.
Eve: Eve. Mmm.

I met Eve on the first day of secondary school, on the bus from the local streets of our little primary school in Finchley to the big scary comp from which we would spend the next six years dreaming of escape. She was tiny – a blonde sparrow, with thick lenses in the plastic frames of her glasses and an own-brand rucksack worn on both shoulders like a hiker. The space next to her was the only seat available, so Susie (chaperoning her baby sister) signalled me into it while she stood in the aisle, chatting to her own classmates and occasionally involving me in their conversations. Gathering confidence under the protection of my glamorous older sister I deigned to talk to this speccy mouse, and following Susie's lead, was as friendly as could be. We ended up sitting next to each other in every lesson for the next two years, until one September, Eve arrived back at school with contact lenses, breasts, and a sharp blonde bob. The ensuing attention resulted in the school authorities declaring us a bad influence on one another – ha! – and we were reduced to only hanging out every weekend, the bus to and from school and two hours on the phone each evening. We stopped being friends at the very end of the Upper Sixth, when Tim O'Connell, the crush I'd laboured under for a year and a half, finally got sick of Eve pushing her new cleavage at him and snogged her. We didn't speak for months. This was the start of a pattern: we'd visit each other at university, I'd let slip about a guy I liked, then I'd find Eve kissing him (or more) in broom cupboards, dark corners of nightclubs, brightly lit kitchens, even, at one memorable house party, my own bed.

I'd be so hurt and furious that I'd have no contact with her for months, then I'd find some old photos, or she'd be mentioned in conversation, and I'd start thinking: is she so bad? Really? And it would begin all over again.

But with Thom, it was so different. For a start, I didn't even tell her about him until we were moving in together; secondly, Thom has never liked Eve. He doesn't like the way she speaks to me, and he's no great fan of her past conduct, either.

So that goes some way to explaining why the phone call announcing our engagement went like this:

Me: Eve! It's Kiki! I've got some great news . . .

Eve: George Clooney's leaving his pig for you. You've found Atlantis.

Me: Nope. It's—

Eve: Hang on. [crashes about, away from phone] No, darling, you have to go! No, now. I'm sorry, it's a work call and I simply *have* to take it. [back on phone] Sorry. Some guy. Incredibly hot but with the smallest hands I have *ever* seen. Can you imagine some tiny ventriloquist's dummy manhandling you? Dummyhandling. God, I've absolutely no idea why I let him stay . . .

Me: Eve! Thom and I are getting married! [silence] Will you be my bridesmaid?

Eve: [long silence] Kiki, darling, can I give you a call back later? Little Miss Muffet can't find his way out. Love you!

Thom's asking why I'm writing my diary so angrily. I'd better stop for tonight before this page becomes shredded paper.

TO DO:
Rest of wedding party – best man, maid of honour, bridesmaids, ushers, ring bearer, flower girl
Find out if Thom is allowed to carry the ring himself, being a grown man and everything

August 30th

I took Thom out tonight to the bar where we had our first date. It happened a couple of days after we met; he 'found' my number (thanks, Suse) and called me within twenty-four hours, asking if I'd like a drink with him. Just him, no heavy storage, he promised. I felt self-conscious as I still had not only an enormous black eye, but also an eye-patch that the doctor wanted me to wear for the next week, to protect the – I don't know – eyeball, or something. But speaking to him was so lovely that I said yes. Sure. Thank you.

The night of the date I despaired of ever finding anything to go with an eye-patch. I toyed with going full-blown pirate, but just picked my favourite summer dress and headed off to the bar, hoping I could hide most of the patch under my hair. I got there first, and took a little booth at the back, facing away from the door so I wouldn't be looking up every time it opened. Then suddenly I was aware of someone standing at my table. I looked up. It was Thom.

Thom: [pointing to his own eye-patch] Well, if *this* isn't just a coincidence.

With that, I was hooked.

August 31st

An engagement ring! I hadn't thought too much about it until now, but my hand certainly did feel a bit light without one. Who knew picking a ring was an extreme sport?

We were using up the last of our summer days off at a dusty antiques market this morning, trying to find a suitably beige-and-purple (Mum's favourite 'tones') watercolour for Mum and Dad's anniversary present. Then Thom turned to me, grinning, and said, 'Let's find a ring.' Turning around the dark and plain hall, I felt pretty pessimistic about the whole thing, but Thom's face was so hopeful it felt mean to not even look. At the very first stall the man behind the table gave Thom a little smile and pushed a tray towards us. Off to one edge of the tray was the most gorgeous ring I'd ever seen – a pale gold band with a small ruby and two tiny diamond flowers off to one side. When I picked it up to try it on, it fitted perfectly.

Thom: Do you like it?
Me: Like it? This is . . . *perfect*.
Thom: Then it's yours.
Me: But how much is it?
Man at stall: To you two? £400.

Thom was grinning at me, but something in my stomach had shrunk from that figure. Yes, it was lovely, but it was also only £400. Weren't engagement rings the one thing that you'd wear forever and ever? I pulled him a little bit away from the stall.

Me: Shall we look at some shops in town?
Thom: But you love this! [laughing] Do you think it's too much?

Me: [queasily] It's just . . . aren't engagement rings supposed to cost one month's wages? It's got to be an extra-special piece of jewellery, to show how much . . . your husband . . . loves . . . you . . .

Thom: If that's what you really want, Kiki. [turning to vendor] Sorry mate. Looks like I was wrong.

It turned out that Thom had snuck over to the market a few days before, spotted the ring and, knowing I'd love it, asked the guy to keep it for me. Thom told me all about how special he knew I'd find it, with its own personal history and a unique story that no ring in a jewellery shop would ever have, of how it was originally made for a young wife by her new husband, with stones to signify passion and constancy for their life ahead. Unfortunately, he didn't tell me this until he'd turned off the light after finally coming up at midnight; he'd driven us home without talking and had been watching the TV in a terrible silence, until I'd lost my nerve and slunk off to bed alone. I'm writing this now in the bathroom by the shaving light, wondering whether my dearly beloved is tempted to call off the whole thing. Oh God. What have I done?

TO DO:

Dress – still needed?

Venue – as above?

Honeymoon – see if Susie is available to accompany me on the solo holiday I may need to get used to, in my new single life