

# The Wedding

Karen Bies

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English translation: Trevor Scarse

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# The Wedding

## Sunday morning 8 April

Ids is lying next to me, still sleeping. We've been together since last night. It was the third time we met in The Rose where people we knew from school (Noel and Jane) and some regular musicians were playing. The piano of The Rose is old but still in tune, so Ids was playing on it all night. Brendan asked me if I wanted to sing 'Galway Shawl' and later on I did a rendition of 'Beautiful' by Christina A., together with Jane. It felt liberating. Singing helped, together with the sounds made by the piano and the knowledge that Ids was there.

We snogged outside for a long time and he walked me home without asking. We drank the last of the bottle of red wine I still had from my birthday. Ids laid down beside me with his head in my lap. He is a great kisser and his piano hands are so soft yet strong at the same time. I was a little bit tipsy, but not too drunk to forget what I was doing, you know?

Ids. Ids, I hope. Please PLEASE. Dear diary, I write this to reassure myself that he's for real.

Xxx

## Thursday 12 April

A dress must be found, and I had to tag along. Bah. I have exams next week but mum is quite fond of traditions so I couldn't get out of it. She'd rather have taken grandma with her, but that is no longer possible. So, there we were, three of us in the bridal shop, mum, aunt Nora and me. And two shop assistants, one with a pin cushion on her arm and a blonde one. Mum started trying on dresses while Nora and I sat in red chesterfields (that's what mum called them, soft armchairs) and were offered tea.

I looked around me, a typical bridal shop full of wedding gowns, headless ladies, all white or whitish in clear plastic. I felt the flowers on the table. If this is how it's like to marry, I want no part of it, I know that.

Mum exited her fitting cubicle and, of course, Nora started crying immediately. 'Aaaawww', she crooned. 'Grace, it's lovely.' The assistants joined in the singing of praises. They're probably quite accustomed to emotional outbursts. I remained dumb.

Mum was standing in front of us, studio tanned so the white looked even whiter. The dress had a short train and glistened like a snow-covered mountain side in the sun.

However, the excessive amount of fabric at the bottom was lacking above the waist, as mum's breasts didn't quite fit.

'Does it fit?' I asked.

'No worries, it'll be fine', said the pun cushion and started to pull on the dress and take mum's measurements. Mum smiled at me in the mirror and looked at me puzzled, as if she was looking for my support, for the dress, for Kieran. Fine mum, I won't be too negative, I don't want to spoil your day.

Mum tried on two other gowns but chose the first one in the end. She would get matching silk shoes and a bra of course, which, according to the blonde one, 'would accentuate her cleavage and protect it at the same time'. From dancing too wildly or something like that, I think she meant. The blonde assistant gave mum a piece of headgear, a 'fascinator' she called it. And with that, her outfit were complete.

Aunt Nora threw her arms around mum's neck. They both started to cry. Which, of course, made me cry as well, dear diary, your Ruby may be hard but not made of stone. Mum held out her hand. 'Come here, pet.'

I went to her. Her body felt strangely hard, she smelled of Hermès. After a while mum let us go and said to me: 'So. Now it's your turn.'

### **Friday 13 April**

We ended up with old rose. 'Gorgeous', mum and Nora said, 'matches your red hair.' I twirled around in front of the mirror and felt like princess Kate or Pippa. Princess Ruby! Then I heard that Kieran's sisters would get exactly the same dress. 'We'll look like three pink pigs', I said to mum. But she insisted, because it would fit so well into 'the complete picture'. Kieran will have a grey suit with a pink tie.

I'm afraid it's going to be awful. A charade! But this must be mum's day. It won't be the best day in her life, because that was the day I was born (as she so often exclaimed while I was small).

Just FYI, Kieran!

## **Saturday 14 April**

This weekend Ids came along with me to Hollyrock. He slept in the guest room. As we entered O'Reilly's pub, I felt clumsy and proud at the same time. Clumsy because I wore new boots. Proud of my tall, dark Ids, clearly not from here. Fortunately, he just drinks beer too. Aunt Nora's daughter Tara was there as well. She was at the bar in between a couple of men. Her curls seemed to glow, and she towered above the rest on her stiletto heels. I wondered if she wouldn't get sore feet, even though Pete O'Donoghue, from the sport fishing shop, supported her the whole time. Tara is two years older than me, lives in Dublin and has a very interesting life, so I gather. She swayed towards us.

'Hey Ruby, how's tricks?' she asked me. I introduced them to each other: 'My cousin Tara, ... My friend Ids. He's from the Netherlands.' She started laughing. 'It's? It's ... what?' Ids smiled at her friendly and said: 'It's me.'

Tara's eyes burned but I wasn't afraid. Go on dearie, just try, he's mine. She took a sip from her gin & tonic and wish-wooshed back towards Pete O'Donoghue.

Mum and Kieran were at the bar as well and mum said to Ids (in such an earnest manner) 'that the friend of her daughter was invited to her wedding, for the whole day'. Really ... cringe! Of course, I knocked over my glass of beer and the mop-up gave Ids a chance to mull it over. You don't have to, you really don't have to if you don't wanna! But then he laughed from under his dark curls and said that he would love to come.

Kieran had his arm around mum the whole time. He looked as if he had won the first prize already.

OMG!!! Ids is coming to the wedding and I don't know if I like that. Ids is different in Galway than he is here in Hollyrock. After O'Reilly's pub we headed to the beach. It was low tide. We walked across the stones, my boots hurt but I didn't want to whine. There was no wind and we heard the gulls.

I said: 'Sometimes, during a western storm, the sea rises so high here that the water floods the quay, into the houses along the Shore Road.'

'Really.' We went on. Ids didn't say much, bloody hell, how very annoying! Is there something wrong, should I ask or keep quiet? Is your musical brain running wild, or are you just thinking about kissing me tonight? Dear diary, I felt the tension the whole time, as if it walked along with us, between us.

We came to a halt before we went up the quay again and then Ids grabbed hold of me and caressed my body with his hands. I totally warmed up, of course. He kissed me passionately and plucked at my hair. 'It's the fire within you!' Yes, dear diary, this is how he talks. Saying stuff you can use directly as lines in a song.

And then: 'Have we met each other just to find each other?' Yes, that too. He's rather fond of such spiritual goofiness.

I answered him: 'You've found me already. This is who I am. Just your Ruby. What you see is what you get.'

Ids smiled: 'Do I even *want* to find you? Or do I want Ruby to remain a mystery to me?'

Dear diary, who thinks up this stuff? Why do I need to be a mystery? Does he even want me? Or am I too ordinary for him? But I'd love to let my mind soar free too, that he would take me with him into the clouds.

So, we only kissed on the beach. That's all about us. I think.

### **Sunday 15 April**

Kieran is glad my attention is focused on someone else now, it gives him a chance to slip under my radar and have free reign regarding mum. He hasn't seen mum's dress yet. 'Let's keep it a surprise.' When she told him that, he threw his arms around her and said that she'll be the most beautiful, no matter what. Awkward. She giggled, so ... so annoyingly nervous. I leave them alone when that happens.

It's rather quiet at home, alone with mum. She doesn't want Kieran to move in until his wedding ring is around her finger. But we never talk about dad. Mum isn't in the mood, all she can think of is her heating engineer. (She now knows what a circulator pump is and an expansion tank or whatever it's called, and she pretends that's very important information.)

It's going to be a wedding with three hundred names on the guest list and live music by the Jukeboxies and a party lasting deep into the night. It's in hotel The Waves, which is rented in its entirety by O'Reilly's Bar & Funeral Services. Kieran's cousins own the pub in Hollyrock along with the undertaker's business. Plumbers, bartenders, undertakers. The O'Reilly seem to be everywhere in this village. As Kieran says: 'In life and death and liquor as well to keep it all bearable.'

They're not going to get married in a church.

Her first marriage was in a church. Ultimately it proved not to be a blessed union, as it was with that asshole Ron. I was ten but I quickly learned that Ron was no good. 'Don't you have to go to bed?' he'd say when I'd just sat down on the couch with crisps and Fanta.

Mum should've seen that as well, I think. Dear diary, sometimes, mum can be very oblivious. He promised her everything and she fell for it. At least five hundred people attended that party in the bowling centre. She had a pretty dress on then as well and was 20 pounds lighter. Nevertheless, within a year Ron had absconded with the checkout girl of the Centra. I thought mum would have been cured of marriage after that.

And now it's eight years later and Kieran is in the picture.

Mum called the installation company of O'Reilly because the heating had broken down. We'd been shivering from the cold for two days. As she let in the mechanic, I knew what was going to happen. (But not her! So, I'm much smarter than mum.) The way he looked at mum, can you imagine? As if she was the first woman he'd met in ten years. 'Kieran O'Reilly. How are you.' A bear of a man, he gave her his enormous hand. He winked at me. (I don't think that's appropriate, to someone you don't know at all. But I now know that Kieran is awkward like that.)

He said 'How are you' to me as well, while he tried to pass us with his tool box. Which is quite impossible in our narrow hall. Mum led him up the stairs to point out the broken boiler to him and when she came back down only one minute later, her cheeks glowed red.

We heard him whistling while he was busy in the attic. He whistled 'Grace', would you believe it? Later his whistling changed into song. '*O Grace, just hold me in your arms and let this moment linger...*' OMG, how transparent can you be? I thought. I still remember the way his voice resounded through the stairwell. Mum was laughing while she made him coffee.

As our house warmed up again, she had something else to fix, the washing machine was always shaking, and oh, the gutters leaked too, somewhere. Before I knew it, Kieran was at our house every week and the coffee breaks lasted longer and longer.

They've been in a relationship for a year now.

Kieran took over his father's installation company in Ballyfields. 'I'm ready to settle down,' he'd say. And then he looks at mum in such a doglike manner. You know. With puppy dog eyes. Kieran looks like a Labrador, a cheerful big softy, always shaking its tail.

Aunt Nora and uncle Keith have just such a dog, always licking everybody's hands. Hopelessly grateful for a kind word or a pat on the head. Throw a stick, and he'll retrieve it for you.

Kieran always tries to be nice to me. He makes tea or coffee or even pours me a glass of wine when I'm home in the weekends. 'How are your studies going, Ruby?' he sometimes dares to ask. And then I'll tell him about solfège and music theory and composition, things that are totally foreign to him and he'll stare at me with his dog eyes. Yes, very trite of me. Usually I behave, because he lets me drive his van. I might get used to Kieran, eventually.

### **Friday 20 April**

I miss grandma Katie, dear diary. I can tell you everything, but she was good conversation as well. I now know she kept stuff from me too. In the letter she wrote me, she talked about dad. But there is so much I don't know. How could dad leave us? His infant daughter? And how did my family come to hear he died in an accident? Mum doesn't want to talk about these things. Because of all this wedding stuff, she forgets what really matters. Love. Mum hopes for happiness, but why the hell does she have to marry again ... I don't get it.

I asked her while we were doing the dishes. (The dishwasher has broken down; Kieran and his pipe wrench will probably fix it in the next few days.)

She said: 'Ruby, we love each other.'

Ooh. This annoyed me no end. Keep asking questions. 'But when do you know a man is for real?'

'Kieran is a darling and he'll do anything for me.' Yeah, you say that now, mum, but it only takes one woman popping up at the wrong time and everything could change.

'How do you know if he really means it?'

She said: 'I feel I can trust him.'

Splash, the cutlery went into the water. Mum is so certain of herself, and of Kieran! I remember, and mum as well, the huge lies of Ron. He came home later and later and then he'd lie angry on the couch. The only thing he did was the shopping. But that was because of something else. Mum has never gone to the Centra since.

I gently held a bowl underneath the hot tap and asked her: 'But why would you just let him into your home?'

'Because we get along well. Why does this matter?'

I said: 'You and Ron got along at first too.'

Shouldn't have said that.

Clang! Mum put the plates down in the cupboard much too hard. She looked at me with eyes ablaze. Dear diary, she was FURIOUS! 'We're happy, can't you see?' And then she went all in: 'Your father was an asshole!' (really, that's what she said about dad!) 'And Ron was an even bigger prick! But now I've got someone in my life whom I trust! Why can't you let me have that? Do you even know how hard it's been for me in this life?'

She towelled furiously and banged the plates down on the table.

But I wasn't finished! 'Of course, I want you to be happy. But mum, you're living in a trance at the moment! You're consumed with the dress, all the guests, the food, how many salmon and beef. I'm your daughter. Why can't you just listen to me?'

'Ruby, you have your own life. I want someone who looks out after me. After ME!'

Crash. Grandma's bowl shattered into a thousand pieces on the tiles.

Aww. Dear diary ... mum couldn't bear it anymore. She threw away the tea-towel and steadied herself on the table. I dried my hands and threw my arms around her.

Hermès. Un Jardin Sur Le Toit. Good, her perfume hadn't changed, she smelled just as strong as ever. She used to be the woman with the fireproof hands, now she just dropped grandma Katie's dish. Oh, mummy dear.

#### **Thursday 26 April**

I did well on music history.

I saw Ids yesterday, while his band was playing in The Rose. I had to go home early because of my didactics test. He didn't even notice me as I got my coat and left.

Now I'm lying in my bed and only now received a text from him. 'Miss you!' along with the kissing emoji. The same emoji I use in texts to mum or Jane sometimes. Maybe he thinks this is normal? Or normal for where he comes from. I don't want to know, fuck Fryslân. I want Ids. Love you, Ids. Id's love. But I am not certain. I keep singing Rita Ora: '*Wish that I could let you love, let you love me. Say what's the matter with me?*' Owowowowow I've got to get some sleep.



## **Tuesday 1 May**

I failed Didactics. I'm not certain about music theory either. I'm thinking of Ids. We text regularly and he's coming to the wedding on Friday. 'You can be sure.' He texts that he's busy writing songs. 'Songs about you'. Yeah yeah. Ids twists all the girls in Galway around his long piano fingers.

Mum didn't even want to make dinner tonight.

I said: 'Mum, you should eat well. Think of the dress!' She looked at me with large eyes in a thin and grey face, despite the tanning bed. So, I just got some fish 'n' chips for us.

## **Saturday 5 May 2018**

Should I have seen it coming? Had I already known beforehand, unconsciously? Really, diary, sometimes you just have to believe in something. Only now do I know for certain.

The reception hall was decorated with pink fabric and there were lights shining through the fabric. It was a pink cushion, a brothel and candy floss all at the same time. I walked by the plush chairs towards the 'altar' (which was just two restaurant tables shoved together with a white cloth over them). My pumps sank into the carpet. Shit, the party hadn't even started yet and I was already longing for my sneakers. On the table was a vase with plastic lilies and photographs of people who were unable to attend. Grandpa Matthew and grandma Katie and Kieran's mum as well. Some real candles were burning, just in time I thought of my polyester dress. I cautiously felt my hair. The fascinator was welded firmly. Aunt Nora had emptied half a can of hairspray on it and had said: 'Like concrete.'

Nothing could go wrong.

I half closed my eyes and peered through my eyelashes. This was a romantic bubble, everybody would look innocent and sweet and pretty and enticing here. Here mum would say 'I do' to a man with large hands who could repair waterpipes. Mum is probably dreaming of warm nights and a long life together. I should be happy for her and her confidence in the future. But I felt sad, as if doom was lurking. I kicked off my high heels and ran up the stairs in the corridor. 'Grace! Nora! Where are you!' Some tears had been shed again, so the makeup had to be retouched. They both sighed into the mirror.

Most of the people in Hollyrock had been invited to the pink bubble and Kieran welcomed every guest personally at the door. His tie was the same colour as his face. This endeared me.

Deirdre was clothed in dark blue. Tara had her stiletto heels on again and I wished her sore toes for the rest of the day and the night. But with her platinum blonde hair she looked as beautiful as Marilyn Monroe in this pink lighting.

Nora was sitting in the front, handkerchief at the ready and her fascinator's feathers pointed high, which made the woman behind her change chairs. Uncle Keith had had his first pint already and he seemed happy and familiar.

Ids hadn't shown up yet when the ceremony started. Together with Kieran's sisters I walked behind mum and her train, as I was supposed to. Well, I got stuck once in the carpet with one of my heels. My beautiful snow-white ski slope of a mum laid her silk bridal bouquet on the table. Kieran made me think of a large grey pigeon, calm and hungry.

My task was giving them the rings. The registration officer spoke about true love and faithfulness. The box with the rings laid in my polyester lap, where Ids had lain his head in Galway. Where was he?

This is my chance to sabotage this, I thought. Truly, dear diary, I almost did it! Throw the rings away and sprint out of the hall on my stockings. I mean, Joe is dead and he's still one big mystery to me. Ron had definitely been untrustworthy. Kieran seems okay, but I'm still cautious about him. And Ids should have been here already. Fuck all men. Nevertheless, at the agreed time I gave the rings to the registrar.

OMG! Kieran went down on his knees!!!! This was the most awkward moment of all Kieran moments thus far, dear diary... Again, he sang 'Grace', the song with which he had wooed mum one year ago. Now with a trembling voice: *'With all my love I place this wedding ring upon your finger.'* Everybody clapped, Kieran put the ring on mum's finger and then he kissed her passionately. Yes, that put the picture of the slobbering Labrador of Nora and Keith back into my mind. We got champagne. Now it was official, I had to get with the program. I wished the bride and groom well and said to Kieran: 'Take care of her.'

'Yes, dear Ruby, I will,' Kieran said. He jutted his chin out. Like a conqueror, if you ask me. And then he gave me an enormous hug.

I tried to get rid of Kieran's aftershave outside. Tara was standing in the smoke corner, an e-cigarette between her fingers. Red lips, white puffs of smoke, bitchface. And yes, knives were drawn immediately. 'Hi Ruby, where is that foreign boyfriend of yours?' she giggled in a high pitch.

I braced myself. 'He'll be here shortly!' I said. 'He's a musician, so he's got other obligations.' Ruby, girl, what did it matter what she thought?

The reception was almost over when Ids came walking in through the swing doors. I felt my head starting to get hot and probably red. He walked straight at me. I said 'Hi!'

'Hi, my love,' he said softly and kissed me on the mouth. I kissed him back for a long time, I felt overconfident from the champagne. I felt Tara's eyes in my back. Ha!!! You're seeing it clearly, it's him, this is my tall handsome boyfriend from Fryslân.

Ids sat next to me during dinner, with Tara on his other side and next to her a nephew of Kieran from the village, Michael. I told Ids a long and stupid story about Irish wedding traditions. But I did feel his warmth underneath the table.

Angus, Kieran's father, gave a toast and kept looking at mum during.

'I like to extend a warm O'Reilly family welcome to Grace and Ruby! (applause) I toast to the past and a happy future! (applause) And I hope that Grace and Kieran's home is heated nice and warm!' During the following applause, a wobbly Angus leaned over to give mum a kiss. He fell forwards, almost straight into her cleavage.

Beer flowed freely, the candle light flickered. The waitresses asked: 'Salmon or beef? Salmon or beef?' The wedding cake was over three feet high. Mum and Kieran cut the cake together. The frosting broke, the cake fell in two, iPhones made pictures. The Jukeboxies played Ed Sheeran.

The dance was opened by the bride and groom. Grace had removed the train from her dress for ease. Kieran couldn't keep in step, I saw.

I love dancing so much! But Ids didn't want to. 'Maybe later,' he said. We drank beer. As people were moving to and thro in front of us on the dance floor, we hung on to each other tightly at the bar. I sought him, dear diary, couldn't he feel that? The night lasted so long already, I wanted to hope, I wanted to trust. I longed for a couple of words from him. Not about Ireland, not about music, just about us.

'How do you feel?' I asked.

Ids laughed, his teeth looked even whiter in the purple light. He didn't answer, pressed his lips on mine. I tasted beer. A few moments later he turned around without looking at me. One gulp and his glass was empty. 'I need to go outside for a moment, okay? See you later.' Okay, I won't follow you. WTF Ids, I'll let you be for now. I want to dance!

I waltzed with Angus, with uncle Keith, with mum. Then Michael, the nephew, dragged me onto the dance floor.

'How are you, Ruby,' he asked. Beer breath hung between us.

'Oh, fine,' I said.

'You brought a fine-looking boyfriend along.'

'Yes.' I said. 'He's a musician and he's from the Netherlands.'

'Is it more interesting to do it with a foreigner?'

'What do you mean?' I said.

Michael started to sing: '*Ruby Ruby Ruby Ruby!*' The Kaiser Chiefs – I've been hearing that song all my life. He whispered something into my ear. Yuck, a sweet-talker. I was getting faint, but he held me tightly. Let go, let go, please, let me go. We kept on twirling.

But then large hands made us stop. It was Kieran. 'Hey, Michael.' Michael wanted to say something, but Kieran shoved him aside quite brusquely. He and I danced away, out of step. He stepped on my toes. 'Thanks,' I told him. 'You're welcome,' Kieran answered.

I eventually got tired of dancing. I looked for Ids but couldn't find him anywhere. I felt myself getting more and more anxious. I came across mum at the facilities. The white fabric underneath her armpits was wet. 'Do you have any deodorant?' she asked me. There was a deodorant spray on the washbasin, for general use. She sprayed copious amounts under her arms and waved.

Where was Ids? Still outside maybe. It was late and dark, the group of smokers on the terrace was now very large. The women had kicked off their pumps and were sitting on top of the picnic tables between glasses of beer and ash trays. Men were lounging against their knees. They were laughing and drinking. Through the night I walked into the large hotel garden, to the arbour, which was hidden by the rhododendrons. The ground rebounded beneath my feet, it wasn't far.

I heard the high-pitched laughter I've known since childhood. White puffs of smoke drifted upwards. I doubted myself for a moment and stopped. Then I stepped around the bushes. The first thing I saw were his dark curls, very close to her platinum blonde hair.

I said: 'Hey, hi.'

They looked up simultaneously. Tara closed her eyes whilst she sucked on her cigarette.

'Hey, hi Ruby.' Ids laughed, his hair in front of his eyes. He was sitting on top of the iron table. A glass of beer was beside him.

Tara had pulled off her stilettos.

*Karen Bies*