

Fairytale Wedding

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Ollie was to marry Henry the following afternoon, and we wedding partiers were more than a bit tipsy that night. My three fellow bridesmaids were all from the same Upper East Side castle-dwelling-in-the-winter, Hamptons-in-the-summer crowd Ollie had run with her whole life. I was a grateful outlier, her best friend and roommate at Barnard, which I had attended on scholarship. But by the time we left the restaurant and hit the clubs, I felt like I was on the inside; invincible, and unshakable.

It was between Moscow Mules and EDM beats that I found out that there was a posh send-off for Ollie and her new husband the following evening, after the reception. A family tradition. I wasn't sure how I had missed the memo, but as I listened to the discussion of who was wearing which designer, it dawned on me that I hadn't brought anything to wear to this stealth shindig.

I excused myself and swayed to the ladies'. I wet a paper towel with cold water and stood still for a moment or two, pressing it against my wrists so as not to disturb my makeup. A woman I hadn't noticed stepped toward me from a corner nook of the powder room.

"Pick something," the woman said.

I stared at her.

“Make a wish, and I shall grant it.”

This city.

The woman looked perfectly normal, impeccably groomed and coiffed. Like maybe a rich matron slumming it with her friends for the evening.

“I want the dress of my dreams,” I said. I curtsied as I left, laughing.

The story about meeting my fairy godmother in the restroom was a hit back at the table. In the limo on the way to Ollie’s parents’ house, I belatedly realized that though I hadn’t meant to, I’d gone and confessed my ballgown deficit. Ollie’s crew had been sweet about it, though. And if I needed to double up on something I’d already worn, it wasn’t the worst thing in the world.

I woke up the next morning with a very nasty hangover. Not surprising, given that I’m usually a beer and wine kind of minimalist. As I headed to the shower, I was still a little drunk. I took my time under a scalding spray designed to reupholster my dignity. It was a big day, and I wanted to enjoy it.

Ollie’s brownstone looked enormous from the street, but even so, from the outside it was hard to imagine it was large enough to contain what the family called The Great Room. Many generations had been wed there, and I could see why. The space was thrilling, with floor-to-ceiling stained glass windows and chandeliers that threw shimmering arrows of light against brocade-covered walls. Ollie looked like a princess, dazzling as she and her Henry murmured their promises and took their vows.

98 The reception was held in the same hall after nearly invisible staff swiftly rearranged it. The celebration was glorious, with toasts from people whose names I dimly recognized as intellectual celebrities, and a small orchestra so guests could dance. And the spread was insane, hundreds of small plates pre-filled with food that looked too pretty to eat. I couldn’t help but wonder how the evening’s pre-honeymoon soiree could possibly compare to this one.

We bridesmaids eventually retired to our rooms to rest up before the final round. As I entered, I saw something draped over the foot of my bed, something shining and frothy and dark red.

When I reached to touch it, I found my arm swallowed up past my wrist by gossamer fabric so delicate it appeared to pulse along with my heartbeats.

The gown was like nothing I'd ever seen up close. The fabric seemed to gather the light to itself and beam it back tenfold. I looked at the label, itself a work of art, with scrolled lettering stitched onto a piece of velvet shot through with gold threads. I didn't recognize the designer's name. It was exotic, with combinations of vowels and consonants I didn't know how to pronounce.

There was no note or card.

I wondered who among our cast of bachelorettes might have been most likely to have loaned me this beautiful thing, who in the group had heard my drunken admission and had acted so kindly upon it. I resolved to find out.

I could barely feel it, the dress was that soft in my winter-weathered hands. I carried it to each of my new friend's rooms in turn. The reaction was the same at each door: appreciative oohs and aahs and, it seemed to me, sincere professed ignorance as to its origins.

Of course. There was only one person it could be.

I found her in the hallway outside my own room, ready for the party and coming to see me, she said. She looked at the dress cradled in my arms and the color rose in her cheeks.

"O my lord," said Ollie. "Where on earth did you find this? What an extraordinary shade!"

I held the gown up to her shoulders. Ollie was set aflame, its hue perfectly offsetting her auburn hair and the emeralds at her ears.

We were the same size and had similar taste; during our school years we had freely combined our wardrobes. That I had always benefitted more from this arrangement had bothered me. Now was a chance for me to repay her, and I wouldn't take no for an answer. We would trade clothes for the evening.

The dress fit Ollie as though it had been sewn while pressed against her skin. Its bodice clung to her ribcage, somehow suggesting the curve of each delicate bone beneath the gleaming scarlet silk. The same fabric cupped her breasts before curving into

a high, Victorian-style lace neckline. Beneath her slim hips, the gown increased in volume: billowing panels of paper-thin velvet that just skimmed the floor. The dress was objectively demure, I knew, yet on her, it seemed more revealing than sheer nakedness.

When she and Henry appeared at the threshold of the ball, I swear there was a collective gasp. They appeared to float toward the dance floor; once there, they melted into each other's arms.

Ollie stopped breathing at several minutes before midnight. She died in full view of more than a hundred people, after silently falling to her knees. The autopsy revealed no previously undetected heart defect, no underlying illness. There was some scant evidence of constriction at her throat, but nothing definitive.

We go back to that nightclub as often as we can. We recreate the circumstances, drinking Moscow Mules and dancing to whatever happens to be on tap. And I go to the powder room, hoping to find the woman who furnished me with the killer dress. No luck so far. But my Henry and I are determined to find her.

He wants revenge. I want my next two wishes.