

OH, MY WEDDING!

Finally! The day I've been dreaming of for the last two years is approaching! I'm so excited! I hope - no, I *know* - Jeremy is excited about it, too. My fiancé is such a darling; he always helps me with everything we plan and want to arrange and whatnot! Of course, he is helpful! How can a six-foot tall, blond with blue eyes *not* be helpful? I believe - no, I *truly* believe that I would refuse marrying anybody who is not as helpful and smart and handsome as Jeremy!

Ah, Jeremy... My thoughts are interrupted by the murmur of my cell phone. And no, it's not Jeremy, though a call from him would be nice. I know he can't call me at this time as his boring job in some boring high rise in the boring downtown Chicago keeps him busy at his boring desk. A second murmur, and I press the green button.

'Have you ordered your wedding gown, Sarah?' Oh, Valerie sounds so excited! 'Tell me, tell me, tell me,' she is on the verge of chocking with happiness for me.

'Yes, I have,' I manage to calm myself a little. 'And it's *the* gown that *you*, bestie, picked up in that catalog.'

'Ahhhh,' I can actually picture Valerie's smile, the smile that makes her so beautiful. 'You're too sweet! Wish I was there to help you with all the preparations. Don't you think Jeremy and you should find a good wedding planner?'

'A wedding planner?' As usual, my friend is being practical and level-headed despite her occasional silliness. 'I believe his mother is looking for one. I think you're right... We do need somebody not to miss all those small things--'

'And then you'll have someone to put all the blame on if, say---' and she bursts into her infectious laughter. I wonder whether she is at her dinner table and is about to bend forward and nearly hit the top with her face and extend her arms along her head and let her long hair cover her back and let her body shudder and tremble for some time. In a

second, though, she is all business and continues, 'if, say, the napkins on the table will carry something like *Happy Bar Mitzvah, Shlomo.*'

'Ha...!' A pause. 'Hah...!' A pause. 'Very funny,' an itchy-bitsy spider of sarcasm crawls into my voice. She senses it and reduces the thunderstorm of laughter to a modest mist of giggles. 'Anyway, how's your dearly-beloved?'

'Karl? Oh, he's in Europe right now. You know,' now, a pause by Valerie, 'Lecturing in Vienna. He called a couple of hours ago and told me about his students.' I hear her giggles, though without her usual 'Bang!' against the tabletop. 'You know how much he likes to teach in Europe. He says that his students over there are more... What *does* he call them?' And she plunges into her usual endless stories about her adorable, loving, lovable, etc. etc. Karl. And in her usual manner she concludes with that assertiveness that is an integral part of her, 'Karl is fine. Karl is always fine.'

Of course, he's fine, I press the 'Call end' button and slide down the slippery slope of my thoughts. *How can you and you Karl not be fine, when you date a man twice your age and who has a position, a good income, and a house on the East coast!???* *Wish I had a guy like that...*

Gosh! I sound just like my younger sister who blurted that stupid thing in front of my twenty-five year old boyfriend. Oh no, not in front of Jeremy, but in front of Jason whom I dated when I was in the ninth grade. I do, do, do hope that Jeremy will never find out about it.

I hear the sound of the turning key in the front door and slowly move down the narrow carpeted passage and find myself in Jeremy's arms.

'Hey, hun,' I loop my arms around Jeremy's neck and press my face against his chest.

'Hey, babe,' his lips find mine. His hands are moving up and down my back, making me feel relaxed and... alright, more relaxed. 'How was your day?' His whisper comes to me as if through a thin pillow while he is nibbling on my earlobe.

'It was fine,' I reply, feeling a bit rough skin of his palms right above my jeans and under my blouse. *Has he noticed that I'm wearing a new blouse?* I wonder. *I guess, not.* I sigh. 'Hungry?' A silly question... Who asks this kind of question while your fiancé is...

...Valerie flies in for one day from Boston. Actually, she is on her way to Madison, WI, for some conference at the UW. For some reason, she has decided to rent a car and drive all the way to the Chicago's backyard and probably have some fun in that dump Milwaukee. So, I have to shlep all the way to O'Hare and then cope with the Sunday night traffic chocking I-90.

'Finally,' I let out some sort of sigh of relief, when I get on the ramp that will take us to North Sheridan Drive. I do like this area. My one-bedroom condo overlooks the lake and it's not too big and not too small.

'When you two get married you'll have to find some place to live. A bigger one I mean,' Val has apparently read my mind whatever blank it is for some reason.

'Nah,' I reply, just to make her snort in that cute way she's been doing since fifth grade at the Belmont Middle in Worcester. She does and, satisfied with my prediction, I pour a cup of coffee for her in my small kitchen. 'Then I'll have to sell this condo. And I don't want to... A Dominic's is just like three blocks away. And if I want to hit downtown, all I have to do is to jump on the red line, and voil á! I'm on the Magnificent Mile!'

'Yeah, yeah, you and your Magnificent Mile!' She giggles for no reason. 'You just don't want to leave this magnificent view and move to Skokie with Jeremy. Is it 'cause of his Mother?'

'Maybe, yes, maybe, no... I can't put my finger on what it really is...' I pause, meditating. *I can't believe Jeremy didn't say anything about my blouse...* Somehow appears on the screen of my mind. *What's happening?*

'Are you alright?' Val fixes her greenish eyes at my face.

It brings me back to reality. 'Yeah... I'm alright. Want more coffee?'

'Ugh-hu,' she mumbles with her mouth full. 'Definitely, I'll have another cup. How about we'll hit the downtown--'

'Oh, oh! I have to stop by Henrici's and see if they could make a cake.'

A half an hour ride above ground takes us close to the Loop and to the famous coffee-shop with a bakery adjacent to it. Val is as excited as I am and we sit at a table by the window. We order coffee and pastry; I start looking through their catalog. My friend is chirping about this and that and how magnificent (that's exactly the word she's using every five minutes) the multilayer cake will be and how delicious and how it might become the centerpiece of the dinner.

'After you of course,' she corrects herself. 'And your Jeremy. Why wouldn't you call him and ask him to come here? Perhaps, he'd want to take part in the preps?'

'Jeremy? Interested in a wedding cake?' I'm about to burst into laughter. Or, into tears. I can't decide which public display of emotions is more suitable for this situation. 'You must be kidding! Jeremy is not interested in such mere trifles as cakes. Sorry to blow your bubble, bestie.'

'Oh...' my friends sounds and looks lost. 'Anyway, why wouldn't he join us for coffee, then?'

I shrug and scroll down to 69 on my speed dial. Bleep-bleep... Bleep-bleep... 'Hey, sweetie... Want to have coffee at Henrici's?' I do my best to squeeze at least some sort of a nicety out of him. Of course, I fail miserably.

'Who with?' It always irritates me, when on the phone he never says Hello and ends his sentences with prepositions!!! Gosh! Is that what they teach them at the Ivy League and Cambridge?

I suppress my emotions and calmly respond, 'Val and me of course.'

'Val? How come is she around?' I can actually see his eyebrows travel all the way up his forehead.

Gosh! He's such a forgetful dork! I told him just last night! I slowly half-whisper, 'She arrived in the morning. From Boston. Remember?'

'Oh...' His voice isn't convincing.

Dork! However, he does bring his six feet and his impeccable gray suit with a matching tie to the coffee-shop. What he does not bring with him is any kind of fun or interest in my friend or in the damn cake! He flops on the chair and orders coffee and then looks at the pictures in the catalog as if it's some sort of obligation and not a preparation for one of important or, perhaps, the most important day in his life!

Besides a couple of questions to Valerie from Jeremy, the conversation is nearly dead so I take pictures of five or six cakes that I kind of like. The catalog also includes those marzipan figurines that may be thrown on top of the multilevel monstrosity; I add the pictures of about a dozen of those to my cell phone's *My images* folder. I'm glad that Jeremy's mother is not here to ruin the day; however, Val's sweetie pie calls from Vienna. Gosh! They've been married for how long? Three years? And they still call each other honey-bunny and babe and whatnot! Not that I am eavesdropping; Val's cell is set to *Loud*, and most of their conversation can be heard from at least three feet away. Why's Jeremy always so dry and distant? I am looking at him, meditating...

Gosh! Where did Jeremy's mother find this wedding planner? She looks as if her first assignment was the wedding of Alexander the Great! We are to meet at a coffee shop in LaSalle street not far from the stock exchange. After all the required ceremonies of introduction, she arranges her long skirt and slowly lowers herself onto the chair across the table. There is not a single wrinkle on her coffee-with-milk long-sleeved blouse, which she has on despite the hot and humid day of the Chicago summer. I feel a bit out of place in my plain T-shirt and cutoff shorts. I look at her, waiting for the Fragile Lady to order her whatever she wants to order. While the waiter is arranging the cups and saucers with cakes, a heavy silence is hovering above the table; the silence is almost visible – am I going nuts or can one pick up a knife and actually start cutting it?

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