

The Perfect Fit.

She almost didn't go. She was tired, having spent a full eight hours on her feet. The emergency department had been rammed and they had had one serious case after another. Would she ever get used to going through the pockets of a recently deceased patient, iteming his wallet and its contents, small change, family photos, house keys? Knowing that he had left his house that day never to return to his loved ones? She had almost run out of the resuscitation room in distress, but had managed to hold it all together, thank goodness. Nineteen eighty-four, her first job as a qualified nurse, she had to show she was up to it, especially under the watchful eye of Sister Kelly.

Finn hadn't offered much in the way of sympathy or support when it came to her job, if she was honest with herself. Soon to be married and living together, she was beginning to think the only thing he was interested in was getting his dinner on time, other than sex, of course. He didn't seem to appreciate the stresses and strains of her job, and had actually yawned in her face the other day when she had tried to tell him about a man who had been very near to actually hitting her, so frustrated was he at having to wait to see a doctor. Thinking of this, she stepped wearily off the bus at the stop by the address that had been given in the paper, luckily on the same bus route as their own cold and tired looking flat. She looked again at the advert:

Wedding Dress For sale: Never Worn. Size 12.

Collection only. 23, Cherry Tree Road, Acocks Green. £80 ONO. Telephone 0121 706 5431

Well, she was in the right place, she may as well at least take a look, and the buyer was expecting her as she had used the pay phone in A and E to phone in advance. She couldn't help but wonder why the dress had never been worn; a relationship gone wrong, she assumed. It sounded like an older woman on the phone, but she had been too busy at the time to give it much more consideration. Only now did she wonder if this would be a wasted journey, the dress being old-fashioned and having been stored in a wardrobe for the past forty years. Visions of forties style dresses suddenly danced before her eyes. Resignedly, she rang the bell.

The door was opened almost immediately. "Hello. Katy is it? You've come about the dress?"

She started a little, as the dark haired, handsome, twenty-something man who stood on the threshold soon dissipated any thoughts about old fashioned wedding dresses.

"Er, yes." Was she blushing? The words came out awkwardly.

“I’m Tom. Do you want to come in and have a look at it, then?” smiling easily, and, as if sensing her hesitation, he added “My mum’s here. She’s been helping me out a bit, recently.”

She pulled her coat around her as Tom softly closed the door behind her, leading her into a warm and cosy living room off the hall at the back of the house.

“Mum, this is Katy. She phoned earlier about the dress.”

A middle -aged woman looked up from her task of feeding what looked like mashed banana to a small, gurgling infant strapped into a high chair, and gave her a tired looking smile.

Tom left the room, soon to return with a beautiful creamy white silk and lace dress on a coat hanger, protected by a plastic covering.

Katy gasped when she saw it “Oh, that’s really beautiful. It’s really lovely.” She lightly touched the Queen Anne’s lace adorning the top of the bodice. She hadn’t expected something of such beauty and quality, she had to admit.

“Do you want to try it on?” he held the dress towards her.

“Yes, thank you. But can I ask, why are you selling it?”

Tom looked at the space between his feet. His mother turned sadly towards the baby. An awkward silence filled the room.

“It’s ok. Sorry. I didn’t mean to be nosy. But it’s so beautiful. Why wouldn’t you want it?”

“No, it’s ok, you should know. The truth is, my fiancée died a few weeks before the wedding. She had breast cancer. Rory here was only a few months old. It’s been a year now, and I just wanted it to go to a good home.”

“Oh no, I’m so sorry, I really am.” She shuffled her feet.

“Listen, if you don’t want it anymore, that’s fine. A few people have gone off it once they know.” He smiled gently at her.

“No, I do want it, as long as you are sure you can bear to part with it.”

She took the dress and he led her into the front room, pulled the curtains and showed her the full-length mirror which stood by the table.

“I’ll leave you to it, then.” Quietly, he closed the door behind him.

The room was warm and softly lit, and as she slid the dress over her shoulders and let it cascade downwards, it was as though a silent seamstress was right there in the room with her, adjusting its folds to her slender frame, so perfect was the fit. The bodice sat just

right, and the three-quarter sleeves fell just where they were meant to. She smiled with pleasure as she realised the dress could have been made for her. She turned around and looked over her shoulder to get a view of the back of the dress. It had the slightest trailing hemline which was so beautiful, being decorated with the same lace as the bodice. She loved it. She thought of Tom, such a nice man, it was so sad, and a baby left without a mother, too.

A fleeting doubt passed through her mind as she thought of Finn, and how he might react to the story behind the dress. He always seemed to want to be part of every decision she made, so how would he react to her going off independently and sorting out the wedding dress? She frowned as she thought of this; she always seemed to worry when she thought of him. She supposed that was normal, getting used to one another, a relatively new relationship, though they had been together for over twelve months, now. At twenty- nine, he was seven years older than her, but that hadn't seemed to matter when they first met. He had been so warm and attentive, making her feel like the most beautiful woman in the world. But, over time he had developed a slight edge to his dealings with her, wanting to know where she had been, who she had seen, how long she had spent at the hairdressers, at the shops, questioning why she felt the need to see her family and friends. In fact, if she thought about it, she didn't see any of her family and friends very much, any more, as he had insisted on moving to the Midlands, away from the familiar Devonshire countryside she was used to. '*Cheaper property prices,*' he had said, '*more opportunities.*'

She wondered now, seeing herself in this beautiful dress, thinking of her family in Devon and seeing the sadness of the little family in the next room, thinking of the couple who obviously loved one another denied a life together, did *she* really want to take this next step? Though she had just met Tom she sensed a sincerity about him, a transparency and kindness which was totally absent in her relationship with Finn.

She looked in the mirror again and gasped as a shadow fleetingly passed behind her left shoulder. She jerked her head around, but there was nothing there. '*Just the light flickering,*' she thought. A strong smell of jasmine wafted through the room and she thought what a great idea it was to spray the dress, to keep it fresh. She twirled this way and that, admiring her reflection in the mirror in this exquisite dress, when a sudden realisation hit her, like an arrow piercing her heart. She didn't, actually, love Finn at all. A great weight suddenly lifted from her shoulders and with a hugely liberating surge of energy and optimism, she carefully took the dress off and replaced it in its protective cover. Smiling to herself, she knocked on the door of the living room and pushed it gently open. Tom stood to face her. The rays of the setting sun filled the room with a golden glow.

"Well, what do you think? Does it fit? Do you like it? He smiled at her.

“Yes, yes, in fact, it’s a perfect fit. I like it very much.” She found herself staring into his eyes. “And a great idea to spray the dress with jasmine to keep it fresh.”

“What? Jasmine?” he gave her a puzzled look.

“Yes, there was a lovely smell of Jasmine as I tried the dress on.” She looked at him from beneath lowered lashes.

“What!” Tom’s mouth gaped “No, no perfume has been used on the dress, Julia was very careful about that as she said it might ruin it, but jasmine was her favourite perfume; she wore it all the time.”

“What? Well, it was definitely jasmine in there and I know this sounds crazy but you know, I don’t think I am going to go ahead with my wedding after all. It doesn’t feel right and somehow the dress made me realize that. I’m so sorry. It’s got nothing to do with your fiancé’s death, honestly.” Her words tumbled over one another. “In fact, this sounds really amazingly stupid, but could you keep the dress for now? Could I come back and see it, and, in fact, see *you* again?”

“What?” he stepped back a couple of paces.

“Look, I’m not sure what just happened in there, but I would like to see you again. I’m not usually so forward but I’ve realised that my life has to change and I’ve suddenly found the courage to start making those changes.”

“Well, you know, I’m not sure what happened in there either, but if you’re sure, yes, it would be lovely to see you again and I’ll keep the dress.... for you.” A slow smile crept across his lips, half happy, half bewildered.

Sue Pate. October 2026.