


Runaway Brides, Bad Boys & Big Brothers

AVOIDING THE
Pity
PARTY



AUSTRALIAN BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MEL A ROWE

Avoiding the
PITY PARTY

MEL A ROWE

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***Caveat: As a courtesy, since there may be some sparse language choices in this story that may represent an obstacle for the reader, I am offering this warning. Please note this language and cultural references are purely for fictional purposes only and not designed to offend any individual persons, culture, or religions implied.*

The Following Is Written in Australian English

“Families are like fudge – mostly
sweet, with a few nuts.”

Les Dawson

ONE

Her stomach spiralled like a stone sliding off the cliff's edge. 'Can I do this?' Deanne Harrison clenched sweaty palms as she peeked through the door's gap to spy on her seated guests. Light streamed through stained-glass windows that haloed the groom standing beside his groomsmen adjusting their suits.

And they all waited for her.

Piped organ music began, and Deanne scooted to the side of the curtain just as the doors opened. 'You can do this, Lou.' She urged the first bridesmaid, who scowled at her. 'Please?'

'*Fine.*' With a death grip on her delicate floral arrangement that contrasted against her bulging bodybuilder's frame, Lou started down the aisle. Her strapless cocktail gown complimented her bleached hair spiked to near dagger points. In her mannish gait, she hobble-plodded on heels, glaring at the groom, then lurched towards the sidelines to wait the rest of the bridal party's arrival.

'Can't believe we're doing this,' muttered the petite Jane, as the next bridesmaid to walk down the aisle. With each step, Jane choked the stems of her bouquet, while her rogue ringlets sprung-free in their rebellion against the attempted intricate up-do that Deanne knew Jane had tried so hard to achieve. At the end of the aisle, Jane stopped beside Lou, scowled sideways at the groom for all to see, and then forced a smile, as another one of her curls escaped from its clutches.

The matron of honour, the statuesque Clare, made her

appearance, with her thin-lipped grimace and red-rimmed eyes, she glared at the groom from the start of the aisle.

‘Clare, it’ll be fine,’ said Deanne, urging her friend on.

‘I hope so.’ Clare raised her chin, her complexion pale against her midnight hair slicked into an elegant French twist. With her graceful, long-legged stride, Clare made short work of the aisle, to stand beside the other bridesmaids. There she faced the crowd, sniffed back tears, and with pursed lips she waited.

At the doorway, the father of the bride, Reg, tugged at his collar, brushed fingers through his grey receding hairline, pushed his glasses up his nose and puffed out ruddy cheeks. He then held out his bent elbow. ‘You ready to do this, luv?’

Deanne nodded beneath the fragile veil. The delicate diamantes detailed within her gown sparkled like tiny rainbows.

She swallowed an oversized lump and tried to shake the tremors in her hands. ‘Let’s do this.’ She wrapped her arm around her father’s extended elbow, re-gripped her bouquet of lilies, and counted. ‘One, two, and three...’ And they stepped in time to the music, hoping her gown’s small train would trail perfectly behind them.

Reg nodded to the gathered guests as they headed down the aisle and at the end of the red-carpet, he unveiled the intended bride.

Deanne couldn’t fool her father when the worry in his eyes mirrored her own.

‘Um?’ Reg’s brow crinkled. He blinked back tears as his teeth clamped on his quivering bottom lip.

Deanne squeezed his hand. ‘It’ll be okay, Dad.’

‘You sure?’

‘I know what I’m doing.’ She hoped.

‘Well, okay then...’ Reg kissed his baby girl on the cheek and replaced her veil. He took his seat in the front row beside his

sniffing mother, Nan, where they gripped hands and prepared to watch in teary silence.

The groom, Darren, in his tailored suit, turned on his movie-star smile that spread across his spray-tanned features. He swept a hand through his blond hair, and winked at the crowd where his bright blue contact lenses caught the light. He stepped in alongside his wife-to-be and they stood before the Minister and the ceremony began.

The service was well underway when the Minister called out, 'Should anyone object to this union, speak now or forever hold your peace?'

Darren twitched his shoulders, his palms clasped tightly in front, as beads of sweat trickled down the sides of his face. He licked his lips and stared at the carpet.

Time dragged.

Outside birds twittered. Traffic shuffled. Children's laughter carried across from the park.

Inside, gowns rustled, paper programmes fanned faces, but no one spoke.

The minister's chest rose high as he inhaled to continue.

Darren exhaled as his stature relaxed.

'STOP.' Deanne flung her veil back as her words reverberated off the walls.

'What?' Darren asked.

'Did you sleep with my cousin, Katrina?'

The crowd gasped.

Darren gulped, blinking fast. Raking fingers through his thick hair, he shared a taut smile at the seated audience. 'Everyone's watching,' he said through gritted over-white teeth.

Deanne's skirts swished as she turned to search the gathered guests. 'Katrina, I hear you're pregnant and congratulations are in order?'

Katrina sat in a low-cut, skin-tight, red dress, a few rows behind Deanne's dad. Her smudged lips parted, her wide racoon eyes darted between the bride and groom as she sunk lower into her seat.

'Is it true, Katrina, that you're pregnant to my future husband?' Deanne lifted her gown's hem, kicking out at the train. Her bouquet slapped against her skirts, scattering frosty petals as she stomped down the steps.

Katrina sunk lower into her seat, while those around her shuffled aside to give the incoming bride access.

'Don't. Lie. To. Me. This is the house of God, and you'll go straight to hell if you do.'

Katrina lowered her head, as loud, wet sobs echoed off the cathedral ceiling.

'ANSWER ME.'

'Yes,' Katrina said between whimpers.

Deanne cupped a hand behind her ear. *'I can't hear you?'*

'Yes. I'm pregnant.' With makeup smeared and tears flowing, Katrina stood and pointed with a trembling finger. *'And it's Darren's baby.'*

The crowd gasped. Their heads pivoted from Katrina to the groom, to the bride, then back again

'She's lying.' Darren frowned. He tugged at his tight collar, then reached for Deanne's hand. 'What are you doing, Dee? Not in front of everyone, please?'

Deanne peered up at her intended husband who was handsome. Charming. And what every woman desired. Should she surrender?

Instead, she pulled away, clenched her fist, and punched him.

It was a direct hit.

Darren collapsed on the steps below the altar. He covered his eye, moaning in pain, while everyone remained motionless.

Deanne hitched up her many skirts and sprinted down the

aisle. She burst through the church doors and into the blinding sunlight. Jumped the front steps, scattering pigeons in her way, as she cut straight across the road. A car horn blared, and a taxi screeched to a halt, as Deanne ran through the park and never looked back.

NOT FOR SALE

TWO

Deanne's legs burned, with her skirt's layers hitched up in front, petticoats stuck to her sweaty skin as she ran. Well away from the church, well past the park, unsure where she was. With no more road to run, only the jetty lay ahead of her, and she ran. All she saw was the tall light pole at the end of the jetty where seagulls hovered, and there Deanne collapsed on the bench-seat, ignoring the group of boys packing up their fishing gear onto their bikes.

She tried to catch her breath tasting the salty air, staring at the calm sea spread before her that reflected a warm orange from the autumn setting sun.

Deanne fingered the soft material of her bridal gown. The hems were browned, the veil tattered. She didn't need a mirror to reflect the way she felt—rejected and miserable.

How could she have been so blind to fall in love with the handsome and charming Darren?

She'd played her part as the ugly duckling that never became a swan but remained the goose inside this nightmare. A part she'd excelled at as an obese kid with a frizzy bomb of auburn hair and freckles. Lots of freckles, which was a mystery because Deanne never saw the sun.

Bullied at high school as the easy target because no one could miss her wide waddle down the hallways. Yet here she was, still that fat, frizzy-haired, ostracised geek.

So, when the dazzling Darren asked her out, he wined and dined her, and she changed for him to be part of the perfect

romantic dream. After all, Deanne's only experience of all things romantic came from books and movies, where she believed in her own fantasy.

No wonder her perceptions on the real world were beyond warped, now stuck in the final act of her personal teary tragedy. How dare she take on fate, when destined to be single for eternity?

True love didn't exist for her when she couldn't even pass as a normal bride—running away from her own wedding.

Deanne let her tears fall as she sighed like a deflating bleached balloon. Shoulders drooped. Her lower lip trembled. The skirt's material scrunched under her fists.

Her head fell to her chest as waves of nausea washed over from the torturous visions of the two-timing couple passing behind closed eyelids. The shame of their betrayal and her bizarre public humiliation unleashed fresh tears.

Deanne had ignored the signs from the start. The gossip, the words of warning, where hindsight just sucked. How stupid and naïve had she been?

She'd had her doubts, and all those niggling questions. Yet, she'd never questioned Darren. He'd made it clear he didn't like people who pried into his business. So, she never dared to voice her fears.

Instead, she'd trusted Darren, to never ask and upset Darren, but to please him, always. Especially in the beginning, when in awe of the demigod who wanted to be with her—in public.

But all those late-night meetings, the regular weekend trips away, his phone switched off and unreachable, the hint of another's perfume, and the condoms he carried...

Condoms! *Ha.*

'Bastard. Bitch.' Her voice sounded foreign as it cut through the evening air.

Katrina was a blossoming, unrestrained, nineteen-year-old.

Her notorious nocturnal activities fed the rumour treadmill, which included her alleged attempts to entrap a man by becoming pregnant.

Hearsay was now publicly proven.

Deanne's guesstimated time of the affair's conception—since her engagement party. A memory she'd once adored. Not anymore.

Today definitely topped the top ten most tortured moments of her life. *Did Hallmark make cards for this crap?*

And what dark part of her brain forced her to tell all in front of everyone?!

She'd never had the courage to deny Darren anything, when she'd been nothing more than a glorified slave to him.

Yes, a slave.

Darren's slave.

She'd slaved on her body-image, the wedding planning, and all his day-to-day domestic duties. She'd done it all for Darren. For what?

Everything was dashed to dust now. She had nothing else going for her. But her job.

Would Katrina have the guts to return to work on Monday?

Was it a sackable offence to be pregnant to the supervisor's future-husband?

Could she dare face her friends and family after what had happened?

Could she face herself?

Identical to the shift of an incoming tide, the waves of shame enveloped her hunched stature as salt laden tears tracked through her makeup. They fell from her chin to create grey blotches that spread across her gown. Helpless and hopeless to stop their spread, she cried.

And cried...

Deanne sat up and licked her dry lips. Under the light of the wharf's tall lamp, she gazed out at the darkened ocean.

How long had she been sitting here?

A slight autumn chill carried on the sea breeze that brought a shiver across her exposed skin. With vicious swipes to rid the last of her tears, she straightened up her gown, and headed towards the esplanade's lights.

Ignoring the other people's stares, Deanne didn't care where she went, she wanted a drink. She wanted to get lost in the city and avoid facing her own pity-party...

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