

Max's Revenge

1. THE WEDDING

Dad cut the engine, jerked on the handbrake and turned round. "These are the rules," he said, looking from me to Charlie and back to me. "You're both to be quiet, still and polite." His voice deepened. "At *all* times."

"Yes, Dad," we answered like a pair of robots.

"This is Sophie and Dan's special day—"

"Daniel," I interrupted, "Sophie wants everyone to call him Daniel."

Dad glared at me. "He's my brother and I'll call him what I want."

Another point to me. Charlie and me were having a competition to see how many times we could annoy Dad without getting into serious trouble. So far I was winning three to one.

"I don't want either of you ruining their special day because you have the attention span of two year olds." He stared at us as though that would make his message sink in. "Okay, Charlie?"

"Yes, Dad."

"And Max, absolutely no trouble today!"

"Yes, Dad." I tugged my collar. The tie was choking me and I felt stupid. I could see myself in the rear-vision mirror; I looked like a shrunken version of Dad going to work. "It would be easier to be quiet and still if I didn't have to wear this tie."

"The tie stays on," Mum said, without looking up from the murder mystery she was reading.

After she'd read to the end of the page, we were allowed to get out of the car and hang out at the front of the stone church with everyone else. There were heaps of people. People I'd never seen before. All the guys wore suits, which made me feel less stupid. And there were heaps of gorgeous girls with long shiny hair and suntans. Dan and Sophie had lived in London for years and years, so how did they know all these people?

The four of us stood in a circle looking at each other because we didn't seem to know anyone else. Mum smiled. "The sunshine is lovely," she said.

"Beautiful," replied Dad, returning her smile.

My parents were weird. Actually, weddings were weird. For months

everyone had carried on like Dan was a prince and Sophie was a princess just because they were getting married. But they'd been living together in a little flat in London for ages, so it was like they were married anyway. How did dressing up and going to church change anything?

And Mum and Nanna couldn't wait until Sophie had a baby. Once Mum told me babies are hard work. She said, when I was a baby I never slept and I cried all the time. So why did Mum and Nanna want Sophie to have a baby so much? Maybe they didn't really like her.

I shrugged. Who knew? I just hoped this day and night would go real fast. Now that I wasn't the pageboy I might die of boredom.

A woman wearing a large hat with feathers on it came up to us. She said to Mum and Dad, "I'm Sophie's mother." Mum introduced Charlie and me. Sophie's mother patted me on the head and whispered, "You would've made a very handsome pageboy."

I smiled, but inside I was mad because I'd wanted to be the pageboy. I wanted to be standing near Dan when the minister said, *Now you may kiss the bride*. I wanted my face in a wedding photo on their mantelpiece. I wanted the guests to tell me how handsome I was.

And I wanted to do something that Charlie hadn't done. He'd never been a pageboy. And now he was too old, so he never would be. Charlie had always been the chosen one. He was captain of his soccer team again. When he was in grade six he was captain of Yarra house. And last week the girls in his class voted him as the boy they'd most like to kiss. It sucked.

Dan had called me from London to ask, *Would you do me the honor of being my pageboy?* I pretended to think about it for a minute, before I said, *Yep*. I even went to get my suit fitted. But three weeks before the wedding, Dan came over to our place and said, *Sorry sport, Sophie has changed her mind. You'll find women do that.*

I decided I didn't like Sophie and I didn't want Dan to marry her. Even though I'd seen her photo and she had beautiful green eyes and smooth skin. Then a week later I met her when we had a barbeque at Nanna's place. As soon as Sophie saw me, her hand went over her glossy pink lips and she said, *Oh, you're so cute and just the right age. You would've looked perfect with Lucy*. She seemed really upset that she'd made a mistake, so, being the kind, generous person I am, I forgave her.

I knew then that something fishy was going on. All I found out was that I'd lost my place in the team to a five year old named Hamish (tell me, what sort of pageboy is named Hamish?), who was Sophie's twenty-third cousin or something. But why? Someone must've told her I wasn't cute enough. Who would've said that?

As Sophie's mum told Mum all about Sophie's Italian handmade beaded silk shoes, Nanna arrived. She wanted to know the colour of the bridesmaids' dresses. Mum thought they were lilac and Sophie's mum thought they were lavender.

Aunt Evil (as Charlie and me call her) turned up. She parked in the loading zone out the front of the church, probably so everyone could check out her red Mercedes sports car. She came over and Charlie and me stood back while everyone kissed everyone else like they hadn't seen each other since Christmas (and not two weeks ago at Nanna's place).

Charlie kicked a stone in my direction. Dad spun round to see if we were doing anything we shouldn't be. I stood on the stone and gave him a blank look. So far I'd made a good impression. I'd been quiet and still, just like Dad had told me to be. I wouldn't kick the stone back to Charlie. I'd let Charlie suffer.

Everyone turned to look at me.

"I didn't do anything," I said.

Then Sophie's mum stepped back and wrapped her arm round me, squeezing me like I was a plastic duck that spurted water out its mouth. Geez, I'd only just met her! "Avril," she said, "I think he's lovely and he seems perfectly behaved."

Aunt Evil laughed nervously. "Trust me," she replied, "he's programmed to make trouble."

"Oh, he's a good boy," said good old Nanna.

I glared at my evil aunt. She looked guilty and turned away. So it was Aunt Evil who told Sophie that I was too naughty! My heart thumped like I'd just run a hundred-metre race. I wanted revenge, but I wouldn't do anything yet. I'd wait. I'd wait until the right moment. Then I'd get revenge on my evil aunt.