

SARAH IVENS



A

Modern
Girl's Guide To
Getting Hitched

*How to plan, survive and enjoy
your wedding*

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A Modern Girl's Guide to Getting Hitched



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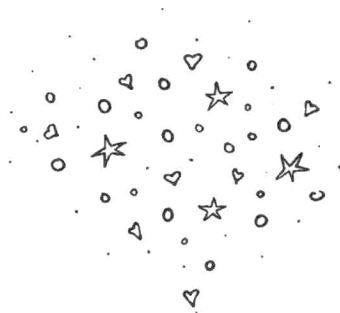
Sarah is married and lives in East London.

Dedication

For my mother, who made me what I am, and my husband,
who loves me the way I am.

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Introduction



A bride-to-be's life is not a simple one

It seems so easy. Boy meets girl. Girl meets boy. They fall in love. She realises after one week that she can't live without him and they should get married. He realises the same thing – but after a much longer period of time – and he drops down on one knee and asks the question. If it is true love (and we're assuming it is), she says yes and they get married. They live happily ever after. That's how it always happened at Disney.

The reality starts the same: they fall in love, he asks, she says yes – but stop right there. It's not as simple as just getting married. Anyone who says 'just get married' has obviously never even attempted to do such a thing. In fact, the most annoying thing about falling in love and getting engaged is that you have to organise the wedding.

You enjoy the romance of being a fiancée for about two months and then – wham – you're a bride-to-be with a mission. You will have the best wedding ever. You will be the most beautiful bride in the world. You will have a happy

and successful marriage... and this is just what your mother is telling you. In truth, your main mission is to get through the whole process without killing your parents, having a nervous breakdown and conducting an escapist affair with a man in your office.

I got married in October 2000. The fifteen months prior to the day itself were a rollercoaster of fear, excitement, panic, dread, regret, poverty and shock. I was expected to spend a sickening amount of time thinking about distant relatives whom I have never liked, my preferences for icing over marzipan and the convenience of outside toilets. I turned into a monster; a wedding bore with an attitude problem, a Bridezilla with frequent paranoia attacks.

My main problem was that I thought I was the only one going through these irrational ups and downs. In the movies – and in wedding magazines – brides are perceived as sweet, gentle girls who look lovely all the time. I wanted to swear like a trooper and start smoking again. And as for looking lovely? The stress did nothing for my skin or my nails. This is where this book comes in. I hope that by sharing the hard facts and real dramas, you will be able to get on with planning the best day of your life without making the same mistakes I did. Try to enjoy every minute because, believe me, as soon as it's over, you'll have envy attacks every time you come across a modern girl with it all to look forward to.

When I was getting married, I wish I'd had an easy-to-use guidebook that told me the bare facts and explained the common misconceptions. Magazines are perfect for finding a dream dress but they can't explain bridal neurosis. I have written this book by recalling my bleakest moments and remembering what got me through them: the basic rules, advice from friends and amazing tips that I would never

have thought of. So, along with a general guide to all the elements of your wedding and the run-up to it, I have also included anecdotes from countless past brides and their foolproof Secrets of Success. I've also devised an Ideal Time Planner, so that you can get organised from six months before the wedding until the day before.

Good luck... survive the next few months and you can survive anything!



Chapter One

Coming to terms with never
being able to pull men again



NO DOUBT, YOUR LIFE SO far has been awash with childhood crushes, teenage romances and twenty-something relationships. Now you have found the man of your dreams, what do you do? Marry him of course. It may be difficult to relinquish your dating techniques to your single sisters, but where you are going, you won't need them. You may have twinges of sadness that you will never be able to pull rugby players in nightclubs again, or even that you will never have to sit by the telephone for two weeks thinking, 'will he, won't he?' Yet if your man is

special enough to marry, he is special enough to start staying in on a Saturday night for. So enjoy love, security and loyalty and shout '*Au revoir le singledom*' from the rooftops.

The proposal

As every woman knows (and every man should remember), a proposal isn't just about asking someone to marry you. It will come to signify your relationship forever more. So try to make sure it's worth repeating. Obviously, the girl isn't supposed to know anything about it. This is, after all, one of the man's only responsibilities during the whole wedding process before he backs off into a pre-matrimonial coma.

JANE, 30

☹ My husband is lovely: sweet, generous, honest, and hard working. That's why it is so sad that my proposal was such a disaster. Apparently he had planned to propose on a holiday later in the year, but during a particularly vicious bout of food poisoning, he thought he'd ask to cheer me up. I was in my sweaty pyjamas in bed. He burst in like a rabbit caught in headlights. He asked the question, I said yes, he tried to kiss me but it made me nauseous. He explained that he hadn't planned to propose this early so he didn't have the ring, but he had stopped off at the jewellers for some brochures. He was upset that I had ignored them, but I couldn't summon up the energy to sip water, let alone enthuse over pages of diamonds. ☹

Should he ask for your father's permission to marry you?

Tricky one. He won't want to. He's probably a bit scared of your dad and finds it difficult enough talking to him about the football scores. And anyway, maybe you'd be affronted that he was treating you like a possession swapped from man to man. Your dad would probably like to be asked, although nowadays, it does seem a bit sexist and ridiculous. Also, your dad might say no and put a damper on the whole thing.

As soon as you are engaged, decide what the best thing for everyone is. If you'd like your fiancé to talk to your father, remind him how close you are to your dad. If you feel strongly that it's got nothing to do with your dad, make this clear. It will save your partner a lot of unnecessary stress and sweat.

What to do if the dream proposal is a nightmare?

Grin and bear it. What else can you do? If this is the one for you, you can't really strop off and say, 'Not until you ask me properly!' But before you tell anyone else how it happened, change your state of mind and turn the negative into a positive. When anyone asks you how it happened, embellish the truth or act coy and let his or her imagination take over.

If he really hasn't made an effort at all, demand a second proposal and get him to take you to your favourite restaurant, hotel or – at a push – city to make up for it. This might be a fun thing to do a few months before the wedding.

The engagement ring

Traditionally, a man is supposed to spend the equivalent of one month's salary on the engagement ring. This takes a lot of saving, as he'll still have the bills to pay without looking suspiciously thrifty. If he's taken the effort to choose a ring for you, he loves you very much. Men don't like shopping at the best of times, so the fact that he spent time hanging about in jewellery shops speaks volumes. If he has chosen badly (or meanly), choose an extra-glam wedding band – or demand a diamond-encrusted eternity ring when you give birth to your first child.

To many of you, the thought of being presented with a ring is probably horrific. There is nothing wrong in choosing together, in fact, although less romantic, it might be more practical in the long run. You will get exactly what you want and he won't have to worry about disappointing you with his choice.

Telling the world your good news

The impact the engagement has will depend on how many people your fiancé has already told. In a whirl of excitement – and a certain degree of self-confidence – my husband told the world we were getting engaged before I'd said yes. This replaced the 'can you believe it?' factor with a house full of family and friends waving helium balloons when we returned from Rome, where he had proposed. This was fun – and saved on the phone calls – but I resented being such an open-and-shut case in the proposal stakes. Maybe he should have waited, just in case I'd said no. He won me over by describing what the last few months had been like for him (stressful, uncertain, expensive) and that to keep his

morale high, he needed to double-check his plans with our nearest and dearest.

If you haven't told people yet, try not to do so via email or fax. Even to tell people over the phone is a shame, although, in some cases, inevitable. Where it's possible, tell family and friends when you are together as a couple – and near a stock of champagne, or at least sparkling wine. You'll be amazed by people's genuine joy and excitement... because after all, everyone loves a good wedding.

For pure drama and decadence, take out an advertisement in the local paper. This is a good way to show ex-classmates or colleagues that you are a rounded, wanted woman with a future ahead of her. For extra impact, add flamboyant details of the wedding and your great career. Exaggerate as necessary to get revenge on bitches from your past.

Engagement parties: the done thing or an added expense?

If you're a party person, you will feel completely justified in throwing a soirée in your own honour. Invite your friends and family over for a glass of champagne (or twelve), and an eyeful of your new piece of jewellery – if they decide to bring you a present, all the better. Don't assume you will receive engagement presents – most people consider a card sufficient – and certainly don't let your smile drop a mile when friends arrive on your doorstep with little more than a bottle of Chardonnay and an eighties compilation tape.

Traditionally, engagement parties have been used to introduce close friends and families on one side to their equivalent on the other. And alcohol always does make stressful situations like these a little easier, provided your