

I WANTED TO BE WONDERFUL

Excerpt

I sat at night, in my empty house, and after so many years of longing for a moment of quiet for myself, I realized that I hated this silence. Suddenly I knew that what I'd thought I wanted wasn't what I really wanted. I understood that I was so preoccupied with sorrow and anger that I wasn't looking at all the good things I did have. I had erased them. In this moment of clarity, I suddenly understood a number of things.

I have to stop wasting and sacrificing my life on the altar of small details. I have to separate what is important from what isn't. To let go. Because you can't control everything anyway. I won't be able to save my daughter, even if I devote all my time to her—my entire life, all my energies, all of myself. Because sometimes you just can't save someone. I have to stop being angry about what was, agonizing over the past and worrying about the future, because whatever will be will be. I have to remember that the here and now is also important, and I have to enjoy it. Because now will never come again.

This moment can be good. And this one good moment plus another one is what happiness is made of. Because happiness is something that suddenly emerges, illuminating the sky for one second, for one moment, and then it passes. It's so easy to miss them, those tiny moments of happiness. For too many years I had let them pass without even noticing them. Without even stopping to rejoice in them.

And for the first time I thought about what I wanted. Not what I wanted from other people—not what I wanted others to do, to be, to give me—but what I wanted from myself. And I wanted so many things. Too many things. I knew it wouldn't be easy, that I would have to change myself. But considering the fact that I hadn't smiled for so long, that years had passed since I had last laughed, and that I had pretty much ruined my life, I didn't really have anything to lose.

I thought of the first time we met. The sun was rising and the city behind us emitted the first sounds of morning. We rose from the reclining deck chairs on the empty beach, and he asked me what he had to do to see me again. I found a piece of paper, wrote my phone number on it, gave it to him, and said that I'd be very pleased if he called. He laughed and told me to remember that I was the one who made the first move.

The few friends I told about him, who had only my best interests at heart, immediately summoned expressions of concern and hastily explained to me that there was no future here, and that at my age—not even twenty—it was foolish to get into a relationship with a man who was divorced and had a child. But I wasn't thinking that far into the future. He was interesting, different, and he made me laugh. It was enough for me to fall in love. Two and a half years after that sunrise, he went away for several days, and I missed him so much that the minute he showed up with his suitcases, I ran to him and asked him if he wanted to marry me.

He said yes.

My mother told me that getting married so young was a mistake, but I was twenty-two and a half and felt ready and mature enough to start real life. I loved him and wanted a commitment. To do the right thing. For him to be my husband and me to be his wife.

I never fantasized about planning my dream wedding, and the event itself wasn't important to me, so we decided on a small ceremony in a restaurant. I hadn't worn a dress since third grade, I never wore makeup, and my hair had been short since fifth grade. I wasn't about to make an issue now about what to wear. One day, I went out and bought a white dress. As far as I was concerned, this was where the preparations for the big day ended.

Two days before the wedding, his parents brought me a gift, a small, delicate gold watch. That same day, my mother appeared with a present of her own: a massive silver necklace. His parents and mine expected me to wear their gifts at the wedding. Even a girl like me, clueless and lacking any passion for fashion, could see that these two pieces couldn't be worn together in any way.



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On the day of my wedding, in the afternoon, we went, my man and I, down the steps of our rented apartment and into our car. It was all so ordinary and so routine, except for one thing: I was dressed up in a long dress made of a rich and wonderful cream-colored material, and for the first time in my life, I looked like a woman.

I got married wearing the large silver necklace that my parents gave me and the small gold watch that his parents gave me. Even though they didn't go together.

The princess is dancing at her wedding ball, her long white dress flying with every movement she makes, wrapping her in an aura of purity. She's as beautiful as a princess in a fairy tale, just like she dreamed she would be. She's floating on a cloud of happiness that dulls the pain of the blisters caused by her new shoes, and she's spinning around, celebrating the moment, the pinnacle, the peak, the most important evening of her life, the end of this process, of the questions, the wonder, the hesitancy about this decision that was so difficult to make. The decision to entwine her life, forever and ever, with someone else's life. Through thick and thin. For better or for worse. Of all the people in the world. It took her so long to find him. And for him to find her.

She stops for a minute, catches her breath, and searches for him among the celebrators, and she sees him at the edge of the large ballroom—the prince, swaying drunkenly. My sweet doesn't really know how to drink, which is good, she says to herself, and he laughs too much, which is nice, and here are his charming friends surrounding him, friends who will accompany them forever and ever, and no, she won't ask what happened at the bachelor party because she knows that he loves her. And he knows that she loves him.

The princess is so happy—everyone keeps telling her she's beautiful and glowing—she forgets everything that happened before this evening, all the arguments between his parents and hers, that fight they had, he and she, when they were torn between former loyalties to the families from which each of them came and their new commitment to each other, and the indecision between the purple napkins that she wanted and the pink ones that his mother wanted. Another waiter passes by, crossing the room with a tray laden with dirty dishes, and for a second she lands with a crash from her cloud, petrified. For a moment it seems to her as though she's no more than an actress in some end-of-the-year school play, hiding the fact that she's not who everyone thinks, and that she actually still feels like a little girl, that she's afraid, that he's not really a man but just a young prince who has just started his life, and that there's no chance that the wedding gifts they'll receive will cover the expenses for this evening, which have unintentionally swelled to monstrous proportions.

She doesn't really understand how it happened. They had promised themselves a small, modest event, and now she's wearing a dress that cost more than all the clothes she has ever bought in her life.

She inhales deeply, observing all the aunts and uncles eating, and all the strangers scrutinizing her. Her parents are approaching, their chests puffed out with pride. They hug her, and the photographer captures them with his flash, the bride and her parents, and she hastily summons a smile. Today she's the star of the evening. Someone pulls her onto the dance floor, and again she's spinning on a cloud somewhere. Mazel tov, congratulations. From the other side of the room the prince smiles at her, and she smiles back at him. She loves him so much, and she knows that he loves her deeply, and that they're going to be happy together. They're a wonderful couple.

