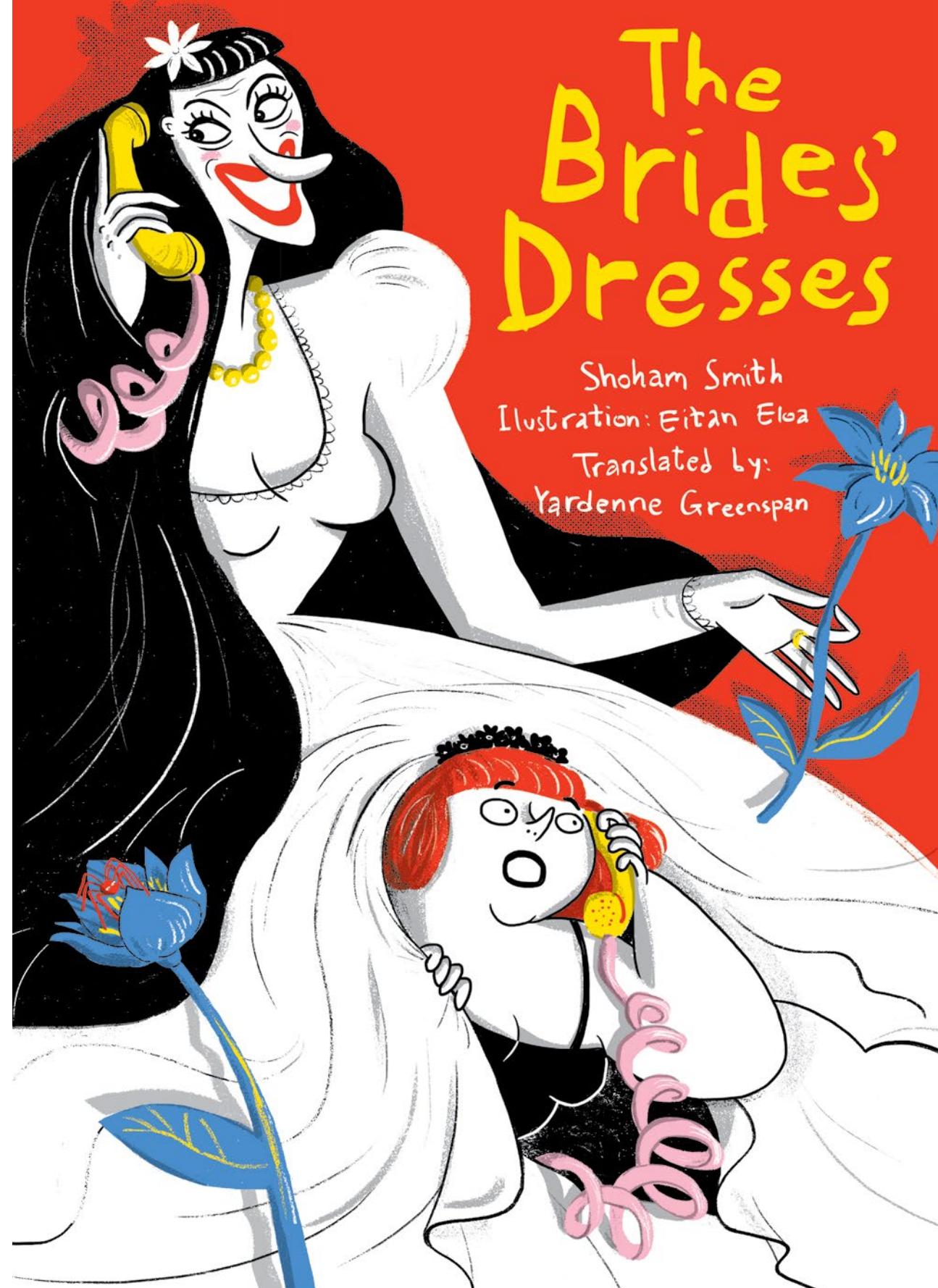


The Brides' Dresses

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Day 1

The mother of the bride, a widow, in excellent mechanical shape, called her daughter, the bride, to tell her that this afternoon, immediately upon waking from her beauty sleep, she plans to go into town to buy a dress that would suit her and the event that will take place...







"Fine, fine." The bride could sniff out a potential digression that could gobble up precious quality minutes from her final hours of bachelorette-hood. "Tell me about it this evening, after you buy the dress."

"Dress?" her mother marveled. "What dress?"



"Damn it, Mom," the bride complained. "That's why you called me! The dress for the wedding!"

"Oh," her mother got a hold of herself. "That dress..."

"You're chewing in my ear again!"

This was in the middle of dinner, when the mother of the bride called to report the satisfying results of her shopping spree.

"It isn't my fault you always call during mealtime," the bride countered, her mouth bustling with French fries.

Her mother didn't let that one slide. "It's one thing not to lose weight before your wedding, like most brides do. But gain weight? Don't be surprised if your wedding gown doesn't fit you."

"Don't you worry about my dress," the bride said. "It's made of stretchy fabric."

"Stretchy fabric," her mother mocked.

"Now, that's a stretch! Get it?"

"I get it, thanks!
Anyway, didn't you call to tell me about the dress you bought?"

"Well, that's the thing. It's just that... there were so many options... I had trouble deciding..."
The bride couldn't believe her ears. "That's what happens when you have a perfect figure. Can you imagine, even the cashier didn't believe me when I told her my age? The saleswomen leapt out of their skin. They said I was



a wonder of nature,

a sun that never sets...

a fountain
of youth,

PARISIAN CHIC





A colorful illustration depicts a bride lying in bed, looking distressed. She has long, dark, wavy hair and is wearing a pink nightgown. A red ladybug with yellow spots is crawling on her hair. In the foreground, there's a stack of colorful bowls and cups, a small mouse, and a candle. The background shows a window with a view of a night sky with stars and a crescent moon.

"Tomorrow," she promised solemnly, "I'll go out again and buy myself an appropriate dress."

That night, the bride crawled into bed with a heavy heart. And when the heart is heavy, the sleep is light. And when the sleep is light, it tends to become disrupted. At first, the bride was convinced it was hunger, but after her many forays to the fridge offered no comfort, she realized—it was doubt, not hunger, that was gnawing at her.

Once this became clear, she quickly called the fortune teller she'd consulted with last year.



"Good evening," said the bride. In spite of the late hour, she still retained full control of her manners.

"If you don't mind," the fortune teller grumbled, "it's already the middle of the night."

"If I don't mind? I certainly do mind! Boy, do I! Would I be calling you at this time if I didn't?"

The bride cried out in grief.

"And to whom am I speaking, if I may ask?" the fortune teller investigated.

"I thought a fortune teller should be able to know," the bride teased.

"Excuse me!" the fortune teller erupted. "Do you have any idea how many clients I have?

You're not an only child!" "That's what my mother always says."

"Well, then, there you have it." "But I am a single child..." the bride started, quickly trailing off when she recalled her arguments with her mother, deciding, just as she always did with her mother, to give in. "Last year," she started over, swallowing her saliva and her pride. "Last year, when I came to see you, you told me to go see a seamstress and order myself a wedding gown." "And?" "You read my coffee grounds and saw tomorrow's date..." "Well, then," the fortune teller said, "all that's left to do is follow through." "That's the thing." The bride paused to debate how to put what she needed

to say into words. "Look," she tried, "it's not that I'm doubting you or anything, but my groom-to-be, the one you promised I'd meet, with the white Peugeot pick-up truck, well... I'm a little worried, because to this day I've never even bumped into the bumper of a Peugeot pick-up truck, and like I said, all the invitations have been sent, and the wedding's tomorrow,

so I was thinking—"



"Listen carefully now!" The fortune teller sounded as if she were about to shatter a crystal ball. "Tomorrow is tomorrow and today is today. Do you have any idea how many things can happen in one measly day? Believe you me: if the earth, in all its glory, can complete a full turn around its tail in a day, you've got nothing to worry about, and certainly nothing to worry me about! And in the dead of night, no less!"

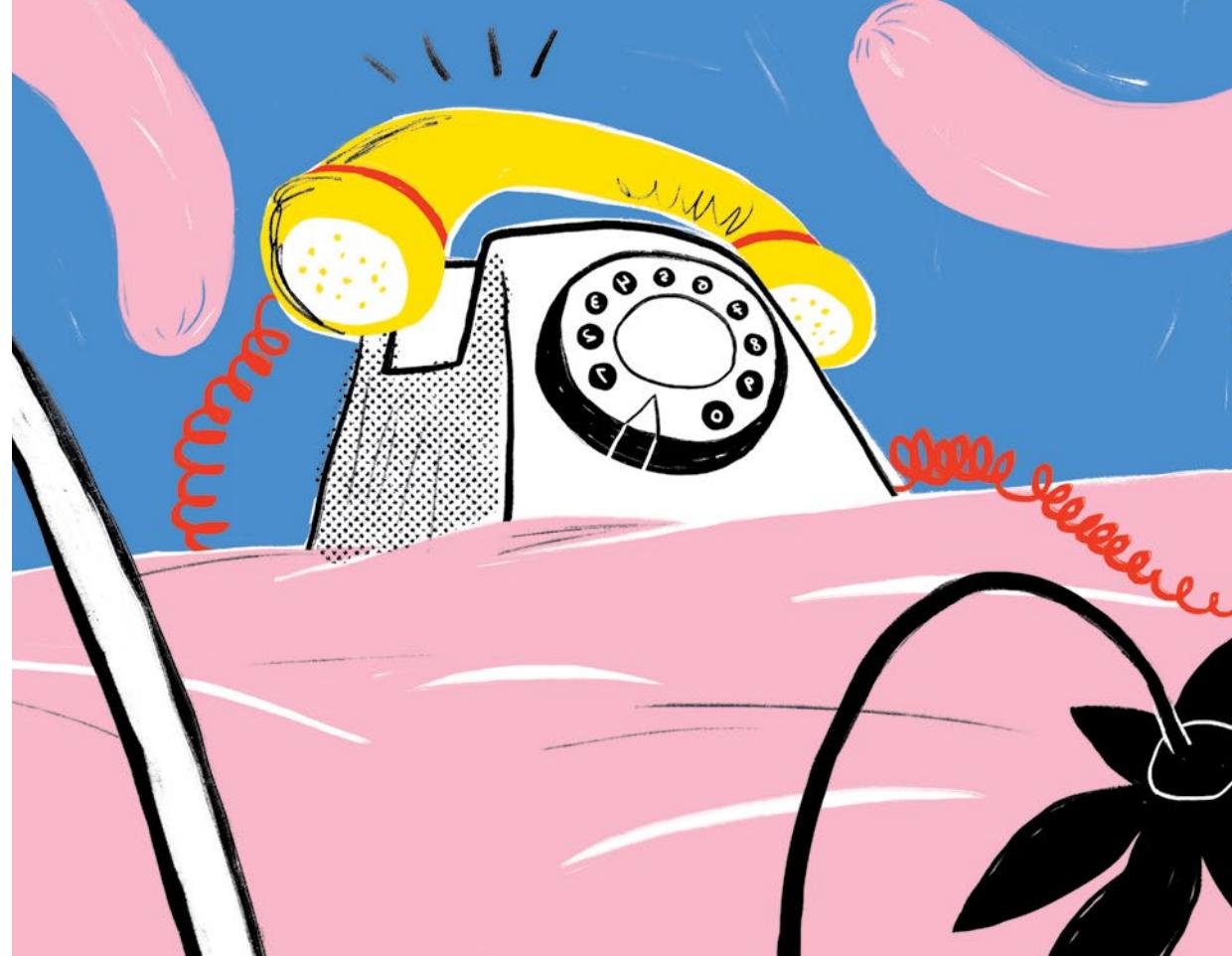
She slammed the phone before the bride even had a chance to wonder how this woman knew so much about the intimate affairs of Planet Earth.

Maybe I was nervous about nothing, the bride thought.
What did the fortune teller say? Tomorrow is tomorrow and today is today.
She crawled into bed again, this time with a lighter heart, and turned her pudgy back on the clock.



Day 2

She was awakened by the ringing of the phone. To be honest, she had planned to wake up like Sleeping Beauty, from fluttering of the oily brakes of the Peugeot owner (soon enough she'll be calling him "my husband")! It never occurred to her that a phone call might precede that event. It was more polite, of course, but what does politeness have to do with romance? On the other hand, since her groom has proven his manners by calling, it wouldn't be very polite to reject the gesture, banal as it may be... It was her duty, the duty of a loyal wife, to comply right away, and pick up the gauntlet, or, rather, the phone. Oh my! She was excited.



"Hello?"
Her heart was pounding.

"Hello!"

"Oh, Mom, it's you..."



"I'm sure it
suits you,"
she told
the
mother of
the bride
in order
to settle
the matter.

"Who did you think it was? You don't even get wrong number calls from widowers, but me? Just this morning one woke me up. Listen! The things he told me—"

"I'm getting married today!" the bride cut off the mother of the bride, and with crude, exhibited rudeness to boot.
"Well, why do you think I'm calling?" her mother asked, insulted.
"I've just returned from the boutique bearing a dress."

"What a relief," said the bride, even though she couldn't care less.
The problems of yesterday were the problems of yesterday, and she had fresh problems on the agenda—the groom-to-be, for one...

"Suits me' is an understatement,"

said the mother of the bride. "In fact," she rushed to expand on the topic, "there were no fewer than two candidates. The first was a blue chiffon dress with sequins. The other was purple satin with an applique of the flowers of evil." She debated between them for a torturous fifteen minutes before a professional opinion was summoned, from the boutique owner himself, who was also, of course, impressed with the mother of the bride.

"By the way, it turns out he's a grass widower. His wife—may she live a long and healthy life— took off with the guy who renovated his store.

He renovated the guts out of that place! The cracks between the bric—"

"Sequins or applique?!"

"Neither!

The boutique owner said that even though both dresses wrapped around my body like a dream, the colors were a little too gloomy. Purple is known as a certified generator of depression, and blue, well, blue only emphasizes the wrinkles widowers lust after. Long story short, he recommended a classic-cut, cream colored dress."

"Chocolate cream or vanilla cream?" he bride asked with trepidation.



"All you think about is food!"

Face cream.

It's the
color
of face
cream."



We would be lying if we said the bride was fond of the idea of the mother of the bride appearing at her wedding in a dress the color of face cream. But, as has already been insinuated, this problem was dwarfed like a mushroom in the shadow of the question of the groom, who has shown nary a sign of grooming. Luckily, the time crunch left the bride with little pause to devote herself to worries of the future. And what's more, by some devilish coincidence, a new problem was just introduced into the mix—the dimness in the closet had infected the white bridal gown, which had been buried in it for months, coloring it a shade the mother of the bride would have only been able to pronounce, "battered women's eye shadow".

And, to add insult to injury, the famous stretchy fabric seemed to have lost its stretchiness, or perhaps the dress had shrunk with anticipation of the big day—how else could we excuse the bride's struggle to wriggle into the garment, sewn (at the time) to her exact measurements?



At any rate, the dress, in spite of its color,
was kind and noble enough not to stand
in the way of the bride's will, and gave
her a hand—and a leg, and the rest of
an overgrown body—in squeezing her
way inside, if tightly, forcing her to dam
her breath. This side effect prevented
the bride from speaking her mind, but,
come to think of it, one can certainly
be an excellent bride without
uttering a sound.

If there is any justice
in the world,
the groom-to-be
would appear at once!



Believe it or not, the groom did show up, riding
a Peugeot pick-up truck (white, in excellent mechanical
shape) and right on time. The bride glanced at her watch,
her face beaming. In a minute or two, she thought, I'll be
changing my relationship status.



Was
it this hubris,
taking time's virginity
without consent, that deprived
the bride of that very banal happiness
she was just about to sink her teeth in?

Or perhaps the fault is not in the bride, but rather in the groom in the white Peugeot, who let the brilliance of the mother of the bride's classic-cut dress blind him? Or perhaps the fault is neither in the groom nor in the mother of the bride's white dress, but in the bride's black dress—which used to be white in its younger days, and which, as you'll recall, was glued to her like a second skin, in a manner that obligated her to hold her breath and keep her mouth shut, even as she witnessed the groom switching gears and linking arms with her mother, to the cheers of the guests and a barrage of sour celebration candy.

