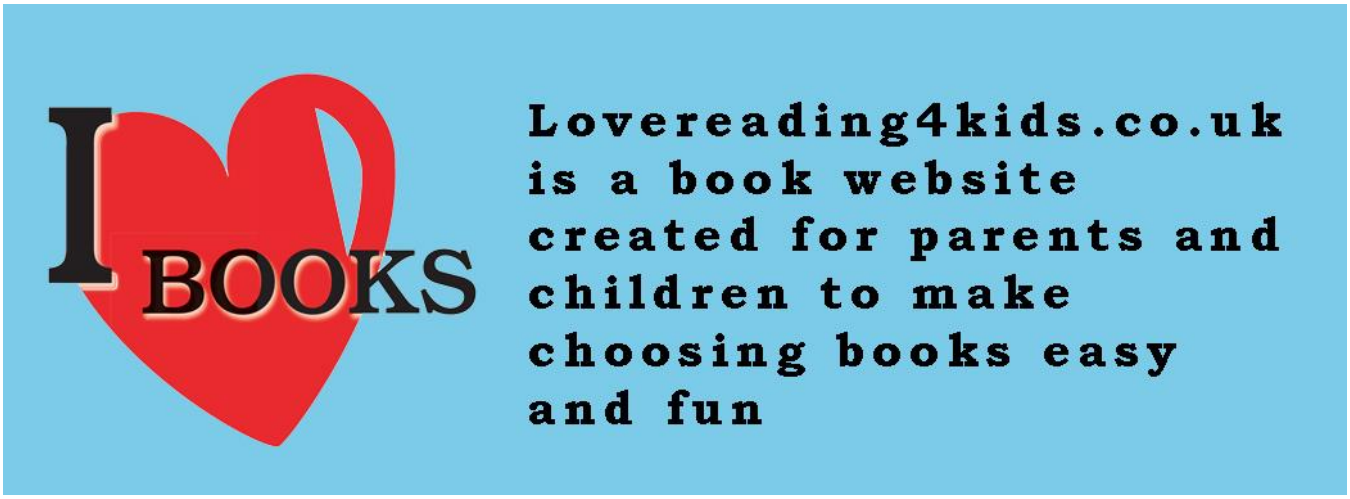


Opening extract from

Nathalia Buttface and the Totally Embarrassing Bridesmaid Disaster

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Published by

HarperCollins Children's Books

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CHAPTER ONE

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"DAD, I'M NOT COMING OUT OF THE CHANGING rooms and I'm not even joking and this wedding is utter pants and I hardly even *know* my lame cousin and bridesmaids are all rank and I LOOK TOTALLY STUPID and anyway I'm not doing it," said Nat.

Ever so loudly.

Dad looked at the sour-faced lady who ran DREAM BRIDES LTD – a hot and cramped little dress shop above a newsagents on the high street. He gave her what he hoped was a charming smile.

She wasn't charmed one little bit. Her face, which was stony to begin with, hardened to granite.

"She doesn't have to shout," said the lady, who was called Dolly Crumble and who was almost lost among the sickly pink and curdled cream and violently violet fluffy, frilly frocks that filled her little boutique.

"That's not shouting," said Dad, whose voice was muffled by some kind of purple velvet thing that was apparently a really important bit of a bridesmaid outfit and seemed to be attacking him. "When she was a baby and was hungry or had wet herself, THEN she shouted. You should have heard it."

"Shuddup, Dad," shouted Nat from the changing room. Billowing pink material surrounded her. It looked like she was being consumed by a possessed blancmange.

Dad didn't shuddup.

"When baby Nathalia started yelling in the car, people thought a fire engine was going past.

It was great – everyone else on the road got out of the way. I lost count of how many cars drove into lamp posts."

"Nobody cares, Dad," shouted Nat.

"Are you ready to come out yet?" asked Dolly Crumble. "Only you've been in there twenty minutes and this is the SIXTH Perfect Fairy Princess dress you have tried on."

"That's because they're all horrible," wailed Nat. "They all look like vomit."

"Such language," said the dressmaker, glaring at Dad as if he was to blame. "I hope she's going to be a better behaved young lady on the big day." She sniffed in a superior way and hoisted up her enormous bosom.

"A wedding is the most precious day in any woman's life. It is, you might say, the best moment of her entire life."

"Rubbish," said Nat. "There's tons of things better than a soppy wedding. There's getting to number one in the charts or winning Celebrity

All-Star Cook-Off or climbing Mount Everest or getting an Oscar or a Nobel Prize or an Olympic medal or going into space or—"

"Yes, well, not many girls will do those things," interrupted Dolly Crumble, "but all girls can get married."

"If everyone can do it, that doesn't make it very special then, does it?" argued Nat. There was a stony silence, like a big, gaping dark hole. Dad jumped into it. With both feet.

"Tell us about YOUR wedding day," he said. "If I've learned one thing in the last few weeks it's how much women like to talk about weddings. They really REALLY like to talk about weddings."

Nat thought she heard a rather strained tone in Dad's voice but as she was still being swallowed by the evil dress, she couldn't be sure.

The silence got EVEN worse.

"I have not had the pleasure of the bridal day," hissed the dressmaker. "Well, I had the pleasure

of the DAY – the lovely church, the beautiful flowers, the glorious dress, the expectant relatives. What I did NOT have was the pleasure of Derek Sponge, my intended, turning up. No, he decided NOT to marry me, but to run off to Torquay to open a Bed and Breakfast with Sally Bucket, my next door neighbour."

"Oops," said Dad, stepping back. "You ready Nat?" he shouted. "We should be off soon."

"And so I vowed to make every other woman's day at the altar absolutely *perfect*, NO MATTER WHAT," said the jilted bride, "and whatever the bride wants, she gets. And *this* bride has left strict instructions that her six bridesmaids are to be six Perfect Fairy Princess Bridesmaids."

Angry little bits of spittle had gathered around MISS Crumble's top lip.

"And if it takes me all day to turn a turnip into a Perfect Fairy Princess Bridesmaid, then so be it!"

With that she whipped open the changing

room door and Nat popped out like a cork from a bottle of pink fizzy pop.

Miss Crumble picked up Nat and dusted her off.

"You're as beautiful as I can make you," she said. "Possibly as beautiful as ANYONE could make you."

"Thanks," snarled Nat.



Dad pushed the smothering purple material from his eyes. "Let's have a proper look at you," he said.

"This is my biggest and best Perfect Fairy Princess outfit. I call her the Esmerelda, the Flower Fairy Princess. Isn't she beautiful?" said the dressmaker, proudly.

"No, she's horrible," said Nat, miserably, "and I'm going to have to walk around in it ALL DAY including at the party afterwards when everyone else is in party clothes and having fun and being all cool. I'm going to look like a cross between Tinkerbell, a stick of candy floss and a sneeze."

Which is literally what she looked like.

Dad pushed the bit of purple material into his mouth for some reason. "No, it's all right actually," he said, squeakily.

Nat eyed him suspiciously.

His shoulders were shaking.

"Are you LAUGHING at me?" said Nat, furiously. "You are, I can tell, don't lie to me."

"It's nice to see you in a dress," coughed Dad in a strangled kind of way, "even a dress with big pink flowery wings."

"What even *is* this on my head?" snarled Nat. "It's got my hair all tangled up." Her long blonde hair was wrapped around some kind of pink fluffy crown. She tugged at it, but it was stuck fast.

"It's a tiara. All Perfect Fairy Princess Bridesmaids have to have tiaras, it's the law," said Miss Crumble, advancing towards Nat with a box full of sharp dress pins.

"What law?" snapped Nat.

"Fairyland law. Everyone knows that. Now, stand still and let me take it in. You haven't got a shape really, have you?"

"Dad, stop her talking about me like this," said Nat, "she'll make me sad."

"She's a professional," said Dad. "She's just got her…er… own dressmaking language."

"Ow, she jabbed me on purpose," yelped Nat.

"Of course I didn't," fibbed Miss Crumble.

Eventually, after much prodding and pushing and pinning and yelping, Dolly Crumble was satisfied and Nat and Dad were free to leave. Five minutes later they were sitting in the burger place opposite. Actually, Dad was sitting, Nat was hovering. Her bum was now a pincushion and it was too painful to sit.

Nat slurped her pop fiercely. So fiercely, in fact, that bubbles came out of her nose and made her even crosser. "Why have I got to be one of Tiffannee's stupid bridesmaids anyway, I hardly know her," she growled.

Dad sighed the sigh of a dad who has answered the same question six thousand times. Which was a bit unfair to Nat as he'd only been asked that question FIVE thousand times.

"You DO know Tiffannee. She's a close relative when you look at our family tree from a distance," he said.

"If you look at family trees at enough of a

distance, it looks like EVERYONE's related," said Nat, who had done evolution at school that term. "Everyone except Darius Bagley, who was made in a lab. By mistake."

Darius was not only the naughtiest boy in the history of schools ever, he was also Nat's best friend for reasons so old and complicated Nat couldn't even remember.

"But you are *properly* related to Tiff," said Dad. "She's the daughter of my cousin Raymonde. Auntie Daphne's son."

"Is she a proper Auntie or just one of those old women I have to call auntie even though they're not? The ones with hairy faces and a smell of cat wee?"

"Auntie Daphne is Bad News Nan's sister," explained Dad, patiently, "and you know Raymonde because he lives in Texas these days and always sends you baseball caps for Christmas."

"Oh yeah I like him," said Nat, who liked baseball caps.

"Tiffannee's his daughter, which makes her your, er, your, um—" Dad's eyes glazed over, "it makes her your relation anyway. Let's say cousin."

"I don't know why she can't get married in Texas," grumbled Nat, "we could all go there and eat cheeseburgers and get a tan and drive round in big cars."

"Tiffannee was born here, most of her relatives are here, and she says she's always dreamed of a perfect English wedding."

"I flipping well know THAT," said Nat, "it's all I've heard for months, Tiffannee's perfect wedding."

"I was pretty honoured to be asked to organise it," said Dad.

Nat snorted.

"I haven't really got the time," fibbed Dad, who always had loads of time, "but Raymonde's stuck out there in Texas working for that big oil company and, well, you can't say no to family."

Nat snorted again. "Tiffannee asked MUM to help organise her wedding, not you. No one would ask you to organise anything, not even a sock drawer. You write Christmas cracker jokes for a living and you don't even get those done in time."

Nat stamped her feet in silent fury as Dad just chuckled and dripped tomato sauce over his shirt. "I did do something useful actually," he said. "I got you promoted to THIRD ASSISTANT Bridesmaid. Cool, eh?"

"Brilliant, thanks," grumbled Nat sarcastically as they clambered into Dad's rubbish old campervan, the Atomic Dustbin. The Dog licked Nat's face, as if to say he understood her fairy princess pain. As they drove off in the familiar cloud of black engine smoke, Nat's brain was working overtime.

I'm not doing it, she thought. *I don't care how I get out of it, but I'm not doing it. I just need a plan…*