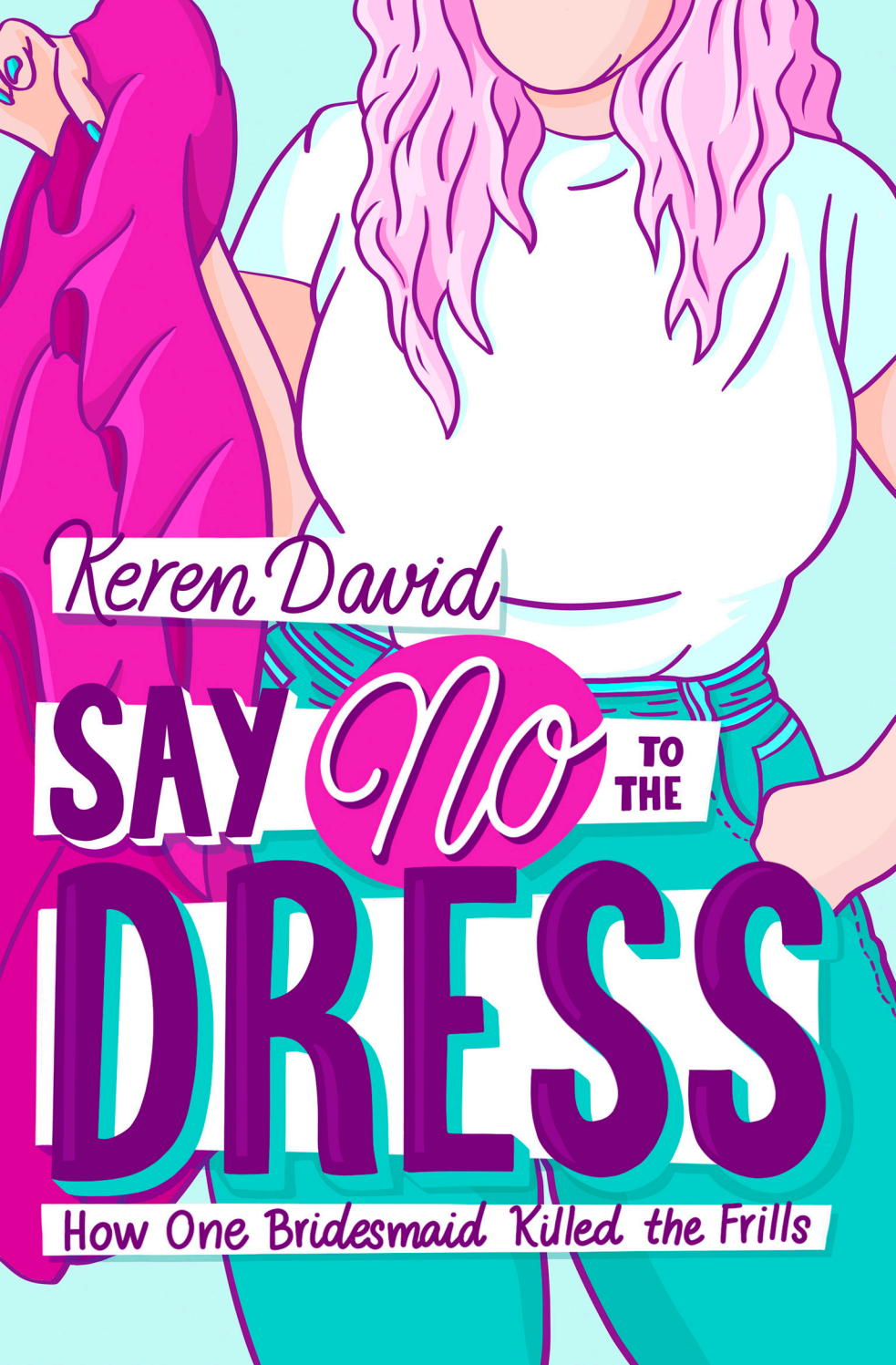

Keren David
SAY No TO THE DRESS
How One Bridesmaid Killed the Frills

SAY *No* TO THE DRESS

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To Beverley

Chapter 1

The dress is bright red with black stripes – it's a jumper dress with a roll neck. It would look great with black tights and my lace-up boots.

That is, it would look great if anyone else was wearing it. Anyone apart from me.

"Just try it, Miri," says Sophie. She's my best friend. When we're older, she's determined to be a stylist. She's very determined. Sophie wants to work with celebrities, but until then she's practising on me. I'm not so keen on being dressed up – and I'm certainly no celebrity. But I love Sophie. I do it for her.

There's just one problem. The problem is me.

"The dress won't fit," I tell her. There's no way. Those skinny, stripy arms, that tiny skirt …

"It's stretchy! It's jersey! It's body-con!" Sophie says.

Body-con stands for body-confident or body-contouring or body-conditioning – I can never remember which. It basically means that the clothes will cling to every bit of your body. But I am not feeling confident or conditioned. My contours are like a mountain range. My body has betrayed me lately.

One year ago I was a small and skinny and flat-chested thirteen year old. No one ever looked at me. I was fast on my feet, good at netball and gymnastics. I liked my body. Mum and Alice, my older sister, were both slender and sporty, so I was sure that was how I was going to stay.

But then things happened. Things that made me less sure, less confident. Along came puberty. Hello, spots. Hello, massive breasts that jiggle around if I run. Which meant goodbye, sporting career. Hello, sweaty patches under my arms. Oh, and I'm about six inches taller – taller than Mum, taller than Alice, and nearly as tall as Dad and my brother, Adam.

I've also got wider. And bits of my body have taken on a life of their own. Yes, gigantic, spotty bum, I'm talking about you.

Plus I got Covid, and then Long Covid, which meant months of not seeing anyone. I didn't do anything very much apart from feel miserable and eat flapjacks and watch daytime TV. I watched a lot of *Embarrassing Bodies*. I binged *Come Dine with Me*. I even got a bit addicted to *Say Yes to the Dress*.

Getting bigger meant I had to have a completely new school uniform when I finally went back to school. "Ho, ho, ho, it's the jolly green giant!" my dad said to me when he first saw me in it. This made me hate him, and hate myself, and especially hate whoever it was that decided our skirts and blazers would be a disgusting shade of "forest green".

"Dad's just trying to cheer you up, Miri," said Mum. "You know his jokes are rubbish." That didn't help at all.

None of my clothes fit any more. And none of the hand-me-downs from Alice fit either. And today, none of the clothes that Sophie has ordered from Depop have fit me. Which is a shame

because Sophie's plan was to let me pick my favourite as my birthday present.

"I don't like body-con," I tell Sophie. But I agree to try the jumper dress. I pull it on over my big fat head. I tug it over my gigantic bouncing chest. I thrust one arm into a sleeve …

And I am completely stuck. I can't see a thing.

"Help!" I squeak in a tiny, muffled voice.

Ding dong! Sophie's front door rings. And rings again. *Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong.*

"Hang on!" says Sophie. I think she means she's going to help me, but then I hear the bedroom door creak and I realise she's answering the front door first.

Gah! I wriggle and twist and push and pull and … Am I going to die by dress? Will I ever see the light of day again? I try to pull it over my shoulders and there's a massive ripping noise …

"Oh my god, Miri! What have you done?"

I know that voice. That's not Sophie.

"I can't believe you tried that on!"

It's Toxic Tiffany. Now I'm definitely going to die.

"I could have told you it wouldn't fit!" Tiffany goes on. "What are you going to do now?"

Unbelievable. I have ruined a brand-new dress in front of my arch-enemy. And I am still stuck in it, head and shoulders cocooned, gigantic bum on show.

"What a disaster!" says Toxic Tiffany. I suspect she's trying not to laugh.

"Are you all right, Miri?" says Sophie.

"Yes," I say in a faint voice, struggling with the dress. "I'm fine!"

But of course I mean no. I'm not fine at all.