

## The Special Day

I can't turn my gaze away from the entrance as I watch the masses of people streaming inside. *Wow!* It's hard to believe that so many people came today. But here they are. Just for me. To be honest I didn't even realize that I know so many people. As I gape over their heads, I'm trying to match faces with names. *Let's see...* Over there we've got Tom and Natascha. There's Uncle Joey. *Ohm my!* He's put on some weight. Maybe Laura left him again? Who else is here? Simon! Jesus, I can't even remember when I've last seen him. Must be ages ago. He's grown out his hair. Suits him, but I bet Aunt Dana won't be happy about it. Over there are Mum and Dad dutifully and politely shaking hands. Mum looks like she's going to cry any moment now. *Come on Mom, cheer up a little! This is supposed to be my day. They all came to honour and celebrate me so why the long faces?* But she isn't the only one. In fact, even the coldness of the sterile celebration hall is nothing against the freezing mood cloud that seems to hover over everyone's head. Maybe we all need a good warm up before the party starts, *eh?*

Gradually everyone takes a seat on one of the chairs standing in front of my podium. There are occasional whispers and whimpers and of course the obligatory hushed "Shushes" from a mother trying to calm down her crying baby, but altogether there's a heavy silence. Actually it's starting to get a little depressing here and - *Oh my God! No bloody Way!* My blood is boiling with rage as I see Eric Volta strolling through the entrance. Who the hell invited him? And why would he come? *Guess what, amigo, not everything is about you, okay? I don't care what you think or what you have to say and I clearly don't care about it now, on my special day! In fact, I don't want you here at all.* Oh, I bet - no, I'm convinced he knows that. That's why he came, right? To mock me and to gloat. *But you know what, you bloody prick, I won't let you ruin this day, my day. Just please, someone make sure he stays at the back or preferably outside.*

I force myself to calm down and move on. Turning to the other guests I try to figure out who else is here. A little in the background I spot my sister ignoring everyone on a master's level. She looks a bit upset but mostly annoyed... just as usual, I guess. You rarely spot a different expression on our little Miss Sunshine these days. It's really hard to get through to her. My little brother is way easier. He seems to be the only sensible one today. "Mummy, when can we eat the cake?" he asks, sheepishly eyeing the tray with my favourite dessert on it. *That's my boy.* At last someone is asking the real questions. Over at the corner the neighbour's kid is peering over to my sister. *Hey! Quit the attempt right there. She may be a pain in the arse sometimes, but she's still too good for you. So back off, okay.* What a creep.

There's a ruckus beside me which nearly sends me falling down the podium. Helena is setting up some tools and a curious guitar-shaped suitcase. *No way!* They organized a band for me? *Aw*, they are just the best friends in the world. I knew I could count on them for this special day. I wonder if I can steal a glance at the set list, but Pat keeps it clutched to his chest spilling no secrets. After they're done setting up the instruments Pat puts an arm around Hel and guides her to the third row of chairs. Now that's interesting, isn't it? I mean not astounding, but last time I talked to Hel about her and Pat there was *'definitely nothing going on'* between them. This doesn't look like nothing to me though. Maybe some crucial event happened that shoved them right into each other's arms. Although, we only spoke about a week ago. What could happen in such a short time? Behind them sits a girl who's looking rather uncomfortable. She keeps staring at the ground eyes glued to an extraordinary, interesting, little piece of dirt. I don't recognize her yet, but she seems familiar. *Who is it...? Who is it.....? Was it Lin-..., Lina..? No, Melina! Yes, her name is Melina. Melina... Sharp. Yes I think that's right. (Wow, I'm pretty good at this.)* We did a biology project together. Well, actually I did the project. She was more busy texting her girlfriend at that time. At least she's got the manners now to show up on my special day. I appreciate the gesture.

While turning my head again, I notice something unpleasant. Something unpleasant and alas inevitable. In other words, Volta is walking directly towards me. So no one threw him out yet. That's just too bad. Seems like I have to do everything on my own. I'm just about to tell him to hit the road again when he pulls out something from his jacket. He looks into my direction, but it seems like he stares right through me. I try to make out the blue thing he just pulled out. *Oh no, are those...? Yes, but how did he...? It has to be a coincidence. There is no way he knew they are my favourites.* "If I recall correctly they were always your favourites." *Damnit!* He places the small bouquet of cornflowers in front of me. They were, in fact, beautiful. *Goddamnit!* His mouth twitches into a little smirk as he leans a bit closer and lowers his voice. It's only a whisper now. "Actually, I thought a bunch of nasty thistles would have suited you better." *Bastard!* And here I was thinking he might do something nice for once. Yeah, very funny. I'm just about to crack his skull with the heavy plank next to me when he turns around and smoothly strolls back. I want to follow him but at this moment a woman comes up the podium, taps on the microphone and says the embarrassing "One, two, three, test, test, can you hear me" phrase. *Loud and clear, lady.* As the last people find themselves a chair, she fishes out a piece of paper with some bullet points written on it. A light tune of music starts to play. *Let the show begin!*

I want to welcome and thank everyone – well, almost everyone- for coming to my special day today, but the woman is faster. During her talk she adds some nice things about me. I'm starting to like this. But when I look around I notice only a few people looking in my direction. *Come on Guys, I'm right over here. Don't be shy to look at me.* Some people prefer to look at the floor or in the air. I even catch a few throwing sly glances at the cake. *Yes, I saw you, Uncle Joey. There is no point in denial.* After the introduction a few of the guests rise and share some of our best anecdotes.

- "... remember that camping trip. It is already a while ago. We went to this lake. It was the first time we tried alcohol and, oh boy..." *Yes Nathan, unfortunately this night is etched into my brain. I just have my doubts if you can still recall it.*

- "...the time we got marooned on that small, silly island and that helicopter had to come to rescue us..." *Shush Tanya. Not in front of my family. They can't bear such a wicked sense of adventure.*

- "The cheese sandwiches!" *I know sweetie they're the best.*

This time more people chuckle. I even see a few crying. I mean those stories were hilarious but are they really that funny to outsiders? After this marvellous honey roast, the band starts to play. They really put on an effort there playing a well calculated mixture of my favourite songs. I really have to pull myself together to not sing along and ruin their performance. On the other hand, this is my celebration, right? So no one would mind me taking part, would they? Just as I am about to join in, their last song, a calm emotional ballade, fades into silence. Okay maybe next time.

Eventually the woman steps up again advising everyone to head outside where the celebration will be continued. After that there'll finally be cake and some sandwiches. I'm really looking forward to the cake now. I want to follow the other guests outside but there are already six men in suits gathered around me who lift me up like some kind of monarch on a sedan chair. *This is getting better and better.*

As they carry me outside, I can already see everyone lined up. Some people are holding flowers, others are holding tissues. A little strange, but maybe they have a cold. The men carry me down the line while everyone pays some respect. They bow their heads, say a nice thing or two, bid me farewell, wish me good luck... *Wait! Bid me farewell? Did Helena just say goodbye? Are you seriously leaving early on my special day? Come on Hel. Hey! What do you mean by "safe journey", Nathan? I'm only visiting my Grandma and that's next month. Clearly we'll see each other until... May the bloody road rise to meet you, too. What does that*

*even mean, Uncle Joey? Why is everybody suddenly so keen to leave? Is this some kind of a joke? A new game to humiliate me? Did Volta organize that? “Goodbye my darling”, Mum says and touches the sedan. Not you too, Mum! Can somebody please explain what the f- Hey!*

Suddenly I’m lowered into a hole. I want to scream: *Wait! What the hell are you doing?* But when I open my mouth to shout, something nasty hits me. I’m a bit puzzled. Are they seriously throwing dirt at me? When I look up again, the next pile of soil rushes past me. *Stop that you idiots! What are you doing? Stop!* No one listens to me and when I try to jump out of the hole I fail miserably. Looking up again I can finally make out some faces above the hole. I give them the finger and round it up with the deluxe collection of the finest curses known to mankind. *Is this your idea of fun?* But they ignore me and keep digging me into the dirt. Suddenly I have a horribly nasty feeling about this. The faces vanish as do their voices. There is only a handful of guests left. *Please guys. Get me out of here,* I plead as the last people cover me nearly completely with dirt. *Come on, please.* Panic starts to rise in me. I can’t hear anyone anymore. When I notice that I can’t move my body I want to scream. But just as I am about to shout for help, another face creeps into my vision. *Oh. God. No!* I shoot Volta an angry glare while he picks up the shovel with the soil. I bet this was his idea. I totally blame him for ruining my special day. This is all his fault. Then he turns to me staring directly into my eyes. “Sweet dreams my nasty thistle. I hope you enjoyed your special day”, he hums and thrusts the dirt towards me. Everything is dark. He stalks off and I scream. It is only then I realize that I can’t hear my voice anymore. Everything is dark.

*Well fuck!*