

Trudel's Wedding Boutique

Proudly Presents:

The 1st Annual

Silver Linings Wedding Dress

Auction

Benefiting Rachel's House, a shelter for women in need, this unique auction will feature fifty

designer wedding gowns graciously donated by former brides from

the Portland Metro area.

Individual Tickets: \$250

Tables of Ten Available for \$2,000

Cocktails and Silent Auction begin at 6 p.m., Dinner and Dress Auction begin at 7 p.m.

Saturday, November Eighteenth

THE PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

THE PARK BLOCKS

PORTLAND, OREGON 97205

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT: THESILVERLININGSDDRESSAUCTION.COM

Title Sponsors: Weddings by Milan, Buddy's Flowers, Portland Lux Properties, and Sauveterre Jewelers

Present Day: *FIVE* days before the Auction

“Now, with a sweet story of happy endings, let’s go to Hannah who is shopping until she drops at the Portland landmark, Trudel’s Wedding Boutique. Hannah, take it away!” the news announcer with the too-bright teeth said as he set up the story for his reporter in the field.

“Thank you, Jeff. I’m excited to be here so bright and early to bring you this story that is bound to have fifty happy endings!”

“Well Hannah, that is a pretty tall order,” Jeff replied with a wink.

“Jeff, it is all but guaranteed,” Hannah announced with her own big toothy grin. “On Saturday night, Trudel’s Wedding Boutique will be hosting a wedding dress auction in the ballroom at the Portland Art Museum like nothing ever seen before in our city. Benefiting Rachel’s House, the local women’s shelter, this large wedding dress auction is raising money for a great cause. Before I show you a couple of the dresses up for grabs, I want to introduce someone special.

“We are here with Trudel herself and the most beautiful wedding gowns you’ve ever seen,” the reporter said, turning to Trudel, a small statured woman who was dressed in her customary black dress and large pearls. “Trudel, I want to thank you for getting up so early to meet with us this morning to talk about your first Silver Linings Charity Auction.”

“Thank you, Hannah, I’m happy to be here with you showcasing this fabulous event.”

“Great, great! Now, tell us how you came up with this idea.”

“Well, you know that love is not a straightforward journey for everyone. Sometimes a beautiful wedding dress makes it down the aisle and the next step in life begins. For others, it is the collateral damage that sometimes gets left behind. A gorgeous gown can become a bride’s nemesis after a broken engagement, which is such a waste.”

“Really, Trudel, I never thought about it that way. Have you seen it happen a lot over the thirty years you’ve been running your boutique here in downtown Portland?”

“Most of the time, everything goes off without a hitch. But there are those times when everything that can go wrong, *does* go wrong. That is how I came to have such a glut of beautiful inventory. And in some cases, people have glorious gowns they will never wear again or give to another family member to wear. Well, the gowns aren’t doing anyone any good just hanging in the closet! But they could! That’s when I got to thinking that an auction could help those who aren’t lucky in love and Rachel’s House at the same time. Also, these dresses could help women who find themselves in a difficult financial position, but still want to have a designer dress for their wedding day.”

“That’s so great,” Hannah said as she smiled at the camera. “Such a lovely thing to do.”

“Just to give you one example, I have several elegant wedding dresses I will be putting in our sale from a lady who hasn’t made it down the aisle yet!” Trudel confirmed.

“Wow, now *that* sounds like a good story.”

Trudel shook her head to the contrary, her smile turning to a grimace. “She is a very sweet person, but she has been engaged many times and yet never married... And she is like a niece to me, so she knows the importance of ordering a dress at least six months in advance. Unfortunately for her, several times, just when the dress was ready for the first fitting the engagement was a thing of the past.”

“So, it was this reluctant bride that gave you the idea for the auction?”

Trudel nodded and continued, “Most of the time it was unfortunate circumstances for this particular bride, if memory serves me right, but I do believe there was a time or two that she realized this was not ‘the one’ for her. On some level, she was my motivation for the Silver Linings Wedding Dress Auction. It is just so sad to see all those wedding dresses hanging in her closet. She doesn’t need to be reminded of those situations, either. It isn’t like I can resell all of her dresses because they’ve been altered to fit her. She has generous curves,” Trudel recalled the jilted bride’s figure as if she was divulging a dirty little secret, “So her dresses could fit smaller women who aren’t as curvy.”

“I’m curious, just how many dresses does she have in her closet?”

“I think she has at least a half dozen! One for each new fiancé!” Trudel exclaimed with a laugh.

“My goodness,” Hannah’s astonishment got Jeff chuckling at the studio and probably many of their viewers, too. “What does she do that she meets all those men who propose to her?”

“She is a realtor, they just meet *everyone*,” Trudel said with a sarcastic laugh. “I can tell you she has some beautiful dresses though, a Paris Germaine, and several James Casper’s, who I think is her favorite designer. Overall, we are excited to have nearly fifty dresses from almost every major name in bridal fashion.”

“That’s wonderful, they should raise a lot of money for Rachel’s House.”

“That’s what we are hoping!”

Hannah looked into the camera and said, “Now, if you have a dress you don’t want, and it doesn’t need to be a Paris Germaine, you know who to call. They should call you, shouldn’t they, Trudel?” she asked turning back to the store’s owner.

“Yes, or they can just bring the dress by the shop. We are known for our designer gowns, but as long as the dress is in good shape and only worn once or not at all, we will take it. We are hoping to have enough gowns for a second auction next spring.”

“So, if you have a story similar to Trudel’s honorary niece, I’m sorry her name escapes me,” Hannah nonchalantly asked Trudel, as if she was trying to finagle some tidbit of gossip.

“Leslie Westcott,” Trudel blurted out, as she looked into the camera with large, frightened eyes, the realization hitting much like a cornered rabbit looking up the long barrel of a shotgun.

“Yes, if you have a story like Leslie Westcott’s, Trudel of Trudel’s Wedding Boutique would love to hear from you. Okay, thank you, Trudel, and thanks again for getting up with us so early this morning. Now, in our next half hour, you’re going to see me in one of the dresses from the Silver Linings Auction. Who knows? Maybe it will be one of Leslie Westcott’s cast-offs. Okay, see you in a bit. I’ll send it back to you, Jeff.”

“Thank you, Hannah, great story,” Jeff said. “Let’s hope Leslie Westcott’s dresses bring a lot of money for such a great cause. Now, we’ll turn to Rhonda for the latest in traffic.”

Leslie Westcott stood naked in the bathroom doorway with a towel wrapped around her wet hair and a toothbrush dangling out of her mouth as she watched the morning news in horror. First, she *was* Trudel’s niece, but since Leslie’s mother had died, Trudel always treated her like a second daughter. And Trudel’s daughter, Suzie, was like a sister to her and her best friend. That honorary stuff was crap. This woman, who had just blurted out her name on the morning news, *was* her blood relative.

Second, they had all agreed that if Leslie decided to participate, her dresses would go into the auction *anonymously*. She knew when she’d mentioned this last, important detail that Trudel

hadn't been listening—or as the family liked to think of it, she was *projecting*, but not *receiving*.

Aunt Trouble strikes again!

Had Leslie believed this whole charity auction wouldn't come back to bite her in the ass? No. She had just hoped it wouldn't be so personal. Aunt Trudel had been so crazed with auction details it had been difficult to be around her.

Leslie stepped back into the bathroom and rinsed her mouth. She held onto the edge of the granite counter and counted to ten, reminding herself to breathe. As the words Aunt Trudel had said repeated again and again in her mind, Leslie cringed, her stomach doing flip flops.

This was going to be trouble. She couldn't murder Aunt Trudel. She didn't need the hassle with the police, but then she had connections in the police department and a good lawyer, but still, it wasn't worth it. And it wasn't like Trudel meant any harm. She was a very sweet person with a big heart and the attention span of a gnat. To be fair, that reporter was a bit sneaky in her questioning; Leslie could see it in her eyes and then especially in her aunt's when she realized what she'd said.

Her cell phone began buzzing and a number she didn't recognize registered on the display, and then there was a chirp and a second number appeared, and this time her caller ID snared the caller—it was the news station that had just interviewed Trudel. No doubt they wanted Leslie for a follow-up story, posing in one of the gowns. Not going to happen.

And, just to be clear, she had not yet agreed to put *any* of her wedding dresses in Aunt Trudel's Silver Linings Dress Auction. No, all the garment bags holding clues to her torrid, tumultuous, and controversial past were still in the guest room closet like white encased corpses. And she was quite content to have them stay there.

Leslie's sweet Vizsla, Daisy, raised her head off the bed, her amber eyes big and tender,

as Leslie dressed. If her dog could talk, she'd no doubt be saying, "Are you mad at my Aunt Trudel? Is she coming for a visit? She gives me treats even when you tell her to stop."

"You sweet girl," she said as she placed a kiss on Daisy's head. "Be good while I'm gone. I'll try to be home early. Got to run to a closing. Who else is going to keep you spoiled in doggy biscuits? Take care of the house."

It was obvious to Leslie that her clients had watched the morning news. As she took her seat at the conference table, their wary, suspicious expressions asked many unspoken questions. She wanted to reassure them that she only had five wedding dresses in her closet and a very nice cocktail dress that was too significant to her past to ever wear again and too expensive to ever give away. But truly, they didn't need to worry, because she could explain everything. She was a good realtor, and they had acquired an excellent property. Their *dream* property.

Instead, she settled for the thick silence that seemed to permeate the room like fog.

Was it her imagination or was Mrs. Peters giving her a dirty look each time she smiled in the direction of Mr. Peters?

Just two painful hours later, Leslie was out the door, finished with the awkward closing on the Peterses' new 1.2-million-dollar home in the prestigious West Hills of Portland. What should have been a celebratory experience for them both was nothing more than an uncomfortable transaction, all because of her aunt. On her way to her car, Leslie turned on her phone and listened to more offers from news stations and other local media wanting to interview her. The one person she'd hoped to hear from hadn't called, which wasn't a total surprise. She was starting to accept that after all they'd been through, he wasn't going to marry her; he was going to ghost her. She spent the next ten minutes freeing up her voicemail and blocking all the

unwanted numbers she'd hoped to never hear from again.

She needed to call Aunt Trudel and discuss the interview. The longer she put this off the worse it would be for both of them. She just didn't feel like letting her off the hook yet.

Perky Peggy, the overly friendly office receptionist and notorious gossip, hopped up from her chair as if it had springs, and rounded the large mahogany reception desk to stop Leslie when she arrived.

"Lessslie!" she announced. "Oh my god! I saw your Aunt Trudel on the news this morning. She was talking about all your broken engagements. That must have really gotten to you. I'd be so embarrassed."

"Good morning, Peggy," Leslie replied as she tightened her hold on the mail and tried to remember to keep a handle on her words. "Yes, I think everyone was watching the news this morning. I'm doing fine. I just hope the auction raises a lot of money for Rachel's House. It is an excellent resource to women in our community."

"You have eighteen messages, and your voicemail is full," Peggy informed her.

"Great, thanks, I'll take care of it," Leslie said as she took the messages, turned, and tried to make a run for her office.

"Have you really been engaged like a half a dozen times?" Peggy asked. "I mean I remember a few of them—"

"No, I haven't been engaged that many times. It just feels like it. Bye-bye..."

"Who are you dating now?"

"No one," Leslie said, thinking that she wasn't sure what she was doing with the man she'd just realized she loved. She hadn't heard from him in three weeks. It didn't take a relationship expert to analyze what was going on. His inaction spoke volumes, and Leslie didn't

like what he was saying at all. He didn't love her. Not like she loved him. And she had only herself to blame. It had taken her too many years to see what was right in front of her. And he'd witnessed everything that was her life. Obviously, it was all too messy for him and he didn't want to deal with her past.

"I can't blame you, not after that good-looking guy married someone else instead of you," Peggy said with a tilt of her head.

Leslie just nodded, not wanting to rehash old news or protect what was left of her bruised self-esteem—which Peggy seemed hell bent on kicking until it was dead. She walked toward her office without another word.

"What should I say to the reporters when they call?" Peggy asked as she followed.

"I like, 'no comment.' I think it gets the point across nicely, don't you?" Leslie responded as she shut her office door not waiting for Peggy's answer.

She leaned against the door and shut her eyes for a brief reprieve. This was going to be a long day.

Dropping her mail on the desk, she looked at her cell phone and gave a sad smile. In all the drama, she had a missed call from "Suede" aka Samuel Winston Drake. Finally, an oasis in a shitstorm morning. She hit redial and waited for her lawyer friend to answer. He was the older protective brother she'd never had. The one man she'd never marry despite the lovely dress he'd purchased for her.

"Hello, baby, how is my beautiful today?" he asked after the first ring.

"You don't need to butter me up. I know you saw the interview," Leslie said. Sam had been a friend of hers since a very complicated time in both of their lives. They were now connected. Not only was he one of her closest friends, but he was also her attorney, and knew

what each dress in her closet had done to her heart.

“Try not to let it bother you. It says more about Trudel than it does about you. Remember what they say about relatives?”

“What?” she asked.

“If you shoot them, it’s murder. If you push them down the stairs, it’s an accident.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she grumbled as she briefly envisioned Trudel rolling down an elegant staircase in her perfect black dress and pearls.

“As your lawyer, we never had this conversation.”

“Thank you,” she said, and smiled genuinely for the first time since she’d seen the interview.

“How else are you holding up?”

“I’m good, but Peggy just reminded me that my last fiancé was that good-looking guy who married someone else.”

“Oh Peggy,” Suede laughed. “You know, every time I set foot in your office, she looks at me as if I’m a juicy filet mignon. I worry she will bite me someday.”

“I kind of hope she does and I’m there to see it,” Leslie said with a sardonic chuckle.

“Have your little laugh at my expense. But, let me ask you a question, Ms. Westcott. Just who is this new man Suzie has been telling me about? Some mysterious love affair that has the cool, put-together Leslie turned inside out.” She wasn’t comfortable with the new Sam and Suzie closeness. He was her friend, and Suzie needed to keep a tighter zip on her lip. And she didn’t want to talk about it.

“I don’t want to talk about him. No jinxing, no discussing, no obsessing. Not yet,” she said into the phone. “Besides, there is nothing to tell.” Except that he was in some far-off land on

business and hadn't called her for several weeks. And she was finding it hard to eat or sleep which was totally ridiculous for such an evolved woman as herself.

"Except that you are in love with him."

"Please Suede, if you care about me at all, you will stop this conversation. If you saw the news this morning, you know that Trudel's niece falls in love all the time."

"Because she is a wonderful woman with a big, open heart."

"This isn't helping, but thank you," Leslie said.

"Okay, I know you're having a hard day today, so I'll take it easy, but I did have a couple of details on the auction that my sweet husband, Milan, asked me to iron out with you. Do you have a moment?"

"Suede, for you, I've got all day, but I don't want to talk about my dresses. I haven't decided what to do yet. Tell Milan to cool his jets."

"That's Suzie and Trudel's department. I just want to know if you'd like to have cocktails before the big event. We could get our copper fur babies, Ginger and Daisy together. Mother and daughter haven't seen each other in a bit."

"Want to come to my place?" Leslie asked.

"Sure, we'll bring the champagne and the hound. Now then, keep a handle on it. And remember, Trudel Strudel really does love you, I love you too," he said and ended the call.

Leslie glanced down at her mail. Among the assortment of catalogs and bills was a thick ecru envelope, similar to a wedding invitation. Inside was an elegant reminder for the dress auction. She had RSVP'd two months earlier, but she got the reminder with a personal note from Suzie, who was supposed to be her best friend, sister from another mister, and—not to forget—cousin!

I haven't heard how many dresses you will be adding to the show. We need your dresses by the 15th! I'll call you for pickup.

Had nobody listened to her? She'd said she'd "think about it." Had Trudel and Suzie just assumed she would be donating all her dresses to the show? Well, that was a huge assumption, and she wasn't sure how she felt about it. She was upset by the lack of regard for her feelings. Yes, she would probably donate a couple of dresses, but all of them? No way. They were her battle scars and they couldn't be more personal to her.

Each one of the dresses represented a different part of her life, a chapter that was both a learning experience and a lesson. Those dresses were hard won trophies, and she wasn't about to give them away without careful consideration. She just didn't know how much it might cost her to revisit the past.

Why was this so hard? It wasn't for other people... She just wanted to be happy, to love the man she married, to feel protected, adored, and to know that when she woke up each morning, that the man next to her loved her with all his heart. But was that too much to ask? Maybe you only did get one chance at true love in this life. Maybe she'd had her chance and it was time to give up.