



# The Wedding of Rose Brier and Benedict Denniston

As seen by Paul Fester

By Regina Doman

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Paul was almost ready. About as ready as he could be. Harp music was drifting up the aisles as Paul and the other groomsmen followed Ben, taking their stand at the front of the church. He wondered what it would feel like, to see Rose Brier coming down the aisle in her wedding dress, without being her groom.

*I guess I'll soon find out*, he thought.

His friends Alex and Leroy, and Ben's friend, Steve, escorted the bridesmaids Kateri, Donna, and Nanette to their pew, each shimmering in a jewel-colored dress of a different hue: purple, blue, and bronze. Paul glanced at the packed assembly and recognized friends from college, dressed in their absolute best, most of the girls looking very pretty. *See, there's other options out there*, he told himself. He stepped forward almost mechanically to take the arm of the bridesmaid he was escorting, one of Kateri Kovach's older sisters. The best man escorted the matron of honor to her pew. Now it was time for the bride's entrance.

*Let go. Just let it go*, he told himself. He took a deep breath and then lost it as the church doors opened revealing a vision of sheer beauty -- a slim, red-headed girl in clouds of chiffon veiling, an eager smile on her glowing face.

Rose Brier was as radiant as always on her wedding day. Her pink cheeks were flushed with eager vivacity as she stepped forward to the strains of "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee." Her hair, caught up on the sides by pearl combs, was flowing down her back in red waves, and her skirt reminded Paul of a ballerina's long tutu, its translucent folds sweeping the ground on either side of her. A long black satin sash trailed down behind her.

To help himself let go, Paul, with an effort, turned his eyes to the groom. Ben was not a handsome man: average height, slight, and life hadn't been kind to his appearance: his face bore a few noticeable scars. But right now he was transfigured as he watched Rose coming towards him. It seemed as though the two of them were alone, completely enrapt in one another.

*Well, I guess I should be happy for them. No, I can be happy for them. I can. After all, this is good. It's almost goodness itself.*

After the Mass, Rose and Ben led the wedding party out of the church to the entrance. Paul exited the pew with some relief, feeling that now at least it was over. He was looking forward eagerly to seeing his college friends at the reception. Since he had just graduated two weeks ago, it would be great to have another farewell party with his friends from Mercy College, plus just to kick back and relax for a few hours before his big trip.

But no sooner had he reached the doors at the back of the church than someone touched his shoulder. He looked around, and saw Rose's mother Jean, with an anxious expression on her face.

"Paul, I hate to bother you, but there's a bit of a crisis," she said quickly. "There's no wine at the reception hall. Ben had ordered several cases, but they never arrived. I just got a call now from the man at the store. They're about to close for the day, but he said he could stay open if someone could run and pick them up now. Do you think you or one of your friends --"

"Sure, no problem," Paul felt for his keys. "I'm on it."

He hurried out of the church, the directions to the store in his hands. Quickly he sprinted to his car and got in. *With any luck, I'll be back in time...*

Unfortunately as he exited the church parking lot, he could tell he was joining some sort of rush-hour traffic. The game at the football stadium in town must be starting. He groaned.

While waiting behind twenty cars for the light to turn green, he glanced around the car. It was packed with everything he needed for his National Guard service for the coming month. He was scheduled to report for duty tomorrow. This wedding was supposed to be his last respite before he plunged into Army life for the next year or so. And then heading to medical school which was going to be expensive, even with the Army's help.

At last his car could inch forward towards a light that was now green. He squinted at his car clock. There was still a chance he could make it back to the reception on time...

But by the time he had the cargo of bottles safely stowed in all the nooks and crannies of his blue car, he knew he was late for the reception.

*Ah well, it's not like groomsmen have much to do after the wedding anyway*, he told himself. With resignation he pulled up to the stone-and-beam Tudor building that housed the reception. There was a contingent of his fellow groomsmen waiting for him.

"What took you so long?" Leroy bellowed.

"Traffic," Paul said, hefting a case of wine to him. "Sorry I'm so late."

"Yeah, I'm sorry! I had to escort your bridesmaid in for you. Got her phone number, too," Leroy winked.

With a mock scowl that was partially genuine, Paul shoved another case into his arms. James took one as well.

Alex was grabbing a couple others. "Sorry you had to do this, Paul. But I know the family is really grateful."

Paul eased out the last case of bottles, whose box was partially crushed as it had been jammed between the back windshield and his army duffle bag. "Just glad I made it here." He was trying hard to ignore the self-pity that was creeping into his mind. He knew he would have to leave the reception early. Of course, Mrs. Brier hadn't known about his National Guard service...

But as he walked into the reception hall with the case of wine, he couldn't help gaping in admiration at its majesty. Soaring oak beams over a paneled hall, with tapestries and oriental carpet decorating the walls and floors.

Cheers broke out from the assembly as the groomsmen processed into the hall with the cases of wine. Paul caught a glimpse of Rose clapping her hands and bouncing with gratitude, and grinned at her as he dropped the box onto the edge of the bar. But as he did that, the box split open down the side, and six wine bottles toppled out of their slots. Two landed dully on the carpet, but the other four were spiraling towards the floor...

His reflexes kicking in automatically, Paul batted the bottles back into the air, quickly, *one two three four*. Reaching and grabbing and tossing, he kept pushing them back up, back up until he had corralled them into a juggler's fountain. He was barely aware of the gasps from the guests as he deftly flipped them up and over, up and over, around and around, traveling slowly across the carpet, until at last he reached the safety of the serving table. Then quickly he snatched one from the air and set it on the table – *two – three – four – safe*.

He bowed with artificial slowness to the roars of the crowd, sweating slightly. His friends, knowing his juggling skills, might have thought he had done it just to show off. Only he knew how close he had come to losing the bottles he had been trying to save.

All too soon, the reception came to an end, and before Paul had quite gotten into the mood for the party, he realized he had to leave. When he had found the bride and groom and said his goodbyes, Ben said, "Let me walk you out to the car." Rose was occupied with talking to some elderly relatives.

"Well, thanks for having me in your wedding," Paul said.

"I'm the one who should be thanking you," Ben said.

“For what?” Paul looked at him.

“You know I have a lot to thank you for,” the groom said. “But actually, what I was thinking about just now was how you took yourself out of the way. I could pretend that I would still have won Rose’s heart on my own, but I know it would have been a lot harder if you hadn’t made the choice to fade into the background.”

Paul shrugged, flushing a little. “She always had eyes only for you,” he said.

“You flatter me,” Ben said quietly. “But it’s not every guy who could let himself be passed over by a girl and still agree to be a groomsman at the wedding.”

“Thanks,” was all Paul could say as they approached his car in the moonlit parking lot.

Ben held the car door open for him, “Paul, I know there’s someone out there for you. I hope you find her soon.”

Paul silently looked up at the moon shimmering in the midnight sky. “Me too,” he breathed. Then he looked at Ben and smiled. “Say a prayer for me. And for her. Whoever she is.”