



Bursting at the Seams (Sew Zoey Book 10)

By Chloe Taylor

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Bursting at the Seams (Sew Zoey Book 10) By Chloe Taylor Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #761453 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-12-16
- Released on: 2014-12-16
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Chloe Taylor learned to sew when she was a little girl. She loved watching her Grandmother Louise turn a scrap of blue fabric into a simple-but-fabulous dress, nightgown, or even a bathing suit in an instant. It was magical! Now that she's grown up, she still loves fashion: It's like art that you can wear. Chloe has written more than thirty books for children and lives, writes, and window shops in New York City.

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Bursting at the Seams



CHAPTER 1

Runway Ready!

Hello, readers!! So, remember when the dress I designed for Bryn Allen was on the cover of Celebrity magazine? I do! In fact, it's hard to forget. Since then, I've been getting some e-mails and requests through my Sew Zoey store for more runway looks. I'm not sure that's my speed, exactly, but here's a design that could look great on someone young, without showing too much. The problem is that making it would probably take me thirty or forty hours, which is a lot for one dress! I'd need a nice, long vacation afterward.



And speaking of vacations . . . my most favorite aunt, Lulu, is finally back in town after a romantic Caribbean getaway with her (dum dee dum) new fiancé! She and John got engaged while they were on their trip. I'm meeting her for tea and cupcakes after school to get all the juicy details. I'm SEW pumped to see her!



Zoey Webber was in heaven. She was at her favorite café, Tea Time, with a cup of oolong tea, a pink frosted cupcake, and her aunt Lulu. Lulu was tanned and smiling as she drizzled honey into her English breakfast tea and stirred it with a spoon.

"Tell me everything," Zoey said. "Don't leave anything out! I want to feel like I was there too!"

Lulu laughed, and began to unwrap the bag that held her croissant. "Well, it was pretty magical. Everything about Barbados is magical, really. John and I were out to dinner at a beautiful restaurant built on a cliff at the edge of the ocean. We were watching tiny nurse sharks swim up for chum the restaurant throws them, and when I looked away from the sharks, John was kneeling beside me."

"And?" urged Zoey. She was so enthralled with the story, she hadn't even touched her tea or her cupcake yet. "Did you say yes immediately, or did you cry, or what?"

Lulu laughed again. "Let's just say my eyes were teary, but I was so happy. And I said yes right away. I think I might have even shouted it. The people sitting at tables around us applauded, and that was it."

“Sounds perfect.” Zoey sighed with satisfaction. The story was exactly what she would have wished for her aunt, who had always been more of a second mother to Zoey since her own mom had passed away when she was very little. Although it had been somewhat hard for Zoey when Lulu and John had first begun dating, because she’d been worried she’d lose her special place in Lulu’s life, that hadn’t happened at all. Zoey felt sure that adding John Chadden to their family would make things even better.

With the proposal story out of the way, Zoey bit into her cupcake with enthusiasm. It was Friday afternoon, and a long and busy week at school had made her ravenous. She was so intent on her cupcake, in fact, that she didn’t notice Lulu wasn’t touching her own croissant.

When Zoey finally looked up, Lulu was leaning forward in her seat, her eyes bright and her lips clamped together. A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth.

“What is it?” Zoey asked. “Why are you looking at me like that?” Self-conscious, Zoey wiped at her mouth with a napkin, in case she was covered in extra frosting.

“There’s a tiny bit more to the story . . .,” Lulu said. She giggled and then clapped a hand over her mouth to stop. “But before I tell you, you have to swear to keep it a secret.”

Zoey felt her heart begin to pound. More to the story? Like what? Her aunt was acting very strangely, and not at all like the calm, cool interior designer and business owner that she was.

“Tell me!” Zoey exclaimed.

Lulu placed her hands on either side of the café table, as if to anchor herself so she wouldn’t fall over, and whispered, “John and I are having a surprise wedding, and it’s in three weeks!”

Zoey stared at her aunt, her mouth hanging open. A surprise wedding? What on Earth was that? In three weeks?

Zoey shook her head, unable to spit out a sentence. All she could mumble was “What?”

Aunt Lulu giggled again, her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks making her look every bit the happy and excited bride-to-be. “We’ve decided to invite our close friends and family to a little ‘engagement party’ at my house in a few weeks. At least, that’s what they’ll think. But when everyone arrives, we’re really going to surprise them and tell them we’ll be getting married that night!”

Zoey had never heard of a surprise wedding. “So the wedding, the actual wedding where you say your vows, is in three weeks at your house, but no one will know except you and John and me?”

Lulu nodded. “And a few other close family members, like your dad and brother. And the vendors. We’ll have a caterer and a cake and flowers and a photographer, like a normal wedding. But it’ll all just be a little more casual and fun, since it’ll be at my house and no one will expect it.”

Zoey’s mind reeled with the possibilities. No church, no big reception hall. No waiting months and months for the big day. A surprise wedding for her aunt, in just three weeks. And she was one of the few in on the secret!

“I LOVE IT!” Zoey screeched, and several people in the café turned to glance at her. Lulu and Zoey looked

at each other and grinned. "I really do, Aunt Lulu. This is so you."

Lulu winked at her. "Exactly. John and I have both been married before, and we didn't want to do the big wedding thing again. We love each other, and we want to start our life together now. And the surprise just makes it so much more fun!" She paused, taking a sip of her tea and then carefully placing the teacup back on its saucer. "And there's something very special I'd like to ask you, Zoey."

"I'm not sure I can take any more exciting news, Aunt Lulu," Zoey said honestly. "I'm already on a sugar high from the cupcake, and now I know the biggest secret ever!"

Aunt Lulu put her hand over Zoey's and squeezed it. "I'd like you to be my junior bridesmaid, honey. And I'd really love it if you'd come shopping with me and help me pick out my dress."

Zoey was honored. Truly honored. She'd get to stand up with her aunt at the wedding and help find the dress. It was a dream come true!

"Of course, yes to both!" Zoey said. "I can't wait!"

"My maid of honor will be my best friend, Sybil, but since she lives in Atlanta, she won't be here to shop with me. I'd like for you and her to wear dresses that coordinate, at least in color. She'll buy hers, but I think it would be wonderful if you designed and made your own junior bridesmaid's dress."

Design my own junior bridesmaid's dress? Zoey was flabbergasted. With that final piece of exciting news, Zoey jumped up from her seat and threw her arms around her aunt. What could be more fun? She'd make the most beautiful junior bridesmaid's dress in the world!

Aunt Lulu hugged Zoey back, smoothing Zoey's hair with one hand. "I take it that's a yes?"

Zoey nodded and gave her aunt one more big squeeze before returning to her seat. A really good afternoon for Zoey was a cupcake and conversation with her aunt. Hearing about a wedding proposal made it extra special. Finding out about a secret wedding made it unbelievable. Hearing that she'd be a junior bridesmaid and get to design her own dress? Zoey didn't have a word for it.

"I think I might burst," she told Lulu. "I think I'm going to burst right through the walls of Tea Time."

Lulu chuckled. "Well, if possible, don't. And remember, the only people you can discuss this with are Marcus and your father. We have to keep it a secret so that the surprise works. It's very important to John and me. Promise?"

Zoey nodded. "I promise," she said.

She had no idea how difficult that promise would be to keep.



The next morning, Lulu picked up Zoey, and they drove to a fancy bridal salon. Zoey had never been wedding dress shopping before, and she couldn't even remember the last wedding she'd attended. Probably her cousin's wedding when Zoey was about seven. She had no idea what to expect when they walked in.

A chic, middle-aged woman in a fitted black suit approached them. “Good morning. Do you have an appointment?” she asked.

“Yes, I’m Lulu Price,” Aunt Lulu said.

The woman checked a clipboard, nodded, and ushered them back to a large round room, with racks and racks of gorgeous dresses on display, and a wall of dressing rooms on one side.

The consultant, Deirdre, gave Lulu a quick tour of the gowns, showing her how they were grouped by price. “And when is your wedding?” Deirdre asked, making notes on her clipboard.

With slightly pink cheeks, Lulu explained she was having a surprise wedding at her house in just three weeks, and she wanted something not too formal, but elegant, and that it needed to be ready to purchase and alter immediately.

“Three weeks?” Deirdre repeated. “Three weeks?”

Zoey’s eyes swiveled from Lulu to Deirdre and back to Lulu. What was the big deal about three weeks?

Lulu simply nodded, and said firmly, “Yes, three weeks. What do you have that’s ready to wear?”

Deirdre wrinkled her brow a moment, and looked worried, but then her face seemed to relax. “I love a challenge,” she told Lulu. “Go into the dressing room, please, and I’ll bring you some sample dresses available for purchase, and also a few of our consignment dresses. They can all go home with you immediately.”

Lulu sighed with relief, and she and Zoey headed to the dressing room.

Zoey whispered to her aunt, “I didn’t realize you couldn’t buy a wedding dress off the rack,” she said. “What’s the big deal?”

Lulu explained. “Most wedding dresses are made to order. So you go to a bridal store, try on a sample, and then they order it in your size. When it comes in, which can take months, you usually have to alter it some. That’s what happened with my first wedding. But we don’t have time for that now, so I’ll just have to take what I can get.”

Zoey sat, slightly worried. She wanted her aunt to have the perfect dress. She didn’t want her to have to settle for whatever samples or consignment dresses were available that very second.

Deirdre knocked and came into the dressing room, her arms full of gowns. They were beautiful, every one of them, and varied from silk chiffon to tulle to lace.

Aunt Lulu began trying them on. Luckily, she wore a standard dress size, and was able to fit into most of the samples. The first dress, a strapless silk chiffon with seed pearls and sequins, was too formal for a fall wedding in someone’s backyard. The second, a voluminous ball gown, had a skirt so wide, it would never fit through the front door of Lulu’s house. The third was a possibility, with wide straps, a square décolletage, and a smooth flowy skirt. It wasn’t too formal, and it looked appropriate for a surprise wedding at home. But, unfortunately, Lulu was a bit on the tall side, and the dress was three inches too short, even without heels, and the hem wasn’t quite long enough to let down.

“There’s no fixing a too-short dress,” Lulu said with a groan. “Too long would have been a better problem.”

“You could cut it and make it knee-length?” Zoey suggested. She was starting to feel discouraged by Lulu’s limited options.

“I really want a long dress,” Lulu said. “In fact, I really like the top of this dress, but with the bottom of that first one. It’s too bad it’s not like magnetic dress-up dolls where you can mix and match!”

Lulu tried on several more dresses, but none of them were right either. Everything was either too formal or fit poorly. Finally, she looked at Zoey, and blinked. “I think we’ve struck out,” she said dejectedly.

Zoey’s mind raced. They had to find a dress for Lulu. They had to!

“What if . . .,” Zoey began, an idea forming in her mind. “What if I were to sketch the top of the dress you liked, with the bottom of that other one, and you gave the sketch to a wedding seamstress and they made it for you? Could that work?”

“It’s a terrific idea, Zoey,” said Lulu. “But I’m afraid I tried that first! I called my regular seamstress as soon as we got back from Barbados, but she was booked solid. She even gave me some other people to try, but none of them had availability to make a dress so fast. That’s why I thought I’d make do with a sample dress.”

Deirdre knocked on the dressing room door, and Lulu opened it. “I’m afraid that’s all we have available in your size that could be ready in time,” Deirdre said. “I’m so terribly sorry! I can call you if we get any new consignment gowns in this week or next.”

“Thank you,” Lulu said. “Something will work out, I’m sure. I can always look online.”

Deirdre removed the dresses, and Lulu put her regular clothes back on. She and Zoey left the store, packed with beautiful wedding gowns that wouldn’t be ready in time for Lulu’s big day.

“What are you going to do?” Zoey asked her aunt.

Lulu stopped walking and turned to Zoey. “Zoey,” she said, “I know this is a lot to ask, especially with you being so busy with school, but is there any way you’d have time to make a dress for me? We could keep the design really simple, but it’s the only way I can get what I want in time for the wedding! And it would mean so much to me to wear an original Sew Zoey dress on my wedding day.”

Zoey couldn’t believe her ears. Her aunt wanted her to make her wedding dress? The most important dress of her life?

“But, Aunt Lulu, I don’t know anything about wedding dresses! I didn’t even know you had to order them! I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“We’ll design it together. Just think of it as a simple white dress. And you know a lot more than you think you do, my talented niece. Wasn’t an outfit you made just on the cover of *Celebrity* magazine?”

“Well, yes.” Zoey blushed. She was so honored that her aunt would even ask. “I’d love to, Aunt Lulu. I’d really, really love to!”

Lulu hugged her and said, “This will be great, Zoey. Really special. It fits our surprise wedding theme, don’t you think?”

Zoey agreed. It was sort of perfect.

“Why don’t you think about the dresses we liked today and come up with a sketch or two? Something that won’t be too hard for you to make so fast. And one more thing: I’ll need the skirt fabric to be stretchy if it’s fitted, because John and I plan to surprise everyone with a tango for our first dance, since we met in ballroom dance class.”

“Okay!” agreed Zoey. “I already have some ideas from what we saw. And I began sketching some designs for my junior bridesmaid’s dress last night. Maybe you should take me home now so I can get to work. . . .”

Lulu nodded. “Sure thing. Do you still want to come with me tomorrow for a cupcake tasting, flowers, and stationery?”

“Yes, yes, and yes!” said Zoey. “I don’t want to miss anything!”

Lulu and Zoey linked arms and then headed for the car. They had a lot of work to do.

Users Review

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