

DEAR DIARY...

Wedding expert Kate Smallwood reports on how things became altogether more emotional in the final week of planning her big day

7 DAYS TO GO Since boyfriend Chris dropped to one knee nine months ago and we set a date to say “I do”, I’ve been glancing at my diary regularly, counting down the weeks until the big day. The date 18 March 2006 is circled with a big red heart and contains the word “wedding”. This is the landmark date around which everything else has been measured. Weekends away and other appointments are either “before the wedding” or “after the wedding”.

5 DAYS TO GO Bags packed, legs waxed, house pristine. I’m ready to jump on a train back to my parents, where I’ll be spending the rest of the week and the night before the wedding. I’m also ready to begin the pampering. I’ve packed my favourite DVDs, two trashy novels, various face masks and my gym kit. I shall be running every morning, reading books and enjoying lazy evenings and bubble baths (complete with aforementioned novels and face masks).



1. Kate catches a train to her parents’ house for what she was planning as her “pampering” time. 2. Kate’s mum Margaret decorates the front of the house with white flowers. 3. Kate (second from left) on the morning of her wedding with her bridesmaids: from left, Nicola Tomlinson, Claire Ellis and Vinita Janicijevic. 4. A champagne toast with dad Trevor and her bridesmaids. 5. Kate sets out to tie ribbons around 110 napkins for the reception

For months, the date looms in the distance until suddenly there’s just a week to go. You only need to turn one page in the diary to see the date with the big red heart...

6 DAYS TO GO I’ve officially finished work and won’t be charging up the little grey cells until after the honeymoon. I should now be in the pampering stage of wedding planning and giving myself a big pat on the back for losing excess weight, sticking to my strict fitness regime and drinking at least two litres of water a day for the past six months. Instead, I stare at the chaos that is our house, swot up on the details of a crash diet and head to the gym, water bottle in hand. Is it possible to achieve physical perfection in seven days?

Over the course of the weekend, we both receive text messages from friends, the general theme being ‘this time next week...’ By Sunday afternoon, Chris and I look slightly pale and nervous. We make an executive decision to halt wedding nerves by going to the pub to watch the rugby – England vs France. We lose – badly. I think Chris is paler than when we arrived. That night I dream of arriving so late for church the vicar has gone home.

Alcohol shall be avoided at all costs. My body is a temple and on Saturday morning I shall awake, the radiant bride.

As I arrive, my father is standing on the platform with his camera, capturing every moment. I consider explaining it all to everyone on the train in case they think we’re completely mad. Back at my family home, my mother is decorating the front of the house with white flowers. A few wedding presents and cards have already arrived and my tiara is sitting on the dressing table. The excitement kicks in.

4 DAYS TO GO I’ve had my hair coloured, I’ve collected napkins from the hotel (for tying ribbons) and been generally hectic. The DVDs, books, face masks and gym kit are clearly unlikely to emerge from my suitcase.

After dinner I decide to tie ribbon around the napkins, thinking it will take me an hour or so. After the first one, my father makes positive comments (poor dad, it can’t be easy being bombarded with questions about ribbons) and mother is honest – she doesn’t like it. It’s at this point that I experience my first “bridezilla” moment. I have 110 napkins, metres of ribbon and an evening to get this done. I want

positive comments – lies would be fine. A slight strop, an apology (from me) and a lot of patience (from mum) later, we've opened a bottle of wine and come up with a better napkin treatment. The kitchen now resembles a factory floor. Mother measures and folds, I cut and tie, and father counts and packs the finished articles into boxes. Teamwork. Three hours later, we've finished. Lesson number one: everything takes significantly longer than you think it's going to.

3 DAYS TO GO It's spray-tan time! I've exfoliated to within an inch of my life and am standing in a booth, resplendent in paper knickers – it's not a good look. After 30 seconds of spraying, the beauty therapist stops and casually suggests I pop to the loo to grab a damp tissue because it's gone a bit splodgy. With those words, I'm so desperate to escape I even consider running home in nothing but my paper knickers. Visions of walking down the aisle with spray-tan splodges enter my head. I get dressed, apologise profusely and go home, pale. Lesson two: irrational panics are par for the course.

2 DAYS TO GO After an early morning manicure, the bridesmaids arrive. The excitement reaches a new high and we go to the wedding rehearsal at noon. The church is a hive

scene in *The Waltons*. I share a bed with Claire, one of my bridesmaids. I don't think we've slept in the same bed in my parents' house since we were about 12.

THE DAY I wake up at 6am and give up any hope of sleep by 7am. My parents are awake too, so I sit on their bed and chat. The nerves don't kick in until I'm at the hairdressers with my hair in rollers. I head home with hair up and tiara in place – a confusing look when worn with a tracksuit. This is when the fun really begins. We take it in turns to go into the "snug", where make-up artist Jayne has set up a mini beauty parlour, and father opens another bottle of champagne (he has become expert at this). Mother produces lunch and I'm relieved to see that for once she's bought the food from M&S...

Mathew (florist, friend and wedding guest) arrives with the bridal flowers at around 1.30pm. He gives my mother a lily-of-the-valley plant in a beautiful pot, explaining that it's the plant from which the lily of the valley in my bouquet has been cut. People can be so thoughtful. Mother's immaculately applied mascara is in danger of parting company from her eyelashes – it won't take much to shed a tear this morning!

The three bridesmaids go upstairs to get dressed and I



of activity and full of beautiful flowers. Chris and Matthew Henderson (his trusty best man) are looking happy and healthy after numerous rounds of golf, and we run through the ceremony. No one tells you quite how strange it is to rehearse your wedding vows. It seems quite real until you realise the vicar is in cords and a jumper.

Mother produces yet another lunch for everyone (she is a domestic goddess) and we go to the reception venue to deliver table decorations, seating plans and those beautifully tied napkins. Chris and I kiss each other farewell, mutter something along the lines of 'see you in church' and I head back home with the bridesmaids. Father cracks open a bottle of bubbly and is being charming – clearly delighted to have a household full of lovely ladies – while mother pulls another dinner out of a hat (when did she have the time to do this?), and we spend the evening chatting and having a lovely time. Various text messages come through from Chris and friends who are celebrating Paddy's Day in the pub. I think my intended might be consuming a few pints of Guinness – at least he'll sleep well.

Lights out just before midnight – it's a bit like the closing

hear a shriek about 10 minutes later. Vinita's dress is far too big for her and we stand in horrified amazement before realising that she's put on Nicola's dress by mistake. Nicola is a tall, elegant five-foot-niner and Vinita is equally elegant but a good few inches shorter. Panic over.

With half an hour until we leave for church, everyone is ready and looking fabulous apart from me. All I need to do is put on the Ritva Westenius dress and my shoes – achieved with the help of the bridesmaids and my mother (it's hard to see your own feet in a big white dress).

The wedding cars arrive and at 2.40pm my mother and the bridesmaids leave for church. My father and I are left behind in a remarkably quiet house, commenting on how we've been thinking of this moment for months. I think my heart must be beating dangerously fast. What is to be the only "oops" of the day happens when I attempt to climb into the car. Sparing far more consideration for my dress, I forget about my head and bump it on the door frame.

Fifteen minutes later and we're outside the church, veil forward, bouquet in hand. I smile at the bridesmaids, give my father's hand a squeeze, and we start the walk...

6. Kate and her dad on the morning of her big day. 7. Kate gets a helping hand to get into her Ritva Westenius dress from her mother Margaret. 8. Adding the final touches to her look. 9. A radiant Kate stands with her husband Chris after exchanging vows