

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

RAINBOW ROWELL



Slow Dance
a novel

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.....
A Novel

RAINBOW ROWELL

The logo for William Morrow, featuring the lowercase letters 'wm' in a stylized, cursive script.

WILLIAM MORROW
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Dedication

*For my friends Kai and Paul,
time machines*

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Acknowledgments
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Also by Rainbow Rowell
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One

January 2006

The wedding invitation came, and Shiloh said yes, of course she'd be there.

 Mikey was one of her oldest friends, and she'd missed his first wedding. She couldn't afford the trip to Rhode Island at the time. (She still couldn't afford a trip to Rhode Island.)

 But this time he was getting married here in Omaha, right down the street—of course Shiloh would be there. Everyone would.

 Everyone loved Mikey. He held on to people. Shiloh had never been sure how he managed it.

 She checked *yes* on the RSVP card and wrote in, *With bells on!*

 The week before the wedding, she bought a new dress on clearance. Deep-burgundy floral with a low-cut neck. It was meant to be tea length, but it came to Shiloh's knees. The sleeves were a little short, too—she'd just wear a denim jacket over it. (*Could you wear a jean jacket to a wedding? A second wedding?*) (It would be fine. She'd pin a silk flower to the chest.)

 The wedding was on one of Ryan's Fridays. Shiloh waited until he picked up the kids before she started getting ready. She didn't want Ryan to see her wearing makeup. Or heels. She didn't want him to see her *trying*.

 Maybe some people wanted to look good for their exes, to show them what they'd lost or whatever. Shiloh would prefer that Ryan

never thought of her at all. Let him think he was too good for her. Let him think that Shiloh had gone to seed.

Shiloh was a thirty-three-year-old divorced woman with two children under six—maybe she literally *had* gone to seed.

Ryan was late, even though she'd told him she had somewhere she needed to be. (She should never have told him she had somewhere to be.)

He was late, and the kids had gotten tired of waiting. They were hungry and sullen when he finally showed up and blustered his way into the living room like she'd invited him in.

"They're hungry," Shiloh said.

And Ryan said, "Why didn't you feed them, Shy?"

And Shiloh said, "Because you were supposed to take them for dinner."

And then he said—

It didn't really matter what Ryan said after that. He was just going to keep saying the same old things for the next fifteen years of coparenting, and Shiloh was going to have to keep listening, because . . . Well, because she'd made a *series of serious* mistakes and miscalculations.

It was funny, almost, how poorly Shiloh had built her life—especially for someone who had once prided herself on her ability to make decisions.

That's something she'd decided about herself when she was a teenager. She'd thought she was good at making decisions because she *liked* making them. They felt good, they gave her a zing. If someone was lingering over a decision or seesawing between two options, Shiloh loved cutting in and settling the matter. The world would spin faster and with more clarity if Shiloh were in charge.

If Shiloh could talk to her teenage self now, she'd point out that deciding wasn't any good if you weren't deciding correctly—or even in the neighborhood of correctly.

Ryan finally left with the kids. And Shiloh tore the clearance tags off her dress. She put on makeup. She pinned up her hair. She stood on tiptoe to get her boots zipped over her calves.

She'd already missed the wedding, but she wouldn't miss the reception. No one would. Everyone would be there.