



Prologue

Now is probably not the best time to admit I hate going to the hairdressers. I'm sitting in the dreaded chair shrouded in one of those strange black capes that remind me of Batman, completely at another's mercy.

All around me is the chatter of women making polite conversation and pretending to enjoy the experience. They must be pretending because quite frankly I would rather go to the dentists and have a root canal. At least *they* don't pretend that it's fun. You know it's going to hurt like crazy but is a necessary evil. Hairdressers smile as they drag the harsh metal comb through your tangled tresses. They grin as the tears pool in your eyes while they tear your hair out by the roots. Then they shower you with scalding water as you lean back on some sort of neck torture device while they dig their nails into your scalp all in the name of beauty.

No, I hate going to the hairdressers which is why I'm curious as to why I'm even here in the first place?

Then I remember and the guilt hits me.

I shouldn't be.

I should be streets away in a meeting that's been arranged for months. I even had one of those notifications on my phone reminding me. Guiltily, I picture my phone in my bag, silenced and hidden away much like I am now.

The heat spreads through my body making me feel as if I'm experiencing early menopause. That would be Karma. Payback for letting everyone down just to hide out here in Hell.

My torturer/hairdresser slams a mug of tea on the shelf in front of me along with a pile of trash magazines.

"Here you go, lovely. You can cook for a while until the colour takes hold. I'll just see to my blow and go."

She winks suggestively and I stifle a smile as I reach for a magazine I usually disregard. However, today is different. Today normal has been replaced by impetuous abandon and today I'm out of my comfort zone and playing truant. All of my responsibilities have been left firmly outside because today I've had enough.

For years I've worked longer than most people and put everything into it. I have a nice house, car and all the trappings of a working woman. I even have a man who wants to marry me and that's where the problem lies. There's a part of me that's unsure. What if he's not the one? You know, the man in the movies who brings the heroine to her knees. Her soulmate who makes her world complete. Is that Spencer? I'm not so sure anymore.

We work together, eat together, sleep together and rarely play together and this was the next logical step. My life runs like a machine and nothing is left to chance. My day is planned out months in advance and any deviations must be agreed in writing and emailed to the relevant people to keep them informed.

Yes, if they knew where I was now all hell would break loose. As I take a sip of my tea, I open the magazine. Time to switch off and become normal for however long it takes my hair to cooperate. I should make the most of this because as sure as the extra sugar in my tea, it won't happen again.

The seat next to me is taken by a young, glamorous, blonde. She smiles at her reflection in the mirror as the hairdresser looks at her with approval. Yes, she's obviously one of them. Those women who head here religiously every week. This is the mother ship and shamelessly I listen in on their conversation.

"So, honey. What will it be today, the usual?"

The woman speaks in a soft girly voice – actually, she lisps adorably.

"Oh, please, Donna. Make me look beautiful because today is going to be amazing."

Donna smiles indulgently and softly strokes the woman's hair lovingly. None of the pain inflicted on the masses for this woman. She is revered and loved as the obviously important customer she is.

Almost sighing, Donna runs her fingers through the hair of the woman who looks as if she's just stepped out of the magazine I'm holding. They make eye contact and the girl smiles smugly and whispers just loud enough for the whole world to hear.

"I think he's going to propose today."

Donna shrieks which makes me almost spill my tea. Frantically, I try to stop the liquid splashing on to Batcape and start to think I may hate this woman sitting next to me.

She giggles. "Yes, I'm heading off to meet him now. We're having lunch which is unusual in itself."

Donna raises a quizzical eyebrow which quite fascinates me as they appear to be drawn on with a sharpie.

"Ooh, tell me more."

Perfect woman sighs wistfully.

"Well, he's a real catch, Donna. I met him on Tinder last month and quite honestly my ship came in that day. He is everything. Good looking, well spoken, manners of a prince and the body of a sportsman."

Donna looks a little green as she continues.

"Well, he is also rich because I've never had anyone treat me so well. Jewellery, clothes, five-star nights away and flowers almost daily."

She giggles. "He likes to spoil me and who am I to argue with that? Anyway, we've spoken about getting away from it all overseas but he's so important and busy he doesn't have time for it. He told me he needed to settle down with a wife who will distract him from business. He wants one woman to take care of the machine – his words but quite appropriate if you know what I mean."

They both giggle and I almost join in. Suddenly, I can see the appeal of this place. This is so much fun, listening to the idle chatter of women with nothing better to do. Maybe there's something in this after all.

She carries on. “Well, as I said before, he’s so busy and works really hard. So, last night he called and asked me to meet him for lunch in Saracen’s. You know, the posh place on Bond Street. Well, you don’t just grab a sandwich in there, Donna. That place is special and if the roses I received this morning are anything to go by, I think this is it. The day he cements our future and asks me to marry him.”

Donna looks unsure.

“Are you sure, Camilla? I mean, it’s only been a month. Maybe it’s something else.”

Hmm, she looks like a Camilla. I should have known. Why wasn’t I called Camilla? It sounds so posh and popular. Rachel doesn’t quite have the same ring to it. I need to be an ‘A’ name. Arabella, Camilla, Araminta, Cinderella... they scream success and I feel cheated.

They carry on and I lean a little closer to hear over the noise of the dryer.

“Well, I grabbed a new outfit in Chloe and when my hair is styled amazingly, the scene will be set. He won’t want to let me go and as sure as the Jimmy Choo’s I’m wearing aren’t fake, I’m going to have a Tiffany diamond on this finger by the end of the day.”

She holds up her finger and we all admire the polished perfection of her manicured digit. Yes, a ring would look good on there. I’m excited for her.

Then Donna says innocently, “So, who is this man made in heaven?”

Camilla giggles and stares dreamily into the magic mirror.

“Spencer Scott. He runs Viking foods, you know the company responsible for that new Vegan ready meal range that everyone’s talking about.”

Donna nods, looking impressed, while I watch my world shatter and fall into the cut hair at my feet. The Tiffany diamond on my finger flashes angrily as it yells, “What the hell just happened? Spencer frigging Scott is your fiancé! Wrestle the bitch to the ground and tear her hair out by the roots. Fight for you man and tell her he’s taken.”

Instead, I sit on that angry diamond and retreat into my shell. I hear no more conversation, just the sound of my own life shifting. Something just happened that changes everything and I have exactly one hour to figure out just what I’m going to do about it.

One hour later and I’m a new woman in every sense of the word. I stride from that hairdresser tossing my new blonde locks behind me. My ring sparkles in the sunlight and reminds me of urgent business. Yes, I need to get to Bond Street and fast.

Hailing a taxi, I make the journey that will tell me what I need to know. The driver whisks me there like an approaching army ready to do battle. I actually feel great. I love my new look and walk with confidence. I’m wearing a sharp suit that makes me feel strong and powerful and I try to ignore the part of me that’s actually hoping this is all true.

For the last hour, every possible scenario played out in my mind. Camilla was talking of that other Spencer Scott who runs Viking foods in a parallel universe. Sliding doors in real life – my life and this will all have been an amazing mistake.

However, I know it’s true. Of course, it is. Spencer’s a player and always has been. I’ve pushed aside the rumours of the office dalliances. Scoffed at the women who turn up at reception demanding his time. Gritted my teeth at the envious looks of women who openly flirt with him and discounted any tales of sightings in seedy bars at night. No, Spencer and I are a formidable

team and work well together. Of course, he loves me because he tells me it every night in bed before switching off the light. I'm the one who receives the perfunctory roses on Valentine's day sent to the office designed to impress. I'm the one who has been told to clear my diary to plan our wedding and I'm the one who fields the calls of the estate agents searching for our dream forever home. Not Camilla, perfect hair and nails, Jimmy Choo wearing Barbie doll. Me, Rachel Asquith, all round super person and the love of his life.

By the time we reach Bond Street I'm ready to do battle. Yes, I will find out once and for all and confront them. If it is him, I'd like to see him talk his way out of this one.

As I stride toward the impressive doors of Saracen's my step falters a little. I start to slow down as something changes. What if it is him – what then? Maybe he wants to end it with me but doesn't know how? Will I be the one who leaves with nothing? However, there's one voice inside my head that won't go away.

'What if you disappear? Start again and leave this all behind. Go far away and forget all about Viking foods and cheating Fiancés.'

I must look like a crazy person because quite frankly I'm walking in slow motion like a robotic dancer. I see the looks all around me, raised eyebrows and shaking heads. 'Madwoman alert, call the crazy police.'

So, with a sigh, I step to the side and away from the restaurant doors. I move to the side of the building and shadow the window instead. Maybe, I'll just take a look inside. It's silly to make a scene if there's not one to see.

Removing my sunglasses from my bag, I cover my eyes. I am now officially in disguise because my hair has changed colour from light brown to platinum blonde and I'm wearing a bright red lipstick for once.

Carefully, like a private investigator, I glance in as though I'm looking for someone. Well, I am and my heart jumps as I see him. Yes, there's no mistaking it, Spencer Scott, aka cheating asshole, sits there gazing into the eyes of Camilla flaming bimbo. They are holding hands across the table and I watch as he smoulders across from her. Who does the idiot think he is smouldering away like that in public? She is openly flirting with him and bats her fake eyelashes making me hope they fall into his food.

Yes, there's no mistaking it, Spencer is cheating on me during the day when I'm supposed to be several miles from here, tied up in a meeting that sucks the will to live out of you. Here he is, secure in the knowledge that nobody will see them because nobody else can frigging well afford to eat their lunch in this billionaire's playground. What the hell is he playing at?

Turning around, I fight to breathe. Any tears that show themselves are blinked away angrily. How dare he? In fact, how dare he a million times, because I'm no fool. I know in my heart Camilla is just one of many and there will be more in the future. I'm under no illusions and am tired of it all.

Moving away, I start walking. The only companion I take with me is change. The office is in the other direction but my minds made up.

I'm getting as far away from here as possible. They can cope without me because for the first time in my life – I'm walking away.

