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EXAMPLE BOOK TITLE

DALE HARTLEY EMERY

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Published by Driscoll Brook Press
www.DriscollBrookPress.com

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Cover design © YYYY Driscoll Brook Press
Cover art © XXX

ISBN: 000-0-00000-000-0 (print)
ISBN: 111-1-11111-111-1 (ebook)

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2016-04-15 12:05

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CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS A STARK and knightly *dorm*.

CHAPTER TWO

MILDRED HAD NAMED THE DOG "STUMPY," just in CASE.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DALE HARTLEY EMERY has worked as a failed shoemaker, reluctant dairy farmer, and ruthless ice cream man. For several years he monitored the nuclear test ban treaty, making sure those pesky commies didn't blow up the planet. (They didn't.)

He prefers writing.

When he isn't writing, Dale advises software teams and leaders about how to play nice together. Colleagues in Dale's industry once created a special award for him for being reasonable.

Dale lives in California with his wife.

For more information, visit <http://DaleHartleyEmery.com>.

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BY DALE HARTLEY EMERY

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TAILOR'S TEARS

by

DALE HARTLEY EMERY

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TAILOR'S TEARS

THERE ARE THREE THINGS a tailor needs above all others: cloth, needles, and a fresh supply of tears. Clarke Whiteley was all out of tears. He looked at Dulcie Byers's wedding dress, in tatters on the cutting table, and wondered whether he could retire on the money in his savings account. He decided he could not.

Clarke's workshop was empty now, his boutique closed. The cheap battery-powered wall clock ticked heavily, and the mid-afternoon humidity hung in the room like a gas leak.

Dulcie Byers was likely halfway home by now, screaming into her cell phone at her unworthy fiancé that the tailor he recommended, the tailor he *insisted* that she use, had ruined her \$3,000 wedding dress. Maybe she would scream, as she had at Clarke, that he had ruined her life.

She had a point.

Hue Hawthorne, the unworthy fiancé, would call Clarke to find out what had happened, to find out how to make this right.

That conversation would lead to nowhere, and he too would yell at Clarke, about trust, about putting my faith in you, about third and fourth chances, about I knew you would let me down when it really mattered.

Ten years earlier Clarke had shepherded Hue through his senior year at Brown University, tutoring, writing papers, stealing advance copies of upcoming tests, ensuring Professor Combover that surely he was mistaken, surely it was not Hue Hawthorne he had spotted with tender young Fiona Combover leaving Rosa's Ristorante, because on Thursday evening Hue had been in the library with Clarke, studying diligently for the poli-sci midterm.

Hue was nothing if not grateful, but gratitude had a shelf life. The cheesy clock on Clarke's wall ticked past the expiration date.

The boutique's phone rang, and Clarke answered before the first ring died away. "Hey, Hue."

"You son of a cur. What have you done to my daughter-in-law?" It was not Hue. It was the elder Hawthorne. Assemblyman Gorance Goldsmith Hawthorne III. Old Gory had never liked Clarke.

"I'm sure she's told you the whole story herself," Clarke said, sure she had done no such thing.

"The poor girl was unconsolable. Incoherent. Couldn't say three words without breaking into great gasping sobs. How could you let her drive in that state?"

That had been a mistake. It would also have been a mistake to try to reason with an enraged bride-to-be in a room full of scissors.

"I do hope she gets home safely."

Gory shouted, “You do not want to play games with me, you little weasel. I advise you to repair that dress with all possible haste.”

“That won’t be possible—”

“Why not? What sort of incompetent tailor are you?”

“I am competent. I am not magical.” Which was exactly the opposite of the truth. And that was what created this whole mess. He should not have imbued Hue’s fiancée’s wedding dress with magic. Not with a maiden aura. Not four days before the wedding.

And certainly not without conferring with the bride.

“Is it money? Is that it? Four days before the wedding and you stoop to extortion?”

“No, sir, nothing like that,” Clarke said. “I can’t repair it for any amount of money. It’s been torn to shreds.” And imbued to glow with the subtle pink aura of virginity at her moment of happiness.

Assuming she was actually a virgin.

Gory screamed, “Why in the name of all the gods would you do such a thing?”

“Actually, Mister Hawthorne, she was the one who—”

“He ruined it.’ Those were the three words she was able to choke out between sobs. ‘He ruined it”

Clarke had to admit that she was right. Sure, she was the one who had torn the dress to shreds, but by then it was already ruined.

“I assure you it was an accident.” Not so much an accident as an oversight. He should have known better than to take the prospective mother-in-law’s word for something as potentially catastrophic as this. Even if she was the wife of the most powerful politician in the county. Especially then.

“Well, for god’s sake, man, make it right.” Gory’s voice no longer sounded angry. More like pleading.

Make it right. It sounded like such a reasonable plea. “I will do what I can, Mister Hawthorne,” Clarke said. “I promise—”

“You would be surprised how little I value your promises right now,” Hawthorne said, and Clarke could just picture the man spitting the words through clenched teeth. “But do make this right. I am feeling an exaggerated sense of stress in my life right now, and I would not want that to affect my professional judgment in the upcoming zoning board meetings. A happy, boring wedding would be a great relief. Am I making myself clear?”

Clarke’s Corner Clothier was on the western edge of the commercial zone, next to a large undeveloped lot. Hawthorne was golf buddies with Mathias McCoy, the owner of the lot, who wanted to expand his holdings eastward and build an apartment complex or a strip mall or a putt putt golf course. The five-year zoning plan was up for review next month. The chairman of the assembly’s zoning committee was none other than Gorance Goldsmith Hawthorne III.

Yes, Gory was making himself clear. Clarke bristled at the threat. Gory could have appealed to Clarke’s human decency. Or to his sense of business propriety. Or even to guilt. The implication that Clarke would do the right thing only under threat was an insult.

But not entirely undeserved.

Clarke said, “I think we’re all hoping for a happy wedding, sir.” Gory was right. Clarke had to make this right.

He had no idea how he was going to do that. But it had to start with Dulcie.

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