**57 Don’t Look Now**

‘Gems! Come over!’

‘Ella!’

‘Where have you been? I’ve been searching for you since the toast.’

‘Really? I was… chatting to Mrs Gale. She was one of the bridesmaids and…’

‘Never mind Mrs Gale! Follow me!’

‘Ella, I can’t leave in the middle of the party.’

‘Who said anything about leaving? I just need you for a couple of minutes. That’s all.’

‘That’s all?’

‘Yep.’

‘Sure?’

‘Come on! I promise it’ll be worth it.’

‘Fine but I hope it’s not one of your melodramas because this isn’t the time or place for it. Ollie’s been planning this for months and he’s counting on me to keep things running.’

‘Tell me something I don’t know! Honestly, it’s all you’ve had to say since…’

‘Yes?’

‘Since *you* got engaged. It’s like you’re a different person. You’re literally down to three types of conversation. There’s Ollie, his parents and the wedding.

Don’t give me that look! I’m merely pointing out the facts so you might as well take it in your stride and confess.’

‘To what?’

‘You know what!’

‘Loving my fiancé?’

‘Nope! You’re fast turning into a *Bridezilla*.’

‘Am not!’

‘Are to!’

‘Is this why you pulled me aside?’

‘What?’

‘You implied that this was important.’

‘Oh, it is. Look over there.’

‘Where?’

‘There.’

‘Is that?’

‘Yep.’

‘But how?’

‘Beats me.’

‘Ollie wouldn’t have invited her.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘That’s not funny!’

‘It is a little.’

‘I’m serious.’

‘I know you are.’

‘We have to get rid of her before Ollie finds out.’

‘What if someone invited her?’

‘That’s not likely.’

‘What about his parents?’

‘Do you really think they’d invite her?’

‘Why not?’

‘Because Ollie is looking into a restraining order.’

‘Really?’

‘She’s been following him and turning up at the house.’

‘And his parents know about this?’

‘Of course they do. Mr Todd’s the one who suggested legal action.’

‘That’s great but what about Mrs Todd? Does she know about the stalking?’

‘I presume so.’

‘I wouldn’t count on it.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning, they’ve been seen together.’

‘Together? Where?’

‘In town.’

‘By whom?’

‘Amy and Mum for starters. Even Derek saw them.’

‘Derek? Why would Derek be seeing them.’

‘Well, Derek didn’t plan on seeing *them* but he did have a lunch date with *her*. Mrs Todd was leaving as he arrived.’

‘That doesn’t explain what Derek would want with her.’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps she needed a reference.’

‘Or sympathy. Derek *did* have a soft spot for her.’

‘So what’s the plan?’

‘Well one of us will have to talk to her and I think it would be better coming from you.’

‘Me! Why me? You used to be her best friend.’

‘True but *I* stole her husband.’

‘And *I* helped!’

‘So help me again.’

‘Fine. I’ll ask her to leave but what should I say? I can’t do it without giving her some kind of reason.’

‘Of course not! I just need to think of a good excuse for you to move her away from the crowd before explaining the sensitivity of the situation.’

‘You’d better think fast because Ollie’s heading this way.’

‘I’ll handle Ollie while you deal with her.’

‘And how should I lure her from the party?’

‘Tell her it’s an emergency and you need her help. Go! Now!

Ollie! Darling, I’m glad you’ve found me.’

‘Me too! Aunt Judith polished off the gin before embarrassing Mum with tall tales about their courting years. We need Uncle Henry to take her home but nobody’s seen him since the toast. I thought he might have made it to the cake stand over there.’

‘Oh don’t look.’

‘Why not?’

‘I’ve just come from the cake stand and he’s not there.’

‘Are you sure? You know he can’t resist a bit of cake.’

‘Positive. You should probably check the buffet table. He always goes for savoury food when he’s trying to be good.’

‘If you’re sure.’

‘I am.’

‘Wait. Isn’t that…’

‘Who?’

‘Over there, isn’t that?’

‘It can’t be. You know it can’t.’

‘It is!’

‘Ollie, come back! Ollie wait!’

‘You’ve got some nerve showing your face here.’

‘Let go of me!’

‘I want you out of here before you ruin everything. Before you… Are you? Are you pregnant?’

‘Yes, I’m pregnant. I’ve been trying to tell you for three months. I was never barren. In fact I fell pregnant two months after trying. That’s why I needed to see you. Ollie say something, please.’

‘Who’s the father?’

‘I am.’

‘Tony?’

‘That’s right cousin.’

‘Why would you?'

‘Marry a fine woman you discarded?’

‘I had good reasons.’

‘A direct bloodline is hardly necessary in this day and age. You could have adopted if you were that desperate for a family.’

‘It’s not the same and you know it.’

‘It would have been if you actually loved your wife.’

‘You’re saying you love her?’

‘I’ve always loved her. I came back the moment Aunt Rosie told me you’d split up.’

‘Mum told you?’

‘Told him what?’

‘Mum! What is going on?’

‘Hmm? Oh, you mean to tell me that you’re angry about your ex-wife marrying your cousin when you spent the last few months of your marriage sleeping with your ex-wife’s best friend? I raised you to be many things but never a cheat!’

‘Mum!’

‘You’ve been a horror of a child and I knew you’d make a terrible father.’

‘Mrs Todd?’

‘You needn’t worry dear. You’re much better off with Tony. He’s a good boy and will take great care of you both.’

‘But what did you do?’

‘Yes Mother, what *did* you do?’

‘*Do*? For starters I spared her any pregnancy with you. And when everything fell apart, which I knew it would, I helped her build a better life.’

‘What kind of mother are you?’

‘A terrible one! But I am a decent human being or at least humane one. I knew enough to know the world would be better off without your spawn!’

‘How could you?’

‘Quite easily, I assure you! And I wouldn’t be the first woman to slip contraceptives into a breakfast bowl.’

‘Mother!’

‘And Mr Todd, did he know?’

‘Mr Todd! He’s been too rampant to notice much of anything!’

‘I didn’t think you and Dad got up to much these days…’

‘Me, and George, ha! He hasn’t laid a finger on me since I was pregnant with you.’

‘You mean… you mean Dad’s been seeing someone else?’

‘You’re both nasty cheats but George is by far the worse.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Neither did I, at first. I thought he was afraid to disturb the baby. Then I believed he was being a considerate husband, letting me recover after the birth, until I found out.’

‘Aunt Rosie, I don’t think this is the time…’

‘My darling Tony, now is never the time and at my age it’s better out than in.’

‘Mum, what’s this got to do with Tony?’

‘Everything! Do you think Judith would have carried on as a drunk if it weren’t for George?’

‘Do you mean to tell me Dad’s been carrying on with Aunt Judith?’

‘Nonsense! He’s been busy exerting himself with Henry! Poor Judith. She really loved Henry but he’s been with George since their teenage years. We’re the stupid sisters that fell for them. They wanted to keep up appearances because it was a legal offense so they dedicated time to *woo* us. Having a baby was perfect for throwing people off the scent and a good way to keep me distracted. It was harder on Judith. There were no babies for her, not after…’

‘Aunt Rosie…’

‘She… She was the one who witness them together. It broke her heart. She kept to the house for some time out of shame. If she hadn’t looked… It was my fault and… And I had to help her…’

‘Aunt Rosie…’

‘She would never have suspected it if I hadn’t sent her into that room. It drove her mad. Afterwards, I thought… I thought she could do with a distraction. I went away and stayed with a friend. When I returned I made arrangements for Judith and I to convalesce abroad. When we returned we had Tony with us.’

‘You mean you took Aunt Judith abroad to adopt a child?’

‘Nonsense. We had to minimalize the costs and the paperwork. I waited to get pregnant before we travelled. I had one baby, why not another? It gave Judith something to look forward to and it saved all of us from being caught. Despite Judith’s weakness for gin, Tony turned out fine, which is more than I can say for you!’

‘Mum!’

‘I wash my hands of you and your father. Marry your tart and be done with it. Judith and I are due a proper retirement and it’s high time for Henry and George to get on with their lives.

Tony, fetch your mother. We’ll wait for you in the car.’