

## ~ *The Perfect Dress* ~

### ~ *Chapter III* ~

Leaning forward with a grunt, Emily stuffed the Burger King wrappers into the glove compartment and heeled the empty coke cup under her seat. Moments later she pulled into the services.

It wasn't hard to spot her fiance. Oliver's blond mop stood out like a beacon. Slouched against the wall of Costa, he was staring at his feet with a penitent frown, hands thrust deep into pockets.

*Wonder how long it took him to perfect that stupid pose*, Emily thought, finding much to her annoyance that she couldn't suppress the butterflies she felt in her stomach whenever she saw him, even after just a few days apart.

*No*, she corrected herself, *it's not butterflies, it's those bloody muffins!* Belching uncomfortably, the auburn beauty tugged at her seatbelt, trying to loosen its grip on her bloated middle. *Ugh*, she felt absolutely *stuffed*. And it was all Oliver's fault! She never would've eaten so much if he hadn't made her so stressed and angry.

Emily pulled up alongside her slouching fiancée, deliberately avoiding eye contact as he heaved his bags round behind the car. As he reached forward to open the boot, she suddenly drove off, stopping right on the cusp of the exit. In the wing mirror she saw him staring after her, mouth slightly agape in an expression of numb stupidity.

*Pathetic*, she thought, absentmindedly rubbing her full stomach.

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Like an impala limping into a lion's den, Oliver slid wordlessly into the passenger seat. Hesitating, he moved in for a kiss, then quickly aborted when Emily continued to stare coldly into the distance.

*At least I'm in the car*, he thought. *Phase 1 complete.*

As Emily curtly checked her mirrors, Oliver checked her side profile. The little rounded chin was protruding, a sure sign of suppressed fury, and the lips were pressed tight. It was a severe expression that matched Emily's severe overall look: crisp armless blouse, thigh-squeezing business skirt, sleek, neat hair. Every inch the serious young professional.

*And a few extra inches too*, Oliver noted, eying the rather plump potbelly that pushed assertively against his beloved's seatbelt. In a strange way it was consistent with her appearance: a budding power paunch that seemed to demonstrate, almost proudly, that here was a successful, career-driven young lady who could afford to eat well and simply didn't have time in her busy schedule for trivial things like exercise.

Another thing she clearly didn't have time for at the moment was her fiance. And so, shunned by the Emily beside him, Oliver flipped open his wallet, enjoying the guaranteed

approval of the slightly creased Emily within. Funnily enough, the picture showed her in an almost identical pose to how she was now: side profile, hands on the wheel of her car. Although the car in the picture was a shuddery old Peugeot 106 - its worn-out interior a far cry from the sleek leather of the Audi A5 in which they now sat.

The other big difference was that in the picture Emily was smiling.

Oliver had to fight not to smile himself. The photo had been taken when Emily was eighteen, just after she'd passed her driving test, and they were off to Nandos to celebrate. She looked so fresh, so carefree... so happy. What a contrast to Emily of today! Stressed, snappish Emily, who at twenty three had the expensive car, the important career and no time to laugh; whose only smiles were photo-ready ones that never reached the eyes.

And those weren't the only changes. Oliver loved his girlfriend, but he couldn't help noticing, as he looked from Peugeot Emily to Audi Emily, just how much weight she'd put on recently. Em had never been a sporty or skinny girl, always carrying an inviting layer of softness on her thighs and middle. But it was only now, comparing her to her picture from five years ago, that Oliver fully realised just how much bigger she'd become. Softened at university by a fondness for Chinese takeaway, Emily's squishy tummy had swelled into a seriously chunky paunch, thanks to a daily barrage of donuts and Greggs pasties at work, and her slender neck had been so thickened by booze and rich food that it actually looked shorter than it did in the photo, with softly smiling creases starting to form at the throat. As Emily reached down to change gear, the back of her upper arm quiver flabbily, in a way the slim limb in the picture never could have. Even her face was puffier - and a little meaner looking for it.

*She'd be just as beautiful, Oliver thought sadly, if only she smiled once in a while.*

As they joined the motorway, he cleared his throat. His long purgatory at the service station had given him plenty of time to think about opening lines. 'Your hair looks nice' had the advantage of being true, but was too bland. 'Have you lost weight?' a kind of jokey way of starting to apologise, would, in light of his recent findings, have been suicidal.

With these possibilities dismissed, Oliver went straight in with the big guns.

'Did you get a chance to pick up some food?' he asked gently.

Silence... Not ideal. Then again, there were worse responses. Adjusting his seatbelt Oliver turned slightly towards her. 'Honey,' he continued, easing into the role of caring boyfriend, 'you know it's not healthy to skip meals.'

And to Emily's horror he drew from his rucksack a huge brown bag.

An unmistakable scent tickled her nostrils.

'I- I don't want anything from you!' she blurted, her full stomach groaning loudly at the mere idea of more food.

'Sounds like someone's tummy disagrees,' Oliver chuckled gently, tragically misinterpreting the warning. 'Ah, fuck it,' he thought. Throwing caution to the wind he reached across and gave his fiance's plumpening paunch a friendly pat.

The effect was like poking a Hyena in the eye.

‘Get-off!’ Emily snarled, smacking his hand away so roughly that the car swerved into a different lane, causing the van behind to blast its horn. Her cheeks flushed from rose-pink to crimson. ‘You *idiot!* I’m trying to drive!’

Oliver sighed. There was a time she’d have welcomed his touch, giggled and swatted him playfully. ‘I’m sorry honey,’ he grovelled. ‘It’s all my fault. But please have something to eat.’ He looked up with last-ditched hope. ‘It’s a Zinger Tower; your favourite.’

By now Emily’s horror had turned to fury. She already knew from the smell that the bag contained a Zinger, and it was indeed her absolute favourite. Her tastebuds were prickling. There hadn’t been a KFC where she’d stopped earlier, so she’d had to settle for Burger King. And now here it was, and she was too full to enjoy it! Far from making her more kindly disposed to Oliver, the presentation of her favourite food had just made her even more furious.

A period of silence followed, during which the delicious smell grew stronger, filling the car. *No... Emily resisted valiantly. No... I’m far too full. I can’t possibly eat another meal...*

Not even a meal of crispy, unbearably delicious Kentucky Fried Chicken...

*Who said anything about a whole meal?* The voice of temptation swirled seductively in her head. *You could just have a few small bites - just enough to get the taste.*

For a few moments Emily stared straight ahead.

Then, as slowly and disdainfully as possible, and without taking her eyes off the road, she opened her mouth the slightest fraction.

Taking his cue, Oliver lifted the burger up to her lips. Looking as bored as possible, Emily annexed a modest chunk, chewing in what she hoped was an unimpressed manner..

The delicious KFC tang swarmed over her tastebuds - and was gone all too quickly.

Oliver turned the burger, presenting a fresh angle.

Hesitating for a second, Emily took another bite. Considerably larger than the first.

Smiling to himself, Oliver reached into the bag and fished out some fries.

*Phase 2 complete.*

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‘Last one babe.’

Slowly, mechanically, Emily’s lower jaw creaked open just enough for Oliver to squeeze in the final popcorn nugget, drenched in honey BBQ sauce. With a heroic effort she bit down, splitting the juicy chicken between her back teeth. Too exhausted to chew or even swallow, she tilted her head back, allowing both chunks to slide down her gullet, one after the other.

Emily gasped deeply. ‘Drink!’

Obediently Oliver brought the straw to his betrothed’s lips and held it steady as her flushed cheeks swelled with Pepsi. Two salt-laden fast food meals in as many hours had made Emily incredibly thirsty, and before long the dregs were gurgling up the straw.

*Uuurrrp!*

‘Oops!’ Oliver smiled, dabbing grease from his fiancée’s pretty lips with a napkin. ‘Better out than in, honey.’

Emily could've punched him. Except that, well... she really couldn't. It was all she could do to keep her hands from sliding off the wheel. Already she could feel the sugary cola adding even more density to the mountain of meat and carbs that seemed to be expanding within her poor belly. She glanced at the empty bag in Oliver's lap and then looked away again quickly. Oh God... why oh why had she eaten the whole lot? Her stomach felt like a boulder.

'You okay there, honeybun?' Oliver asked, sensing his sweetheart's discomfort. Reaching forward, he tenderly wiped a spec of sauce from Emily's underchin, briefly wincing at how squishy it was. 'Want me to drive for a bit?'

Too full and exhausted even to open her mouth, Emily flipped on the left indicator.

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Gripping the doorframe on both sides, Emily hauled herself out of the car. Her cheeks bulged to hold in another belch and she staggered forward as her overloaded belly sloshed, dragging her centre of gravity down. *Oh God*, she thought, hiccuping drowsily, *I'm going to burst*. Sensing that Oliver was moving around the back of the car, Emily took the shorter journey around the front. She was still furious with him, but for now, all her energy was directed towards digesting all the fast food that was sitting in her gut like ten pounds of wet cement. *I'll really lay into him later*, she decided, wincing at the pressure in her middle as she ducked sideways into the car and began lowering her rump into the passenger seat. *Once I've slept this ooo-'Yeooouch!'*

If she hadn't been so heavily weighed down with food, Emily would have headbutted the roof of the car. As it was, she rose just enough for Oliver to quickly whip away the squashed box before her considerable bottom could land on it again.

'*What the actual fuck?!'* Emily seethed, one hand pressing gently atop her overloaded tummy. The sudden jolt had jostled it horribly. She glared at Oliver, who was trying to straighten out the box in his lap.

Her eyes widened. 'Are those-'

'Krispy Kreme,' her fiance confirmed, sighing in resignation as he tried to reform the crushed box. 'Sorry honey, I just... I thought it would be a nice surprise... I've fucked up again.'

Emily stared at him in utter disbelief, a million different methods of murder flashing across her mind. Krispy Kreme was her absolute *favourite* thing to eat in the entire world! Why hadn't the idiot warned her to leave room, instead of stuffing her with all that KFC?!

Panting from the effort of shouting, Emily glared at the mangled box, fury building within her like a rumbling volcano. The extent to which the box had been crushed certainly wasn't improving her mood. The thing was almost completely flat. Was her bum really *that* big? She felt her cheek flush at the thought, and she was opening her mouth to rage at her fiance once more when something else about the box suddenly caught her eye.

It was the same selection Oliver had bought her on their first ever road trip together.

Emily shut her mouth. She squinted at her forlorn fiancé. He really did look pathetic. That stupid tangle of blonde hair bobbing before his miserable face as he fidgeted with the box, trying desperately to squeeze some buoyancy back into the pancake-flat donuts within.

‘Pass it here.’

It was a few seconds before Oliver lifted his head. ‘Huh?’

Emily rolled her eyes. ‘Are you deaf as well as stupid?’ she huffed, holding out a hand. ‘I said pass them here.’

*I’ve already got tummyache*, she reasoned, settling the offered box into her lap. *Might as well make the most of it*. Flipping open the lid, she noticed that one of the chocolate dreamcakes was unsquashed. Besides, she did love donuts. Lifting out the dreamcake, Emily couldn’t help licking her lips. *Just one though...*

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*‘Snuurrck-pisshooo...’*

Phase 3 complete. Oliver’s relieved sigh was as quiet as possible as the noises continued to emerge from his fiancé’s gaping sugar-stained lips. Not that there was much chance he’d wake her. Slouched back in the passenger seat, arms dangling limply either side of her, Emily was snoring like a drunken sailor, the box of donuts balanced in her lap. Oliver hadn’t been surprised when she’d reached for a second. After all, one donut was never quite enough, and Emily loved a lotus biscoff almost as much as a chocolate dreamcake. The third, a toffee krispie, had caused his eyebrows to rise a little, especially after all that KFC. And when a rather groggy looking Emily had sent her sticky fingers back into the box for a fourth, Oliver had almost intervened. In the end, though, a few mouthfuls of caramel sensation were all Emily could manage before the overload of carbs and sugars finally hit home, and after one more hesitant bite the greedy girl had been forced to return her half-eaten donut to the box with a defeated groan.

Shifting in her sleep, Emily puffed out another heavy snore, mingled with a moan of gluttonous discomfort. As she exhaled, her bloated belly swelled forward, nudging the box of donuts further down her plump thighs so that part of it was hovering over her knees. It rocked like a see-saw balanced on the edge of a cliff.

Keeping one hand on the wheel and one eye on the road, Oliver reached across to lift the box from his overstuffed sweetheart’s lap. The last thing he needed was for it to fall to the floor, spilling sugar all over the interior of Emily’s beloved car. That would be his fault too. Not wanting to risk balancing the box on his own lap, and with his rucksack out of reach, he popped open the glove compartment.

A brown paper bag tumbled out. For a few seconds Oliver frowned, watching it float down.

As it turned over in the air, his eyeball bulged.

Shaking his head in disbelief, Oliver returned his attention to the road. *‘Didn’t get a chance to pick up any food,’ eh?* Smirking, he glanced over at Emily’s sugar-glistening lips, and then down at her belly. Plump enough before her KFC and donuts, it now looked obscenely swollen, stretching the gaps between her buttons with each snore, like a cartoon barrel

straining to hold in too much liquid. And no wonder, with two huge fast food meals and three and a half donuts inside. What a pig! Oliver shook his head again. He hadn't seen anyone look so bloated since... well, since his mother and sister got carried away at the Cheesecake Factory in Dubai last year.

The thought made him chuckle. Perhaps the family hen do wouldn't be such a disaster after all. He pictured Emily and Amelia in the Cheesecake Factory, gushing about their favourite flavours as they gorged on slice after gooey slice, finally having found something they had in common: a greedy appetite for desserts and sugary treats.

As if announcing her credentials in this area, Emily chose that moment to belch in her sleep. Brow knitting, she groaned in pain, her hands rising slowly, coming to settle on the flanks of her turgid, pulsing paunch. Oliver couldn't help noticing how much of a gap there was between the tips of her neatly manicured fingers on one hand and those on the other. *She's going to need a serious crash diet before the wedding*, he thought. Unbidden, the image of an enormously fat Emily popped into his mind, clutching her bridal bouquet between pudgy fingers, huffing and sweating as she waddled down the aisle, supported by grimacing bridesmaids on either side. Resting her ponderous belly on the altar when she finally made it, after five full repetitions of Pachelbel.

*At least she'd be too exhausted all the time to tell me off.* Yawning a little, Oliver flipped the left indicator on, moving to exit the motorway. *Time for a pit stop.* He glanced over at Emily, her pretty cheeks now a greener shade of olive. *And some indigestion tablets.*

*To be continued...*

**By Halrion**

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