

## **Prologue**

She just stared at him, unable to process what he was saying to her.

'I-I'm sorry - could you just repeat that?'

'You heard me.'

'Yes I *heard* you - I'm just not *entirely* sure I understood you correctly.'

'Look, Sarah, you're a brilliant accountant-'

'Well obviously not good enough!'

'- You're a brilliant accountant and a great asset to this company.'

'Oh please! You're making me blush!' She shot back acidly.

'But we have to count the costs - make some sacrifices in the current climate'

'Why not start with those two at reception? All they do is chat about their dogs and paint their nails!'

He looked at her. 'Sarah I'm sorry, if there was any other way but the costs just don't add up.'

'Fine! I take it that you'll give me a reference?'

'Of course! The best!'

She stood up and walked away, not even bothering to shake hands.

He watched her go and breathed out slowly, shaking his head - he reached for his phone.

## **Chapter One**

'Are you sure you're alright darling?'

Sarah glared at her mother. 'I've just lost my job Mum, of *course* I'm not bloody alright!'

'You'll find something else love - there're loads of accountancy jobs out there.'

'Yes Dad and a string of about a million applicants as well! My job isn't selective, I'm not chartered or anything!'

'Now! Now! You won't get anywhere with *that* attitude will you?'

'It's alright darling - we'll help.'

'I don't see how Mum - anyway - remind me why you wanted me round here?' At that, her parents exchanged a somewhat guilty glance. 'What's happened?'

'Well...It's to do with your sister.'

At that, Sarah's heart leapt - purely by coincidence - her sister had been dating her boss's younger brother, maybe something had happened - maybe they had split up and she was coming home. 'Is she alright?'

'Well let's just wait until they arrive shall we?'

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Sarah had just finished setting the table when she heard the doorbell go - she heard her mother greet them enthusiastically and then she came through.

'Hi sis!'

Sarah smiled, she'd always admired her elder sister - so focussed - she had started out has having a passion for photography - she had met her boyfriend shortly after Sarah had started working at the company - that was how they had met - Symone had turned up one day to take her out for lunch and Harry had been there and the rest was - as they say - was history; that had been nearly four years ago, but now, something had happened, and, the way she was feeling - she selfishly hoped they were splitting up - not because she was resentful, but because, at that precise moment, she didn't particularly feel like being anywhere near that family at the moment.

'Hi!'

At that, here sister suddenly opened her arms. 'Oh come here!'

Suddenly, Sarah found herself being crushed against her sister, she breathed in her perfume and suddenly felt very vulnerable, feeling the tears begin to creep up in her eyes, she hugged her back tightly. 'I'm Okay.'

'Don't be silly! Of course you're not!'

'Hey! These things happen!'

'Yes but why you? Look, I'm sure it's all a silly misunderstanding that can be sorted - but, first of all, let's go downstairs - we've got some news to share!'

As they headed downstairs - they heard the doorbell go, Symone looked apologetic. 'Look - I-I can get that if-'

'No! I'm fine - honestly!' She wasn't, but she knew that she had to be.

'Sis-'

'It's fine! Go ahead!'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes! Go on!' She heard Robert's voice and took a deep breath as she headed down, he looked immaculate as always whereas she just felt careworn; she hated that.

'Oh!' At least he had the decency to look slightly embarrassed.

'Hello Rob!'

'Yes - hello, how are you?'

'Oh on top of the world!'

'Yes - about that I'm truly sorry; you know you'll get a brilliant reference - besides, you could always see it as a golden opportunity.'

She scrutinised him. '*Excuse me?!*'

'Well...you know- you'll get a brilliant reference!'

'I can't believe we're having this discussion, let's just go and see what they have to say shall we?'

Heading into the living room - they saw their respective siblings happily holding hands and looking very excited.

'Well?' Their father suddenly said. 'Don't keep us in suspense!'

'Do you want to tell them?'

'No you!'

'Alright!' Symone held out her hand Sarah's heart sank; on her third finger was a diamond, engagement ring.

## **Chapter Two**

Sarah was silently filling the dishwasher when Robert entered; he hovered around, uncertainly for a minute. 'Can I help?'

'No thanks - you'll probably just take over and fire me anyway!'

'Look I'm sorry - it was out of my hands...'

'Yeah right!'

'It *was*! Look, The Board said we had to make cost cuttings and-'

'And you though "out with the old and in with the new?"'

'Well - I wouldn't *exactly* put it like that...'

'I've worked there since I was eighteen - that's eight years! I'm hardly old am I?'

'No! Of course you're not! Look - it was more to do with the maths if you like - we had to cut down on each department.'

'Whatever! Look - we're going to be family - that means we have to tolerate each other - fortunately it shouldn't be more than a couple of times a year.'

'Look if there's-'

'Well, there isn't! As far as I'm concerned - we may soon be brother and sister-in-law and we'll have to work together on this bloody wedding, but we're not friends alright?'

'Planning to go down the frosty relative route then? Christmas dinners should be fun!'

'How dare you!'

'Look, our siblings are getting married; it's not a perfect scenario I'll admit, but we'll just have to accept the fact that we'll be in each other's lives a lot more.'

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Sarah stared into the distance - it was as if all her nightmares had all come at once.

'Hey!'

She turned as her sister appeared. 'Hey! Congratulations!'

'Thanks! Although the timing could have been better!'

'It's the financial climate, Harry told me.'

'Yeah I know.'

'Don't think I'm going to let it rest - in fact, Harry and I have already been talking and-'

'Sis- I don't need charity - I'll be fine - honestly! Besides, it's not like I'll have to spend any time with him!'

'Err...yeah about that - I *was* going to ask you to be my Maid of Honour...'

At that, for the first time, Sarah truly felt a weight had been lifted at *last* something to look forward to! She hugged her tightly. 'Oh my god! Of *course* I will!'

'Yeah...Great! There's a slight snag though...'

'Oh, whatever it is - I'm sure we'll get through it!'

Harry's asked Robert to be his best man.'

She stared at her sister, of *course* he had!

### **Chapter Three**

It was a lovely day; Sarah was sitting outside a cafe, reading, when a shadow fell over her.

'You look very studious - anyone would think it was *you* getting married!'

'I don't have time for this; go annoy someone else.' she looked up at him. 'And, at least this is one job you *can't* fire me from!'

He sighed and sat down. 'It wasn't personal, you know that.'

'I don't want to talk about it! I just want to concentrate on my sister's wedding.'

'Look - may-maybe we can sort something out; you know, you could unofficially work for us - come in a couple of times a week or something.'

She looked up at him. '*Excuse* me?'

'Well - I can sort something out with the board.'

'*What* did you just say to me?'

'We - I'd have to talk to the board of course...' Suddenly, she grabbed her bottle of water and tossed it over him. He jumped up. 'What the *hell's* wrong with you woman?'

'You seriously don't know??!!'

'No!'

'Oh forget it!' She stalked off - leaving him staring after her.

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She was impossible! He decided as he made his way to work - she was so, so... *argumentative*...And to think he had to spend the next thirty odd years with her! It was intolerable!

'Don't slam the door, it creates the wrong image.'

He jumped as he heard his brother's voice, it was half past eight and the place was empty. 'Hal - there's no-body here!'

'There could have been though.'

'Yes but there isn't!'

Harry sighed. 'Just don't do it!'

'Fine!'

'Why are you in such a mood?'

'What?'

'Why are you in such a mood? What's the problem?'

'Oh it's - it's Sarah! She's being *impossible!*

'Well, I suppose you can't really blame her, I mean you *did* make her redundant.'

'Hey! How can you lecture me? *You* told me to do it!'

'No - I said we had to make some cut backs; I didn't say fire my future sister-in-law!'

'Oh she understands.'

'Well, Symone says she's not finding it easy finding something else.'

'Well...what was I supposed to do? I was using my initiative, I looked at the departments and counted the costs - she had to go, others went as well you know!

His brother sighed. ' Yes, I know and I hope that's true, otherwise you're going to be in for thirty odd *very* difficult years!'

'Well...what do you suggest I do then? Give her, her job back? She won't take to kindly to being patronised.'

'I'm not suggesting anything of the kind - but you could make more of an effort to help her.'

'Look - you told me we had to cut down the numbers - you didn't say anything about after care!

'Well, maybe you should think about it - could do you some good - helping another human being.'



