

## **The Cute Teacher and the Article from Hell**

*Miranda's note:*

*In the original draft of **It Started With a Kiss**, Romily worked as a photographer at a local portrait studio. As part of her job she was sent to photograph an Easter Bonnet competition at a local primary school and met a cute male teacher called Jon. They had a date together where he revealed that his mum was a big fan of Romily's blog (as a way of showing readers how the support for her quest was growing) – and later, Jon was the one who revealed Cayte's article to Romily. Madison Avenue was a New York-themed coffee shop near to Romily's workplace.*

*The photo studio job was cut because these scenes detracted from Romily's quest and I subsequently changed her job to Jingle Writer at Brum FM – which was more in keeping with the music theme of the book.*

*Jon was cut because again his scenes slowed the action – something my friend (and faithful reader of my novel drafts), Kim, was quite upset about. Watch out in future novels because I have a feeling I'll have to bring Jon the cute teacher back just for her!*

*In the later edit, I reassigned the task of telling Rom about Cayte's article to D'Wayne, which actually worked better because this gave me the opportunity to show D'Wayne's caring side.*

The week after the soggy marquee gig, I was taking my lunch break in *Madison Avenue* when, to my surprise, the cute teacher from the primary school knocked on the window, waved and entered the café when I beckoned him to join me.

‘Hey, Jon, how’s it going?’ I asked as he sat down on the sofa opposite mine.

His face was flushed. ‘Good, thanks. I haven’t got long, I’m afraid. I’m due back at St. Benedict’s in half an hour. I just – erm – I came to see you.’

‘Oh.’ Unsure of what this meant, I bit into my sandwich and waited for him to explain further.

‘I didn’t know if you’d seen this, and after our conversation in the pub about your quest, I thought it was important you did.’

He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. Intrigued, I reached out for it, but he held it back for a moment, fixing his soft grey eyes on me. ‘I just want to say, Romily, I think this is unwarranted and you should ignore it.’

What an odd thing to say. If he thought I should ignore it, why had he travelled across Moseley in his lunch break especially to show me? I took it from him and unfolded it to reveal a print out of a news article. Looking closer, I recognised, with utter horror, my photo from the Pinstripes’ website at the centre of it:

## **DESPERATELY SEEKING... ANYONE**

*How far should you go to find love?*

**They say that The One is out there, somewhere, for everyone. But how far is too far to look for them? CAYTE BROGAN thinks she's found the answer.**

Like many women, I believe in true love. I cry as much as the next girl when Elizabeth marries Darcy, or Bridget snogs Mark in a snowy London street; I listen to songs about the pursuit of love and use them to soothe my broken heart when love goes wrong for me; and I will admit, in the past, I've accepted the odd blind date, on the off-chance that the stranger I'm about to meet is the man of my dreams.

But would you spend an *entire year of your life* searching for a stranger you only met once?

Romily Parker is doing just that. Following a chance meeting with a handsome stranger in Birmingham's Bull Ring last Christmas, she is convinced he is The One and has embarked on a desperate quest to locate him again. And 'quest' is exactly the word she chooses to explain it.

'I know people will think my Quest is mad, but I'm determined to find him,' she told me. 'When something like this happens in your life, I believe you shouldn't let it go.'

Ms. Parker, 23, is not undertaking this mission alone, however. She has enlisted the help of family to set up a Facebook campaign – which, to date, has attracted almost a thousand followers, keen to see if her real-life fairytale gets its happy ending. So far, the mystery man remains at large, but Ms. Parker – who hasn't been in a relationship for over three years – is undeterred. 'Love doesn't come along every day. This may be my only chance of happiness,' she said.

However, not all of her friends and family share her enthusiasm. 'Romily seems to have latched onto this "quest" on a bit of a whim,' a close friend confided. 'One minute she was declaring undying love for a mate of ours, the next she was starting this search for a random stranger. If you ask me, she's desperate.'

Alice Parker, 49, Ms. Parker's mother, expressed horror at her daughter's year-long search. 'She's done some preposterous things in her time, but this takes the biscuit. It's a real embarrassment to the family. I'm ashamed of her.'

Die-hard romantics might argue that Ms. Parker is simply following her heart and that all's fair in love. But I believe her 'quest' carries a darker, more sinister undertone for women today.

While womankind has progressed so far in terms of career choice, civil liberties and recognition, what of our personal lives and relationships? Have we been reduced to this? Wasting our lives searching for some outdated, utopian ideal forced down our throats by society and the media?

Whether Romily Parker succeeds in her 'quest' or not, the picture this kind of desperate act paints of today's young women is not a pretty one. Happy-ever-after? I don't think so.

I couldn't breathe. My eyes scanned the scathing article over and over, as if this would eventually wear it away completely. Insult piled upon offending words as Cayte's damning verdict of my life screamed out at me from every line. A sickening cold rush gripped my stomach and my head was giddy. Hands, that didn't look like mine any more, were shaking as they held the paper.

‘This is – a *disaster*...’ I spluttered. ‘It wasn’t supposed to be like this!’

Jon watched me impotently, his face full of concern. ‘I’m just so sorry.’

‘She told my *mother*,’ I shuddered as the full force of the implications of this hit me like a landslide. ‘And one of my friends called me *desperate*...’ Closing my eyes as tears flooded in, I realised that the only person she could have talked to was Tom. How could he have said that – and told her how long I’d been single, too?

My mind switched into damage limitation mode. I needed to stop panicking and try to think clearly: this was a local article in a local paper that only a relatively few people would see. Granted, I might encounter some problems with people who knew me and the inevitable conversation with my parents that loomed ominously on the near horizon was going to be *hell* – but once the initial interest had died down, surely it would pass?

‘Where did you get this?’ I asked him, wiping my eyes.

‘Mum’s friend Maggie saw it on the *Edgevale Gazette*’s website this morning and when I checked the local paper it was on their website, too.’

I took a gulp of tea. ‘Right. Well, that’s not too bad. Cayte said to me that the articles she wrote were often syndicated locally. Edgevale –that’s Stone Yardley way, isn’t it?’

‘I think so. But...’

Taking a breath to steady myself, I collected my thoughts. ‘OK, good...’

‘Romily,’ Jon’s hand reached across the table and closed over mine. I stopped speaking and stared at him, suddenly chilled by the tone of his voice. ‘It gets worse, I’m afraid.’

‘Define ‘worse’.’

‘I think – no, I know – it’s gone viral.’

I blinked. ‘What does that mean?’

‘I Googled the article to see which papers it was in after mum called me this morning. It’s *everywhere*. Websites, newspapers, blogs... It turns out some columnist at the *Daily Mail* picked up on it and wrote her own opinion this morning. I didn’t bother to print that one, but you can imagine how bad it was. The worst thing is, they’ve obviously ripped your image from the band’s website, so it’s in every article. There are hundreds of links already.’

When Cayte said her article would achieve the most exposure possible for my Quest, she wasn’t kidding. ‘I can’t believe it. I didn’t say any of what she quoted me as saying.’

‘To be honest, I’m a bit surprised you spoke to her in the first place,’ Jon admitted, his hand leaving mine, as the merest hint of a blush coloured his cheeks.

‘She said she could help me. She said I was an inspiration to other women,’ I replied, even though in the light of what she wrote in the article, my protestations carried about as much weight as a feather in the wind.

Jon shook his head in disbelief. ‘She’s a *journalist*. She’ll say anything to get the story she wants. I can’t believe you trusted her.’

‘She’s dating one of my closest friends and she offered to help. What was I supposed to do?’ I stared back at her article, feeling like the biggest fool in the world. ‘Do you think I’m desperate?’

‘No.’ His kind smile brought the cute dimples back to his face. ‘Not at all.’

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