

Adventures in Tory Land by Katie Barron

Chapter 9 The Camel-Coated One

Oh.

Actually, we're just going out. Edmund? Are you ready? Have you got the present? Sorry, we're a bit preoccupied at the moment. It's not the best time. It's my father's birthday and we're all going out to lunch. In the country. We've got to get over to the Cotswolds.

Seventy one. So it's not the biggy. He had the biggy last year. Warwick castle. I organised it all. It went very well. I owed him really because he bought us this house. This is just a lunch this year, but he hates us being late. We've got to get over to Burford. It's going to take us an hour. My fiancée isn't the best timekeeper. It's s'posed to be the other way round, isn't it? Women are supposed to be fashionably late. I s'pose I had it drummed in to me by Daddy. Do you want me to take one of your leaflets? Oh. It's politics. I don't get too involved.

The local elections? Oh yes we vote I think. A paper comes through the door and we go and vote, if we're here. Sometimes we're on holiday.

Conservative normally. We work in the private sector. So.

Local issues bothering me? I'd have to think. I can't think now. We haven't been here long.

Eddie! What d'you mean while I'm chatting? I'm not chatting. Why are you going next door? Edmund. You know how uptight Daddy gets when we're late. He will have booked a table for twelve thirty, he always does. I know he's got mummy and my sister but that's not the point, is it? It's his birthday for God's sake.

I don't want to keep chatting!

Well that was a unilateral decision. I can't think why he's gone next door. Local issues. Um. Can't think. The roads. Pot-holes.

That's the Conservative county council is it? And you're the district council. It's quite confusing. Personally I think there are too many councils. They need to rationalise. That's my job actually. I do Change Management. It's hard. It's quite frontline. I meet the people on the receiving end of changes. Sometimes what's good for the organisation is actually good for them too in the long run. Change isn't always a bad thing. Of course I have to watch how I talk to people. They're often much older than me, and males, who have to make a jump and they don't always like a leggy young woman telling them but that's the way of the world, isn't it. It's not me that's made the decisions anyway. My job is to explore options with the individuals. And I run workshops. I get in speakers. Neuro-linguistic programmers... It's about re-programming. Christians sometimes or multi-faith. Different perspectives. Try to make change positive.

Does it sound positive? Yes, of course the reality isn't always how it sounds. For some people, they're not going to work again. But that's the world we live in, isn't it. I

mean I don't think about politics that much but I suppose I do believe in a meritocracy. That's probably why I vote Conservative I s'pose. Actually, there is something bothering me. That street light. It shines straight into our bedroom. It's quite annoying.

Thank-you. If you can get on to them I'd be very grateful. Keeps me awake. Ed can sleep through anything. I don't like being bathed in an orange glow either. Not really my colour. I've been thinking we need to buy black-out blinds but I really like the curtains we've got there. I got them in France, at a flea market, in the south of France.

Not vote for them? Why? Just because I don't like the roads? It's probably not their fault. There's just not enough money, is there.

What d'you mean there's money to hire Warwick Castle? I find that quite offensive. That's completely different. Our family earned their money. Why shouldn't we spend it? And it creates business, doesn't it? Helps the hospitality industry. It all goes round.

What? If we paid more tax that would help the road building industry. I don't see what point you're making. I wish Edmund would hurry up.

The leak? What d'you mean our bathroom's leaking? This is the first I've heard of it. That bathroom was new when we moved in last year. There can't be a leak. She's imagining it.

He's been trying to fix it? No he hasn't. What rubbish. He's never said anything about going next door. Why was she talking to you about our bathroom? What's it got to do with you if you don't mind my asking? It's not really a local issue. I don't understand why she was talking about it.

Quite a lot of water? Why hasn't she come and talked to us?

Well Edmund's never mentioned it. I don't think this is your business. Maybe I should go round now and find out. But we're going to be late. Getting hot.

There's water in her bedroom? On the party wall. Coming through. This is surreal finding out about this from you, a Liberal Democrat. Are you a spy or something? Why was she talking about this with you? I can't understand why she was talking about my bathroom with you – with someone off the street – no offence. But why was she talking about it? How did it come up? I think maybe I should go round now. We haven't got time now. I'll call him. .. Ringing... She told you, a stranger.

She's got mould in her bedroom? God that's awful. Still all she had to do was come round and tell me. She did. But why didn't Edmund tell me? Fuck! Excuse me. He's not answering his phone. I don't want to be a nag, going round there. How did it come up?

You were just listening? I think she's a bit of a bitch. I think she's got it in for me for some reason. Of course I would sort it out if she'd told me. She's renting and I own my own house, is it all because of that? There was a weird incident when we first moved in. She was sunbathing topless in her garden. I'm not a prude but it was a bit much. It would be like trying to set up house with your fiancée on the Wallen in Amsterdam. Edmund's a sweetie but with the best will in the world you're gonna look, aren't you, if you're a bloke. Boobs aren't my thing. I'm more leggy I s'pose. She's well endowed and

good luck to her, but she could look a bit further afield, couldn't she. Anyway, I can't think about this now, we'll be late for lunch. Don't want to upset Daddy.

Don't need this coat. Getting hot.

Advice? You? You want to give me a piece of advice? I don't even know you. You don't know anything about me.

Cancel the lunch? Cancel the lunch? That's a bit melodramatic, don't you think? Cancel my father's birthday lunch because Miss Big Tits has got a damp patch? Edmund's seeing to it anyway. Why d'you think I should cancel the lunch? Aren't you getting a bit over involved?

You think my life is important. What's that supposed to mean? I need to find out what's going on? What d'you mean, going on? I find that quite insulting. What are you suggesting? If you're suggesting what I think you're suggesting I find that outrageous. You're stirring. I think you're making this whole thing up.

What whole thing? Everything you're insinuating. I'm going to ring your headquarters and make a complaint. This is completely unacceptable. What is actually your problem? Is it envy? Why can't women support each other, it's pathetic. Why are we always like this? It's like my mum. Always trying to put me down. I didn't notice it till Eddie pointed it out to me. Now I notice it. And my sister too. And we're supposed to be a normal happy family. With my sister she's just a little bit shorter, a little bit plumper – Who cares? Anyway if she worked at it like I do, she'd be different. I can't believe I'm still talking to you. Don't you have anyone else to see? You're like a magnet. Or I am.

Do I believe there's a meritocracy in relationships? Funny question to ask. Maybe there. I go to the gym twice a week. Try to stay in shape. I do my best, I s'pose. Do you?

No? You don't look bad if I can say that. What just knocking on doors? Keeps you fit? Are you with anyone, if you don't mind my asking?

Oh bad luck. Who left who if I can ask?

Did he cheat or something?

No? My parents always say you have to work at relationships – they mean marriage of course. Mum keeps nagging me about a date but I think that sort of thing scares men off. Sometimes I think Eddie only proposed cos he knew I wanted it. Sweet of him. He's a sweetie really but maybe we're a bit different. He's not very ambitious, quite laid back. My Dad can't understand him. I'm starting to feel like I should offer you a cup of tea. I suppose I should set sail for Burford.

You've got a call to make. Can't get Eddie on the phone. Keep trying him. I really don't want to start knocking on doors saying, 'Have you seen my fiancée?' I could set off without him. Would serve him right. I can say he's got the flu. Can't disappoint Daddy.

Where's my coat?

End

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