

Chapter One

I can't believe I'm actually going to a place called Happy Ever After. It's so strange – mad, even. Then again, I could use a little crazy in my life right now. Life has certainly been dealing me a few low blows lately, and I need to break this run of bad luck.

The scenery distracts me from my usual depression and I feel it shift a little inside me as I stare out of the windscreen at a place where magic happens.

Dorset, England. Rolling hills undulating against a backdrop of a clear blue sparkling sea. The sun's rays catch on the surface and become dancing diamonds, sparkling their fairy dust into the eyes of the beholder. Lambs frolic in the lush green fields and raise a smile that hasn't been there for some time. I've decided the best thing of all about Dorset is that it's just me and nature. No crowds, no cars and no noise. Perfect.

My little mini eats up the miles as I drive towards the mini break that was a gift from my best friend Polly. She is like a sister to me and has endured many long conversations where I have poured my heart out and cried on her shoulder at the endless mistakes I keep on making in life.

It always involves a man - men actually, and I am finally coming to the conclusion that men are not for me. Not that I prefer women, well, I do as friends, but... Men! If God were a woman, Eve would have been tempted by Adam. That's me, easily tempted. The trouble is, I was tempted by the devil and I've just managed to drag myself out of Hell and am now dealing with the burns.

Sighing, I crank up the music and nod my head along to 'I Will Survive' and raise a smile. I don't need a man to define me, I'm strong, powerful, a goddess that walks on earth and slays men in my path. *I am superwoman.*

The music is so loud I don't notice the change in engine noise and so it's a complete shock when my car decides to do a voluntary emergency stop and I almost meet the windscreen head on.

The music dies along with my last nerve, and I thump the wheel in frustration. Bother, bother, bother, extreme bother with a Christmas hat on. What a time to break down.

Sighing, I rummage in the glove box for my emergency pack, meticulously researched and printed out on a spreadsheet with the various numbers I need to save me from certain panic.

Thankfully, it's there in its plastic wallet as it was designed to be, and I breathe and count to ten slowly before I deal with this crisis as I know I can.

Locating the details for the roadside rescue service, I reach for my phone and dial the number feeling a little smug that I'm so organised. What's a break down after all when you are superwoman?

Call failed.

I try again and then again and then again before I realise with a sinking feeling - there's no signal.

A nearby lamb calls for its mother and I know it's laughing at me. Why wasn't I born a lamb? Life would be so much simpler, and I wouldn't have to deal with LIFE!

Deciding to exit the vehicle as protocol usually dictates, I stare at mini moo in frustration. Why? Why now? You've always been so reliable, so solid. Why now when I'm miles from anywhere with only a lamb for company?

The thought of locating the problem myself doesn't even occur to me. I'm not a mechanic, why would I know? I can't even google my way out of this because apparently those undulating hills serve to keep the rest of the world out and there's no signal!

The fact I'm blocking the road is also a bit of a problem. I say road, more like a track, and I stare around me nervously in case a car decides to finish the job and put mini moo out of her misery.

Feeling frustrated, I wonder if I can walk to a neighbouring farmhouse where a friendly farmer's wife will welcome me in and pour me a mug of tea from her ever boiling pot on the Aga and cut me a slice of homemade apple cake. Yes, that's a good idea. She will have a land line and happily offer to help me and I can wait in her farmhouse kitchen and warm my toes in front of her fire in the rocking chair. Yes, that's going to happen, I just know it.

However, all around me are just fields, lambs and a now oppressive silence.

Taking a deep breath, I climb back into my car and try to turn the ignition. It just makes that whirring sound that tells me it's not happy and isn't going anywhere. The phone signal doesn't even have one bar and I feel like crying. What now?

It's taken me several hours to get this far, and Happy Ever After must be only ten minutes away.

It will be dark soon, and what if no one comes? Maybe a murderer will be the first one on the scene and they will find my car and I'll be missing presumed dead. I expect that's going to happen because it's just my luck.

Resting my head against the steering wheel, I squeeze my eyes tightly shut. Why me, why is it always me? Why can't I go anywhere, or do anything without something bad happening?

Suddenly, I hear a sound – of life and look up with hope flaring in my heart. I'm being rescued. This is it; someone will save me and he will be a billionaire on his way to his mansion. He will stop and fall in love with me on the spot, and all my troubles will vanish like smoke on a windy day. He will be tall, dark and handsome and look a little like Tom Cruise in his glory days although much taller. Actually, scrub that, he will be Chris Hemsworth dressed as Thor wielding his sword.

So, it's with a little disappointment that I see a tractor heading towards me and my heart sinks even more as he sounds some kind of horn thing and waves at me to move aside. Once again, I exit the car and stand waving apologetically, mouthing, "Help me."

The man inside looks irritable and rolls his eyes and squeals to a halt and jumps down from his monster vehicle. As he saunters towards me, yet again my heart sinks when I see he is no Chris Hemsworth, or Liam come to mention it. He is angry!

"You can't park there."

"I'm not parked, I've broken down."

"You can't break down here either."

"Tell that to my car."

"Listen lady, I have a herd of cows heading this way and your car had better not be in their way."

Looking over my shoulder in horror, I picture them stampeding mini moo and it's not a pleasant image.

"Can you help me?" My voice sounds rather high and damsel in distressy and he blows out – hard.

"I'm not the emergency services love."

"But you're all I've got until I can get a phone signal to call them."

“What’s the matter with it then?”

“I don’t know, she just stopped.”

“She?”

He raises a sarcastic eye, yes, there is such a thing and blows out again, I would say exhale but this man doesn’t do anything by halves and I’m guessing he doesn’t meet many people because his art of conversation is seriously off.

“Yes, mini moo is a she and *she* has let me down badly.”

“Mini what?”

“Moo, like in the cows that are heading our way as we speak. Please help me, you’re my only hope.”

I think he whispers something like, “Bloody grockle,” and I wonder if this a Dorsetonian swear word. I really must look it up when I reach the land of google but for now, I am completely at his mercy.

Remembering my manners, I say formally, “I’m pleased to meet you, I’m Susie Mahoney and I…”

He kicks the tyre and I say in outrage, “Excuse me, what are you doing?”

“Checking for a flat.”

“Oh, that’s alright then, I mean, having eyes isn’t enough around here is it? I mean, a good old kick will really tell you what your eyes can’t.”

He shrugs and runs his fingers through his hair, and I notice a tattoo of a lamb on his bicep. Come to think of it, this man’s arms are a walking farmyard because he has every farm animal going tattooed on his arm, with names too.

I stare at him with interest as he grumbles, “I’ll get my brother to drag it out with his landrover.”

“Drag it! Can’t you just call the AA man? I mean, they do have actual ways of making cars roadworthy again and I’m sure dragging it will do more harm than good.”

“Don’t have time, the cows.”

He turns away and grabs some kind of walkie talkie thing from his tractor and speaks into it with words I don’t recognise. Grockle, airhead and townie are littered with expletives and carry towards my ears on the bleat of a lamb’s cry.

He returns and says gruffly, “He’s on his way.”

He turns to leave and I say slightly hysterically, “Where are you going?”

“Got work to do.”

He heaves his body back into the tractor and the engine noise drowns out my plea to stay with me. I watch in disbelief as he reverses his tractor back up the road, and then I see him enter the lamb’s field. As he passes me on the other side of the hedge, he shouts, “I’ll head off the cows.”

He goes before I can answer, leaving me stranded once again with just the promise of a landrover and his brother to rescue me. Hoping against hope his brother is some kind of hot body building, billionaire farmer, I sit down and wait for the love god to arrive.

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