

1. London

‘Well, that about wraps it up!’

No one reacts to the worst ever pun and I feel Buz’s eyes burning a great big curse in my back.

I’m in the middle of a megameeting with the full board of directors of Poopers, the diaper people. I have no clue as to why I’m starting my story here. But hey, I have to start somewhere! And I know you probably have better things to do than to hear about this, but what happened to me is just *so* weird, that you’ll just have to do your laundry, ironing, tv watching, sleeping, working, or whatever it is you do, later. You just *have* to hear about this.

By the way, I’m Hazel. That’s not my real name, but one of the nicknames I got in school that hung on. Hazel is short for hazelnut, which my friends called me because I wore this nutty coloured anorak for like, ages! Luckily, this name stuck, because I had other ones too. Like Spotty. Well, no prizes for guessing how I got that one. And Casimir. Which was what some French teacher called me. He thought my real name was too boring. Don’t ask me why.

My real name, for the record, is Margo Joanna Bernard. But let’s stick to Hazel.

Anyway, this is how I made it from rags, not so much to riches, but to haute couture. Maybe not everybody’s main goal in life, and it sure wasn’t mine, but as long as I keep my body in a reasonable shape, hey, it feels good!

Now, to make things a little clearer to you, I’m not a model. No bones sticking out anywhere and no face to match. I smile too much and nowadays, you know, the junkie sullen look is in. Not my cup of tea. And too old, I

have to add. I was sixteen some eighteen years ago, so that rules me out.

So I became an advertising copywriter. It was the only job I could come up with after my busy youth, in which I had two hobbies. Fashion and advertising. As I didn't have enough money for fashion, all I had was spent on fashion books and magazines. Time was scarce too, because I had to sing to my mirror - the whole Evita musical in particular - and collect ads (which were conveniently enough in the already bought fashion magazines!). You heard me. I did not collect stamps or teddy bears. I collected ads. Benson & Hedges were my favourites back then. Along with White Horse and Smirnoff. I kept them in folders. Still have them somewhere.

So after I went to art school, delivered pizza's, taught myself to type under a tree on Ibiza, it seemed only the natural thing for me to get a job in advertising. As a copywriter.

Anyway, writing ads, commercials for tv and radio, that's what I have been doing for the past ten years, and probably would have been doing for the rest of my life, had I not bumped into all kinds of new people. As well as a few treacherous margaritas in Paris. But more about that later.

As I was saying, I'm in the middle of this bold presentation. Some crazy idea I have about seasonal diapers. I somehow managed to convince my colleague Buz, who's handling the account, to come present it with me. We've been on this for months. Passed all the lower ranks, and today is d-day. All the big shots are giving us

some of their precious and very expensive time to hear about this project. Our careers can be over in a blink, or it could mean the start of... well, seasonal diapers!

I have just finished my presentation. My audience, the full board of Poopers is staring at me, digesting my performance.

I slowly sit down. You can hear a pin drop. Instead my imitation leather seat makes a big pfff sound.... I manage an apologetic smile. God how I hate this part of the job. Should have paid more attention at the graciously offered presentation courses. This is probably what Buz is thinking at this very moment. What a waste of money! He should never have let me talk him into this self-inflicted kamikaze situation. Hazel and her Big ideas! He should have stuck to his gut feeling. This is not what Poopers want. Seasonal diapers indeed! Where do I get these preposterous ideas from in the first place! By now all the grey suits around the nondescript seventies conference table are staring at the presentation on paper.

My life is flashing in front of me. So this was it. This is how careers end. This way out please. Just follow the exit signs. Do not pass go and do not collect your fifteen minutes of fame. Don't call us, forget about us calling you! Nice try, but please make way for the real creatives. I feel that Buz is about to collect enough courage to break the silence, when the managing director of Poopers clears his throat.

He pushes the presentation in front of him and takes off his glasses.

‘Thank you miss...’

‘Bernard, Hazel Bernard.’

‘ Yes, miss Bernard. I can see you’ve put a great deal of work into this. Of course you are aware of the fact that printed diapers are no news to us. I mean after all, we came up with that idea ourselves...’

The whole board is chuckling politely at him as he looks around, sharing his little joke with them. I feel the blow. Right against my extra rib, under the wire of my 36B wonderbra.

‘However, your approach does have some freshness to it, I must admit. The idea of a baby lying or trotting about in nothing more than his diaper doesn’t appeal to me, never has, never will, but I know that these things happen. It’s better than the shit hitting the fan, after all...’

He pauses, waiting for the chuckling, which arrives just a little too late for his taste.

‘Anyway, adding to that the fact that our market share in warm countries is very healthy, I think you might be on to something... Charles?’

‘Oh, absolutely... Ahm...’

Yeah right. As if Charles had suspected only for one second that the boss would be so enthusiastic. In fact, by now everyone is shuffling in their seats, reassessing their positions. He’s even got me puzzled. Buz is just plain flabbergasted.

‘Very fresh indeed! Great idea, sir.’

The third suit from the right and second in command, has spoken.

‘I especially like the thought of starting with the Christmas and Easter diapers. And if they’re any good, we can continue with the summer prints, like the faded jeans design. Gentlemen, Miss Bernard, we’re definitely

on to something. I trust the marketing department will take this up with the agency. Work out final designs, print and tv proposals, colours, costs, planning, maybe even get your media department to look this over and give us some input on this and then we can all get together again to press the green button! Feel free to join us in our lunchroom, but I know you're always pressed for time and prefer to lunch at our expense in much better establishments!

As he is leaving, he stops and turns around.

‘And by the way, great initiative. It needs guts to be pro-active. We do appreciate that. Keep it up.’

With all the sketches and mock-ups safely back in the presentation bags, Buz and I chuckle ourselves politely out of the boardroom.

‘You drive.’ And I hand Buz the keys.

Silently he makes his way onto the motorway. Me? Well, I'm just beaming.

‘Well, aren't you going to say anything?’

‘Come on, give me time to readjust. I had an ‘I told you so’ speech all ready, but you understand now I'm lost for words...’

‘You could try ‘well done, love’...’

He smiles, looks at me and put his hand on my knee.

‘Yeah, you're right, I'm just being an inflexible asshole.’

I ostentatiously take his hand off my knee with a huge oh-no-you-don't grin.

‘Sorry. Of course congratulations are in order. It's just, and I'll be honest with you, I'm still amazed at how

you pulled it off. I mean, it wasn't like a standing ovation or anything...'

I know that, but then, has it ever been? Did they jump for joy after the Poopers Troopers campaign, which sent their market share sky high? No! And they were happy then! Boy, they were ecstatic!

'The poker faces are just their way of having an orgasm.'

'Hazel!'

'You know what I mean! You'll never see these guys dancing on the tables or crying of happiness. It's just not Poopers policy! And anyway, we have to wait for tomorrow for a definite go.'

'Tomorrow? Come on, you heard the guy, go ahead he said!'

I turn to him and give him this motherly smile.

'Haven't you overlooked something?'

Buz hits the steering wheel. 'Of course, the wives. The boardmembers wives club.'

'Exactly. They'll hear it tonight over dinner, past the paper or if we're lucky, in bed, and tomorrow you can get together with marketing to see if the baby is still alive. Or if we have to throw it out with the bath water.'

'How about making a little offering to the board members wives club?'

'I think a little Nobu might be in order...'

'Now you're talking!'

As if driven by a higher power, his hand is seeking out my knee again, but he gets the body language just in time to laugh it off. 'Sorry... it's just...'

'I know, you can't help it...'

I give him a condescending smile.