

Curling Iron

by Alison Clifford

There is no better weapon than a hot curling iron and a can-do attitude.

Okay, so that's not completely true, but sometimes you have to adapt. Especially when there's a stranger creeping around your home. I like a bit of excitement, but on the television or in a book, not in my house.

I wasn't supposed to be at home. The plan had been to get ready for the party at a friend's place, but when she fell sick, the plan had changed. Which made me wonder if the person had known of the original one and seized the opportunity. Not for long though—there wasn't time to wonder much except how I would get out of this situation. I could see my phone sitting on my bed, but it was in plain sight of the door and I wasn't going to risk the intruder hearing me move. Perhaps he wouldn't come into my en suite, and would leave without finding me. Fingers crossed. Or they would have been if I wasn't clutching the curling iron.

I sucked in some long, quiet breaths, fighting the adrenalin my hammering heart pumped around my body. A stair creaked, warning me of the approaching danger, and I crouched beside the bathroom door, out of sight. No sound reached me and my mind picturing the intruder pausing on the stair, listening for movement, for any sound indicating someone was home. I swallowed and gripped the curling iron in my right hand as the fingers of my left hovered over the plug, ready to pull it free at the right moment.

A long silence. I pictured the intruder creeping along the landing, checking the upstairs room. A faint sound of fabric brushing against a wall, and then the light changed as the intruder moved between the bedroom window and the door to the en suite. I tensed, my fingers grasped the plug and eased it from the socket as I readied the curling iron. A faint current of air, the door eased open in front of me and a hand, sprinkled with dark hair, edged through. The fingers quivered in front of my face for an instant, and then I struck.

I whipped up my hand, the hot iron pressing against the skin of the man's wrist. He screamed as I sprang forward, my shoulder colliding with his stomach. He fell back, and we landed in a heap on the floor. I pushed up, desperate to get distance between me and my assailant, to get out of the house and find help.

And then I recognised him.

“What the hell?” he asked as he lay on the floor his burned wrist held up accusingly.

“Exactly my question! What the hell were you doing creeping around my house?”

My brother raised himself off the floor and headed to the bathroom. He turned on the cold tap and stuck his wrist under the flow, sighing as the water ran over his skin. “I wanted to borrow something.”

“And you couldn’t come while I was here?”

“You told me you would be away this afternoon, and I didn’t want to bother you.”

“So considerate. If you knew that, then why did you creep through the house instead of just walking?”

He shrugged as he kept his gaze on his wrist. “I thought I heard something. It was more a bit of fun than really expecting anyone to be here.”

“Hmm. What were you going to borrow?”

“Do you have any cream or something to put on this?”

“Not until you tell me what you were going to borrow.”

No answer. His gaze met mine for an instant and then he looked away.

One step forward and then I grabbed his arm just above the burn. “Speak.”

He opened his mouth and then the doorbell rang. He glanced towards the door and then down at his wrist. “I was meeting someone here.”

“Who?” I tightened the grip on his arm and he cringed.

“Sadie.”

“Your wife?” I released him. “What on earth...?” I took in his red cheeks and understanding hit. “You use my place as some sort of...of...” I didn’t want to say it as then I would picture it.

“Sorry.”

“Tell me you don’t use my bed.”

The doorbell rang again, and he made to move for the door. “No, no. The spare bed. And we change the sheets after.” He attempted a smile. “It’s good for our marriage.”

And there was the picture. I shuddered, closed my eyes, and tried to imagine something else. Anything else. The doorbell rang again and my eyes opened. “Key,” I said, holding out my hand.

His face fell. “Really?”

“Key.” He took the key I’d given him—in trust—and put it in my hand. “And take your wife to a hotel.”

“We weren’t hurting anyone, and a hotel costs...”

I reached for the curling iron that lay on the floor where I’d dropped it and he sprinted out the door. Moments later I heard my front door slam, and I returned to the en suite and plugged the curling iron back in.

“Mental note to self,” I said. “Get the locks changed—just in case.” I grinned at my reflection in the mirror. “And get him a curling iron for his wedding anniversary.”