

## The Appointment

When Marnie Tindall arrives late for her scheduled tanning session, she finds herself in the ultimate “wrong place, wrong time” situation.

Marnie Tindall woke to darkness.

Her mind was swimming, but she could see some light near her right hand. A small dim stripe in an otherwise dark chamber. She tried to remember. It was early evening. She had been running late to...

*The tanning salon!*

Marnie was getting married in two weeks and this was her final appointment. However, she was a spray tanner. Why was she lying in a tanning bed? She pushed on the rigid plastic panel above her and it didn't move.

"Help! I'm stuck in here!"

She ran her fingers around the opening, looking for a release latch, but there was only a fabric strap wrapped around the chamber.

"Help! You have a customer in here!"

"Ma'am," a woman said over the room's intercom. "Stay calm."

"Oh Jesus," Marnie said. "Thank you. I was so worried something terrible had happened."

The voice laughed.

"Ms. Tindall, nothing has happened. Yet."

"What?"

"We were closed when you arrived for your appointment"

Marnie smiled, "I know. I am so sorry. It's just...my day was so crazy and--"

"Do you remember anything you saw?"

"What?" Marnie stopped smiling.

"When you came in tonight. Do you remember anything?"

"No," Marnie replied. "I don't think so. Wait! I remember a woman carrying...kerosene? But I'm so confused."

“What you’re feeling is a high dose of anesthesia. I thought it would allow me to finish my task, but I must have overestimated the drug. Or underestimated you. Regardless, you’ve seen too much. I’m sorry.”

“Please,” Marnie voice wavered. “I’ll go home and I won’t say a word.”

The speaker clicked off. A few seconds later, someone unlocked the door and walked inside.

“This is better than that intercom.”

“Who are you?” Marnie was crying now.

“I guess it doesn’t matter if I tell you. I’m Carla. I own this salon. Bought it for a steal a few years ago from an old man who was bored with seeing half naked women walk around the joint. Weird, huh?”

Marnie pushed the top of the tanning bed again. Nothing.

“Wow,” Carla said. “I wasn’t sure that would hold you.”

“You did this?” Marnie asked.

“Look, I didn’t want anybody to get hurt tonight. But I have heard that people who are burned alive usually pass out from the smoke before they feel anything. So that’s good news for you.”

Carla started leaving the room.

“You know, I really do feel bad about this, but I have a salon to destroy.”

“But I’m getting married,” Marnie whimpered.

“Oh?” she turned back and walked over to the bed. “I’ll bet he’s a real hunk, huh?”

Marnie continued to weep quietly.

“Can I tell you a story? When I was 13, all I wanted in the world was a pair of Rollerblades.”

“What does this have to do with me?” Marnie asked.

“Quiet! I’m telling a story.”

Marnie explored the side of the bed opposite the light. She felt several hinges and something else.

*A cord. A power cord?*

“Anyway, for my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday my parents bought me a pair of exquisite Rollerblades. I guess my father had finally convinced my awful mother that we could afford them.”

Marnie tried to use her finger to strip some of the cord’s rubber, but she realized her captor had trimmed her nails.

“I skated all the time. It was wonderful. Until a girl—a pretty girl like you—tripped me in the middle of the street one day.”

Marnie pulled the cord to get some slack.

“I hit my head on the pavement and was only unconscious for a minute or so, but it was enough time for one of her hunks to take my skates. I never saw my Rollerblades again.”

“That’s...that’s terrible,” Marnie said. Carla lit a cigarette.

“I spent the next twenty years trying to get back at her. Well, not her specifically, but pretty girls like her...and you.” Carla sighed. “Listen to me yapping away. I must be boring you, but it’s only fair that you understand why you’re about to die.”

Carla stood up and walked toward the doorway.

“Why are you doing this?” Marnie asked softly.

“Burning it down? I know it sounds silly for me to buy a place like this in the first place, but I guess I liked the idea of controlling even a small part of their lives. If I wanted to, I could amp up the beds or mess up the sprayers. But no matter what I did, they never stopped being mean. So no more salon for them, and no more chit-chat.”

Carla walked out and Marnie frantically scraped the power cord against the edge of the hinge. When the cord was severed, she gently pulled it across her body, avoiding contact with the wires she hoped were live. She found the fabric strap and touched the exposed metal to it.

*Nothing!*

Minutes went by with no sign of ignition. Just as she started to panic, she smelled smoke and the strap fell away from the bed. Marnie quietly lifted the upper panel and walked to the open doorway. No sign of the owner.

Still a bit foggy, Marnie walked toward the front of the salon. Footsteps away from freedom, a hand grabbed her arm while another drove a syringe toward her neck.

She ducked in time, but the head rush created a kaleidoscope of needles and Carla's angry scowl. A desperate flail clipped the owner's leg, sending her to the ground. The loaded hypodermic rolled to Marnie's feet and she was able to focus just enough to grab it and plunge it into the owner's thigh.

Marnie scrambled to the receptionist desk while the drug took effect. It only took twenty seconds for Carla to pass out, but Marnie remained motionless until smoke started pouring into the room from the rear of the salon.

*She actually did it.*

Shaken but relieved, Marnie escaped and collapsed on the front sidewalk as sirens screamed in the distance.