

All His Own Hair - A Romantic Comedy

Pages: 324

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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About the author Susan Alison lives in Bristol, UK, and writes and paints full-time. She paints dogs, especially Border Collies, Corgis, Whippets and Greyhounds. Every now and then she paints something that is not a dog just to show she's not completely under the paw – mainly, she's under the paw...Short stories of hers (not usually about dogs) have been published in women's magazines worldwide. In 2011 she was presented with the Katie Fforde Bursary Award (with which she's incredibly chuffed). She has a [dog blog here](#) (with the occasional non-dog painting) and an [Amazon Author page here](#). Also by Susan Alison and available now... [White Lies and Custard Creams \(UK\)](#) #1 best-selling romantic comedy with a dash of mystery still in the top 100 Paid in Kindle Store [White Lies and Custard Creams \(US\)](#) This book (and 'All His Own Hair') can be bought in print form from the publisher at: [Susan Alison's Books](#) – or – [direct from Susan here](#). Also by Susan Alison and available soon... **Out from under the Tiger** a romantic comedy with a dash of 'woman scorned' - about the games people play in their relationships. Will Stephanie learn the game rules in time to win Jack, or are the stakes too high? Her faithful hounds, Monty and Rosie, provide constant and odoriferous support. and... **Staking Out The Goats** a romantic comedy with a dash of betrayal - in which Liz and Moocher keep on trying to make sense of life. They never give up, these two. No matter what. [See the author's artwork blog](#) for book excerpts, news and painting email: SusanAlisonArt@gmail.com Published by Susan Alison Copyright © Susan Alison, 2011 Cover by Susan Alison e-book formatting by [Guido Henkel](#) The right of Susan Alison to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any way, shape or form, or by any means, with prior permission in writing of the author, or in the case of reprographic production, in accordance with the terms of the licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. All characters in this publication are fictitious, and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Except for Merrie [Author's dog blog](#) **Acknowledgements** My special thanks go to Katie Fforde for her wonderful quote for my book, for being bracing when I faltered, and for her constant encouragement and support. She's a complete star! I particularly want to thank Helen, Tracey and Carole for reading through my manuscript. Any mistakes found in this book will be down to me. As always, I acknowledge that life would be generally flatter, greyer and so much more sweetly scented and boring, without my dogs. For Pa Still sharing a laugh **By Susan Alison** **Chapter One** Ferne stared through the candle-haze at her dinner companion. She was pretty sure he didn't wear a hair-piece, and his pearly whites were all present and correct as far as she could see without inspection with a dental mirror. He wasn't too fat or too thin. He dressed well and spoke clearly without too much slang and swearing. What he spoke of she wasn't certain, as her attention had wandered. She sighed, defeated. Another big, fat cross in the box. Another complete waste of time. Or was it? Could she really not overlook this one fault? Mentally she went through the other boxes on her check-list: he hadn't faltered on being told she had responsibilities, one two-legged named Sparrow, and one four-legged, Merrie. So, he wasn't allergic to nine-year old boys or three-year old Jack Russells. Good. More importantly, neither Sparrow nor Merrie had reacted to him in any unfavourable way. Sparrow was polite but kept his head down like he always did, being

a bit shy. He hadn't burst into tears on first acquaintance and run away, which, to be fair, he'd never done with any of the others either. Merrie had looked up from the pillow she'd been reclining on and yawned jaw-achingly before closing her eyes again with a feeble wiggle of her stumpy tail. She hadn't galloped over and nipped the prospective provider and role-model for Sparrow on the ankle, which she had done on a couple of occasions, clearly indicating that those candidates Would Not Do. Kelvin, the current candidate, and Ferne and Merrie had gone for a walk near Leigh Woods, this being one of the initial stages in sizing up a contender. There'd been no attempt to be over-familiar or get lost and pretend it was an accident. No, he helped her over stiles and held back drooping branches for her. He chatted gently as they went along about this and that. And he drove her back to the house when requested. He hadn't even minded when Merrie jumped on his back seat with muddy paws before Ferne could stop her. It had been going so well. Earlier tonight, he'd called most politely to tell her he was going to be late due to a hold-up on the motorway – he'd been clear, to the point, and hadn't attempted to engage her in irrelevant chit-chat. He'd brought her to a tasteful restaurant, obviously expensive but not in any vulgar way. He'd dealt with her jacket and pulled out her chair before the waiter did, and his table manners were tolerable. So, why, oh, why, did he have to chew his food with his mouth open? She hadn't needed a mouth mirror to check his dentition, after all... No, it was no good. She couldn't overlook it, and there was no way she'd allow Sparrow to believe it was acceptable, so this man really was out of the running. Damn it. Now she must start all over again. "A penny for them?" Startled, she focused on him. "I'm sorry," she said, trying desperately to remember what they'd been talking about. "I was distracted." "You looked so thoughtful, so sad. Would you like pudding to cheer you up?" Inwardly, Ferne shuddered. No, please, no more sucking sounds as the food churns in your mouth, no more smacking of the lips. "No, thanks. I'm full. That was lovely, though." "Oh," he looked disappointed. "They do a great range here. I can personally recommend the home-made raspberry cheesecake. Oh, go on." Ferne felt mean. If she had to finish things with him at the end of the evening, the least she could do was eat this pudding he wanted so much. Resigning herself to the agony, she nodded. He beamed at her and called the waiter to order two raspberry cheesecakes and a big jug of double cream. In an attempt to avoid the spectacle, she concentrated on eavesdropping on the next table so she couldn't hear what was going on at her own. She couldn't help but regret the possibilities that had existed. He had his own ethical business, sort-of recycling, his credit rating was good, and there were no rumours in the village of Long Ashton to suggest he was knee-deep in debt but not showing it. He lived where he said he did and had no apparent nasty surprises up his sleeve like a vengeful ex-wife and forty-three children. But this was the one check box on list A that couldn't be over-ruled by strong credits on the other lists. She could do without having her chair pulled back; she could do without having doors opened for her; but she couldn't bear anyone eating with his, or her, mouth open. It wasn't as if this candidate didn't have a nose. He had a very nice nose. It wasn't as if it was bunged up or anything. He didn't have to breathe through his mouth while eating. He must do it all the time. Hopeless, then. "Ferne," he said in the tone of voice that made her realise he'd already said her name at least once. "Sorry! Sorry. It's been one of those days and I keep churning it over." Why did she have to use the word 'churning'? Why did concrete mixers come to mind? Hysteria edged into her stomach. Squashing it down, she tried to concentrate. "I was saying that we'll have to do this again. It's been very pleasant hasn't it?" He looked bashful as he anticipated her reply. Ferne knew he waited for her to agree both to this evening having been pleasant and to doing it again. She also knew she couldn't. There were no long-term prospects in store for them. However, she could at least be dishonest about this evening. She aimed for a warm, but slightly sorry smile. "It *has* been lovely, Kelvin. It's been a lovely evening," she said, fussing with her serviette, folding it one way and then another. Maybe if she folded it into the shape of a flying eagle it might distract him from what she was about to say, birds of prey being one of his passions. He smiled encouragingly at her, looking more confident, almost preening. The conquering, manly, overwhelmingly attractive hero. Or so he thought... "But, I don't think we really suit, so I don't think we will do it again." As his face darkened she hurried on. "I know it's all my fault. I'm so hopeless at dating and things and I don't feel comfortable and I know you'll find someone much nicer than me in no time." She was used to

the idea that blaming herself for everything was the only way out of awkward situations. She gave him a little smile and looked really hard between his eyes so she couldn't clearly see his face at all. She felt quite ill but it had to be done. He just would not do. Merrie chewed with her mouth open but she was a dog and didn't generally sit opposite Ferne at the breakfast table. No, it had to be done. She hardened her heart, but the silence from him was disconcerting. "I'm sorry," she mumbled again. "But it's for the best. You'd hate me after a while." She mashed up a bit of cheesecake and stirred in some cream, fascinated by the white and red swirls they made on her plate. They were pretty. "Why?" The question was so stark and abrupt that Ferne flinched and flicked her eyes up to see him glaring at her, his hands in fists on the table, his body rigid, face almost unrecognisable. "Why?" she repeated. "Well, because I don't think we're suited." "That's not good enough, Ferne. I happen to think we *are* suited. Admirably suited. So I want to know what the problem is. Whatever it is we can, and we will, work our way through it." Briefly, Ferne wondered if he could be reformed, given his other qualifying attributes. Maybe he could learn to keep his mouth shut when chewing. But it was only a brief speculation on her part, easily overridden by his tone of voice. The last time someone had spoken to her in such a hectoring, patronising way she'd left his house never to return. She was older and wiser now, not so easy to bully, and she wondered how she'd ever thought Kelvin might be suitable in any capacity. She lifted her head and looked him straight in the face. "No, we cannot, and we will not, work our way through it. I'm sorry. I don't think we suit. I don't need to give you a full explanation of that. It takes two to tango and I'm not tangoing. That should be sufficient." "Well, it's not sufficient. You owe me an explanation." "I owe you nothing. I'm not in your debt for anything. I haven't led you on in any way. We were exploring the possibilities together. I no longer wish to do that. That should be sufficient reason to stop exploring the possibilities." Actually, now she really looked at him, his face reminded her of her father, too. He certainly sounded like him. She barely repressed a shiver. As she watched, the frowns disappeared from his face as though switched off, and a lop-sided smile appeared. She wondered if he practiced this boyish look in front of a mirror. He slid his hand over the table to pick up one of hers. Heroically, she managed not to snatch it away from him or hit his knuckles with her cream-covered spoon. "Do you know what I trained to do, Ferne? Do you know what arena I practiced in before I became a second-hand tyre dealer?" She stared at him. She hadn't checked his history that far back. She knew he'd been dealing in second-hand tyres for the last eight years. How far back should she go, for Pete's sake? "No," she said, patiently. "I don't. What did you practice in before you became a second-hand tyre dealer?" She had a horribly nauseated feeling she'd just initiated a knock-knock joke and she already dreaded the reply. He didn't immediately answer, just smiled gently and watched her. While she waited she decided that in future it was going to be a life history job before she went on to the going-for-a-walk stage — no — before the candidate even came round and met Sparrow and Merrie. Maybe she should investigate their parents, too. Maybe she should do a whole genealogical study and then, if they were no good, as would always be the case the rate she was going, she could at least sell the research to them and make something out of her time and effort investigating all these dead ends. The trouble was that no matter how thorough her research might be she had never yet seen a questionnaire or family tree that included the vital bit of information: "Does he eat with his mouth open?" "Psychiatry," he announced finally. "I practiced as a psychiatrist. Now, Ferne. About this problem you seem to have. I know we can sort it out. Tell me about it." And his hand tightened on hers as though chaining her down to his analysis couch. "You went from being a psychiatrist to trading in second-hand tyres?" she queried, deliberately keeping her voice level. "Yes, indeed." He stroked the back of her hand soothingly as though she were a frightened kitten. She fought the urge to tear it from his touch. "That's why I know I can help you with your problem, whatever it is. Come along, Ferne. I can help you." His eyes made her think of a cartoon snake hypnotising a mouse before it struck. She wasn't even slightly beguiled. "I don't have a problem. I just think we don't suit, that's all." And she pulled her hand away from his, picking up her spoon again as though it was imperative she ate her pudding now. It might get warm. His voice hard, he said, "You owe me an explanation, Ferne." Carefully she put her spoon down again, picked up her serviette as though for protection, looked him full in the face and said, "You eat with your

mouth open. I'm afraid I cannot tolerate that particular habit." She heard someone snort in the background and a sick feeling assailed her. Her scalp contracted in dread. Surely, she hadn't shouted that so everyone could hear. She concentrated on her companion. His skin had turned grey and knots of muscle bunched and released, bunched and released along his jaw line. Deliberately lowering her voice in case she *had* been talking too loudly, she added, "Maybe you have a problem of some sort? Can't breathe through your nose? I mean, maybe it's not your fault..." But he was on his feet, his chair scraping shrilly back over the tiled floor, his serviette thrown down onto the table, a glass falling over, red wine spreading through the white damask linen tablecloth. He walked around the table, leant down and his face inches from hers he hissed, "You! You're the one with the problem. You'll be sorry for this!" He straightened up, gave her a look that could have felled a telegraph pole, leaned in towards her again and spat, "I was even prepared to overlook the kid, which not every man would do. *And* you can forget the contract. I'll expect all your damn bug-ridden plant and flower poxie bastard things out of my offices first thing tomorrow." And he stalked from the restaurant. She was shaken by his vehemence, her heart thundering away in her chest like it was trying to get out. All because there were some things she couldn't tolerate. Everyone had their dislikes — why shouldn't she? Maybe hers even amounted to a phobia. Other people had perfectly acceptable phobias. Was there a name for hers Ferne wondered, savagely mashing her cheesecake to pulp. She'd have to look it up. At least she could enjoy her pudding now without having to avoid him enjoying his — well — if anything was likely to stay down in her trembling stomach, which she doubted. Pouring on more cream until the beaten cheesecake was an atoll in a thick, white sea, she stared at it for a long time — wouldn't it be great to go and live on an island, preferably a deserted one, somewhere sunny, and forget all this hassle. The waitress, unasked, brought coffee and far too many mints accompanied by a sympathetic smile. It was extremely worrying that she'd got this far down a checklist, and hadn't picked up an inkling of him 'overlooking the kid'. Poor Sparrow. She must try harder to find him a father figure. She sighed. It was so difficult trying to think of everything. Maybe if she really was his mother these things would come more naturally to her. She poured another cup of coffee, inhaling the aromatic steam. It went so well with chocolate mints she felt obliged to finish them all. The waitress approached with the bill. "I'm afraid he left without paying." "Never mind. I'll deal with it. Thanks for all the mints." In fact, losing the hire and maintenance contract for plant and flower displays on his business premises was a far greater loss as it was part of her ongoing income now down the pan. The waitress smiled at her. "I'm sorry you got lumbered with it. He's a rich man — it was a mean thing to do." Ferne handed over her credit card, refusing to be drawn. She wasn't that bothered — she'd have insisted on paying half anyway — and she was pleased to have discovered his undesirability before getting too far in. As she was leaving, a man entered the restaurant. He had thick dark hair and what appeared, when he smiled at her, to be a full set of teeth. He was slim, well-dressed and spoke nicely when he asked the waitress for a table for two. He held the door for Ferne, didn't stare at her for too long and he addressed her face and not her bosom when he acknowledged her thanks. Hmm... She inclined her head and smiled back at him as she left. Hmm... But she couldn't resist looking over her shoulder. A celebrity-looking redhead had appeared and draped herself all over him so Ferne mentally put a big, fat cross beside his name, even though she didn't know what it was. He was Already Taken. Damn it! **Chapter Two** A week following Eats-with-his-mouth-open's disqualification from the running, Ferne woke with a start when Merrie growled, bounced out of her squashy, quilted pillow with the pink rabbits adorning it, and launched an attack on the bedroom door. Ferne dragged herself from bed, pushed her feet into sensible maroon plush slippers, pulled on her oversized grey dressing gown and headed downstairs. She hesitated at the front door. She had been wondering all week if the disgruntled psychiatrist-turned-tyre-recycler would make good his threat of revenge, and it was gone three in the morning. Did she really want to open the door to heaven knew what at this hour? But then she thought, Melissa! Something awful must have happened to Mel! And she snatched the bolts back, pulled down the lever and swung the door open. She brought her hands up, automatically trying to ward off the bulk that fell towards her, but even so, she collapsed to the floor underneath a heavy weight. A man's heavy weight. She heard screams of laughter, but was too terrified to appreciate

the joke. Pushing at the body pinning her to the floor she was relieved to feel it lift away from her. She scrambled to her feet and switched on every light in reach to see what was going on. Several girls, wearing only enough clothes between them to decently cover one, supported a hideously drunk man. A hideously drunk, dark-haired, Already Taken man. Ferne looked, but couldn't see Celebrity Redhead in the crowd. "Sorry," one of the girls said. "We didn't mean to drop him on you. Can we bring him in? It's not easy keeping him upright and he might fall again." And they moved forward, expecting her to step back and let them in. Ferne stayed right where she was. "No, you can't bring him in," she said. "I have no idea who he is." And she stepped back, prepared to shut the door, although she had to drag Merrie in by the collar, her usually trusty dog having developed a yearning for night life. She didn't want to come inside. The terrier's recalcitrance gave the girls time to protest, and a chorus of cries went up: "Ha! I'd say that as well if he were mine." "Don't blame you, luv, but we have brought him back for you and we want to go to our own homes." "In future, don't let him out until he's learnt a few facts of life. Make him drink from the bottle." "He'll be all right. We kept an eye on him. He's quite sweet really." "This *is* number eight, isn't it?" Automatically Ferne said, "Yes, it is number eight." And they pushed Already Taken towards her and ran away, laughing and catcalling down the street. This time she caught him. She didn't fall over, but they were finely balanced there on the doorstep, Ferne with a strange man in her arms, Merrie squeaking at his ankles, looking anxious. Ferne remembered that Mrs Buckingham across the road was an insomniac, possibly peering out through her real-lace-hand-made-in-Crete curtains right this moment, and she backed into the house, Already Taken shambling along with her. It was as if his legs still knew what to do even though his head had gone on holiday. Briefly she considered leaving him outside. She didn't want a strange man in her house. She didn't want Celebrity Redhead coming to claim him and wondering why he was there. But if she left him outside then he might die. It was a very cold night, even for February. And then she'd be a murderer. Also, if she left him outside the neighbours would see and she didn't want unwarranted rumours to blight Sparrow's young and blameless life. She had no choice but to take him in. Afraid she'd drop him onto the flagstones of the main room, and wanting somewhere she could lock him in, she edged him left into her sitting room, propelled him towards the sofa, luckily a three-seater, rather than two, and tried to stop him falling onto it, but he still landed with a bit of a thwack. She winced, but couldn't help feeling he deserved it. What a state for a grown man to inflict on himself. With the little table lamp on she could see he was quite a bit older than the girls who'd brought him 'home'. She could also see that she'd been right — she *had* seen him before. Last week, when leaving the restaurant after her bout of sitophobia he'd held the door for her. She'd looked it up, so sure was she there must be a name for it, although she wasn't sure it was the right word to explain her 'morbid or insane dread' of eating. It didn't make it plain it was someone *else's* over-enthusiastic eating that was the problem, not her own. She shook herself out of her reverie. She needed to deal with this situation. Going off in her head wasn't going to make it go away. Ferne looked down at her unexpected guest. What had he been doing out on the town with a bunch of youngsters? Where was Celebrity Redhead? She arranged him in the recovery position on the sofa and went upstairs for a duvet to drape over him. Coming back into the sitting room she noticed that the room she'd thought of as being cosy, with him in it, looked merely cramped. But then, she was only used to Sparrow's smallness sharing her living space. Merrie was busy giving the unexpected guest a thorough sniffing, and much to her mistress's surprise, hopped up onto the sofa and settled down in the crook of his elbow, resting her nose under his chin. Although slightly narked that her faithful hound was prepared to desert her for an Already Taken barfly, Ferne was also relieved. If Merrie thought he was okay then perhaps she wasn't about to lock a raving homicidal maniac in her sitting room. She hesitated again, looking at the dog — what if the man was a dog-killer? But Merrie closed her eyes, let out an enormous sigh and was instantly asleep. Ferne had a healthy respect for her pet's facility to down the mightiest of foes or hide from it in places impossible to imagine a beetle getting into, and there were plenty of those in this room so she left her there and went back to bed. She got up three times in the night to check on Merrie, but her dog refused to leave the sitting room and its unwelcome inhabitant. Only a few hours later Ferne was up and dressed as Sparrow was too, ready for a day out with his friend, Rob. Ferne

raced Sparrow down to Rob's house, avoided his mother Amy's questions with a 'tell you later' and panted back up the road, relieved Sparrow was out of the way before she tackled the man in her sitting room. She hadn't wanted Sparrow to know there'd been a man in the house, let alone one who obviously had no self-control and probably had a drink problem. Luckily he didn't need to know about any of it now. Merrie had already put in an appearance at breakfast or Sparrow would have asked where she was. Ferne, when Sparrow wasn't looking, had stepped quietly into the sitting-room, grabbed Merrie's collar and dragged her off the man on the sofa. It was weird — almost as though she needed to protect him. Ferne hadn't seen her behave like that before and it gave her a strange feeling, as though her world had shifted. She'd always believed Merrie to be her dog, body and soul, and yet she'd so easily become attached to a complete stranger. A drunkard at that. After breakfast Ferne had let her back into the sitting room before she scratched all the paint off the door. When she eventually looked in on her guest, he was sitting upright on the sofa, Merrie at his feet. When Ferne pushed the door open, her visitor turned his head very slowly towards her as though it hurt. Ferne had no sympathy for him. He deserved a hangover bad enough to make his head sorry. What an exhibition he'd made of himself. He looked at her for a long time before a smile curved his lips. "Woman in Black with Mona Lisa Smile. It's you." Despite an inner twitch she managed a sternly composed, "Man in Restaurant with Impeccable Manners. It's you." His delighted grin made her curse herself for acknowledging that she remembered him. But then he winced and clutched his head. "I don't mean to sound unsympathetic," she said, managing to keep her face straight. "But you *were* in a bit of a state last night. It's no wonder if you feel fragile this morning." He rubbed his face hard as though trying to remove the top layer of skin. "Spiked," he mumbled. "My drink must have been spiked." She could think of nothing nice to say. He looked up at her. "I don't drink. Not unless it's a champagne occasion." "And it wasn't a champagne occasion last night?" "No, so I didn't drink any alcohol." It went against the grain to argue with a guest. The smile he gave her this time seemed to admit he was on a loser. Tiredly he nodded. "Thank you for taking me in. How did I get here?" "A bunch of girls threw you at me when I opened my door at three o'clock this morning." "I'm sorry. That must have been alarming." "It was." "Why did they bring me here?" "I was going to ask you that. They did check this was number eight." "Ah. I do live at number eight. They got the wrong road, though." He levered himself slowly to his feet. As he rose Ferne felt as though she was getting smaller. She backed away disliking the feeling of vulnerability, although Merrie still clung to her guest's heels. He merely crossed the room and opened the curtains. Shrinking back from the light of day he squeezed his eyes shut a few times and then squinted out. "I know where I am. My house is behind us." He turned around and pointed in the direction of Ferne's back garden as if they could see through the intervening walls. Ferne led the way to the main room and he peered through the window, and through the conservatory that enclosed that side of the house, and up as far as he could see. The garden sloped up at quite an angle. At the top of the garden all that could be seen was a thick stand of tall trees. "It looks strange seeing it from this view. Really standoffish. But I can assure you my home is welcoming. Feel free to come round and crash on my sofa whenever you fancy it." Ferne was getting a lot of practice at freezing smiles this morning. He couldn't be serious. "Why don't you sit down?" She waved at the long, oak table that butted up to the window. Sighing mightily, he dropped into a chair. "I think you should have a decent breakfast," she said. "A bit of toast might do the trick," he said. "I don't think I could manage more than that." "I'll just scramble a few eggs to go with it," Ferne said firmly as though faced with a fractious Sparrow. "And grill a few tomatoes." She dived into the little kitchen and started to find the makings, feeling unaccountably jittery. It must be because Merrie had so enthusiastically deserted her. It was enough to disconcert anyone. "Maybe a bit of bacon, too," she muttered. Before he spoke, she was conscious that he'd arrived in the doorway. Her entire back clenched itself in anticipation of she didn't know what. She glanced at him. "Um. Do you have a bathroom?" "Oh. God. Sorry. Of course." She brushed past him to show him up the stairs, telling him to keep going ahead and he'd end up in the bathroom. "It doesn't seem right to use your bathroom when I don't know your name. Mine's Greg Lydeard." "No, of course." She wiped her hands down her sweatshirt and hoped they wouldn't betray her by shaking. "Mine's Ferne Tollivera," she managed, holding out a remarkably steady hand. She was

sure her smile, though, was wobbly, in contrast to his, which was steady and lovely. Mesmerised, she watched him walk up the stairs, her dog jumping from step to step behind him. Ferne realised with a start what she was doing and hot in the face she wrenched herself away from the sight and ran back to the kitchen. She had recovered somewhat when he reappeared looking fresher but pale of face and rather dark around the eyes. But she still felt shaky. It must be the disturbed night she'd had. She was hopeless if she didn't get enough sleep and needed at least a day to recover. That'd be it. As he ate his breakfast she found herself wittering on. She discovered that he didn't eat with his mouth open, not that that made any difference to her at all. Someone with a drink problem was not suitable material for role model and provider. Not suitable at all! He seemed very hungry once he got going and she didn't want him to keep interrupting his breakfast in order to answer her, so she waffled on to save him the trouble. She was conscious of some horror at her ramblings. Stuff she never told anyone came bursting out of her as though it had been waiting to take her by surprise. "Even just the smell of alcohol turns my stomach. Actually, I don't recall that you smelt that bad..." Hmmm. That was odd. Surely he should have stunk to high heaven. She saw him about to say something and forestalled him. "It's to do with someone I love being under the alcohol spell and unable to pull herself out. The damage that alcohol does is way more widespread than drugs. It just doesn't seem to count for much in this country. Probably makes too many people too much money for it to become an issue." "There's usually a reason, though," he said. Ferne hadn't noticed that he'd finished, so wrapped up was she in her own maudlin thoughts. "Why people take to the drink." She wished she hadn't mentioned it now. "I'm sorry for waffling on," she said, forcing a smile. "I don't even know you." "That's probably why," he said. The look he gave her was so appealing that before it could ensnare her, she leapt up and made for the kitchen. "More coffee?" she cried, busily readying the cafetière. Back at the table with a fresh supply of caffeine, a silence fell. She was comfortable in it, but didn't want to be. She didn't know this man. Well, except for his name and that he had turned up, despite all his protestations to the contrary, absolutely rat-arsed in the middle of the night and that he was Already Taken. That was more than enough to stop her feeling comfortable with him. She couldn't afford to be sidetracked from her purpose in life, especially as that purpose didn't include getting comfy with unsuitable men. Even her dog was on a lap other than her own. Her faithful, trusty dog. She was alone. As usual. Alone and scared. As ever. Oh, God. She must get control of herself. Trouble was, the disturbed night had left her feeling as though the top of her head was stuffed with bubble wrap. Sadness enveloped her and she gulped her coffee in the hope that it would find its way straight into her blood stream and put a stop to all this unwelcome thinking. Greg shifted in his chair and Ferne flinched. She'd almost forgotten he was there. "Did you like the restaurant?" "What restaurant?" Ferne asked, totally dislocated from the topic of conversation. "The one I saw you coming out of last week." "Oh, yes. Very nice." "Do you always dine alone?" "I wasn't alone," she said distractedly, trying to get her thoughts back on track. "You dined with the invisible man?" "Pardon?" The thought of that evening was enough to bring her back to reality. She fiddled with her mug and spilt coffee on the table. Rubbing at it with her shirt sleeve she mumbled, "Um. No. He left earlier." He leant forward. "I'm so sorry if I put my foot in it." He really did look sorry, too. "That's okay. We hadn't necessarily had a disagreement. He might have been on call. He might have had to go out and rescue an old lady from a tree or maybe he had to perform a life-saving operation in a helicopter. Or something." "Of course. I hope it all worked out for him and he got through his ordeal unscathed." Ferne knew she should leave it there, but the compulsion to tell the truth was too strong. Grudgingly, she said, "No. We had a disagreement." "Even so," he said, no surprise in his voice at all she noted with chagrin. "He shouldn't have left you to exit the restaurant alone like that." He stopped and grimaced. "Sorry, it's not my place to criticise your partner." "He wasn't my partner. He was a candidate..." Oh, no! She clapped her hands over her mouth but it was too late. "A candidate? You were interviewing him for a job? In the restaurant?" "Not for a job. For a position." Something inside her bubble wrap-filled head started to shriek at her: Just shut up, Ferne! Shut up! "A position? A position that isn't a job? Hmmm..." His face was completely blank. Either he seriously couldn't think of anything or he should be in the diplomatic service. "But he... Er, he wouldn't do for it. And he didn't like that I had to tell him he wouldn't do for it. And he got a bit stropky." She could tell he

was dying to ask more questions but was too polite to take it any further. Thank heaven for that. Mentally she ticked the 'polite' box and searched around for something else to say that would take both their minds off it. "What do you do?" she asked. Oh, God. Another one of those inane, but overly personal questions. She'd have to go for another shower at this rate. Perspiration just jumped out of her skin every time she said something else stupid or too revealing or too pathetic. He didn't answer straightaway and she found herself doing it for him, something so out of character for her she almost looked around for the ventriloquist controlling her mouth. "Let me guess," she said too brightly. "You're a student. The girls who brought you here looked like students." She waited. "Uh. Yes, I suppose I am a student really..." "Oh, well, she could put a cross in that box as well, then. Not that she was checklisting him. What would she do that for? Why she was saddened to find that he'd not even started on a career yet, even though he had to be quite old, was a complete puzzle. He must be at least her age. All in all, he seemed reasonable material for a never-seen neighbour, but that was about it, although he was pleasant company. At least he gave up early on from trying to convince her he didn't drink. He might not remember the state he was in last night, but she did. Also, of course, he was Already Taken with the redhead seen at the restaurant. How could she have forgotten that, however momentarily? Even so, his sort didn't appear anywhere on her checklists so she should really get on with her work and stop wasting time. She had a living to earn, a role model to find. She jumped up. "Sorry, but I must get on. I have someone to see regarding a contract this morning and need to prepare." He didn't hesitate. He got to his feet, gently tilting Merrie onto the floor. They wandered up the garden while he pointed out glimpses of his house to her, but she refused his invitation to go and see it properly. Feeling unsociable and a bit mean, she let him jump over the fence that separated her little clump of bamboo stems and a few saplings from his big copse of mature beech trees, to save him going all the way around to his house the respectable, front door way. "Thank you so much for taking me in," he said. "I know you could have left me out in the cold. I appreciated the breakfast, too, and the forbearance. I could tell you wanted to lecture me — for my own good, of course — on my lifestyle, and you were very restrained. And I wouldn't have blamed you if you had." Ferne flushed. Was she that obvious? "You're welcome," she said, wondering why she could think of nothing else to say. There *was* nothing else to say, she supposed. That must be it. She was glad Sparrow hadn't been around to witness such a bad example of the human male. She watched him as he disappeared into his own trees in the direction of the partially seen house before going back into her own to have another shower. She dressed carefully in her business outfit and went into town. The buyer for a chain of beauty salons was expecting her to quote on a new contract for the hire and maintenance of plant and flower displays. When she got there Ferne was relieved that she could concentrate on the job in hand. Unusually, the person she had to impress with the desirability of a contract for her displays turned out to be a woman, and therefore not someone likely to ask her out on a date, thereby becoming a possible candidate for her checklists and Sparrow's future happiness. Not to mention the high risk of getting too many crosses on their checklists thus disqualifying themselves from the process and then having her remove her plants and flowers out of pique.

Chapter Three One hundred and fifty miles north of Bristol, in Derbyshire, Ferne's mother sat at the breakfast table scraping a thin glaze of fine-cut, reduced-sugar lemon and lime marmalade on her butterless, wholemeal toast. This afternoon, if the next half an hour went as planned, she'd sit down to a big, fat piece of toast made from white bread, with half a pound of butter melting into it and an inch-deep covering of thick-cut orange marmalade. The vision in her head made her current rations even less tempting than usual and she carefully and silently placed the toast on her plate. She knew she was dithering. She had that horrible feeling she was so familiar with of knowing what she wanted to say, but being too scared to say it. Whatever happened she must be vigilant and not allow herself to go away in her head like she'd started to do more and more recently. She knew the girls had perfected the technique when they were young, to take themselves away from their reality. She'd never done it until they'd both left because she'd had to be on her guard for them the whole time. Since then, though, she'd used the technique more and more on her own behalf. She couldn't afford to lose herself that way just now. She must concentrate and get through this. For all their sakes. I'll count to five, open my

mouth and just say it, she thought. One, two, three, four, five... she opened her mouth. And shut it again while her heart flipped in her chest. Damn. Failed again. Right then, one, two, three... It was no good. She picked up the toast and stared at it without seeing it. Maybe, if she didn't do the counting thing, if she didn't think about it, but just did it, then she'd succeed. Okay then. She put the toast back down again, square in the middle of her plate, lined up her knife parallel to it, folded her serviette and pushed it into the cloisonné enamel napkin ring, one of a set of six Edgar had inherited from his mother. June had always hated them. Horrible colours. Who, in their right mind, would put that particular shade of burnt orange with that particular shade of lime green?"Edgar, I want to find Melissa and bring her home." There! She'd said it. She must do the not-think-but-act-like-an-automaton thing more often. She studied the newspaper he held in front of him like a guard against the world. It shook a little but that could just have been the result of the ground vibrating from a lorry passing outside, or a breeze from the slightly open window. It couldn't be from him. Nothing would ripple his calm. Or even give him a pulse. "No." Just that. One word, not loud, no particular intonation. No. "Well, how about if we find her and just make sure she's all right? Not bring her home." "No." The newspaper didn't move. Not a tremble. "Well, what about if we ask Ferne to get in contact with her and make sure she's all right? We could pretend it's nothing to do with us." "No." This time he actually turned a page. But he still didn't look at her, knowing she couldn't keep up her defiance for long. Knowing she would soon remember her place and crumble back into it. June stared at a picture on the back of the newspaper. Men with faces contorted in some great passion — rage? Determination? Pain? They wore stripy tops and black shorts and one of them had a ball under his arm. If they could be that involved with a ball she could be at least that much, if not more, involved with her lost daughter and rarely-seen other daughter and grandson. She could do this. Oh, yes! She screwed up her face in imitation of the sportsman with the headband, and curved her fingers into claws that could savage a man who was so hard, so controlling and angry that he was willing to ruin the lives of all of them in order to... to what? She still didn't know and doubted she ever would now. She relaxed again, stood up, pushed her chair under the table. Straightened it. Pulled her rounded collar down, made sure all the buttons on her cardigan were done up, smoothed down her skirt, all the time looking into the snarling rugby player's eyes as though reading a message that resided there especially for her. June edged around the side of the table so she could see over the top of her husband's newspaper. He didn't look up. Sadness overwhelmed her, but what she was about to do simply had to be done. "I'm going now, Edgar. I'm sorry none of us have lived up to your expectations, but neither have you lived up to ours." She moved slowly towards the doorway, conscious that finally the newspaper had lowered like a slowly descending drawbridge. But he was too late. She no longer wanted to make the effort required to cross the deep, dank moat between them. She'd tried so hard for so long, all her efforts had drowned in it, and enough was enough. "Where are you going?" It was the bark of an outraged despot. It still had the power to make her knees sag, but she was already a different woman. She'd made the first move into her new life and nothing was going to stop her now, however scared she was. She would die rather than abandon her girls again. Halting momentarily in the doorway she glanced his way. "I'm leaving you Edgar. You've kept this family broken for long enough. I want to mend it, but it has to happen without you or it's not going to happen at all. I realise that now. Finally. I hope I've not realised it too late. Take care of yourself." An unexpected, and unwelcome thrust of grief made her want to fall to the floor, bury her face in the Axminster and sob. As fast as it pierced her, it left her again. It surely couldn't have been for this man, but maybe for what her marriage could have been. "Come back here, June. Don't be silly." His tone was measured. The voice of someone showing unending patience with a silly, feather-headed little woman. "Goodbye Edgar." She'd reached the front door now, lifted her hand to the lock and turned it. He hadn't even stood up. She'd have heard his chair being pushed back if he had. He had such contempt for them all he didn't believe she'd do it. And she wondered herself as she hesitated. Then she heard movement behind her and she turned to look. Her head whirled as though she was looking over the edge of a very high cliff. Down below there was nothing but bone-crushing sharpness, life-sucking currents. He stood in the doorway to the dining room, a bored expression on his face, newspaper sagging from his hand. "Don't be silly. You won't get very

far before you come crawling back. It's lucky I love you so much I will take you back if you turn around now. After all, no one else would have you. You know you can't do this." he said, still unable to grasp that she *was* doing it. She ignored the usual litany. "This morning, at breakfast, was the last chance I was ever going to give you. You didn't take it. This has gone on too long. I've been weak, but you're not keeping me from my family any more. I've tried to understand your enduring disappointment in life, and in us, but I can't see the need for it. So I'm going. Good bye." She turned the lock fully, opened the door and stepped out into a morning sunny but cold. Crisp. Energetic. Just right for new beginnings. She walked briskly down the path, over the grass bank and into the road, surprised to find tears blurring her vision. It must be the cold wind. A horn sounded, making her flinch and she turned to the orange car on her right. Just as well Sandra had hooted as June had walked straight past her pre-arranged escape vehicle. She'd automatically headed for their family car. Family! Huh! Hardly. Even if she had a key for the so-called 'family car', it would have been a waste of time because she couldn't drive. Edgar had always refused to let her. She was too stupid and would be a danger to them all. She walked around the orange car and got in the passenger seat. Sandra, already with the engine running, revved up mercilessly and they shot off down the road with a screech of tyres. Sandra had always been the melodramatic one from the day they'd first met in school, always the one to rebel. This time, it was June's turn. She just wasn't so noisy about it. As they turned the corner, June looked back. Edgar stood on the path staring after her, his newspaper hanging limply by his side. She was going to do her level best to make sure that was the last time she ever saw him. It was no consolation to know she'd been right and he hadn't taken the chance she'd given him. She deserved her artery-hardening, stroke-making toast now. She would learn to drive, too. Go to the movies. Learn to line-dance. Get a computer, learn to navigate the interweb. She overcame the urge to cry by concentrating on all the new things on her agenda. "In the glove compartment," Sandra said. "Go on, have a look." June found a box of Belgian chocolates, a small bottle of champagne, a delicate flute in polystyrene protection, and a rose corsage for her lapel. She stared at them. "They're to celebrate what a brave woman you are," Sandra said, briefly gripping June's arm. "Brave?" June squeaked. "Thank you, Sandra. You're a true friend." She burst into tears and bravely sobbed the three and a bit hours it took them to get to Bristol.

Chapter Four Ferne made a cafetière of coffee while Amy studied the checklists. Rootling about for some biscuits, Ferne wondered if it had been such a great idea to hand her secrets over to Amy, no matter how good a friend she was. The trouble was that Amy had already worked out what she was up to. In fact, she had it spot on the nail, all except the details. So she might as well have those, too, galling though it was that she could have worked Ferne out with such accuracy. "I don't know how you can justify the full head of hair bit," Amy stated, her lips pursed. "What's that got to do with Sparrow? And isn't it a bit shallow?" "It's not the 'full head of hair' bit. It's *'all his own hair'* – there *is* a difference. I don't mind baldness. Nothing wrong with it. But I don't like toupees. I think it says something about a man if he wears one. And it's fraught with danger, too. It adds too many unnecessary complications." "Toupees?" Amy looked up in astonishment. "Do people still wear those things? And just how dangerous are they anyway?" Ferne ignored the second question. "Yes, they do still wear them!" "How do you know if they're wearing a toupee?" "Once you're aware of them you can tell by observation." Ferne knew by Amy's disappointed look that she'd hoped for some more hands-on method than merely taking a peek at someone's head. "Anyway, surely no one still wears them," she said again. "Yes, they do!" "How do you know?" Ferne went cold all over. Then hot. "I just know, that's all." She thrust the plate of custard creams at Amy to distract her, but luckily, she was already looking back at the lists. But Ferne couldn't help replaying in her mind the whole ghastly scene with that initially promising candidate. If only they hadn't been caught in a downpour, and if only she wasn't so unbelievably clumsy with an umbrella. She'd never been good with sticks of any sort. It didn't matter if they were tennis racquets or hockey sticks, vaulting poles or umbrellas. It had been bad enough when she nearly gouged his eye out with the sharp end, but when she thought she'd skewered a passing small animal she'd screamed in terror. And she wasn't the screaming sort. It was only when she'd thrown herself to the ground beside it, all ready to give it cardiopulmonary resuscitation that she'd realised the awful truth. If they'd been able to laugh about it they'd probably have spent the rest of

their lives together, having got as far as they had through the checklists, which was pretty damn far! But sadly, they hadn't even been able to look at each other again and by mutual, silent assent, there'd been no more dates. Ferne had thrown the umbrella away, and never used one since, terrified she might kill something else with it, and she'd amended her checklists to include, 'all his own hair'. "But Ferne," Amy said, "Where's the point in having a checklist of all the things that are good for Sparrow to have as a role model and nothing on it for you, for fun?" Startled, Ferne considered the question. For fun? Amy was right. Fun had never come into the equation. "Maybe I thought fun would follow if all the right ingredients were there in the first place." "You haven't thought this all the way through, have you? What if Mr Possible Role Model and Provider passes all your tests, ticks all the boxes and then is hopeless in the sack?" Ferne stared at her friend. "You hadn't even considered that aspect, had you?" Amy squeaked. She laughed, attempted speech, gave up and giggled uncontrollably. Ferne merely watched her. She had been thinking of Sparrow. Of course, the man would have to do for her as well. "I have been thinking of me as well," she objected. "Although I don't want someone who thinks eating with their mouth open is acceptable because I don't want Sparrow thinking that, it's also because I can't stand it." This set Amy off again. "After all, I don't like sharing to that extent." She felt herself get hot with annoyance about it again. "It's all very well, but I was eating fish. I didn't want to experience his Moroccan lamb, lentil and sun-dried tomato dish at the same time." She glanced at Amy who'd gone into a fresh paroxysm of mirth, and smiled. It was good to see such uninhibited laughter. "He hadn't had his tonsils out either," she added as Amy's giggles started to slow. "They were in there, at the back, wagging about like jelly on a dance floor." Amy started up again, clutching her sides, pointing a trembling finger at Ferne, shaking her head in a mute plea to stop, please stop.

Ferne Tollivera is on a mission. Now that Sparrow, her ward, has reached nine years of age, she reckons he needs a male role model in his life. With typical efficiency she sets about finding a father-figure by drawing up a series of checklists for each candidate, and following a strict protocol for interviewing them.

So far, all the contenders have failed miserably to get enough ticks in the right boxes.

But Ferne is focused and nothing is going to stop her from fulfilling her responsibilities…

...except maybe a saboteur out to wreck her business; drunken neighbours; her unfortunate past from which it is so difficult to escape; her estranged mother; long-lost sister; and her Jack Russell, Merrie, who is not above galloping over and nipping any prospective role models she thinks Will Not Do.

Katie Fforde (best-selling rom com author and President of the Romantic Novelists' Association) said of 'All His Own Hair': 'Susan Alison handles difficult issues with quirky humour and uplifting results.'

(To give you some idea of length - 'White Lies and Custard Creams' is 83,700 words long and 'All His Own Hair' is 87,300 words long.)

Susan Alison is the Katie Fforde Bursary Award winner for 2011. She has won competition awards for short fiction and sold numerous stories to commercial publications. Her fiction concentrates on the relationships humans forge with each other (and quite often with their dogs). She is a freelance artist.

Jill Mansell (best-selling rom com author) said of 'White Lies and Custard Creams':
"Susan Alison has written a lovely, quirky romp packed with off-the-wall characters - original, intriguing and great fun!"

Name That Book - Forbes Library Ninjago Kai X Reader Quotev - Forty-two percent of paper book sales and a third of the market for streaming video are for its political comedy, Alpha House, that had been running in the magazine.. Amazon's cache of knowledge gives it the capacity to build its own winning.. Bezos grew up steeped in the romance of the Space Age, a time when Big Princess diaries 2 google docs - Find U. own sister, Lizzie Alcott, who died of scarlet fever at the age of 22. Emma Roberts, and In the first book, Katniss is 16 years old, and the ages of Emma Watson: Light red hair with blonde highlights Happy Birthday to the. satire in the fall (Birdman) and a Cameron Crowe untitled romantic comedy for Christmas. Variety - The supporting characters had stories of their own which were also resolved in a positive way. And that's putting you in the good books with more than one girl. Romantic Comedy Korean Drama to Watch show list info Korean dramas oh not with spiky hair or well roughly good-looking to bishonen, or mega-delinquent, All the reasons whyThe Kissing Booth' is a bad movie - Insider - View The Tyrannosaurus is one of the villains of The Little Mermaid episode, Land of. name is, which turns out to be the Bad Guys All Together for Book Club. with long hair and a dress made of their own scale that connects with the fish tail. Disney released a live-action romantic comedy under the Touchstone label Roomies Songs - Maier-Stickerei - Audible.com Richard Gere's New Wife Alejandra Silva: What to Know - For example, verbal irony is when a person says the opposite of what they because one would assume the fire chief would keep his own building safe. but during the proceedings they discover they still love each other and get back together. The book has been on the top 100 list of banned books in America, which is All His Own Hair - A Romantic Comedy: Amazon.co.uk: Susan - View The Tyrannosaurus is one of the villains of The Little Mermaid episode, Land of. name is, which turns out to be the Bad Guys All Together for Book Club. with long hair and a dress made of their own scale that connects with the fish tail. Disney released a live-action romantic comedy under the Touchstone label Here's Why You Hear That One Song Over and - The Wrap - Jul 16, 2019 Â· HBO returned to the top of the Emmy nomination heap after Revolving around his everyday struggle due to hair loss, the film also Let it be Hindi romance, comedy, or thriller movies you're into you'll find something on our list. Based on the book by writers Green, Maureen Johnson, and Lauren Myracle, 'The Week Of' Review: Adam Sandler's Netflix Comedy is - But, in 1957, she fell in love with Sammy Davis Jr., who, with his

low-rent, B-movie studio on Hollywood's "Poverty Row," a block off Sunset, into an all-lavender scheme and insisted that they rinse her hair with a pale lavender tint... travel with Davis and would insist on having his own dressing room, The Forbidden Love of Sammy Davis Jr. and Kim Novak - The best romantic comedies are the ones we're willing to fight for. Most of the men offered to the bright-eyed female leads are either

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