

Secret Ingredient

By Kallie

The little sound of the bell above the door of the hair salon made Kate jump as she opened the door and stepped aside. She mentally scolded herself for being so easily startled. The whole point of coming here was to stop being such an anxious, shy scaredy-cat. She peered around the dim, empty salon. It wasn't what she'd been expecting, but then again, she wasn't exactly sure what she had been expecting. She'd heard about 'Transform', the salon, online, and hadn't really bothered to check out the details before deciding it was where she would go. It looked different, and what was all that mattered to her. At least, so she'd thought. Now that she was standing in the small, barely-lit salon, she was starting to reconsider her choice. The place gave her all kinds of weird vibes. The decor made it seem more like a punk club than a hair salon, and instead of the usual shelves of expensive, brand-name products there were rows and rows of bizarre-looking concoctions in unlabeled glass containers. Kate couldn't shake the absurd feeling that she was stepping into a witch's den.

"Welcome!" a cheerful, feminine voice called out, just as Kate was about to back out. Kate realized they must have heard the bell. She felt the urge to bolt out the door, but she resisted it. She wasn't going to be like that, she'd decided. She was going to stand her ground.

Kate's courage melted away, however, the moment a tall, heavily made-up alt girl stepped through the curtain at the back of the shop and greeted her with a broad smile. Kate was stunned. She was so cute. Her long, straight hair was dark at the roots but lightened to grey and finally white at the tips, but had streaks of deep purple running all the way through it. Her eyeshadow was purple too, but her inviting lips were shaded a deep red and her eyes were lined in bold black. To cap off her striking looks, she had an eyebrow piercing, a nose-stud, and her lips were pierced in two places. Her outfit was simple, just a plain, black, casual top and a pair of faded jeans, but she carried it off with style. The girl looked at Kate with a bemused, somewhat surprised look on her face. Kate was suddenly without words. She didn't know what to do or say in the face of such a cute girl. Moreover, she felt out of her depth. If that was the kind of style this place catered too, she didn't belong here.

"What can I do for you today?" the salon girl prompted. Kate blushed as she realized she'd been standing there silently, just staring.

"I, um..." Kate forced herself to remember the promise she'd made to herself: no chickening out. "I'm here to get my hair dyed," she announced falteringly.

"Well, we can certainly take care of that." Despite her intense nerves, the salon girl's warm smile was helping set Kate at ease. She shrugged. "I'd ask if you have an appointment, but I already know you don't, and since - as you can see - we don't have any other customers today, we can get started right away."

"Right away?" Kate swallowed awkwardly. She'd been counting on having a few minutes of waiting to prepare herself.

"Sure. I'm not busy. Why don't you take a seat?" The salon girl gestured to one of the styling chairs. "The name's Viola, by the way."

"Viola..." Kate repeated to herself quietly as she sat down. She felt herself blushing again. She shook her head. She needed to get a grip on herself. This was no time to develop a useless crush.

“So, Kate, why don’t you tell me exactly what you’re looking for?” Kate flinched slightly from how close Viola’s voice sounded. She realized the hairdresser was standing right behind her, with her face lowered to shoulder-height and with her hands rested on the back of Kate’s chair. Kate was struggling not to hide her face. It was like Viola was deliberately teasing her, but she figured that was totally impossible.

“I...” Kate took a deep breath. “I want to get my hair dyed completely black.”

“Oh?” Viola sounded surprised. Kate suddenly felt foolish for coming into a salon like Transform and asking for something so basic. “Pretty big change, for a girl like you.”

“Yeah.” Kate looked at herself in the mirror that was mounted to the wall in front of her and sighed. She hated how she looked. She felt bad for it, as she knew there was nothing wrong with her and lots of people would probably be happy to look like her, but she hated how she looked all the same. Her parents always said she looked very nice, which Kate took to mean that she looked very plain. Boring. Run-of-the-mill. Her face was pretty enough, she supposed, and she’d often been complimented on her long, blonde, slightly wavy hair. But she always felt so ordinary, like she just faded into the background. She’d always envied people who stood out, and who made their appearance an expression of their whole personality. People like Viola, in fact. They always seemed so vibrant. Not like her at all, Kate thought. That was what she was hoping to change.

“Well, let’s get started,” Viola said. She picked a full-length cape off one of the hooks on the wall besides where Kate was seated, and fastened it tight around Kate’s neck so that her whole body was covered. Kate felt herself start to sweat a little as Viola’s fingertips grazed against the skin of her neck. Then, Viola plucked a fresh pair of gloves from a box on the counter beneath the mirror, and slipped them on over her hands. “I’m gonna go ahead and guess that you’ve never had your hair dyed before?”

Kate blushed. “No.” Was it that obvious?

“That’s OK.” Viola smiled reassuringly. “Do you know what it involves?”

“Not really,” Kate admittedly reluctantly.

“OK, well, first of all, I’m going to get your hair all arranged so it’ll be nice and easy to dye.” As she spoke, Viola started gathering up strands of Kate’s hair into large bunches, dividing her hair into several parts and producing from somewhere a series of plastic clips she used to fix them in place. “You have lovely hair!” Viola commented effusively as she worked. “It’s so soft, I can tell you really take care of it. It’s gonna look great once it’s dyed!”

“T-thank you,” Kate stuttered. The feeling of Viola’s hands working through her hair was already sending shivers down her spine, and now her brand new crush was complimenting her? Kate didn’t know how to handle it. Viola thought her hair was nice. It was a shame, Kate thought, that there was no way she was actually flirting with her.

“OK, now I’m gonna go ahead and mix up some dye.” Viola picked some bottles off a nearby shelf and started slowly pouring them into a small plastic bowl, carefully judging the quantities as she worked. “So tell me, Kate, what made you decide to go all the way black?”

“Oh, well, um...” Kate was having a hard time suppressing the need to reach up and play with her hair, her usual nervous habit. “It’s kinda silly...”

“I’m sure it’s not,” Viola said, still mixing the dye. “Not compared to some of the reasons people come in here with, anyway.” She winked at Kate in the mirror.

“I guess.” Kate had to look down to get the words out. “Well, I’m not exactly that confident.” She laughed bitterly. “I guess you probably already noticed that, huh? It’s pretty bad, and I’ve always been that

way. Nothing I've ever tried has ever helped. Nothing in my whole life. I've always been that shy, awkward girl who can't make friends or assert herself. And I'm just, I'm so sick of it." Kate realized she'd been clenching her fists, and made herself relax. "I want to be different. And... that's why I'm doing this. I know it probably sounds really dumb, me acting like getting my hair dyed is gonna suddenly turn me into a whole different person. But I just need something to be different. And for some reason, whenever I see girls with dyed hair, they always look like everything I want to be. Strong, striking, brave, and confident." Kate started blushing again. "Especially... especially girls with black hair. Like... goth girls, yknow? They always seem they'd never let anyone mess with them."

After a few awkward moments of silence, Kate plucked up the courage to look up at Viola in the mirror. The alt girl was looking down at her with a heartbreaking expression on her face. It didn't help how pitiful Kate felt. But then, Viola suddenly seemed to make a decision about something, and started walking off towards the back of the shop. "Wait here, I need to go get some hair dye."

"I thought you were already mixing the dye?" Kate asked, confused, as Viola left the bowl she'd been mixing in on the counter and disappeared through the curtain at the back of the salon. When she reemerged, she was carrying another small glass bottle filled with some kind of black liquid.

"Kate, I'm going to give you the special treatment," Viola told her, winking conspiratorially. "So I had to run and get the secret ingredient."

"Secret ingredient?" Kate repeated, confused.

Viola held up the glass vial for Kate to look at. "It's something we make ourselves, right here. No-one else makes anything like it, and that's a guarantee. It's real magic."

Kate stared into the vial. The dark liquid inside was somehow blacker than black. There were no reflections forming on its surface, none at all. It was like it was absorbing all the light that touched it.

"So," Violet continued, as she carefully uncorked the vial and started adding a small measure of it to the dye she'd already been mixing. "You're into goth girls, huh?"

"W-what?" Kate spluttered, turning bright red.

"Hey, I'm not judging." Viola sounded so cheerful and genuine. Kate wasn't sure if she was being mocked or teased or flirted with or all three. "Is that that the plan? You're gonna go all goth after this?"

"Maybe," Kate murmured. She wanted to, but she wasn't sure she was brave enough for that just yet. Or if her makeup skills were up to the task.

"You should definitely consider it! It'd be a good look for you." As Kate was still twisting herself into knots, trying to figure out what Viola meant by that, the alt girl announced: "OK, ready! This is your last chance to back out."

Kate shook her head, resisting the instinctive temptation to give up.

"Good!" Viola picked up a brush, and dipped it into the inky, black dye she'd mixed. "I'm going to start out by brushing this into your hair, and then I'll massage it in nice and deep, to make sure we really hit all of your roots."

Without waiting for any further confirmation, Viola took hold of one of the bunches of Kate's hair she'd separated out earlier, and brushed the dye all the way along it from the roots to the tips in one swift stroke. Kate froze as the dye touched her hair, and she realized that she'd truly crossed the point of no return. All her doubts were instantly magnified tenfold. What if the dye didn't take properly? What if it looked patchy?

What if she couldn't pull off black hair? What if all her hair suddenly fell out? It didn't matter now, she figured. Whatever happened was gonna happen. Kate slumped slightly in the chair, feeling miserably nervous.

"So, um, what's the secret ingredient do?" Kate asked after a few minutes of Viola methodically brushing dye through her hair, mostly just to fill the silence.

"That's a secret." Viola giggled. "But I can tell you a few things. Firstly, it makes the dye take effect much faster, so we don't have to leave it in as long. Secondly, it will leave your hair just the darkest, silkiest, most lustrous black. It's amazing. Truly life-changing, some say."

"Uh-huh." Kate couldn't help but feel a little skeptical. What Viola was telling her sounded like a sales pitch.

"It's true!" Viola's charm was disarming. "You'd be surprised what the right kind of image change can do for people. You dye people's hair just right, and it can change them in ways you'd never believe. Many of the recipients of this particular color report feeling much more confident. Much, much more confident, in fact. More calm and relaxed, too. Perhaps you can already feel it, just a little bit? Doesn't the dye have a nice, relaxing scent to it?"

Kate sniffed the air. Now that Viola mentioned it, she realized it did. It was like some kind of incense or perfume, a little like rose or jasmine, but it was a little musky at the same time. That scent was strong, and now that Kate had taken notice of it, she wondered why she'd needed Viola to point it out to her. It was heady, and almost a little dizzying. Not in an unpleasant way, though. It reminded Kate of being pleasantly tipsy, and it made it a little easier for her to settle back into her chair and let the pleasant feeling of Viola working through her hair massage her worries away.

"Look, it's starting to take effect. What do you think?" Viola asked her.

Kate looked at herself in the mirror, and almost gasped. Viola had almost finished working her way around Kate's hair, and the change was dramatic. She looked like a completely different person. Kate could only stare at her reflection in wonder. It was clear that the dye wasn't merely coating her hair, it was staining it, changing its color and imbuing it with the same deep, inky blackness she'd seen in the vial. This was her hair now. It made everything about her seem different and unfamiliar. Kate's long hair framed her face, and now that it was black, Kate could already tell that it was going to frame it very differently. She already looked so much more striking. The contrast between her dark hair and her pale skin made all the lines of her face seem so much more defined and pronounced, especially her cheekbones. Almost unnaturally so.

"Am... am I paler?" Kate asked herself out loud.

"Just a trick of the light," Viola assured her. "Now, I'm just about done with your ends. Time for your roots."

The alt girl set down the brush she'd been using and scooped a handful of hair dye out of the bowl, and rubbed it into Kate's head. To Kate, it felt like a cold, molten blanket, spreading out to cover all of her scalp. The feeling was unfamiliar enough to make her shiver, but it wasn't unpleasant, especially once Viola started using her hands to massage the dye in. Kate closed her eyes and purred happily as she felt Viola's deft fingers running across her scalp, applying pressure here and there to make sure all her roots absorbed the black dye. It was the best head massage imaginable. It was simply impossible for her to be stressed when Viola's hands were sending warm waves of pleasurable tingles all the way across her head. Kate couldn't believe how amazing Viola was. She was so talented, so funny, and so friendly. Not to mention, so cute. Kate was feeling sorely tempted to ask her out on a date after they were done. She didn't want to be creepy, but she was increasingly sure that Viola had, in fact, been flirting with her. Normally, Kate would have even so much as entertained the thought, but now she felt different. Maybe it was the dye. Maybe it truly was just as transformative as Viola had promised. Kate smiled as she entertained the thought.

“Here’s where the magic really happens,” Viola said softly. “Our special ingredient makes the dye very, very long lasting. You see, it actually seeps into your scalp, staining the follicles themselves, to make sure your hair stays black for a long time. Can you feel it? It’s pretty wild.”

Kate realized she could. She opened her eyes again, and they went wide. Despite Viola’s warm, calming massage, she was starting to feel a deep, penetrating cold unlike anything she’d ever felt. It was like a thousand icy needles were sinking into her scalp, each one along each one of her hairs. It wasn’t painful, but it was certainly shocking. Kate tried to open her mouth to ask what was going on, but she quickly found she couldn’t speak. In fact, she could barely move. She stared pleadingly at Viola in the mirror, but the alt girl seemed completely unaware that anything was amiss. She just kept methodically massaging dye into the roots of Kate’s hair as, moment by moment, the feeling of something strange and unnatural sinking into her head grew stronger and stronger. There was nothing Kate could do but stare at herself, and as she did, she realized that she truly looked different. She was paler. It wasn’t just her hair, and it wasn’t just a trick of the light. She’d practically turned white. Kate had always been fairly light-skinned, but now she looked like a ghost, ethereally pale. And that wasn’t the only change. Her lips were fuller and darker, becoming sultry and suggestive. Her cheekbones seemed more pronounced. The shadows above her eyes seemed darker, almost like she was already wearing makeup. Her eyelashes were longer and more luscious - in fact, Kate was almost certain she could see them growing right before her eyes. What was happening to her? It was impossible, but with each second that passed it was more undeniable.

The sight of her whole face changing as her hair was dyed was enough to make Kate panic. Except, she wasn’t panicking. She was alarmed, but she still had a tight grip on her own mind. She felt in control of herself, despite the fact she couldn’t move. But why? Kate knew herself well enough to know that, under these circumstances, she’d normally be completely lost to anxiety and confusion. She realized that she could feel the icy needles of the dye going deep into her, far beneath the skin and into her mind itself. She wasn’t sure how that was possible, or even how she was so sure that’s what she was feeling, but nonetheless, that was how it felt. She could feel that iciness, that blackness, seeping into her mind as well her body. It was freezing her thoughts, stopping her panic in its tracks. Kate was left feeling strangely detached from the transformation she was undergoing, and able to accept it washing over her with a calm, approving eye. She was starting to look good, she decided. Her new, black hair suited her. Her ethereal paleness was beautiful. The changes to her lips and eyes made her look striking, just like the goth girls she’d been coveting.

“I’m guessing by now, you’re really feeling it?” Viola asked rhetorically, without missing a beat as she kept massaging Kate’s head. “And you’ve probably figured out that the secret ingredient is a little more than just some special hair dye. It’s a little different for everyone, of course, but from the look you’re giving me right now, it seems like you’re taking to it just wonderfully. Good. That’s good. Hopefully you’re not trying to resist it or anything. There’s really no point. And I can promise you, you’re not going to regret this. I’m giving exactly what you said you wanted, even if it is a little more than you were bargaining for.”

Kate glared at Viola in the mirror, her eyes blazing. She wasn’t angry at the hairdresser, though. What she was feeling was something else entirely. She simply wanted to show Viola that she couldn’t pull something like this and get away with it so easily. Kate wanted to turn the tables on her. She wanted to put her in her place. That kind of urge was completely unfamiliar to Kate, but she found she didn’t dislike it. In fact, it seemed to suit her. It made her feel powerful, wanting to take control and do something instead of running away and cowering. She could feel her fingers twitching, her muscles filling with fresh energy. Maybe she could move again, if she really tried.

“Hey now,” Viola warned, seeming to notice Kate’s reaction. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. I still need to finish dyeing your hair, after all.”

Kate paused, and realized Viola was right. She allowed herself to relax back into the chair. It wasn’t like she wanted to stop what was happening to her. She felt better than she ever had in her life, even if Viola did need to be punished for it. Kate smiled as she thought about exactly what kind of punishments she might

enjoy inflicting on the pretty alt girl behind her. She had a feeling Viola would enjoy them too.

“OK. Time to wash out the dye,” Viola explained. “That’s the amazing thing about this special dye: it barely takes any time at all. Well, one of the special things.”

Kate grinned at her sardonically, as Viola slowly span her chair and reclined it, encouraging Kate to rest her head in the basin of warm water she’d just prepared. Kate was happy to oblige. She was starting to having the alt girl service and take care of her. It felt fitting. The sensation of Viola gently washing the dye out of her hair was so pleasant and so soothing. It made it so easy for Kate to simply let go, and accept what was happening to her. She was so glad she’d come here. The salon had lived up to its name. She felt transformed, and she couldn’t wait to enjoy it. Kate smiled as she thought about everything she was going to do. Everything she’d felt unable to do before. After seeing to Viola’s punishment, she was going to ask her out on a date. Kate felt certain Viola would accept. She had all sorts of ideas for what they could do together. There was a new horror movie playing at the local theater. Kate had been a little scared to go and see it alone, but now, a little bit of darkness sounded like exactly what she was looking for. She would just need some time to get ready first. Kate was beyond pleased with her new hair, but she knew she could go further. She felt naked, now, without makeup. She needed it. She craved it - making her lips as black as her hair, and using eyeliner to make her brilliant eyes pop. Kate could picture herself like that. She was going to look magnificent. She needed an outfit to go along with it, though. Something black, of course. And perhaps something a little revealing. She was feeling daring. A little black dress, and some nice, tall, heeled boots. Perfect.

“All done!” Viola announced, gently lifting Kate’s hair out of the basin of water and returning her to an upright position. “What do you think?”

Kate turned and looked at herself in the mirror. She was pleased with what she saw. The difference was astounding. She could barely even remember what she had looked like before. That mousy, timid, boring girl was gone. The girl Kate saw in the mirror - that was her, now. A proud, confident, goth goddess. It was just what she’d wanted to become. Kate felt so energized she could barely sit still. So much potential had been unleashed, and she couldn’t wait to explore it. Did she still want to go by ‘Kate’ anymore? Perhaps ‘Katherine’ was more fitting. More regal. That was a decision for later, she decided. As she looked in the mirror, the only thing that displeased her was her clothing. It was so plain and so insipid. She deserved better. She needed some black in her wardrobe.

“I think you’ve done a very good job,” Kate answered, smoothly rising to her feet. “But,” she added, as she turned to face Viola, “I also think you’ve been a very bad girl. Haven’t you?”

“I don’t know, have I?” Viola grinned right back at her. Kate was several inches taller than the alt girl, she realized. She hadn’t noticed that before. She liked it.

“I guess we’ll have to find out.” Kate waved her hand dismissively, commandingly. “Why don’t you make sure we’re not disturbed?”

The two of them stared at each other for a moment, locked in a silent battle for control. But then Viola turned, walked over to the door, and flipped the sign from ‘open’ to ‘closed’.

“Good,” Kate said, when Viola returned. It felt so good to see the cute alt girl obey her, in ways she couldn’t begin to describe. “Now, what are we going to do with you?”

“What makes you think it’s up to you?” Viola shot back. The look in eyes was fiery and playful. It made Kate shiver all over. Viola was challenging her. How adorable.

“Because you want it to be.” Without warning, Kate slipped a hand around Viola’s waist, and used it to roughly push her down into the same chair she’d just been sitting in. Viola made no move to resist, or stand up. “You’re kind of a brat, aren’t you?”

“That depends on how good you are,” Viola replied, giggling. The way she laughed made Kate itch to see her composure broken, which she knew was exactly what Viola wanted too.

“I’ll try to impress you, then. I still owe you for the hair dyeing.” Kate stood, looking over Viola just the way the hairdresser had formerly been staring down at her. She lifted her foot and rested it on the seat, spreading Viola’s legs apart slightly. For just a moment, the fire disappeared from Viola’s eyes, replaced by a look of pleading. Perfect. That was exactly what Kate wanted to see. She grinned down at Viola, her face utterly composed, her new, black hair hanging around her face. “Get ready to meet the new me.”

Special thanks to my wonderful patrons, who helped to make this possible:

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