Avoidance activity

I am in Birmingham, sitting in a cafe opposite a hairdresser's. I'm trying to find the courage to go in and book an appointment. I've been here three quarters of an hour and I am on my second large cappuccino. The table I'm sitting at has a wobble, so I've spilt some of the first cup and most of the second down the white trousers I was so proud of as I swanked in front of the mirror in my hotel room this morning.

I can see the hairdressers or stylists as they prefer to be called, as they work. There is a man with a ponytail who is perambulating around the salon, stopping now and then to frown and grab a bank of customer's hair. There are two girl stylists: one has had her white blonde hair shaved and then allowed it explode into hundreds of hedgehog's quills; the other has hair any self-respecting woman would scalp for: thick and lustrous. All three are dressed in severe black. Even undertakers allow themselves to wear a little white on the neck and cuffs, but undertakers don't take their work half as seriously, and there lies the problem. I am afraid of hairdressers.

When I sit in front of the salon mirror stuttering and blushing, and saying that I don't know what I want, I know I am the client from hell. Nobody is going to win Stylist of the year with me as a model.

"Madam's hair is very th...", they begin to say "thin", think better of it and change it for "fine" — ultimately, coming out with the hybrid word "thine". I have been told my hair is 'thine' many times. Are they taught to use it at college? Along with other conversational openings, depending on the season: "Done your Christmas shopping?" "Going away for Easter?" "Booked your summer holiday?" "You are brown, been way?" "Nights are drawing in, aren't they?" "Going away for Christmas?"

I am hopeless at small talk (and big talk). I'm also averse to looking at my face in a mirror for an hour and a half. I behave as though I am a prisoner on the run.

I've looked at wigs in stores, but I am too shy to try them on, and I still remember the horror of watching a bewigged man jump into a swimming pool and then seeing what looked like a medium sized rodent break the surface and float on the water. He snatched at his wig, thrust it anyhow on top of his head and left the pool. I didn't see him for the rest of the holiday.

There is a behavior trait that a lot of writers share — it is called avoidance activity. They will do anything to avoid starting to write: clean a drain, phone their mentally confused uncle in Peru, change the cat's litter tray. I'm prone to this myself, in summer I deadhead flowers, even lobelia. In winter I'll keep a fire going stick by stick, anything to put off the moment of scratching marks on virgin paper.

I am indulging an avoidance activity now. I've just ordered another cappuccino, I've given myself a sever talking: For God's sake, woman! You are forty-seven years of age. Just cross the road, push the salon door open, and ask for an appointment!

It didn't work. I'm now in my room, and I have just given myself a do-it-yourself hairdo, which consisted of a shampoo, condition and trim, with scissors on my Swiss army knife.

I can't wait to get back to the Toni & Guy salon in Leicester. The staff there haven't once called my hair 'thine' and they can do wonders with the savagery caused by Swiss army knife scissors.

The last paragraph means that the Toni & Guy salon in Leicester is the...

1. ...only hairdresser's she has ever risked going to.
2. ...salon she trusts and is not afraid to go to.
3. ...place where she is a special client.
4. ...the first place she has ever tried.