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This story, my story, all starts way back when I was just a teenager, I was barely 13 when it all started and looking back I have to laugh, it all seems so interesting but then it was life. I grew up with two fabulous parents, my dad was a career air force man, my mum was his faithful servant, we moved so many times I lost count. I really learned to hate my dad coming home with a large envelope or an unexpected present, because I knew that mean we were packing again. But back to the story, just before I turned 13 we got orders to move again, I was not happy about this, we had lived in Perth for almost 3 years, I had friends and I was looking forward to starting high school with my friends in the new year, we were moving to Adelaide, I had never been there but I was opposed to he move, to the point I begged a friends parents to adopt me so I could stay. I lost the argument but my dad did promise this would be the last move for five years, this was a long term assignment and he would need to be away a fair bit but we would stay.

I wasn't thrilled but I packed and we moved, the house the air forced moved us to was truly awful, it was a tiny little fibro thing. It shook when a plane took off and that was about every twenty minutes, my parents enrolled me in the local high school and I served my time out on the base during the summer holidays, normally on a base you will find people your own age or with the same interests but not on this one, the only families all had young children and I spent most of my holidays working out at the gym, running on the base with the cadets or watching tv. It all eventually come to an end, we got a letter confirming I was starting at the local high school and that I was expected to attend an orientation day. This was not my first o day but it was not something I was looking forward to, when we got to the school my mum paid for my school fees, we collected my books and bought my uniforms, we dumped all of that in the car and made our way to the gym, we were told to be there at eleven, we arrived a little early to discover that there were about 20 students taking part, I thought I would have been a lot more, but I kept quiet. The head master stood up said a few things, then told us what would happen, it seemed that we had each been paired up with a volunteer from the next year up, that on this day, they would take us around show us where things were etc then on monday they would escort us around to our classes and answer any questions we had. It all seemed fairly normal, he then called the volunteer students in. They were mainly girls, there were a couple of guys but not many.

In turn each of our names were called and we were introduced to our buddy, each of them all looked a bit sweet for me, my name was called and I met my buddy, her name was Sara, she'd seemed normal enough, then the most beautiful guy stepped out from the back of the group, he had been paired with another guy, the other guy was ok, but Sara seriously started to drool, when

the guys joined the rest of the group, she introduced me to beautiful guy, his name was Craig and he was her twin brother, I suggested we swap buddies, everyone agreed and everyone was happy. Craig was the perfect host, he asked me questions, answered my questions, found all of my classes, introduced me to all of my teachers and even found my locker. When the bell went to tell us lunch was on, he escorted me to the oval, they were having a BBQ lunch, he stayed by my side the whole time, he charmed my mum and we became firm friends.

I guess I should introduce myself, my name is Claire, Claire Louisa May if you are my mother, I have auburn hair, blue eyes and naturally fair skin, I was born in Borneo to Australian parents, I have been all over the world with my dad's job but Australia is the place I call home. But back to the story!

Craig and I would hang out after school, he was always really nice and he often helped me with my homework, especially when my dad was away. It wasn't until three years later when I was in year ten that he asked me to be his girl, I was so flattered, he was a year ahead of me at school and he seemed so much more grown up. We were boyfriend and girlfriend for a couple of years, Craig graduated from high school, he got an apprenticeship to be an electrician, I was working really hard at school it was my final year and I really wanted good enough grades to be an engineer. It was during this year that our relationship moved to the next level, we had never been sexual before, just touching and kissing, but he asked me to be his first and I wanted to be. It was around this time that my mum was working at the local hospital, she was doing reception work and she loved it, it also meant that our house was usually empty for most of the afternoon. It was during this time that we explored each other's bodies, the end result though was that half way through my final year I found out I was pregnant. I knew I was in big trouble but when we told my parents they were really calm about it, we intended to get married, just a small wedding on base, Craig announced that he would support us and that he was looking for a place for us all to live. I worked really hard at school and took my final exams, I was barely able to reach the table but that was fine, I had done it, now I just had to wait for the results.

The pregnancy was fairly normal, nothing much troubled me, I got very tired but other than that I was fine. Craig was true to his word, he found us a flat, it was not much but it was home, he worked really hard, his mum and dad helped us with furniture and my parents bought us the things we needed for the baby. In due time the baby decided it was time to make his appearance, after almost twenty hours in labor, they decided to do an Emergency c section, as soon as he was born, I knew something was up, he was born with a genetic defect, the doctors stitched up my stomach and moved me to a room, it was

there they explained that my baby had a very rare genetic condition, that we would probably only have a short time with him and that we should make the most of that. I was devastated, we named him Ben Adam, he was beautiful, we held him and took heaps of photos, hoping the doctors were wrong and that in years to come we could show him the pictures and tell him the story. Unfortunately the doctors were right, at just three days old Ben died, it was awful, the doctors sedated me for a couple of days and when I woke up it was the day I was leaving hospital, the next day was the funeral.

The funeral was hard, heaps of people from school came, lots of people hugged me and told me it would all be fine and in a way it was! Craig and I went home, my parents had packed all of the baby stuff up and taken it to there place, we went on with life. The doctors assured us that we had done nothing wrong and that the chances of having another baby with the same issue were extremely unlikely. They recommended we wait a few months and try again. The day of the funeral I got my exam results, I got really good grades, plenty good enough to go to uni but my heart just wasn't in it now. I stayed home for a couple of weeks before I went looking for a job, I got an administration job at a local plumbing company, I also got a part time job at the local supermarket, it meant that we both worked long hours, I really wanted to buy a house and we both decided that it was best if we worked really hard, saved as much as we could and we bought the house before we thought about trying for another baby.

Fast forward three years, I am about to celebrate my 21st birthday, last year Craig had a big birthday bash for his birthday so this year it was my turn. I bought a fabulous dress, I was in great shape working two jobs left little time, but I was proud of the shape I was in, it was the best shape of my life. When we got there it my parents had done the most amazing job, the footy club looked amazing, no one would have guessed it was a footy club fromt he inside any way, it was all done on a budget. We had a caterer who was making sure we had everything we needed, the decorations were up and my friends had started arriving, the only person I hadn't seen was Craig, I knew he was there we arrived together but I hadn't seen him for ages. It didn't really surprise me he had become more and more distant in the past couple of years, it would have still been nice if he had been by my side, it was the one event I really wanted him to at least pretend we had a normal marriage.

We lived together we slept in the same bed but that was about it!

A couple of people asked me where Craig was, I said he was around somewhere but I hadn't seen him for a bit, then it was time to cut the cake, everyone went looking for Craig when they found him, he was in the change

room with a man I didn't know, they obviously knew each other because they were engaged in a very intimate act, with another man, I had met him but didn't know him but clearly he and Craig were seriously involved. I was horrified, how could he at my birthday, I did the only thing I could I burst into tears and run from the club. I got into my car, I had people chasing me but I didn't stop, I started the car and drove off, I stopped a little way down the street to pull myself together then I drove to our flat, I packed my things as quickly as I could, packed it into my little car and I drove to my parents place. My dad was waiting there they guessed I would show up there, he called my mum and told her I was home, he helped me unpack my car, then run me a bath and left me alone, he went back to the club and helped my mum clean up. They also ferried home my presents, Craig's parents were also at the party and they were furious, they helped my parents clean up and offered to do what ever I needed to get this sorted out. I was in shock but being at my parents home, having a warm bath and a stiff drink helped, when my mum got home she asked if I wanted to talk, I didn't I just wanted to go to bed and try and make sense of it all.

The next morning I woke up thinking it was all just a nightmare but being in my old room reminded me that it was real. I got up and wandered into the kitchen, I really needed coffee. My mum was making pancakes and coffee, it was then and there I realized how much I loved my mum. She said we could talk if I wanted to but it was up to me, I just wanted to put it behind me, I had my breakfast and went to watch some tv to realize that the lounge room was full of my presents from the night before! Bonus, I opened the presents, I realized how much I loved my friends, I also turned my phone back on and I had heaps of really nice messages and missed calls, mostly from people at the party last night, a few from people that had heard already. It was a really weird situation I didn't know what to say, I send SMS thank yous for the gifts and the messages, it took most of the day. That afternoon, Craig and his parents showed up, my dad said if I didn't want to see them he would send them away but I had to face it sometime and now was as good a time as ever. Craig said he was sorry about the party but that he had been trying to tell me about being gay for a while, he just didn't find the right words. He offered me a document, it was a summary of our assets and his offer to me, it was extremely generous and all he wanted was a quick no fault divorce. I was happy with that, we had heaps more money than I thought, he offered me the flat at least until the lease run out, but I didnt want to go back. I took everything I wanted the night before, Craig promised if he found something he though I would want he would leave it at my parents place, he said he was sorry and it was a genuine apology. I was hurt but I knew I would be fine, we made arrangements to meet the next day at the bank to sort out the cash we had in the bank, I was already intending to take a couple of days off work to find a new place to live so it was fine. He left

and I was left with the paperwork he had given me, my dad called a friend who was a lawyer, then he scanned the paperwork and sent it to him, he said it was more than generous and far more I would get if we went to court. I signed the paperwork and put it in my bag to give to him tomorrow, I just wanted it all over with. My parents were taking this all really well, I on the other hand run myself a bath and proceeded to have a good cry in the bath, my mum come in to check on me, I felt like I had failed but she explained that this was out of my hands, that I was still young and I had plenty to look forward to. I knew she was right, I decided in the bath to quit one of my jobs, I was going to apply to university and I was going to have the best revenge ever and have a great life.

When I got out of the bath, I grabbed my computer and had a look at properties online, I was looking at rentals but my dad pointed out that with the settlement I would be able to put a decent deposit on a place of my own, and that he and mum would sign the loan if I needed it, I told him of my plan to quit my job and go to university. He said it was a great idea and that my parents would help me wherever they could. It was so nice to know they had my back, I had a look at property in my price range there was a fabulous two room flat, close to my work, it looked lovely but it had been on the net for ages and it was really cheap. I called the agent and he said he was happy to show me the next day, I also called my boss and told him I wasn't coming in, he wasn't happy but then I also told him I would be handing my resignation on tuesday. I was sick of working for the sleaze bag anyway, I spent most of my time trying to avoid his wanfering hands any way. I would keep my job at the supermarket, I really enjoyed it, it was fun and I would be able to work it around my studies, I also went to the university site and checked on the application process. I talked to my dad and told him I was going to do my MBA, it was a 12 month intensive course and I knew it would be hard work but I was sure I could do it. I was also planning to have a reasonable amount of savings I could fall back on, I downloaded the application, I filled it in and I scanned and emailed it to the address, i also packaged it up to post it, I knew it would take ages to get an answer but I needed to do something.

I could not believe how empty I felt, I had never felt anything like it, I put on a brave face but it was just that, I had nod idea how I was going to get through this. I went to bed, I slept well which really surprised me, I got up determined to get through the day looking like a together adult, I was catching up with Craig at 11, so I had some time to sort it out, I had the real estate agent at 2 but I had some time to do other things. I posted my University application, I tried to move my crap into my room, so at least it wouldn't be all over my parents house after that I had a quick shower and got dressed, my dad was at work and my mum was volunteering at the local school, she offered to stay home with me but it was nice to be alone. I decided that if we were going to sort out

bank accounts that I would most likely need all of my bits of paper, so I grabbed my file of paperwork and headed out of the door, when I got to the bank Craig was already there, he looked like hell! I had to fight the urge to smile, it took ages to sort it all out, but in the end I was a fairly rich single woman, I had almost \$200,000 in the bank, I called my supermarket boss and she gave me two weeks paid leave at short notice, it was awesome of her! She also told me that there was going to be a job opening coming up soon as a night fill manager, and that I should apply. I told her about my plan to go to uni and she said she would work around uni if I wanted. It was awesome to know that some one had my best interests at heart.

I met with the real estate agent, it was a nice unit but not what I wanted, it was a great area but too much for what it was. I told the agent what I thought, he said he would have a look around and get back to me if he found anything he thought might match my criteria. I didn't hold much hope, I didn't want to spend any more than \$100,000, and that ruled out most of the nice areas. I decided to keep looking and go get some junk food, while I was eating my junk food, I decided to flick through the paper, there was another house nearby that looked interesting, I called the agent and he said he would meet me there in an hour. I was almost a bit worried, he seemed really excited that some one was looking at it, I wasted a little more time then headed off to find the unit, it was a great area, there was a great park nearby, the unit itself looked nice, it was really well presented but the sign out the front had clearly been there a long time, the agent showed up, he opened the door and encouraged me to look around, it was a lovely unit, it had two reasonable size bedrooms, a great kitchen, small laundry, it was lovely, I asked about the price and he said he would take all offers, the unit had been on the market almost two years and the people that owned it would consider all offers. I asked the question, why was it so cheap? His response, there was military housing all around it, not an issue for me and that the previous owner had died and her family has spent a lot of time fighting about it, so it had been empty for almost four years. I told him I was interested but I needed to think about it and bring my dad back to look at it. He said that was fine, to let him know when I wanted to look again, he lived around the corner and he would keep the keys. I went home excited, I told my dad about it, after dinner we drove around to have a look at the area, we spoke to some of the neighbors, they were mainly army but I grew up on a base so I wasn't worried about it.

My dad took the next morning off so he could have a look at the unit inside, he didn't need to worry the agent was driving past, he really did live close, he lived at the other end of the street. He gave me the keys and we had a look inside, my dad agreed it was lovely, it needed a coat of paint and a good dust but it looked sound. I decided to sleep on making an offer, I took the offer form from

the agent, he said I could email it back to him when I was ready, I was ready now, but I thought I should be an adult about it. When I got home my dad told my mum about it, she said if it felt right I should make an offer, they were asking for \$85,000 I thought I would be cheeky and offer lower, I did some research online and discovered that I should offer what I thought was a fair price and then they would negotiate, I filled in the form at \$70,000 expecting to pay around \$80,000, I also asked for a clause that said the sale was subject to a building inspection, apparently that was the thing to do. I emailed it to the agent, he called me about 30 minutes later to ask if I needed a finance clause as well, I said I didn't i was a cash buyer. He also said the standard settlement was 6 weeks, I was disappointed, I was hoping to move as quickly as I could. He said he would present the offer the next day and he would let me know, I expected there to be some drawn out negotiations but I was prepared for that.

The next day was my actual birthday, my mum and I went shopping, had lunch and generally had a good time, I got a call just after we got home that my offer had been accepted, I almost fell off my chair! When my dad got home, I told him, it was a spectacular price and as he said even if I only lived there for a while i would be able to sell or rent it. It was far better than my previous place and well below my budget, which was good because I had given Craig all of the furniture. It was a really good reason to start fresh and I knew exactly what I wanted. The next week passed in a blur, I got the building report, there was nothing I didn't expect, I paid the deposit and just had to wait for settlement. Six weeks seemed like so long but I spent some time researching what I wanted and needed for the new place, the agent arranged for me to have access so I could measure up the spaces for the fridge etc, I also called the utilities company and arranged my service, along with insurance, the insurance company gave me a book about everything I would need for my new home, I marked off everything I had and priced everything I wanted, most of it come from Ikea, I was going to pre buy then move a lot of stuff but my parents place was already bulging at the seams. The saving grace was that they were not there, they had left on a holiday to America, they booked and paid for it ages ago and they offered to cancel it but I was really looking forward to some time alone, it mean that I would get the keys to the house about two weeks before they come home, it also meant that I got to drive my mums car while they were away. It was so much nicer than mine, I had a little Mazda, it was sad but when I bought it, it was all we could afford, it was one of the things on my list to buy when my dad got home.

Finally the day arrived, I had paid my money, I got the keys and the agent took a photo of me with the sign board, he also gave me a basket of chocolates, the first thing I did was grab my mums vacuum cleaner and vacuum, just getting rid of the dust made a huge difference, I washed everything down with

disinfectant, including the back yard, then I went home and packed my mums car with the first load of rubbish, I ferried stuff to the unit, until it was all there, I also pulled apart my old single bed and desk, my parents had said I could take them so I did, I carefully locked up my parents place and went to my place. I put the bed together and remade it, I was spending my first night in my new home! I put some stuff away and ordered pizza for dinner, I didn't have a fridge yet, so it was take away until I sorted that out. The next morning I was up really early, I drove mums car to the car hire place and I hired a removal van, then I drove to the first store on my list and bought a small fridge and washer, I also bought a few things I wasn't expecting to, I got a microwave and a funky clock. I took that stuff back to my place, it was a bit of a challenge but I managed to get most of the things out on my own, the fridge was a bit different, I was lucky one of my neighbors was around and offered to help me. We unpacked everything, and plugged it in, then I got back in the van and drove to ikea, I parked out in the back lot, I went in and found everything on my list, it was an awful lot of furniture, when she finished processing it, I was only \$2300, I was shocked! They helped me to pack it into the van, then I drove home and proceeded to unpack it all, I just dumped everything in the garage, I had to get the van back, I locked the house up and took the van back, by the time I got home it was after 6, but it had been a great day. I also had the next day off work so I proceeded to put my furniture together I turned on the old cd player I had and set to work.

Around 8, I decided I was starving so I jumped in the car and went to get food, I found a local Chinese place and ordered. I got home with my food and sat on the floor to eat for the second day in a row, I had chair, I just needed to put them together. I then decided to at least finish the bedroom that night, so I set to work putting everything together, when that was done I started on the lounge and dining, I had a huge pile of cardboard in the Garage and an almost adult looking house, I was happy with it, I had put away most of my crap and for the first time I felt proud of what I had achieved. I pushed all the cardboard into the corner and put my mums car in the garage, then at 4am I fell into my single bed and slept soundly. I woke up at midday, got up and went out after a shower, I still had no food or eating utensils, so on my agenda was some more shopping, I know what I wanted and went out and bought it! It was so nice not to have to worry about Craig and if he would approve, I also bought some linen for my new bed, everything was new, then I did a big grocery shop, I had taken a couple of loads out to my mums car but didn't realize how much I had put in it until I went out to the car with the groceries and had to put them on the front passenger seat. I went home and unpacked all of my new things, I washed everything before drying it and putting it away. It was fairly late but that was ok, I didn't have to be at work until 2pm so I had heaps of time.

I slept for the first time in my new bed, it all seemed a bit surreal, it was truly a new beginning for me and I was determined that it was all going to work. My parents were due back the following week, and I really needed to figure out what I was going to drive, my car was sick, I took it to a mechanic and he told me it would cost over \$4000 to fix it, I only paid a quarter of that for it, four years ago, i knew I needed to go car shopping but it was all just too overwhelming, besides I had mums car for a bit longer then maybe my dad would take me car shopping. My car was still going so I might even use it for a bit longer yet, I made some muffins and took them to the neighbors, it seemed like the nice thing to do since I had been the one disturbing them for the past few days. Directly across the road there were 3 ex air force guys, they had retired from active service but were still training the cadets, they all seemed really nice, one was a mechanic for the air force, I told him about my old car and he said he would be happy to have a look at it for me. I also ought I should check on my parents place, water the plants and empty the post box.

When I got there there was heaps of mail, I dumped it all on the breakfast bar, unlocked the back door and turned on the watering system, the garden looked a bit dry, I set the time for forty five minutes a bit longer than normal but it had been pretty warm. I checked the phone for messages and sorted through the mail, there was a fair bit of mail for me, I had a look through it and found the acknowledgment of our divorce, it was a bit of a shock, I was expecting it but not this soon. There was also a letter from the uni telling me that I needed to come in for an interview, it had the time and date, it was the next step. I decided that I needed to do something to kill time, so I grabbed the vacuum and duster, the house was presented pretty well. Then I realized I had to go to work, I got changed and headed off to work, I did two laps of the house to make sure it was all locked up but somehow forgot to check the watering system, I tossed my mail on the passenger seat, I would deal with it later.

I got to work on time, only just, but the night went really fast, I had so much to do, when I finished there was a message from my parents neighbors telling me that the watering system had been on for ages. That they had let themselves in and turned it off. I could not believe that i forgot the watering system, oops, I decided that I should call past and just check the damage, I got to my parents place and turned all the big lights on, it was a bit damp but nothing too bad. I made sure I turned off everything, I properly checked everything this time, then I drove my car home, after carefully putting my mums car in the garage, I wanted to get the mechanic to look over it and see if it really was terminal. I drove home realizing how bad my car really was, it was sick.

The next morning I knew I wasn't working so I got up early and went for a run, well a brisk walk any way, on the way back I called into my neighbors place to

see if they were busy, it was as I suspected they had no plans, I crossed the road and grabbed my car keys, I moved the car to their front lawn and let them look it over. The first thing they said when I got out was that it was a dragon, it breathed fire when I started it up! I thought they were being dramatic but when jack got in and started it up, it was true it blew flames out of the muffler, not a good thing I was sure. I decided to go home to wait for the verdict, I made some cookies for them, it seemed only fair, a couple of hours later they come to get me, the verdict was not good, it was indeed very sick. They gave me a list of the things they thought were wrong with it, it was a long list, I offered them the cookies and we sat and drank milk and ate cookies at 10 am in the morning, it was clear it was going to cost more than it was worth to fix it.

There was no way around it I needed a new car, I had about \$10,000 to spend, I had saved a bit on the house the fitting it out was way less than I had allowed, I told the guys I was going to have to car shopping. I was hoping to wait for my dad but that also meant I would have to go on my own, and I really didn't want to do that. I told them I would need to go car shopping, jack asked me what I wanted and what sort of budget I had, I told him I needed something small, reliable, auto transmission and preferably cute, I also told them my budget was around \$8000 but I could go a little bit higher. He said he would ask his son, he worked at a local yard, he went and grabbed his phone, made a call and come back, he told me they had a few things that I might be interested in and they all agreed that they should all come to check it over. It was really not what I had planned but I was great full for the help. I changed into my nice jeans and a good top, put on some lip gloss and grabbed my cards. I also grabbed the paper work for my old car, expecting to trade it in.

When I met the guys and told them I had the paperwork they laughed, they tried to be nice but they said no one would take that car except maybe a scrap yard! I think that was a bit mean! So any way we all piled into jacks car and headed off, the yard was only a few blocks away, jack son, Sean was just like him, he showed me a couple of cars, it seemed fairy settled that I would buy the Honda, we had test driven a couple of cars, this one seemed the best option, it was nice but a bit boring. Sean sensed there was someone missing, he said he had some other ones out the back, that the cars were rotated between the yard every couple of weeks, he said he would let me have a look. We went out the back and had a look, there were a few really nice cars, I found a BMW, it was beautiful, but just a bit too much for me. I spotted a Subaru over near the back, it was fabulous, I had a look and it was well within my price range, so Sean got the guys to get it out, while they were moving cars around they had the most beautiful Peugeot, it was love at first sight, Sean seen it, he got them to put the Peugeot out, it was at the upper range of my budget, but I was willing to go that far. I took it for a drive and I was in love, the guys gave it

a clean bill of health, then Jack said he would negotiate the price for me, I was ok with the list price of \$9,950 but I didn't want to hurt his feelings. The peugeot was a bright blue, hard top convertible, it was the perfect combination of toy and tool. When Jack come back and told me it was \$8400 including 12 months of registration and insurance, I couldn't get my card out fast enough, we did the paperwork, I paid my money and then they told me I wouldn't be able to take the car until after everything was processed, it was disappointed but it was fine, I asked Jack to drop me at my mum and dads place so I could get my mums car, they said it was no problem at least I had access to my mums car.

I was working all weekend any way, while I was at my parents place I checked their flight numbers and arrival times, according to the itinerary they would be in Sydney tomorrow morning and home on Tuesday afternoon, i had tuesday and Wednesday off work, so I would come home and get my dads car to collect them from the airport, after six weeks in the USA they would have a fair bit of rubbish. Hopefully some of that rubbish will be for me! The next morning I was working, so I would have to wait until Monday to get my car, I called Sean and explained that I wouldn't get there until Monday morning to collect my new toy, he offered to stay back after work on Saturday so I could pick it up. It was so kind of him, I told jack and he said he would follow me back to my parents place after work, then he would drop me to collect the car. He was really going above and beyond for me, I really wanted to do something nice for him,he had been so generous. Saturday at work was always really busy, it took ages to close the store but finally it was done, I raced home, got Jack and off we went, I put my mums car away, made sure it was all locked up and we went to the yard. My car was sitting in the car park, Sean was in the office, I thanked him for waiting and gave him a box of chocolates, he gave me the paper work and the keys. Then he invited me out for dinner, it was really sweet but I wasn't ready to date again, I thanked him for his offer but told him I was exhausted after a long day and I just wanted to go home and have a bath, i asked for a raincheck and he agreed, he gave me his number and I promised to call. His dad dropped me off but kept going, he was meeting some one for a drink, he seemed quite excited by it.

I drove my new car to my parents place, I checked the garden for water and made sure I locked up, I drove home and put my new car in the garage, I run myself a bath and took a long bath, I felt fabulous afterwards. I put my favorite pajamas on and settled down in front of my computer, I tried to do some work but couldn't concentrate. I really wanted to take my new toy for a drive but i was already in my pajamas, so I turned off the computer and headed off to bed. I slept really well until about 4 am when my phone rang, the supermarket had been broken into, the security company had cleared it but there was a

mess, I dragged myself out of bed, threw on some clothes and headed into work, when I got there I realized that "some mess" was an understatement, there was water everywhere, the cleaning crew had already been called but I decided that I should start, at least cleaning up around the check outs, everything was soaked, the clean up crew arrived and set to cleaning up the water, it was lucky that it was mainly on the floor. At 10 am I called my store manager and let her know what had happened, I also had to ask what to do about the stock that was damaged, she said she would come in and cover my shift, I was about to head home to get changed so I decided I would stay until she got in. The store was ready for trade by the time the staff started to arrive, the store was open and operating when the manager arrived at about 11.30. I went home, took a shower and went back to bed, I got up at about 3, I had the next 2 weeks off and the only thing I had to do was collect my parents on Tuesday.

On the Tuesday I got up early and went around to my parents place, it was a glorious summers day, so I opened all of the windows and sprayed fabric softener on the curtains, it was my mums trick, when we used to move all the time she would do it make any place smell like home. I also went to the supermarket and got some basic groceries, just to get them started. When I got home the mail was in, I grabbed it out and flicked through it, there was a letter for me from the university, when I went to the interview they said I would hear in a few weeks, so I guessed it was a rejection, I put it on the breakfast bar and ignored it, after a quick tidy up and dust, I decided that I should open the letter, when I did I couldn't believe my eyes, it was my acceptance I started uni in just under six weeks time, I had to attend orientation in five weeks, I was so excited! I looked up and realized it was just after 3, I had to get my act together, I called the airline to check the plane was on time, only to be told that it was due about ten minutes early, it was only about ten minutes to the airport from my parents house, so I very carefully backed my dads car out of the garage and headed to the airport. When I walked into the terminal, I checked the screen and it said the plane had just landed, so I went to the arrivals area to wait, it didnt take long, then we all went to the baggage hall, when they left they had a small suitcase and a small carry on bag, when they got back they had two large suitcases, the two small ones they took plus a bigger carry on each plus my dad had a briefcase and my mum had a handbag, I was glad I bought his car not mine!

My dad drove home, when we got there my mum asked who's car was in the drive, when I said mine, she was shocked, then she told me off for spending so much on a car. It was a beautiful little car and it was mine! I helped my parents unpack the car, my mum was impressed that the house was so clean, I told

them that I left them food in the fridge as well, I told them I would leave them to unpack, I left lasagna in the fridge it just needed to be heated.

I took my mail and drove home, I was so happy my parents were home safe but I would see them tomorrow, mum and I had plans, we were going shopping, I intended to tell them about uni then, right now I just wanted to go home and let it sink in. I was excited but scared, what if I couldn't keep up and made a fool of myself! I didn't sleep well that night, I got up early and went for a run, after that I got ready to go pick up my mum. When I got there my dad was out the front, he quizzed me about the car and when I told him I had befriended a group of ex air force mechanics and that they had helped me choose it and in return I had given them the old Mazda, my dad found this amusing, he was going back to work on thursday, so he was enjoying his last couple of days of leave, I went in and found mum, she was really impressed with the food I left them and how well cared for the house was. She gave me a huge bag of goodies from the USA, there were lots of lovely things, when dad came in for a drink I told them that I was accepted to uni and started in about five weeks. They were both really excited, I told them I intended to keep my retail job at least part time but I might have to consider leaving if it got to be too much, I also told them I had over \$100,000 in the bank, so even if I did drop out of work I would be fine for a while. I planned to finish my course in 12 months, then go back to work in a corporate job, they were both really excited and told me that they would help me if I needed it. Then my mum and I decided that I needed some corporate clothes so were we're changing our shopping trip, on the way she wanted to stop at the goodwill shop to drop off some stuff she had cleaned out of her wardrobe, it was a shame I took after my dad, I was tall and thin, she was a petite size 6, I was more of a size 10, when we got to the goodwill shop, I noticed that they were looking for volunteers, I wanted to do something in my community for a while so I asked about it, I said I would only be able to give a few hours but they said they were happy to take whatever I could give.

So fast forward six months or so!!!!

I have just finished the first half of my course, it has been a lot of work but I am doing great, I have to admit I am feeling very proud of myself. I gave up my retail job, my parents talked me into it before uni started and I have to admit I am glad. It was nice to have the extra time, I volunteered a couple of afternoons a week at the goodwill store and sometimes worked on a Saturday, they were happy to work around my uni and didn't hold it against me if I was late or had to pull out because of uni. It was great working at the store the people were great, I always had a great time and I always got first pick of the

new stock, I had gained some really nice clothes and other things that really made my little house a home.

One Saturday afternoon I was working, I got in a little bit before I was suppose to start, I made some cookies to share, when I got there the store manager grabbed me and dragged me straight out the back, a lady had come in with some donations, there were two large suitcases and a dress bag, they had opened it up and realized it was all corporate clothes and it appeared it was all in my size, everyone knew I was looking for corporate clothes, I told my manager I would sort them and price them, she said no, I should put them straight in the car, we would never sell that much small size clothes and that it was mine. I said that was not right, it was given as a donation, but my manager insisted she had spoken to the lady and she just wanted it out of the house. I was reluctant but she insisted, so at the end of the day, I moved my car to the back door and she helped me load my car, it was a lot of clothes, I offered money but she refused to take it. When I got home, I put the bags in the lounge room and opened them up, there were so many brands in there I would never have bought myself, I tried a lot of things on and it was as if it had been made for me. Most of them still had their dry cleaning tags on them, I opened the dress bag and found eight evening dresses, they were all amazing, I had no idea what I had done to deserve this.

I sorted it into piles in my spare room, my house was completely trashed but it was so awesome, I needed some more coat hangers and some more space, my next task was to clean out my wardrobe, I had two huge built in wardrobes but I also had plenty of rubbish in them, I started a pile to go to goodwill, rubbish and sort, finally at about midnight, I fell into bed, I had a list of things I needed to buy, I slept very well!

Next morning I decided to go through my sort box, I found a few things that really belonged to Craig, so I decided I needed to suck it up and visit his parents, I also found my engagement ring, I had offed it back to craig but he didn't want it but I know it was a family ring, I couldn't keep it. His parents had not asked for it but I would return it. So I put everything in the car, I also put the bag for goodwill in the boot before church, I went to church then drove to his parents house, I didn't see Craig's car, so I guessed he was living some where else. I had worn a lovely designer dress, it was wool and I looked great in it. I parked in the drive and walked up and rang the bell, I was carrying a bag of stuff for Craig and had the ring in my handbag, his mum answered the door and greeted me with a hug, she invited me in, her husband was sitting on the couch, he seemed shocked but he was happy to see me, I explained I didn't want to intrude but I had found some stuff that was craig's and it didn't feel right to call him. His mum said it was fine, she would pass it on next time she

seen him. She offered a cup of tea, I accepted, i didn't want to seem rude, it really wasn't their fault what had happened, I told them about uni and my little home, I didn't want to boast but I did want them to know I was doing fine! After my tea I said my goodbyes and dug into my handbag for my keys, when I did I remember the ring, I pulled the ring out and told them that was the real reason I had come, that I knew the ring was a family ring and it should remain part of the family. I didn't mention that I had offered it to Craig and he didn't want it, his mum said she had forgotten it and that it was a lovely generous thing to do. She hugged me and told me to keep in touch!

I drove to the good will store to drop off my bag, then intended to go to the shop for my bits and pieces, by the time I got the goodwill stores was really emotional, it all seemed so final and I know it was but this was the first time it had really sunk in. I was crying so hard, I hit the door lock and grabbed a handful of tissues, I have no idea how long I was there, some one tapped on the window, it scared me a little, I turned the key and put the window down a little, there was an older man, he asked if I was ok. I said I was fine, just feeling a bit overwhelmed that's all, he smiled and said he understood, he took a card out of his pocket and wrote something on it, he gave me the card, he was a psychologist, he said his personal number was on the back and if I ever need to talk to some one, he would be happy to help or put me in touch with some one. I thanked him for caring, but said I was fine, he left, I pulled myself together patched up my makeup and grabbed my bag out of the boot, I took the bag in and caught up with the crew, I offered to pay for everything I took but they kept on refusing.

Then I went shopping, it was fabulous therapy but I kept thinking about he guy in the car park, when I got home I sent him a message, just to say thank you for caring, he called me back and said I was most welcome, he said his name was Joe, we talked easily for a while, he was really nice, I told him about my divorce, it was really good to talk about it. He said he had been divorced so he understood, I thanked him the the chat and hung up. I put all of my new clothes away, I had everything back in order, I was feeling very happy with myself, I knew I had done the right thing my returning the ring, it felt right!

Later in the week, Joe rang again to invite me to lunch on Saturday, he also had some passes for the local fun park. It sounded like a lot of fun, so I said yes! Hell what did I have to loose, the rest of the week went really fast it was school holidays but I had plenty to do. On saturday I got up early and took extra effort getting ready, Joe asked me if I wanted to be collected, I said I would rather drive, he was fine with that, he told me where to meet him.

I got there a little bit early finding a park was far easier than I expected, I put some coins in the parking meter then opened the boot to grab my purse and my coat, when I looked up I seen him walking towards me! He looked really nice, last time I seen him he was in sweats but then I guess he was dropping off at a goodwill store, this time he was in dark jean and a sweater! He smiled when he seen me, he greeted me with a kiss on the cheek, we walked and talked for a bit until we got to the venue for lunch, it was a lovely place, Joe told me to order whatever I liked, not to look at the prices because he didn't pay them anyway, I chose the chefs speciality, we talked easily for a while, he told me about the fun fair he had been given some passes, over \$200 worth and thought it would be weird for him to use them alone besides he thought I might enjoy some fun. The meal arrived and it was as good as I expected, I ate slowly making sure to enjoy every bite, I noticed Joe watching me eat, it made him smile, after we had finished he said something to the waiter and the chef and off we went, I asked him what that was all about, he said he had helped them start the business so now he never paid, he didn't take advantage either just the occasional special meal. That little comment made me feel so special, the fun fair was a short walk away, he gave me the cards and told me to knock myself out, I told him he had to play too otherwise it wouldn't be as much fun.

Most of the games gave out a tickets to the value of the score, the higher the score the more tickets, when I walked past the prize booth I seem a huge stuffed toy I wanted, I told Joe, that was my aim, I wanted the giant bunny! He threw his head back and laughed, he seemed genuinely surprised but he went along with it any way. We weren't half way through the credit when we had more than enough tickets for the bunny, we had both also had enough, so we gave the balance of the cards away to some kids and cashed in the tickets for my bunny, we had enough left over for the smaller version as well so we got that, then Joe walked me back to my car. I strapped my bunny into the passenger seat, he tried to shove the other bunny in as well but I told him that was his! He looked so horrified that I said it could come stay with me until he was ok with the idea. He had been a complete gentleman, I had a fabulous time and I told him so, he said he had not laughed this much in a long time, I had to agree, he kissed me good bye, it was a proper passionate kiss, it took me a bit to realize it, I enjoyed it but it also scared me a bit. I ran after the kiss, I didn't even say goodbye I jumped in the car and backed out, I can only thank god no one was behind me. I had put my purse on the front passenger seat floor, I could hear my phone ringing and I knew who it would be, I ignored it, I would deal with it when I got home. I drove home, put the car in the garage, then grabbed my purse, coat and my bunnies, I put the bunnies on my chair and went to my bedroom to get changed before I checked my phone.

There were 7 messages from Joe, he sounded so concerned, I called him back and said I was sorry, he said he was sorry, he seen fear in my eyes and was concerned I didn't feel the same way. I told him that I did but I have never been in a proper adult relationship, I was tired and started to cry, I never intended to but I did, he asked me if he could come to me, no string, no intentions just to talk, to tell him what was going on! I said he could, I know I shouldn't have but I gave him the address, he showed up about ten minutes later, he had ice cream! I was still crying but it was getting better, I tried to talk about everything but the words wouldn't come, he sat at my feet and waited for me, I got up and went into the bedroom and grabbed a photo album, it was bens album, I gave him the album and sat down. He opened it up to a birth certificate, he flicked a few pages of photos and found the death certificate, then it all clicked, pulled me into his lap and held me, I felt so safe! After at I told him about the marriage that wasn't he said it was all fine, he was not in any hurry, he was happy to wait until I was ready to progress our relationship, he just thought that I was ready to get involved but he understood that I needed more time and he was happy to give me time, he was willing to wait. I felt like such an idiot, I barely knew this man!

What the hell had gotten into me, I never took risks, everything was always carefully considered! I liked it, it felt good. Joe got up, he picked me up off the floor and put me on a chair then he went to the kitchen grabbed the now very soft ice cream and opened draws until he found two spoons, then we sat together and ate an awful lot of ice cream. Joe put the remained of the ice cream in the freezer, the spoons in the sink then he kissed me, it was a long gentle lingering kiss, then he said good night.

I floated thought the next couple of weeks, I told my mum I was seeing someone but I was taking it slowly, she was happy for me but also concerned, she didn't want me to rush in. Joe and I went out a few times, just for dinner or a movie, it was nice to be going out again, then Joe asked me to accompany him to a ball, he was up for some big award and didn't want to go alone. I was really excited my first ball, Joe offered to buy me a dress but I had all of the dresses I got from the good will store, I had even collected the perfect purse and wrap, I just needed the shoes, I had something in mind already! The ball was a week away so I had plenty of time, I got the dress out and tried it on again, with all of the accessories, it looked amazing, I wanted to show Joe but decided to show my mum instead and save the surprise, she agreed it looked amazing. The day of the ball I decided to treat myself to a pampering, I had a massage, my hair done and my makeup done, I was running a little bit late but I got home and had just finished getting dressed when Joe knocked, I made him wait a minute while I did one last check, I picked up my purse and my wrap and opened the door, Joe was genuinely impressed, I felt like a princess, Joe

stepped in and gave me a small box, I opened it up and it contained a small pearl bracelet, he said he wanted me to have some thing special, it was beautiful, i asked him to put it on me. Then we went out, he had hired a rolls Royce, it was beautiful, the driver got out to open the doors, I took out my camera and asked him if he would a photo of us together with the car! Joe was by amused by this, it is as I pointed out to him our first black tie event, hopefully the first of many. He smiled back! I felt very warm and fuzzy.

The night was amazing, Joe won the big award, he was so proud, we danced and danced and he introduced me to heaps of people, the food was amazing the wine was even better, I fear I had a little too much wine, I must have gone to sleep in the car on the way home, when I woke up I was in a strange room. I looked around and seen my dress on the chair in the corner, I looked down and I was still wearing all of my underwear including my panty hoes. I sat up and immediately regretted it, I notice something on the side table, it was a note from Joe, he said he gone out in search of food, he would be back soon, there were fresh towels in the ensuite and I should help myself to anything else. He had also left some water and pain killers, I took a big drink and some pain killers, then I stripped off my clothes and made my way into the bathroom, it had everything I could want, I had a long shower and was almost feeling human by the time I got out. I dried off and walked out to the bedroom in the towel, I found some sweat pants and a t shirt on the chair, I helped myself, they were a bit too big but a far better option than the evening dress.

Then I wandered out the door, into this huge room, it had a massive window front, I looked out and guessed that I was about ten floors off the ground, there was an amazing view of the beach, we must be in a motel! I was looking out the windows when the door opened and Joe walked in, he carried a couple of bags, he smiled at me and asked how I slept, it was obvious that I slept well, I asked him to fill in some of the gaps for me, he said he would be happy to but he was going to arrange some food while he did it. I asked him where we were, he said I went to sleep in the car and he didn't want to take me home, so he bought me home to his place, I slept in the guest room. I told him it was beautiful, I was thinking it must have cost a fortune. Joe made brunch and we sat at the the breakfast bar and enjoyed it, he was a really good cook, he said when I was ready he would drive me home, no rush, he had no plans, but he knew I had some work to do for uni.

I offered to clean up the kitchen but it was already done, then I said I should go home, I had to finish my assignment, he gave me a sports bag to put my clothes in, he didn't think it was classy to do the walk of shame, I had to agree, when I was ready I told Joe how thankful I was to have him in my life, we kissed for a long time, it was so sexy to feel him so close to me. He grabbed

the bag, his keys and phone etc, then he escorted me out the door, the door didn't have a key it had a card that you waved over a point, he showed me how it worked, I thought it was very cool, then we went down to the garage, he told me he had four car parks and that if I come I could use one, he opened the boot of a different car to what I had seen him in before, I raised my eyebrow and he said it was a toy, he had a work car, a fun car and a toy, I was allowed to drive the first two. He drove me home, it wasn't very far, when we got to my place he got out opened the boot and carried the bag in for me. Then he handed me two cards, he explained one to access the garage and the other for the lift and the apartment. I was welcome to visit any time, he trusted me, I was really excited, this was a huge step, for both of us. He also suggested that if I was going to stay over it might be an idea to leave some clothes at his place. I was feeling very overwhelmed, it was awesome but unexpected, I wanted to do the same and I told him I did but I didn't have a spare key at home, my spares were at my parents house, but I would get him one. He laughed and said when I was ready, he just thought it would be handy for me, that and he noticed I didn't have a tv, so if I wanted to watch tv he had a huge one and he wouldn't have to be there. We kissed for a bit then he said he would leave me to work on my assignment. He was such a sweetie!

I had another shower, put on my own clothes and tossed a couple of loads of washing through and tossed some clothes into the bag he loaned me. Then I finished my assignment, it was not one of my best but I was confident it was enough. On Wednesday Joe called me to invite me to dinner on Saturday, he said he and a few friends were having dinner to celebrate his birthday, I was totally in! I suggested I get dressed at his place, I was working at goodwill until 2 then I would head to his place, he said that was a great idea, he had a patient Saturday at 1 so he would be home around 2.30 I asked about the dress code, he said it was a nice restaurant so wear something nice. I stood in front of my wardrobe for a bit before I decided, I grabbed the outfit out, shoes underwear the works, I put my good make up in a cosmetic bag and my new bracelet. I also put in his clothes I had borrowed, it was a bit full, so I grabbed another bag and put some things in it. I was also a bit cheeky and put in a pair of pajamas and fluffy socks. The rest of my week was really busy, I was excited Saturday morning when I got up, I put my bags in the boot, along with a small gift bag, I wasn't sure what to buy him for his birthday, I ended up settling on a nice pen and a framed copy of the photo of us in front of the rolls. It felt like the right present, I really hope he likes it.

I went to work my shift at good will, it was really quiet so I decided to leave early, but not before I bought the most beautiful scarf. I drove to Joes place, I let myself in the garage with no issues, I grabbed the bags out of the car, then had to tackle the lift, it was easier than I thought it would be, I opened the door,

it felt really odd. I put all of the bags in the guest room, then turned the kettle on and made myself a cup of tea. I had my laptop so I got it out and did some work, enjoyed my tea and waited for Joe to get home. I was going to turn on the tv but I just couldn't be bothered, I got a fair bit of work done on my next assignment, I only had this plus one more assignment left then a small thesis. I was on the home stretch, I was averaging high distinctions, I was also working hard but I knew I could do it now. It was a major revelation to me, I was like a huge weight had lifted off of me, it was at that moment that Joe walked in, he was wearing a suit, he looked very smart, he said he would just take off his work clothes and be back, I asked if he wanted a coffee, he said he would love one.

I made him a coffee, it was nice to feel so domestic, he came out wearing jeans and a sweat shirt, I told him I had his other clothes in the guest room. He said I shouldn't have worried they were too small for him. I went into the guest room and grabbed his present, I came back out and gave it to him, he looked surprised and said just coming tonight was enough of a present, he opened it up he loved the photo, he put it over on the cabinet by the tv, then he opened the pen, he said it was lovely but far too expensive and that I should take it back. I told him it was fine, it was my gift to him and reminded him that I wasn't exactly poor! He came around the breakfast bar and kissed me, it was a fabulous long kiss, when he went to pull back I pulled him closer, I pulled a key out of my pocket and gave it to him, he smiled, we kissed for a bit longer, I wrapped my legs around him, he looked a bit shocked then realized what I was saying, I was ready to go further, I wanted to go further, he asked me if I was sure, I said yes. He picked me up and carried me to his bedroom, it was beautiful, not at all what I expected, he went into the bathroom and turned on some water, I thought interesting he was running a bath, this was all totally new. He carefully undressed me, kissing and sucking as he went, he left to turn off the water but was straight back, I pulled his sweater up over his head, he had a slightly hairy chest, I ran my hands through it, I touched him, he unbuckled his jeans and slipped them off, he was still wearing his boxers, I was wearing my panties but that was not for long, he knelt in front of me, sliding my panties to the floor and tossing them aside, then he kissed my thighs, my knees and touching me in a way I had never been touched. Then he spread my knees and he buried his face in me, I had read about this but never experienced it, I was panting and shaking, then he ran kisses up my tummy eventually reaching my mouth, he had slipped off his boxers, he entered me gently and fully, it was so right, so amazing, I felt alive. He was so gentle, Craig had always been so rough and in a hurry, Joe wasn't, it was amazing, I reached a point I had never experienced before, I climaxed, I felt the waves flow through me, then I felt Joe come, he collapsed onto me, then he pulled out

and fell onto the bed beside me. He rolled on his side and smiled at me, I smiled back then I stretched to kissed him.

He rolled out of bed and come around to my side and picked me up, he carried me to the bathroom, this bathroom had a spa, we had a spa together, then we got out, I couldn't believe how late it was. If we didn't get our act together we would be late, I went down to the guest bathroom and got ready to go out. I was happy with the result when I walked out Joe made it clear that he was happy with the result as well. He pulled me close and asked if I was ok, I knew what he meant, I was better than ok, I kissed him, just a little teasing kiss, I didn't want to ruin my make up! We walked to the restaurant holding hands, we arrived a little but late but no one cared, there were a lot of looks but Joe made certain everyone knew we were together, it was a fun night, it was not late when we got home, Joe asked if I was going home, I asked him if he wanted me to go home, he said no, he wanted me to stay in his bed. I said that sounded like a lovely idea, I got changed into my pajamas took off my make up and wandered back into the living room, Joe found my new outfit very interesting, we cuddled on the couch in front of the tv for a while then we turned in. We cuddled in bed but there was no request for sex or anything sexual, I fell asleep and slept really well, when I woke up I was alone, I got up and looked at the clock it was just after 9, if I got my act together I could still make church. I found Joe in his office, I stuck my head in as said hello, I told him I was going to get dressed and go to church, he asked if it was ok if he come with me, of course it was. We got dressed and Joe gave me the car keys, we drove to church and caused quite a stir, I was in love and I wanted the world to see it. Joe also got to meet my parents it was a bit weird but they were very gracious and polite. My mum just happened to mention that I had a birthday coming up next month and that she wanted to throw a big bash since my 21 st was ruined and how being the stubborn person I am I didn't want a party.

Joe said he would talk to me, my mum gave him her numbers, I knew I was screwed! When we left Joe let me drive his car again, I really liked his car, he started on the birthday thing in the car, he said I should let my mum do the party thing, I stayed quiet until we got home, when we got home I explained to Joe that my birthday was a traumatic experience, that my whole life was turned upside down at my last birthday. Joe said he understood and he would talk to my mum, maybe find some compromise solution but that he would run it past me before he agreed to anything. I liked that idea and I rewarded him with a kiss, then I went home I had to get sorted for uni and I am sure he had things to do as well. When I got home, my home had been broken into, I stayed outside and called he police, then I called my parents and Joe. Joe got there just after the police, the police cleared the unit, they asked what was stolen

and I had a quick look, I couldn't see much missing, at least I had my laptop, when my parents arrived, I was cuddled into Joe, my home was a mess, my crockery was all smashed but they hadn't touched my wardrobes, Joe insisted I move to his place at least until we could upgrade the security, he helped me pack everything.

We packed it into my car, Joes car and my parents car, everything that was left didn't matter, we cleaned up the mess and my dad nailed the door closed, he said he would arrange a handy man to fix it. I had to laugh, my bunny was on the front passenger seat, it made me smile, Joe gave my parent directions to his place, he had called the building and arranged for my parents to park in the garage, when we got there I took my bunny up stairs and dumped it on the couch, Joe started ferrying things upstairs, I had an awful lot of crap, Joe said we could just dump it and we would sort it out later. When my parents arrived they helped ferry my things up, I stayed upstairs and made coffee, I think I was in shock, when it was done Joe showed my parents around the ivory tower, he made a point of showing them my room and bathroom, my mum pulled me aside and told me if I wanted to come home I just had to call, to be honest I was more relaxed with Joe. We had coffee and I said goodbye to my parents, I collapsed onto the couch, Joe grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around me, he said I should just relax, that I was safe and that he would protect me. I must have gone to sleep, when I woke up the place was all tidied up, Joe seen I was awake and come to sit on the couch, I asked where everything was, he said most of it was in the spare room, all of my clothes were in the walk in wardrobe, he had no idea if they were in the right order but they were hung. I had never been into the walk in, he took me on a tour, it was huge, I noticed that's despite this being his bedroom he had no clothes in the wardrobe, he told me he moved them to the built in in the guest room, to give me more space it was the sweetest thing ever!

We were both exhausted so we called and ordered Thai food, it was delivered to the apartment, we ate on the couch it was so familiar and seemed a little naughty. I was feeling tired so I turned in, I went to sleep in Joes room, I asked if it was ok, he said of course it was. I slept fairly well for the first hour or so but then I had a night mare and woke up crying, Joe was there he held and reassured me until I went back to sleep. When I woke up in the morning I was late for uni, Joe was sitting at the breakfast bar, he said not to worry about uni, he had called them to let them know I would not be coming, that my home had been broken into and I had a tough night. They promised to keep notes but that they were just reviewing any way, I decided to go back to the bed room and have a spa, I asked Joe if it was ok, he said this was my home so I could do what ever I liked, he had to go to work but he wouldn't be gone too long.

I was in the spa when Joe come to say goodbye, he said he would be home around four, that I should take it easy and call his personal mobile if I had any problems. I got out of the bath and called my mum, just to let her know everything was ok, she didn't have any plans so she invited me to go shopping, I thought that was a great idea, she said she would come up to the apartment, I went into the wardrobe to find some clothes, it was all very neat, I found what I was looking for easily, I was getting dressed when my phone rang, I answered it, it was the police, they said they had an idea about what happened at the unit. My dad had sorted out the repairs to it, I thought about moving back but to be honest I liked it here, I would discuss it with Joe tonight. I was still getting dressed when the door buzzed, it was my mum so I hit the button and the lift brought her up to our floor, when I opened the front door she was really surprised with how tidy it was. I told her Joe had taken care of it, I took her on the grand tour, it was a large apartment, it had two large bedrooms, two smaller bedrooms, the huge living, dining and kitchen area and four car parks. It was bigger than any house we had when I was growing up, I showed mum my wardrobe and the big bathroom, she was very impressed, she asked me straight if we were sleeping together, I couldn't lie, of course we were.

She left it at that, we went for a walk and I told mum about my first date with Joe, we got lunch at the local shop then took it down to the beach to eat it. I was feeling really good about life, my mum said Joe had called her about my birthday and he was going to throw a party but he was planning and paying for it, she didn't seem that happy about this but she had gone along with it, it was just another thing to add to my list to talk to Joe about tonight, I grabbed some yummy things from the the supermarket on the way home and had a plan for dinner, when I got home Joe was floating around in his track suit, he spotted the bag and asked what it was, when I responded dinner I knew I had his attention. He parked himself at the breakfast bar while I prepared dinner, I told him about the phone call from the police, he said I was welcome to go back but he would prefer I stayed, I wanted to stay as well so it worked for both of us. I also told him about the conversation with my mother, he had wanted to discuss it with me, he was planning a dinner at a local restaurant, nothing too much, it sounded like the perfect compromise.

The next few weeks went past peacefully, I went to uni and worked my shifts at good will, it was decided that I would rent my unit out, so i still had it to move back to if I ever wanted, it also meant I had a small income, while I was working at goodwill I come across the most beautiful black strapless dress, I tried it on and it fit like we were made for each other, I had to buy it, because I was a volunteer it was only \$20, it must have been worth a lot more, I dropped it in to be cleaned on my way home, when I got home I told Joe I bought the

most amazing dress for my birthday, he was surprised I spent so little, he kept telling me that he could afford to buy me whatever I wanted but I didn't want anything else, I wasn't with him for his money. He had introduced me to my own body, it was an amazing experience, the sex was amazing but I was always the one that made the first move, once I figured this out we had sex often, I asked him once why that was and he told me it was all about me. Any women could be asked to give herself but only a special woman would offer herself.

Finally the weekend of my birthday arrived, I got dressed in the master bedroom and Joe got dressed in the guest room, it seemed to work at least we didn't get in each others way and Joe got a surprise when I emerged. I had my hair and make up done, it had become my ritual when we had something special on, I had gotten back to the apartment before he did, he said he had to go and have something checked on the car, I took advantage of his absence and got dressed slowly, I took extra care to make sure my lingerie was perfect, I slipped into the dress and it was amazing, I had my hair pulled up, so I looked very tall and thin, I put on my bracelet and wished I had borrowed a necklace from my mum, nothing I had seemed to do the outfit justice so I just went with a bare neck. I was putting on my shoes when I heard Joe come home, he said he would just get changed and be ready in ten. I touched up my make up and grabbed my wrap and purse, it was a lovely little purse, I had become very fond of it, I bought it from the goodwill store but it always seemed to accompany good events.

When I emerged Joe was straightening his bow tie, he looked up and looked very impressed, he said there was just one thing missing from the outfit but he had something that might fix that, he took out a small package, he said he was going to make me wait but he would give it to me here, I opened it up, it was the most beautiful string of pearls, I almost cried, I took them out and asked Joe to fasten them for me, he run his hands around my bare shoulders and neck as he fastened them. I turned to look in the mirror, they were stunning, I told him so, I turned and kissed him, then turned back to admire them, we were going to be late but thats ok, then he said something that threw me off balance completely, he said I hope you will wear them when we get married. I had never thought of it, he held my shoulders and looked at my eyes in the reflections and said well what do you think? Will you do me the huge honor of being my wife? I was speechless, I looked at him, I was not sure what to say, my heart wanted to say yes, my mind was screaming no, then he said gently I didn't have to give him an answer yet and that we would have a very long engagement, but he wanted the world to know I was his.

Then he broke the spell by reminding me we were going to be late for my birthday party, I walked in a daze, the party was at the place he had first taken me to, it was just as beautiful only this time it was decorated with lots of pink balloons, he had invited a lot of people, so much for his little party, the night was fabulous, everyone ate well, they had even made a small dance floor, when Joe and I took to the dance floor they played a song We danced to at home, I whispered in his ear that I had thought about it and the answer was yes! He stopped dead! Everyone was watching us, I was wondering how he was going to get past this one, instead he just kissed me. After wards when we were sitting enjoying desert, he asked if he should ask my parents, I said that would be a lovely touch, but that he should expect some resistance. Being a man that loved a challenge off he went right then and there, he asked my parents if he could see them alone in the foyer for a minute, my parents thought I was about paying, when he got there, he asked them if it was alright for him to marry me, they said they would be happy if he asked, he come back with a huge grin and said they said yes! So not being the most subtle at times, he started off the speeches with the announcement that he had asked me to marry him and I had accepted. It was a huge night! We got home fairly late, heaps of people gave me gifts, I had so many Joe had to go home and get a car to ferry them home. When we finally got home and I took off my shoes, I turned to him and asked about the engagement ring, he said that it was up to me to chose it, I could have whatever I liked but I should really like it because I would be wearing it for the rest of my life. Typical response!

We were both exhausted so we went to bed, I slept late the next morning, when I got up Joe had the Sunday paper, and all of the fixings for a fabulous breakfast. We had breakfast then we went for a trip into town to look at rings, we had a look at a lot of stores and I couldn't find anything I liked. I told him not to worry, I would find the perfect one, it was just a matter of time. We headed back home, I wanted Indian food so we went for a walk to get it, on the way we passed a jewelry store, I had a look in the window as we passed, something caught my eye, I turned back for a proper look, it was beautiful. I pointed it out, Joe thought it was nice, so we went in and had a closer look at it, it was stunning, I tried it on and it fit, I looked at Joe, he took out his credit card, it was not an expensive ring but I thought it was perfect.

I floated home with my ring and Indian food, I enjoyed the moment but knew that I was back at uni in the morning, I had just handed up my thesis, I had two classes left, then I was done. I really hoped everything was right, I wouldn't find out for a few weeks it in the mean time I was intending to start looking for a job, but I didn't want to think about it. The next week passed in a blur, by the following weekend I had emails from my mum about Christmas, she really wanted to do something special this year, since it would also mark my dads

retirement, there was a fair bit of discussion about it, we went around to my parents place for dinner and to discuss it, Joe suggested we go to movie world on the gold coast, my mum looked at him in horror, what she really wanted was a white Christmas but that doesn't happen in Australia. My parents also mentioned that they would be selling the house early next year, they were thinking about buying an apartment, something smaller than Joes but with a similar level of security. Joe said when they were ready they should let him know, he had some friends who could help. We finally settled on Christmas at a theme restaurant, not our first choice but we decided to go along with it for the sake of peace. The week before Christmas a friend of Joes called to let him know a lovely apartment was on the market at west lakes, he had run into him and told him, he was in the market for something smaller. It was a smallish three bedroom apartment, we had a look at it, it was lovely, had a great view, was modern and very stylish. I called my parents and told them, they come down and had a look, it was lovely, they were very happy until they asked the price, it was well outside of what they could afford, there was disappointment on both of their faces. Joes suggested that he buy it and they pay what they could and we would give them a lifetime tenure. They said they were not willing to put us into debt, Joe smiled and told them it wouldn't put us in debt, it would mean I wouldn't be able to spend as much on my honeymoon but it would leave us with about \$300,000 in the bank, plus what ever I had in my personal account.

I knew he was rich but I didn't realize he was that rich, I didn't care, I suggested on the drive home that we combine our saving accounts, that if he was going to buy my parents a house I would contribute what I could, he said no, I should keep that money aside so if I ever want to leave I would have a nest egg. I looked at him in horror, how could he suggest that, he had given me a credit card that he paid, not that I used it, my own investments gave me more than enough money to live comfortably. Joe put in an offer of the apartment without waiting for my parents, his offer was very low but the people who owned it needed it gone, so they accepted it, we didn't tell my parents, it took them a few weeks to come back to us with an offer, they would sell their house and buy the apartment with us so we would own it around half each. Joe smiled and said it was too late, he had bought it, it settled in the new year and it was in my name, so as long as it was always mine, they could live there and we could sort out some arrangement if we really wanted to.

Now it was my turn to be shocked, I knew he was up to something when he got me to sign some of the paperwork but he said that was because we were both buying it and it was to make it all legal. It was so typical of him! My irritation pasted quickly when Joe asked if we could invite a couple of people to Christmas, he had a couple of friends who would be orphaned at Christmas

and he didnt want them to miss out. My mum was fine with it, she was interested in his friends, she would love them, they were so un military but also so fun. The next day I got a call from my mum to tell me I had mail, I had nothing better to do so I went for a drive to get it, it was both great and sad mail, I got the final paperwork for my divorce and my invite to my graduation along with my grades, I had aced it! I was so proud, I called Joe to see if he had any objection to going somewhere special for dinner, I had graduated! I also got a letter from one of the ladies I volunteered with at goodwill, there was a management job, state stores manager, being advertised, she said I should apply, at least then some one at the top would know what really happened in the store. Seemed logical, But applications closed at five today, so I rushed home, threw together my application and emailed it in, then I forgot about it, Joe come home and we both laughed and danced around the lounge. We went out for dinner, to our favorite Italian place, then we walked home, I was so glad the weather was finally warming up.

When we got home Joe moved the mail off the table and noticed the court letter, he didn't ask but he knew, I seen the look flash across his face, I told him it was all over. The divorce had been granted, I had moved on to a new stage with him, he grinned like an idiot. This also raised another question I had been wondering about kids, I also got the reminder that my contraceptive implant was almost due to be replaced, we hadn't discussed it I guessed that it would come up at some point but was not sure how to raise it, so I just blurted it out. Joe looked at me with a sad face, it seems that is what split his first marriage, his ex really wanted babies, they tried for a few years, it turned out he had poor swimmers, there was nothing wrong with them just their gps was broken. I on the other had was terrified what happened last time would happen again, we talked about it and he said if it were to happen he would be fine with that but he didn't want to force it or go through what he did last time, they had gone through IVF and nothing had worked, I told him of my fears and he said he would respect me if I said I never wanted to try again but he also pointed out that we would have the best medical care and that there were test to check for problems early and that we would face that if it ever come to that. Based on our conversation I decided to have the implant removed and see what happened, on some level I wanted a baby maybe. We also talked about the divorce papers, he asked how I was feeling about it, I had to admit I was relieved, it was over.

A couple of days later I was getting ready to go out Christmas shopping with my mum when the goodwill people called and asked me to come in for an interview, tomorrow! I said I would love to. That night I told Joe I had a job interview the next day, he looked surprised, he commented that he thought I was going to leave it until after Christmas, I told him about the job, it wasn't the

highest paying job but it was one I could really enjoy, he said the money didn't matter he made more than enough to support us, I could stay home if I wanted but we both knew that was not going to happen. The next morning, he kissed me good luck and off he went to work, he had been busy working on a research paper, I had read through part of it to proof read and I didn't have a clue what it was about. I went to the job interview, then called in to see the ladies at the goodwill store, the interview went really well, the ladies at goodwill we're very excited for me.

Christmas was only a three days away, so I spent some time buying gifts and other things we didn't need, I wanted a tree but Joe refused to have a plastic one, so he arranged for a real tree to be delivered, it was the most beautiful tree, I spend a fair bit on things to go on it, but it was worth it. I also had my implant taken out, not the smartest move a couple of days out from Christmas, the bandage was hot and uncomfortable and it kept getting in the way. I had no idea what to buy Joe, I ended up buying him an iPad, I know it wasn't romantic but he loved gadgets and his iPhone so I guessed it would be ok. I bought my mum a new sewing machine, hers was ancient and I knew she loved her sewing, it was a fairly simple model but I hoped she liked it. I got my dad a voucher for the gym, he had been saying he would join a gym for ages so I got him a voucher for any of a chain of gyms, including the gym next door to the new apartment we had bought, they were still trying to decide what they would do, I really hoped they would move, it would be so nice to give something back to them. It was decided that we would do Christmas at our place, we were only a short walk from the restaurant we had booked and if we all enjoyed it too much they could always stay over.

Christmas eve I got the best surprise of all, I was offered the job, I couldn't believe my luck, I didn't start until the first week of February, but I had a job and I had a bit of a break before hand, it also meant that I would have my graduation off, and Joe was taking me to the theme parks on the gold coast the week after my graduation, he wasn't that excited about it but I was, I couldn't wait. Christmas was so fun, my parent come over at about ten, so did Joes friends ken, nick and Ben, I didn't know the guys well so I bought everyone a book and a gift card, once everyone was there my dad played Santa and distributed the presents, it was awesome, my beautiful tree, my family and my fiancé, Joe bought me a weekend in Melbourne, he didn't know what to get me and thought maybe a weekend away would be nice. He loved his present, he was so excited, he had to plug it in to charge before we left for lunch. Lunch was fun, it was a very odd but everyone enjoyed the experience, then we all headed back to the apartment, we had agreed on a cold dinner at our place for dinner, everyone bought food so we had heaps to eat, not that any one was very hungry. We all lounged around the apartment, we watched

some old movies and started a very interesting game of monopoly, we grazed all afternoon and by dark we had eaten enough. So everyone went home to sleep it off, Joe and I went for a walk on the beach and then he spent the rest of the evening playing with his new toy and I started going through the crap I had in the spare room, I had to start some time and now seemed like the ideal time to start, I was determined to get it all sorted out before I started work again, I had taken a few weeks off already and needed to get some things sorted out.

Joe and I had talked about how we use space and it was decided that the spare room would become my office, as soon as I sorted it out, Joe would keep the walk in robe in the the guest room, so I had to either find somewhere to store all my crap or get rid of it. I was erring towards the later, I was working at goodwill the day after tomorrow and I intended to take a lot of things with me. I was also looking forward to telling them I got the job and I wouldn't be volunteering any more. I started by moving some of the loose stuff, I had no idea I had so much crap, I moved some stuff into my wardrobe, I moved the bunny Joe got me on the first date to the couch I intended to get a chair it could sit in and put it in the corner of my office, I sorted through the kitchen stuff, there wasn't much, I put most of it away in the kitchen, there was heaps of room in the pantry and the linen cupboard, so i put what I could away, I was a little shocked at how little I really had, I sorted a couple of boxes of things I didn't want, I put them to the side, I would check through them again tomorrow just to check. I sat down and made a list of the things I wanted for my office, one of the things was a book case, I had lots of books and photo albums, I also need some storage, a desk and a couple of chairs, I knew what I wanted now I just had to find it. When Joe come to see what I was doing he was impressed with my progress but he pointed out it was after four in the morning and probably time for bed. I had the agree, at least I could sleep in the tomorrow.

Joe and I slept really late next morning, we finally got up at midday, it was nice to lounge around, I stayed in my pajamas all day, we both had a look thought he boxes of crap and neither of us wanted to save anything, Joe even added some stuff, then he loaded everything into his car, it wasn't going to fit into mine, there was too much of it, he said he would take his other car if he went out, he wasn't planning too, he had four weeks off for Christmas and summer, he enjoyed taking a holiday and this was the first holiday he had taken in a few years. I intended to enjoy them with him, we would be going back to work at the same time, it would be nice to have some time to do nothing together, it would also be a test of our relationship, everything had happened so fast it would be nice to slow down and enjoy each other. We discussed my plans for my office, he thought I was nuts but said we could get whatever I wanted, he

also said if we needed more space we could get a storage cage in the basement but we had plenty of space.

The next morning I woke up early, I decided to go out for a run, I left Joe a note and went for a fairly long run, when I got back Joe was up, he was drinking orange juice in his boxers, I come in all sweaty and headed to the shower, he followed and it ended in shower sex, we had ended up like that a lot lately! Not that I was complaining, after that I got dressed, Joe tried to entice me to stay and play but I wanted to get some things done. My first stop was my parents place, Joe wanted to know if they were moving or if we were going to need to find a tenant, I talked to them about it and told them I needed an answer by the end of the week. Then I headed off to the goodwill store, to drop of my donations and tell them I was going to be the new boss, they were all very excited, I also had a look through the new stock and ended up buying a few pieces, then I went off to look at office furniture before heading home. When I got there I told Joe I couldn't find what I wanted, so I would leave it until I did, he was fine with that, we went out for a walk in the afternoon, it was a lovely day. That evening while I was arranging dinner, my mum rang and said they would move to the apartment, but just for six months to see if they liked it, they would also clean up their place and put it on the market, I was relieved that they had made a decision.

The next few months pasted in a blur, I graduated, Joe and I went on a holiday to the gold coast, it rained the whole time we were there, I started my new job, Joe was offered a teaching job at the uni and took it, he worked at the uni three and a half days and private practice one day, it kept him really busy. I settled into my new job, it was everything I expected, it was challenging, interesting and no two days were ever the same, Joe and i settled into a routine, the next thing I knew it was July, we were planning a beach wedding in October but had really left it a bit late, so we moved it to march, we were in no great hurry and I didn't want to stress out planning a wedding. I already had a dress, we had the rings but that was about all, I wanted a relaxed fun wedding, my parents were busy enjoying there new lifestyle, so they were not that concerned when I told them we had decided to delay it, my mum did ask if anything was wrong but I said it was simply we were both busy and it wasn't our highest priority right now.

We put the wedding on the back burner for a while and went on with our lives, it was amazing how busy we were, in the September Joe was nominated to become the president of the psychiatrists board, it was a huge honor, he didn't think he would get it, but we did attend the gala event, it was a great night, I recycled a dress I had, it was a little tighter than I remembered but I had been busy and physical activity had not been high on my list, although it couldn't have been too bad, everyone commented on how well I looked, Joe won the

role, and we had a very late night! The next morning I woke up feeling very unwell, something I couldn't explain, I only had a couple of glasses of wine, not enough to make me sick, maybe it was something I ate, any way the following Monday at work I was still not feeling great so I decided to go home early, when I got home I grabbed my computer and put my symptoms in, just to see if it was worth going to the doctor, it come back with a few options, the one that stood out was pregnant! I jumped in the car and drove to the supermarket and grabbed a few things including a pregnancy test. When I got home, I did the test, it was positive, I couldn't believe it, I was over joyed and terrified at the same time, this was not the best time and what if something was wrong, I called the doctor and managed to get an appointment in ten minutes time they had some one cancel, when I got there I told her I peed on a stick and it said I was pregnant, she felt my stomach, made me pee in a cup and took some blood samples, she said it did look like it was right, she also did an ultrasound, it was to the most unpleasant experience, they insert the ultra sound thing into you, but the result was two pictures of our child. It had a heart beat, she suggested I was about nine weeks, we scheduled another appointment in four weeks and she gave me a pack of information about early pregnancy. When I got home I burst into tears, I sat on the couch and cried, that was where Joe found me when he got home, I told him the news, he was surprised, he knew my reservations but said we would have the best doctors an we would have all the tests done as soon as it was safe and we would meet any challenges head on and together. Our baby was due late march! So it looks the like wedding was being moved again!

We decided not to tell any one, we wanted to have the tests done and see what they said before we told any one, at least I now knew why I felt like crap. The next few weeks went fast, the sickness eased up, I went back for the check up and was told everything was progressing as expected, I had an appointment with a genetic specialist, they were going to do some tests that included putting a needle into my tummy for some fluid, the appointment day arrived, Joe come with me, the tests took forever, they told me it would hurt but it didn't really, I did get more photos of the baby, they used an ultra sound to see where the baby was and I got to drive the little probe, I think they just let me play with it to distract me, they did tell me it was a girl and that she looked perfect. I really wanted to tell everyone at work, but I had to wait, just another week or so, I think everyone had guessed, I normally wore really fitted clothes and my clothes had been looser than normal. I had been wearing some clothes I didn't normally wear to work as well, I think everyone was a bit amused but it wouldn't be much longer and I could tell everyone.

The next week really dragged, it seemed like it was a month long, the on the Friday morning I got the call that said everything was fine, they had tested for

everything they could test for including what Ben had and everything was fine, I called Joe and told him the good news, then I called my mum and dad, I scanned the photos and emailed them to a few friends and the people at work. Everyone come past to congratulate me, it felt nice to be able to let my tummy out, I was so sick of sucking my tummy in! When I got home, Joe was so excited, we had talked about moving before the baby was born, so he had some potential houses to look at on the weekend, I had to admit to him I didn't want to move, this place was heaps big enough, we decided that he would move his office into the guest room and we would get a hidabed for my office, I never got around to furnishing it any way, it seemed like the best solution, so on the weekend we gave away the bed in the guest room and Joe moved his office in there, it was heaps bigger than the old one, so he had heaps of room, we also decided that should get a sofa bed or couch for his office, it sounded like a great idea. On the Sunday after church we called into a baby warehouse, I had no idea what I wanted, last time I only got the basics but I had a feeling this time would be different. We had a look at some different options and I decided what I really liked, Joe agreed and he ordered the set, we also picked out a bassinet and linen. We bought the car seat and pram, I doubted we would need all of this crap but Joe was so excited. We arranged for it to be delivered in two weeks time, I was going to leave buying stuff for another few months but he was so sure everything was going to be fine. When we got home, I collapsed into the couch, I was exhausted, Joe knelt in front of me, he looked me in the face and said he would really like for us to be married before our daughter was born, I didn't really want to get married pregnant a second time but it was clear it was important to him, so we decided to have a simple little ceremony in our lounge room, with just our family and a few friends, we called the celebrant and she could do it the next weekend if we wanted, the paper work had been lodged ages ago, she was just waiting on us to set a date, so my cheeky streak kicked in, I called everyone to invite them to dinner at our place the following Saturday to celebrate the forthcoming baby. Everyone was coming, I called our favorite restaurant and arranged for them to cater the party, I called the cake shop and ordered a large chocolate mud cake then I sat down with my computer to write my wedding vows, it was fairly easy the celebrant had given us some words we just had to choses what we liked and email it back to her. I chose mine, Joe chose his then we sat down to compare, they were very similar just a couple of thing we negotiated on. After that I was so tired I went to bed early, I slept really well, the week went really fast, on the thursday night I called into the goodwill store to say hi to everyone and show them my bump, while I was there I had a look at the new stock, I was planning to wear a pale pink dress I had bought but while I was the I found the perfect dress, it was a 1970's style it was beautiful, I also bought some other stuff, they had some great flowing tops, on the way home I dropped the dress into the dry cleaners to be cleaned and told them I must have it back

Saturday morning, I took Friday off, I was just so tired, I also wanted to tidy up and put some stuff away, on Saturday morning I went and collected the dress, I also went to the market and bought some flowers, I took them home, checked on the catering and went to pick up the cake, i put the cake in the boot and went to have my hair and make up done, i still had the dress in the back seat in a box, when I was all made up I went home, I took the dress out and carried it up to the apartment, I sent Joe down to get he cake. I noticed that he had a new suit and shirt, both looked freshly pressed, I put the dress in the wardrobe, still in the box, I wanted it to be a surprise. When Joe got back up we unpacked the cake and put it in his office, then I had a nap, when I woke up Joe was dressed and he had hung wall hangings on wall, the apartment looked amazing. I decided I might even leave them up for a while, I went to our bedroom and closed the door something I never did, Joe called out to see if everything was ok, I said yes I was fine, i just wanted some time to myself to get ready. I heard the door buzz and knew it would be my parents, I called out to Joe that I didn't want to be disturbed until it was time, the door buzzed a few times, I fixed my hair, touched up my make up and lifted the dress out of the box, I layed the dress on the bed, I changed my underwear, then I slipped the dress on, I started to zip it up, when my mum tapped on the door and asked if I needed a hand, I said yes, she come in and I asked her to pull up the zip, the dress looked amazing, I had shoes to wear but I decided not to wear them, i put on a pair of lace socks and took a deep breath, I put on the pearl necklace and bracelet Joe had given me, a spritz of my favorite perfume and I was ready, my mum suddenly pegged what was going on, I smiled at the look on her face, I told her she had to keep quiet, she was very excited, she wondered why Joe was in a suit when he answered the door, she almost jumped out of her skin when Joe tapped on the door and said it was time.

I walked out everyone was standing by the windows, Joe had arranged a photographer, when I reached Joe we both smiled at everyone and said surprise! The wedding itself was a simple affair, we invited the celebrant to stay for dinner, we have a lovely meal, it was a great day, we enjoyed the cake and then everyone left. Not everyone was happy with the way it happened but they were all happy we were married, I spent some time showing everyone the baby photos, they were happy for us and I was happy and relaxed.

I went back to work on Monday, I got to spring our wedding on everyone, the photographer had emailed me some photos so I put one on my desk and emailed one to everyone at work. Everyone was surprised! My boss come in to congratulate me and to discuss my maternity leave, I had intended to resign when I got closer, but she wanted me to stay on, even if it was part time and from home, I did most of my work on the phone any way, I said I would think about it and discuss it with Joe, I enjoyed my work and pretty much everyone I

worked with was a mum. That night I talked to Joe about it, he said it was up to me, I could leave the workforce if I wanted, we had plenty to live on, but he knew how I felt about my work. I went back the next day and sat with my boss and we come up with a plan that allowed me to work from home, via my mobile and the computer, i called a meeting of all of the managers and told them of the plan, everyone was very supportive, I would start working from home in a couple of weeks time, with the intention of working out any bugs before I took some time off for the birth, I was informed that I must take at least six weeks off after the birth, I was fine with that, if there was anything really important they would still be able to reach me.

The next few months flew past, we decided to go with a bunny and owl theme for the nursery, every thing was sorted, I had a big splurge and bought heaps of baby things, we had so much crap, I knew what day the baby would be born, I was having a c section everything was going fine but I was still nervous, Joe set up the spare room as a little office for me but most of the time I sat at the breakfast bar to work, it was easier, I was huge and uncomfortable, finally the night before the operation came, I had my bag packed, everything was all set, Joe and I sat on the couch the night before and discussed what would happen if anything went wrong, we talked about names and plans, he was sure everything was going to be fine. The next morning we were up early, I slept really well far better than I expected, we checked into the hospital and they took us to the room, they put some monitoring on me and I was told to sit back and relax, yeah as if!

The doctor came in, explained what was going to happen and when, I had been here before, I knew the drill, this time was different, this time I had Joe, we had the best doctors on hand and my daughter would be here by the end of the day.

The birth went well, our daughter arrived safe and well, she was perfect, healthy and completely beautiful, after we went back to the room, I was sitting in bed holding her, Joe was just looking on in awe, we needed a name but everything we had chosen didn't seem right, we both decided that we would sleep on it, Joe was saying good night when a student nurse come in to see if she needed anything, i didn't but she was a nice girl, after Joe left she come back with two cups of tea, the baby slept well, I didn't I still found it hard to believe I was a mum, the next day the doctor come in, he said when I was ready I could go home, I wanted to go home, our apartment was far more comfortable than the hospital, the doctor said he could arrange for a nurse to call in and check on me and I had to come back in a few days for a check up and to have the stitches checked and removed. I called Joe and told him we could come home, he was as excited as I was, he said he would be there in

ten. He arrived with the capsule and a big smile, we carefully put the baby in the capsule, one of the midwives called through to check we were set, then we set off home, we got our daughter home, took her out of the car and carried her up to her home, we spent the first few hours just looking at her, amazed that she was here, we took a whole lot of photos of her but we still needed a name, Joe grabbed his favorite books and started flicking through, he pulled names out until we found one we both really liked, finally she had a name Isabelle Grace!

Epilogue

Well the last few year have just flown past, Isabelle was a great baby, two years later she was joined by the twin boys, Bradley and Toby, and a year later another daughter Matilda. After the twins we decided we needed to move so we left the apartment and bought a large family home, it seemed huge when we bought it but with baby number five on the way now, it seems so much smaller. I am still working part time from home, I still love my job, Joe is teaching and mentoring now, he gave up private practice so he would have more time with the kids. In a few short years I went from thinking I would never have a baby to having a house full of little people, all of the babies are perfect, my house is a mess, but my life is so much richer than I ever thought it would be. My parents are still living in the apartment we bought, they love it and the life style, my parents visit every few days to see us, my dad mows the lawn and looks after my garden, it was the one thing he really missed, it also gives my mum time with the grand kids! My life has changed in such a massive way but I wouldn't change a thing!

When I was pregnant with Matilda, we ran into Craig on the beach, he looked like hell, after we divorced he had gotten involved with drugs and had gone to rehab a couple of times, I know i should have felt pity for him but i just couldnt. The same day we also run into Pamela, Joe's ex, she was surprised to see him with the kids, she told us she had been trying to have a baby for a long time but was now too old to try IVF again, she had been remarried twice since Joe, I felt bad for her, she so wanted to be a mum and there I was with her former husband raising our own mixed basket ball team.



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