

# **No Second Chance**



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Inspired by true events

All names have been changed to protect the identities

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## Forward

A light breeze infiltrates the densely warm air, a fan whirrs in the corner near the door, covered by a light sheet. David Bowie posters line the metal walls, drooping with the build-up of heat. Cactus plants and exotic flowers line the book shelves underneath, filled with nothing but collections of dust and spider carcasses.

Matthew kneels down on the floor next to the brown table, a door supported by two stolen milk crates. Sweat runs down the side of his reddish face. It might have been awhile since he last slept but he was ready for more fun. He looks up with a big smile on his face. "Want some?" he asks.

I looked at the white crystals lying on the small square mirror on the table. It looked almost twice the quantity from the reflection I saw from where I was sitting. "It's good stuff. My mate Geoffrey only gives me top quality" he smiles again.

I didn't move, unsure. "Do you have it often" I ask, tempted to give it a try, guessing I was in safe hands.

"Oh yeah, every time I see him. Geoffrey knows what he's using though. He won't touch anything else. Here . . . I'll give you a bit" he says. He picks up a razor blade and begins cutting the rock into small fine pieces. Easier on the nose, I guessed. A small white lump flew onto the thick carpet. "Shit! SHIT!!!" he spluttered, placing the razor back onto the table. On all fours, he desperately begins searching for the small piece of escaped cocaine-methamphetamine, ever so small, I didn't see the point.

"You've still got heaps" I suggest.

"That's not the point! Do you know how much this stuff is worth?" Matthew asks, looking up at me, fear rearranging his face. His eyes pinned from heavy days of drugs, perhaps lack of sleep adding to its toll with the markings of black marks under his eyes. He jumps up and grabs a torch on the drawers near the radio, which was blaring the cricket game somewhere in South Africa. He passes the torch to me. "Look for it. I'll turn the light on and see if I can get another torch".

I slid off the couch in search for a tiny rock that I really didn't think would be found or worth finding. The mirror had a heap of small crystals ready to be snorted or however you could take it. Microscopic shards of mirror lay embedded in the carpet, not yet cutting us during our frequency of utilising The Shed. He'd accidentally smashed a mirror some months ago, hence his unlucky temperaments following like a fateful curse!

He returns with a red Dolphin torch and it doesn't take him long to locate the precious drug, among thick hairs and dirt from the previous owners. He'd found the carpet on the side of the road for the verge collection. Who knew what the history of this carpet was?

Matthew smiled a sigh of relief, holding the small rock in his palm, ever so glad before returning it onto the mirror. He shifted the mirror onto the centre of the table so no more drugs could escape and continued cutting it up. A five dollar note lay stretched next to him, he picked it up and began rolling it into a scroll like I'd seen in the movies. "Do you want some?"

I shrug. "Yeah okay" I said, keen to try something new. I'd always been slightly interested in drugs but constantly learning the ingredients, methods and dangers of using them had always scared me off, particularly when every course I'd studied at TAFE, high school or article in the media continued to remind me of the dangers.

"Do you want to snort it?" Matthew asks.

"Nah". I'd seen the movies and magazines plenty of times. Snorting coke always burnt holes in your nose and you'd see some photos of past-beautiful women with the cartilage in their noses annihilated. He pushed some crystals aside for me, it seemed like a lot.

"Just lick it or use your fingers" he said. He passes me the fragile mirror that contained his future. I wondered what would happen if it all fell on the floor. I scraped my finger over the crystals and put it in my mouth. It was definitely a surprise, perhaps a shock. The taste was so sour and bitter, it is hard to explain. I pull a face.

He laughs. "I think it's battery acid or something" he says. "It makes it look white and clean". He leans over to a small prescription bottle on the table and grabbed four dexamphetamine tablets, swilling them with half a can of bourbon and coke.

Well that sure explains a lot. I wondered what my mother would think if I was digesting battery acid! I remember getting it on my hands at the beginning of the year when I was messing around with the battery in my car. The acid had stung my hands and then began itching all night and I hadn't even realised that we weren't supposed to have bodily contact with it, yet here I was, consuming it! Wondering what damage it would do to my body. But perhaps it would be okay, after all Matthew had been using it all day.

He snorts the remainder when I passed him back the mirror. "You watch! It's 7.30 now, before you know it, it'll be morning" he says. "Time seems to go so fast, you just lose track of it. It's amazing, it keeps you up all night".

I lay back down on the couch, the summer night air still warm. The temperatures were extremely odd to forecast. One night it was hot, the next so very cold.

He stands up, unwrapping his fluffy blue bath gown from his toned body and drops it to the floor. Across his heart was a lion tattoo, roaring with vengeance, its sharp teeth fully bared. It symbolised his character in bed, he would say. Down the left side of his body was outlines of waves, symbolising his short-lived surfing career. Further tattoos lines his thigh underneath, I hadn't asked him about that yet. It didn't appear to be anything exactly defined, just lines and markings of black. All up, it gave him some interesting characteristics, although my mother was sure not to approve!

He comes over to me and smiles, before lying down on top of me, his bodily sweat slightly refreshing. Both his nipples had previously been pierced with the right one ripped open looking like a man's testicles. The left one now wore several black magnets and a piercing. The right had a padlock through the hole, slightly strange, slightly eccentric but appealing.

He pushes my fringe off my face with a smile. The fan still whirring hard at work but I could no longer feel it. "I want to be with you forever, I want to have a family together, I really think we can make it work" he says. His green eyes shined in the dim light, I rubbed my hands on his mousy brown beard, a few days of after growth that made him look like an amateur bushranger. His white teeth slightly yellow from days of not brushing but he still looked so beautiful to me. "I really want a future with you. I really can't wait to get divorced and marry you" he smiles. His hand slides down to my stomach. "You know I was thinking about it today. You've got six signs that my ex-wife had when she was pregnant with my two girls. You might be pregnant. I hope it's twins" he says, lying his head down on my chest.

## Chapter One

"What do you mean you didn't do it? It's due today. Why the hell haven't you done it?"

I sat up in bed, half dizzy, half asleep. Matthew was outside, obviously talking to his ex-wife again. It seemed like a morning of dramas for him, a great way to start the day! I stood up and put on my underwear before heading out to the kitchen, the arguments infiltrating through to the small room.

His grandma was in the kitchen, drinking her wine even though it was only 7.30 in the morning. She was an early starter, it ran in the family. By 10 am, she was drunk. By 5.30 tonight, she'd still be drinking but it made her happy, so who really cared?

"It happens all the time" she mutters. "First the kids school uniforms, then this. She really knows how to stir him up" she says, shaking her head with disgust.

"You do this every time. What the fuck is wrong with you?" I overheard Matthew say. "I told you three times last week. Her homework is due TODAY!" he storms into the house through the front door. "Get it done NOW and stop fucking around!" he yelled, hanging up. He turns around and punches the front door, which is wide open. The handle smashes into the wall, making a hole in the plasterboard but he doesn't seem to care or notice.

He smiles when he see me and comes over for a warm hug, I didn't want to let go. "She still hasn't done it!" he says to his grandma.

"Well I don't see why she has to call you on your week off" she says.

"That's not the point" he frowns, walking over to the fridge to grab a cold beer. "I'm going to go Bunnings" he says. "Are you coming?" he asks me, leaning over for a kiss, his lips so soft and warm.

"Yep". I return to the bedroom to get dressed before meeting him outside where he'd lit up another cigarette, freshly stolen from his grandma's supply on the kitchen bench.

I jump into the passenger seat of the car and he walks over, sculling his beer before throwing it onto the lawn. "Actually, I'll just grab another" he says. He puts the cigarette down on the ashtray on a nearby table to get another beer, before returning to rescue it. He takes a few more puffs and throws it into the garden. Uncapping the beer, he throws that on the ground and proceeds to scull half before joining me in the car.

"What do you need to do?" I ask.

"I just need to get some more plants. Not sure what I want yet, might get something colourful to go between my sunflowers. Can't wait for them to come along" he grins. He

leans over for another kiss, his pink lips soft but now tangy with beer. He accelerates up the steep driveway, spins it around and floors it at 90 kms to the end of the street. I was glad I didn't have any breakfast, it was always a fast ride with him. He slams on the brakes at the end of the road and then speeds out to the main street upon seeing no cars. He grins at me as he takes both hands off the wheel.

"Matthew!" I say.

"Don't worry, it's got an excellent braking system.

"That's not what I'm worried about. Besides, you never know what the other road users are like" I say.

He smiles at me wryly. "So you keep reminding me. You know this car beats a Subaru WRX any day. It's got this thing called a limo diff which means that it can do 0 to 100 in 5 seconds and brake just as good as a race car without throwing it off balance. Like a safety feature I guess" he smiles. "You know, I could take the motor out of this car and re-build it! I've never done it before but I've owned about 90 cars in 20 years and know so much about them. I can't do the wiring though, especially with radios. I'm always worried I'll get an electric shock or something" he grins. "But I can do anything and everything with a car" he puts both his hands down the front of his pants and floors the accelerator, 50 metres away from the T-road. "The kids love it" he grins.

"MATTHEW!" I shout.

He grins, placing one hand back on the steering one, one on my neck and slows the car down in record speed. "You know I'm good enough to be a race car driver. Just never been interested. My mate owns the race track up past Joondalup, he offered me full sponsorship and a million dollar car but you know, I've got the kids and they sure mean a hell of a lot more to me than some race career" he grins.

We got to Bunnings in record time.

"Hang on a second. I just need to pee". He walks over to a brick wall of the building and proceeds to relieve himself, not caring who was watching! According to him, it was okay for guys to go anywhere they wanted because their urine didn't have half as much acidity as women do, which is why they could water the plants and we couldn't. I didn't think that was very fair but at least we had respect for ourselves and took our privacy seriously!

"Righto" he comes over and grabs my hand.

"Ew, I don't know where that hand has been".

He laughs. "Trust me, it hasn't touched anything new!"

Bunnings wasn't very busy but I was always amazed at how many staff members they had to help customers, which was a rarity for any other shop! We grab some screws after Matthew measured them against one he already had and then headed to the garden section.

"Aloe vera, that's what we needed" he says, walking over to a large plant on the display. He snaps a piece off and put it down the front of his jocks, looking at me. "It doesn't cost them anything plus it makes the plant healthier".

I rolled my eyes. "That's shoplifting!"

"No, it's not! You should see my ex. She steals anything that's not tied down. I tell you what, I really look forward to the day she gets caught. It's gonna be soon. I remember when the girls were really young and we didn't even have the money to eat. I was always too proud to go to the charity places for help but she'd go into a supermarket and grab a heap of nappies to put under the trolley and end up not paying for them. Groceries, bread, other people's wallets. I don't know how she did it. I wouldn't have a bar of it and kept walking out. I couldn't do that but she had no shame!"

"Have you ever stolen anything?" I ask.

"Well when I was a kid, we were kinda bored so we broke into this house just before Christmas and stole a heap of presents. We ended up throwing all the presents out the car window without even opening them up. I feel so bad about that now".

"Have you ever thought about going back and repaying them or saying sorry?"

"Yeah, I have all the time. I still remember the house but it's been a long time and this is over in the eastern states anyways. Grab a trolley, I think we'll need one".

I walk over to the checkouts and grab one as he hoists a large sack of manure on the bottom tier with the plants on top. "I think that'll be us".

We head to the checkout. "That's \$35.67" the lady says.

"Did you get the manure?" I ask.

"Oh no, thanks for that!" she peers over the counter and looks at the type we have before typing it into the computer. Matthew looks at me with evil eyes and then begins laughing, shaking his head at me.

"\$55.67" she says to Matthew, who gives her some notes.

As we walk out, Matthew says "what the hell did you do that for? We could have bought some beer with that! You and your big mouth".

"That's shoplifting!"

"Well, it's her own fault for not noticing it. You can't always be honest!" he says to me, throwing the car keys at me so he could open up the boot and put everything into it.

We took off at high speed to the local drive in. It was now 10 am on the dot and time for Matthew to grab a morning's supply of beers and bourbons. I stay in the car and he returns with a Midori Illusion for me and a couple of bottles for himself. He cracks open a beer and heads home.

We get back, leaving the purchases in the car until later when we had more energy. As soon as we open the front door, the grandma begins her warbling. "She came over you know, she wanted a piece of you"

"Why the hell did you let her in the house for?" he yells at her.

"I can't stop her! She went straight for the kids bedroom and grabbed some clothes. She said she didn't have enough for them to wear to school tomorrow".

"That's bullshit! She's already got all their underwear and socks. I'm sick of buying more for them! You should have made her stay outside"

"Matthew! I couldn't! You know what she's like. Then she went on about the rego being due but I said I didn't know anything about it"

"Just let me handle it from now on!" he grumbles.

"You weren't home" she says angrily. "What was I supposed to do?"

"Don't answer the door!"

"Matthew, the door is open! Anyone can come in. I can't stop her. I'm getting really sick of this" she walks out of the room. "I've had enough of this. I can't stay here any longer" she says, slamming her bedroom door behind her.

"Fuck sake!" Matthew says. "See what I have to put up with every day?" he shakes his head and sculls the remainder of the beer and cracks open a bourbon. "Let's go sit in the shed". He opens the back sliding door and opens it for me. The crows are sitting in the tree near the shed. Their "cawwww" sounds loud enough to wake the neighbours in the next suburb. Matthew steps away from the door and throws his half-full bourbon bottle at the tree. It misses and a smashing sound can be heard two houses down. He laughs. "Sounds like it landed at the Kiwis. Did you hear them last night?"

"Nah I didn't"

He shakes his head. "They have loud parties almost every night, always brawling in the middle of the street. I'm tempted to head over there with my baseball bat you know.

They're always stripping on their front lawn . . . I've got kids you know. I need to protect them from this shit. Most of the time they're okay though".

We head to the shed for a cuddle. "Seriously can't wait to get divorced. Really wished I was now, at least I'd be able to marry you".

"How long have you been separated?"

"About four years" he says. "I never loved her though. We were together for a few weeks and then we split. She got a friend to write a letter to me and we ended up back together. I thought the letter was from her so I was really angry that she wasn't sincere. Then she ended up pregnant . . . twice and she's been trouble ever since. I really regret meeting her. I really can't stand her". He looks at me, running his hand through my hair. "But I really want to make a life for us together. You've done more for those kids in two weeks than she has in a year! She doesn't even know where their classroom is and it's almost the end of the school year" he grumbles. "She never goes to their sports carnivals, helps them with their homework. As soon as she picks them up from school, she puts them in front of the TV so she can do her own thing, gives them cereal for dinner and then tells them to go bed when they want".

"So they can watch TV all night even on a school night?"

He shrugs. "I guess so. There's nothing I can do. I've been so tempted to get full custody of the kids. She doesn't deserve them. She hasn't even turned up to a single mediation appointment, she doesn't give a shit about the kids unless she benefits from it somehow. She won't give them the time of day" he grimaces. "But it wouldn't help the kids if they lived with me full-time. They need their mum. And I need my peace and quiet".

"How long has your grandma lived with you?"

"About 18 months. I'm desperate to get her into her own place but she changes her mind all the time at the last minute. So many times she could have bought great investment properties but then she doesn't go through with it. I've had enough! I need my own space. You can see what I have to go through, can't you?" he asks. I nod. "See, it'll be different with you and me. I think it'll be great and I want to marry you next year. We'll have four kids . . . I so badly want to have stability you know? I'm 45 and I don't have a house. I used to but we sold it. I need to get something soon. As soon as I do this nursing course next year, I'll be able to get a decent job. I used to get \$3000 a week doing nursing at the mental hospital even though I was just an orderly" he shakes his head. "I really wished I'd stayed over there".

He stands up for another swig of his bourbon before lighting up a joint from a table nearby. He grabs the Nivea moisturiser and began pumping some onto his hands to put on his legs, which were freshly shaved. He said it was because in the days he was an super athlete, he had to wear lycra and it used to give him wicked itches and sweat

lumps if he kept his hair on. He pointed out his feet like a ballerina, sometimes I wondered if he was gay but kept a straight face when thinking this. "You want some?" he asked.

"Yeah all right" I say.

"Roll over and I'll give you a back massage".

I certainly couldn't argue with that!

## Chapter Two

It was Samantha's fifth birthday and the ex-wife was coming over for dinner, much to the frustration of Matthew, who didn't want a bar of her at the party. Grandma had made two beautiful birthday cakes, one for Samantha to bring to school and one for dinner. Matthew went and lit up the barbie. Both girls were wearing beautiful white dresses and had their shoulder length blonde hair tied up in a neat pony tail.

Someone at the front door knocked. It was Sandra. I was in the bedroom but I didn't feel the need to rush out and greet her, even though I'd met her two days before at Kmart by accident. Funny how she'd been there just as Matthew and I went with the eldest girl Mikayla to buy Samantha's present. Matthew suspected her of following us, which had happened on a number of occasions. He wondered if she'd put a tracking device in his car!

When I came out of the room, she was wearing a red Super Ted t-shirt and ill-fitting blue jeans. I was wearing a white dress, similar to what the two girls were wearing. Matthew took her outside for a few words, whilst I went and joined the two girls in the lounge room.

The girls were all excited, kicking the many balloons we'd blown up earlier. I was really impressed with Matthew's blowing skills. I try and blow a balloon and both my cheeks ache in agony but I'd hanged up a Happy Birthday banner in the kitchen, so at least I'd done my part. Now their mum was here, they rushed over to the sofa to where the presents were. Matthew and Sandra came back into the house.

"Did you bring the camera?" Matthew asks Sandra sourly.

"No, I left it at home. I think it's broken or something, it wasn't working the other day"

"Have you thought about putting batteries in it?"

"YEAH I have! I'm not that stupid you know", she snaps back.

He looks at me. "She was supposed to take photos of Samantha's school carnival at the beginning of the year but she forgot the batteries" he tells me angrily. "And that's the first time she's ever rocked up to one of their events but of course, she didn't stay long!"

Sandra's expression was pure evil as she pulls out her Iphone to capture photos of Samantha opening her presents. "At least I have an Iphone to take photos!"

"GEE, I'm sure I could buy one if I was given the chance to work. You know, having to look after the children full-time for the past three years hasn't been quite easy, especially money wise" he says.

"I give you money now and then!" she snaps.

"Oh yeah, when the rego and school bills are due. I should really charge you child maintenance because you sure earn a hell of a lot more than I do. Imagine what I could buy with that kind of money! Working full-time that is!" he snaps, heading outside to the barbecue, slamming the sliding door closed behind him.

The kids look up for a brief second, obviously used to the nasty disputes, as Samantha opens up her first present, some kind of white cuddly dog that could walk and talk. The girls scream happily.

"Next one! Next one!" Mikayla says. Samantha reaches over to another, which turns out to be mine and was a cool board game based on Trouble but the Squinkies version. I didn't really understand the concept of Squinkies yet but I guess they were the next phase of Ninja Turtles and Monsters in my Pocket.

I head outside to console Matthew, who was steaming over the heat of the barbecue, which he'd just poured oil onto and was greasing up the hot plate. The whole barbecue was in desperate need of cleaning, I was amazed he never seemed to get food poisoning or some kind of sickness from not cleaning it!

"You see how drunk she is?" he asks me quietly. I shrug, not even realising. "She would have drank at least three quarters of a bottle of bourbon before she got here!"

"But she drove here!"

"That doesn't matter. She doesn't live too far, she does it all the time! But what gets me, is that it's almost six o'clock and she's supposed to have finished work less than an hour ago. By the time she gets home, drinks the bourbon and comes back, she must have finished work early today. See, she'd never do that if the kids were sick or needed her!"

He slaps the spatula onto the hotplate angrily, picking up the sausages with his spare hand and slapping them onto the hot plate. He toys with them using the spatula.

"When she saw you wearing the dress, she was furious" he says. "You should have seen her expression, which is why I took her outside for a few words. I told her, any trouble and she can get the fuck out of my house. I told her I didn't even want her here but it's for the kids' sake"

"But it's cool she's wearing a Super Ted t-shirt!"

He laughs sarcastically. "The kids must have told her that you liked Super Ted and had a Super Ted pillow" he grimaces. "I've never seen that shirt before. She's just trying to get on your side".

Sandra comes outside with her Iphone. "Check out the photos I took" she tries to show Matthew.

"Not now, I'm cooking" he snaps. "Can't you see?"

"Just check this one out. These are your kids. Look . . ." she says, sticking the Iphone in front of Matthew's face, who glares at her.

One of the girls calls for their mum and she returns back into the house.

"See what I have to put up with?" he asks. "She normally doesn't give a shit about taking photos. She's only here to check you out and pretend she's a great mother but I can see through her shit!"

He slaps the steaks and puts the onions on the grill, pouring some beer from his bottle to make them taste even better. I was really surprised at how much better they taste like that. I'd never heard anyone doing it like that before. I knew you could use Coke, especially for baking a ham but I didn't know about beer!

"Daaaad! Dad!" Samantha calls excitedly, she runs to the screen door and opens it.

"Close the door. The flies!" he tells her. She quickly closes it behind her and says "Look! I've got a computer game".

It turns out to be a desk clock with a calculator but it made her happy, since she desperately wanted a PSP but no one in the family could afford it. It made funny sounds and a few songs that were associated with the alarm, so it made her day.

I went to the bedroom and sat down to play with my Iphone on the bed, hoping someone had messaged me on Facebook. Sandra comes up and sits down on my bed, I could hear the girls laughing in the lounge room. I look at her, she looks dangerous and drunk, her eyes red but not from any makeup. Her messy blonde hair uncombed for the past few days, perhaps in an attempt to look cool.

"So have you done it with him?" she asks.

"Sex?"

She nods, "what else would I mean?"

"Nah, not yet. Why's that?"

She shrugs. "I still love him. I'm going to go back to him one day you know. You're only just a bit of fun for him" she looks me in the eye. "He's only using you, you know?"

"Aren't you guys getting divorced in a few months?"

She scowls. "Yeah but anything can happen. If he does, I'm going to take the kids off him and head back to Tasmania. Nothing he can do about it" she pauses, looking at her wrinkly old hands in her lap. "He's like 20 years older than you. How the hell did you two meet?"

"At a friend's place".

"Cathy?"

"Yeah".

She looks around the room. "They were having an affair while we were together. We've known each other for eight years and we still love each other very much. We're just having a break" she smirks sourly. "You know he's bi though?"

"Huh?"

"Him and Geoffrey have been getting it on for the last three years! Didn't you know that?" I shrug disinterestedly. "How do you think he scores all them drugs when he's got no money? He gives Geoffrey what he wants and then he comes back high and doesn't sleep for some six nights!"

"Doesn't it bother you then, if you were supposed to have a relationship for that long?"

"Oh we go on and off. I went back to Tasmania a few years ago. He loves me so much he followed me there. I took the girls of course".

"And then you came back?"

"And then I came back. I just wanted to make sure he loved me enough to follow me. That's how I knew it was true love. I don't really care that he's getting it on with Geoffrey. We haven't had sex since the kids were born" she pauses. "So have you ever been with a girl?"

I shook my head no, looking up from my Iphone. "Why's that?"

"I've always wanted to know what being with a girl was like" she says, looking me in the eyes. "See, I've only ever had Matthew as a partner. Why don't you come over someday and watch some Super Ted cartoons with me. I've got the entire series at home. This could be our special secret". She grabs a piece of paper from the floor and pulls out a pen from her jeans pocket, writing down her mobile number on the paper. "Don't tell Matthew I've given you my number. I don't want him to know we're friends".

Matthew suddenly appears at the bedroom door as she gives me the piece of paper. "Get the fuck out!" he shouts at Sandra.

"Why? What for?"

"You've been here long enough. Get the hell out of my house. The kids are going to bed soon, there's no reason why you should still be here". She storms out of the room in a huff. Matthew enters the room with a smile. "You okay?"

I nod and grin. "I got her phone number. I made her believe we're going to be friends".

He grins. "Well done, proud of ya. That's my girl!" he pulls me up off the bed and gives me a warm hug. "Good job!" he steps back and grabs the piece of paper. He spits in the centre of it and then rips it into a million pieces before throwing it into the wastepaper bin behind him. He grabs my hand and we head out to the kitchen for a drink.

### Chapter Three

Matthew was in a really jovial mood this afternoon, which was quite refreshing. I hadn't seen him like this before and it was a lot of fun! He'd been drinking all day from a new bottle of vodka and most of it was already gone. It was one of the few drinks his grandma didn't drink, which was a big relief because she'd drink any alcohol that wasn't tied down. Last week, Matthew had urinated in a bottle of beer and left it on the kitchen counter. By the time he came back from the shops, she'd drunk it all without realising and he'd didn't dare tell her. Everytime I had a drink in the fridge like a Lemon Ruski, as soon as I turned my own back, Matthew seemed to pinch it especially when there was nothing else to drink, no matter what time of the day it was!

I'd been working outside all day and when I went into the house for a drink of water, Matthew grabs me and started dancing, which was so funny! His grandma was finally quiet because he'd put a Neil Diamond DVD on and it's the only thing that keeps her quiet, so he had it on repeat all arvo. His two kids were in the bedroom, he'd picked them up from school an hour earlier.

"If you ever want some peace and quiet, stick a Neil Diamond DVD on and it will keep grandma busy all arvo" he grins, his breath slightly smelling of a combination of orange juice and vodka. I look into the lounge room and his grandma had her eyes glued to the television, although he said she was fairly blind or at least getting that way!

"So why don't we stick it on every day?" I ask.

He laughs. "Maybe we should" he says, dancing around with me, his naked body warm and soft from another dose of my Nivea moisturising lotion.

I return outside to where I was fixing up my cat pen I'd built for my two cats Roadie and Spam. Spam had escaped a couple of times, although I suspected his two girls didn't block it up properly after feeding them. I think it was really nice of Matthew to let me build a cage on the side of the house and let me keep them, considering he was allergic to cats. Amongst other things, bees, some plants and a shit load of other allergies. At least I knew the cat one was legit because Spam had brushed against one of his ankles once and it wasn't long before he got an itchy welt. Everything else, I figured he was just a drama queen!

I was tying plastic to the side of the cat cage so the cats didn't get the wrong idea about escaping. They didn't seem to try and dig out where it was in place, near a small crate where they spent half their lives sleeping. I felt pretty bad about them not being able to run around but I guessed it wasn't forever and Matthew was pretty keen on rebuilding it. He wanted to build a long chute down the garden on the far side of the house and maybe behind the shed, so they could run around.

Matthew comes up to me with a grin. He seemed bored. He starts picking up the hammer and banging the plastic top of the cage, making the screws jump around just to annoy me.

"Oi stop it" I say. He grins like a schoolboy and keeps doing it. "Dude! Don't be so annoying!"

"Don't call me dude! You know I don't like that" he frowns.

He keeps banging the hammer down. "Are you drunk?" I ask him. He freezes, the hammer still in mid-air and he looks at me with a strange expression. Sort of sad, hurt and confused, all rolled into one. He places the hammer back down on the roof of the aviary and walks off back to the house. I felt really bad, I wasn't sure what I did wrong but I didn't like the expression on his face.

After half an hour, I'd finished the changes on the aviary and walk back into the house where Matthew was sculling another drink. The bottle was almost empty! He didn't meet eye contact with me as he finished the remainder of the bottle, I went into the kitchen and hug him from behind but he wasn't very responsive.

"What's the matter? What did I say wrong?" I ask.

He didn't say anything for a few seconds. "I'm not drunk!" he snaps angrily, returning the bottle back to the counter upon emptying it into his beer glass. He lifts up the orange juice to the left and mixes it up.

"Well sorry! I was just asking!"

"My whole family are drunks but I'm not and it hurts when you say that!" he turns to look towards me, my arms still around his waist. "I might have a drink from time to time but I never get drunk and I sure am not now. Maybe tipsy but that's about it" he says.

I felt really bad. I didn't mean to make him so upset. "I'm sorry!"

He nods but the hurt and damage had already taken place. He picks up his drink and walks outside. I stay in the kitchen, munching my way through last night's leftovers. The girls run through the house and towards the backyard, yelling and shrieking "chasey chasey!" Mikayla runs after Samantha, forgetting to shut the sliding door behind her.

Matthew jumps up angrily, knocking the white plastic chair he was sitting on, to the ground. "MIKAYLA! Close that door right now. I don't want any mosquitoes in the house, you know I'm allergic to them" he growls. Mikayla stops in her tracks in shock or from being scared, it was hard to tell. "Both of you get back in the house NOW! Back into your room".

"But we just want to play outside" Samantha said in a small voice, her pretty face marked with tired lines under her eyes. "You never play with us daddy!"

Matthew jerks open the sliding door so they can go back into the house. "I don't have time. I've had a hard day. Go back to your room and if you've got nothing to do, go do your homework!"

"Can you help us" Mikayla asks meekly.

"NO . . . it's your work. Stop being so lazy and do it yourself. How are you going to learn if you get other people to do your homework?"

"But daaad!" Mikayla says. Matthew throws the cigarette to the ground and grabs her by the scruff of the neck before throwing her into the house and closing the sliding door behind.

She trips over the skirting off the sliding door, banging her knee and she starts crying. I step out from the kitchen counter and notice a bit of blood on her kneecap, she looks up at me expectantly for a hug.

Grandma jumps up from the living room couch. "You heard your father! Get in your room before you start causing any more trouble" she yells at Mikayla, who stops crying and bolts for her room. "Those girls are nothing but trouble" she mutters to herself. She continues muttering something so I went into the bedroom for a nap.

## Chapter Four

Matthew sits in the shed, smoking his joint, looking very stressed. "Are you okay?" I ask. He doesn't say anything and then nods after a few seconds. "You don't look okay".

"Just stressed".

"Why's that?" I ask.

He shrugs again and then moves his head back before looking at me. "Just Christmas coming up and I don't know if I have enough money to buy the kids' presents this year" he says wryly. He spent an average \$80 on pot a week, that's a great way to start saving, I thought to myself.

"I could get a job" I offer.

He looks up at me. "Is there work coming up at the recruitment agency?"

I nod. "There's always work. I just needed a break because of my exams".

"Can you get me work?"

"Yeah probably but I thought you didn't want to work. You told my Uncle that your ex had three years off work and now it was your turn to laze around".

Matthew shrugs before sitting up. "Yeah I know but hey, got to be a good role model for the kids. Plus that money under the bed isn't going to last forever". Matthew kept a backpack full of money under the bed because he didn't want Centrelink to know about it and stop his parenting payment.

"What about asking your ex for some money. Isn't she supposed to pay child maintenance?"

"Yeah but I don't want to cause any more trouble with her, plus she pays for the car and I get to drive it around most of the time. It's salary sacrifice and comes straight out of her pay, I get unlimited fuel so you know . . . she'll account for that. Plus, she takes the blame for my speeding fines".

"How did you guys meet anyways?"

He grins, "You really want to know?"

"Yeah" I smile"

"Well, you know how I used to work in a mental hospital down in Tassie . . ." I nod. "She was actually a patient at the hospital".

"You're kidding!"

"Nope. She was a really messed up bitch back then. Still is but she was on drugs and trying to kill herself. There was one time . . ." he grins slyly. "I had to restrain her, I was on my own and I had to tie her on the gurney . . . you know the hospital bed" I nod. "Well I did that and then I kinda took it upon myself to have a bit of fun with her, you know. Well, we kinda did the deed, she was resisting at first but then she liked it in the end and we ended up hooking up".

"After she got released?"

"Yeah, we didn't want to get caught you know. Then she fell pregnant with our first child".

"Did you ever love her?"

"Nah, not really but we had a kid together so we thought we'd make the most of it. Then we ended up with another. We kinda lived on and off for a while before I filed for divorce this year. She's a mental train wreck but hey, she was a bit of fun on the side and she gave me two beautiful girls!"

"What about Geoff?" I ask.

"What about him?"

"Well . . . she reckons he's your boyfriend" I grin.

He scowls for a few seconds. "Who the fuck told you that?"

I stop smiling. "She did!"

"She had no fucken right to say that. It's bullshit"

"So he's not?"

"Of course not. I'm not a fag. Why, do I look like one?" he asks.

I try to hide my smirk. A couple of mates on Facebook had said he looked like one when I first posted his photo on my status. I tried to suppress a laugh. He watches me before throwing himself onto me and attempting to restrain me. "I'm not gay" he laughs. "I've got two kids! I've always been able to get any girl I want. I'm telling you, I go down to the pub and I always have a couple of hot chicks wanting me every time!"

He stands up and goes over to a bucket to smoke some marijuana, coming back and kissing me with a mouthful of smoke. He laughs and sits back, playing with his finger. "See this?" he shows me a pale scar on one of his fingers. "You know what happened here?" he asks me. I shook my head no. "Well, when I was a kid, me and a mate found this Tasmanian Devil up a tree, so we started throwing rocks and sticks at it. You know, out of boredom, nothing else to do in Tassie. Then this thing just jumps out of the tree

and I'm like . . . four feet away. I step back but it manages to jump onto me and bites my finger".

I wince. "Did it hurt?"

He nods. "Oh hell yeah" looking up at me and then his finger again. "I managed to shake him off, he was really heavy. We had a trap set up to catch it the previous day, a dead chicken and it ate the whole thing straight! Gobbled it up and all, so it took a lot to shake the bastard off. I ended up running home to mum because I was bleeding everywhere" his face starts to look pale at the thought of the memory. "I remember that day so well. I lost about four litres of blood and almost died" he says, looking back at me.

I had no idea if four litres of blood was a lot, so I nodded in sympathy before giving him a cuddle.

## Chapter Five

I grab my lunch and left the house to start going to work. Matthew was pottering in the front garden. "Do you want me to take the kids to school today?" I ask.

"No, I can do it" he says, without looking up at me. I pause and then head off to my car and drive off. I was working in a screw factory today and as far as shit jobs go, it had to be the worst job I've ever done. The minute I started work there, my back was caining. I think it had to do with our queen sized bed that was really dodgy. I know it always threw Matthew's shoulder out, an ex-sporting injury made worse every night. I was working with two little Vietnamese women who were also really hard to get on well with. They didn't speak much English and when they did, it was usually to pick on something I'd done wrong, despite each telling me to do things differently!

I'd worked with a shit load of Vietnamese people before, blokes especially but these women quickly gave me the shits. I yearned to plug in Offspring on the Iphone and just let it blare. It could always take me away from reality and help me feel better. Thankfully the shift was only eight hours but that was bad enough as it was! The job was placing screws into 250, 500 and 1000 holes in trays so the heads could be sandblasted and painted either one of 20 colours.

I'd had some pretty bad jobs but this definitely ranked the highest on the list. One of the women had been here the longest - some 10 years, I couldn't understand how she still managed to rock up with a smile on her face. This place would deaden my mind and my soul. I know Asians are one of the best workers and they work their arse out anywhere but it was mentally exhausting here. The only good thing about this place was being able to daydream. I yearned to be in Matthew's arms right now. I was tempted to go home sick but I know we needed the money and I wanted to be able to give him \$200 this weekend. I figured that would make him feel better!

He didn't bother signing up at the recruitment agency like he said he would, so I figured he was happier in his own little world, doing his own thing and just relaxing. He had a lot of issues to deal with right now so I guess it was the only time he could sort himself out. The good thing about The Shed was that his grandmother never went down there, so we pretty much had the place to ourselves. I don't even think the grandmother was capable of being able to see the path all the way down and she'd probably trip up but it didn't stop her from yelling "Matthew!" every now and then when she wanted something or there was a phone call. Her voice was so annoying, her calling out his name was hard to block out of my head! Even his daughters didn't dare venture down the garden path!

When I went home, the two girls was eating with Matthew and his grandma at the table, so I went to my room and ate a can of baked beans that I'd bought for lunch the next day. Matthew hadn't even looked me in the eye as my favourite girl Mikayla said

"g'day" with a big smile, as she ate her sixth rib, or so I heard her say out loud. I had a shower and then went straight to bed.

Matthew didn't end up coming to my bed tonight, which was not unusual when he didn't sleep but he ended up falling asleep in Mikayla's top bunk. She ended up coming into my room, which was stifling hot without the fan, which had been taken out of the room for some reason. "Dad's snoring" she says. "Can I sleep with you tonight?"

"Yeah sure" I say, honoured. I loved cuddling up to her. I had a special relationship with her. She had a lot of behavioural issues that reminded me of myself when I was her age. We'd always have our daily talks, just the two of us and pinkie promised that we loved each other. I didn't think her dad spent enough time with her and her mum had said a few times that Samantha was her favourite one. Right in front of Mikayla! Samantha was a really pretty kid but Mikayla had something of her own. She was smart and good with languages. Very intelligent but perhaps had some kind of undiagnosed ADHD or dyslexia. We stay up and talk for about an hour and then fall asleep, holding each other's hands.

She had been worried about getting into trouble with her dad for being in my bed so she said she was going to tell dad that I'd popped my head into her room, saw she was awake and then that I'd said she could come and sleep in my bed.

It had been almost a week since Matthew had come into our bed to sleep, I really missed his presence. Sometimes he snored so loud, I had to bop him with a pillow but he was definitely nowhere as bad as his grandma, who sounded like an old steam train. Apparently Samantha snored a bit too but Mikayla was the quietest of them all.

The next morning, I heard both girls being collected by their mother.

"If you want, you can sleep in my bed again tonight" Mikayla told Matthew, as they left the house.

"Mmm things will be all right" I heard him say. I had no idea what that was about and I feared that I had done something wrong that I didn't know about. Matthew always told me we had to talk things out if we ever had a problem because he was ever so devoted to making things work out between us. Or so he said! But it was hard to get him to talk himself, he obviously had so many secrets and locked up his feelings so I guess the rules didn't apply to him. It was a guessing game, I had to guess how he was feeling to be even allowed into his thoughts but maybe it had to do with a trust issue or something that would take time. Mind you, he was the first person I'd been able to trust since I was 10 years old!

I went to work and did an eight hour shift. When I returned home, Matthew said grudgingly "we need to talk!" This didn't sound good. Something was definitely on his

mind but I had no idea what. I tried to think back to what I'd said or done but nothing was clear. He built the inflatable pool in the backyard, something he'd been pushing off for the past 2 or 3 months whilst I cooked up a mean spaghetti bolognese, with beautiful garlic and sundried tomato sauce. He didn't want to eat any, which I was hoping he would because he had irregular eating phases. Sometimes he ate heaps, then nothing for days. No wonder he kept his athletic figure, despite not having done any exercise or sport for months!

I watch TV for most of the evening, just for the sake of wanting to be made available to Matthew in case he wanted to talk. Truth was, I was dying to go to bed. He came for about an hour and sat on the far side of the couch as we flick through the channels, barely talking. I really had no idea what this was about but the silence was deafening! He hugged his right leg to his chest like a child. He was so beautiful to look at, I hoped we would last forever!

After a while, he left the lounge room and it looked like he went to bed. The lights in the house and the kitchen were turned off. So much for staying awake for him to talk! I went to bed but he wasn't there, so I assumed he was sleeping on the top bunk again.

The next morning, he'd told me he fell asleep in The Shed. Perhaps he was hoping I'd come down and talk to him but he was starting to dislike the idea of me spending so much time down there in HIS space and would drop subtle comments. It was the only place he could get away in peace, something he was used to doing for the past three years and we'd only been separate for one full 24 hours in two months! Perhaps it was getting on his nerves a bit but he didn't have the guts to talk it out. Men were funny creatures!

I made myself a protein shake as he made his morning coffee in a giant mug that would have held at least a litre! He never drank it all but liked to fill it up anyways. "Come down to the shed when you're done" he smiles. "We need to talk".

I nod, nerves chewing at my stomach in worry. I really had no idea what this was about. I follow him after consuming my protein and washing out the container. He was sitting on the far side of the lounge again, so I kept my distance, not sure why there was an invisible brick wall between us. He lit up another joint.

"I need some space for a bit" he says. I nod. "Why don't you just go for a bit".

"Go where?" I ask.

"Go to a friend's place or something".

"I don't have anywhere else to go".

"What about a room in the city. Or there's a tent up there you can borrow" he says, pointing to on top of one of the wooden shelves.

"What's this about? What have I done wrong?"

He shook his head. "Nah you haven't done anything wrong. I just need some time. I've got a lot of things on my plate right now".

"But I'm here to help you".

"It's just everything" he snaps.

"Like what?"

"Well this last week, the kids are really rattled all week at school because they're not used to you being here. They've been a bit upset and they just need some time to get used to it all" he says. That didn't seem right, they were pretty much used to me after the past two months and he said I did more for them than their mother!

Their Aunty was coming to Perth this arvo from Queensland with her two daughters about their age so they were really excited to see them. But their mother had them for the next week and she was refusing them to see their cousins or even pull them out of school for two days like Matthew was demanding. That was enough to play on their minds and rattle the hell out of them during the week! In addition to their great-grandmother talking senile crap the whole time and their father having conflicting arguments with their mother, I didn't think it was fair to blame me for the issue. But I realised with me gone for a bit, Matthew's sister had a bed. With me here, it would have been difficult and if I'd stayed in the shed, he'd never get any peace and quiet, even if it was only for a week.

"Plus the cats need to go".

"Why?" I ask in shock. He was finally spilling the beans about what was bugging him but I didn't think it was fair he did it all at once without offering better solutions.

"Because they're making me sick!"

"You don't even go near them!"

"And there's a heap of cat hair in the car and I've had enough!" he grumbles bitterly. It didn't make sense. I didn't even use the same car as him and really didn't believe there was actually any cat hair making its way into the car. Mikayla occasionally had a bit on the front of her school shirt when she fed the cats but I always wiped them clear and if they were in the car, it wouldn't be where Matthew was sitting because he never sits in the back of the car!

"Plus, what happened the other day?" he asks angrily about Mikayla falling off her bike after I picked her up from school.

"You know what happened!"

"Yeah but I want to hear from you about it. I'm getting a lot of crap from Sandra!"

"She fell off the bike and I comforted her".

"WHY didn't you pick her up" he asks angrily, looking up at me.

"Because I didn't know if she had broken anything. You can't just go up to her and pick her up without knowing what injuries she had! I gave her a hug in the end, got her up and we walked back home" I say. He still didn't seem happy with that and appeared persistent in finding some kind of fault in my actions.

"You don't even like Mikayla do you? You seem to favour Samantha! "I start treatment next week anyways".

"For your liver?" I ask.

He nods. "I could end up really sick, I don't know how it's going to go. I don't even think I'm going to be allowed to drink on Christmas" he says, looking extremely disappointed and sorry for himself. He'd also been saving a handful of dexamphetamine for New Year's Eve, which could now put his liver at jeopardy.

"I really need to sort this issue out with my grandmother" he says. "I desperately want to get her out of the house, then things will be okay. A lot easier, because right now, you know how much shit she causes. And it won't be long before I get divorced, that will be even better. I just need to sort these things out".

"But I don't have anywhere to go" I say. He shrugs. "All I've got is my car. So you're saying I have to live in my car for the next three months until you sort things out?"

"I'm not saying you have to live in your car!"

"Well, where else am I supposed to go?"

He begins to get irritated. "I don't know. I'm sure you can find a cheap room in the city for the meantime". He stands up and walks out of the shed.

I pack up my car, which I was still very lucky to have. He'd advertised it in the West Australian and Quokka, hoping I could sell it pretty quickly so I'd be debt free for next year when we started saving for a deposit for our house. I didn't want to imagine what it would be like if I didn't have it, I'd definitely be on the streets with as much as I could carry. I shuddered to think about that, as I packed what I could into my car and my BMX into the back seat, driving off without saying goodbye. I felt so hurt, saying goodbye seemed pointless, he was keen on seeing the back of me. I had no idea what the real reasons were for this. I'd officially moved in three weeks ago despite living with him for two months. If he'd known this was going to happen, why did he get me to move in with him?

## Chapter Six

"Well . . . it's no surprise!" my uncle starts, leaning against two fists on the granite kitchen top. "He's a loose cannon!"

"But you were keen on playing golf with him!"

Uncle shrugs. "So what . . . I can play golf with anyone. I just think he's a bit dodgy, especially to kick you out like that" he pauses, looking outside the view of the city from where he stands. "It could be the drugs. It could be his mental condition. I really think you had a lucky escape on this one".

"But I still love him".

Uncle chuckles sarcastically. "It's your first love! What would you know about relationships?"

"I really think he's my soul mate".

"The guy's a fake! Everything about him isn't real. I see guys like him every day who end up in the gutter. How do you even know anything he said was true?"

"Like what?"

"Well, him working in a mental hospital for starters. Have you ever seen any proof of that?"

I shrug. "No . . . well why would he lie?"

"Have you thought that perhaps he could have actually been a patient? It's that grandiose display fraudsters have, you know . . . they big note themselves. With what you've said about this guy, I really don't think he would have been working as a nurse! Sounds like he's got a few screws loose and a shit load of medication to take" he laughs. "You said it yourself, his ex was a patient there and that's how they met. Do you really think if he tied her to the bed and had sex with her, he'd kept his job after they met?"

The door opens, Uncle's partner comes in all hot and bothered. Simon's roughly his age, slightly balding around the front of his head, which currently had the colour of a tomato. Uncle walks over to him and they embrace, as I look away.

"Come on love, there's nothing wrong with that" Uncle grins at me. "We're just talking about her fella right now" he tells Simon. "Think we should bend him in half and have some fun with him" he laughs.

Simon grins. "Now there's a bit of an idea. Nothing like a bit of fresh meat" he laughs. "What's he gone and done now?" he says, walking over to the kitchen tap to fill up a nearby glass.

"He's kicked her out for no apparent reason. Knew he was trouble!"

"Jeeze, never got to meet the bloke either!"

"How do you know he ever owned a house like you said. What was it, two houses and a block of land? With a bag of cash under the bed? He's either soliciting himself or he's done a bank job" Uncle says.

"Or fraud!" Simon adds.

"Well yes, it's definitely in his nature. When you brought him over here the other day for lunch, something didn't seem quite right. See, I pick these things up really well. I may only be in business but I know when something doesn't add up right. I think he's been using you from the start go. He's 45 years old, he's got no career, no house . . . nothing. What do you expect from someone like that? And don't say love!" Uncle says. I shrug. "Someone like you, you're beautiful, you can do so much better than going for some druggie you find on the street. Go for someone who has a house, a career, a degree and no kids. You don't want any baggage. You might love the kids but look at the life they have. Both parents use drugs, alcohol, still have serious mental illnesses . . . what hope have the kids got now?"

"I love those kids so much" I say.

"I know you do. And you'd make a fantastic mother but the truth is, you don't want to get involved in that kind of thing. It's like domestic violence, it goes in cycles and so does he. He uses drugs, comes down, is nice and then he's back to fucking up his life again. What's he going to be like in 10 years' time? I'll tell you . . . exactly the same! And as for having liver problems, I knew a guy who dropped dead of Hep C and that could happen to him. It's best that you love him and leave him before he attracts anymore trouble!"

"He's right love" Simon adds. "Now can we go and get some dinner? I haven't eaten in two hours!" he says, patting his bulging stomach.

## Chapter Seven

I'd sent Matthew a short letter yesterday:

"I just want to know what's going on. I feel like you've used me, maybe your ex was right, I don't know what to think. I still love you so much and really think you're the one. Please talk to me".

I could imagine him receiving it today. I heard my phone go off in Uncle's office. I head over to it, it's recharging again. I hate how it always goes flat so fast, the battery doesn't even last a day now! Someone had sent me a text message from an unknown number.

"I've been asked to text you, that you must pick up your stuff on Saturday 10.12.2011 at 10 am and be finished by 2 pm. You can hire a truck and put your stuff in a storage unit if you have nowhere to put it. Everything must be gone by the set time, even your cats. As we are nearly out of food. If unable to adhere, the cat will be given to the RSPCA and your belongings to charity. Matthew will not be here, due to treatment, all correspondence to myself" the message says. I had no idea who it was from but it couldn't have been from the grandmother, as she was almost as blind as a bat. I guessed it was from one of his sisters.

So I guessed the relationship was over. I had no idea what it was about. I guessed Sandra was right, he was only out to use me and that was the end of it. Part of me felt relieved, Uncle was right about him. He sure knew how to read people, I still had a lot to learn.

I left Uncle's and headed over to the Street Doctor, which was a service run in the city for the homeless and anyone out and about at night. There wasn't many people there so I was the second on the list for the night. I'd been going there for as long as I could remember. The nurse was awesome and the doctor was hot!

"Hi Hayley" Doc says. "What can I do for you today?"

"Can I get a pregnancy test?"

"I thought you were a virgin" he smirks. I laugh and didn't say anything as he passes me a cup. "We'd better do a STD test too in that case".

"Do we have to?" I ask, totally afraid of needles. I regularly went to the Red Cross Blood Service to donate plasma just to try and get over the fear of needles but so far it hadn't helped.

"Yep, you never know what you might have caught".

"Well I know he has Hep C, do you think I might have caught that?"

The Doc shrugs. "Hep C is really hard to get through sex unless he bleeds. Most people get it through intravenous methods like using needles but we'd better make sure".

The nurse gets off the phone to her son. "Hayley, so you've got a boyfriend!" she smiles. "Great news!"

"Well I did. He broke up with me after two months. Bang! Didn't even tell me why!"

"Oh, well that's not good, is it. What happened?" she asks. I told her what happened and what he was like. Her face went pale. "Oh dear God, I'm glad you're not with him anymore. He sounds like a real monster. You don't want to get involved with those kind of people you know. We see a lot of them around here and you don't want to get intimate with people like that. You should know better!"

"But I love him so much".

"Honey, I'm sure you do but love isn't going to get you anywhere if he's mentally unstable and using drugs. Look at his family background. Do you think you could be pregnant?"

"Well I missed my first period".

"Well that can happen if you get stressed out. This is stressful enough to cause that".

"But I've been way more stressed before and never missed it".

"Well I don't know. I tell you what, go to the toilet up the road and then come back and we can test it then. It might still be a bit too early to tell. You might have to wait a few more weeks before we can definitely give you an answer but I'd say you probably wouldn't be. It can take YEARS to get pregnant you know?"

"Yeah but some people CAN get pregnant after one time!" the Doc adds, shrugging.

I went and did the urine test which came out negative. "Come back in a few weeks and we'll try again because it could still be too early to tell. And don't even think about this guy! He's not worth your time and effort young lady. You can do better than that, you're at uni doing two degrees and he hasn't even got a career or a job and he's 20 years older than you!" Nurse says.

"He's a predator" Doc grinned. "You gotta be wary of people like him!"

Nurse laughs. "Like a toolie!"

Doc breaks out into a smile, throwing some paperwork onto the counter behind him. "Ha ha yeah that sounds a bit right . . . toolie!" he laughs, facing back to the computer.

## Chapter Eight

Sandra is sitting at the small table on the front veranda, sculling straight from a bottle of Jack Daniels. Her eyes are bloodshot and it looked like she's been bawling her eyes out. She places the bottle back down on the table and lights up a fresh cigarette lying loose on the table.

"Where's Matthew?" I ask, walking down the driveway. All my possessions were now in the garage. I was sure there'd be some things he'd forgotten to give me back but there was nothing I could do about it.

"He's gone out. He's not here" Sandra says, frowning as she struggles to light the cigarette. She blinks her eyes like there's something bugging her and then stands up, wobbly at first. "There's all your stuff. Matthew's been nice enough to put everything into the garage so just grab it and go".

"You were right, he was using me" I say.

She smirks sourly. "I was drunk when I said that" she says. I felt like telling her she was always drunk. She takes a step forward and is so wobbly, she decides she's much safer sitting down. I can smell gunja, her eyes are already half stoned as she closes them to enjoy the smoke infiltrating her body.

Beeping sounds fill the air as Uncle backs the hire truck into the driveway. I wave him back and then get him to stop. "Righto, let's get in and get out" Uncle says, getting out of the truck. Simon jumps out of the other side.

"You guys wouldn't be pooftas, would you?" Sandra asks, from where she was sitting.

"Now why the fuck would you say something like that?" Simon asks. "We're brothers, you think we run around doing incest or something?"

Sandra shrugs and looks at the garden in front of her. Simon says something quietly to Uncle and they both laugh. Sandra looks uncomfortable and manages to make her way back into the house. Simon laughs again. "She's maggoted" he says. "Reckon if we hit her on the head with her flagon, she'd even notice?" they laugh. "She looks pretty cosy here, reckon she's going to go back to him?" he asks Uncle.

"It wouldn't surprise me. Think it's good you're getting out now Hayley!" Uncle says. "Okay, let's make a move!"

We manage to get everything into the truck in record time! The cats were in the cage next to the garage, I moved them last because they would only get in the way.

Sandra and Grandma come out of the house and sit down at the table, continuing their conversation. "So when he gets back, are you going to take the kids home?"

Sandra nods. "Yep, then I might drive them out to the hills and see my mum" she says. Grandma picks up the bottle that Sandra had been drinking from and started sampling it. Sandra sits up and grabs the bottle before Grandma could swallow much. "Get your own bottle, that's mine!"

Grandma looks at her with squinty blue eyes and then frowns with an edge of a temper. "You just came into my house and drank the last of my four cans of vodka and now you're not sharing!" she splutters. "How dare you! How DARE you!" the grandma stands up, scraping the metal chair loudly on the veranda. I look at Simon and Uncle, watching on comically from behind the truck. Simon was grinning, enjoying the free entertainment.

Grandma starts walking back towards the front door of the house. "You can go now Sandra, you can GO!"

"Oh wait on. Get a shot glass and I'll give you some!"

"A shot glass!" Grandma freezes in her steps and looks back. "I want more than a god damn shot glass. I need another drink before he comes back in one of his tempers. He's already smashed two windows today!" she returns back to the house and Sandra attempts to follow her.

"Let's get the hell out of here" Uncle quietly says to both Simon and I. "I can't believe you were even living here" he says. Uncle walks over to the table where they had been sitting and peers into the cigarette packet. He prods around with an index finger and then pulls out a small bag of white powder. "Ah ha" he grins. He walks over to the fence separating Matthew's neighbour and throws it over the fence, laughing. Simon starts chuckling and bolts to the passenger side of the house before the two women realised their drugs had been stolen! I jump into the back of the cab also laughing. I think I was definitely glad to be gone from Matthew. Things happen for a reason and this was surely one of them. I felt sorry for the kids but what could you do? It proved anyone could have kids these days!

\* TBC