In Daddy's Arms

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Summary

AU: A story of faith, family and friends; where life begins and love never ends.

All angst is mostly of their own making this time....

Notes

For Sarah on A03.
As If...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aaron, September 2016

It’s strange with Liv gone, peaceful and I can’t deny I’m enjoying getting to the end of a day without feeling like I just got off a roller-coaster. I think if she’d stayed much longer Robert would have seriously started to consider some of the more drastic measures he’d been joking about. I know how much effort it took for him to keep trying to be nice and have her throw it back in his face most of the time and I love him for not giving up on us.

We’d actually made a lot of progress with her but in the end it was Liv’s choice to go back to Sandra, she missed her mum more than she let on and she just couldn’t help being jealous of Robert. I’d made it clear that I love her and I will never choose between them; we’ve battled too long and hard to get where we are and I won’t let Robert go, not even for Liv. So we’ve come to a compromise that she stays in Dublin with Sandra during term time, we’ll skype every week and she can come here for the holidays or sometimes we will go visit them in Dublin.

I’m still trying to work out if the tear in Robert’s eye as she went through the gate at the airport was one of sheer joy or that he’ll actually miss her, probably a mix of both, though he’ll never admit to it. They did get on after a fashion; it was just never easy and sometimes it was difficult to tell who was worse half the time.

We’ve been living together properly since the end of August. Robert bought Edna’s old place and after some quick painting to neutralise all the flowery wallpaper and a new kitchen we moved in. Mum has been constantly warning me that it’s too soon because she still doesn’t quite trust him yet, but I’m tired of being dragged down by the past. What’s important is that I trust Robert, sometimes more than I trust myself. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for him keeping me sane through everything; it’s our time now and all I want is to enjoy being together without anyone interfering.

One clear benefit since being on our own is not having to rush round like a blue arsed fly of a morning and we’ve definitely been making the most of the extra time in bed; the down side is we can’t seem to drag ourselves away from each other and are nearly always late leaving for work. We don’t have a choice this morning, I have a collection job up in the dales with Adam where we have to be there for a set time and Robert has some meetings in Leeds for some new project he’s working on. Unsurprisingly despite our best efforts we’re running late and I spy Adam already waiting outside the pub, chatting with mum and Cain. However, having finally made it out of the door I’m finding it difficult to focus on locking up, distracted by Robert’s arms sliding round my waist as he kisses into my neck, “Have a nice day pumpkin.”

I dart a look over at Adam to check they’re not watching before glancing back at Robert giving him my unamused face, “Pumpkin?”

He smiles at me, as if butter wouldn’t melt, “Honey?”

My expression doesn’t improve any with this one either, “Really….., Honey?” According to Vic and Nessa when we were in the pub the other night, every couple has pet names for each other but we don’t, so since then Robert has been trying a few out much to my annoyance; he’s definitely doing it
on purpose, his weird idea of fun.

He whispers into my ear, “Lover.” I love it when he calls me this and he knows it. Robert’s hands start wandering down, his fingers prising down the inside my jeans and I have to push them away, thinking on all the comments I’m going to get if the others catch us.

“Behave, go to work you.” Robert smiles at me mischievously as I start to walk up the path and pulls me back to him, kissing my neck and ear, biting gently. I just melt into him, I can’t help it; he gets his way with me every time when he does this and it wouldn’t matter who is watching on. He whispers into my ear, “Whilst you’re lugging all the stuff around with Barton boy, just think of me when you get home tonight and what my mouth is going to do to you.”

I blush as I feel the shifting of my dick getting hard already, “Oh god, ger’off will you.” I make another feeble attempt to push Robert away, but it was never going to work whilst I feel the force of him pressing me up against the door, his body rubbing mine and our mouths crushing together in a passionate frenzy of kissing; god he makes me so turned on when he’s like this. In the end it’s Leyla giving us a wolf whistle as she passes that pulls us out of the moment and we finally manage to make it up the path and out of the gate.

“You love it Livesy.” We throw each other a cheeky grin as I watch him get into the car and drive off before I walk up to the others. Unsurprisingly I get a boatload of sarcastic comments making me smile, all embarrassed but secretly I know Robert is right, I do love it. I love Robert and there’s no doubt any more for anyone that he loves me, it’s written all over his face every time we’re together and even mum has accepted it. I’m not really into PDA, but with Robert it’s not optional and since we’ve been together officially he can’t help himself, always touching or looking at me, keeping it small so I don’t get too self-conscious. Even though he knows I’m not touchy feely like he is, I’ve got used to it; I love how it makes me feel and I’d miss it now if he stopped.

It’s been a long day when we get back and I’m knackered as I go into the pub. It’s not long before I see Vic come in, she must have got fed up already listening to Adam witter on about his toothache; he’d been doing my head in with it all day. As she comes over to sit with me it looks like she’s grown again, her seven month bump getting bigger by the day. “Robert not back yet?”

I look at the clock, “No, he’ll be a little while longer; he wasn’t expecting to be home until around eight.”

“Aaron.....”

I look at her curiously, this sounds suspiciously like she wants something. “Victoria.”

She smiles at me knowingly, “Will you come with me to the antenatal class tomorrow? It’s the first one and I don’t want to go on my own. Adam’s appointment with the dentist is at the same time, it’s the only appointment they had left and you know he doesn’t handle pain well so he can’t miss it. There’s no way I’m asking Robert, anything to do with babies and he runs a mile; apparently a room full of expectant mothers is not his thing.”

I know she’s right about Robert, he does seem to have an aversion to small people, “Oh and you think it’s mine?”

“Please......, pretty please?”

There goes the pouty smile that she has and I shake my head at my own weakness, “What about
Diane or mum....., take mum?” Vic starts batting her eyelids and unable to resist her infectious charm I cave, “Oh go-on then, not like I’m ever gonna know what it’s like for real. What time?”

Vic claps her hands happily, “Yay, ten o’clock in Hotten; it’ll be fun.”

“Mmmh, we’ll see; I think your idea of fun is as peculiar as your brother’s. I’ll come get you at quarter past nine okay.”

“Perfect.” We get distracted by Robert coming in, he looks tired, but his face lights up at seeing us. I still can’t get used to him kissing me in public but I miss him too much when we don’t get too see each other all day. I clock the look I get from Vic who finds it all very romantic.

Aaron, September - Vic’s Ante Natal Class

I am pretty much dragged into the clinic by Vic who is buzzing; she is so loving the whole motherhood experience. She has had this glow about her ever since she found out that she’s having a little girl and Adam is just as bad; he’s made up that he’s going to be a dad for real. I’m truly happy for them; I’m just a little less happy however at being here in his place. I don’t know why he couldn’t take a paracetamol and go to the dentist tomorrow instead.

The midwife, or whatever she is, has been doing the introductions and is smiling at me, “Don’t look so nervous dear, fatherhood will be a wonderfully amazing experience.”

Vic is already laughing at me as I splutter a response, “Oh no....., I’m not the father.”

“Not to worry, you’ll bond just the same.” She’s moved on to the next couple before I get chance to correct her and an amused Vic pushes my chin up to close my mouth. She gets a death stare from me, but just ignores it and carries on giggling.

These two hours are some of the weirdest of my life. I didn’t want to be here, I don’t want to be here, yet oddly I find myself feeling increasingly connected to Vic and her unborn daughter. For part of the class we are all sitting on the floor, Vic is resting back in my arms and our legs stretched out in front of us whilst we listen to them explain about breathing and relaxation techniques which we then get to practice. A surge of emotion flows through me and I feel really protective of both of them and I squeeze Vic’s hands seeing her so happy preparing to be a mum for the first time. I sense that she feels it too and as we get up she squeezes my hand back, “Fatherhood suits you Aaron.”

I feel all embarrassed at this, “Yeah right, I’m just the stand in for the day; as if I’m ever going to be someone's dad.”

“Why not, you could if you wanted.”

After the class is over, I have to wait whilst Vic swaps numbers with some of the others that she had got chatting to; walking out to the car she links her arm through mine, “What would you like if you do have kids?”

I shrug my shoulders, “Wouldn’t care as long as it's healthy; I’ve never really thought about it.”

Aaron, Beginning October 2016

Adam had been quite jealous of me after hearing all about the first antenatal class, he’s not missed
one since and now I find that I’m the one feeling a tad jealous when he tells me about them. He says he’s nervous but I know he’ll be fine, Adam is a natural with babies and all that; you could see that from how he was with Johnny. Both Vic and Adam have started teasing me this last week after deciding I’ve been acting all broody which I haven’t, but Robert found it hilarious when he heard them winding me up in the pub.

Vic is just on her way out when Robert comes home, she’d been helping me bring over some stuff we need for the house that they had going spare. He finds us sat on the chair arm, Vic perching on my knee and my hands feeling the bump kicking away. It’s not that Robert isn’t interested in Vic becoming a mother; he just doesn’t go all gooey over it like the rest of us. Vic asks Robert if he wants a touch but he declines and she’s not long before heading off home. Robert follows me upstairs where we get changed out of our works clothes, “You still have that look?”

“What look?”

“You must have felt her kick loads; thought the novelty would have worn off by now?”

I shrug, “I know; this was just different, more intimate.”

Robert looks at me oddly because that’s not a word I would normally use for when I’m with his sister. He has a twinkle in his eye when he teases me as we get into the shower, “I know she was your first and all that, Adam and me don’t need to be worried about you and Vic do we?”

I smirk at him, knowing that he’s joking, “No, don’t be daft. It special when it’s family that’s all; we should make the most of it, we won’t ever have that ourselves will we.”

I’d been sorting out all the crap in my coat pockets and come across the leaflets that I been given at the antenatal class with Vic; I’d just stuffed them in my pocket at the time and then forgotten they were there. I lie down on the sofa and have a read; it’s fascinating how mother-nature works. Being with Vic that day had got me thinking what it would be like to have kids of our own; we could find some way or another or we could decide to adopt. I’m not sure what Robert would say and anyway it’s way too early to be thinking about kids; we are happy, busy enjoying just being the two of us with no complications, but one day, maybe.

I’m must have dozed off waiting for Robert to come home and I only wake up as he shakes my shoulder gently, He picks up the leaflets which are resting on my tummy, “Are you still all broody?”

“No, as if. God you’re as bad as Vic and Adam almost.” I hear him laughing at me as I go into the kitchen; being my turn to make tea. Robert slides up behind me, making it difficult to move around as I start to chop some veg. “We’ve never really talked about children though have we; I don’t even know if you really like them or want any.”

He pulls away and puts the kettle on to start making a drink before jumping up to sit on the counter, “I thought we are just concentrating on us for now. You want to watch that new series that’s starting tonight? It looked quite good from the promo.”

I glance at him whilst pulling the pans out of the cupboard, “Don’t go changing the subject.”

“I’m not. I just don’t see the point talking about kids right now.”

“It’s important though, if we’re going to stay together for the rest of our lives; what if I do want kids one day? I don’t really mean that we have to have our own.....”
“Oh good.”

I ignore the sarcasm, “But we could adopt.”

“Maybe one day; look do you want to watch this thing or not? Because if you do, we need to get a shift on and make food before it starts or we’ll end up missing the plot.”

I prod him half joking, “Why are you so prickly every time someone mentions children to you?” He was like this the other day when Vic prodded him about it the same when we’d been round theirs for tea. Robert has done his fair share of bed-hopping over the years and that’s putting it nicely. I can’t help teasing him, “You don’t have a sprog already do you, some secret child you’ve forgotten to mention?”

This gets me a look I’ve not seen for quite a long time, defensive annoyed Robert, “No. He jumps down from the counter top all huffy, “Do you know what, I think I’ll go to the pub for some food; maybe I’ll get less nagging there.” He picks his coat up and is half out of the door before I can stop him.

His reaction has thrown me completely and remembering to switch off everything, I grab my coat and chase after him, “Rob....., wait up.” He’s almost at the pub steps when I catch him, “I was only winding you up; you didn’t need to get a strop on.”

It takes me a while but eventually he gets over his mood with me, I have to buy tea in the pub and a few pints before he finally relents and stops sulking. I don’t quite have the courage to ask him if he was telling the truth, now’s not the right time, but when he reacts like this, I can’t help wondering.

Our sex life was always amazing and our make-up sex is even better; back home and chilled out Robert is now more than making up for his sulky mood earlier, “God Rob don’t stop......, oh yeah oh yeah, just there, right there. Please Rob I want you inside me, I want you now, fuck me, please fuck me.”

He whispers mischievously into my ear, pinning me down onto the bed so I can hardly move as his mouth moves to my neck, “Are you sure you’re going to behave, no more stupid questions?”

“Whatever you want, please I need to feel you inside me.”

“Did you believe me?”

“About what? I......, oh crap; you're seriously asking that now?” He's looking at me for an answer, all the while driving me wild with his touch, ”The kids thing.....? Rob......, wow that feels amazing....., yes, yes I believe you.”

“You’d say anything right now, how do I know you’re telling me the truth?”

“I’m a rubbish liar you know that......, arrgghh god fuck me, christ that feels so good.” Robert’s fingers keep playing with my hole and I want more, I want to feel all of him.

“Mmmh alright then, but only cos it’s you,” He smiles at me, “I won’t stop until I’ve fucked ever drop of come out of you.”

“Yes please,” He bites my nipple, playing with it in-between his teeth and then flicking over it with his tongue, “I love it when you talk to me like that.”
“I know you do.” I can practically feel the smile on Robert’s face but my thoughts are already elsewhere as he turns me over and slides up into me. It isn’t long before he has me begging for him to stroke me but tonight he wants to be in charge and is holding my hands down, thrusting deep and hard.”

“Say please Aaron.”

“Please......, oh please Robert, I need to come, I need your hand or let me.” He hits my prostate and I cry out loudly, so loud he giggles as he puts his hand over my mouth to muffle the noise I’m making before the neighbours start banging on the wall. We move onto our sides and he pushes as deep as it’s possible to go, his left hand over my mouth and his right starts tugging on my dick which is close to exploding. I know he’s getting close, his breathing always changes just before and I can feel his upper body starting to tighten. I close my eyes, trying to pull him into me as deep as I can; I love how he makes me feel, our bodies moving together in perfect harmony as we make love. We come almost at the same time and I can feel Robert’s mouth biting into my neck to muffle his own sounds as the orgasm pushes him to the limit before it starts to subside and when it’s over we collapse into each other, a wave of quiet contentment washing over us as we hold each other tightly, quietly resting to get our breath back.

“I love you Robert Sugden.”

He rubs his nose against mine, “Say it again.”

I kiss him and give him a return nose rub, “I love you.” Still riding high from making love his mouth covers mine and we kiss, our tongues teasing until I rest my head into the crook of his neck, wrapping ourselves around each other in the hope that we might actually fall asleep. I have a feeling though tonight there will be at least a round two, maybe more.

We do manage to doze a little, but after a while I feel Robert’s hands start to roam; he tells me he loves me over and over, whispering it into my ear so I can feel the tingle of his breath. This time it’s me taking the lead, pushing him onto his back, working down his torso with my mouth until I reach his hard shaft; the sound that escapes his lips is intoxicating as I take him into my mouth. I always find it a huge turn on to have him squirming helplessly to the command of my tongue and hands, begging me for more as his dick pulses and throbs, aching for the final release. I make him wait, completely at my mercy until he can hardly bear it and then I push him over the edge. He feeds his come to me as my reward, all the while whimpering from the intensity, his fingers digging in so hard that they’ll leave bruises as he tries to channel the sensations.

I don’t need to give him any nudge of encouragement to return the pleasure; his mouth is soon wandering and seducing my entire body with his lips and hands. His eyes tease me in the darkness as he lets his wet tongue trail down my front, hovering over my twitching dick which is desperate to feel his deliciously wet mouth. I gasp and moan as he takes his time, his hands pressing my hips down so he is in control of my frantic thrusting and desire for more. When he finally brings me to climax, I cry out with pleasure, my senses reeling and he knows just how to hold me there; I’m almost out of my mind until I eventually give into it so completely that I zone out, pushing deep into his mouth forcing him to take every last drop.

When we are like this, children are the last thing on my mind; all I can think about is how much I love Robert and just how good he makes me feel. How little do we realise what seeds of love our union has sown.

TBC
Chapter End Notes

Aaron doesn’t change his name in this world: sorry I just don’t like Aaron Dingle, it’s either Livesy or Sugden for me.
Chapter Summary

October 2016 / Month 1 - Weeks 0-4: Aaron is starting to feel the effects of his changing body.

Aaron, Mid October 2016

All I want at the minute is for Robert to get a shift on and go to his dinner thingy. I bite my tongue willing the excruciating pain to go away as I listen to Robert getting all worked up and annoyed with me, “God Aaron, will you make your bloody mind up. Last night you said you’d be happy to go with me and now you don’t want to. You’ve been like this for well over a week now changing your mind on stuff, you’re like a flamin’ yo-yo and it’s beginning to get old. I have enough on my plate without you being a mardy arse all the time.”

“What did you call me?”

“Mardy arse, my new pet name for Aaron Livesy and will become permanent the way you’re going.”

“Whatever. Robert, I didn’t say I don’t want to, I’m just not feeling very well, I’m tired and I want an early night.”

“The other night it was a headache, tonight you’re not feeling very well, at this rate by the weekend you’ll be telling me you’re staying in to wash your hair. If you don’t want to come, then just say so instead of making excuses.” Robert stumps off in a huff going upstairs to get changed and I can finally bend over, grimacing as I let the release of pain wash over me.

The pain in my lower abdomen started at the end of September when it was more of a dull ache but this last week it’s been permanent with the pain from the cramps just being a matter of degree. I can take a whole world of pain but this is a completely different level, it feels like my insides have been rearranged by an army of munchkins. I’m not big on going to the doctors and I thought it would have gone away by now; although I know I should make an appointment, I keep pushing the idea out of my head.

I haven’t wanted to tell Robert because I know he’d worry and it’s a really important time for him setting up the new business, but unfortunately the silent approach isn’t really working out like I’d hoped. I know Robert’s upset with me, like tonight he’s taking out the last set of investors he’s relying on to make it all work; I don’t want to ruin it or be a distraction for him but now he thinks I don’t want to support him which isn’t true. I can’t blame him for being unhappy as all he’s seeing is me being permanently knackered and my weird mood swings which I can’t explain but I know they are not just down to the cramps. It feels like I’m back on the roller-coaster but this time Liv isn’t the one causing it, I am. Even Adam is beginning to get fed up with me after we argued earlier for the umpteenth time over something stupid; in the end I came home early from work, took some painkillers and went to bed.
I'm woken by Robert coming home after finally having managed to drop off to sleep, but Robert's not so good at being quiet when he's had a bit to drink; actually it sounds like he's had a lot to drink as I hear him crash into furniture navigating his way into the kitchen and is now on his way upstairs. He goes into the bathroom and I feel proud of him for finally making a go of things away from the Whites but also irked that he's going to climb into bed wanting to tell me all about the evening expecting through his drunken haze that I'm going to be all happy to listen to him. I know he'll be on a high if the night went well. I do my best to feign sleep in the hope that he just falls into bed and sleeps, but I quickly realise it's not going to do the job as he sosses down on the bed and it's obvious he's very drunk and not in the mood for sleep.

“You sleeping my beautiful mardy arse?” He climbs in beside me and wraps his arms around me, “Aaron.....” He has that boyish voice he has when he wants attention. I can't help feeling irritated as he pulls me onto my side facing him and the stench of beer, wine and whiskey hits my senses. “I love you......, you know that. I love you......, Aaron wake up.”

The last of several attempts to wake me would have woken half of Yorkshire, forcing me to give in and respond. “I am awake.” I do my best to hold him slightly away from me, he smells like a brewery, “I take it all went good then?”

His eyes are sparkling and he grins at me like the cat that got the cream, “Yep, they signed and got wined and dined.”

“I gathered....., you’re pissed.” Robert rolls me onto my back and climbs on top of me, slobbering into my neck. I think even without my crabby mood I wouldn't have been too happy by this, but tonight I'm not even close to being in a humouring frame of mind as I push him off me. “Smashing, go to sleep Robert and you can tell me all about it in the morning.”

“Huh....., I'm not tired, why can’t we celebrate now?” He's in no fit state to do anything but it's clearly not going to stop him trying as he starts kissing down my front and his hands reaching inside my jama bottoms.

I look at the clock and it's well past two in the morning, “I'm tired and I have to be up early, we can celebrate tomorrow okay?” I pull his hands away but they are quickly moving back down; I push him away gently a couple more times but he's persistent I'll give him that so this time I push him off much harder, “No Robert.”

“Ouch.” I hadn't realised how close to the edge of the bed we are until he lets out a yelp after landing with a thud on the bedroom floor.

I can hear him giggling to himself and lacking any sympathy I throw him down a pillow and turn over, “Night Robert.”

Waking up in the morning, I remember Robert’s homecoming and when I peer over the side of the bed I see Robert fast asleep like a baby on the floor; he looks so cute with his hair all dishevelled and his face peaceful. I smile to myself as I get up knowing that he's going to have the hangover from hell. He doesn't do too well when he mixes his drinks.

I trudge downstairs, take some ibuprofen and make some coffee; it's not long before I hear his lordship stumbling around upstairs. He walks into the kitchen just as I’m pouring a mug for him and pass it to him silently. He looks at me sheepishly, “Was I really that drunk?”

I can't resist a smile at him and more than a hint of sarcasm, “What do you think?”
“I think I slept on the floor and now I ache everywhere not taking into account the banging going on in my head.”

“Do you now, so we’ll be staying in tonight for your headache instead of mine then?”

“Funny, very droll.” He takes a drink of coffee watching me make my pack-up for work, “Are you okay Aaron?”

I glance over at him to see him studying me closely, “Yes, why?”

“You’ve just been out of sorts this last couple of weeks.”

I grin at him trying to give the impression that he’s making a mountain out of a molehill, “What more than usual? I didn’t think you ever went out with me because I was a ray of sunshine.”

“You know what I mean. It’s not that long since you stopped seeing the counsellor and I was thinking that maybe you should start again. You know if you don’t want to talk to me or Adam then you still have someone.”

Stopping what I am doing, I look at him carefully, “What’s Adam been saying?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t lie to me.”

Robert sighs, knowing he’s been sussed, “He said you’re taking lots of tablets at work and that one minute you’re fine and then the other you’re jumping down his neck for something and nothing. You can’t tell me that you’ve been your usual self because we both know you haven’t.”

I go up-to him and slide my arms round him, I can’t help pulling my head back slightly, holding it away from his morning alcohol breath and he smiles at me apologetically, “I’m fine Robert; I’m just tired I promise. You know how I hate stuff like last night and I’m no good at it, I didn’t want to let you down.”

Robert rests his head on my shoulder, “You could never let me down, got that....., not ever.”

I ruffle his hair and push him away gently, “Big softie, drink your coffee. Why don’t you come help out at the yard today, work off that hangover of yours.”

He smiles at me, “Okay; I was planning having an easy day today after last night anyway, but I’m begging you, please no banging or loud noises too early on.”

I must have taken enough ibuprofen to flatten a tank as the pain receded back to a dull ache and we actually had fun at the yard with Robert and Adam acting like big kids all day; I don’t think any of us did too much work in the end.

Robert, End October 2016

I’m just getting in from work, my meeting ran late and it’s well after eight. Aaron is sleeping on the sofa, already in his jamas, lying on his front with his hands tucked under his chin, so adorable. He’s so tired all the time at the moment, more often than not he’s in bed by nine most nights. He stirs slightly as I climb on top of him and kiss into the sides of his neck and let my hands start wandering over his body, “Hey sexy baby.”
Aaron mumbles a reply, “I thought you said you wouldn’t call me that, you know I hate it.”

I slide my hands up his back smiling to myself, “I know, it’s why I do it; I quite like that one and it’s a big step up from mardy arse.” I pull down his jama bottoms slightly so I can kiss Aaron’s bum, eliciting a moan from him with a playful bite.

I can feel my desire bulging already, we’ve hardly had sex since the beginning of the month, Aaron’s either already in bed asleep when I get home or he’s never in the mood; the complete opposite of a few weeks ago when we couldn’t keep our hands off each other and I miss it. I miss the feeling of intimacy and being so close to him physically and emotionally if I’m honest, it’s like he’s holding me at a distance all the time and I don’t know why.

I slide my tongue over Aaron’s soft bum cheeks, I can tell he is awake properly now and his breathing quickens as I glide my tongue over his skin. Pulling Aaron up slightly, I drag his jama bottoms down further and his body jerks as my tongue slides down between his cheeks, glancing over his hole but on the next pass my tongue finds the target and I tease the outside. He loves this and Aaron’s response is needy, quietly moaning and whimpering as I play. I pull him up onto his knees to get better access; it makes me smile as I see his head snap back with pleasure when I pull his dick and start stroking it back through his legs, he is so hard. I undo my trousers and start to stroke myself as I watch him squirm to the touch of my hand until I finally take his dick in my mouth. After a while of teasing with my mouth I pull him up so he is upright, resting back against me as I kiss into his neck and mouth; Aaron puts his arm up behind my head so he can rest his hand round the back of my neck holding us close whilst my hand jerks his shaft in just the way he likes it.

Pushing him forward once more, I’m kissing slowly and sensually down his back before returning my attention to his hole, now pushing inside with my tongue. He’s so tight, we’ve not been inside each other for well over a couple of weeks; it’s the longest I think we’ve gone without since we’ve been together. I push inside with my finger to start opening him up a little more, but the reaction is not what I’m used to as he stops me and brushes my hand away sharply.

“I can’t......, I’m sorry.” Aaron practically flies off the sofa and upstairs, leaving me kneeling on the sofa with a raging hard on and no idea about what just happened.

I pull my trousers up, fastening them as I go upstairs. Aaron is in the bathroom and I can hear the tap running, but the door won’t open when I turn the handle. We don’t have a lock, but Aaron is behind the door, his weight preventing me from opening it. “Aaron, talk to me....., what’s going on?”

“Nothing......, I just don’t want to that’s all.”

I know he wanted to and it’s making me crazy with all the thoughts running through my head right now about why he stopped me, “That’s okay, we don’t have to. Let me in Aaron......, please open the door......; I love you, I just need to make sure you’re okay alright. Please Aaron......, don’t shut me out.”

I feel his weight move from the door and I push it open to see Aaron sitting on the floor against side of the bath which is filling up with water. Tears are streaming down his face and all I see is confusion in his eyes. I go sit down and pull him into my arms, “Hey, it’s okay. Whatever it is, it’ll be okay I promise.”

“I’m sorry I do want you; I’ve just been having these cramps and they won’t go away. I didn’t want to worry you and it hurts, when you push inside it hurts.”
“Have you been to the doctors?”

“No......, I thought it would stop on its own but it hasn’t.”

“How long has it been like this?”

“Not long.” I’m not sure if I believe him and he knows it, “Honest Rob, not long.”

“I know you’ve been taking lots of painkillers still, I’m not stupid Aaron. Is that why you’ve been taking them?”

He nods, “Yeah.” I stroke my hand through Aaron’s hair, “I love you, you muppet, don’t keep things like that from me; we promised, no secrets.”

He heaves a sob, “I know; I just didn’t want to get in the way of you getting the business up and running.”

“You’re more important to me than anything, you can’t keep stuff like this from me Aaron. Promise me you’ll go to the doctors.” He nods and I can feel him relaxing against me; I kiss his forehead, “You okay?”

Aaron nods again, his voice almost a whisper, "Yes."

I pull him up off the floor with me, “Come on, no point letting this bath water go to waste.” We undress and get into the bath where I wrap my arms around him and hold him close. Leaning against me with his hands in mine, he completely sinks into me; I realise only now that I haven't feel him do this for quite a while.

We’re lying in bed and I can’t wipe the stupid grin from my face after Aaron has given me the most amazing blow job ever, I’ve never been with anyone who can make me feel all the different things at the same time as he does with his mouth and then when he brings his hand into the mix, I might just as well have died and gone to heaven.

Cuddling together, neither of us can be bothered to venture out to make a drink, it’s too cozy and warm under the duvet; anyway I like it when I can still taste myself on Aaron's tongue when we kiss, there’s something really intimate about that which I love. Things seem to have settled down with Aaron a little, at home anyway. I haven’t pushed him for sex but we’ve played in other ways which has more than made up for it. That said, even though he’s sleeping way more than normal, he always looks completely exhausted when I get in from work and his mood is still very unpredictable; I’m never sure which Aaron I’m going to get when I come home at the end of the day.

Fortunately, being Saturday and the fact it’s pissing it down outside means he’s mine all day and I get the chance to spoil him as much as I want. He’s snuggling into me and I take a chance on finding out what was up with him yesterday, “Are you going to tell me now why you kicked off at your mum last night?”

He shrugs, “She was doing my ‘ead in, you know what she’s like.”

“Aaron you even had Pearl almost swearing.”

“I said I couldn’t see the point of getting a baby christened, it’s not as though Adam and Vic go to church or anything. The discussion got a bit....., heated. By the time you walked in, you’d actually missed the bit where Vic had stormed out already upset with me and then Adam had a go and
followed her.”

“So you were just that way out then? It’s not as though you’d normally even care about stuff like that.”

“Maybe.....” He smiles at me contritely and I shake my head at him.

“What am I going to do with you eh?”

“I was upset.”

“Why?”

“I spoke with Liv and she’s talking about staying in Dublin for Christmas, saying it would be too boring here.”

“So you had to take it out on half the village.”

“They’ll get over it.”

“I’ll speak to Vic, smooth things over for you.”

“No need, I can do it.”

“Mmhhh and what about Liv?”

I know he’s putting a brave face on it and he’s actually feeling quite hurt about her not wanting to come for Christmas, but I’m not going to say anything after I see the glint in his eyes, “If she doesn’t want to come home, then we get to have all the time to ourselves.” He pushes my hand down his front and I smirk at him, knowing exactly what he is after.

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Later on we finally get out of bed to watch the footy on the box. Aaron comes downstairs after his shower and he smells really good as he kisses my neck whilst I’m rummaging in the fridge for what I need, “I know it’s two in the afternoon, but I thought I’d make breakfast. How about bacon and egg with some toast before the game starts?”

Aaron kisses me a final time on the lips and then goes to put the kettle on for drinks, “Sounds good to me.”

With the bacon on I start getting everything else ready and look across to Aaron smiling, but he looks to have gone a little bit pale, “You okay?”

“I think I’m going to be sick......, maybe breakfast isn’t such a good idea after all.” With this he suddenly dashes upstairs and I can hear him hurling down the loo.

I can’t resist smiling to myself as I look into the frying pan where the bacon is cooking away nicely, “Well I’d say that just means there’s more for me then.”

TBC
To Pee Or Not To Pee.....

Chapter Summary

November 2016 / Month 2 - Weeks 5-8: Robert is getting used to Aaron’s changing habits but as it nears the end of the month he has cause to worry.

Chapter Notes

If you see .~. this means it’s a few days different to the previous paragraphs but in roughly the same timeline.

Aaron, Beginning November 2016 (Week 5)

Finally, I have some peace and no pestering for the next five days. Robert has gone to London meeting clients but it took some convincing that I was okay to be on my own for the entire week. I think if he’d had his way I would have moved back into the pub until he comes home, but there was no way I was going to let that happen. He still went behind my back though, telling mum I’d been under the weather and to keep an eye on me which I wasn’t too happy about, but as it turns out I’m in the pub most days to eat; it saves me having to cook or make something at home. The cramps have finally stopped; I’d told Robert I’d been to the doctor’s anyway, a little white lie here and there won’t hurt if it helps convince him that everything is back to normal.

If only....., I get rid of one problem just for it to be replaced by several others. I mean where do I start.....? If I told Robert he’d freak out, a little bit like I’m doing with each new day. As quick as I talk myself into going to the doctors, I find ten reasons to talk myself out of it and just tell myself to stop being daft. My habits are bound to change sometimes as I get older, it happens with everyone and it’s not as though I feel ill, just a bit off colour still.

I’ve worked out that eating usually stops me feeling like I’m going to be sick. I eat dinner and tea in the pub, but then there’s first breakfast at home, second breakfast at the scrap yard.....; elevensies, post dinner snack, afternoon tea and then supper at home after proper tea at the pub. This all just about keeps the need to throw up at bay. The stupid thing is, after all this, I’m still hungry. In fact I’m hungry all the time; at this rate the shopping bill is going to double.

You’d think with all this food inside me I would have enough energy for a little army but I go to bed not long after I walk through the door and I don’t wake until my alarm goes for work....., well that’s not quite true either. I wouldn’t say I’m awake during the hundred times I have to get up during the night to pee but I’m not asleep either. I’ve cut back on what I drink, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference, nope......, to pee or not to pee......; if only this was optional or multiple choice even. However, if it were it would have the same answer for each option because all I do other than eat and sleep, is pee......, all the time. Robert’s going to love this when he gets back, I’m not going to hear the end of his mickey taking. Like tonight, I get in and have some supper, a banana sandwich with chutney, my new favourite snack and then that tidal wave of exhaustion hits and I go to bed; a cheap date even by my standards.
Then there’s the moods which are back with a vengeance. I’m so up and down with them that Adam has now adopted Robert’s pet name for me, calling me mardy arse all the time which I find completely unamusing, but even I have to admit I’m doing a fine job of living up to my new name.

I’m just hoping my whacky week of whacky is gone by the time Robert gets home on Friday night; his train doesn’t get in until well after ten. By this time I’ll probably have been in bed three hours, more if I can leave work early.

Robert, Beginning November 2016 (Week 5)

I wake up before Aaron and watch him sleeping for a while, he’s so cute and angelic looking when he’s fast asleep. Aaron was dead to the world when I got in late last night. I heard him get up a few times until I dropped off properly, he’s not the only one who's tired; it had been a long week in London, good but tiring and once I fell asleep I was just as dead to the world as he was. After a while I get up and plod downstairs to sort us some breakfast in bed, I thought it would be nice and help make up for being away all week. Going back upstairs I push the door open with my foot and although it’s almost eleven Aaron is only just waking up, “Hey you, sleepyhead.”

He pushes himself up leaning back against the pillows, I put the tray down and lean in for a kiss, “Mmmh, I missed you.” He pulls me back in for another kiss, this time we let it linger a lot longer.

“Good, that’s what I like to hear. You okay?”

“Mmh hmh, starving; is that breakfast I spy?”

I sit on the bed, putting the tray in-between us, “Yep, tea and toast okay?”

“Perfect.” Aaron is already grabbing his first slice and makes me laugh watching him devour the rest pretty much in record time. I’d hardly taken a bite of mine before he’s asking for seconds.

“That was quick.”

He grins at me, “You make the best toast ever.”

“Sweet talker, but apparently not the best tea ever, since you haven’t touched it.”

“Mmmh, about that; I stopped drinking tea..... and coffee. Can I just have a mug of hot water instead?”

“Hot water, you’re kidding me right?”

“Nope, hot water please Mr Sugden. Cleansing for the system so they say; I’m trying to be a bit healthier since I went to see the doctor, part of which is cutting down on the caffeine. That’s okay isn’t it?”

I smirk at him, nodding my head amused at the thought of Aaron consciously trying to be healthy, “Fine......, perfectly okay, just a surprise that’s all; one hot water coming up.”

“Thanks......, you are so sexy in a morning Sugden, do you know that.” I throw him a shy smile as I get out of bed and go downstairs to get his mug of hot water and a second round of toast.

It’s Bonfire Night and later on we go up-to the Bartons’ along with half the village. Aaron is
practically falling asleep on my shoulder but he is hugging close and it feels nice as we stand by the fire watching the fireworks. We don’t stay too late though otherwise I think he would have fallen asleep stood up and he crashes under the duvet as soon as we get in so I leave him to it, going back downstairs for the footy highlights.

God knows what else the doctor advised him though because his switch to hot water isn’t the only change in his habits I’m noticing across the weekend. I’m not quite sure how sudden likings for dark chocolate and banana sandwiches with chutney come into the mix. Then we get a curry in on Sunday night which he hardly touched and looked like he was going to throw up the entire time until I took it away from him. I ended up eating mine and his, feeling like a complete pig by the time I’d finished whilst he put a pizza in the oven and ate that instead.

I’m not going to complain though because as soon as we went to bed he was all over me and I have no idea what else he might have changed, but when he goes down on me he makes me feel like I’ve never felt before. His mouth is so deliciously wet that I didn’t know if I was coming or going, well actually I was coming pretty much from the moment he put his lips around me but it just kept getting better and better until I didn’t know what to do with myself. It was amazing, I didn’t want to come because I didn’t want it to stop but I couldn’t help myself. Then I wanted to do it all again after I had chance to recover and it was just as incredible the second time if not better. Let’s hope the doctor had told him that all the protein from my come is just as good for him as hot water because I think I came as hard as I’ve ever done in my entire life and he didn’t spill a drop. I’d always said it wasn’t possible for Aaron to get any better at sucking me off, but I take it back, he has surpassed anything I ever dreamt possible.

Aaron, Mid November 2016 (Weeks 6-7)

“Here sweet pea, I forgot to give you this after I unpacked at the weekend.”

I give him a look which he just ignores, smiling away at me. He’s still at it with the flipping pet names; you’d think he’d have got bored of them by now, but no such luck. He was with this old American guy some of last week when he was in London who apparently called his wife sweet pea whenever he spoke to her on the phone so Robert has decided to try it out on me much to my displeasure, “You call me sweet pea again Sugden, then you’ll be looking like a mushy pea, you got that.” He’s grinning away at me, but I don’t think he’ll be calling me it again after seeing the look on my face.

Relenting a little I take the box from his outstretched hand, “What’s this?”

“What does it look like, it’s a present.”

“Aww……, you shouldn’t have.” I open the box and pull out the bottle, the intense smell hits me immediately and I’m a little slow in hiding my reaction, “Wow…….”

Robert’s trying to work out the look on my face, looking at me expectantly, “Well do you like it?”

“Yeah……, nice……; very nice.” I thought I’d hidden the reaction quite well until I start coughing, I’d been holding my breath a little too long from trying not to breathe in the scent of the aftershave; it’s so overpowering that I have to put the bottle down on the table far enough away from me so I stop feeling the urge to be sick from it.

“You don’t like it.” He looks at me disappointed like a sad puppy. “I should have known you wouldn’t like it.”
I wrap my arms around him, “I do; I do like it, I promise.” He’s giving me that look where he doesn’t quite believe me so I have to find a way to distract him and soon I have him begging for more with any thoughts about aftershave long gone for both of us.

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My tastes are definitely changing; I just put it down to maybe getting to that age where it happens naturally, though it’s causing a few difficulties. Like earlier today we were at mums with all the family for tea and she’d made my favourite, chicken dinner, which I’ve loved ever since I was little but not anymore apparently because as soon as she put it down in front of me I knew there was no way I could eat it. I was already doing my best not to throw up before we even sat down at the dinner table and then with my plate in front of me I had to excuse myself before retching down the loo from the sheer smell of it; awkward or what.

Being Sunday, other than the couple of hours at the pub I’d slept on the sofa the rest of the day, yet despite my unbelievable tiredness, my horny need takes over again. I catch Robert when he’s passing and pull him down to me and it’s not long until we’re both naked on the living room floor and I’m guiding him from nipple to nipple which I’m finding unbelievably erotic. He must think I’m mad, because I wanted him to spend more time teasing them than my dick at one point; they are super sensitive and go all tingly with the touch of his tongue, it feels so arousing that I hardly wanted him to stop. I’m also getting really emotional when we make love, I feel so connected to him and it feels wonderful after having the last few weeks where all I felt was pain the entire time. Now it’s the complete opposite. I crave his touch and he doesn’t disappoint; Robert senses it too and we’re as close as we’ve ever been.

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I still can’t seem to shake the feeling of nausea, but eating seems to do the trick. Breakfast is my favourite meal of the day, I’m completely ravenous when I wake up and I eat enough to get me through to second breakfast at the yard. I have at least one cereal bar with my hot water whilst I wait for my porridge to simmer away and then I have toast after that. It’s a good job I’m usually up and out before Robert surfaces or I’d get a whole commentary about how I can eat so much this early in a morning. All he needs first thing is a mandatory two mugs of coffee, he’s not bothered for food as long as he gets his coffee fix and he’s happy as Larry but I’ve always been a breakfast person.

The need to pee all the time doesn’t seem to be disappearing anytime soon either, I got so bad one night that Robert joked I should sleep in the bathroom to save the walk. He’s just not funny, having to get up is really annoying because it interrupts my sleep and I’m already sleeping more than I’m awake. The only way I’m distracting Robert from all these weird changes is that luckily he is working really long hours and my need for sex, therefore my need for him when he is home. He’s definitely not complaining about the perks of me re-discovering my sex drive. I still have my fetish for him playing with my nipples which he reckons have got darker with the skin around a little bigger; I tell him it’s his doing from all the teasing, sucking and biting. I don’t care as long as he puts his mouth on them and Robert loves all the noises he gets out of me encouraging him to keep playing.

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Robert, Mid/End November 2016 (Weeks 6-7)

I walk through the door after finishing work early for once. Life is good at the moment, the business is taking off better than I could have hoped for, our sex life couldn’t be better; Aaron’s acquired a few new odd habits but other than being tired a lot, he seems back to normal which is a relief because I’d been worried about leaving him before going to London.
“Hi hot lips,” I crush my mouth onto Aaron’s before he can find a response and we spend next few minutes exploring just how hot they are until he burps in my mouth, which kind of spoilt the moment for me and sent him into a fit of giggles after seeing the look on my face. "That was disgusting, so disgusting." I can't keep the stern look for long though and have to turn away to avoid him seeing my smirk, "I'm hungry; after that lovely experience, I'll make some tea shall I?"

Aaron is still grinning, amused with his eyes laughing at me, "Yes please." He seems to be going through a faze at the moment, it’s like living with a teenager sometimes, burping, farting and he’s complaining about indigestion and that it’s stopping him sleeping. I just tell him to stop eating so much; I’m really not so sure that the doctor told him it was a good idea to eat some of the stuff he throws down his neck, it’s like he’s a food dustbin but some of the things he used to love he won’t touch. Very strange, but Aaron never was like other people.

Tea now finally cooking away I wrap my arms around him, squeezing gently and rest my chin on his shoulder, “You’re getting cuddly with all this food you eat. At this rate we’ll need to buy you a new wardrobe, won’t that be fun, you could even buy something with a colour in it for a change.” I smirk as he turns round smacking my bum a little harder than just playful. He wouldn’t be seen dead in half the stuff I wear, but a change from the dark colours wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing. At the weekend I had caught him struggling to button up his jeans, but he wasn’t having it that he’s put some weight on and it was more than my life’s worth teasing him any more about it. He did not appreciate it when I wound him up by saying we could switch his pet name from mardy arse to lardy arse and he sulked with me after that.

“God Robert, what did you put in the food, it smells to high heaven.” Aaron goes to open the window wide letting all the cold air in.

“Same as usual.” I pull a face at him before closing the window with a loud bang, “It’s freezing out Aaron, I’ll catch my death; it’s the middle of November not summer.”

“Soft lad.” With this he lets out a louder than normal fart and it’s not long before my nose curls up from the smell and I have to open the window again to let in the fresh air whilst Aaron laughs at me like a schoolboy.

“I’m going to send you to a dietician at this rate; maybe I’ll pay for Adam to go with you, you are both as bad as each other.” He just giggles away at me ignoring the hint of annoyance in my voice.

Robert, End November 2016 (Week 8)

How time flies, Vic is due any-time now; she can’t wait to pop as she calls it, moaning permanently about feeling like she’s going to burst. I’d called round to see her after a nudge from Diane that she needs some moral support with Adam and Aaron apparently having wound her up earlier. I’m sure I can think of a way to admonish young Aaron for not being too kindly to my sister knowing how touchy she is from being so close. As it's Friday I have all weekend to think of ways in which he can apologise; I smile to myself as I walk in home imagining what that could be and the noises it would get out of him, but that idea goes out of the window as soon as I close the door, going upstairs to get changed.

I push my head round the bathroom door just as Aaron finishes throwing up and flushes the loo. He looks terrible; he was throwing up yesterday as well as during the night and his tiredness has hit a whole new level in general. It was always Aaron in the past dragging my sorry arse out of bed in a morning, now it’s completely the other way around with him struggling to stay upright half the time. I’d caught him stood up asleep in the kitchen earlier in the week whilst he was waiting for the kettle
to boil. He's in bed early on a night and then can hardly lift his head off the pillow in a morning. He’d promised me this morning he was feeling properly better and then after talking to Vic, she’d said he seemed fine when he was round at theirs and I was feeling more positive well not anymore and enough is enough. I go rub his back, he tries to push my hand away but I won’t let him; I can be just as stubborn as he can when I’ve a mind to want. “You need to go see the doctor again Aaron, this isn’t normal for you to be so tired and you’re not well if you are still throwing up like this.” He wipes the spit from his mouth and I pass him a glass of water. "You didn’t actually tell me what he said was wrong last time, the cramps haven't come back have they?

He shakes his head, “No, this is different; the cramps stopped weeks ago, the doctor said there was nothing to worry about. I must have just caught a bug or something.”

I look at him closely and there’s that little tell he has when he’s lying. He’s so tired he doesn’t have the energy to cover it up when he’s like this. I know something is wrong and I think so does Aaron, if he would just admit it. “Did you go to see Doctor Bailey before or did you tell me a pack of lies so I wouldn’t worry whilst I was off in London?”

He looks away sheepishly confirming my suspicion. “Right, you might not have the cramps anymore but something is up. I’m going to make you a doctor's appointment for first thing on Monday whether you like it or not and I don’t care if you stop throwing up over the weekend, you’re still going and that’s final, got that. If you argue with me, then we'll go to A&E right now to see what's wrong.”

He sits silently staring into his water and he doesn't fight me as I pull out my phone, calling the surgery to make the appointment. I tried to get an emergency appointment now but they didn't have one left and I decide to wait but if I think it's getting worse then I will take him to hospital to get him checked out. After ending the call, I look at him really annoyed, “Eight-thirty Monday morning. I can’t believe you lied to me like that.”

“I was fine all day.”

“Well you’re not fine now are you and you weren't yesterday.”

There’s not a lot he can say in response and with that I leave him looking miserable on the bathroom floor, going downstairs to try and calm down. It takes a while, but eventually he comes into the living room and sits next to me on the sofa. I put my arm round him, pulling him to me, “Sorry.”

“I don’t want sorry Aaron; I want you to look after yourself and don’t you dare give me an excuse on Monday about not going or feeling better; I meant what I said, I will drag you in there myself if I have to.” I kiss his forehead and hold him close. For the first time I'm starting to believe that he could actually be ill and that thought scares more than anything.

TBC
Chapter Summary

End November-Beginning December 2016 / Month 2 – Week 9: Aaron goes to the doctors.

Chapter Notes

Warning for anyone sensitive to the topic, there is mention of abortion.

Aaron, Monday 28th November 2016 (Week 9)

I wake up to a text from Adam that he sent just after midnight saying he won’t be in work because they’re at the hospital with Vic now in labour; even Robert got a little giddy with excitement when I told him. He was all for going to the hospital after dropping me off at the doctors but I told him he should probably wait a while as she might not actually give birth for hours yet. For someone as intelligent as Robert, he’s completely clueless when it comes to the whole having children thing. I’m sure he switched off when Vic got carried away telling us all about her progress and how she was feeling; knowing him, he was probably sat there thinking about his ideas for the business, he’s so weird sometimes.

Talking of weird, typical now that Robert’s forcing me to go to the doctors, I stopped being sick after Friday and for the first time in weeks the feeling of nausea is almost gone completely. However, I got the lecture last night and again this morning before I could even open my mouth about not bothering with the doctor’s appointment; Robert can be annoyingly stubborn at times.

We’ve been in a funny mood with each other all weekend one way up or another. Robert was still upset with me that I’d lied to him, but underneath it all I know he’s worried so I’m going to the appointment just to humour him, even though I’m probably wasting my time, “Do you want me to come in with you?”

I glare at him annoyed that he’s treating me like a child, “No. I think I can manage to go see the doctor on my own.”

He frowns at me, clearly lacking trust after my lie, “Mmmh, if you say so.”

Grabbing hold of my stuff I open the door, “I’ll see you at home later, I’m out on a job after here.”

With that I slam the car door behind me, admittedly a little harder than I had intended but it felt like my first day at nursery with him watching to make sure I go in okay. He’d insisted on driving me and I’m certain if I had walked out again he would probably still be waiting just to check I don’t sneak off without seeing the doctor.

Even though I’m the first one down to see the doctor, I’m late being called in but eventually I hear
my name and go on through. Sitting down I look around the room waiting for Doctor Bailey to get organised. I hate coming to the doctors, hospitals and all that; they remind me of things I would rather forget, “So Aaron, how’s things? I hear Vic has gone into hospital, I expect Robert must be all excited for her?”

“Mmmh, not really; he’s not that into children.” Still having the monk on with him I joke to myself out loud, “They cost money rather than earn him any so they’re not particularly high on his priority list.”

“I’m sure he’ll be all doting once she’s born,” I shrug my shoulders as he continues, “So how about you? What brings you to see me this morning?”

I hesitate, not quite sure where to start but I tell him about the cramps last month then some of the other stuff like being tired, the feeling sick and constant hunger. He starts asking me questions and I keep on answering thinking I have better things to do and that I really need to get to work, but he wants to take some blood and gets me to pee in a cup for some tests. I wouldn’t mind but I actually do feel lots better, in fact pretty much back to normal if I ignore the exhaustion and I’ve put on some weight, but that’s hardly a surprise from all the food I’ve been eating.

After lots of questions and some physical checks we sit back down, “So I’m good right, something and nothing?”

“Well, that depends on your perspective.”

I feel more anxious at this, “Then there is something wrong?”

“Aaron have you considered the possibility that you might be pregnant?”

My first reaction is a laugh, but then I look at him like he’s from another planet and for the first time in my life I have no idea what to say until I eventually manage to splutter something, “You are kidding me right?”

“Well according to the basic tests on your blood and urine, I’m fairly certain you are in the early stages of pregnancy.”

I stay silent a moment, shock doesn’t come close to what I’m feeling right now, “Do the test again, it can’t be right; you must’ve made a mistake.”

Doctor Bailey looks at me calmly, “I will send everything off for confirmation but these tests are usually very reliable Aaron, I’ve already treble checked to be sure as I can be. I’ll send you an appointment for Wednesday when we’ll have the official results back.”

I look at him in disbelief, this just can’t be true, “How is this even possible.....? I mean I know it’s possible now but it’s not that long ago that I was in hospital, surely they would have noticed something different with my insides and said something right?”

“Not necessarily if they weren’t looking for it and your body may not have shown any changes then. Also it’s becoming more the case even if it is picked up on that it isn’t highlighted to avoid making men who are capable of getting pregnant feel as though they are being treated differently to women. The medical world is still adapting and deciding how best to handle this. I’m not sure what you know and don’t know, but for men it’s like an instance which only occurs when certain genetics combine with the right triggers. The conception and first month is completely different than for a woman; this is why the cramps were so bad and it hurt during sex, your body was changing,
developing what you weren't born with that you need to conceive and support a pregnancy. After the first month everything then pretty much follows a similar pattern to a woman up until giving birth which again has some differences."

He continues rambling on about how it all works, but the sound of his voice is fading as I get more overwhelmed until it's all too much. I don’t want to hear it; I don’t want to know details, I don’t want to know anything and I get up taking the doctor by surprise, “I have to go....., I need to go to work.”

I'm pulling my coat on as he tries to get me to listen, “Aaron come back on Wednesday when you’ve had time to get over the initial shock, we can......” However, I'm legging it out of there so fast my feet hardly touch the ground and I’m running; I’m running as fast as I can until I’m so out of breath that I have to stop and lean against a tree, coughing. Some old lady passing by stops to ask me if I’m alright, however she soon leaves me alone after I snap a response and glare at her with a face of thunder.

I find myself walking around in a daze after this. I don’t really know how much time passes but eventually I go into the nearby park and sit just staring into space trying to wrap my head around it all. My phone buzzes, it’s the second time that Robert’s called me and I send it to voicemail without answering. God what am I going to say to him? Although it was a joke, I’d meant what I’d said earlier, the words now ringing in my ears; Robert doesn’t seem to have any interest in children. How would he react, what would his clients think or our family and friends.....; that we’re freaks of nature......, that I’m a freak?

At this I get up once more, wandering aimlessly with my hands stuffed in my pockets and I think back over the last few weeks. I don’t understand why I didn’t consider this before now especially after spending so much time with Vic, but although it’s happening more and more that men are giving birth, it’s still something you don’t ever think will happen to you; it’s just not....., it’s just not normal. I sit down on another bench and gaze out over the lake. My phone goes again and I’m tempted to throw it into the water as I stare at it ringing in my hand, Robert’s name on the screen and this time I switch it off. I don’t have space in my head for Robert or anything else right now.

After walking for an age I remember there’s a pub in the corner of the park and I make my way over. With it being a November Monday lunchtime I don’t have a problem finding a quiet corner to drink my pint. I order some food, which I eat and then follow it with another pint. I’m not really taking any notice of anything around me until I’m pulled from my thoughts, distracted by a little girl running in, closely followed I assume by her grandparents. It sounds like they’ve been playing pitch and putt and she’s all excited, full of energy, bouncing all over as she decides what she wants to eat and drink. I can’t help smiling until I realise that this could be mum or Diane and Doug with my child and immediately I feel the tightening knot in my stomach, my panic rising once more and I turn away focusing instead on staring out of the window to try calm myself.

Upon downing the last of my third pint I go outside and turning my phone on I see I’ve missed a few calls to do with work, plus a couple more from Robert. I read a text from him saying he’s on his way to the hospital and I should get my arse over there to see our new niece who has finally put in an appearance......, so typical Robert in how he words it. I turn the phone back off and think what I want to do. £3.60 later armed with a putting iron, I start playing my own round of pitch and putt not concentrating on anything other than getting the ball in each hole as I work my way round the 18-hole course. After a second round and the fact it's getting dark I start to make my way home, stopping off for a sandwich and then again for a burger on the way.
The house is quiet and dark when I get in, it doesn’t look like Robert has been home yet. I go and have a shower and although it’s only seven o’clock I go to bed, tucking the duvet under my chin and close my eyes, but although I’m exhausted as much mentally as physically I can’t sleep. My mind won’t let me relax enough and for the first time, now surrounded by the sounds and smells of our own home, I feel the first tear fall down my cheek. Once this first one escapes it’s like the floodgates have opened because after that I don’t remember going to sleep, just the tears and an overwhelming sense of confusion and fear, it feels like my entire world has been torn apart.

Later I wake up needing to go to the loo, some things can’t be avoided and I can only hold it in for so long. Climbing back into bed I feel Robert moving beside me and when I look over at the clock I see it's after one. I can’t believe I slept for so long without needing to get up before now, no wonder I’d been ready to burst.

Robert turns over and I tense up waiting for him to say something, but he doesn’t and all I can hear is the steady sound of his breathing. I can smell beer on his breath meaning he’d probably landed in the pub with Adam and the others to celebrate; if he drank enough he will have just crashed into bed and won’t wake until morning. With a bit of luck, I’ll be up and out before he wakes; I can’t even start to think about how I’m going to face him or what I’m going to say.

Robert, Tuesday 29th November 2016

Lifting my head so quick was a bit of a mistake and I let it fall back on the pillow deciding it’s a little too soon to attempt getting up. I think it was that third whiskey that did it or maybe the shot; I’ve no idea what that was but I’d drunk it anyway.

After stumbling home I remember climbing in beside Aaron; I think I made a feeble attempt to wake him, but through the fuzziness of all the alcohol I’m not so sure. I put my hand to my mouth and I get a push back wave of alcohol breath and I smile to myself, imagining Adam will likely get a telling off by my sister when he brings her home today for celebrating quite so much.

Looking at the clock, it’s just past eight and Aaron’s side of the bed is already empty. He didn’t answer one of my calls yesterday, text or make it to the hospital, but Adam had convinced me that I was worrying about nothing and that Aaron was probably just in a strop, annoyed with me for making him go to the doctors. The more we drank, the easier it was to convince myself he was right; lying here alone in our bed sobering up, now I’m not quite so sure.

Cleaned up and showered, carrying my third cup of coffee I head over to the scrap yard to find Aaron stripping out an old banger. He grunts a hello at me, nothing unusual there seeing my hangover face and probably sore that he’d missed out on all the fun. I squint at him, my eyes still not too happy with the brightness of daylight, “You didn’t answer your phone yesterday, she’s six pound seven ounces if you’re interested. Vic was asking after you at the hospital..... and Adam.”

“I was on a job out in the back of beyond so my phone wasn’t working and then it was late when I got back; I was knackered so I went to bed. She all cute and lovely then? Tug on those Sugden heart strings?”

I study him to decide if he’s telling me the truth but if he’s lying he’s doing a good job of not showing it and my head hurts too much to argue, “Oh you know, she’s alright; any excuse for a celebration pint and to see Adam make a fool of himself.” He nods his head but doesn’t say anything else, just carrying on working. “So what did the doctor say yesterday?”
“He said he didn’t think it was anything serious, but he took some blood and urine for tests. I have to go back tomorrow for the results.”

“And did you mention the cramps from last month?”

I see a hint of irritation as he answers, “Yes Robert, I mentioned the cramps.”

“And?”

Now there’s visible annoyance, “And what? I just said didn’t I. I won’t know until I get the test results back; what else do you want me to say?”

“Okay okay, no need to get so narky. You feeling better, you’ve not been sick or anything?”

“No. Haven’t you got work to do or something instead of hanging round here pestering me?”

“I have a meeting this afternoon and then I told Vic we’d call round. You know right they pretty much push them out of the door after giving birth if there’s no problems, she comes home already this afternoon.”

“They picked a name yet?”

I smirk, “No, they keep changing their minds; I think it could take a while.”

“Right, I’ll see you later then if you have work to do.”

“Pfft, not trying to get rid of me much are you.”

“I’m busy, not everyone can swan about, picking and choosing when to work you know.” There’s more than a hint of sarcasm in how he says this and now he’s doing his best to ignore me, fully concentrating back on the car he’s working on. He seems on edge but I suppose that’s to be expected until he gets the test results; I know he’d not readily admit to being worried unless I pushed him on it.

I go over and whether he likes it or not I pull his head out of the car and kiss him full on, there’s a little bit of resistance but only for a second and then he’s kissing me back.

He pushes me off him, ”Go on you......, I’ll see you later.” There’s a shy smile on his face with our fingers reluctantly the last to part as I grin at him, walking backwards a few paces before turning to leave and go off to do some work of my own.

“You ready?” Aaron had taken forever in the shower after work. At one point I thought I was going to have to switch the water off until I heard the shower door banging and eventually he appears downstairs.

Aaron nods and we go out of the door; I’m already at the gate whilst he locks up and we make our way across the street with him trailing behind me. When he reaches me I give him a quick kiss before knocking on the door, “Come on you, now you get to see what the bump looks like outside mummy’s tummy.” I shake my head at myself, Vic’s infectious enthusiasm must be rubbing off on me and I smirk at him, “God what do I sound like. Just shoot me if I go all gooey over her like the rest of them; it is just a baby.”

Aaron gives me a weird look as I pull him into the cottage to do our visiting duty. I have to admit, she is cute though with Vic looking all motherly-like cradling her daughter in her arms. I go over and give Vic a kiss, “Hey sis, good to be home?” I manage to avoid gooey, but I can’t resist a little stroke
of her tiny cheek. Vic looks as content and glowing as much now as she ever did and I can’t help feeling happy for her; it’s what she’s always wanted a family of her own and now she has it. We always were different that way; Aaron is the only family I really need when it comes down to it.

I look back at him to see he hasn’t quite made it into the room, instead leaning against the doorframe and Vic smiles seeing him for the first time, “You coming in then or what, don’t you want to see your god-daughter?” I see Aaron’s eyes widen at hearing her say this but he shouldn’t be surprised, they’d talked about it beforehand. Andy and me have uncle status so Aaron gets god-father status to even it out.

I can’t work him out as he edges a bit closer almost reluctantly; he’s been so supportive with Vic all during her pregnancy, especially after he had been with her to ante-natal. Now it’s like he doesn’t want to go near or touch but Vic encourages him, “You want to hold her?” I knew he’d get favouritism, what surprises me is when he says no and I see even Vic now frowning at him because he’s not acting anything like you would expect and it’s not like he’s not been around babies and doesn’t know what to do.

Aaron is shying away from the attention focussed on him and I distract Vic’s questioning stare, “What about me, do I not get another hold?” Vic turns to me grinning as I go sit down, carefully taking my niece into my arms. I look across at my sister glowing with pride, “Still no name then?”

Adam comes and perches on the chair arm by my side, beaming away as he watches us, “No, we still can’t decide, got it down to four though.”

“That’s not too bad, you can draw straws.”

I get a kick for that from Vic, but I just smirk back at her, “We are not deciding my daughter’s name by drawing straws. That is exactly the kind of thing you would say Robert Sugden; just wait if you have kids of your own, you’ll be different.”

I pull a face at her, “I don’t think so. It’s what’s so great about being an uncle, you get to give them back at the end of the day……, perfect.” I laugh at Vic, now shaking her head at me in despair.

I look up to where Aaron was standing and I realise he’s no longer here; Vic looks at me concerned, “Is everything okay? Aaron seems completely off.”

I pass Vic’s daughter back to her and start to get up, “Yeah, he’s not been feeling too well, he’s just tired.” I hear Adam mutter something but I don’t catch what it is and looking at his face I don’t ask, but it’s clear he’s not too impressed with Aaron’s lack of interest. “Right anyway, we’ll get off then and leave you all in peace; we just wanted to welcome you home.” I give Vic a goodbye kiss and a smile, “I’ll see you tomorrow okay.”

Pulling the door of Keeper’s cottage behind me I look up and down the street to see if I can locate Aaron and see him leaning against the wall of the beauty salon next door to our cottage. I go across and sit next to him, “Thought you’d be wanting a hold; she’s cute.”

“She’s okay; wouldn’t want to be all gooey over a baby right.” I was expecting a sarcastic tone for him to say something like this but there isn’t and his expression is hard to read.

Aaron doesn’t normally talk like this, he does the gooey thing where I don’t and I try to lighten his mood, “I was only joking Aaron, she’s as cute as a button, just like you.” I put my arm round his
shoulder, “Vic looks in her element doesn’t she?” Aaron nods then catches me off-guard when he turns into me burrowing his head against my chest and I wrap my arms around him kissing his head. It feels like he has the weight of the world on his shoulders. “Are you worried about getting your results tomorrow?”

He shrugs his face still hidden, facing into me, “Maybe, I don’t know.”

“Like you said, I’m sure it will be fine.” I hug him tight, “And if it’s not Aaron, well we’ll deal with it.”

He pulls away from me sharply, his tone suddenly defensive, “You make me sound like a problem to be fixed.” He’s already walking off in a huff down the path to the cottage leaving me to stare after him.

I follow him into the kitchen where he puts the kettle on, “That’s not what I meant and you know it.” I run my hand through my hair in frustration, “Don’t go twisting my words.” I go across to him, take the mugs out of his hands and put them on the counter then pulling him to me again I hold him close, “I love you Aaron. I love you more than anything or anyone.”

Aaron, Wednesday 30th November 2016

“I wasn’t sure you’d come back Aaron, but I’m pleased you did.” I struggle to look Doctor Bailey in the eye and instead give a non-committal shrug in response. “Your results came back late last night and confirmed that you are pregnant. Going by our conversation, I would say you’re due at the beginning of July; it’s a little harder to calculate as men don’t have the monthly cycle to help guide us so with men it’s more a guestimate for want of a better word.”

He’s smiling at me, trying put me at ease no doubt; well it’s going to take a little more than that, “So what now?”

“That depends entirely upon you. Aaron there’s nothing to be scared of, I know this is a shock and it’s going to take some getting used to. Just take it slow and some time to understand everything; see what support there is to help you and talk it over with Robert before you decide what you want.”

He must have seen the panic on my face when he mentions Robert, "You know I can't say anything to anyone. What we discuss is completely confidential and it will be your choice every step of the way."

I don't know where to start. Now it’s confirmed I’m still processing the fact that this is real with my mind going round ten to the dozen again; there’s so many questions, “How do I even give birth?”

"Your body has adapted to make it possible; it’s not that different than for a female for the most part except....."

I stop him, feeling sick just thinking about it, “I don’t think I want to know.” I get up to pace a little to release some of my tension, willing the nausea to pass.

Doctor Bailey waits for me patiently until I sit back down, “Look here’s some leaflets, read them and write down all your questions in your own time because you will have lots and then we can talk everything through. You don’t need to make any decisions just yet. In many ways it’s just like a female pregnancy, we do some things sooner and take more precautions because we are still learning and it’s such a recent evolution. We’ll also now run some tests to detect any genetic conditions and it would be good for you to speak to the family to see if there is any history that we should be aware
of.” Again he sees the look of horror and panic in my face, “This is completely standard procedure, we do this for mothers at this stage.”

I manage to push down my panic as more questions come to mind, “How safe is it, for me and the baby?”

“There’s no statistics to show the baby’s health is any more at risk than with a female giving birth; there is potentially a higher risk for the father during the birth but here there is less knowledge to go on. Most fathers opt to have a C-section rather than give birth naturally so we don’t have much experience with that yet and the first males to give birth are still relatively young so it’s impossible to say what the longer term risks could be because we just don’t know.” He pauses, looking at me earnestly, "Aaron men have been giving birth now for more than ten years and all evidence is pointing to the fact that both father and child continue to live happy and healthy lives facing the same problems that all families face.”

“Apart from the stigma that your father gave birth to you instead of having a mother, I bet that goes down well at school.”

Doctor Bailey doesn’t react to the negativity and bitterness in my voice, “There’s a lot more understanding now and support networks; it’s becoming more common whether people like it or not, mother-nature has evolved.”

“Not everyone sees it like that.”

“Maybe not, you can say that about a lot of things, my philosophy is let nature take its course.”

"They call it mother-nature for a reason.” I let out a tired sigh, exhausted from thinking about everything, “I feel like a fucking science experiment; I’d be the Emmerdale village freak show.”

“You’d be surprised to hear, but there’s a fair few women out there who find the idea of pregnancy just as scary; everyone is different.” I look at him like he’s mad to even make the comparison. “You’ll probably also be surprised to hear that it’s not just gay couples who are trying to work out if this is something they can do, some heterosexual couples are looking into it also where they want to be able to choose who carries the baby. It’s opened up a whole new door to the possibilities and how we view having children. This change is driving a lot of progressive medical advances, we’re learning more every day.”

I look at him astounded that any man would actually choose this because I wouldn’t, “I want you to get rid of it.”

There’s a silence in the room for an instant, “Take my advice Aaron and take some time to consider everything carefully and if this is really the route you want to take then we can make arrangements but you need to be informed.”

“No. No I don’t.”

I get up and go lean against the wall by the window, staring out through gaps in the blinds and I can feel the doctor observing me, “Well to have an abortion on the NHS you will have to go through a course of counselling; this is one area where it is much stricter than for women due to it being a cultural and emotional shock that you are less prepared for. Pregnant fathers feel under significantly more stress and pressure because of this so you would need to attend several sessions before you are
allowed to proceed.”

My anxiety is going through the roof, I just want to make this all go away, “I can’t wait that long; I’ll go private. Women don’t need to go through all that palaver, I don’t see why I should if I know it’s what I want. If I go private to a clinic I reckon they’ll take men just the same, it’s all about the money to most of them right?”

The doctor gets up and sits on the edge of his desk, much closer to me, “Look Aaron, I can’t stop you from having an abortion privately, you’re right; but I can’t emphasize enough how important it is to take time over this decision. It could be one you regret for the rest of your life; you might never get over the sense of loss.”

I turn back to him, “So? That’s no different than for a woman who has an abortion.”

“But it is different Aaron. Women have been giving birth for thousands of years; there is a biological cycle for them. No-one really knows how it evolved for women in the beginning but for men as far as we can tell it’s a one off event, a combination of genetics and triggers in the body that we are still working to understand. Men don’t have ovaries or a monthly cycle, not yet at least; it’s only when a change is triggered that they develop a uterus and a way of conceiving. That might evolve further over time, but that could be in 10 years, 10 million years or never; we just don’t know. All we know is this instance is occurring more regularly but it has never repeated in the same person, not that we know of. If you terminate then you might never have the chance again, do you understand. So you need to be sure.....; really really sure Aaron.” I look away remaining stubbornly silent.

"I’m giving you a prescription for some vitamins and something to help your body better cope with all the hormones it’s not used to. Here’s also all the leaflets including some on foods to help, it can ease some of the symptoms if you eat certain foods and don’t eat others. Try to stay healthy, cut out alcohol, cigarettes and listen to your body when it is telling you to rest; it’s been working overtime even more than if you were a woman. You’re starting out at a disadvantage and your body is finding it hard work. You should begin to feel much better in general in the next couple of weeks as you move into the second trimester.”

I shake my head as I go to pull my coat, ready to leave, “You’re wasting your time doc, I’ve made my mind up, there’s no way I’m having this baby.”

Despite my words, he puts all the various leaflets and prescription into my hands, “It doesn’t hurt to take them with you and you'll find that there’s a lot of reading on-line.” I shove them into my pocket so I don’t have to think about them and to shut him up. “In the meantime I’ll make you an appointment for an ultrasound; you’ll get the confirmation through the post in the next few days.” I'm at the door when he rests his hand on my arm causing me to stop, "You don’t have to rush this Aaron, you have until the 24th week to terminate so please take the time to think this through carefully and don’t do this alone; you have Robert, talk to him, make this decision together.”

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Everyone is already in the pub for the family session to celebrate Cain’s birthday, I’d got delayed getting to a collection having set off late after the doctor’s appointment and then got stuck in traffic on the way back. Even Robert had made it into the pub before me.

He rests his hand on my lower back as he orders me a pint, “Everything okay?” Robert’s eyes are searching into mine, looking for assurance that I’m alright.
“Yep,” I pull out the prescription from my jeans pocket waving it in front of him, “Apparently I have deficiencies of some vitamins and stuff which is what has been making me so tired. I just need to go to the chemist then he reckons once I start taking these I’ll be right as rain.”

Robert leans in and kisses me, I can see the relief cross his face and his body visibly relaxes, “Good; you know I was worried right?”

“I know, but I’m fine; I told you it’d be nothing serious.”

“Well, I think that’s worth celebrating, more than your Cain’s birthday anyway.” He knocks the top of his pint against the glass mum has just handed over to me and I take a sip as I watch him get pulled away by Charity to talk about god knows what. He lets Nicola and Jimmy take care of running Home James these days, but he has this little side venture going on with Charity; I don’t ask, he’s smart enough not to let her drag him into anything dodgy.

I’m tired and not very talkative all night so I find myself in the corner of the bar just quietly observing; watching Robert who looks so happy with everything. Apart from things being difficult with Andy who’s still together with Chrissie, our life is exactly how we want it right now. This would change everything and I don’t want to put ourselves through this especially when I’m still trying to move on from the trial, from what dad did to me; I don’t think I can cope with all the stress and how people would look at us, at our child. Neither of us are ready for children, if having Liv with us taught us anything, it taught us that and it wouldn’t be fair to bring an unwanted child into the world; this would be like jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. In the end though, it’s not really about Robert; I don’t want this and he never needs to know. I see him coming over and he sits next to me, “You’ve not touched your pint, don’t you want it?”

I shake my head thinking he must be on at least his third now, “No, not in the mood for drinking, you have it.”

“Well if you insist, who am I to say no?” Grinning, he takes the pint from in front of me and has a drink. I shake my head at him whilst wiping a dribble from his chin, thinking I’m likely to be carrying him home before long. Who needs children when you’ve got Robert......

TBC
.....And Into The Fire

Chapter Summary

December / Month 3 - Weeks 10-11: Aaron makes a decision that will change his life forever.

Chapter Notes

w.c. = week commencing (I will always use starting with Monday)

Aaron, w.c. 5th December 2016 (Week 10)

Adam has gone out on a job so I’ve taken the opportunity to sneak home and check the post, the same as every morning since I found out last week so Robert doesn’t see or open anything by mistake that I don’t want him to. I knew what it was as soon as I saw the envelope. Although I know Robert has gone to York and will be in meetings all day, I’m still paranoid that he could come back and walk in at any moment so I’ve come upstairs to open it, just in case to buy me a bit more time if I was interrupted unexpectedly.

Now reading the confirmation letter for the ultrasound next Monday, seeing it black and white, the feeling is ever so strange. I can’t seem to stop staring at it and I pull the leaflets out from my inside jacket pocket where they’ve been burning a hole in it ever since I’d stuffed them in there at the doctors. I don’t know why I hadn’t just thrown them away at the time; now sitting back on the bed I start to read and I can’t believe all the crap you have to go through. Pulling off my jumper and t-shirt, unbuttoning my jeans, I go stand in front of the mirror. I’d already started to notice some more subtle physical changes this last week which are becoming increasingly obvious, to me anyway, but this is the first time I’ve looked at myself more closely and it’s oddly fascinating.

I can see a slight roundness in my lower abdomen; Robert won’t think anything of it other than I’m putting on weight still but I can tell it’s not that, it feels completely different. I let my hand wander down, sliding over my stomach and chest, my fingertips brushing over the light blue lines which have suddenly started to appear, crisscrossing over my skin. One of the leaflets explained this is because the volume of blood increases about twenty percent to help nourish the baby so the veins are more visible as they try and keep up with the flow. Apparently they won’t disappear until the baby is born, after stopping breast feeding.

I catch myself in the mirror, smiling as my hand continues to move over my skin. It’s hard to believe that something is growing inside me and immediately the sense of joy I had felt turns to a feeling of sheer terror. I kick myself for even thinking about it, there’s no point because soon there will be no baby.

Pulling my clothes back on properly, annoyed with myself, I grab my laptop, boot it up and start looking for clinics that will take men. I was right, I should be able to sort something quickly; I’ve been constantly snapping at Robert these last few days so the sooner I get rid of it, the sooner things can go back to normal. Before I’d been able to distract him with sex but despite still feeling horny a
lot, for some reason now when he tries to come on to me I push him away; I haven’t let him near me sexually for over a week. If he sees me naked now he might start to notice the changes, he's distracted from working too much but he’s not stupid. It’s already strained between us, we're both tired and stressed and he's getting fed up with my odd behaviour; this thing inside me has taken over my body so much that it feels like I'm not the one in control. I just want my life back to how it was before.

Looking at the time, I decide to call to make the appointment later. Adam will be back soon and I’m already in his bad books enough as it is without him thinking I’m skiving off work. I call in at the coffee shop on the way back to the yard to get us brownies, one for Adam and two for me. I fancy one for after my mid-morning snack and the other I can have later when Adam’s not looking. Both Robert and Adam had been winding me up that every time they saw me that I was eating so I’ve started to hide it from them this last week or so.

“I’ve just put the kettle on, you want one?” The door closes behind Adam who has just walked in and I throw him his brownie; for the first time in a while I get a grin out of him, he loves chocolate brownies.

“Yeah, but need a hand to unload this stuff first so old man Weatherill can get off.” I follow him out and we get to work, there’s some pretty heavy stuff on it and I’m feeling knackered and desperately hungry by the time we’ve done.

Finally Weatherill drives off and we’re just finishing stacking the last of the piping, “So when are you coming round mate, you know Vic is mega annoyed with you. You’ll love Charlotte, I know I’m biased being her dad an’ all but she’s perfect.” I realise that I’m running out of excuses not to visit; it’s not like I can say I’m busy all the time because then Robert might go and unwittingly drop me in it which has already happened once. It’s becoming more and more obvious I’m deliberately avoiding going round. “Why don’t you come round after work tonight?”

“I’m not feeling a hundred percent, I don’t want her to get any bug from me, just give me a few days.”

“She’ll be fine mate, come on Aaron, I don’t get it, it’s like you don’t want anything to do with your own god-daughter.”

“No, I’m just being extra cautious that’s all.”

“You fallen out with Vic over something?”

“No, why?”

“Because that’s what she thinks, that she’s done something to upset you. I never thought that Robert would have been round more to visit than you; you’ve only been the once.....”

I have to stop what I’m doing; Adam is still twittering on giving me a hard time but I’m not listening anymore as everything around me starts to go all fuzzy and I feel lightheaded. I’m too tired and I need to eat something but I don’t make it to the portacabin; everything starts to swirl around me and the next thing I know is Adam is holding me up and half carrying me into the office. “Woah mate, steady on, here come and sit down.”

“I don’t know what came over me.”

Adam knows me as well as anyone and is watching after passing me a glass of water; I grab for my
sandwiches, “Aaron, are you really alright or is there something you’re not telling us?”

I'm exhausted all the time, it's like this baby is sucking the life out of me, but I can't tell Adam that, “I'm fine so don't go running your mouth off to Robert, he's got enough on with everything and I don't want him worrying over nothing,” I trough down my first sarnie and immediately begin to feel better. I look across at Adam, “I mean it Adam; I said I’m okay, I'm just tired still that's all.”

He catches the edge to my voice, but I can see he looks worried, “Okay okay, whatever you say, I believe you.” He leaves it after that and doesn't push about me going round, but I know I'm going to have to be much more careful from now on.

Aaron, Saturday 10th December (Week 10)

In the end I had no choice but to give in and we're sitting watching the footy with Adam; Robert doesn't have a team he follows, but he'll watch if there's nothing better to do, like today being a rainy miserable day out. Adam passes the beers round and I shake my head, “No thanks, I'll just stick to my hot water.”

“What is it with you and this hot water?”

I shrug, by now I'm used to the comments I get from everyone, “Doctor told me to try being healthier; I told you. Why is it no-one ever listens to me?”

“Cos, I just can't get over you drinking hot water instead of alcohol; it's not natural that's all.”

“But it is natural Adam, that's the point.”

“Ha ha.” Vic comes down with Charlotte, now Charlie who has just woken up after her sleep; I see the beaming smile on Adam’s face, it just lights up when he sees her. “Here she is, daddy’s little girl.”

I can't help but wince at hearing this and I grab hold of Robert’s hand without realising what I'm doing. He gives me an odd look, but then someone scores and both he and Adam are cheering away. Typical, my team go one down and I get an amused grin from Robert; I wouldn’t mind but he's only supporting them so then he can tease me about my team if they lose which is looking increasingly likely as the afternoon goes on. I’m almost pleased when Vic takes Charlie out of Adam’s arms before he gets too carried away and comes over to me. I don’t stop her as she passes Charlie to me and I can’t take my eyes off her, she’s so tiny, still waking up with her face all pink and scrunchy, blissfully unaware of everything around her. Robert smiles at me and rests his chin on my shoulder, he does seem quite taken with her as he strokes with his fingers over her head and down her cheek; I still can’t imagine him being a dad though especially after hearing what he'd said last time we were here. I’d forgotten that baby smell, a mix of powder and poo which is becoming more evident the longer I hold her and I pull a face, “Vic you could have changed her.”

“Thought god-father Aaron could do it; remember what you said when you came with me that time to antenatal?”

"I was being supportive, didn’t mean I was actually offering for nappy changing duties."

Robert and Adam gang up on me, grinning at me like schoolboys as though this is my payback for keeping my distance all this time with Adam adding his two-penneth, “Changing mat's upstairs, you can do the honours seeing how Vic is sorting tea out.”
“What did your last mug die of?”

“Oh look, a penalty, you want to stay and watch your team’s final humiliation?”

“You’re such an arse sometimes.” I hear a cheer and laughing, presumably at my expense with the penalty scored, as I carry Charlie upstairs to her nursery and go through the motions of changing her nappy. It’s been a while since Leo but you don’t really forget and once we’re done I pick her up and go lean against the wall next to the window looking out for a while as she snuggles against me. We stay like this, content together with each other, until Vic shouts up that tea’s ready and I go downstairs, putting Charlie in the Moses basket whilst we eat. I can see Vic smiling at me proudly from across the table, her family complete now that I’ve done my bit. If only she knew how it was making me feel inside; I’m practically attached to Robert sitting back on the sofa yet my eyes keep straying to Charlie and she’s always there in the corner of my eye.

With Adam and Robert moving onto yet another can of beer I head upstairs to the loo, more to get away from their continued ribbing about my team losing so badly than anything. Seeing Vic nursing Charlie I stop in my tracks to watch them, leaning against the doorframe and resting my head onto the wood. Vic has finished feeding and is in the rocking chair quietly singing ‘twinkle twinkle little star how I wonder what you are.....’ and that’s me all the time, I can’t help wondering.....

Vic gets up to put Charlie down into her cot and she spies me watching; grabbing my hand she pulls me over with her, “You see, she loves you already.”

I smile back at her as she lays Charlie down and we watch her sleeping away, “She doesn’t know who I am Vic.”

Vic squeezes my hand whilst resting her head against my shoulder; “Sure she does, she knew you before she was even born.”

I don’t dare say anything as we watch in the darkened room, there’s just the mobile above the cot giving off a soft light, the shadows from its patterns dancing round the walls as it turns. I suddenly remember why I originally came upstairs and go to the loo whilst Vic goes back downstairs to the others.

I seem to have relaxed after spending the time close with Vic and Charlie. It's quite late when we get home and we come more or less straight to bed. I've hardly let go of Robert all evening and I need him so much that I pull Robert properly near to me.

My yearning to be close to him increases and I let it override my brain despite it telling me not to. Maybe it’s all the hormones or whatever playing with my senses because we make love with an insane neediness for each other, connecting in a way like almost never before. I can’t explain it, we’re not playing, teasing or even driving into each other hard or fast like we usually do; instead it’s close and intimate in how we move together, lying on our sides with Robert’s body tight behind mine and our legs intertwined. Robert feels like a part of me as he moves inside me, his fingers moving between my chest and my face, loving me simply by their touch and then trailing down my side as he kisses into my neck. The only sound to be heard is our heavy breathing, our bodies hardly parting and when his hand reaches for mine I grab hold, squeezing so tight it wouldn’t have surprised me if Robert said something but like me, he’s too lost in the moment. Even when we come we hardly make a sound, but we can feel it; clinging to each other I can feel Robert’s quivering from the climax just as he feels mine. There’s not even a whisper between us, we don’t need anything except each
other’s touch to communicate.

Laid in his arms afterwards, there’s not a better feeling in the world than how I feel right now; loved, safe and protected.

I have no idea how late it is, but I didn’t go back to bed after waking up in the middle of the night for a pee, instead I’m sitting in the bedside chair quietly watching Robert sleeping. It’s soothing watching the rise and fall of his body in the darkness and it reminds me of earlier with Vic watching Charlie sleep. I’ve given up trying to wipe the tears away; I just let them fall as I wrap a blanket around to keep me warm. Instinctively I move my fingers to touch my nipple which had been so sensitive earlier to Robert’s tongue and fingers and I squeeze, my head falling back slightly from the sensation closing my eyes and I wonder what it would feel like feeding a baby as my hand slides across to the other doing the same. They’ll hardly look any different on the outside, even after giving birth, but I know the change is happening; I can almost feel it even though it’s all internal. It’s so hard to imagine that in six months I could be sat here being able to feed a baby just like Vic had done today with Charlie.

It was pretty straight forward at the clinic Friday afternoon; there had been a lot of questions but nothing I wasn’t expecting after reading the website. By the time I had left everything for the termination on Thursday has been arranged yet I’ve never felt so confused and in turmoil as I do now. I know it’s just my mind and body playing tricks on me, especially after being with Vic and Charlie earlier, all this stupid emotion will just disappear once it’s gone. It doesn’t matter how hard I try though, I can’t seem to get away completely from a nagging doubt; what if the doctor’s right. What if it doesn’t go and I’m left with this sense of attachment and loss for something that I don’t want, which will never be born; I mean, it won’t be any bigger than a plum when it happens.

It doesn’t make any difference though; I’ve made my mind up. Robert had run away from the topic of children every time it was brought up, they just don’t factor into his future; they hadn’t ever factored into mine to be honest. I mean what kind of parent would I be, I can hardly look after myself sometimes.

Aaron, Monday 12th December 2016 (Week 11)

Getting out of the car I shift uncomfortably in my clothes which are feeling tighter by the day; this time on Thursday I’ll be back to being me. No more stress or exhaustion, no need to think about going to buy new clothes and feeling like a permanently farting elephant; if I feel like this now god knows what it would feel like by the time it’s due. I’ve promised myself that once Christmas is out of the way I’ll put myself on a diet, it won’t take long to get my weight back to how it was before; I might even go running for a while to help, my New Year’s resolution.

Robert and Adam think I’m having some more blood tests to check everything is going in the right direction after my last doctor’s appointment. I couldn’t tell them the truth but I didn’t want to lie too much either; I’m not good at lying and I’d already had to make up an excuse when I went to the clinic on Friday by putting a false job down in the books. Fortunately they are so pre-occupied with their own stuff at the moment that neither of them questioned where I was going exactly and I still don’t know why I’m here as I walk into reception of the hospital radiology department and give them my name. I thought I’d get a weird look, but I’m just another waiting room statistic as I get told to sit down and wait to be called.

I don’t realise it’s my name being called at first, but I’m jolted back to reality hearing the nurse now
in front of me asking if I’m Aaron Livesy. It seems daft that I’m put off by the fact it’s a man and not
a woman but he told me later that there were male midwives even before, you never think about
these things I suppose. He’d be an idiot to not sense that I’m completely petrified as we walk down
the corridor, “You on your own, no partner or friend with you?” I shake my head silently, not
trusting myself to say anything as he guides me into the room. I’m stressing so much that he gives me
a sedative to help calm me down, if he hadn’t done I think I might have run for the hills.

“You okay?” I nod and he gives me an encouraging smile, “So I’m going to put some lubricating gel
onto your tummy first which will allow this little hand-held device here move smoothly over your
skin. It’ll feel cold, but we will be able to hear your baby’s heartbeat and see what’s going on
inside.” I so wish he’d not said that and I let my head fall back onto the raised back of the bed,
closing my eyes as he starts. He was definitely right about the gel being chilly but I keep my eyes
closed, still not wanting to look as I feel him move the transducer thingy over my belly and abdomen.
Then I hear the tell-tale thumping, for the first time I hear the beat of my baby’s heart and I bring my
head forward slightly, opening my eyes. I stare at the screen not really sure what I’m seeing and the
noise of the heart beat is faster than I was expecting, but what I wasn’t prepared for is just how fast
my own heart is now racing.

“Mmmh, interesting.”

I’m slightly panicked not liking the sound of that, “What do you mean, interesting, I’m not good with
interesting.”

He’s smiling at me and points on the monitor with his finger, “Well you see here and here?” I nod,
“There are two placentas,” I’m staring at him with a look that hopefully translates to I’m an idiot, you
need to be more simple, “You are expecting twins Aaron. They won’t be identical, because then they
would share the same placenta; there aren’t too many men had twins, it’s still quite rare but the scan
is looking good.”

The words are out before I’ve put my brain into gear, “This whole experience is rare if you ask me,
no wonder I’m so fucking hungry all the time.“ I check myself after realising I just swore and look a
little contrite, “Sorry....., you’re sure there’s two of them?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” He’s smiling at me still, he must be used to all this. It’s a good job he can’t see
inside my head because just at this instant for some oddly bizarre reason I can’t seem to stop the
picture of Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger taking front and centre until I shake it away
and focus back on the screen to my side, now becoming more and more fascinated.

“Can you see what sex they are?”

“Do you want to know?”

“Not sure, can you tell?”

“So we're using 4D, yes I can tell for one of them fairly well, but the other is more difficult; we’ll
hopefully see much better next time, being twins you have scans fairly regularly anyway.”

I rest my head back but my eyes never leave the screen, “I don’t want to know.” I fail to mention that
there won’t be a next scan.

“Okay.” I’m feeling totally overwhelmed just about now as everything starts to register. It had never
entered my head that there could be two of them, but after he’s pointed them out even I can see the
two little bodies on the screen, two heads, “They’re sleeping.”

“You can tell that?”

“Mmh hmm, they’re about two inches long and you can see they are really beginning to take shape now. Their hearts are both fully formed, this one here has 163 heart beats a minute and the other, here, has 168; that's about two to three times faster than your heart.”

My eyes are just transfixed; I almost want to touch the screen, as if I could actually touch them. I look back to the midwife, “Is that normal?”

“Perfectly, they’ll gradually slow down as they develop. Everything looks just as we would hope at this stage.” I look at him not quite knowing what to say; he passes me a tissue and it's only then that I realise I’m crying. If I was in turmoil at the weekend, well I still am, just now for a completely different reason. Before it had felt almost like I had an alien inside me but now I feel connected to them; the babies growing inside me are truly real to me for the first time, they’re mine and I’m filled with an indescribable joy that I can’t deny. I might not be ready to admit it out loud or to anyone else and it could take a while to get used to, but deep down I know that one way up or another, in six to seven months’ time, I’m going to be a dad.

TBC
December / Month 3 - Week 11: Struggling to cope, Aaron distances himself from Robert.

Robert, Wednesday 14th December 2016 (Week 11)

I’m certain now that something is wrong so I’d come home early to try spending a bit more time together, get Aaron to talk to me or that’s the idea anyway. He’s been sat outside in the car for a good ten minutes maybe longer before coming inside, obviously not realising I’m home already and watching him through the window, “Hi.”

Aaron looks surprised when he walks through the door and not really that pleased to see me, “What are you doing here so soon?”

“What no ‘Hi honey I’m home’?”

He scoffs at me, seemingly unimpressed at my lame attempt at humour, “You’re such a div Robert; I’m off for a shower.”

I listen to his heavy trudge up the stairs, unwittingly muttering to myself heavy with the sarcasm, “Love you too.” He’s been all over the place this last week, more than even before. At the weekend for a short time he’d been all clingy and needy, the sex had been incredible, but the rest of the time like now he’s all snippy and off with me.

Coming back down he’s already got his jamas on and I can’t help my face falling with disappointment, “Oh, I thought I’d take you out and treat you, get away from everything for a few hours, but that's okay, we can just as well snuggle up here and enjoy a quiet night in.” I give him my shy boyish smile, sidling up behind him and wrapping my arms round his front, but he brushes them off and pushes me away.

Aaron gets a glass of water, takes some paracetamol then stares out of the window a moment; the tension is coming off him in waves, “I’m knackered so I’m just going to go to bed, I’ve already eaten.”

For an instant I’m speechless and I have this lurching feeling in the pit of my stomach, “It’s only just after six, that’s early even for you. I thought you said taking the vitamin tablets would help, you’re sleeping even more now than you were before though.”

“How would you know, you’re hardly home. I’m just tired after a long day and I have a stonking headache. Just because you’ve decided to come home early for once, you expect the world to run to your agenda.”

That he even has the gall to stand there and say this with how he’s been the last few weeks is just astounding, “Pfft....., you have some nerve; at least I’m trying here. I never know what to expect any more when I come home, you’re worse than a teenager with PMS; come back Liv, all is forgiven.”
Aaron glares at me, tops up his glass of water and ignoring me, stomps back upstairs leaving me leaning against the cupboard, fuming with my arms folded and then I decide; I’m not quite done yet.

I take a minute to calm myself then go up to our room and sit down on the edge of the bed to see if I can find out what's really going on with him, “When do you get the results from your blood tests?” He looks at me confused at first almost as though he doesn’t know what I’m talking about and then seemingly it clicks.

“I got them earlier today, it’s all good.”

I don't I believe him, Aaron’s right, he’s not a very good liar, “Yeah, can I see?”

“Threw the letter away.”

“Do you have to see the doctor again?”

“Probably.”

I shift to sit closer to him, “I can come with you if you like.”

“No, I’m alright on my own.”

“I just thought.....”

My pushing makes Aaron snap, “I’m good Robert; stop mithering all the time, you’re suffocating me.”

I retort, the irritation in my voice ringing clear, “Chance would be a fine thing.” I look away, take a deep breath and try again. I rest my hand on his stomach, starting to move further onto the bed to cuddle up with him when he brushes me off with so much force that I have to put my hand out to stop myself falling off the bed.

There’s not a hint of apology in his eyes and I can’t begin to tell what he’s thinking, “I told you I have a headache, I just need to sleep; go do your work or something Robert.”

Staying calm I keep going, I’m not going to be put off that easily, “What’s going on Aaron? I know something is wrong. Are you ill? Is this why you don’t want me to come with you, why you’re shutting me out?”

“No, I’m not ill.”

My eyes are searching into his, but he's avoiding looking at me, “Then talk to me, please Aaron.”

“There’s nothing to talk about. I’m fine.”

I reach for his hand, but again he pulls away from me. He never pulls away from me like this and the look that flashed across his face was one I’ve not seen before; he doesn’t me want me anywhere near or touching him. Aaron turns over onto his side facing away from me, pulling the duvet over him; I sit there unmoving, fighting back the tears that are welling, thinking I don’t know what to do and in the end I give up, going downstairs into the kitchen.

I look around for anything that might help me and start digging in his coat pockets pulling out a card. It’s an appointment card for the hospital radiography department on Monday past; so he didn’t lie completely but he did lie and now I know without doubt that there’s something wrong, something
he’s not telling me. I try to do some work to take my mind off all the scenarios running through my head but fail miserably and eventually I give up, going up to bed. He’s already asleep or he’s pretending to be when I climb in; he’s lying next to me, I love him so much and I miss feeling close to him but it’s like he’s on another planet. I don’t have a clue anymore how to get him to talk to me, not without risking breaking us apart.”

Robert, Friday 16th December 2016 (Week 11)

I’ve been trying not to push Aaron, I know what he’s like when he feels trapped; I'm worried but I want him to tell me himself what’s going on. However, it's just getting worse, to the point we’re not even snapping at each other anymore. He won’t let me near him in bed or anytime else for that matter, it’s almost like I don’t exist.

I’d planned things so I could take two weeks off for Christmas and New Year but it’s been killing me trying to fit everything in. With Liv staying in Dublin I thought we would be able to enjoy spending time together, make it up to Aaron for all the long hours I've been working on getting the business up and running. I’m glad Liv isn’t coming home now; I don’t know what she’d make of everything but it would be even more unbearable than it already is.

The lunch bill is just paid after dining my newest client to sign up and I'm waiting for them to get their coats so we can say our goodbyes, merry Christmases and all that. I'm stifling a yawn as I wait, I was up at the crack of dawn this morning after not being able to sleep and needed to be up early anyway. Today’s the last full work day pretty much, I'll have to do some stuff in-between but in the end everything has come together and I need the rest that’s for sure. Between work and Aaron I don’t have much left and I’m not even too sure how it’s going to go with him after this last couple of weeks; at this rate we might not be together by New Year.

Whilst I wait for everyone to sort themselves out I gaze out of the window, observing the group of people coming out of the pub next door and I debate going in for a pint after leaving here; it would be nice maybe to enjoy a quiet half hour to unwind before heading home. I look at my watch and I have time, it’s only just after three. I let my eyes wander, watching the world go by but then wish I hadn’t. Aaron had said he was going to be out for meetings, but he’d failed to mention that included hugging some bloke in the middle of the street in Leeds. I watch them through the window and they seem close. It’s more than just a hug you give a casual friend and he’s smiling; he looks relaxed even and there’s a definite connection because Aaron doesn’t hold people like that unless he cares about them.

I can't tear my eyes away and I think about his odd behaviour this last few weeks; all the mood swings and I’ve caught him out at least a couple of times if not more in a white lie which I let slide each time. I know I’ve been working lots and guilty of neglecting him but it’s not as though we’ve not spent time together, it's just that he’s been distant and more than half the time almost looking for an argument over the smallest of things. We both knew the deal with the business and that it would be tough the first few months. We’d talked it all through and agreed, but I don’t want a successful business at the cost of losing Aaron in the process. I never dreamt that Aaron could cheat on me, it was always more a concern that I would be the one to cheat on Aaron, but after what I’ve just seen I don’t know if I can trust him anymore; all the little lies suddenly making sense and now I don’t know what to believe.

I’m home before Aaron but he walks in just afterwards and my insides start doing somersaults; I’m so scared that I’m losing him. After everything we’ve been through and I still manage to fuck it up
somehow; I mean I must have, because this is Aaron, he doesn’t cheat, he just doesn’t. My chest tightens with the hurt, I don’t want to believe it but I can’t get what I saw out of my head.

I can tell immediately something is different with him, less closed off, as he starts to make a jam sandwich and I watch him, “I went shopping, I thought we could have a quiet night in.” I can't gauge his mood at all and I panic, hastily adding an alternative, "Or we could go to the pub if you prefer?"

For the first time since the weekend he smiles at me, albeit nervously, “We can go to the pub if you want. I just need something to tide me over; I’m hungry it’s been a long day.”

He doesn't want to be alone with me then. I can't take my eyes off him as he takes a bite of his sandwich, “Yeah. You have a good day? Where did you get to in the end, you said you were out and about.”

“I was over Harrogate way all day talking to some dealers we are thinking of working with; traffic was a bitch on the way back.”

The lies just keep coming but I don’t let him see I know, “Mmmh, well I’ve managed to finish almost everything. I should be able to spend most of the time at home now, maybe help out at the yard next week until you finish. You decided when you’re shutting for Christmas yet?”

He leans against the counter finishing the sandwich, “No, not yet, was thinking maybe Wednesday and then do the paperwork at home. I said I’d do it to give Adam time to spend with Vic and Charlie so if you want to keep working ‘til then it’s okay.”

“I promised I’d make sure we have Christmas for us, I want to spend it with you.”

He has that smile again whilst shifting nervously from one foot to the other, “Well it’s not quite Christmas until the weekend and why would you want to be bothered with the yard when you could be doing stuff for your own business; you’ve been saying how hard it was to get everything done and could do with more time.”

My voice gets more defensive, I can't help myself, “The yard is part my business too remember.”

“It just doesn’t make sense that’s all.” Aaron starts fidgeting and looks unsure, like he's about to say something else but then stops himself, "Right I’m off for a shower; I’ll be down in a bit.” All I can think as he walks away is that he doesn’t want me around him at the scrapyard so he can sneak off and do whatever he’s doing with whoever he’s doing it with.

I shout up the stairs, “I’m off to see Vic for a bit, I’ll see you in the pub okay.” He yells down an acknowledgement and I go over the road, but actually I want to know more from Adam what else Aaron’s been lying about, or maybe I’ll find out he’s even lying to Adam.

Leaving Vic and Adam's I go over to the pub, but after two pints he still hasn't turned up; I get tired of waiting and decide to go back home. I’m about to shout out after going in but hearing Aaron talking, presumably to someone on the phone, I hold back instead shutting the door really quietly so he can't hear. I can't see him, but I can hear him.

“Paul, it'll be fine. I’ll try to get away, Monday if I can; I'll just have to find an excuse if Robert’s at the yard. I promised you didn't I, you’re not on your own; I want to do this.” I lean back against the wall and I feel like my entire world is collapsing. I remember saying those words to Aaron earlier in the year after he first told me about his dad; I had promised him that he wasn’t on his own, that I’d be there for him. “Yes I will, I just don’t know how I’m going to tell him.” There’s a long pause and
I’m holding my breath, paranoid that he’ll know I’m here listening, “I know, I’m excited, I never expected to feel like this.” There’s another long pause, “I packed a bag yesterday, I was all ready to leave and not tell anyone; I didn’t though. Seeing you earlier today helped me put it into perspective and I’m sure now it’s what I want more than ever; I already feel a lot more relaxed about it, there’s no turning back for me now that I’ve made my choice......, you think? He knows something’s up and I won’t be able to hide it from him much longer; I can’t lie to him anymore. You’re right it’s better to do it sooner rather than later. Just give me a few more days and anyway I need a little time to get on his good side after being such a shit with him recently, it’ll make it easier to tell him.” Another pause and then a nervous laugh, ”Yeah, then we could be living together sooner than you think......; Paul I promise I’ll tell him, I’ll find a way. It’s going to be good together I can feel it, it’s hard to believe we’ll actually be our own family.” I bang the front door closed to let him think I’ve just come home. “Gotta go; I’ll call you later.”

I walk in to the room, “You didn’t come over; I was feeling lonely.”

“Yeah, a friend rang. I’m ready now, if you want to go back?”

“I’m not in the mood anymore, let’s just order in.”

“Okay. You want your usual?”

The evening carries on, kind of normal, but I’ve put up a barrier as I try to work out what to do. There’s a weird tension from both of us and for the first time all week Aaron is trying to snuggle up to me except now it’s me pushing him away. I can’t stand him touching me, the feeling of betrayal is too strong; I can’t believe I’m just sitting here, waiting for him to tell me he’s leaving me for someone else.

He puts his hand into mine but I pull away and go into the kitchen to get myself a glass of whiskey, downing it in one. Aaron comes up behind me, trying again, wrapping his arms around my front and kissing the back of my neck but I shove him away, “Get off me Aaron.”

He looks taken aback, a little afraid even, probably scared that I might have worked out what he’s up to, “I know I’ve been a bit off recently, I’m sorry. I want to make it up to you.”

“A bit......, try a lot.” He can hear the bitterness in my voice, “I was in Leeds today.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, took those clients I told you about out for lunch.”

He looks apprehensive, definitely stressing, “I forgot.”

I can’t hold it in anymore, I can’t let him be with me here like this, trying to worm his way into my good books before ripping my world apart, “I’ll bet you did.” He’s looking at me trying to work out where I’m going with this. “I saw you Aaron. I saw you with another guy.”

Aaron’s expression is one of shock and I can almost see the cogs of his brain whirring away as he tries to think of what to say, “He’s just a friend.”

My hurt takes over and there’s real vehemence in my voice now, my eyes hard, “I don’t believe you. You know earlier in the week when I found the appointment card in your pocket I was actually worried that you were ill, but you can’t be that ill, if you’re gallivanting around with Paul or whatever his name is. Remember I’m the expert cheater right, you can’t cheat a cheater.”
“It’s not like that, I can explain.”

“What that you’re leaving me,” I scoff at him, “I heard you on the phone earlier; you already packed your bag. I thought we were happy, that we were good together.” I glare at him, the hurt pouring out of me, “You were acting all strange for weeks and then everything seemed okay again and I started to relax but it wasn’t okay, it just got worse and worse.”

He comes towards me but I walk to the other side of the room and he hangs back, “I’m not cheating on you Robert I promise and I’m not ill.”

“I don’t believe anything you say Aaron. I spoke to Adam earlier; you lie all the time about where you are and what you’re doing. He said you collapsed at the yard and made him promise not to tell me. I don’t know what to think anymore Aaron; I don’t know what I’ve done wrong to make you like this.”

Aaron is getting visibly upset and I can see the tears welling in his eyes, “You haven’t, you haven’t done anything wrong, it’s me....., Robert it’s me that’s screwed this up and made a mess of everything.”

I’ve never felt so confused and hurt as I do now, “I can’t do this, if you’re going to leave me, at least you can tell me why.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“But you said on the phone.....?”

Aaron interrupts, “I was scared and.....” He hesitates and I scoff at him once more, he can hardly look me in the eye, “I didn’t know I would feel like this about.....”

“Aaron, please, just.....”

“I’m pregnant.” I stand dumbstruck staring at him, “And before you ask, yes they are yours.” I had lots of things going through my head of what he was going to say; this wasn’t one of them.

I gawp at him still registering the words, “They....., you said they....., pregnant and they.”

“Yep, that was a bit of a shock for me too.”

I sit down at the table, pour another whiskey and before even putting the bottle down I pour in some more for good measure, I think I’m going to need it and then I take a drink before looking at him again, “I don’t understand.....; you’re sure?”

"Oh yeah, I'm sure," Aaron has this odd look on his face but he’s smiling.

A zillion and one questions are hitting all at the same time; I don't know where to start as I stare at him thinking I can't have heard right, but I know I did, “How long have you known?”

“A couple of weeks.”

The shock is written all over my face, “Why didn’t you....., why didn’t you say anything?”

“You don’t want children.”

“I never said that.”
“Well it’s how it came across and I got scared. First I got scared because I didn’t want it and then when you made all those comments about Charlie I thought I was sure so I made an appointment to get rid of it.....” He lets the words trail off, his eyes avoiding mine.

I look at him aghast, “An abortion, you were going to have an abortion without telling me?”

The words come spilling out of him, “Yesterday, but I couldn't go through with it. I wasn’t going to go to the ultrasound even earlier in the week, but I did and when I found out it was twins this just made it all worse. I panicked and I didn’t know what to do for the best. As soon as I saw them I knew deep down I was going to keep them, I just couldn't even properly admit it to myself until yesterday.” Aaron pauses and takes a deep breath, he looks as overwhelmed as I feel, "I wanted to tell you, I wanted to tell you so much......, I packed a bag to leave because I couldn't face the thought of you rejecting us and then there's the village and everyone. I got scared and thought it would be easier to run away, I’m sorry."

I shake my head still trying to wrap my head around things, “So who’s Paul?”

“I went to an antenatal class on Tuesday. I wanted to know more even though I wasn't planning on keeping them, I couldn't help myself. There were just three of us, guys I mean; he was there and freaking out after, I helped him calm down and we got talking. He'd already told his partner, he didn’t react well and kicked him out.

“I would never do that.”

“His family don’t want anything to do with him either. They come from not far off from here; I’ve been helping him to find somewhere to go. I know I only met him Tuesday but I needed someone to talk to who understood. He talked me out of leaving and tried to help me work it out; he made me realise I had to tell you, that I wanted to tell you and for us to do this together. I’m already starting to show, it’s why I didn’t want to let you close to me. I was so paranoid after we slept together at the weekend that you’d realise I’m changing and not just putting on a bit of weight.”

I stare into my whiskey as things start to fall into place, “That’s why you stopped drinking and the funny changes with your food.”

He nods and there’s a quiet pause until he pulls something out of his pocket, “You want to see a picture......, sonogram?”

I don’t know and don’t answer, Aaron comes and sits next to me, “Meet your children, daddy Sugden.”

He’s grinning at me, pushing a picture into my hand and I stare at it, "Do you know what sex yet?"

"No, I didn't want to know." Resting his head against my shoulder he continues, “I didn’t want to lie to you but I was so confused and I needed some time to accept it; I know I’ve made a right mess of things by not telling you sooner.” He hesitates and I can tell he’s nervous as he bites his bottom lip, “What do you think?”

The honest answer is I don’t know what to think or what I’m feeling right now, “I have no idea Aaron. I don’t.....” I see the look of panic on his face and he starts to pull away and I stop him. “I don’t mean that wrongly, you’ve had two weeks to get used to this. I’m just....., I’m just a bit shocked and I’m going to need some time too.” There's an understatement if ever there was one.

“Was frightened you wouldn’t want me....., us.”
“I’ll always want you, but it’s.....,” I half laugh not quite able to find the right words for once in my life, “It’s.....”

“Fucked up?”

This gets a hint of a smile out of me, "I’m not sure I’d say it quite like that but definitely in weirdest moment of my life territory.”

Aaron looks at me seriously, “I don’t want anyone else to know, not yet. This changes our entire lives and until I don’t have a choice I want to keep this just between us. We need to take our own baby steps for a bit without anyone else interfering, is that okay?”

I nod silently, my eyes turning back, fixing on the sonogram still in my hand and when Aaron puts his hand on mine I rest my head against his. My heart is fluttering with a strange mix of elation and fear at the thought of becoming a parent; that these two babies are our children and our future. Aaron’s right, this changes everything and just right now it feels a little scary until I can get my head round everything; baby steps Robert....., baby steps.

TBC


Some Kind Of Normal

Chapter Summary

December / Month 3 – Week 11-12: Aaron and Robert work through some teething problems as they adjust to their new future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Robert, Friday 16th December 2016 (Week 11)

“Just baby steps,” Aaron is smiling at me talking to myself but I’m beginning to feel more than a little overwhelmed and the panic that has been building takes over completely, “I’m not good with baby steps; I really need some fresh air.” Grabbing my coat I bolt out of the door, outside before even waiting for Aaron to have a chance to react. I don’t go far, just to sit on the wall at the bottom of the garden where I tilt my head up to look at the dark sky whilst trying to calm down. Inside my heart had been beating ten to the dozen and I couldn’t slow it down, it was like I couldn’t breathe. Hearing Aaron come towards me I tip my head back forward to see him looking a little unsure if I want him here or not, “Did you bring the whiskey?”

“No, you want me to go get it?”

I shake my head, “No, better not otherwise I’ll have a hangover in the morning. Just think then we could be throwing up together.” At least I can manage a half smile when saying this.

Cautiously Aaron sits down next to me, “That’s a lot better now; I don’t feel sick much anymore.” He’s constantly glancing at me probably trying to work out what’s going on in my head and all I can think is good luck with that one.

Turning to look at him our eyes meet, the blue of his eyes are as striking as I have ever seen them and they help to calm me, “I am allowed to freak out right, you won’t be mad at me for freaking out just a little bit?”

He pulls a wry smile, fidgeting nervously with the zip on his coat, “I’ve spent the last few weeks freaking out: I don’t think I get a vote on that one.”

My emotions are all over the place and I can’t disguise the resentment in my voice, “I can’t believe you were planning to get rid of them and not tell me. We promised no secrets Aaron; after everything we went through together this year, do you know how much it hurts that you’d talk to some stranger and not me?”

Aaron shakes his head, reaching out with his hand and then seems to think better of it, “I couldn’t ever have done it, I didn’t even go inside; I was just fooling myself to think I would.”

“And if this Paul hadn’t convinced you to stay, would you have left me?” I have to know, laying bare my deepest fear, that even after all this time he doesn’t trust me. With Aaron's hand now resting on my arm I still refuse to look at him; not wanting him to see just how afraid I'd been of losing him.

“I would have told you.” He can tell I’m not so sure I believe him and pulls my face round with his
hands, holding my head in such a way that leaves me almost no choice but to look at him, “Robert, I would have told you. You know all my secrets, all of them. I just needed to accept it myself first and I did that yesterday. I couldn’t walk away from you if I tried, you would have to push me hard for me to leave; I love you. I love you with every bone in my body and now I love our children in exactly the same way.”

My eyes search into his and after a minute I pull him in-between my legs, sitting him down sideways onto my right knee, “Can you feel it?” I kick myself mentally, “Sorry them?”

“No, I mean there’s all this stuff screwing with my body,” He gives me a tired smile, “That I feel all the time.”

I slide my hand up under his coat and put it against his tummy, “You didn’t want me to touch you; you didn’t want me to touch you here.” My hand moves over the top of his t-shirt, my fingers feeling across his stomach, “I wouldn’t have noticed Aaron. I can’t tell any difference, maybe just putting on a little weight but it would never have entered my head to think you’re pregnant.”

“Join the club until I went to the doctors although it was obvious really when I think back; I know it’s possible, but you don’t ever think it’s something that could happen to us, to me.” Aaron looks away guiltily and then back to me, “I was paranoid you’d work it out and I wasn’t ready for that.” He bites his bottom lip, “I can’t feel them physically, but ever since seeing them on the ultrasound, it’s like I can feel them; it sounds daft and it’s all in my head I know, but they’re a part of me and I feel a bond with them.” Aaron rests his head against mine, “Will you forgive me for not telling you before? Please Robert you have to believe me I would have told you.”

Averting my eyes an instant, his words roll round in my head. I know I have no choice but to accept his reasons but Aaron sometimes makes me doubt myself in a way no-one else can yet as soon as I look back into his eyes I melt. I never could resist him for long and I soften, kissing him on the mouth awakening a neediness in both of us with our lips reluctant to part. I feel him shiver a little, “Come on, let’s get you inside; it’s cold out.” We start to get up but I hesitate pulling him back down again, “Aaron.” He turns his face to mine, we are so close I can feel the warmth of his breath but this time I ignore the desire to kiss him once more, “I love you, but don’t ever lie to me like that again. I’ve spent the last few weeks going out of my mind and you let me. You have no idea of some of things I thought could be wrong and you went through this all alone but you’re not alone, not anymore and you haven’t been for a long time. You have to trust me because I’m not going anywhere; we’re a package deal and that includes our children, even Liv.”

Aaron puts his fingers over my lips to stop me talking, “I wasn’t alone though, you didn’t give up on me and you wouldn’t let go even when I pushed you away. Robert it wasn’t you I didn’t trust, it was me; I have to learn to trust myself.” Aaron rests his face into my neck and we wrap our arms around each other holding on tightly. I suppose it’s easy to forget when everything’s good how much we are both still controlled by our insecurities from the past.

I kiss him and push him up off my knee, “Come on, I’m tired, let’s just go to bed.”

He smiles at me, “At this time of night, you’re not pregnant are you?”

“I think one pregnant mardy arse is enough in this house don’t you?” I smirk at him having earned myself a smack on the arse in retaliation. “Ow daddy that hurt.”
Something flickers across Aaron’s eyes, a shadow of the past and I know where his mind went, but we had both agreed we need to leave the past behind us. He’s still learning how to deal with that sometimes but he responds, a slight twinkle appearing in the corner of his eye, “Well if you can’t be nice to me, what do you expect?”

When we reach the door into the house I turn round preventing him from coming back inside, blocking the doorway with my body, “Ooh just think, all those new pet names I can come up with now, won’t that be fun.” I smirk before leaning in to kiss him, my hands moving to his face as we kiss more deeply and for the first time since he told me I feel Aaron relax properly.

Taking my hand Aaron leads me upstairs where I first go to clean my teeth needing to get rid of the whiskey taste lingering in my mouth. Going into our bedroom I was expecting Aaron to be in bed already but instead he’s stood by the window, his eyes looking up and down Main Street outside. I go stand behind him, “Anything interesting?”

“No. What do you think they’re all going to say?”

“They’ll probably say it’s about time those two gave us something to gossip about, things were beginning to get boring round ’ere.”

Wrapping my arms around him, Aaron tilts his head back, “Muppet.”

I shrug, “They love you and some of them even love me now.” Aaron smiles; it feels so natural as he leans back into me and I kiss the side of his head, “Anyone says anything that you don’t like and they’ll have me to deal with. I can still be the old Robert when I need to be.”

“Mmmh, not sure I like the sound of that.” After closing the curtains I go sit on the end of the bed where Aaron comes to stand in front of me. He puts his arms around my shoulders and kisses the top of my head whilst I kiss his tummy, my hands resting on his hips.

My eyes as always are drawn to his, widening a little when he next speaks, “Undress me.” Checking to be sure this is what he wants I see him smiling at me, “I want to show you.” I unbutton his jeans, pushing them down along with his shorts, helping him step out of them. My hands roam over the bare skin of his upper body, reaching up under his t-shirt, touching and feeling him without seeing. He’s still toned, he might have put on weight, but there’s no fat anywhere. I push up his t-shirt and he pulls it up and over his head so he’s now stood naked in front of me. Aaron takes my hand and moves it over his stomach and down to his lower abdomen. I drink in his body; it’s as beautiful as it ever was as he speaks softly, his hand now guiding mine to where he wants me to touch. “You can tell here just a little bit.”

I let my eyes wander, my hands and fingers exploring at the same time, “Maybe, but you look more like you’ve been overdoing those banana chutney sandwiches than pregnant. I wouldn’t have known but for the veins showing more, that’s what would have made me ask questions. I seem to remember Vic saying something about that; it is the veins right?”

Aaron nods, “Yes.” He moves my hands up towards his nipples, “Touch them.” As soon as I brush over them with the tips of my fingers his head falls backwards and he closes his eyes; the circle of skin is definitely darker than I remember and a little bigger I think. Aaron’s hands are practically grabbing fistfuls of my hair, “Use your mouth.” He’s stood in really close now, leaning into me so I can reach and moans as my tongue moves over the first one, licking a little and then kissing, lightly sucking. His breathing is more irregular and I can tell he finds this totally erotic as he moves my head to the other side whilst guiding my hand to continue teasing the one I’d just been playing with, “Do
they taste different?"

“No.” We’ve both been getting hard as we’ve been exploring his body but I ignore it, consciously not wanting to push Aaron into anything he’s not ready for just yet.

“They’re so sensitive and when you touch them with your mouth it’s such a turn on.” Aaron starts to giggle, his eyes looking down at me in amusement, which I don’t work out why at first until the smell of his fart hits me and I let him go, pushing him away from me so I can move. Curling my nose up I undress and climb into bed while Aaron gets in his side, quietly laughing at me shaking my head. “Get used to it; apparently it’s one of the side effects.”

“Seriously; Christ you were bad enough before.” I pull him to rest against me, “It’s a good job you’ve got other things going for you otherwise that’s grounds for separation.”

Aaron laughs at me, “You said you’d love me whatever.”

“I will, there are limits though......, ow that hurt, what did you do that for?”

Aaron snuggles against me and I can’t help feeling a massive wave of love for him surge through my entire body. I kiss his forehead and he puts his hand in mine. It feels such a long time since we were like this, “I’ve missed this, not the sex, not the other stuff, I mean I did but I missed this more......, you and me being close. I don’t want to ever let you go when we’re like this.”

“Good. I missed this too, I’m sorry it took me so long to tell you.”

“I’ll get over it; I get it even though I don’t like it. So what else? Tell me what else is different.”

“So, I’m tired all the time.”

“No, really?”

Aaron smiles at me, “Less of the sarcasm you; really. Even standing up is hard work then the eating all the time helped with feeling sick.”

I scrunch my face up, thinking back a while, “I haven’t seen you eat anything like as much this last couple of weeks?”

“I hid it; you and Adam were winding me up too much.” I sigh but I don’t say anything, there’s no point, he knows I’m upset with him not telling me. “It’s not as bad now, I don’t feel sick anymore much, but I feel full all the time even when I’m hungry. You know how it feels after you’ve stuffed your face and you can’t move because you’ve eaten too much?” I nod, “It feels like that all the time. I’m still peeing for all of Emmerdale which is annoying as hell because I can’t sleep too long without having to get up but the midwife said that a lot of the symptoms will go away in the next couple of weeks pretty much like the morning sickness has, but they’ll come back the further along I get.”

“I don’t know really how it all works. You’re going to have to explain it to me, not tonight though. Tonight I just want to cuddle up with you and sleep; is that okay? It’s been a long day for both of us and I’m knackered never mind you.” Aaron nods and we spend some time kissing, just enjoying how good it feels be close again until we eventually fall asleep in each other’s arms.

Aaron, Thursday 22nd December 2016 (Week 12)
We closed the yard yesterday as originally planned. On Monday Robert wasn’t going to even let me out of the house which led to a big argument. I might be pregnant but I’m not going to be wrapped up in a ball of cotton wool for the next few months and he’s going to have to get used to that. We’d come to a compromise in the end that he did his work in the scrapyard office and let me work as normal but he helped me with the bigger stuff that needed sorting out. He made me take breaks more often than I would have done but I’ll let him off, it's quite cute watching him fuss over me. Anyway we survived the experience without killing each other but I’m pleased now not to be working until after the New Year, I think we both are.

Neither of us had gotten round to doing anything for Christmas so earlier today Robert fetched a tree and we spent the afternoon doing all the decorations then after tea we’ve come into Leeds to do some late night Christmas shopping. It's bitterly cold out, but I like it like this, it feels like Christmas, especially with all the lights up around town. I still have to decide what to get Robert, I have no idea; I’ll have to sneak back on my own and have a look.

Right now I’m stood leaning against a lamppost waiting for Robert who has gone back into Marks and Sparks for the scarf he had spent fifteen minutes choosing, then deciding he didn’t want until he changed his mind as soon as we got outside. I said I’d wait out here, needing some fresh air; it gets too hot in the shops after a while. I’m just stood watching everyone and everything around me when I hear my name, “Aaron Livesy, well there’s a face I’ve not seen for a while.”

I turn to where the voice is coming from, “Yeah, they daft enough to let you out of prison then?”

“Ha ha, you still think you're funny when we all know you're the joke.”

“Get lost Wayne, go bother someone who gives a shit.”

“Hark at you getting all high and mighty; you always did think you were better than me.”

“Oh I didn’t think it, I knew it; I still do.”

“No boyfriend keeping you warm tonight? Oh that's right you killed him; not found someone else yet?”

“Fuck off Wayne, go crawl back into your hole you grubby gobshite.” I start to move away from the lamppost to go look for Robert; I’m bored of Wayne already but I don’t get far as he shoves me back and now I’m irritated.

“What did you call me?”

We face off, “I can call you a lot worse; you want me to keep going? Let’s see.....” Before I get any further his fist comes at me; I’m ready for him despite stumbling over his foot when avoiding his fist but I manage not to fall. The adrenalin is pumping now though and I’m laughing at him, seeing the annoyance on his face at having missed his target, “Come on then, let’s be ‘aving you.”

He’s about to come at me again but stops and pulls back, “You’ll keep Livesy.” I’m smiling at him, feeling disappointed that he was backing off so soon and I look across at what had stopped him. There are two coppers looking on, watching as Wayne picks up his bag and walks off in the other direction pulling his hood up; probably only just got out. I don’t know why they don’t just put him inside, leave him there and throw away the key. They give me a hard stare but I turn round to pick up my own bags, ignoring them as well as the few bystanders who had slowed down to watch and now carrying on with whatever they had been doing before our little show had distracted them. It’s
now when I see Robert that I stop still; he comes over and I can’t tell how much he saw, but enough
I think going by the look on his face.

“What was all that about?”

“Nothing, just a face from the past.” He doesn’t say anything else and as we’d more or less finished
the shopping we head to the car to go home. It’s a more silent journey than the one here, Robert’s
mood is not a happy one and when we get home he gets out of the car, slams the door and goes into
the cottage without saying a word. I take a big deep breath and follow him in.

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Getting through the front door, I decide I’m not in the frame of mind to put up with Robert being off
with me all night, “Come on then?”

“What?”

“Say what you've got to say.”

“What’s the point? You won’t listen.”

“That’s not true.”

“Isn’t it?” Robert takes a beer out of the fridge opens it and necks about a third in one hit, so I know
he’s pissed at me.

“I don’t know what your problem is?”

Robert’s eyes flash with anger and he comes close up-to me, “You don’t know what my problem is?
Aaron you were going to deck him and he was going to go for you. You can’t do things like that in
your condition.”

I laugh at him incredulously, “Whoa, in my condition. I’m not a fucking invalid.”

“No you’re not, but you can’t carry on like nothing’s changed neither.”

“I don’t. I’m well aware everything’s changed thank you very much.”

“Then use your fucking head, anyone would think you still don’t want these children.”

I’m as angry as Robert now and I lash out without thinking, “Don’t you dare say that, I went through
agony that first month and then deciding what to do, so don’t you dare lecture me. If I’d wanted to
get rid of them I would have and nothing you would have said or wanted would have made any
difference.”

“Are you sure about that? Maybe you’re doing this on purpose because you can’t handle it after all.
It’s easier this way, get into fights like a teenager who can’t keep control and get hurt so you miscarry
or worse. You could convince yourself it’s not your fault then, just blame someone else.” He takes
another drink as we glare at each other, “When are you going to get it through that thick skull of
yours that you can’t do the things you did before; you have a life inside you, two lives, our children.
You might not want them, but I do; I want you and them.” Robert grabs his keys off the side, “I’m
going to pub; I need a real pint.”

Left standing in the middle of the kitchen my fists are clenched tight and hearing the door slam I let
go, smashing my right fist into the door between the kitchen and the living room. I stand stock still,
trembling and shocked that I can still have that kind of anger inside me; gradually I calm down and go to the sink to get a glass of water where I see my reflection in the kitchen window. I quickly turn away knowing I've screwed up again and that we need to sort this out before it blows up into something it shouldn’t.

I lock up and walk to the pub finding Robert sat by the door on his own; his anger so visible that I sense no-one dare go near. Mum looks between us as Robert shouts over to her, “Hey Chas, why don’t you pull Aaron here a pint; he has some catching up to do after all that hot water.” Sitting down next to him I ignore the tone in his voice, his eyes avoid mine focussing doggedly on his beer. Mum brings over my pint, putting it on the table but I push it to one side out of my way. She hesitates until she sees the look on my face and thankfully she leaves us alone without trying to interfere. Robert grabs my hand seeing my grazed knuckles; he looks at me and then releases it down onto the table, “Some things don’t ever change do they, do you wish that had been my face?”

I take a deep breath knowing I need to keep calm, “No. I don’t wish it had been your face and I don’t want a pint; I want us to go back home and talk.”

“Why? I mean you don’t do talking except with your fists.”

“Now who’s being the teenager, you know that's not true. I can’t change who I am overnight Robert.”

“I’m not asking you to, I want you to stop and think about what you’re doing before someone hurts you and.....;” Robert stops and looks around not wanting people nearby to hear.

If he won’t come home with me then I’ll say what I have to say here and I move closer to him; at least he doesn’t pull away even though I think a part of him wants to. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.” Robert ignores me, turning his head away to stare at the door just to our right, looking anywhere except at me, “Robert you know I didn’t mean it.”

When he turns to look at me, I realise he has tears in his eyes and his voice breaks just a little, “Didn’t you?” Seeing him like this, it hits me how much I have hurt him. “Sometimes it’s like you do this on purpose as though you have something to prove, but you don’t; not with me, not ever.”

I turn to the side, my leg wrapped under me and I put my hand to his face, shielding it from anyone who might be watching from seeing the tear as it falls down his cheek and I kiss him. We hardly ever do this in public, not in the pub anyway but I keep our faces close, talking to him almost in a whisper, “I know. I love you, I love our children. I told you the truth the other day, I want this and I want us to be a family; you, me and all of us, together. I just wasn’t thinking.”

“Then there has to be some ground rules Aaron, at work and at home. I love how you stand up to people, it's part of who you are and why I love you, but you can't goad people like that anymore. All it would take is a kick or a punch and everything we talked about in the last few days could go away and you could be hurt, really hurt.”

I rest our foreheads together and kiss him again, a little more intense. “I promise, I won’t do it again, but until we tell people then we have to keep some kind of normal.” I see the look he gives me, “I know; I know that doesn’t include decking stupid people where I should know better.” I get a reluctant smile as he starts to relax and I let out a deep sigh of relief knowing we're okay, “I don't know Robert, maybe some of it was just all the crap from the last few weeks and it had built up more than I thought; it felt good to feel like me for a minute. I don’t feel like me sometimes and I need to let it out.”
Robert looks at me intently, his eyes burning into mine, full of love as he strokes his fingers down
my cheek, “Okay, I get that, so we’ll think of something to help when that happens.”

I check around us to see if anyone is looking but no-one seems to be taking much notice except mum
who mouths to me asking if everything is okay; I nod and give her a quick smile. I intertwine my
fingers with Roberts and squeeze his hand. “Come on, let’s go home; I want to go home.”

Robert looks at me seriously a minute, “Promise me you won’t do anything silly like that again.”

“I promise and I promise that I want these children as much as I want to be with you, not more, not
less.” I smile at him. “I’m greedy, I want you all.” I kiss him once more, wanting it to last longer but
I'm conscious of where we are.

“Oi cut it out, we’ll have none of that in here.” I look up to see Adam with a big grin on his face, he
can't help himself sometimes, knowing I'm easily embarrassed, “You good for drinks?”

It’s Robert who answers, smiling at me conspiratorially, “We were just leaving actually; you know,
things to do, people to see.” He pushes my untouched pint towards Adam, "Here, take Aaron’s pint,
he never got round to starting it."

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll bet you do.”

We leave Adam grinning to himself not believing a word of it as he picks up my pint, taking it to the
bar and we leave to walk home. Robert gives me a knowing look as he sees the broken panel in the
door I’d punched, “You’re fixing that.”

I grin at him, “Duh, if you did it I’d only have to re-do it.”

“Cheek, I don’t think so, how about we do it together mmhh? I’m hungry; do you fancy something to
eat?”

My look tells him that's a stupid question; he knows I'm always hungry. Going over to him I wrap
my arms around his waist, “Are we good?”

Robert nods at me quietly smiling, kissing me on the lips, “Just behave yourself from now on or
you'll have me to answer to good and proper.”

Smirking at him, I can't resist teasing, “Is that a promise or a threat Mr Sugden?”

He kisses into my neck, biting gently, "Try it and you'll find out." He presses me against the counter
where we get a bit carried away and our kissing gets more intense. Robert pushes me away slightly
and then down onto my knees; he watches me with a big mischievous grin on his face as I start to
undo his jeans, "You did say you were hungry right?"

I grin back up at him, knowing how very soon he's going to be begging, "Starving."

TBC

Chapter End Notes
For anyone who didn't watch Aaron's story before he went to France, Wayne was someone doing community service with him and he was always trying to get at Aaron.
Robert, Christmas Eve - Saturday 24th December 2016 (Week 12)

Hopefully today’s shopping run should keep us going at least for the next week; that said, Aaron is still eating us out of house and home so if not we’ll just have to eat at the pub instead because I don’t think either of us want to venture too far out of the village unless we really have to over Christmas. I’m waiting in the car whilst Aaron nips into the shop to buy some milk which we’d forgotten to get. Whenever I have a quiet moment like now I’ve gotten into the habit of looking at the sonogram and I smile as my finger softly strokes over the images of our unborn children, it lives tucked away in my wallet where no-one will see. Despite our argument the other night we’ve been super close since Aaron told me he is pregnant, though I’m still trying to wrap my head around that we’re going to be parents. I look over to where Aaron is talking to Paddy; I wonder what they will all make of it when they find out. We’re both a little worried about telling everyone; the family will be okay we think but we’re not too sure about in the village and I don’t even want to think about what reactions we will get further afield.

No-one would ever guess by looking at Aaron that anything is any different, in fact this last week he’s looking really good and has a kind of glow to him. He still does the odd weird thing, like he has this uncanny sense of smell that he can tell what I’ve had to eat even though he has no idea. It’s become a bit of a game now with me not having my usual snacks and then he has to guess. We are so sad like this but right now we’re happy and I’ll take all I can get of that after this last three months. He’s stopped going to the loo every two seconds which means Aaron is sleeping the night through although he still gets tired quickly when we are out and tomorrow will be full on keeping up appearances for the family so we’ve decided to have a quiet night in and enjoy Christmas Eve in our own home.

After we get in I go straight out again to take the presents over to Vic’s; Charlie might not be old
enough to have a clue what’s going on but Vic wants everything to be under the tree for the morning and if it makes Vic happy, I’m not going to argue. Aaron was going to come with me but changed his mind feeling all emotional about seeing Charlie and didn’t think he’d be able to act normal around her so I left him making something to eat. Let’s just say no two days are the same at the minute and the more time we spend together the more I’m learning now that Aaron has stopped hiding things from me. Quite often I catch myself watching him, making me realise just how much I love him, sometimes trying to imagine what he’ll look like when he starts to show properly. I know it won’t change how I feel about him, but it’s still strange when you see a pregnant guy in the street; it’s going to take some getting used to for us never mind anyone else we’re with.

The cottage is warm and cosy, all the presents are wrapped and under the tree; after finishing eating we couldn’t be bothered to wash up and just left everything, coming to settle on the sofa for the rest of the night. We never even got round to putting the telly on, instead just cuddling up together with some tunes playing in the background; it’s as perfect as it gets. Aaron is lying on top of me, his fingers drawing an invisible pattern on my chest, “You want to open a present then? We said we’d open one each tonight.”

I squeeze Aaron, making him smile as I pull a face in objection at the thought of having to move, “That would require getting up and I’m so comfy with you here, we can just leave them all until morning.”

“We could, but I want to give you a special present now.”

“They’re all special when they’re from you Aaron,” My winsome smile isn’t going to do the trick though and seeing him pout at me, I give in as he knew I would, “Okay. You’re in charge.”

“Exactly,” Aaron’s face is all lit up, excited like a big kid as he kisses me, "Get used to it."

I laugh quietly watching him go to the tree returning with a padded envelope, putting it in my hands, “I’m not even going to try and guess what this is.”

“Good, cos you’ll never guess.”

“Now I’m intrigued.” Aaron is kneeling on the floor by the side of the sofa; his eyes are flickering with the reflection of the flames from the fire and I almost put the present down to focus on him instead. We’ve been very close emotionally since he told me but we’ve not had full-on sex although we’ve been verging on a few times. It’s not caused a problem between us, I just think we’re both scared a little, I can’t really explain it but each time we’ve held back.

Aaron nudges me forcing my attention to the envelope in my hand as he rests his chin on folded arms at the side of me; he’s making me a little nervous with how intensely his eyes are watching me. After opening the envelope, I peak inside and look at him before pulling out a keyring and there’s a card with it; it’s an appointment card for Aaron’s next ultrasound on the 5th Jan. “It would have been sooner but it got pushed back because of Christmas; you’ll get to see them for yourself, you get to see our children for real.” The key ring has a small frame where I can put the sonogram picture and then another attachment about the same size in silver which has the month of October 2016 stamped into it on one side, it looks just like a calendar would and has the ’3’ circled with the words ‘our daddy since’ at the top then on the other side it’s blank except at the top it says, ‘you held us for the first time on’. I look at Aaron, “We’ll get that side stamped when they arrive because it was even too difficult to know which month to put. The third of October is the closest I can get for when I
conceived, so that’s what we’re using; merry Christmas daddy Sugden.”

I’m not actually able to say anything just at this moment. Aaron kisses me and then kisses away the tear that is now rolling down my cheek; I’m turning into a right old softie. I pull Aaron back up onto the sofa where we lie sideways on with our arms and legs wrapped around each other, kissing and caressing. "Just think, this time next year we’ll be a family, how weird will that be.” I stroke my hand down Aaron’s cheek and we take our time with a kiss that I don’t want to ever end, but eventually our lips part and I open my eyes, “Your turn.”

It must be the day for envelopes as I pull out the crumpled brown envelope out of my back pocket. “It only arrived today and you know me, I’m a bit rubbish sometimes; sorry it’s so creased up.” I watch Aaron’s face just as closely as he had watched mine and I see his eyes widen, “We can change it to whatever you want if it’s too soon; I just thought it would put the past properly behind us and we start out as we mean to go on and I know it’s not the most romantic.....”

I don’t get any further as Aaron pushes me onto my back and his lips crush onto mine, kissing hungrily, "It's perfect." Aaron looks at me like I'm the only person in the world, his eyes full of love, making me want him even more. Wrapping my legs around him I hold his head still with my hands either side, kissing into his neck, biting and sucking until he's gasping and when my tongue moves to his earlobes his eyes are so wild with desire that his mouth finds mine once more and we lose ourselves in a frenzy of passionate kissing.

Aaron, Christmas Day - Sunday 25th December 2016 (Week 12)

“Oi you, are you having wet dreams about me again Livesy? The amount of drooling you do when you sleep, we’re going to have to change the bedding every day at this rate.” Robert is smiling at me, taking full advantage of winding me up as I’m still not yet properly awake, god knows how long he’s been watching me.

Excess saliva, apparently it’s another of those pesky side effects, but it has the advantage of letting me give even more pleasure to Robert when I use my mouth on him. I think it’s about time I reminded him and also that being pregnant does not mean no sex. I’d wanted to last night, but he’d pulled away and I was too tired to push him, but today’s a whole new day. Robert is laid on his front, moving on top of him I lean over to kiss his shoulder blades and then into his neck before working my way to talk seductively into his ear, “Yep, my super sexy boyfriend turns me on so much that I can't help myself; would 'Sir' care to take a test drive in my nice wet mouth?” I position my dick starting to tease in-between his bum cheeks and I now most definitely have his attention.

Robert turns over onto his back, holding me up with his hands around my waist so I don’t have to move off him, “I could be persuaded.” Straddling him, I start to rub our dicks together and the friction from my hand is soon having the desired effect with both our shafts hardening quickly.

Robert loves to be teased and pleased and I love to seduce him, my eyes and hand turning him on more and more, “I’ll bet you could.” I lick my lips and bite my bottom lip in anticipation from seeing the desire in his eyes turn to need.

He manages to get a final dig in about my drooling ability, “We do need to put that pillow to dry though, it’s wet through, that must be one hell of a dream you have each night Aaron.”

"Be quiet Mr Sugden," I kiss him, taking my time, enjoying the taste of his mouth, then watch his reactions as I start to kiss down his front, biting and pulling a little harder than I need to on his nipple making him gasp and his eyes close. I continue working my way down, leaving a trail with my
tongue and then gently blowing back over it, he's so sensitive to my every touch as I probe ever
further lower down.

Robert's body is writhing and arching with his breathing becoming erratic from the motion of my
hand which has continued the whole time with a steady rhythm stroking. I resist the pressure he’s
starting to put on my shoulders to try and push me lower down more quickly that I want to, “Oh god
Aaron, please I want your mouth, you know you do amazing things to me with it.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.” My hand stops, holding still except to apply pressure at the base
of his shaft as I kiss up his length, taking in his scent and when I flick my tongue over his head so
lightly that he would have hardly felt it, his entire body jerks in response.

“That’s what I’m banking on, please Aaron, ah ah oh god.” I squeeze harder and smile hearing him
groan from the mix of pain and pleasure.

I grin at him mischievously, “Be careful what you wish for Robert.” He was about to say something,
his eyes burning with impatience and I can't help smiling to myself as I go down on him. He must
have forgotten what he was going to say because after this he couldn’t string any words together
coherently. I take my time and make him wait finishing by milking his prostate with my fingers
whilst teasing his dick with my mouth until he's shaking and trembling so much, unable to channel
the sensation that I think they might have heard him in Hotten when I finally give him the release he
is frantically begging for. It's such a turn on to make him lose control so completely like this.

By the time we get out of bed we'd definitely gone a long way to making up for lost time. Robert had
been afraid of hurting me or the babies and although the midwife had said we can have sex as
normal, I’d also felt more unsure so neither of us were ready for Robert to be inside me yet. He
played a lot instead; he can also do incredible things with his tongue and I always love fucking
Robert. I love to watch the changing expressions on his face; it just makes me push deeper, playing
with the speed and different positions to see what response I get. He didn't disappoint making me
come just as loudly and filling him with my load more than once.

The pub had closed at two and when we arrive it is laid out already for the family with everyone
having chipped in to help out either in the kitchen or to set up. We’d spent so long in bed making
love that we turned up quite late; the afterglow of all the sex must still have been visible because
everyone gave us knowing looks and comments, having assumed this was what we'd been up to and
we didn't bother to deny it. It probably also had something to do with the rather impressive love bites
on my neck which are impossible to hide eliciting comments from half the family; mum switching
between amused and giving Robert the evil eye for marking me like this.

Not all but some of the foods I’ve not wanted to eat for the last couple of months seem to be back on
the menu, so I'm looking forward to the turkey and today I can eat as much as I like without getting
sarky comments for once. I accept the pint of beer given to me, one pint on Christmas day won’t hurt
but I’ve actually gone off the taste so we do sneaky switches as Robert drinks some of his. I keep
pretending to take the odd drink and Robert is trying to go slow so he doesn’t get too pissed by
drinking for the two of us.

At one point I have Charlie with me whilst Vic eats because she wouldn’t settle and apparently
Adam had been in the pub for a quite some time before Vic got here and she didn’t want him holding
her after all the beer he’d drunk. I’m sat next to her and according to Vic the soberest option around
the table which I wouldn’t disagree with; the Dingles and the Sugdens do like to drink. Robert never
moved his eyes away when I am holding her and I know he’s imagining that this will be us in a few
months with our children. I get some commentary from the family at how comfortable we look
together so I pass her to Robert and I’m just the same, unable to tear my eyes away from watching
them the entire time until Vic takes her back.

It’s obvious that I’m not drinking anything now which has earned me several sarcastic comments as I
decline yet another beer and Robert has stopped for a while using the excuse of coffee being on offer
at the end of the meal so he can slow down. He’s sitting next to Diane talking about whatever and
mum has moved to sit next to me, eying my neck disapprovingly, “You make up with Robert then?”

“Yep, just a tiff, you know how they are.”

“Well you seem more loved up than I’ve seen either of you in a while.”

“We were both stressed and needed a break; it’s been good for us to spend time at home together
with no work you know.”

“I was beginning to think all wasn’t well in paradise.”

I look over at Robert who catches me, he gives me a quick smile and I smirk back at him, “Oh
paradise is good, paradise is definitely good.” I’m not sure if mum is too happy at this. The whole
family accept that we’re together, but sometimes I think mum would be happier if I was with
someone else but she knows better than to fight me on this; they all do.

“So what did he you get for Christmas?”

I smile remembering last night and how perfect both our gifts had been but that’s not the answer I
give, “A punch bag.”

“Oh,” Mum looks between us a little bit unsure if there was a hidden meaning somewhere in this,
“How romantic, whatever floats your boat I suppose.”

I pull a face at mum as if to say it’s none of her business anyway, “I asked him for one; it’s what I
wanted.” Robert comes back to sit with me, he’s hardly left my side all the time we’ve been here and
we’ve been permanently exchanging little looks and touches; so much that we’d had a few
comments because it’s not something we usually do too much of in front of the family, but we can’t
help ourselves at the moment.

Adam comes and sits with us, he’s quite drunk now and Vic is shaking her head at him, but still
smiling knowing what he’s like and you can’t help be sucked in by his banter when he’s got such a
big sloppy happy grin on his face. “You still on the no alcohol diet, mate you can’t not be drinking
on New Years; you should have a week off. Start with the New Year’s resolutions after, then we can
have a laugh.”

“Are you trying to say I’m boring if I don’t have a drink in my hand?”

“No......,” He smirks at me, “Well maybe a teeny-weency bit.” He gestures with his hand making me
smile, “You’re all domesticated and couply, boring boring.”

“Not at all like you and Vic then?”

“Nah, we know how to have fun.”
“So do we.”

Adam looks between us and it’s obvious he just thinks we’re boring. “Yeah, so what do you do for fun?” I look at Robert and we both burst out laughing and Adam clicks on, “I don’t think I want to know the answer to that do I?”

“Definitely not.”

Robert, New Year’s Eve - Saturday 31st December 2016 (Week 13)

We’re going to get a reputation for being late at this rate but we’d had a drink in town first before coming to the pub; Aaron lets go of my hand as we walk through the door and head for the bar. Theme of the night is film couples and we’ve gone the boring route. I had bought Aaron a new suit for the occasion which he didn’t think he’d like, but apparently he’s finding braces and long britches are not as constraining as a modern suit and as far as I’m concerned he looks hot as hell; there are definitely no innocent thoughts running through my head when I look at him. Seeing us, Chas comes over and kisses Aaron on the cheek. I just get a smile, not forced but you know, there’s no kiss, “Finally, where’ve you been?”

“We went into town for a drink.”

“Oh, that’s a bit adventurous for you two.”

I smirk at Aaron and we share a conspiratorial smile as I reach round his shoulder with my arm, pulling him close into me whilst we wait at the bar to be served. I kiss his ear lobe then speak quietly so only he can hear, “You okay, not too tired already?”

Aaron answers back just as quietly, giving me a shy smile, “No, I’m good; we didn’t get out of bed ’til late.”

“True, but we weren’t exactly resting were we?” Aaron laughs with the most gorgeous sexy glint in his eyes and he looks so good in the worsted suit with waist coat and pocket chain, I’m going to have to get him in it more often.

Charity is busy for once, serving, “There you go Cain; so what’re you two boys having? And who are you both supposed to be? You look very nice an’ all but I have no idea who you’re supposed to be.”

“Two bottles please.” Cain has stayed at the bar, taking a drink of his pint as I answer, “Well he’s Alec, a gardener who seduces this posh gent Maurice in the 1920’s, they go off to London to have a bit of how’s your father and they go at it so hard they break the bed; a forbidden love conquers all kind of story.” Cain almost spits his pint out and Aaron blushes embarrassed but laughing at Cain whose face is a picture in itself. He’s so easy to embarrass on some things, it must be where Aaron gets it from, “Ahh, well you both look very fetching. I could do with a bit of how’s your father.”

Charity is looking at Cain when she says this, “I’m taken Charity, go find some other mug; oh look there’s a Barton over there, you still have a couple to choose from excluding Finn, he’s probably not up for it.” Charity pulls a face and we go over to join the rest of the clan.

It’s definitely not dull with the mix of Dingles, Sugdens and Bartons all together at some point or other; it’s a good night but I can tell Aaron is getting tired as I come to sit back down after having
been dragged up to dance by Vic who’s buzzing. As she quite rightly points out, she doesn’t get much chance to party these days; I have no idea where she gets her energy from. We’ve had a long day and Aaron is leaning against me more the closer it gets to midnight, “Can we go after, I’m really tired and I have a headache; we don’t need to stay too long, just say happy new year and then go.”

I nod, “You know we can, we can go now if you want, no-one will miss us with all this lot.”

“No, it’s good; just don’t think I can last much longer than midnight.” I kiss Aaron’s forehead.

“Ahh, all lovey-dovey isn’t that nice to see.”

Paddy sways a little then sits down, putting a bottle in front of each of us; Aaron gives him the same telling off look for him taking the piss that he gives me sometimes, making me laugh at seeing someone else get it for a change. Aaron takes a little sip from the bottle before looking a little more serious, “Still no joy with Rhona then?”

“I’m working on her; I knew it would take time. If you two can work it out after everything you’ve been through, me and Rhona should be able to.”

I’m not sure he quite believes it at the moment, Rhona isn’t with anyone else now but she’s not ready to trust Paddy again just yet. Aaron puts a hand on Paddy’s arm, “You will, right I’m off to the loo.”

I look at the clock, reluctantly letting him get up, he pushes himself out around the table and I give him a cheeky smack on the bum as he goes, “Hurry up you, not long to go.”

“Yes dad.” Aaron looks back at me smirking before heading out into the corridor. We’ve been playing off each other all night like this, saying things to each other that have a completely different meaning for us than anyone listening. Sometimes I actually think I don’t want anyone to find out; it’s kind of fun having secrets where we are the only two in the know.

Charity and Chas are getting everyone worked up in readiness for the countdown to midnight. There are champagne glasses everywhere and I see Aaron coming back carrying one for each of us just as the count is beginning. We might as well be in our own world on the stroke of midnight; clinking our glasses before taking a sip of the champagne. We have eyes only for each other as Aaron kisses me, I can taste the champagne on his lips, “Happy New Year Mr Sugden.” I grin at him and whisper back into his ear causing him to lean into me, pressing his body against mine before we kiss once more.

“Put him down Aaron, it’s my turn now.” Diane comes over for a New Year kiss; she’s looking nicely merry along with everyone else as Aaron gives her a quick peck on the cheek before going to find Chas. We both do the rounds with our families and everyone; kisses, hugs and handshakes for the New Year. Andy and Chrissie have gone away so there is no awkwardness with them at least; we still don’t really have conversations, but we tolerate each other these days, that’s something I suppose.

Aaron is laughing away with Adam about something and I think back to when I used to be so jealous of their friendship and how easy they were with each other when I was still in denial. I know better now, Aaron loves Adam, he always will, but there’s no mistaking that he looks at him in a totally different way to how he looks at me. I’m distracted from watching them as a hand puts a glass of whiskey on the table in front of me from a most unexpected person, “What’s this for?”

“Well if you don’t want it?” Cain moves to pick the glass back up when I stop him.

I smile after getting over my surprise, “No no, thanks.” We knock the whiskey glasses together in
acknowledgement, “Happy New Year Cain.” He doesn’t hang around to chat, but this would not have happened this time last year, that’s for sure.

I get pulled from my thoughts, hearing what sounds like Chas cry out Aaron’s name, “Aaron, Aaron, sweetheart.”

I can’t see where they are as I get up, but as soon as I see Diane coming towards me with a concerned look on her face I start to feel sick with fear, “Robert, you need to come, quick.”

Pushing through to where they are I see Aaron collapsed, unconscious on the floor. I kneel down beside him, the busy pub has suddenly gone much quieter and someone has turned the music off; Chas is trying to wake Aaron but she gets up to let Emma, who has also come over, have a closer look at him. She looks across at me, “Has he been ill? I’ve seen him in the surgery a couple of times.” I don’t answer, seemingly paralysed as I watch Emma trying to wake Aaron but he doesn’t respond and she looks back to me trying to get my attention, “Robert, is there anything that I need to know? I haven’t seen his records.” I look down at Aaron and then back to Emma, stricken by the shock of seeing him like this, “Robert?”

I look at her, stuttering before I manage to finally get the words out, “He’s....., he’s pregnant.”

I can practically feel the shock of my words reverberate around the pub, “Okay, okay. Charity, call an ambulance please.” Emma looks back to me, “How far gone?” Again I don’t answer immediately and she can see the panic in my face, “Robert?”

“Errm....., he’s about thirteen weeks we think.”

Emma checks his vitals again, “Aaron, Aaron love, try open your eyes for me,” He still doesn’t respond and I feel the tears welling in my eyes, unable to look anywhere else except at Aaron. I’m sure everyone had heard, we can’t hide it now, not that I care about that, I just want him to open his eyes and for everything to be okay. “Don’t worry Robert, he’s unconscious but his pulse is steady.”

Charity comes back over, “Ambulance is on its way.”

“Ohh, this is just magic, we’ll be having daddy day care classes at the village hall next.”

Emma glowers at her son, “Be quiet Ross.”

Chas has finally recovered from the initial shock of hearing what I’d said and grabs my arm, “What do you mean he’s pregnant?” I shake her off to stop her trying to pull me up off the floor.

I look at her and now the tear falls down my cheek, “Exactly that Chas, you’re going to be a grandma.” I shift my eyes to Diane, “You too......, again.” I look back to Aaron, holding his hand as he lies completely motionless and focus back to Emma, “He’s been getting the odd dizzy spell and he said he had a headache earlier; why won’t he wake up Emma?”

“It’s not unusual for anyone pregnant to go dizzy and light headed sometimes; has Aaron passed out like this before?”

“No; well he did kind of at the yard early on, but not since. I knew we should have gone home earlier; I should have just taken us home when he said he had a headache, but he said he was okay to stay. Emma please tell me he’s going to be okay, all of them?”

“It’s probably just exhaustion Robert.” Emma hesitates looking at me questioningly, “You said them,
all of them?”

I hesitate, but hiding it won't help, “He’s carrying twins.”

“And it gets even better,” I think it’s Finn who kicks his brother shutting him up, but it feels like the whole pub is judging us as we wait for the ambulance which arrives after what feels like an age even though it probably wasn’t. I switch off from everyone, only Aaron and our children are important to me. Emma gives the ambulance crew a summary and the paramedic starts to ask more questions, “What’s his name?”

Chas answers before me and I can hear the fear in her voice, “Aaron….., Aaron Livesy.”

I look at the paramedic, “Sugden, it’s actually Aaron Sugden.”

TBC
Blood's Thicker Than Water

Chapter Summary

January / Month 4 - Week 13-14: Aaron and Robert deal with the initial fall-out of Aaron's pregnancy becoming public knowledge.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the later than usual update; as you know I normally post fairly regularly but at the moment real life has taken over as I need to find a new job which has priority on my time.

However this chapter is a nice long one which hopefully makes up for it a little.
Enjoy
Caro

Robert, Sunday 1st January 2017 (Week 13)

I’ve never been so relieved in all my life as when Aaron wakes up in the ambulance, “Hey you; don’t go scaring me like that.”

He smiles at me weakly as I lean over and kiss his forehead then leaving my fingertips there resting against his head, stroking gently through his hair. It's like I need to be physically connected to him. “What happened?”

“I didn't see, your mum said you just collapsed.”

Aaron’s eyes fill with panic as he suddenly remembers it’s not just himself that he has to think about these days; he tries to sit up but I stop him and seeing the look of determination on my face he relents instead grabbing for my hand which he holds onto tightly, “The twins, what about our children, are they okay?”

The paramedic with us answers, “We’ll need to get you checked out properly and they’ll do an ultrasound just to be sure.” Aaron tries to sit up again and I can see the fear in his eyes, looking at the paramedic for more answers, “Just lie back Mr Sugden, we didn’t find any reason not to believe that everything’s fine, they just need to do some tests to confirm it when you get to the hospital.”

Aaron does his best to remain calm and lies back down but his grip on my hand doesn’t lessen; he’s pale but manages another weak smile, more for my benefit I think than anything. I know he won’t relax until they tell him for sure that everything is okay, “It was in the pub right?” I nod, “Does that mean what I think it means?”

“Well it depends. If you mean does everyone know, then yeah.”

“I don’t want them near; I’m not ready yet, you know what they’re like.”
“They love you Aaron, they’ll be fine.”

“I know, but I don’t want to see them; I can’t cope with them all tonight, not even mum. It stays just us; promise me Robert, just us.”

I lean in closer to him and brush my hand across his forehead once more feeling the intimacy of the moment and the emotion behind it, “I promise.” Aaron closes his eyes as if to try and hide from me how scared he is but he can’t; I know him better than that and a tear escapes down his cheek just as he turns his face away from me but I won’t let him turn away, “It’s going to be okay Aaron, we’re all going to be okay, our family is everything and we’re going to be okay.”

His voice is almost a whisper when he answers, “You don’t know that.”

“Our children are tough; it’ll take more than this to stop our kids.” Although scared, he smiles at me in rueful acknowledgement; we do have that stubborn streak in both our families.

The paramedic is watching, but he doesn’t seem to be bothered that it’s Aaron who is pregnant, “Congratulations by the way, twins; you happy?”

I look back down at Aaron, “Yeah, we’re happy, just still getting used it ourselves; we hadn’t planned on telling anyone so soon. Our families are hard work normally, never mind them wrapping their heads round this.”

“As long as you’re both happy, the rest is irrelevant right?”

The ambulance slows as we arrive at the hospital and I squeeze Aaron’s hand, giving him a smile, “Exactly.”

I’m allowed to go with Aaron and the only time he lets go of my hand is when he has no choice as the doctor checks him over. Aaron watches her nervously, “Are they okay?”

She gives him a reassuring smile, “First thing first; let’s check you’re okay.”

“I’m fine; I need to know they’re alright, please.” The doctor manages what I cannot and that is a look that dictates the order of what is important and Aaron seems to accept this whereas from me he would have argued.

Eventually after a lot of prodding and poking the doctor finishes her preliminary check and a nurse is taking some blood, “I don’t find anything to make me suspect anything is wrong. You’re not that far along and we’ll need to do an ultrasound, it won’t be long Mr Sugden and then we’ll be able to make a much better assessment.” Aaron starts to cry and is getting himself all worked up and anxious.

“Hey, it’ll be fine Aaron.” I stroke my hand down the side of his head.

“I need to be sure Robert; I couldn’t face losing them, I wouldn’t cope.” It doesn’t matter what I say he won’t relax and gets worse as the doctor comes back with what we need for the ultrasound. Despite the fact that I think the doctor has now given him something to help calm him down Aaron is gripping tightly onto my hand.

“So this is just the normal basic ultrasound, but it does the job.” I watch fascinated as she puts the gel on his stomach and lower abdomen then seeing her press down with the transducer. Aaron’s eyes are fixed on the monitor, but mine are fixed on him, because if it comes down to it and we have to ever choose, I will ensure Aaron always comes first. I hear the beating of their hearts and for the first time
I look at the monitor where Aaron’s eyes are transfixed. It’s just an indescribable feeling seeing them; although it’s a little sooner than I’d expected I’m overwhelmed at seeing fuzzy blobs on the monitor, but they are our fuzzy blobs, our children. It feels almost surreal knowing that they are actually inside Aaron. I can’t get over the sound of listening to their heartbeat and I know for the first time now what Aaron had meant about how emotional it is; he wasn’t wrong when he’d said it makes it real.

“Everything seems fine, there are no irregularities that I can tell; it all looks and sounds good.”

Aaron is crying a lot more now, tears of relief I hope and I put my arms round him perching on the bed to get as close to him as possible. I look at the doctor, “Aaron will be fine as well right?”

“We need to wait for the bloods and other test results, but yes I believe so.” The doctor smiles at me reassuringly and then speaks directly to Aaron who for the first time takes his eyes away from the monitor, “Aaron you’re tired, physically you’ve gone through a huge change in the last three months. It’s harder for men in the beginning, there’s so much more that your body has to do and it takes an even bigger toll developing twins.” She turns back to me “The early stages put a strain on his system; his body gives the babies what they need.”

“And what Aaron needs?”

“Rest, good diet, exercise of the right kind and rest doesn’t mean stay in bed, it means slow down and take good care of yourself.” The doctor has that matron-like tone to it and for the first time she gets a hint of a smile from Aaron. “You will learn how to regulate what you need as you get further along.” She looks directly at Aaron now, “Do you still have morning sickness?”

“No, I’m feeling much better with everything. It’s like I said before I had headaches all the time back in October but then they stopped, it’s just this week they’ve come back, but nothing like as bad as before.”

I look at the doctor, “Does he have to stay in or can we go home?”

“I want to check the results from some of the tests where possible; the others will take a couple of days so we’ll filter them through your GP unless there’s any reason to bring him back in.”

“So we can go home soon?”

She smiles at my keenness to get us out of here, “Hopefully yes; in a couple of hours. I’ll be back in a short while okay.”

I stop her as she’s about to leave the cubicle we are in, “Erm, he doesn’t want to see anyone else, not yet. There might be family here and we hadn’t got round to telling them yet.”

She looks back to Aaron, “Tell them I’m fine, but they should go home. We’ll see them tomorrow; I don’t have the energy to face them just yet.”

The doctor nods, “I’ll pass on the message.”

For the first time since I saw him on the pub floor it feels like I can breathe properly; wrapping my arms around him, I pull Aaron into a kiss, “You scared the crap out of me. You do realise I’m not going to let you out of my sight now.”

He flashes me a look of annoyance, a mix of tired and relief but also that he means it, “We’ll agree new ground rules but don’t smother me Robert; I’m not an invalid remember.”
“Mmmh, we’ll talk about it.”

“We can talk, but I can’t stop living my life. You heard her, slow down, not stop altogether and if you go overboard I won’t give you sex, you’ll have to become best mates with your hand and on your own with me back at the pub, understood.”

That’s me chastised, “I’m just worried.”

Aaron smiles at me, he looks exhausted as he closes his eyes, “I’m tired; we’ll talk about it later.”

Cuddling up with me, I hug him; I don’t think I ever want to let him go. I’m probably not supposed to be on his bed like this but until someone tells me off, I’m staying right here, as close to Aaron as I can be, “Oh they know about the other thing too.”

“I thought they might.”

“Along with the rest of the pub.”

“Well at least now we don’t need to tell anyone.”

“That’s one way of looking at it I suppose.”

My phone keeps buzzing, “It’s Vic.” I cut off the call and text her that everything’s okay and that we’ll see them tomorrow.

“Do you think they’ll actually have gone home?”

“Probably not; I’ll go and see.”

I get up and make to leave the cubicle, “Robert.”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t take any crap from them, mum included.”

I nod, knowing what he means, “I won’t.” Aaron lies back down closing his eyes.

I take a deep breath going out into the corridor and down to the waiting area to see if they did as they were told. Unsurprisingly when I get there they hadn’t and I’m practically thrown against the wall by Cain, “What did you do to him?”

“Cain get off him, don’t be so stupid.” I give Moira a smile of thanks as Cain releases me but he’s still firing daggers at me with his eyes, still standing a little too close for comfort.

Everyone gathers round and I look at Cain warily but he stays back, Moira’s arms having a calming effect, holding him in check. “Aaron’s fine, he woke up in the ambulance and they’ll let him go home soon.”

Paddy is the first to get in a question, “How is he, do they know why he collapsed?”

“Like Emma said, his body needs to rest, he’s just got over-tired.”

“And the babies?”
I look at Chas, “They’re fine too.” I sit down for the first time feeling the relief properly settle inside me and I smile at her, “I saw them for the first time on the ultrasound, the doctor said everything looks okay.”

Vic sits next to me and puts her hand on my shoulder; Charlie is fast asleep in the car seat on the chair, “That’s why Aaron was so off with everything and with Charlie when she was born?”

“Yeah, it took him a while, he didn’t even tell me until a couple of weeks ago.” I look up at everyone, “We didn’t want to tell anyone just yet, we were still getting used to it ourselves.”

Cain’s eyes are boring into mine, “And how did he get pregnant?”

I snap back, “The same way every other man gets pregnant.” I try to keep calm, “This wasn’t planned Cain, we didn't know; we had no idea so we’re just as shocked as you all are now.”

Chas is at the other side of Cain, “Aaron’s fine about it though?” Moira puts a warning hand on Cain's arm as he visibly tenses once more.

I smile tiredly, “Yeah, he wasn’t in the beginning, but that’s because it scared the shit out of him; he was too scared to even tell me. He’s happy now though, we both are; we want you to be happy for us.” I look cautiously at the faces around me, “You’ll break his heart if you’re not, so make no mistake,” I’m looking at Cain now, “If you can’t accept this then he won’t forgive you for it. You know how Aaron is, when he loves he loves completely and he loves these babies as much now as if they’d already been born; they are already part of our family. He won’t care about the village or anyone else, but he does care about what his family thinks.”

Chas looks at me, visibly finding it difficult to hide her impatience, “Can we see him? I want to see my son.”

I stand up, “He’s tired and we’re going to go home when they’ve released him, you should all go and I’ll call you tomorrow if Aaron’s up-to seeing you. Don’t push him; you have to let him do this at his pace. It’s not about you or even me at the minute, it’s about Aaron okay.”

Exasperated, Chas snaps at me, “I’m not leaving Robert without seeing my son.”

I look at Paddy for help, “He doesn’t want to see anyone Chas, even you. He’s really tired and I left him sleeping; just wait until tomorrow, I promise he’s okay. Please Chas, it’s what he wants.” She lets out a big sigh and I can’t quite work out what she’s really thinking and I probably won’t find out until Aaron tells me after she’s seen him for herself. “We weren’t prepared for you all finding out just yet, you need to give him some space.” She relents, reluctantly, but she backs off when I wasn't so sure she would.

I thought Aaron was asleep when I go back to him but his eyes open as I sit down in the bedside chair, “They take it okay?”

Tipping my head slightly from side to side I decide how best to answer, “I think so, shocked. The one good thing is no-one even thought to mention about the fact we got married. I suppose that will come but I think tonight they’re just glad you’re okay.”

“And mum?”

“She asked if you were okay with being pregnant and I told her we’re both happy about it but she wasn’t too pleased about not seeing you for herself.” I don’t mention Cain’s reaction, I know him
well enough now that he loves Aaron and he would do anything for him; he just needs a little time, like Aaron had or I hope that’s all it is. Aaron tries to fight the exhaustion but it isn’t long before his eyelids close. Despite my own tiredness there’s no way I’m going to sleep until we get home, instead I watch Aaron sleep until the doctor comes in to tell us he is being released.

Aaron, Sunday 1st January 2017 (Week 13)

Waking up today I still feel completely knackered so I don’t really want to see anyone except mum. Robert has already gone across to Vic and Adam’s because I want to talk to her on my own; I’m not really sure what to expect which is making me nervous, I just need to be sure she’s okay with everything. I’m making a drink when she arrives, she knew to come in, we don’t really stand on ceremony in our lot to actually wait for someone to open the door after knocking. I hadn’t realised she was there until she says something, taking me by surprise, “Aaron Sugden, has a ring to it I suppose.”

I turn round smiling, “I know, I’d been thinking about changing to Dingle still, but other things kind of took over. I like it.”

Despite my smile she can tell I’m anxious as I meet her halfway in the kitchen. I had known things would be okay; just like with Robert she loves me unconditionally but I can’t help crying as mum wraps her arms around me pulling me into a hug. I wonder what our children would say, not having a mum but two dads, does that even make a difference? So much about this is weird and not what I’m used to, Robert had just said we make up as we go along and he was adamant that we are going to do everything we can to be better parents than either of ours. I’m not going to argue with him on that one.

Mum squeezes me gently and takes hold of my hand, “Love, you don’t need to cry, you’re my son and I love you no matter what.”

I brush my tears away, “I know, but it’s been so hard. I screwed everything up; I nearly lost Robert because I didn’t tell him.” I see the look on mum’s face, “He thought I was having an affair, he knew something was wrong but I wouldn’t talk to him; he forced it out of me because he thought I was leaving him. He’s been great, he went into shock when I told him, but he’s been perfect; it was me that didn’t react very well, I pushed him away for weeks but he didn’t give up.”

“You’re allowed. It’s amazing what you can away with when you’re pregnant; just blame it on the hormones.” She grins at me as we go sit down on the sofa.

“I’ll remember that.”

“Haha.” I can see her studying me, looking to see if she can see if I’m showing, “So how does it feel?”

“What….., to be married or to be pregnant?”

“Both I suppose.” Mum has a more serious look and I can’t really tell what she’s thinking.

Strangely I feel more nervous about being married with her than pregnant and decide to get this part of the conversation out of the way, “Robert asked me on Christmas Eve and we got married yesterday.” Mum looks irritated and I continue before she can jump in with her assumptions, “I wanted it to be just the two of us; it was my decision not to tell anyone so don’t go blaming Robert. We would have got married eventually, being pregnant just speeded it up.”
“It needn’t have been a big do, just close family.” Mum looks disappointed in me.

“I don’t regret it if that’s what you’re thinking. It was exactly what I wanted, just accept it. We’ve been through so much last year and Robert never let me go once, I’d never have told you if wasn’t for him, but you know that. I wanted it to be just about Robert and me for once; no interference or fuss, just telling him I love him and that I want to spend the rest of my life with him.” Mum watches me intently not saying anything, “I didn’t want to wait, it’s a new start putting all the bad stuff behind us you know; I don’t want any reminder of ’his’ name, not me or for our family.” She knows by this I mean dad.

Mum grips my hand tightly, her gaze intense, “As long as Robert doesn’t ever hurt you, I’ll accept it. He does make you happy doesn’t he Aaron?”

I smile, “Yeah he makes me really happy. We’re good for each other and he’ll be a good dad; I trust him mum and I love him.” Her face has the look of resignation and I’m not sure she’ll ever fully trust Robert but she knows I’m not going to change my mind; we had this conversation a long time ago.

“So, how do feel about being a dad, being pregnant?”

There’s a hint of amusement in my voice and I half laugh quietly thinking about how far I’ve come in the last few weeks, “It’s a good job you’re asking me that now.” Mum gives me an odd look, waiting for me to explain. “In the beginning it was like an alien had taken over my body and I hated it, but things are settling down and it’s getting a bit more normal.” There’s that word again, normal, there is nothing normal about this in my own head, “You don’t think I’m a freak do you?”

Mum puts her mug down onto the floor and wraps her arms around me, “No love, I’m over the moon; who’d have thought, I’m going to be a grandma, wow, I’m actually going to be a grandma.” She pauses an instant as though she still doesn’t quite believe it’s real, “It’s just something I never expected or even thought about. You’re okay with it all now? Robert said you were happy, you are right?”

I nod, clinging onto her, “Yeah, they’re our children, mine and Roberts.” I can’t hide my cheesy grin, “It feels amazing mum that we’re actually going to have our own children. I mean maybe we could have adopted or fostered but these are ours, we made them together.” Mum squeezes me tight, “Do you want to see a picture?”

I hand mum the sonogram picture, “I’ll have a better one later this week, I have my normal appointment on Thursday.” You should have seen Robert’s face at the hospital last night; he loves our children and he’s already really protective of me and them.”

If I didn’t know better, mum has a tear in her eye as she finally looks up from the picture in her hand, “I did some reading; did it hurt in the beginning?”

“Yeah, I don’t really want to talk about that, but yeah it hurt….., a lot.” I grin at her, “I’m good with pain remember.”

“Not funny.”

“Not funny?”

“No. Not funny.”

I shrug my shoulders, “I got through it and it’s just like it is for a woman now until I have to give
birth.” I blush, suddenly feeling embarrassed, “This is so odd talking about this.”

“Yep, odd is one word,” Mum holds my hand again and I feel overwhelmed by how close we've become these last few years, “You told Liv yet?”

“Rang her this morning. I didn’t want her to hear it from anyone else, but she’d already got a text from Gabby first thing.”

“How was she?”

“Don’t know, she didn’t say much either way. I asked her if she wanted to come over for a few days, she said she’d think about it.”

“I’m sure she’ll be fine.”

“You think, or maybe she’s thinking about all the grief she’ll get at school; they take their religion a bit more seriously over there.” I grimace at mum, “If you did some reading, you'll also have seen some of the other stuff on the internet. There’s plenty of folk everywhere that thinks men being able to have kids isn’t natural. If it was up to some people they’d have me put down; I bet there are some round here that are thinking exactly that.”

Looking at me in horror, mum becomes tense for the first time since she got here and has a flash of anger in her expression, “Don’t talk like that Aaron, not ever. Liv loves you and she can give as good as she gets; she is your sister after all.”

I smile at this, “Haha, yeah, we’ll see. You know I’m right though. What are they saying in the village?”

Mum relaxes again seeing that I'm okay with everything, “Hhhm, we're still working that one out.”

“And the family?” I'm watching her intently to see how she responds.

“It’s still sinking in, but you know us, blood’s thicker than water.”

Interesting answer, but I don't push for anything more, I'll find out eventually anyway. “It’ll probably need to be.”

“Oh I don’t know, I think a few people might surprise you, they’re intrigued more than anything.”

Leaning back I let out a groan, “Oh great, I was right, I am going to be the village freak show.”

There’s another look telling me off for my reaction, “Robert won’t allow that and neither will the family. It might not be as bad as you think. You should have heard Pearl in the shop she can’t wait to see you, though it’s probably a good thing Edna isn’t around for this one, not too sure what she’d make of it.” I pull a face until I'm distracted by the buzz of my phone and fish it out of my pocket to see it’s Robert checking in that everything’s okay and I fire a quick text back so he doesn’t worry. “Come over tomorrow, have tea with us.”

“Maybe, I’ll see how I feel. At least now I don’t have to pretend to be drinking.” I give mum a tired smile, “I never realised until now that our families are total alcoholics.”

“Mmmh, you were just the same until you switched to the hot water. I should have known something was up, I mean you and hot water. You will need to start looking after yourself properly though love.”
“You sound like Robert.”

“Well he loves you and he’s bound to be concerned.”

“Don’t smother me and don’t you dare start ganging up on me; I’ve already threatened him to back off.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, no sex and I’d move back into the pub. If you want grandma rights when they’re born you’ll behave yourself too.”

“Look who’s getting all stroppy and assertive; married, pregnant and bolshy.”

“Too right, don’t get a choice with you lot.” I look at mum with a glint in my eye and she gives me another hug.

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Aaron, Tuesday 3rd January 2017 (Week 14)

A bout of nervousness is making me panic a little, “This is not a good idea.” I’m thinking of taking my coat off when Robert wraps a scarf around my neck and puts my bobble hat on my head pulling it down to keep my ears warm.

Robert puts his coat on and rests his hand on my arm, “We’re not hiding Aaron, we have nothing to be ashamed of and you said you’re going back to work tomorrow anyway, so you’re going to have to leave the house then aren’t you?”

“Mmhh, but most of the village don’t come into the yard.”

Robert smirks at me, “I think they’ll find an excuse so come on, let’s just get it over with.”

I look at my phone and Robert sees the annoyance in my face, “Liv’s still not picking up or texted me back, I’ve been trying to talk to her all day. It’s not like she’s busy, they don’t go back to school until next week.” My nervousness about how Liv has reacted to things has been building and is beginning to get the better of me, “Do you think she doesn’t want anything to do with me anymore?”

Robert strokes his hand down my cheek and pushes me up against the wall so I can feel him which makes me blush as he kisses me, “Stop worrying about Liv and worry instead about keeping your fantastic boyfriend happy.” I smirk at him, amused by his mistake which he quickly corrects, “Husband.” Robert pulls a face, “Still getting used to that.”

“I know right, Aaron and Robert Sugden, Aaron Sugden. Hmmm, it’ll come.”

Robert grins at me mischievously, “I think it already did, on numerous occasions.”

Laughing at him I open the door, “You’re incorrigible you know that.”

“It’s why you love me.” I give him a look that says I’m not so sure sometimes, “You do love me right?”

“Yes Robert, I love you.” I wrap my arms around him, then let my hands trail down to the top of his jeans, “Maybe I could show you just how much.”

“I’ll let you.” He pushes me away gently, knowing what I’m up to, “When we get home later; come
on you. You’d think you’d be too tired for sex but you still can’t get enough of it.”

“Are you complaining?”

Tugging me along by the hand, he smiles at me, his eyes full of love that just melts my heart, “Oh no, I’m not complaining.”

I’ve not been out of the house since coming back from hospital. Yesterday was tiring from a string of visitors, mostly family. Our little house has never had this many people in it all at the same time since we’ve been here; I was pleased when the last one left and we shut the door. I still have no idea what they really think, but they’re putting a good front on for me whether they mean it or not. Cain was decidedly quiet with Moira and Lisa more than making up for it. It’s like the men don’t quite know what to say so don’t really say anything much, even Adam and Paddy then the women can’t stop being completely curious to see if it’s the same for me as for them. It’s only going to get more bizarre as I get further along so I suppose I’d best get used to it.

I follow Robert into the pub; we’d decided to go in through the back room which is a little quieter than walking in through the front or that was the plan. What I get when I walk through the door is a surprise, I turn to look at Robert, “Did you do this?”

“Nope, this was all Liv’s doing, I just paid for the flight.”

I get the biggest of hugs possible from my sister, I mouth a big thank you to Robert who I can’t believe didn’t tell me. I had got it into my head she would be too embarrassed to come anywhere near me. I do have to push her off me though before I get annoyed by her already prodding me like I’m a science experiment, “Can you feel them?”

“No, not yet, it’s too soon.” She has her hands on my stomach again, “Liv…. gerroff.”

“What? I want to know.” Her expression is adorable, a cross between awe and curiosity.

“They’re too small.” I push her away more firmly and holding her hands together to hold her in check, I pull out the sonogram picture from the weekend, “Look, this is what they’re like at the minute.”

She scrunches up her face not connecting the photo with actual babies and quickly gives it back, “How big? You don’t look any different.”

“About the size of lemons according to the doctor,” Robert has been watching us with an amused smile and hands me a packet of tissues for me to blow my nose, I think I’m coming down with a cold now but it doesn’t stop me being hungry. “I’m starving, if Robert’s not told you I can eat for the five thousand and still be hungry. We’re going to have tea in the pub.”

“I know; it’s my treat.”

“Mmmh, Mrs Money Bags.”

“Got to celebrate, it’s not every day your brother gets pregnant.”

I watch her go into the pub shaking my head and smiling back at Robert who is laughing at me, “No it is not.”

“Told you she’d be good.”
I sigh, “I know. I worry too much.”

“I didn’t say that, you just don’t need to worry about Liv.”

I don’t say anything to this and take a deep breath before Robert takes my hand and we follow Liv into the bar. There is an audible hush as we walk in and then it returns to the normal buzz of chatter. I daren’t look up and when I do I don’t take my eyes off either Liv or Robert other than a quick glance to mum behind the bar who gives me a smile. She looks so proud of us all and I smile back at her.

At first I’m completely paranoid that everyone is talking about me but I think I’m safe tonight; it’s like I have my own protection squad of Robert and Liv defending our position with me safe in the corner and mum’s fierce glare that would stop armies if anyone stares at me for too long. Fortunately most people must be having a day off from the booze and food which isn’t unusual, still recovering from too much overindulging over Christmas and New Year because it’s very quiet in with hardly any regulars. There’s Paddy who comes and joins us, Emma and James are in but fortunately none of the boys. Emma comes over, “How are you feeling?”

“Yeah okay.” I feel awkward but I’m going to have to get used to it, “Thanks, mum said you were good with me, you know after.”

“T’m glad; I’m sure Robert and Liv here will make sure you behave yourself.”

I laugh relaxing more, “Yeah just a little.” I’ve never been a fan of Emma, but sometimes she surprises people. I glance at Robert, one down a whole village to go.

Liv had stayed with us all week and went home yesterday. She went with us to the scheduled ultrasound which was on my birthday and was completely fascinated by it all; it’s not so often my sister is lost for words. I let her touch my tummy which felt totally weird especially as for the first time Robert said I’m properly beginning to show a little, even when I’m wearing clothes. I know I’m going to have to get used to this and although a lot more people know now, it still feels kind of safe because it’s not really that visible yet, but that will change very quickly in the next few weeks. He reckons no-one else would really notice yet unless they knew but he said there’s a definite look of pregnant now when I’m naked.

Liv did say she wasn’t planning to tell anyone at school or anything, which I think is probably a wise move and we said she should come here for the holidays instead of us going there which she seemed okay with. She’s insisting on being here for when they are due, but she should be at school then. We’ve let it drop for now to avoid getting into a row, that’s an argument for closer the time.

Because Liv was here I didn’t go back to work as planned. Thursday we all piled up to Lisa's. Liv and Mum had arranged a surprise birthday/sonogram/wedding party for us and all the families. Cain was apparently off on a job but I get the distinct vibe from Moira and mum that he’s not reacting too well. I had more energy as the week went on so Friday the three of us went into Leeds to pick wedding rings. We hadn’t had time before and after talking about it we decided we would both like to wear one. I keep staring at my hand, it’s just a plain platinum band; we didn't want anything too fancy, but I like it and I love seeing Robert wear his. He didn’t take it too well in the shop though when I'd said he could only have his if he promised this one was for keeps. Robert however didn’t see the funny side and I had to go get him to come back inside, bribing him by whispering sweet favours into his ear; sometimes he has no sense of humour.
We’ve also been squabbling about what to call the babies until they are born, because ‘it’ and ‘they’ don’t sound very nice and we don’t know the sex and I’ve said I don’t want to know. I’m not sure how long that will last because the 3D and 4D ultrasounds are much clearer and it’s easy to tell as they grow bigger, but at the minute I’m determined I don’t want to know.

I’d already picked names after watching some re-runs over Christmas but apparently I live in a democracy and was outvoted, Batman and Robin it is. I wanted Mork and Mindy, but Liv did have a fair point saying that once they start kicking it'll be like a comic strip with me being the guy getting punched. With two of them in there, thinking about it I'm not sure 'kerpow' is going to cut it!

TBC
Revenge Is Sweet

Chapter Summary

January / Month 4 - Week 15-16: Aaron rebels, Adam complains and Robert explodes.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the later than expected update, real life has this habit of getting in the way at the moment meaning I'm going to be slower on posting for a while. Many thanks for all the encouraging comments. I promise there's lots to come that will make you laugh and cry, even at the same time.

I love the first half of this chapter, I find myself grinning as I imagine it playing out in my head. It's the simple pleasures that are the best sometimes.
Enjoy.... I'll try and not be too long for the next chapter.
Take care
Caro

Aaron, Tuesday 10th January 2017 (Week 15)

After realising it’s impossible to slam the swing door into the pub, I'm left with taking my frustration out on the next best thing...... mum or anyone else within earshot for that matter. “I am this close to ordering a pint and drinking it.” I'm emphasising the point with my hand; that is until I scrunch up my face thinking that it wouldn’t actually help my mood much, “Or I would be if I’d not gone off the taste of beer so much.”

Mum smiles at my huffing and muttering, doing her best not to laugh as I plonk myself down on a bar stool resting my head down onto the wooden surface to see if that helps. “What’s up now?”

Ross is at the bar having just paid for his and Finn’s dinnertime pint, “Aww, it must be all those hormones playing havoc with his moods.”

If he had intended riling me up even more than I already am then it worked; I practically growl in his direction, most definitely not in the frame of mind to humour him, “I’m not too far gone to smack you and if they say mothers have a protective violent streak in them when they feel threatened, just think what that means for someone like me.”

Ross has that mocking look on his face which I would have no qualms about thumping if he gives me enough reason, “Ooh, touchy touchy.” He takes the hint though seeing I’m actually seriously pissed off and goes to sit at the other side of the bar with Finn to keep a safe distance from me just in case.

I’m grimacing, so annoyed gesticulating again with my hands as if I'm throttling someone with them, “They are driving me up the wall.”
Mum is now actually laughing at me, “Who is?”

“Adam and Robert, they can’t help themselves; I warned Robert, but Adam he’s just as bad.” I’d finally lost it with them both at the yard, their permanent mollycoddling pushing a step too far, hardly letting me even answer the phone; apparently all I’m fit for is being the tea boy. “He is this close..... I mean it, this close to never getting sex ever again.” I’m at it with my hands again to further express my frustration.

Mum grins at me, “And Adam, because I’m not sure that refusing sex will work on him.”

“Don’t you worry now, I’ll think of something.”

Still smirking, mum does her best to show some sympathy and tries to cheer me up. “I’m sure you will. So seeing as beer is off the menu, what would do the trick to help; how about some triple chocolate cheesecake?”

Switching my thoughts to something that will at least make me feel better, I ponder what I’d like; I am quite peckish still even though it’s not that long since eating my butties. “Mmmh maybe, if you throw in some pickles on the side and a hot water with lemon.”

“Right, cheesecake, pickles and hot water with lemon coming up: you can manage to cut your own lemon I take it and can you do some extra for me please; I didn’t get round to it yet.” She shoves the chopping board with lemon and knife in my direction.

Finn is looking across at me curiously, “You have lots of weird cravings then?”

I look over at him, now feeling much calmer, “So far just the chutney, usually with banana sandwiches; I just want food all the time though. Think food dustbin and that’s me.”

Mum comes back with a jar of pickles, “I was going to say, I just thought it was chutney you liked so what’s with the pickles?”

“Don’t know; I also like the pickles sometimes. You know the sweeter ones, they’re really nice; I could just eat a jar by itself.”

“ Weird because you hated them as a kid.”

"I still did until now." I’m watching her trying to open the jar, “’Ere, give it me.” I open the lid and smile at her, “At least I’m good for something. Pass a fork will you, don’t bother with anything to put them in, I’ll probably just eat all the lot out of the jar.” After crunching on the first pickle I glance back at mum, "So what did you crave with me?”

“An abortion.” Ross can’t seem to help himself, his dulcet tones ringing out once more.

I half stand, glaring at him, my eyes full of anger, “I won’t tell you again.” He raises his hands probably partly in self-defence, watching me warily as I wave the fork menacingly in his direction. Finn puts his hands on Ross’ arm cautioning him not to piss me off anymore looking relieved when I sit back down.

Mum watches on unphased by my attitude, giving Ross a warning stare. “I didn’t really; I had a thing for toothpaste at one point. I used to wander round the house with the toothbrush in my mouth half the morning but other than that I didn’t have a food craving.”
Thinking about how odd that would look I pull a face but before I have chance to say anything I see Robert and Adam walk in together and instantly my face turns to thunder. It looks like they’re going to put a united front on to try and win me round and get me to accept their terms of how it’s going to work from now on at the yard. However I am still not in a sufficiently forgiving mood for them yet, “Don’t bother coming near until I’ve finished these and polished off at least one bowl of triple chocolate cheesecake.”

They put this to the test but quickly back off, the look on my face telling them I am deadly serious, going instead to sit on the bank of seating against the far wall. Mum is giggling whilst telling them she’ll take their pints over. Ignoring them completely I sit front and centre at the bar with my pickles on the one side and I even indulge myself with a small second helping of the cheesecake; it really is very good. I wonder if maybe we can swap partners for a while, Adam can live with Robert and Vic can come live with me, my personal chef; that would be nice.

When I’m done, I turn round; it’s now their turn to be pointed at with my fork. “Right, either you start treating me like someone who is three months pregnant instead of nine months or,” I wave the fork in Robert’s direction, “I mean it, you will be using your right hand for the rest of your married life,” Then turning to Adam, it now being his turn to get the fork treatment, “And you can find yourself a new business partner.”

Nicola has joined me at the bar; she’d taken the day off and it looks as though she’s been shopping judging by all the bags she has. Looking between us all, she tut tuts, shaking her head at Robert and Adam, giving them that reprimanding look she does so well, “You should both know better than to mess with anyone who’s pregnant.” She turns back to me, ”You tell ’em Aaron. I threatened to cut off Jimmy’s balls once; he soon ran for cover when I pulled out the knife.”

I look at her thinking she might be onto something there, “You don’t fancy doing the same with my husband do you?”

“What chopping his balls off?” I can see her considering it, “I seem to remember your husband having quite nice tackle.”

Being reminded of this makes me smirk whilst Robert is going a bright shade of pink as I turn on the sarcasm, “Oh yeah I forgot about that. It was a long time ago though; he’s aged a lot since then.” Despite his embarrassment I can hear Robert protesting in the background but I ignore him.

Nicola plays along, turning to Robert, “Very true, I’d start running now Sugden.” Robert’s face is a picture as she picks up the knife I’d been using to cut the lemon earlier, “Chas, you don’t mind if I borrow this do you? Just say the word if you’ve got anything against a bit of castration in the pub, what with it being dinnertime.”

Mum somehow has managed to keep a serious face, “Be my guest, don’t make a mess though.”

Robert is becoming increasingly concerned with the conversation, “Hold on, how did we get from me not getting any, to Nicola here chopping my balls off. You do realise husband dearest, you won’t get any then?”

I shrug, “I’ll trade you in for a new model.” I see Adam laughing until he sees me looking at him with the same withering glare, “I don’t know what you’re laughing about, I’m sure Nicola would cut me a two for one deal; Vic’ll understand.”

Nicola chips in, “Four for two.”
I look at her, “Whatever; you’ll do some damage won’t you?”

“Oh yes, I can definitely do some damage. I mean Adam’s sorted now what with having little
Charlie, it wouldn’t be a big deal if he doesn’t have anymore. He won’t have to get the snip later
then will he and I’m sure you’ll give Sugden visiting rights as long as behaves himself.” She hesitates
and looks at me expectantly with a glint in her eye; I think we’re both enjoying this way too much,
“Are you sure you don’t want to do this yourself? You’ll find it very therapeutic.”

I throw her a disappointed look back, “I would but I’ve only just finished my suspended sentence,
it’s a bit soon to get in trouble with the police again.”

“Ah, shame.”

Pearl and Paddy come in at this point, looking a little startled at seeing Robert and Adam who are
now stood up on the back seat, hands protecting the crown jewels. Nicola is stood almost in reaching
distance, waving the knife about, with me at her shoulder encouraging her. Paddy doesn't seem to
know whether to laugh or be cross, “What on earth?”

Nicola looks at me, “So what’s it to be Aaron? Their balls.....,” then looks to Robert and Adam, “or
are you both going to play ball?”

I could kiss Nicola right now, Robert is practically pleading with his eyes, acknowledging defeat.
“Whatever Aaron wants.”

Nicola looks back at me, “Well?”

I take my time to consider then looking at Nicola trying to keep a straight face, “I’ll let them off this
once, but you stay on standby just in case; I’ll make it worth your while.”

“I thought you might.” Nicola returns to sit on her bar stool, ”I’ll have a glass of white wine Chas
please and here’s your knife back.” Robert and Adam audibly let out a sigh of relief as Nicola puts
the knife back onto the chopping board.

“Thanks, that is most definitely on the house, I’ve not laughed as much all Christmas; oh hi Vic.”

Vic comes in from the kitchen with someone’s lunch order looking bemused at what's going on,
“Why are both my husband and brother stood up on the seat?”

Mum is the first to answer, “No reason, they're just messing around, you know a bit of bonding on
the whole fatherhood thing.”

“Hhm, very strange.” She takes the next order and disappears back into the kitchen, clearly too
distracted by chef duties to notice Adam and Robert’s discomfort. They get down from the seats
cautiously, both looking unamused as I sit in front of them with the table providing a nice barrier
between us and I carry on talking as if it's any old dinnertime. “You not eating then? I can highly
recommend the triple chocolate cheesecake, very nice.”

Pearl and Paddy come and sit with us, both sniggering at the slightly shell-shocked looks on both
Robert and Adam’s faces whilst Pearl is happy to continue winding them up on the subject, “I used
to threaten my husband with knitting needles when he needed reminding how to behave; very
effective.”
Robert looks to have calmed down some but doesn’t take kindly to the comment, snapping a retort. “Well thankfully no-one knits these days Pearl.”

“Oh I do. I love a nice night in front of the telly knitting away.” She pats my arm, “I’ve started already Aaron love; the little ones won’t want for cardigans or jumpers.”

Robert looks at her, failing to comprehend why anyone would bother, “Why not just buy one?”

“Robert Sugden, a bought cardie isn’t full of the love the same, there’s nothing more satisfying than knowing you’ve made what your child’s wearing. I bet you wouldn’t be able to knit one anyway. I mean with those hands, you’d be all fingers and thumbs.”

Robert looks at his hands, they are quite big, compared to Pearl’s anyway, “I could if I wanted.”

“Pfft, I’d like to see you try.”

“Whatever. Our children will get perfectly adequate clothing I’m sure and they’ll be none the wiser if they were bought or hand-knitted.”

I look at the clock amused, “Robert don’t you have a meeting to go to?”

“Oh shit and I’ve not even had anything to eat yet.” He gets up looking at me completely unimpressed that he probably won’t have time until after his meeting.

I wave to him as he picks up his coat, now feigning all sweetness and light, practically batting my eyelids at him, “Bye......” I look to Adam who just puts his hands up as I then get up as well, he seems a little uncertain about what I’m going to do, “I’ll see you back at work then, don’t be too long skiving will you Adam.”

“No Aaron, but please don’t go turning into Nicola, one of her is bad enough in the office.”

I grin at him hearing Nicola’s response as she turns round in our direction, “Oi, I ‘eard that; I’ll do his for free whatever Aaron.”

Later at night I get into bed beside Robert who’s been on his best behaviour all evening after we had re-negotiated terms of what I can and can’t do at work until we reached a compromise acceptable to both of us. He looks at me, his smitten kitten face all nervous and apologetic, “I can’t believe you let Nicola come at us with a knife; you won’t really let her do any damage will you?”

He's so adorable right now, needing reassurance that he's forgiven, “Maybe, depends; are you going to behave yourself and not be an overbearing overprotective husband?”

He bats his eyes at me as he comes in close whispering, “Yes daddy. I promise.”

Robert looks at me with a cheeky grin but his expression suddenly changes, I think a little concerned he might have said the wrong thing. I smile at him putting my arms round the back of his neck and kissing his nose, “I like it when you call me that.”

He looks at me not too certain, “Really? It’s not too weird, you know......, with everything from......?”

I interrupt him planting a kiss on his lips, “No, I like it. Daddy Aaron and Daddy Robert and to you when we’re on our own I won’t object to just daddy.”

Robert pulls me down on top of him and wraps his arms round me, “Mmmh, very sexy. No daddy
Robert, w.c. 16th January 2017 (Week 16)

I walk into the coffee shop to see Aaron sitting with what feels like half of the younger females in the village; they all seem to time their breaks to the same as his, it’s like a mother’s meeting every morning in here. I can’t help making a comment, “You do all know he’s gay and married right?” I smile at Aaron, my fingers teasingly brushing through his hair as I pass and I can’t help feeling all warm inside seeing his shy smile. Ordering my Americano, I decide to get it to go, not sure I want to be chatting about whatever it is they find to gossip about.

Leyla is sat on the chair arm next to Aaron and waves a magazine in the air, “We’re comparing notes after doing this quiz.” I look at Aaron who shrugs at me smiling. I’ve been surprised at him being so comfortable sharing the experience but I’m learning being pregnant is having an effect on him in ways that I’d never have expected. I don’t mind; as long as he’s happy, I’m happy. He’s not having problems in the village with the female population since everyone found out that’s for sure.

Adam comes in and he’s definitely not looking happy, making a beeline for Aaron, “Glad you got time for a laugh and a chat mate; so much for you wanting to be treated like normal.”

Aaron looks up at him like he has no idea what he’s talking about shrugging his shoulders, “What? I’m on my break; I told you I was coming in here and that I’d get you a coffee.”

Clearly irritated Adam raises his eyebrows whilst looking at Aaron as though he’s a bit slow, “Thomson’s pick-up?”

Aaron is still shaking his head none the wiser, “What about it?”

“You didn’t put it in the book, he was fuming just now on the phone; I’ve had to tell him we’ll pick up for free this aft.”

The penny drops as he remembers, “Oh yeah, he might have called.”

Adam huffs, looking fed up, “Really, no shit. You keep this up we won’t have a business mate; sort it out Aaron.”

Nessa takes the pen from Aaron and the magazine from Leyla, crossing things out and scribbling for a minute, “Well you got that one wrong.” Adam and Aaron stare at her waiting for her to explain, “Pregnancy brain, you forget things and lose stuff all the time.” Aaron is doing his best not to laugh and even I can’t help but chuckle seeing Adam’s exasperated face; he does not see the funny side apparently.

“You know what, forget it; I’ll sort it, I can’t believe I have months of this to go. At least with Vic I didn’t have to put up with all this crap at work.” He looks over at me, “Robert please do something with your husband before I do.”

Aaron gets up, “Keep your hair on Adam, it’s not that big of a deal, I forgot one thing. I’ll come with you.”

Leyla contributes further shaking her head with a knowing smile, “You’d best get used to it Aaron. Even if you put things on a piece of string around your neck or write it down you’re likely to lose it still.”
Aaron grimaces at her before getting up and bringing his mug over to the counter, clearly feeling a little guilty, “Not helping Leyla.”

I laugh at Adam holding my hands out, not prepared to take sides, “I’m not saying a word mate; I prefer to keep using my right hand for writing thank you very much.”

“Useless the lot of you,” Adam leaves irritated slamming the door to everyone’s amusement as he heads back out.

Aaron smirks at me, looking at least a little contrite, knowing he’s screwed up, “I’ll make it up to him; two chocolate brownies and a coffee for Adam to go Bob please.”

Whilst he waits, I give him the once over with my eye, “We’re going to have to go shopping, you know that don’t you? Get you some big boy trousers.” Aaron looks at me now less amused and I just take a drink of my coffee, “Revenge is sweet husband dearest.”

“I’m not that big, not yet.”

“You do need some new clothes though Aaron. We can go into town after the ultrasound at the end of the week else you’ll have nothing left to wear that you’ll fit into.” Aaron pulls a face but doesn’t argue.

Being a man and carrying twins Aaron has to go for an ultrasound every two to three weeks, he just has the normal 2D usually from now on and then every so often they’ll do a 3D or 4D if we want as he gets closer. The mid-wife says it’s clear now what the sex is but Aaron doesn’t want to know and I’m not bothered as long as they are all healthy.

I’m getting ready for bed as Aaron comes in from cleaning his teeth, just wearing his jama bottoms. He half stops and pulls a weird face as though he had felt a pain; catching his hand I sit him down on my knee. Aaron wraps his arm round my shoulder and neck and I can’t help feeling a pang of concern, still conscious of what happened at New Year, “You okay? What’s the funny look for?”

He smiles at me reassuringly, “Sometimes I get this....., I don’t know how to describe it, a kind of fluttering feeling in my belly; you know how the mid-wife said that they’re moving a lot more now. It’s probably just my imagination playing tricks on me but I keep thinking I’m feeling them moving; I don’t really know for sure.”

I rest my hand on his tummy and slide it down over the growing bump whilst pushing his jamas down just a little so I can see more. I love watching and touching him, it’s fascinating to see the change and I can’t keep my hands off him or them. He has a definite tiny baby bump now, it says ‘baby’ and not ‘fat’. I kiss into his neck, “I love how you look.”

Squeezing my hand, Aaron gets up and goes to stand in front of the full length mirror we have leaning against the bedroom wall. He turns sideways on and I can feel myself getting hard just watching him, he’s mesmerising. Seeing him like this is just makes me want him even more as Aaron runs his hands over his tummy and I go stand behind him, watching his expression in the mirror. He looks almost embarrassed by me seeing his body like this and attempts to cover his tummy with his arms, but I don’t let him.

“Don’t hide, you’re beautiful; you don’t realise how amazing you are and how much you turn me on right now.”
He gives me a reluctant smile, “You won’t be saying that when I look like a big fat balloon. I’d swap you.”

“You don’t mean that but I’d let you if you could.”

Aaron practically scoffs at me, “What, you’d want to be pregnant?”

“We made them with our love; do you realise how special that is, how special you are. I’m not sure I’d handle it all as well as you though; I’m so proud of you. I wouldn’t have it any other way this time; you’re gorgeous but maybe yeah one day if it happens.” I know Aaron doesn’t really believe me as he examines himself in the mirror; not just the change in his body but the cuts. All the small cuts he’d made early last year aren’t visible any more but the bigger ones lower down will leave permanent scars, the older deeper ones are more faded but they won’t ever disappear completely.

Still stood behind him I kiss into the back of his neck, my fingers lightly mapping over the curves of his swelling tummy. Slowly my hand starts reaching lovingly up his front towards his neck and my other winds its way ever lower down. Our eyes are locked as we observe each other in the mirror; Aaron shifts his hips ever so slightly, rubbing against my groin so that I have to catch my breath. Kissing into his earlobe I hear his breathing sharpen from the wet and warm teasing of my tongue. Wanting to feel more of his skin against mine, I pull my t-shirt off over my head then rub my body against Aaron’s, watching his head tip back to rest on my shoulder; his lips part as a delicious sounding moan escapes from them. “God I love you Aaron.” I wrap my arms around him, my lips finding the sensitive spots on his neck and shoulders, “I want to make love to you.” We have sex a lot and it’s a good job his sex drive is still through the roof. I couldn’t imagine how it would be if he’d been the opposite which I’ve read can happen because he makes me horny as hell when I look at him. Aaron can feel my arousal as I press him back into me, my hands on either side of his lower abdomen whilst shamelessly grinding against him making me impatient for more, “I want to be inside you, can I?”

He looks at my reflection in the mirror biting his lip unsure, but I see the lust in his eyes. I miss how it feels, I think we both do and as good as his mouth is it doesn’t compare to being inside him. “The doctor said we could right, we just need to be careful, you’ll stop me if anything hurts.” I’ve teased Aaron’s jama bottoms so far down that they now fall to the floor. He steps out of them and it takes all my willpower not to pounce on him without waiting for his answer, “I want to watch you, I want to make love to you and watch you in the mirror.”

Aaron is moving his naked body against me, his seductive smile drawing me in as I massage his cock with the palm of my hand, his shaft now fully erect from my touch. After nibbling on his earlobe, such a warm feeling surges through me at hearing his gasp as my lips suck and teeth bite down on the arch between his neck and shoulder making me smile in the knowledge that for the next few days he’ll be carrying the mark that this will leave.

With his breathing more laboured Aaron whispers his response, “Yes.” I graze my fingers along his lips before pushing them into his mouth. Aaron sucks on them, his eyes fixed on the mirror watching as I alternate how many fingers he takes whilst gripping onto his hard shaft, stroking him with my other hand. He’s rocking his body with the motion of my hand and seeing us like this in the mirror is making me harder than I ever thought possible. I can’t help getting carried away, turning his face so I can devour his mouth with mine, our kissing becoming hungry and passionate.
We continue kissing, Aaron turning round properly to face me; my lips move to his collarbone as he pushes down my jamas so we can feel each other completely, our naked bodies pressed close together. I slide my fingers down over his hole which makes him moan loudly, so willing to please and be pleased with Aaron parting just enough from me to rub our shafts together with his hand. I close my eyes enjoying how it feels, my forehead resting on his shoulder until he starts teasing down my front with his tongue, then taking my thick cock into his mouth. I gaze at him, sometimes looking down and sometimes into the mirror before moving down onto my knees to kiss him, invading his mouth with my tongue but I want more than his mouth tonight. My hands are caressing his body as he stands upright on his knees, resting half against me whilst my hand tugs on his swollen member. Slowing it down I stroke him with just my thumb, back and forth and I smile as his hips buck craving more.

Pulling his mouth to mine we kiss, Aaron pinches his own nipples, playing as my fingers circle his entrance, his eyes demanding until I push a finger inside him. He’s so tight that I can feel his muscles flexing almost protesting at first as my finger explores. Aaron cries out but I keep my mouth over his, our kissing muffling any attempt he makes to speak, my tongue driving down into his throat.

I move my fingers back to his mouth and he needs no encouragement to start sucking on them. Then watching his reaction in the mirror I scrape my nails down his back whilst Aaron nestles his head in the crook of my neck, occasionally kissing. My finger eases back inside, stretching him ever more open; taking my time I repeat the process until eventually increasing to three fingers. The more I play, the more he relaxes; wanting to please me at the same time he moves his hand to stroke me, “No......, touch yourself, I want to watch you touch yourself.” I am in heaven, like I’m spellbound as he follows my command.

Unable to wait any longer, I kneel behind him, kissing once more into his neck with my hand now taking over on his already leaking shaft, my thumb grazing lovingly over the slit spreading the liquid around the tip and head of his cock, “God I want to taste you Aaron.“ Pushing him forward onto all fours I slide my tongue over his perfect skin, kissing down his back. He spreads his knees further apart so that I’m practically drooling by how he is offering his body to me, his hole now open and on display. I let my tongue continue down sucking on each ball then pulling his swollen cock back between his legs I take it in my mouth luxuriating on how good he tastes. Aaron's quiet moans turn to more of a whimper when I switch, swirling my tongue around his entrance before slipping my tongue inside, all the while stroking his engorged cock backwards through his legs with my hand. Aaron is humming, so aroused that his thighs start trembling.

I’ve hardly given any attention to my own raging hard-on, I didn’t need it, just watching Aaron and his responsiveness to my every touch is enough and I want to enjoy all of Aaron tonight, it's been so long. I have to get up to fetch some lube, there’s no way after all this time I dare pushing inside him without. I put a good helping on my cock and spread it around inside him, his muscles flexing, sucking in my fingers greedily before positioning myself, knowing I need to be careful on the angle, aware of the changes his body has made for our children. Aaron is looking into the mirror and I see a hint of fear in his eyes, “I won’t hurt you or our children Aaron, I promise.”

“I know, I trust you.” Gently I push in with just the tip as Aaron's fingers start grabbing onto the threads of the carpet. With my hands on his waist alternating with caressing his lower back to help him relax I start to push deeper watching my cock get slowly swallowed up inside him. Aaron’s head drops and I can hear him groan; he is so tight and even going slow he is struggling at first, panting almost as he adjusts to being stretched like this after such a long time, “Fuck, I’d forgotten how big you are.”
When I’m pretty much all the way in I hold still, my hands trailing over his body, my mouth peppering his back with kisses and the odd playful bite, “Tell me when you’re ready.”

Aaron is looking straight into the mirror as he answers without hesitation, “I’m ready.”

My eyes lock with his, needing to know he means it, “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” I start to move, slow and steady thrusts; I love the tightness, I can feel every reaction he has and the changes in his breathing as he starts to fully relax, the pain now replaced by a craving for more, “Faster, Rob I want to feel all of you.” After pulling him upright so his back is flush against my body, he wraps his arm round the back of my neck; first kissing his mouth I then trail my mouth to his ear and neck, making him quiver with desire, his eyes closed and lips parted, “Harder, fuck me harder Robert.” I can feel him pressing back into me and his muscles acting like suction for my cock increasing the pleasure for both of us as I bury myself ever deeper inside him.

Aaron opens his eyes; we are communicating with our bodies but our eyes are now permanently fixed on each other, our desire burning through the mirror glass as my hand goes back to his shaft. He’s getting closer, it’s almost too much too soon and I want to make it last longer. Occasionally he falls back onto all fours, mewling from my fingers digging into his hips whilst my mouth, hot, wet and possessive leaves marks all over from my teeth sinking into his skin. Aaron’s eyes bore into mine, begging me as I steadily thrust harder and faster, losing myself in him. The urgency consumes us, almost reckless as our bodies move in unison chasing climax, yet trying to delay the need to relieve the building pressure, desperate to prolong our love making for as long as we can. I'm so close; I have to work hard to hold it until I bring Aaron to the edge.

With my hand jerking him off, having intentionally delayed it, for the first time I shift to hit his prostate, tipping the balance and I feel his body strain with the tell-tale shudder of his orgasm. I let go and my come explodes into him as he spills into my hand, calling out my name loudly, groaning with satisfaction. He thrashes and squirms against me so much that I have to hold still, floating with wave after wave of ecstasy coursing through my body making me cry out then going quiet as it peaks, so intense I can’t make a sound until I gradually start to regain control of my senses.

Completely exhausted and spent; still on all fours my body is draped over Aaron. We're both breathing heavily and our bodies are glistening with sweat as I bounce inside Aaron a little, kissing his shoulder, "You okay?" Aaron nods his head not quite able to speak just yet but laughing quietly to himself as I continue talking, "That was fucking amazing, you're fucking amazing."

We continue observing each other in the mirror; I'm smiling at him after collecting his come into my fingers then licking and sucking them clean with my mouth. Aaron’s eyes seem almost glazed over but they never leave mine as we kneel upright, as if captivated by me doing this. He is smiling back at me through the mirror, looking contented as he holds my hands, pulling my arms around him protectively, “You’re just as beautiful Robert, I love you so much sometimes it hurts you know that.” Stroking my fingers down his cheek we collapse together onto the floor kissing and wrapping ourselves around each other not wanting the intensity of the connection to end. It's quite a long time until we find the motivation to move to our bed, eventually falling asleep in each other's arms.

TBC
Hungry Hippo

Chapter Summary

January 2017 / Month 4 - Week 17: Aaron feels a little insecure and overwhelmed as he starts to show and Robert tries his hand at something new.

Chapter Notes

'Ocker' – old Yorkshire dialect = to hesitate

Robert, w.c. 23rd January 2017 (Week 17)

Lying back, I take a minute to catch my breath before turning onto my side to rest my head on Aaron’s front, unable to hide the massive grin still covering my face, “Well that was a surprise.” I’d woken up to Aaron’s mouth on my cock and well, one thing had led to another. He is feeling a lot happier about me being inside him and he had soon switched from giving pleasure with his mouth to straddling me, squeezing with his thighs as he expertly controlled the depth and speed of our lovemaking. I’d be hard pushed to think of a better way to wake up in the morning.

“Judging by all the noise you were making, I take it was a nice surprise?” Aaron’s fingers are stroking lovingly through my hair and I shift onto my front, playfully I blow raspberries into his belly button making him laugh. I land a final kiss before folding my arms, resting them on his chest with my chin on top.

“Mhmm, let me think about that a minute.” With a glint in his eye Aaron pushes me off him, punishment for not giving the right answer, but I just go back to the same position. He runs his hand through my hair again, looking contented and happy. I can’t resist winding him up a little more, “I’ll admit it was rather nice but you have no room to talk about me making a lot of noise. You snored all night, loudly I might add and then I wasn't the only vocal one this morning, what with your screaming orgasm, I think the whole village heard you.” We were never quiet having sex but Aaron’s emotions with everything are heightened and when he orgasms, he’s louder than he ever was before. “At this rate we’re going to have to soundproof the bedroom,” I pull a face, "Actually more like every room. I’m surprised we haven’t had any sarky comments from next door.”

Aaron smiles at me fondly, not denying anything, “We have; you’re never around to hear them. I just said that it’s only fair and we were getting our own back for Johnny’s crying, though that one might backfire once the Dynamic Duo are born.”

Laughing, I look at him apologetically, “Sorry, I didn’t know they’d complained.” I’m back to working long hours again, the business is taking off better than I could have hoped and if it keeps up I’ll be able to afford to take someone on to help out.

“I know and it’s fine; they were just teasing. I think they’re jealous more than anything. You heard the midwife, the babies can hear my voice now so they’ll hear me scream your name; they’ll hear how happy you make me.”
A shiver runs through me hearing Aaron talk like this and it takes quite a bit of willpower not to jump on him for a second round, but we don’t have time, we’re already later than usual. “Interesting; just think, we can give them lessons in dirty talking before they are even born.”

“Oi, I don’t think so. There’ll be no swearing anywhere near them thank you very much from now on; I want our children to be well behaved.”

“It’s not me who’s got a filthy mouth; some of things you say at the minute Aaron are sexy as hell.”

We move to lie on our sides, wrapping our legs and arms around each other, I ache for more as Aaron kisses me, his eyes are playful, “I whisper those so they won’t hear.” He’s laughing at me as I stop his hands roaming or we’ll be here all morning. ”Did I tell you I've started having weird sex dreams sometimes?”

“No......, weird how?”

“I don’t remember all of them but not too weird; we'll have try some out.”

“Aww Aaron, you’re going to be the death of me.” I groan, looking at the clock desperately wishing I could push back time, ”I have to go to work and so do you; you can’t say stuff like that at this time of the morning, no fair.” Finding a streak of resistance, I push the duvet off, “Come on, get up. I’ll treat you to breakfast at the coffee shop.”

“Thanks Bob,” I take a big gulp of coffee, needing the caffeine fix to kick-start the day whilst watching Aaron dig into his breakfast; I would sit and watch him all day if I could.

Seeing me, he stops eying me warily, “What are you smiling at?”

“You; I like watching you. That’s alright with you isn’t it, that your husband enjoys watching you?”

“S’pose,” I can tell he likes it, he’s blushing. “Anyway, what was that you said about snoring earlier? I don’t snore; you always said I don’t snore.”

“Well you do now and believe me I’m surprised the whole of Emmerdale hasn’t complained about it. If you keep it up I’ll be investing in ear plugs.”

Aaron hates things like this, especially when he has no control over it. He pulls a face, all embarrassed sounding more than a little peeved at this development, “Oh great, you’ll be comparing me to a hippo or some such like next.”

I lean over and kiss him, lingering just a little too long that I feel a stirring in my groin which I force myself to ignore instead teasing Aaron. “A very sexy hippo, my very own permanently hungry sexy hippo who snores but I love him anyway.”

Aaron groans, half amused and half annoyed with me, but there’s a twinkle in his eye, “I hate you.”

I giggle at him, knowing he doesn’t mean it. “Angry hippo sex, mmmh; maybe you can have weird sex dreams about that.”

“You are such an arse.”

I can’t help laughing at him now. “That could be your new pet name.” Seeing the flash of irritation, I decide to quite now whilst I’m ahead, ”Right I have to go and I’ll see you later; I’m not sure what
time I’ll be home, I’ll text you.”

Getting up I lean over for a nice long kiss, I don’t care who is watching. Aaron grabs my tie stopping me from leaving, “Remember this, if you don’t play nice, you’ll be sleeping on the sofa so just bear that in mind for when you get home husband dearest.” He knows I love it when he calls me this.

Grinning cheekily I kiss him again, “I always behave, you know that.” My tongue brushes over his lips a final time, giving him something to remember me by after I’ve gone, “Love you too.”

Aaron, w.c. 23rd January 2017 (Week 17)

Walking into the yard, I hand Adam a bacon sandwich before we both head into the warmth of the office to eat, “Cheers mate.” I grunt a response, still a little put out that I have to work instead of spending the day in bed with Robert and irritated with myself for giving Robert ammunition to wind me up. It’s the last time that I wake him up to the pleasure of my mouth for a while, that’ll teach him a lesson; hippos can be dangerous to man and so can I.

Adam catches on I’m in a bit of a mood, “What’s up with you, you missed a breakfast or something? Which is this that you’re on anyway, second or third?”

I glare at him, “Second and last.” I’m already thinking about going back to the coffee shop for a third, but I know I have to resist the hunger pangs; the doctor said I had to be careful about eating too much. I hate dieting so I’m trying to be good, but it's really hard when I still feel like I could eat for all Yorkshire and then some.

“Go on then, what's he done now?”

“What makes you think he's done anything?” Adam just raises his eyebrows knowingly and waits for me to answer. I sigh, “He called me a hippo, a snoring hippo to boot.” I fail to mention that it had actually been me to bring hippo into the conversation in the first place; Adam doesn’t need to know that.

Laughing at my pouting face, he claps his hand on my shoulder in sympathy, “Vic was bad with that for a while too, remember; it'll wear off. There'll be worse things than snoring to deal with over the next few months.”

“Great, somebody shoot me now.” I rest my head back and close my eyes; I can't really imagine how it's all going to feel as I get closer to giving birth. I reckon it can't be any worse than the first few weeks.

It goes quiet between us whilst we eat and Adam hands me a bottle of water from the fridge. He doesn’t need to say anything and I don’t argue knowing he’s under instruction from Vic and Robert to make sure I drink enough during the day. This is one of the conditions for me working fairly normally still; I have to drink a minimum of eight glasses of water a day whilst at work, more if we have a lot on. We agreed to review at the end of each month what I can and can't do so that as I get further along we can make adjustments until I have to give up altogether.

Opening my eyes I watch Adam thinking we haven’t really properly talked about me being pregnant just the two of us. After we re-set the ground rules for me continuing to work earlier in the month, we just fell into a routine like always but with one change, Adam now does the bookings so I don’t forget.

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“How was it yesterday?” I’d been for my second sonogram for the month. This is the first time he’s actually asked a question, until now it’s usually been other people and he’s just listened in.

“Good, the midwife said everything’s as it should be.” I look at him to see how interested he really is to hear, “I was longer waiting than actually having the sonogram.” Hesitating I’m not sure if to continue, “Are you okay with this?”

“What?”

“Me being pregnant, you’ve not kind of said anything, not really. You’ve let Vic do all the talking so I don’t really know what you think.”

Adam shrugs, “It’s just a bit weird that’s all.”

“Tell me about it.”

Smiling at me with his usual sloppy grin plastered on his face, I know he’s okay with it. “I was trying to imagine what it would be like. I did the same with Vic, but it’s different; she’s my wife and well you know, you’re a bloke and my best mate. I won’t ever know what it feels like and part of me’s a bit jealous you know; a bit like after that first time you went with Vic to ante natal and then how close you were with everything.” It hadn’t entered my head he would feel like this; it reminds me of what Robert said. I wonder what Robert would look like pregnant but I park that thought for when I’m alone, it’s turning me on too much.

Pulling the sonogram out of my pocket, I pass it to Adam, “You want to see? You can’t be the godfather and Vic godmother without keeping up on things.” I hesitate, “If you want to be that is?”

His smile broadens into a wide grin, “Seriously?”

“Who else do you think we’d ask you idiot.”

“Dunno; someone from the Dingle lot.”

“I don’t think so, not unless you say no.” Perish the thought, it wouldn’t have surprised me if my expression hadn’t been one of pure begging, "Please don't say no."

Chuckling Adam puts me out of my misery, “I’d be honoured mate, we both are; Vic’ll be made up.” He smiles at the picture, he knows what this feels like and how special it is.

I move the conversation to something I've been curious about but not wanted to ask Robert directly, “Did Robert ever tell you and Vic about when I told him?”

“Nope. We already knew something was up though. He was really upset when he came round one night not long before Christmas. He was crying; it's weird seeing Robert cry, you don't expect it. He was asking allsorts of questions about you. Is that when you told him?” I don't answer, still taking in what he'd said. Adam, unsure what's going through my head, looks a bit guilty, "I told him about you collapsing at the yard. You really had us worried you know that right? I thought we were doing the right thing.”

I think back to what a mess everything was back then, “Yeah you did. He thought I was having an affair.”

“What you? That's more Robert's thing than yours.”

“I wouldn’t let him near me and then he saw me hugging some bloke in Leeds so he put two and two
together."

“And came up with forty; you’d never cheat."

“No, he was just a friend but I did lie. I lied to Robert and I used you to help me lie to him, I lied to you. Sorry."

“I get it.” Adam hands me back the picture and I look at it. Sometimes I’m still overwhelmed to think they are inside me, growing every day. I’m lost in my own world a little as I continue talking, my eyes not leaving the sonogram in my hand, my thumb brushing over the two little shapes, my children. I think back to how confused I had been, the total opposite of how I feel today; I dread to think where I’d be now if I’d gone through with it. “I was going to get rid of them, but I couldn’t; I couldn’t do it Adam.” I look up at him, not realising he was so close, almost touching, sitting on the edge of the desk watching me. I hadn’t meant to tell him, but I’m okay that I have, “Don’t tell Vic......, please, not Vic or anyone; only Robert knows. I was scared and it took some time for me to work it out.”

“I won't. Aaron I don’t know how I’d have reacted if it had been me; I’ve no idea but I know one thing, you’ll make a great dad.”

“You think?”

Adam puts his hand on my shoulder and his touch grounds me, “I know so. Aaron anyone can be a father, but both you and Robert both know it takes someone special to be a good dad and you’ll be a great dad, you both will.”

I smile, thinking back to discussions we’d had when Adam had been all excited and scared as hell at the same time about being a dad for the first time. Now I know how he feels, just a million times more scared. “I don’t know what to do about Cain. He’s hardly said a word to me since they found out.”

“You know he went for Robert at the hospital; mum had to hold him back.”

“He what?” I’m shocked, but not really surprised I suppose, we’re not so different. “Robert never said anything.”

“What does Robert think you should do?”

“I haven’t said anything to him. He thinks my family will support me whatever and he’s distracted working all hours again to get the business where he wants it before they’re born. You know what Robert's like if I tell him, he’ll get annoyed and go confront him which won’t do anyone any good. It feels a bit like when Cain found out about dad, but this is different. I'm not sure this is something he can accept, that he thinks it’s unnatural.” I hate how that sounds, because it feels like the most natural thing in the world to me now.

“I’ve not really seen him much; he’s been away a lot. I can talk to mum if you want?”

“No, it’s good. I need to do it; thanks though. Don’t say anything to Robert please; I need to speak to Cain myself.” Adam answers the phone which interrupts the conversation and I head back outside into the yard, pondering my options.

It starts to snow again as I walk to the pub for tea after work; it’s been snowing on and off all day. Mum smiles as I walk into the Woolpack, “You on your own love?”
“Mmmh yep. Robert texted to say he probably won’t be back ‘til late; the roads are all jammed up with the snow and what not.”

“What do you fancy?”

“Surprise me, actually no, I’ll have hotpot.”

“And a hot water?”

“Yes please.”

I take my coat off and stretch my shoulders backwards; working is a lot more tiring than it used to be, my body is always exhausted at the end of each day. I hope Robert isn’t too tired or too late when he gets home because I’ve got used to him giving me a massage which helps me relax before going to bed; I don’t sleep as well without.

Leyla comes in, standing next to me as she orders and I see the look, I’m learning to recognise it, moving before she even gets chance to touch; I’m not in the mood. Now that I’m starting to show everyone seems to think I’m like a pet to touch and pat. “You had a feel yesterday, you don’t need another.” She smiles at me with a glint in her eye, “I mean it Leyla, if you touch my belly I’m going to grab your boob okay.”

Leyla touches anyway before facing me, pushing her jacket out of the way so her low-cut blouse is like an open invitation which a lot of men would snatch the chance at, “Feel free, I have great boobs, be my guest.” I sigh in resignation, shaking my head as I see the warm smile on her face. I laugh, we both know there isn’t a chance in hell I’m going to cop a feel.

I relax as Leyla knocks my arm playfully and I groan in defeat. She is actually one of a handful of people I feel totally comfortable around, “I’m now officially the village freak show.”

Leyla orders her drink, still smiling at me, “Sorry, I won’t do it again, not for a while anyway. When I was pregnant people wouldn’t stop wanting to touch either, especially after he started kicking. Some people just look good on being pregnant and it’s like a magnet, everyone wanting to share the experience; and just for the record Aaron Sugden, you look sexy as hell.”

Now I’m truly blushing from the compliment and I love being called Sugden. Then just sometimes I wish a hole would gobble me up, like now as Moira cones in and joins us, “Who’s this? Who looks sexy?”

“Aaron being pregnant, don’t you think?”

Moira looks between us and embarrasses me even further, “I’m not sure I’m allowed to call you sexy. I probably would if I could though.” Chuckling at the mortified look on my face, Moira tries to make me feel better, “You do look well Aaron though; being pregnant definitely suits you.”

I can’t help the warm feeling inside from the praise, the old me would have probably kicked off but I’ve changed and instead I mumble a response, “Thanks.” I’m so proud of our children and they’re not even born yet. Then I think about the conversation with Adam at the yard and I look at Moira, my expression more serious. “Cain share that view or uncle Zak for that matter? They haven’t said two words to me since they found out.”

Both of them catch the sudden change in my mood, exchanging a wary glance, “Ah you know Cain; he’s not a talker.”

Unable to find the off switch on my emotions, I say exactly what’s in my head right now, “You
know what this feels like; it's like all the women in the village can't get enough and want to know every little detail, can't keep away from me and all the men just ignore me or walk in the other direction with a look like they're avoiding the plague, that a guy being pregnant isn't right. I hate it; I hate how everyone looks at me.”

Oblivious, mum interrupts, “Here you go love, one hotpot.”

“Actually I’m not hungry. I think I’m just going to go home.” Grabbing my coat, I’m out of the door before anyone has chance to say anything.

“Aaron, wait up.” I keep walking as if I’d not heard. My head is down in an attempt to hide the tears running down my face. I just want to be with Robert, to feel his arms round me and for him to make me feel safe and loved. With him I never doubt, but with everyone else, I’m never quite sure what it is they see when they look at me or touch. Moira catches hold of my arm, stopping me from walking any further and I brush away my tears with clenched fists, avoiding her eyes before I break completely, “Aaron, you know Cain loves you.”

Looking at her I shake my head, “I used to. Now I’m not so sure.”

“Nothing has changed Aaron.”

"You're wrong, everything's changed; I've changed."

"He comes back at the weekend; come up-to the farm for Sunday dinner, both of you.”

“That'll just make things worse with Robert there; I've seen the way he looks at him, at both of us.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Isn’t it; then tell me Moira, what is it like?”

“Give him some time to get used to it.”

Shrugging off Moira’s hand I start walking again, but she comes with me, “I’m tired, I’m just want to go home.”

“Not if Robert’s not there you’re not, not like this. Aaron you’re hungry and you need to eat after working all day. Come back in, have some food and get Robert to come for you at the pub when he gets back. If you don’t, then I’ll call him myself and then he’ll worry.”

I ocker, not sure what I want to do but I know it’s not an empty threat. “No baby talk and no touching.”

Moira softens and smiles at me, linking her arm through mine as we head back to the pub, “I promise and I’ll make sure no-one else touches.”

Reaching the pub steps I hold back and Moira looks at me waiting for an explanation, "I'll be in, in a minute; I just need to call Robert; sorry.”

“You don’t have anything to be sorry for Aaron and don’t be afraid to tell people to keep their hands to themselves.”

“I don’t mind most of the time; usually I like it, just not today.”
I’m so pleased that it’s weekend; I’m knackered. I’m looking forward to spending some time with Robert, we’ve hardly seen each other all week one way up and another. I’d been round to see mum wanting advice on what to do about Cain and she said the same as Moira and Adam, that I need to talk to him. Easier said than done I think to myself; this is so much harder than anything with him before. I shudder; it’s cold out and I’m looking forward to a nice quiet night in, telly, food, massage from Robert and bed.

I look at my watch as I walk down the path to the cottage, I’d been with mum a lot longer than I’d intended, we’d got chatting about other stuff and before I knew it the afternoon had flown by.

“Hey, I’m back.” I take my coat off and put it on the hook at the bottom of the stairs. I hear Robert swearing to himself, which he hardly ever does unless he’s really annoyed and I go in to the living room to see what he’s up to. “What are you doing?” I manage to stifle a laugh, knowing full well Robert will take offense if he thinks I’m laughing at him.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” There’s no mistaking the irritation and frustration so I know I need to tread carefully but it's really hard holding back the giggles.

Resisting the urge to say something very sarcastic which will only hurt his feelings, I watch Robert in amusement as the ball of wool on his lap falls and rolls across the floor. Cautiously walking through the room I go get a glass of water and then coming back I remain standing in the doorway into the kitchen, quietly watching Robert get tangled up. Having fetched the wool, now sitting back down he is looking confused as to why he’s dropped some of what he’s done from the knitting needle; the ball of wool falls onto the floor again and Robert is all flustered and annoyed, at which point I decide to intervene, “Errm maybe it’s a bit early for knitting whatever it is you’re knitting; we don’t want to jinx anything. Why don’t you leave it ’til a little closer the time?”

I go to sit over his knees, distraction tactics usually work well at times like these; straddling him before putting my hands on his waist I lean in for a kiss. Feeling Robert relax, I move my mouth to his neck and I don’t stop until I hear him moan as my touch works its magic on him. Sitting back a little I observe him, noticing at the same time the growing bulge in his crotch, “What made you want to start knitting anyway?”

He shrugs, “It’s supposed to be relaxing, therapeutic.” It doesn’t look like it was though, more likely he wanted to prove Pearl wrong. He dejectedly pushes the knitting needles and wool to the side out of the way, huffing; a clear sign of defeat.

“Mnh hhm.” Moving in again, this time, I start at the other side of his neck, working my way up-to his earlobes which soon has the desired effect as Robert's grip around my waist tightens, pulling me closer in to him, “Well, I can think of easier ways to help you relax.” Robert’s mouth finds mine as my body moves against him, slow and intentionally rubbing against his crotch. I can’t resist a last tease though, “Maybe you should do something a bit more 'you' on the whole relaxation front; you know like Sudoku or something.”

Robert’s hands hold me still, his eyes looking crestfallen at my lack of confidence in him, “You saying I can’t knit?” We both turn our heads to stare at the now abandoned first attempt and break into a fit of giggles, “Just you wait Aaron Sugden; the first cardigan and boots our babies will wear will have been knitted by their daddy.”

There is absolute certainty in Robert’s voice and suddenly I find myself really turned on by this, my body moving against his now with a lot more urgency, my breathing heavier, needing it to be true, “Is that a promise?”
Roberts responding to me, “Absolutely, I’m a Sugden and I can do anything I set my mind to; I mean, how hard can it be?”

I decide not to answer, thinking he’ll need to draft in expert support and I have other matters on my mind right at this minute when it comes to things being hard. “Speaking of hard; how about you let me try some relaxation techniques of my own?” Starting to unbutton Robert’s jeans, my hand reaches inside as I crush my lips onto his, stifling the noise he makes as my fingers wrap around his hard shaft. Robert continues to moan to the movement of my hand and I slide off his knees; Robert pushes his jeans off, kicking them to one side with his bare foot. Our eyes lock, Robert hungry for more but watching me silently as I slowly trace my hands over his bare feet, up his calves and thighs until I reach his groin and then I stand up on my knees as he spreads his legs wider apart inviting me to have whatever I want of him. I gladly accept, taking everything he has to offer and more.

TBC
A Little Chat

Chapter Summary

January-February 2017 / Month 4-5 - Week 17-18: Aaron overhears a conversation which affects him more than he lets on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Robert, Sunday 29th January 2017 (Week 17)

“Woah slow down Aaron.” Having left his wallet when visiting Chas at the pub yesterday I’d been sitting on the garden wall waiting for Aaron whilst he went to fetch it, but then seeing him come back I’d practically had to run to get in the car before he set off or I have an inkling that he would have just driven off without me. “Talk to me Aaron, what’s up?” The only response I get is the screeching of the car tyres as we speed out of the village. I hastily put my seatbelt on, biting my tongue so not to say anything because it’s immediately apparent he’s wound so tight that telling him to slow down a second time is more likely to cause an accident than prevent one.

Sitting quietly I observe Aaron, the countryside zipping by a little too quick for comfort. It’s clear we’re not going to Butlers for Sunday roast which was the original plan but I don’t say anything about this either. There are times to push and argue with Aaron, usually when I’ve done something wrong, but then there are times where you just have to wait it out and rely on giving the odd nudge to do the trick in breaking him down so he opens up.

With his hands gripping tightly onto the steering wheel, the look of concentration on Aaron’s face doesn’t waver. Giving up hope of him starting to talk of his own accord I’m about to ask him a question when we swerve off the road taking the fork which brings our white knuckle ride to a sudden stop at the top of the quarry. Before I get chance to say anything, Aaron gets out, slamming the car door and instead I find myself following in his footsteps along the gravel track leading down into the quarry. I haven’t seen him this angry in a long time; it’s not just a strop but something more serious and I decide it's going to need something closer to a sledgehammer than a nudge to get him to calm down and talk to me, “Perfect, I always wanted a day out at the quarry, must be all that stony silence, it just turns me on like you wouldn’t believe, thanks buttercup.”

“Prick.”

Smiling to myself I now know exactly which button to press. I give it a minute or so, we’re already half-way down the track and I put myself in front of him. With my hands grabbing either side of his face I ram my tongue down his throat; he is so surprised that he doesn’t have time to do anything other than stand there and take it. Pulling out I release him and with a wicked grin on my face I turn round and keep walking; what can I say except there's method in my madness.

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I can hear him muttering as he follows and I turn round walking backwards smirking at him; the pressure inside him has peaked but he is still consumed by a boatload of angry energy. Turning back round I don’t look at him again until we reach the quarry floor. Grabbing his hand as he catches me
up I pull Aaron into me once more, "You're so gorgeous when you're mad you know that?" I kiss him hungrily. He fights me initially but as I push him up against a boulder that’s twice my height he’s kissing me back; he needs a release valve for all the tension and I'm it, plus this is way better than him using his fists. “You want to talk now or fuck?” Aaron is stunned but his eyes have the look I was hoping to see as I continue to challenge him, “Take too long to decide and I'll choose for you.”

Finally finding his voice I get a gruff response, “What do you think?”

“I think why would we want to talk when I could get to hear what your orgasm sounds like with an echo.”

That most definitely did the trick; we’re fumbling like kids round the back of the bike sheds with belts being unbuckled, hands groping frantically and buttons popping open. Aaron’s focus has switched to a raw need for release. “We don’t have any lube.”

Breathless and impatient, I stop kissing his neck long enough to say something, “Don’t need any; I’ve got your mouth.” After a long crushing kiss I push Aaron onto his knees, my fingers threading through his hair as I pull his head towards me. I'm using his mouth with a lot more force than I would normally but I'm quickly lost to the slurping noises coming from Aaron giving me so much blissful pleasure it’s obscene. He’s so fucking hot when he's like this that I almost can't help myself and have to pull out quickly before I come; it would be all too easy to let him swallow me down but it's not what he needs and it's not what I want.

Before he even has time to think about it, I flip Aaron round to face the boulder; placing his hands flat on the rough surface he holds his body away from it and presses back into me as much as I'm pushing to get inside him. We'd had sex earlier so I knew Aaron could take me without any preparation; I can’t describe how amazing it sounds hearing him cry out my name as I drive inside him. After picking up a furious pace I come quick and hard, feeling completely spent and worn out as I rest my head in-between Aaron’s shoulder blades then after taking a few seconds I switch my attention back to him, “I love you so much Aaron Sugden you know that, do you realise just how happy you make me?”

Hearing him mumble a response I take Aaron’s swollen cock in my hand, revelling in how it feels as he fucks into it moaning for me to let him come. I love listening to him swear at me, calling me all the names under the sun as my arm holds him fast whilst I edge him until he can't take it anymore. The orgasm rips through him and I think the final release takes him by surprise because he literally screams when he comes, the sound echoing as it bounces off the quarry sides. Aaron collapses against the boulder and I lean over him, almost like a cocoon; the fingers of both our hands are tightly intertwined above our heads as we steady ourselves against the stone, needing a moment to recover our breath.

Aaron turns around and we kiss before smiling at each other a little in awe of just how intense that was. I grin at him mischievously, “I think that gives me a whole new meaning to rough and ready. I’ll take your angry sex any day Aaron.” Laughing at me, most of the tension and stress from before are now gone, his eyes telling me that he’ll let me and I stroke my fingers down his cheek before kissing him a lot more slowly, taking our time to enjoy it. Eventually we move away from the cover of the boulder, “I didn’t hurt you did I; it wasn’t too hard?”

“No, it was good, really really fucking good.” He’s looking around us amused at where we are, no-one ever comes here hardly but you never know who could be watching I suppose. “How did you do that? All I wanted was to hit something when we got here and instead we end up having outdoor sex.”

I smile at him mischievously, “Well you see, I’ve gotten good at channelling your negative energy
into positive energy and the doctor did say you needed to get regular exercise and fresh air if you remember.”

Aaron is shaking his head at me, half smiling, “You talk such bullshit Robert Sugden.”

Jeans pulled back up and belts buckled we look around for somewhere to sit, “Come on.” Aaron grabs my hand as I pull him up with me after climbing onto the top of the boulder we’d just had sex against and we sit down on the almost flat surface. Resting back onto the stone, I close my eyes, enjoying the warmth of the sunshine. Aaron leans against me and I wrap my arm around him, snuggling us close together, “We need to do this again some time.”

“Haha. If we do I'll make you beg so loud until it's echoing off every inch of this place.” I lift my head slightly, opening my eyes to find Aaron grinning at me as he continues, "I wonder if the sound travels outside the quarry.”

“No idea; we’ll have to test it out next time.” I kiss Aaron’s forehead before resting my head back down but I continue watching him so I can gauge his next reaction, “So you going to talk to me now?”

Aaron's happy expression disappears instantly, his tone agitated, “I thought you gave me a choice and I didn’t pick talking.”

Remaining calm, my eyes never leave his, “You didn’t seriously believe it was an either or choice did you?”

Aaron scoffs at me with annoyance, sitting up with his back to me, “Silly me.”

“Well, you know you’re going to have to tell me sometime.” I look at my watch; it’s well on the way to one, “Did you let Moira know we’re not going for dinner?”

“Nope.”

“Don’t you think we should?”

Turning his head to look at me I can see he's feeling a bit guilty and he pulls his phone out, but after staring at the blinking light he decides to ignore it and shoves the phone into his back pocket, “She’ll work it out.”

“You going to make me work it out?” A flash of anger crosses his face but it doesn’t carry the same energy for a fight as it did earlier. “I take it this has to do with Cain then?”

After initial silence, Aaron lets out a big sigh and starts talking, “He was in the back room with Zak and Doug was also there putting his two-penneth in, stirring old git. I over-heard them talking.”

He seems lost in thought at the memory and when he doesn't continue I prod him gently with my hand, “And….“

“I don’t want to talk about it Robert.”

“Well I do and we’re not leaving here until you tell me.”

“There’s nothing to tell. Mum said blood’s thicker than water, she was wrong.” Aaron lies down on
his back staring up at the sky and I turn onto my side, propping myself up with my arm at an angle.

“That’s it?”

“They can’t get their heads around a man having kids; they don’t think I’m a proper bloke anymore.”

I look at him carefully, “What do you mean?” Aaron doesn't answer but there's no way I'm letting this go, "Aaron, what did they say?"

Aaron avoids looking at me, “The way you’d hear them talk, I might as well have had a sex change.”

A disbelieving laugh escapes my lips, “But that’s not how it works. Do they not know how to use the internet to get their facts straight?”

“Apparently not; Zak said a bloke giving birth and having babies isn't right and Doug harped on about god and it not being what he intended.”

My blood is boiling hearing the hurt in Aaron’s voice, but for his sake I keep calm, “Is this all what they actually said or is this you paraphrasing?”

“It’s what they meant and Cain practically said he doesn’t know how to look at me anymore, that me being pregnant is too weird. No idea what he’s going to do when I start getting properly big and then what about when they’re born, what’s it going to be like then? Oh and they went on about that an’ all, if they’d even be like 'normal' babies. Sam wasn’t there but he probably thinks the same, he’s not been near me in weeks either.”

"Did you speak to any of them?"

Aaron shakes his head, "No, I didn’t trust myself not to kick off so I legged it out of there."

"So they don't know you heard them?" Aaron shakes his head again, wiping away the tear running down his cheek with his coat sleeve. "Come here." I pull him back to me, hugging him close “Start at the beginning and tell me exactly what they said.”

Robert, Monday 30th January 2017 (Week 18)

Adopting the Dingle approach of not knocking I let myself into the kitchen; there’s no-one around and leaning against the counter I wait quietly. It takes about ten minutes until Cain walks in; seeing me he stops then goes to fill up the kettle, “You want one?”

“What the fuck’s wrong with you Cain?”

“I’ll take that as a no then.” He turns round after switching the kettle on, “We missed you for Sunday dinner yesterday, very nice it was too; shame you weren't there Sugden.”

Moira walks in and looks between us, quickly sensing the tension in the air, “What’s going on here?”

“Nothing; we're just having a little chat, isn’t that right Sugden?”

“We don’t chat Cain, we never did and that’s not about to change any time soon.” I turn to Moira, “Sorry for yesterday, I know we should have called but things took an unexpected turn. If you want to know why we missed dinner, then you should have a conversation with your husband about his view on male pregnancy.”
Moira looks at Cain but he just shrugs his shoulders. I’m so angry that I’m struggling to contain it. I don’t get him, I don’t get why when I know he loves Aaron and he would do just about anything for him, that he can’t accept this. Getting nowhere with Cain Moira shifts her gaze back to me, “Well Robert?”

“He’ll support your druggie daughter and was there through the hardest thing Aaron’s ever had to do during Gordon’s trial only to turn his back on him for the happiest time of his life because he's too ignorant to do any better.” I glare at Cain, “You’re such a fucking loser; I told you he won’t forgive you. He heard yesterday, he heard you, Zak and Doug all talking about him.” Cain stands still for the first time and I see the realisation of what this means hit him yet he still doesn’t say anything, his expression impossible to read.

Maybe he doesn’t know what to say to Aaron and he's still wrapping his head round it. At least I’d get that but he has to try and that’s what I won’t accept, he’s not even made an effort; it’s been a month almost and I’ve had enough. “You don’t come near Aaron or my family unless you’ve got a big fucking apology in your pocket and you’d best grovel and hope to hell that he’ll forgive you. If he does, he’s a better person than me because I won’t ever forgive you for this, you or Zak; I don’t care what Doug or the god-squad think, he’s not family.” I move into Cain's space, "And don't ever let me hear that you or anyone else in his family have been talking about him like that again or I swear I will make you all regret it." Cain is grinding his teeth but he hasn't reacted; taking a step back I look across to Moira but I decide it’s up-to Cain to tell her the details. “I’ll let myself out.”

I don’t realise until I'm sitting in the car and put my hands on the steering wheel that I’m shaking from the strain of holding back from lashing out physically. I don't do physical violence like the Dingles but today I wanted to squeeze the life out of him.

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Robert, Tuesday 31st January 2017 (Week 18)

Aaron hasn’t mentioned Cain or the others once since Sunday. He point blank refused to tell anyone he’d heard them and we’d left it with him saying we’d known all along that it wouldn't be easy and we just needed to give it more time and be patient. I haven’t wanted to come back to it just yet but I will when the time’s right and then I'll also tell him about confronting Cain. I’m not sure how he’ll react but I know he’ll understand. Putting all this out of my head, I put on my best smile and sit on the chair arm staring down at him laid out on the sofa, “Come on lazy bones, shift yourself; we’re supposed to be going shopping tonight.”

“We can go another night, tomorrow I promise. I’m tired and everything aches; can I have a massage please….., pretty please.” Aaron prods me playfully with his foot giving me his puppy, doe-eye look, "You know you want to.”

Sighing with frustration I try to resist, “Clothes Aaron, you need new clothes; the only things you can fit into these days are your joggers.” However another whimper from Aaron, his eyes pleading and I know I’m on a losing battle; it’s a given I’ll relent, same as every other night. “It’s been a long day and you give the best massages ever, please daddy Robert”

This has me almost laughing, but I manage to keep a straight face, “Mmmhh, what do I get in return?”

“A less grumpy husband; who then keeps your Batman and Robin here much happier.” Aaron’s grinning at me, patting his tummy. He knows that’s not exactly the answer I was looking for but I can’t help melting at the adorable look he gives me. Aaron knows he’s won as I slide down onto the
sofa, straddling his legs and I help him pull his top off.

“Anyway, I thought you were going to look online for some new clothes?”

“I did; I didn’t see anything I liked.”

“Then we are going shopping tomorrow or I won’t give you a massage again until we do. Do we have a deal?” I hold my hands away from him, emphasising that he won’t get anything until we have an agreement.

“Deal.” He’s smirking as he passes me the body cream he likes, watching me pour some out onto my hands.

“Turn over then before I change my mind.” I smile down at him getting settled and comfy before I start, “I can’t believe I’m such a soft touch these days.”

It’s not long after my hands start to rub and knead his back and shoulders that he starts getting vocal, “Mmmh, that’s nice; oh just there, oh that’s so good.” I shake my head quietly laughing at him; Aaron moans when I give him a massage almost the same as when we make love. The back massages and foot rubs have now become part of our daily routine; next door must thing we are sex addicts and at it all the time.

“Ow, not too hard; oh god, do that again, oh yeah, just like that.” My hands go back to where I was instructed and I listen to Aaron continuing to make little noises of contentment intermingled with the odd ‘ouch’ as I work out the knots in his shoulder blades and neck. After a while he rolls onto his back and I switch my attention to his calves and feet. He complains regularly about cramps in his legs and quite often his feet and ankles are swollen which are always worst on a night after he’s been working all day.

Aaron’s eyes are closed by the time I’ve finished, he could almost be sleeping but I know he’s not. I grab my phone, taking a picture which I know Aaron has heard as he starts smiling at me despite having his eyes shut still. I’m accumulating quite a lot of pictures and video clips; I love looking at them and comparing to see the changes. He’s less amused that I’ve started to measure round his tummy and keeping a note of how much bigger he’s got. I’d do it every night, but he might just kill me if I ask for that; he humours me enough to let me two or three times across the week. I think sometimes that I’m more fascinated with him being pregnant than he is but I just love his body and how it looks, how good he looks, plus sometimes it gives me such wonderful opportunities to wind him up, like now.

My hands wander innocently over his swollen tummy, “Are those stretch marks?”

This grabs his attention and he pushes himself up on his elbows, his eyes opening to look, “What?”

I smirk, “Oh they are as well. You’re getting stretch marks, how sexy will that look in a few years’ time.” I pat his knees in mock condolence and getting off him I giggle to myself as the horror spreads across his face. I need to calm myself down anyway; touching Aaron’s tummy always has the strangest effect on me, giving me a warm fuzzy feeling inside whilst making me hard every time. I throw the bottle of cream at him, “I’ll let you work out the stretch mark thing whilst I go make us some food ey.” Grinning I go into the kitchen, listening to him chuntering away to himself as he inspect the new changes in his body whilst I make tea.
“What about this one?”

“No, I don’t like those either.”

My frustration is getting the better of me with the clothes shopping not going to plan. “Aaron if you don’t pick something, I will get you a maternity dress for each day and be hanged to it.”

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

“No swearing in front of the children please. If you don’t want me to choose for you, then I suggest that you pick something quickly; anything at this point would be a step forward.”

“God you’re such a grump....., and a bully; it’s now proven, the father of my children is a bully.”

He’s so not helping my frustration with him to lessen any, “Say it any louder why don’t you.” Aaron can pull a tantrum with the best of them and I think to myself who needs children, “And stop acting like a two-year old.”

It takes a real effort not to laugh at his whiny complaining, doing my best not to sound sarcastic but failing spectacularly. “Which is why we are in a baby shop and they are our children by the way sweet lips and don’t you forget it.” I see a lady coming towards us to offer help, but she gets the afterglow of Aaron’s glare at me and decides not to approach him, instead heading off in the other direction. Chuckling, I leave him to go try on some of the stuff he’s finally picked out and I have a wander round. We’ve had a little look online at baby things but we haven’t bought anything yet or even talked about it properly. I think partly we are both still a bit frightened that this is actually going to happen, however the further along he gets the more real it becomes.

I’m lost in my own world looking at prams and cots when Aaron comes to find me and I give him a kiss on his nose making him blush, “Any good?”

“They’ll do I suppose, it’s not like I’ve got a choice much is it.” He strains to see what I’m holding behind my back, “What’s that you’ve got?”

“Rabbits.”

“Let me see.” I pass him the two fluffy rabbits I’d picked out to buy. I used to have one similar when I was little, it went everywhere with me until I dropped it out of the car window by accident whilst having a strop and dad refused to go back for it. I never did forgive him for that. “Aww, so cute.” Aaron catches me unawares and kisses me, lips parted just enough to get my heart rate up a notch or two, “Just like their daddy.”

I can’t help flushing bright pink with embarrassment, but in a good way; I like it when he’s like this, I like it very much. Needing a distraction to calm myself back down, I change the subject, “We should start making a list of what we need to get. I reckon we can cadge some stuff off Vic and Nicola as well probably; she must have plenty we could have after all their lot but we’ll still need to buy some things ourselves.”
“Mmmh.” Aaron is distracted, having started to play with a pram and trying all the knobs and levers, making me laugh as he gets a little surprise when it closes on him unexpectedly. Seeing Aaron look up at me grinning, I’m not always sure our children will be the biggest kids in our family.

“Come on husband dearest, time to go home. I don’t know about you but I’ve had enough clothes shopping for one night; I’d much rather be giving you a massage in return for some guilty pleasure you could offer in return.”

Holding my hand out I pull Aaron up and we start to make our way out to the car, "Really, you’re using a massage for your pregnant husband as a bargaining chip for sex?" Aaron's shaking his head at me in mock despair, "That’s so shallow; you’d best make it one bloody good massage if you want anything from me tonight.”

I can't resist pushing him a bit more, “If I do, can I throw you not snoring into the bargain? That would be great, really great......; ow......, and you call me a bully.”

Robert, Friday 3rd February 2017 (Week 18)

“Anyone tell you it’s polite to knock Chas?”

“You married into the Dingles, we don’t do knocking; you should know that by now. Anyway it’s you who asked me here for a little chat, remember? I waited for Aaron to go to work like you wanted and here I am so spill, what’s up?”

Leaning against the window sill, I don’t rise to the challenging tone of her voice; I know Chas senses this isn’t just any old chat, I see it in her eyes. “You know what’s wrong and I need you to help me fix it.”

Chas takes a moment before speaking and then sits on the sofa with a heavy sigh, “Cain.”

“And Zak, Sam and Doug; not that I think that Aaron gives a shit what Doug thinks.”

“What’s brought all this on? I know Cain is still struggling with the idea of Aaron being pregnant, but he loves him like before, same for Zak; neither of them are big talkers you know that.”

“Maybe but they seem to have no problem discussing with everyone else behind his back.” Surprised by the vehemence of my retort Chas waits for me to explain. "Aaron overheard Cain, Zak and Doug talking; they didn’t know he was listening in and he heard some really hurtful things.”

Chas looks at me cautiously, "What kind of things?”

"I don't need to spell it out for you Chas and just so you know I've already had it out with Cain on Monday; I'm surprised Moira hasn’t said anything.”

“Well I know Cain slept on the couch a couple of nights but I thought that was to do with them arguing about Holly’s shenanigans. We were going to catch up earlier in the week but then all her crap got in the way and we didn’t get chance. Cain’s away on some job down south now.”

“He’s been away a lot recently don’t you think; it’s like he doesn’t want to even try with Aaron.”

“Does Aaron know you’ve spoken to him?”
“What, that we had a chat where I talked and Cain said nothing?” I take a deep breath, pausing; it riles me up just thinking about it. “No, not yet, but I will when I think the time’s right and that’s not now. He’s scared of losing some of his closest family but I don’t want them anywhere near unless they get over themselves and can act like his proper family again; otherwise it might do more damage than good.”

“I’ll talk to them, knock their stupid heads together.”

"It wasn’t easy when he found out he was pregnant, telling me and everyone knowing sooner than we wanted; yet through all this Aaron just keeps proving to me how strong he is and we’re happy. Us getting married and having our own family, it makes Aaron really happy Chas and he wants to share that with the people that mean the most to him.”

“I know. Cain just needs some time that’s all, like he did in the beginning when we found out about Gordon. He’ll come round, they all will, given time.”

“The problem is we don’t have time. We’ve come such a long way since this time last year but I realise now just how much his family and what they think means to him, especially Cain. Aaron’s desperately trying to give them time but the longer they carry on like this the more it's hurting.”

Chas doesn’t miss the anxious edge to my voice and she stares at me with increased concern, “What are you trying to tell me Robert?”

“He doesn’t know I saw but when I got home last night, he was stood in front of the mirror with a razor blade in his hand.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Re the reference to potential self-harm at the end of the chapter:

I decided not to put a trigger warning specifically on this chapter but I did add one to the main tags. Anyone who’s read my other fics will be used to a lot of triggers in my stories. So I apologise if anyone was upset by this reading it unexpectedly at the end, however I wanted to keep the element of surprise and reveal it in the natural course of the chapter.

Caro
Chapter Summary

January 2017 / Month 5 - Week 18: Robert convinces Chas not to confront Aaron about what he saw, but is surprised by Aaron’s reaction when they talk.

Chapter Notes

Apologies it took such a long time for this chapter. I was really struggling with deciding how I wanted this to go and I needed to make my mind up as it sets the tone for the coming chapters; so this along with being busy with a few other things I'm much later than I expected to be.
Hope you enjoy, take care
Caro

Robert, Friday 3rd February 2017 (Week 18)

Chas stares at me in silence, the shock delayed whilst my words sink in and I hastily continue to try and put her at ease before she goes into total meltdown, “He didn’t do it Chas. He was staring into the mirror with the blade in his hand, and I could see he was thinking about it but he didn’t.”

Despite me saying this, Chas is clearly struggling to keep calm, probably still caught up in the simple fact he was even thinking about it and this alone has frightened her just as much as it had me. “You just stood and watched him; you didn’t say anything?”

Standing quietly by the window, shaking my head, it seemed for an instant that she might come at me, but instead she just stares at me aghast, “Maybe I thought he might do something by accident if he saw me. I don’t know Chas,” I shrug my shoulders, once more shaking my head slightly from side to side, “I don’t know.”

She looks at me as though I’m not quite all there for not having intervened, “He’s okay though? He didn’t do it; you said he didn’t do it.” Chas starts to pace up and down a little, wringing her hands until finally she stands still and looks straight at me, doing her best to keep control, “You need to speak to him, get him back into counselling; we need to talk to him Robert, we need to talk to him right now.”

My response is louder and more forceful than I had intended, “No, no we don’t; that’s the last thing we should do.” Chas looks at me in disbelief and I do my best to explain before she really does kick off. I look at her my gaze unwavering, “Maybe about counselling but that’s still up-to Aaron.” I take a deep breath, “Sit down Chas; he won’t do it.” There’s the glare of resistance that comes second nature to her, but then reluctantly she sits back down on the sofa. I don’t blame her for being shocked or worried, we thought this was in the past but if I'm honest with myself I had accepted last year already, this is never going to leave him totally; it’s been Aaron’s emotional fall-back for too long for this to happen.
“You’ll tell him that you saw though and that he needs to get help?” Moving for the first time I sit down next to Chas, passing her a tissue upon seeing a tear fall down her cheek, her tough exterior crumbling with every word.

“Probably not,” I place a hand on Chas' arm, my grip gentle, but firm enough to stop her from getting up and charging over to the scrapyard to confront him, “Just hear me out Chas.”

There’s a break in her voice as she tries to convince me, desperate almost, “You have to speak to him Robert, what if he cuts himself so deep that he harms or loses the babies; what then? You have to do something.”

“We will, but Chas, Aaron isn’t the problem here. It’s not Aaron we need to talk to.”

“Robert you can’t take the risk, you can’t not say anything to him; this isn’t just Aaron’s life, but your children’s. God, how can you be so flamin’ calm about this?” Chas huffs, shrugging my hand away; standing up again she is clearly distressed by the thought of what could have happened and I can see her battling to keep a hold on her emotions.

“I’m not calm, I’m angry. Not at Aaron, but at Cain and Zak for pushing him back to this place in his head again. I trust Aaron though; I trust him to tell me and I trust him not to do it.”

There’s that look of disbelief on her face again, “But you said he was thinking about it, that he was close to doing it?”

“I said he was stood in front of the mirror with a blade in his hand, and yes I was freaking out inside just like you are now but my gut feel is the same as it was last night; he won’t hurt himself because of this.”

Returning to the sofa she sits back down, at least looking a little calmer but her hands give her away, visibly trembling in her lap, “You sound so sure.”

“We’ve been through a lot together, good and bad, and we’ve learned to talk to each other.”

Chas snaps at me, “Well he wasn’t ruddy talking to you last night was he when he was holding a blade to his stomach, and if you haven’t forgotten, he didn’t tell you he was even pregnant.”

“But he was going to. He’s processing everything Chas; this is just part of it. He knows he needs to release the pressure and he doesn’t want me to worry. I might have had to push him but he told me the same day as he heard them talking so he’s not bottling things up. He knows that I’ll make him talk eventually. He won’t be able to hide from me just how much this is getting to him, but do you know why I’m absolutely sure he won’t do it?” Chas shakes her head, “Aaron will put our children’s lives and their wellbeing above everything; above his own life and even before mine, it’s who he is. If I need to push to get him to tell me I will, but I don’t think I’ll have to; in his own time he’ll talk to me.”

“Then why did he even do this? I don’t understand Robert; I don’t know how you expect me to keep quiet about this.”

“Think of it like it’s his comfort blanket that helps him deal with how he feels about this in his head.” Disbelief is once more written across Chas’ face, “Chas you need to trust me; just like you trusted me through everything with his dad, even though you hated me.”

“That’s one heck of a dangerous comfort blanket.” There’s a silence hanging in the air for an instant, “And you know I don’t hate you anymore.”
“Maybe not, but I’m not top of your Christmas card list either.” There’s a hint of a smile which epitomises our strange relationship, held together by our love for Aaron. “Trust me with Aaron and I’ll trust you with Cain and Zak. We need to find a way to mend this, for everyone’s sake and not just Aarons. I want our children to know what it’s like growing up in a loving family, not a broken one like we both had. Chas promise me you won’t say anything to him. Think about how we get Cain, Zak and anyone else who has a problem about this to see that Aaron is just the same as he’s always been and our children will be no different to anyone else’s.”

It feels like the fight has drained out of Chas as she pulls herself together, picking up her bag and making to leave, “I need some time; I don’t know what to think at the minute. I’ll call you but in the meantime I promise I won’t talk to him, but if you’re wrong about this Robert…..”

Unable to concentrate, I had decided to pack up work for the day. Now sitting quietly in the kitchen with a mug of coffee I’m mulling things over in my own mind, still feeling somewhat concerned that Chas won’t be able to help herself from confronting Aaron or taking matters into her own hands. Her words echo in my head but I know I’m not wrong, it’s more than just a gut feel; I know my husband, sometimes better than he knows himself.

I wasn’t as late home last night as I had thought I would be when I had called Aaron to say what time I’d get back from the conference. By the time I got in, he would usually have been asleep already so I was tip-toeing around trying my best not to disturb him, assuming he was in bed, but when I got to the top of the stairs the bedroom door was ajar enough for me to see him and I stopped in my tracks as if I’d been hit by an artic lorry.

It was one of the strangest emotions I’ve ever felt; I’ve never seen him like that before. I’ve only ever seen the results of his cutting and the fresh wounds on his body, but seeing him actually contemplating doing it was frightening; more so, by just how calm he was, eerily calm. His hand had been hovering over his left side, the blade between his finger and thumb, yet the sharp metal edge never touched his skin. It was almost like he was in a trance until suddenly he pulled himself out of it. Then he had simply stood, quietly staring at himself for a minute, letting his hand fall down by his side before going to put the blade on the dresser and getting into bed.

When I first saw him, I really had tried to call out to say something, but no sound came out of my mouth; instead all I could do was silently watch him. Afterwards I was a long time, just sitting on the top step, before I went into the bathroom and then went to bed myself. I hardly slept just in case he woke and actually did something, but he didn’t. He slept the same as every night, pushing under my arms and snuggling into me; he must have unconsciously sensed I was there but he never stirred. He was already up and off when I woke to the sight of the blade still on the dresser. I don’t know if he left it there intentionally for me to find and ask questions but I’m not going to, not yet anyway.

A shudder runs through me just thinking about it and I need to move, I need to get out of the house before it drives me crazy so grabbing my coat I wander over to the scrapyard. It’s not that far off lunchtime and when I get there I see Aaron moving some stuff around from a collection they did yesterday. Approaching ever nearer, yet unseen, I watch him work steadily away like he doesn’t have a care in the world.

He’s smiling at me when I get close enough for him to notice me coming; there’s not a hint of the look I’d seen on his face last night. For a second I panic and think I’m making the biggest mistake ever. I know Aaron can lie and cover things up, yet I just know on this I’m right and I calm myself whilst giving him a big hug. “What you doing here?”
Returning his smile, I hope he doesn’t sense my anxiety as I follow him into the office, “Thought we could go for lunch and then I might take the afternoon off. I can’t seem to find any enthusiasm for work today; maybe after we can talk with Adam about how we split the workload more now. We agreed a month-end review remember and you’re not that far off being halfway gone.” I check myself after suddenly realising for myself that we’re this far along already, it’s sometimes so scary how quick the weeks are flying by.

“No need.”

Looking at Aaron, I make sure I stay calm and in control, deciding how best to talk him round, “Aaron you promised, you know you can’t work as normal anymore. It won’t be long before you’ll barely be able to put your socks on, never mind lug scrap around the yard.”

“I know; more importantly I can already hardly jerk myself off anymore never mind my socks. Anyways I can’t even if I wanted to.” Handing me a document he’s looking at me all smug, almost like he’s won an argument before I’ve even got chance to get going. It takes a huge amount of effort not to glower at him which would be childish; not that that’s ever stopped me.

After reading I understand the situation better, yet what surprises me is how okay he seems with everything and then I realise this just reinforces what I’ve felt all along since Aaron became pregnant. He’ll fight to remain independent but not at the cost of endangering the babies, but I still weigh my words carefully, “Are you okay with this?”

He shrugs, “I don’t get a choice. If we want to keep the insurance for the yard, after week twenty I’m not allowed to do any manual work outside the office until three months after the birth, and I got a letter from the doctor’s reminding me as well.” He grins at me, his eyes sparkling mischievously as he comes and wraps his arms around me, “Adam’s more annoyed than I am. We might need to get someone in temporary to help him with the more physical stuff and then I’ll take care of all the office side which should hopefully mean a few less hours and I could even work from home some days and well, when it comes to jerking myself off, I suppose I’ll have to get a man that can; you don’t know anyone do you?”

Shaking my head at the playful grin he’s sporting, I smirk back indulging Aaron in his own amusement and pull him even tighter into me, planting a sloppy kiss on his mouth, teasing with my tongue, “Ahh, so there are some benefits to this then; how long until Adam gets back?”

“Not until after one.”

Nuzzling against his neck, I bite down a little with my teeth, eliciting a moan of wanton lust from Aaron’s lips and I can’t help rubbing myself up against him, “So we’ve got the place to ourselves for a while yet?”

Aaron pulls a face, “Mmh, don’t go getting any ideas, anyone could walk in.”

With our bodies gently swaying together I push back, reckoning that it won’t take much for him to cave, “Actually I was thinking of maybe another outdoor adventure.”

Yet I was wrong, “Well you can if you like, but you’ll be using your own hand; it’s cold enough today to freeze my nads off and I’m starving.”

Chuckling at him I step away, pulling his bobble hat down over his ears, “Ever the charmer you know that? Always just so sexy.”
“You wouldn’t have it any other way and you know it.” Aaron pulls me back to him and kisses me hard, “We could make up for it tonight though, quiet night in and early to bed.”

“We could, orrr......, you could take the afternoon off and we could spend the rest of the day in bed.”

“I like the sound of that.” I’m grinning at him when Aaron suddenly pulls an odd face, “Oooh.”

I panic a little at seeing the shocked look on his face, “What Oooh?” Aaron’s expression changes to one of surprise but I’m not sure it’s a good surprised or not until he takes my hand and presses it against his tummy under his coat. He’s watching me intently as he moves my hand a little to the side, “Can you feel them?”

I shake my head, “No. Are they moving?”

“I think so, it’s more than before, I can feel them properly now.” Aaron sees the flash of jealousy cross my face, but it’s also mixed with pride and fascination, “Don’t worry daddy Robert, you’re still my special boy and anyway it won’t be long until you can feel them and then later on when they’re kicking you in the back or wherever when you’re trying to sleep you’ll be begging for them to keep still.”

He releases me and grabbing his hand, we head in the direction of the pub, “Mmhh, not looking forward to that and I’m not jealous really......,” Aaron looks at me knowingly and I smirk at him no longer trying to feign denial, “Well maybe just a little bit.” We both know I am; part of me feels like I’m missing out on the bond that Aaron is already building with the babies but I know I have to be patient. It’s not like I have a choice anyway.

“I saw you. I wasn’t going to say anything but I saw you last night.” Aaron stares at the blade that I’m still holding, “Did it help?”

“No. Well except to know that it wouldn’t make me feel any better, it’s not what I need.”

“And what do you need?”

“You.”

For some strange reason, I let out a half laugh; not that I find this funny but more that, hearing this, I
don’t believe him, “I’m not enough Aaron, if I was you wouldn’t have even thought about it.”

Aaron looks startled somewhat, “Robert, I didn't....., I wasn't; that wasn't what you think it was....., shit. I was looking for something and just found it at the back of the drawer; you know it's the dresser from my old room at the pub. It felt strange seeing it and just for a minute it drew me in and I wanted to remember what it felt like.”

So much is tearing through my brain right now that I go off on a tangent, my words blurring out, “I told Cain to stay away.”

“Good.”

Our eyes don’t leave each other, almost like we are sizing each other up, trying to see what’s coming next, “You don’t mean that.”

“Yes I do; I don’t need to cut myself Robert. I need people who are going to be there for me, for us and our children. Anyone else can jump off a cliff for all I care, our Cain included.”

Aaron, Friday 3rd February 2017 (Week 18)

I can see Robert doesn’t quite believe me, but last night stood in front of the mirror like that, everything just clicked into place, not that it hadn’t probably already; it was just my brain finally acknowledging what I already knew deep down. My family with Robert comes first and anyone who doesn’t want to be a part of that isn’t important to me in the same way anymore; what is important is that Robert believes me. Placing my hands either side of Robert’s face, I kiss him gently, “I wouldn’t cut myself, not over this, I promise; it doesn't hurt that way, not now. We have too much to look forward to Robert, I want this; I want you and our children more than anything in the world and nothing is going to get in the way so you can stop all that worrying right now daddy Sugden.”

Smiling at him, I hope that he lets it all drop, because I mean every word; we have a whole lifetime together to look forward to.

“I wasn’t, not really.” I can tell he’s fibbing. I know my husband and he might be able to lie to everyone else, but he can’t with me; he never could, not for long.

“Don’t tell porkies, you know I can read you like a book.” I watch his features, still full of tension, more than they should be at this point and it’s now I see a glimpse of his guilt and I can take a good guess at why, “So out with it; what have you done? I know you Robert, you think that you can fix this, but you can’t; sometimes you just have to let it go.”

There’s a slight hesitation before he answers and a flash of panic crosses his face, but he does answer, “I told your mum.”

Despite having already guessed this, I still can’t stop my hands from balling into tight fists, wishing that we could just keep things like this between the two of us with no-one interfering. I can’t be mad though; I had recognised the fear in Robert’s face just now. I let out a big sigh, forcing my hands to relax before nudging him playfully with my knee, “Well you’ll have to untell her won’t you.”

Robert looks at me like I’ve just asked him to fly to the moon, “Like that's really gonna work.”

“Well you’re the bright spark of the family, you’ll have to think of something; you could even tell her the truth.”

Almost doe-eyed in how he looks at me, Robert searches for my forgiveness, “Promise me you’re
not mad at me, I didn’t know what to do or what to think.”

“I get it Robert, believe me I get it; I know why you’d think the worst but we have better things to get worked up about; like deciding on colours for the nursery, and sweetheart you need to get yourself some knitting lessons if you’re going to outdo Pearl for their first outfit.” Ahh, that got his attention; Robert can’t help smiling at me before turning serious once more.

“That doesn't solve the question of how we get the men of this family to start behaving like one.”

“They know where we are.”

“What, you want to give up? Aaron we have to at least try to bring them round; they’re just like you were in the beginning, they need time.”

“They’ve had time and their time’s up.”

Although I get why he’s saying this, I don’t believe for one minute that he really wants what he’s suggesting, “I don’t understand. You’re the one who said to be patient and that they’ll come round and we’ll work it out. What, now you don’t want to?”

“It’s up-to them. If they want to be part of our lives, our children’s lives, then they’ll start acting like it; but until they do, I don’t want to know.”

“Now who’s fibbing; you can’t ignore this Aaron.”

“I’m not. We’ve just got better things to spend our energy on; everything is exhausting enough as it is and they’re not my priority.” I take his hand and press it against my stomach, “These little ones and you my darling husband are all I'm interested in.” Keen to distract him from the topic and not ignoring the desire that protective Robert always stirs in me, I slide down onto the floor in-between his knees. Looking up at him, his adoring eyes are staring back down at me as I undo the belt of his dressing gown. His attention is caught slightly upon seeing his phone light up and we can both see it's a text from mum. He might think that he hasn’t finished talking about this, but I have and I can be as stubborn as he can any day, so I have my win for now.

Robert makes no attempt to stop me as I take him into my mouth; it's going to be quite some time before I'm done with him and he doesn't look at his phone further to see what the message says: ‘I have an idea, call me’.

TBC
February 2017 / Month 5 - Week 19: Robert and Chas have a plan.

To get ones hackles up = to get mad / become irritated.

Aaron, Beginning February 2017 (Week 19)

“Invited for tea at Lisa’s,” I grin at Robert, “You do realise what this means right when they ask you not me?”

“It’s just food Aaron and I’m playing nice like a good husband should; I wouldn’t read anything into it.”

“Come off it, this means you’ve made it into the family; fully paid up member of the Dingle clan, whether you like it or not.” Robert isn’t returning my cheeky smile so I’m none too sure that he’s appreciated the sentiment. I ignore his huff of a response, too busy amusing myself wondering if I can get Lisa to have him drink out of a wellie, but I think that might be pushing it a bit too far on both sides.

Smiling at Mr Grumpy next to me and not getting a bar of enthusiasm out of him, it’s obvious he isn’t looking forward to tonight one little bit. “There was a reason you changed your name to Sugden when we got married Aaron and it wasn’t just to be shut of your dad’s name.”

I wrap my hand round the back of Robert’s neck, my fingers gently stroking as he focuses on the road, “Whatever.” I pull a face and let it drop, studying him a moment. He looks uncomfortable but I put it down to the fact although the females in the Dingle family are warming to him, he’s not overly keen on sharing too much love from his side. I can’t imagine it being half as bad as he reckons; I mean Lisa’s cooking might not be up-to Vic’s ‘chef’ standard but looking on the bright side it’s not as bad as mum’s neither.

No-one could have been more surprised than me when Robert said that Lisa had asked us up for tea and that he had said yes, normally he would do everything possible to get out of it. He’s never really got past the humouring stage with my lot except for Liv; although things have thawed a lot with mum I know he probably said yes to keep me happy. I’m even more surprised as we pull up-to the farm, my happy musing turning to displeasure as I start to think things might not be all they seem.

We come to a stop, parking behind mum’s car; there are a lot more cars here than I had expected and some that I don’t particularly want to see. “What’s going on Robert?”

“Just tea with the family.”

Glaring at him, I snap irritably, “I’m pregnant not stupid, you never said all this lot would be ‘ere.”
Robert gets out of the car, holding his hand out for me, “Come on Mr Sugden.” He shakes his head, quietly smiling at my stubbornness when I shove my hands in my pockets; he walks up the path leaving me to trail behind him, feeling like I’ve been conned and not just by Robert from the looks of it.

Not even knocking on the door Robert walks straight in. I debate whether to play along or turn round and leave but I end up following him, muttering under my breath, “I’d best not regret this Robert Sugden or you’ll get what’s for.”

My hackles are up the minute I walk through the door and I turn round angrily, attempting to leave, “Out of the way Robert.”

He had already positioned himself between me and the door as soon as I had walked through it blocking my exit, “We’ve just got here, you not going to at least say hello Aaron?”

I glance round at all the people in the room before turning back to Robert, my fists balled and it’s taking all my energy to hold myself in check, “No and it doesn’t look like I’m the only one up here under false pretences.”

“You’re not, Lisa’s cooking tea; right Lisa?”

“For those that want. Afterwards mind.”

Livid with Robert I grab for the door handle, “I can’t believe you’ve done this behind my back.”

“If I’d told you, you wouldn’t have come, the mood you’re in at the minute. We were going to do this without you at one point but that would have been going behind your back and I didn’t want that. Just come in and sit down, please Aaron.”

It’s like pistols at dawn as I weigh up my options but seeing the stubborn look that he has, I give in, my lips pursing as I let him take my hand, guiding us over to the two free chairs, front row, slap-bang in the middle. Not daring to look at anyone, I don’t know whether to feel mortified or amazed at the set up in the room but going by the shuffling, huffing and puffing from certain people, I’m not the only one feeling uncomfortable. I have to hand it to mum and Robert though, assuming they’re chief orchestrators of tonight’s entertainment, together they’re a force to be reckoned with; I don’t think I could ever have made this happen. There is the entire Dingle clan including Joanie even and all the Sugdens, along with Moira, Adam and Doug as well as Paddy who gives me an encouraging smile when I pluck up courage to peek a look across as him. Even Andy is here I notice, looking sullen but no Chrissie thankfully.

I glare at mum, giving her the same evil eye treatment that I had given Robert, but I keep my mouth shut; far be it from me to be the one to put the kaibosh on their plan before they’ve even got going. Judging by the looks of some of the others in the room it probably won’t need me to put an end to it.

Mum stands in front of the fireplace, “Right, now everyone’s here, we’ll make a start. I grant you this is a little different from the usual family meeting but needs must and it’s time we got everything out on the table once and for all. Call it an intervention if you like, but I’ll not stand by and watch how some of you have treated my son, or Robert come to that, since we found out they are expecting and I’ll not have our own spouting ignorant nonsense behind their backs.” Her gaze very pointedly went to Cain, Doug and Zak, “So I’ve asked Doctor Bailey and Emma here to give you the facts and
you’re going to hear them out. No-one and I mean no-one leaves this room until we’re done.” As if to push the point home Lisa locks the door and puts the key in her pocket, not that this will stop anyone who wants to leave, me included, but it’ll slow us down. I’m surprised there’s no backchat or comment from anyone despite a few faces looking like thunder; a testament to the force of some of the women in this family. Even Adam looks like he wishes he were anywhere but here and I know he’s happy for us and doesn’t have a problem with me. “If you do you’ll find yourself barred from the Woolpack and those of you who can’t get over yourselves and start acting like a family should, will be looking for alternative sleeping arrangements indefinitely so count yourselves warned.”

There’s a lot of uneasy shifting from all quarters at this but no-one is prepared to put this to the test, not yet anyway.

Doctor Bailey starts his introduction, talking about the first male pregnancies that happened, over ten years ago now, before then going into some details about how it works. I remain steadfastly frozen in my seat, my eyes fixed firmly on the stone floor. I’m feeling totally conflicted; a mix of pride at my mum for fighting my corner but still angry and humiliated that it’s come to this and I refuse to respond to Robert’s concerned look that I might flip out. Emma is playing at being Doctor Bailey’s assistant, holding up posters and diagrams, chipping in at certain parts. Thankfully when it gets to the part about actually getting pregnant and how a man gives birth they don’t go into too much intimate detail on the physical part but even so I find myself sliding down in my seat, my face burning.

Emma puts the latest sonogram up for everyone to see, explaining how rare and special it is that we’re having twins. Robert grabs hold of my hand and smiles shyly at me; despite the fact I’m still very upset with him I squeeze it, giving him just the hint of smile back, ever the proud parents to be. There are some questions directly to me, but feeling overwhelmed, I struggle to find the words and leave Robert to answer instead.

The longer it goes on, the more I find myself drifting off into my own head whilst Doctor Bailey and Emma continue showing pictures of happy families, healthy children and even talking about that some hetero couples are looking into ways to try make this happen for them. I remember he’d told me about this when I first found out and I hadn’t reacted too well at the time, but now knowing how it feels to carry children of my own I can understand why people would be interested. There are quite a lot of questions popping up at certain points but it’s mostly the women together with Paddy and Marlon who seem okay with everything, the others remain awkwardly silent. I find myself wondering if our places had been switched and this had been Adam how would I have reacted, but I can’t judge this with any perspective anymore; the lives in my tummy are a part of me which is so overwhelming in itself that I can’t imagine anything more natural or wonderful. That and the fact he’s not gay, so then I try to think if it were Finn but that doesn’t seem to work either and I give up trying. I’ve accepted that now it’s happened, it’s what I want and there’s no regret.

Sometimes I listen in properly and take an interest, like when Vic asks if Robert could get pregnant. We haven’t talked about this possibility other than when we were making love that time but I was never sure he was really serious about it and I look at his face with curiosity as Doctor Bailey answers. “Possibly, we don’t really know enough; so much research is still being done but it can’t be discounted. However there’s never been a case yet where it’s happened to a man whose sperm has fathered a child with another male.”

“It’s still not natural though, is it? I mean if God had wanted men to have children they would have been able to have babies right from the beginning.”

Vic glares at Doug who unsurprisingly had been the first to break ranks, “What’s God got to do with anything? Were you not listening to the part where they think these genes might have always been
present in some men, but might never have been triggered until recently?

“Load of bull if you ask me, I’m sorry but if the body rejects it all afterwards, then it’s not meant to be is it and never was, not like with a woman.”

Paddy speaks up, “They also said the baby develops inside men just the same and the babies grow up no different from children born to women so what does that tell you?”

“Yeah and I also heard the part where most men give birth by C-section because it’s too risky otherwise....., coming out of......, coming out of that......, that other part; it’s just more proof that a man’s body isn’t supposed to carry children, it’s too dangerous.”

Vic counters, "That's not what they said. Most men just decide on what they see as the safest option meaning they don't have enough research data on males giving birth.”

Emma intervenes, "There's also a big increase in many developed countries of women opting to have a C-section. It's not just men who are deciding this. Before modern medicine and techniques there was a significant chance of mother, child or both dying; modern science makes childbirth safer for everyone whether by C-section or not"

Sam is pulling a face, "You've got to admit it's more than a bit icky though."

"And what about the increased risk of infection?" Zak is scratching his beard, "I don't know, maybe I'm too old to change; this is a bit beyond me. I'm sorry but it still just doesn't seem right, it goes against everything I was taught to believe."

Robert puts his hand on my knee which is probably intended to be calming but it does the opposite and I feel myself stiffen with the turn of the discussion as they all start talking at once, voicing their questions and justifications. I look at Diane, who is also a staunch church-goer but I can't tell what she's really thinking and then Cain who has remained still and silent throughout, keeping himself apart from the others. All the squabbling around me is blurring into white noise, rising in volume with every minute that passes as it gets more heated but all I can focus on is the fluttering in my stomach which is becoming significantly more pronounced with each week. It's still not enough for Robert to feel yet, but there's no doubting now it's the babies and I've never felt more emotionally connected to anything in my whole life than when I feel them moving like now.

The arguments swirl around me, becoming fierce with even Robert now stood up taking part as the opposing sides press their case home, disputing the rights and wrongs of it all. Having kept quiet all night, it's now almost like I've become irrelevant and the first tear falls down my cheek. Still with my coat on, I'm not helped by my starting to feel a little faint from the heat in the room; unnoticed I go to the sink and pour a glass of water which I gulp down. With the empty glass still in my hand, I stand looking at my reflection staring back at me from the window pane and I find my attention drawn by the carving knife on the draining board. I smile seeing the glint of the blade, sharpened the old-fashioned way so it cuts through the meaty flesh of a roast with hardly any resistance and before realising it I've picked it up.

Unconsciously, my brain acknowledges and understands the release it could give me. My words to Robert last week that I would never hurt myself take hold, confronting me head on as I stand here, lost in a room full of my so-called family and friends debating whether I'm a freak of nature or not. I find it calming just to hold the knife, to have such power and control over my life resting in my own hand; it's grounding. It reminds me that I know I can do this and I don't give a shit what anyone in the room thinks or says. I always come back to the only ones that matter in all this, my babies, Robert
and our family together. I’m so concentrated by the intensity of my emotions that I don’t realise my
own strength until the glass in my hand breaks, the sudden silence in the room as shattering as the
glass now strewn around me, blood pouring out of a cut in my hand. I turn round to see Emma and
Doctor Bailey approaching to help but they suddenly stop. I’m confused as to why they look so
alarmed until I remember my arm now hanging down by my side, my hand still gripping tightly onto
the carving knife.

My eyes search for Robert and once they connect with his, he understands. “I want to go home.”
Robert comes over, taking the knife he puts it back onto the draining board before handing me a tea
towel to stem the flow of blood from my hand. “Paddy can sort this at home.” He nods and our eyes
lock, silently communicating with each other. I’m openly crying now and I don’t try to stop the tears;
I don’t think I could even if I wanted to. I can feel the weight of everyone’s gaze, the room hushed as
they part to let us through but I ignore them, they’re not important to me. Robert is resting his hand
protectively on my lower back, holding me close as we make our way to the door. “Lisa you need to
open that door and let us out; I know you meant well but some things can’t be forced. We’ll come up
for tea another night if that’s okay.” After a slight hesitation Lisa unlocks the door and we walk out
into the night air, Paddy not far behind. Mum has finally found her voice; I hear her calling out my
name but I don’t look back. It’s probably Paddy that stops her from following us, I don’t know but
Robert never lets go of me other than the few seconds it takes to get into the car.

He looks me apprehensively, “Sorry.”

Despite the stray tears, for the first time all night I feel totally calm; maybe in an unintended way
tonight was what was needed on all sides. I’ve no idea and I’m too knackered to think about it right
now. “It’s okay, let’s just go home; I’m tired. You can make us some food whilst Paddy sorts my
hand okay?” Robert nods. He looks uncertain whether to say something but I stop him, our gaze into
each other’s eyes unwavering, “I don’t want to talk Robert, not tonight, but nothing’s changed from
what I told you last week; you don’t need to worry, not about me, the babies, not about any of us.”

“Oh okay,” he visibly relaxes and I see a half smile appearing, “You want a massage as well?”

“No; bed and a cuddle would be nice though.”

“That I can do.” Robert continues to watch me, unmoving.

Letting my head fall back against the headrest, I give him an exhausted smile, “You kind of have to
start the engine first though Sugden, or we’ll be here all night and I don’t think either of us want
that.” Stretching across with his arm, his hand brushes away the last of my tears and he leans over to
kiss me so softly on my mouth, almost as if I would break if he pressed harder before turning his
attention to starting the car. I stare out of the window as we head away from the farm, but when I
turn back to look at Robert, the tear falling down his cheek doesn’t go unnoticed and I put my hand
on his. They rest together on the gear stick with our fingers intertwined for the duration of the
journey home.

Robert said he would square it with Adam that I take the day off; he has meetings he can’t get out of
and was feeling guilty as he left this morning but I’m actually thankful for the quietness. The door is
locked and bolted. Robert will call me when he gets home for me to let him in, until then as far as
anyone on the outside is concerned no-one is home. After some on-line shopping I sit down to read
the texts and listen to the missed calls after having ignored everything since leaving Lisa’s last night.
Robert, to give him credit, hadn’t asked any questions or pushed me to do something different; he
seems to have accepted that I wasn’t intending to harm myself and the fact he’s left me on my own
knowing I was holing up in the house alone all day just tells me how much trust he has in me. I
know we have to talk but I’m not ready, partly because I don’t know what to say that’s not been said. Nothing’s really changed from our perspective, I don’t feel any better or worse than before; the babies are fine and things with Robert are good. I can’t be mad with him about last night, he was just trying to help and as far as I’m concerned the rest isn’t our problem.

Opening the post, I have the confirmation of my next scan, which is different to the other scans up-to now as this one checks for abnormalities in the babies’ development. Despite Doctor Bailey saying that women also have it at the same stage of the pregnancy and it’s just standard procedure, it still makes me fret a little just in case they do find anything wrong. I remember when Paddy, Marlon and Rhona found out about Leo being a downs baby, not that they would change anything and I know we’re strong enough to cope if there is anything, but it doesn’t stop me hoping that everything is perfect all the same. I don’t dwell on this otherwise I’ll drive myself nuts worrying; instead I start reading some of the pamphlets that the mid-wife gave me that I haven’t had time to read yet. I’d kept the most contentious one ’til last, wanting time to think about it whilst I’m alone and quiet. This will be a conversation I’m not particularly looking forward to. For the most part Robert and I have been pretty much on the same page with things, but I have a feeling this might not be the case when it comes to giving birth. He’ll go into protective mode and want everything super cautious whereas I feel like I have enough scars on my body and I’d rather let nature take its course. I’ll have a bath after dinner and have a re-read to help me make my own mind up first on what I want before having to deal with daddy Sugden on the matter.

Whilst eating my sandwiches, I exchange some texts with Robert before making seconds to totally kill the hunger pangs, finishing up by demolishing a whole bar of chocolate which I don’t feel an ounce of guilt about. Going upstairs for a nap, it doesn’t take long for me to drift off. I’m not sleeping too well again, not really because of all the family crap, just in general. I can’t seem to settle from all the various aches and pains. If it’s not leg cramps especially in my calves, it’s the backache and then there’s the headaches returning with a vengeance after I have a really bad night’s sleep, all in all it’s pretty exhausting. It’s a pity that Robert can’t help out and share in some of it, that might make him think twice about wanting to have children himself. I can’t see him coping too well with all this, it’s not in his nature; it would be amusing to find out though. Thinking it through a little more, I decide maybe not; he’d be Mr Grumpy from hell and I’m not sure I could live with him like that for nine months. Mhhm, moving on from that thought I snuggle down and close my eyes.

After waking up and taking a nice long bath, I feel less achy in my legs and back but I just feel something somewhere else instead, and I sigh, reaching for the cocoa butter to rub on my belly. This helps a little with what the mid-wife affectionately called growing pains, but that doesn’t account for the dry skin and itching I sometimes feel from the stretched skin. I don’t seem to remember Doctor Bailey or Emma mentioning all this crap last night, I suppose that just gets wrapped up with the statement that ‘men suffer from the same symptoms and side-effects as women’. It would be nice on occasion if that wasn’t the case, but beggars can’t be choosers.

Sighing with resignation I look over at the clock, surprised at how late it is and shiver a little, roll on summer. I head downstairs and light the fire before going into the kitchen to see what we have in for tea. Robert had texted saying he won’t be late back. Making a cuppa, I send him a quick ‘I love you’ and still in my dressing gown I go lie on the sofa. Some days it seems that I spend more time lying down than being upright.

I must have dozed off again. Waking up, but still drowsy, I can’t help giggling. I might have non-stop aches and complain a lot about the downside of being pregnant but not when it comes to my sex
drive. Reaching down with my hand, I start massaging the hardness between my legs, my eyes closing with how good it feels. I wasn’t joking the other day though, I don’t think it will be too long before I won’t be able to see or reach my cock once I get that bit bigger; Robert will just have to become my right hand man in more ways than one for a while. I don’t think he quite appreciates how many times a day I jack off depending on my mood and that doesn’t include anything we get up to when we are together. A sadistic snicker escapes my lips, he’ll soon find out I think to myself.

Letting go of my cock, my hand wanders lovingly over my tummy, the movement loosening my dressing gown. Feeling the dynamic duo do their thing a smile spreads across my entire face. I can’t believe that in a few months they’ll be born and in the outside world instead of warm and safe inside me. “I wonder if I’ll miss the feeling of carrying you.” My hand rests still, enjoying the intimacy of the moment. Recently I’ve started talking to them; if anyone knew they’d think I’m a little mad, but it’s relaxing. Robert is just as bad. Before we go to sleep on a night he kisses my tummy saying goodnight to the twins and sometimes talks to them, it makes him feel more connected. We’re already acting like a family and they’re not even born yet.

Grunting with the effort, I shift myself, kneeling down on the rug in front of the fire to put some more coal on so it will be nice and cosy for when Robert gets home. I watch the flames a little after stoking it, putting the poker back on its stand. My hand reaches down to my bobbing erection and I do some more stoking of my own. I can’t help myself, it feels so good and it seems like my hard on isn’t going anywhere soon of its own accord so I might as well give it a helping hand. Lying back, I open my dressing gown fully, letting it fall half off my shoulders as I wriggle to lie more centrally on the rug. Glancing at the curtains I double check they are closed. I hadn’t bothered to open them during the day, more to stop people snooping. Good job; if they saw me now, they’d get more than an eyeful of me, pregnant and all turned on and needy.

With my eyes closed I hear Robert’s voice in my head, as if it’s his hand stroking me, his voice teasing and pleasing in a way only he knows how to, “Arrgh god, flip me, it feels so fucking good.” Spreading my legs wider, my back arches up off the floor, my lips parting as the need to come steadily builds. I sink into the sensation as my fingers fondle, rub and pinch in just the right spots. Licking my hand, getting it nice and wet, I imagine it’s Robert’s mouth as I wrap it around myself, my other hand resting protectively on my tummy. After a few minutes, stilling my hand over my cock to calm things down a little, my thoughts switch to Robert. I’m still in awe that our lovemaking got me pregnant, producing babies of our own; no-one can take that away from us, no matter what they think about it, we’re going to be parents for real. “You’re both special, so special and don’t you ever let anyone tell you otherwise.” I chuckle, “Your dad calls you Batman and Robin, but to me you’re my dynamic duo because I don’t care if you are boy or girl. We do make a good team though.”

My cock continues to throb with need and I tug a few times before stilling my hand again, distracted by the fluttering I can feel, like they know I’m talking to them. “Hhhmm, if daddy Sugden could see us now. It won’t be long before he can feel you moving around; I can’t wait to see the look on his face the first time.” The aching need to get off is too strong to ignore; licking my hand again, I reach down to continue palming myself, my voice keening involuntarily from the pleasure, “Oh christ, fuck me. I swear sex is even better being pregnant and believe me it was good before.” I chuckle, almost like I’m tipsy from the effect of the endorphins and hormones, “Best not tell daddy that though, we don’t want to make him think that sex is boring after you’re born; I’ll probably be too knackered then anyway.” My hand stops an instant, moving to pat my tummy as if to give the message further weight, “Oh and talking of that, you both won’t be having sex for a very long time, you got that; no fucking around getting unexpectedly up the duff for my kids.” Thinking about what I’ve just said, I shake my head slightly, stuck on the realisation that I’m turning into mum and then that I shouldn’t be talking to the twins about sex before they’re even born. I blame it all on the hormones, yep this is all definitely down to the hormones; they’re sending me a little doolally.
Feeling emotional and wishing Robert was here in my arms, I can’t keep my hand away for long and biting my bottom lip, my desire rises together with the increased speed of my hand. “Mmmh, it feels so fucking good though.”

Robert, Beginning February 2017 (Week 19)

Pulling up outside the cottage, Aaron doesn’t pick up and everything looks suspiciously dark, but I can’t easily tell with the curtains pulled. Knowing him, he’s probably fallen asleep and has his phone on silent. I walk to the back door which doesn’t have any bolts, but it didn’t matter for keeping people away as only we have a key for it. I go into the kitchen and take my coat off, pulling a funny face as I can hear what at first sounds like Aaron in some kind of pain. However I let go of my initial panic, quickly realising it’s not that kind of noise and I creep to the living room doorway, curious what he’s up to, but I already have a good idea. What I see completely blows me away and I have to lean against the doorframe from the effect it’s having on me, making me go all weak at the knees. Aaron is practically naked, lying on the rug touching himself; the living room is in darkness, lit only by the flames from the fire and he looks absolutely breath-taking.

I bite my lip to stop myself just in time, holding back the moan itching to escape so I can enjoy watching without him knowing I’m here. I’d never put myself down as a voyeur, but this is something else entirely and I pull back into the shadows, but still where I have a perfect view of my husband and it almost kills me to keep my hand away from my own cock which had sprung to life and is already rock hard. It’s entrancing watching Aaron teasing himself closer to the edge, the flames from the fire casting a golden warmth over his body. I’ve never seen anything so fucking hot, he’s beautiful; the temptation is overwhelming and I’ve never wanted to touch him more than I do now. It takes every bit of will-power I possess to not go to him, knowing that I’m witnessing an incredibly intimate moment and I’ll treasure this memory for the rest of my life.

Seeing Aaron suck his fingers, I bite down so hard that I can taste blood, watching as they trail seductively down his torso to his leaking cock; I have no idea how I manage to keep quiet or my hands away from the bulge inside my trousers. Instead I tether myself to the spot, my hand gripped firmly to the doorframe inside the kitchen.

Aaron practically mewls, his eyes closed as his body arches up and I have to shove my left hand into my mouth to stop any sound escaping from watching how his skin glows in the firelight, his muscles straining and flexing as the pressure builds. He slows it right down and it takes me a minute to comprehend until I realise he’s started quietly talking; he’s talking to the twins, his face blissfully serene. Listening to him fills my heart with pride and love; he’s right we are already a family unit and I smile at over-protective Aaron, it’s what he usually calls me. I’m not sure which one of us will be worse, god help us if we have a girl; we’d never let her out of our sight. Normally I might have said it’s a bit off, Aaron masturbating whilst talking to the babies, but there’s something about it that just makes it feel right, an extra special closeness he has by sharing a part of him that no-one gets to see, telling them his innermost feelings, all during such an intimate act.

His eyes are part closed as he talks, “Not as good as when daddy touches me though, sometimes I don’t think he knows just what he does to me.” Aaron smiles, that happy boyish shy smile he gets sometimes when he’s lost in his own world and he thinks no-one is watching, “You’ll find out for yourselves, it’s not always wise to tell him everything especially if he’s done good. He gets all heady and know-it-all; it drives me potty even more than usual so I’d never tell him this, but I want you to know your daddy is the best thing that’s ever happened to me. He brought me back to life, he gave
you both life and no-one can tell me it’s not natural, because we are, you are and I love you all very much.”

Aaron’s hand abandons his cock, instead rubbing it back and forth across the roundness of his tummy. Continuing upwards he squeezes his nipple, and then tastes his fingers. I’m fascinated, drinking in his every movement and hanging onto every word, “Hhhmm, nnnng, I wonder what I’ll taste like, what it’ll be like to feed you. I feel selfish sometimes that Robert won’t get to know what it’s like and I don’t always want to share but then I might not want to share him with you all the time either.” Aaron’s hand slides back down his front, again gently moving back and forth over the bump. “I can’t wait to see him hold you. It was so weird seeing him with Charlie when she was born, but when he holds you for the first time, I know I’ll cry, I won’t be able to help myself.” I smile, not realising until now just how fast my heart is beating. Aaron looks so relaxed and happy, despite all the crap outside the two of us, he’s as happy as I am about becoming a father. I love Aaron with every fibre of my being. Seeing and hearing him like this, I can’t believe it took me so long to give in to my feelings and what I put him through.

He moves onto his side, propping himself up on his elbow. In this position I can clearly see flow of his body, the curve of his hip seeming more pronounced than before he was pregnant and how his hand supports his lower abdomen, almost like he’s cradling our children with it. After a minute he moves his free hand, exploring his upper body with it, his fingers lightly tracing over the softness of his skin, “You have no idea how scary it is being pregnant, but I wouldn’t change it for the world.” Aaron is quiet for a short while, like he’s thinking about something and his face turns more serious. He stays like this for so long that I contemplate going to him, but then he speaks, “I promise you that we won’t ever leave you, not ever, we’ll always be there for you.” I feel a tear slide down my cheek and wonder if I should leave, that I’m intruding on his privacy and shouldn’t really be hearing this. Maybe I should go for a walk, but I don’t seem able to tear my eyes away from him and my feet remain rooted to the stone floor.

Aaron is quiet, his head resting in the crook of his arm as his hand brushes lightly over his tummy in a circling motion until eventually he turns onto his back. He is still completely hard and I wonder what he’s been thinking about as he reaches down and wraps his fingers round his engorged cock once more; my knuckle returns to my mouth and I have to bite down hard again in an effort to remain silent because Aaron doesn’t say a word, fully concentrated on getting off. It doesn’t take him long before he’s on the edge, “Fuck……, oh god, I’m so close.” He whimpers, his hips shifting and I watch him reach the point of no return, his body twitching, tightening as his hand pumps out ropes of milky come which splatters all over his front. His hips buck from the intensity, lifting his upper body off the floor where he holds still, crying out as a final spurt covers his hand, his body shuddering, surrendering completely to the climax.

I quickly step backwards into the kitchen upon seeing his head tipping back to a ninety degree angle and I hope he hasn’t seen me. It feels wrong somehow if he knows I’ve been watching him but just for the moment I’m too occupied with my own need. Now I’m the one lost in my own world, with my trousers open it only takes a couple of tugs and I’m spilling into my hand inside my shorts. Panting quietly I rest my head back against the kitchen wall, suppressing a giggle at the absurdity of my situation. I don’t think I have ever come so quick in my entire life. Waiting for my breath to return to normal, I contemplate what I should do next. Do I stay or do I leave and come back in a while making out I’ve just got home, but he’ll know I’m lying when he listens to the message I left on his phone. Before I get chance to work it out, the decision is made for me.

“I know you’re there Robert, I saw you already.”
Chapter Summary

February-March 2017 / Month 5-6 - Week 20-22: Pending fatherhood continues to impact everyday life and the boys start thinking about some of the decisions they face, finding some easier than others.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Aaron, Mid February 2017 (Week 20)

I'm realising that I can forget any thoughts about gentle fluttering being all I'm going to experience with my little bundles of joy; I think......, no I know, I have two acrobats inside me. I just have to keep telling myself, only four months or so to go, “Grrrrr, be still kids, just for five minutes, daddy is not a trampoline.”

“You sound just like Vic, get used to it; you know it’s only going to get worse.”

Adam is laughing and gets my unimpressed face in response, “It’s not funny Adam; you should try being a baby making machine.”

“No thanks. You’ve only got yourself to blame and anyway you love it.” I grin at him not disagreeing. Grabbing the last chip off my plate I sit back, my hand instinctively moving to rub over my now very visible pregnant bump. No idea how I'm going to make it until they're born, I already feel like I'm going to burst. I’m becoming more conscious of my growing size and permanently tightening clothes, and I’m not the only one. Robert is totally fixated, hardly leaving me in peace, making me love him and want to throttle him all at the same time when it gets too much. He got nothing but short shrift from me this morning when I caught him taking a photo. When I’m out and about I get a mix of cooing and ewwing depending who I see but I’ve been used to that for a while now so no change there. I don’t venture out of the village too much anymore, I handle any negativity much better here than from people who don’t know us.

The entire village got to know about the family meeting and have cast judgement same as they did with me when they first found out I was pregnant so in general the family has been keeping a low profile. It’s a little unclear to me if anyone is officially barred from the pub; let’s just say certain people aren’t putting in an appearance. I suppose given time it will get back to normal, but I’m not exactly sure what that is anymore. For our part, we haven’t changed a thing; Emmerdale is home so I’ll be polite and it’s up-to others to do the same if they can’t be anything more. We have our 'Baby Sugdens' Defence Squad' as Vic calls it, which makes me laugh. The protective circle that formed when people first found out I was pregnant has steadily grown into a group of friends with whom we spend time. We won’t have a shortage of babysitters that’s for sure.

Leyla and Nessa come to sit with us, Paddy following not long after. “Where’s Robert?”

“On a mission.” Paddy looks at me curiously, “He’s taking a night class, something to do with the
“More than half way through now, hey Aaron?”

“Don’t remind me, please Leyla. Robert has it all planned out, he’s driving me up the wall. He’s attached to the due date on the calendar, everything is written down with a schedule date, including when I’m going to give birth. It doesn’t matter how many times I tell him, babies don’t pop out to a timetable, but he just ignores me.”

Adam looks at me quizzically, “Does that mean you’re thinking about a C-section then?”

I shrug, “We haven’t talked about it yet.” Steering the conversation in another direction, “I have more important things on my mind at the minute, like my belly button won’t stay in.”

“Haha, get used to it, you’ll have an ‘outie’ until after you’ve given birth.” Leyla grabs for my jumper, “Let me see.”

“Gerroff, have you got no shame woman?”

“No. You know I don’t.”

Possessive hands grab my shoulders, “Mitts off you, he’s mine.” Robert kisses the top of my head and positions himself between us, “Budge up.” He nudges me with his knee, “Let me in sweet cheeks.” Making room for him, he sits down, grinning as I redden with embarrassment, very conscious of when he said this to me this last night he wasn’t referring to my face.

“Some people have got no manners.” Robert scoffs at Leyla’s comment. He and Leyla have got this thing going on where they have a fondness for getting in as many digs as they can with each other. It always remains on the edge of friendly banter, well most of the time, but they definitely get off on winding each other up with it.

It had to be Leyla didn’t it; I swear she’s as nosey as Vic. “What kind of class are you doing then Robert? Aaron never said.”

“Here you go love.” He gives me an odd look whilst mum puts his pint down on the table and I shrug my shoulders, attempting to silently communicate in the hope he cottons on. “Oh I didn't know you were doing a class, I don't know where you find the time Robert.” I chuckle at his unspoken response, raising an eyebrow in my direction; like I’m to blame he’s having knitting lessons with Pearl. He was the one who'd threatened to withdraw sex if I told anyone so now he has to deal with the consequences.

“Thanks Chas.” He looks to Leyla, playing along, “Networking, I've picked up some tips here and there.”

“I might come with you, it could come in handy.”

Robert pulls a face, “Please don’t, you’ll scare everyone and I’m just getting to make some good connections; anyway I don't think there's any places left.”
“I’ll have you know I’m very personable.”

“Yeah, so’s Donald Trump I’ve heard.”

Leyla grimaces; she can’t stand him which Robert knows. I intervene before they start to argue, “Alright kiddies, that’s enough for now or you’ll both be going on the naughty step.” Leyla’s mouth snaps shut and Robert sniggers, taking it as victory but I know Leyla will get her own back when he least expects.

I’m laughing at them, broken off by a big gaping yawn and I put my hand over my mouth, “Ahhh crap, I’m tired, don’t be too long with your pint Rob, I need my bed.”

“That doesn’t exactly mean sleep for you two does it?”

I tip my head forward to look at Nessa, “Meaning?”

“Well, you might be five months pregnant Aaron, but you’re still at it morning, noon and night. The walls are thick, but not that thick; if you keep going at this rate Jonny’ll grow up thinking that’s the norm.”

My blushing is made worse by Robert, who winks at me shamelessly, ”You should try living with him.” He flashes a wicked smile, adding to my embarrassment, “I tell you all this sex is wearing me out, it’s exhausting; what between that and his snoring. Adam I’ll be coming round soon asking to kip in my old room just to get a good night’s sleep for once.” I slouch lower down in my seat as they all snigger at my expense. Robert ruffles my hair, “Aww, I still love you though my little bunny rabbit.”

"You are so heading for a smack." I brush his hand away, grimacing at him, “I’d stop complaining if I were you. You should be happy it's on offer still cos you won’t be getting any sex or sleep after they’re born. I'll be too knackered and you’ll be too busy wiping up sick and changing nappies, and don’t push your luck, remember I know all your secrets.” This time it’s me winking and grinning at him.

His eyes sparkle as he takes a drink of his pint and I can’t help but melt at the way he looks at me, “Bring it on.”

“Oh, we’ll remind you of that when you fall asleep at work, wearing different socks because you don’t have the energy left to co-ordinate.” Leyla pats his knee, “Don’t worry, it happens to the best of men.”

Aaron, End February 2017 (Week 21)

Robert’s priceless, I’m chortling so much I can’t hold steady with the clippers, yet again busy cutting my nails which seem to grow at a rate I can hardly keep up with these days.

“Knit one pearl one, oh crap lost one.”

I look across at him, doing my absolute best not to properly laugh out loud, but seeing his pouty exasperated face, it's impossible, “I can’t believe you are still trying with the whole knitting thing.”

“It will not get the better of me. Robert Sugden will not be defeated by a piddly ball of wool and two pointy sticks.”
“What is it you’re knitting again?”

“Cardigan.”

“You will get all the button holes in the right places won’t you dear?” He grunts a response not rising to the mocking tone in my voice, too busy trying to recapture the stitches he’s dropped, unfortunately managing to lose even more from the other needle in the process. “Maybe you should try something a little less complicated, you know like booties. Mmh maybe not; how about a scarf, a scarf would be good, you can never have too many scarves. Oh and a hat, with a cute little bobble on top. We can frame them after, ‘My first hat and scarf - knitted by daddy’.”

Robert looks up, “You’re enjoying this way too much Aaron Sugden. Just you wait and see; I’ll prove you and Pearl wrong.”

“Speaking of which, you should invite Pearl round here for your next lesson; it’ll be comedy gold.”

”Hilarious.” Scowling, he admits defeat on the knitting front for the night, “I’ll show you. You’ll all be made to eat your words.”

Finishing what I’m doing, I decide to take pity on him. Going over, I pull the needles and wool out of his hands, coaxing him to lie down on the settee so we can cuddle up. “I love you whatever.” It feels nice as he nuzzles against the back of my neck, wrapping his arms around my front; until I get a reminder we’re not on our own, “Ooh.”

Startled Robert lays both his hands flat over my tummy, “I felt that.” I tip my head back to see Robert smiling from ear to ear. “That wasn’t my imagination right Aaron, they did kick?”

“Mmh hmm, they’ve been belly surfing a lot today.” Taking Robert’s hand I move it a little so he can feel better, ”This little one likes kicking me in the ribs, a right wriggle bum compared to brother or sister.” As if on cue there’s another one.

“Oh wow.” I grin at him, it’s not often that Robert is speechless, but he kind of is and it’s adorable.

Robert switches the telly off but we stay wrapped up together on the settee, too lazy to move upstairs to bed. “I forgot to tell you, the surgery called with the diagnostic test results this morning, as far as they can tell we have two healthy babies.”

“Good. They were so cute on the ultrasound, side by side; they looked like they were hugging.” I feel a tingling sensation as Robert brushes his hand through my hair and down the back of my neck, where his lips leave an invisible imprint from his kiss, ”Are you sure you don’t want to know what sex they are?”

I shake my head, “No, you can but you’re not allowed to tell me if you find out.”

“I wouldn’t be able to keep it a secret, I’d be too excited. I’m okay to wait until they are born. As long as they have all their fingers and toes, I’m happy.” He kisses affectionately into my neck again, “You know we do need to talk about how you’re going to give birth?”

“Mmh, but let’s save that one for another time when I'm more awake, talk about something easier instead, like colours for the nursery.”

“Okay, but this is not going to go away you know that?”
“It’s not exactly something I’m going to forget about is it.”

He takes the hint and moves on, “Cornfield yellow has my vote, it works for boys and girls; soft and warm, just like you. We can get some murals or something to make it more fun and interesting.”

“Awww, you big softie.”

“That’s me. I thought we could go shopping at the weekend and get some paint and stuff.”

“I know you did, you've got the timetable stuck to the fridge remember.”

"Don't mock, it's good to be organised; you'll thank me for it when the time comes."

"You also have down to start looking for cots as well but I thought we'd already seen what we wanted online.”

“Ah.”

“What ah?”

“Well, I kind of already got one.”

I peer back at him suspiciously, “Since when?”

“Since Diane gave us one, but I haven’t seen it yet and you might not like it.”

“Why, what’s wrong with it?”

“Nothing I don’t think, it’s just a bit old. It’s from when me and Vic were born; dad kept it apparently. Diane said Vic didn’t want it for Charlie, but I think I’d kind of like to use it.” Robert hesitates then rushes to finish, “But only if you agree. We don’t have to.”

“I think it’s a nice idea.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“It might need a bit of TLC but we can do that between us right and we’ll need to buy a new mattress thing for it.”

“I'm sure it'll be fine, but we'll still have to get another. Even if by some miracle mum kept mine, I don't want to use it, I don't want anything connected to him but let's have a look at yours, make sure it's safe and then see if we can get one similar to match.”

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The tension is rising as the midwife looks between us, he must be used to this, but we’ve been arguing for a good while now and there's no sign of either of us backing down anytime soon, “My body Robert.”

“Our children Aaron.”

“I’m not having a C-section and that’s final.”

The mid-wife intervenes once more, in an attempt to placate us, whilst I put my jumper back on after
having the regular scan. In a couple of weeks we start the antenatal classes where we’ll start talking about how I could give birth and learning how to feed and take care of the babies once they’re born. The doctor says that he won’t let me go past week thirty seven or eight at the most, twins usually come early anyway but this has scared Robert even more. “You don’t need to decide just yet, learn about all the different options and then take it from there.”

He might as well have not spoken, “I’ve already read all the stuff. I don’t want any more cuts and I want to do this as naturally as possible.”

“And what if something goes wrong?”

“Robert, C-sections aren’t risk free either. I don’t want it; it’s as simple as that.”

His face is as black as thunder, the happy mood from the early part of the scan well and truly spoiled. I pick my coat up, not prepared to discuss it further; saying goodbye to the mid-wife I walk out of the room leaving Robert to follow in his own time.

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Our silence hangs heavy in the car the entire journey home. “I’m not trying to be difficult for the sake of it. I know why you want me to have a C-section Robert, I do, but I just don’t want to give birth like that. I’m sorry.”

Robert puts the brake on after coming to a stop outside the cottage. “It’s not just about the safety of the babies; it’s about keeping you safe. I can’t lose you. I won’t lose you Aaron; you have to understand that. I don’t want you putting yourself at risk like this.”

I put my hand over his, for the first time since leaving the hospital he looks at me, “I know, but this is really important to me; I don’t want them to be born by me being cut open with a knife.” Robert’s eyes flicker in acknowledgement of what I’m saying, but his priorities on this are different to mine. “It’s not like I want to give birth at home, we’ll be in the hospital and if anything at all looks risky or starts to go wrong, then we’ll decide what to do for the best at the time. Please Robert, let me have this. You can have your own way with anything else, just let me try.”

He sighs heavily, staring out of the window before turning back to me, our fingers intertwined, his unconsciously playing gently with mine, “I’m not happy Aaron and I want to talk everything through with the doctor.”

“I know.” Smiling at him quietly, I take his hand and rest it against my tummy, “Alive and kicking; feel how strong they are.”

“Headstrong and stubborn more like. Just like their father.” He’s eyes remain full of concern but there’s a hint of a rueful smile in them.

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Robert, Beginning March 2017 (Week 22)

I’m stood leaning against the shop counter whilst waiting for David to stop faffing around when Leyla walks in, “Anything I should know Robert?”
“What?” She raises her eyebrows, nodding to the fact I’m holding up a cantaloupe melon in my left hand and a bag of sugar in the other, “Ah, no. The midwife compared the babies to a small cantaloupe in size and a pound of sugar in weight.” Resting my elbow on the counter, I contemplate the melon, twirling it around in my hand, thinking how small and yet how big it is. “I can’t get over that Aaron is carrying two of these inside him and he’s still got a long way to go.”

“Scary huh?”

“Mmmhh, we’re going to start sorting out the spare room to turn it into a nursery at the weekend. “ I turn to Leyla, “You fancy helping?”

She pulls a face, “Mmh, let me think about that.”

I smile at her, knowing she prefers organising and being creative to physical hard graft, “Well you let me know when you’ve thunk.”

“Funny Sugden; don’t give up your day job.”

“You could design something for the walls if you’d like?” Leyla is too slow to hide how chuffed she is that I’ve asked but I don’t let her get away with it. “You can let me know when you’ve thunk about that too.”

“I’ll check my calendar and get back to you.”

“You do that, I suppose I could ask someone else.”

“No, no, I’m sure I can find the time, you know….., for Aaron.”

David grins, he’s got used to us dancing around each other like this. He tots up the money I’ve given him, “That’s another one pound seventy for the melon please.”

“Oh I don’t want to buy it; I only came in for milk and sugar.”

His grin disappears, grabbing the melon away from me, “Hands off the merchandise then.” He puts it back in the basket where I’d got it from.

“So how’s Aaron doing? I’ve not seem him for a while.”

“Moody. I’ve been getting whiplash from it all week. He’s up and down like a bloody jack in the box. If he keeps it up I’ll be taking refuge in the pub and sending Chas in to give him some mollycoddling. I’ve run out of ideas, he just snaps at everything. At least I’m getting a rest from all the sex, he’s not been interested once this week.”

They both laugh at my exasperated expression, “It’s not funny you two, Aaron is not easy to live with when he’s like this and guess what set it all off?”

“Places to go, people to see, we could be guessing all day knowing you two.” I pull a face at Leyla’s glib response.

“He can’t see his feet, his feet are swollen and he’s sick of people, including me, trying to cop a feel of his belly which he says is huge; but then the next minute he’s all clingy and whiny wanting a massage and a foot rub. Honestly, it’s like I’m living with Jekyll and Hyde.”

“Send him to Paddy, he’ll sort him out.”

“You reckon?”
“He’ll come back calmer from there than after being with Chas.”

“Mmmh, maybe; I want Paddy to talk to him anyway.”

“What about?”

“Never you mind, nosey. You just concentrate on creating a fantastic design for the nursery, cornfield yellow’s the backdrop.”

“You have paint on your nose.” Aaron wipes it off with a rag, giving me a quick kiss before handing me my drink. I smile at him; he seems to be in a good mood today, for now anyway. Taking a break, I plonk myself down on the floor, blowing on my coffee before taking a sip and Aaron sits down on the rocking chair which arrived yesterday.

We’ve been talking about names and have come up with a few that we both like, it’s doubly hard with having twins and the fact we don’t know what sex they are. We’ve started writing down names that we both like onto a slip of paper and putting them in a jar where we’ll then have to find a way of whittling it down once they are born. So far we’ve agreed on Daisy, Amelia, Erica, Madison and Grace for girls names, boys we’ve had more trouble with, only agreeing on two so far, Alfie and Joseph.

Aaron has his pad and pen ready, looking at me expectantly, “Harry.”

He shakes his head, “He'd get called Harry Potter and it makes me think of him from One Direction; urrggh, no thank you.”

Robert laughs at the look on my face, “You’re so weird. Okay, what about Ryan?”

“Nope, reminds me of Ryan Lamb.”

“Who’s he?”

“Used to work at the garage.”

“Okay, so your turn.”

Aaron scrunches his face up in thought, “Ethan?”

“Maybe, not bad, give me another.”

The next he fires off immediately, “Daniel.”

“No, don’t like that.”

“Albert.”

I hold off taking a drink of my coffee, giving him a look that speaks volumes as to what I think of that idea, “You’re being silly now.”

“What, you don’t like Albert?”

“Next.....”

“Errrm....., Elliott.”
I ponder a few seconds, “Put it in the pot, I quite like that.”

“Anyone home?”

I yell out a response, “Up here.”

Chas enters the room, rosy cheeks after coming inside out of the cold, “You're coming on then; it’s beginning to look somebit like.”

"Just a topcoat to go on the skirting boards and we're finished."

"Vic thought you might like some hot-pot, so I brought it over; it's in the kitchen.” She peers down at Aaron’s writing pad, “What are you up to?”

Aaron puts the slip of paper in the jar after writing down Elliott, “Thinking of names.”

Seeing the look on her face I get in first, “We're picking what we like Chas, bible name or not, it won't matter.”

Chas purses her lips, but doesn’t argue, turning to Aaron instead. “So you looking forward to your first antenatal class then?”

“Suppose so.”

Chas peers between us, sensing the sudden tension, “You don’t sound too excited.”

"We are mum, it's just giving birth has become a sore topic of conversation, we don’t agree.”

“Ahh, take all the drugs they throw at you love or even better go for the easy option and bypass the pain altogether.”

Nudging Aaron’s foot with mine, I try to make light of it, secretly pleased Chas said this, “See, I told you.”

Aaron pulls a face, “She’s saying that for a different reason to you though.”

“Safe and painless versus not so safe and painful.”

“I only get to do this once most likely and I want a natural birth.”

Playing dirty I put Chas on the spot, "What do you think Chas?”

She shuffle's uncomfortably but I feel vindicated hearing her response, “Oh, well errmm, if you call thirty hours of pain, sweat and blood something you want, then go for it, but I agree with Robert, you should do what is safest, especially only getting to do this once.”

This did it, he practically erupts out of the chair pointing his finger at me in disdain, “Did he get you round 'ere just so you could agree with him, seeing how Paddy crashed and burned?”

“No. What do you mean crashed and burned?”

“Talking me out of a natural birth.”

"No love, we just want what's best for you, you and the babies.”
“So do I.” He turns, glaring at me, annoyed and his voice raised. “You won't fucking let it drop will you.” He stomps out of the room without another word.

“Aaron.....” The bathroom door slams shut and there's the sound of running water into the bath; snapping I follow in his footsteps. I yank open the bathroom door and yell angrily at him, "No I won't let it drop and no swearing in front of the children remember." Slamming the door shut, I yell back up to him as I go downstairs, "Your rule, not mine!"

Chas cautiously comes into the kitchen, watching me bang the pots around as I side them away, emptying the dishwasher, “Sorry.”

My anger dissipating, I give Chas a weary half smile, “We're just both tired but we’ll have to work it out one way or another. I'm hoping the mid-wife or doctor can talk some sense into him, but I wouldn't put money on it. He's dug his heels in and won't even consider it. Chas he doesn't get how much this scares me.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the kudos and lovely comments, they keep me motivated.
It's quite hard writing about someone being pregnant when I've never had my own children, so feel free to throw ideas and experiences at me. The more the merrier... oh and I've picked the babies names now. I got all warm and fuzzy feelings at that.
Take care
Caro
Patience and Fortitude Mr Sugden!

Chapter Summary

March 2017 / Month 6 - Week 22-23: Robert needs the patience of a saint whilst Aaron struggles with the roller-coaster ride his emotions are giving him.

Chapter Notes

Sooooo sorry it has been this long in posting.

I hit a bit of writer's block and then there's the small matter of the real world getting in the way....stupid real life!! I got a new job though and I've been working hard closing out stuff on my old one so I can have a couple of weeks off before Xmas where I promise there will be some serious writing going on.

Aaron, Beginning March 2017 (Week 22)

“Mum’s gone then?” I wouldn’t call the tone of my voice conciliatory, but the anger has peaked and I don’t have the energy to keep on with it any longer, it’s too exhausting.

“Yep, strangely enough she didn’t want to stick around for a second bout of her son being a stubborn arse. Apparently, that’s my role now, all part of the job of being your husband.” His frustration with me is evident as he continues, "Alongside to love and to cherish, they should have put patience and fortitude in the wedding vows Mr Sugden because without it we'd be hitting until death us do part a lot sooner than expected.”

“You don’t fancy giving your husband a foot rub then, you know what with it falling under the husband and daddy to be job description?” Peeking across at him, there's a glint in my eye, knowing that I might just be pushing my luck, but you've gotta be in it to win it.

His body language tells me how upset he still is with me and I know he’s not going to back down on the giving birth discussion yet his withering stare turns into semi-amusement at my cheek and he follows me to the sofa, “Lie down then.”

Grinning and feeling better about things, I do as I'm bid and I can’t resist pushing him a little more, tickling his nose with my toes whilst he's getting himself comfy at the other end of the sofa. He shakes his head at me in despair, “I swear sometimes you have a death-wish; idiot.”

It doesn't take long for his fingers to start working their magic. “Ow.” The devilish smile I get tells me he enjoyed hearing my yelp from one of the more painful clicking of my muscles as he expertly kneads my foot and calf. It’s the little things that give him so much pleasure. “Sadist, you know I’ll get my own back.”
“If you say so.” Despite our ability to argue like there’s no tomorrow when we are that way out, it doesn’t stop us having some fun with it. It’s one of the reasons we fit so well together; we like to push each other’s buttons. We might not have had the smoothest of relationships, but then where would be the fun in that.

With my eyes shut, there’s a comfortable quietness as the foot massage helps me to relax. Even without my sight I can tell he’s watching which always gives me a warm fuzzy feeling and I adore Robert’s hands touching my body, they’re safe and reassuring. Opening my eyes, I find I was right. Robert looks contented, gazing at me with a boyish smile on his face, “You seem more relaxed now, is it helping?”

“Yes thanks.” I stroke my hand over my tummy, “The dynamic duo feel it too; they don’t like it when I get upset.” There’s a flash of something in Robert’s expression but he doesn’t say anything and I feel a little guilty, “Sorry.”

“I know Aaron, I know.”

I can see the love in his eyes and having made our tacit agreement to leave the argument for another day with these words, he switches onto my other foot. It’s so good that after a while I can’t help but let out a needy moan. “I’m serious Rob, you really did miss your true calling in life Mr Sugden. Mmmhh, promise me you won’t stop doing this after they’re born, I think I’m addicted to your massages.”

“Maybe, if you behave yourself I could be generous and give you a reward every now and then.”

“Mhmm, I’m always good, you know that.” We are smiling at each other, both knowing exactly what Robert is thinking.

“Of course you are.” He shifts onto his knees and opens my dressing gown enough so that leaning over me; his hands cradle both sides of my swollen belly. Kissing it gently he makes me laugh hearing him talk into it, “Don’t you believe a word of it kids.” Lifting his head up only far enough so he can look at me I go all gooey inside. God he’s so tempting; I can feel his breath on my skin still and he has that adorable impish grin on his face. He kisses my belly button once more, continuing, “And I wouldn’t have him any other way.”

That did it and I drag him up alongside me so I can kiss him whilst his hand tears my dressing gown fully open. Make up sex is the best!

Aaron, w.c. 6th March 2017 (Week 23)

Unnerved and gasping for air I concentrate on calming down but I’m finding it hard. Leaning over, I gulp down a big drink of water from my glass on the bedside table in the hope this will help before resting my head back on the pillow. Silently I start counting in my head, measuring my breathing to settle myself down enough so I can try to go back to sleep.

Robert hadn’t stirred and I thought I had got away with it but his eyelids flutter a little before opening. Quite often he usually sleeps through, having gotten used to my restless nights but this dream was one of the worst I’ve had in ages. It felt so real and I hate the feeling of panic when I wake up like this. Discounting the nightmares caused by dad, before being pregnant I never remembered my dreams, but now they stay with me in vivid colour long after I wake up. Doctor Bailey calls them anxiety dreams and reassures me this is normal during pregnancy but I hate them, I hate how vulnerable and out of control I feel.
Robert puts the bedside light on dimmed; his fingers brush my cheek and I look at him apologetically for waking him. Snuggling in close, he rests his hand round the back of my neck kissing me gently, his lips feel silky soft. “A bad one?”

I nod, a slight shudder coursing through me, and I practically cling to my husband, his touch safe and warm, “We’re not going on any planes, not ever okay.”

“Okay, no planes.” He knows better than to talk sense to me when I’m like this and instead kisses my forehead, “You want to tell me about it?”

“No, one of us freaking out is enough, just go back to sleep.” I shift, wriggling, trying to get comfortable whilst Robert patiently waits, his tired eyes observing my annoyed pouting, huffing and puffing until I get as comfy as I’m going to get. “I hate being pregnant sometimes; I’m growing in size like it’s gone out of fashion and everything hurts. Mum was lying when she said being pregnant is the most wonderful thing ever. Remind me again why I thought that keeping them was a good idea.”

“Because we get to have our own family, plus we’ll be the bestest, funnest parents ever.”

Huffing and puffing again, I shuffle with frustration, “Mmmhh, that’s probably what they all say until it’s too late and then you’re just stuck with them, in debt and miserable. I mean it’s going to be a disaster. Think about it, Dingle and Sugden genes all rolled into one. We might as well book a cell at the nearest prison and get insurance for the psychiatric hospital now.”

Giggling quietly, he hugs me close, shushing me whilst cradling me in his arms and slowly my worry starts to seep away, “You don’t mean that, you’re just tired and feeling out of sorts from having a bad dream.”

Although more settled by Robert’s calming touch I’m still on edge, the uneasy feeling won’t quite go away just yet. I look deep into his eyes, “Do you ever get scared about all this, think that maybe this is a bad idea, that we made the wrong decision?”

A little taken back by the question, he kisses me before answering, “I don’t regret anything about this and neither do you and yes, every day it scares the shit out of me. They will probably be a handful and push every button, past limits we never knew we even had, but I won’t ever think we made the wrong decision. I don’t want boring kids and I don’t want a dull life. Look on the bright side there’s potential in those Dingle-Sugden genes; with the right guidance and love, maybe we should be booking a place at Oxford and searching for a country mansion that they could buy instead.”

“Maybe, not Home Farm though; I’d sooner burn it down than have anyone from our family living there and I don’t want snobby kids, Hotten comp will do just fine. After that they can get to decide for themselves. They have to learn how to fight somewhere.”

“That’s assuming we’re having boys, but we might have girls or one of each.”

“Girls fight, Dingle blood remember.”

“Yeah, that’s something we’re going to have to work on along with a few other family traits they might inherit; you don’t have to fight with your fists to win a battle Aaron, we’re going to teach our children how to play it smart. So let’s see, that would be no fighting, no drinking and no sex......, ever. No problem.”

This has me properly smiling because it’s exactly who we are, “Dream on, you don’t want dull and
boring remember.” Finally, I’m feeling more relaxed and try to imagine what our teenage children could look like. It seems such a long way away. We snuggle closer, “So what scares you the most?”

“I want them to be born healthy and to make sure we can give them a happy home. I don’t want things between us to change, though I know it will, just not too much. I like what we have.” This time it’s me stealing a kiss from Robert. “What about you, other than nasty dreams that wake you up in the middle of the night?”

His fingers run through my hair whilst I consider what scares me the most, “Same as you but then silly things like how big I’m going to get. I already feel huge, I won’t be able to move by the time I’m ready to pop and I’m already knackered all the time. How are we going to cope having two babies? Like when will we have time to sleep, feed them and do all the other stuff never mind thinking about running two businesses.”

Robert pushes for more, almost murmuring, his breath warm in my ear, “What else?”

“Giving birth,” I bite my lip nervously, “And it doesn’t make a difference on the how; I can’t wrap my head around it, any of it. You know what I’m like when I get stressed and I know I’ll be just as bad with a C-section. What if they come early? Twins are born early a lot of the time, right? What if they come and we’re not ready or too early?” My hand moves protectively down in-between us to my tummy; I don’t think I can imagine what it would be like to lose them, I don’t think I’d survive it. I know people do, but I’m not sure I would be strong enough. I’m pulled from my thoughts by the sound of Robert’s voice in my ear again.

“I’ll look after you and you look after Batman and Robin so we’re gonna be fine and they’ll be perfect. We’ll get someone to help with the business or at home if needed and the family and our friends will do their bit, take over for a while when we need a break as long as we let them. It’s going to be hard until we get used to everything but we will Aaron; you know we can do anything together, just being here now is proof of that.”

“I know. God I love you.”

“You too Aaron Sugden even though you drive me to distraction half the time.”

“You love it, you love me like this, definitely not dull and boring.” I nudge him, teasing, “Not sure you can knit their first cardie though.” I get a playful dig in my side for that and promptly I get a warning kick from one of the twins which both of us feel and we burst out laughing.

“Ye of little faith; I told you Aaron, anything is possible.” Yawning, I finally feel as though I might be able to go back to sleep. We don’t talk about stuff like this too often, downside of us being two blokes maybe, or just the way we both are but it feels better somehow having voiced our fears and he’s right, I know we’ll make good parents. Sometimes I just need reminding of what we are capable of, because same as for Robert, it scares the shit out of me.

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“God give me strength.” He looks upwards as if that’s going to help as he mutters to himself, "Patience and fortitude Mr Sugden, patience and fortitude."

Grimacing, I throw him a look of pure irritation, “I’m stood right here you know, I can hear you.”

Robert gives me just as good back, glaring at me, "Yes but you're not listening Aaron."
"I am listening see.” Begrudgingly I drink the water just to spite him and prove my point, "You have no idea what this feels like Robert. You try being pregnant and see how you like it being told what you should eat and drink. I'm fed up of it all." We have a deal on certain do’s and don’ts so I drink enough and keep on a healthy diet and I'm only allowed healthy snacks which I admit are probably a good thing and help overall, but it’s still not an enjoyable experience when I’m feeling bloated and heavy like now and he's making me drink a glass of water.

All this last week I’ve been struggling to get a grip, with every little thing getting to me, either pissing me off right royally or making me cry. This morning is no different; we’ve been arguing ever since getting out of bed. It seems like Robert’s finally reached the end of his tether with me, the week has been wearing on both of us, “You don’t seem to have a problem guzzling junk food down your neck when it suits you.”

“I don't eat junk food......, much. I’m eating for three, what do you expect?” Robert’s right, I know he is. The problem here is, I keep thinking I've got the hang of things and then something reminds me that I’m not in control which is when I reach for the comfort food. Most of the time he never finds out or if he does he doesn’t let on, but every now and again I get caught red handed.

“Healthy and in moderation is what the doctor said. Just do what the hell you want Aaron, you will anyway but don’t come to me complaining afterwards with why it’s taking so long to get back into your jeans.”

The argument has reached the point where it has tired me out and I go quiet, restlessly scratching the wooden counter top with my fingers whilst Robert pours his coffee to take with him. “Remember those new jeans I have, I only got to wear them once. They fitted really nice; you said I looked hot in them.”

Robert smiles, shaking his head at me; I watch him take a drink thinking I must be giving him whiplash again. Even I've got to admit I've been difficult to live with this week. "I remember." I keep staring at him pointedly, waiting for the rest and he smirks, "Yes Aaron, you looked hot in them."

I nod, sufficiently mollified by the compliment, even if I did have to pull it out of him. "See. Anyway, you keep making me exercise so it won't take long and then what with all the sex, we have lots of sex still and that’s good exercise right?"

"Mnh hhm, so they say. Right I'm off, I'll see you tonight. Don't forget your exercises.” He's grinning mischievously and I roll my eyes at him. "Adam keeps asking for that paperwork you promised him so that might take your mind off things and if you go to the supermarket, drive safe and be safe okay." I nod silently. He gives me a kiss, then kisses the bump, "Look after daddy you two, don't let him do anything he shouldn't." We smile at each other knowingly as he walks out the door.

Lying back after finishing my exercises I let my mind wander, thinking about all the changes I've noticed this last week. I now have a funky dark line running down from my belly button and I’m learning the twins react to certain things, like if I have a warm bath or a glass of icy water. I’m also noticing patterns in their movement and I can wake them up when I move around or with sounds which can be amusing at times and also surprising me sometimes when I’m least expecting it.

With sleep now being a thing of the past between my anxiety dreams and insomnia, I can’t remember what a good night’s sleep feels like and I don’t see that changing after they’re born. If it wasn’t for Robert refusing to even consider allowing it, I’d be seriously trying to stay awake at night and sleeping during the day because it seems like whenever I’m in bed at night feeling relaxed and trying
to sleep, they are suddenly wide awake. They get all wriggly, reminding me exactly who is in charge of this body and it’s not me. It’s flaming typical and always just as I’m dropping off when I get a kick, only light but enough so stop me sleeping. I can’t tell which one is which yet though.

Looking at the clock I have time for a nice long bath, before needing to start getting tea ready. I pat my tummy as I drag myself onto my knees and haul myself up off the floor with the aid of holding onto the sofa. "It won't be long now until daddy's home and yes I'll try to be nice. I kind of thought I could make it up-to him with an early night. It's probably about the only perk of being pregnant other than the obvious end result. Yes yes I know. Don't lecture me, daddy definitely deserves some pampering from me for a change."

“Hey what's wrong?”

I’m blubbing down the phone to Robert, having called him, needing to hear his voice. “I’m clumsy, I knock things over with my belly and then I can’t pick things up when I drop them.” I’m picturing Robert’s smile, the one he always has listening to me feel sorry for myself, this isn’t the first time he’s had a call like this and it won’t be the last. “I’m pretty much useless, I don’t know what you see in me when I'm like this.”

“Well where do I start, let’s see. For one thing, you’re gorgeous; even when you’re grumpy. In fact even more when you’re grumpy and worked up because your eyes go all sparkly and shiny. The sex is incredible and you give the best blow jobs I’ve ever had. How much time do you have? Because I could go on and on but I have a meeting soon and they probably don’t want to know about how much my amazing husband, who just also happens to be the father of my children, makes me happy and turns me on.”

“Mmmh, flattery will get you everywhere.”

Robert’s giggling down the phone hearing the sultry shift in my voice, “That had better be a promise husband dearest after the merry dance you’ve done this last few days. Where are you anyway?”

“At home, sat at the top of the stairs.”

“What on earth are you doing sat there?”

“Contemplating; I was running a bath and remembered the shampoo in the bathroom is finished. I forgot to bring the new one I just bought at the supermarket up with me but I don’t think I can face lugging myself down and then back up again. I’m too exhausted after doing the shopping and my exercises not to mention traipsing over to the yard to see Adam. Oh, that reminds me, I forgot the chutney, how can I forget the sodding chutney, it’s my lifeline. Will you bring some with you on the way home, buy bulk like always.”

“Anything else you’ve forgotten or is that it?”

“No, I don’t think so. How’s your day going?”

“Good, I won’t be late. I’ll try and wrap things up so I can be home sooner. Why don’t you go and enjoy your bath and then you can make my favourite for tea in exchange for the best massage ever afterwards and then you can remind me just how much you love me. How does that sound?”

“Sounds good; aww shit....., hold on.” I hastily haul myself up off the step and leg it into the bathroom.
“What now?”

“Oops crap, almost dropped the phone in the bath; just in time; thank fuck for that.”

“Errrm, what happened to no swearing in front of the children?”

“Sorry kids. The bathwater is like one centimetre from the top, I forgot it had been running so long. Please don’t laugh at me Robert. Shit I’m crying again, why does everything make me cry? I’m like a wet girl’s blouse.”

“Just blame it on the hormones.”

“Shitty hormones, sorry kids; maybe I should get a swear jar. Sorry Rob, it’s been one of those days; our darling children have been jammed into my ribs, there’s only so much I can take and hormones might be good for the twins, but personally, I’m not a big fan.”

“Ha-ha, have your bath and you’ll feel better.”

“Don’t forget the chutney, write it down or something or I’ll be sending you back out for it.”

“I won’t forget the chutney, I promise.”

Robert’s arm snakes round my waist, hugging me back into him as he nuzzles my neck, “Hi, you feeling happier now?”

“Yep, a long soak in the bath was just what I needed but ignore my hair smelling like soap, other than that we’re all good. Food’s ready almost. Did you bring the chutney?”

“You and your chutney, yes I brought the chutney, we now have lots of chutney.”

“Good and just so you know I’ve been exploring options to give you a reward for being the best husband ever.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Patience, patience; food first, massage for me and then mind-blowing sex for you, I’ll make it worth the wait.”

“I can live with that. I’m starving, I skipped lunch and then it got too late to bother. How long’s it going to be?”

“Not long, ten minutes maybe.” Robert opens the kitchen cupboard and I know what he’s looking for to nibble on. I consider lying but then I’ll probably not get my massage and Robert can always tell when I’m lying from a mile off these days. Being pregnant has the side-effect that I am now totally incapable of hiding my emotions.

“I have a confession to make.”

Closing the cupboard door already knowing what’s coming, Robert leans back against the counter with his arms folded making me feel even more guilty, “Really and what would that be?”

“I didn’t stick to the usual plan for breakfast. I was feeling a little down after our argument.”

“Mmmh.”
“Yeah, well anyway, errm I had some of those cheesy nachos you like for a change and well, they were really moorish so I kind of ate the bag. I was good at dinner time though.” He’s trying to keep the stern expression on his face but failing, “Soz......, I made your favourite for tea like you asked.” I'm kicking myself for being so stupid; I don't even like cheesy nachos usually.

“You hate cheesy nachos; that’s why we buy them for me. They’re mine and I never had to worry about you stealing and scoffing the lot. I can't believe you ate an entire family size bag of nachos; I'm surprised that you weren't sick.”

He's not the only one. I bite my nails feeling contrite and wondering if this has cost me the massage he promised, “Hormones, pesky little things aren’t they.” I turn around smirking to myself fidgeting with the wooden spoon, stirring the sauce.

Robert moves to stand behind me, biting a kiss into my neck; it's a nice heady mix of pleasure and pain forcing me to stop what I am doing, having lost the ability to concentrate on anything but Roberts mouth. “I'm not sure mind-blowing is going to cut it after stealing your husband's favourite cheesy nachos. Maybe instead I’ll take the chutney back, tell the shop I made a mistake.”

I turn around wrapping my arms around his neck, my big bump forcing him to take a step back “No, no; there’s no need to get like that. Firstly, because, well, taking away the chutney would be more than your life’s worth and second, I’m sure I can make it up-to you, I’m very creative when I want to be.” I give him the come-on with my eyes, the one where he’s lost the battle before he’s even tried despite his best efforts to resist.

Robert sits up on the counter-top and starts unbuckling his belt, “No wonder you were all tearful earlier; lack of good nutrition can affect a person’s moods like that so they say. Why don’t you give me a preview of the night's entertainment before we eat? I’ll let you have a taster of what I'm expecting and you probably need a boost in protein after all those nachos to keep your energy levels up for later. If you meet the grade I might still give you that massage I promised. You did say mind-blowing and creative, right?”

"If you think you can handle it." Grinning at Robert, I pull down his zipper. Somehow, I've a feeling it's going to be a long night but I'll probably sleep like a log after we're done. I silently say 'game on' because I'm not losing my massage or my chutney stockpile all for a bag of cheesy nachos. "Just you take note because I too can have patience and fortitude Mr Sugden when I've a mind to want and with it I'm going to make you a very very happy husband indeed!"

"God yeah......"

TBC
March 2017 / Month 6 - Week 24: Aaron and Robert go to their first ante-natal class together.

Robert, w.c. 13th March 2017 (Week 24)

I don’t know why I’m feeling so nervous but I am. Maybe we’ve been stuck in our comfortable Emmerdale bubble for too long. This should be no different to the conversations we’ve had with the doctor or mid-wife, yet I’m finding my first time at any group interaction together with other pregnant father’s-to-be a bit overwhelming. Leaning against the wall trying to look unfazed by the experience, I slide my arms around Aaron’s waist, my hands protectively resting on his bump whilst we wait for the mid-wife to turn up. He’s calm and even the dynamic duo are keeping still for the occasion. I sense him looking at the others around us before whispering to me, “I thought Paul might be here.”

It’s honestly not a conscious act when hearing his name my entire body stiffens and Aaron tilts his head up to look at me, his eyes chastising my reaction with a single glare and I’m only part successful in forcing myself to relax. “I didn’t know that you were still in touch.”

Aaron returns his head to its original position resting back against my shoulder. “We’re not much, just the odd text every now and again; he moved in with his cousin living out Garforth way in the end. I suppose he might have started with an earlier group, he’s a little further along than I am but not by much and there’s nothing like the number of antenatal classes for us as for mothers. This is the only centre giving them for men in the whole of West Yorkshire as far as I know. I’ll text him after just to make sure he’s okay.”

Sensibly, I keep my mouth buttoned shut. Now would not be a good time to let any jealousy show and I focus my attention onto the people waiting with us in the corridor. The group is for expectant males only and I really hadn’t known what to expect from tonight. I count five couples including us so far and not all gay men, by the looks of it anyway. There’s one hetero couple, but they don’t look very couply so they could be just friends and she is just there for moral support like Aaron was for Vic that time. One guy looks like he might have his mum with him as she’s a lot older, then again I suppose you can’t really tell that either these days. Fortunately I don’t have time to ponder the possibilities any longer as the mid-wife bustles past, calling us to follow her into the classroom.

I resist the urge to say something sarcastic about all the huffing and puffing of everyone getting settled in their seats and I focus my attention onto the people waiting with us in the corridor. The group is for expectant males only and I really hadn’t known what to expect from tonight. I count five couples including us so far and not all gay men, by the looks of it anyway. There’s one hetero couple, but they don't look very couply so they could be just friends and she is just there for moral support like Aaron was for Vic that time. One guy looks like he might have his mum with him as she’s a lot older, then again I suppose you can’t really tell that either these days. Fortunately I don’t have time to ponder the possibilities any longer as the mid-wife bustles past, calling us to follow her into the classroom.

Looking at the piece of paper in her hand, the mid-wife asks if anyone in the room is carrying twins and we share a proud smile with Aaron blushing adorably as he nods. All eyes in the room turn to us.
with a strange mix of awe and relief in their expressions. Aaron answers her next question, saying he’s at around twenty-four weeks after which the mid-wife who has introduced herself as Jan then explains that if you’re having twins classes start around this time as they are more likely to come early, whereas for others they usually start at the thirty to thirty-two week mark so I now know why the others look bigger than Aaron.

Instead of introductions, Jan kicks off a sort of icebreaker activity where we have to sort lots of different flashcards out into the various stages of labour, with things like the different types of pain relief, having a bath, delivery of the placenta and so on and I’m beginning to regret not doing a lot more reading. I had skipped a lot of the more squishy bits in the books and on the internet, firm in the belief it was Aaron who needed to know more than me so I’d decided to put that off until a lot closer the time. Planting a kiss on the side of Aaron's head I find myself smiling, I suppose that time has come. Aaron glances at me, his gaze a mix of curious and amused as we sort through the order of the cards and after we are done it gets everyone talking a bit. I learn there’s definitely no going back now, the law defining that a foetus is officially a baby at twenty-four weeks. It seems so strange to hear this out loud as I don’t really think of the babies as a foetuses; I just think of them as our children.

It fills me with a warm fuzzy feeling every time I look at Aaron listening to the mid-wife’s patter which fades into the background for me a little, instead content just to watch his reactions as she lists all the many symptoms and changes to his body still to come. I have to smile as he stares down at his hands recognizing that his moaning earlier this morning about red, itchy palms has nothing to do with the amount of washing up he’s doing which was his assumption now that he’s at home more so we use the dishwasher a lot less. I don’t think either of us really thought of quite so many random things to expect. When she mentions that a calorie controlled diet is not healthy but watching what he eats most definitely is I give Aaron a dig in his side, which he steadfastly ignores; this'll give me more ammunition next time I find him thieving my cheesy nachos or stuffing his face with any comfort food come to that. Jan wasn’t kidding when she said that apart from some of the physiological differences, the classes are pretty much the same content as for expectant mothers. We both laughed when she said we can ignore anything we might have read about not being able to wear nail varnish during pregnancy, adding that it’s only if you have a C-section they remove it, same for all operations because they look at the colour of a person’s nails for circulation and when they need to use a finger clip which measures your pulse and percentage of oxygen in your blood.

I tense up a little at the mention of the C-word but Aaron squeezes my hand with a smirk on his face, “Maybe we should wear some after to celebrate; we’re going to need some practice if we have a girl. We could do it anyway for fun; bright pink for a girl and bright blue for a boy because I can promise you it will be the one and only time we do the cliché thing with the colours. I can just imagine Leyla’s comments now, it’ll be a laugh.”

Sniggering at the mischievous glint in his eye, I play along, “Knowing Leyla she’ll likely be the one insisting to paint it on, no doubt with glitter effect to cap it off. I think painting nails is a mum's job, so that's one for you I reckon.”

"Muppet; both of us do it or not at all and just think on, there'll be no daddy's girl for you if you can't do the pampering. That's daddy’s job I believe." Aaron's expression falters a little and then spreads out into a wide grin, "Unless they all turn out like the Dingle lot and then you’ve no chance."

"Let's hope we have boys then; even if they wear nail polish it'll be when they are much older." Before Aaron can whisper his next answer we stop our banter, having caught a glare from the couple next to us and I can feel Aaron’s body shaking from his chuckles.
Apparently it is better to advise in advance the do’s and don’ts for the mid-wife during the labour so we are clear about the things that are important to both of us; something else that we'll need to talk about. Jan covers all the different options around pain relief. I keep changing my mind as to how much I really want to know about it all when it comes to the details and I'm beginning to think ignorance is bliss; god knows what's going through Aaron's mind at this point.

Then again, listening attentively, I start thinking that this class might be useful in my battle to convince Aaron to change his mind about having a C-section, especially if all the others are going to have one. I haven’t given up just yet on getting him to change his mind. We had promised each other on the way here that we wouldn’t argue about the question of giving birth and I’m determined to keep my end of the bargain for us not to get drawn into one as Jan now launches into what to expect when Aaron first goes into labour. Then as she talks more about giving birth, I feel myself blanching a little as she demonstrates what happens to the pelvis and for this instant I’m very pleased Aaron is the pregnant one and it's probably a good thing that he already has an above average tolerance for pain. I quickly move myself away from that train of thought to concentrate as I’m going to need all this information to use in my strategy with him.

We are told how to recognize the signs of labour and when to ring the hospital and it’s not all just about Aaron. Partners-husbands aren’t left out, receiving a list of tips like always ensuring there is petrol in the car and to limit alcohol as well as being in charge of packing the bag for hospital so I always know where everything is and that nothing is forgotten. All of this just reinforces for me in my own mind that with a C-section we don’t have to go through half this trouble with everything set to our own managed pace instead of panic stations and false alerts.

Moving on the mid-wife talks about the time in hospitals or a mid-wifery unit and what it’s like which gets me to wondering if it’s worth considering going private instead of on the NHS and I make a mental note to do some more investigation on this.

It’s clear from some of the questions that giving birth is an uncomfortable subject for almost all of us as Jan asks everyone what they are considering for themselves. Interestingly, three of them say C-section without hesitation; Aaron answers natural birth but I hastily add that we are still considering our options; Aaron thankfully doesn't contradict me and seemingly ignores the stares he gets as if to say he’s mad, but then I’m irritated by the last guy saying that he’s considering giving birth at home because he was born at home. If I think Aaron is wrong in his choice then I reckon this bloke is certifiable and I don’t think I’m the only one. The mid-wife goes into more details and that this is strongly cautioned against for males as it is felt to be too dangerous with the level of current understanding about male birthing. I suppose I have to be thankful for small mercies that this is one road that Aaron doesn’t want to take, because there would be no way on this earth that I would ever let that happen.

When the class finally draws to a close Jan says that future sessions will be on feeding, which I’m looking forward to and quite intrigued about, then others will be more on basic new-born care which I’m less keen on, having the vivid experience of changing Charlie’s nappies and her being sick seared into my memory that I’m not sure how much more I need or want to know.

Once the mid-wife had wrapped up the class neither of us wanted to hang around making nice with the others. I’m surprised how quickly the two hours had passed and it doesn’t take us too long to arrive home. “You want to book an appointment to see the baby ward and the mid-wifery unit?”

“I’d thought about just the mid-wifery unit. I checked and there’s one in Hotten.”
I tug Aaron along with me into the kitchen, “It doesn’t hurt to look at both. We could even look at going private if you want.”

“What for?”

Starting to fill the kettle, Aaron nods when I motion if he also wants a drink, “Why not, it’s just covering all our bases. I want you to have the best care.”

“We don’t need to go private Robert, I’m not the first man to give birth and you know I hate hospitals.”

“All the more reason to have a look and compare; I reckon if we go private it’ll feel less like a hospital and be better than the mid-wifery unit with a lot more homely touches. It’s part of what you pay for at the end of the day.” I can see Aaron consider this more and I reel him in. “Let me find out how much it would cost and we take a look at them all and then decide.”

“Okay, you’re paying though if we go private.”

Aaron pulls a funny face whilst we wait for the kettle to boil, “You okay?”

“Mmhh, just felt some of those small jerky movements the mid-wife was talking about.” Aaron rests his chin on his hand, his elbow on the counter next to me. “I was just wondering if one of them has hiccups.” We grin at each other, “Is that not so weird, that they can hiccup like that when they’re inside me?”

Scooping Aaron up in my arms, I kiss into his neck, “I know, and suck their thumbs. It makes them human.” Aaron gives me an odd look at this. “You know what I mean, like they’re already real with real personalities.”

“Oh they are definitely their own personalities and I swear to god they are working as a team just to be sure I never forget they are there. As soon as one stops, the other one starts.”

“What do you expect between all those Sugden and Dingle genes mixed up and made nice; never boring remember.” Aaron grunts at this resigned to the inevitability of it all. “What do you think about going away for a few days holiday like the mid-wife suggested for a rest. We’ve not been anywhere since last summer and we never even talked about a honeymoon with everything after we got married.”

“I thought you wanted to work extra now to get things to a state where you can take some time off after they’re born?”

“I was, but it would be nice to have some quiet time to ourselves before. It’s not like we are ever going to have a holiday just the two of us again afterwards.”

Aaron doesn’t look too sure, shifting uncomfortably. “Let’s just stay here. Everything’s easier here and I don’t want to be somewhere with people staring at me or making comments. That’s hardly going to be restful is it and I know you’ll be on the phone half the time for work so it probably wouldn’t be much of a holiday.” Intending putting out a denial on this, Aaron’s knowing look puts a stop to it and realising he’s right, my mouth instead closes like a goldfish. Aaron smirks at me. “I’m okay with it Rob, it was always the plan to work hard on the business for the first year. We both signed up for that and being pregnant doesn’t change it.”

“I know, but I still feel kind of guilty.” With our foreheads and bodies pressed together, I run my
hands up his sides and down his back, landing on his hips as we kiss.

“Let's maybe go somewhere quiet for a long weekend or something in a few weeks and I'll hide your phone so you don't have a choice but to give me all of your attention. I'm sure I can find a way to make you forget about work for at least a couple of days.”

Aaron starts shifting his body against mine and I can feel myself responding, smiling as my body temperature rises, “I'm sure you can.”

With his sultry eyes luring me in, we kiss intensely whilst in-between attempting to continue talking, “We could even have a holiday for a few days after they are born. Just think we could make love all night and day with no holds barred, no bump to get in the way. I’m sure mum or Diane will look after them for us.”

Swivelling us both around, lifting Aaron onto the kitchen table, I pull off his jumper and t-shirt in one go, kissing into his neck, with it muffling my response, “You reckon? You’ll probably be on the phone every two minutes fussing and checking up on them.” I finish by teasing him, biting into his neck one more time with a kiss eliciting a scandalous moan from his lips that turns me on like you wouldn’t believe.

Responding in kind Aaron sucks down on my neck, the lust ratcheting up another notch with his hands wandering before tugging at my shirt buttons. Our faces are so close that I can feel his every breath, “You’ll be as bad, we’ll both just have to be more inventive than usual at distracting ourselves.”

“Nnngh.” With my shirt now hanging off my shoulders, my tongue slides into Aaron’s wet and warm mouth, putting a complete stop to the conversation as his fingers frantically unbutton my jeans, his hand massaging the already significant bulge just begging to be touched and having found something better to do, all our thoughts of holiday planning are temporarily suspended.

“If I’d have known getting you drunk would have done the trick, I’d have done it right from the offset.”

“I’m not drunk.”

“Tispy then.”

“I’m not tipsy either.” I flash my know-it-all smile at Pearl mischievously, “Maybe a bit mellowed out.”

Pearl lets it slide, “Another one?”

“If you insist, we wouldn’t want to lose the muse now would we?”

With a snort Pearl picks up the bottle of wine and we share a conspiratorial grin as she fills our glasses after which we both take a quick gulp as you do.

Considering the state I was in before I got here I’m feeling surprisingly nonchalant about everything. For the first time since lessons with Pearl started I’ve managed to knit more than a dozen rows that are still on the needles exactly as they should be and what I’ve knitted so far matching the picture on the pattern I’m following. I smile smugly to myself, now feeling confident that Aaron is going to have to eat his words and under no circumstances will he ever know that I’d begun to doubt even myself that maybe I was a lost cause on the knitting front.
Pearl’s needles are click-clacking away and it’s like she can tell what’s going through my mind, “You were over-thinking it.”

My response is the usual off the cuff remark, “Mmh, that’s kind of what I do; I’m the brain, Aaron’s the brawn.”

“Oh don’t underestimate that husband of yours; you know as well as anyone that he just has a different way about him.”

“And don’t I know it.” A hint of venom had sneaked into my tone and I’d been doing so well until now. Pearl raises her eyebrows, clearly expecting me to expand further, “I left him at home.......” Looking up from my knitting I grimace, “with lots to think about.”

She sniggers at the expression on my face, “I guessed you’d had an argument. You turned up with a face like thunder. You know his hormones are all over the place dear. It’ll all be forgotten about when you get home and he’ll be after a hug and a cuddle.”

“Not on this it won’t, this is way more than his hormones talking. We had words, the kind that are not so easy to unsay.” Being conveniently at the end of a row I push the ends of the needles through the ball of wool and put my knitting into the bag on the table before taking another big drink of wine to try and deflate the increasing tension creeping back into my body.

After a blazing row with Aaron I had left the cottage with absolutely no intention of coming to my scheduled knitting lesson with Pearl but stomping down the street I’d changed my mind, childishly not wanting him to have another of my flaws to throw in my face. Pearl had already opened the bottle when I got here and I seem to remember getting an entertained look as she watched me down the first glass in one go, then holding it out for an immediate re-fill. I’d attacked the knitting trying to avoid thinking about the row with Aaron and helped by the alcohol I had focused my thoughts on anything but him so that for the first time I’ve actually managed to knit exactly what I’m supposed to. God, I hope this doesn’t mean that I need to be angry or drunk to hold onto my new found aptitude so I can finish the damn cardigan or I’m doomed. I rarely drink this much these days and I seriously don't think I could cope with another row like this one.

Pearl pulls me out of my thoughts, “You and Aaron are always knocking heads about something or other. It’s what you do, pushing each other's buttons, isn't that what they call it these days.”

“Yeah, but we don’t usually push the self-destruct button. I can’t fathom out why he won’t see sense; he’s so set on doing it his own way and nothing I say seems to make a blind bit of difference.”

“Is this because of what was on the news earlier?” I look steadily at Pearl, surprised by her hitting the mark so readily, “Robert, I’m an old lady but I haven’t lost all my faculties just yet.”

A man had died after complications giving birth. This kind of thing reignites all the debate on the news and was the last straw breaking the fragile ceasefire we’d held on the subject, leading to a huge fight. “He doesn’t listen Pearl; he won’t listen to me, Paddy or Chas, or anyone come to that.” I rest back in the chair closing my eyes. Sometimes I feel so tired, there’s so much going on all the time, I never get a minute to just sit back and have time to think without distraction. Everything is always racing around in my head a million miles an hour. It’s quiet for a moment with just the ticking sound of the clock on the mantelpiece breaking the silence. Opening my eyes I decide to take the plunge. Talking it through with Pearl can’t make it any worse than when I left the cottage with Aaron shaking with rage on the verge of tears, both of us angrily refusing to back down despite the threats and ultimatums hurled between us. It had been such a stressful day at work, I didn’t have any energy
left to keep in control and not let it get to that stage after we had started to argue. “I want him to have a C-section, everyone in the village knows that and he point blank refuses to consider it, blatantly ignoring all the risks and caution from the doctor that it would be for the best.”

Pearl listens patiently while I present both sides of the argument; she’s probably heard it all before from Paddy, but it’s actually helping me now to say it all out loud to someone who isn’t family.

“Did Aaron tell you much about his time with Jackson and how he was afterwards?”

The change in subject catches me unawares and I look at her a little confused. “Yes. Well as far as I know, I think he told me everything. He doesn’t like talking about it, but he’s never hidden anything from me intentionally I don’t think. We talked a lot last year, you know after Gordon; he’d started to cut again after he came back to the village. Aaron almost died from it.”

“I didn’t know about that, but it’s no surprise.”

The truth of this is very sobering and it still makes me angry that he turned to harming himself instead of the people who love him to help and I can’t help snapping a retort. “It’s hardly something you talk about Pearl is it.”

Pearl watches me with that look she has peering over the top of her glasses in a way that it would be comical if it weren’t so serious, “Why do you think he’s digging his heels in so hard?”

Shrugging tiredly, I repeat what I’d said a short while ago, “He doesn’t want them to be born under a knife and he doesn’t want another scar.”

“Have you ever thought that for him there might be more to it than just that?”

“Like what?” Snapping once more, unsure where she is going with this, I tap my foot on the floor impatiently waiting for her to explain.

“After Jackson, he cut and hurt himself to cope. He didn’t want to do it but he did what Jackson asked. He set him free and that’s how Jackson saw it, being released from a prison he could never escape on his own.” Still with no idea where this is leading to, I grind my teeth to hold back saying something I might regret. "It was a lot of stress and pressure for someone so young and it marked him forever. He’s changed in a lot of ways since then and he’s happy again. Robert you make him happy and I think it’s the best thing to ever happen to him. He’ll have a real family of his own to love and care for; he's never had that before.”

“I still don’t see what any of this has to do with it. I really do get his reasons, truly I do but I can’t lose him Pearl and if we lost the babies, he’d never forgive himself and what if I blamed him, what if I couldn’t forgive him? It would destroy us.”

“You said he wants to give birth in hospital even though he hates them so if there was anything untoward he could still have an operation.”

“It’s not that simple, after a certain point in giving birth it becomes too late, it would then only happen if there was a threat to life and that in itself makes it very dangerous. What if something goes wrong after the point of no return, what then Pearl? He’s my entire world; what would I do if I had to choose? Aaron will always come first for me.”

“And these children are his world; they will come first for him, even before you maybe.”
Elbow resting on the chair arm and propping my head up with my hand, I sigh, exhausted by it all. “I know. I’ve known that ever since he told me and I accept it; it’s how Aaron’s wired.”

“He wants a clean slate Robert, free from the shadows of the past.”

Stubbornly belligerent I snap out my response, "Well we can't always have what we want."

Pearl doesn’t bite and calmly continues, “I had a lot of trouble with my son and I learned the hard way that being a parent means that you are forced to make some hard choices and doing the safest or the right thing doesn't always come into it. It's hard, very hard. This is very different, but what I'm trying to say is that to hold onto the person you love sometimes you have to give them what they need even if you don’t like it, understand or agree with it. You know Aaron well enough that he won’t budge on this, it's too important to him, it's something deep inside. Jackson wouldn't budge the same either so both Aaron and Jackson tried to shut each other out to try and cope, but when it came down to it they couldn't. Aaron gave Jackson what he needed and no matter what happened afterwards and how very hard that was for Aaron, he accepted it and they were together until the very end. So Robert, truth be told, unless you want Aaron to shut you out the same and risk losing him then you're fighting a losing battle. You don’t really have a choice and deep down you know it.”

TBC
March 2017 / Month 6 - Week 25: Aaron and Robert struggle to move past their argument.

Aaron, Thursday 23rd March 2017 (Week 25)

“Incoming.....”

Hearing Vic's yell up the staircase, I open the door wide to let them through and can’t help smirking at the thought that I’ve got both Leyla and Vic fetching and carrying at my beck and call which isn’t something that’s going to happen too often. They offered to help for the day so they can't have seriously expected me to say no and I've definitely made the most of it. "You didn't scrape anything on the way up did you?" Having collapsed through the door, I'm not too sure if their red faces are from the effort or a flash of irritation at my words, maybe a bit of both, admittedly it's been a long day. I feel a pang of guilt but it honestly only lasts a few milliseconds, “Just set it over there, I'll sort everything else tomorrow; I think that's it, we're pretty much done I reckon. Good job ladies.” I beam at them, pointedly ignoring their muttering and grumbling, "We can head over to the pub if you like and I'll buy you that thank you drink I promised."

“It’ll take more than the one, I’m thinking the bottle,” raised eyebrows and the look on Leyla’s face makes it clear there’s no room for negotiation with Vic smiling at me in tacit agreement, “In fact I think a bottle each is in order.” Sliding down the wall, Leyla sits on the floor, looking back up at me, “Flipping 'eck Sugden, they don’t make them like that anymore; I'll never complain about putting flat pack together ever again.”

Very much doubting this, I resist the urge to be sarcastic, turning away from them in the knowledge that my face is probably getting that pinky-flushed effect which is becoming a habit of late and yet again I blame the hormones for making me all sentimental. I still love being called by my married name; it never gets old, sending me all warm and tingly inside. It makes me think of family, our family of four, but today the same as every other day this week these thoughts are tinged with a sadness that has gradually taken over just a little bit more with the passing of each day. Chastising myself, I know I can't think like that; today was meant to be a happy distraction, not dwelling on things that are, for now at least, out of my control. I keep telling myself to be positive, but my confidence is wavering; maybe this wasn’t such a good idea just yet after all.

Leaving them to take a breather, I pull myself together, re-focus and concentrate on manoeuvring the sturdy wooden frame of Robert’s old childhood cot into the position I want next to the modern new one we put together earlier. Taking a step back for a final check, satisfied with the result, I reach down into the new cot to switch one of the fluffy rabbits that Robert had bought, gently propping it up in one of the corners of the newly arrived reconditioned cot. Despite a thirty-odd year age gap, the two cots look just right, side by side in their new home and it's with reluctance that I resist the tugging inside me to already start putting the covers on to see the final effect. I so can’t wait to get them all decked out along with the rest of the finishing touches for the nursery. Instead I sigh and content myself with placing the quilts, still in their plastic covers, inside each cot in readiness.
The love within me is practically bursting at the seams; I'm impatient to hold the twins in my arms for the first time as I imagine nursing them before laying them down to sleep. My hand falls unconsciously to rest on my bump, feeling the dynamic duo do their thing, the permanent reminder that our lives have altered forever and I wouldn’t change it for the world. Leyla and Vic catch the look on my face and exchange grins, making me blush, but I don’t care, they both know all too well that I’m pretty much a puddle of goo every time I think about the babies being born.

Leyla groans whilst hauling herself up off the floor, “So tell me again, why were we your chosen minions to do this instead of your big lump of a husband?” Once up she nudge Vic with her elbow, “And where’s your other half when he’s needed come to that?”

“You're such a cloth ears sometimes, we told you yesterday. Aaron wants to surprise Robert for when he comes back tomorrow and Adam’s not good with secrets so I got Nicola to rope him into doing a delivery for Home James to keep him out of the way for the day.”

I nudge Leyla playfully, “You offered remember and with the mural finished you have to admit it needed a careful eye to put everything together without damaging anything and obviously your attention to detail. Can you imagine Adam or Robert with their clodhopper feet and clumsy hands; it would be like bulls in a china shop in comparison. I wouldn’t trust anyone with this except you two; some things just need a certain woman's touch to make it perfect.”

"Mmmhh," Seeing the twinkle in my eye Leyla smirks at Vic, “He’s buttering us up isn’t he?”

"Just a tad.” Vic nods back at Leyla grinning, I swear they’ve been perfecting their own version of a double act during the day, “Flattery will get you everywhere Aaron but don't think for one minute you're going to get out of buying us copious amounts of wine in gratitude.”

With a mock show of offence I grin back, “Pfft, can’t take a compliment much.”

“Yeah yeah, you know we love you,” Standing in front of me she rests her hands over my tummy, "And both of you too my little ones." I smile at Vic's tired sigh, "I still can't believe you don't want to know what sex they are.”

Catching me off guard she pushes the conversation onto more dangerous ground, “How come Robert’s off anyway? You never said and he never mentioned it; normally he can’t stand being away from you or Batman and Robin for long during the day, never mind a whole week.” I see the sneaky look of amusement she gives Leyla as she moves to gather her things, “They’re so cute.”

It’s a struggle not to let my face slip, but I think I manage it, “Conference in Newcastle; he wasn’t going to go but he changed his mind last minute after being invited by some clients in the area.”

Leyla frowns and I can almost see the cogs in her head whirring away, “I still thought he'd have said something to one of us at least with him being gone so long and anyway that's no excuse for not picking up or replying to my texts all week. Sometimes your husband can be a real arse and for another thing what if we needed to get hold of him.....?”

She lets her words trail off looking a little guilty, the implication that something could maybe go wrong still implicit in her words. I shrug, turning away, hiding my face as I finish putting some of the baby clothes we've accumulated onto the shelf, “Like I said it was last minute. Maybe you wound him up too much and he’s taken his bat and ball home.”

“ Nope, not recently and he always gives as good as he gets; Robert loves our verbal sparring, it
keeps him on his toes.”

Groaning inwardly, I know I need to move things into a different direction as I turn back around, “We should get going……“

However, having mulled over Leyla's words, Vic cuts me off mid flow, “Now you come to mention it, he’s been ignoring my calls and texts as well.”

Vic has that look on her face which probably means she's counting all the times Robert has avoided her attempts to reach him in the last week; I'm certain it's a lot less than he’s avoided me and I snap a retort. “Well maybe he wants some space from nosy nagging females; I’m beginning to know how he feels.” Taking my wallet from my pocket I pull out a couple of twenties, “You know what, ‘ere you go, I’m too tired for the pub and I can't drink anyway; why don’t you two go and enjoy your hard-earned wine. Just don’t blame me when you both wake up with a hangover because you don't know when to stop.”

Leyla wags her finger at me, teasing, “Oi, be nice to the females who’ve just spent the day helping you finish off your dream nursery to surprise him, which is looking perfect I might add.” She means it kindly but I still scowl at her, wishing they'd just go now. I know I couldn't have done all this today without their help but I'm tired and annoyed at the turn in conversation and having allowed them to wind me up so easily; I should know better but something in me is ready to break.

Vic is on a roll now, coming closer she's watching for my reaction, most likely knowing that they are onto something; she’s as bad as Robert when she gets an idea in her head, “And another thing, I’m surprised he hasn’t been on the phone every two minutes, to you and everyone else, mithering and making sure you’re all okay. That last time he was only gone the one night and he was never off the thing, he drove us all nuts but he hasn’t called you once all day.”

“Well maybe he’s gotten past being all overprotective, just because I'm pregnant doesn't mean I need mollycoddling; it'll do us good to have a bit of time apart instead of being always on top of each other.” With that I manage to escape past them both, bolting downstairs into the kitchen.

Staring through the window at the darkness outside, I kick myself; I know I've now got them properly suspicious, my words had come out a lot harsher than I’d intended. I love Leyla and Vic, but they are like ferrets when they get a hold of something, they don’t let go and I’m almost beginning to regret asking them to help. A shuffling of feet and the scrape of kitchen chairs tells me they aren’t going anywhere voluntarily and I brace myself. Turning around with my best game face on, I’m even surprised at how calm I sound, “Look, you both know that building his business up is really important now to get it properly off the ground; it's what we agreed so he can then have some time off after the birth. It just means that sometimes he has to put all his focus into work instead of worrying about home every two minutes.”

Vic frowns and I can tell she's not quite buying it, “So, you haven’t had a falling out or anything?”

Agitated, I turn my back to them and fill the kettle, snapping my response, "Everything's fine Vic, a bed of bloody roses." The silence is deafening and they know they have their answer, it's just not the one I want them to believe and I suddenly feel the weight of our problems dragging me down as I join them at the kitchen table waiting for the water to boil.

Leyla quietly prods further, “Aaron, he is just at a conference and visiting clients right, there's nothing else going on is there?”
Without warning, my resolve crumbles completely and I can’t seem to stop the words tumbling out of my mouth, “As far as I know he is, but we haven’t really spoken all week, just a few texts.” Miserable and tired, I avoid their eyes, but they can’t have mistaken the uncertainty in my voice. “He probably just needs some space away from me right now.” Shit, gulping, I realise I said that out loud. I didn't mean to actually say what I’ve been thinking all week; I hate how being pregnant messes with my emotions so much. Before I would just have fobbed them off without any trouble and pushed them out of the door, now I’m just a bumbling mess and I don’t even attempt to stop the tear falling down my cheek. Defeated, I swipe at it with my sleeve. I’ve come to learn that I’m not in control of anything hardly anymore and that I just have to wait for everything to run its course. Glancing between them, I take a deep breath, “He’s agreed to let me give birth naturally.”

Clearly confused at why I’m upset, Vic puts her hand over mine, her eyes full of concern, “Which is what you wanted right, that’s a good thing?”

“I didn’t really give him a choice, or to be exact I did give him a choice.” Vic waits, expecting me to explain further. The memory of our argument has been haunting me since he left a few days after we’d rowed. Everything had been increasingly strained and although he said he’d support my decision, it was obvious that he still wasn't happy about it. He hadn’t even given me any warning, just come downstairs with a bag packed on Monday morning and announced he was going to the conference in Newcastle and taking another couple of days to visit some clients in the area. He was out of the door and in the car before I’d properly registered everything. He was out of the door and in the car before I’d properly registered everything. I seem to remember him mentioning being invited to the two-day conference a while ago, but at the time he’d said he didn’t think it was worth the money and wasn’t going to go. We haven't spoken since he left and not from my lack of trying.

“We had a blazing row last week, everything kind of blew up about how I’m going to give birth; it's been brewing for a while. It was the worst row I think we’ve ever had; I've never seen him so angry, we both were I suppose. I gave him an ultimatum, either get with the programme or get out kind of thing.” Vic’s eyes widen, her hand over mine stilling my nervous fidgeting. This is probably the last thing either of them expected to hear, especially after spending such a good day finishing off the nursery as a surprise for his return. Defiantly I respond to their shocked stares, “Don’t look at me like that Vic, he had a few choice words of his own.”

“But he knows you didn’t mean it right? And you said yourself he's agreed to what you wanted; he wouldn't do that if he didn't mean it. Aaron you’re both too stubborn for your own good, I should know; he’ll come round you know he will.”

I smile a little at her acknowledgement of that well known family trait but it quickly fades, “That’s the thing though Vic, I did mean it, I still do and Robert knows that.” Vic starts as if she wants to speak, her mouth part open, but no words come; it’s not often I see her stuck for words quite like this. “After we argued last week, he stormed out, it was really late by the time he came back and I was already in bed. I can't keep my eyes open that late, I never even heard him come home. The next day he said he’d slept in the nursery because he’d gotten drunk and didn’t want me having to wake up to him reeking of alcohol.” The morning after it was weird between us; coming downstairs, it had almost felt like any other day with him leaning against the counter, gulping down his coffee and making my breakfast, all dressed for work except for his tie, his hair still wet from the shower. However, it was anything but like a normal day. “He said he wouldn’t fight me anymore on it and would support my decision, whatever I wanted to do.”

I should have been happy, but I’ll never forget the look on his face as he told me. I had forced him to concede but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t hide how much he was upset about it, upset
with me. Since then, there’s been no mistaking the rift that had emerged. Something serious had
shifted between us and it worsened over the weekend that when he left for his trip on Monday it had
been a kind of relief. But at night I can’t sleep, then when I do, I wake up filled with worry and it
kills me that he’s not here to hold onto, desperate to hear his voice soothing and calming, telling me
it’s going to be alright. He’d said he would be home at the end of the week and he had texted as
much since but I can’t help feeling unsettled and insecure that he might change his mind and not
come home.

Aaron, Friday 24th March 2017 (Week 25)

On his way home Robert had finally texted saying he’d be late unexpectedly so not to wait up and I
went to bed crying; he still couldn’t even pick up the phone to call me. I’m beginning to wonder if
things between us will ever find their balance again and what that might mean once he’s home. What
if he can’t find a way to accept that I’m not going to change my mind? It’s not a choice for me, no
matter how much I love him; I can’t back down on this even if that means hurting Robert.

I don’t remember dropping off to sleep, but I sure as hell know it when I’m woken by the acrobatics
going on in my belly, mumbling to the kids that daddy can’t sleep when they are having this much
fun in their playground and that I’m not amused. Unsurprisingly they don’t listen and I roll onto my
back groaning in frustration from the discomfort. Robert’s absence beside me in bed each night had
been unbearable but by now at least I have gotten to the point where I’ve stopped reaching out for
him every time I wake up. I almost didn’t notice him, then after rubbing my eyes I look again to test
if his silhouette against the window was real or just a shadow of my imagination. Still unsure, leaning
over, I switch the bed-side light on, squinting a little from the sudden brightness. As my vision clears
I realise it really is Robert sitting in the bed-side chair, quietly watching me and the butterflies kick in,
and for once it’s not because of the twins.

He’s still dressed, wearing jeans and a t-shirt which I recognise as being one of my old ones and I
bite my bottom lip to stop myself from teasing him, acutely aware that this probably isn’t a good time
to be cracking jokes. “Hey you got back safe and sound then, you okay?”

After a slight hesitation he answers, “Yeah, about that, I got waylaid leaving and then there was a big
accident on the motorway. I should have called you, I’m sorry.”

Despite wanting to retort that yes he ruddy well should have, I manage to keep my tone
reconciliatory, “It’s okay.”

“No, no it’s not okay.” His voice is unsteady and I’m unable to tell from his expression what’s going
on in that head of his. Wiping the sleep from my eyes, I’m unsure what to say next, I’m too tired to
be angry and it feels like it’s all been said so many times before. Propping the pillows up behind me,
I shuffle myself up the bed so I can sit upright. When I’m almost settled, he continues but doesn’t
finish, his words trailing off into nothing, “I should have called......, I.....”

There’s an awkward silent pause hanging between us. The ache from missing him so much all week
feels worse than ever even though he’s now sat opposite me, which just serves to put me on the
defensive, “Robert, you’re going to have to stop being mad at me, you can’t keep this up forever.”

He looks as weary as I feel, “I’m not, not anymore.”

Our somersaulting children are really not helping the situation and I grimace whilst shifting a little in
an attempt to get more comfortable, my voice laced with an angry frustration, “You sure about that,
because we haven’t spoken all week. Don’t worry I got the message after the hundredth call that you
didn’t want to talk to me and all those lovey-dovey texts really left an impression, all five of them.”

He snorts with a flicker of wry amusement in his eyes, “What, you didn’t appreciate me telling you that the hotel’s chicken was worse than your mother’s?

"Go figure." Knowing that I’m not blameless in pushing us to this point, I take a deep breath but I can’t hide how much his lack of communication had hurt, “You sent me a text a day so I knew you were alive and I knew you were coming home but I didn’t have a clue what to expect when you got here.” I force myself to take another deep breath, the not knowing of where we stand is killing me and I blurt out the words, “Are you staying? I don't want you to leave Robert, please don't leave.”

Robert moves to the bed and gets in beside me under the covers, shoving me over a little to make room before pulling me into him wrapping his arms around me, my head resting in the crook of his neck, “I’m not sure I knew what to expect when I got here either, I chickened out from calling I think, it was easier that way.” He squeezes me with his arm as if in apology. His hand guides my head so we are facing each other, our noses almost touching as his hand strokes down my cheek, our eyes searching out the comfort we've been missing whilst being apart. "I love you more than anything and I should have said that before I left on Monday and I should have told you that every day since. I'm sorry Aaron, I promise I'm not going anywhere, I just needed some distance.”

“I don’t understand if you.....”

Stilling my lips with his fingers he continues, “Sshhh; I needed to have an argument with myself and I didn’t want you to derail it by pissing me off which wouldn't have turned out well the frame of mind I was in. You see I do know what I’m like. I don’t react well when I’m in not in control or backed into a corner and you know how good I am at screwing things up even more when that happens and I couldn't risk losing you or these little ones because of it.” His hand slides down my front resting on my tummy and I can feel the love for us coming off him in waves as he tips his head forward until his forehead is touching mine. “Aaron, it scares the crap out of me you giving birth naturally because I don’t want to lose any of you and I don’t want to have to make a choice if something goes wrong. I’m scared that I’ll blame myself and fall apart or blame you, the twins, or lash out at anyone else. I also know how much this means to you, why you want it so badly and that there’s just as much chance everything will be fine; it doesn’t mean I’ll stop worrying though, there are just so few statistics to help me feel it’s a safe option.”

“You could have said that before you left. Do you know what you've put me through this week?”

“Would it really have changed anything if I had, made you fret any less? I still needed to get away for a bit Aaron to work it through in my head without any distraction.”

“Maybe, I don't know, probably not, but it would have been better than not knowing anything.”

“I know I haven’t handeled this very well, but you’re not the only one who can’t always control how they feel. I couldn’t put it in perspective, I was too angry, inside I was still very angry with you Aaron. You asked me to make a choice and I did even though I didn't like it but I stand by that choice if you’ll still let me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

Realising I'm trembling a little, Robert pulls the duvet in around us probably thinking I'm feeling
cold, but it's more the emotion running through me and I cling tightly to him as he kisses my forehead softly. “So, what changed?”

Robert's fingers stroke down my cheek and I can feel his warm breath as he speaks, “Nothing really; I wrote down every single scenario I could think of, good and bad, and thought about how I would need to handle it. Think of it as a Robert Sugden coping strategy on how not to go off the rails when his husband goes into labour.”

"You and your lists."

"Don't knock it, I'm here aren't I? I need you to promise me a couple of things though Aaron."

"I'll do my best."

"Promise me if anything even begins to start to go wrong you'll let them do a C-section if it’s still possible."

Grabbing his face in my hands, holding us as close as possible, I try to convey the sincerity of my words with my eyes piercing into his, “I promise; believe it or not Robert I don't actually have a death wish.”

“I know you think I’m worrying unnecessarily and if everything goes to plan, you can spend the rest of our lives reminding me how stupid I am but you have your demons and I have my own. I love our children with all my heart and they aren’t even born yet, but I can’t imagine a life without you in it. Aaron do you understand that? You're always going to come first for me. Without you the rest is meaningless and I’m not sure I’d manage if I had to bring them up on my own. I grew up without a mum for the most part and it wasn’t a happy childhood; I hated my dad for a lot of my life and to be honest I still do so I know from experience that the loss of a parent isn’t an easy void to fill.” I start to interrupt but he cuts me off, “No Aaron; let me finish because this is important to me. If I have to make a choice because something goes wrong then all I ask is that you try and understand my reasons and not hate me for it whatever the outcome.”

“This conversation is so wrong Robert. Say you did make a choice to save me over the twins, it doesn't mean that you still won't hate yourself for it, what then?”

“I don’t know any more than you do Aaron. I don’t think I’m saying anything you don’t already know, I just needed to say it out loud and for you to understand a little bit more of where this is coming from. We could always try for more children or adopt, but I’d never get another you. I just don’t want you to hate me for loving you more than life itself.”

“Please tell me you didn't spend all week thinking about this?”

“No, well not only this, I did have to work as well. I just reminded myself about all the good stuff and that I married the strongest person I know and if anyone can do this you can.”

"I promise to try Robert, that's as much as I can give you but is that enough?"

“Yes, it's enough. I love you so much.”

“I love you too. Now are you going to get undressed and come to bed properly?”

“Yeah, in a minute, just hold me.”
It feels like I'm crushing him, we're pressed so close together, our bodies tightly intertwined. “Robert, our children will be perfect, healthy and beautiful and I'll be fine; I believe things happen for a reason. Getting pregnant is a gift we would never have dreamed possible, but I did conceive without us even trying and my body has been rearranged so I can give birth. Don't forget men have given birth naturally without any problem, it's not like we're the first to do this.”

I run my fingers through Robert's hair after getting a sense from his body of just how deeply emotional he is feeling, his response practically a whisper. “I know, just sometimes I get so scared.”

“Join the club. I can't explain it, but I feel like it's meant to be; I just know it's going to be okay.” We lie quietly cuddling each other for a while. Robert creates a slight space between us, placing a hand on my swollen belly, his fingers gently stroking and caressing. Needing to set something of my own straight, despite the smile, my voice takes on a more serious tone, “Don't ever do that again though; leave like that without at least having a proper conversation. You worried the shit out of me, and believe me when Daddy’s unhappy, the dynamic duo pick up on it making it a million times worse. I already burst into tears enough as it is for no reason. I cried the other day just because we ran out of bread, so you can imagine how bad this week has been. In future we find a way to talk properly okay?”

"I promise; I'm so sorry Aaron, I'll make it up to you."

The remaining tension in his body dissipates when I smile at him, switching to a more playful mode, "Too right you will. You have massages to make up for and do you know how hard it is now to jerk off with my hand these days, I've almost become a contortionist trying to get off. My dick still doesn't seem to care about all my other problems.”

“Well I didn't get off once stuck in my lonely hotel room; it's not the same without my horny husband.” Robert's hands roam down over my back, grabbing at my bum to pull me back in close, all with a cheeky grin on his face.

“Mmhh that reminds me, I didn’t even know which hotel you were in or anything.”

“Nicola had details if you really needed to get hold of me.”

I can’t believe I didn’t think of that. “Oh now you tell me. I’m glad to know where I really rank in the line of importance.”

“You know you hold the number one spot, always have and always will, you always did even when I was being an idiot and still with Chrissie.”

“Mmhh still an idiot when you want to be,” For that I get pinched on my bum cheeks and yelp out not having expected it. "Now now, be nice to the father of your children." He smirks at me mischievously, "Oh and before I forget, you might want to keep out of Vic and Leyla’s way for a few days, I kind of told them; well they dragged it out of me really. I already got my earful and telling off so I’m pretty sure you’ll cop the same one way or another.”

“I'll survive.” Robert buries his face in my neck kissing, his teeth leaving their mark. With a decisive movement he swivels his body out from under the duvet, stretches with his arms raised upwards, tipping his head from side to side. "I'm knackered, it was a long drive." He turns his head, observing me an instant, "I should go clean my teeth and get out of these clothes, maybe have a shower. You want to help me wash my hair dear?"

He leans over to kiss me and I grab his hand, “I have something to show you first, come on, help me up.”
Managing to stand up with a modicum of gracefulness, me naked and Robert fully clothed, I tug his hand, pulling him along after me. Entering the nursery I flip on the switch for the mobile hanging above the cots and watch his face light up in wonder whilst he surveys the finished nursery, the warm glow and shadows dancing around the room to the soft tune playing. "Welcome to your children’s world daddy; I wanted to surprise you." Seeing him like this fills me with joy and it makes all the hard work worthwhile. "Leyla and Vic helped, you should have seen them lugging your old cot up here; I didn’t know Vic knew that many swear words, it was hilarious."

Robert fingers trace lightly over the animals dangling down from the mobile before turning back to me. His fingertips start to stroke down my cheeks, his touch fleeting over my neck making my body hair stand on end as they continue their journey, trailing down my sides. I quiver from the sensation and Robert's voice as he finally speaks, “It’s beautiful, you're beautiful Aaron; you have no idea how much you turn me on just looking at you.”

Our kiss is soft at first, deepening as my tongue teases further inside his mouth, our bodies brushing against each other and I can feel just how hard he is as I start to unbutton his jeans. “You know, even when I’m pissed off with you I can't stop loving you.” Rubbing our shafts together, I suck on his bottom lip gently before moaning into his mouth as my desire takes over completely, "God I want you so much, fuck me Robert; make love to me and take me apart."

After pulling his t-shirt up over his head his lips crush mine until the need to breathe forces them apart, “Do I get to put you back together again as well?”

“You’d better. Our children need both parents remember.” About to say something else, I find myself unable as Robert's mouth covers mine once more, his hands pulling me down to the floor and all the worries of the past week disappear as my husband slowly unravels my body and soul.

TBC
Aaron, Monday 27th March 2017 (Week 26)

I halt with a start and not quite knowing what to do for an instant I hover before making a decision, “I was expecting Dan to be here, he said you were off. It doesn’t matter, just tell him I’ll come back later.”

Turning round to head back the way I’d come I’m annoyed with myself for feeling embarrassed when I have absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about; silently muttering to myself questioning why they get to me so much.

“Wait. You’re here now and the car’s ready.”

Cain is unreadable as ever and the latent anger that has been festering away inside me in spite of having ignored it well and truly until now is bubbling up to the surface and turning to face him, the months of pent up hurt is undisguised on my face. “I wouldn’t want to darken your day by my unnatural presence, I’ll come back later if that’s all the same.”

“I never said that.”

“You didn’t need to say it out loud, you’ve made it very clear how you feel about me. You might not have been the one to call me that but you didn’t disagree neither. You can deny all you like but I heard everything Cain.”

“You have no idea, Aaron.”

“Well you could always try talking, but then I think I’ve seen and heard everything I needed or wanted to. You attacked my husband when I was in hospital and you haven’t wanted a bar of me since you found out so I’m hardly going to expect you start acting like a caring human being now.”

“Not true, Robert warned me off, did he tell you that?”

“He told you to apologise and surprise surprise two months later I’m still waiting.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Yes, it was Cain; it really was that simple. Last year when everything was all fucked up around
Gordon and the trial, you said you’d always love me no matter what and I believed you. I thought I could count on you to have my back, not be one of them that sticks a knife in it. You didn’t even have the guts to say what you thought to my face, mouthing off instead with Zak and Sam behind my back.” I’m tired, my swollen feet and ankles have been giving me grief all day not helping my mood any. I don’t think I have a pair of trainers or shoes that fit me anymore. At this rate, I’ll have to buy some new ones; either that or spend the next three months in flip flops. With my discomfort spurring me on, I turn my attention back to Cain, “Tell Dan to call me when he’s back and you’re not around.”

My priorities have shifted and I don’t have the energy for arguing; with nothing left to say I turn on my heels but the anger must have propelled me a little bit quicker than I intended; the world around me is all but a blurry vision and everything suddenly feels so far away.

The dizziness fades and it’s only when I open my eyes fully that I realise I’m sat on a buffet at the back of the workshop. I have no recollection of getting here. Robert’s going to have a field day with this, though I can probably get away with him not finding out; it’s not as though Cain is going to tell him, it’d be more than his life’s worth. Talking of Cain, I can feel him nudging me to get my attention, “Ere, have a drink of this.”

Batting away his hand defiantly I ignore the little voice at the back of my head going, ‘don’t be so stupid’ and instead attempt to get up, which definitely isn’t the best idea I’ve had all day. Begrudgingly I’m grateful as Cain’s hand steadies me, supporting my weight to sit me back down and I give in, letting my head drop in-between my knees. In fact, I’m beginning to think this entire day is one bad idea. Stupid people staring at me at the supermarket this morning and now this, I should have just stayed at home all cosy and stuck to the original plan of doing the scrap yard books for the end of the month so I suppose this is payback for playing truant from work.

“You’re not going to be sick or anything are you? Do you need a bucket?”

Laughing at the ridiculousness of the situation, “No Cain, I’m not going to be sick, that stopped a long time back; I’m six months gone.”

“Good, good. It’s ah....., well it’s been a long time and I’ve forgotten some of the timings and whatnot.”

Strangely amused, I snort an unpleasant laugh, “Kyle’s not that old, but oh yeah, there’s another pregnancy you right royally fucked up.” Finally feeling more like my usual self, considering anyway, I slowly sit up and lift my eyes. Cain is grimacing, tight-lipped and I’d clearly hit the mark which stupidly makes me feel ten times better. “Well help me up then, I wouldn’t want you to be seen with an abomination of nature any more than absolutely necessary.”

Trying to hoist myself up, Cain’s hand presses firmly on my shoulder, “You’re not going anywhere just yet; here have another slurp of that whilst I put the kettle on.”

Scoffing out loud, I don’t hold back with a caustic edge to my voice, “Don’t bother yourself; anyone would think you care at this rate.”

“I do care, you idiot.”

“That’s right, call your pregnant nephew an idiot.”
“Right now you are, yeah.”

“Whatever you say, Cain. You’re just scared mum’ll rip your balls off if she finds out about this.”

“Maybe, and you’d be grounded after they find out you fainted.”

“Manly wooziness, I don’t do fainting.”

“If you say so.”

“I do.”

“This happen a lot?”

“No, it’s just been a long shitty day.” Realising I’m not ready to be going anywhere soon, I listen to Cain pour the water and the clinking of the spoon stirring the teabag until the appropriate colour is achieved.

“You still take three sugars?”

“Yeah, though I don’t really drink much tea these days and coffee is just a downright no-no; can’t stand the smell, I have hot water more than anything.”

“I can pour you another if you want?”

“No, tea’s fine, I’ll live I’m sure.”

“You’d better, or I’ll have more than Chas and my balls to worry about.”

“See, there you go again, making me think you give a shit.”

“Just because I wasn’t all gushing and cooing doesn’t mean I don’t Aaron. I care more than you know. It’s just....., it’s just weird that’s all.”

“Tell me about it, how do you think I feel waddling round, crying at every little thing that doesn’t go right.”

“Well, you always did like a good cry.”

There’s a hint of a smile in his eyes but I’m too wound up to appreciate his feeble attempt at humour if that’s what it was, “Oh, you’re so fucking funny.”

“Better out than in.”

“Tell yourself that and take your own advice, and I might actually believe you.” Leaning against the counter, arms folded, I study him and try to work out what’s going on in that thick head of his and I realise it’s a pointless exercise; he’s as hard to read as ever. I certainly didn’t get his genes when it comes to emotions, which I suppose is a good thing considering he is about as emotionally stunted as it gets most of the time.

Shifting, looking uncomfortable from my unwavering stare he breaks the silence, “So what’s it like?”

“Imagine you’ve been out for the best Indian ever with the love of your life, the works, second helping and everything and lots of good beer; but despite it being the best night of your life, you
spend the rest of it feeling so bloated that you can’t sleep and when you do, you’re snoring and farting for England. Throw in non-stop acrobatics and kicking on your insides, especially on your bladder that you might as well spend your entire day sitting on the bog, that about sums it up but it lasts for nine months. That and I feel horny all the time. Robert says I’ve turned into the male equivalent of a nymphomaniac. Did you know that’s called a satyromaniac? I had to look it up. Don’t you think it’s strange no-one’s hardly heard of it, doesn’t have quite the same ring to it I suppose, but everyone knows what a nymphomaniac is; well, this is me, this is my life and do you know what, I wouldn’t swap it for the world, not ever. I can’t wait to see my children born so fuck you and fuck everyone who thinks I’m a freak show.”

The stunned silence from both of us hangs in the air until Cain finally speaks, “I don’t think that.”

“Funny way of showing it.”

“Yeah well, I’m not good at emotions.”

“Tell me something I don’t know, but there’s a difference Cain between that and being a complete arsehole.”

“I suppose I deserve that.”

“Oh, I could do more if you’d like. Would like me to continue?”

“Nope, I think I got the gist.”

“Oh goody. Can I go now?”

“You’ve not finished your tea.”

I can’t help but laugh at the absurdity of it all, “Apologise and maybe I’ll finish my tea. You’d best make it fucking good though if want any part of my life or my children.”

Robert, Monday 27th March 2017 (Week 26)

Getting home early for our visit to the ante-natal class tonight, closing the door behind, me I wasn’t expecting to hear the sound of voices and I’m most unhappy when it sounds like Cain. It takes all my restraint to not drag him out of our kitchen when I enter seeing him stirring what smells like macaroni cheese on the cooker but I’m well aware that in a fight I’d lose and I don’t want Aaron caught in the middle risking him getting hurt. “What’s he doing here?”

Seeing the look between them, I grind my teeth resisting the urge to punch Cain’s lights out, but it’s a close call when he answers, “We had a chat.”

“Cosy and did that ‘chat’ include an apology?”

It’s Aaron who answers this time, “Yes and some. I made him grovel, mum would have been proud.”

Unconvinced and feeling protective, I’m not prepared to accept this at face value, “Yeah well, excuse me if I don’t feel all warm and fuzzy. Proof’s in the pudding an’ all.” I don’t expect any further explanation from Cain, it’s not what he does and just because he’s wormed his way round Aaron doesn’t mean he likes me any more than he ever did and I will never forgive him for what he’s put Aaron through these past few months.
He looks at me as if butter wouldn’t melt, “Aaron was hungry.”

“Aaron’s always hungry, you’d know that if you’d been anywhere near this last three months.”

“He said.”

Aaron remains strangely quiet, staring at his mug, but clearly listening to the exchange. “I’m going for a shower.” I forgo the usual kiss I give him when I get in from work, needing to distance myself from the situation before saying something I regret because I know Aaron and whatever has gone on between them, I can see it on his face that this isn’t temporary. Just another thing I’ll have to accept whether I want to or not.

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Coming out of the shower, I reach for the towel which finds its way into my hands a lot earlier than it should have when on the towel rail. Towelling my head quickly, before starting to dry the rest of my body, Aaron is calmly sat on the side of the bath watching me intently and I hold my tongue not wanting to start an argument. Although it’s been good between us since I got back from Newcastle, it still feels fragile; we’re not quite back to where we were. Sometimes I want to suggest moving somewhere else, no Dingles, no outside interference from my lot or anyone causing upset.

“Your car’s good for another year, MOT was fine.”

“Mhm-hhm.” I head into the bedroom to grab some clean clothes avoiding the inevitable conversation for as long as possible. Although I can’t help feeling a little more relaxed as Aaron sidles up behind me wrapping his arms around my front, his right hand reaches down, his fingers not so subtly stroking over my abdomen and downwards that I’m already half hard as I do my best to decide what I want to wear. Selecting joggers and a t-shirt I pull away from Aaron determined that we don’t brush over this with sex. If I’ve learnt one thing from last week is that we need to communicate more. Aaron leans against the wardrobe door watching me pull on the clothes, he doesn’t attempt anything else but his eyes devour every part of my body which in itself is a huge turn on and it takes all my willpower not to let him have his wicked way with me.

“We talked and he’s still struggling with the biology part of it, he’s okay with the fact that in three months’ time he’s going to have two little nieces or nephews.”

“Well that’s alright then, we just forget about the last three months as if they never happened.”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it; but if we want to have any chance of being a family I have to accept his apology and give him a chance. Maybe if he starts being okay with everything, then Zak and some of the others might as well.”

“And what if it all goes pear-shaped, what then? Aaron, you almost started harming yourself last time.”

“I won’t and I didn’t.” Sitting down on the bed, I pull on my slippers and he comes to sit beside me as I stare at the dresser remembering being in this exact same position not too long ago seeing the razor blade and feeling scared to death with everything spiralling out of control.

“I don’t know if I can forgive him, Aaron.”

“I know. We have to try though, I want to try.”

“Even after everything?”
“He’s blood, family whether you like it or not.”

“Your blood, not mine.”

“Blood to our children. Just go with me on this, please Robert. It's a step in the right direction; you know this is important to me.”

Biting my tongue so hard, I actually taste blood and I decide not to answer; it’s clear Aaron’s mind is made up on this and I don’t want to argue. “Didn’t think you liked macaroni cheese and he’s not staying for tea is he?”

“I fancied it and no, he’s not staying for tea; he left already. He was just helping; my feet were all swollen and tired from standing up.” Lying back on the bed he wiggles his toes, “If I beg, will you give me a foot massage?” Softening, I smile at him, that daft adorable smirk he has plastered all over his face melts my heart, just as he knew it would, “We have twenty minutes to kill whilst tea is in the oven.”

“Depends; what's in it for me?”

“What would you like?”

“I’ll let you know when I’ve decided.” Aaron’s boyish grin switches instantly to a grimace as his leg spasms and he leans back straightening it out, flexing his ankle and toes several times in an attempt to get rid of the cramp. Sighing to myself, I crawl onto the bed, settling myself in-between his feet and start my massage, smiling at the sounds coming out of Aaron’s mouth as he settles back to reap the benefit of my ministrations.

“So, what do you think then about what the mid-wife said earlier?”

“I think we should go look at both.” Big puppy eyes and those lips, oh god those lips; how is a man supposed to resist. I have to force myself to ignore the arousal they ignite, a shiver coursing through me as my mind wanders back to a short while ago and how I was both begging Aaron to stop and keep going all at the same time. I swear he will be the death of me. I suppose that’s not a bad way to go, death by my husband’s perfect blow-job skills. “Robert, are you even listening to me?”

“Sorry,” I grin at him, “Got distracted.”

“So I noticed; should I ask?” I can tell by the glint in his eye he's already guessed and I smile back, snuggling into his neck, my hand resting over our children, who are feeling a little playful. Sex always seems to get them going and I try not to think about that too much or I might find it more than a little disturbing. I slide down Aarons’ body, shifting in-between his legs and kiss his swollen belly. It still feels as amazing as ever that this is possible as I rest my nose against his belly button, now permanently an ‘outie’, soaking up his scent; the smell of Aaron and our sex intermingled, it’s almost like a drug.

Yelping, my head lifts up; I really shouldn’t be surprised as this isn’t the first time, “Ow.” Rubbing my nose, I hold my face a short distance away from our children’s current residence, glancing up at Aaron who is giggling at me, wholly amused and I grin back. Revenge is clearly sweet for the dynamic duo but who said I had to wait until they are born to start setting some ground rules; they don’t listen anyway, but I suppose I should get used to that. Apparently, it’s par for the course of being a father, not that it'll stop me trying I think to myself whilst prodding gently with my finger in
the general area where I think they are, “Hey you, little children; what did I tell you about kicking
daddy in the nose. Remember we’re the ones that will love, feed and clothe you for the next twenty
years, so less of the karate-kicking alright?”

Aaron is tittering at me, “You know they can’t actually hear you? They always get hyper after we’ve
had sex; they just need a little while to settle.” I look at him dead serious making him chuckle even
more and so I ignore him and instead rub my nose against his skin to give them a final kiss
goodnight. Crawling back up Aaron’s body, I shift onto my back; turning awkwardly onto his side,
he sprawls his leg and arm across my body getting himself comfy.

Going back to our conversation, I squeeze Aaron’s shoulders letting my fingers play, drawing small
circles on the skin in-between his shoulder blades, “You want to make the appointments or should I
do it?”

“I’ll do it; your calendar’s up-to-date, right?”

“Mmh-hmm, yep.”

“I know you like the idea of going private, but that’s all the way into Leeds and the midwifery unit is
only down the road in Hotten. It doesn’t hurt to see both and then you can make a list for each and
we can write down the pros and cons to decide.”

Feigning offence, I can’t not respond, “Are you taking the piss out of my lists again?”

“Me? No, never.”

“The amount of ridicule I seem to get these days, just because I like to be organised and prepared.
It’s a good job I love you, Mr Sugden.”

“Say it again.”

“I love you, Mr Sugden.”

“We love you too daddy; sleep tight, don’t let the bedbugs bite.”

"Idiot."

"You love it, Sugden and you know it."

TBC
March 2017 / Month 6 - Week 26: Aaron has reached the end of his second trimester.

Aaron, Wednesday 29th March 2017 (Week 26)

“Don’t laugh Robert, it’s mortifying enough as it is.” He doesn’t respond verbally; instead, he kisses the small of my back, his lips soft and wet against my skin but I can still feel his body shaking from his amused chuckling as he stands, pulling my jama bottoms up, before wrapping his arms around me. “You wanna clean my teeth whilst you’re at it.” I smile at him tiredly, our faces staring back at us from the bathroom mirror, Robert holding me from behind, his body slightly swaying us both in a soothing movement.

“Nah, you’re a big boy, I’ll let you do that all by yourself.”

“Well, you’d best let go then,” glancing at the half-steamed clock on the bathroom shelf, “You’ll be late if you don’t get a move on.”

Robert’s hands are stroking over my protruding belly as he nuzzles into my neck, “I was thinking of working from home this morning, there’s nothing that can’t wait and we can go shopping together after the scan, “You think you’ve stopped feeling sick now after yesterday?”

“There’s nothing left to throw up if that’s what you mean; I’ll let you know after breakfast, my arm still aches though.”

“Baby, baby, let me kiss it better.”

Allowing Robert to kiss down the crook of my neck, continuing over my shoulder and down my upper arm until he hits the bruised area where the needle had left its mark, I yelp a little as it still hurts to touch. Pushing myself out of his arms, I pull his towel from around his waist, leaving him standing stark naked which I find mildly amusing, “Right, that’s it. Get dressed and go make your baby a drink of hot water and some breakfast; seeing how you’re planning to skive off, you might as well make yourself useful.”

“Pfft, gratitude. I seem to remember making myself useful at two am this morning as you were hurling into a bowl for the umpteenth time.” Grunting, I don’t answer, instead, I start to clean my teeth watching Robert leave in the bathroom mirror and can hear him rummaging around in the bedroom.

Yesterday had not been a good day. I’d been to the doctor’s surgery where the nurse had given me a whooping cough vaccination which supposedly boosts my levels of antibodies for me to pass on to the babies for their protection. Apart from a bruise where the needle had injected appearing fairly rapidly, I’d been okay until late into the evening when the nauseousness started to hit me which eventually turned into me hurling three times in the space of a couple of hours to the point where that last time I was just throwing up the water that Robert had made me drink to keep me hydrated.
I’d already been in a touchy mood having seen the doctor before the nurse, his diagnosis confirming my suspicions. Apparently getting piles isn’t all that unusual, but it’s definitely a sure-fire way of how to make a person feel totally unsexy. It was so embarrassing having to ask my husband to rub in the haemorrhoid cream that the doctor prescribed to numb the pain and stop the itching. All in all, it was not a pleasant experience. I’d left the surgery with a ready-made shopping list of all the necessary foods noted down by the doctor saying these were my best bet at prevention, with instructions to eat plenty of fibre-rich foods and to increase my fluid intake. The thought of drinking more than I already do doesn’t sit too well either, I don’t particularly want to go back to spending half my day on the bog and interrupted sleep every flaming hour.

Generally, I’m sleeping better but I can feel the uterus swelling more each day, pushing on everything in its path and it’s getting increasingly difficult to get comfy, no matter how many pillows I use to prop myself with.

I wonder what will happen when this all disappears, what my body will feel like after the birth. I’ve read some articles saying that after males have given birth, they can get depressed from feeling an acute emptiness, the physical and psychological impact of losing a part of you that has nurtured the baby and won’t be able to do it again. After the birth, the male body expels the uterus or it is removed before that happens naturally. The thought of this sends a little shudder down my spine; these two aren’t born yet and I’m thinking about the chances of getting pregnant again even though they don’t believe it’s possible. Well twenty years ago, they didn’t believe men giving birth was possible and look at me now, they got that wrong didn’t they.

Dressed, I make my way downstairs and sit at the table where Robert puts my breakfast in front of me. For the first time in a long while, I don’t feel like eating, but under Robert’s watchful eye, I know I have to try otherwise he’ll worry. Cautiously I eat a couple of tentative spoonfuls of porridge; both of us relax when I don’t seem to be about to immediately throw it back up and I dig in, hunger getting the better of me.

Robert kisses the top of my head, his fingers combing through my hair, “Where’s the time for the visit to the midwifery labour unit in Hotten written down? I need to put it into my calendar.”

“In my coat pocket, there’s also the shopping list from the doctors, can you get that out as well please.” He’s studying the list as he comes back in from rummaging around in my coat, sitting back at the table taking a bite of his toast before fishing his phone out to enter the information. “You going to make that appointment for the private place we looked at in Leeds?”

“If that’s still okay?”

“Might as well.”

“What’s this?” I have a habit of stuffing things into my pocket and still having my pregnancy brain I don't always remember to get them out again. Robert opens the booklet he’d unintentionally pulled out with the other note from the doctors, “Mhm, birthing plan; I seem to remember the midwife talking about that. Isn’t it a bit early?”

“No, not really; she handed it out on Monday remember.” Robert looks at me blankly, but doesn’t say anything, “She said we don’t have to do one but we should if we want to have input about what we want and don’t want, before, during and after. She recommended that we wait to finalise it together with our nominated midwife wherever we decide to have the birth so we’re all on the same page when the time comes.” Robert goes quiet drinking his coffee. I’m not sure if he is intentionally not looking at me but his eyes remain fixed on the booklet of questions to help guide us with our
options and choices. I don’t call him out on it but I know what he is thinking about.

I have to laugh as Robert turns the booklet upside down, twisting his head at a funny angle trying to make sense of one of the pictures and I pull it out of his hands before he does himself an injury from his contortions, “Give it here, we can do it online when we’ve decided on the where.”

I knew Robert wasn’t paying full attention at the ante-natal session on Monday, I think sometimes he gets so overwhelmed he catches on a point and then misses some of the other stuff. His next question surprises me somewhat, “You don’t want anyone else from the family there, right?”

“Oh, flippin’ eck no. It'll be only you getting the absolute pleasure of having your hand squeezed to the point of breaking.” Ignoring the slightly alarmed look on his face, I continue more seriously, “To be honest if we can manage it I don’t think I want them to even know until the day after at least. You know how they all get, fussing and wanting to see, it would be nice to have some time for just the four of us for a little while.”

”God, you can just imagine it can’t you; it’ll be like a cattle market, the Sugdens and Dingles vying for a first hold.”

“Mnh, I wouldn’t go that far, I mean there will be two of them, so each side can have a hold at the same time.”

Robert looks offended by the thought and responds gruffly, “You’ll have to be in charge of that; I don’t think they'll take a blind bit of notice of me, what with Chas and Faith, then Vic and Diane.”

“Oh no you don’t get out of it that easy when I'm doing all the hard work. You can organize them in advance you big scaredy-cat. Anyway, I’ll be too busy coming down off the good stuff to notice probably.” Robert looks a little surprised and I grin at him, “What? I’m not a masochist Robert, I’ll be after as many drugs as they’ll let me have.”

“Do you think they’ll let me have some?”

“No, sorry.”

We grin at each other, “That’s so unfair.”

“You’re such an idiot.” Despite my embarrassment, I can’t stop smirking at Robert who looks like a mischievous big kid. If nothing else, it’s been an entertaining afternoon’s shopping trip into Leeds after having the bi-weekly scan.

“What? I don’t understand why you wouldn’t want one in your condition.”

Now that irked, “Well, I’ll tell you what, you try it at six months pregnant and then let me know how it feels.”

“You heard the woman, it makes the world of difference.”

“I am not having any of it shoved up my insides thank you very much, no matter how constipated I get.” Whilst in the health food shop we’d got into a conversation with some woman; correction, Robert got into a conversation about the different kinds of foods she’d tried for a myriad of reasons having given birth to four kids which were all around us causing mayhem, she was quite the expert
apparently. As usual with Robert, once he got going there was no stopping him; he was most
definitely enjoying prolonging my agony of having to listen to it, knowing my embarrassment
threshold was a lot lower than his. I can’t win, it’s either I’ve got people tut-tutting at me because I’m
a pregnant man or I’ve got people gushing to share; there doesn’t often seem to be any middle
ground. I swear, between him, the lady behind the counter and Robert’s new-found friend they were
discussing the pros and cons between suppositories or having an enema during pregnancy with some
expecting mothers taking one usually to alleviate constipation. I wouldn’t mind but I don’t even have
constipation. I reached my limit when the lady behind the counter innocently said she thought with
me being gay that I’d be used to them as if all gay men had daily enemas. I could have died of
embarrassment and at this point, I walked out leaving an amused Robert to catch me up.

“It’s not like you’ve never had one.”

“That’s not the point, I feel bloated enough as it is, I’m hardly going to want to make it even worse.
Anyway, when the doctor mentioned it, he didn’t seem convinced how safe it is during pregnancy.”

“Oh, so you have discussed it?”

“Yes, but in the privacy of my doctors’ consulting room, not in the middle of bloody Leeds with all
and sundry.” I glare at an older lady, making a comment as she passes by and she scurries off before
I decide to say anything back.

“Well, it didn’t seem to do her or her kids any harm.”

Grumpily, I head into Boots, answering, “They all looked to have ADHD if you ask me.”

Laughing at me, Robert follows close behind, his hand brushing my back affectionately, “They were
fine, boisterous energy more like. What are we in here for?”

“Your expensive shampoo.”

“Ah, give me two ticks then.” Leaving him to go hunting for his favourite brand I head to the baby
section to look at baby clothes. I’ve seen the cutest little outfits ever when I was browsing which I
could have just ordered online, but I like to feel the fabric to make sure it’s nice to the touch if I can,
before actually buying anything. Robert, having found his shampoo and seemingly a few other
things, smiles upon seeing the two matching sets I’ve picked up. “Cute, not sure white will stay
white for so long though.”

“They won’t be in them for long, I thought these would be nice for just after they are born.” We head
over to the counter to pay as the self-service are all occupied, “What’s that?”

It seems as if it’s ‘let’s all embarrass Aaron’ day as I pick up the pack of nasal strips from the basket,
“I thought it might help with the snoring.” Listening in, the young lad behind the counter is smirking
away at me and I’m thankful he hasn’t cottoned onto the fact I’m pregnant, my coat and the counter
concealing it as I’m never too sure what kind of reaction I’m going to get, especially from other guys.

Going back to the car, I have to stop suddenly resting my hand on my stomach after getting a round
of kicking caused by the papping of car horns as some muppet driver is impatient for the car in front
to set off when the lights change. The twins are in general moving around more enthusiastically
during the day and I’ve noticed they are a lot more alert to both touch and sound now. Loud noises
often make them jump and kick which I can feel, just like I feel every single kick they make now.
“What on earth; Robert what are doing skulking round down here? You’re lucky I didn’t call the police already.”

“Sorry.” I look at Chas a little sheepishly, “I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“It’s late, it’s almost midnight.” She looks at the packet of corn on the cob in my hand, “I take it that’s for miladdo? You should tell him to have something else instead, has he gone off the chutney?”

“No, as if. He’s started craving a few other things this last couple of weeks, tonight it’s corn on the cob, fresh and organic, naturally.” Chas smiles at my pained tone, "I swear you don’t understand what it’s like Chas; he’s a whole different person, a scary person who I don’t recognise until he gets what he needs. Don’t laugh, it’s not funny, he wouldn’t stop whining. Aaron never whines, not like that, he usually just does nonverbal when he wants something that badly, but not today. Today he went and on and on and on until I couldn’t stand it any longer." I stop, realising I'm doing exactly the same to Chas and silently reach for my wallet only to find I don't have it on me. "I'll pay you back tomorrow.”

“I don’t want your money you daft ‘apeth. You should tell him he should be asleep at this hour and to stick with the chutney.”

“You tell him; I’m really not that brave.”

“Go on, skedaddle.” She throws a second pack at me which I manage to catch, "Take another one with you for next time just in case; if he's that desperate he won't care if it's fresh out of the freezer. I’ll tell Vic in the morning.”

Smiling, tired but grateful, I go back to my needy husband thinking he can cook his own sodding corn on the cob after this.

Aaron’s eyes brighten when I get home as he takes the packet from me before I’m hardly through the kitchen door, putting the two husks into the waiting dish and then into the microwave.

“I’m going to bed.”

“You don’t want any?”

“Nope, all yours. It’s late and some of us have to function tomorrow.” I’m seriously thinking about going into the nursery to sleep. Aaron gets wearing when he’s like this and I have a busy day tomorrow needing to catch up with having taken time out this week for both the ante-natal class and the scan. The nasal strip doesn’t seem to be making a blind bit of difference and he’s been struggling to sleep, moaning he’s carrying the Karate Kid along with Batman and Robin. Although I have to admit it had been funny earlier as he tried coaxing the babies into a different position with his hand when it got too much and it actually seemed to work. I’d left him doing some stretches when I was sent to the pub for supplies, I was thankful for the reprieve if nothing else.

Shaking my head, I go upstairs when Aaron yells up to me, “Thank you, you’re my hero.” I don't even bother with a response; hearing the microwave ping, I'm pretty certain he's too occupied to hear it thinking to myself I’m not sure how we’re going to survive if this carries on until they are born.

Robert, Friday 31st March 2017 (Week 26)
It’s strange for me to be in bed before Aaron. He was restless and grumpy most of yesterday, we both were, so he decided he needed a break from Emmerdale and went with Adam to keep him company on a job somewhere in North Yorkshire for a change of scene. They were off quite early so I’ve had a lovely quiet day and managed pretty much to shut myself away and catch up on most things.

They called to say they were stopping off in Middleham to see a friend of Adam’s before setting off back home so I know they’ll be latish back. Adam will probably have a few pints if Aaron is driving. All tucked up in bed, it's peaceful, warm and cozy; being alone I have some rare quiet time to myself and I let my mind wander. All-round, this has been a full-on week with a lot of things coinciding at once; it sometimes feels like we’re on the world’s best and longest rollercoaster and it's not quite time to get off, with so much changing almost daily.

On Wednesday, the midwife announced that the second trimester is coming to an end with the twins measuring about nine inches. Now realising that this is the diameter of a football, I’ve decided I should cut Aaron some slack when he moans about feeling bloated or when he has odd little moments of madness. Hopefully, he doesn’t get too many more untimely cravings like last night. He really did push me to the edge of distraction, not helped by it being late and we were both very cranky. So, no I’m not looking forward to a repeat performance of that, once was enough thank you very much.

Aaron keeps catching me watching him; I love looking at his body, half the time I don’t even realise I’m doing it. The twins have become really responsive to touch so much that at odd moments we are actually able to see them move; it’s surreal when seeing a little foot or hand poking out from Aaron’s belly. It brings home to me how real they are; if it’s like this for me, I can’t imagine what it’s like for Aaron.

Yesterday we got the letter through the post that he could start claiming maternity pay as of this week which they would start paying out from week twenty-nine but we’ve already decided to wait until he’s four weeks before the due date unless he has a reason to stop earlier. Aaron might be slowing down but we both admitted he’d go insane if he didn’t work which in turn would drive me round the bend.

I must have dozed off because I’m woken with a start by a cold nose on my face and Aaron’s smirk after giving me a wake-up kiss. “Hey, sleeping beauty.” He smells of the outdoors, although a little tired he’s looking really alive, buzzing almost.

“You look to have had a good day?”

“Yes, it was nice to get away. You should have seen some of the stares I got when we met up with Adam’s friend in Middleham at the local pub. He works at one of the big stables there. Trust a boat load of farmers and horse training folk to end up being totally interested in how a bloke can get pregnant and give birth; Adam nearly died of embarrassment, it was hilarious. Did you know....., ah, course you do, you grew up on a farm.” I can’t help smiling at his chattering away, how wired he is. I know he misses the physical side of work and having the kind of banter he doesn’t get too often with me. Apparently, I’m not a typical farmer type, which I’m not quite sure what he means when he says that, but I don’t think I’d disagree with him. It’s not a life I’d ever want to go back to.

“I’m going to grab a shower before coming to bed, I smell of horses.”

Shifting off me, onto his side, he closes his eyes; I think if he stops more than an instant he’ll be asleep and I give him a little nudge with my knee, “You want a hand with the soaping and what
He turns his head to the side, giving me a sloppy grin. “Yes please and don’t forget the haemorrhoid cream afterwards.”

Chuckling, I grab his hand and pull him up off the bed to lead him to the bathroom, “Who could forget the sexy haemorrhoid cream for my beautiful husband and father to be.” I wrap my arms around him smiling to myself, pushing him along from behind, “The things I do for love.”

Aaron starts undressing us both, an impish grin on his face, “I can think of a couple of things I can do for love, payment in kind if you’re interested.”

“Really, lead on my brood mare, tell me more.”

That earns me a stinging slap on my backside as he tugs my shorts down but there’s no disputing Aaron is in a horny and playful mood as he pulls off the last of his clothes, stepping into the quickly steaming shower, “Come on then stud, show me what you’ve got.”

“Urgh, that’s totally unsexy. Did you just fart Aaron?”

TBC
Karma

Chapter Summary

April 2017 / Month 7 - Week 27: Aaron and Robert visit the birthing unit in Hotten.

Aaron, Monday 3rd April 2017 (Week 27)

“So, Aaron love, it’s in here we’ll help you to keep moving around, find comfortable positions and whatnot. It really does make a difference keeping you upright for as much as possible, you know, let gravity do its job. Believe me, you'll be thankful for every little bit that helps when the time comes.”

“Well, I'm going to find out, aren’t I?” Fidgeting with a nervous smile, I tell myself that I’ve no-one else but myself to blame for being where we are and I sigh.

“You certainly are. Don’t worry you’ll be fine.”

The midwife is beaming at me and I’m a little jealous of the certainty in her voice. I suppose it’s her job to be all cheerful and motivating, but even I give her a look of scepticism whilst Robert most definitely has that ‘I told you so’ look on his face which I pointedly ignore. To be honest, I’m surprised that he’s not mentioned the C-word, but to give him his due, he hasn’t, not once. I’m not sure if that’s a positive sign, or if he’s just waiting until we get home; maybe I’m doing him a disservice because he’s been really good since we sorted things out. Whatever, I’m not going to mention it unless he does and even then I’m still certain I’m not going to do an about turn and change my mind; not for love, nor money and he should know that by now.

Sometimes I'm really my own worst enemy; my mind's been wandering off like this since we got here and I get a nudge from Robert to pay attention more. Not wanting to piss off the midwife I cover by putting on my best smile, “You’ll be telling me next that I’ll look back on this as the best experience ever, won’t you?” I glance at Robert, “Vic said that remember, but I’m not sure I believe her; she just looks all gooey eyed at Charlie and forgets about everything else.”

Nodding sympathetically, the midwife has an expression on her face that seems to say she knows exactly what I’m talking about, “I’m pretty sure if it isn’t, it’ll come very close.”

Yeah right. Remind me again why I want to do this naturally. Oh yeah, the twins, our little dynamic duo who treat my body like their own personal playground. I don't think for one minute they're going to give me an easy ride when they decide to make an appearance in the real world, that would be too easy and nothing about us is ever easy. At least I know I have a pretty high pain tolerance and as long as they come out healthy, I know I won't care what it takes in the end.

Robert is pulling a funny face which makes me laugh to myself; I have to admit I've been intentionally half tuning out the midwife, she's rambling on about stuff I mostly know already, well the theory, and it's far more entertaining watching Robert's facial expressions as he listens to her. The novelty of the antenatal classes soon wore off for him and unless it's something interactive I'm sure he spends most of the time thinking about his work stuff. I did the reading so a lot of this is more for his benefit than mine, but crap, she has to go disturb my karma by mentioning about the way the
pelvis shifts and how the birth canal forms which gets my attention. On second thought, I might just be a little bit crazy wanting to do this but I think I’ll keep that to myself; Robert is blanching enough already at this, just like he did in the antenatal classes.

I’d never let on, least of all to Robert, I really could be freaking out a whole lot more about this, I’m not immune to worrying about what giving birth is going to be like but it’s not as though I’ll be able to see how it goes and then change my mind halfway through. That said, there are definitely times where I have this voice at the back of my head, you know, tapping on my brain cells saying this can’t be real and it’s just a matter of time before I wake up either in a padded cell or to find this was all just a big dream where Robert will laugh at me for even thinking this up. Well if it is a dream, it’s a pretty fucking good one. Finishing her blurb, the midwife is seemingly inviting some kind of comment from me, looking at me intently with her encouraging smile and I splurt out the first thing that comes to mind, “Well I am good with pain, so that should help.” Oops, daggers from the hubby; Robert is not amused at that one and I can see his teeth grinding down, I’m so going to cop it when we get home. Maybe a nice blowjob will help him relax a bit. Focus Aaron, focus.

“Well, you’ll probably find it’s one of the more painful things you’ll experience in life, if not the most.” She rests her hand on my arm, steering me towards the door, “But once it’s over, it’s over and you’ll soon have lots of wonderful discoveries that it’ll all feel worth it. There’s nothing quite like it when you hold your newborn child for the first time.”

Now on the more interesting part of the visit, touring around the various rooms, I get to play a little, with the midwife getting me to try some of the positions and aids I’ll be able to use to help me through the long process of giving birth. I don’t even want to think about how many hours it might take. Robert and I share a look as I plonk myself into the birthing chair so I get the experience of what it feels like, the midwife pointing out how the various parts move to switch its positions. Robert has been pretty quiet the whole tour, up until now that is, as he plays with a lever that didn’t do what I quite expected and I resist the urge to smack him as he comments, “Oh, that’s quite clever.” I glare at him to show my lack of amusement, which he of course ignores, instead winking at me and I melt instantly, responding with a suggestive smile that just makes his grin broaden.

I think I can safely say from this part of the tour, that watching me try all this stuff out he’s been thinking more about having sex rather than the result of it, especially the birthing chair I’m still in. That doesn’t stop me from being floored at what he says next, almost absentmindedly the git, “The last time I saw one of these, it wasn’t anything like as snazzy.” Seeing the curious look on my face he smirks mischievously and knowing he has my full attention, continues, “That said, I don’t think Mistress Annabelle was interested in children much.”

If I was a betting man, I’d put money on that the look on my face at this particular moment is priceless, my chin dropping as I gawp at him, whilst at the same time blushing with embarrassment on behalf of both of us. Robert pushes my chin back up with his fingers and kisses me, a peck really but with just a hint of tongue pushing into my mouth. Unsure why I seem to be more embarrassed than Robert, avoiding looking directly at the midwife who’s also blushing on his behalf, I attempt to haul myself up as fast and dignified as I can which is really not that fast and definitely not that dignified even with her help.

She gestures for us to follow her out into the corridor, her professional face now securely back in place. Admittedly she has probably seen and heard it all before but that doesn’t help me much right now. Quietly laughing at me, Robert grabs my hand and squeezes it as we tag along. Guess what we’ll be talking about on the way home.
All in all, it's been a good afternoon at the birthing unit. There was the introductory chat, the tour and then now we’re doing the practicalities about what we need to do if we decide to have the twins here. Feeling a little tired I decide to let Robert do the talking. Last night I was super excited and admittedly a tad nervous about the visit today, but once here I’ve been fairly relaxed except the odd minor freak out; everything we’ve seen and been told is pretty much what I expected.

I knew already that Robert hadn’t bothered to do more than skim through the books or leaflets that I’ve been giving him so with being less absorbed myself, I’ve been able to spend more time taking notice of his reactions. He’s been an unusual mix of fascinated, amazed and scared; one occasion I saw all three emotions cross his face at more or less the same instant, flitting from one to the other in the blink of an eye as his brain digested everything. This part of what's to come definitely feels more real for him now I think. Let's face it, as much as he might try, he hasn’t had the experience of the dynamic duo causing havoc with his insides for the last few months, but being in the delivery suite, I could see it truly hit home for him and we've really not got that long to go now in the grand scheme of things. The only sticky point of the visit was when the midwife got to talking about some of what happens to prepare us if anything goes wrong and I saw him clamp down his teeth to not say anything; I love him so much for doing that knowing how he feels.

After saying our goodbyes, we make our way out to the carpark, “So what did you think?”

“What? Of you comparing their equipment with a sex club or if I want to give birth here?” Now over the embarrassment, I smirk at him, a mischievous glint in my eye, “You going to tell me more?”

“Maybe one day, or maybe we can do a live demo sometime; I probably still have her number somewhere.”

I can feel the blood rushing back to my cheeks already, “Mmmh, I think maybe there are somethings I'm not sure a husband needs to know, thank you very much. Anyway, to answer your question, I liked it; the staff were nice and it didn't feel awkward. I still want to see the one in Leeds on Friday, so we can compare.” I squeeze his hand, “Maybe now I’ve had a go, I should let you try their chair to see how it looks on you.”

Wrapping his hands around my waist as we reach the car he cocoons me against it and I rest my hands on the car roof in front of me, enjoying him kissing the back and side of my neck, then his voice seductively purring by my ear, “Nothing like as hot as my sexy husband.” Tipping my head back, my mouth turns into his, kissing sloppily, our lips crushing together so I don’t get a chance to argue, but I’m very sure I disagree with him on the sexy part right now.

We ate as soon as we got home and after a bath, we've turned in for an early night; Robert has his hand resting on me as he reads some paperwork ready for a meeting tomorrow. He looks tired, I know he’s found it hard juggling both work and everything going on with me this last few months. “Did you hear what the midwife said about flying?”

Distracted, he doesn’t look up and I get just a “Mmhh,” in response.

Persevering I continue my train of thought, “If we want to take that holiday and fly off somewhere, they don’t recommend with me being a higher risk pregnancy that we do it after week 28 which would be next week according to my reckoning.” Robert rests his papers down on his lap and looks
at me, “We said it would be nice to have a few days break maybe, but only if you have time?”

Picking the papers back up, “Probably, have a look if somewhere takes your fancy and we can get a
cheap deal. We don’t have to fly though; we could go a bit later, take the Eurostar or one of the
ferries.” He starts reading again.

“Mmhh, I was thinking more, floating in a swimming pool and warm sunshine.” Giving up trying to
concentrate, Robert puts his stuff on the bedside table, before snuggling under the duvet and curling
himself around me, “Adam’s good with it, I checked and..., “ I hesitate, a little worried he’ll get
defensive, “You look tired Robert; I worry about you, the same as you do about me.”

He kisses the back of my head and I sink into him, for us to be as close as possible, “I’m alright, I’m
a workaholic remember and knowing you, I’m not too sure just how much sleep I’ll be getting on
this little getaway.”

Shifting to get comfier, I take the opportunity to turn over to face him, pulling his arm back over me,
“Well this’ll definitely burst the bubble then, you’ll see me sleep lots, you just hardly see it at the
minute because I nap when you’re not here.”

“Okay, book something. Surprise me.”

“You don’t want to know where; I could literally book anything I want and you won’t mind?”

“Nope, somewhere nice and quiet.” He glances at me, raising an eyebrow hearing the mischievous
edge to my voice, “Nowhere too surprising, please. I’m going to be sleeping remember, tired old man
here and you seem to forget that you’re six months gone.”

“Aww, shucks, and there was me thinking I could be having my wicked way with you the whole
time.”

After kissing me deeply, there’s a twinkle in his eye, “Oh I didn’t say that Aaron, you can have your
wicked way with me anytime you want.” Losing ourselves to kisses and touching we eventually fall
asleep, both of us too tired for once to do anything more.

Robert, Wednesday 5th April 2017 (Week 27)

“So, we fly tomorrow night, it should be good we both need it....., what you want me to come over
now?” Smiling I switch direction and head to my sisters, “I’ll be there before you can open the
door.”

Walking down the path, the door opens and Vic smiles at me, Charlie snuggling in her arms, “Here
you go.” Expecting to be invited in, Vic grins seeing the look on my face; after handing my niece
over to me, she keeps on down the path, peering back over her shoulder, “Aaron’s snoozing, tea’s in
the oven and Charlie’s bottle’s in the fridge and oh she could do with a bath if you think you can
cope with that. We won’t be too late....., much.”

Having being caught unprepared, I kiss Charlie’s head, gently rubbing her back as I watch my sister
head off in the direction of the pub, “Well, it seems you’ll have to make do with us babysitting for
the night then, young miss, aren’t you blessed.” Charlie stares at me with wide eyes, gurgling away
as I turn around and head inside clutching her in my arms to see where his lordship is.

Aaron looks cute, his head lolled to one side of the sofa, dribbling slightly and I smile to Charlie
about to say something sarcastic to see her also dribbling, sucking on her fist. “So apparently, I’m
babysitting both of you tonight, hey. You hungry? I’m hungry. Let’s hope mummy made uncle Robert and uncle Aaron something nice for tea.”

I look back down at Aaron, he looks so angelic, “Shall we wake him huh?” Charlie gurgles a response, her eyes have a mischievous look that I translate as a yes, “Oh, you meanie; I’ll tell him it was your idea.”

Reaching over, I take Charlie’s dummy off the table and let its ribbon dangle down, floating very close to Aaron’s nose until his hand swipes it off, on the second pass he pulls it out of my hand before it had actually landed, smirking up at me through still drowsy eyes, “So that’s how it’s going to be when our two are born mmh? I think I’m going to have to watch you, Mr Sugden.”

Leaning over for a kiss, I release Charlie into his arms, “You do that Mr Sugden and while you’re at it, you can practise by watching this fabulous arse go into the kitchen to see how tea’s doing.” Aaron chuckles, mumbling something to Charlie that I don’t hear as I leave them to their own fun and games.

I shout back to them from the kitchen, “You hungry? I’m starving.”

“I could eat.” Aaron pops up behind me, Charlie in his arms and this time we kiss properly.

“Looks like it’ll be about a half hour; you want a drink?”

“Just a hot water please.” He goes to the fridge and gets out Charlie’s bottle, shaking it before taking the top off and then shifting Charlie to cradle her in his arms, he puts the teat to her mouth. I watch them as I open a bottle of wine, Charlie guzzling away like there’s no tomorrow, “Thought you had to heat it up?”

“Sometimes, but Charlie seems to be okay with it cold most of the time, so nice n’ easy.” For some reason Aaron knowing this, when I don’t, surprises me and Aaron notices the look on my face. “I’m round here a lot more than you.”

“I just didn’t realise you’d been spending that much time over here I suppose.”

“I haven’t, not really, but Vic helped with the nursery and it’s easier to learn from her and Charlie than from the antenatal classes and anyway Charlie’s usually in bed by the time you get home.”

“We should have her one night, give Vic and Adam the whole night to themselves and we, “I peek over totally fascinated by her sucking away on the teat, “will get to know what it’s like having a baby in the house through the night.”

“Not sure Vic’s quite ready for that, but you never know; I’m sure Adam’ll be able to persuade her if he uses his wily charms.” Aaron is watching me watch them, “You want a go?”

For a second, I want to say no, worried I’ll upset the cosy thing they have going on, but apparently, it wasn’t really a question as he takes the glass of wine from my hand and transfers Charlie to me, waiting until we are settled before handing me back her bottle. Charlie looks like she’s about to cry but as soon as the milk is flowing again she settles, her hands gripping the bottle tightly. It’s clear that she’s going to follow in the family tradition of the women liking to be in control. Aaron is smiling at me and I look at him nervously thinking I might be doing something wrong, “What?” He doesn’t answer but continues to smile as he pours the hot water from the kettle into his mug.

Turning back around, Aaron laughs openly at me as he answers my questioning gaze, “If you must
know I was wondering if we’re going to have boys, girls or both and if we have any girls, that they are going to be in charge before either of us know it.”

Heading back into the other room, we settle on the couch, Aaron leaning against me, tucking his feet under him; I smile realising that he’d been thinking the same as me. “Yeah, Sugden and Dingle genes. I’m not sure we thought this through.”

“I don’t think we were probably thinking at all the time, do you? We didn’t think we’d need to. You wouldn’t change it though, would you?”

There’s no doubt in my mind on this, “Never. I will admit it’s getting harder to not look too closely at the sonogram. It’s a good job we’ve asked the midwife to hold onto the pictures until after they’re born otherwise, I think we’d know by now.”

Aaron nods and I know he’s as curious as me, “You can look if you want, but I still don’t want to know. I want to be completely surprised; as long as they’re healthy I don’t care.”

I lean over and give him a peck on the forehead, “Correction, as long as they and daddy are both healthy you don’t care.”

“Now who’s being bossy.”

Smiling, I nudge his leg with mine in retaliation for his cheekiness, “Yeah well, growing up with all those strong women you have to have balls of steel.”

Making me laugh, Aaron covers Charlie’s ears, “I don’t think they’ll be balls of steel when I get hold of them later on.”

Giggling, I elbow him out of the way, “Down boy; it’s burp time.”

He sniggers, “Sick time more like.”

“You want to take over again then?”

“Noope, she’s all yours. I’ll go check on tea; you need more practice than me. Vic has started her on some solids during the day thankfully but it’s milk only at night still.”

Watching him go into the kitchen, he’s got me thinking and I study his face as he answers my question upon his return, “Do you think about what it’ll be like?”

“What?”

“Feeding, I mean I can’t see hardly any difference but you can breastfeed them, I’m remembering that right, aren’t I?”

“Yep, but they won’t really show much I don’t think; there’s no sign of it so far. It depends on how much of a certain hormone is produced, I can’t remember what it’s called, I’d have to look it up. Anyway, the doc said the milk ducts stay mostly internal unless the guy is...... has a bit more flab then there’s more space but for guys like me, they don’t produce enough milk, some do but most don’t. It’s even harder with twins.” Aaron goes quiet, his face a little wistful and I don’t say anything, giving him whatever time he needs, “Vic says it hurts when Charlie first latches on.” There’s a pause before he continues, “It would be nice to know what it feels like, but I’m not banking on it.” He shrugs and half smiles at me, but there’s no mistaking that he’s going to be gutted
if he doesn’t get the chance to find out.

“Could you take something, I mean would you want to if you could?”

Aaron looks away and it's not my imagination, I swear I saw a flash of guilt cross his face, “I talked about it with the doctor in...., in December when I decided to keep them.” I tense up without being consciously aware of it and Aaron hesitates. Turning Charlie to face me, I pull her up with her chest against my front, her head resting on my shoulder and I’m silently thankful she hasn’t brought any of her milk up, now would not be a good time for that to happen, “He said I would have to start taking some hormones as early as possible, you know a bit like transwomen take when they want to have breasts, but there can be side effects and I said no, I was scared enough with everything and I couldn’t cope with anything else so I said no.”

There’s no keeping the hurt from my voice, despite working hard not to let him hear it, “Was that before or after you told me you were pregnant?”

“After.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me?”

He looks at me surprised at my reaction, “To be honest, no.”

Aaron looks a little upset as he turns his head away; I can feel the sudden tenseness between us and so can Charlie as she starts to fuss. Getting up, I sway a little, but it’s not having an effect, “I’ll go give her a bath and put her down. Will tea wait?”

“Yeah.”

I don’t know why, but I’m feeling hurt that he hasn’t shared this with me before now. It’s stupid I know, but every time I think back to December it drags up all the memories, reminding me just how bad it had got, he was carrying such a big secret and didn't trust me with it. It feels such a long time ago, but it’s not, not really and sometimes it’s very raw and I hate being reminded that Aaron had been scared about how I would react and all the while I was convinced he was cheating on me until I forced it out of him.

We could have lost everything back then. At times, I don’t know what scares me the most about the last six months.

It’s fun in the bathroom with Charlie back to giggling away, both us as bad as each other with the water antics. She loves the water, I should ask Vic if I can teach her to swim when she gets older; Vic hates the water and I’ve always been a strong swimmer.

Hearing a noise in the doorway, I look up to see Aaron enter; he struggles down onto his knees beside me, smiling hesitantly at the mess we are making. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“Are you sure?”

“Probably.” I smile at him, he’s right, I am tired and a holiday would be good. “You don’t regret not doing it?”

“No, I’m just going to let things happen as they turn out and if I can’t feed them everything they
need, it means you get to share more of the feeding time right from the beginning.”

Aaron stands up on his knees, taking one of the plastic buckets he pours water over Charlie’s front, which in typical fashion makes her reach out for more which eggs him on and he repeats it another couple of times, Charlie clapping away at him. Watching them closely, I realise I forget how much emotional strain he is still under, I wonder how much more there is going around in that head of his that he hasn’t told me about. He sits back down on his heels as we watch Charlie splash the water with her hands. Pulling Aaron into me, he lets his head rest on my shoulder.

“You know you can tell me anything don’t you, that I love you whatever?”

“I know. I didn’t not tell you on purpose, it just wasn’t……, I had to make a decision and I did.”

Hating myself for asking the question, but I have to, I look him straight in the eyes, “Is there anything else that I don’t know?”

“No. Well, nothing I can think of but if I do, I’ll tell you. I promise.” We kiss before I reach down to gather Charlie out of the bath and wrap her up nice and warm in her towel. I help Aaron up with me and we make our way into her nursery laying her down on her changing mat and with Charlie here, now I’m the one blushing as Aaron asks his question, “So, who was Mistress Annabelle again?”

TBC
Addicted to You

Chapter Summary

April 2017 / Month 7 - Week 27: Aaron and Robert take a much needed break from life in Emmerdale.

Aaron, Tenerife - Friday 7th April 2017 (Week 27)

“Oh wow.” Smiling to myself, I silently follow Robert out onto the terrace, not needing to see his face to know exactly what is going through that overactive albeit predictable brain of his and it doesn’t take a genius to know what’s coming next, “I seem to remember mentioning something along the lines of a cheap late deal.” He glances at me, squinting from the sunshine and my breath catches as he runs his hand through his boyish blond locks, ‘Considering we’re skint, as in really skint, I didn’t think I had to define cheap. I mean, cheap’s cheap right, a cheap late deal. Do I want to know how much this is costing, because this doesn’t look cheap, it looks like it cost an arm and a leg, not that I’m complaining but well, I am. Don’t look at me like that, I can’t help it; someone has to make sure we have enough money for all that chutney you keep eating.”

Robert looks so cute right now, he’s totally not getting why I’m giggling at him. The look on his face is a rare old contradiction. On the one hand, his eyes are lapping up the luxury and the fantastic view yet on the other his face is all pinched at the thought we’re breaking the bank. He’s such a worrier sometimes and I love him for it so I take pity and put his fears to rest. “I used the honeymoon fund.”

Oops, that did it!

Openly chuckling upon seeing his chin drop as it does when he finds out he’s not quite as in control as he thinks he is, I can’t help feeling a little smug that I can still stun him when I want to as he stutters a response, “We had a honeymoon fund?”

“It was going to be a surprise later in the year, but I thought what the hell and decided to kill two birds with one stone.”

And there it goes, chin up with his pouty face taking over; he’s so adorable, looking all flustered and indignant. “I thought we said no more secrets; I can’t believe you had a honeymoon fund and didn’t tell me about it.”

“Well, it wouldn’t have been a surprise if I had, now would it? I assume it meets sir’s exacting high standards; just wait until you see the bedroom.” His features soften a little and I spy a hint of a sexy smile just waiting to burst onto the scene, “And you’ve got to admit a bit of pampering will do us both the world of good.” Oh, I do love my husband, teasing him with my best come-on eyes is fun, “So, am I going to get my thank you kiss now?”

I’m too late batting his hand away as his playful slap on my arse definitely has a sting to it, “Oi, pregnant man here.” I grin at him as he scoops me up in his arms.

He rubs his nose against mine, nuzzling, his voice taking on a heavenly flirtatious edge, “Maybe, just a little one, I’ll think about it.”
Encouraging him, I give his nose a nudge with my own, “That had better be a definitely maybe else you can go get back on that plane and I’ll enjoy this all on my own lonesome.”

I make as if to pull away, but there’s no chance of that with his wonderfully large hands getting all grabby with my arse cheeks, holding me in as close as the bump allows to kiss my nose before sliding his down the other side of mine to continue nuzzling. With our mouths so close, it’s a wonder our lips aren’t touching what with the sexual tension rising at a rate of knots yet we continue our dance a little longer, “Oh, really, you’d be very lonely though.”

Feigning indifference, I fail to resist wrapping my arms around his waist, “I’d cope, I’m sure.”

Swaying our bodies together, his right-hand works its way under my t-shirt, sliding up my back, “You wouldn’t miss me at all, not even a teensy-weensy bit?”

“Naw, I’ll have the little ones to keep me company.” With our eyes locked, we’re both smiling at each other, it’s heady and intoxicating; we both know exactly where this is going to end up.

“They can’t give you daily head and shoulder massages though, or those foot rubs that you like; admit it you need me.”

Slightly distracted by his hand meandering its way slowly down my back, I lick my lips; the lust in Robert’s eyes is plain to see as I keep the act up, “Oh I don’t know, it’s amazing what you can pick up on the internet these days, don’t you think? I’m sure I can find a nice local fella whose good with his hands.”

With a hand easing down inside my jeans, his finger strokes fleetingly over my hole and there’s no holding back the decadent moan that slips out of my mouth as he kisses my ear and works down my neck before stopping to pull my t-shirt up over my head, “It’s a good job I come for free then wouldn’t you say? And I have very talented hands.” To prove his point his finger caresses my hole then abandoning any kind of pretence, he rams his tongue down my throat and we share a hungry kiss.

With my hands either side of his neck, my fingers spread up through his hair as I take a few seconds to recover my breath, our noses once more touching, but I prevent him diving in for more, “It depends on what you’re offering. Not just any old massage and foot rub will do, I’m quite hard to please or so I’ve been told.”

“Are you now? Why don’t I give you a sample of what I can do and let’s see if I hit the mark?”

The rest of my clothes are removed so quickly that I don’t get a chance to register that I’m buck naked whilst he’s still fully dressed as he walks me backwards before guiding me down onto the end of one of the sun loungers. I lie back as Robert strips out of his own top, throwing it over his shoulder without a care where it lands. He kneels down and drags my body towards him so that he has full access to me whilst my feet come to rest on the warm smooth tiled floor, one leg either side of him and with his hands resting on my tummy I close my eyes as he goes down on me.

I chuckle to myself, musing at how adventurous we’re having to become with needing to explore new positions with the ever growing bump getting in the way too much for us to play in a more conventional fashion. However, any further thoughts on this become a complete impossibility as Robert’s tongue glides up my shaft so that my body arches upwards seeking more as he pulls off to repeat the action on the underside of my now very erect dick, his tongue teasing and most definitely pleasing.
Reaching with my hand I try to guide his head for his mouth to take all of me, but he grabs my fingers so he is able to hold them out of the way. Moaning with pleasure, whatever my intention had been, it slips from my mind as he licks under my balls, before taking each one, swirling them around in his mouth, finding all my sensitive spots. Not being idle the fingers of his other hand edge tantalisingly up my thigh before his mouth devours my dick completely.

It’s been a few days one way or another since we’ve had sex and apparently, I’ve missed the release; I don’t have to tell him I’m close, he can read my body as well as I read his and he devours me, taking me past the point of no return with his finger breaching my hole to caress inside me. With my hips bucking upwards I come hard and fast down his throat; I’m gripping onto his shoulders so tight to help me channel the orgasm coursing through my taut body that I’m sure they’ll leave some bruising. For an instant, it feels as if the moment of release will last forever, my reaction amplified as his finger intentionally grazes my prostate making me zone out completely.

I must have lost time a little because the next I know, he’s cradling me in his arms, both of us managing somehow to fit on the same lounger, his voice helping to bring me back to him, “So do I get the job?”

Although still feeling in somewhat of a blissed-out haze, I’m pretty certain the words formed in my head to answer, but I don’t remember actually saying them out loud but I think I said yes.

Upon waking with a start, I immediately recognize I’m not in our own bed and it takes a few seconds to think where I am and I definitely don’t remember making it here under my own steam so Robert must have carried me. Sinking back into the luxurious pillows I enjoy the quiet sound of the waves breaking on the shore and finding the ebb and flow of the water relaxing I decide to rest a little longer before attempting to get up.

I’m comfortably settled and whilst dozing away I start thinking of baby’s names. There are so many to choose from and each time I’m decided I change my mind again. Although we’ve got our clear favourites, we can still add to the pot if we want, and when the mood takes us, we play the name game as it’s now become known.

“Hey, sleepy head.” By the time my eyes are fully open after having nodded off, Robert is laid down beside me, his arm loosely resting over the twins, who are blissfully settled for the moment.

“You hungry?”

“Thirsty.”

“I’ll get you some water.”

“Ten minutes; want to lie with you a bit longer.” Snuggling into him, we exchange loving kisses and I’ve never felt so secure and cared for as he wraps his arms fast around me.

“I can’t believe it’s so warm; the forecast is for seventy odd tomorrow.”

“Warm enough, not too hot; that’ll do me.”

“We could try the beach if you fancy; not sure if the water will be warm enough though, we might have to stick to the pool for swimming, don’t want you catching a cold.”
“Aww, such a fusspot. Let’s see how the mood takes us, would be nice to have a swim though.”

Wrapping his leg over mine, I can’t believe I’m getting turned on again and as much as I like the idea of making love non-stop, it’s probably for the best that Robert doesn’t seem in the mood and is content to just cuddle. “I like it here, thank you; I love you, Aaron Sugden. Just whatever you do, don’t let on how much it cost unless the debt collectors are going to be knocking at the door, you’re right, this is just what we need.”

His soft kiss melts my heart as I snicker, yet feeling a little guilty I decide now’s as good a time as any, to tell the truth. “Well, in that case, I have a confession to make.”

Amusement flickering in his eyes, his lingering luxurious kiss ignites the spark of lust once more, “You robbed a bank?”

Christ, why does that make me hard again and I think to myself who needs Matt Damon and Brad Pitt, I so wouldn’t swap Robert and all his quirks for the world as I nudge his forehead in admonishment, “No, you idiot, not even a piggy bank.” Robert snuggles closer to me and I breathe in his scent. “I’m not sure how you might feel about it though.”

Robert’s hold tightens a little, but his voice remains playful, “Spit it out Aaron, you have me where you want me, all loved up on our honeymoon; it doesn’t get any better than this much.”

I delay a moment, my own apprehension coming to the fore despite knowing Robert won’t have a problem with it; the problem’s mine, as it always has been. “Mum passed me a letter from the solicitor a few weeks back reminding me I only have until the middle of May to decide if I want to take my share of the money from Gordon. I’m going to take it. Liv took hers back then, she got pissed at me remember when I told her that if I still didn’t want it by the end of a year, I’d give it to her but it doesn’t make sense does it. We’ll have children of our own and as much as a big part of me doesn’t want to, that money’s their future. I’d be daft not take it, so I told mum to have it transferred.”

Surprisingly, Robert is quiet which I hadn’t expected, “What do you think?”

His eyes pierce directly into mine, his expression now serious and I can almost see the cogs of his brain whirring away, “It’s your call Aaron. If you don’t want it, we’ll manage; it’s tight but not that tight. Have you thought about what you want to do with it? We could put a big part of it away for the kids, a deposit for their first house and to buy a car and then there’s university if that’s what they want.”

“Cain said Debbie’s thinking of selling her share in the garage, he asked if I was interested.”

Clearly not expecting this, businessman Robert switches on, “Are you?”

“Yeah.”

“What about the scrapyard?”

“We can afford to keep on the help we’ve got, the yard is holding its own and I can still do all the paperwork and organization stuff, Adam hates all that and I kind of miss the garage.”

Robert buries his nose into my neck. “I could get used to having my greasemonkey back. I definitely had a thing for you all rough and ready in those overalls.”

“Really?”
“Oh yeah, god, just the thought of you all hot and sweaty on a warm summer day, smelling of engine oil and come is enough to get me going.”

“Now there’s a combination.” I study him and he catches me staring.

“What?”

“Thought you might kick off about the garage more.”

“As long as it’s what you want I’m happy. I’m still not happy about Cain though I suppose I’ll come round eventually; I’ll have to if you’re going to be working with him.”

“What when he retires?”

“I was thinking more when he’s popped his clogs.”

“Now now, that’s a member of my family you’re wishing away to the grave.”

“How soon enough in my opinion.”

“He’s trying Robert, that’s all I need.”

“I know.”

“Anyway, we’d still need to look at the garage books, but if it’s doing okay, then I’d buy her out and there’ll still be a nice bit left to invest for the dynamic duo.”

“Sounds like you’ve thought of everything.”

“Well, you didn’t marry me for just my pretty face.”

“You have a pretty face? I was too busy looking at your arse, in fact.....”

His hands are meandering as I protest, “Oh no, we can’t spend all day having sex.”

Robert brushes my arms out of the way, pulling me up and leading me up off the bed and I know I’m on a lost cause trying to dissuade him and let’s face it I really don’t want to. “Who said anything about staying in bed.”

Laughing, completely naked, as he shuffles me out of the bedroom, “And you call me a sex addict.”

“I’m not addicted to sex, but I am most definitely addicted to you.”

“.~.

Stupid me, why do I do this, I never think. Robert keeps telling me that I can’t carry on like I used to as if I’m invincible, without a care in the world, but do I listen, nope and it just gets me into trouble, every flippin’ time. Taking an involuntary step back, I realise I’m quivering and I’m not sure what unnerves me the most, that I’m shying away from a fight or that I’m letting a bunch of kids scare the shit out of me.

Flailing around to find the right words to extract myself from the situation I’ve gotten myself into, startled by the intervention of another voice I find myself unexpectedly saved yet all I can do is stand rooted to the spot as if a spectator. The relief that washes through me is undeniable as I let my rescuer
take charge, “Get out of here. Go on, get yourselves off home; you boys should know better. I’ll be having words with your father Manu Cortez and don’t you believe I won’t, you should be ashamed of yourselves.”

Watching the group of teenagers leave the playground, with the odd one still mouthing off, but I don’t take any heed, they’re nowhere near me and that’s all I care about right now. Unconsciously, I step back and the only thing that keeps me from retreating any further is the immovable wall behind me.

I don’t immediately react to the person now beside me. I know she’s talking to me, but I don’t register her words, instead allowing my eyes to follow the two children now skipping around in the playground reminding me what had drawn me here in the first place. “Please tell me you’re alright. Can I call someone?”

“What?” For the first time, I hear the words as I finally pull myself back to the here and now. “No, I should be going, sorry, I need to get back.”

Unsteady on my feet, her hand grabs hold of my arm and I don’t say so, but I’m grateful for her support as she leads me over to the park bench, “Come sit down for a minute first, they won’t bother you anymore, come on, humour me.”

Emotionally I’m all over the place and the first thing in my head spills out of my mouth, “How come you spoke to them in English?”

“I’m their English teacher, habit I suppose.” I must look totally stupid as I stare at her only distracted by the shrieks of the two little ones careering on and off the spinning roundabout; I watch them silently, assuming they are her children.

“Not too fast kids, you don’t want to fall off.”

“We won’t, it’s fun when it goes fast mummy.” My unnamed saviour smiles indulgently as the energetic pair jump down from the roundabout only to next scramble up the steps of the slide and practically hurl themselves down it, before running around to do it all over again.

“They’ll be the death of me, but they’re happy and I suppose I can’t wrap them up in cotton wool as much as I’d like to.” I stare down at her hand on my arm, before for the first time properly looking at her, taking in her soft features but still feeling very insecure, I don’t say anything.

After a squeeze of my arm, she lets go and holds out her hand in introduction, “Helen Rodriguez, nice to meet you.”

Almost on auto-pilot, I shake her hand, “Aaron Sugden.”

“Sorry about the others, I’ll make sure they regret it.”

“Teacher, right?” A shudder goes through me at how their mocking words had got to me and having seen this they’d taken advantage of my vulnerability and I had let them.

“Yep, they won’t know what’s hit them with the amount of homework that’s going to come their way and a stern talking to, with their parents if I have to.” Maybe not quite yet fully with it, I notice her eyes assessing me filled with concern. “Are you sure you’re okay?”
I don’t answer the question directly, as I’m still not sure on that one, but I do at least nod and respond, “Thank you.”

With no-one else around and seeing her smile, the tightness in my chest begins to fade, “You’re welcome.” She hesitates, looking somewhat pensive before continuing, “I think you’re the first pregnant guy they’ve ever seen. The chances are not high of it happening on such a small island.”

“They caught me off guard, I’m not usually such an easy target. I should have been better prepared.”

“I don’t think so, they should still know better; they’re smart kids most of them.”

“I really should be going.” Her hand pressures me to remain sitting, and staying put I don’t remark on it, instead switching the topic, “You sound English.”

“Yeovil born and bred.” Noting my inquisitive look, she expands further, “I met my husband working in London and he wanted to move back home here when we talked about starting a family. It was a bit of culture shock, but I quite like it now we’ve settled, it’s home and the kids love it.”

“How long have you been here?”

“About five years, I speak the language but we want the kids to be brought up bi-lingual so I speak English a lot of the time and I have the rule in school to only speak English with the students.” After a quick glance across to the children, she turns back to me, “I think I’ve seen you a couple of times walking on the beach in the afternoon, with some other guy. You here on holiday?”

“Yes, we wanted to get away for a bit, a rest and some sun before these two come and turn my world even more upside down than it already is.” My hand is resting on my bump and I can feel the twins shifting into different positions. I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of being in awe of the lives growing inside me.

“Twins, wow, you are brave.”

I snort in agreement, “That’s one way of putting it. Anyway, I really should be getting back, Robert fell asleep and I didn’t want to wake him so I left him a note about going for a walk but he’ll fret if I’m not back and I’ve been gone a while, we’re staying over in the next cove.”

“He your partner?”

“Husband.”

“You want some company as you walk?”

“I’m good.” she doesn't look convinced, "Honest, I'm fine; just a bit shaken. It's not often I'm in places where no-one knows me. I forgot there's a big wide world out there that doesn't always agree with men being up the duff.”

“Well, we’re going in your direction anyway.” Before I can protest any further, she’s called her children who come charging over, the little girl holding her mum's hand, both of them studying me curiously. “Lara, Joe meet Aaron. It’s Josue, but we call him Joe most of the time.” Her hand resting of Lara’s head as she corals us all along in the direction of the beach, “Go get your jumper Joe, I don’t want to have to come back for it like last time.” She grins at me, “He’s inherited my forgetfulness.” Somehow, I can’t see Helen being forgetful, it’s very easy to imagine her in front of a classroom full of boisterous teenagers, I bet there’s no unruly behaviour in her classes much.
I’m taken by surprise by a little hand extended in front of me, "Do you want a lolly?"

Apparently, she assumes the answer will be yes, thrusting a lollipop into my hand. Amused, I unwrap it and put it in my mouth, "Thanks." She watches me closely. I think to check whether I like it and as I don’t say anything to the contrary she grabs hold of my other hand, tugging me along impatient to get to the seafront, “Are you having a baby like mummy?”

There’s no judgement with children her age and I catch Helen smirking at me as I say, "Yes." I can’t help but smile as she starts babbling away about everything she’s going to do when her new baby brother or sister arrives. I get the impression she’s hoping for a sister so they can gang up on Joe; some things don’t change. Grinning I soak up her innocent rambling, thinking that maybe this afternoon isn’t so bad after all. Reaching the beach, we all go paddling in the sea which is colder than I’d like but if I can paddle at Filey in winter I think I’ll be okay with Tenerife in spring. I’ve decided I quite like Helen Rodriguez and her family.

TBC
Snuggle-baby

Chapter Summary

April 2017 / Month 7 - Week 28: The boys meet up with Helen and her family for a picnic on the beach before heading home.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year one and all, I wish you all well for 2018!

Apologies for how the chapter starts, but I was struggling to get going writing this one and this is what I came up with, and then it kind of stuck. You have to read it imagining Robert's sarcastic attempt at being patient and Aaron acting all bratty eight year old.... it's all in the tone.....

I also wanted to give Robert chance to talk about how he feels about Aaron being the one who can carry the babies, without Aaron around, but it kind of morphed into something else.

Lig = old Yorkshire dialect for 'to lie' (as in lie down)

Take care

Caro

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Robert, Tenerife – Thursday 13th April 2017 (Week 28)

“Tosser.”

“Twat.”

“Balls.”

“Cock.”

“Dickhead.”

“Prick.”

“Arse.”

“Knob.”

“C-word.”

“C-word; really?”
“What? I don’t want my children to hear the c-word just yet. Is that alright?”

“Perfectly fine.” We’ve been at this for the last few minutes; it kind of started out of nothing after he threw the tea towel at me whilst finishing the washing up after we’d eaten but to be honest he’s been provoking me one way or another since he got in. However, this last little word game of his had quite quickly shifted from where we started out, exchanging innocent teasing jibes, into full-on swearing and just deteriorated from there and I wasn’t going to stop if he didn’t so it’s kept going. I wait to see if he’s going to continue or if this has helped enough to finally get whatever he needs to out of his system yet. You’d think I’d be used to the emotional rollercoaster by now, but we’ve been so chilled out since being here that the switch in his mood after coming back from his walk had caught me off guard. So far, I’ve managed to restrain myself, maintaining a calm I’m truly proud of in an attempt to wait it out, but he’s making it very hard work. “So, are you feeling better now, after all that?”

“Don’t look at me like that.”

“What? I’m not looking at you like anything.” Following him as he goes into the lounge area, I’m interested to see what’s next as he pummels one of the cushions for about the twentieth time in the last couple of hours before looking around at what he can attack next. “Aaron there are only so many times you can re-arrange the cushions on the sofa and I have absolutely no idea if I’m supposed to be trying to understand your muttering or if I should just ignore it. So, considering you’ve had us putting money into a swear jar the last twenty-odd weeks for a lot less, forgive me if I’m a little curious about what’s brought on my husband’s sudden liking for profanities this evening. Care to enlighten me?”

There’s a flash of disappointment in himself, but he’s not quite ready to give in completely, “Wanted to feel normal for a change, is that alright with you husband dearest?”

Far be it from me to point out to him that he hardly ever swears except when we’re in the throws of passion or having a big argument, but I don’t think he’d appreciate me saying that at this particular moment so I just watch him bemused as he moves over to the sideboard. Standing with his back to me, he appears to be re-arranging the fruit in their bowl before repositioning it, moving on to fiddle with the vase but seems unable to make his mind up on where is best to place it. Breathe Robert, breathe. “And do you?”

Turning around, he has the good grace to look at little apologetic, “So-so.”

“We can keep going if you like? You can get a cushion and put it over the dynamic duo’s ears, they won’t hear a thing. I might have to get my phone though, cos I’m running out of swear words; I’m sure there’s lots but I can’t think of any more right at this minute. I’m all sworn out.”

And there it is, that last bit of fight within himself fades away; I’m still no closer to knowing what has set him off but at least now we can get back to some semblance of what is our real normal. “Nah, I’m good...., thanks.” Pausing, I can almost see the cogs in his mind whirring away, “I wonder how much we’ve got in the swear jar by now.”

“Well after tonight, quite a lot I should think.”

“We’ll have to work out how much we owe from today. Ouch.”

There’s an uncomfortable edge to his voice leading me to watch him a little closer as he rubs his hand over his stomach, then seemingly scratching an itch, “You feel okay?”
“Mmh, I’ve started to get spasms quite a lot after I eat anything spicy; they’ll settle in a bit.” Leaning back against the sideboard behind him, Aaron looks tired as he rests his hand over his bump, but his expression is filled with affection in spite of his grumbling, “Just another day in the life of being Batman and Robin’s incubator.”

The look on his face is a contrary picture, and I can’t help smile at how I find him so adorable; he could be picking his nose and I’d find him gorgeous to look at, “Well, who’d have thought watching you scratch your belly would be so fascinating.”

“Told you, never a dull moment with me.” He’s peering down at his stomach, prodding at his belly button through his t-shirt and then raising it up and prodding onto his bare skin, “Look it won’t go in anymore, I’ve tried, but it’s stuck like that.” The face he pulls is so very amusing until a sneeze comes out of nowhere, “Ah-choo.” I throw him the packet of tissues off the coffee table where I have my feet up, watching him as he blows his nose.

That’s another thing no-one tells you; you need to remember to carry around as much crap to look after a pregnant person almost as you do for the babies once there are born. If it’s not one thing it’s another and I wouldn’t mind but you have to be on the ball because what he might need one day, he’ll need something else the next. It’s very inconsistent. In fact, throughout the whole ride of his pregnancy the only thing that’s been consistent is his inconsistency; except for the chutney, there’s always chutney. Aaron is looking down at his belly button again, still amusing himself by prodding it, looking not overly impressed that it’s now taken on a larger-than-life life of its own until his next comment has me laughing out loud at him, I should have taken a picture of his glum expression. “It’s like a timer on the oven; ping! Almost cooked.” He’s hilarious, I feel like I’m in the middle of a sitcom but without the adverts.

“It won’t be too much longer; you’re two-thirds of the way there now, maybe less.”

“Ah-choo. For crying out loud, I must be the only person in the world that goes on holiday to somewhere warm and comes down with a cold.”

“You have a stuffy nose, not a real cold; you’re probably sneezing from disturbing the dust with all your titivating. The midwife said as much that you’d probably get one, remember?”

“No, I don’t remember. Do you want them for a bit; I don’t want to be pregnant anymore.”

“Oh Aaron, I would if I could.” Somehow though, I’m not sure he’d cope with me going through all this, and he probably knows it.

“I know. I bet you’d look sexy as fuck.”

“Possibly. I know you do.”

“Yesterday, I’d have turned that into sex, but today I’m too tired and we’ve done nothing except lig around most of the day.”

Still with the grumpy face on, I try and coax him into a better frame of mind, “Come here my beloved, come cuddle up and stop feeling so sorry for yourself.”

Switching from rubbing his belly to rubbing his eyes he yawns in an animated fashion, “My eyes are dry again. Will you put me some drops in before we go to bed?”

“Yes dear, not sure what we did with the bottle though, I’ll look for it in a while.” Giving in to a
yawn of my own, I put my arm around him as he settles sideways on, lying lengthways beside me, “You’re not the only one feeling sleepy. I’m tired out from doing nothing; it’s great.”

He takes a few moments of shuffling to try and get comfy, kicking off his flip-flops before he finally stills, “A right pair of old men we are.”

Nuzzling into his neck, I kiss the back of his head, breathing in how good he smells, “I don’t mind that label one little bit. I can’t think of anything better in our dotage than to cuddle away on a porch or terrace somewhere; a beer or glass of wine in hand, watching the grandchildren and putting the world to rights.”

“Awww, you big softie.”

“Don’t tell anyone; specially your lot, I’d never hear the end of it.” Another big yawn consumes my world for an instant before I tilt my face forward again burying my chin against the crook of his neck.

“Haha, they like you really.”

Knowing I’m not convinced on that, I take comfort in sneaking a kiss, his salty skin carrying the taste of the sea, “Mmhh, still, more of in the 'tolerates me out of necessity' category.”

“No, mum said she thought you’d make a good dad.” It feels nice as Aaron takes my hand in his, our fingers entwined, draping them over our children protectively.

My eyes are closed, but I’m intrigued enough to prod for more, “Honestly, out loud, she actually said that?”

“Yes. Well......, I was dreaming at the time, but I’m sure she would say it for real, as well.”

That earns him a well-deserved tap on the back of his head, “Such a muppet.” His only answer is a squeeze of my hand and I can sense him relaxing properly, “You want to move this into the bedroom, it’s late enough not to be too embarrassing at turning in and it’ll be more comfy?”

“In a while, it’s such a long way away. Too far just now.”

“Okay, close your eyes my snuggle-baby; I’ll wake you up when it’s the proper time to go to bo-bo-bunny-land.”

He sniggers quietly, “I’ve warned you before, don’t you dare start with the names again, it won’t end well.”

“Go to sleep, bossy-boots.”

“Whatever you say, daddy.” I bite my bottom lip to stop myself getting drawn in any further, feeling Aaron’s giggling thrum through his body. At least we’re now back to our usual pleasant teasing in comparison to our earlier efforts and feeling contented that all is once more right with the world, I close my eyes and let myself drift off to sleep.

Robert, Tenerife – Saturday 15th April 2017 (Week 28)

Aaron has wandered off with Helen and the kids leaving me to chat pleasantries with her husband, ‘Samuele’, Sam. He’s my age I think and surprisingly easy to talk to which is a good thing,
We’d been invited by Helen to a picnic which Aaron had told me about on Friday after meeting her on Thursday. What he had omitted to tell me at the time was how he had met Helen, Lara and Joe which has now lead to an awkward conversation. Thankfully, it only came to light after we had finished eating and not right off the bat; otherwise, there probably wouldn't have been a picnic. Sam is clearly feeling guilty; unfortunately, he’d been the one to mention it, assuming I’d known. Me on the other hand, I’m still practically vibrating from the effort it’s taking to hold off venting any more than I already have done about Aaron hiding it from me. In the end, Helen has taken him off for a paddle in the water with the kids to give me time to calm down.

At least, finally, I now know why he was in such a bizarre mood when he'd got back from his walk on Thursday. So here I am fighting with myself internally to keep a lid on my frustration, feeling even worse, that I’m guilty that Sam is stuck with someone he doesn’t know who is mightily pissed off with his pregnant husband. Although to give him credit, he’s been very nice about it all. It's been one way to break the ice if nothing else.

Pouring himself a large glass of wine, I gratefully accept the top up he gives me. None of that small measure shit either, full to the brim, just what I need, “Does he get a lot of grief like that?”

Getting in a final glare at Aaron’s back in the distance, I sigh and decide to not take any more of my feelings out on a stranger who’s trying to be nice to me and make me feel better, “Some. It’s not been too bad, but he sticks more to the village and places we know than he used to and gets very embarrassed when people get curious. He’s his own worst enemy though sometimes. He doesn’t like that he can’t carry on the same as before, that it’s not just him on the receiving end if anything kicks off; but since he started showing properly, he’s a lot more aware. It’s probably the family that’s the hardest; not everyone can accept that a guy can get pregnant which upsets the both of us, me more than him at the minute.”

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

“It must feel odd at times, you probably never expected it either?”

Strangely enough no-one usually asks about me, too preoccupied with Aaron, not that I mind, it’s just how it is, “No, but I wouldn’t change it for the world. I never dreamed we’d be able to have our own kids. Sure, we’d watch the news and knew it was possible since it first became known but this kind of stuff happens to somebody else, you know? I always thought we’d end up adopting if we got that far and now look at us, married and expecting twins.”

“I’m adopted; I have no idea who my parents are and I decided I don’t want to know. I was lucky though, my adoptive mum and dad are great, and now I’m a father myself I can’t imagine giving my children up. I understand the reasons why people do, don’t get me wrong, but knowing what I have, I can’t imagine making that choice.” Thinking that he’s probably had enough of our crap, I don’t go down the road of telling him Aaron almost had an abortion, but his next question throws me a little, “Do you wish it was you?”

“What, being the pregnant one?”

“Yeah.”
I take a big drink of wine before answering, it’s been quite a while since I thought about it, “Sometimes, but then I’m not really sure I’d cope. Aaron’s more cut out for handling all the ups and downs of being pregnant and I’m better at handling him than if it were the other way around. I think I’d be ready to jump off a cliff by now with all the stuff he has to put up with; I don’t suffer quietly.”

Sam has a sparkle in his eye as he looks over to where they are all paddling and splashing at the edge of the water, “Ha, Helen’s a great mum; she has patience in spades it’s also why she’s such a good teacher, but that all goes out of the window when she’s pregnant. I travel off the island a lot for work and I’d put money on it being the only reason we didn’t kill each other when she was carrying Lara and Joe, it was the same with both of them.”

“Aaron has his moments, quite a few at the minute if I’m honest; but generally, I’d also say he wears being pregnant pretty well.” I look over and watch him for a minute. He’s in the water with both Joe and Lara hanging off him; he does look good and it makes me feel all warm and fuzzy about what’s to come. Looking back to Sam I find he’s watching me watch them and has that knowing look on his face as if he knows he’s watching me watch them and has that knowing look on his face as if he knows he’s caught me out at ogling my man and he wouldn’t be wrong.

“Helen’s brother’s gay, been with his partner forever. They’ve been thinking about adopting but after she told him about meeting Aaron, they’re talking about looking into trying to actually get pregnant although I don’t think it’s that easy.”

“Well, I know they can at least test if either of them has the right gene. I tried to learn as much as I could when I found out about Aaron but it gets quite sciency and I gave up trying to work it out. As long as Aaron’s healthy and the babies are when they arrive, I’m going to ignore all the rest of it. It’ll only send me round the bend with worry if not; been there done that. All I remember is that Aaron has some dormant gene that gets triggered by a rare protein that I have which releases when, well you know. Something has altered to somehow make this possible, but no-one knows what and why, just another change in the evolution of mankind, I suppose. Who knows, at some point in the future maybe it’ll become normal for all guys to be able to have babies.”

There’s a lull for a minute or two and I actually have my eyes closed, lying back with my wine glass resting on my front, when Sam’s words surprise me, “I have the same gene that Aaron does.”

Sitting up, switching onto my side, sipping my wine I find myself curious, “How do you know? They’re not supposed to tell you unless you ask, or at least in the UK they’re not. If you don’t mind me asking, that is.”

“I had an operation a few weeks ago; it’s a standard test now and they asked me if I wanted to know so, I said yes. I don’t really know why; curiosity more than anything maybe. I haven’t told Helen, I haven’t told anyone.”

“You going to? Tell Helen I mean.”

He’s fidgeting, the conversation bizarrely doesn’t feel as weird as maybe it ought for two complete strangers to talk about something so personal. “Maybe, it’s not like it’ll change anything; but it’s a strange feeling to know it’s a possibility. Do you have any other children or will the twins be the first?”

“They’re the first, as far as I know of.”

“Odd answer.” He said this unintentionally I think as he’s looking quite sheepish.
Smiling at myself, thinking about my past doesn’t scare me like it used to, “I wasn’t the most faithful of people. It’s different with Aaron now, but before, I played around a lot and got someone pregnant; I suppose there’s always the chance that there’s a kid out there that I don’t know about.”

“Did she have it?”

“She had an abortion. Aaron doesn’t know; not that it’s a secret, just it was well before I met him and it never came up in conversation. It was what I wanted at the time and I still don’t regret it because I probably wouldn’t have met Aaron but you do think about things differently as you get older. Sorry, you’re not religious are you or…?“

“It’s good Robert. Sometimes it’s easier talking to someone you don’t know and I needed to tell someone, someone who isn’t Helen. Sorry that you got dumped on with it.”

“Well, considering you saw our marital spat earlier and that my husband is pregnant, I think you can feel free to talk away.” He smiles at me, shooting a quick look over to where the others are, he clearly isn’t ready to share this with his wife yet. “You don’t have to answer, but would you want to try and be the one to carry?”

“I don’t know, I’ve thought about it, a lot. It’d be weird and I know Helen’s really progressive on all this kind of stuff, but I’m not sure how she’d feel about this. And it’s not like you and Aaron, she can’t get me pregnant so at the end of the day it’s neither here or there.”

“It’s never that simple though is it?” Our circumstances are different but I’d be a liar if I said I hadn’t thought about it. Being able to give birth, to carry a life is special, but I’m at peace that it’s Aaron and not me. “The way I look at it is that it takes the two to conceive. Aaron said the other day he felt like an incubator, but he’s not, he’s so much more than that; but you see, I also know that at the same time he needs me. I’m not saying he couldn’t do this on his own because I know without a shadow of a doubt that he could, but he looks to me to keep him sane and I’m the first person he turns to for help. Sometimes it feels like I’m a part of him, or we’re a part of each other, but then again, we have a complicated history. We’ve been through a lot which probably plays a part in how I feel about this.”

“You don’t ever get jealous?”

“No, but as far as I know, I can’t carry, you could, so like you said it’s a bit different in more ways than one.”

“I’m just struggling to wrap my head around everything; it kind of all happened around the same time Helen realised she was pregnant.”

“And you keep thinking what if it was me?”

“Yeah, it’s stupid I know.”

“Not really, I did the same when I found out about the twins. Just the fact that Aaron’s a man and can carry a child, it’s a mind-fuck and telling yourself any different doesn’t change that. You’re happy though right? Great wife, nice kids?”

“Yeah, I am happy that’s what makes me feel guilty every time I think it.”

“Don’t. There’s nothing wrong with wondering what it’d be like. You’d know better than me, but didn’t you ever think what if, even before you knew; like when you had Lara or Joe? I kind of always assumed the thought crosses most dads-to-be mind at some point.”
“Yeah, but you push it away; like you said, I never thought it was a possibility.” I’m about to answer when he cuts in looking nervous, “Do me a favour, don’t mention this to Aaron, I just needed to say it out loud to someone, it’s been driving me nuts.”

“I get it.” Pulling my mobile out of my shorts pocket, I push it over to him, “Look, here’s my number; if you want to talk, you can call me and I know you asked me not to tell Aaron, but he knows how to keep a secret and for what it’s worth, from the what, oh all of two hours I’ve known you, you and Helen seem as close as me and Aaron, but when you’re ready, you should tell her.”

“Maybe. Thank you.” He gets up as I hastily retrieve my phone and put it away as the others land upon us, Sam hoisting Joe up into his arms. Watching them, it’s easy to see they all belong together yet. I wonder how I’d feel if I was in Sam’s shoes? He clearly loves his wife and family; all the same, finding this out has had an effect he hadn’t expected I don’t think. I’m sure he’ll work it out when he’s ready.

I’m distracted by my own child-bearer, sticking his foot in front of me, “Look.”

Smiling up at him, I’m amused at his pained expression, “What Aaron?” He uses his foot to gesticulate, prodding it very close to my glass of wine which I pick it up to protect its contents. Squinting at my husband, I’m still non-the-wiser what he’s on about.

Honest, he’s so like a big kid at times, “My swollen feet and ankles need a growth chart all of their own, Robert. I’m so not looking forward to the plane ride home tomorrow, it’ll just make them worse. You’d think putting them in the water would make a difference, pfft.”

“We can have a bath when we get back to the villa and I’ll give you a foot massage after.”

“Calves, neck and shoulders too?”

Taken in by his cute hopeful face, begging with a certain twinkle in his eye, he knows he has me, “Yes, if you want.” However, I’m not a complete pushover, “It’ll cost you though.”

He’s giving me playful come-on eyes, the ones he knows I can't resist, “I’m good for it.”

I turn over onto my front, mostly to hide the effect he’s having on me, “Oh, I’ll make sure you are.”

Kneeling down on the sand next to me, he whispers into my ear, “Promises, promises.”

Unable to avoid laughing at his cheekiness, I wrap my arm around his waist pulling him down onto the towel with me; everything from before forgiven and forgotten. He’s hardly down when out of nowhere Lara and Joe career into us, before Sam and Helen extract them chiding their boisterousness and that we might not appreciate being mauled by them. That said, Lara manages to install herself against Aaron and we both find Helen's huffing at her daughter’s inability to do as she’s told amusing.

“Oh!”

Aaron places his hand protectively on her head which is resting against his tummy, “What ‘Oh’?”

“They kicked me.”
Smirking at her surprise, I enlighten her to the ways of our children, “They do that, they like to make their presence felt, usually when you least expect it; but I have to say in this case, you probably just woke them up from their afternoon nap so they got you in retaliation.”

“Really? That’s just meanie.”

"Lara, really, leave the boys alone; Aaron must be fed up of you by now. Go help daddy and Joe."

With an almost sulk on her face, she does, but then not a minute later she’s laughing away with Sam. God if our children are anything like Lara and Joe, I’ll be exhausted; I have no idea where they get their energy from.

Helen must have seen my expression, “It’s good when they’re like this, they wear themselves out so much during the day that they’re in bed on time and sleep like a log.”

“I can’t believe we’re going have two of them at the same age, we’re mad Aaron.”

“Nah, we’ll be good. Hey, listen to this, Helen was saying that from around now you might be able to hear the babies’ heartbeats if you put your ear to my belly. How cool is that?”

“Pretty cool; can’t say I’ve heard anything so far. Although they must recognise my voice when I talk to them, as they do like to kick.”

“Yeah, you always did provoke physical response more than most anyone else I know.”

“Haha. I’m not that person anymore and you know it.”

“I wonder if we can record it on our phone.”

“Maybe.”

Ruffling his hair, quietly we watch the others for a while dozing in the sunshine.

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Helen is in tidy-up mode whilst Joe and Lara are putting the finishing touches to their castle, “You want any more to eat before I pack this stuff away, Robert, Aaron?”

I shake my head and Aaron practically groans his response, “No thanks, I feel like a beached whale as it is.” He looks back at me, pre-empting my thoughts, “No comment you.”

Feigning innocence, I respond in kind, “Never said a word.”

“Didn’t need to, I know how that mind of yours works.”

“Stop wriggling, here, lean like this.”

“It's not me that can't keep still, it's your children; urrgh, stupid body.”

Helen comes and sits next to us, pouring me a top up of wine and I smile at the forlorn look in her eye that she’s not having one with me, “You should get one of those pregnancy pillows, they’re great.”

Aaron finally stills so we can cuddle together lazily, “I was looking at them, but wasn’t so sure.”

“Worth every penny, well for me anyway, everyone’s different.”
He looks tired. We should be going soon, have a nap, “Midwife told me to do yoga to help with the cramps, but me and yoga don’t get along too well. I have a go every now and again, but I get bored, I just about manage the other exercises I got given.”

“You could try going to a class.”

“Oh yeah, let myself be made more of a spectacle than I already am. No thank you.”

This irks me and I snap at him a little more than I intended, “You’re not a spectacle, don’t say that.”

“Well it’s true, you see how people look at me sometimes.”

“You’re gorgeous, it just annoys me when you say stuff like that and you know it does, so just stop it.”

“I’m sorry.” In the blink of an eye, I see the tears forming and I kick myself, knowing how sensitive and emotional he is at the moment.

“Oh crap, I didn’t mean to make you cry. Now I feel like a right dick.”

Having made our excuses, we parted ways promising to keep in touch and are now making our way along the beach back to the villa, walking hand in hand, Aaron having gotten over his emotional moment. I’m used to them by now, as he says, ‘those hormones are a real bitch’. Playfully bumping against each other as we walk, Aaron’s the one to start up the conversation, "You seemed chatty with Sam?"

“You abandoned me remember, swanning off with Lara and Joe.”

“They’re cute and funny, and you were annoyed with me.”

I bite my tongue, holding back the retort that springs to mind, “I was the epitome of polite, he seems alright though.”

“Just alright?”

“I could say he’s cute and funny, which would be true, but I didn’t think you’d find it amusing.” I throw him my best grin and it wins him over easily, “Don’t be jealous love, you know I only have eyes for you.” He rolls his eyes at me knowingly. “Thursday really upset you, right?”

“I know I should have told you, but I was annoyed with myself; I didn’t need you to tell me off as well. Sorry I’ve been so moody since.”

“Haha, Aaron you’ve been a moody yo-yo for the last seven months; I think I’ll cope. Lara’s fascinated by your bump, I didn’t think she was going to let you go at one point, you’ve got a friend for life there.”

“She’s excited about having a new brother or sister.”

“She’s right about one thing; we are going to have to brush up on our nursery rhymes. The only ones I know seem to be politically incorrect apparently.”

“No-one’ll notice in Emmerdale. You could just sing the top ten in the charts, they won’t know any different; no swearing of course.”
“What, Ed Sheeran and Clean Bandit?”

“Why not?”

“I dunno, it just seems wrong.”

“Easier though probably.”

“Is it sad to say that I’ve missed Emmerdale? It’s been nice to be somewhere warm and not working, but I kind of missed being in our own home.”

“Me too. I have a blood test on Tuesday, can you come with me?”

“Depends what time; I shifted a couple of meetings with us coming away. Did you put it in my calendar?”

“Forgot, sorry. Still got that pregnancy brain thing going on. I think I put the antenatal class in though because they’re planned out pretty much all the way now.”

“What’s the blood test for?”

“Anaemia and something else, I don’t remember. Oh, they’ll test for glucose tolerance also. I’m not supposed to eat anything the night before. Don’t let me forget, you know what I’m like.”

“I’ll put a reminder in my phone.”

“Robert.”

“Aaron.”

“I do love you. Sorry for being such a grump.”

“I know snookums.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to ‘Nice’ for the prompt on the pregnancy pillow.
Tea and Sympathy

Chapter Summary

April 2017 / Month 7 - Week 29: The third trimester symptoms begin to make their mark.

Aaron, w.c. 17th April 2017 (Week 29)

It's such a lovely afternoon, it would have been remiss not using this chance to escape the reality that is my life; I'd just been waiting for the right opportunity to present itself. After settling as comfortably as is possible on the not so comfortable plastic garden chair, pulling another in front of me, I put my feet up before resting back, tilting my head upwards in order to catch as much of the sunshine as possible. It feels good after being cooped up inside the last few days, it had seemed like the rain wasn't ever going to stop until it finally did.

The garden is blessedly peaceful with, for once, no-one bothering me for this and that; all the prodding and poking earlier this morning by the doctor and midwife was wearing. The original excuse, not that I needed one mind, had been to have some quiet time to read the pamphlets I'd received. They had said the more informed I am, the better I’ll be prepared for what’s to come in the next few weeks. Saying that life wouldn’t ever be the same again was somewhat of an understatement I think; they’re not the ones having to live it.

Now I’m out here, I drop them down the side of the chair unopened, instead preferring to close my eyes for a while and simply enjoy the sunshine. I chuckle to myself, my own warped sense of humour kicking in; it’s a good job no-one is around to ask, they probably wouldn’t have got the joke. It’s nicely relaxing and definitely warm for the time of year, the sun on my face reminds me of our holiday to Tenerife. Thinking back to it brings a smile to my face; we’d really enjoyed having some quality time to ourselves, knowing that after giving birth that might become a rarity and not to mention the fantastic sex. I can’t imagine what it would have been like if I’d have been the opposite and had gone off sex like some people do. Robert complained about the amount of sex I ‘forced’ upon him, but we both knew it was in jest; he was as bad as me most of the time.

It’s such a perfect day, there’s not a cloud in the blue sky when I open my eyes squinting before closing them again. Smirking to myself, at least I’m resting and doing as I’m told for once; honestly, the family can’t help themselves from fussing and do they ever make so much noise when they’re around. Everyone has been doing my head in, always having an opinion; the more time that passes, the more it feels like they talk at me as if I’m a child. Do this, do that, go here, go there. I’d tell them not to waste their breath, but they wouldn’t listen so I don’t bother. Hearing a distant voice calling my name, I peer up, wave an acknowledgement before returning to my musing.

I had considered taking myself off somewhere else to have some space to myself but on a day like today, here’s as good as any. Shifting uncomfortably, I attempt to find a better position; the bane of my life, sodding aches and pains in places I didn’t even know I had. Unconsciously I place my hand under my t-shirt, resting it on my stomach, the instinct to protect as strong as ever.

With sleep during the night still elusive, I’m exhausted so it feels good now that I’m finally able to
close my eyes and let the darkness pull me in. So many memories, so much love, more than I could ever have imagined; it’s these that fill me now, they’re like a warm embrace. It’s a relief after letting the guilt consume me these last few days. Everyone and their mother has visited, not knowing what to say or where to look; they didn’t stay long and I told the staff I didn’t want to see anyone today. You can only take so much tea and sympathy before it takes its toll.

The only person I want to see or talk to is the one person that doesn’t want to talk to me, doesn’t visit and isn’t interested in what I have to say. Not that I blame him, he had told me over and over but I never was very good at doing as I was told. As usual, I didn’t listen and now I have to live with the consequences of my selfish actions. That’s what he said in his letter, he couldn’t even bring himself to come and see me. It’s not my fault they pissed me off so much that I retaliated, well it is, but I can’t change who I am. Hot head Aaron Livesy, Sugden; Aaron Sugden. I least I won’t die with that bastard who called himself my father’s name.

As I’m pulled under, ever deeper, one of the last things I remember is my hand grazing over the bandage covering my now almost flat stomach; this is the only reminder that they’d ever been in there. A solitary tear escapes, running down my cheek but there’s no point crying about it; no amount of saying sorry or tears will bring them back. It’s ironic really, Robert had been so worried about this happening, who would blame who. Well now we know, but not for the reasons we had ever thought. He’d had to make the decision he had dreaded so much; he should have chosen to save them not me. It would have been better for everyone, at least then he’d have our children because he doesn’t want me anymore. I was far enough along they would have had a chance at surviving better than me. Now all that’s left is a gaping abyss and no way out. Our lives over because of a moment of my stupidity, couldn’t keep my mouth shut or my fists to myself; I never change, not really.

The sadness of it all suddenly overwhelms me as I sink into unconsciousness, my last thought feeling glad I won’t be waking up again. It had been unbelievably easy to steal the tablets; the hospital is so under-staffed it will be too late by the time they notice either that or me. I would have been released tomorrow, but at least it’ll save them an unnecessary ambulance trip. I’m not totally selfish.

A distant voice is calling my name, and all I think is no, I don’t want to wake up, I can’t face it, them; all I want is to be left alone, they should just let me go. Feeling the grip of a hand on my shoulder, my eyes refuse to open as I fight against it, trying to fend off the hands touching me. I don’t deserve forgiveness and I can’t live with what I’ve done; this feeling in itself has me fighting harder, “No, let me go, let me go, please.”

“Aaron, wake up, it’s me. Aaron, shit.” My eyes fly open, confusion flooding through me like a tidal wave, “Hey, it’s just a dream, just a bad dream.” The tears won’t stop, I can’t breathe, everything feels wrong. Although I’m clearly losing the battle, my struggling reduced to nothing more than feeble attempts at escaping, I’m not quite ready to let go. Robert’s strong arms enveloping my upper body serve to sap the last of any fight within me as he holds me close, rocking me in his arms, “Ssshhh, it was just a bad dream Aaron.”

Startling us both at the same instant, I’m filled with a sudden panic, my hand flying to my stomach and there’s no describing the feeling at knowing I’m still pregnant and as if on cue, I get a kick to remind me. The relief is real as I finally allow myself to collapse into Robert, I don’t know if I’m crying, laughing or maybe both. The only two things I’m certain of right now is that the three of us are alive and Robert doesn’t hate me; nothing else matters. Robert’s talking to me, but I’m not really listening, it’s simply comforting hearing his voice; he could be reciting the bible for all I know. For my part, it’s impossible to put anything into words just now and thankfully Robert doesn’t seem to expect me to, instead focussing his energy into calming me down, his hand stroking through my hair.
until it eventually rests on the back of my neck as I curl myself into him; well, as much as I can, considering my condition.

He must have realised that this position wasn’t going to work as he pulls us down onto the bed, holding me tightly in his arms until my breathing becomes more regular and the tears subside. I have never been as frightened of anything in my life as that dream; it wasn’t a dream, it was a nightmare. A nightmare of my own making, it wasn’t real, but I’m still scared, it could have been, it could be.

When I finally say something, it probably doesn’t make any sense to Robert, “You’re here, I’m alive.”

“I’d hope so. You weren’t answering your phone, I got worried so I finished early and came home.”

“What time is it?”

“Four-thirty.”

Looking over at the bedside table, I don’t see my phone which is where I usually put it, and for some unknown reason, I start panicking again. “It’s downstairs on the kitchen table, shush, its okay Aaron.” I can’t get rid of the unsettling feeling inside me, even now knowing that it was all in my head, “Hey, sssh, it’s all okay, we’re okay.” I realise I’m quivering. I’m not cold, but I’m trembling from head to toe. Robert must have noticed because his hands start moving, steadily working their way over as much of my body as he can; his big hands helping to do what I seemingly cannot on my own.

It’s quiet for a short while; the phrase ‘deathly quiet’ springs to mind and immediately I push my face against Robert’s chest, “Shit, crap that was so real, it was horrible.”

“It was just a bad dream.”

“That wasn’t a bad dream Robert, that was a fucking nightmare. Sometimes, I don't think I can do this.” My fingers are grabbing at him, grasping for purchase, desperate for him to ground me however he can. “Hold me, please just hold me and don’t let go. Don’t ever let go.”

“Always, ssshhh, I’m here and I love you. I’m right here, it’s all okay.”

“No, it’s not. Not after that.”

“Just breathe Aaron, take as long as you need.” His hand moves to my belly, his stroking is soothing and the twins think so too as they settle into their usual pattern. They had been stressing from me I think, or maybe I’m just imagining it, but they feel happier now. Either way, I don’t want him to stop and I place my hand over his just in case he tries to move it away.

“You want to tell me about it?”

Shuddering, I don’t want to even think about it never mind talk about it, “You’ll hate me, I hate me.”

“I don’t think I could ever hate you; remember it was just a dream, Aaron.”

“Well you did in the dream, you hated me so much.” The breathlessness starts to return and I battle with myself to push it back down, taking deep, slow breaths, until I’m able to say something, “Just
give me a few minutes, I’ll be okay. Just don’t leave me.”

“I won’t. I’m not going anywhere; not ever.” Kissing my head, he wraps his legs around me, it’s like his entire body is cocooning mine and gradually I feel the tension ebb away. I’ve had bad dreams and even the odd nightmare since being pregnant, but nothing like this. This was even worse than the one about dad, this was way worse.

“It’s to do with what happened in Tenerife, isn’t it?”

“What?” Stuttering my response, I wonder just how he knows.

“You’ve had bad dreams every night since that day; I sleep next to you Aaron so I know when you don’t sleep well because I don’t.”

“I’m sorry. You didn’t say anything.”

Shrugging his shoulders, his hold on me seems to tighten slightly, “Sometimes you half wake up but not properly; I just hold you and you go back to sleep. You’ve been bad though, since last Thursday; I thought it would work its way right.”

“I don’t remember that. I definitely dream more but even if I know I’ve had one, I don’t usually remember most of them, maybe the odd weird feeling or like déjà vu, but I remember this one. I wish I didn’t.”

“You look shattered Aaron, try and get some proper sleep. I won’t leave you, I promise.”

“No, I don’t want to; I daren’t.”

“Okay, just rest your eyes then, snuggle up and hold onto me. Talking about it might help. It did after you had the dreams about your dad, right?”

“S’pose so,” Robert squeezes me, helping me to feel safe and I inhale his scent, it’s familiar, comforting. “Yes, it helped you know it did. Just give me a little time, I just need to come round a bit first.” For the first time since he woke me, I look at him directly, and kiss him; being able to taste him makes me feel better, helps me know this is real and not in my head, “I love you.”

“I love you, Mr Sugden”

His eyes are watching me, and he gets a hint of a smile of me, he always does at this, “I love it when you call me that.”

“I know. I know you, Aaron, all the good and all the bad; not going anywhere not ever and neither are you.”

“Promise.”

“Cross my heart.”

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We’ve been lying together quietly for a long while, Robert had got undressed down to his shorts and we’re wrapped around each other under the duvet. I daren’t quite close my eyes, but I’m calm. Looking over at the bedside table, I see the pamphlet I’d been given whilst having my check up with the doctor earlier in the week, the one about male breastfeeding on the top. Robert is quietly observing me, thankfully he doesn’t push for any explanation not batting an eyelid as I think of
something completely out of the blue, “It’s your birthday on Saturday, you want to do something?”

“What other than you?”

Sniggering at his quip, this is evidence that he’s as horny as I am most of the time, “Ever the romantic.”

“It’s why you love me, I can talk on your level.”

That earns him a playful slap. Rolling on my back, I half release myself from his hold but his arm follows my movement as he presses up against my side. His hand reaches over my belly and I turn my head back in his direction to watch him. He smirks at me as his fingers play with my belly button, getting a girlish giggle out of me when it tickles. “It’s not a game you know?”

He’s unrepentant, continuing to play, “I like it.”

“I noticed.” Raising my free hand, I cover my eyes before rubbing my forehead. He’s right I’m exhausted, I hadn’t realised how much until now. Letting my hand fall over his, I stare down at the ever-growing bump that has taken over my body and pretty much dictates every little detail about my life. I’d been warned as we got closer, I’d have more weird dreams, something to do with the hormones they think and from the build-up of anxieties about becoming a parent. They told me I’d be dreaming about giving birth, not losing them, but I suppose it’s a reflection of my own insecurities and the increased risk we’re facing about anything going wrong. Twins are higher risk with a female, never mind a bloke. “I dreamt I ran into Wayne and his cronies in Leeds, ended up fighting and got badly kicked about. It was my fault, I practically goaded him. You had to choose, you chose me but you blamed me and I couldn’t live with it. I dreamt.....” Robert’s fingers interlace with mine as my eyes settle on his, “I wanted to kill myself, I took some tablets and went to sleep; that’s when you woke me.”

“You didn’t do that in Tenerife though, yes maybe you could have handled it differently, but you backed off Aaron, you didn’t push for a fight, you were looking for a way out. Helen said as far as she could see you couldn’t really have done anything other than what you did.”

“I shouldn’t have been there.”

“That’s crap and you know it. We can’t stop living our lives, we talked about that. We knew there’d times that would be hard.”

“I freaked out though.”

“I’d be more worried if you didn’t.” He lifts up, propping himself up by his elbow, his fingers guiding my chin so my face inches from his, kissing me softly, “Aaron, I know that you would put our children first every single time, you wouldn’t ever intentionally put them in danger.”

My voice is little more than a whisper, “You don’t know that. What if that happens for real, Robert; you know what I’m like.”

“Yes, I do and I know you’ll walk away, and so do you. You can’t help what other people might do or say but your instinct is to protect Aaron, it’s your first reaction, it’s who you are.”

“It’s hard. It’s so hard sometimes.”

“I know. You think I find it any easier; I’d be with you every minute of every day if I could. I just keep telling myself that easy is boring; there's no fun in easy.” Staring at him, he cuts me off before I can say anything. “You know what I mean, nasty nightmares not so funny I know, but having the
karate kids inside you 24/7 isn’t easy either or having to get up to the loo so many times, I lose count and to be perfectly honest, if I never see another jar of chutney in my entire life, it won’t be a minute too soon, but I wouldn’t change that for anything and neither would you. It was just a bad dream, let it go. It's not going to happen and if something does we're both stronger than that. We've been through so much already, we're not going to start giving up now, not ever.”

A big sigh escapes and he’s right, I know he is, it’s scant comfort just right now though. “I want to give birth at Hotten.” We have to inform the midwife this week at the latest and although we’d talked about it on holiday, Robert had left the final decision to me, “I don’t want to be too far away from home and that’s the closest.”

“Oh, you want me to tell them or will you do it.”

“I’ll do it.” I grin at him a little mischievously, beginning to feel more like myself again, “So, we’re staying in for your birthday then, I take it?”

It’s almost dark, the reflection of the street light outside shining in Robert’s eyes “Yes, you can pamper me for a change and I’ve been thinking of a few new positions to try, I think you might quite like them so make sure you get lots of rest beforehand.” Intrigued, I close my eyes listening to Robert tell me more until his rambling eventually lulls me to sleep.

“Hey, fancy seeing you here.” Smiling at Adam’s playfulness as he spins around with Charlie in his arms as soon as Vic had handed her over upon his arrival, before sitting down next to us and settling Charlie on his knee. She’s not overly interested in him though, too busy watching the world around us with her big bright eyes soaking everything and everyone in.

“We went swimming today, didn’t we Charlie, and uncle Aaron came with us.” Vic is fondly watching Charlie with Adam, they look cute together.

“Yeah? A right life of riley this pregnancy lark.” Adam grins at me. There’s only so much paperwork to keep me occupied and he knows how much I miss being at the yard.

Ignoring his attempt to goad a response, I let it wash over me because no-one in his right mind would say that to me seriously and instead I carry on with the theme of our earlier exploits. “You have a water baby, that’s for sure, she loved it.” I can’t resist stroking Charlie’s cheek as she sits on her daddy’s knee, it had been an interesting afternoon in many ways.

Vic clucks at me, setting me straight; I swear she gets more like a headmistress than a chef the rate she’s going, “They’re all water babies at her age. We had fun and uncle Aaron was less grumpy when we left than when we got there, so I think that’s a result.”

Robert coming in, hanging his coat over the back of a chair, smirks at me hearing Vic’s comment before going to the bar for a pint. I grimace in return, shaking my head when he gestures to see if I want something else to drink. None of them realises how tiring it is being the object of everyone’s attention all the time. Apparently, I’m a grumpy mare at the minute, quote-unquote from my sister-in-law earlier today. Tuning out Vic’s twittering on, I watch Robert, I can tell he’s tired. He’s been super busy since we got back from holiday and said he’d be late tonight so we decided to make things easy and eat at the pub which is fine by me. Although it had been fun at the swimming baths, I’m cream-crackered.
Kicking my foot under the table, Vic gets my attention, “Oi, bugalugs, I forgot to ask earlier, how did the blood test go?”

“Fine, glucose is good and I’m only a little bit anaemic which they seemed pleased about, but they still prescribed me some iron tablets. They told me I need to rest more to help with the backache, oh and swimming is good for me apparently.”

“They must be getting quite big now, I don’t know how different it is with twins. Do you have a picture from the last ultrasound?”

“Nope, we stopped getting them, the midwife is holding onto them for us. We don’t want to know the sex and apparently, it’s obvious. Though I did see by accident and I’m not too sure how he said that it’s obvious because I couldn’t tell anything one way or another.”

Vic would be far too impatient to wait like this, she wants to know every little detail, whereas I’m not bothered as long as they are healthy; her exasperation with this is evident in her voice, “Did you at least ask them how big they are?”

Adam and I share a look of amusement stemming from our long-term suffering of Vic’s personality traits now shining through. “Yes Vic. Batman is 2lbs 11oz and in the 32nd percentile and Robin is 2lbs 5oz in the 14th percentile. I’d swear they were bigger though, I’m sore more often than not; they’re kicking and punching each other quite a lot, Robin is the worst though. Batman is a lot more laid back.”

Adam looks at me suddenly interested, “You can tell which is which?”

“Yeah, they each have their own habits. I pretty much always know even when they’re moving around, not that there’s a lot of space in there for them to move about in these days.”

“Huh, we’ll be able to take them boxing when they’re older.”

Vic chimes in smugly, “They might be girls.”

Adam smirks at me, “So, girls can go boxing; equality and all that. Aaron’s mum packs a rare old punch. We can take Charlie as well.”

“Mhhm.” Vic is clearly unimpressed.

Fortunately, Robert’s return with his pint puts her off her stride. Sitting next to me, his hand rests casually on my thigh and I apologise as I pull myself up, using his shoulder to balance myself. “Nature calls. Again, sorry.”

Vic just knows how to make my night, there’s apparently no privacy when you’re pregnant not with our family and friends anyway, “You’d best get used to it, the time of spending your days on the bog have returned. You can’t stop peeing on the one hand and on the other you can’t go.”

I roll my eyes as if to say tell me something I don’t know, “Oh joy, and that experience was such a rush the first time around. Can’t wait.”

“I have some dietary sheets still if you want to use them and there’s some recipes you’ll like I can dig out for you.”
“Midwife gave me some stuff, but hand ‘em over anyway, it can’t hurt.”

“Eat lots of fibre. You know, have some wholemeal bread with your chutney and porridge preferably without the chutney.” She ignores the face I pull at her, and Adam and Robert just sit there snickering away, unhelpful as usual. “Anyway, I still say that pregnancy is a beautiful experience.” Thankfully I’m not the only one to glare at her, all three of us had the same reaction; if looks could kill. “Well, I’m just saying, it’s worth it in the end, hey my beautiful girl?” Leaning over, she tickles Charlie’s tummy who giggles in response.

Resting my hand on Robert’s shoulder after standing up and not being in the mood to agree after receiving yet another blow to my insides, the devil’s playground, testily I jab back at her without a moment’s hesitation, “You know that forgetfulness thing that you get being pregnant, well you must still have it Vic cos there is absolutely nothing wonderful or beautiful about permanent backache, swollen hands and feet, snoring so much that my husband has to go sleep in the other room so he can go to work without looking like a zombie, and spending half your day in the bathroom just puts the cherry on the top, that’s unless I sneeze and then I’m peeing practically where I am. Oh, and I still have to look forward to the varicose veins, heartburn and indigestion, and whatever else I have to suffer through in the next few weeks. The result might well be beautiful, but the way there, I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy.” I smile at Robert, feeling instantly better from being so snarky; he’s looking rather fine in his new suit, “The only good thing is all the fantastic sex we keep having.”

Adam is tittering away at us and Vic looks put out by my outburst, not that I care, “Now, don’t exaggerate Aaron.” Then there’s an envious turn in the way she’s looking at me, “Really, you’re having lots of sex still? I went off it well before this point.”

Robert decides to chime in at this point, pulling me down to sit on his knee and I don’t have the energy to object, “Well there was no sex last night, that’s for sure.” Wrapping his arms around my middle I lean back against him, “Honest to god they probably heard his snoring next door, it would have woken sleeping beauty.” Having finished embarrassing me in front of everyone, he gently pushes me back up, winking at me as I give him a scathing yet loving look, “You go to the loo poppet, wouldn’t want you peeing on my nice new suit now would we?” This earns him a grimace, a cross between adoration and I want to kill you which he pointedly ignores, he’s more than used to it by now, “Have you ordered yet?”

Ignoring the pet name, because reacting only makes it worse, I respond, “No, I was waiting for you, I’ll have whatever you’re having, go for something with more fibre in it if you can. I’ll take all the help I can get.”

“Christ almighty Aaron did you just fart? That’s worse than Vic ever was, that’s just rank.” Robert is struggling to hide his laughter at Adam’s words.

I got used to this kind of humiliation in the first trimester so I simply glare at all of them, my eyes landing on Vic, “I think I forgot to mention all the gas from my little list.”

“Yes, well, toddle off to the toilet then, before you do anything worse.”

Ignoring Adam’s face, still scrunched, exaggerated and over the top in his reaction to the unfortunate gassy smell. Sighing, I waddle away from them with as much dignity as I can muster. It’s better to just leave them to it.
Upon returning, I stop Robert as he’s about to get up to let me back into my place, “You might as well shift up, I’m going to be in and out a few times whilst we’re here probably.”

“You’re the boss,” After shuffling across, I sit down, gesturing for him to pass me my hot water, “So, how was swimming?”

Robert’s hand has returned to my thigh, he’s always touching me when we’re together these days I realise; I like it, I like his protective side like this, “Good, Charlie was fun. And floating in the water, I could almost forget I’m pregnant if it wasn’t for the size of my bump. I’m going to go again later in the week probably.”

Sitting next to Adam now, Vic’s is gushing almost to tell them more, “He was the star attraction. Sexy, pregnant, good-looking male, honest it was like a bee to honey with all the women around him, young and old.”

Shooting Vic a scathing look, I feel myself flush with embarrassment, she’s exaggerating but I did get some appreciative looks as well as a couple that weren’t, “Mhmm, I’m going to go at a quieter time if there is such a thing. Male bump caused a bit of a stir.”

Chiding his wife, Adam teases Vic, “You just called my best friend sexy.”

I swear she has no boundaries sometimes, “Well he is; have you looked at him?”

“Hello, sitting right here. Seven months pregnant, definitely not sexy.”

“Yes, you most definitely are.” Robert glances at both Adam and Vic mischievously, “And you two had best not forget that he’s all mine.” A little more seriously, he turns to me, “You’re alright though; nobody said anything to you?”

Shrugging my shoulders non-committedly either way, I make sure to stay relaxed so he knows I’m not covering anything up, “It was okay. Nothing bad happened, just got the look, you know. Surprise, then curiosity. It was easier than I expected really, but that was probably because I had Charlie and Vic there. You should come with me next time.”

“He was being ogled Rob, believe me; he was blushing for England most of the time. It was so cute.”

Intentionally avoiding Robert’s searching eyes, a mix of amused curiosity and if I didn't know better a touch of jealousy that he wasn't there. I change the subject, “Bought a few things earlier, Vic’s going to give us her pregnancy pillow so I didn’t need to buy that in the end and I started to look at car seats, lots to choose from.”

“You going to keep your car?”

“Don’t know. We haven’t thought about that. Aaron’s car is big enough. We can keep mine for us to have some fun in.”

“What that old thing?”

“It’s a classic Vic.”

“It’s horrendous that’s what it is.”
He looks at me for support, “Don’t go dragging me into this, you can fight your own battles with your sister, I’m exhausted enough from my own.”

“Pfft, some help you are.”

“Well, that’s what you get for not giving me any tea and sympathy earlier when you were all taking the mickey out of me. So, husband, I’m hungry; are you going to shut up and feed me or what?”

“Yes wife, your wish is my command.”

He’s beaming at me, just waiting for my response which he gets, “You are so going to suffer for that.”

I can’t help but smile, blushing, as he whispers into my ear, “I can’t wait.”

TBC
Whiplash

Chapter Summary

April 2017 / Month 7 - Week 30: Well into the third trimester, Aaron and Robert navigate through the ups and downs of returning symptoms, and a few new ones.

If you see .~. this means it’s not the same day as previous paragraphs but in roughly the same timeline.

Aaron, w.c. 24th April 2017 (Week 30)

It’s the undeniable absence of anything in my life that doesn’t revolve around being pregnant that has me feeling all needy and wanting to act out this morning, irrationally jealous that everyone gets to go to work and do normal stuff whilst I’m left stuck at home reduced to doing paperwork and the housework. “Take the day off.”

“I can’t, you know I can’t, as much as I want to.”

Batting my eyes, relaying a saucy promise of what’s on offer, I start to make my play, “I’ll make it worth your while.”

“Tempting as that is, I have a business that won’t run itself and people coming that I can’t afford to let Nicola or anyone else entertain for too long if I want to keep it.” Robert chuckles extracting himself from my arms, “You can hold the thought though until I come home tonight.”

Notching up the seduction, the sultry edge to my voice draws him closer, “Depends, will you do that thing with your tongue again that you did last night? I like that.” Kneeling on the bed with a wicked smile on his face my husband kisses me lovingly which has the blood rushing to my dick so that by the time he pulls away after landing a final luxuriating kiss on my mouth, I’m hard as a rock. Rising, Robert makes for the door to go get a shower. With my body already mourning the loss of his touch, rolling onto my side, I resort to more devious means to see if I can get him to return to bed. Giving me a sideways glance he sees my hand drifting down my front to in-between my legs and I don’t feel one bit guilty seeing the effect it has on him; I have no qualms about playing dirty to get what I want. Nicola’s not so incompetent that he can’t be at least a little late.

Hesitating by the bedroom door, his hand on the doorknob, Robert snatches a look at the clock on the dresser, “You could always come and help me out in the shower.” I would but the thought of having to leave the comfy warmth of our bed wins out especially as we can’t really fit the two of us in the shower anymore and he laughs at my expression, “Thought so. You’re such a lazy tease.”

He’s not wrong about the tease, but I’m not feeling one bit lazy as my free hand pushes down the duvet far enough for him to have a full view of what I’m doing with my other hand. Standing up, I can’t hardly reach my dick with my hand, but lying on my side in this position is much easier and I bite my bottom lip in response to the increasing desire as my hand curled around my shaft, strokes up and down its length in a twisting motion and Robert is caught like a wild rabbit in the headlights of a car. Standing stark naked, his visibly hardening member shows he is clearly torn between needing to go and wanting to stay.
Unfortunately, the spell is broken as Robert’s phone rings out and reaching across to retrieve it, he answers, all the while his eyes never leaving my body. “What do you mean they’re arriving early.” With a steady firm rhythm, pulling myself off has Robert’s eyes fixated on my groin as my teasing taunts the part of our brains ruled by our sexual urges. “Tell them I’m on my way.” Propping myself up on my arm, I rest my head against my hand and pushing forward with my hips I release a deliciously wanton moan. As the pleasure builds, my lips part slightly and I close my eyes to sink even further into the experience, Robert’s voice gradually becoming background noise. “Yes, yes. You can start things off, I’ll be there as soon as I can......, just handle it; it’s what I pay you for.” My breathing is increasingly thready as I speed up my hand and I know I’m not going to last much longer when suddenly my eyelids fly open at feeling an unexpected dip in the mattress, “Fuck, you’ll be the death of me Aaron Sugden.” Rolling me onto my back, his mouth draws me into his throat and sliding my fingers through his hair, I grasp tightly revelling in its wet, warm sensation which triggers ripples of burning desire through my entire body as he takes me on a journey that transcends like no other. His finger unexpectedly slipping inside is what has my senses ultimately flying off the chart.

Sometimes I seem to have the ability to hold off forever and then at times like this, I lose total control before I know it, coming hard and fast. My legs rest either side of Robert's body as he devours me, eliciting a pleasure that has me arching up, chasing for more, but his strong hands hold me in place as he drinks down every drop I deliver into his mouth. It seems he has been as quickly affected as me because in what feels like a split second he is scooting up the bed, pressing his engorged shaft into my mouth and before I have time to do anything, his cum is pouring down my throat. My dick is even still pulsing as his taut body kneeling on the edge of our bed shudders from the release and I’d be happily smiling at him if I wasn’t otherwise engaged. Instead, my fingers dig into his pert arse cheeks, grabbing with a tightening hold as there is less and less oxygen knowing it’s only when he has nothing left that he relaxes enough for me to feel the air rushing back into my lungs. Feeling pleased with myself, I smack his arse whilst lying back tiredly against the pillow and I blow a cheeky kiss up at him, “Have a nice day at the office, dear.”

Standing up with a sated grin as I pull the duvet back up around me, Robert leans over to tuck me in before kissing my forehead; reluctant to leave, his face hovers close, “You are so naughty.”

With a giddy laugh still coming down from the high, I reach up to give him a quick peck on the lips, before waving him away with my hand, “Shower, you smell like sex.”

Robert draws back, smiling at me his eyes sparkling mischievously, “You taste of sex.”

Chuckling to myself, I lick my lips in response and Robert groans as he finally leaves the room after a last kiss and I lie in our bed contented rubbing my hand over my belly as I hear the shower switch on, “So kids, what are we going to do today?”

I really don’t want to get out of bed, but I know I should. We’ve hardly left the bedroom since Saturday night other than to eat, pee and have a bath. It was Robert’s birthday on Saturday and I spent the night pampering him for a change; nice meal, massage, making love, sleep and then making love some more. It didn’t seem worth getting up for yesterday by the time we were finished exploring some new positions. Afterwards, we had played cards in bed, then watched a couple of films, talked and had more sex. Last night we’d made love like it was the end of the world; it was perfect.
The dynamic duo is definitely getting stronger. They are wriggling around like a pair of boxers, kicking and punching, and it’s the oddest feeling ever as if I might burst apart at the seams, whenever I sense them stretching. Typically, they continue to be at their most active just after I’ve eaten or when I’m lying down which is frustrating as hell because the lack of sleep on its own is a bitch. Combined with rest of the same crappy symptoms as the early months hijacking my life once more means my mood swings are back with a vengeance. I seem to effortlessly switch between them. One minute I’m horny and want to jump Robert’s bones and then another I’m so tired and cranky that I want to rip his head off which always gets a reaction from the kids. They are sensitive to loud noise now, so if either of us raises our voice they let me know one way or another that they’ve heard.

Even when they are not kicking, the familiar aches and pains are a constant reminder what with needing to pee all the time, not to mention the heartburn and indigestion which is so bad sometimes, it feels like I have a flamethrower in my chest.

However, there is also new stuff that didn’t happen before which I find fascinating even if it makes me feel slightly apprehensive. My nipples and the surrounding area have become very slightly swollen and tender. No-one would really notice unless they see me without my t-shirt on, but the change is my body gearing up for milk production. Even though I know the chances of being able to breastfeed are slim, it doesn’t stop me from wishing for it to be possible. Then lower down the dreaded stretch marks, itchy pink and red streaks across my tummy, are now a permanent feature. Robert tells me off for scratching at them; he’s forever batting my hands away as he massages in moisturizer before we go to bed on a night which helps for a while at least.

All in all, at the moment, each day is a repeat of the previous one, with either one or both of us reeling with whiplash from the rollercoaster of my emotions. I’m surprised Robert hasn’t threatened to move to Vic’s for a few nights to have a break from it all; I know I would if I were him.

Today I’ve been looking through all the lists we, well Robert, had made of everything we need to organize. I’m acutely aware now that we only have a few weeks to go which fills me with nervous butterflies. We have enough clothes already for quadruplets and the pram arrived earlier this week; slowly but surely our preparations are coming together.

Coming downstairs, Robert has gotten changed out of his work stuff and sits at the kitchen table. After closing the oven door, I stand still a moment by the sink, willing my hot flush to go away, “It won’t be long.”

“What’re we having?”

“Chicken.”

Fanning my face with my hand I don’t need to turn around to see his frown, “We had chicken yesterday.”

He should know better than to question things like this and I foist my frustration at nothing and everything on him, “I fancied it again. You could always come home earlier and do the cooking if you don’t like what you get given.”

“Alright, alright. Who am I to argue with you oh pregnant one, light of my life, my ray of sunshine.”

Turning, my lips pursed, demonstrates that I’m not in the mood to be humoured, “No need to lay it on so thick.”
“Who me?” Shaking his head in amusement, he ignores my withering stare.

Ignoring the petty response that sprung to mind, it’s time to plant the seed in his brain of a little something that took my fancy earlier today, “I was looking at car seats today.”

“Cars seats or cars?” I’d left the laptop on the kitchen table and he’s looking through some of the pages I’d bookmarked and I can’t resist a smile, not attempting to hide the fact.

“I can look, can’t I?”

“We don’t need a new car, we do however need car seats.”

“We could get something more practical.”

“Like what? And Aaron, I’m not sure these fall into the category of practical, do you? Yours is a four-door which we can use for when we have the kids and we use mine when we don’t.”

“So, does that mean just because my car has four doors, it’s going to be me playing taxi driver or I have to drive yours when I don’t. I like my car, yours not so much.”

He doesn’t rise to the bait, instead continuing to reading, “Let’s see after they’re born.”

Sighing, not wanting to get into an argument, I let it drop, for now, and take control of the laptop for a minute, “Those are the car seats I bought, they’ll arrive early next week.” I point him in the right direction to show him what I’d chosen, “Say thank you.”

“Thank you, Aaron.” We smirk at each other and I smile to myself getting the plates out seeing that Robert is now looking at the page of my number one choice for a new car, knowing that by the time I’ve done with him if I play it right he won’t need much convincing.

Getting comfy in bed is steadily becoming an impossible chore with each week that passes, and Robert’s antics tonight aren’t helping, “What are you doing?”

Huffing and puffing, I prop myself up on my elbows to watch him, “I thought I’d try some payback on our little mischief-makers.” Robert is sliding down under the duvet and not wanting to be left out, I pull it up further over my head so we are both now underneath. The warm stuffiness has me pushing away a mild wave of nausea as I stare down at him wriggling into the position he wants. I’m trying to work out what he has in his hand until flipping its switch forces me to shield my eyes with my hand as he shines a torch full beam onto my stomach.

“Oi, I have enough to put with without you sending me blind as well. What on earth are you doing?”

Ignoring my protest and attempt to shove him off me he carries on regardless, “A little birdie told me that they are now sensitive to light as well as noise and I should try this to get a response out them. Oh, and it does, look you can almost see the little foot there. Hilarious.”

He switches off the light and then back on again. Seeing stars with the shift from darkness to bright light, before throwing up on us both, I decide that’s enough. I wasn’t able to see the movement, but I sure as hell felt it and thoroughly irritable I snatch the torch from him, switching it off and then back on again, this time shining it directly at Mr Evil, “Hilarious is not how I would describe it.”

Now shielding his own eyes from the brightness, peering up at me Robert looks a little contrite as I stare daggers at him, the penny dropping as he realises why I fail to be impressed, “Sorry. I just
thought it'd be fun, you know. Didn’t think about that.” He can’t stop the grin spreading across his face though, “You still have to admit it’s cool.”

Too tired to make anything more of it, I haul myself back up out of the duvet, “I don’t know who’s the bigger kid out of the lot of you. I think half the time, I’m just here for everyone’s amusement, never mind that I’m a walking, talking punchbag.”

“Don’t be like that, if it was the other way around you’d be just the same. I need some form of entertainment after a long hard day at the office.” Robert slides back up, settling against me after dragging the duvet back to its normal place.

“Oh, so I’m not entertainment enough for you that you have to resort to tormenting our unborn children?”

Cuddling up, Robert wraps himself around me, his hand on mine resting on top of the bump and as if on cue there’s a kick, or it might have been a punch and Robert smirks at me, “Aaron, you’re all the entertainment I need and you know it; you love me really.”

“Mmmh, sometimes.” Seemingly comfy for now, we lie quietly together for a while and I pull Robert just that little bit closer, settling into the security of his arms.

Snug and warm, there are too many things rolling round in my head for me to drop off but I had thought Robert was already asleep until he speaks, “We're going to have to start thinking how we sort logistics out, we’ll have two businesses to run and two children to take care of. I can’t imagine the insurance would be too happy if you have them strapped to your front at either the yard or the garage.”

The picture that conjures in my head is surprisingly pleasant and a big part of me wishes I could do just that, “We can both probably work from home at least one day a week.”

“Yeah, but it won’t be easy to do more than that. They’ll be too young to go to a creche and a nanny is a cost we can’t afford right now.”

Deep down I know I’ve been avoiding thinking about this, kidding myself I could find a way to have my cake and eat it, “I don’t want anyone else to look after them, Robert.”

“We don’t have a choice, Aaron; not if we both want to keep working.”

“I could be a silent partner in the garage or just take care of the paperwork, then I’d only have the yard and we can probably afford to keep on the help we have now.”

“But you want to buy the garage because you miss being there, and you hate paperwork.”

“Not as much as Adam.” It's so frustrating and a part of me also feels guilty, "Do you think I’m wrong not wanting to give up work?"

“Aaron, I’ve always known you wouldn’t want to be at home full-time, you’d go nuts, we both would. The only reason you accept it now because you don’t have a choice.”

Contemplating our options, I work through what’s possible in the village, “Mum and Diane would probably do a day each a week. We could work from home one day, together though because I’m not sure either of us on our own would cope sorting two babies and working at the same time. That just leaves us with two days to work out.”
“We could maybe afford to pay someone for that.”

“No, I'd rather work part-time.”

"You don't mean that?"

"I'm not trusting our newborn twins to a stranger, Robert, no way. What about Pearl?"

“A few hours maybe on a night to babysit, but looking after twins for the day, it’d be too much, on a
regular basis anyway. She’s closer to ninety than eighty. Let me talk to Vic, she might have them the
other two days, she shifted her hours so she works a less during the day to look after Charlie.”

Sensing my concern about finding a solution, Robert gives me a gentle squeeze, "We'll work it out,
one way or another."

Having had his fill of arguing, my mood has turned even more thunderous upon hearing him shout
up that he’s going to the pub and the door slamming behind him. Perched on the side of the bath, the
big bath towel wrapped around me, I’m staring irritably down at my body, my legs to be accurate
and I'm decidedly unimpressed.

The doctor, who had squeezed me in for an appointment earlier, had confirmed the appearance of
varicose veins, explaining this is one of the things that happen and gave me some special exercises.
He’d said if I was a woman, he’d recommend getting some support tights. He was right in that I
might not like the idea but I don’t really care, I lost my pride a few months back; I’ll try anything that
helps so he told me what sort to get.

After coming home, Robert had burst out laughing at me and I’d burst into tears when he saw them,
which lead to an explosion of frustration on my side where I said a few things I meant and a few I
didn’t. With us both being cranky and tired, it was a case of bad timing and now he’s at the pub
probably having a few pints to get over his bad day and crabby husband whilst I’m crying on the
side of the bath at the unfairness of it all.

After testing the water, I turn off the tap and manage to lower myself down into the bath without
causing too big a splash, and closing my eyes I instantly feel a little calmer than I had earlier. Hearing
my phone buzz with a text, I take a look and seeing it’s mum I ignore it. She’s probably checking up
on me after listening to Robert tell everyone the woes of having a pregnant husband.

The quiet is bliss and the hot water is doing its job of helping me to relax. Batman and Robin doing
their thing are currently my only distraction. I equally love and hate them moving around; on the one
hand, it’s comforting as it tells me they are okay, then on the other, it’s wearing and their timing
sucks. I’ve started doing a kick count twice a day, once in the morning and usually on a night after
my bath. Tonight, I decide to start now to pass the time as oddly enough I find it soothing to count all
their movements, their swishes and rolls until I hit the magic number of ten. Fewer than this inside
two hours and I’m supposed to call the midwife.

By the time I’m out of the bath and sorting a few things in the bedroom, there’s no fear about them
not being fine, I’m more than halfway to the ten for each of them and it’s only been forty-five
minutes.

Scratching my itchy belly makes me smile, there’s no Robert here to tell me off but I still force my
hand away hearing his scolding voice in my head. Not having the energy to make it downstairs and
back up again, I'm pleased I had the foresight to bring the cream up with me. Rubbing it in, I consider just how much of an old man I've turned into. I'm out of breath from hardly doing anything these days, climbing the stairs especially does me in; I have to slow right down and have a pause to rest halfway up.

Cream all rubbed in, I go stand in front of the full-length bedroom mirror for the first time in quite a while. Letting the towel fall to the ground I take an appraising look at my body. Robert still swears he finds me totally sexy. In spite of all the unpleasant symptoms which seriously drive me to question why I’m doing this at least once a day, upon inspection, turning to the side and brushing my hand over my abdomen, I can see what he means in a weird kind of way.

There's a healthy glow to my face; physically I’m slightly curvier on the hips and I feel nothing but sheer contentment as my hand travels up over my swollen rounded belly. I’m really quite big now, which makes me smile to myself because if Robert dares to say this, I shoot him down so quick and hard it takes him the rest of the day to recover.

I’m so absorbed by looking at myself, that I don’t notice Robert’s return until I swing around hearing a noise by the door. We stare at each other for a moment, neither of us saying a word. We have these blowouts and then we move on, we’ve given up having a conversation to dissect it afterwards, we simply accept this is how it goes sometimes. I mean, there’s no easy way to apologise after asking for a divorce accusing your husband of impregnating you with the hounds of hell especially when you both know you didn’t mean it.

Robert might not be saying anything out loud, but his eyes are doing plenty of talking and eventually, he pushes himself off the wall against which he’d been leaning and reaching me places his hands on my hips, our lips brushing softly against each other in a chaste kiss, “Sorry.”

“Me too.”

Laying my head on his shoulder, with his arms wrapped around me, we both observe ourselves in the mirror for a minute, slightly swaying, Robert fully clothed and me naked as the day I was born. “Come on you, bed-time. You want anything getting to drink?”

“No thanks.” After a tender kiss, we part and I wipe a speck of something that catches my eye off his dark blue shirt, then stop an instant as my brain registers what it is. To be sure I test it, putting my finger into my mouth. Robert is inquisitively curious as I squeeze my right nipple, causing a tiny droplet of yellowy liquid to appear, which before I can stop him Robert sucks clean off my finger, then screws up his face in disgust. “Not your thing?”

“It might be nutritious for the babies but I wouldn’t recommend putting it in your tea.” Guiding me into bed, I strategically place a couple of pillows to help me sleep better whilst he undresses putting his clothes on the bedroom chair before joining me. “Don’t hit me but does this mean you need to wear breast pads now?”

Emotionally drained by the entire day and overwhelmed by the possibility that after all, I might be able to feed the babies at least something from me, all I can manage is to give him a weak tap on the side of his head whilst all Robert does is smirk, snuggling closer. Picturing the look on Robert's face just now, I find the whole situation uniquely absurd and start to chuckle. However, that did it for the pair of us because once I’d started, I couldn’t stop which leads to us both breaking out in fits of giggles for the next ten minutes or so. Not capable of thinking about this seriously right now, I decide to consider the answer to that question tomorrow.
Pregnancy Merry Go Round

Chapter Summary

May 2017 / Month 8 - Week 31-32: Inevitable changes occur as it gets closer to Aaron giving birth.

Chapter Notes

Apologies it's been a while, life is still hectic but hopefully this chapter gives a nice mix of everything the boys do best.

Robert, w.c. 1st May 2017 (Week 31)

Sitting back on the sofa, I flick through the photo album on my phone, enjoying one of the few and far between afternoons of peace and quiet for as long as it lasts; all on my lonesome for once and it's pure heaven. Aaron is over at the pub having arranged to spend some quality mother-son time with Chas but I'm not too sure how long he'll be so I'm going to make the most of it.

A few of the villagers, led by Chas and Vic naturally, want to throw him a baby shower and he totally baulked at the idea. They really should have known better. I did try and warn them but they thought they'd be able to talk him round so he’s gone to set them straight after being asked by Leyla earlier when and where it would be even though he’d already told his mum and Vic no way in hell. Considering the look of determination on his face when he left, I know who my money’s on.

It’s amazing how much has changed over the months. I’ve been comparing the photos I've taken practically weekly, sometimes daily; the almost insignificant swelling in his abdomen of those early weeks has blossomed into the unmistakable rounded bump of pregnancy, undeniable even if he is male. Smiling to myself I remember how good his taut body felt, filled with love and pride knowing our children were growing inside him especially when it was still our secret. I still feel the same now when I touch him. He’s lost some of his muscle tone having had to give up the physical side of working at the yard, but it’s been replaced by toning of a different kind from his exercises to help him in readiness for when he gives birth. He does them religiously despite bitching about it every day so I have one very fit pregnant husband. The muscles might be in different places but there’s nothing more of a turn on than his lithe thighs pulling me towards him when we're in the throes of passion.

I keep waiting for the day that he says he doesn’t want to have sex but it hasn’t happened yet. We still make love almost daily although it’s always me inside him as the size of his bump now forces this as our only choice. However, that doesn’t stop me pleasing him in the many other ways. His prostate is like a switch and I adore watching his face light up with ecstasy as my playing fingers turn him on, though I am a little concerned that after the birth he’ll go from one extreme to the other. According to everyone else who has an opinion, we'll be too tired to care.

It’s hard to imagine just what will change after the twins are born, and each in our own way we’re
preparing for another huge adjustment to our lives. It’s not easy though; being first-time fathers of twins, we don’t really know what to expect outside the obvious. One certainty is that I’ll have to share more of him. I share him now with the twins, yet until he gives birth they remain contained, but once born they will likely completely dominate every waking minute from dictating when we sleep, eat, everything pretty much at least at home until they sleep through the night. Not that I begrudge them being the centre of attention, I love them as much as Aaron but a small part of me doesn’t want anything to change. I like what we have now; it feels as though I have the best of both worlds: our children, a horny husband albeit one addicted to chutney but right now it’s about as perfect as it gets.

I love every reaction in Aaron, from watching him rubbing his tummy when the kids get active to his passionate stubbornness still trying to do as much as his body will physically let him. I couldn’t be any prouder of him if I tried. Sometimes I sense the jealousy of how deeply he feels about the dynamic duo, but then when he looks at me, even when he’s all irate and worked up over something or other, his love sears into my soul, it’s like a force of nature that consumes me. Now we’re so close to the birth whenever he’s near, I find myself wanting to be touching him, even if it’s just a brush of fingertips or knees, or sat side by side; he grounds me like never before. We both find the prospect of being fathers daunting and for Aaron that’s amplified with being the one to carry them.

This morning we made our final decision on names having chosen two girls and two boys names; there’s still a chance that we’ll change our minds once they are born, but I don’t think so. This led onto what they might call us, ‘dad one’ and ‘dad two’ doesn’t quite do it and neither of us really like the alternatives to dad. I suppose calling one of us, probably Aaron, daddy in the earlier years will be inevitable but they’ll likely grow out of that and then what, who knows. In the end, the conclusion reached was that we probably won’t get a say in it and they’ll call us what they want. I just hope we’ll be good fathers.

Picking names is the fun stuff but the not so fun stuff shapes our days. The books and midwife weren’t wrong when they said the challenges of the first trimester will come back in the third. Aaron indulges me when I tease him for being clumsy and forgetful but it’s totally dependent on my indulgence giving him massages to help with the aches and pains with a big dose of sympathy and caring. He’s not as tired as in the first few months but he struggles to sleep, his body is a constellation of by now very familiar conditions. After a spurt of growth which has Aaron saying he’s going to burst if they get any bigger, Robin now weighs 3lb 6oz having almost caught up with Batman who comes in at 3lb 9oz. Just by touching his stomach it’s clear just how little wiggle room there is, so no wonder he finds it hard to get comfortable.

Trailing a finger lovingly over his bump in the most recent photo from earlier I can’t deny the love I feel for them all. Aaron still moans at me taking the photos but accepts that after all this time I’m not going to stop and lets me; if he’s feeling generous he’ll even give me a smile. That said he wasn’t too impressed with me taking a short video of him struggling to get out of the car yesterday; I thought I’d got away without him noticing and it was seriously too good to miss. He was swearing like a trooper and it was hilarious as anything but I went and blew it, my unfettered amusement drew attention to myself by telling him how much he would owe the swear jar which in turn led to even more swearing. We’re now on jar number three and this one is filling up much quicker than the other two did and more importantly to me, I’m not the main contributor, much to Aaron’s chagrin.

He finds driving increasingly annoying. The lap belt has to sit under the bump but surprisingly enough once he’s settled, that’s okay, it’s the diagonal strap that causes the most trouble. With females, the strap nestles between the breasts and remains above the bump, whereas for Aaron who doesn’t have any breasts finds the friction against one of his nipples causes him irritation, the strap seems to gravitate there even after we made some adjustments. He’s hyper-aware of his nipples
finding them now very sensitive all the time which is great when we're in bed but not so much when we're in the car; something I now avoid whenever I can get away with it.

At the last visit to the GP there was a raft of tests again now he’s getting closer and he’s on tenterhooks until all the results arrive but according to the doctor and the midwife he’s as healthy as can be for anyone pregnant.

During the visit there was the risk of conflict between us when the doctor wanted to discuss the labour more and what kind of pain relief he wants; however, much to my own relief, this didn’t seem to get to me like I thought it might. The giving birth part still scares the crap out of me and despite his bravado Aaron is now in no doubt about the stress his body will go through with a natural birth, yet even with all my own misgivings about this I couldn’t hide my pride in his continued determination to do this as naturally as possible.

It's with a twinkle in his eye that Aaron restarts our banter as we take an afternoon stroll around the village, “I think there should be prams for pregnant people, not just infants. You could push me, it’d be good practice for when they’re born.”

Smiling at him, I plant a loving kiss into his neck. Wrapping my arms around him, he takes the opportunity to lean against me for support as he takes a moment to rest. “I had practice with Charlie and no offence but you weigh a lot more than the twins on their own. I could steal you a wheelchair if you’d like and then you could roll yourself around the village.”

“Don’t think I’d have the energy to move it. Knowing me, I’d be as likely to end up in a ditch covered in mud and then you’d make fun of me or even more likely yell for dangerous driving in charge of a wheelchair.” Refraining from laughing at his pout, my eyes and smirk belie my happy contentment as he continues to vent some of his frustration, “God I can’t wait for them to be out, Robert. I wonder if it’s as bad as this with just one or it’s this hard because there’s two of them.”

“Probably adds to it, but we did say it would be worth it remember, twice the fun in the long run.” Kissing him on the cheek, I tug his hand and we continue down the lane.

“I don’t remember saying that, are you sure; it must have been just after sex and I wasn't thinking straight. Did I tell you that it’s not as easy now to know who is who in there sometimes, they don’t move as much.”

“I think you mentioned it. You okay to go a little further or you want to turn around and go home?”

“Let’s go as far as the pavilion steps and we can have a rest.” There’s a smirk on his face as we both know only Aaron will need the rest whereas I could go on at this pace all day. I love listening to him ramble, I thought I’d find it irritating by now, but it’s oddly relaxing, “Robert my stomach has taken over my body, everything is all squished into one.”

Pulling him in close, I wrap my arm around his waist, “Is that a technical term, squished?” Narrowly avoiding his playful smack, my fingers find his once more as we meander our way along. “The midwife says it’ll get a bit easier when they start to drop.”

“I’ll believe it when it happens and not before. I know I’m going to miss having them inside me but right now I can’t wait for them to be born. Remind me why you let me think coming for a walk was a good idea.”

“Because it is; fresh air is good for both of us and some exercise of a different kind for a change.”
Aaron smiles sheepishly having seduced me twice earlier in the day already. Turning sideways on, he unwittingly gives me all kinds of access I could take advantage of but I content myself with holding him close and immersing myself in his smell, kissing his temple and resting my nose against it.

“It’s not my fault you’re such a horny husband.”

“You must have us confused my beloved. You might not be able to walk far, but you can still go the distance in bed even if we have to slow down more. I like it.”

“It’s your own fault. You make me horny, pressing all the right buttons and that sultry voice you use. I’m easily susceptible in such a delicate condition.”

Snorting at the gall of him I shake my head. “Let’s hope you’re still easily susceptibility after they’re born otherwise I’m going to be getting RSI from using my right hand too much.”

“I wonder if they know.”

“Know what?”

“When we have sex. They feel more settled afterwards these days.”

“That’s because we don’t go at it hammer and tong as much as we used to. They probably thought they were at a party where now it’s more like rock-a-bye, baby.”

“As long as they don’t think it’s sex education, they're not going to be having sex before they are at least thirty, I don’t care.”

“I thought we said no sex ever?”

“I quite like the idea of grand-kids one day, but not until after they’re thirty.”

“You’re not thirty, yet.”

“Well, I’m passing on the wealth of my fatherly knowledge and experience.”

“Maybe we’ll have had so much it will put them off.”

“We can only hope.” Looking at each other we burst into giggles as there’s much chance of that as us going to the moon.

“Mmhh, you’re such a worry-bucket and they’re not even born.”

“I want our children to enjoy life before settling down, what’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing, personally I’ll settle for happy.”

“Independent and happy.”

“I’d like that.”

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After walking the last bit chuckling at our over-protectiveness, we sit on the veranda of the pavilion, forgoing the bench with Aaron leaning back against me, cherishing the peace and quiet for a while.
Aaron shifts position a little, I’m on the top step with him on the step below, “I had my first kiss here.”

“Oh yeah, who was the lucky recipient?”

“Your sister – you’ll find our initials scratched into the bannister somewhere if you look.” His hand waves off up to the right behind us.

“You would have found mine and Katie’s but Andy scratched them out when we were late teens.”

“Bet this pavilion has seen its share of sex over the years.”

“Is that a hint?”

“Not really. As much as the mind is interested and willing, I’m not sure the body is able.”

Toying with the waistband of his joggers, I let my hand wander, taking pleasure from the subtle parting of his thighs, “Who said you had to move.” Sliding my hand lower combined with nibbling his earlobe starts to have an effect. “We should enjoy it whilst we still can. Make hay whilst the sun shines and all that.”

“And you call me a tease.”

“I like to please and you never said it was on ration.”

“It’s not. We can’t have sex here, someone might see us.”

“There’s no-one around, Aaron; just you and me.” He wraps his hand back around my neck a sure signal that he doesn’t want me to stop and I press my lips against just below his ear, tasting his skin and enjoying the hardness of his shaft, my hand curled around it. “Somehow I think my husband is no longer as tired as he was professing to be.”

There’s no mistaking the slight hitch in his breath as he answers, “You’re very persuasive.” I love how responsive he is when he’s in the mood.

“I’m not doing anything.” The exact opposite is the truth, my hand cupping his balls, rolling and teasing them between my fingers.

“Fuck.....,” his head tips back his eyes filled with desire as I capture his mouth with a possessive kiss.

“We need more leverage if we’re going to do that; how bad do you want it?” There’s no answer and I grin at seeing my husband with closed eyes, biting down on his bottom lip.

Making the decision for both of us I nudge Aaron forward a little whilst I fumble with my jeans and push them down until one of my legs is completely out whilst Aaron silently shuffles his joggers down far enough before focussing all his energy on pushing himself up as we slot ourselves together with practiced ease, only the spit in my hand available for lubrication. He holds himself still with one hand flat on the top step, the other on the upright of the bannister as he seats himself down all the way, “Fuck Aaron, you feel so good.” Planting my feet firmly on one of the lower steps, I lie back and with my hands on his hips, I guide his movement, closing my eyes relishing the friction. Each thrust deep inside him is slow and very intense as we move in unison, a perfect fit.

Aaron’s voice is heavy with arousal as he expertly rides my body, adjusting the angle a little, “Oh
yeah, oh yeah......, oh, don’t stop, don’t ever stop Rob. Crap I feel so full.”

“I want you to come as well Aaron, use your hand.”

“I don’t know if I can. Flippin’ eck, oh god, fuck me until there’s nothing left to fuck......, just like that, it’s so good.”

Grabbing onto his hips harder, I feel myself getting closer as I watch my cock getting swallowed up into Aaron’s body, “I won’t let you go, use your hand, I can’t reach.” Aaron’s body instinctively knows exactly what to do and relinquishes control to me. His hand lets go of the bannister as the other moves to my upper thigh and I feel his body react the second he touches himself. “Tell me how it feels.”

“So good, you’re so deep. Fuck, I love this, I love you.” A sense of urgency takes over and Aaron’s desire overrides any caution he had earlier, his inner muscles clenching as he presses down, my hips lifting upwards, each of us deliberate in our actions knowing exactly how to heighten our pleasure, “I’m going to come Rob.”

“I’m close, Aaron; come hard for me.”

“Fuck yeah, I don’t think I know any other way with you......, aargh......, I’m coming, shit I’m coming......, fuck......; I love you, more Rob, keep going I want to feel you come in me.”

My body is tired and trembling from the effort but there’s no stopping until I’m spent and Aaron’s words have the desired effect, our joining a combination of emotion and physical. My fingers grip onto his hips so tightly it draws a gasp from Aaron as I drown myself inside him, the force of my release is equally strong that I pull myself up so my front is flush to his back, wrapping my arms around him, our bodies pressed together at every possible touchpoint. Aaron’s fingers wind amongst mine, our grasp almost painful as I rest my forehead against his back, out of breath as my orgasm floods into his body. Only when my grip relaxes do I realize there’s nothing left except a sated exhaustion that crept up on me and without a word I lie back, bringing Aaron down with me.

My head rests on the wooden floor beneath me as our upper bodies rise and fall as one whilst I recover my breath, not quite able to think or say anything or make any further movement. Aaron remains still, his thumb gently stroking my hand, the simple way of telling me he’s okay.

“Think we might both need that wheelchair now.”

“Okay, but you’ll have to fetch them.”

“Mnhm, let’s just stay here a bit longer. I need a minute or few.” With my breathing back to normal, I have no urge to move despite what we might look like and how exposed we are. “You know you only call me Rob when we have sex or fight.”

“I hadn’t noticed. You don’t mind, do you?”

“No, just an observation. Don’t suppose you came prepared with tissues, did you?”

“Coat pocket.” Aaron’s hand rummages around and a packet of tissues lands by my head but I haven’t quite found the motivation to move just yet, too happy enjoying our closeness and not looking forward to the eventual sloppy clean up we’ll have to do.
My fingers lovingly stroke over Aaron’s belly, “You warm enough?”

“For now; the kids are a little frisky after that.”

“What no rock-a-bye moment?”

“No, that was more a party moment. Don’t know about you but I need some party cake after that for some energy.”

“Caf’s still open. I’m sure Bob won’t notice the smell of sex on us.”

“Double chocolate fudge, mmmh yummy. Move Sugden, I’ve worked up an appetite for three.”

“I’m not carrying you, you’ll have to walk.”

“You’re paying.”

“That I can do.”

“We should get it ‘to go’ and then you can feed me in bed.”

I glimpse at my watch, “It’s only four o’clock.”

“What’s that got to do with it, your husband and children need feeding and their rest.”

“Too much partying.”

“They’re young, they have lots of energy but I think they’ll sleep well after all the exercise today.”

Laughing, I finally find enough energy of my own to sit up and prepare to get us cleaned up, first taking a moment to nuzzle against Aaron’s neck, “Love you.”

We ate cake on the sofa deciding it wasn’t a good idea to take it into bed which was the right call as after we’d done we were both a messy combination of chocolate and cum so we had a quick bath. Aaron’s hunting for some random film to watch on TV whilst I fetched drinks. Carrying a mug of tea for me and a hot water for Aaron, I tiredly trapse upstairs and settle myself in bed, cuddling up next to him, not paying any attention to the telly. I’d rather watch Aaron whose eyes are already half closed. “Have you packed a bag yet for the hospital?”

“No, was going to do it this week.”

Absentmindedly, I find my fingers massaging his; he gets numbness in them, especially his thumb and first two fingers. I find the action relaxing with Aaron resting against me on his side which is now about the only position he can lie in for any length of time. My fingers move across his hand and wrist enjoying the simple act of touching his skin. “The list of what you need is on the fridge.”

“You and your lists.”

“Hey, they’ve stood us in good stead, so far.”

“I don’t expect our children to take much notice of them when they’re born.” He sounded as though he was going to continue when I heard his breath hitch and his body tighten for about thirty seconds and I feel a little pang of anxiousness, but his hand holds mine calmly conveying that I don’t need to be concerned.
“Don’t worry, they’re not coming yet.”

“How do you know?”

“I get it now and again; my body’s just practising apparently.”

“I’d prefer if it didn’t and just waited for the real thing.” It’s too early for them to come yet and as much as I’m ready for them to be born, I’m not. “Does it hurt?”

“No.” Knowing Aaron drifted to sleep after this, I wasn’t far behind him, all worn out from too much partying most probably.

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Grinning with amusement I had let the scolding from Robert wash over me saying I should have just let him pick me up. I now have my last few ultrasounds in Hotten to get me used to the birthing centre and staff but there didn’t seem any sense that Robert fetched me because then he’d have had to come all the way back to Emmerdale just to go to Hotten again and I’m quite capable of getting the bus not wanting the hassle of driving – I would have done but I couldn’t find the keys anywhere but Robert didn't need to know that. Having given up my search I was still caught out again by my forgetfulness not watching the time and missed the intended bus so had to wait for the next, which typically was late hence my tardy arrival made later by the fact I don’t rush anywhere anymore, a sedate waddle is about as much as I can manage. In the end, all was well and the twins have grown again, both now a staggering five pounds; no wonder I feel like it’s not possible to get any bigger.

I even joked with the midwife asking if they couldn’t just start me off today as I’m so ready for these babies to be born. I’m tired of constipation and haemorrhoids and all in all pretty much fed up with my pregnancy merry go round – it’s still no less embarrassing than it was the first time having Robert put the haemorrhoid cream on. Everything hurts or itches and I can’t remember the last time I was comfortable, it feels like another lifetime.

I’m even more embarrassed by the fact I now have to wear nursing pads on the odd occasion and this has also unexpectedly upset me. Not because of having to wear the pads as such, but more that I’m convinced I won’t be able to produce enough milk to feed the twins and I would prefer if as much milk as possible stays inside me instead of leaking out of me now. It’s only a very little bit but my mood has been all over the place again and I’ve been reacting emotionally to almost everything and it’s not just me, even Robert is beginning to be more on edge.

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We’re both increasingly nervous about the birth now it’s getting closer and for the first time in a long while, Robert mentioned the C-word. Amazingly I didn’t bite his head off; instead, I burst into tears as I’ve started to question my choice. To give Robert his due he hasn’t pushed and as the hospital said I can change my mind whenever I want helped put him at ease. However, I’ve remained adamant in my decision, yet part of me now suspects this is more to prove a point. I’m no longer altogether sure it’s the right thing. This has only added to my restlessness. I can’t sit or stand still anymore, gone are the days where I enjoyed feeling the twins rocking and rolling inside me, now I just want them out.

The midwife had looked at my miserable face at our appointment, letting me down gently saying my mood swings are natural and it’s too early either way for them to be born but I could book a slot for a C-section to be done in a few weeks’ time. I had practically stomped my way to the car afterwards
and Robert had wisely said nothing, knowing it was more than his life's worth.

However, I reckon that’s partly because he was still caught up from learning that the leading twin, Robin, is beginning to drop down whereas the only thing remotely interesting to me about that fact is that the pressure is causing me to pee more often. I just wanted to scream at the midwife to tell me something I don’t already know and I’ll be all ears, even better give me something to make it stop and I’ll be happier because as it stands I’ve got Batman pressing at one end and Robin pushing lower down at the other. I can’t believe they haven’t damaged something inside me because I’m pretty much stretched to my limit and if I grow any bigger I don’t think my body can take it.

Finally, to cap off this wonderful week from hell, after months of non-stop eating my appetite is waning and I’m being nagged about it. I don’t require anyone to remind me I’m eating for three and I need to keep my strength up thank you very much. It’s not my fault that the only thing I find appetising is banana and chutney sandwiches and small bites at that. A sandwich can last me the whole day almost.

Robert’s face, bless him, is a picture of love and desperation when he looks at me but we have both admitted that we’ve come close this week to reaching the end of our tether and are ready for this to be over and done with. I’m eternally grateful this will be my only pregnancy because I have no idea how women consider doing it more than once voluntarily.

The doctor said they wouldn’t let me go past week thirty-seven or eight, so six weeks at most, it feels like a lifetime to wait still. Even sex doesn’t help anymore as a distraction. I’ve rejected any suggestion of it this week, finding it too uncomfortable; it’s no wonder after these last months that Robert is going into withdrawal but whenever he came close to suggesting it he got rejected without much sympathy as I wasn’t in the right frame of mind to explain and when he joked about it I just told him if his right hand is tired, he should learn to use his left. He went to the pub for a pint after that to calm down whilst I made a banana and chutney sandwich.

TBC
Bring it on, Sugden

Chapter Summary

May 2017 / Month 8 - Week 33-35: Aaron and Robert attend the last antenatal class and gear themselves up to be parents.

Robert, mid/end May 2017 (Week 33-34)

It’s hard not to feel sorry for him when looking at the forlorn face of my husband. Having checked off another day on the calendar, he stares at it as if wishing power alone will make the days go faster but when it doesn't, he returns to his pacing up and down the kitchen. Making fun of him has lost its appeal recently, we’re truly down to the nitty-gritty of living with an eight-month pregnant man. I doubt very much it’s any different to living with a pregnant woman eight months gone and if I could make the days pass quicker, believe me, I would. Chas warned me this would be hardest time, she wasn’t kidding.

“Will you sit down Aaron, you keep wittering on about being knackered but then you won’t rest. You heard what the doctor said, you need to take it easier, you’re stressing yourself and the twins. You'll be even more miserable if he puts you on bed rest.”

By now I’m immune to the face I get whenever I try to be supportive. He smiles and does all the right things when anyone else is around, but with me, just the two of us on our own, he lets his guard down and it’s me that cops the brunt of his frustration. “It helps Rob, I can’t get comfy when I sit down and if you tell me one more time to have a nap I’m going to punch you because I keep telling you, sleep is not a happening thing right now. You’re just going to have to put up with me or go sleep somewhere else.”

“Keep that tone up and I might do just that.” He knows I’m not serious, but I am tired; we’re both tired.

“I’m sorry, but you mithering every two minutes isn’t helping.”

Slinking up behind him, I kiss the back of his neck playfully, “I’m not always mithering.”

My touch has the desired effect, “I know, I know; I’m grumpy and irritable. I can’t seem to help myself.”

Massaging his shoulders, I can feel the tension and Aaron's head falls back against my chest, “What do you need?”

“Mmhh, that feels good. You’re not planning on going out again tonight, are you?”

“Nope.”

“You do have very nice hands; did anyone tell you that?”

Smiling to myself, I know exactly how the little wheels in Aaron’s head are turning, “Big and clumsy.”
“You trying to be funny.”

“No dear.” Oops, not what I meant at all, sometimes I just can’t win. “Do you want me to run you a bath and then we could put my hands to good use with a massage if you’d like.”

“Well, if you’ve got nothing better on.” Aaron flutters his eyes at me; as if I’m not wise to his wily ways by now.

I can’t help but tease just a little, “Mmhhh, let me check what’s on the telly and I’ll see if I can fit you in Chez Robert.”

Aaron gives me a playful smack, turning sideways, “You know I love you, right?”

“You’d better, Aaron Sugden.”

“You love me, too.”

“I suppose.” I kiss him tenderly, just to be sure he knows I do.

“You want to push me up the stairs?”

Chuckling to myself, I oblige, shuffling my beautiful husband through the living room towards the stairs, “You’ll have to lift your own feet I’m afraid.”

“Mmmh, difficult, but I think I can just about manage it.”

Aaron is a picture of pending fatherhood in the bath, “Here, something for you to play with.” After I gently drop the cute bath toys I bought earlier in the day onto his tummy, he smiles up at me, reminding me why I haven’t gone completely doolally yet. For every grump and groan, there’s a smile and kiss that makes up for it.

“Big kid.”

“That’s me. I couldn’t resist.”

“You know we’re likely to have more fun with these than the twins.”

“Too right, there have to be some perks to come with all the poo and sick. Did you know your mum is running a book on the sex?”

“And the names, she’s been pumping me for inside information for weeks. I caught her looking in the name jar from the kitchen counter the other day.”

“Did you tell her that’s the reject jar?”

“Not a chance. If she goes snooping, it’s her own loss.”

“You’ve not changed your mind, have you?”

“Not unless you’re having second thoughts. Alphabetical order, like we said.”

“Obviously, depending on the sex.”

“Well obviously.”
Sliding down onto the floor, I sit with my back up against the side of the bath, ignoring the handful of bubbles his lordship puts on top of my head. He’s easily amused as I hear him giggling to himself like a schoolboy. “I tried the car seats earlier and they’re fine so that’s checked off the to-do list.”

"My car?"

“Yep.”

“Don’t think that you’re not going to be having them in your car. I thought you said you’d sell it and get something more family-friendly.”

“We said we’d wait until we see how it goes, and if we’re talking about family-friendly cars then your boy racer should go as well.”

“It’s not a boy racer.” I hear Aaron patting the bump and can imagine the loving look on his face doing it, “Don’t worry kids, I’ll keep you safe, meanie daddy there doesn’t have room for you in his miniature box on wheels.”

Now, that’s taking it a bit far, “It’s a classic.”

“Classic my arse. The only reason it’s still going is because I keep it that way.”

“That’s another pound in the swear jar.”

“Whatever.”

“No-one’s asking you to get into it; not that that’s a problem, you wouldn’t fit in it these days.”

“That’s because I’m taking good care of our children.”

I react too slow when I turn to face him, spluttering as I get a pistol full of water in the face, “You are so going to pay for that.”

“Yeah, what you going to do huh?”

“You spoiling for it, Sugden?”

“Yeah, I’m spoiling for it. Bring it on, Sugden.”

"Such a child."

Bathtime had kind of descended into carnage from there on. Needless to say, I was victorious but I spent the next half hour mopping up water from the bathroom floor. It would have been quicker, but my mischief-maker husband wasn’t overly helpful. He had only behaved when I had threatened to withdraw massage rights. Finally, all nicely tucked up in bed, calm is restored. I was going to read some paperwork, but my eyes are too droopy.

“I packed my bag for taking with me to the labour unit today. Can you put it in the car for me when you go out in the morning please.”

Resting my chin against Aaron's shoulder, I sneak a kiss against his neck, “Yes mum. Has a nice ring to it don’t you think?”
“You get the kids calling me that and it’ll be more than your life’s worth.” Aaron is about to give me more words of wisdom but stops suddenly, gasping, “Oohh crap, Robin if you don’t stop doing that daddy’s going to pee himself.”

“So sexy.”

“I need time to get to the bathroom. You try walking with a football attached to your front.”

“You want me to buy you a pee bottle like they have in the hospital? You wouldn’t have to get out of bed then.” Husband dearest doesn’t seem to think much of the idea.

“Only if you’re going to hold it for me. I can’t reach round the dynamic duo. I have to sit down to pee, remember.”

Ah, I hadn't thought about that. Nuzzling into his neck again, my fingers stroke down the side of his head, continuing down his body until they find his hand, “I could do that. What’s a bit of pee in a bottle when you’ve rubbed on haemorrhoid cream.”

“There is that, but I’ll pass thanks.” Aaron groans, starting to haul himself out of bed for the first of many trips to the bathroom during the night.

Lying back waiting for him to return, I wonder how much sleep we’ll get when they’re born. I’m so caught up in my thoughts, I don’t notice Aaron is leaning against the door, cleaning his teeth, grinning at me like a big kid before disappearing to swill his mouth out, leaving me shaking my head. The children will be in competition with us to see who is the biggest kid in the house and if I were a betting man, Aaron would have my money. My eyes are closed when he comes back into bed, it’s only nine. We're officially boring.

“You can go sleep in the other room if you want. I won’t mind.”

“Maybe, I’d rather stay with you. Where do you want the extra pillow putting?”

“Just there.” Sliding the pillow, just the one for now in-between his legs, Aaron sighs from feeling the benefit.

“Better?”

“Yeah. Don’t like it when you not with me. Sorry for being such a grump, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You’re forgiven. I have a long list of ways you can make it up to me after they're born. You know, to say thank you for having such a patient, loving husband.”

“Really.”

“It’s verrrry long list.”

“Is it now, you going to let me see it?”

“If you’re good.”

“Maybe I should make a list of my own, we could compare.”

“See, I told you, you’d become a list man.”
“Do you think I’ll be a good dad?”

“I know you will. Stop doubting yourself, you’ll be a great dad.”

“What if they’re the kind of babies that never stop crying, what if I can’t cope with them?”

“That’s what you’ve got me for.”

“You won’t be here all the time.”

“I’ll be here whenever you need me and now we’ve arranged who’s going to look after them when we’re at work we’ll get a break.”

“What if they don’t settle when we’re not there?”

“They’ll be fine”

“What if they’re not?”

“Aaron.”

“Yes?”

“Go to sleep and stop worrying.”

“Yes, dad.”

.

All I can do is be there for Aaron to help ease him through each day, some days are better than others and on some, he tests every thread of patience I have. It says something when even Cain is giving me a look of pity when he sees me. Work is full on again so I’ve started going into the pub for a pint before going home, just the one, but it helps me mentally prepare, switching from one part of my life to another. Aaron’s a handful, challenging me in ways I never thought possible. I’m surprised I haven’t bitten my bottom lip away by holding my tongue and doing my best not to let his stress pass onto me. Before, sex used to help relieve the tension, but that’s been taken off the table now for the foreseeable future and my hand isn’t anywhere near as satisfying as Aaron.

I love watching the subtle changes in Aaron, although the return of his huge mood swings and feeling overly emotional not so much. His bigger belly has him cursing, forcing him to walk (waddle) slower and he avoids steps like the plague. He’s got increasingly clumsy and I often come home to find things strewn around the floor, either that he’s dropped or knocked over and can’t get down to pick up. I’ve caught him dropping something and then walking away, muttering “Fuck it”. At moments like these, I’m not brave enough to call him on it to pay up for the swear jar and it’s telling that he’s given up even attempting to pick things up now. Then there are quiet moments in-between when he’s asleep or the kids are not causing too much discomfort and I can’t take my eyes off him. He’ll totally deny it, but in spite of all his moans and mumbles, being pregnant still sits well on him.

He’s now started grumbling daily that his insides feel all out of sorts, which at the ultrasound the midwife said was a good sign. I sniggered at the look that earned him, Aaron has inherited and perfected that withering stare that Chas wields so well. His body is getting ready to give birth, with his pelvis dropping and broadening, the form and position becoming more similar to that of a female.
He’s unimpressed.

Aaron is not the only one having the odd moments of contemplation. I have pangs of worry that we’re not ready to be fathers, especially of twins. The few occasions I manage to enjoy some quiet alone time, it reminds me how much our lives will be turned upside down when the twins arrive. We never got the chance to really enjoy being just the two of us. I was pouring all my energy into getting the business up and running, as well as moving in together and just as things were beginning to settle down, the bombshell of pending fatherhood blew out of the water any chance of that happening soon. Not that I regret where we are, but the fact that our lives for the next eighteen years or so are going to be consumed by children, we need to make sure we still find time for us.

I’m snapped out of my musing by Aaron coming in after dropping some paperwork over at the yard. He’s still insisting that he can do it all. I know there’s no point trying to get him to stop. Being at home so much has started to wear on his nerves and he’s taken to doing the paperwork at the yard some days and far be it from me to say anything and I know the company is doing him good. Adam will watch over him, he’s very aware that otherwise, he’ll have me and Vic to deal with.

Often Aaron’s hand is resting on his belly, his face pinching every now and again; the dynamic duo’s pokes and kicks are pretty sharp these days. The grimace on his face tells me exactly when he feels them. They’ve also added pushing to their repertoire, less room to move around I suppose. My heart always takes an extra beat when I see a teeny-weeny foot imprint through his bump.

Robert, Friday 2nd June 2017 (Week 35)

We both regularly have mini-panic attacks that the babies could now come at any time. As much as Aaron wants the babies out, it helps to remind him the longer they are in the healthier they will be but the anticipation is getting to the both of us.

“Reading about all this in the books helps but it doesn’t really prepare you, does it? I’m so ready for them to be out, but then I’m not.”

Aaron’s face is a conflicted jumble of emotions as he talks. It’s often like this after the antenatal class, but today was the last one so it’s playing on our insecurities a bit more than usual, both of us because that’s it, we’re on our own or that’s what it feels like. “I don’t know; we’re doing okay I think. Not sure I impressed the midwife as fatherhood material though.”

“Don’t be daft. You’re being paranoid.”

“It scares me, Aaron; fatherhood scares me.”

He shuffles closer, cupping my face in his hands. “There’s nothing to be scared about, nervous maybe, but not scared. This is too good to be scared, we’re going to be dads Robert, we’re going to have two beautiful children.”

Keeping my face close to his, I take comfort from his words, our conversation from this morning coming to mind, “You called them the spawn of the devil earlier.”

I get a withering look for bringing that up, “They wouldn’t stop pressing down on my bladder.”

“Hah, you did look like you were going to pee yourself.”
“You made me laugh, it’s a dangerous thing these days Robert. I only have to sneeze or laugh and I want to run to the bathroom.”

“You want to go back inside before we set off back home?”

“No, I’m good, just not too much hilarity and we’ll be fine.”

Taking him at his word, I switch on the engine and we head off in the direction of home. “Did you see the look on everyone’s face when she asked if anyone was still having sex.”

“What did she expect at this stage. I don’t know why she looked at us.”

Our conspiratorial smile says it all, we’ve been the only couple having sex for the last few sessions, “I miss sex. It made everything seem easier when we could have sex.”

“Don’t do that, please don’t make me laugh.”

“I didn’t.”

“This is all your fault. I swear you’re not coming near me ever again, got it? No more sex, no more babies.”

I can’t help laughing at the pinched pout on his face, “Just breathe Aaron.”

“Screw you, Sugden; you’re not the one being used as a pinball machine.”

“The doctor said you won’t be able to conceive again.”

“I don’t care. You’re getting the snip, I’m not taking the risk.”

“Are you saying you don’t want more kids?”

“I’m not always sure I want these ones.”

“You love the twins, Aaron.”

“Only sometimes.”

“All the time, even when they are kicking and pushing at your insides.”

“Mmmh, what would you know.”

“I know you. Just like you know me.”

Resigned, Aaron rests his head against the window, angled in my direction, “What I know is, it’s not my imagination that I waddle like a penguin and I don’t want to suffer heartburn and indigestion, headaches, varicose veins, haemorrhoids, bleeding gums all at the same time ever again. I can’t get down on the floor, and if I did I couldn’t get back up again. Being pregnant is not a pleasant experience.”

“That’s what Vic said at the end and now she talks about it being a beautiful spiritual experience. You’ll change your mind once they’re born.”

“You’re still having the snip if you ever want us to have sex again.”

“Whatever you say, Aaron. You’re in charge.”
“Too right.”

“You fancy stopping off for a drink somewhere on the way home? It’s nice out.”

“I’m too tired, but I’m not in the mood for all the noisy, Friday tea-time traffic. Can we go home the scenic way?”

“Awww, you’re so Mr Sensitive.”

“Fuck off and yes I’ll put my money in the swear jar.”

He ignores my chuckle and I change the subject. "So, last antenatal class over and done with; can’t say I’m going to miss it.”

“I will and I won’t.” We’re interrupted by Aaron’s phone ringing and fishing it out of his pocket he looks at who’s calling, “It’s Paul.” I raise my eyebrows, it’s not as though Aaron needs permission to speak to him. Aaron pulls a face at me as if he can read my thoughts and answers. “Hey. ......Really. Wow. You’re okay, right? .....Nice name.” Okay, so I still don’t like Paul so much, I’ve met him the once, that was enough. “No don’t worry, not even on our shortlists but Liam’s a nice name. How was it?” Aaron frowns but relaxes and I hope he’s not second-guessing himself. He seems to have settled again with giving birth naturally and Paul had a C-section; I’d forgotten it was today. “We’ll come and visit. When do you go home?” I pull a face and Aaron smiles at me knowing there’s not a chance in hell that I’ll go with him to visit, even if I know I have nothing to worry about as far as Paul is concerned. Doesn’t mean I want to play nice. I know it’s good for Aaron to have another guy going through a similar experience to talk to. We didn’t really hit it off with anyone at the antenatal classes.

I would never admit it out loud, not even to Aaron, but my best go-to person when things get on top of me is Pearl. I’ve accumulated some nice baby clothes with my knitting, Aaron has no idea; I want it to be a surprise. I can’t wait for the look on his face, he was so smug assuming I’d given it up as a bad job. He should know better, Robert Sugden was never going to let it get the better of him.

It’s Aaron’s swearing that pulls me out of my thoughts, “Shit.”

“What?”

“I dropped my phone, it’s under the seat I think.”

“I’ll fetch it out when we get home. I take it Paul’s dropped then?”

“You’re never going to let that go, are you?”

“I have.” Aaron doesn’t look as though he believes me, “I have.”

“If you say so. Bouncing baby boy; seven pounds six ounces, if you’re interested.”

“He still living with his cousin?”

“For now, he’s saving up for his own place.” Aaron looks thoughtful for a while, “I don’t know what I’d have done if you hadn’t wanted us.”

“That was never going to happen, I’ll always love you, no matter what. There’s no Aaron off-switch for me. I keep telling you, you’re stuck with me whether you like it or not.”
“I’m glad, I know I was stupid looking back but you know what I’m like.”

“I do, and now look at you. Eight months gone, looking a picture of health and ready to pop.”

“I’m sick of tired of feeling sick and tired. Ready to pop indeed.”

We grin at each other and Aaron’s hand moves to rest on mine on the gear stick, our fingers intertwining until we hear a loud bang and suddenly my stomach is lurching, the seat-belt tightening unbearably, “What the......”

TBC
Ready Or Not!

Chapter Summary

June 2017 / Month 8 - Week 35: Aaron goes into labour under challenging circumstances.

Aaron, Friday 2nd June 2017 (Week 35)

My eyelids flutter, making a concerted effort to open, but just when I think I’ve been successful, raising them fully, I can’t actually see anything properly, just a fuzziness and it all feels wrong with things pressing and digging into my body that shouldn’t be. Recognising that I’m about to be sick, I manage to put my hand to my mouth just in time. At least the breathing exercises from the antenatal classes are good for something as I concentrate on forcing the rising vomit back down my throat. Totally disoriented, I close my eyes, embracing the darkness whilst feeling nervous and unsure about what I’m going to find when I do manage to open them. One thing at a time, Aaron; inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth, and repeat.

Marginally calmer, I know I can’t put off the inevitable with my senses guiding my thoughts as they become increasingly aware. My head hurts and I ache what feels like everywhere. ‘Shit, what’s that smell?’ Opening my eyes is as bad as I had imagined it would be, “Robert.” Moving my head, however, a little too quickly has everything going immediately blurry once more and a spike of pain has me squeezing my eyes tightly closed, willing the accompanying wave of nausea to subside with it. The midwife had said car journeys were a good time to practice breathing exercises, I’m not quite sure this was what he had in mind.

Determined not to rush it again, working hard to keep my breathing in check, it’s third time lucky and on this attempt, upon opening my eyes, I can see more clearly. The first thing to get my attention is the deflated airbag, the nylon fabric hanging down in front of me, bright white reflecting with the shards of sunlight streaming through the windscreen. However, this is quickly forgotten as filled with a sense of dread and guilt, my hand instinctively moves to my stomach. The seatbelt, taut across my chest, is all that’s holding me in my seat and my body is screaming at me to release the aching pressure causing me to cry out; for help, seeking comfort, I’m not sure which, both? “Robert.” Shit, it hurts; I need to move, get out of here. Then everything stops when for a few seconds I believe I can't feel the babies; it's such a crushing weight bearing down on me that I can't hardly breathe until when on the verge of all-out panic it's as if they know I need the reassurance and the familiar punching and pressing on my bladder causes me to laugh out loud with relief. My hand stroking over them helps to settle all of us, I think, “Just this once, I’m not going to complain kids, but really, daddy won’t be impressed if I pee my pants in the car.”

Resting my head back against the seat headrest for a few seconds, I gather myself together before rolling it to my right. I hardly dare look. Robert’s eyes are closed, and there’s blood on the window on his side which I suspect is likely to be from him having banged his head. Trying to reach out with my hand has my body rebelling, the sharp pain shooting through my chest has me gritting my teeth it's so intense; this isn’t good, this really isn’t good. Clamping down on my own hurt, I focus on getting Robert to waken so we can get ourselves out of here. “Robert, come on, wake up, I need you to wake up.” Shaking his shoulder garners no response, and it takes everything I have, first stroking my fingers down his cheek, before placing them against his throat to check for a pulse. The relief is
overwhelming and for a minute, I stare, unable to take my eyes off him. He’s so pale, quiet and calm, the face of an angel and I smile to myself, knowing what an imp he can be, not to mention a royal pain in the arse when he wants to be, but I love him, I love him so much, it hurts. “Wake up Rob.” It doesn’t matter what I say or do, he doesn’t move a muscle and I push away darker thoughts about what if he’s hurt so badly that he can’t. Realising that I have no idea how long we’ve been here, probably not long, I snatch at Robert’s wristwatch which confirms my suspicion that what feels like an age hasn’t been much time at all. It still doesn’t prevent me from fearing the worst, but I know I can’t worry about that now. First, we need to get help and then I’ll worry when I know I have something to worry about.

Focusing, I look around to take stock of our situation and it doesn’t bode well. “Fuck.” There’s a smell of burning, which is seriously not helping me stave off the feeling of wanting to be sick, but at least I can’t smell petrol fumes, I just hope it stays that way because I’m not likely to be getting us out of here in a hurry. I reach for my phone only to remember that I dropped it earlier, but having a quick scan around, I can’t see it and even if I could I’m not sure I could reach it, depending where it is. Instead, I push my hand into Robert’s back pocket, thankfully the side nearest me, and fishing out his phone, it seems to be in one piece. Tapping in the code I swear under my breath, “Shit. You see this is what happens when you take the scenic route in the middle of the Yorkshire Dales, no fucking signal. Just marvellous.”

Looking at Robert again, it’s unnerving to see him so still. I don’t remember exactly what happened, it was all so fast but forcing myself to think about it, one of the scariest moments of my life comes flooding back. The swerve of the car, the cracking of wood as the car hurtled through the fence and down the steep banking. I vaguely recall the car slamming into the ground which is how it is now, pretty much sitting on its front end, almost vertical. One hell of an uncomfortable ride, I wouldn’t recommend it. I’m not even so sure what caused it; there wasn’t another car anywhere near, that I remember at least.

The pressure of the belt is increasingly unbearable and I know it can’t be good for me or the twins, but I’m torn what to do. Trying to wake Robert again doesn’t have any effect and part of me worries that I’m making things worse for him, his head is lolled down on his chest and I’m tempted to move it but decide not to. Feeling down the far side of his head, my fingers are covered in his blood when I retrieve them which serves to ramp up my anxiety another notch, “It’s not bleeding now I don’t think, so it can’t be too bad. Daddy’ll be fine, okay kids, we’ll all be fine. Just need to get out of the car, find a way to call for help, then we’ll be out of here in no time.” As if on cue, I grimace at the pushing down on my bladder and it takes all my concentration to not pee myself. “I hear you, I really do. Be kind to daddy, he needs you to be still for a little while, can you do that?”

Robert’s side of the car is jammed against some kind of rock face or big boulder so he’s fully hemmed in that side. “This is definitely the scenic route, kids. I tell you, it’s never a dull day out with the Sugdens.” Looking up behind us, the one blessing is that although steep, it doesn’t appear to be too far to the top.

It’s so frustrating as I have no idea what I should or shouldn’t do for Robert. “We can’t stay here like this, I need to go get help Robert, okay? I don’t know if you can hear me, but I won’t be long. I’ll be back soon, I promise. I daren’t move you and I’m not sure I could even get you out of the car if I wanted to.” Having had a little closer look, I don’t think I can even begin to manoeuvre him to get him out my side, the steering wheel is a major obstacle, not discounting the fact I’m practically in my ninth month. I manage to give him a kiss, my fingers stroking down his cheek, coming to rest on his neck where the beat of his pulse gives me comfort that he’s still alive as I silently watch him, still hoping for any sign of him stirring. Knowing I can’t wait forever, I write a note just in case he wakes
and after making sure the phone is safely zipped inside my coat pocket, I brace myself as best I can. Ignoring an intense pain in my back, pushing against the dash with my hand, I press my back against the car seat to hopefully release enough pressure on the seatbelt to try and release it. Much to my surprise, it does and I find myself falling suddenly lurching towards the dash. Thankfully after an initial shuddering from the movement, the car holds steady, but I keep still for a long moment, making sure it stays that way. I had assumed it was resting fully on the ground, but fate has a habit of conspiring to piss me off so now I’m not confident about anything.

Trying not to shake the car any further, the door opens on the first attempt and I raise my head up to the heavens, “Thank you.” I’m not at all religious but I am grateful for small mercies and I don’t care who’s listening. Biting down on my lip, I get ready for the next part. ‘Crap, don’t lose it, Aaron’. Again bracing myself with my arms, it’s a lot harder than it had seemed it would be. Pushing the door open is the easy part; pushing myself into a position where I can slide down and out of the car onto the ground without hurting the twins in the process takes a few goes and I’m out of breath when I finally slide out and downwards, crumbling into an ungainly heap on the ground. Sitting back against the car wheel, I’m completely jiggered and close my eyes thinking that a nap would be really welcome about now.

A nap might not be possible but after a few minutes rest I begin to feel better and taking in my surroundings, for the first time I’m able to see just how screwed we are. Although it could have been much worse, I suppose. There doesn’t seem to be any leaking petrol and the car doesn’t seem that bad considering, except for the fact it’s sat on the front bumper, the bonnet all buckled, but I doubt very much it’ll be worth fixing. Despite the circumstances, it brings a smug smile to my face that Robert will have no choice but for us to get a new car.

We must have gone further off the road than I had realised because where we are is a sheer drop down, not far, but enough, at least three lengths of the car, maybe more. Then higher up it looks as though it might turn into a slope which I assume then goes all the way up to the road. There are trees and foliage all around us, rocks and boulders scattered in amongst. It’s deadly quiet except for the trees and birds; not even a sound from the road can be heard. I’d be tempted to call it peaceful if our situation weren’t so tenuous.

With more of my energy returning, I shift onto my knees and not having anything else to grab hold of I’m left with no choice but to grasp onto the car door to carefully haul myself up. Inspecting the steep craggy rockface I’m left in no doubt that there’s no way I can safely climb up in this condition and looking left and right doesn’t seem to offer up an easy alternative, but I assume it will stop at some point or other opening up into countryside. Climbing up a little way, I ignore the ache in my belly and manage to get up high enough to try the back door of the car. The bag I’d packed for the hospital has lodged itself under the seat where I had been sitting and I find a bottle of water with it along with my phone but that’s just as useless as Robert’s. I hadn’t noticed I was so thirsty until now, and after gulping down a drink, I drop the bottle back into the bag throwing it a little ways from the car at the base of the crag. There was no food inside; it’s a good job the hunger pangs have disappeared these last couple of weeks otherwise I’d be feeling ravenous and even more tired by this point.

Exploring how to get us out of here, now able to move around, I try the phones again, “Shit,” still no signal. Needing to bolster myself, I talk to the babies to keep me company, “Come on then, let’s go for a walk, kids. Which way do you think, hmmh?” As I make my way, following the rockface, I keep glancing down at the phones and holding them up occasionally to check for a signal, but to no avail. My mind wanders as I walk along; it really is a miracle that I got out of the car pretty much unscathed. Saying that, I daren’t have a look at my chest where I’m sure I’ll have a massive bruise
from the seatbelt and my back is killing me, but all things considered, I’m okay. There’s the recent emergence of a stonking headache, but as it doesn’t feel any different to my usual headaches since being pregnant I’m not going to worry about it.

Living in a Dales village I should know better; Robert would have much more of a clue with having been brought up on a farm. Me, I’ve never paid too much attention to all the notices and posters put up by Search and Rescue; they were targeted at keeping safe the many walkers, climbers and potholers as far as I was concerned. Another thing to add to the kid’s education.

Still, without a signal, I try 999 and 112 for what feels like the umpteenth time with no luck and despite feeling stupid, there’s no response to my shouts for help. It might have been the scenic route, but we aren’t actually that far off the beaten track and it’s Friday teatime on a nice day. If I’m lucky I’ll come across someone out walking or climbing. I don’t know this part of the road well and what’s around, but we usually see cars parked up in these parts especially in summer. There’s no sign of an obvious path, but that doesn’t necessarily mean anything. More concerning is there doesn’t seem to be any sign of open countryside nearby; if anything, the banking is more sheer and the crag now much higher than where we came down. I consider turning round and going to check out the other side of the car, maybe I’ll have more luck in that direction; I’m loathe to wander away from the crag thinking I’m more likely to get lost that way through all the trees and not be able to get back to Robert. Debating what to do for the best, I decide to continue a little further. It’s only five O’clock so there’s plenty of light left and although we took the quieter route, it’s still quite a busy road, surely some keen-eyed motorist would see a gaping hole in the fence and take a look or call the police. I ignore the niggling in my head that questions whether I would. Even if I was that observant, people are too busy and caught up in their own crap especially just before the weekend.

Trying 999 and 112 again, there’s unsurprisingly still nothing yet it doesn’t stop me hoping each time, just in case. Resisting the urge to throw the phone against the rocks, I grit my teeth until I’m forced to stand stock still, all of a sudden feeling a pain, not a contraction I don’t think. Then again how do I know; but it’s too soon right? It’s a pulling and moderately painful sensation. “Not yet, kids, you can’t come yet, you’ve got at least another week to go.”

Shivering a little, I wrap my coat tightly around me. Changing my mind, rightly or wrongly, I head back to the car and Robert, silently praying to myself that I hope he’s okay or still breathing at least. Feeling totally knackered, my return walk is much slower, needing to take more care not to trip over the uneven ground and stop more often for a rest. It doesn’t take long for a second wave of pain to hit, and it rattles me more than I’d care to admit. Stopping whilst it passes, I bend over using the rock for support to try and channel the sensation coursing through me.

Sufficiently recovered and able to stand upright again, I get going, now moving with a greater sense of urgency, somewhere finding a burst of energy I didn’t know I had in me. Probably, adrenalin or fear, maybe both. All I can think about is that if I’m going to give birth out here, then I’m going to do it with Robert close by.

After walking for what feels like an age, I’m worried that I’ve gotten lost. Although, logically I know I can’t have, as I’ve been following the rock face all along and I breathe a sigh of relief as my car eventually comes into sight, strangely glad to see Robert exactly where I left him. He’s still unconscious, that can’t be good though. I manage to reach him to touch and I’ve never felt so relieved in my life to feel a pulse in his wrist. I hold on, not wanting to let go. “Robert you need to wake up now, I can’t do this without you. Please, I’ll give you a massage every day of our lives, whatever you want, don’t let me do this on my own.” Feeling exhausted, for the first time, a tear slides down my cheek as I fully acknowledge the enormity of our predicament, “I’m scared Rob,
really scared so I really need you.” I don’t know what scares me the most, losing Robert, scared for the
twins or for me. For all my worries about how I’d give birth and what could possibly go wrong,
this was not a scenario I’d considered. It’s so unfair, “Robert Sugden, if you don’t get yourself in the
land of the walking and talking right this minute, then....., then......, then you get no blow jobs for the
rest of the year, got it?” I’m so angry I want to punch something, but anything close by is likely to
break some bones and I’m well aware that I’m in enough trouble already without adding to it. “This is
not how it’s supposed to be you stubborn shit. Who’s hand am I going to squeeze, huh? You
promised me you’d be there for painful hand-squeezing.” We’re supposed to be doing this together,
we’d talked about it. I had pictures firmly in my head of Robert with the cheesiest grin ever on his
face, holding baby number one, whilst baby number two made a first appearance. The harsh reality
that one of more us might not make it out of here if something else goes wrong is very upsetting.

In a bizarre way, I’m glad Robert can’t hear my ranting, even though he isn’t actually aware of it as
far as I can tell, and I so don’t want to think about that right now. Getting it out of my system
somewhat has helped me to feel calmer. I’m determined to believe that I’m not yet in labour, and
even if I am I’ve got hours to go. Everyone said to prepare myself for many hours before the really
hard part; we’ll be found long before then I reckon. Feeling contrite about venting to Robert when
he’s unconscious, I reach over to hold his hand, “I didn't mean it about the blow jobs, but you do
realise husband, dearest, you are going to cop so much grief for missing the birth if you don’t get
your arse into gear and wake up, so you’d best get a jog on and stop sleeping.” Resigned to the quiet,
I stare at my husband intently, my eyes roaming over Robert’s unconscious form triggering such a
mix of emotions; the thought that he might not wake up is frightening.

After considering my options, decision made, I make to set off in the other direction when another
burst of pain hits. This last couple of weeks I’ve been getting the odd contraction, the womb
tightening and then relaxing. ‘Practising ’ the doctor had said so I know what it feels like but this one
is much worse than anything I’ve ever felt so far, not even hearing my own groaning as I try to
ride the wave of pain and I’m not left in any doubt that this is a true contraction.

Walking off doesn’t feel to be the best idea at this point but neither does staying here if it means no-
one comes to help. Yelling out gets me a whole lot of nothing in return and as another contraction
hits, I grit my teeth, “It’s too soon kids, crap I need to time these; too soon, you like inside daddy’s
tummy right, it’s nice, safe and warm.” Finding the hospital bag again, I realise there is very little in it
that’s going to help me out here. Looking in the back of the car I spy Robert’s pullover that he’d
thrown there earlier in the afternoon but I don’t find anything else of use and stare at the car,
assessing if I dare climb up high enough to get to the car boot. The tools I have in there won’t be
much use, but I know for sure there’s a tarp and a blanket we use for picnics. I wait it out for the next
contraction to pass, which thankfully seems to take longer to arrive but it’s stronger and has me
gripping onto the car door for dear life until it lessens. Not wanting to dilly-dally any longer, I
carefully climb up, holding onto the car to keep my balance, steadfastly ignoring the fact that I have
this great big solid belly full of life with me. However, the excitement of my success is short-lived at
finding that the sodding thing won’t open. I can reach the release button but nothing happens and I
smash my fist down on the top of the boot and for the first time, I scream out loud. No words, simply
all my emotion and fear bundled up into one long burst until I finally stop, resting my head against
the car in defeat, I’m tired and out of breath from the exertion and stress I’ve been putting on myself,
“Well if no-one heard that, then we are well and truly fucked.”

Slowly and very carefully I climb back down, Robert would have killed me if he’d seen. Thankful
that there wasn’t another contraction, I get myself up into the car again, careful not to catch Robert
and pull the keys out of the ignition. After a rest, I make haste before another contraction hits and
climbing up I try to see if using the key will open the boot, but it seems whatever I do, it won’t budge
and eventually, angry and frustrated I give up. Hardly back down onto the ground, I know I've over-reached my limits, dropping onto my hands and knees, I'm drained and shaking from the exertion.

I've run out of ideas and energy, and resign myself to being stuck here for at least a while. Gathering the things that I do have to hand, I try and prepare a space on the ground and myself as best I can, whilst I still can. I'm now timing the contractions, ignoring the building nervousness as I scrabble around on the ground on my knees clearing away twigs and stones to get as comfy a space as possible, spreading out my coat to provide some kind of cushion. Each time I look at the phone I'm willing the bars to appear indicating that there's even the faintest hint of a signal, but I'm kidding myself. We're in the middle of nowhere, down a steep banking, so the odds are not in my favour of getting a signal anytime soon if I can't get one now.

Absolutely shattered, I lie down, my back on Robert’s pullover. Grabbing the sleeve in my hand I hold it to my face so I can smell him, his scent mingling with the faint whiff of his aftershave and I close my eyes immersing myself in it.

Putting my hand on my abdomen, each painful contraction seems to be getting stronger and lasting longer, harder to cope with. Low moans escape my lips as I try to ride the waves of pain, quietly reassuring myself it’s going to be okay. In-between each one, I yell out for help but no-one comes, I yell at Robert but he doesn’t waken and all the time the pain is getting worse where I’m reaching the point that nothing I seem to do helps. This is such a head-fuck and I’m scared shitless. Laughing mirthlessly, I tell myself that I wanted to give birth naturally, well, it doesn’t get much more natural than this. Another contraction comes again and I know now for sure that I’m in labour and there’s nothing I can do about it except ride it through. “Ready or not.”

In-between each excruciating wave of pain, I talk to Robert, giving him a running commentary to keep myself going as much as trying to see if Robert wakes enough to respond to my voice. My moans get higher pitched and less controlled as the time moves on and I’m very aware that it’s getting darker, the earlier sun filtering through the canopy of foliage above us now replaced by darkening shadows which serves to make me feel totally isolated and it takes a huge amount of willpower not to cry.

My entire world has been reduced to counting the length of the contractions and then how long in-between until the next whilst trying to remember all the relaxation and breathing exercises though I’m not convinced they are helping much. I discover that my body appears to know exactly what it is supposed to do so I follow its lead and surprisingly, I find that walking around and bending over, resting my hands against the nearby boulders or trees does actually help, at least for a while and I’ll take whatever I can get at this point.

The longest contraction has now lasted forty-five seconds and they are becoming more intense and painful that I’ve had to move onto all fours again, rocking my body to try and help with the back pain unable to stand up anymore. This feels to give me some relief, the rhythmic swaying comforting, back and forth, right and left for a few minutes until whilst resting my head on my hands, I get the final confirmation that there’s no going back as I feel the breaking of my waters. For me, it’s more a trickle than a gush, with an ache in my back. I find myself gripping onto the rough ground beneath me until some semblance of normal returns. The wetness is horribly uncomfortable and with the dusk of night gradually drawing in, it’s cool and I shiver involuntarily.

Tiredly, I realise that I need to get my jeans off and if I'd had any common sense I would have done it sooner, then they wouldn't have been all wet like now. In exasperation, I try the phone again
before slamming it down. Taking deep breaths, I forget about the phone; instead, I concentrate on my body, and gradually any overall sense of time passing is now getting lost as my priority becomes the birth of my children. The only time I’m aware of now is that between contractions which I’m counting out loud to give my mind something to focus on.

Now around three to four minutes apart, I ride out the pain of each, cursing that I ever asked Robert to take the scenic route. Right about now I would kill to be on the dual carriageway surrounded all the traffic annoying the shit out of me.

Startled by a drop of water hitting my forehead, I wait until there is another and one more, soon followed by the steady pitter-patter of rain. It doesn’t seem to be anything more than a light shower but I’m at the end of what I can endure. Yelling out, I’m well and truly pissed off, “Oh come on, where did that come from, give me a fucking break.”

Feeling a sudden overwhelming urge to push, I try to put it off by panting, using the breathing techniques, lying on my side. It’s all well and good the midwife from the antenatal classes saying not to push too early, her words echoing in my head, but the first one must be a Sugden, impatient to be out and isn't paying a blind bit of notice to anything I say no matter how much I insist.

In the end, I’ve given in trying to go against such a force of nature. Having realised the inevitable is happening, the first baby is coming and it is coming right now! Lying on my side, my body gives a tiny involuntary push, and I felt something come up between my legs. My first thought was, "Oh, God, the cord." I think maybe I had somehow crapped myself so I reached down with much trepidation to feel, relieved that it was most definitely the cord. I might have cried out again at this point albeit was probably closer to a growling grunt. If words were involved I have have no idea what they were, I'm too busy moving back onto all fours with my chest down, and belly and arse raised up in the air, but not too far in case the baby dropped out. I can’t imagine what this must look like, I think I’d be mortified if I could see myself.

I’d read incessantly about male birthing, wanting to prove to myself I knew everything I needed to know to make a considered choice and to be prepared for a natural birth; I’m all the more glad for it now. I feel for a pulse in the cord, but can’t find one; I’m talking to myself, babbling away to bolster my confidence in my ability to do this, switching between begging the baby to stay in and then begging it come out. By now I’m really all over the place. It’s all happening so fast, and I can honestly say any semblance of modesty is stripped away, giving birth feels a truly primal experience. The pushing and grunting is happening whether I want it to or not, I don’t get a choice in what’s happening, nothing is stopping this baby from coming now. There is literally nothing I can do but work with my body and my baby, hoping for the best.

Thoughts about what could go wrong hover on the edge of my mind yet, in the end, it is the most beautiful feeling I have ever experienced and when the time comes I’m no longer scared — instead totally consumed by it and again it's like my body knows exactly what to do, and there is simply no stopping it. Occasionally I lift my head to look at my surroundings, looking back at the car, where Robert is still slumped unmoving and after a short prayer for all of us another burst of pain hits and I drop my head to the ground to try and deal with the intensity, my hands grabbing at anything and everything to channel the pain, Rob's jumper, the leaves, dirt and twigs beneath me.

I don’t know how long, but maybe about five minutes pass when the baby's body makes an appearance and I move onto my back. I will never forget the feeling of her coming out all at once. There aren't words to describe it as I look down in-between my legs, seeing body and toes, just the head still to come out, but I knew that it would come. Feeling completely calm now I waited
patiently for my next contraction, and it is a little girl I welcome into the world. Supported by my hand, quietly out she comes. Chloe Sugden slipped seemingly smoothly and gently from my body into the June rain; she had practically birthed herself when it came to the final moments.

Moving her onto my thigh, she looks whitish grey and is completely floppy. The first thing I noticed is that she isn’t crying. Slapping her back a little uncertainly, I’m overjoyed when the silence is broken by the shrill sound of my daughter; I’d been holding my breath with fear that it’s only now I realise that I’m also crying as I cradle her in my arms, the strength of the connection I feel with her is incredible. Gently stroking downward on her nose, my fingers brush away the excess mucus and amniotic fluid, before wiping as much as I can from her body with my hands. If I hadn’t been totally paranoid and read so much I might not have known what to try when she wasn’t breathing and I’m thankful I had. Whilst waiting for the afterbirth to come out, I’m almost about to tie off the umbilical cord until I stop, mentally kicking myself, remembering that it’s better to wait a little while.

Increasingly I’m conscious of how unprepared I am, realising that I have nothing to properly wrap her in. The rain has thankfully stopped but everything is damp from one thing or another and there’s her brother or sister still to come so now my biggest fear is keeping her warm and somehow dry. Looking around me, my jeans are too wet and I have to make do with wrapping her in my t-shirt which is drier than anything else I have. Sitting here in the outdoors, thirsty and totally naked apart from my socks, doesn’t seem such a big deal when I have Chloe in my arms. All that matters to me is that she is alive and well, and I intend to keep her that way. I can’t hold back the emotion as she latches onto my nipple and although I don’t reckon I’ll be able to feed anything like what they’ll need myself, she takes what she needs for now and I watch her wide-eyed, amazed by her teeny-tiny fingers resting against me, everything in miniature, but she’s strong. She doesn’t suckle for long and I lie with my hand cocooning her head close into me not daring to let her out of my arms. Closing my eyes, I’m absolutely exhausted yet elated. I don’t want to miss a second of her and am filled with love as I observe this little person in my arms. “Daddy Robert will be so proud when he sees you.”

I have no idea how much time has passed and am filled with a strange mix of dread and joy as the contracting re-starts, which I assume is the placenta. Massaging my belly, I kiss Chloe’s head, taking comfort in her until I am left with no option but to lie back in an attempt to deal with the pain. I wasn’t expecting that delivering the placenta hurts so bad. It feels almost like the contractions from Chloe and I’m being vocal again, unable to keep quiet, moaning and groaning loudly.

Having been on my own with this for so long, it’s like I’m lost in my own universe and seeing everything through a looking glass, that I don’t really believe that the voices I’m hearing from somewhere up the banking are real and at first, I’m convinced they are just a figment of my imagination.

Then as they get nearer, my feelings become irrationally conflicted with a part of me wishing they’d stay away, selfishly wanting to keep such as special experience all to myself but as with everything else today, having a choice is not something I’m given and in this case, that’s probably for the best. Fearful of gripping onto Chloe so tight that I might hurt her, I place her by my side, still close to my head so I can look at her; for now, she is quiet. I can’t take my eye off her as I cry out with the next burst of pain, it’s excruciating and I’m not sure I can do this a second time, my tiredness is getting the better of me as I give in and let my eyes close as the pain consumes me, the sound of Chloe’s cries ringing in my ears as she reacts to my distress.

“You’re doing fine Aaron, just fine.”
“I’m cold, I’m really cold.” My teeth are chattering and they won’t stop.

“It’s partly just the shock, it won’t be long until the ambulance and rescue team are here.” I’m wrapped up as best possible but there’s only so much that can be covered up during labour when out in the middle of nowhere.

Feeling disoriented from the sudden switch to having other people around, I’m all over the place, unable to concentrate on any one thing, “How’s Robert, please tell me he’s okay.”

“My colleague is with him now, we’ll get you all out of here as soon as we can.”

“As much as I want to worry about Robert, another agonising burst of pain rips through me as I scream out. There’s no way I can hold it in, it’s just too much. Whoever’s hand I’m holding clearly felt my suffering, a quiet grimace and a few choice swear words work their way into my consciousness. A few contractions later he said it looked like I was ready to deliver the placenta, and moved down to check. I was involuntarily pushing again no longer aware of what was coming out, just willing it to be over and done with, my body has reached breaking point and it’s a good job it didn’t need me to be in the driving seat because instead of the placenta it’s the head of the second twin. Too tired to see and not needing to be ready to catch this one, I leave it to the officer, screaming out not caring how loud or who heard. It seemed to be never-ending until my body starts pushing and unlike Chloe, this one comes out yelling; the Dingle of the two, I reckon.

With tears of pain and utter exhaustion streaming down my face, I got to experience that first cry that everyone wants to hear. Looking I try to see, but hands and arms not belonging to me are in the way but after a minute, I’m finally told what I’m wanting to hear, "It’s a girl Aaron, you have another girl!"

Despite my lack of energy, there’s just enough stamina left for a last stand, “I want to hold her, just a minute, please, I need to see she’s okay.” Noticing my increasing distress, the officer who looked as affected by the experience as I am places my other daughter against my chest. My arms wrap around her like a cocoon as I whisper to her, “That’s my girl,” Ignoring the hands wrapping foil around me to conserve my body heat, my gaze is transfixed on my second daughter. Her eyes are piercing and she’s bawling like there is no tomorrow; I’ve never seen or heard anything more amazing, “Hello, Maia.” Looking at the officer, he did tell me his name, but I was too busy screaming obscenities in pain at the time, “She’s called Maia.”

Within a few hours, I’ve given birth to two babies and not an ambulance or midwife in sight. Robert would have been having more than a few palpitations at this. Lying back, I’m unaware of the many more people around or the sound of firemen cutting Robert out of the car.

“She’s a feisty little lady.”

Smiling, I answer with my eyes closed, “It runs in the family.” Looking at her once more, I’m in awe of how animated she is, exaggerated even more so with the lights being set up around us. “Can’t wait to introduce you to your other daddy and your sister; soon Maia, very soon.” I didn’t want to let Maia go, but it wasn’t safe for me to hold onto her, these last words have sapped what little I had left and I relinquish my children trusting the people around me to take good care of them both for a little while.

It’s a strange feeling to know the twins aren’t inside me anymore, and I don’t know if it’s physical or
psychological, but there’s an odd sense of emptiness, yet having held them both in my arms, my heart is bursting with love, it felt indescribable finally getting to touch and see them in the flesh.

Feeling the prick of a needle in my arm, my eyes fly open to find a paramedic at my side and for a second I panic, "It's just something to help rehydrate you." My eyes are searching until I see the girls bundled up to keep them warm and dry, being prepared to be taken up by the rescue team. The bustle around us all permeates on some level but not enough to hold my attention and it is with closed eyes that I’m put into the rescue cradle to be lifted up out of the clough and transferred to my own waiting ambulance up on the road.

I have no recollection of the trip to the hospital, during which I delivered the placenta. The two placentas had apparently fused together which I have no idea if that’s a bad thing or not but no-one seemed to be treating it like a big deal and the girls didn't seem any worse off for it. Chloe and Maia had travelled on their own, I was too weak and tired to hold them again but I was lucid enough to see them a last time before being put in a second ambulance next to mine. The one thing I know for sure is just how absolutely beautiful and perfect in every way they are. Both girls were said to be in good health upon arrival at the hospital with Chloe weighing in at 5lbs 13oz and Maia just touching 6lbs meaning that they didn’t need to be in a special incubator.

All I need now is for Robert to wake up and be okay, then my world will be as close to perfect as possible.

TBC
Mission Impossible

Chapter Summary

Aaron and Robert meet their daughters properly for the first time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aaron, Saturday 3rd June 2017

“Robert!”

It’s with absolute fear that I wake with a start; used to nightmares throughout most of my pregnancy, this isn’t one I want to repeat. The image of being stood at his graveside with the girls in my arms is something that I don’t want to experience either in dreamland or the real world. Shrugging off the uneasy feeling it has evoked, I wish Robert was here. His big arms hugging me after a bad dream always makes everything feel instantly better, safe. Instead, I’m alone.

Resting back on the pillows, I take stock; it’s quiet around me but with the recognisable sounds of being in the hospital. Unfortunately, this doesn’t prevent the spike of panic running through me; not being able to instantly see the girls and Robert anywhere is worrying. I need to know where he is, how he is.

Pushing myself to sit up, I pull the tube which I assume is an IV out of my hand; however, swivelling around so I can put my feet on the floor was maybe a little too much, too quick and I have to breathe deeply before I can make any attempt to stand. I’d apparently underestimated just how weakened my body is still and I’m tempted to crawl back under the covers but the need to know that my family are okay was always going to win out.

I’m actually surprised no-one has come running, but then I realise I hadn’t been hooked up to anything other than an IV. Sniggering, feeling daft, I clearly watch too much telly; sleep and rest are probably all I need despite our ordeal.

Looking around, I don’t see my phone or any of my things and I’m too tired to hunt around for them. Instead, sitting here, my legs swinging, gently banging against the side of the bed, I smile to myself as it dawns on me that I have two daughters and I whisper their names, “Chloe and Maia. Maia and Chloe”.

The emotion I’m feeling right now makes the last months more like a far distant memory, dreamlike and I’m filled with a desperate need to see them. Finally, mustering all my strength, I push myself up off the bed, taking a minute, standing still with my hand on the bed to steady myself. Ignoring that my legs feel jelly-like and the aches in my abdomen, I note that I’m definitely more than a little sore in the nether regions. Not that any of these are going to stop me.

Putting thoughts of any discomfort out of my mind, I peep out of the door into the empty corridor. Feeling like the man from Mission Impossible, I sneak out, looking up and down, my one goal, not
to be caught and ushered back into bed. Predictably, I’m hardly a few steps into my quest and I hear
the dulcet tones of one of the staff, “Now, Mr Sugden, you shouldn’t be wandering about like this.”

Leaning against the wall defeated, although dearly wanting to object, my aching body doesn’t seem
to agree with me and I don’t resist at the hand on my arm to help hold me steady, “Need to see
Robert and the girls.” Looking at the nurse, tears are welling in my eyes that have somehow crept up
on me; how did that happen? “They’re okay, right?”

The nurse observes me, her sympathetic smile mixed in with a big dollop of chastisement. “I need to
check with the ICU on how Mr Sugden is doing, he was unconscious but stable according to your
notes, and your daughters are doing just fine.” Studying me, possibly assessing if I’m going to cause
any trouble, “Do you want to see them?”

Nodding, with grateful relief, she pats my arm, “Wait here, I’ll go get a wheelchair.” Taking this as a
win I relax, quietly leaning back against the wall.

Nurse returning, I let her manhandle me into the wheelchair and the exhaustion crashes over me, not
having understood that the simple effort of standing and taking a few steps had wiped out the little
energy I had. With this in mind, I’m quite content at being pushed down the corridor and for the first
time take in more of my surroundings, “Where is this?”

“Hotten General; you were all brought in yesterday.”

My eyes fly open wide, “What time is it?”

“You’ve been asleep for over eighteen hours. It’s Saturday night.”

Wow, that would explain the hunger pangs; first, see the girls and hopefully Robert, then food. “Are
you sure they're okay?”

“Your daughters are doing just fine, you on the other hand clearly need more rest. We’ll move you
all to be together once we get you back and settled, you went through quite the drama yesterday.”

It’s hard to explain the battle inside me. I want to see Robert and the girls at the same time, I don’t
like having to choose but I ache to see Chloe and Maia again. Once I see for myself that they are
fine, I can then better focus on Robert, get the stubborn shit to wake up if he isn’t already.

Entering the baby unit, my heart almost leaps out of my chest seeing the two cribs next to each other
with the label ‘Sugden’ on them and the most unnerving wave of panic hits me; I don’t know which
is which. How can I not know this; I gave birth to them. Trying to stand for a better look, the nurse
puts her hand on my shoulder gently applying pressure to keep me sitting, “Give me a minute, you
have time to hold both of them.”

Watching her, I’m jealous she gets to touch before I do. The raft of conflicting emotions right now
are very overwhelming, “Why aren’t their first names written?”

With the baby from the nearest crib being settled into my arms, any irritation evaporates as I look
down at the face of my daughter, “Look at the wristband.”

Such a tiny plastic name tab surrounds her wrist; reading I see the date of birth and the name ‘Chloe’.
I’ll have to thank the policeman who made sure they knew because switching my gaze between
them, I’m not sure I would know for certain myself and that would bug me immensely.
It’s with awe that I look down at Chloe’s face. Seemingly unaffected by the events of yesterday, she remains happily oblivious and I look across to the nurse, “Can I hold Maia as well?”

“Not together, just for now; wait until tomorrow when you're feeling a bit stronger.” Lifting Maia out of the crib, she helps me switch them around and I’m grateful when she pulls another chair over to sit next to me, holding Chloe near so I can at least have them both close to me. I hardly had any time with Maia after she was born and I bend over to kiss her forehead, smiling at the stretching of her face morphing into a yawn before settling back down. Yep, she’s the Dingle of the crew.

Absentmindedly I murmur to myself, “They’re perfect.”

“You were very lucky by all accounts.”

Looking at the nurse, I’m acutely aware of just how much that it’s difficult to find the words, “I know. I wasn’t sure we would be found, I tried.” Looking back at the babies in our arms, the love I feel is incredible, and I smile shyly at her, being a male mum is still disconcerting at times, ”These two wanted out a little earlier than planned.”

“Well, they're none the worse for it. The police will probably be around in the morning.” I nod, my eyes straying back to my children. “Your family were here most of the day as well but we sent them home.”

This makes me grin, imagining the look on Grandma Dingle’s face, “Did they behave themselves?”

“Doting grandparents, uncles and aunts; they were worried about you all.” Knowing our family and hospitals, I don’t comment on the diplomatic response that didn’t quite answer my question.

I’m happy to have this quiet time right now, I don’t think I could cope with the family being here and my thoughts turn to Robert. As much as I don’t want to leave the girls, I need to see him. "Just wait 'til you both meet daddy Robert."

Sensing the shift in my mood, the nurse puts Chloe back down. “Let me ring down to the ICU and see if we can go take a look at our other Mr Sugden.”

The nurse seemed to be gone for an age, but it was probably only a couple of minutes. Maia is getting restless in my arms, her little hands curled into two fists, so tiny. Looking to stave off any crying, I open my gown to see if she’ll feed. Suckling, I’m not sure how much she gets, but it seems to do the trick and I’m very glad for this time, just the two of us. I had been too exhausted after she was born; unlike with Chloe, I didn’t get more than hardly a few seconds to hold her.

Watching her miniature features, my eyes drifting over to Chloe, I can only wonder at the miracles that they are; that we never ever imagined would be possible. It seems foreign to me now that I was so scared by everything and seriously thought about having an abortion. If I’d known then what I know now, I wouldn’t have considered the notion for even a millisecond. All I need now is for Robert to be awake and well so I can take our family home.

The nurse returning pulls me from my thoughts, “Your Mr Sugden is awake, he’s been moved out of the ICU into a side ward.” Giving me time to get Maia to let go of my nipple, the nurse then lays her back down in the crib next to her sister, “You can visit quickly, he needs to rest, but I think he’ll be glad to see you. He’s apparently been quite agitated since waking.”
“He gets over-protective.”

“To be expected.” Standing before me with a wry smile, for the first time since waking it feels that all will be well with the world, “You ready?”

“Drive on.” Wrapping a blanket over me, we set off and I close my eyes a minute, these moments with Chloe and Maia will remain imprinted in my memory forever.

It’s with a strange nervousness that I’m wheeled into the room where Robert is lying, but once there, before the nurse can stop me, I’m out of the chair, tears once more welling as we wrap our arms around each other. Gripping him as tightly as is possible we both ignore the admonishment from the nurse that we both have to be careful not to cause more injury but she could be talking to the wall for all I care.

Whispering to Robert, everything I’d been holding inside is released with these words, “I thought I’d lost you.”

Robert is as affected as I am, and I don’t miss the tear escaping down his cheek which I kiss away, “You’re not going to get rid of me that easily, you alright?”

“I am now.” Smashing our lips together, the familiar taste of his mouth is wonderful and the last dregs of anxiety flow out of me. I think after all this I might have to sleep another eighteen hours but it’ll be worth it. “They’re perfect, Robert. Our girls are perfect.”

“And you? How was it?”

“Just bruises mostly from the accident, but I’m okay. I tried to get help, but there was no way out, I really tried but they wouldn’t wait. I was so scared....” The dam holding back my tears finally breaks.

“Shush, shhh now,” Robert brushes his fingers through my hair, “Shh Aaron, we’re all okay that’s the main thing. They’re impatient like their fathers.”

Chuckling quietly, I wipe away the dampness from my cheeks before resting my head against his shoulder, “Huh, doesn’t bode well does it?”

“We don’t do boring remember.”

Peering up at him with a smirk I beg to differ, “Told you, I like boring, Safe and boring from hereon-in you got that? I won't tell you again.”

“Yes, mum.”

My attempt at a frown fails, my happiness that he’s awake winning out and I shake my head, laughing quietly at the knowing smirk on his face, “Don’t you dare call me that neither.”

Not one to take a hint, ‘yes mum’ is all I get as I hide my face, pressing a kiss into his neck. “I was so afraid when you wouldn’t wake up, promise me you’re okay.” It feels like I’m in heaven as we lose ourselves in a deep, lingering kiss; as if we needed it to prove we're both really here.

“You taste nice.”

"Need to clean my teeth I think."
"Not for me you don't." Settling against him, Robert answers my earlier question. "According to the docs, I’m fine, just concussion in the end. Very boring."

I punch him playfully, there’s no weight behind it, “Don’t joke like that, it’s not funny.”

“Sorry, couldn't resist but honestly I'm okay, amazingly.”

“How long do you have to be in for, did they say?”

“They’ll probably let me out tomorrow I reckon, said they want to monitor me during the night.”

“I wish you could see them, Robert. They’re so tiny.”

“We have plenty of time, I'll wait now I've seen you.”

"Be nice to the nurses, they might let you come over sooner. All being well we'll be in the same room tomorrow.” He doesn't respond and despite his words I know he’s eager to see them. My eyes close, and all I want to do is curl up and go to sleep here, but I’m sure the nurses would object so I treasure the moment for as long as I’m allowed, Robert’s fingers carding through my hair. We cuddle quietly until the ‘hhrmgh’ of the nurse indicates that my time’s up.

Grinning sheepishly at her isn’t going to change her mind, but she patiently waits with the wheelchair for me to kiss Robert goodnight.

Robert, Sunday 4th June 2017

As much as I love our family, I wished they’d all shut up and leave as soon as they got here. It was only shortly after waking up from my nap that they descended and I didn’t have the heart to turn them away but their noise and concern was a little too much when all I wanted to do was see Aaron. Irrationally, it also irked somewhat that even Cain got to see the girls before me. However, when I finally do, the moment of bliss seeing Chloe and Maia is without equal. With only Diane remaining, she had helped me take the slow walk from my ward to see Aaron which is more tiring than I had imagined it would be but all that flies out of the window walking into his room finding him with both girls in his arms. I’d have been intensely jealous if it wasn’t for the fact that I love them all more than life itself.

After initially perching, I give into temptation, overcoming my initial reserve to sit next to him, my legs outstretched on the bed. Stroking Maia’s forehead, my long fingers emphasize how tiny they both are and I feel hesitant even when Aaron moves for me to take her from him. However, it doesn’t take him more than a minute or two until I find myself holding them both whilst he is busy taking photos with his phone. He’s amused at Chas and Diane hovering as if I’m about to drop them; I get the impression they had done the same with him earlier.

Very soon, I’m relaxed with my husband, sharing the most precious of moments with our children, it would be impossible to wipe the smile off either of our faces.

We’ve both been on tenterhooks waiting to find out when we can go home, but in the end, they decide to keep Aaron in an extra night whereas I’m allowed to go home already tonight. This decision was made after the family all left. Visiting hours with Aaron were over by seven pm, so, unfortunately, I missed out on a lift home with them. On the plus side, I’m allowed in to see Aaron for quite a long time after visiting hours which more than makes up for it. I get to do some feeding
with the bottle and change my first nappies with them, gross as it is, even that can’t wipe the smile off my face.

The police came to see us both earlier in the day, where it seems that the accident was exactly that, no-one’s fault, just a sharp piece of metal on the road causing the tyre to burst right before the bend and I’d lost control. They still have to do a final inspection and report, but they don’t suspect anything else.

I’m not sure how I feel about that right now. It’s been playing over and over in my mind, that I should have been able to keep the car on the road. The fact that we’re all okay doesn’t stop the roundabout of what-if’s from turning in my head. Aaron, as ever, is just happy we’re all okay; move on, look to the future. For me, I think that’s going to take a little longer to get over. It’s the thought that the outcome could have been very different that will haunt me for a while yet.

It was hard to leave Aaron behind as I was signed out. Usually, he is the teary one, but today it was me struggling to keep my emotions in check as I kissed them all good night.

Waiting for the taxi to arrive outside the hospital, I had convinced Aaron not to come down with me and anyway I don’t think the nurses would have let him. The whole reason he has to stay an extra night is some residual bleeding he has so I played the guilt card and made him stay in bed, leaving him with a promise of the best orgasm ever when he gets home to make up for it. The coy smile on his face was so sweet, it warmed my heart.

Although the night is mild, I wish I’d asked Diane to bring my coat with my change of clothes earlier as another shiver runs through me from the light breeze. Putting it down to the fact that the hospital is so warm inside, I hug my arms tightly around myself whilst I adjust to the normal temperature of the real world.

I’ve been pretty much ignoring the world around me whilst waiting, that it’s the yell of the taxi driver pulling me back to the here and now, “Taxi for Emmerdale mate?” About to say ‘yes’ I find myself staring at him, open-mouthed. It’s foolish, but the thought of getting into the car has my heart beating like it’s about to burst out of my chest as he asks again impatiently. “Oi, did you order a taxi to Emmerdale or not?”

Frozen to the spot, my legs won’t move and my mouth doesn’t work immediately, and when it does, the words aren’t the ones they should be, “No mate, not me.”

Walking swiftly away in the opposite direction, I ignore the muttering of the driver. He’ll leave eventually or pick up another fare, I’m probably not the only one needing a taxi tonight. It’s only when I’m through the gates of the hospital that I bend over, having walked so quickly that I’m feeling out of breath, the exertion seemingly too much but what unnerves me the most is the shaking of my hands and I can’t seem to get them to stop.

The coup d’état, however, is when I hurl against the wall, my vomit and spittle spattering against the brickwork and I’ve never felt so embarrassed that as soon as I’m bodily able, I’m rushing off down the path towards Hotten centre leaving the scene behind me as fast as I can.

I call myself all the names under the sun for being stupid, yet at the same time there’s no way I’m going back or calling another taxi, and once on the main street of Hotten, I’m unsure what to do next. Maybe I’m just overwhelmed with being out of the hospital finally and missing that Aaron isn’t with
me. I mean there’s no reason why I should have frozen and then reacted like that, it’s not as if I haven’t been in an accident before. Just me being daft getting into a funk like that for no reason and I’m exceptionally relieved that I was alone and not with Vic or anyone from the family, I’d never hear the end of it if I’d done it with them there.

Making my way to the bus station, I check the timetable and don’t have long to wait until the Dales circular turns up and thankfully, there’s no hesitation as I get on otherwise I would have been in a right predicament. After paying my fare, I head to the back seat, sinking down into the corner, hiding out.

The journey passes quickly and ignoring everything and everybody, I spend the time looking through the raft of photos I’ve already managed to take of us all during the day. Aaron is positively glowing on one, I have my arm around him and we’re each holding a baby; one to be framed and put on the wall, I think. Somehow, I reckon Aaron will have to suffer me continuing my diary of photos; I know, secretly, he likes them.

Unseen from bus stop to the door of the cottage, unlocking and going inside is like a weight lifted off my shoulders. Everything is just as we left it at first glance, but then it seems that our family have been meddling somewhat, with cards on the kitchen table waiting to be opened and someone has done all the washing up and tidied around.

After going upstairs to run a bath, I steadfastly ignore the returned jittering of my hand as I pour a whiskey, deluding myself that it’s a celebratory drink upon becoming a new father and not to calm the pangs of anxiety deep inside me. I can’t wait for Aaron to be home, I’m convinced that everything will be okay and back to normal once we’re all together.

Getting into the bath, I distract myself by coming up with new names for Aaron now he’s a mum, it’ll keep me entertained for weeks. He’d kill me if the girls ended up calling him that even though I think it suits him because for me being a mum isn’t about being a man or woman, it’s that he gave birth to them, but I know he disagrees just like he knows I dislike the idea of being called dad two or even shortened to D2 which would make me feel like I’m second best. Daddy and dad will have to do for now, but I’m sure with the help of the girls over time, we’ll find the right names.

Pushing my head up out of the water after washing my hair, I hear the ping of my phone and my face lights up, a good night kiss from my husband and daughters. This time tomorrow we should be doing it for real.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Vehophobia, or the fear of driving, is an issue suffered by many people. It is quite common—both in people who have been involved in serious accidents and sometimes in those who have not.
Doomed

Chapter Summary

Settling back at home is a mixed blessing, adjusting is easier said than done.

Robert, Sunday 11th June 2017

Tipping my head towards the door, I voice my curiosity, “Who was that on the phone?”

“Helen and Sam, they say congrats and all that; invited us over later in the year if we’re up for it. Thought you were asleep or I’d have called you down to say hello.”

“It’s okay, you can talk for the both of us.” Lying down on the bed next to me, I ignore his slightly perturbed look at my tone, at the same time pushing off the tiny pangs of guilt. I hadn’t meant it quite how it sounded.

Settling on his side, head resting against the pillow, curling his hand under his neck, his eyes are practically burning a hole in me, intense like a laser, “Have I done something to piss you off?”

“No, course not. My back’s playing up that’s all; it’s making me grumpy.” Not giving him any chance to probe further, I use my dead cert diversion tactic, “They asleep?”

Rolling onto my side, groaning at my body’s twinges, I mirror his position, the smile creeping across my husband’s face reflects his mirth that comes with having new-born twins to care for, “Mmm hmm. It’s all they seem to do at the minute. Well, sleep, eat and poo. It’d be quite relaxing ’cept that they want feeding every other hour.”

“We can’t say we weren’t warned.” Absentmindedly I brush over his nipple with my finger causing his eyes to close, his lips parting as a damp spot appears on his t-shirt. It’s with curiosity that I watch his shifting expression; he hates the nursing pads and knowing he’d pull a hissy fit with me I haven’t tried dissuading him otherwise. “Sensitive?”

Aaron responds with a subtle nod as he nudges closer, wrapping his leg over mine. Feeding is a family affair with Aaron only able to provide the girls about a third of the milk they need. The doctor had said to feed them both as much as he can, although I’ve had to keep a lid on just how overjoyed I am about this. Despite knowing this was likely, Aaron has been very touchy on the subject, ignoring anything positive I say; he won’t admit it out loud but it’s written all over his face that he feels inadequate and guilty that he can’t give them everything they need.

Chloe always wakes first, hungry and impatient so I take over with the formula whilst Aaron feeds Maia eventually also switching to the bottle. He gives me a wry smirk, “It’s weird, I never reckoned that I’d be turned on by them tugging on my nipples. It’s not like they are any different to before except darker and super sensitive.”

Snorting a laugh at his expression, I give him a kiss on the forehead amused at yet another thing we didn’t expect to discover. “You always liked me sucking on them so it stands to reason really.” His eyes mist over and I pull him into me; sometimes he gets emotional without much of a reason, sometimes not even knowing why. “Have a nap whilst you can.” My own yawnng belies how tired
I am also, what with sharing the feeding, fitting in housework, eating and not being able to sleep for more than an hour at a time, it feels like I’m on autopilot most of the time.

“I’m too restless to sleep right now.”

“Can I do anything to help? Massage, bath?”

“You can tell me what’s going on with you and don’t say nothing or everything’s fine because something isn’t, I’m not imagining it. Ever since I got home you’ve been out of sorts.”

“I told you, my back’s niggling, it’s difficult to get comfy.”

Frustrated at my excuses he’s not buying it, “Don’t lie to me, Robert.” Not knowing what to say, I don’t try to make anything up knowing it will probably only make things worse. “Why didn’t you come to pick us up from the hospital on Monday and now you’re trying to get out of going with me tomorrow.”

“I wanted everything to be just perfect for you to come home to and I never said I wouldn’t go with you tomorrow.”

“You know I don’t care about things being perfect and neither do you. You’re hiding something from me and I want to know what it is.”

Rolling away from him, annoyance gnawing away at me, “I want, I want. I thought having given birth would make you less demanding, not more.” There I go with my big size eleven feet again, and I can feel rather than see Aaron’s incredulous glare at my snippy tone.

“Grow up.” Clearly fighting not to turn this into an argument, he takes a deep breath, his hand turning my face back towards him yet I avoid his searching eyes, “Don’t you dare turn away from me. After everything we’ve been through, you don’t get to keep things from me.”

“I’m not. You’re not the only one who finds everything overwhelming. I’m not perfect remember.”

“I don’t expect you to be.”

Reluctantly, I look at him feeling ashamed by my outburst, knowing he’s looking for more, “I can’t sleep okay.”

Aaron doesn’t say anything immediately, waiting to see if I’ll offer up anything else but this is more than I wanted to say already, “You think I don’t know about the nightmares?”

Shrugging my shoulders, there’s no point denying it, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to admit it either. “Remember what you told me when I had nightmares with the girls?” He went through a prolonged phase of bad dreams, I said a lot of things and instead of protesting it’s not the same thing, I push into his arms, soaking up his scent, intermingled with the familiar baby smell. It’s comforting as Aaron speaks softly in my ear, his arms wrapping around me, “You said we can do anything together.”

His hand strokes through my hair and I struggle to hold back a tear. I should be the one looking after him, not the other way around, feelings of my own inadequacy roll through me, “Sorry.”
“You don’t need to be sorry, you’ve nothing to be sorry for. Just talk to me, that’s all I ask.” The words are there on the tip of my tongue, yet I say nothing, “You know the police said it was just an unlucky accident, there wasn’t much you could do any different. It wasn’t your fault, it was nobody’s fault.”

“I could have kept us on the road.”

“We’re all alive and we have two beautiful healthy daughters.”

Picturing them brings a smile to my face, but it fades as quickly as it appears. “You were all alone with them. What if no-one had come?”

“But they did come and I was okay; more worried about you, than anything. I’m not alone now, and neither are you so stop acting like it and stop feeling guilty; there’s nothing for you to be guilty about.”

Do I feel guilty? Maybe. How can I explain to him that, right now, I’m scared of my own shadow. Thankfully there’s a knock at the front door, and Aaron’s head falls back on the pillow annoyed at the interruption, his mum’s dulcet tones making her presence known, “It’s only me. I brought you some shopping.”

“This conversation isn’t over, Sugden.” Climbing out of bed, he pulls on his jumper to hide the wet patches and trudges downstairs. Leaving them to it, it’s only when I hear the bang of the front door that I realize I’m shaking. I don’t think it was a panic attack as such, but something isn’t right with me, and that worries me more than I care to think. Aaron doesn’t need this crap on top of everything else. He doesn’t come back to join me, but I hear him shuffling about in the kitchen and I’m grateful for small mercies as I try to pull myself together.

Eventually, feeling more like myself, I go downstairs; seeing him putting away the shopping that Chas brought with her, I’m so proud of my husband and his resilience, envious maybe. Crossing the room, I grab hold of him, burying my nose into his neck, I wish I could stay like this with him forever. “It’s okay, Robert. Whatever it is, we’ll work it out.” There’s no point denying that something isn’t right, but that doesn’t mean I’m ready to share anything about how I’m feeling. I wouldn’t even know where to start; I haven’t a clue what’s going on with me, never mind trying to put it into actual words he’d understand.

For the most part, this last few days have been nice since Aaron came home from the hospital; as if in our own bubble. We’ve kept visitors to a minimum with the excuse we wanted time to get used to our new family focussing on just the four of us but we could only stave off the family for so long and to be honest, they’ve been a welcome distraction for the both of us. The lack of sleep has been fraying both our nerves.

Looking at the clock, it’ll be hopefully at least an hour before the girls wake and my tummy rumbles reminding me that we have to eat as well. “You hungry, mum?”

The expected playful smack, on the top of my head, makes me chuckle. Aaron has given up trying to dissuade me from calling him mum on the understanding that I’m not to call him that out of the house. We’ll see. Rummaging around in the kitchen to see what we have, a mischievous smirk can’t be avoided, “Oh look what I’ve found; fancy some chutney, sweetheart?”

His face pales and grabbing the jar out of my hand, puts it back on the shelf, firmly shutting the cupboard door on the little stockpile we have, enough to feed an army for a year at least, “You’re so
fucking funny.” Since coming home, he can’t stand the sight or smell of chutney or anything resembling it. After spending the last eight months or so playing second fiddle to his favourite food, it’s been nice to get some of my own back.

Holding the swear jar in front of his face, he gives me a look that could kill, and I simply return it by smiling sweetly, “I’ll put in an IOU for you.” Ignoring the snort as if to say don’t hold your breath, I make good on it by writing a post-it, placing it into the jar. Chas has taken some of the chutney but apparently, even the pub doesn’t go through that much in a year; the demand for ploughman’s lunch isn’t what it used to be. Musing on a possible solution other than throwing it all in the dustbin, maybe the cash and carry will want to buy some of it back, or we could throw a pickle party for charity.

Smartly switching the subject after the growling of my stomach reminds me of what I was doing, I park that thought for a later date as my husband distracts me by something more immediately satisfying, “Mum made us shepherd’s pie.”

“That’s nice of her, maybe she heard my hunger pangs from up the road, cos I’m starving. We should have time before the girls wake up.” Thankfully it’s already cooked, it just needs warming up and unwrapping it, Aaron pops the dish in the microwave.

Surprisingly we’ve managed to find a pretty good rhythm to our days. It’s been quite interesting seeing Aaron in full-on parenting mode. He’s been very set on having a schedule, waking the babies when it is time to feed and not waiting for them to wake of their own accord. It’s not a completely fixed schedule in terms of the same time every day, but if she’s not awake already we get Maia up once Chloe starts to feed, it helps to stagger them slightly and Chloe almost always wakes on plan. Then it takes around forty-five minutes to an hour for feeding and burping. I can’t get over how much they’ve grown already in the few days they’ve been home, but it’s not surprising considering how much milk they guzzle down their necks, they have healthy appetites that’s for sure. Setting the table whilst waiting for our food, I spy an envelope, reaching for it curious, “What’s this?”

“They had a collection at the pub apparently and bought us a present.”

Seeing how he doesn’t explain further, I open to find a voucher inside for a session with a professional photographer. A smile crosses my face as I know just which outfits will fit perfectly but seeing the back side, it appears they’ve already made an appointment at the studio in town for this next week, “It’s a bit soon don’t you think; why don’t we wait until they’re a little older?”

Not looking in my direction, Aaron misses the frown on my face, “We can have some more done if we want, later. It’ll be fun, don’t you think?”

“Why don’t we do it here instead then, I’m sure they wouldn’t mind switching.”

This gets his attention and I kick myself for being unnecessarily difficult, “No, I want them to look good.”

Pursing my lips, I try not to sound to put out, “So our home isn’t good enough?”

“That’s not what I said.”

“That’s what it sounded like.”

“Stop arguing. Mum is going to come with me to the hospital tomorrow, so you don’t have to bother.” Distraught by the ping of the microwave, I start spooning our food onto plates, not sure who I’m more cross with, him or me, feeling backed into a corner. The see-sawing of my moods is getting
harder to hide, it reminds me of the early days in Aaron’s pregnancy when he didn’t know he was pregnant, “If you want to go back to work already, I won’t mind.”

Looking at him, his suggestion catches me so much by surprise, I stop what I’m doing, “What makes you think that?”

Shrugging as we sit down, he hands me some cutlery, “I just wondered if you were going a little stir crazy being at home so much, I thought it might help.”

“I don’t need to go to work yet.” Calming myself down, wondering how I had let it get this bad, I put my hand over his, “I don’t want to go back to work. I’m enjoying being here with you and the girls.”

“Really?” Aaron sounds vulnerable and it dawns on me that he thinks my strange behaviour is his fault.

Squeezing his hand and sporting my best husband smile, I try to convince him, “Really. Now eat up and I’ll give you a nice foot massage, assuming you do still like them.” A sly smile tells me the answer. He might not need them the same, but he still practically sounds like he’s orgasming every time he has one; I should record it one time, he’d be super embarrassed by the noise he makes. Fortunately for him, as much as it’s very entertaining, it is also something very private that I treasure immensely.

“Phew, gruesome twosome. It’s a good job that daddy loves you both so much; you give mummy a run for money.” Smiling at my playful banter with our daughters, speak of the devil, Aaron comes over, taking Maia off my hands and I can’t help but playfully wind him up, quietly teasing as I blow a raspberry into Chloe’s tummy, “Now mummy comes, when you’re all clean and smelling that nice baby smell instead of poo stink.” Runny poos at that; we take it in turns with changing nappies and I pulled the short straw this time much to my husband’s amusement.

“Don’t you listen girls; daddy can fart for England, specially after a curry.” My glare in his direction is like water off a duck’s back as he carries on as if butter wouldn’t melt, “You want to go for a walk?”

My response of yes is immediate thinking it’s a very good idea. Maybe that’s been my problem, too long in the house without a break in the routine. We’ve not given the pram a true road-test yet, mostly because Aaron was still very sore from the birth and would have found it too much before now. “We can show them where mummy and uncle Adam work.” Smirking at Aaron’s groan, I notice he bites his bottom lip and I’d swear he likes my name for him, no matter how much he doth protest. Planting a kiss on his nose and that of Maia, I’ll notch that as a win for daddy, girls.

It’s a bit of a palaver getting everything together that it almost feels too much effort by the time we are ready, but the fresh air will do us good and I have to admit it feels like a weight lifted after being cooped up in the house for so long. The weather had been crappy all week but today’s pleasant enough. Steadily making our way through the village we are only stopped a couple of times, patiently feigning happiness at their well meant cooing and oohing, until finally free we take the path through the graveyard, ending up on the bench by the swings. However, neither of us could resist the pull of child's play, and it didn’t take us long to move to a swing, each with a baby in our arms.

“Penny for them.”
Smiling, I tell him, “It’s funny how you always end up with Maia and I have Chloe.”

He looks startled at this as if it’s something he should be concerned about which hadn’t been my intention at all, “You think that’s on purpose?”

“No, I don’t mean anything wrong by it; just an observation that this is how we end up most of the time.”

Pondering, he nods in acknowledgement, “I suppose, mostly because Chloe feeds first and you take over whilst I’m with Maia.”

“That’s because Maia is a sleepy head, aren’t you?” Lovingly, Aaron kisses her head and upon stretching out my hand, he takes hold of it as we gently swing in unison, the movement lulling both girls to sleep. Not that they need much encouragement on this front. I suppose we should enjoy it whilst it lasts.

Robert, Monday 12th June 2017

Munching down the last bite of toast, it’s difficult to tell what Aaron is saying but I think it was, “Mum asked if we are going to have a christening.”

I don’t know is the honest answer, “Are we?”

“Mum would like one. What do you think?”

“We don’t go to church. I don’t see the point unless you want to.” A wry thought springs to mind, “It’d be more fitting to pour beer from the Dingle welly over their heads.”

Stopping in his tracks, he looks at me like I’ve lost the plot, but it’s not that weird an idea considering our families, “You’re so strange.”

Glad he thinks this rather than I’m boring, I grin at him, “Take’s one to know one.” Unfortunately, he ignores the bait, too busy all in a fluster trying to get everything together, “What time’s your appointment?”

“Mmmh, two o’clock.”

Nervously looking at my watch, I think Chas is cutting it tight for time, “You ought to ring your mum to see if she’s on her way.”

Without looking up, he finds the cardigan he’d been searching for and I’m filled with pride. Aaron did indeed have to eat his words as the only knitwear that our daughters have worn in their short little lives have been knitted by yours truly, although I do like the little booties that Pearl knitted and finding them out, I put them first on Maia and then Chloe whilst Aaron puts on his own clodhopper boots of the leather variety, explaining further, “She called a while back, something came up unexpectedly.”

Surprised he’d not mentioned it sooner, I swing round to look at him, but he has his back to me. “So how are you getting to the hospital?”

“I’m driving, how else?”

“Are you up to it?”
“Well if I’m not, you’ll have to take me, won’t you?”

Silence isn’t a good defence apparently, and the question crosses my mind if he’s done this on purpose, but he doesn’t know anything so that doesn’t make sense.

Following him out, just looking at the family-sized car we’ve borrowed from the garage until we get round to buying a new one of our own, makes me feel sick. I can feel myself blanching already and it takes all my willpower for me not to throw up whilst helping him get the girls strapped into their car seats. It feels as though Aaron is watching me more closely than usual, but I shrug off the feeling as I listen to him explaining to our daughters about where they are going and why; their first ever car ride. Tentatively, he gets into the driver’s seat and a moment of panic floods through me, seeing him grimace slightly, “You okay?”

He nods, “Yeah, just stretched a little awkwardly, it’s fine now I’m in.” He re-arranges the seatbelt avoiding his nipples and grimaces a second time. Watching I’m filled with guilt, but there’s no way in hell, I’m getting in with him, and the force of this thought scares me as it suddenly dawns on me that this isn’t something that’s going to go away so readily. My earlier concerns that Aaron could see right through me was just my paranoia, in the end I don’t think he had a clue what was going through my head, and I force a smile as Aaron waves to me smiling as he pulls the car away from the cottage completely unaware of my ensuing mini breakdown.

Sinking down onto the ground, everything is out of focus and any sound is just faint background noise. If anyone had tried speaking to me I wouldn’t have a clue what they were saying. Resting my head in-between my knees, it takes a monumental effort to stave off throwing up. Not only do I not want to be the one to drive them to the hospital for the check-up I don’t want him to either, but that would have been too obvious if I’d tried to stop him. However, I’m pretty certain this feeling inside me will not go away until I know they are back safe and sound.

Since our almost spat yesterday, I’ve managed to convince him that my back and bruised chest has been hurting more than I’d like which is why I’ve been more difficult than usual. This isn’t exactly a lie but on the other hand, it isn’t the whole truth either.

The twinges in my body are real enough but not so bad to prevent me from driving if I really wanted to. What they are is a permanent reminder that I could have killed my family before we even had a chance to be together. My back pain has been getting worse, but now I begin to wonder if that’s wholly physical or more a case of my mind playing tricks on me.

Shit, what am I going to do if this doesn’t go away? I’m supposed to go back to work in a week’s time, although I could work from home, it’s not really a practical option. Aaron, strangely enough, hasn’t mentioned returning to work at the yard once, and I wonder if he’s changed his mind about it. I can’t imagine him wanting to stay at home full-time, but he’s also very settled in the routine we have going right now. Either way, even with Aaron taking Gordon’s money we can’t afford for me not to work as most of it is earmarked for the girl’s future and although he hasn’t mentioned it recently, he is still talking to Debbie about her stake in the garage. Great, my husband’s going to be fixing broken cars for a living and I don’t want him anywhere near one. He’s going to think I’m nuts.

Wiping a tear away from my cheek with my sleeve, I realise that I don’t rightly know how long I’ve been sat here but looking at my watch it has to be more than an hour and that in itself, is frightening. Then there’s the panicky feeling that Aaron should have been back by now, even though I know it’s not realistic; they are never on time with the appointments and it takes a good thirty minutes to drive
there depending on traffic. With that sinking feeling in my stomach, all I can think right now is that I’m doomed; a failure of a husband and a father.

TBC
Superhero

Chapter Summary

Aaron finally drags out the truth from Robert.

Chapter Notes

Apologies to anyone who read this the first 2-3 hours after posting. I always do my final editing in AO3 but unfortunately hit the post button by mistake. Anyway, I decided not to delete but that meant I've been finishing the editing live, so it's in much better shape now but with a couple of subtly important changes to the original draft that went up first.

Robert, Mid-June 2017

“Very fetching.”

“Which colour next?” I mull it over, considering what would go with the glittery pinks already on two nails of both hands and then the blue and red on two other fingers of each hand. I could just go for another red, but why get boring now. Glancing around for inspiration, my eyes rest on the picture of Chloe wearing an orange and white all-in-one and that settles me on the last colour, “Do you have orange in there?”

Aaron frowns as he tips out the remaining bottles of nail polish from the bag onto the table, “Who knew a person could own so many different colours of nail polish. It’s not like she wears all these.”

After hearing the midwife saying you should avoid wearing nail polish during one of the ante-natal classes we’d joked about painting our nails to celebrate if we had girls. Aaron must have remembered because getting home after going to the shop, I found him merrily choosing colours, having borrowed Leyla’s extraordinarily large nail polish collection. Spying a small bottle of bright orange, I pick it up and Aaron grins at me; unscrewing the top he starts to paint my last two nails.

Then with my multi-coloured swap shop of nails now drying I watch whilst Aaron coats the nails on his right hand, his face full of concentration and I shake my head in amusement, “I don’t know if should be worried about how good at this you are.”

“Shit, my secret’s out.” He kisses me before blowing on the row of nails just painted, “Are you going onto Pearl’s later?”

“Yep, unless I get a better offer?”

Aaron smirks at me, recognizing the not so subtle hint for what it is, “Well, you could just come home a little earlier.” Now there's something to tease me with over the next few hours. We'll have to send the twins to grandma's more often if this is the effect of some time alone together.

Despite much rib-taking from all and sundry including my husband, I’ve so far kept up my evening
of knitting with Pearl finding it relaxing, plus it gets me away from all the hustle and bustle without having to be on my own which I'm not so keen on these days. I also know Aaron is quite proud of my efforts, always making sure that when we go out the girls are wearing something I’ve made and when getting them ready he tells them, this or that is knitted by daddy. It’s very endearing.

I'm feeling impatient watching him pack everything up and helping, I chivvy him along, “You ready to go and show off our new fashion statement, I’m hungry.”

My husband smiles at me affectionately, “You miss the girls.” It’s only been a couple of hours since grandma Chas came to collect them and we said we’d go to the pub for tea before coming back home. It’s not often that we get some time to ourselves and it’s been nice to catch up on some stuff at home; that said it no longer feels quite right when they are not around and I know Aaron feels the same.

“I’m a big softie, what can I say.”

Waiting by the door for him to go fetch his wallet, I smile at the picture on the wall. We did indeed organise a time with the photographer and the photos turned out really well. With a stroke of genius, I had suggested that with it being summer why don’t we have them taken here in the village playground and Aaron liked the idea. On the wall by the coat hooks is one of us on the swings, each with a baby, our swings pulled close together. It’s a nice picture of us and we were having decidedly more fun with it than the girls who were fast asleep. My favourite one though is framed on our bedside table where we are lying on a blanket, Chloe and Maia in-between us. The love on Aaron’s face in it melts my heart every time I look at our family altogether; the twins, awake, are just as adorable as he is.

“Finally, you ready, now?”

“Mmh hhm, in a minute.”

Watching Aaron pull his boots on, once finished, seeing my outstretched hand he takes it and I pull him up with a little more strength than intended so he lands up against me and I take advantage of it, holding him tightly with my arms wrapped around his waist. “You happy, Mr Sugden?”

With my forehead resting against his, he relaxes into me, “Very. Tired, but happy.” Being permanently tired has become our daily life but neither of us would have it any other way and I smile fondly at how much our lives have changed in the last twelve months. For the first time since coming home from the hospital, I feel a stirring in my groin, which is just typical now we are all ready to leave and Chas is expecting us. However, that doesn’t mean we can’t be a little late and we both seem a little surprised at the desire behind our kiss. My lips latch onto his as I push him back up against the wall, but his tongue is soon chasing mine, his hand wrapping itself around the back of my neck. There’s a greedy glint of anticipation in Aaron’s eyes, and parting our lips are reddened from the unexpected attack of passion. It’s easy to see he’s torn, the pull of getting back to our children versus the pull of maybe sex that we’ve not had in what seems like forever.

Considering we used to be at it, morning, noon and night at one point, it’s weeks since we’ve made love or fooled around even. During the last few weeks of the pregnancy, sex wasn’t an option with Aaron’s hormones finally kicking his sex drive to the touch and physically it would have been difficult anyway, and since the birth our lives have been entirely consumed by surviving long enough to get through the cycle of waking up to going back to sleep every few hours. I don’t think it would be out of place to say it hasn’t crossed either of our minds - until just now.
“Your mum didn’t give us an exact time to be there; they’ll think we just fell asleep.”

Aaron kisses my lips tenderly, “It’s not that I don’t want to.”

Grinning at him mischievously, my hand slides down inside the back of his jeans, my fingers getting all grabby with his arse cheeks. He’s still wearing the maternity kind whilst his body adjusts after giving birth, something I don’t mention as he’s been quite touchy about getting back to his former shape. He has his mind set on those skinny new jeans he bought and just thinking about how sexy he looked in them has my thigh instinctively rubbing up against him leaving me in no doubt that his dick’s on board with the idea, but I know why he’s being cautious, my words a statement more than a question, “You’re too sore inside.”

He nods, but there’s still a seductiveness about him, his eyes filled with a playfulness that I know all too well, “The doctor didn’t say that I couldn’t fuck your tight arse though.”

Biting down on his bottom lip, he’s so cute when he’s horny and there was me thinking I’d need to give him more motivation, “Why mummy dearest, what a filthy mouth you have.”

This presses just the right button and he switches our positions, the desire winning through. With my back to the wall, it’s now my husband’s leg that is rubbing up against me as our mouths crash against each other so forcefully that by the time we take a breath we are both flushed with want, “Why don’t you let me show you just how filthy it can be.” Aaron’s fingers are scrabbling at the buttons on my jeans and I’m like putty in his hands as his fingers work their way inside, encasing my hardness.

“Fuck, Aaron. You don’t know what that does to me.”

Nibbling my earlobe, his hot breath has me squirming, “Oh, I think I have a fair idea.”

His hand massaging my cock has me needing and wanting, so turned on that my breathing is becoming heavy and my eyes close, enjoying just how good it feels, “We should go upstairs.”

Aaron’s mouth is working its way down my neck, and I cry out as he bites into it, sucking and I hazily recall thinking that’s going to leave a mark as he speaks, “Why?”

Struggling to find a reason to argue, I’m about to voice my surrender to whatever he wants, however he wants, when his phone starts to ring and Aaron’s hand stills, his forehead resting against my chest in frustration. Defeated by circumstances, our desire is put on standby as I reach into his back pocket, pulling out the ringing phone, holding it so we can both see Chas’ name and number.

Pulling his hand out of my jeans, resting it on my front, his other takes the phone from me, “Hi, everything okay?”

There’s a series of ‘mmh hmms’ and 'okays' from him as he listens. I don’t quite hear everything that is being said, but my eyes narrow somewhat, wondering what Aaron is thinking if what I believe I’ve heard is right. “Let me talk to Robert, I’ll call you back.”

Sitting down on the staircase to the side of us, I guide Aaron onto my knees; sitting sideways on he leans against the wall behind him, my hand on his neck as I play the innocent, “What was that all about?”

He looks at me a little pensive, “Lisa and Zak were at the pub and we’ve all been invited to the farm
for tea; bit of a family tradition. Cain and the others will be there.”

Still unclear about how he’s feeling, I don’t push but am still curious, “Just family?”

“I think so, she didn’t say anyone else.” At times like these, it’s better to let Aaron mull things over, but his fingers intertwine with my free hand, settling on his lap. We haven’t been up to the farm since that difficult night back in February when everything went to pot with the family. Sure, things seem to have found their way with Cain but we’ve barely seen Zak and when we have it’s been strained. Doug has kept out of our way and Sam, well it’s hard to know what Sam thinks. He’s said hello but hasn’t gone out of his way, more like he didn’t know how to act around Aaron which just made him feel like a freak so he kept out of Sam’s way. Not avoidance exactly but a definite distance. It never occurred to me to ask Aaron who had come to visit at the hospital when I wasn’t with him. Thinking back, I know Cain was there and Adam came with Vic, but other than that I think it was just Chas and Diane from the family, oh and Paddy.

It’s always been Aaron pushing to build bridges more than me. Having been burned so many times by my own family, I find it less easy to let people back in once wounded but on the other hand, I don’t want my daughters to grow up surrounded by a difficult atmosphere within the family. It’s hard enough as it is without all that crap going on as well so, I test the water. “See, I told you the Dingle wellie would get an outing.”

With a half-smile, Aaron squeezes my hand, “It’s not coming anywhere near the girls.” He turns his face towards me for the first time, his voice teasing but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes, “Doesn’t mean we won’t be expected to drink from it.”

“You sure, Aaron?” He knows I’m not talking about drinking out of the wellie.

Hesitantly, he nods; it’s clear he’s feeling emotional about the decision, but I also sense he won’t change his mind. “We should bring Chloe and Maia back here first, get them fed and changed. There’s no way I want to have to go through all that up at the farm.”

“I’ll go, you sort out whatever you need to here, okay?” I move to push him off me so I can get up but he keeps me down, wrapping his arms around me. It's only when he speaks that I have any indication that he's okay, “Best button yourself back up, don’t want half the village to see what’s mine to unwrap later.”

This time his devilish smile is for real, carrying with it the promise of more to come and I tease him, “You know I’m going to hold you to that, no falling asleep until wild sex is had.”

“As long as you don’t fall asleep on me first.” His own positivity fades, an acknowledgement that's it's a strong possibility we'll both be asleep before any hanky-panky can be had, but I don't mind. Either way, it feels good simply to know we still turn each other on.

Finally, standing, this time it’s my husband who is giving me a hand up, planting a firm kiss on my lips, “Love you.”

Giving him a look that returns the sentiment, we separate and I button up my jeans, “You call your mum, tell her I’m on my way and to have the twins ready.” Struck by a thought, I turn before going outside, “Tell her to keep it just to the Dingles, hey; not too much too soon.” Last time he was completely overwhelmed by having everyone there, and it had only made things worse when everything turned south. With a half-smile, my husband nods appreciating the suggestion.
If I hadn’t been so pre-occupied getting myself mentally prepared for going up to the farm, I would have noticed Robert was acting oddly when he returned from the pub, his relaxed behaviour from before replaced by a tension that is now coming off him in waves. Having fed Maia, I’m rubbing her back with the usual winding and burping routine, Chloe is with Robert who is struggling to get her settled. This is not the norm as she’s usually off to sleep with him better than me. Whatever is bothering him, it’s safe to say Chloe is picking up on it which is, in turn, getting to him as she gets more upset, ramping up from just mithering to full on crying and all of a sudden, he gives up. Putting her down in the crib, he walks out of the nursery without saying a word and still busy with Maia I call after him, “Robert.” Maybe another day I’d have just gone after him, but with Chloe now full-on screaming and Maia in my arms, I don’t.

Fortunately, after being fed, sleep is what our children do best. Maia is oblivious, ignoring Chloe's crying who I try to calm with words until I’m finally satisfied Maia is burped enough. Then picking up a red-faced Chloe, I wipe her tear-streaked cheeks; she isn’t quite screaming as before, but is definitely still loud enough to make herself known to the neighbours, “Now then, little one; what has you so riled up, hey?” Moving to the window, swaying with my daughter in my arms, she begins to quieten. Looking outside, I’m surprised to see Robert in our small back garden, sitting on the grass with his head banging back against the stone wall. He looks cross with himself. Robert’s got me so used to hearing him say it already, I don’t even think when referring to myself, too concerned with what’s going on with him instead, “Mummy’s just going to see what is going on with daddy. You settle down and be a good girl like your sister, can you do that for me, hhm?” Kissing her head, I place Chloe in the cot watching as she shuffles a little. Switching on the mobile above the cot, the animals seem to dance to the music as it turns. Giving Chloe a few minutes, I keep my hand in contact with her which always seems to do the trick to help her go to sleep and after a hiccup or two, with her little fist in her mouth, she closes her eyes and they stay closed. After checking on Maia, I take the chance, going downstairs in the hope of finding out what’s going on with the other love of my life.

On my way, I gather a few things together, making sure we have everything we need to take with us and head out, not letting on that I knew Robert was there. He seems to ignore me as I pass by to go load up the car and I push down the tiny pang of irritation that he didn't offer to help.

Back through the gate, I plop myself down on the grass and sneaking a look at Robert. I’m shocked to realize he’s crying and for an instant, it’s like I’m frozen in time. Thinking how to start, he’s actually the one of us to speak first, “She okay?”

Scrunching my face up a little, I’m confused, “Yeah, she was just being grouchy.”

“Because of me.” There’s no mistaking the derisory tone clearly targeted at himself.

Carefully, I try to deflect any blame away from him, “Not necessarily; she gets like that sometimes, they both do. She’s a baby Rob, they cry when they want, sometimes for no reason at all.”

Shaking his head almost angrily, his fists ball up as if he wants to hit something, “She knew I was stressing.”

Shifting closer to him, I take his hands in mine, “She’s back in her crib, so is Maia and they are doing their usual thing after being fed.” For the first time, he glances at me, acting as if I can’t actually see the tears on his cheeks; he’s in full-on avoidance mode which is exasperating. “Do I need to burp you and put you down to sleep as well or are we going to talk?”
“Oh joy, I’m married to a comedian.”

Sheepishly, he dries his eyes with the back of his hand, and I hope to build on this, “That’s a sexy gorgeous comedian if you don’t mind.” However, there’s no retort which is worrying because banter is what we do, a dance of words that can lead to anything and everything; silence is never a good sign. “So, you going to tell me what’s up?”

Any hint of a smile has evaporated, replaced by an apprehension that I’m not used to seeing in Robert, “I can’t.”

“That’s not going to wash, you know. Remember that talking to you gave me, well as I keep reminding you, it works both ways. I can’t help unless you tell me what’s going on in that Sugden noggin of yours.” His hand grips mine tighter than ever, so much that I wince a little. Placing my arm around his shoulders, I pull him in close, and he rests his head against me. Kissing him, I card my fingers through his hair, “Talk to me, Robert. Please. Is this only because she wouldn’t settle?”

“I don’t know; maybe....., no.” At least it’s finally an honest answer.

“We don’t have to go up to the farm today. We can do it another time.”

“They’re expecting us now.”

Studying him, I can’t imagine either of us being in the right frame of mind to cope with the family right now, “So, they can un-expect us. We’ll just say the twins are being difficult.”

“What instead of me?”

His stubbornness in refusing to talk is beginning to grate and accordingly, my tone is snippy, “Self-pity doesn’t suit you, Robert.”

He responds in kind, “Oh I’m sorry. I didn’t realise that it’s just the Dingles who can act up and get away with it.” Biting down, I stop myself from saying something I’ll regret which will only make things worse.

Taking a deep breath, I’m determined to not let him off the hook and as calm as I can possibly be, I probe further, “You were fine when you went to the pub to collect the girls, what happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Something must have upset you. You were already wound tight when I was feeding Chloe.”

“See, so it was me that upset her.”

Frustrated, I need him to see he can’t go on like this, “So, what if it was. This isn’t about Chloe, it’s about you. Something is bothering you and has been since we came home from the hospital. What do you want me to do when I find my husband banging his head against a wall and crying, just ignore it?”

“Yes.”

“Such a fucking idiot. I love you. I’m not going to ignore it and I’m not going to let you ignore it.”

“I can’t. You’ll think I’m being stupid.”
“I love you, Robert, no matter what, end of. Now tell me.”

“I’m scared. I didn’t think about it until coming back from the pub.”

It feels like pulling teeth, but we’re also getting nearer to the truth, “Think about what?”

“Going to the farm.” He looks as if his world is crashing, and I still don’t get why. His body is as tense as I’ve ever known, and whether his fear is warranted or not, he’s holding on fast, using me as his anchor. The tears start to fall once more and this time he doesn’t make any effort to hide or stop them. My husband is seemingly falling apart before my eyes and I don’t know how to help him.

Scrabbling to find the right words I try, “I’ll be fine at the farm. It’s not like last time and if anybody says anything we don’t like, either they leave or we do. We have two beautiful daughters and we’re stronger than ever.” It feels as though my words are having the opposite effect of what I’d intended. Robert looks almost broken, his chest heaving as his sniffles continue, and I’m at a loss what to say to try and make things better or get him to open up to me.

“That’s not the problem.” Maybe it isn’t but if that’s not it, I don’t know what is. It’s not being a first-time father that’s causing this, he’s taken to being a dad like a duck to water, he’s so good with both Chloe and Maia.

The only thing I can think is causing all this is still guilt from the accident. His nightmares haven’t gone away, and if anything, are getting worse not helping his lack of sleep any. His moods are like a yo-yo, one minute he’s fine and dandy, the other temperamental and no matter what I say, I can’t seem to get it through to him, that he wasn’t to blame, that I don’t blame him, “You have to stop feeling guilty about the accident, Rob.” He stills yet doesn’t say anything, but I’m certain now this is the root cause of whatever is going on with him. He’s hidden it too well before now, but the cracks in his armour are there. If I’m honest with myself, I’ve known all along that he’s been struggling with this more than he let on. I think I was hoping that if I didn’t make a meal out of it, that with getting ourselves into a routine it would work itself out. It seems I was wrong. “I’m sorry.”

Jerking up out of my arms, his eyes bore into mine, his outburst adamant yet filled with conflicting emotions, “What for? You haven’t done anything wrong.”

Stroking his cheek, I continue using my hands, letting them roam, hoping that he finds my touch soothing, “And, neither have you.” Unable to quite put my finger on what’s driving his anger, I feel at a loss and then it dawns on me - Robert’s afraid of himself. He’s been deflecting, although he said it himself earlier I had misunderstood and I carry my own guilt in not pushing him harder, sooner. I still don’t quite understand but my gut instinct tells me it’s all connected to the accident, it has to be. “I’m sorry that I can’t turn back the clock. I’m sorry that whatever’s going on inside that head of yours, you won’t let me in to help.”

“It’s not your fault.” Resisting the urge to say the same to him, I get the impression it won’t help and I switch tack a little. “It’s okay to be scared, Rob. When Chloe was born, I was scared but I kind of wasn’t at the same time. I was angry with myself; it was me that asked you to take the scenic route. If it hadn’t been for me, we would never have even been on that road. So if you want someone to blame for what happened, then blame me.”

This seems to make him angry, not with me but with himself. This is so not like the Robert I know, he doesn’t wallow in guilt, he takes action even if he is the one at fault; this is a side of him, I don’t see hardly, if at all. His voice is bitter as he grabs my arms, his finger gripping tightly, “Don’t say that, don’t you dare say that.”
With his eyes piercing into mine, I make him hear it whether he wants to or not. “Why not, it’s the truth. If you can blame yourself, then so can I. Do you know what I remember the most about that day, other than being afraid you wouldn’t wake up?” He doesn’t say anything, his hands staying firmly in place and I continue, “When Chloe was born, it was amazing. She was amazing. It didn’t matter to her whether we were in the middle of no-where or the best hospital in the world. She was beautiful and hungry. I told her that Daddy Robert would be so proud.”

His voice is barely a whisper at hearing this, “I am. Of both of you. Maia too.”

“You know what else that kept me going. You. You keep me going every single day. I wouldn’t have made it through the pregnancy without you. I mean who else would put up with a chutney-guzzling husband for all those months.”

Sensing that my words are getting through to him, for the first time, I get a smile, “You put out a lot, it was good sex.”

“Fool. I thought you said I wore you out.”

“Well, you did. I don’t where you got your energy from sometimes.”

“You turn me on so much. That’s how.”

“Hormones more like.” It’s hard to separate things out, nothing with us is ever as simple as it seems. However, Robert feels suddenly calmer; defeated sounds too negative but it feels like the fight inside him is waning. His hands relax their grip and I take them in mine as he asks suddenly curiously, “What about Maia; what was she like?”

It feels good to share more about the day with him. I’d unwittingly held off talking about it, not wanting to stir up bad memories unnecessarily, “Chloe was so good, it’s like she knew she had to be because her sister was on her way. Maia was on top form as soon as her head appeared, she came out crying, no surprise there. She does everything on her own agenda. The policeman called her feisty. I reckon she’s the Dingle of the two.”

“Maybe.” He looks at me nervously. “Aaron, I can’t drive us up to the farm. I can’t even get in a car without feeling afraid. Just the thought of it makes me want to throw up.” Strangely, hearing him finally tell me the truth, everything falls into place and I find I’m not surprised.

Kissing his forehead, I make sure I have his full attention on me so he knows it’s okay to feel like this, “We can walk up to the farm. That’s if you’re still up for going.”

“You don’t think I’m fucked up?”

“No. I think we should go see the doctor, but there’s worse things in the world than not being able to drive a car.” Studying him, he looks relieved, tired. “I’m going to call mum, tell her we’ll go to the farm another time. You look as knackered as I feel.”

He snorts, this time his derision targetted at our family, “No, we’re going. I don’t want to give them the satisfaction of thinking there’s something wrong.”

Shifting to sit beside him, I bump his shoulder with mine, “Fighting talk; now there’s the husband I know and love. I wondered what you’d done with him.” This earns me a shy half-smile and before I say anything else, a loud cry coming from the direction of the bedroom window catches our attention, “Sounds like Maia, can’t mistake the noise those lungs make.” Hesitating, I consider whether to ask him to go or do it myself.
He makes the decision for me, “You go. I need a few minutes.”

Feeling uncertain, I don't move immediately, “You sure?”

“Yeah.” Getting myself up, I pat the bits of grass off my jeans and head towards the back door, “I love you, Aaron Sugden.”

Turning around, I walk backwards a few paces, my smile bashful, the words touching me deep inside, “You too, Robert Sugden.” Before turning, I do some deflecting of my own, ”I’ll show you just how much later on.”

It’s not too far to walk to the farm, Robert seems more at peace with himself now he’s finally admitted what’s been bothering him. The girls are fast on and we haven’t talked much, but it’s comfortable between us, each half lost in our own thoughts. Arriving at the bottom farm gate, I eye the house and cars outside nervously. Partly because I wonder if Robert gets anxious just looking at a car or if it’s just at the thought of getting in one. I have lots of questions for him, but I don’t want to get into them today; it’s enough he’s told me the truth and the rest we’ll work out as we go. I’m prepared for the fact he’s not likely to find it easy. Robert doesn’t handle feeling vulnerable all that well at the best of times. I'm still not sure it's a good idea to do this now, considering; but Robert wouldn't be swayed and it was pointless turning it into an argument.

I hadn’t realized I’d actually stopped stock still and am staring at the farmhouse when Robert’s voice catches my attention, “We’re a right old pair aren’t we?”

Smiling in acknowledgement, I push the pram handle at him and he takes over as we start walking again, “I wouldn’t have it any other way. Who do you think is in there?”

Robert scopes out the vehicles, “Well, most of your lot. Debbie’s here, and Paddy by the looks.”

I hadn’t seen his car, but looking closer, the back end is peeking out behind the rickety old van. Pulling me out of my thoughts, Robert asks a question, completely out of the blue, “Do you still hurt inside sometimes?”

Taking a moment, I think about it. I forget Robert missed a lot of what was said at the hospital and although we’ve talked, we haven’t gone into all the details and then we’ve been so caught up in coping with the twins, it either hasn’t come up or we've gotten distracted, “Not really; it did for a few days, kind of, but not like when I got pregnant. That’s what you mean right?”

He nods, “Yeah. You were bad with it then, I just thought that it would be the same after they were born.”

“Not that I can tell, but then again giving birth was painful, so perhaps it all happened at the same time, I’m sore from the birth, but you know that already.” Robert remains quiet as a thought strikes me, “The uterus came out with the placenta when I was in the ambulance. I was so out of it and they’d given me some of the good drugs by that point, I didn’t have a clue.” Robert looks thoughtful but doesn’t say anything as I continue. “They asked me if I wanted to see it or keep it.”

His reaction mirrors mine at the time, his face scrunching up at the thought of it, “Seriously?”

“Yep; apparently some people do.”

“Gross.”
“I said no.”

“Some of the books said people feel a kind of loss after giving birth, you know, inside. It must feel different?”

This isn’t easy to answer, partly because I don’t really know the whole answer and it depends on my mood, “I do and I don’t. It’s weird after carrying the girls for so many months. I’m definitely glad not to be pregnant anymore but I’d be lying if I didn’t say a little part of me still wishes they were inside. They were safe and warm there, a part of me, you know?” Robert nods, “When I look at Chloe and Maia now, it’s hard to believe they were inside me for so long; it’s weird. I’m happy I’m not bumping into everything and I can pick things up again but yeah, I do feel different, but I can’t work out how much is physical and how much is in my head.”

“I know that feeling.”

There’s a sadness as Robert speaks and I stop us once more, standing in close to him, my fingers tracing down his cheek, “It’s going to be okay you know. We’re going be okay. Can you believe we’re parents Robert, for real,” I grin at him, “And we have superhero children remember.”

He snorts amused, “Mmh, the world’s first female Batman and Robin. I actually think Chloe and Maia are perfect just as they are.” He smiles down at them and it has me feeling emotional watching his big hands tucking the cover up under Maia’s tiny chin, “God we’re so sappy. Do you reckon all new parents like this?”

“Probably, we might be only ones both wearing so many different colours of nail polish though.”

Finally reaching the farmhouse door, I grin at him, albeit a little nervously as I start to get the girls out of their pram, first handing him Maia leaving me free to pick up Chloe, “Anyway, I have my own superhero husband right here with me.”

"Did I ever tell you that you're strange?"

"Plenty of times. We don't do boring and I'm not about to start now just because we have children." Hovering outside the door, it actually feels like a miracle that no-one’s already opened it up to meet us; our lot don’t usually stand on ceremony and they probably know we’re here by now. I’m nervous beyond belief and with his hand in mine, Robert knows I am. He’d been waiting for me to let him know I’m ready. Finally, with a nod in the direction of the door handle, Robert gets the message that he should be the first one in, “After you, Master of my Universe, onwards into the evil Dingle Den we go. I know you’ll protect us.”

We allow ourselves a last quick peck on the lips, Robert grabbing my hand again as soon as he’d knocked and opened the door. His own playful charm reminds me why I love him so much as he whispers back to me all the while shielding me from everyone as we cross the threshold, “Pfft, and who’s going to protect me? This superhero lark isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. I want a refund.”

He chuckles quietly at my response, “How about a bonus?”

TBC