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With or Without You

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Extract

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Chapter One

'This isn't working, is it?'

For one mad moment I thought Jake was talking about the toaster. It had been on the blink for a while. But then so had we.

Two perfect golden-brown slices of wholemeal toast pop up with a cheerful ping! I glance up from my own bowl of 'luxury' muesli and try to look as if every dry, claggy spoonful isn't choking me.

Jake grabs his toast, wincing as it burns his fingers. He tosses it onto a plate before he returns my gaze. 'You know what I'm talking about, Lyssa.'

Yes. I do. Our fourth and most gruelling attempt at IVF has just ended in a red blob in the toilet bowl and misery. My misery. *Our* misery. I give up with my spoon. 'Of course I do.' I'm trying not to cry. I should go over to comfort him, but I haven't got enough emotional energy for myself, let alone any to spare. I force a rigid smile. 'But we can try again.'

Jake hasn't made any attempt to butter his toast and it must be getting cold. In a pan on the cooker, two eggs are knocking around in our only Raymond Blanc pan, the bubbling water tossing them to and fro. My boyfriend, or whatever we're supposed to call them these days, sounds irritable. 'Not the IVF.'

I mentally trawl through a list of all our other domestic appliances that might be dodgy.

'Us,' he says starkly. 'Us. *We're* not working.'

I nearly laugh. I was just wondering if he meant the fridge – which frosts up far too quickly for my liking. I'm sure it never used to – but then you really never pay that much attention to your fridge, do you? Or your partner in life, it seems. And then I realise that Jake is deadly serious. The skin round his eyes is more drawn than I've ever seen it before and his mouth is pulled down at the corners.

'It's a difficult time for us,' I say calmly when I really want to scream, 'You're not the one that's bleeding here, Jake!' I sigh inwardly. 'All couples have them. We'll get through it.'

Jake comes and sits down. He takes my hand and turns it over, examining it as if he's never seen it before. 'And what if I don't want to get through it? What if I've suddenly woken up to the fact that there's more to life than *getting through* it?'

I open my mouth to answer with some platitude about how life can't always be a bed of roses, but he rushes on before I can speak. 'What if I don't want a baby? What if I don't want to spend any more time alone in cold cubicles with crumpled wank mags?'

My eyes widen. I thought that was the bit he liked best. Sometimes he specifically chose his own porny material to take with him.

'What if I don't want our sex-life littered with charts and thermometers and injections?'

'I . . .'

'When did we last go wild and have a purely recreational shag?'

'I . . .'

'When?' he says with the triumphant note of the just in his voice.

'What are you saying? I don't mark notches on the headboard, like some old Lothario.' I do, however, mark notches on my heart after every failed coupling. Failed in the sense that it didn't produce a pink, bouncing baby at the end of it. 'I thought you enjoyed our sex-life?'

'Then you are truly delusional,' Jake says.

I'm stunned. I had hoped that in the face of another disappointment, another thwarted dream, he'd take me in his arms, shush my tears – even though that isn't politically correct these days – and tell me that it would all be fine, we would find another wad of our hard-earned cash to blow on hormones for Jake to inject into my bum, and that next time Sammy Sperm would get it together with Esme Egg and we would no longer be the complete failures we are with our inability to succeed in the most basic of human tasks.

How difficult can it be to make a baby? These days our teenagers are popping them out all the time. Britain has the highest rate of child mothers in Europe. Aren't a mobile phone and a baby at the top of the 'must have' list for every schoolgirl? Go anywhere near New Look in any high street, on any Saturday and it's like a teen mums' convention. Okay, so I'm a little past the acne stage, but at thirty-four it does seem a bit unfair that all my eggs, like the ones in Jake's unattended saucepan, appear to be turning hard-boiled.

'I need space,' Jake says into my self-pity.

'You're not an astronaut,' I say. 'You don't need space.' Only astronauts and Sigourney Weaver need space to function in. The rest of mankind have to operate in confined quarters – offices, homes, relationships – that's what it's all about. No man is an island. And no man whose sperm has been called 'sluggish' has a right to lay all this at my feet.

'I need time to myself,' he continues.

This is a man who every weekend plays some sort of sport – football and cricket in the appropriate seasons, golf and

squash when he can fit them in. This is a man who I think has plenty of time to himself, and before we used to argue about our lack of babies, we used to argue about how *much* time he had to himself. I wonder why all this is going round in my head, but none of it is coming out of my mouth.

Jake takes a deep breath. He puts my hand down. Right into some milk I hadn't realised I'd spilled on the kitchen table. 'I think we should have a trial separation,' he says. 'For a few days. A few weeks.'

'Have you met someone else?'

'No.' He looks at me as if I'm insane to even entertain the thought. 'This isn't about anyone else. It's about me – and you. And your obsession.'

'Wanting a baby is not an obsession. It's a . . .'

Jake waits.

'. . . a preoccupation.' Which sometimes borders on slightly obsessive. Very slightly. 'I just want a baby. Is that too much to ask?'

Jake stands up. Patently it is. 'I've packed a few things. I'm going to Pip's place for a couple of days. I need to get my head round this. I need to decide what I want.'

'And what *I* want doesn't come into it any more?'

Jake looks very tired of me. 'Suppose we can never have a baby, Lyssa? What then? How long would it be until you stopped hoping that one day modern science will no longer be baffled by our inability to conceive?'

'I don't know.' I shrug lightly. 'Three weeks? Four?' This fails to add levity to our desperate situation.

'I'll phone you tonight,' Jake says. 'To make sure you're all right.'

I won't be all right, I want to say. I'm not all right now. I may never be all right again. 'You can't just go.'

'I'll phone you.'

'Jake. Don't go. Not like this.' I can feel panic rising in

me. Begging words are rushing up to my throat, but I won't let them out. I can't let them out. Why is he doing this? He can't be thinking straight. I'm the one who's supposed to have raging hormones and mood swings. He never behaves like this. We've been together for years – four, in fact. That's twice my usual quota for long-term relationships. He is The One. My heart's desire. I thought I was his.

Jake and I are joint owners of this rather nice terraced house in St Albans, a pleasantly leafy city on the outskirts of London. Although we haven't actually tied the knot, we've discussed marriage on several occasions. Usually after a couple of bottles of vino blanco, admittedly. We're trying to have a baby together. You don't just leave someone at eight o'clock on a Friday morning before you go to work, do you? You wait until Friday night or the weekend or Christmas or their birthday – a catastrophic date they'll always remember. Friday morning is such an insignificant time to do something so momentous. He's nearly at the door. Anxiously, I cast a look at the bubbling pan.

'Your eggs. They're drying up.'

He looks as if he's about to say something and then changes his mind. 'They'll be too tough now.'

Like mine. 'What will I do?'

'You'll be fine,' he says, and it seems he's already managed to convince himself that I will. But I'm not sure how I'll cope at all.

My lover, my life, the father of my as-yet-unfertilised-foetus is walking, *strolling*, out of my life. He picks up his holdall at the front door, the one I thought contained his squash gear. He gives me a distant little smile that doesn't even begin to reflect what he's doing to me. And with that he closes the door behind him.

Chapter Two

I *can't* go into work. I *have* to go into work. I am blessed with great colleagues who will be hugely sympathetic and will call Jake all manner of obscene names including 'fuck-wit'. That will make me feel heaps better. They won't mind that I'll be horribly late and will spend the entire day crying into cups of manky machine coffee.

Boiled eggs and toast soldiers are supposed to be comfort food, but somehow it's just not happening. I bash in the top of Jake's abandoned eggs with the back of my spoon, using rather more force than is necessary and stare at their rubbery white skins and dried-up yolks. My stomach has decided that eating isn't on the agenda. The toast has gone all floppy and wouldn't even make a dent on them anyway – you can draw your own metaphorical conclusions on that one.

Jake is in advertising. I don't really know what he does other than wear sharp suits and make up slogans. His latest project is to convince a sceptical general public that eggs are good for you. Now Edwina Currie may have skewed judgment on some things, but she was damn well right about the eggs all along. But now they're no longer stuffed full of salmonella and they're a safe and wholesome foodstuff once again – so Jake says. One of the very few benefits of this ad campaign is that we've been getting free eggs. But it's not the type of egg donation that's any use to me.

Work for me is as an Assistant Editor at Global Magazine Publishing – a bit of a misnomer because none of our magazines ever venture out of the British Isles. This sounds very glamorous to people until I say that our main magazines are called *My Baby* and *My Divorce*. I can never decide whether these are extremely dull titles or marketing masterpieces. Certainly the circulation is steadily climbing – well, of *My Divorce* anyway.

After my own, uneventful schooldays, I thought very seriously about becoming a teacher with a view to watching my eager charges blossom under my tender tutelage in the manner of Miss Jean Brodie. But after one terrifying work experience stint at a North London comprehensive, I decided that it was far too hideous and desperately underpaid. And that even the formidable Ms Brodie would have cracked under the strain of trying to control a room full of shaven-headed, pierced twelve year olds. So, instead, I joined the world of publishing which, several years later, I still now inhabit. It's marginally less hideous, but still desperately underpaid. Plus all the shaven-headed and pierced people are over thirty.

My day mainly consists of compiling the letters page for *My Baby* – which means I'm constantly knee-deep in tearful epistles from cooing mothers or tirades from childless harpies, not unlike myself, who feel that the world has dealt them a duff hand. I also commission and edit articles that are given whizzy titles by Monica, my editor, such as – *Make Your Fallopian Tubes Your Friends, The Greatest-Ever Guide to Baby Poo, Feeling the Strain – All You'll Ever Need to Know about Constipation and Pregnancy*. There are also far too many entitled *Great Expectations!* Occasionally, when there's no one else available and my desk isn't swamped under a deluge of urgent copy, I'm allowed out with my trusty Dictaphone to interview 'C' list celebrities about their

joyful, and often alternative, birth experience or their long and painful struggle with polycystic ovaries or similar.

Jake has, on one or two occasions, voiced the opinion that my current employment is doing little to quell my 'obsession' with babies. I just feel that when the time comes I'll be fully equipped – mainly with baby- and toddler-type freebies – and confident in my knowledge of the wonderful adventure that is pregnancy.

I do admit that every now and again I tear up or bin a letter from some whining, sleep-deprived mother who is writing in saying that she's permanently tired from disturbed nights. Some women don't know how lucky they are. *I'm* permanently tired from disturbed nights trying to bloody conceive!

I give the eggs another whack for good luck and toss the spoon onto the table. With my loved one gone, it looks like that particular problem is going to be a thing of the past.

Chapter Three

Monica and Charlotte are smokers. I can see them as I stomp up the road from the Tube, scarf wound round my neck in an effort to keep warm. It's only November and the temperature is barely above freezing already, but that doesn't deter them from pursuing their chosen vice. I join them in their shivering huddle outside the front door of our offices.

'Afternoon,' Monica says. It's not even eleven o'clock yet. Sometimes I wish I smoked and then I could join the select band of lepers who come out here on the hour, every hour, to damage their lungs despite what the elements can throw at them. Sometimes I come out just for the hell of it because I'm sure they gossip about the rest of us when we aren't there. But we all know that cigarettes lower the birth weight of babies so I've resisted temptation. Next they'll be telling us that trying to conceive by having sex is bad for unborn babies – and then we'll all be in a dreadful mess.

'Nice of you to join us,' she adds, but I'm not sure that she's being sincere. Monica is a relocated Liverpudlian and I've always found that they tend towards aggression when riled. In theory, Monica is my boss, but she very rarely chooses to exert any authority over me and is generally one of the girls – albeit a rather short-tempered one.

'You look dreadful,' Charlotte says through her low-tar lungful. 'Are you okay?'

I move away so that I won't be damaged by inadvertent, passive inhalation. I shake my head. 'Jake's gone,' I say.

'Gone!' they chorus in unison. 'Jake?'

'The latest IVF's ended in a big, fat zip,' I explain with a wobbly lip. 'I don't think he could take it. He's gone to stay with Pip for a few days.'

'I wouldn't mind a few days with Pip,' Charlotte confides.

'Get in the queue.' I'm never quite sure what women see in Pip, but a lot of them do see it. 'I don't know what to do.'

'Come on.' My friends have one last hefty drag on their cigarettes and then stub them out on the pavement – recklessly risking a fifty-quid fine. Charlotte takes my arm. 'Let's get you some of that vile brew they call coffee and you can tell us all about it.'

The offices of *My Baby* and *My Divorce* are wonderful. We're housed on the eleventh floor of a huge chrome and glass monolith on the South Bank, overlooking the murky expanse of the Thames. For all my lowly position, I've managed to bag myself a desk right near the vast window and can spend hours watching the river rippling by. Nothing on this earth would persuade me to give up this coveted space. In the summer I fry, but we have so few hot days, who cares? Today the low, reluctant winter sun is playing hide-and-seek behind the white iron skeleton of the London Eye and encouraging the water to look grey and glum. I'd like to think it's coming out in sympathy with me.

'So.' Monica plonks a plastic cup in front of me. She and Charlotte sit on my desk. 'Tell all.'

And I recount my story while casting occasional wistful looks out over the Embankment. Even as I'm filling in the gory details and slagging off my partner in life with much gusto, I know in my heart that when I get home tonight Jake will be there. He'll have realised that it was all a terrible

mistake and will be waiting for me full of remorse, hopefully clutching an expensive bunch of flowers and wearing a mortified expression. In all, he will have come to his senses the minute he realised what he was about to lose.

'Well.' Monica scratches her chin as I finish. She and Charlotte exchange a worried look. 'It's not good, is it?'

'He'll be back,' I say as confidently as I can manage. 'I'm sure he will. You know what men are like.'

'You are a bit obsessed with this baby thing,' Monica suggests.

I'm not sure I like the number of times 'obsessed' is being linked with the word 'baby' in conversations about me.

'I'm not obsessed,' I insist. 'I'm focused.' I think there's a difference. 'I'm going through an IVF programme. It's costing us a lot of money. And it's flipping time-consuming.'

Charlotte lays a hand on my arm, but she looks over my head at Monica who grimaces in return. Charlotte pats. 'It's not surprising that your relationship is under strain.'

Monica sighs. 'Perhaps Jake *has* had enough of it all.'

'He wants a baby just as much as I do.' I take a sip of my coffee and push it away. Perhaps this is why I'm not with child – it's like drinking a cocktail of toxic chemicals. I'm sure the plastic cup's melting. 'Well, he did until this morning.'

Charlotte and Monica exchange another nervous glance. Monica gives a small nod and Charlotte takes a deep breath before she speaks. 'You do talk about babies an awful lot, Lyssa.'

'I work at a bloody baby magazine! My entire day is spent talking, writing and thinking about babies!'

'Do you think that's healthy, given your situation?' Monica offers.

'I can't get sprogged,' I cry. 'I'm not psychotic.' Although at the moment I do sound a bit borderline.

'It must be very hard for Jake.'

I close my eyes, blocking out the view, blocking out my friends and blocking out the flashback of Jake closing the door with a decisive little click. 'It's hard for both of us.'

'He did look a bit put out at the office party when you were talking about his sluggish sperm over the Christmas pudding.' To avoid the Christmas rush our company decided to be innovative and hold the annual festive bash in July. Go figure, as our American friends would say.

Charlotte chews her lip. 'He dragged you off to dance to Shakin' Stevens's "Merry Christmas Everyone". That's always a sign of desperation.'

'If anyone knows about desperation it's me,' I point out.

'Why don't you give this whole baby business a rest?' Monica again.

'Oh, that's a good idea. I'll forget all about it – right this minute.' I can't help being sarcastic. No one in their right mind would go through the gruelling process of artificial insemination if they could avoid it. I've taken so many damn forms of hormones – I've popped them, I've sniffed them and I've shoved them in my bum – that I'm a walking mass of puberty, PMS and the menopause. I've been counselled about my 'Inexplicable Infertility' until I'm blue in the face and aching in the heart. I've had my fill of sitting in bleak waiting rooms in clinics stuffed with tearful women who avoid eye-contact in case talking might mean addressing their worst fears. I'm sick of reading in the daily press that, despite the emotional and physical trauma that women like me endure in their quest to satisfy their maternal urges, the majority of IVF attempts just don't work. I can't bear to think that I'm one of the statistics in the box marked 'Failed'. Who would put themselves through this torture if a pet poodle was an adequate substitute?

How can I explain that my cocktail of hormones is making

me feel like there's some madwoman locked inside of me? My progesterone is in deadly combat with my oestrogen. My body is screaming at me to get pregnant! I have taken to looking at babies in prams and being tempted to take them out and give them a cuddle. I'll swear that some days my breasts leak milk, but I think it's wishful thinking. If I don't get up the duff soon, I'll become like some sad old bitch – the canine variety – moping around with a phantom pregnancy.

'You need to get things right between you and Jake.'

'You think this is all my fault, don't you?'

They do that how-do-we-tell-this-crazy-woman-the-truth? look again.

Charlotte clears her throat and puts on an understanding face. 'Perhaps Jake thinks that having a baby is more important to you than he is.'

I don't know what to think. Does he? *Is* he? What if I could have a baby and not Jake – or Jake but not a baby? Which would I choose?

Monica is losing interest. She glances over at the clock. It's getting towards time for the sandwich run and her growling stomach is starting to take precedence over my life falling apart. 'Maybe you should just try to give yourselves a break. Get this back into perspective.'

'Yes,' I say. Is this what Jake thinks too? Is that why he's gone to Pip's? 'You're right. Maybe I should.'

Maybe I should try to stop seeing babies everywhere. Maybe I should romp round the bedroom with Jake, exhibiting gay abandon and not consulting my charts to see whether it would be a waste of effort. Maybe I should try not to view my monthly period as if I were being afflicted by some deadly disease. Maybe I should think more positively.

But how can I, when everyone else in the world is pregnant except me?

Chapter Four

Jake was in the boardroom, preparing for his presentation. It was possibly the very last thing on earth that he wanted to be doing. He wasn't the slightest bit interested in portraying Mr Egg – 'The Good Egg' – as the most creative advertising campaign of all time. He was sick to death of eggs – chicken, human and any other kind there might be. The presentation was due to start in half an hour. It was a multi-million-pound promotion, and the importance of it was steadfastly refusing to stay in his mind.

At the moment his Powerpoint wasn't playing ball either. He punched a few keys on his laptop. There were some impressive whirring noises, but nothing – absolutely nothing – appeared on the projector screen. Jake felt his slender grip on his patience slipping away. 'Oh, bollocks.'

His friend and fellow Dunston & Bradley inmate, Pip Henshall, crossed his feet which were up on the highly polished, yew boardroom table. 'Take five minutes to calm down, Jake,' he advised. 'It'll be all right on the night.'

Jake tossed down the laser pointer and threw himself into the seat opposite Pip. He blew the air out of his lungs in a steady stream.

'That bad?' Pip asked.

'Worse,' Jake said. He looked rather sheepishly at his friend. 'I've told Lyssa I'm staying with you.'

'Oh, thanks. Involve me in your sordid little schemes.'

'This isn't sordid.'

'Office flings always are.'

Jake shook his head. 'This isn't a fling. Not for me.'

'And what does Lyssa think?'

'She doesn't know,' Jake admitted.

Pip made a steeple with his hands. 'Marvellous.'

'I could hardly tell her that I was moving in with Neve, could I?' Jake raked his hair. 'Walking out while she's in the middle of her latest baby quest is bad enough. I can't tell her that I'm going to shack up with a nubile twenty-five year old with legs like Lara Croft whose urge to go through the motions of procreation is very much in evidence. It would crush her.'

'I didn't realise you were so sensitive.'

'What would you do in my situation?'

'I'd like to think that I possess more sense than to get myself in your situation.'

'I feel terrible about leaving Lyssa,' Jake said. 'Terrible.'

'But not terrible enough to stay?'

'I'd stopped being a boyfriend and become a baby-producing machine.' He shook his head in dismay. 'We've been at it every night for months.'

'I thought that's exactly what you were looking forward to with Neve?'

'Yes, but the intention is very different. With Neve it's for pure eroticism and mutual pleasure. With Lyssa it's for years of sleepless nights, family-sized transport and hideous expense.'

'Call me perceptive, but do I detect that becoming a father has lost some of its attraction?'

Jake rubbed his hands over his face. 'I didn't think it would be so hard.'

'Isn't this supposed to be the fun bit?'

'I think it probably is when Mother Nature deigns to take her intended course. It's when you have to get a bunch of doctors involved in the process that it all goes a bit pear-shaped.' Jake could feel himself getting a headache – which was ironic because it was something he'd tried to feign several times over the last few weeks. 'It's so horribly mechanical. It's all injections and hormones and specimen jars. If I'd known it was going to be like this I'd never have agreed to it in the first place. It completely undermines all you believe about manhood.'

'Is it trouble with . . .' Pip jerked his head.

'With what?'

Pip glanced round the room furtively, before saying: 'Getting it up.'

'Good grief, no. Do you think "Nympho Neve" would give me the time of day if that was an issue?' It seemed strange to be using the derogatory office nickname now it referred to his girlfriend rather than just a work colleague, and he wasn't sure that he was comfortable with it even though he'd never overly concerned himself with office sexism before.

Pip shrugged. 'I suppose not.'

'That's the problem, mate. To the casual observer the whole thing functions perfectly well. It's just when you come down to the nuts and bolts of it, there's a slight difficulty.'

'Are your sperm still sluggish?'

'Sluggish sperm,' Jake sighed. 'What does that say about me?'

'How the hell do they get sluggish? They can't start out like that.'

'I don't know. I did eat a lot of curry at college,' Jake confessed. Maybe that was what had taken the sting out of their tails. 'You know, I have this vision of them sitting

around in a comfy chair with their feet up, doing the *Daily Telegraph* crossword when they should be out there swimming for England. Still, you can't blame them. Every time they've popped out over the last year their performance has been criticised for being sub-standard by some suit in horn-rimmed specs. I just don't think they can get motivated any more.'

'Sounds like one of our creative meetings.'

'Yeah.' Pip and he had worked together at the Dunston & Bradley Advertising Agency for the last five years. In theory Pip was senior to him, but Jake had no intention of letting it stay like that for too much longer. Out of the two of them, Jake was the more obviously mean and hungry. Pip gave the impression of being laid-back, but behind the foppish exterior of velvet chalk-stripe suits and purple shirts there lurked a superbly twisted and razor-sharp brain capable of the most obscure lateral thinking and resulting brilliant marketing campaigns. Everyone assumed Pip was heavily reliant on cocaine for his inspiration, but his particular vices were nothing more serious than the occasional six-pack of John Smith's beer and licking the brown stuff off Twiglets.

'Whichever way you look at it, it's a very messy business,' Jake complained.

Pip nodded sagely. 'And it's going to get messier.'

That was the most annoying thing about Pip – he was usually right. Jake wasn't sure how this whole thing with Neve had started – actually, that was a complete lie, he *was* sure. The fact was, the whole of the male contingent of the office thought she was totally horny, and he'd been ridiculously flattered that he was the one she'd shown attention to. 'Shown attention to' in that at a fabulously trendy launch-party at the Soho nightclub Snappers, she'd pressed her finger to his lips and silently led him into the ladies' toilets where, less silently, she'd had sex with him standing up in a

cramped cubicle. He could get an erection just thinking about it. And their dangerous liaison had sort of progressed since then. Dangerous because if either Lyssa or their bosses at work found out about it they'd both be for the chop – and Lyssa's version of it would be a lot more painful and would make fatherhood an even more difficult concept in the future. But then wasn't the fear of discovery part of the attraction of these things? Heaven knows, he was the last person to think about analysing the reasons – all of his life was spent focused on his nether regions for one reason or another at the moment. At least in this situation there wasn't a bunch of doctors overseeing him and telling him he wasn't good enough. Neve seemed to think he was perfectly adequate.

The work issue was a worry though. He loved his job and was damn good at it, but fraternising between colleagues – other than a sociable Absolut Vodka – was considered a sackable offence. 'Gross misconduct', his contract said. And some of the things that he and Neve had done could certainly be considered under that heading.

The only consolation was that in these days of supposed equality, Neve would probably carry the can. She was a more junior member of staff, a woman and, therefore, despite employment legislation, considerably more dispensable than he was. The truth of the matter was there would always be a queue of tall, leggy and beautiful graduates ready to take her place.

Pip peeled his tall frame out of the Philippe Starck boardroom chair and stretched. 'Come on, Mr Swift. Time to stop dwelling on your tortured love-life and turn to the infinitely more pressing matter of work. Time to put your corporate underpants on outside of your suit and transform yourself into a superhuman advertising executive.'

Jake dragged himself up. 'I can't get fired up about this one. Eggs are a bit of a turn-off for me at the moment. I need

something more meaty to get my teeth into.'

'We've got a pitch for a New Zealand lamb promotion coming up,' Pip said with a smile.

'You know what I mean. I need something sexy, something glammy. My testosterone is in turmoil, I need to channel it,' Jake said. 'Whatever happened to the Blow aftershave contract? We got that one, didn't we?'

'Yeah,' Pip mumbled.

And if Jake hadn't been quite so preoccupied with his own problems, he would have noticed that his friend had suddenly become rather shifty.