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Shopaholic & Baby

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ONE

OK. Don't panic. Everything's going to be fine. Of course it is.

Of course it is.

'If you could lift up your top, Mrs Brandon?' The sonographer has a pleasant, professional air as she looks down at me. 'I need to apply some jelly to your abdomen before we start the scan.'

'Absolutely!' I say without moving a muscle. 'The thing is, I'm just a teeny bit . . . nervous.'

I'm lying on a bed at the Chelsea and Westminster hospital, tensed up with anticipation. Any minute now, Luke and I will see our baby on the screen for the first time since it was just a teeny blob. I still can't quite believe it. In fact, I still haven't quite got over the fact that I'm pregnant. In nineteen weeks' time, I, Becky Brandon, née Bloomwood . . . am going to be a mother. A mother!

Luke's my husband, by the way. We've been married for just over a year and this is a one hundred per cent genuine, honeymoon baby! We travelled loads on our honeymoon, but I've pretty much worked out that the baby was conceived when we were staying in this gorgeous resort in Sri Lanka called Unawatuna, all orchids and bamboo trees and beautiful views.

Unawatuna Brandon.

Miss Unawatuna Orchid Bamboo-tree Brandon.

Hmm. I'm not sure what Mum would say.

'My wife had a slight accident in the early stages of pregnancy,' Luke explains from his seat beside the bed. 'So she's a little anxious.'

He squeezes my hand supportively, and I squeeze back. In my pregnancy book, *Nine Months of Your Life*, it says you should include your partner in

all aspects of your pregnancy, otherwise he can feel hurt and alienated. So I'm including Luke as much as I possibly can. Like, last night I included him in watching my new DVD, *Toned Arms in Pregnancy*. He suddenly remembered he had to make a business call in the middle, and missed quite a lot – but the point is, he doesn't feel shut out.

'You had an accident?' The sonographer has paused in her tapping at the computer.

'I fell off this mountain when I was looking for my long-lost sister in a storm,' I explain. 'I didn't know I was pregnant at the time. And I think maybe I bashed the baby.'

'I see.' The sonographer looks at me kindly. She has greyingbrown hair tied back in a knot, with a pencil stuck into it. 'Well. Babies are resilient little things. Let's just have a look, shall we?'

Here it is. The moment I've been obsessing over for weeks. Gingerly I lift up my top and look down at my swelling stomach.

'If you could just push all your necklaces aside?' she adds. 'That's quite a collection you have there!'

'They're special pendants.' I loop them together with a jangle. 'This one is an Aztec maternity symbol, and this is a gestation crystal . . . and this is a chiming ball to soothe the baby . . . and this is a birthing stone.'

'A birthing stone?'

'You press it on a special spot on your palm, and it takes away the pain of labour,' I explain. 'It's been used since ancient Maori times.'

'Mmm-hmm.' The sonographer raises an eyebrow and squeezes some transparent gloop on my stomach. Frowning slightly, she applies the ultrasound probe thing to my skin, and instantly a fuzzy black and white image appears on the screen.

I can't breathe.

That's our baby. Inside me. I dart a look at Luke, and he's gazing at the screen, transfixed.

'There are the four chambers of the heart . . . ' The sonographer is moving the probe around. 'Now we're looking at the shoulders . . . ' She points to the screen and I squint obediently, even though to be honest I can't see any shoulders, only blurry curves.

'There's an arm . . . one hand . . . ' Her voice tails off and she frowns.

There's silence in the little room. I feel a sudden grip of fear. That's why she's frowning. The baby's only got one hand. I knew it.

A wave of overpowering love and protectiveness rises up inside me. Tears are welling in my eyes. I don't care if our baby's only got one hand. I'll love it just as much. I'll love it more. Luke and I will take it anywhere in the world for the best treatment, and we'll fund research, and if anyone even dares give my baby a look—

'... and the other hand.' The sonographer's voice interrupts my thoughts.

'Other hand?' I look up, choked. 'It's got two hands?'

'Well . . . yes.' The sonographer seems taken aback at my reaction. 'Look, you can see them here.' She points at the image and to my amazement I can just about make out the little bony fingers. Ten of them.

'I'm sorry,' I gulp, wiping my eyes with a tissue she hands me. 'It's just such a relief.'

'Everything seems absolutely fine as far as I can tell,' she says reassuringly. 'And don't worry, it's normal to be emotional in pregnancy. All those hormones swilling about.'

Honestly. People keep talking about hormones. Like Luke last night, when I cried over that TV ad with the puppy. I'm not hormonal, I'm perfectly normal. It was just a very sad ad.

'Here you go.' The sonographer taps at her keyboard again. A row of black and white scan pictures curls out of the printer and she hands it to me. I peer at the first one – and you can see the distinct outline of a head. It's got a little nose and a mouth and everything.

'So – I've done all the checks.' She swivels round on her chair. 'All I need to know now is whether you want to know the gender of the baby?'

'No thank you,' Luke answers with a smile. 'We've talked it through at great length, haven't we, Becky? And we both feel it would spoil the magic to find out.'

'Very well.' The sonographer smiles back. 'If that's what you've decided, I won't say anything.'

She 'won't say anything'? That means she's already seen what the sex is. She could just tell us right now!

'We hadn't actually decided, had we?' I say. 'Not for definite.'

'Well . . . yes we had, Becky.' Luke seems taken aback. 'Don't you remember? We talked about it for a whole evening and agreed we wanted it to be a surprise.'

‘Oh, right. Yes.’ I can’t take my eyes off the blurry print of the baby. ‘But we could have our surprise now! It would be just as magical!’

OK, maybe that’s not exactly true. But isn’t he desperate to know?

‘Is that really what you want?’ As I look up I can see a streak of disappointment in Luke’s face. ‘To find out now?’

‘Well . . .’ I hesitate. ‘Not if you don’t want to.’

The last thing I want is to upset Luke. He’s been so sweet and loving to me since I’ve been pregnant. Recently I’ve had cravings for all sorts of odd combinations – like the other day I had this sudden weird desire for pineapple and a pink cardigan. And Luke drove me to the shops especially to get them.

He’s about to say something when his mobile phone starts ringing. He whips it out of his pocket, but the sonographer puts up a hand.

‘I’m sorry, but you can’t use that in here.’

‘Right.’ Luke frowns as he sees the caller display. ‘It’s Iain. I’d better call him back.’

I don’t need to ask which Iain. It’ll be Iain Wheeler, the chief marketing honcho of the Arcodas Group. Luke has his own PR company, Brandon Communications, and Arcodas is Luke’s big new client. It was a real coup when he won them and has given a fantastic boost to the company – he’s already hired a load more staff and is planning to open loads of new European offices on the back of it.

So it’s all wonderful for Brandon Communications. But as usual, Luke’s working himself into the ground. I’ve never seen him so at anyone’s beck and call before. If Iain Wheeler calls, he always, always calls him back within five minutes, whether he’s in another meeting or he’s having supper, or even in the middle of the night. He says it’s the service industry and Arcodas is his mega client, and that’s what they’re paying for.

All I can say is, if Iain Wheeler calls while I’m in labour, then that phone is going straight out the window.