

# J'S JOURNAL

By Kate Hunter



**ROBIN, TERRY & BOB**



**Wednesday January 18, 2017**

Had an early shift at Chermside today.

Usually Bella's up at sparrows', but today she slept in. I think we let her stay up too late. I kissed her little elbow and thought there is nothing sweeter than the snores of a five-year-old.

Some pathology collectors hate earlies, but I like them because it means Sam's bribing Bella to eat her Weet-Bix, not me. It is the little things that make me happy these days.

I used to think I'd be happy when I had a novel published and went on a book tour and was deep in negotiations with Reese Witherspoon about the film rights, but this morning I was happy as a pig in mud driving along Gympie Road at 6am, singing, 'Someone Like You,' and not dangling an iPad in front of a five year old like a seal trainer with a sardine.

There was not much traffic, so I had time to swing through the Hungry Jack's drive thru.

I had thought about making some muesli before I left home (in line with my New Year's resolution to give up drive-thrus) but then I remembered Mum saying that really, between Melbourne Cup Day and Australia Day the nation is effectively on holidays so the new year doesn't start for another week.

I ordered a Barbecue Breakfast Burger and a medium latte and refused to let guilt ruin my mood. That was another of my resolutions - do not be brought down by perceived failure or weakness.

Another reason I like earlies is the oldies. The waiting room is usually full of them before nine. They are good about fasting and because they probably had their dinner at 5pm they are starving by 7am but still, they are super-patient. Old people are generally nicer than the young ones.

The worst are the executive types who go to the city centres; mainly guys who show up at lunchtime, rolling their sleeves up as they march into the waiting room like it is a pathology drive thru.

They are grumpy when they see there's people ahead of them, and do not even say hello when I call them in. Sometimes I'm tempted to look carefully at the doctor's

request form, then at them before smiling in a trying-to-look-positive way and saying, 'Gee, you look don't look too bad ... considering.'

But I do not, because I am a professional.

Anyway, when I arrived at the rooms this morning there was just one old lady waiting; she had a bandage on her wrist (so many old ladies do, I've never worked out why) and was watching the TV even though it was on mute and the subtitles were disabled.

A walking stick leaned against her chair. A man about my age was sitting with her, staring at his phone, jiggling his leg. There were smudgy shadows under unnaturally bright blue eyes.

His almost- black hair had a tiny bit of grey in it and needed cutting. He looked like he could use a Barbecue Breakfast Burger.

'Mate,' I thought to myself, 'can you at least pretend not to be angry about bringing your mum for a blood test? Pretty sure there's somewhere she'd rather be too.' I smiled at the lady, 'Would you like to come in now?'

'Tom,' she said, touching the man's knee, 'Do you want me to come in with you?'

'I'll be right,' he said softly. Then he drew a deep breath and reached for the walking stick.

Ok, so I might have been wrong to assume it was the old lady who was there for a blood test, but I was right in thinking her son did not want to be there.

'I just need to confirm your details,' I said as I finished up, 'What's your name and date of birth?'  
'What's yours?' he snapped.

He was not being creepy, he just sounded tired and fed up. 'Sorry,' I said, 'I just need to check.'

'Thomas Michael Gillies, eighteenth of the first, eighty-two.'

'Oh,' I smiled, 'Happy birthday.'  
Shocked, he looked up at me, eyes wide open, like a little boy. He had not realised.

Bloody hell. He was embarrassed and I was embarrassed and as he shuffled back into the waiting room I said, 'Have a good one' which was a stupid thing to say to

someone so sick and sad they didn't realise it was their birthday.

Even his mum must have forgotten. Maybe she has got dementia? Maybe he had to bring her because she cannot be left alone?

For the rest of my shift, as I drew blood and bagged up little jars, filled in forms and made small talk, I thought about Thomas Michael Gillies. Who does not remember their own birthday? His mum must have forgotten too. Why was she with him? I hope he is not very sick. Why do I care?

Like clockwork, just as I was packing up, a text from Sam arrived. I felt my face tighten. Would it be about Bella? No. A suggestion of what we might have for dinner? No. Was he wondering how I was? Of course not. He wanted to tell me storm cells were forming over the Darling Downs.

Sam's obsession with the BOM is becoming an issue. Am I being pathetic? I wonder if anyone ever got divorced and cited the weather as the reason. It is pretty much an issue year-round but hits its peak in storm season.

He copies and pastes the warnings into messages with lots of wow emojis and sends me screenshots of the radar images. Why does he do this? Why? He installed the BOM app on my phone himself (maybe he thought it would give us a shared interest?) so I have the same information as he does. I would have to work hard NOT to know when the front is hitting Gatton.

If the storm skirts around our place he says things like, 'Looks like we dodged a bullet there, babe,' but at the same time he seems super disappointed we did not get slammed. We never normally watch the news, but if there has been a big storm he flicks from channel to channel and records any he is missed.

I think he has got a thing for Jenny Woodward, the weather lady on the ABC. I asked him about it once and he did not deny it, he just laughed.

I get it. His job is boring. We have been married nine years and I still do not understand what an actuary does. When he tried to explain I glaze over and reach for my phone. For Sam, the idea of having someone like Jenny at home, interested, knowledgeable, who shares his enthusiasm for grapefruit-sized hail and winds that fling trampolines onto roofs would be appealing. Libby

says I should just pretend to be interested because Sam is - in all other respects - a wonderful husband.

My friends reckon if talking about falling barometric pressure is the worst thing I must put up with, I should count my blessings. Libby said the last guy she dated was obsessed with Nordic porn so maybe they are right.

I am having lunch with Mum tomorrow at Indro. I will ask her if I am right to be annoyed by Sam's weather thing. Dad went through a stage of being obsessed with the traffic reports - even when he was not going anywhere, so maybe she will have some advice.

I wonder how Thomas Michael Gillies is. I hope someone remembered his birthday.

## **Thursday, January 19, 2017**

Mum was no help. She binged on for twenty minutes about weather lady Jenny's jackets, which she apparently sews herself. I knew where this was going. Sipping her Coke, no-sugar, Mum reminded me how sad Nana was when I told her I did not want her old sewing machine when she upgraded to the new Pfaff.

I had been as gentle as I could, but I was not interested in sewing and suggested she call Givit - so it would go to someone who would use it. Nana had a stroke and died two days later, and Mum believed it was the disappointment that had killed her. I pointed out Courtney had not wanted it either, but mum said, 'Yes, but Nana never expected your sister would want it - she was too good at sport.'

I wanted to ask why a talent for cricket and sewing were mutually exclusive but I was too tired so I got to the point and asked if she thinks that I should make an effort to share Sam's obsession with storm cells.

'Marriage is tricky,' she said.

'I was thinking about when Dad couldn't talk about anything but traffic. I'd ask how he was and before I knew it, he'd be filling me in on the latest bingle at the Deagon Deviation.'

'Yes, well, he did that to me too, but I ignored him, and it passed. 'That's it? 'Marriage is mostly ignoring things until they pass. You know, our forty-third anniversary is in a fortnight,' she said smugly, 'Your Dad's whisking me away as per usual.'

And that was it. The conversation galloped away like a Rhodesian Ridgeback let loose on Nudgee Beach. Mum loves telling me about their romantic getaways. I do not think she means to make me annoyed, but she does.

'We're going to go to Tamborine to celebrate, to that cottage with the fireplace. 'They all have fireplaces. But it will still be boiling. You won't need a fire.'

'It can get cold anytime up there. Remember when you were little, and Dad made us go on that bushwalk and you got a tick on your bottom and you did not tell us? You were so sick! I remember being freezing, waiting outside for the ambulance - and it was Christmas time.'

'Do you want a chip?' I asked, desperate to change the subject. I knew where it was going.

'No thanks. Seriously, we thought you might die. When we got to the hospital it looked like you had three buttocks. 'Yes, I know.'

'The doctors had never seen anything like it, they put it in a medical journal.' said mum, biting into her savoury muffin.

'This isn't exactly nice conversation is it?' What were we talking about before we got onto your bum-tick?'

She made it sound like it was me who had brought the subject up. We spent the rest of lunch talking about whether she should buy one of those light raincoats from UNIQLO for the anniversary trip.

I wanted to stab myself in the eye with a drinking straw. Is it too much to ask for a bit of conversation that is not about the bloody weather?

Thank God I agreed to join Libby's book club. I need more intellectual stimulation. Meeting tomorrow night.

We are discussing *Walking on Trampolines*, by Frances Whiting - it is a coming of age journey about young women, friendship, self-doubt and the complexity of family. Excited to talk about it.

### **Saturday January 21, 2017**

It feels like there is a scrub turkey building its nest in my head. It turns out book club is not about books. Only I had read *Walking on Trampolines* and everyone except me brought a bottle of wine. Libby's neighbour Fran brought two. It was not the literary evening I had hoped for, but it was fun.

Conversation topics included (but were not limited to):

Benchtops

Vegemite - fridge or pantry?

Howards Storage World

Climate change

Chooks

Nut allergies

The deputy principal at Fran's kids' school

Donald Trump

Melania Trump

The Trump children (focus on Ivanka)

Brexit

The Crown

Was Prince Philip hot?

Is Prince Harry hot?

Princess Diana

Bardon kindy

Childcare rebate

Superannuation

The wage gap

Serena Williams

Julia Gillard

Tinder

Nordic porn

Ikea (Springwood v Northlakes)

School reunions

Renewing vows

Waxing v 'sugaring'

Group training

Cricket

Australia Day

Chris Lilley

Colonialism

Adele

Adele's marriage

Parking around the Gabba

The Mazda CX9 - is it too big?

Camping

When is Easter?

Why is Easter on a different date every year?

The Pope

Libby's in-laws

Birkenstocks

Bum-bags

Italy

Speedos

Bondi Rescue

Life after death

I got home at 2am. At eleven, Sam bought me Panadol, a 500ml Sprite and a Chicken Fillet Burger and told me (very quietly) that he was taking Bella to his brothers for the afternoon. I love him.

## **Sunday January 22, 2017**

Felt almost a hundred percent today, and so grateful to Sam for his non-judgemental post-book club care I suggested we catch the bus to Southbank to celebrate the last day before Bella starts 'big school.'

Bella could not have cared less, but I knew Sam would be rapt. If his greatest love is storm activity, then public transport runs a close second. Bella held his

hand as we walked to Coles to catch the 61 and they play-fought over who would tap his Go-Card.

For a moment I felt we were one of those families that you see on the Council newsletters that come with the rates notice. We were happy, wholesome people getting out and about, making the most our liveable city.

As we sailed up Jubilee Terrace then down through Paddington, Sam was making Bella giggle by coming up with nicknames for other people on the bus.

'That'll be Benedict Bumly,' he said as a bloke in too-tight shorts boarded. '... and his girlfriend Penny Plop.' Bella laughed so hard I worried she would throw up.

'This guy doesn't look very happy, does he?' Sam whispered at the Paddo Tavern stop. 'I wonder what his name is. 'I looked up. I knew those blue eyes. I knew his name. Thomas Michael Gilles.

TMG (as I now refer to him in my mind) looked better than he had on Wednesday, not so tired - maybe because his mum was not with him?

Before Pop died, I remember Nana was exhausted all the time. I wondered who was taking care of Thomas Michael

Gilles's mum today? His Dad? A sister? Maybe he has a wife? A lovely girl who is happy to do jigsaws with her vague mother-in-law on a hot Sunday morning.

I glanced at his left hand. No ring. Not that that means anything. Sam hardly ever wears his.

I told myself to stop being an idiot. For all I knew Thomas Michael Gillies's mum was on a stand-up paddleboard on the Noosa River, looking forward to a long lunch with her girlfriends, possibly at Sails.

Maybe she forgot her son's birthday not because of dementia but because she was hungover! Given my performance at Book Club on Friday night, who was I to judge? No one was crowning me 'mother of the year' yesterday, were they?

Thomas Michael Gilles limped past the empty disability seat and sat directly across the aisle from me, putting his walking stick across his lap as if to ward off anyone who might want to sit next to him. Then, unlike every other human being who has been alone on a bus since the mobile phone was invented, he reached into his backpack and pulled out a book.

An actual book made of paper; fat and worn, like it had been read more than once. I couldn't see the title - I

didn't want to stare more than I already was, but I could see there was a drawing of a bird on the cover; it looked like it was staring out from inside the pages. He stayed on the bus when we got off at Southbank.

We had all had a nice day - Bella and Sam had the nicest. They continued their nickname-game throughout the morning at the beach, over dumplings at Harajuku and for the whole trip home.

When we got to Coles, I told them to walk home ahead of me - I needed to pop in for toilet paper and milk. It was not a lie - we always need toilet paper and milk, but if I had to pretend to laugh once more, I would throw myself under the 61 bus. Also, I felt like a packet of barbecue chips and I did not want to share. Does that make me a bitch?

## **Monday January 23. 2017**

Today was Bella's first day of 'big school'. After last night, it was amazing we got her there at all.

We had not made a big deal of it because, frankly, neither had she. At the beginning of December, I had bought the uniform, packed her bag and planned her

lunches (this was Bella, not me). Last week we made and froze little quiches like her friend Lulu's mum does.

Last night she went to bed all happy and excited and I felt smug as I scrolled through the school Facebook parents' group page seeing all the other mums -it's never dads - losing their collective minds:

My daughter is anxious because none of her friends from kindy are in her class. Will the teacher be sensitive to this?

I am not comfortable with the term, 'allergy aware.' Anyone else? My son will only wear his Brisbane Broncos cap. Will they seriously not let him play outside without a broad-brimmed hat? This is an infringement of his civil rights. Kate Jones will be hearing from me if his freedoms are curtailed.

What are the pick-up arrangements if there is a storm?

Worried about ice-bricks. Are most people putting in one or two? If I put in a frozen Up&Go do, I still need an ice brick? What if she leaves her chicken sandwich until second break? Do the teachers monitor this?

Will my daughter be bullied about her Frozen lunch box?  
Her brother says Frozen is for babies.

Does anyone know what sort of music is played at rest time? Would the teacher welcome suggestions? We are a musical family - would be happy to provide some tracks on USB but do not want to be pushy?

Happy to see vegemite sandwiches on tuckshop menu! Does anyone know if it is spread thickly or thinly? I do not want to be difficult but if it is too thick my twins will not touch it and there is nothing else on the menu they will consider. First world problem I know, but I am stressing!

How does the school manage names? My son is Nathaniel, and we call him Nathaniel, not Nat or Nate. Emailed his teacher but worried she will not take it seriously and kids will shorten his name and upset him.

Who would be a teacher? As I was reflecting on how my relaxed style makes me an excellent parent, Bella appeared in the doorway; a tiny, shaking puddle of tears.

It took forever to calm her down and work out what was wrong, but finally she told us (actually, she told

Sam). Apparently, she fears chickens. No idea where that came from but bloody Lulu from kindy told her that the school, *she is* going to has chickens and Bella's now worried that there might be chickens at her school.

I told her I did not think so- we did not see any at the orientation, did we? 'But that doesn't mean there aren't any,' she sobbed.

'What if there are? The school is very big and they could be anywhere and chickens are flappy with mean eyes and that goobly thing under their beaks makes me feel sick and Lulu says the children have to take the chickens home and look after them, and what if my teacher says, *Bella, take this chicken home.*

*It must sleep in your bed with you and if it dies, you will be in trouble for chicken murder.* 'I couldn't risk assuring her there weren't chickens when there might be. Lots of schools them have them now. I checked the website.

Nothing but I still could not be sure, and unless I was sure I was not going to get Bella to sleep, and that meant I would not sleep either. So, I posted on the Facebook page: Does anyone know if the school has chooks?

**Tuesday January 24, 2017**

Praise be. There have been no chickens at school since 2012. And no intention of getting more either because of a nasty incident involving a pair of escape-prone, weirdly aggressive spoodles that lived across the street at the time.

Day One was tense, Bella not fully trusting my chicken intel from Facebook, but today she was fine, and I headed off to work for the first time in nearly a week.

Jindalee rooms today. I am thinking now that Bella's in school I should stick my hand up for regular shifts. In some ways it would be easier to know where I am working, when.

But I like the unpredictability of being a casual collector. I tell myself I'm like a hired gun, but with a syringe, but really, it's a bit pathetic if the most exciting part of my life is - wondering if I'll be northside or southside today?

I wonder if I am having a mid-life crisis. Am I too young at 34? Maybe it is perimenopause. Maybe I am just bored.

**Wednesday January 25, 2017**

I am a little bit obsessed with Thomas Michael Gilles. Not in a romantic way. I have never gone for the angsty Robert Pattinson type. In my experience they are too much trouble.

I am more about Zac Efron, who clearly takes care of himself and likes to sing and dance at every opportunity. I think about TMG in a caring way. I am a nurse by training, after all.

I know he is about the same age as me. I know he has got a mother who may or may not have dementia. One or possibly both live in and around Chermside. Or he might live in or around Paddington where he got on the bus on Sunday morning.

Then again, he might have been in Paddington because he hooked up after a night out and was on his way home to the southside on the 61. But then he wouldn't have had his backpack, would he? And he does not look like the hook-up type.

I may have had a quick search for him on Facebook and a little look on Insta, but he is not there. I found myself hoping I will be sent back to Chermside soon in

the hope he will be there but then I realised that would mean he is still sick. I do not want him to be sick.

Anyway, what am I thinking about this man for? It is ridiculous. I need to start focusing on my own life, on Sam and Bella.

We are going to up to Libby's family's place at Peregian for an Australia Day barbecue tomorrow and we are spending the weekend. That will be fun; good to get away. I said I would make a pavlova, so I will do that. ... Back again. I forgot that eggs need to be at room temperature, so while I was waiting for them to de-chill I Googled, 'novels with birds on the cover.'

TMG was reading *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt! It has a thousand pages and won a Pulitzer Prize. He is something of an intellectual. Sam's smart but he is not an intellectual. He only reads books by Clive Cussler.

### **Thursday January 26, 2017 (Australia Day)**

It is 10pm and I am on a sofa bed at Peregian with Bella's foot in my back. It has been a long day. The traffic was awful, and it took us nearly three hours to get here. We'd planned to leave as soon as Bella woke up (normally before six) but for the first time in her

life she slept in until eight thirty, so we slept in until eight-thirty and we hit the Bruce Highway at ten - along with the rest of the greater Brisbane population.

To make matters worse, while he was packing the car, Sam dumped a slab of Great Northern right on top of the cooler bag with my pav in it, so I made him drive to Coles then to Woollies to find a ready-made pav. Libby could not have cared less about dessert, but I was feeling vindictive.

By the time we got to the Ettamogah pub I'd cooled down a bit and reminded myself this was meant to be a nice family weekend, so I turned down Adele and asked Sam if there were any storms forecast that might spoil Libby's plan to have the barbecue in the park next to the surf club. He said, no, sounding disappointed not only that the weather looked fine all weekend but that I had not checked the BOM myself.

It is now 10pm and Sam's still in the park with Libby, Libby's sister Rachael and Rachael's new boyfriend Wes. They are arguing about whether to 'change the date.' Libby and Sam were team no, Rachael and Wes were team yes. I am team, 'don't understand to enough fight about

it,' so I was happy when Bella started whining and I said I would take her back to the house.

There is a little bookshop here at Peregian, just opposite the toilet block in the park. I ducked over there this afternoon, just before it closed, to see if they had *The Goldfinch*. They had one copy. Yay. Once Bella was asleep, I poured myself a wine, went out to the deck and started reading.

### **Friday January 27, 2017**

I saw TMG today. Work called at 6am, desperate for someone to work at Chermside today. Both collectors had called in sick so could I possibly get there? I said sure. If I got going straight away, I knew I could get home by 8.30, change and be at work by 9.30. I kissed Sam and told him I would drive straight back up after my shift - I would be back by four, five at the latest. But I did not go back.

### **Saturday January 28, 2017**

I spent last night at home and drove back up the coast this morning. I spent most of the day on the beach making dribble castles with Bella.

We had fish and chips in the square for dinner and now Sam, Libby, Rachael and Wes are on the deck drinking red wine and arguing about the flag. I am in the bedroom pretending to settle Bella who has been fast asleep for an hour. I am still trying to work out yesterday. This is what happened:

When I got to work, I saw TMG straight away, like I had been expecting him to be there. He was sitting by himself, reading. There were three oldies ahead of him, so I dealt with them, talking about the humidity and saying how February is always the worst. I had the same conversation with each of them, but it was strangely calming.

When it was his turn, TMG put his book in his backpack and smiled at me. Like he recognised me. From when he was here before? I wondered. Or the bus? Maybe he just smiled. The oldies smile too. Smiling does not mean anything.

He walked slowly into the collection room, limping, but with no stick. His eyes looked even bluer than they had before, and he had put on a little weight. He looked good.

'How are you today?' I said, putting the tourniquet around his arm. 'All right, thanks,' he said.

'Still hot out there?' I asked, as if he was seventy. 'Yep,' he said.

'Little sting,' I warned before sliding the needle into his vein. 'Are you enjoying it?' he asked. 'What?' I said, 'Taking blood?' 'No,' he smiled and nodded towards my bag, '*The Goldfinch*.'

'I'm not sure,' I said, 'I've just started it.'  
'It starts slowly, but it's worth persisting.'  
'I will,' I said, 'It'll probably take me a year though.'  
'Worth it.'  
'Do you read a lot?' I asked.  
'Lately I have. But I am going back to work next week, so I probably will not be able to so much, but I'll try.'

Like last time, I asked his name and his date of birth, but this time he told me. Thomas Michael Gilles. Eighteenth of the first, eighty-two.

'All done,' I said, 'take care,' and watched him go. I wanted to ask what sort of work he did, what was he reading now, where he was going on the 61-last week, and why did he and his mother forget his birthday?

But I did not. I finished my shift then called Sam and told him I was worried about driving with storms around, so I would stay at home and come up in the morning. That was a lie, the BOM radar was clear, and I knew he'd know that, but he just said, 'No worries babe, all good here, see you tomorrow, love you.' Weird.

### **Monday January 30, 2017**

I am at the Wesley. Mum's had a turn. We do not know what that means, exactly. They are doing tests. Dad rang just after I dropped Bella at school. I was on my way to Coorparoo, so I had to call and tell them to find someone else. They were not happy but what could I do?

Dad was in a state and Courtney's camping at Fingal. Also, Courtney's useless in these situations. Mainly because she is never faced with them because - as Nana would have said, 'Courtney's good at sport.'

Anyway, Mum and Dad were at Pilates when Mum went white and fainted. Dad says it has happened before (but never at Pilates) but normally she comes around quickly so they never really worry about it. Thank God they were

at Pilates and the instructor did not think it was nothing. She called an ambulance while Dad called me.

Mum came around on the way to emergency and by the time they admitted her she was talking but still seemed sleepy and weak. I felt like crying but Dad looked like he wanted to too, so I did not.

The doctor told us it was not a heart attack, but they needed to get to the bottom of things and that might take a day or two. I took Dad home so he could change out of his Pilates clothes and get some things for Mum.

We stopped at Kenmore Village to get some grapes because he was in the Wesley with gallstones in 1992 had a floury apple with his afternoon tea and never forgot it. He knows Mum is as fussy about her fruit as he is.

I left Dad in the car with the aircon on, trying to get Courtney on the phone and raced into Kenmore Fresh (they would a hundred percent know if I went to Coles).

As I grabbed a bag of grapes, I missed one of the handles and pretty much the whole lot tipped onto the floor, rolling all through the shop and out into the centre. The manager told me to get out of the way, he

would clean it up, but I felt terrible. What if someone slipped? Another customer crouched down to help. It was Robin Bailey, from the radio.

'Thanks,' I said. 'No worries, hon,' she replied. Dad was cranky because I took so long. I told him what happened and then he was worried I had picked the grapes off the floor, put them back in the bag and bought them.

'Do you want your mother to get listeria on top of everything else?' he snapped. Sometimes being the eldest sucks.

### **Tuesday, January 31, 2017**

Mum's going to be fine. She has got low blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat, and she will probably need a pacemaker at some point, but for now it is just medication.

Dad asked the cardiologist (the 'lady doctor' as he calls her) whether Mum will be ok to go to Tamborine next week for their anniversary. 'Absolutely,' she said, 'But no swinging from the chandeliers.' Mum and Dad laughed their heads off. I felt a bit sick.

**Wednesday, February 1, 2017**

There was a Myers bag with my name on a Post-It on the desk when I got to Chermside today. Apparently 'some guy' dropped it off for me yesterday. In it was a book, *The Rosie Project*. On the cover was another Post It is saying, 'Something a little lighter.'

**Thursday February 2, 2017**

I need to talk to someone about TMG, but who? I am realising there are very few people I trust. I kind of trust Mum and Dad but I cannot discuss this with them. I trust Libby, but she and Sam have become matey lately.

But why should that even matter? I am not cheating. I have spoken about three sentences to a guy who came in for blood tests and I saw him once on a bus.

I am reading a book he read, and he dropped one into work for me. If an old lady had brought me a book, everyone would say, 'how lovely'.

If I worried about an old man, I had taken blood from, people would think I am a caring professional. But because Thomas Michael Gillies is my age, could be

considered attractive, is possibly single and straight, people would freak out and think I am cheating on Sam and possibly breaking professional boundaries.

You could argue that *he is stalking me*. I mean, he came to my work uninvited and left a book for me. Some would say that is creepy. How did he know I would not be there? I wonder - was it a Wednesday when he came in that first time.

Just checked. It was. But the second time was a Friday. Was he hoping to see me yesterday, or did just want me to have the book? Did he make a special trip to Chermside or was he visiting his mum or seeing a movie?

He said he was going back to work. What sort of work does he do that gives him enough time to drop novels off to ladies working at suburban blood collection centres?

Who the hell knows? Why the hell do I care? I think I will talk to Courtney. She is disconnected from my day to day life and she is practical and analytical.

Although we are not super-close like, say, Libby and her sisters, she loves me and would never blab. I have always said if I killed someone, I would call Courtney.

Not only can she keep a secret, but she also goes camping a lot, so she would know a good place to hide the body. Dad says she is back from Fingal tomorrow. I will call her on the weekend.

### **Friday, February 3, 2017**

Tonight, Sam and I went to the P&C 'New Parents' Welcome Drinks at The Tav. Both of us would have preferred to stay home, sitting comfortably at either end of the couch, Sam tracking the BOM, me searching LinkedIn for Thomas Michael Gillies, but I insisted we go.

It was important, I told Sam, that we attempt to make some friends at the school for Bella's sake. We should even volunteer for something. Claire from next door, whose kids finished at the school years ago told me to be careful. She said P&C 'leadership' goes to the 'New Parents' nights to recruit 'fresh blood.'

'They're difficult to spot,' she warned, 'They'll be all friendly, buy you a wine and before you know it, you're the new treasurer.'

Claire says it is better to do a tedious but highly visible once-a-year job - like selling raffle tickets

outside Woollies - than to be roped into an ongoing gig that nobody sees or knows about.

'Whatever you do,' said Claire, 'Don't believe anyone who says their committee's fun. If it were fun, there'd be a line of people wanting to join wouldn't there?' She had a crazed look in her eyes, like someone who had survived a hostage situation.

The Tav is a big place with a couple of bars and a big breezy deck.

We go there quite a bit - Bella loves the garlic bread - but we have never been on a Friday night. There were no signs indicating where the 'New Parents' were gathered, so we took a guess and stood near a group of people who looked kind of like us - white, on the younger side of middle age, awkward and bored.

While Sam was at the bar, a couple came up to me and smiled. I put my phone in my bag. 'Hi,' said the woman, 'I'm Anna and this is Chris.' My guard shot up, but I tried to look friendly, 'Isn't it nice to have a night out?' 'Absolutely,' said Anna. 'Can we buy you a drink?' said Chris. 'No thanks,' I said, 'My husband's getting me one,'. 'Good group tonight,' said Anna, looking around.

'What class is your little one in?' I asked, 'We've got Bella in P2.' 'Oh, we don't have any!' laughed Chris.

'No time for kids,' said Anna, 'Too busy enjoying ourselves.' WAIT. WHAT? Why were these people offering to buy me a drink? Why was Anna looking at me like that?

Bloody hell. Clearly, we had lobbed into a meet-up of the local swingers' club, not the P&F New Parents' Drinks!

'I love your top, where did you get it?' said Anna admiringly. 'Witchery!' I replied too fast, too loudly.

'Ah, look, sorry, I've got the Visa card and Sam's about to be served! Back in a sec.'

I half walked, half-ran to the bar, grabbed Sam by the belt and dragged him downstairs where we found the other prep parents

We ended up talking to a nice couple called Margot and Clayton. Neither of seemed to find me or Sam in any way attractive, which was a relief. And they did not try to sign us up for anything.

They were nice. I could see us seeing them again, although not in a swinging sense, obviously.

Their daughter Molly's in Bella's class. I hope they become friends. God that sounds pathetic. I am relying on my five-year-old to engineer a new friend for me.

## **Sunday, February 5, 2017**

I texted Courtney yesterday saying I might drop over tonight because I had not seen her since Christmas.

She said, sure, that would be great. What she did not tell me was that she and her housemates, and half a dozen other friends would be there watching the Lions women's team playing their first game in the AFL.

I was hoping we'd have a quiet drink on her back deck so I could get her advice on TMG, but instead I sat on a beanbag sipping a cider pretending to know who Shannon Campbell was while everyone yelled at the tv.

Thankfully, lightning stopped play in the second quarter, and I got Courtney on her own in the kitchen.

I told her the entire TMG story as she was making guacamole.

She stopped as she was shaking the Tabasco bottle, 'What did you say this guy's name is?' I told her again, 'Thomas Michael Gillies.' 'Spell it.' I did. 'I think I've met him.' 'What?' 'A girl called Flip Gillies used to be my indoor team. She had a brother called Tom. Skinny guy? Looks a bit like Guy Pearce?'

'That's him.' 'And he's dropping books to you at work?' 'Just one,' I said, 'I do not think it means anything, do you?' 'It means he's still alive,' said Courtney,

'Last I heard he was seriously sick. But that was a couple of years ago. Also, he had a little boy.' 'He's married?' 'Dunno about that, but he definitely had a kid who was six or seven at the time. He used to bring him to games.'

'Are you still friends with Flip?' I asked, 'Can you find out more?'

'No way,' said Courtney, 'She's a bitch. Never paid her subs and we think she stole some gear. We all unfriended her.' 'Bugger,' I said.

'The thing is, you say you do not care about this bloke, but obviously you do. How come? What's going on with Sam?'

'Nothing,' I said, 'Everything's fine. ' 'Is he still on about the weather all the time?' 'Yeh, but he's great with Bella and nice to me.'

'Sounds great, what more do you want?'

Then Courtney's friends started yelling again. The footy was back on so I left. As I drove home, I thought about her question: *what more do I want?*

In the immediate short term, I wanted some popcorn chicken, so I took a detour through the drive-thru on Kelvin Grove Road and sat in the carpark, listening to Adele and searching for Flip Gillies on Facebook.

There was no one named that anywhere in the world. Maybe she was she Felicity, or Phillipa. Frances or Francesca? I should have asked Courtney. I was scrolling through every variation I could think of when there was a sharp knock on the window.

It was Sam. Bella was beside him on tiptoe, grinning at me. 'You could have called and asked if we wanted anything,' he said.

'I thought you two were going to have the leftover spaghetti?' I said through a mouthful of chip. 'We didn't feel like it, did we Bella?' said Sam.

'No,' echoed Bella, 'We didn't feel like it.' 'So, I thought we'd go out. Sunday night treat,' said Sam, looking at the wrappers on the passenger seat of my car. He did not mind junk food but disapproved of drive-thrus.

He says if food is not eaten at a table it is not a meal. I think it is an Italian thing. I felt ashamed. 'Courtney didn't have much in the way of food,' I explained, sheepishly.

'Well, come in and sit with us while we eat,' said Sam. After we got home and I had put Bella to bed, Sam made me a cup of tea - he wanted to talk. I said ok.

He said he is worried about me - that I am a bit disconnected, not really myself. He has been thinking that maybe I need more, something to get me excited again. Apparently, I used to be heaps more 'upbeat'. 'You could be right,' I said, 'Maybe I should think about another job. Driving from place to place, somewhere different every day, I do not really have any

work friends. It's kind of lonely, not good for my head.'

'That's exactly what I was thinking,' said Sam, taking my hand. 'I wonder if I should go back to uni?'

'I was thinking more along the lines of another baby.'

I did not know what to say. Sam was the one who had only wanted one. I asked him if he was joking. He said no, but he had changed his mind, mainly because he thought another baby would make me happier. I didn't disagree.

### **Monday February 6, 2017**

At drop-off, this morning I saw Margot (from the prep parents' drinks). We chatted outside the classroom and she asked if I wanted to go for a coffee. I was not working until two, so I said that would be great and we met at the Java Lounge.

We got on well. Margot grew up in Brisbane, but she and Clayton moved back from Canberra late last year. She'd worked as a PA to some minister (who I pretended to have heard of but hadn't) and she had lots of stories about how federal parliament is a hotbed of sex and alcohol, 'picture Schoolies in suits,' she said.

That was part of the reason they'd come back - things could get out of control down there and now they had three kids, Molly who's five and two boys seven and ten so they wanted some stability. 'We can't afford a divorce at this point,' she laughed.

I wanted to know more about the Canberra debauchery as well as having more than one kid, but she became completely distracted when Darren Lockyer sat down at the table beside ours. Suddenly Margot went from being this quite cool person with a catalogue of juicy stories about people in high office to a starstruck fifteen-year-old.

She pretended to take a selfie, but it was obvious she was trying to get a picture of him. 'Does he live around here?' she said, breathless. 'I think so,' I said, 'I've seen him here a couple of times.' 'Oh my God really?' she said, 'Always on a weekday? Or does he come on weekends? Does he ever bring his wife? Or is he always by himself? Is that where he usually sits?' To his credit, Darren Lockyer did not get up and move even though he must have been able to hear her.

I guess he is used to it. I was embarrassed and disappointed - Margot seemed like someone I could be friends with - maybe she still is?

This should not be a friendship deal-breaker. I tried to turn the conversation back to Canberra, then to the kids but had no luck. Apparently, she has been in love with Darren Lockyer since her Dad won tickets to a State of Origin match in 1997. Her older son's name is James because it is Darren Lockyer's middle name. She wanted his first name to be 'Lockie' ('Darren' was too far, even for her) but her husband put his foot down.

I thought she was being weird. I mean, Darren Lockyer is ok looking and seems like a nice guy, but surely this was over the top. But I checked myself - who am I to judge someone about being obsessed? We paid for our coffees and she said maybe we would get our girls together for a play on the weekend.

I suggested we go to Bounce - Bella loves trampolines, but we do not have room for one at home. Margot asked if I had ever seen Darren Lockyer there. I said he has probably got a trampoline at his place. She looked disappointed, but we planned to go on Saturday.

### **Wednesday February 8, 2017**

Quiet at work this morning, so I was searching eBay if I could get a pair of tickets to Adele without selling a kidney. I thought it might be a nice Valentine's Day

present for me and Sam. He will not admit it, but he loves Adele too. Bella and I always laugh when we hear him in the shower. He thinks bathrooms are soundproof. But then I got a text from Courtney.

It read: *Saw your mate Thomas Michael Gilles yesterday. Nikki says he brings his kid to John Carew for swimming every Tuesday.*

I left it an hour before replying: *Srsly? Was the kid in your class?*

Courtney: *No. Mini squad.*

Me: *Was he alone?*

Courtney: *There are heaps of kids in mini squad.*

Me: *Shut up.*

Courtney: *LOL.*

Gah! Just when I think I am not going to think about TMG ever again he pops up! Why? I am not looking for him (not since that night I stalked his sister on Facebook while I sat in the KFC carpark like a lovesick loser), but this sort of think keeps happening!

Is there a greater force at work? What was I to do with this kind of information? Clearly the right thing to do would be to ignore it and move on; go to Priceline and buy an ovulation tracker then send Sam a flirty text asking about storms to show him I am interested. But did I do either of those things? No, I did not.

I googled John Carew Swim School and enrolled Bella in lessons on Tuesday afternoons. Not because of TMG. It is something I have been meaning to do for ages and John Carew is on the way to Mum and Dad's place and I really should take Bella to see them more often.

## **Thursday February 9, 2017**

I think the swimming lessons are a mistake but stupidly I have told Bella and she is dead keen because it is where Courtney works.

I cannot renege. Sam thinks it is a great idea too - we have been hit-and-miss about swimming classes. I suspect he thinks the sight of adorable squishy babies and toddlers splashing around might fire up my somewhat elderly ovaries (is 35 too old to have a baby? Half the internet seems to think so).

What will I do if I see TMG? Will he say hi? Should I? Should thank him for the book? Ask how he is? How his mum is? Should I be surprised to see he has a little boy?

I have been assuming he is a single father but for all I know he is a happily married father of five. What if he is there WITH HIS WIFE? How would she feel if she knew her husband gave a novel to pathology collection lady? But honestly, I do not think he is married or has multiple children.

Taking one kid to watch his sister play indoor cricket is a single-father-of-one activity for sure. I wonder if the mini-squad and swim-school parents sit in the same area? Maybe he will ask if I liked *The Rosie Project*? When I tell him I have not finished it, yet he might think I am a bit slow. But so, what? What sort of a person judges someone on their reading speed?

He might not even recognise me not wearing my work uniform. But odds are I will be picking up Bella straight from work. I wonder if I will have time to change. But into what? I need new clothes.

I have not bought anything new in ages. I should go shopping. John Carew will be teeming with fashionable

mums from Nudgee Junior or whatever they call it now. But the smart thing to do would be to cancel the whole thing. Moggill Rd is a shocker after three. It is stupid to schlep all that way. There are plenty of swim schools near us. The more I think about it, the more I realise John Carew just is not practical.

### **Friday February 10, 2017**

Dad called and offered to take Bella to swimming lessons. He said he and Mum could pick her up from school, take her to her lesson then to their place for dinner then Sam or me could pick her up whenever. He was so excited. I said, 'yeh, good thanks, that'd be great.' But I felt flat.

### **Sunday February 12, 2017**

Sam and I both took Bella to Bounce yesterday afternoon after Margot messaged suggesting we make it a whole family thing. Their boys are eight and ten. They each brought a friend. There were at least eighty thousand kids at Bounce yesterday afternoon. Sam is suddenly less keen on another baby.

**Monday February 13, 2017**

I picked Bella up from Mum and Dad's after her swimming lesson today. Apparently, they had all had a lovely afternoon. Mum had a cappuccino which was milky but better than she thought it would be.

Bella's instructor was Courtney's friend Nikki who has tattoos but seemed very capable. Dad chatted with a nice fellow called Tim - or maybe Tom. Oh. My. God.

I could barely breathe as Dad sipped his whiskey and told me about his new best friend. Tim or maybe Tom, lovely fellow, only in his thirties but the poor bloke uses a walking stick because he has osteoarthritis. I could not believe Dad asked - surely that is a bit personal, but he said he did not ask - Mum did, as if that made it all right.

Then of course Dad told him about their Pilates class and how it has done wonders for his friend Roger who can barely get upstairs. Tim-maybe-Tom said he is considered Pilates, but his son's mum lives in Adelaide, so he does not have a lot of spare time. HIS SON'S MUM! LIVES IN ADELAIDE!

On top of looking after the young fella, Dad prattled on, there is his work; he is a researcher at Queensland University; studying blood cancers.

Oh, dear god. I knew where this was going. Please, please do not let Dad have done what I know he did. Blood leads to pathology, which leads to me.

My parents think all people in any kind of blood-related employment must know each other. Dad told him my name and said I work all over Brisbane, sometimes Greenslopes, sometimes Toowong. All over.

Tim-maybe-Tom asked if I ever worked at Chermside, and Dad said, well yes. He said I am up there regularly. Then he smiled. Dad said it was a proper smile, like he knows me.

### **Thursday February 16, 2017**

Sam's planning a surprise birthday party for me. I found out because Mum left a message on our answering machine saying, 'Hello Sam love. Doug and I are just wondering if you can remind us what time festivities kick off on Saturday? Is it six or seven?'

Mum's always thinks because it is Sam's voice on the answering machine, she is talking directly to him when she leaves a message. I called her straight back and asked what she was talking about. She was horrified she had spilled the beans and begged me not to let on that I know anything.

Apparently, Sam's booked a room at the Paddo next Saturday. He has paid for a drinks package and finger-food and invited 50 people. He has organised everything - music, a cake, a babysitter to pick Bella up at eight and take her home. Mum said he is so excited and so are they so please could I not let on that I know.

I am furious. Sam asked ages ago what I would like to do for my birthday. I told him I would like to go away for a weekend - maybe to Binna Burra.

He knows I do not really like parties and hate surprises so why is he doing it? The darker side of me says it is because throwing me a party makes him look great. And he loves parties - he is generous and outgoing and loves small talk.

He will make a beautiful little speech saying how much he loves me, and everyone will - rightly - think I am the luckiest woman in Brisbane. The kinder side of me

(the one that is losing) says he is just trying to do something nice for my birthday. The way I see it, I have three options:

1) Do nothing. Just go along with it and pretend to be surprised and delighted when we arrive at the Paddo only to realise our quiet family dinner turns out to be a party for fifty.

2) Ask him nicely to cancel it. Thank him profusely and tell him it was super-sweet and kind and a lovely thought but remind him I don't like that kind of thing and I'm getting to the stage where I don't want to have to be friendly.

3) Tell him he has no right to spend our money on a party he should know by now I do not want and will not enjoy. Tell him I am hurt that he is using my birthday as an excuse to do something he wants to do that makes him look like a star and makes me feel like a miserable cow.

**Friday, February 17, 2017**

I'd pretty much decided on option three (Tell Sam I'm really upset about the party and make him cancel it) when he rang this afternoon to tell me he's bought me

TWO TICKETS TO ADELE for my birthday. He said he wanted to surprise me, but because the show's a Monday night he wanted me to have enough time to roster off that afternoon.

'Getting there will be a nightmare,' he said, 'They're shutting off a bunch of roads around the Gabba.'

I was astonished - Adele tickets had sold out in minutes when they were released last year; but somehow - he wouldn't tell me how - he got two and said I should take whoever I like, maybe Libby?

I reminded him that Libby hates Adele as much as he does, and I would probably take Courtney who loves her. I called Courtney and she squealed, and she is generally not a squealer. I revised my attitude to the party from option three to option one, and will now be the most surprised, delighted and grateful birthday girl ever to have a party at the Paddo. Who knows, it could be fun. Attitude is everything.

### **Sunday February 19, 2017**

Felt upbeat most of the weekend. So excited about Adele, and I even started thinking about what to wear to my unsurprising surprise party next week.

Sam was a bit down because it was so hot and humid, he kept thinking there would be a storm, but it never happened.

To cheer him up I asked Mum and Dad if they would mind Bella while we went to see *Assassin's Creed* at Indro. Not my favourite kind of movie but he was happy and the aircon would be blasting so I was happy enough.

Until I started thinking about TMG. It was dark and Sam was deeply involved in the movie so my mind raced.

Should I take Bella to her swimming lesson on Tuesday, knowing he would be there? What should I do if he says hi? Should I say hi? Technically he is a patient so it would be unethical for me to engage with him but because Dad already kind of bridged that gap maybe he is not really a patient. Maybe he would not be there anyway.

Maybe if I talked to him a bit, I would not like him and then I could put the whole thing behind me. Probably best if Mum and Dad take Bella and I stay away. Also, I think I am getting a cold-sore. Probably stress - related.

**Monday February 20, 2017**

Today I felt like I was fourteen again and it was even less fun than it was the first time around.

My cold sore has apparently developed a life of its own and has colonised my entire upper lip and is expanding upwards into my nostril. I am a fool for not driving to the late-night chemist at Red Hill last night for Zovirax and now I am paying the price. I look like a leper.

So, I called in sick, dropped Bella at school (thank God for kiss-and-go zones - although of course there was no kiss), and drove to the chemist at Milton. There is one right across the street from school but there is a café there that is normally teeming with school parents and I did not want to interact.

Parking at Baroona Road is a nightmare. I'd hoped to be able to park right out the front of the chemist so I could dash in and dash out with minimal chance of being seen but forgot about the bloody dance studio upstairs so the carpark was chock-a-block with Range Rovers, toddlers in leotards and mothers with unravaged skin. I ended up way down near the IGA, nine or ten shops away from where I needed to be.

I had forgotten my sunnies but found a pair of Sam's in the glove box - ugly wrap-around ones he bought for a fishing trip years ago. I also put on a SUNCORP bucket hat I found under the backseat.

I ran the gauntlet of the footpath, past the bakery and the fruit shop and the café, hurried into the chemist and made a beeline for the counter. I am pretty sure they thought I was addict.

Thankfully, there was no one waiting at the prescription counter, so as soon as the pharmacist said, 'Can I help you?' I practically yelled, 'Zorvirax please!'

She took one look at me, realised the urgency of the situation and handed me a little blue box without even asking if I had used it before. Clearly, I am a long-time sufferer. I paid, turned and ran for the door, just as THOMAS MICHAEL GILLES WALKED INTO THE SHOP.

As soon as I saw it was him - and I was close enough to see his UQ lanyard - I looked down at the floor and Sam's giant ugly sunglasses slid off my face. I bent to pick them up but TMG beat me to it.

'Here you go,' he said, handing them to me. 'Thanks,' I said. He looked at me for a long second. Then he smiled and asked, 'How've you been?'

'Fine,' I replied, which was obviously a lie given the way I looked. I did not ask how he was. I did not thank him for the book. I did not mention Dad and the swimming lessons. I did not say anything at all.

'Well,' he said, 'It was nice to see you.' Then he walked into the shop, brushing my elbow with his arm as he passed me.

OH MY GOD. I stumbled down the footpath and sat in my car for a full five minutes. I felt like Chicken Little, desperate to tell someone about what just happened.

But of course, I could not tell anyone. What would I say? I must admit it now - I am attracted to Thomas Michael Gillies. It makes no sense and there is nothing I can - or even want to do about it - but there it is. I drove home, put the kettle on and went to the bathroom to deal with my cold-sore. It was horrendous, but TMG had not seemed to notice.

Maybe he just has nice manners, or he is particularly good at hiding what he really thinks, or maybe he is not just very observant. Mum used to say that if a woman has one nice feature, that is all a man will see.

Maybe he was so captivated by my green eyes that he failed to notice the abomination on my lip. Drinking my tea and thinking what to do next, if anything, I heard Sam's phone ring.

That was weird because he was at work. He must have left it on the hall table. He has not done that for ages. I went to pick it up, thinking it would probably be him trying to find his phone, but it was not. The call was from Libby.

For a second, I thought, 'Why is Libby calling Sam?' Then I remembered the party. No doubt she is helping him organise it. Sam loves a party, but he is hopeless at organising things so no doubt she is all over it. Libby used to be an event planner so is an absolute gun at that kind of thing.

Now I am mad at Libby as well as at Sam. But then I remembered the Adele tickets and my decision to be happy about the party so I called Sam and told him I had his phone and said I'd drop it into his office.

'Thanks, babe,' he said, leaning through the open car window to kiss the top of my head, 'I worried I'd left it on the bus.'

I did not tell him about the missed call from Libby.

I drove home and tried to take my mind off things by sorting out the pantry. Mum always said that in times of trouble, the best thing to do is to 'chop wood and carry water' - do the mundane things that need to be done.

Obviously, no wood to be chopped in steamy, sweaty February Brisbane but I guess the 2017 equivalent is chucking out dented cans of tomatoes and spices dated pre-2010.

I realised I have owned the same jar of smoked paprika since before I met Sam. It was scary how easily I tossed it in the bin.

Mum was wrong about chopping wood and carrying water; even with Adele at full-blast and my hands busy, my thoughts hurtled around like a bee in a jar. The big questions I have are:

1) What to do next, if anything, about TMG.

Specifically, should I take Bella to swimming lessons tomorrow, or get Mum and Dad to do it, knowing Dad will chat to him again (if he is there). The right thing to do, of course is to go and behave like a grown-up and say hi, and in the conversation let him know that I am happily married. Although of course Dad might have mentioned this to him last week, but maybe he didn't and there is no way I can ask Dad about that - or is there?

2) How to deal with Libby re party. Obviously not going to say anything before it happens but we have known each other since uni, and she knows even better than Sam how uncomfortable I am with the idea of surprises.

I wonder who she is going to bring? There will be a bloke for sure. Libby never shows up at a party on her own. That makes it even more annoying. I will be paying for beer, wine and soft drinks as well as finger-food for Libby's latest online hook-up.

3) What to wear, and will my cold-sore clear up in time? No matter what I think of the party or its planners, I want to look nice.

**Tuesday February 21, 2017**

The good news is my cold-sore is on the mend. The bad news is poor Bella has an ear infection. She woke up at 1am burning hot and crying. Poor little poppet. It took both Sam and me to hold her still to so we could get some Panadol into her then it was ages before she could go back to sleep. Sam stayed with her saying he would take today off work to look after her because I really could not afford to call in sick again. I was scheduled to work an early at Chermside.

I felt terrible leaving Bella. She was, curled up on the couch with Sam, her forehead was sweaty, and her cheeks were too pink, but at least she was asleep. Both were. I kissed them and left, leaving a note to remind Sam to make a doctor's appointment as soon as he could. I did not have to do that - I knew he would not forget, but it made me feel I was doing something.

I called school to tell them Bella would be away the next couple of days then rang Mum and Dad to let them know swimming lessons would not be happening. They were disappointed and I was too, but at the same time I was relieved because it kicked my decision-making down the road a bit and gave me more time to think.

I swung through the McDonald's drive-thru at Stafford for a coffee and a sausage & egg McMuffin and thought of the first day I 'met' TMG - I had done pretty much the same thing. I thought, wouldn't it be weird if it happened again? Of course, it would not, and it did not. Not exactly anyway.

When I arrived at work TMG was not in the waiting room, but his Mum was.

'I'll be with you in a second,' I said and went into the collection room to put my bag down and start up the computer, telling myself this was no big deal.

Just another elderly lady - she probably lives next door at the Wheller On The Park retirement village. I went back out into the waiting room and jumped when I saw she was no longer on her own.

There was a woman sitting beside Mrs Gillies (not that I know she is called Mrs Gilles - she could have been married three times or never for all I know). I guessed it was Courtney's former friend, Flip - she looks quite a lot like TMG, the same blue eyes and sharp Cheekbones, a couple of years younger than him, I guessed. She held two takeaway coffees.

'Come on in,' I said to the two of them in general, not wanting to make the same mistake I did all those weeks ago. The old lady stood up, smiled at her daughter and walked ahead of me into the collection room.

I looked at the form she handed me. Her name is Lorraine. Lorraine Gilles.

I asked how she was.

'Fine, thanks,' she replied, 'Although it seems silly to say that when I'm here for a blood test, but I'm fine. I just have overprotective children.'

'It must be nice to know they love you,' I said.

'Well yes, they're very good to me. Their dad died eighteen months ago so I moved into one of the apartments next door - there are lots of people around but they worry about me being alone so the minute I say I'm a bit tired or anything they bully me into going to the doctor. So here I am.'

I felt brave and asked her, 'How many kids do you have?' Two, my daughter who is with me today and my son - he works at the university. I almost said, 'I know,' but I caught myself in time.

'Do you see much him?' 'Oh yes, he comes over most weekends. He had a few health problems himself, so we look after each other. We fight over who cooks! We each want the other one to take it easy!'

'That's so sweet,' I said.

'Yes, he's a darling. But he is moving to Adelaide at Easter. His ex-wife lives there. They have a little boy and they tried to make this long-distance parenting caper work, but it has not. I could have told them. I don't think parents should stay together if they're unhappy, but I do think they should stay in the same state.'

I could not think of anything to say so I just nodded. *He is moving to Adelaide!* I thought, *at Easter.*

Then I taped a piece of cotton wool to her arm and told her to take care. I needed to sit down for a minute before I called the next patient.

### **Thursday, February 23, 2017**

Bella is much better, thank God. It has been a rough couple of days; no one's been sleeping much. I was worried what Sam would do about the party on Saturday

night if Bella weren't alright by then - it is two days away.

There is no way I'd leave her with a babysitter if she was still fevery and I'd bet Sam wouldn't cancel the party, thinking she'd be fine - only an ear infection, after all.

Anyway, she is ok and will probably go back to school tomorrow. Sam's been so good about staying home with her, he quite likes working from home. I would hate it.

Even if drawing blood in our lounge room was possible, I would prefer to be out in the world. I know I am contradictory and that's why Sam struggles to understand me.

I am an introvert who needs to be around people, yet I hate parties and small talk. I like big talk, and there are not many people in my world I can have that with. I think that is why I am so focussed on TMG - he seems like the big talk type.

I think I need some professional help with my TMG dilemma. I did not know where to start - Google? Ask the doctor? See if work has any services available? But I do not think it is a mental health issue.

More a moral and a marriage health issue. I remembered Libby has been seeing a counsellor off and on for years - she had her work cut out for her during the Nordic-porn obsessed boyfriend episode of 2015.

I messaged Libby and asked for the counsellor's name and number. Libby messaged back, 'What's up? You ok?' I messaged back, 'Yeh, all good (thumbs up emoji), just at a bit of a crossroads with work and stuff. Just need some objective advice.'

She sent through the number. Cindy Werner. I called and the receptionist said Cindy Werner was booked up until late October. I sighed but then, like a miracle, she said, 'hold on, if you can get here in half an hour, we've had a cancellation come up just this minute.' As luck would have it, Cindy Werner works in Woolloongabba and I was right around the corner on Vulture Street.

The appointment went well. I clicked with Cindy Werner immediately. It will take me a little while to process everything she said - it was all a bit confronting, but what really shocked me was what I discovered when I got home.

Libby told Sam I had asked her about a counsellor! When I got home just after six, he was waiting for me with a glass of wine, the table set for dinner. Bella had already eaten and was back to her usual smiley self again; she was bathed, her hair was washed, and she was wearing new pyjamas with stars on them. He must have taken her shopping.

When Bella was tucked into bed Sam asked me about the counsellor and wondered why I went. I did not have to ask how he knew, of course it was Libby. He said I should not be mad at Libby; she was just worried about me and so was he.

He also wondered why I had not told him I was in a bit of a state over work. He knew I was a bit bored but had no clue it was that bad.

I understand why he is so anxious. His mum packed up and left when he and his brother were eleven and nine, telling their dad simply that she, 'needed more from life.' She moved to Darwin where she hooked up with a bloke called Scratch and they run a tropical fruit wholesale business.

She's still there, still with Scratch and apparently doing well - she sends Sam cards at Christmas and on

his birthday and always ends saying she hopes one day he'll forgive her and come and visit - or let her visit us. But he says no way, never.

Sometimes I think that happening when he was a kid is what makes him so obsessed by the weather - you can see storms coming; you can prepare for them and clean up afterwards. Sam was blindsided when his mum left and has never gotten over it.

'If you're unhappy at work,' he said, 'And we do not want another baby, then maybe another job is a good idea. I am ok with that. I am ok if you do not work at all! I just don't understand why you needed to talk to a counsellor before you talked to me.'

That put me in a pickle. Because I did not talk to Cindy Werner about work at all, except when I described how I met TMG.

'What do you think you would like to do?' he asked, pouring me another wine, 'A few weeks ago you mentioned going back to uni. What would you like to study if you did?'

'I don't know,' I said, 'I don't think I need a different job, just something to occupy my mind. I do

not really have any hobbies, or anything do I? Maybe do some creative writing courses?'

'That's a great idea,' said Sam. It wasn't a complete lie - I have had the idea bouncing around in my head for a while so I felt ok saying, 'I might go out to UQ tomorrow and have a look around. See if it is changed. I don't want to do an online course; I'd want to be on campus.' 'Do it,' said Sam, 'It's the last day of O Week, isn't it? Maybe you should take your toga.'

### **Friday February 24, 2017**

After I finished work today at Toowong I drove out to St Lucia, miraculously found a park and spent a few hours wandering around the campus. I had forgotten how beautiful it is and how happy I had been there. But I felt ancient. The students are all so young. Most of them looked to me as though they should have still been in Year 10. A group of girls asked me directions - maybe they thought I was staff member?

I drifted through the ground floor of the Forgan Smith and Michie buildings and looked at the framed pictures of the academic staff and wondered what it would be like to spend your life in a place like this, away from

shopping centres and primary schools and middle-aged functions in suburban pubs.

I don't think I'd like that kind of life in a long term-kind of way and Lord knows I'm not smart enough for it, but I think doing a subject or two might be fun, and I'd like coming here even one day a week.

Then, of course I started thinking about TMG. He is a researcher, so he would work either in the bio-med buildings at the other end of the campus, or maybe even at Herston.

I spent twenty minutes sitting under a tree in the Great Court like a lovesick undergrad wondering whether to walk down to the bio-med precinct. I decided I would do it but told myself I was just checking out the rest of the campus.

I was also interested to see what food options were available and the walk would take me past the union complex. Because it was O-Week there were lots of tents and trestle-tables set up, people recruiting members for their clubs and societies, giving away sausages in bread and vegetarian snacks in an effort to attract attention.

When I was a student, I inadvertently joined the Catholic society because they were giving out cupcakes. I wondered if TMG was involved in any clubs and societies. How would I feel if he were recruiting for the international socialists, or even worse, the Young Liberals? But then I remembered he would be too old to be a Young Liberal. He could be an old one!

I was walking down the hill, towards the bio-tech building when I saw him. There was TMG, chaining his bike to a railing.

I was only a few meters away, and I was not wearing a hat or dark glasses. I was wearing my uniform. He looked up and smiled.

Unless I turned and walked in the other direction there was no avoiding it: I was about to have my first conversation with Thomas Michael Gillies.

I walked towards him and stopped beside the bike rack. 'Hi,' he said, 'We keep meeting. Are you stalking me?' He spoke in a serious way, but his eyes were laughing.

'No,' I said, 'But our paths seem to keep crossing. It's weird.'

There was an uncomfortable silence. 'Anyway, how are you?' I said. 'Pretty good,' he replied, 'What are you doing out here? Are you studying?'

'No, just thinking about it.'

'That's great,' he said, 'Literature?'

'Maybe, or Creative Writing.'

'You should do it,' he said, 'I think everyone should be able to tell a story.'

Another silence. Then he took a breath, averted his eyes and said, 'I don't suppose you have time for a coffee? Unless you have to be somewhere?'

'Actually, I'm on my way home,' I said, even though it was not true. 'OK,' he smiled, 'Another time maybe?'

'Maybe,' I stammered. He pulled a scrap of paper out of his jeans pocket and scribbled his number on it.

'Message me if you want to catch up. Totally up to you. I do not know ... I'd just like to have a conversation with you - find out what you thought of *The Rosie Project*.' I looked at his number, then at him and said, 'Oh yes, thanks. I really liked it.'

'Me too,' he said, 'Anyway, it was good to run into you again, J.'

'Yeh,' I smiled, 'It was good to see you too ... Thomas.'

'Just Tom,' he corrected me, 'OK well, I'll let you go. Hopefully, I'll hear from you.' He hitched his backpack onto his shoulder and walked up the hill, limping just a little.

I waited until my heart slowed then walked towards the carpark, holding TMG's number as though it was a live grenade. My head was spinning. Now I know it is not my imagination - he is interested in me.

Of course, coffee could just be coffee. Maybe he is just lonely. The difference of course is he is single, and I am not. I found a bench by the river, TMG's number in one hand and my phone in the other. I knew what I had to do.

I sent TMG a message. It said: 'Hi, I'm sorry but I won't be able to have coffee with you. Not sure if you know, but I am married so I cannot. Thanks anyway.'

After a few minutes he replied, 'No worries. Understand completely. Although I did only mean coffee. All the best, Tom.'

Well, that is embarrassing. Clearly, I read him all wrong, but thank God I have drawn a line and that is that. He is moving to Adelaide in a few weeks and I will not see him again.

I will not go to John Carew, and if I enrol at uni next semester, he will be long gone.

It - whatever 'it' was, is over and that is that. I deleted the messages and threw the piece of paper with his number into the bin.

It was the right thing to do and I immediately felt better on the drive home once I forced myself to think about Bella and Sam and our life together.

Mum says happiness is a decision, so there and then I decided to be happy with what I have, which is a lot.

## **Saturday February 25, 2017**

It is lunchtime and Sam, and Bella are out, apparently, they are 'looking at garden lighting systems,' at

Bunnings. I know they are probably at the Paddo decorating the room for my party, so I played along and told them to enjoy their sausages-in-bread.

Not sure what to wear tonight. As far as know, (or I am meant to know), it is just the three of us are going out for dinner, so I cannot be too dressed up - that would be weird.

I'll likely wear the middle-aged mother's going-out uniform of, 'jeans and a nice top' but I will go to a bit of extra effort; I'll blow-dry my hair, slap on a bit more make-up than usual, put on some heels. Mum's right. It is all about attitude. I am excited now. I wonder who will be there?

### **Friday, March 3, 2017**

Sam and Libby are having an affair. He moved in with his brother, 'for now.' I am at home with Bella, trying to work out what to do. I found out an hour into the party, which was almost a week ago. I was having a great time. When Sam, Bella and I walked into the room and everyone yelled 'SURPRISE!' of course I was not surprised, but I was truly, genuinely happy.

Mum and Dad were there, Courtney, a bunch of girls from school and their partners, Claire and Rob from next door, Margot and Clayton, Libby and the guy she had brought as her date - I think his name was Dan. Maybe Dave? Does not matter.

Anyway, at 8, Sam took Bella out to the street to meet Claire's daughter Emily who he had arranged to take her home. I kissed Bella goodnight told her what a wonderful surprise she and Daddy had given me.

Libby topped up my Champagne. I was chatting with Margot when Mum appeared at my shoulder in a flap saying she and Dad had brought Bella's stuffed puppy with them - she'd left it at their place yesterday when she and Sam had called over to pick up some photos of me for the photo board.

Puppy was in their car underneath the building - was it too late to get it? I told mum to give me her keys - I would race down and get Puppy and hopefully would get him to Bella before she left with Emily.

But my heels slowed me down. Emily and Bella must have gone because there, in a corner of the carpark was Sam, holding Libby's hands, kissing her.

They both saw me at the same moment and stepped backwards, away from each other. There was nothing any of us could say. The party was in full swing above us.

I could not hear it, but I could imagine the laughter bubbling over the playlist Sam and Libby had put together for me.

Now, they looked to me as if waiting for instructions on what to do next. 'Let us go back up,' I said, 'I can't talk about this now.'

There were no speeches. I plastered a smile on as I cut the beautiful cake and thanked everyone for coming. I may never become a published author, but I could a hundred percent win an Oscar for my performance that night.

Finally, finally, people started to drift away about ten. I do not know what time Libby slunk away. Sam and I were the last to leave. We got into an Uber just after midnight.

We did not talk at all that night, but there has been a lot said since.