

# INFERTILITY

## Road to Hell and Back

Memoir of my struggle with Infertility,  
a failed Adoption,  
a hate for Abortions,  
and a Marriage that fell apart.



**Azelene Williams**

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## *Road to Hell and Back*

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Azelene Williams

As told to  
Victoria Austen

Melbourne

New York

London

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**I want to dedicate this book to:**

*Sian Hunter Williams:*

*You are my gracious gift from God, and my entire world.*

*Glyn Williams:*

*You are my pillar, savour and my best friend.*

*I love you guys*



Some names has been changed



# **INFERTILITY**

*The Road to Hell and Back*

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Azelene Williams

As told to  
Victoria Austen





# Preface

*To my dear readers,*

This is probably one of the most intimate and private memoirs you will ever read. I hope that you will do so with consideration and that you will understand why I have decided to share the most important phase of my life with you. I did not write this book to seek sympathy nor because I am a very outspoken person. It all started as a personal journal, many years ago. I decided to publish this book for the following reasons:

- *To remind myself on a daily basis not to take life for granted.*
- *Because I know that there are so many people out there with similar problems.*
- *Maybe you know someone who is going through infertility now, and you don't know what to say to them, or maybe you are even unable to understand them.*

- *Most importantly for me: If you are thinking of aborting your baby. Please read my book and THINK AGAIN!*

On reading this memoir, you will know that you are not alone and that there are hope and deliverance in every situation. You might learn something from my experiences, who knows. Perhaps you bought the book to compare your own treatment or journey with mine. It might be out of curiosity. If that is your reason, I hope that you enjoy reading it. For the ones that know me, I hope you learn a different side to me, a side you never knew. Perhaps you will understand me better than before.

If I can touch one person's life with my story, I will have succeeded in the objective that I set out to achieve when I made the decision to publish it. This was not my mission when I started writing my journal.

When I was experiencing infertility, I felt like the loneliest person alive. All my friends around me were getting pregnant. None of them were going through what I was. They couldn't understand my frustration, pain, and longing. Back in 1999, I also found that people didn't really want to talk about their infertility problems. This was hard for me, because I didn't have anybody who understood what I was going through, or what I was emotionally dealing with. I had support from my family and friends, but they never really understood and most of the time tried to avoid me, especially when I was on treatment. I turned to the Internet and made wonderful friends there. There were

women who were in a similar situation and who felt exactly like I did. I learned a lot about all the treatments and got to understand why women would sometimes go a bit nuts when they were on the treatment. I wasn't always myself when I was on treatment. In the beginning, I thought I was the only person in the world who felt this way. I soon realized that I had Internet support systems and friends who were going through the same dilemma.

These days, it is much easier to talk about infertility, because today more and more women are experiencing it. I am not qualified to comment on the reason for this, but the percentage of infertile women is increasing every year.

What I want you to realize is ***that you are not alone***. You might not know me, but by just reading my memoir, you will realize that there are people out there who can and will support you and understand you.

I am glad that I kept on writing during this sad, unhappy part of my life, because today I can share my infertility memoir with you.

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# A Letter To My Child

I dedicate this book to you, my child, so that you will always know how very much I wanted to have you. I didn't always think that I would want children, and ended up devoting a large part of my life to business. At that stage of my life, children were not important to me. I even thought for a time I didn't want to have any. I was so self-centred back then that I did exactly what I wanted, when I wanted, and had time for nothing else.

To be honest, I didn't want the responsibility of parenthood. It was enough at times just having a marriage, without having to take the time to raise a family. A marriage takes work, and each person needs to grow and cross bridges of their own before completely settling down. But this, in turn, can create a selfish partnership. There are a few moments in life when you see the bigger picture, and when my own father passed away, your grandfather - I got to take a good look at myself.

I suddenly realised why one cannot live without children. Children provide a whole new dimension, and subsequently give a mother and a father a fulfilment in life like no other. I suddenly decided I wanted to be a mom too, just like my own mother, or my grandmother. I know they couldn't ever have imagined life without their children. I just can't believe it took me to lose my own parent to realise how very much I wanted to be a parent myself.

With this book, I want to show you how you are the result of the most important and life changing decision in my

whole existence. If I could live my life over again, I would make the same decision. Deciding to have a baby is the start of my journey, and I will find you.

All my love,

Your Mommy

xxx

# 1

## Blue Skies Ahead

My story begins in Pretoria, South Africa, back in 1990. I was happy and carefree, and Pretoria, now known as Tshwane, was a wonderfully peaceful place to live. I remember feeling completely settled there, and I loved everything about it. I loved the contrast between the modern outskirts with their beautifully elegant malls and the stunning nature that flowed in and around Pretoria like a rippling river.

Some of my fondest memories are going bike riding through the rural areas, usually with my husband, John. Sometimes we would spend the entire weekend flying through the fields on our mountain bikes. We would gaze over the clusters of Jacaranda trees in full bloom, as they let off their vibrant purple haze.

When John and I first lived together, it was in a boxy one-bedroom apartment over the city. As we were simply renting it we weren't allowed to paint the bleak white walls with any other hue. The walls were stark white, the floor tiles were stark white, and John's furniture was cold cast iron. The only colour seemed to be on our green, chequered couch, and as a result, our apartment felt very

clinical rather than warm and homey. It's ironic in a way, as I ended up spending a huge amount of our marriage in a clinic, and it would in turn contribute to the demise of our relationship.

It's amazing to look at myself back then, as though I'm looking back at someone else. I felt like I had it all, living in a tiny apartment with a man I thought was the love of my life, and living in a country that seemed would be forever the epitome of peace and tranquillity. Now I'm living in a grand house in the Middle East, with another man who proved to be my soul mate. The 22 year old Azelene is worlds apart from the Azelene who stares back at me from the mirror now. But if there's one thing I know, it's that life's experiences essentially determine who you will become.

Saying that, there are many parts of my personality that are just as true today as they were back then. I had the happiest of childhoods, and received ample amounts of love from both my parents and my sister, Ronell. Dad always wanted a boy, so he encouraged me to play cricket and rugby, and taught me how to use a drill, chainsaw, and even how to hunt. He bought me a rifle to go hunting with when I was just six years old. But it made sense to me to have this fun, tomboy existence. I embraced the excitement of riding on motorbikes with my friends, most of whom were boys. Looking back I must have been popular, as everyone seemed to flock to our house after school or on the weekends. It was a spacious, colonial home, with beautiful stretches of grass surrounding it. The huge, lazy trees provided us with ample

amounts of space to play in the shade.

But one thing is for certain - my family loved me for who I was. I remember making fun of them in a playful, light-hearted way, trying to make them laugh. I remember looking back at my reflection then - a skinny, tall girl dressed in scruffy jeans and tight little tops, with a boyishly short haircut and not a scrap of makeup. I was comfortable in my own skin, and my family made me feel comfortable. This in turn made me a caring and positive being, as well as being incredibly family orientated. Perhaps that's why my journey through infertility felt all the more gruelling, because family has always been the centre of my world, and it often seemed I was failing at making my own.

But I was used to working hard for what I wanted. As I was growing up I found it harder and harder to keep up with the reading and writing of my peers. It was a horrible feeling being at the bottom of my class a lot of the time during my teens. In 1989, I decided I wanted to leave school and start making it in the working world. My failure at school gave me a core determination to prove myself. I needed to prove myself in every way, and to show people I could be a success.

In 1990, when I was just 16 years old, I started my first full time job as a tea girl, in an anaesthiologist's office. I stayed there for three years, working my way up until I was able to help with the running and management. This role carried over to a psychologist's office, where I happily stayed for two years. I enjoyed the working world very much – I loved earning my own money

and learning the complexities of how a business is ran. It made my self-esteem blossom, and I found myself in my early twenties very content and fulfilled, enjoying each moment of every day.

Then in 1995, I took the plunge and started my own business. I decided to open up my own launderette, which I impulsively gave the simple name, 'Azelenes Launderette'. My life was a simple one, where each week was much like the last, and before you knew it months had passed without too much to report. The Launderette took up most of my time; because it was open 7 day's a week. I'd find myself getting up at five in the morning every day to ensure my business ran smoothly. I would drive to the restaurants I had contracts with, pick up their laundry and get them straight in the machines as soon as I stepped foot through the front door. Fortunately, I had workers there to do the ironing, so would return back to our home for a couple of hours of peace and quiet before hitting the road again to deliver the freshly washed and ironed table laundry back. This cycle could be repeated two more times a day depending on whether there were any functions. But I enjoyed it and thrived on being busy and needed.

The weekends were a different story, however. My social life had to fit into my very busy work schedule. Where my week lacked in fun and play, my weekends made up for it with ample parties with my closest friends. There was a whole group of us – the girls, Liezl, Debbie, Yvette and me, and our other halves, Martin, Etienne, Jaco and of course John. None of us had any children, and

we certainly made the most of being young and carefree. Whether it was camping, a barbecue or just having some drinks at one of our homes, we were always hanging out together. My only sister, Ronell, also often joined us; we were very close and spent lots of time together. Our favourite was long conversations over a glass of Red Wine. There were another couple, Glyn and Thelna they were more Ronell's friends, but socialized a lot with us as well. I've known Thelna from school, as she was one of Ronell's friends in school.

John was my best friend though. As soon as we met we had a strong connection. I fell for his charming smile and kind eyes instantaneously, along with his tall, slim build and light brown hair. He was so friendly and charismatic, and I couldn't help but laugh at his funny sense of humour. We met on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1994, at a nightclub in Pretoria. John was a bit of an entrepreneur too. He had started his own building contractor business and had already been employed on several new developments. It was a new undertaking, and so required expense from him as well as a great deal of hard work and labour. But he oozed confidence and passion, which in turn made me more enthusiastic about my own business venture.

Our relationship flourished wonderfully. We were youthful, happy and enjoyed making a success of ourselves. Just five months after we met we moved in together, into that small, boxy, one bedroom apartment. Six months after that we started building our first house. We made it into a beautiful home and imagined growing old there

with one another. Of course after some time we got itchy feet again. But I will always recall that incredible feeling we both had instilled within our souls - that nothing could hold us back. The world was our oyster, and we were going to conquer it together. We lived in that house for two years before John proposed to me, and soon after we got married.

So, that should have been the start to our 'happily ever after.' We were married, living in a beautiful house, both earning a fair wage from our jobs. Everything had been going brilliantly up to that point, so surely it couldn't be an uphill struggle from there? If only I knew what fate had in store for us? I sometimes wonder if I were to live my life over again, would I do anything differently. I endured so much loss, both financially and emotionally. I lost my father, I lost my husband, I often feel I lost three babies....

But would I do it all over again if given the chance?

## 2

# I Think We Have A Problem...

The month I always go back to when I think of the beginning of my infertility issues is November 1999. John and I had been trying to make a baby the good old fashioned way for nine months before then, but to no avail. Each month came and went, and I had been so sure that it would just happen straight away for us, like it did for so many others.

It wasn't even like I had been off my contraception injections for only nine months either. I had stopped having them for a total of 21 months by November 1999, so technically my system should have been ready and willing to do what nature intended and allow me to carry a baby. But as soon as I had stopped the contraception injections my cycle became irregular. I could quite often go two to three months between periods, and would have no idea when the next one would be or how long it would last. Perhaps it was one of the many small signs that presented itself to me throughout my journey, that there would be many ups and downs to be endured.

After nine months of trying, John and I

agreed that maybe the time had come to go and see a doctor. We both had questions and we both had worries. But we were both under the same illusion that if there was a problem, the doctor would be able to fix it. After all, with modern medicine there is surely a solution to any problem, and whatever the problem was with us, we were certain it could be solved. We decided to enjoy the rest of our year, not giving it too much thought, and embark on that chapter after the New Year.

January 2000 arrived and so did our appointment with Doctor Smith, a well-known gynaecologist in Pretoria. He was a tall man of an average build, and I instantly felt at ease with him. I felt at ease with the whole situation. It was a new year, a new century, and I had faith in it delivering good fortune to us. After scanning my abdomen with a look of intense focus on his face, he nodded his head and told us to come and meet him in his office as soon as I had sorted myself out.

Once I had finished cleaning the smear of transparent jelly off my stomach, John and I followed him into another room. He sat us both down so we were facing him, with an unsteady looking wooden desk between us. It had various objects scattered across it - a name stamp, a pot of pens, a photo of his family, numerous paperclips and post-it pads, and then our file, spread open and empty in front of him. I wondered how full that file would become...

Doctor Smith explained that I was indeed not ovulating. A wave of sadness poured over me and I just stared at the doctor's warm and friendly

face, waiting for his solution, praying there was a solution. He spoke gently and kindly to us, suggesting we tried a medication called Clomid for three months. Its purpose was to encourage my ovaries to develop eggs, and therefore help me to ovulate since I was struggling on my own. As it would simply be in tablet form and not injections, it was a no brainer. We went straight to the pharmacy. So there we were - embarking on this three month trial that we firmly believed would remedy our problem. The weight gradually piled on, a total of 15 kilograms to be exact, but as I had the height of 1.73 metres and only the mass of 49 kilograms to begin with the weight gain didn't appear to be very dramatic. In actual fact, I looked healthier than ever. But it seemed the Clomid wasn't encouraging my body to do anything. My menstrual cycle was still all over the place and the doctor once again established that I was not ovulating. I continued on with the treatment, believing with all my might that it would work.

Two months passed, and I finally noticed a more regular pattern to my cycle. I had the conviction that everything was coming together, so I didn't bat an eyelid when Doctor Smith decided to conduct a laparoscopy that March. I went into the clinic for the procedure feeling surprisingly positive, and as it wasn't the first time I had experienced a laparoscopy, I wasn't remotely daunted. I had gone through three previously when I was younger due to developing cysts on my ovaries. The laparoscopy that day, however, could examine the exterior of my uterus, my fallopian

tubes and my ovaries, simply using a tiny camera. Any problems could be found, scar tissue for example, and would perhaps account for some of my fertility setbacks.

But everything looked normal, and the doctor determined that I was indeed finally ovulating. I left the clinic later that day, somewhat sore, but with my heart fluttering with joy. I couldn't wait for John to get back from work to share this news with him. The news that my body was beginning to function properly fuelled a new passion into our marriage. Our sex life was better than ever, despite the fact it was no longer about finding one another irresistible, but about making our very own baby. I would think, "This is it now, we're going to do it!" The Clomid was working, so surely there was nothing more to it.

We ended up making love almost every day. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months....and still there was no baby. I was growing increasingly frantic and nerves were getting the better of me. I had also discovered that Clomid shouldn't be used for long stretches of time as it can make the lining of the uterus too thin for a fertilised egg to implant. I didn't know what was going wrong and could sense my time on the medication running out. I was beginning to feel desperate.

Before we knew it half the year had passed and it was July. At the end of the month, John took himself to the doctor after coming down with what he suspected was a bladder infection. It was a chilly day, and I waited at home, cuddled up in a soft, pale

blue fleece and my grey tracksuit trousers, reading a book. I had just put the kettle on to boil when I heard John come in through the front door. He wore a tired, perplexed look on his face, and slumped down on the green, chequered sofa with a sigh.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, rushing to sit down next to him. I stroked his hair lovingly, filled with worry, not knowing what bad news he was about to tell me.

“The doctor I saw, Doctor Davies, made me do a sperm test today,” he said, a self-conscious flush spreading over his cheeks.

“Really?” I responded, arching my eyebrows in surprise. “What did he say?”

John paused for a moment, shrugged his shoulders and leaped up from the couch.

“Just that I do have a bladder infection, which I already knew, but that it would be wise to have my sperm tested as we’ve been trying to conceive with no positive result yet.”

John began frantically busying himself by organising the clutter abandoned on the dining room table. He didn’t seem to want to catch my eye.

“Well, that’s a good thing to do I suppose,” I murmured at last, feeling sheepish. I knew he felt his masculinity was being attacked and I needed to make him feel slightly better. “It won’t be because of your sperm anyway, but at least that’ll be something else to cross off the list,” I smiled, making light of the situation. “I mean, how unlucky can we really be? Me not being able to ovulate *and* you having a low sperm count? No way – it’s fine.”

I got up and gave him a big hug, and then joined in with the organisation of the clutter. We didn't talk about it again for the rest of the day.

Three days later, on July 28<sup>th</sup>, we went in to see Doctor Davies together. He was a tall man, with dark hair and an attractive face. He beamed at us as we walked into his office, and I instantly felt relaxed and welcome. He informed us that John's sperm count was, regrettably, very low. The reality was that we had a mere five percent chance of conceiving naturally. John and I looked at each other in complete shock. We were not expecting that kind of news at all. I squeezed my husband's hand affectionately and listened to what Doctor Davies was telling us.

"It's very unfortunate," he said, looking at John, "but the report indicates that there isn't really any chance for you to conceive naturally."

There was a moment of silence between all three of us. The doctor seemed to just be staring at us, absorbing our reaction. I sensed that John was holding his breath, not knowing what to say or do. I could feel tears stinging my eyes, and I looked down, watching a couple of water droplets fall to my lap.

"There are other options guys," Doctor Davies added. "Take these reports back to Doctor Smith and he'll explain where to go from here."

I cried all of the way home. John was being incredibly strong though. He held my hand and encouraged me, telling me everything would be okay. But I wanted it all to happen then, like we had planned. Infertility wasn't meant to happen to me.

By the middle of August I was beginning to feel more upbeat again. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, we went to see Doctor Smith with the update in our infertility case. He looked through all of the reports and scratched his head thoughtfully. John and I sat opposite him, hand in hand once more, waiting for the verdict.

“Right, there are three main options,” he began, with an intense look upon his face. “The first option, which I would recommend, is artificial insemination. We would take the sperm from you, John, and wash it. Then the best sperm would be injected through to your uterus, Azelene.”

He sat back in his chair, looking triumphant. John cleared his throat quickly, ready to respond.

“So, is that the procedure that would be most likely to work?” he asked, letting go of my hand. The doctor shook his head and closed his eyes.

“No, no, no. It might work, and in many cases it does. But it is very inexpensive when you compare it to procedures such as IVF and ICSI, which are the other two options. So it is worth trying the artificial insemination initially, just in case it does work,” he explained.

Both John and I let out a heavy sigh at the same time. I looked over at my husband, whose eyes looked tired and sad.

“Shall we give it a try?” I asked him, taking his hand in mine again. He nodded silently, and looked back at the doctor.

“Right then,” said Doctor Smith, confidently and smiled. “Let’s make you an appointment then!”

# 3

## Exploring Other Options

A couple of weeks later, I sat at home staring at a small piece of paper. On it there was a phone number belonging to a lady called Elmin, whose brother in law was my sister's boss at the time. Feeling brave, I picked up the house phone and dialled her number. I listened to the ringing of the unanswered phone, biting my bottom lip nervously. Eventually a woman picked up – she sounded older than me, but also very gentle and kind. It was Elmin.

She told me how glad she was that I had called and asked how I was getting on with my current doctor and the Clomid. She listened carefully to my story, offering support and friendly advice. After struggling with infertility herself, Elmin had gone to a clinic called The Lab which was located in Johannesburg.

She strongly recommended I looked into going there.

“Did their treatment work for you?” I asked timidly, enjoying our conversation despite feeling shy. “I couldn't actually continue with their

procedures, only because we couldn't afford it," she replied honestly. "But they gave their advice on what course of action we should take. The thing is, Azelene, they *specialise* in infertility problems, so it's good to even just consult them before starting any procedures. It'll stop you spending money unnecessarily."

I got off the phone after some time and thought long and hard about Elmin and her advice. My gut feeling was to get an appointment at The Lab as soon as possible, and see what happens from there. I made a call to Doctor Smith's rooms and cancelled the appointment to start the artificial insemination.

The infertility clinic was in Johannesburg, about an hour's drive from where our home was in Pretoria. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000, I phoned the clinic and made an appointment to see a Doctor Robetz in four days time. I felt that it was the beginning of a significant chapter for me, and the realisation that I could soon be carrying my own child was almost overwhelming. My head was full of questions and doubts, and I was constantly wondering how it was all going to pan out. I was also worried that I had steered off the correct path – perhaps I should have gone for the insemination just like Doctor Smith suggested.

But Elmin made me feel like I was doing the right thing, and I was glad that she suggested them to me. After all, The Lab specialised in infertility cases. All the same, I couldn't help but have a lingering fear in the back of my mind, questioning whether I was about to waste a great deal of money

on procedures that ultimately wouldn't work for me. But the fear was dominated by the sheer excitement of all the possibilities that lay ahead. I had a belief that it was my time and Doctor Robetz was the man who could make my dream a reality.

So on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2000, at 2:45pm, John and I were at The Lab, waiting to see our saviour. I was expecting a typically rundown clinic, with drab white walls and scruffy, well-used furniture. I had imagined a dark and depressing facility, with magazines still there from the eighties and an elderly woman behind the front desk who clearly should have retired a decade ago.

But I was pleasantly surprised. We stepped through the front doors into a bright, airy and refined waiting room. Different walls stood in contrasting colours – mushroom beige against a sophisticated charcoal grey. Simplistic pictures in monochrome tones lined the walls, all exactly the same in size and shape, with matching black frames. All of the furniture was made of a rich, dark wood, and each piece looked sturdy and strong. The upholstery on the clusters of chairs was a soft, cream hue, juxtaposed effectively against the abundance of dark carpentry.

On one side of the waiting room a black, leather sofa seemed to be beckoning me over. I wanted to squish down into it and leaf through the magazines fanned out on the brawny coffee table in front. On the other side of the room three beige chairs sat in a U-shape against a charcoal wall. It gave the impression of being a little nook, and I envisioned myself hiding over there with my head

in a book on one of the rough days that surely lay ahead.

I was completely surprised that the atmosphere wasn't at all cold and clinical - it was incredibly warm and inviting. I immediately felt at peace, and I felt that I belonged there and was understood. I wasn't the barren friend or the one going through a tough patch because she couldn't conceive. I was simply a woman having some infertility issues, and this was the place where it could all be sorted out.

"Can I help you?" a happy voice interrupted. We looked to the side to see a beautiful wooden desk with soft, rounded edges and three beige swivel chairs positioned behind it. The petite receptionist smiled at me, showing a set of brilliant white teeth.

"We're here to see Doctor Robetz," I said shyly, offering a weak grin back.

"Is this your first time here?" she asked, looking down at a clipboard. John and I agreed in unison, and walked up to the desk.

"If you go and take a seat, I'll bring over some forms for you to fill in," she instructed, gesturing over to the inviting, black sofa. I eased myself into the plush leather and took a deep breath. Butterflies filled my stomach, and I was beginning to feel a tad shaky. I glanced to my right and studied all of the small African figurines lined along a lonely dresser, all by itself in the middle of the wall.

"What are you thinking about?" John asked, breaking the silence.

“Oh...nothing,” I replied, watching the receptionist head over to us with paperwork in her hands. “I’m just nervous I guess.”

Before long, we were called in to see the doctor. We walked through to a larger waiting area, where the vast white floor gleamed confidently at us and several doorways surrounded the space. Between the countless door frames rested a collection of vibrant African paintings positioned within bold, black frames. I admired them as I followed the nurse, who finally stopped at one of the doors. She knocked on the door, and then paused, waiting for a response.

“Come in,” a deep, important-sounding voice called out.

We stepped into a spacious office where warm, natural light spilled in through the numerous large windows around the room. A big, white bookcase stood on the left hand side, bursting with books in an unorganised and topsy turvy manner. A pin board on the right caught my eye. Every space on it was covered with photos of gorgeous children. Doctor Robetz must have been the man to thank for their very existence.

John and I took our seats and looked nervously across at the doctor. He had a very friendly face – it was round, kind looking, with sparkly blue eyes behind thick-rimmed glasses. His hair was dark brown with splashes of silvery grey.

He listened carefully to our whole story, his brain clearly at work as he deciphered what course of treatment would be best for us.

“So...” he began, tapping his pen on the

table. “I don’t think it’s wise to go through with the artificial insemination.”

“Oh?” I blurted out, unable to help myself. Doctor Robetz looked at me, blinked, and then continued.

“Because the sperm count is as low as it is, and because you are not ovulating without medication, Azelene, the result of the insemination would have been unsuccessful.”

His words seemed to deflate me like a balloon. All the simple infertility remedies just weren’t an option for us, and a huge cloud floated over me as I envisioned the tough road ahead.

“John, I would like to do some blood tests in a few days to determine whether your count can be increased with medication. If it can, then we have another option,” Doctor Robetz explained, smiling compassionately at both of us.

John agreed, sounding somewhat relieved that he didn’t have to give another sperm sample any time soon. Our consultation drew to a close and we left The Lab feeling slightly confused. We wondered what path we would eventually be following. We wondered what the future held.

Almost three weeks later, on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, we sat in front of Doctor Robetz again, praying he had answers for us. He tapped the table with his pen like before, indicating he was ready to talk. “Unfortunately, John’s blood tests showed that medication is not an option. So, we need to discuss other alternatives. Insemination is definitely not the way to go, but two procedures that could possibly be good solutions are In Vitro Fertilisation,

IVF, or Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection, ICSI.”

My mind raced. I had no idea what either of the two procedures involved, and I couldn't help but be a bit disappointed that the simple insemination was not even worth a try.

“The way it works,” Doctor Robetz continued, “is that you, Azelene, would be put on a nine week program. You would have medication to help you to produce the eggs, or follicles, and then ovulation would be stopped to enable the follicles to multiply and grow. We would then remove them and take sperm from John, so the IVF and ICSI procedures could be done.”

The sound of a ticking clock suddenly dominated the room, as none of us made a sound. We needed to absorb this information for a moment, to try to make sense of it. I thought I heard John gulp loudly, and I could see his leg nervously twitching from the corner of my eye.

“What are the differences between the two procedures?” John asked, with a serious tone in his voice.

“Well,” Doctor Robetz said, placing his hands calmly on top of the wooden desk. “With IVF, the eggs and sperm are put together in a container, and are left to fertilise naturally. If fertilisation is successful, the embryos will be implanted into Azelene's uterus, and we keep our fingers crossed that they attach to the lining of the uterus wall.

With ICSI, a single sperm is injected into each egg using a tiny needle. If fertilised, it will be implanted into the uterus, just the same as with the IVF.” Doctor Robetz paused and offered a gentle

smile. He clasped his hands together, twiddling his thumbs thoughtfully.

“This would be hard work on your body, Azelene. You would be having a lot of injections and a lot of tests over the following couple of months. But these might be the best options for you.”

I could sense John looking at me, filled with worry. I knew he was concerned whether we were doing the right thing or not. I met his gaze and raised my eyebrows.

“I’m game if you are,” I said softly. He studied my eyes for a moment, and then reached over to pat my leg optimistically.

“Well, I guess it’s worth a try,” he grinned, the anxious creases beneath his eyes showing that he was not entirely convinced. Doctor Robetz nodded his head in acceptance, marking the start of our voyage with The Lab. Half of me felt happy and excited, but the other half of me felt sick with fear. Whether a gut instinct or women’s intuition, I somehow knew that our ride through IVF and ICSI was going to be anything but smooth.

## 4

**“A Dream Doesn’t  
Become Reality  
Through Magic; It Takes  
Sweat, Determination  
And Hard Work.”  
-Colin Powell**

The day after, on October 24<sup>th</sup> 2000, I went to my local pathologist in Pretoria, ready to begin. I had to have a series of blood tests, the results of which would be sent to The Lab. I remember that reassured feeling I felt that day - so sure that after the first clinical trial I would be carrying my much longed for baby.

The nurse who carried out the blood tests was beautiful. She had reddish hair, friendly brown eyes, and her makeup was flawless. But she also had a cleft palate, which made it hard for me to understand what she was saying. I couldn’t bring myself to look up at her, or even ask her to repeat herself. I just nodded in agreement to everything she said and blushed to myself, feeling

uncomfortable.

The next day more blood was taken. As soon as I sat down in the old, worn and somewhat uncomfortable chair, the nurse stopped what she was doing and looked at me square on.

“Why are you struggling to look me in the eye?” she asked, catching me off guard. I could feel my cheeks burning, and knew they were both as red and as hot as fire. All I wanted to do was burst into tears – I felt so ashamed of myself.

“The truth is...” I started, gulping loudly. The nurse waited for the explanation with an accusing eyebrow raised. “The truth is...I’m embarrassed. Not for you, but I’m embarrassed because I feel so selfish.”

The nurse listened intently, and seemed to be waiting for further enlightenment. She only blinked at me, urging me to go on.

“Okay,” I continued. “Here I am, sitting here, after months of crying on end because I can’t seem to conceive. But I can hide my struggle. You have had to go through your whole life with a physical problem that you can’t hide, and you still have sympathy for my problem. You are such a better person than I am. I only seem to think of my own problems at the moment,” I admitted, feeling awful. I didn’t know how she was going to take what I said, and I regretted saying anything at all. But she simply smiled back at me, and got back to work.

“Hey,” she replied, gathering swabs, plasters and needle packets. “Don’t even worry about it. I don’t even notice it anymore. I just stopped looking in mirrors.” I breathed a sigh of relief and felt in

awe of this woman. I hoped I would be as strong as her one day. But on that particular day, I didn't feel strong. Instead of feeling the hope and reassurance from the day before, I felt doubtful and full of self-pity. A new wave of worry ran through me, questioning whether these procedures would actually work. Half of me had the faith that I would, without a doubt, fall pregnant, but the other half told me I wouldn't. I worried over how I could handle the disappointment. I felt like a failure, and as the days went on, I felt the infertility issue taking hold of me more and more. Each and every day the thoughts in my head seemed to only revolve around making a baby, and I knew that I was no longer the relaxed and carefree Azelene from just a couple of years before.

I couldn't speak to my friends as they all had babies of their own at that point. Of course they were supportive of what we were going through, and they asked lots of questions to try and understand. But at the end of the day, they couldn't understand. Falling pregnant had been so easy for them. I longed to connect with someone who was going on the same journey as me, and who understood exactly how I was feeling. I decided to look online at infertility websites, and found comfort in meeting a few girls online experiencing the same turmoil that I was going through. Some of them had only just begun their treatment, like me, whereas others had been through it for several months already. But the majority of them were doing IVF and ICSI, so there was a huge connection point just in that.

But as wonderful as it was talking to these women who understood my every thought and emotion, it could also be disheartening talking to them at times. A lot of them had gone through several rounds of implantations without success. The more people I spoke to, the more scared I got. I was reading one negative story after another, and I couldn't help but question how I could ever be the one successful person out of all of these women who were trying as desperately hard as I was. I consoled myself with the thought, "Everybody's body is different." But I was becoming increasingly wound up.

Friends and family were repeatedly telling me to relax, but it seemed to be an impossible task. I hated myself for being so emotionally worked up as I knew that could affect my body's reaction to the treatment. But how could I relax when everywhere I looked there were pregnant women? They made it look as though it was impossible not to make a baby. I always thought it would be the most natural and easy task to carry out in the world, and I would choose when in my life I would do it. But I had no control over it. When you initially decide to make a baby, the very last thing on your mind is being that woman with the infertility problem. That happened to other people surely, not to you?

The last weekend in October, John and I decided to get away with our friend, Melonie, and her boyfriend. I needed to escape my life and the constant reminders that we were going through a tough patch in our lives. Our refuge was a small country village called Dullstroom, which can only

be described as idyllic. It had its amenities in the village, such as a small, corner shop and some pubs, but everywhere you looked it was farmland and beautiful nature.

Being an outdoors girl at heart made it the best getaway I could have had. I adored it. The endless fields and the crisp, fresh air literally took my breath away. We stayed in a stunning little house, built completely out of rocks. The two nights we stayed there ended up with conversations lasting till the early hours of the morning, cuddled up in front of an open fire. I watched the flickering flames and felt my troubles floating up the chimney.

I couldn't help but think of my troubles though. I tried my hardest not to talk about them, as everyone just wanted to have fun. I needed to get on board with them and unwind. There was so much to do – horse riding, hiking or even trout fishing if you fancied it. We gave it all a go and enjoyed every second of it. We decided to make the most of relaxing, breathing in the fresh air, and enjoying each other's company. Admittedly, I did long for a glass of wine to go hand in hand with all the tranquillity, but that was strictly a no go when going through the treatment I was on. I made the most of that weekend escape, and felt just a little bit closer to John again. On the drive home on Sunday, I felt stronger and more ready for whatever lay ahead next.

The following Monday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, I was back at The Lab. Not for a blood test, not for a check up, but for a hysterosalpingogram (HSG). The HSG would examine the shape of my uterus,

and the condition of my fallopian tubes. If I'm honest, I expected it to be an easier experience than it was. I wasn't prepared for the most intense pain I had ever gone through in my life, to the point where I wanted to die half way through the procedure.

On the bright side, it didn't last long. I lay down on the hard examination table, and brought my knobby knees to my chest. I amused myself with memories of dreading going to the gynaecologist, just for a mere check-up. I was mortified when I had my first internal scan. Now here I was - everything downstairs on show, and not even a fancy dinner and glass of wine to lead up to it. I was now used to having my legs in stirrups and people walking around me to take a look. No, this was reality. Harsh, undignified reality.

My knees dropped sideways to the table and Doctor Robetz quickly began. A speculum was placed into my vagina to expose the cervix, common practice even when having a routine smear test. The doctor went on to insert a thin catheter through my cervix and into my uterus. A dye was slowly released into the catheter and into the uterine cavity. The dye was a radiographic contrast medium, and would show up on the x-ray images they were about to start taking.

"We're going to start taking the x-ray images now, Azelene, to show the uterus filling up," the doctor said, concentrating on what he was doing. I didn't reply. I just lay back, trying to think positive thoughts, despite a horrible pain becoming unbearable. X-ray images were taken as the dye flowed through my fallopian tubes, and I prayed

that the dye would spill out into my abdominal cavity. Because that would mean my tubes weren't blocked.

But just my luck, there were no spills. My fallopian tubes were closed. I felt a sad knot form in my stomach, and I looked hopefully into the kind face of Doctor Robetz. He decided to repeat the procedure once again, as sometimes a surge of dye rushing through the tubes can be enough to unblock them. He instructed the nurse to inject me with some painkillers before he began.

"Please don't be blocked," I cried to myself, starting to shiver with cold.

"You're very brave," one of the nurses said softly, stroking my hair. "Just bare with us a little longer, it's almost over."

"It's so painful," I sobbed, tears rolling down my cheeks.

"Hang in there, you're doing so well," she whispered, squeezing my hand.

Sadly, however, the result was just the same. Doctor Robetz was talking to me, and encouraging me with the fact that the procedures could still go ahead despite the blocked tubes, as my uterus looked fine. But I was hardly listening. I was overwhelmed with sadness, and overwhelmed with pain. I filled my thoughts with prayers, asking God to take the pain away and to make me feel right as rain as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the pain only got worse that night. Doctor Robetz had warned me that the pain would be like that of labour, as the womb needed to eject the fluid that was still floating around in there.

I lay helplessly in bed, curled up in a ball, for hours and hours on end. I wanted the pain to go away but found it only got worse. The painkillers didn't seem to help, nor did a relaxing, warm bath. I desperately longed for sleep, and after several hours of lying still and a soothing hot water bottle to cuddle up with, I finally did drop off. To my relief, the new day brought no pain with it, and as a result, a happier me.

## 5

# **Nursery Complete! Now Where's My Baby...?**

On November 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, I went along to the baby store to fetch the camping cot I ordered a while before. It made me deliriously happy buying everything and anything I could possibly need for a baby. I went home and unpacked all of the baby things I had collected that past year, an activity that had become far too frequent. I would unpack, repack and organise everything, and I loved every minute of it.

I had it all, from beautiful white and buttermilk baby outfits to sterile new bottles and pacifiers. I bought each item twice due to a higher chance of having twins through IVF and ICSI. I even had the cot made up and ready in the nursery, just waiting for a newborn to sleep in it. I would spend hours rearranging the cupboards and touching all of the gorgeous baby clothes. The activity was more like a hobby – I enjoyed it as much as a sprinter loves to run or an artist loves to paint.

I would feel my pain disappearing as I felt the softness of a cuddly toy or as I folded up a little sleep suit.

Of course, it would also make my longing intensify and that much more real. But it also gave me the will to go on, and the faith that everything would turn out fine. I guess it was therapy in a way. That baby's room was where I would go and disappear. That's where I could truly show just how much I wanted to be a mother. I could prove it with the wonderful haven I had created.

I even loved going around all of the shops and making my special baby purchases. Instead of feeling odd because I wasn't pregnant and I was buying all of these things, I felt happy. It soothed my mind and distracted me from the harsh reality that pregnancy might not ever happen for me.

At least the baby's nursery provided a comfort in my own home, even if it was, in fact, in the bedroom of a child I didn't even have yet. John gave very little comfort, and I could feel us drifting apart. There were times we weren't allowed to have sex as the doctors needed to monitor John's sperm count. Instead of being a tough few days where we could hardly resist each other, it came as no problem. The rift between us was not only firmly established, but steadily growing.

All I wanted to do was to break down, cry for hours and pour my heart out to my husband. But he didn't know what to do. He didn't hold me in his arms or talk me through my worries. He just remained quiet and kept his head down. I thought back to the old Azelene – full of life and constant

laughter. I looked at myself in the mirror that day, and saw a frail, emotional wreck. I knew at that point that John didn't understand me anymore, or what I was going through. One minute I would be giggling enthusiastically with him, the next bursting into tears. I was hormonal and stressed and John was distant and irritable. I wondered how we had become this couple – these two people I thought we'd never be. All I could do was hope it would all work out and that we would be better again.

But right then I was nothing but depressed and scared. I had no idea what lay ahead of us and I had never felt so afraid. I was afraid of what could, and ultimately would, go wrong. Time was slipping through my fingers – wait, my marriage was slipping through my fingers – when just a year and a half before we were a happy married couple embarking on starting our very own family.

## 6

# Oranges And Dartboards

“It’s like throwing a dart.”

This is what the nurse, Anna, told me as she jabbed a juicy orange with a sharp needle. Anna took her job very seriously – she had a no nonsense attitude and was always straight to the point. Her chocolate brown hair sat neatly on her shoulders as she turned injecting an orange into a military procedure. I gulped and thought nervously about what I was going to have to do. I was going to have to inject myself with Buserelin every day until the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, and on that day it was only the 9<sup>th</sup>. My stomach flipped anxiously.

The purpose of the Buserelin injections was to stop natural production of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinising hormone (LH). These two hormones trigger the ovaries to create oestrogen and consequently assist in the control of the menstrual cycle. The Buserelin would put my ovulation cycle on pause, allowing the doctors to take charge of the timing of my further treatment. When they decided the time was right, a synthetic FSH and LH would be administered to me to

artificially induce ovulation. Basically, the doctors at The Lab needed to be in complete control of what my menstrual cycle was doing.

So there we were - just the nurse and me, injecting a poor orange with needle after needle. I caught on quickly but knew that injecting three millilitres of Buserelin using a 15 millimetre needle into my thigh every morning wasn't going to be quite as easy. "Do it yourself now, Azelene," Anna smiled nicely, looking confident that I was ready. I put on a brave face and quickly punctured the needle into my skin. I felt nauseous, but also proud at the same time. Who knew that I could be so strong? I did it! Perhaps it was that empowerment I felt from time to time that kept me going when times were tough.

One week later, my period began. The following day I had to take myself to The Lab to give blood samples and have a scan. The drive from Pretoria to Johannesburg was growing increasingly dull. It was an incredibly boring journey and could often be hectic due to such intense traffic. Fortunately, Mum would keep me company on many of the trips. I would talk to her about all of the procedures and also about all of my worries. She would look at me with her smiley eyes, her pretty, auburn hair tucked behind her ears, listening to my ramblings. She would continually offer me words of comfort when I needed them. At that time of my life I had never appreciated her more, and will always remember those long drives to the clinic together.

Those long drives did seem to be worth it

though, when all was said and done. On the day of the blood sample and scan, all appeared to be well and there were no abnormalities. It boosted my confidence in The Lab, and I felt at home being there, waiting for my results. No one judged me for being infertile and everyone I dealt with tried so hard to help me with my problem. The staff was warm and welcoming, and I knew that I had taken the right path by choosing to undergo treatment there. But that feeling of contentment didn't last long. Just a few days later I was at the clinic once again - ready to start a course of new injections. They were human menopausal gonadotrophin injections, or HMG, which contain both FSH and LH. They would stimulate my ovaries to not only produce follicles, but to allow them to mature.

Anna went over the process of injecting myself again, and I was about to leave when the receptionist called me back.

“Excuse me - you forgot to pay your bill.”

I looked back at her and suddenly realised my mistake.

“I'm sorry, I don't know where my head is,” I smiled, taking the bill from her petite hands. I glanced down at the piece of paper, and my eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Five Thousand and Eighty Five Rand? R5,085 South African Rand! That's the equivalent of approximately US\$707, and I only had just enough in my bank account to cover it.

I gathered all the effort I could muster into acting as though everything was fine and that it wouldn't even make a dent in my savings. But

inside my heart was pounding and my stomach was tangling itself into knots. I wondered if I should just terminate the treatment – I honestly had no idea where I would get the money to pay for the next stage. I wasn't earning anything from the launderette because I simply didn't have the time to run it anymore. Mum had taken it over for me, and the only spare cash coming from the business paid her a small salary.

I reluctantly paid the bill and started thinking of the expensive HMG injections. I knew that every time I punctured myself with a needle, I would be reminded of how much it was costing. I would be able to feel my bank balance trickling away with every prick.

But as it turned out, the HMG injection proved even worse than that. The needle was 40 millimetres long, and had to be inserted fully into the buttock. "It's like throwing a dart," I thought bitterly, after giving myself the first one. Luckily for dartboards, and oranges, they don't feel pain.

# 7

## **“Patience, Persistence And Perspiration Make An Unbeatable Combination For Success.” – Napoleon Hill**

At the end of November, I was walking through the doors of The Lab...yet again. I was feeling drained and my ovaries were growing increasingly painful. The mild painkillers I was allowed to take were about as effective as Smarties, but I struggled on, telling myself it was for a good cause.

The scan backed that belief up. I had 30 follicles with eggs developing beautifully. I was so ecstatically happy that I almost jumped up and kissed Jessica, the flame-haired sonographer, square on the mouth. She smiled sweetly at me, sharing my happiness. The wall of my uterus was the perfect nine millimetres I needed it to be, so for the first time I felt things were beginning to go my

way. I looked down at my bloated stomach and imagined it being lived in by a baby. It seemed like a closer reality at that moment, and even though I was in excruciating pain, all the effort wouldn't have been in vain if I could just get pregnant.

Scans over the following days gave me even more hope. The follicles with eggs in were growing well, with the biggest one being 17 millimetres in diameter. The whole experience was incredibly tiring, especially when I had to leave home at five in the morning just to make it to the clinic in time. But I had never been so optimistic about the treatment. I believed it was finally my time. How wrong I was. How very, very wrong I was. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, the illusion I had instilled in my head of it all actually working came crashing down around me. A scan at the clinic showed all of my follicles with eggs were between 18 and 20 millimetres in diameter, which was wonderful as it meant they could possibly be withdrawn that week. I was lying down looking at my bloated pregnant-looking tummy quite happily, my heart fluttering in excitement. I glanced up at Jessica, who was frowning at the screen.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked nervously. Jessica paused, and then took a deep breath.

"It looks like there's fluid in your womb," she said softly, concentrating on the luminous image on the monitor. "I'll go and ask Doctor Robetz."

Jessica and Doctor Robetz returned back in together and began frowning at the screen in unison.

"It is fluid," he confirmed at last. "But I don't know where it's coming from."

My eyes welled up with tears and my heart ached. I knew this was not a good sign.

“I’m sorry,” Dr. Robetz said, still looking at the scanned image. “The wall of the uterus has decreased from nine millimetres to just seven. I don’t know why the fluid is there, but I suggest you come in again tomorrow and we’ll see if it has decreased further.”

I nodded slowly, tidying myself up ready to go home. I could feel my cheeks burning as I held back the tears, busying my hands as much as possible by straightening out my outfit and fumbling about with the contents of my handbag. It took all of my strength to fight back those tears.

Doctor Robetz went to leave the room, but then turned around to face me.

“See if John can also come tomorrow. It would be good to talk to the both of you after the scan.”

I nodded in agreement, and let out a faint “okay” as he walked out through the door. I stood there for a moment, very still and quiet, filled with more worry than ever before. Was this simply a hurdle to be jumped over? Or perhaps it was a huge, lit up billboard saying “Give up now, Azelene, this isn’t going to work!”

John agreed to come along with me the following morning. The outing felt quite awkward, and I wished I was happy and reassured by his presence. We seemed to avoid talking about the treatment on the journey over, alternatively chit chatting about whom we had seen lately or what the weather forecast was predicting for the weekend.

Even when we had arrived at The Lab, we didn't sit down and discuss thoughts on what the scan would show.

As it turned out, the scan results were a mixture of good and bad. Yes, there was still fluid, but it had decreased a considerable amount in just 24 hours. But what came as a shock was that the wall of my uterus was a mere two millimetres thick. Two tiny millimetres! The follicles with eggs were growing fantastically, up to 22 millimetres in diameter, but if fertilised they would never be able to attach to the wall of my uterus unless it reached nine millimetres once more.

Doctor Robetz sat down in the squeaky leather swivel chair in his office. John and I sat side by side across the desk from him, waiting for the verdict.

“Now, because the wall of the uterus is so thin and there's this presence of fluid, once we do the IVF and ICSI procedure next week, we won't be able to implant the embryos. The risk of an immediate miscarriage is simply too great,” he explained, looking more serious than I had ever seen him. I waited for him to continue, to tell us the new plan of action. Every second we sat there felt like an hour, and I willed him to break the silence with an optimistic strategy.

Finally, he did. The new plan was to remove the eggs on December 1<sup>st</sup>. The eggs would be fertilised using the IVF and ICSI techniques, but rather than implanting them, they would be kept frozen until the cause of the fluid was determined. On the same day of the egg removal procedure, a

sample of the fluid would also be withdrawn and then analysed.

I gulped nervously, trying to take it all in.

“So, we’ll see you this Friday, but then when will we see you after that, for the implant?” I asked, hoping it would be soon, and that this bump in the road was just a small one. Doctor Robetz twitched his mouth thoughtfully and starting leafing through his big diary, calculating dates in his mind.

“January 10<sup>th</sup> 2001,” he said blankly.

I thought my heart had stopped beating for a moment. January 10<sup>th</sup>? After Christmas and New Year? After the entire month of December? I looked down at my hands lying helplessly in my lap. I was so sad, and so close to giving up. John reached over and squeezed my hand.

“Thank you, Doctor,” John said strongly, pulling me to stand up next to him. We walked out of the clinic in silence, and remained that way for the entire drive home.

## 8

# Lending A Helping Hand

That afternoon, Elzette popped by to cheer me up. We sat across from one another at our homey, wooden kitchen table, and light heartedly chatted away about everything over some coffee.

“You’ll get there,” she reassured me kindly. I smiled back at her, hoping with all my heart she was right.

“At least your body is producing eggs now,” she went on. “So that’s a battle overcome in itself.”

We both sat in silence for a moment, pondering it over. Yes, it was an obstacle I had overcome, I thought to myself. I felt slightly more hopeful and enthusiastic all of a sudden, and grinned at my friend.

“Would you ever consider being an egg donor for a woman who couldn’t produce eggs?” Elzette asked, sipping on her coffee. I raised my eyebrows and bit my lip – my heart, mind and soul all told me the same answer.

“If I were ever asked, I don’t think I would be able to. Not even for my best friend,” I admitted quietly. I felt slightly selfish as I said it, but Elzette

nodded in agreement, and then took our conversation in a different direction.

The following day, I returned to The Lab for a blood test. The bill that was handed to us the day before was for 7,760 South African Rand, or approximately 1,119 United States Dollars. I was feeling pretty sour about how much it was costing, especially as I was losing faith in the whole thing working. Fortunately, I once again had just enough in my bank account to cover it, but life would definitely be financially difficult for a while.

After blood was taken, Anna asked to see me for a chat. She sat me down and began telling me of another patient of theirs who was also struggling with infertility issues. A pang of nervousness hit my stomach, wondering where this story was going. I had the distinct feeling Anna was about to ask something of me I wasn't going to want to do. Don't get me wrong - my heart immediately ached for this other woman going through the same struggle as I was. It turned out that her problem was that she couldn't produce eggs and was consequently reaching out for a donor for just three eggs. She needed someone whose blood group would match hers, and surprise, surprise...mine did.

Anna stared hopefully at me across the table. "Azelen, you are going to have so many eggs, and because your blood group is compatible her body would more than likely accept them," she explained.

I stared back at her in disbelief. I was completely unprepared for this conversation and didn't know how to handle it. I looked into her eyes

and slowly shook my head, knowing I could be no part of it. I couldn't give away part of me when I was still trying to fall pregnant myself. After all, I wasn't sure if I might need all my eggs or just a couple at that point. I imagined giving that woman my eggs, and I knew I would always question where that little piece of me was...where that little baby was.

Anna didn't dwell on it too much once I gave her my final answer. I left, feeling somewhat guilty but confident that I had made the right decision. I did understand why I had been approached, and if I were in her shoes, I would be reaching out for help too. But I wasn't a donor right there and then. I was like her – desperate to make my own baby.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, I woke up at five in the morning and just lay incredibly still under the bedclothes, soaking up the silence. I had a big day ahead of me – the eggs would be removed from my ovaries, and I was scared of how painful and ultimately how successful it would be. I lay there in the darkness, thinking about God. I felt a lot closer to Him as a result of the journey I was on, and my belief in Him seemed to keep me going. I prayed every day that it would all turn out fine, and I had faith in the fact that God knew best. I believed that He would be watching over me that day, like every other day. He seemed to pull me through the bad times when I didn't even think I could go on.

The sharp bleeping of my black alarm clock interrupted my thoughts. I had to be at The Lab, by half past six. I quickly jumped out of bed and got dressed.

Admission proceeded speedily as soon as I arrived. I was taken to the day ward where I signed the procedural forms and dressed into the undignified theatre gown. That's right, covered at the front and open at the back. At half past seven I was wheeled out to the theatre. I felt sick and shaky, just wanting the terrifying day to be over and done with. The nurses were unbelievably friendly towards me, which put me at ease. But when we arrived in the theatre that feeling instantly changed. The room felt cold and clinical, and I instantly felt scared.

To my delight, however, I saw Maria Masemola already there. Maria was not only a nursing sister, but also a social worker and a great support to anyone who needed her. Her brown eyes sparkled back at me and I knew she understood that I needed her. A huge sigh escaped my chest as Maria came and stood by my side. She was a slim and graceful African woman with the most sincere and comforting manner I had ever had the benefit to witness. She held my hand firmly and stroked my arm with her other hand.

"Are you comfortable, my dear?" she asked soothingly, still stroking my arm. I nodded back despite shaking with nerves.

"You don't need to be afraid. Everything will be fine." She smiled so warmly that I couldn't help but feel a bit better.

The anaesthesiologist came beside me and injected a cold fluid into my arm. The anaesthesiologist towered over me, and I could only see his stony blue eyes amidst the mint green mask

covering the rest of his face.

“You’ll soon become sleepy, Azelene,” he told me matter-of-factly. “Then only we’ll put your legs into the supports. Don’t be worried if you’re not asleep when the nurse starts to get you ready, because you’ll soon be off to Dreamland.”

I was listening to every word he was saying, and starting to feel quite panicky. I didn’t feel sleepy at all! I needed to tell them that the anaesthetic wasn’t working on me.

“Are you feeling sleepy?” one of the nurses asked. I looked up at her, and opened my mouth ready to speak.

“Na...na...” came blurring through my lips, and I frowned in confusion.

“Na what?” the nurse chuckled. I felt extremely puzzled, and just looked at her for a moment.

“I can’t remember what I wanted to say...” Suddenly I was drifting off into a deep sleep, long before my legs were in stirrups.

When I surfaced a while later, I was lying in the recovery room. A nurse was smiling and talking to me, but my brain didn’t seem to be working properly. She took my hand and started writing on it with a marker. I had no idea what was going on, and quickly dozed off back to sleep again.

A little later I woke up and found myself in my private room once more. I looked over and saw that John was sitting beside my bed, dressed in scruffy jeans and a white t-shirt. He was staring vacantly into space and I wondered what he was thinking about. He must have sensed me looking at

him and glanced over.

“How did it go, Az? How are you feeling? Does it hurt?” Worry was spread all over his face, and I suddenly wanted to hug him and stroke his head softly. I felt exhausted and still slightly bewildered.

“I think something is written on my hand,” I replied at last, squinting tiredly at him.

John took my hand out from beneath the blanket and laughed.

“Look here, Azelene. They’ve wrote on your hand how many eggs they retrieved,” he smiled warmly. I snatched my hand away from him, desperate to see the number. In bold, black ink “Well Done! 27!” was written. I burst into tears and wept like I hadn’t wept for years. I felt like a child with no control of her tears. But the relief was enormous. I was a huge step closer to making my baby.

Later that day, I was given a coffee and a sandwich. It gave me the energy boost I needed to get dressed and make my way to The Lab with John that was located just outside the hospital building, where the procedure was done. Doctor Robetz wanted to make sure I was fit enough to go home and to tell me what to expect. I felt okay, so wasn’t at all surprised when Anna told me everything looked good. She said that there could be a bloody secretion, which was normal, and that I might be in some pain later on that day. But I left the clinic feeling optimistic. John drove us home and I curled up in bed straight away, still very tired from the day’s events.

When I got up the next day, I was more under the weather than I had anticipated. The pain was almost unbearable, and I was weak and emotional. I took some painkillers to take the edge off before phoning Anna. She informed me that they had carried out the initial stage of the ICSI procedure on 11 eggs, and that 10 of those had fertilised. They did IVF on 12 of the eggs, but only four of those had fertilised. Four of the 27 eggs that were retrieved weren't used at all, due to them either being too big, too small or too over stimulated for fertilisation. However, that still left a total of 14 fertilised eggs, which would be left until the next day to divide into cells before being frozen.

But instead of being thrilled over the 14 fertilized eggs, I was concerned over something a lot darker. Back when they did the scan on November 25<sup>th</sup>, Jessica had counted exactly 30 follicles on the sonar. She printed the scan out and marked them all with a red cross. The question I had racing through my mind was how come they had only extracted 27? What happened to those other three follicles with eggs in that were visible and pointed out to me the day of the scan?

I felt sick and perplexed by the whole situation. I was asked to donate three eggs, and after the procedure I was three eggs down. Where had they gone? I decided to quiz Anna about it on the phone that day. "Our scan counting might not have been one hundred percent correct," she said. "That'll be the reason behind it."

I didn't say anything, and there was an awkward pause between us on the phone line.

“Azeline, we would never take eggs and donate them to a person unless we had permission from the donor,” Anna continued, sounding confident with her answer. I didn’t believe it though – she had sounded too prepared for my question. But I delivered a false and feeble agreement back and got off the phone.

How would I ever prove that there were three eggs missing? I didn’t even have a copy of the scan – the scan with 30 crossed follicles with eggs, clear as day. I hoped I wasn’t right, but I also feared I was. One day there could be a child who was half of me. I would never, ever know.

One thing I did know, however, was that I needed to put it behind me. I had to focus on those 14 beautiful fertilised eggs, and pray that God would make a baby from those, and not the three I felt I had lost.

## 9

# The End Of Another Year.....

The following day, I went for my appointment with Doctor Robetz. I arrived feeling suspicious of the clinic and untrusting of anything they were about to tell me. I eyed the doctor moodily when he called me into his office, but fortunately he didn't seem to notice.

Doctor Robetz informed me that they were going to freeze 11 of the 14 fertilized embryos. The remaining three had divided so well that they could have been implanted that day. But my body had let me down, and I was filled with sadness at the lost opportunity. "What will happen to those three embryos?" I asked him. He looked up at me from under his glasses, a wave of surprise over his face.

"Unfortunately, we will have to discard them, I'm afraid," he stated matter-of-factly. I raised my eyebrows and pursed my lips, wondering if that really was the plan for them. Perhaps The Lab wanted them for somebody else. Somebody else who was a patient there, and was desperately struggling to conceive.....somebody like me, somebody like the girl that wanted three of my eggs.

I just shrugged my shoulders and sighed. This was all in somebody else's hands and I hated

that. But I had no other choice. I had to focus my mind on my babies on ice, and hope with all my might that my body would finally be ready after the New Year.

Over the next week I was overcome by negativity. My stomach was swollen, the results of the mysterious fluid they found in my uterus still hadn't come through, and I was sorely disappointed about not being able to go ahead with the implant. It seemed we were taking one step forward and two steps back all of the time. I was drained emotionally and physically, and who could blame me? I had endured months of countless injections, tests and scans – more than I had anticipated having in a lifetime. John was trying to understand what I was going through, but at the end of the day, it was my body going through the turmoil. He had withdrawn from me and I had withdrawn from him. I was fed up with the world. I urgently needed a positive influence back in my life.

Thankfully, I had something to look forward to. On December 18<sup>th</sup>, John whisked me away to Ballito Bay – a holiday destination in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. It really was a beautiful place, and at one point of every day I wanted to stay there forever. Hills of vibrant green stood majestically in the distance, and the warm waves of the Indian Ocean tickled our toes as we stood, hand in hand, in the soft sand. I made the most of snoozing under the inviting glow of the sun and breathing in the fresh sea air. I felt rejuvenated and alive, and I certainly looked better for it too. My skin boasted a glimmering, honey tan, and my

green eyes sparkled happily.

John and I became closer on that holiday. We would laugh and joke together, and he would hold me in his arms. We were like the old us, and we seemed to fit together once more...we seemed complete. We enjoyed delicious meals with one another, talking for hours and hours until it was time for bed. We even went snorkelling together, to witness the beautiful fishes everyone was raving about.

The days trickled on, and before I knew it, it was time to go home. The holiday had not only breathed some life back into our marriage, but into me too. We arrived home on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001, and it was a brand new year. As John and I cuddled up on our sofa that night, I knew both of us needed the same thing. That brand new year had to be a brand new chapter in our lives. Hopefully it would be a positive year, where things will start to go our way.

## 10

# A Brand New Year – A Brand New Chapter

That New Year's Eve had marked a significant step in my personal growth. I sat outside under the stars with John, and lit a cigarette. I watched as the smoke spiralled through the air as I blew it gently from my mouth. I cherished the taste, the smell and how it felt to hold it. It was going to be my final cigarette before throwing in the habit for good. I needed to give my body the best possible chance from that moment forward.

John and I sat in silence, both busy with our own thoughts. I thought of all the hopes and aspirations I had for 2001. The previous year had brought so many disappointments and setbacks, and I thought warily of each and every one, knowing I couldn't endure it all again.

Just ten days later, I went to that appointment at The Lab. When Doctor Robetz had pencilled it into his diary it had seemed like a lifetime away. But there it was, and it had come along so soon. I was overflowing with a newfound faith that a new year would bring ample loads of good fortune and luck. I greeted Doctor Robetz

warmly and shared my enthusiasm with him. Fortunately, he seemed to have adopted a similar viewpoint too, and beamed happily at me when I told him that I had given up smoking.

“I am so glad, Azelene,” he grinned. I felt proud of myself, and couldn’t help but smile heartily back.

“From this point on though,” he continued, a wave of seriousness straightening out his face, “you must take it easy. You have to stay positive. The embryos are still frozen, and I’m not confident about implanting them right now. The risk of a miscarriage is still too high.”

I listened to what he was saying, not surprised about it in the least. All I could really do was nod my head in understanding, and tell him that I was okay with his decision. In reality, I was considerably more relaxed about the situation than I had been at the end of November. It amazed me that my embryos were still okay just being left frozen, and how incredible technology was to even make it possible.

Doctor Robetz let out a loud sigh from his nose in what I could only assume was relief that my eyes hadn’t welled up with tears. He tapped his pen on the table, glancing at me pensively.

“What I can do, Azelene, is put you on a hormone program to ascertain how your womb would react to the embryos being implanted. If we have poor results, I suggest we carry out another laparoscopy to see if there is anything going on that we missed before.” He paused, staring at me.

I considered it all for a moment, knowing that the hormone treatment was going to be an

expensive process. John and I had recently taken out medical insurance, but I knew it wouldn't cover the hormone treatment. The funds would have to be coming directly out of our savings account. But then again, our medical cover would pay for the hospital bills after the laparoscopy, so perhaps it wouldn't be too big a dent in our savings all in all. I really didn't know what the right thing to say or do was at that moment. I simply decided to agree and take it from there. If John wasn't happy about it, I could always change it afterwards.

"Okay, that sounds like a good plan," I said at last, forcing my lips into a fake smile. Doctor Robetz didn't reply, however, and I wondered if I hadn't been convincing enough. He continued to fix his blue-eyed stare at me, looking as though he was toying with an idea in his mind.

"On second thought, Azelene, don't waste time on the hormone treatment. It's not going to solve any problems. Let's do some blood tests and book you in for a laparoscopy, probably next week." He crinkled his eyes slightly, his gaze quizzing what I truly thought of his plan.

"Whatever you think is best," I replied, slightly relieved with the new idea. A less financially difficult proposal was more than welcome, and I immediately felt like a weight had been lifted. Perhaps 2001 would be a year of good fortune after all. I left with a skip in my step, and happy butterflies swooping in my stomach.

The laparoscopy was booked for January 16<sup>th</sup>. In the meantime, I had to arrange the authorisation from the insurance company, as well

as control my yo-yoing emotions. It was unbelievable to me that I had felt on top of the world at the appointment with Doctor Robetz, and just a couple of days later I was on the brink of being manically depressed. One moment I was so happy, but the next moment I seem to be extraordinarily sad. I simply couldn't understand why my life was rolling along in the way it was – one obstacle after another. I was fully appreciative of The Lab and all of their efforts to assist me with my infertility problem, but I had grown tired of being patient. In fact, I had grown tired of being a patient. I was so frustrated. I wanted to scream out in rage. It felt as though I was in some kind of Hell, with no way out. I did try to stay positive, but it was starting to become impossible to not expect the worst. The months had been trickling by with countless tests and treatments. In that time so much had gone wrong. I was dreading the upcoming laparoscopy, terrified of the outcome. I was dreading Doctor Robetz telling me that he couldn't ascertain what the problem was, or that he couldn't fix it. I was terrified of yet another disappointment. My thoughts were filled with prayers to God, begging him to create some kind of exit off the *Road to Hell* I was on. I was even starting to consider using a surrogate, so those embryos on ice could actually be put to use.

John, however, was attempting to distract my mind away from all the baby drama. He took me to see a plot of land with a small four-roomed building on it. John wanted to transform the building into a beautiful cottage, and had even

drawn up plans for a baby room. I felt a surge of happiness knowing he still imagined our life with a baby in tow. I cuddled up to him as he showed me the plans, listening to his voice babbling away excitedly about moving in just four months time, and all that he wanted to do. I thought of us, as a family of three, living in that cottage, and I smiled. But just as quickly as that hopeful feeling had come, it had gone, and I was yet again left with a negative state of mind.

I remember staring out of the window of our house that day with my arms folded and the sound of John pulling a beer out of the fridge in the kitchen. I envisaged John and me holding a beautiful baby, cooing and kissing the child lovingly. The sun was shining in my daydream, and John and I looked relaxed and carefree. All of our troubles had gone. But the image I saw in my mind was drifting away, out of reach, and my gut told me for a split second that my much longed for dream was never going to be a reality.

## 11

**“Courage Is Doing What  
You’re Afraid To Do.  
There Can Be No  
Courage Unless You’re  
Scared.”  
- Eddie Rickenbacker**

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, I had to get up painfully early. The Lab wanted me there at 6:45am, and I had to pick up Mum on the way. Of course I would have much preferred John to come with me that day, but he had insisted that he had urgent matters to attend to and couldn't possibly come.

I knew it wasn't a matter of life and death him being there, and I knew he would have had to have done a lot of waiting around for the entire day. But I still would have loved him to be there. I knew if it were the other way round, I would have been there for him. Nevertheless, John did offer to deliver three lots of laundry that day for Mum, enabling her to come to The Lab with me. She was incredibly keen to come along, and I was glad of her being there.

When we arrived at the clinic we were sent to Ward H, which was the day ward. I dressed into my “sexy” lime green hospital gown, and immediately got into bed. Mum sat on the chair beside me, looking around the room thoughtfully as though planning out how she would redecorate it. I just lay there feeling sick with worry, dreading the bad news that would surely come from the laparoscopy.

Mum must have figured out what I was thinking about, and swiftly took my cold hand within her warm clasp.

“Now, don’t you go worrying, today will be fine. It’s just a routine procedure and you’ve had plenty of these already,” she smiled. Tears pricked my eyes and I couldn’t bring myself to speak. Mum gave my hand a final squeeze before letting go. She began raking through her bag until she found a well-worn book, quickly opening it and settling down to read. I averted my eyes and began thinking of all the potential outcomes to the laparoscopy again. I couldn’t wait for it all to be over – not just the procedure that day, but for the whole infertility era. A small tear rolled down my cheek, and I brushed it away with the back of my hand, not wanting Mum to see.

A couple of hours later, a nurse came in to inform me that the anaesthesiologist was running behind schedule. The nurse had shiny, light blond hair that was flicked out at the ends, just above her shoulders. Her eyes were steel blue and she looked at me with them coldly, clearly wanting to get through her day with as little interaction as possible.

“Are you alright, dear?” she asked after a moment, frowning. “You look very pale.”

“I just want it to be out of the way,” I admitted, feeling both wary and fed up at the same time. “Would you like me to give you a premed now to calm your nerves?” she suggested, touching my forehead in that caring, hospital way I had become accustomed to. I closed my eyes and nodded in agreement, desperate to feel slightly more relaxed.

The nurse said no more, and went off to organise the premed. I was relieved to find that just ten minutes after the frosty nurse had administered it, I felt delightfully drowsy and definitely more relaxed. It had taken the edge off the knot of anxiety that had been rigidly sitting in my stomach.

A man I had never met before floated gently into the room. He had silvery hair sitting on top of his square, suntanned face. His nose struck me as being very angular, but his caring eyes seem to detract from it. I instantly smiled at him, sensing he was a nice man.

“Hi Azelene, I’m Doctor Wilson, the anaesthetist today,” he said softly, shaking my hand. “Let’s wheel you down to theatre now.” He gestured to the nurses to start moving the bed.

My head was clouded by thoughts all the way down to the theatre and tears streamed down my face. I had surprised myself by how afraid I was that day. Mum walked beside me, and leaned over to plant a light kiss on my forehead.

“Don’t worry, darling. Everything will turn out fine,” she whispered softly. I looked up at her

beautiful face and could see how hard she was trying to hold back tears of her own. My heart swelled with love for her, she was always right by my side when I needed her. Nothing was more important to her than coming on those countless trips to The Lab with me. She was my rock. I suddenly wondered if I could ever show her just how much she meant to me.

We arrived at the cold and impersonal operating room with clusters of intimidating machines and harsh lights dotted around the room. I looked around for Doctor Wilson, wanting him to get the anaesthetic into my system as soon as possible. I wanted to fall asleep and escape from the miserable situation I was in. Fortunately for me, Doctor Wilson seemed to like punctuality more than Doctor Robetz, and I was sound asleep just a couple of minutes later.

When I groggily opened my eyes and looked around some time later, I half expected to still be in the operating room. Luckily I wasn't, I was in the recovery room and the procedure was finally over. My teeth chattered and my whole body shook from cold and pain. A nurse came over and placed a tube under my blankets, pumping in cosy, warm air to heat up my body. I quickly defrosted and was made even more comfortable after a heavy dose of morphine. Not surprisingly, I dozed off back into a drug-fuelled sleep.

When I woke up next I was in the day ward, desperate to go to the bathroom. I dozily looked over and found Mum sat beside me, engrossed in her book.

“Mum?” my voice cracked.

“Yes, Azelene?” she replied, dropping her book into her lap and turning her body to face me.

“Can you take me to the bathroom?” I asked, nodding in the direction of the toilet, located in a room just a mere ten steps away.

“Oh, okay,” Mum replied, looking flustered. She helped me up from my bed, and I stood holding her arm, my legs shaking weakly. Something didn’t feel quite right, but I started walking slowly anyway, putting it down to the anaesthetic.

“STOP!” someone shouted out, breaking the silence. A nurse came running towards me, staring at the floor in alarm. I looked down to see blood covering the floor, dripping down my legs. The nurse conjured up a huge sanitary pad out of nowhere and pushed it between my legs, helping me back into bed. I simply lay there mortified as she cleaned me up. It suddenly all became too much to bear and I dissolved into tears. It was one bad experience after another, and I didn’t need that humiliation on top of everything else.

“Don’t cry. It’s all okay,” the nurse said kindly, comforting me. “It’s nothing to be worried about. It’s just the blood from the internal procedure. It’s very common for this to happen.”

But I didn’t start to feel any better and less ashamed until I had been completely cleaned up and the nurse had gone. I shut my tired eyes firmly, and could feel them stinging from all of the tears. I tried to block the whole world out, and somehow run away to a distant paradise where life was easy.

I was just imagining swimming peacefully in

a blue lagoon with the sound of a trickling waterfall in the distance, when I heard footsteps come towards my bed. I opened up one eye slowly and saw Doctor Robetz stood in front of me. I sat up anxiously, ready to find out the results of the laparoscopy.

“We found a small hole in your uterus,” he explained, straightening his glasses. “It could possibly have been created by an instrument used in the laparoscopy you had in 2000. The hole had a number of growths surrounding it, that’s where the unexplained fluid was entering into your uterus.”

He paused all of a sudden, taking off his glasses and cleaning one of the lenses. My stomach had tied itself in a knot – I could sense he was about to reveal some more.

“I managed to repair the hole which is good, and also remove a cyst that was located on your right ovary. There was also endometriosis – found between the uterus and the ovaries so that has all been removed.” He balanced his thick-rimmed glasses back on his nose, looking at me once more. I held my breath, digesting all of the information being relayed, waiting for the bottom line.

“We had thought the fallopian tubes were blocked when we did the HSG,” Doctor Robetz carried on. “As it turns out, the fluid didn’t spill out of the tubes during the HSG because they had some sort of spasm which closed them at that particular moment. It seems that the tubes are open after all, which is positive news too.”

I covered my eyes with my hands, not able to believe there was no dark and sinister news on the

way. I took a moment to think about all that Doctor Robetz had just told me, trying to make complete sense of it all.

“So, it went well?’ I asked after a while, placing my hands on my lap.

“Yes, very well. We were able to repair everything that was wrong. I’m very satisfied with the results,” he grinned, the corners of his pastel blue eyes creasing up. I beamed back at him, thrilled by the news. My heart was racing, and all I wanted to do was phone up John to tell him what had happened.

But John was still not home when I returned later in the day. I wanted to tell him how everything had gone, and what the new plan was. They wanted to implant the embryos in just under a month and we would have to keep our fingers crossed that they adhered well. If they did, I would be expecting a baby in December. I could hardly contain my excitement. I had faith that it was all meant to be all along. Had it all happened for a reason? Would I get my December baby after all?

I thanked God from the bottom of my heart for looking over me that day. I still couldn’t believe that Doctor Robetz had found the problem and repaired it too. I was in a great deal of pain, and my abdomen was surprisingly swollen. But the painkillers took the edge off, and I lay on our couch deep in thought. I imagined a time of no more pain, physically or emotionally, with a beautiful baby in my arms. But for some reason John wasn’t in my mental picture at all, and I returned to reality with a bump. No, John was becoming less and less part of

the journey, and at the end of that significant day, I hadn't even received a phone call...

## 12

# “Relax And Just Forget About It!”

“Relax and just forget about it!”

Yes, that’s what my friends would say. I would stare at them in disbelief, wondering how exactly I was meant to relax and forget about it. The daily injections, countless medicines and endless scans weren’t likely to ‘distract’ me from it all, or the constant procedures, the cold operating theatres or the sharp and painful needles. It almost amazed me that they thought I *could* relax.

“Just because you have your baby curled up in your tummy, dear friend, doesn’t mean you have the faintest idea what you’re talking about!” I imagined screaming at them. “It was so easy and so natural for you. Just for a moment, could you forget that you are pregnant and put yourself in my shoes?”

I would have a sense of satisfaction whenever I envisaged this rampage. It would be so liberating to be able to release all of that anger during those moments when friends would say the patronising “just relax” comment. I wanted their understanding, and to some extent their sympathy.

But I didn't want their opinions. I muttered to myself as I dressed into the same old jeans and worn sweatshirt. I ran a brush through my short, dark hair, and smeared some moisturiser onto my face. I started to think of holding my own newborn again, and all those negative thoughts from the moment before blew out the window. I thought of holding my baby that very Christmas with family all around, and my heart swelled. Yes, it was all going to be okay.

I was tired and cranky that day. I had a dreadful night's sleep because my bladder kept on waking me. My head throbbed heavily, and I wanted to curl up into a ball, preferably in a pitch-black room, and just sleep the day away. A lady called Maggy phoned after I had been pottering around the house for a while. She worked alongside Doctor Robetz, but I hadn't dealt with her very much up to that point. She was a beautiful woman with long, dark hair and a slim frame. She had beautiful plump cheeks and a massively big smile. Her voice was just as big as her grin, and I rubbed my eyes tiredly as I listened to her enthusiastically explaining why she was calling. She wanted to see how I was doing and to ask if I had questions after the Laparoscopy I had the previous day. When I told her about my splitting headache she reassured me that it would have been due to the strong anaesthetic the day before, as well as the morphine they gave me for the pain.

"Drink plenty of water to help flush out all of the toxins and get lots of rest," she advised before hanging up. But the headache rapidly got worse and

I began to vomit. I frantically dialled Doctor Robetz's number, desperate to find a way to make it stop.

"It sounds like a bad migraine," he suggested thoughtfully. "Take some Imigran and see how it is after that."

I scurried off to dig out the Imigran I had stashed away in the medicine cabinet. My hands were shaking and my eyes brimming with tears. I wished John was there to help me, even to offer a cuddle or a glass of water. I wondered when he'd be home, and a small pool of hatred settled in my stomach. He never seemed to be around when I needed him the most.

I slid under the bed sheets and curled up once more. A sleepy cloud rested over my head, and when I awoke a few hours later, the migraine had disappeared. My body was weak and my emotions high. I lay there for the rest of the evening, barely moving an inch, alone with my thoughts. Alone, with no husband by my side.

Much to my relief, John did manage to take time out of his busy work schedule to take me out for dinner on our wedding anniversary. It was February 1<sup>st</sup>, and it had been a drizzly day in Pretoria despite being a comfortable temperature of 24 degrees for most of it. I had been taking Estinyl tablets for two weeks by that point, which was simply to hinder ovulation, and I was due to start a course of Provera tablets the following day. Being a synthetic form of progesterone, the Provera would restore my natural hormone levels and basically kick start my menstrual cycle.

I was filling John in on all of this as we ate our meal at one of our favourite restaurants. He nodded in all the right places, but glanced around the room as I spoke looking as though he had something else on his mind.

“It’s now time for children,” I said confidently. John bobbed his head in agreement, and continued to tuck away at his steak. I ignored his seeming lack of interest and continued to focus on the real possibility that a December baby would be on the cards.

That night after John had gone to sleep I crept out of our bedroom and went downstairs. I had been thinking of contacting the magazine called *Your Pregnancy* for a while now, wanting to see if they would be interested in my pregnancy diary just as soon as I managed to conceive. I sat cross-legged at the computer with all the lights off, and started writing an e-mail to the editor.

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Dear Wendy

At: My Pregnancy Magazine,

My name is Azelene I am 28 years old. I live in Pretoria, and I enjoy reading the “Share Your Pregnancy With Us” articles.

I am not pregnant yet, but will be very soon. I am on a fertility program, which started in October 2000. I would really like to share my story, treatment and pregnancy when that follows in March with all of your readers.

I was on a nine week program originally, with

a lot of specialised treatment and medication. They helped my body to produce strong and healthy eggs when I couldn't ovulate. In December last year, they removed 27 eggs from my ovaries, and then using IVF and ICSI, they managed to fertilise the eggs.

I now have 11 frozen embryos, which would have been implanted if it wasn't for unexplained fluid being found in my uterus just days before they were going to carry out the procedure. The fluid had entered my uterus through a small hole which has since been repaired in a recent laparoscopy.

Now that the hole has been fixed, I have been put on a course of hormones until March 2001, which will be when the embryos will be implanted. Hopefully I will become pregnant first time round.

I actually began writing a diary when I first realised my chances of conceiving naturally were poor, and I intend to finish it once my baby is born. If you are interested in my story, please let me know. I want to tell it, and perhaps it will help other women to keep trying.

Kind Regards  
Azelene

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I look back at that letter now and feel a pang of pity for myself. I was so determined that I was finally going to fall pregnant, and the more I made it a reality that it *was* going to happen, the higher my chances would be somehow.

Wendy, the editor, kindly sent me an e-mail

back a couple of days later. She told me that she wanted to speak to the chief editor and the photographer about it, and would let me know the score over the following week. I really wanted them to write a story about me – I felt I could help all those women out there in a similar situation as I was in.

The days passed without hearing anything from Wendy. Not that I was surprised as she had said it wouldn't be until the following week. But still, I hated waiting. My whole life seemed about waiting, and I was exhausted from it and tired of it. I told myself I had to 'relax' but to no avail. I almost gave up hope altogether when I read a particular article one afternoon that week. It was a sad story that I could relate to, touching me deeply and terrifying me at the same time.

The article was about a young woman, just 22 years of age. In 1999 she decided she wanted to be a surrogate mother, and eventually found a desperate couple who had been trying for a baby for an entire decade. It should have been a straight forward procedure, just a case of implanting their frozen embryos.

But the first implant didn't work and neither did the second, despite the fact they used IVF and ICSI. A third implant was carried out, but for some reason that failed too. They opted to try donor eggs, but to no avail. A total of five implants had been carried out in total, and countless tears shed every time it was unsuccessful. A tension had built up between the desperate couple and the surrogate and eventually they parted ways. The couple decided to

find a new surrogate mother.

I read through the story with fear running through my veins. I was scheduled to have my first implant by February 24<sup>th</sup>, after my period had been and gone. Up to that point I was so sure it would be successful first time round. But there was a 60 percent chance I wouldn't be so lucky. A staggering 60 percent of women can't even become pregnant with frozen embryos.

I consoled myself with the fact that the wife in the story was over 40 years old, so her eggs would have been weaker. But what about the donor eggs? Surely they would have been from a young and healthy woman? I knew there were many, many reasons why it didn't work for that particular couple with that particular surrogate. But I couldn't help but feel nauseas and uneasy, wondering if I would be part of that 60 percent. I had thought that I'd be in a good situation as I had 11 embryos on ice. But in the story, the couple defrosted seven of their embryos and only two survived. I could be left with only a few surviving embryos once all of them had been thawed out. Perhaps out of those 11 embryos only three would be able to be implanted. The harsh truth was that they may not even adhere to my uterus, and where would I be then? I'd be 20,000 South African Rand down, or around 2,893 United States Dollars, and back to square one. How was I not meant to be terrified at that prospect?

I thought bitterly of all the people who managed to breed like rabbits when they didn't even want a child in the first place. Then there were people, like me, who were struggling every single

day for something they wanted with all of their heart and soul. I was disappointed and afraid. I sat and prayed and prayed, asking God to help me. The option to “relax and forget about it” certainly wasn’t for me. I just wished my friends could realise that too.

# 13

## Dearest Elmin...

By February 19<sup>th</sup>, I was beginning to feel a bit more settled. I had the house to myself since John had gone to Rustenburg for a few days to start on some building projects for his parents. Instead of occupying my time with work at the launderette, John had involved me in his building projects in Pretoria. It was a positive use of my time and distracted me from my pain.

On the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>, I sat in our quiet home contemplating things. I was thinking of Elmin, specifically of how I wanted to thank her for suggesting I go to The Lab in the first place. But sadly, Ronell had informed me that Elmin and her husband had moved away from South Africa. I felt guilty that I had never set up a meeting with her. She had sounded like a lovely person and I wished I could have thanked her for everything. There was only one thing for it – I was going to have to put it all down in an e-mail. Perhaps I would even attach a personal photo too so she would know what I looked like.

I had felt very sorry for her after hearing her own story. Elmin had gone through a great ordeal struggling with infertility, and on top of that her age

was against her. But she couldn't have been more supportive of my journey despite her own struggles. I wondered if I had avoided meeting her because subconsciously I felt guilty, but also somewhat sorry for her. The thing was I still had time on my side. At least I knew I had a chance of conceiving. But what had amazed me about Elmin was that in spite of her own personal struggles, she would still phone me up and see how I was doing. She even wanted to know if there was anything she could do to help. I will always have a place in my heart for Elmin. I appreciate our chats over the phone so much, chats with a woman I have never met before. A woman that shared her own heartbreaking story with me.

I put my feet up on the couch and lay down horizontally, staring up at the ceiling. I sighed sadly, realising that Elmin would never know how much she meant to me, and how I wish we had met over coffee one morning. Even now, I sit and think about that wonderful lady who I hope is happy and carefree, somewhere fantastic in the world.

Back on that thoughtful evening, however, I just stared up at the blank ceiling. It suddenly dawned on me that it was dark outside. I got up to close the curtains and switch on the lights. I walked sleepily into the kitchen to see what inspiration I could muster for some sort of meal. After several moments staring at the almost empty fridge, I opted for cereal. At least that was one benefit to John being away, I didn't have to slave in front of a stove every day.

I put on a cheesy movie and settled down

into the soft sofa cushions with my bowl of cereal. For a moment I felt like a trouble-free teen again, where I had no responsibilities, problems, or issues. I quickly grew bored of the movie though, so slurped up the remainder of my food while glancing at the book I was halfway through reading, waiting patiently on the coffee table. I hadn't opened it in at least a week. Part of me felt compelled to sit and read for the remainder of the evening, but then a sudden urge took hold of me, telling me to do something proactive. I went to the store room to dig out an old cot that had been abandoned in there. It was a beautiful antique cot that John's mom had used for him when he was a baby. It had two useful drawers at the bottom of it and I imagined filling them with our baby's belongings.

Impulsively I decided to restore it. I enjoyed every moment of the task and the hours quickly flittered away faster than I could fathom. I thought of how there was finally light at the end of the tunnel on the wretched journey I was on. I thought of all that we had been through, and eventually started fantasising about all the many possibilities that could lie in store. After a long time I took a step back from the cot to observe my work. It needed oiling still, but then it would be perfect. Perhaps I was a bit like that antique cot, I thought to myself. I just needed to give my body some care and get it fixed up a bit, and then it would be as good as new.

When I went to sleep that night, I slept more soundly than I had for a long time.

## 14

# I Have The Laziest Follicle Ever...

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, I was at The Lab for a Hysteroscopy procedure. They were going to examine the inside of my uterus with the use of a narrow tube with a telescope on the end, which would be inserted up through my cervix. Sounds comfortable, I know. Images would be sent to a monitor and any abnormalities in my uterus could be seen.

It all went smoothly though, without too much discomfort. When it was all over and I had time to recover, Doctor Robetz paid me a visit in the ward. He looked somewhat drained, perhaps needing an overdue holiday, but he wore a friendly smile on his face.

“I am very happy with how everything is looking, Azelene,” he said gently, the smile lines around his eyes crinkling slightly. “We can now start the treatment to prepare your body for the implant. I’m going to book you in to have an internal scan now so we can find out where exactly in your cycle you are.”

I nodded my head appreciatively, feeling

excited that things were moving forward. I took myself off to see Jessica, who once again conducted the scan.

“Oh, I can see a follicle,” she said quickly, cheerful as always. “It’s very small which means you’re not ready to ovulate yet. You’re in the middle of your cycle.”

I wondered what it all meant in terms of starting the treatment, and glanced hopefully up at Jessica’s porcelain face.

“Come back in two days time, and we’ll see how big the follicle is then,” she commanded, cleaning the gel off of the device. I agreed while my brain worked busily calculating when I should next be ovulating. Was it in just three days time? That would make it Day 14 after my previous period, so perhaps it would be then.

I tidied myself up, and headed for the exit. My mind was racing eagerly, and I wished I was walking in through those front doors of the clinic ready to have the follicle measured again. The voice of the petite receptionist broke through my thoughts, and I spun round to see if it was even me she was calling for.

“I’ve got a bill for you here,” her voice tinkled as she waved a white envelope at me. Damn it, I thought prickly, it *was* me she wanted. I pulled an A4 sheet of paper from the envelope, bearing The Lab’s logo at the top of the page. It was a statement of the costs for preparing my body for the implant, defrosting the embryos as well as the implant itself. The final amount was a staggering 5,500 South African Rand, it was approximately 796 United

States Dollars. I gulped nervously, sensing the stress rising up through my body. My knees even felt a tad shaky, so I steadied myself on the smooth lined reception desk.

Up to that point we had spent 25,000 South African Rand on the treatment, equivalent to around 3,616 United States Dollars. Now we were looking at forking out a considerable amount extra and it was getting harder and harder to part with the cash, particularly when we weren't even sure if the treatment would be successful or not. If it didn't work, would we pay for it all over again?

I could only hope that it would work first time round. I would be pregnant soon, I told myself over and over again. It was like a mantra, "You will get pregnant. You will get pregnant." After all, the laparoscopy allowed Doctor Robetz to repair my uterus, and we were finally taking steps forward – I would be preparing my body for the implant at long last. Beneath the financial pressure, I did have a positive frame of mind. I decided then and there, as I stepped out through the glass doors of The Lab, that I would have a more optimistic outlook. Any rogue thoughts that would spring into my mind would be quickly banished away. I needed to take control of my body and mind. It was time for a new me.

Part of the 'new me', I decided, was to look into ways I could decrease the tension in my body. I was particularly tense after my appointment on March 8<sup>th</sup>. My follicle was an impressive 18 millimetres in diameter, but had decided to just kick back and relax in my ovary in some kind of

effort to torture me it seemed. The follicle was simply not budging, and I longed for Doctor Robetz to get on and trigger it somehow. Fortunately, I had booked an appointment that afternoon with a reflexologist to calm my nerves. I had found out that reflexology assists in soothing your body, improving blood flow to various areas, and boosting your mental health. The latter was definitely something I needed to address I decided as I drove eagerly to my appointment.

The clinic was in Sandton, which was a wealthy area of Johannesburg. I drove past all the high rise buildings, both businesses and flats, and imagined living there. Sure, there were more cafés, nice restaurants and perhaps more business opportunities, but I was a country girl at heart and loved the tranquillity of where we were shackled up. I never longed to be back in the heart of the city of Pretoria in that tiny apartment where John and I first came together. But I did enjoy being in cosmopolitan locations every now and then. I parked the car and attempted to enter the clinic as confidently as I could. I stepped into a small waiting room, where pictures of pebbles and luminous green trees sat neatly on the walls. I sat on a mid-grey canvas upholstered sofa that didn't soften at all as I wriggled down into it. The sound of soft, relaxing music played, but it was at such a low volume I could barely hear it. I looked around, wondering if I'd found the right place.

After a couple of minutes a woman bolstered out of a room that I could only assume was her office. She reminded me of a fairy godmother, with

beautiful, caring, brown eyes and a long, grey mane tugged neatly back into a ponytail.

“Hi Azelene, I’m Pam,” she said softly. Her voice was gentle and tender, and I immediately warmed to her.

She beckoned me into the other room, which was slightly more professional looking with various certificates in frames around the room and an untidy stack of books on a white chest of drawers. I commenced with telling Pam my whole story, and she listened intently throughout, never losing eye contact. She recommended that I went to see her up until the embryos were implanted. She suggested that after that, I should see a Doctor M. Qian. She was a doctor of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture and Chinese herbs, and Pam apparently knew her quite well. The concept boggled my mind slightly, but I had nothing to lose and Doctor Qian was supposed to specialise in pregnancies. Thinking of how desperate I was to keep hold of those embryos once they had been implanted, I decided to see her as soon as the implant procedure had been carried out. I needed any help I could get.

I suddenly realised that I had drifted off into a world of my own, and had been ignoring Pam’s non-stop ramblings. She was certainly made for one on one customer interaction as one topic seemed to flow right to the next absolutely seamlessly. I tried harder to listen to what she was twittering on about.

“Where do you live, Azelene?” she asked, her brown eyes drilling into me all of a sudden.

“Oh, we live in Irene Glen Estate in Pretoria,” I replied, wondering what was coming next.

“There could be subterranean water there, you know.” She looked very studious as she made the statement, like a lecturer talking to students at a University. I couldn’t hide the look of complete bewilderment that was spread over my face. Subter-what, what are you talking about-now?

“Do you and your husband get up at night to go to the bathroom regularly?” she asked, maintaining her no-nonsense expression and speaking with a similar tone in her voice.

“Err...yes,” I admitted, feeling slightly embarrassed and wanting the conversation to detour as soon as possible.

“Right, you should get copper wire immediately and put it around the base of your bed. Subterranean water generates negative energy, which in turn can seriously affect fertility as well as insomnia, migraines and backache.” She finished her speech at last and gave a curt nod. I absorbed as much of the information as I could, which wasn’t too much as she had reeled it all off pretty quickly.

All of a sudden I wondered if that subterranean water was the cause of my countless migraines. But I also had to consider the reality that my headaches were simply caused by the stress of my infertility drama. Then again, perhaps my infertility drama was caused by the subterranean water...I was going round and round in circles, not knowing what was rational and what was plain ridiculous. I did, however, decide to take Pam’s advice seriously anyhow. It was kind of understandable to me. If your bed has negative energy it will spread to your body, and when it

came down to it I was willing to try anything to make me more fertile. I mentally made a shopping list – 1. Copper wire, 2. Folic acid.

I had read an article that morning saying that folic acid was beneficial to take both before and during pregnancy. Apparently it could aid in preventing birth defects, most particularly neural tube defects. It would help my body be healthier and also help in the healthy development of a foetus. Yet again the vision of a beautiful baby popped into my mind...

I realised I had drifted off into a world of my own once more. Pam had stopped talking but continued to work her magic on one of my feet. The session finally drew to a close and I definitely felt better, both emotionally and physically. I sighed in contentment, feeling that by looking after my body in ways such as giving up smoking and reflexology I would be on the right track. To be honest, if I had to give up eating to fall pregnant I would have. I would have done anything to make a strong healthy baby of my own. Surely, if I made the sacrifices, namely, quit smoking, eating healthy, working out regularly, thinking positive and save money where I can, I would reap the rewards at the end of it all.

The events of the following day seemed to back up my theory. I almost sang out in happiness as Jessica reported her findings.

“The scan is showing that the wall of your uterus has grown to six millimetres in thickness and your follicle is one millimetre bigger than yesterday. I think we should trigger it now.” She tucked a few of her red curls behind her ear, still concentrating

on the screen.

I grinned, thinking of Pam the reflexologist and sent her a telepathic “thank you.” After cleaning myself up after the scan, I went into see Sam another nurse at The Lab. She had soft, mousy-brown hair and rosy red cheeks. She flicked a thin fringe to the side slightly and smiled gently when I entered the small room. I would have pinned her at being mid thirties, but due to her dowdy dress sense and frumpy body, she looked a bit older.

“Come and have a seat,” she said, gesturing to the beige upholstered chair. “I’m going to give you an injection, so you’ll probably be ovulating this weekend.” She organised a dish, plonking in a needle, a tiny glass bottle filled with transparent liquid medication, an alcohol wipe sachet and a cotton wool ball.

“You’ll have to come in on Sunday for blood tests, I’m afraid,” she continued. “But if your blood work looks okay, you can start with the hormone injections on Monday.” Sam quickly got on with administering the injection, and then tidied everything away.

“Can I start taking folic acid?” I asked, digging out the car keys from my bag.

“Yes Azelene, you can start taking folic acid and multivitamins too,” she replied, turning her back towards me. I sat still for a while, waiting for Sam the nurse to attend to me once more. But after a few minutes passed I realised she was busy with something else. I blushed slightly and scurried out of the room.

## 15

# When Your Husband Thinks You're Nuts... Perhaps You Are

Sam the nurse had been right – I needed to go into The Lab for blood tests on Sunday morning. I was relaxed and confident that everything was going to be fine. My new problem, however, was that I was coming down with a cold and could feel it taking over me more and more. I attempted to ignore it altogether, hoping it would just give up and go away.

On Monday, Anna called the house phone. In true 'Anna' fashion, she cut straight to the chase, making it a snappily brief phone conversation.

"Your blood tests show that your progesterone levels are a bit lower than we'd like, so we can't begin with the course of injections yet," she explained. I sighed unhappily and blew my nose. I was starting to feel increasingly weak from the cold and I had wanted some good news to lift my spirits. Anna simply told me to return for further blood tests on Wednesday, and we would see where we were then.

By the time Wednesday arrived, I was incredibly down in the dumps, miserable and feeling poorly. Anna took one look at me and immediately recommended that I went to see a G.P. to prescribe something to help. But despite feeling rotten health wise, I did feel somewhat cheerful. I was calm and together rather than the emotional wreck I had envisaged myself being at that point.

I took myself off to see Doctor Paul Merchant, my G.P., in the afternoon. He had friendly eyes. He had an intelligent look, and a warm aura. I've known Paul for years. He wore a mint green shirt with coordinated emerald green tie, creating a somewhat sophisticated air about him. Meanwhile, he got on with conducting a brief examination with his various utensils and sat back in his black chair with his arms crossed.

"You have laryngitis," he said gruffly, as though a secret undercover detective solving a mysterious illness. The result came hardly as a surprise to me – I had a very bad cough and my voice was almost non-existent. I was only glad I wasn't smoking anymore, as that would have made it even worse.

But it certainly took a while to shake the laryngitis off. I was finding it hard to sleep, subsequently making me feel progressively more drained as the days passed. On Thursday morning I was curled up on the sofa with my eyes closed when the phone rang. I sleepily dragged my body over to the handset, yawning all the way. It was Anna, who for once sounded fairly cheerful. "Your levels are 100 percent," she bubbled enthusiastically down

the phone. "You can start with the Lucrin injections today." She sounded triumphant, and I imagined sitting in front of her as she said it, giving her a round of applause. "The Lucrin injection holds off ovulation and thickens the womb at the same time, so after the course of injections we'll have a nice, thick, healthy womb to work with."

I got off the phone and went to make a coffee in the kitchen. I stared out of the window at the bare back garden, thinking of the day ahead of me. I had a reflexology appointment at 10am, so I would go to The Lab to sort out the Lucrin injections after that. The kettle finished boiling, but I decided to ditch the coffee and just get on with the day. After a quick shower, I was out of the door.

Pam the reflexologist was just as warm and welcoming as before. Her grey hair was once again pulled back into a tight ponytail, and I wondered if her whole face drooped and sagged as soon as she took out her hair band every night.

"If I were you, Azelene," she advised after hearing my news. "I would inject the Lucrin into my stomach. Lucrin tends to leave scars on the upper leg, whereas the skin on your stomach is softer and more elastic, so less likely to scar as much." Coincidentally, this is exactly what Anna suggested when I spoke to her on the phone.

I accepted the suggestion, yet again, but shivered at the thought of injecting my stomach. There were some things in life I never thought I'd have to do, and that was one of them. But perhaps it was worth a try.

It took almost two weeks all in all until I

started to feel somewhat better. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, I found myself in Rustenburg with John, sitting peacefully on his parents' farm. John was busy with the three houses he was building, so I spent some quality time with my in-laws. It took about an hour and a half to get there, but was completely worth the drive. Rustenburg sat on the foot of the Magaliesberg mountain range and was a beautiful place to be. It was dry and warm throughout most of the year, and lush green mountains surrounded the many farms that inhabited the area.

Being away from home gave me the ability to distance myself from all of the problems we were going through. John and I had definitely distanced us from one another, but it seemed a little bit better there in Rustenburg. Spending time with his parents made me feel like part of the family once more, and I also realised how distanced from his family I had become. By that point I had certainly thought John and I would be our own family unit – with or without children.

I was injecting myself every day, and even though it was into my stomach, it all seemed to be running along smoothly. Yet again, I had surprised myself with what I could put myself through, but was happy that my body was doing as it should for once. I started to menstruate as planned at the end of the week, on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Just four days later, I took myself to The Lab for a scan. It was a disappointing visit to the clinic, as I was told my uterus wall was still too thin. That meant I couldn't begin the course of progesterone pills and had to endure another two weeks of Lucrin

injections instead.

My emotions were on a crazy rollercoaster ride. I was extremely tearful, and at times I even saw myself as being emotionally unstable. It felt as though something was chasing me and I couldn't get away from it, no matter how much I tried. It was though a negative cloud had swallowed me up and I couldn't get out. I put my horrible emotions down to the Lucrin – I had never felt this way when I was on the course of Buserelin injections. I had been told that this could happen but I never anticipated in a million years that it would be quite so bad. I honestly felt as though I was going nuts. One moment I was fine and the next all hell had broken loose in my head. I just wanted to climb out of my body and run away. What was even more frustrating was I couldn't control the erratic nature of the emotions. It really felt as though the medication had taken over my body, transforming me into a mad and crazy woman.

“NOBODY UNDERSTANDS!” I screamed to myself, tugging desperately at my short, dark crop of hair. “Nobody understands...”

“You’ll begin to feel better soon,” Sam reassured me when she saw my swollen, tired eyes and drained body. They had decided to start building up my thin uterus wall with daily two milligram Progynova tablets. “As soon as the Progynova begins to work, you’ll feel better.”

I was slightly happier after hearing that. All I wanted to do was to escape the hell I was in that was causing me to have spontaneous meltdowns. I offered a slight smile to Sam who was filling out

some paperwork. I sat back, thinking of how much I was looking forward to getting back home. I wanted to curl up in a ball on the couch and watch a good movie. John was still working throughout the week in Rustenburg and I would only see him on the weekends. That following weekend, however, he had decided not to come home.

“Can I come to the farm for the weekend?” I had asked him on the phone earlier in the day.

“It’s probably best if you stay at home until you feel better,” he replied coldly. I ended up sobbing so much down the line that he could no longer decipher anything that I was saying. I hated that he was barely ever at home, and how he couldn’t support me when I was in such a state. He found it too difficult, and didn’t want to be around it.

“Sam, I’m losing it,” I admitted weakly, putting my head into my hands. She looked at me with concern. “Could you phone John, Sam? You could tell him that I am not insane, that it’s just a hormone imbalance and that I’ll be back to normal soon,” I pleaded, hoping she would feel a sense of sisterhood and call him.

But sisterhood seemed to be a long way off of her mind, I realised, as she pursed her lips dubiously, not saying anything. The silence dragged on and on, and I came to the conclusion that she wasn’t willing to help.

“He thinks I’m going nuts, Sam,” I mumbled quietly. “I think I’m going nuts...but at least I know why.”

Sam let out a huge sigh, stopping what she

was doing.

“I’ll talk to Doctor Robetz and see if we can increase your Progynova dosage and speed things up,” she offered with a cool tone to her voice. She wore a very stern look on her face, and turned her stare away from me and back onto what she was doing. I waited. I waited for her to pick up a pen from the countertop so she could jot down John’s phone number. I waited for her to say, “What time would it be best for me to call?” But she said nothing.

I got home and slumped down onto the couch. I was sad and alone, without anyone around to cuddle me up in their arms. I sobbed miserably – I couldn’t cope on my own, and my husband couldn’t cope with me. It seemed so dramatic, and I shook my head wondering how everything had come to that. Why was I putting myself in that horrid situation? Why wouldn’t I move on from the wretched infertility battle? Was I doing it because I desperately wanted a child, or was I seeking the love that was missing from my marriage?

I needed to stop crying, I knew it wasn’t helping. I needed to go to bed and sleep. I prayed and prayed and prayed. I even prayed that when I woke up, it would have all been a bad dream and John would be lying next to me, content in our marital bed.

I opened my eyes slowly, and saw just an empty space beside me. That was right, John was away. I was all alone. My eyes felt puffy and swollen from all of the crying, and my head was pounding mercilessly. I quickly jumped out of bed and raced

to the bathroom. I vomited violently into the toilet, feeling as though my brain would be thrown from my skull. After taking some Imigran, I lay back down in bed. Somehow I managed to drift off into a slumber, and when I surfaced two hours later, the headache had gone.

I was lying under the duvet feeling listless when the phone in the lounge rang. I staggered out to go and get it. It was Sam, informing me that Doctor Robetz suggested I take two Progynova tablets a day rather than just one. I thanked Sam and put down the phone quietly, left standing in the eerie silence of the living room. I clenched my fists, hoping with all my might that the increased dosage would work. My marriage to John was depending on it. John wasn't around to support his wife – he was away working. But what made it worse was that he didn't want me to go and see him. My shoulders sagged and in defeat I dropped my head sadly. My life was falling to pieces.

## 16

# Let My Hair Down, Let Myself Down...

Thankfully, the extra Progynova tablet did help my sanity. It made me feel like a new person – more relaxed, somewhat happier and slightly less exhausted. My womb wall was seven millimetres thick, and everyone at The Lab was confident that an implant would be carried out soon.

John and I were enjoying one another's company a bit more too once the effects of the additional Progynova had kicked in. We went to a friend's wedding on April 7<sup>th</sup>. It was a beautifully crisp day. The sky let off a magnificent blue hue and the breeze laced through the trees surrounding us. Glasses of bubbly continued to flow throughout the afternoon and evening, and everybody there seemed to be in good spirits. John and I soaked in the atmosphere, enjoying socialising with so many of our friends.

At our designated table in the evening, I looked over at him as he told a comical story to the wedding guests we had been seated next to. His face was lit up and his hands were waving around animatedly. I stared at him lovingly – his smart, white shirt opened at the collar, his eyes full of happiness as he continued to tell his story. I

realised how much he still made my heart melt. He was funny, handsome, and a pleasure to be around when all was said and done. In reality, his heart was in the right place, he just couldn't handle the stress and pressure of what we were going through. A pang of guilt hit my stomach. I had put him through a lot the last year, and he had essentially lost the wife he fell in love with.

I was still staring at him, thinking, when he suddenly turned his gaze to me, grinning broadly.

"It was hilarious, hey Az?" he chuckled heartily. I didn't know what he was talking about, and I looked vacantly at all of the giggling faces around the table, all staring at me, waiting expectantly for my input.

"O, yes. It was hilarious!" I lied and laughed simultaneously. John squeezed my hand and lovingly embraced me in his arms. Yes, I will do better for John, I thought to myself, snuggling into his neck.

When I woke up the next morning, my heart pounded. I had forgotten something, but what was it? I jolted up in bed, my mind racing at 100 kilometres an hour. I paced to the bathroom and sat on the toilet. To my surprise, I was spotting.

"Shit!" belted out from my mouth as I realised my mistake. "I forgot to take my Progynova last night. Shit, shit, shit!" John sleepily stumbled into the bathroom.

"It's only one, I'm sure it'll be fine," he said in a muffled, dozy voice. I chose to ignore him and leapt to the phone. I dialled The Lab's number, and was put straight through to Sam.

“Just go on as before and come in for a scan on Tuesday,” she advised, not letting on in her voice whether I had made a detrimental mistake or not. I just couldn’t believe that I had been on treatment for so long now and not once forgotten my medication. Just when the implant was closer than ever before, I slipped up. “Fuck! I so not need this disappointment NOW. I have let myself and my body down. I have tried to do everything perfectly and look at what I have done now.”

After a few days of taking the Progynova tablets each day, Jessica scanned my abdomen to assess the damage. She twitched her mouth nervously as she worked, and I instantly knew something was wrong. She abruptly left the room without saying a word, and when she returned, she had Anna in tow. Anna repeated the scan, meticulously studying the image on the monitor.

“Your womb has decreased by five millimetres in the past four days,” she said soberly. “We’re going to have to terminate all medication immediately. Let’s schedule you for an appointment with Doctor Robetz next week.”

I felt ashamed of myself. I was the reason why all the preparation for the implant hadn’t worked. Anna reassured me that it wouldn’t have been caused by the one pill that I had missed, but I somehow knew she was only saying it to make me feel better. I moped around the house for a few days following the scan, filled with anger and disappointment, both directed at myself. My head was packed with thoughts, doubts and regrets, and I couldn’t seem to snap out of it. John seemed to

pick up on this, and spontaneously booked us on a weekend trip to the coast.

It was just what I needed. We stayed in a beautiful lodge in the forest, which provided us with the intimacy our marriage needed. We ventured out into the wetlands to do a game drive, where we saw giraffes, wildebeests, rhinos and endless species of birds. We walked along the beach, we snorkelled in the sea and we even took a boat trip on Lake St. Lucia itself. It was magical being out there on the vast stretch of water. We could see hippos and crocodiles, basically nature at its best. I arrived back home beating myself up less than before, and for once I had John to thank.

## 17

# When Will It Be *My* Turn?

Much to my delight, John came with me to the following appointment with Doctor Robetz. He held my hand as we sat in the pristine waiting area, and I felt considerably happier being that tiny bit emotionally closer to him again. We sat in silence, but his warm grip on my hand never faltered. I felt loved.

Eventually we were taken to the room where the scans were carried out. For the first time in all my dealings with The Lab, Doctor Robetz carried out the sonogram himself. I didn't know whether to take that as a good sign or bad, but lay on the table trying not to question it too much. He didn't enlighten us on why he wanted to carry it out and conducted the scan in silence. After a couple of minutes he revealed that my womb wall was a meagre one millimetre thick, perhaps down to a deficiency of progesterone.

"I'm going to put you back on the Estinyl tablets, Azelene, and later on in the treatment we'll try you on Viagra. The blood flow to your womb might be too low. Viagra opens the blood vessels

which in turn could prevent the womb from becoming too thin again,” he explained solemnly, looking slightly more aged all of a sudden. I hadn’t realised how much grey hair he had, and it occurred to me how much pressure there probably was in his job.

But all I could do was agree with what he was saying. The whole treatment experience was becoming more and more monotonous and dull. Sure, there were good days, but there were also a lot of uninteresting days, weeks and months when nothing happened apart from the consumption of pills. So now Viagra was being added to the list. Why not? I climbed into bed that night feeling indifferent to it all, and let out a loud and exasperated sigh.

“Are you thinking about Yvette?” John asked as he got into bed next to me. I frowned, wondering why I would be thinking about Yvette of all people at this time of night.

“No, why?” I snapped back.

“Oh, I thought she had called you this evening. Jaco told me that she’s six weeks pregnant,” he explained in a stony voice. I looked over at him and could see that the news had affected him in the same way it affected me. It hurt.

Of course I was happy for both Yvette and Jaco. But when was it going to be us? When would our friends be sitting in bed talking about me being six weeks pregnant? I rolled over and switched off my bedside lamp. I didn’t even want to talk about it. I drifted off into a pleasant dream, and longed to stay in that tranquil slumber forever.

We didn't talk about the pregnancy for a while after that. We carried on pretending that we were as happy as could be, and when friends asked whether we'd heard their news, we'd smack huge goofy smiles on our faces and exclaim, "Yes! Isn't it *fantastic*? We're so excited for them! What do you think they'll have – a boy or a girl?"

Anyway by this point I have been through these emotions a couple of times already. All my girl friends now already had their babies, some already started with baby number two. They definitely didn't worry about my feelings, how could they understand what I was going through when all of them were so damned fertile? They didn't understand.

We had that very conversation one evening whilst out for dinner with our friend, Hendrik. The conversation was flowing and the food was delicious, but I was extremely tired. I yawned and shivered, ready for my cosy bed and a deep sleep.

"Don't go yet, Az," John sighed with an affectionate gaze upon his face. "Stay a bit longer and then we'll all go home together."

I agreed and ordered another glass of wine. One more hour wouldn't hurt, and apart from being tired I was having a lovely evening. We finally left after the men had a couple more beers, and I was relieved to be that much closer to getting some shut eye. I couldn't handle the late nights like before. I didn't know if it was because the sheer stress of everything left me exhausted or because I was nearing 30.

As soon as we pulled up on the driveway I

saw that the front door was open. My heart seemed to stop beating as reality hit me – someone had broken into our house. We nervously crept inside, me shakily clinging onto John as he tiptoed in before me. The place was a complete mess. All of our belongings had been strewn across the floor of every room, from the contents of our drawers in the bedroom to the dvd's off the shelves in the living room. But whoever it was who had been in our house had left, with our television, Hi-fi and some other electronic equipment in tow.

My body wouldn't stop shaking. I wanted to get away from the crime scene that was splayed in front of my eyes, but knew we had to stay and deal with the situation. John came and put a strong arm around my shoulders.

"Thank God you didn't come home earlier, Azelene," he croaked. I caught my breath as I realised how right he was. I could have walked in on the burglars in mid-act and startled them, which in South Africa you do not want to be doing. Meeting an intruder face to face could often lead to an abrupt ending of your life, and regrettably it happened far too often in our part of the world.

I turned my body into John and hid my face on his shoulder. I closed my eyes wanting the turmoil to disappear. That's when the tears started, the sad, distressed, and despairing tears that told the truth of all my unhappiness. After a few moments I took a deep breath and released myself from John's embrace. I sniffed pathetically and knelt down on the floor. It was time to pick up the pieces...

John went with me to my next appointment at The Lab. The burglary had left me even more on edge than I already was, and perhaps he knew that I needed some extra support. But as happy as it made me to have him by my side, it also made me a tad nervous. I knew the time was coming when I would have to take the medication that would drive my hormones wild. I would be emotional, cry over nothing, and basically be an unknown person again. The person that my husband hated. The person that I hated. I was trying to enjoy the calm before the storm, but a feeling of impending doom surrounded us.

Something else that was making me nervous was the Lucrin injections. They were getting harder and harder to give to myself, and I was a lot more hesitant about puncturing the needle in. I would attempt it about six times before actually sticking it in properly. I thought it would have been easier the more I was doing it, but it was definitely considerably more difficult. I felt like a masochist as I forced myself to dart the injection in under my skin, and it constantly baffled me how drug addicts would voluntarily do it for some kind of euphoric outcome.

I had just finished injecting myself one Wednesday afternoon at the start of May when the house phone rang.

“Hi, it’s Wendy here from *My Pregnancy Magazine*,” a woman said. Her voiced sounded very calm and friendly, but my stomach still tied itself in a knot. I had meant to telephone Wendy, but had felt bad about the whole situation. I wasn’t

pregnant yet and didn't want to waste her time.

"Don't worry, Azelene. We wish you all the best for the treatment, and when you are pregnant we definitely want to publish your story. We're in no hurry - it's just that we've never published a story like yours before. Keep going with the diary and write down all of your feelings."

Wendy seemed genuinely nice and caring, and I got off the phone feeling both glad and relieved that she had called. I really did want to write a story for them, even if there was no happy ending to it.

May trickled on smoothly, and so did the treatment. Everything seemed to be happening so quickly, perhaps because the program began after an ovulation and not before one. I was forcing myself to drink almost three litres of water every day in an effort to keep hydrated, as well as eating healthily and avoiding as much second-hand smoke as possible. I wanted to do everything in my power to be physically strong.

With that in mind, on May 21<sup>st</sup>, I enrolled in a yoga class. It was every bit as good as I hoped it would be, taught by a beautiful teacher named Savannah. She had a petite frame and petite facial features to go along with it. Her hair was long and chocolate-toned, matching her dark and mysterious eyes. You could tell she lived and breathed yoga – her passion in the discipline showed in each minute of the lesson as well as her finely sculpted figure.

I stretched, I balanced, and I concentrated on something that was not baby-making. I left the class satisfied, knowing I had worked my body

hard. I had enjoyed spending an entire hour switching my world off, only concentrating on exercises. It was exactly what I needed and I loved it – my body loved it and felt content. I went straight from yoga to a reflexology session. It was carried out by a lady called Donna who was young, with blond curls that sat comfortably on her shoulders. She welcomed me in with a chirpy manner, turning down the radio she had been listening to. Pam, the previous reflexologist, had gone overseas so I was left to try out Donna. But I was excited to give her a go. She seemed lovely and worked in collaboration with Savannah to create a rounded holistic package. Despite never treating someone with infertility issues, Donna seemed to know what she was doing. Her touch was a lot firmer and more intense than Pam's had been, but I felt that it was perhaps more productive. I sat calmly with my foot in Donna's grasp, deciding whether I should schedule a full body massage with her at the end of the week. Even the thought of a lovely massage made me float away into a peaceful state of mine.

What made me even happier was how positive Doctor Robetz was when I told him about the yoga and reflexology. He said it was beneficial both physically and emotionally, reconfirming what I had believed it was doing for me. He went on to explain that my Progynova tablets needed to be increased to four per day, which sounded like a lot but were necessary for an implant to be possible the following week. I left my appointment feeling very tired and decided to go straight home. I had woken

up early that morning to collect linen from the restaurants to take them to the launderette. Yes, I had gotten back into my business again. In retrospect, one of the biggest mistakes I had made was leaving it for as long as I had done. I had been sitting around the house worrying about everything instead of living my life and distracting myself through work.

So there I was at the end of May 2001, taking control of my life again. John and I were going through a warmer spell, and I was thriving off being busy at work as well as my yoga and reflexology sessions. Perhaps I didn't have to worry about it being the calm before the storm. Perhaps it was the beginning of a calmer chapter all together, and perhaps it would soon be *my turn* after all.

## 18

# What Goes Down, Must Come Up?

“I am confused,” Doctor Robetz muttered, glaring pensively at the monitor. I almost rolled my eyes. Here we go again, I thought to myself.

“Your uterus wall has decreased to two millimetres. It’s not five millimetres thick anymore. I have no idea why.” He pulled his glasses off his face and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “All I can suggest is we try Estrogen injections instead of the Progynova tablets.” He sighed deeply, and I could sense his disappointment too. I just listened and nodded my head as usual. I went along with everything at that point, not even questioning it. I didn’t pin my hopes up on any of it working. I was simply open to trying anything that could possibly be successful.

I woke up early the next Saturday morning, and blearily looked at my alarm clock. ‘JUNE 2<sup>ND</sup> 5:03AM’ it read. I put my hand weakly on to the top of my head – it was banging horrendously. I briefly stumbled out of bed for a glass of water and painkillers before falling back under the duvet for more sleep.

My alarm went off at 6am, alerting me to the

fact that I had to get out of bed and go and collect laundry from the restaurants. I switched my alarm off and feebly sat up in bed, the room spinning around me. John woke up and looked over at me.

“Az, honey, you look terrible. Go back to sleep,” he said sweetly, caressing my head.

“But I’ve got to.....” I started to say, my head already back down on the pillow.

“Don’t worry, I’ll go and collect the laundry. I’ll check on you in a while.”

I accepted his uncharacteristically generous offer and pulled the duvet over my head. I heard the front door close and began dozing back off to sleep. I thought vaguely of places John and I could go away on holiday, waiting to drift off. I was calculating a day when I could squeeze in a shopping spree with my sister, when my stomach contracted nauseously out of the blue. I knew I had to get to the bathroom...fast. I vomited as soon as I reached the toilet, followed by a bout of terrible diarrhoea. It carried on and on, never-ending, with no sign of stopping.

After some time I heard the front door open. I was lying motionless on the floor next to the toilet, too weak to get up. John scooped me up into his arms and rushed out of the house. Before I knew it we were in his car and on our way to the hospital. My head pounded all of the way and I bit down hard onto my lip, praying I wouldn’t start to vomit again.

We eventually arrived at the local hospital. Never had a journey seemed longer - I felt that we could have driven all the way to Cape Town in the

same amount of time. John carried me into the ER department at the Pretoria East Hospital, where staff ushered us into one of the small rooms with a single, lonely bed inside. A doctor suddenly towered over me, looking at my eyes and listening to my chest with his stethoscope.

“She’s very dehydrated,” he said. “Do you have a headache, dear?”

I faintly nodded my head, covering my eyes with my hand. My head was throbbing savagely and I just wanted to pass out. The harsh hospital lights made me feel ten times worse and I longed to be at home in my own bed.

“She’s been very sick, and has been vomiting non-stop,” I could hear John saying, worry lacing every word. “She often gets Migraines, and she has been on infertility treatment for a long time now Doctor.”

“Let’s get her some Imigran and something for the nausea. Let’s also get her some IV fluid for dehydration,” the doctor instructed the staff. I could hear footsteps coming and going as the nurses did as they were told. I kept my eyes closed, waiting for it all to go away.

I remained in hospital for the rest of the morning, and rested at home for the remainder of the day. I was concerned over how fast my body had fallen downhill. I was scared at how fragile I was in reality, even on the days it seemed I could take on the world. It troubled me that I didn’t know the damage the treatment could be doing to my body and how efficiently it was functioning. It was then I really questioned whether I was on the right path...

But just two days later, on Monday, I was ignoring those negative thoughts. The only option was to keep walking forward, with one footstep in front of another. I pushed myself to go to yoga before my session at The Lab, and despite feeling weaker I still enjoyed the stretching and breathing exercises. My body felt slightly more content.

Everything ran smoothly at The Lab too, much to my surprise. My uterus wall was two millimetres thicker, so back up to the seven millimetres again. The Estrogen injections seemed to be a great deal more effective than the Progynova tablets had been, and as soon as I stepped out of the clinic doors, I decided to phone John to tell him the news.

“Az, could you do me a favour?” he asked as soon as he answered my call. I agreed, hoping it wasn’t something ridiculously inconvenient.

“Could you pick up Johannes from the plot and take him to the taxi rank?” I thought for a moment before assenting, clutching my car keys in my hand. Johannes was a nice guy who had worked for John for six years at that point. He was very likeable and hardworking, and I didn’t mind helping him out in the slightest.

Before long I was at the smallholding, watching as Johannes strode to the car. He was of African Sotho origin, with curly black hair and deep, brown eyes. He couldn’t have been any taller than me, but was masculine and burly. He always had a gentle twinkle in his eye, and I considered him one of the few people I knew who was impossible to dislike. We chatted light-heartedly on

our journey together, mostly about building work that was being carried out and what would be coming up next. After a while the chatter simmered out and we were left in quietness, our minds busy with individual thought.

“Azelene, don’t you and John want children?” Johannes suddenly asked out of nowhere, breaking the silence. I looked at him momentarily, searching for mockery in his dark eyes or a smirk upon his lips. But all I saw was genuine interest. I was staggered by his question and didn’t know how to reply.

“Yes, we do very much Johannes, but we are struggling with it though,” I said in a quiet voice. I didn’t expand on it anymore, hoping that would extinguish the conversation.

“Azelene,” he said again, surprising me once more. “I have the number of a reverend. I will give the number to you so you can call him. You *must* telephone him. He will pray for you, and you will have your baby.” I didn’t know how to respond. I was shocked and decided to thank him kindly and remain quiet for the remainder of the drive. Johannes didn’t dwell on it much longer either. He raised the topic of his own family, a subject he could elaborate on at great length, and that stole his attention for the rest of the journey to the taxi rank.

When I finally got home, I sat down and thought about what Johannes had said. I wondered why he had asked that very personal question and then given me the information about the reverend. As far as I knew he didn’t know anything about our personal life, and certainly not about us struggling

to have kids. However, I reasoned that anything was worth a try. I took the small folded white piece of paper with Reverend Mtsweni's number on it that he passed to me just before he got out of the car. I stared at it and for a second, hesitated to open it, but then I thought, just go ahead Azelene and phone. You don't have any thing to lose. I dialled the number and anxiously waited for whatever was coming next. I was just about to hang up when a lady answered.

"May I please speak to Reverend Mtsweni." I heard my voice cracking down the receiver.

"I'm afraid the Reverend Mtsweni is busy all day with prayers over the phone, but if you fax your problem, he will pray for you."

Slightly stunned by the whole concept of it all, I started writing a letter to the Reverend Mtsweni. I explained all of the problems we had faced and how I desperately needed the upcoming implant to work. I needed it to work for so many, many reasons. I faxed it off and left it at that. I didn't know whether to believe in it or not, but I personally believe in prayer so I am going to have faith that it is going to help me. All I could do was to stay optimistic and hope for the best. I had nothing to lose.

When Doctor Robetz did a scan of my uterus three days later, I lay on the bed with my fingers crossed. My faith in Reverend Mtsweni rested in the outcome of the scan. If he really did have some magic gift, then it would be proved at that very moment.

"It's growing, woman," Doctor Robetz said

brightly. “It’s exceeded its usual seven millimetre thickness, Azelene.”

I blinked up at him, not daring to believe it.

“How thick is it now?” I asked, my voice croaking slightly.

“It’s between eight and a half and nine millimetres,” he replied softly, his eyes twinkling.

I couldn’t believe it. I wondered if it was down to the new Estrogen injections, or whether Reverend Mtswani’s prayers had worked. Perhaps he had been praying for me and that was the result. I remained pessimistic about Reverend Mstweni’s powers though. I needed to see if the thickness would stay an impressive measurement, so when I had a follow up scan just under a week later, I was flabbergasted to see that my uterus wall still measured in at eight and a half millimetres. I felt proud of my body, but also relieved that the Estrogen injections had worked...or should I say the prayers of Reverend Mtsweni and also my own prayers.

Anna congratulated me on my cooperating uterus and quickly got on with barking out a course of action in her usual no-nonsense, bossy way.

“You’ll need to use Cyclogest 200mg vaginal suppositories, and another Estrogen injection that has to be administered into a muscle. I suggest you go to your nearest family planning clinic in Pretoria for the injection, as the fluid is quite thick and it needs to be done properly. If you can arrange that you don’t have to drive all the way to Johannesburg for us to do it.”

I realised Anna was probably right. I was

finding it hard enough to inject a thin fluid into my skin, so a dense fluid into a muscle was out of the question. I contemplated asking John to do it, but knew he'd tell me that it would upset him too much. John was never able to help me with my injections.

"After the scan on Wednesday, we can start to thaw," Anna said enthusiastically, spreading a relaxed smile onto her usual serious face.

"Thaw what?" I asked, unfamiliar with that part of the process.

"Your embryos, Azelene," she replied, her voice softening for the first time since we'd met. "If everything is fine, you'll have your implant this coming Friday."

I felt as though I could have jumped through the roof. It was the last thing I had expected to hear that day. I was under the impression that if I was lucky it would only be in a few weeks, not a few days! I couldn't believe it. I realised that I might know if I was pregnant or not in just a couple of weeks time. I felt overjoyed at the prospect, but also terrified that something could go wrong. I tried to ignore the fear, and just thought of how I was the luckiest person on the planet at the moment. I was excited, but wanted the following few days to fly by. The emotional rollercoaster was more intense than ever, and all I could do was hold on tight.

## 19

**“I Have Held Many  
Things In My Hands,  
And I Have Lost Them  
All; But Whatever I  
Have Placed In God’s  
Hands, That I Still  
Possess.”  
- Martin Luther**

*Heavenly Father, I am afraid. But I believe that U will help me and support me. I will be a good mother, and I will give my baby all the love that he or she deserves. Please, give me the opportunity to prove myself.*

I had never prayed so much in my life. The scan on Wednesday June 13<sup>th</sup> went perfectly, and everything was proceeding as planned for once. They placed one straw of embryos in the incubator to thaw, and I prayed that all of my embryos survived. As it turned out, all of the embryos in that first straw died. When they thawed out the second straw, one embryo survived. From the third and

final straw, only one more embryo survived.

I heard this news straight from Doctor Robetz's mouth as I sat across from him the day after my last scan. The Lab had called me that morning at 8am, telling me to go straight to the clinic to have the implant. I phoned up John immediately, desperately hoping he could ditch work and come with me. But he had already booked a day off on Friday, the day the implant was supposed to be done. He disappointedly explained that he had 14 men on site and couldn't possibly leave. I welled up at the end of our phone call, but took a deep breath, knowing I just had to get on with it.

I jumped into the car and picked up my ready and willing mum. I quickly stopped off to give John a kiss before driving off to Johannesburg. The journey to The Lab was tense and emotional. I was thrilled yet afraid, but above all, I didn't feel ready. I hadn't prepared myself emotionally – it had all happened far too quickly that morning. John couldn't be with me, and I needed him. I especially needed him as Doctor Robetz told me that out of my 14 embryos, only two had survived. I stared at him as though watching a movie. A movie with me in it. I couldn't even talk. A hot glow flooded over my body and I wanted to burst into tears. I hadn't expected just two to survive – after all, I had always comforted myself with the fact that if the first implant wasn't successful I could try again with some of the other embryos. But there were no more left, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Before I knew it I was in the cold and

unfriendly theatre. I had to lie on my back with my legs strapped into stirrups. They tilted the bed to a 45 degree angle with my head leaning downwards. It was uncomfortable and undignified, and I longed for it all to be over.

“We will feed a very thin tube through your cervix and into your uterus. We will then feed the embryos through the tube and into your uterus,” Doctor Robetz explained beneath his mask. “We will then remove the tube very slowly, and it should all be done in about ten minutes.”

I nodded shakily, a cold sweat covering my face. I turned my attention onto the screen in front of me which showed the whole procedure as it took place. I experienced no pain and everything seemed to be flowing without a hitch.

But I lay in the ward afterwards feeling doubtful. Doctor Robetz had told me that there was a 50 percent chance it would be successful, but I had a horrid feeling I would be one of the 50 percent that failed. I felt as though I was being punished for something terrible. I thought of all the people I had either hurt or disappointed over the years and wondered if I was finally paying the price. I held onto my cell phone with my cold, fragile hand. I clicked open a text my friend, Debbie, had sent that morning and I carefully read through the words again.

***“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.” Martin Luther.***

I sat up in bed and closed my eyes. It was time to do some serious praying...

Each day after the implant felt like a year. By the tenth day I was going up the wall wondering what was going on. I ended up taking a home pregnancy test, which of course came back with a negative result. I knew it was too early, but I wanted to start preparing myself for bad news. I didn't honestly believe I was pregnant. I didn't *feel* pregnant. But I was calm about possibly not being pregnant. I wanted to avoid surrendering to misery. I knew that I would be hugely disappointed if the blood test came back negative, but if that did happen, I knew God must have another plan for me.

John and I discussed it at length over those tense, waiting days. We realised that if the implant didn't work, we were at the end of the road to hell. I wasn't prepared to go through the treatment and infertility program again. I was simply too emotionally and physically drained. After a lot of talking and debating of what we should do if the implant failed, we agreed to give our names up for adoption. John was more reluctant than I was, but I believed that all of our fertility failings could have been fate. Perhaps we were meant to adopt a child after all. Soon enough we would find out which path to take. Either way, I still needed to complete the baby's room in the house that was almost ready. Whether our genetic child or adopted child, I was adamant that I would have a baby to give all my love to and a beautiful bedroom for them to sleep and play in. Over the following days I was proactive in contacting several adoption agencies in South Africa. I wanted to know what procedures you had to follow in order to be selected as adoptive

parents.

“The first step is to get on the adoption lists,” one woman informed me on the phone that Wednesday. “Unfortunately, the lists for this year have already closed.”

“Already closed? But it’s only June!” I exclaimed, hardly believing my ears. “When will they reopen?”

“They will reopen in February 2002,” she said before hanging up. I was taken aback. Being white, John and I had wanted a Caucasian baby so he or she would look like us. But apparently a white baby was rarely put up for adoption. Abortion was on the rise. After abortion became legal in South Africa in 1997, abortion stats between 1997 and 2000 were already exceeding a total of 160 000 abortions. It was also becoming more and more accepted to be a single parent family.

I was somewhat deflated after the call. I had thought adoption would be the solution to our infertility problem if I didn’t fall pregnant. I thought bitterly of all those people who treated their kids badly, had abortions or wished they’d never become parents at all. I suddenly wanted someone to give their baby to me. I knew I would give them more love than they could ever imagine. The thought of a positive pregnancy test fluttered swiftly into my mind, and I realised I shouldn’t get tense about adoption before finding out whether I was pregnant or not.

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, I decided I couldn’t take the waiting game anymore. I needed to get on with living my life, and the tedious wait was driving me

to distraction. It was 14 days after the implant, so I went to The Lab to find out the verdict. The test was...negative.

So, I wasn't pregnant. I wasn't going to be pregnant. I wasn't going to carry my own baby. I felt numb – it didn't seem real somehow. But I wasn't surprised either. I didn't cry, I just sat there, my emotions as hard as granite. I was annoyed that I had endured months and months of treatment for no reason. I wanted to hate someone for allowing it to happen to me. It felt as though something had died within me, or like something really important had been taken away. I felt empty, robbed and so incredibly alone.

Doctor Robetz sat across from me, looking as confused as I was. He leafed through all of my reports, desperately trying to see something he'd missed. Finally, he dropped his head and sighed.

"Azelen, I really think you need to give the treatment a break for a while. I think you're going to waste your time and money if you carry on with the treatment now and start the IVF and ICSI again," he admitted, stress causing the lines beneath his eyes to deepen. "You are overstressed and that might be playing a huge role."

I nodded, feeling slightly attacked. I had tried to stay as relaxed as I possibly could throughout the whole process. But I appreciated his honesty, even if it wasn't what I wanted to hear. I guessed Doctor Robetz needed to pin it on something too.

"We're going to give our names up to be considered to adopt a child," I told him, trying to

sound hopeful.

Doctor Robetz put his pen down and placed both his hands, palm side down, on the desk. He looked into my eyes with softness in his expression.

“I think that’s a good idea Azelene,” he said sincerely. “If I can assist in any way, I’ll gladly do it.” I went out of the glass doors of The Lab, ending a chapter of my life. I would always be grateful to that clinic, and all those who helped me during my treatment there. They had tried their utmost best to help me fall pregnant.

But it just hadn’t worked for me, and that wasn’t their fault. My body just hadn’t played along. Perhaps God had a different plan for me after all.

## 20

# Life Link

The next day was a Friday. When I woke up I had to lie still for a while to comprehend that I hadn't dreamt everything up. I couldn't believe that having a baby, the natural way, would never be a reality for me. After some time of lying completely motionless, I climbed out of bed and made a coffee in the kitchen. I decided I would distract myself by telephoning several places to see if anyone could help us speed up the adoption process. I still held onto a small shred of hope that John and I would have a baby to call our own one day. I sat at my computer and typed out a letter giving our background information and the reasons we should be eligible to adopt a child. I e-mailed it to as many social workers I could find the contact details for.

But one week later, it was abundantly clear that all adoption lists of prospective parents were incredibly long. I stewed over the fact that the right to abort was taking over adoption when there were so many willing couples out there. I felt abortion was a form of murder - innocent little lives were being ended when thousands upon thousands of people would do anything to protect those babies. I sent an emotional letter about this matter to every person I knew, as well as every adoption company

in South Africa, and even some of the abortion clinics. I hoped some girl out there who was contemplating abortion would read my letter and perhaps rethink her situation. Sadly, the only feedback I received was, “sorry, there are no white babies available.” However, rather than being beaten down, it made me want to try harder than ever. I wasn’t going to lose faith, become heartbroken and succumb to failure. Once again I was spending hours and hours in the new baby room, enjoying my therapy. I would caress all of the beautiful baby clothes and organise everything that I had accumulated over the years. It made me feel better, and it gave me the will to carry on.

As July flowed on, I started to hear back from more of the adoption agencies I had contacted. Some added my names to lists that would open the following year, some attached information of international adoption procedures, and some suggested we adopt an African baby. But it wasn’t until I got a call from a lady called Magdaleen Van der Walt in mid-July that I actually felt I was getting anywhere.

Magdaleen informed me that she was a private social worker from Kempton Park, and that she worked with an agency called Life Link. The agency was a new non-profit organisation that strove to help pregnant women who weren’t sure what to do with their babies and who didn’t want to resort to abortion. They provided information to females with an unwanted pregnancy and offered the emotional support they might need. They even provided a home for mothers who planned on

putting their child up for adoption. It sounded like a loving, safe and caring place, and I was thrilled when Magdaleen said that she wanted to meet us in person and hopefully put our names down on her list of potential adoptive parents.

So on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2001, John and I had our first meeting with Magdaleen. She was older than I had imagined, perhaps in her late 60's. She was fairly short with a skinny frame – in fact, she was so slim that you could see every little bone in her delicate hands. Her hands looked skeletal with a thin layer of skin to cover them up. Her skin was marked with liver spots, a classic tell-tale sign that she was that bit older. Her grey hair had been shaped into a bob, but her matured curls transformed a sophisticated cut into a somewhat bedraggled do. However, I immediately liked her. She was warm, friendly, and we seemed to get on well. “When you next come to Life Link, you’ll have to complete a personal questionnaire,” she explained carefully. “At the appointment after that, you will undergo psychometric tests. Then after that, I will come to your home to see what you’re like in your own environment and how you live.”

John and I sat in silence, nodding along to everything she said. It was new territory for us. Not the familiar ground of The Lab’s procedures and surroundings.

“You’ll have to make a life book about yourselves and fill it with photographs and references from friends,” she continued. “We’ll also need letters from the infertility clinic you went to as well as your G.P.”

John took his grasp from mine and cupped his two hands together. He leaned forwards in his chair, clearing his throat ready to speak. I nervously wondered what he was about to say.

“But how does it work? What are the chances of us actually being high enough on the list to be considered at all?” he asked apprehensively.

“Well, it’s not so much about how far up the list you are,” Magdaleen smiled. “It’s about who your profile fits with. Any mother putting their baby up for adoption has some sort of couple in mind. They still envision particular things for their child.” She paused for a second allowing us to take it all in. It did make sense. I know I would want my child to be raised as an outdoorsy, active person, whereas others favour being into music, reading or seeing the world.

“If there is a mother whose profile fits with yours, I will discuss her profile with you. Then you can decide if you would be interested to adopt her baby. If you are, I’ll give the mother your profile along with two other profiles. At that point, it’s up to the mother who she wants to meet with and what she wants to do.” Magdaleen’s eyes darted between us. She seemed to be deciphering our expressions despite the fact that my face was completely blank. I glanced at John who wore the very same expression...vacant.

“What happens if she does want to meet with us?” I asked, wanting to break the tense silence.

“Well,” Magdaleen started, tilting her head slightly. “A meeting will be arranged in a coffee bar, restaurant or somewhere that suites both parties.”

She might also meet the other prospective parents too, on separate occasions. If you are selected though, I will let you know immediately.”

“So, if we are selected, is it set in stone? Her baby will be ours?” John quizzed thoughtfully.

“Well,” she replied again. “After the birth, the mother has a 60 day cooling off period when she can decide whether she stills wants to part from her baby. This puts a huge strain on the adoptive parents, as you can imagine.”

We both huffed noisily and nodded our heads vigorously. I didn’t like that sound of that, it sounded heartbreaking.

“You don’t have to worry about that too much,” she reassured us. “It’s not so easy for her to get her baby back once she’s given it up. She would have to apply to the children’s court so they could establish whether she is capable of caring for the baby. She wouldn’t just be able to take the baby away.”

Magdalen sat back in her chair and smiled kindly. I looked into John’s tired eyes and I raised my eyebrows, wondering what he wanted to do. He stared back at me, not saying a word. Eventually he turned back to Magdalen, leaning his arms on the table. He let out a hearty sigh.

“Can we put our names down then?” he said, smiling timidly back at her. I squeezed his hand adoringly, excited at the prospect. I knew that if we delayed it any longer we would struggle to get our names down on any list in South Africa in the near future. The only reason why Life Link was an option was because it was a new agency. But it wouldn’t

take long for Magdalen's list to fill up, and  
thankfully we were now on it.

## 21

# Good Things Come To Those Who Wait

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, John and I had our first interview for the selection process. We arrived at Life Link that evening, smartly dressed and somewhat on the edge. The weather was cool that day, and I had a black fleecy jumper on to keep me warm in the car. The breeze was slightly chilly and I walked towards the front door of Life Link craving a hot cup of coffee.

Magdaleen shook our hands upon entering. She sat us down across from her, with a simple wooden desk stationed between us. Dressed in a soft, beige, woollen jumper and delicate pearl earrings, she looked just as kind and caring as before. I could smell her flowery perfume from where I was sitting, but it was faint and gentle, and gave the office a homey and welcoming ambience. Despite the fact I was nervous about the interview, I still felt at ease with where I was. Life Link certainly did feel like a safe place to be.

“Let’s begin then, shall we?” Magdaleen smiled. We nodded curtly back, ready for the drilling to commence. The questions ranged from asking what our parents were like and what our

childhood homes were like, to the way in which we were raised. There were also questions on how we viewed our own personalities and what our relationships were like with other people. We were quizzed on how we thought our own upbringings had been, what we would expect from our child if we had one, how we would want to spend time with our child, as well as how we would discipline them when necessary. It was interesting to look at ourselves like that – in a greater depth. I had to recall times I had almost forgotten about, and that in itself was a nice experience. I enjoyed conjuring up all those happy childhood memories I still had stored away in the back of my memory. We left the interview feeling slightly drained but rejuvenated at the same time. It seemed as though we were finally walking in the right direction.

Magdaleen had instructed us to gather references from two of John's friends and two of my own, explaining why they thought we would be ideal adoptive parents. John decided to call upon Martin and Hendrik, and I chose Liezl and Thelma. Renate wrote one for us as a couple. They knew us better than anybody, and I hoped that their letters would sell us well. I was desperate to appear as the 'ultimate mum' who simply hadn't been gifted her child yet. It seemed like a huge task that our friends had to carry out. I wished I could write the reference letters myself – I was so nervous our friends wouldn't include everything that they should and could. But I needn't have worried. All the letters were perfect. They justified why they thought we would be excellent parents, from being

reliable, calm and hardworking, to being dedicated, responsible, warm-hearted and compassionate. I was very happy with their responses; you could see they gave it a lot of thought, but still anxious about whether it would be enough at the end of the day.

Two weeks later, we had our second interview with Magdaleen. It consisted of psychometric tests, which went on for two hours. The questions were often so ambiguous that I found I was confusing myself, trying to find the right answers. The tests were a way to see our personalities at an even closer depth. Our attitudes could be studied to a greater extent, as could our personality traits, intelligence and aptitudes for certain things. But it was a confusing, intense and exhausting process, and I was pleased to leave Life Link that night and go home.

We had to wait over three weeks for the next stage to come around. On September 9<sup>th</sup> 2001, a Saturday, Magdaleen arrived at our house to view us in our own surroundings. It was midday when she knocked on the front door, and I found her standing on our doorstep fanning herself with a leaflet. The weather was starting to heat up, and that weekend seemed to signify that summer was on its way. I invited her in, feeling relieved to finally have her in our environment. I wanted her to at least catch a glimpse of the real us and what our home showed about our personal life. I glanced around observantly as I gave her the tour, and realised what a cosy atmosphere each room had. Our house was small but very welcoming, and I felt proud showing Magdaleen around. We loved having

photographs of our family and friends, whether framed on the walls or behind a magnet on the fridge. I hoped that they would help her to see what a family-focused couple we really were.

She followed me quietly, with a curious expression on her face. Her soft, friendly eyes seemed to be taking everything in. I grinned at her, enjoying being in her company. She made me feel special every time I saw her, and I found it so easy to open up and talk about anything. She studied every room of our house, voicing positive comments about each thing that she saw. It gave me a warm, appreciate glow in the pit of my stomach, and I blushed timidly. Once the tour was complete, I took her to the kitchen to have a seat while I made us some lunch.

“I’m very impressed, Azelene,” she said kindly, her eyes sparkling at me. “You really are prepared for a baby to live here. You seem to have everything ready.” I nodded back enthusiastically, confirming the fact that we really were ready for a child. I buttered the bread in an agitated manner, frantically wondering if Magdaleen would be the one to deliver good news to us, and whether it would be soon. I gave her a fleeting look, querying whether she would prove to be our saviour.

“All you have to do now is wait patiently until I contact you about a potential adoption,” she exclaimed brightly, sensing my mood perhaps. Our eyes met and diverted instantly. I put down the butter knife and sighed deeply.

“I don’t know how I’m going to handle the wait,” I revealed quietly, feeling on edge.

Magdalen's expression softened, and she took my hand in hers, tapping it lightly.

“Good things come to those who wait,” she said with a wink. “You’ll see...”

## All Going Up In Smoke

After almost three gruelling weeks, I had waited long enough. I couldn't fight the urge any longer and decided to phone Magdaleen. I moodily grabbed the house phone and dialled her mobile number, tapping my foot impatiently with every ring that vibrated through the handset.

"Helloooo," her voice sang cheerfully as soon as she picked up.

"Hi Magdaleen, this is Azelene," I responded briskly.

"Oh, hi Azelene. How are you?"

"I'm okay. I was just wondering if you were satisfied with our Life Book?" It was the only reason I could think of to call her. John and I had compiled a Life Book, filled with happy family photographs and stories of our upbringings, as well as how we met, what our home was like and even a financial report of our earnings and outgoings.

"Yes, I did. I liked it very much," Magdaleen commented, sounded like a school teacher talking to her pupil. I cringed. "I actually showed it to a German couple last week to give them an idea as to what a Life Book should look like. I loved all those photographs and that's what these pregnant women really want to see." I felt satisfied that she had

liked our Life Book and was recommending it to others, but I was disappointed in myself for having called her. After all, I knew our Life Book was good, and I wasn't calling to get enthusiastic feedback about it. I just wanted to make contact on the off chance that she would be able to tell me that my baby was going to be born soon.

"I'm glad you liked it. Call me if you hear anything," I said sadly, and went to put down the receiver.

"Azelene, wait a second," she suddenly blurted out. "There is a girl called Samantha who was at the home a few months ago, but she decided to look for a couple overseas to adopt her baby. Anyway, she's changed her mind and came back in last week. She's asked me to give her one couple's profile to look over. If she asks for another, can I give her yours?"

"Of course you can!" I shrieked back at her.

"Wait, there's a few things," Magdaleen replied, calmly. "First of all, Samantha is booked in for a caesarean section next week..."

"That's soon, but that'll be fine!" I yelped back, wanting her to know how desperate I was.

"Secondly," Magdaleen went on. "She is pregnant with twins. A boy and a girl."

"Oh..." I uttered, thinking hard. "I guess I'll have to discuss it with John. But we knew that a chance of having twins was higher when we went through IVF, so we definitely have everything we need for two babies." I chuckled light-heartedly, my pulse quickening. I wanted those babies so badly, and I didn't care if they were born the next day, I

was ready.

“Thirdly,” she continued again. “Samantha is a drug addict. She has used cocaine and other substances during her pregnancy and we don’t know what the situation is with the twins because she can’t afford scans. She hasn’t seen a doctor for months.”

A hush settled between us. I was furious that this woman couldn’t afford scans but could afford drugs. I knew that it was because she was an addict, but how could anyone harm their babies like that? I abruptly got off the phone, telling her that I should speak to John.

When I approached him about it, he was both surprised and confused. He ruffled his mousy hair uncertainly, knowing the decision we were about to make could change our lives forever. What if the babies had disabilities? What if they hadn’t developed properly in the womb? Were we ready to be caregivers to two children for the rest of our lives if there *was* something wrong with them? As selfish as it may sound to some that we even had to mull it over, our dream of going to fun sports days or University graduations might flutter out of the window if there was something ‘wrong’ with the twins. But we still couldn’t resist the fact that those two babies *could* be ours. I called Magdalen and asked her to pass on our profile if Samantha wanted to view it. John and I were giddy with excitement, but also wise to the fact that it could all fall through.

The following 48 hours dragged by at a snail’s pace and my nerves multiplied with every tick of the clock. The not-knowing was driving me

crazy. I couldn't pay attention to anything other than envisaging our new life with twins, and it took all the power I had in me not to get keyed up. So after a strenuous 48 hour wait, Magdaleen finally phoned me. I waited with baited breath on the other end of the line, nervously fiddling with the shoestring strap of the black top I was wearing. But as soon as I heard a heavy-hearted sigh rush out from Magdaleen's chest, I knew I was in for some bad news.

"Samantha met with the first couple yesterday, and she chose them," she put plainly, her voice as calm as always. "She didn't want to see the profiles of any other couples because she felt so confused with what would be best for her babies. She didn't want to confuse herself further by meeting any other people."

"So, is she *happy* with the first couple?" I asked hysterically, practically screeching back at her. "Samantha is happy with them and feels that she has made the correct choice," was her response.

I fell quiet, I had nothing to say. I didn't know whether I should laugh or cry. There had been countless disappointments on this long and winding road, and there it was – one more defeat to add to the list. I felt a void in the pit of my stomach, and realised at that moment, as I stood in my small, cosy living room with the phone in my hand, that it would perhaps always be there. I would never be able to fill it...

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, I invited my friend, Marlene, to come around for some dinner. I had met Marlene through Hendrik recently. I stood in

the kitchen, staring into space as I waited for her to arrive. My thoughts were always seeking answers, questioning whether I would ever be a mother and have my own baby. I had become obsessed with it and couldn't switch off. I seemed to be at a dead end. Despite the fact I would protect a child like gold, I wasn't given the opportunity to even provide a discarded baby a loving home. At least when I was on the treatment, time passed relatively quickly and I knew I was doing everything I could possibly do to fall pregnant. But I could no longer afford the treatment and my body didn't want to cooperate anyhow. So all I could do was sit and wait and pray.

I heard a knock at the front door. It was Marlene, standing on the doorstep in black jeans and a silky red blouse. She had her thick, silky, brown locks twisted up with a clip, and far too much makeup on for just a low-key dinner at a girlfriend's house. She was just as tall as me but much curvier. She had a proper hour-glass figure and I could tell from her low-buttoned blouse that she was immensely proud of her assets. She beamed warmly at me before embracing me in a tight hug, and then strode confidently into our house. She looked slightly wired as she surveyed the kitchen. Her eyes were wide and exploring, and she moved around in a somewhat jittery manner. I decided to pour her a glass of wine immediately. I sensed that she may need it.

"Listen, I've got to tell you something," she panted, her expression looking slightly wild.

"Okay," I replied, puzzling over my friend who was ordinarily very well put together. She

opened her mouth ready to speak, and I knew I was in for a long, fast-paced spiel with very few pauses for breath.

“I hope you don’t mind but Hendrik told me that John and you are struggling to have children and a friend of mine, Antoinette, phoned last Wednesday who said she knows someone who is looking after a 22 year old pregnant girl who is expecting a little boy in December and so my friend suggested I ask you if you want to meet that girl and if you do I’ll contact my friend who can arrange a meeting between the two of you.”

“Breeeeath!” I urged, watching Marlene’s face turn pink. She sat back in the kitchen chair and sucked in a lung full of air. After a moment, I looked into her eyes and nodded my head enthusiastically. A grin was spread across my face. Of course I wanted to meet the pregnant girl, I’d be stupid not to. Perhaps that was the way it was all meant to work out – through a friend of a friend of a friend, or something to that effect.

But despite obtaining the pregnant girls mobile number, neither Marlene, her friend, Antoinette, or myself had any luck in reaching her. Her cell phone just kept on ringing. No one ever picked up. By day ten after my dinner with Marlene, I had given up with the idea completely. It had been something else to make me incredibly excited and then fall flat at my feet. I had started to lose faith in life, and that was a shock in itself. I never thought I would feel that way.

I sought release in something and reached for a box of cigarettes. I delicately placed one

between my lips and ignited the lighter, touched the flame to the end of the cigarette, watching the amber glow send curls of smoke out into the atmosphere. It felt good. I felt the smoke trickle into my mouth and down into my chest, and I exhaled slowly, loving the calm it sent through my body. It had been almost 11 months since I quit smoking, but the desire for some sort of comfort was too great. I was at the point, where I could no longer deal with my feelings, my disappointments and my broken heart.

Keeping in touch with Magdaleen wasn't the easiest either. Well, it was when I called her. I never seemed to hear from her unless I was the one doing the phoning. I felt that she was purposefully avoiding me, and I doubted whether she was even looking for a baby for us.

I started considering international adoption, but as soon as I saw the figures, I knew it was an unaffordable option for us. I sat at my computer feeling desperate. My e-mail account was open on the screen and I stared at it blankly with a half-smoked cigarette between my fingers. I suddenly felt compelled to try something new. I wanted to place an advert in the classified section of a news paper, just to see what will happen. I mean if an abortion clinic can advertise to kill babies, why the hell can't I try to save one that needs a Mom and a home. Without dwelling on it too much, I typed the words, "Consider adoption before an abortion. Phone me for a private adoption." I clicked the send button, and was much surprised to find it was accepted by the news paper and will be published

the next day. I raised my eyebrows in astonishment, wondering if I would receive any feedback from anyone.

Writing that e-mail had stirred up a familiar sensation that I hadn't felt in a while. Over the following days I felt more and more driven to be proactive in getting my baby.

So on November 5<sup>th</sup>, I found myself facing Doctor Robetz once more. I wanted to give The Lab one more shot before ruling out the possibility of carrying my own child all together. There seemed to be an awkward mood between us, which Doctor Robetz attempted to smooth over with a friendly smile and forgettable chit-chat. Perhaps I was just paranoid that he was mentally ridiculing me for even considering infertility treatment again. Nevertheless, he put me on another round of Clomid and told me to return back to The Lab the morning after John and I had intercourse.

Accordingly, I found myself with my feet in stirrups just five days later. I was at The Lab, ready for a pap smear. Doctor Robetz also withdrew some fluid from my uterus in order to conduct tests. I lay back and let him carry out his work quietly, and once he finished, I quickly rearranged my clothes and went to sit in the pristine waiting area. Not long after, Doctor Robetz called me into his office. I sat down in the spacious, light-filled room, and the pin board on the right wall caught my eye again. I recalled spotting it at my first visit to The Lab, when it had filled me with hope and reassurance. Now I felt green with envy, jealous of all the mothers those babies belonged to and bitter that it hadn't

happened for me.

“We measured the pH levels of your vagina and uterus, and they are exceedingly high, Azelene. Even though you had sex last night, the fluid I withdrew contained no live sperm, which I think has been caused by the Clomid. In some people, Clomid increases the acidity levels so much that it kills the sperm. Basically, the Clomid is acting as a contraceptive.” His expression was stern, and his pale eyes bore into me like a strict headmaster’s would if you’d been called into his office. His eyes had no kind wrinkling in the corners or sympathetic twinkling like they used to. I sensed this was all a lost cause, and he knew it.

“What can I do?” I asked, my cheeks reddening. I felt like a fool, and I wished the ground would swallow me up whole.

“Stop the Clomid for now and come back after your next menstrual cycle for a scan. We can come up with a plan from there.”

My heart pounded the entire drive home. I really did feel like an idiot by going for another try at The Lab. All efforts were fruitless at the end of the day - my body did not want to make a baby. But unfortunately my heart and my head did, which pushed me to book in for a sonogram on December 4<sup>th</sup>. It was almost the end of another year, and I had to put the humiliated sensation aside and give it one more shot.

Jessica was just as bubbly as always. Her red ringlets were pulled up into a ponytail, revealing pretty pearl studs on her earlobes. Jessica appeared to be very feminine, beautiful and intelligent. I

momentarily felt envious - I looked down at my black, strap top that was creased up above my tummy, and my plain, fitted jeans open at the waist. Pearl earrings certainly wouldn't have matched my outfit, I realised. But then again, they wouldn't have matched me, would they? I peeked up at Jessica again and considered her expression. She was studying the screen with a studious look upon her face, but she looked tired. In fact, she looked drained. I had never noticed that before. Her hair suddenly appeared unkempt and her eyes weary. I saw for the first time that Jessica - lovely, bouncy, cheerful Jessica - probably had problems too. Underneath that cheery persona, porcelain complexion and pretty pearl earrings was a normal person who had a normal life outside The Lab. I reproached myself for never asking how she was or even where she lived. I had been entirely self-absorbed and the guilt hit my stomach with a bang.

"How are you doing, Jessica?" I asked, gently. Better late than never, I thought.

"Brilliant!" she chirruped back. "There are two follicles - one is nine millimetres in diameter and the other is 12 millimetres. Your womb wall is five millimetres thick, so everything is looking good!"

"No, I meant, how are you?" I started, before registering what had been said. "Wait, what, two follicles? I haven't even been taking medication!" I was ecstatic and beamed happily. I left the clinic with a spring in my step, eager to go back for a scan after two days. I stood by my car in the car park and lit a victorious cigarette. I was smoking like a pro

once again, but had decided to live my life in my own way, despite trying for a baby. I wasn't going to put myself under the pressure I did before, I needed to be more relaxed. The pressure had left my body in a complete mess.

But the subsequent morning, I realised my body was probably *still* a mess. I had a spontaneous blood secretion that would not stop. I knew it wasn't good news for my follicles, and I knew it was probably yet another message from God telling me that John and I weren't supposed to have children. Why had I not listened the first time?

The scan the next day confirmed this. My womb wall was a mere one millimetre thick, and the bleeding had supposedly been caused by a drop in my progesterone levels. The staff at The Lab had no idea why my uterus was so sensitive, and for that reason, they couldn't pinpoint what to do about it. It would just be a case of trial and error if I was happy to go through with it. I couldn't believe that for all those months I had done everything Doctor Robetz had told me to do, yet my body failed me every single time.

"The only other factor I can think of is heredity," Doctor Robetz admitted, tiredly. "Medically speaking, we have tried everything. I am convinced you would have fallen pregnant by now if your uterus wasn't quite so sensitive. What worries me, Azelene, is if you were to become pregnant, your womb is too vulnerable to carry a baby right now, so the chance of miscarriage is incredibly high."

I slumped my shoulders unhappily. It was

time to give up. I didn't even try to put on a brave face in front of Doctor Robetz. I wiped away a tear that had instantaneously fallen from my eye, and sorrowfully trudged out of the clinic. I arrived home, pulled out a black suitcase from under the bed, and started to pack for our holiday. John had booked us to go away over Christmas and New Year, and we were going to leave the very next day. I needed to get away. I needed to leave my troubles behind and never find them again.....ever.

## 23

# Chamonix

The timing of our getaway couldn't have been more perfect. We were going to The Garden Route of all places – a part of South Africa that had stolen my heart many years before.

It stretched along the coast, with copious amounts of lagoons and lakes dotted around and magnificent mountains in the distance. Gigantic trees towered above us as we hiked energetically every day, with wonderful birds swooping between them. Vibrant flowers decorated the rural, forestry locations, and warm, golden sand decorated the beautiful bays. Despite being the summer time in South Africa, the weather was refreshingly mild and we soaked up the fresh air every single day we were there. I wished we could stay forever – leave Pretoria and move to The Garden Route. All my troubles seemed so far away, which is exactly what my heart had desired.

We arrived home on January 8<sup>th</sup> 2002. It was a new year and I firmly believed it would be a happy year. I felt well rested after our trip away, and fresh intentions were clearer in my head than ever before. I had come to terms with the fact that I couldn't put my body through any further tests after

three years of heartbreak. Medically speaking, I had tried everything. Nothing had worked and enough was enough.

So my new plan of attack was to use the Internet to find my baby. As ludicrous as it may have sounded to some, I was determined to e-mail my life story and my plea to as many people as I possibly could, with the hope that someone, someday, would contact me. I knew it wouldn't be in the first few months, but perhaps it would be later on...sometime in the future someone would contact me, wanting me to adopt their baby.

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### My Story

I am 29 years old, and my husband is 35 years old. We met in May 1994, and had an uncomplicated relationship right from the start. Each one of us knew what to expect from the other. We wanted to live a long and happy life together, like in the fairy tales. We never wanted to be one of the unhappy marriages you hear too often about these days.

During the first few years of our life together, we worked very hard at our separate occupations, all the time planning our dream house. We worked at establishing financial security for ourselves. We wanted to build a solid foundation for our relationship, one that we could build on both emotionally and financially. At that time of our lives, we never even thought about children.

After marrying in 1997, we focused even more

on career building, setting up our own separate businesses which are still running smoothly. But two years later, in the winter of 1999, we decided it was time to start our own family. We were ready for the great adventure of parenthood. We were ready for children's voices and little footsteps in our own, safe and loving home. We never questioned whether we would be able to accomplish this seemingly simple task...making a baby. After all, it's the most natural thing in the world. I would lie in the bath, imagining being pregnant, longing to be pregnant.

But it didn't work.

My femininity and self-esteem were hurt. We continued to try, and still nothing. Even a year later, I believed it would all be okay. I believed my body just had to adjust, and that soon enough it would happen. But as the months went by, my despair increased. Each and every negative test made me feel more negative about myself, from my femininity to me as a person. With each and every negative pregnancy test, I became increasingly desperate, especially when all of my friends, one by one, fell pregnant. Eventually, I had to admit to that I needed to turn to the medical world. It just started with an ordinary consultation, but soon enough it involved constant examinations and treatments, which in turn grew increasingly expensive and involved.

At one stage, I was advised to take Clomid to encourage my body to ovulate. Unfortunately, it didn't work. I am one of the rare people that Clomid increases

the acidity levels of my uterus to such an extent that it acts as a contraceptive. The next step was to try IVF, as it meant fertilisation would take place outside the body. It required intensive hormone treatments with daily injections, which I had to give myself, and various other medications to continually take. The objective was to produce as many eggs as I possibly could that could eventually be removed and fertilised in a laboratory.

But before an implantation could be done, the doctors discovered I had a hole in my uterus. If left, it would result in a miscarriage if an embryo did attach to the wall of my uterus. So naturally it was repaired, but I had to start a gruelling course of hormone treatments all over again to prepare my body for a possible implantation.

But my body wasn't playing along. It wouldn't be able to carry a baby if I did become pregnant. However, in June 2001, after a course of Viagra to increase blood flow to my uterus, my body did start to cooperate. Regrettably, only two of my fourteen embryos survived, and as soon as they were implanted my body rejected them. After months of struggling, thousands of South African Rand down the drain and endless heartache and disappointment, we reached the end of the road. I had a void within me I could never fill. I wanted to die.

Time can heal, and bit by bit I gained acceptance. But the hope never went away. Throughout the long and drawn out efforts to have a baby naturally, we often discussed adopting. Finally, I decided to approach several private and governmental

organisations, and was surprised to find out how difficult it was. "Sorry, there are no white babies available in South Africa," was the usual response. This was chiefly attributed to legalised abortions in 1997, the figures of which are increasing daily.

We still didn't give up hope. My desire to have my own little bundle of joy was too great. I decided to send a profile of myself to 72 social workers who dealt with adoption. Sadly, the response was less than three percent. After a while, however, a social worker from Life-Link in Kempton Park, Johannesburg managed to get us on her list in September 2001. But we are still waiting for our baby.

The yearning for a child is indescribable. Frankly, if you are pregnant and don't know what to do, please do not destroy that tiny human being through abortion. Give your baby the opportunity to stay alive. Adoption is much easier to arrange these days and nobody will judge you for going through with it.

To the parents of a child who has an unwanted pregnancy, think carefully. Please don't coerce your child into making a choice they may resent you for. Children become adults and realise where they went wrong. Do not be the cause of an irreversible decision. Support your child if they are considering adoption – it is legal, it is acceptable and it has an element of honour to it too.

I plea to you, as one woman out of hundreds of others out there who are in exactly the same position as

me, consider what I am asking of you. Please send this e-mail on. You might just change somebody's life.

Regards,  
Azelene

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Once I had sent the e-mail out, that familiar, nervous impatience quickly took hold. I knew I wouldn't hear back any time soon, but still I checked my inbox as often as I could. I felt like I had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – if I was in range of my computer, I needed to check my e-mails. I just had to have faith that someone out there would read my story, or maybe be able to help. Even if I just touched one life with my story, I guess that was enough for me...

I was so grateful I had John. He seemed so understanding and supportive when I came up with one strategy after another. He never mocked and he never raised an eyebrow in disbelief. He just stood by me on my mission, being patient and calm. I knew we weren't the perfect couple, but I also knew we would never begrudge each other for not being able to make a baby of our own. John and I have spoken about baby names, and John told me that he just loves the name Chamonix for a girl. "Chamonix." I said out loudly. I just loved it and imagined holding a beautiful little baby girl in my arms called Chamonix, whispering her name softly into her ear. It made me even more determined to find our child. Our own little girl that we would

want to name Chamonix.

On January 18<sup>th</sup> 2002, I had three e-mails back in response to my 'Life Story'. They were from three friends of mine, Danie, Renate and Juanita, explaining how much my letter had touched their hearts. I was satisfied with that early response – just touching someone's life was some sort of satisfaction. Later in the day, another friend of mine, Liesle Buchner phoned.

"I have sent your e-mail to someone in my church. They know a girl who is pregnant, and she doesn't know what to do with the baby. We're trying to persuade her not to have an abortion, because that's what she's looking at right now," Liesle told me, a serious tone in her voice. It was the first time I had heard of that situation without wanting to contact the girl myself and offer to take her baby. No, she needed to decide to put her child up for adoption herself, and with the support of her friends and family. If she chose adoption, I would be there then. I had to stay positive about everything, believing that God had a bigger plan for my life. I just didn't know what it was, and had to take each day as it came.

On the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup>, I finished replying to my thoughtful friends who were kind enough to e-mail me. I couldn't help but wonder if my dream would ever become a reality. Would we ever get to meet our lovely Chamonix? I closed my inbox and opened up a new document. I wanted to write to our child, and let her know we were still searching.

To My Baby

My search for you is very hectic. I know that you are somewhere out there; I just need to find you. I believe that I will make as big a difference in your life as you will in mine.

But I don't know what the future holds for me. I don't know whether I will conceive you naturally or adopt you. But either way, it makes no difference in the love I feel for you. I can only keep on searching.

My life without you is empty, and I feel heartbroken whenever I think of you, because you are not yet with me. But I do have faith, and how ever you enter my life, I will love you with all my heart.

Even though we don't know each other yet, I pray for you every night. Be strong, my little one. I shall not cease in looking for you until you are forever part of my life. From the first moment I hold you in my arms, there will be an unbreakable bond between us. A bond between Mother and Child.

All my love,  
Your Searching Mother

## 24

# Michelle

It was unbelievable to me how many strangers were getting in contact to offer their support. People were e-mailing and phoning – even two men who wanted to offer their sympathy and share their own stories. I never expected my letter would evoke such a reaction, and it warmed my heart seeing the good nature that was in so many people.

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, I opened my e-mail account to find a rather unexpected e-mail. It was from a 19 year old girl called Michelle. She had received my letter from a friend of hers, and it seemed to stroke a cord. She thought she could be pregnant, and she didn't know what to do. Under no circumstances could she consider keeping the baby. After all, she was incredibly young to be raising a child, and there was so much more she still wanted to do with her life, let alone the fact she wouldn't be able support a child financially. Michelle hadn't yet taken a pregnancy test, but had an appointment for a blood test booked on January 31<sup>st</sup> – in just nine days time.

I was taken aback by her honesty. She didn't have any reservations about the fact she wasn't emotionally or physically ready to be a mother. She

confessed to the fact that she didn't want her divorced parents to find out about it, and asked what support I could give throughout the pregnancy. After speaking to Magdaleen I replied to Michelle, reassuring her that she could move into Life Link as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed. I clicked on the 'Send' button, and tapped my foot nervously. I questioned how the situation would unfold - it all seemed a bit odd. But then again, I told myself, it was simply new territory. Sure, teenagers got knocked up all the time and someone had to adopt their babies. Why couldn't it be me?

Two days later, on my 29<sup>th</sup> birthday, I heard back from Michelle. She phoned me on the house phone, and I enjoyed hearing her angelic voice. She sounded incredibly sweet, with the gentlest voice and the most pleasant manner. She sounded delightful. I closed my eyes as I listened, trying to picture her in my mind. But I couldn't figure out how she might look. Blond hair with big, round, blue eyes perhaps?

"Thank you for e-mailing me back, Azelene," she said, lightly. "I was so excited when your e-mail came in. I was afraid you wouldn't reply to mine. Sorry for calling you, but I've been having some problems with my e-mails. I tried to send you one this morning but it wouldn't go through."

"That's no problem at all," I replied, feeling maternal towards her. "It's nice to hear your voice anyway!"

"Well, I wanted to tell you that I live in Johannesburg, but am coming to Pretoria this weekend to see my Dad. I wondered if you were free

to meet up.” She sounded timid as she asked, and I could sense she was equally as anxious in the situation as I was.

“Of course, that would be great. Give me a call when you’re in Pretoria and free to meet me.” I felt giddy. The whole situation was somewhat surreal and I could hardly believe it was happening. I was going to meet a 19 year old, potentially pregnant girl, behind her parents back and make plans to secretly adopt her baby? I couldn’t believe it had come to this – but I was out of options.

When Saturday morning swung around, I stood in my living room, eyeing up the phone nervously as I waited for it to ring. The clock hung on the wall by the dining room table was ticking louder and louder, yet time was hardly moving. I paced the room agitatedly and tried to think of something else. Perhaps I should go out, I thought to myself. But I couldn’t as Michelle only had my house phone number and not my cell phone number. I tugged at my hair and exasperatedly sprawled my body onto the couch.

“*Ring, ring!*” the phone suddenly yelled. My body shot up from the sofa like a jack in the box. I caught hold of the phone briefly before it slipped from my fingers and clanked onto the floor. I frisked it up in my clutch and uttered a desperate, “Hello?”

“Hi Azelene, it’s Michelle,” a nervous voice answered. “Are you able to come and meet me in a half an hour at Big Al’s in Midrand?”

I frantically agreed and gathered up my cell phone, car keys and handbag before racing out

through the front door. I didn't have time on the journey to dwell on what could happen from that meeting. I just needed to get to Big Al's as quickly as possible. I darted past cars like a maniac, worried that I was going to be late. I finally pulled up outside of the café, and leapt out of the car feeling hot and flustered. It was 10:32am, so I was only a couple of minutes late.

I walked through the booth-lined aisle, where people sat on either side drinking sugary drinks or eating innutritious meals. I stared at each person's face as I glided past, looking for a girl who was both young and alone. But after failing at finding her I decided to slide into a booth by myself, feeling sure that she was even tardier than me. I tapped my fingers impatiently, feeling sick with nerves. I had forgotten to give her my cell phone number again, so if she couldn't make it, I wouldn't know. I would just sit alone, perhaps for hours on end, waiting. I decided to order a soft drink and remained sitting quietly, glaring at everyone who entered, wondering whether it was 'her'. Whenever a young woman pushed the rickety wooden door open, I tried to evaluate her in my head, working out whether she was young enough and pregnant. But after catching a few confused glances from countless women who clearly weren't there to meet me, I decided to busy myself with my cell phone.

I was rearranging some data on it when I sensed I was being watched. I looked up to see a young girl stood before me. She was quite short, with long, lustrous, dark hair tied into a ponytail and big, dark eyes. Her face was slightly plump, but

her body wasn't. She wore a pair of smart, blue jeans and a white t-shirt. "Hello Azelene," she said, and sat down opposite me in the booth. Of course she knew what I looked like - I had sent her a photograph. Why hadn't I asked her to do the same? I could have saved myself from twenty minutes of going insane. Nevertheless, I turned my attention to Michelle and watched as she flashed a sweet smile and placed her hands upon the table. "The urine test was negative but I know that I am pregnant - I can just feel it."

I was taken aback at how quickly she cut to the chase. I could hardly keep my eyes off of her as we engaged in chit-chat, all the while praying to God to allow her to be pregnant. I liked her and wanted to adopt her beautiful baby. Michelle had been right about herself - she wasn't ready to be a mother. She was still so innocent. As we spoke, I saw how little she knew about life. But she was very talkative and asked countless questions about the adoption process if it did turn out that she was pregnant.

"If you were to become pregnant in the next few months, would you still adopt my baby?" she asked, her eyes like two dark pools of water.

"Of course I would!" I replied. "But I've been trying for a baby for so many years now that I think it's safe to say it won't happen." I grinned gently at her, wanting to be as kind and honest as she was being with me.

"I don't want the baby to ever know that I was his or her mother, but I would like to see it at some stage," she admitted, looking confused. She

was clearly convinced that she was pregnant, and I got swept along with it. She felt that something was happening within her body, and was sure that when the blood test was carried out on the 31<sup>st</sup>, there would be a positive result. We continued talking for over two hours, and I left the meeting feeling at peace. I was hopeful, yes, but I was also realistic. In fact, I was slightly disappointed in myself for having met her despite the fact she wasn't definitely pregnant. I had got ahead of myself, and I had to do everything in my power to keep my feet on the ground and be ready to be let down...again.

Whilst I waited for the 31<sup>st</sup> to come around, I read the countless e-mails that were pouring in from around the world. I even heard from a man in Hong Kong who told me the story of how him and his wife had also gone through an infertility dilemma a couple of years beforehand, and eventually went on to adopt. He was now fulfilled and happy, and told me not to lose hope.

So I did as he said – I remained hopeful. When Michelle phoned me on the 31<sup>st</sup>, I was optimistic that she had good news for me. Good news she did have, but only good news for her. She wasn't pregnant, and was thrilled. I, on the other hand, was not so pleased. I was angry that Michelle had contacted me even before she knew what her situation was. Why would somebody do that when they are well aware of the desperate struggle I have had? But why had I gone along with it? Why had I met her and imagined her delivering *my* baby, before she'd even had any sort of positive pregnancy result? I needed to distract myself

once more, and pulled out a small, square calendar from a drawer in the kitchen. What was coming up that I could focus on? My eyes scoured the series of dates hysterically, searching for a booked holiday, an appointment with my dentist, *anything* I had planned in my life other than finding a baby. I suddenly saw March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and exhaled a heavy sigh. March 2<sup>nd</sup> was John's birthday. I would plan him a birthday party he would never forget, and I would spend the whole of February organising everything. I was frantic to find a distraction, and that was going to be it.

## 25

# Happy Birthday, John!

On March 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, it was the day before John's birthday. I was organising a party for him, from making sure all of our friends could make it, to picking up the lamb we'd be cooking on the rotisserie. I was excited about the party. It was a great opportunity to spend some time with our friends and forget about all of our problems. I was becoming more and more aware of the fact that we weren't getting any younger and we couldn't just stop living our lives. Subsequently, I threw myself into making a fantastic party for my husband. I wanted to show him the happy Azelene who he fell in love with. The party was going every bit as well as I had hoped it would. Everyone was enjoying themselves, and I loved being a welcoming hostess. I was just coming out of our en-suite bathroom when something within me told me to step out onto the wooden decked balcony off of our bedroom. I stepped out into the darkness and felt a light breeze ripple through my hair. I breathed in deeply, and let the air escape from my chest. I smiled, feeling cheerful. Everything was going to be okay, Azelene.

It

suddenly occurred to me that I wasn't alone on the deck. I looked to my right to see two people embraced in each other's arms, locked in a passionate kiss. I stared for a moment, my heart beating heavily as I tried to digest who was standing there, making out before my very eyes. It was my husband and his best friend's date Karen. I gasped loudly, turned around and stepped into our bedroom again.

"Azelene! It's not what you think!" I heard John shout to me. All I could do was pull my arms around my head and walk away. I spotted John's best friend and stormed over to him.

"Hendrik, can you please keep a leash on your date?" I spat angrily. He stared at me, clearly dumbfounded at what I could be referring to. I paced hotly into the kitchen and put my hands on the work surface and tried to catch my breath. I slowed my breathing down and closed my eyes. I didn't know what I should do - I wasn't prepared for this horrible *thing* to happen. What was he *thinking*? Why her? How long had this been going on for? I sucked a lung full of air in and held it in, wanting to scream.

"Azelene," I heard John mumble behind me. I exhaled slowly and turned around to face him.

"Not now, John, we've got people here. I'm going to see if anyone needs a drink," I grimaced, trying to hold back the tears. I strode outside with a fake smile on my face, where everybody was happily chatting and enjoying the evening, not knowing what just had happened inside our house. The hurt burned within me, but I knew I had to carry myself

like a lady and hope that no one would see the pain in my eyes.

The next day, John and I sat pale faced across from one another at our little antique table in the dining room. I didn't know what to say, my thoughts were all muddled up and I felt exhausted. He had always had an eye for other women, and women seemed to turn into putty whenever he turned on his charm. The charm I had once fallen for. But I never thought he would overstep the mark. Or did I? Did I know this about him the whole time? Was that why I focused all of my attention into having a baby over the previous three years? Perhaps I thought on some level that he would never stray if we were a proper family unit.

"You've driven me away, Azelene," he said croakily. I glared at him, willing myself not to cry. "I never wanted children. You pressured me into everything."

"I have never forced you into anything!" I seethed back.

"Yes, you pressured me into the infertility treatment and into putting our names on the adoption list," he said accusingly.

I was speechless. I had honestly believed that he was supporting me on the whole baby mission since 1999. Not on one single occasion had John ever broached the subject of whether we were doing the right thing or not. I never had a single doubt of his involvement in it all. He went through the phases of treatments, even providing sperm samples at times. He proofread my letters to adoption agencies, and sat by my side at the

adoption interview. He never vocalised any doubts. He kept his family and closest friends up to date with how it was all going. He had even seemed sad when we didn't get to adopt the twins. So to hear he wasn't part of the journey I had dragged myself along for all of that time...it was heartbreaking.

"I don't know why we got married in the first place," he said quietly with his head in his slender hands. "I think we should get a divorce." He looked dishevelled and exhausted – and I hated him. I felt so angry and bitter. I didn't know what to do.

"That's fine, John!" I eventually expelled, hotly. "I can't accept the humiliation and hurt I have been subjected to. You have humiliated me, deceived me, and broken me, John." I lay my head into my folded arms and sobbed.

He gathered some of his things and left, saying he needed to decide what to do. Later in the day he found a lawyer to start divorce proceedings.

Exactly one week later, on Saturday March 9<sup>th</sup>, I pulled up onto our driveway to find John standing outside our house. Butterflies started fluttering like crazy in my stomach – I felt sick and wondered what he wanted. I climbed out of the car and stood across from him, not able to utter a word.

"There's something I want to say to you, but you have to promise not to cry. If you cry, I'll leave. I don't have the energy to deal with you when you're emotional, Azelene," he stated moodily. I remained silent, but nodded, urging him to speak.

"Magdalen called when your mum was here earlier. She told your mum she would be a grandmother very soon." He wore no expression on

his face as he spoke. There was no love, no happiness and no sadness. Just a stone cold expression on his face.

“John, I don’t understand. What do you mean?” I asked crankily, glowing red. The encounter was feeling awkward and I hated it. John glowered back at me a moment longer, staring at me like I was an idiot.

“Azelen, your baby is going to be born in three days time,” he said calmly, before turning around and walking towards his car. He didn’t look back – he just drove away. I burst into tears on the driveway, watching him disappear down the road. I wanted to die right there on the concrete. After everything we had been through, he couldn’t take me in his arms and comfort me, or even say goodbye. I knew he didn’t know how to handle the situation, which is why he had just left. For him that was the easiest way out. But it hurt, and the whole world was spinning round faster and faster, out of control.

I ran inside and phoned Magdalen immediately. As soon as Magdalen heard my voice she began talking a mile a minute, barely breathing between sentences. “Thank you so much for calling me back so soon Azelen. I have wonderful news for you, not sure if your mom or John mentioned anything to you yet.”

I bursting out in tears and started crying uncontrollably, when Magdalen started to talk. I felt sick, extremely sick. The room was spinning and I wanted to vomit. I kept on weeping as if something died inside of me while she kept on

talking. I didn't have the strength to stop her, I knew I didn't want to hear what she was going to say to me, but I didn't have a choice, I was broken and my life was busy crumbling.

"I know this is a shock and I haven't prepared you and John for it," she babbled quickly. "But I took a chance and I gave your profile to a girl without telling you, everything happened so fast this week. And Azelene she's chosen you and John to be the parents of her little baby girl. She has already signed some of the documents, so that you can be present at the birth! And as long as there are no complications, you can take the baby home with you soon after she is born. Also, you should go to a doctor as soon as you can to get a prescription for medicine that allows you to lactate..."

I tried so hard to take it all in whilst figuring out what I should do. After a few moments I broke down and blubbed noisily down the receiver. It was no use - I knew what I had to do.

"Magdaleen, stop, please just stop" I manage to say. "Thank you very much, but I can't take the baby home. There isn't a home here anymore. John and I are getting a divorce. John is leaving me for good, and there is nothing I can do about it" Tears streamed down my face and I crumpled, crying loudly to Magdaleen, not wanting it to be real.

I wanted to wakeup and discover it was all just a dream, a horrible, horrible dream.

But unfortunately this was very real and in fact the beginning of the end.

"Azelene you can still apply to adopt this little baby on your own if you want, as a single

mother you know,” she said tenderly after a while of trying to comfort me. Although it was the kindest offer in the world, I knew that it wouldn’t be fair to that poor child. I knew I had to sacrifice my own happiness for that innocent baby’s.

“I could never do that,” I replied, sniffing wetly. “The baby needs a mother and a father – not just me Magdaleen.”

Magdaleen didn’t reply. Silence lingered on the phone and I sensed that she didn’t know what to say to me.

“Please can you withdraw my profile Magdaleen? There are more deserving and happy couples than us, who are just as desperate and who deserve a chance like this.”

The baby was born on Wednesday March 13<sup>th</sup> 2002. It was a little girl. She was very healthy and had beautiful red hair. I called Magdaleen once more about a month after the birth, I guess in a way to get closure. I wondered if I’d made the right decision. I wondered if her new mommy loved her just as much as I would have. But my chances were up. I would never know what it felt like to hold my own baby in my arms, wanting to protect it from any harm. I would never know what it felt like to look in each other’s eyes at the same time for the first time. I would never know what it felt like to have my baby fall asleep in my arms, safe and warm, breathing softly and contented. My baby will never hold my finger with a tiny little hand. I would never, ever know what it would feel like to be called mommy.....

## 26

# Giving Away A Piece Of My Heart

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, I met John for a coffee. We met at a small coffee shop in Moreletta Park, one that we had frequently gone to for a number of years. It was a quirky coffee shop with mismatched chairs and wobbly round tables dotted around. I always liked how much character the place had, with royal blue walls and a huge chalkboard menu nailed up proudly. I sat down on a slightly uncomfortable, wooden chair, and felt nostalgic as I stared across at John.

We had been separated for two weeks at that point, and it had given me the chance to think. I didn't want to go through with the divorce. I had already lost so much, and I didn't want to lose my husband as well. John listened to me while I was talking my heart out, he was dressed in a pale blue t-shirt and a nice pair of jeans. He looked relaxed and very handsome. I craved to be close to him again.

"I will give up my dream of having a baby, if you sort out your side regarding other women," I stated, offering a compromise. John didn't even pause to think about it. He grabbed my hand

between his and kissed it tenderly. He moved back in that night.

Life continued as though nothing had ever happened. We avoided discussing anything related to the little girl who was almost ours, or what happened at John's birthday party. I would cry by myself when he was at work, but I could never cry in front of him. He didn't seem to understand or even empathise with me. I knew I had to deal with it alone, despite the fact that talking about it all would ultimately help our marriage. But sadly our relationship hadn't grown, healed or developed following the whole ordeal.

Seven months flew by, and when October arrived, I found I was still hurting. The pain was such a deep wound, but I had to keep it all to myself. For John, it was a distant memory. But for me, it had left a bitter and unhappy woman, who hated her husband and hated her life. I wondered if we had ever been truly happy together.

John pressured me to get rid of all the baby things. I had kept the door of the baby's room closed ever since the adoption fell through, and would only go in there to have a good cry when the load I was continually carrying got too heavy. I knew John was right though. To move on I had to get rid of all the beautiful baby's things I had collected over the years. I had to try and forget that part of my life. I slowly packed everything into boxes, from linen, clothes, bottles, toys and dummies, to camp cots and even the baby bath. I had it all. Actually, I had too much. I packed it all away, feeling as though I was saying farewell to

someone I loved more than anything. I cried the whole time, quizzing myself on whether I shouldn't keep just a few things for myself. I would pack an item into a box, lose my nerve and then take it out. I would then sob all over it before packing it away again. It was so hard to say goodbye, and I didn't want to do it. But I knew that I had to if I wanted to keep my promise to John and try to save our marriage.

I loaded it all into my car until it was full to the brim. There was only one place I could think to take it, and that was the Abba Care Home – a nursery that provided care for babies in need. All of the babies there were African, either affected by HIV, AIDS or simply abandoned. I stepped onto the premises and could hear a tired cry from one baby, gurgling from another and a croaky cough from another. The sound of loving and soothing voices floated around the entrance, and I envisaged a room full of women swaddling delicate babies in their arms. However, they must have been in a separate part of the facility, as all I could see were three middle-aged women stood baby-free in a small lobby area. Hundreds of smiley faced baby photos were scattered on the walls along with the words “S.A. Care Homes” painted artistically in large baby blue letters. Abba Care Homes was one of S.A. Cares projects, an organisation that provided care for pregnant women and children in need.

One of the women in the lobby area was a plump African woman, with her braided hair tied back into a bun on the back of her head. Another of

the ladies had blond hair, chubby, rosy cheeks and friendly eyes, and the other lady was stick-thin with a long, thin mop of mousy brown hair. The latter was focused on a book filled with hand-written numbers – perhaps sorting out the accounts, I wondered. I approached their desk, my legs shaking the entire way. I explained that I wanted to donate some baby things and quickly received a warm welcome. The friendly reception momentarily transformed into open-mouthed shock as soon as they realised how much I was offering them. It was all brand new. Everything was unused, unstained and beautiful.

“Why are you giving all these things away?” the African woman asked me gently, her eyes wide open as I bought in more boxes.

I tried to find words, but they wouldn't come. I couldn't hold back the tears, so just continued offloading everything from the car, weeping the entire time. With each box I unpacked, I felt more and more pain. It was as though I was loading off pieces of my heart. I would be leaving part of my life back there in the care home. I cried bitterly and whispered a final farewell.

I expected to feel slightly better on the drive home, but I only felt a huge longing for all I had left. I cried uncontrollably, to the point where I was gasping sporadically. I pulled over to the side of the road and held my heavy head in my hands and sobbed. I had been hurt so terribly, and couldn't imagine the pain ever going away. I wanted to dump the heartache into a box and lock it away forever. I tried to rationalise that everything in life

happened for a reason, but what on Earth could be the reason for the hurt and pain I had gone through?

John was home when I arrived back. I felt drained and empty, similar to the way I had felt after my father's funeral. I sat in front of my computer and opened a new document. I wanted to write to my baby one last time, just to say goodbye.

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Last letter to my baby

Dear little darling, who was never meant for me, I shall always long for you.

You were so near, yet always so far away. My pain was not caused by you. I only felt love when I thought of you. I am so sorry that I could not be a mother for you and never will be.

You will always be in my heart and thoughts. I think that the belief that babies choose their parents and not the other way round is very true. I was not meant to have a baby, right from the start. Not naturally, and not through adoption. I have accepted this and believe that God does have a better plan for my life. Only He knows what it is. My story right now does not have a happy ending. But I always knew I had to follow the path to find out where it leads. My story seems to end with me being childless and very much alone. But every night when I look up at the stars, I shall think of you. I shall think of the sparkling eyes that I will never see. If I see a shooting star, I will no longer

make a wish. But perhaps I will see you wink at me, saying "You will be okay."

All my love

Azelene

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At the end of October 2002, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, John and I went to a birthday party at Renate's house. I was glad to see everybody there, and we talked just like old times. I looked into the mirror that night and recognised a glimmer of the old me. It made me happy.

I casually drifted around the party, spurring up conversation with as many people as I could. After an hour of doing so, I decided to go and see what John was up to. I followed the sound of the music blaring in the living room and quickly came across my husband. He was coming onto a woman dancing amongst her friends, wearing a cocky grin upon his face. I watched him throw his head back and laugh, going off to canoodle with another woman on the dance floor. He looked like a bachelor...a desperate bachelor in his thirties. But he wasn't a bachelor at all, he was my husband. My blood boiled within my veins – how dare he humiliate me like that, in front of everybody we knew. I wanted to wring his scrawny neck and scream. I wanted to scream at him just how much I hated him. I turned around and stormed out of the house. I grabbed my phone from my bag and dialled Ronell's number. She had been at the party

a while ago, but I hadn't seen her for a couple of hours.

"Hey Az, it's Glyn," a man's voice said down the phone. Glyn had recently separated from his wife, after a long struggle with his own marriage. He had surprised me by picking up the phone, for he had also been at the same party earlier. His voice was calm and comforting and made the impending tears prick my eyes. "Ronell went to the bathroom. Do you want me to ask her to give you a call back?"

"NO. Where are you?" my voice wobbled back, half furious, half upset.

"We're at News Café," he replied, sounding concerned.

"Stay there, I'm coming for a drink." I hung up abruptly and tore off down the driveway in the car. I arrived outside the funky bar, and madly searched for a parking spot. It seemed luck was on my side, as a small, red car suddenly reversed out of an ideal spot, leaving me to sneak my car in before anyone else did. I walked into the low-lit bar, with a blue neon-lit trumpet glowing overhead. Every seat was taken, from the black, velvet covered booths to the lime green chairs circled around marble topped tables. An old classic was playing, and everyone had either a cocktail or a bottle of beer in their hand. I darted through the crowd and just as I was about to give up, I spotted Glyn and Ronell sitting at a table next to an open door leading onto another part of the Bar. They clocked me immediately and waved for me to join them. I threw myself down onto a vacant chair and told them the whole story. Ronell rubbed my arm affectionately, worry on her face,

and Glyn listened attentively, looking kind and empathetic. They both knew very well of all the drama I had in my life and marriage.

“I’ve got an idea,” he said after a while, straining his voice over the chaotic surroundings. “Let’s all go back to Ronell’s, open a bottle of wine, and just sit and talk this thing out.” Ronell and I nodded our heads back enthusiastically and got on our way.

Three bottles of wine later, we were still sitting talking at Ronell’s. It was 5:30am, and I was famished. I hadn’t eaten a thing at the party John and I had been at, and had only had wine throughout the night.

“I’d die for a breakfast,” I mumbled, stroking my stomach. It rumbled hungrily and started to ache. “Come on, let’s go and have a greasy breakfast,” a tired looking Glyn said, rubbing his eyes. We both glanced over at Ronell who had fallen asleep. Glyn and I smirked in unison as I covered her up with a blanket. Glyn stood up next to me and gathered his keys from the coffee table.

“Any ideas?”

“Hmmm,” I pondered, looking at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Waterfront.”

“Waterfront in Johannesburg?” he asked, looking surprised.

“No, Waterfront in Cape Town.” I beamed a cheeky grin at him, daring him to go along with it. Cape Town was 1000 kilometres from Pretoria, and would require a two hour flight to get us there. Glyn grinned back, and then broke out laughing.

“What are we waiting for? Let’s go!”

We jumped into Glyn’s car and drove off to Johannesburg International Airport. I left my car at Ronell’s with my phone locked away inside. I didn’t want John to be able to get hold of me - I wanted to escape. It felt exciting and mischievous; we looked like two kids skiving off school. But it was liberating and the kind of insane, spontaneity that I was hankering after. We got on the next available flight to Cape Town, and spent the entire journey chit-chatting happily. It didn’t feel romantic, just friendly. At the end of the day, we were two friends who had known each other for a very long time. I was friends with his estranged wife, Thelma, and he was friends with John. He had been encouraging me all night to try to make things work with John, but I knew it was a lost cause. I had given up.

Before long, we were exactly where I wanted to be, Waterfront in Cape Town. We went to Quay Four restaurant and looked over a stunning view of Table Bay. The restaurant was a converted dockside warehouse, and had been transformed into a beautiful and relaxing haven, with juxtaposing pale blue and cream walls, charming wooden chairs with nautical blue and white cushions on them, and a hearty fireplace crackling nearby. I sighed blissfully and thanked Glyn. It was such a treat and it had cheered me up endlessly.

The day flew by in a flash. Breakfast came and went, as did lunch, and then dinner. I could hardly believe we had that much to talk about, we didn’t move from our seats for the entire day. Glyn was never sleazy or remotely flirty. I felt as though I

was spending the day with my best friend, and we were supporting each other. It was a tough time for both of us, and maybe that's why the chemistry was ideal. We understood each other. At 8pm we finally decided to fly back to Johannesburg. I didn't get back home until after midnight, and found John fast asleep in bed. I took off my jeans and fitted t-shirt, and crawled into bed beside him. I drifted off into a lovely deep sleep, and slept better than I had in years...

The following morning, John prodded me awake. I opened my eyes slowly to find him glaring at me stonily, his jaw clenched and lips curled into a snarl. He looked angry. I smoothed my messy hair back from my forehead, and cleared my throat.

"Did you take your Land Rover in for its service yesterday?" he growled, moodily.

"No," I uttered, immediately wanting to annoy him as much as possible.

"Why?" he spat, his fury quickly rising.

"Because I wasn't here!" I smiled dispassionately, pulling the covers off my body and climbing out of the bed. I walked into our en-suite bathroom and leaned over the sink to wash my face. John stormed in behind me with his hands on his hips.

"Okay, so if you weren't *here*, where were you? I figured you weren't *here* when I couldn't get hold of you all day!" Each word was firing out of his angry mouth like bullets. He was furious, but I didn't care. I simply shrugged my shoulders and turned the tap on.

"I was in Cape Town," I said coolly, before

splashing water on my face. John smirked viciously, not believing it could be true.

“Yeah, right. Where were you, Azelene?”

“Cape Town,” I replied, still splashing cool water on my face. I stopped the tap and dried my face with a small, brown hand towel. I looked back at John and saw how irritated he had become. A vein on his forehead was sticking out and his stare was aggressive and full of spite.

“Okay, so what were you *doing* in Cape Town?” he seethed.

“Having breakfast, lunch and dinner,” I said cheerfully, squeezing beside him to get back into our bedroom. I opened the closet and got out a pair of black jeans and a white strap top.

“Who were you with?” John shouted, his cheeks flushed with anger.

“Glyn.”

“What do you mean, you were with Glyn?” he yelled, watching me dress. His hands were firmly planted on his hips, and a scowl firmly set upon his face. I finished dressing and faced him squarely, as calm as I’d ever been and been confident than ever.

“Well, John, I told you that if you keep doing what you are doing, I would leave,” I said matter-of-factly. “Didn’t I make myself clear in March, after your little fling?”

I stared back at him, daring him to speak. But he was speechless. No words came from his mouth and he gaped back vacantly. He knew he was in the wrong, and he knew he’d been wrong for so long. I strolled out of the bedroom and out of the house, and didn’t return till the evening.

**“A Sad Thing In Life Is  
That Sometimes You  
Meet Someone Who  
Means A Lot To You  
Only To Find Out In The  
End That It Was Never  
Bound To Be And You  
Just Have To Let Go.”  
- Anonymous**

On March 13<sup>th</sup> 2003, the red-haired little girl who was so almost mine...turned one. I wondered what her name was, what she looked like and whether she was happy. I still thought of her a lot. I not only had to give up adopting her, but in doing so agreed to be childless for the rest of my life. The void had not yet disappeared, and I wondered if it ever would. I knew I had made the right decision, and even though John and I were together again, we

had too many cracks in our marriage for it to have been the perfect home for that little girl.

I spent a lot of time with friends to try and cheer myself up, and dived headfirst into work. An opposition company approached me at the start of the year, wanting to buy my laundry business. As they were offering a good price I signed everything over in a heartbeat. The money I made went into starting my new venture. I started a painting contracting business.

It was started so that John could sub-contract me to work for him. We were forking out a lot of money on someone else doing the painting, despite the fact I was perfectly capable of doing it myself. Bigger developers also put me on their books, and although time consuming it proved to be a half decent money spinner.

In spite of having so many distractions work wise, a happy home seemed to be a distant, distant memory. John continued hunting other women at parties we went to, or even parties we threw in our own home. One such evening was at the end of March 2003 at a party we were hosting. I watched as John leeches onto woman after woman, not caring that I was even in the same room. I rolled my eyes moodily, trying not to let it get under my skin. I spotted Glyn across the living room shaking his head in disbelief. He caught my gaze and strolled over with an astonished look upon his face.

“Seems like I’ll need you again tonight as an escape route,” I sighed to him with a smile. But I was actually feeling sick, looking at the picture in front of me. It was so humiliating, even in front of

Glyn who knew what I was going through. He nudged me encouragingly and flashed me a wink. You know I'll always have a place for you to crash if you need one.

"Unfortunately, I have a date I need to be getting to," he said with his eyebrows raised.

"Who with?" I grinned, wanting to know who the luck lady was.

"Melonie, actually," he replied, finishing the rest of his beer. I knew Melonie well, and thought of what a good couple they would make. The last time I saw Melonie properly was when she came to Dullstroom with John, me and her boyfriend at the time. I patted Glyn on the back and wished him luck on his date.

"If you need me though, Az, just give me a call." He put down his empty beer bottle on the table and kissed me on the cheek before leaving. I watched him leave, and was grateful having a friend I could trust. I looked around the party and saw happy couples chatting, clusters of friends laughing and then John all over a busty blond in the corner. I walked into the kitchen and poured a glass of wine, shaking my head in annoyance. Why was I putting up with this? I deserved better than this, right?

The evening got steadily worse. The blond was an old school friend that he bumped into earlier the evening when we all were at a pub watching rugby. He then invited her over to our house to come and party with us. Friends tried to spark up conversations with me, but I wasn't in the mood. I couldn't concentrate on anything other than the embarrassing situation developing on the

sofa in front of me. Everyone surveyed the scene awkwardly and nervously eyed up my reaction. I took myself outside the front door and flicked open my cell phone.

“Glyn? Can I come and have a drink with you and Melonie, please?” I asked, trying my hardest not to break down sobbing.

“Of course you can,” he responded, sounding cheerful. I thanked him profusely and got off the phone. Without even saying goodbye to any of our guests, I got into my car and drove to Johannesburg. We had a fantastic evening and avoided speaking about John altogether. It was like I wasn’t even married to him and the marital problems we had didn’t exist at all. Melonie was happy to see me, for she knew all about my problems. Melonie, Glyn and I danced the rest of the night away at a casino in Sandton.

I decided not to drive home that evening and crashed at Glyn’s house in Melville. I woke up the next morning with a deep sadness in me. But also happy that I left the house the night before, it’s time that John realized that I am not going to sit around and suck up his flirting with other women. I looked at my watch and saw that it was 6am. Time to go home. I gathered up my bag and keys and sleepily got in the car. John was waiting for me in the kitchen. His arms were folded and he had his mouth drawn into that all too familiar scowl. I threw my bag and my keys onto the work surface and stood across from him, folding my arms defensively. “Where were you?” he asked quietly. He looked terrible – he was wearing the same

clothes as the previous night and large, grey bags hung below his bloodshot eyes. I realised at that moment that I felt no love towards him anymore. He was like a stranger to me.

“Don’t even ask,” I replied coldly. “This is the last time I’m coming back, John. Next time you behave like that, I will walk out of the door and not return.”

I calmly walked past him and into our bathroom. I needed to have a shower and get into some fresh clothes. I hated being in the same house as him but felt that there was no way I could possibly leave...for good. Where would I go? What would everyone say? I knew I could do it, if I just tried hard enough. I could leave John and start a new life – a new, happy life where I didn’t have to *deal* with his wondering eye. I stood in the shower, thinking of our wreck of a marriage. It was no longer what it used to be, and I couldn’t keep trying to pick up all the pieces. It just wasn’t working. I couldn’t trust him and the hurt was growing more and more by the day. Our life together over the previous three years all seemed like one, huge, mammoth lie. There was no love, laughter, trust, friendship...there was nothing that made it a marriage to work on. I felt used. He was using me for cheap sex, regular meals and just to be his eye candy in the house, and contribute towards the mortgage too perhaps. But I was so utterly trapped, and I didn’t know how to get out.

Weeks trickled on painfully slowly, and months seemed like years. I would wake up every single morning and look at John with a distinct

feeling of hatred. I hated him more than anything else in the world. I couldn't forgive him for all the pain I had been subjected to and each day I spent with him felt like some sort of emotional torture. On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2003, I woke up and rolled over next to my sleeping husband. I absorbed every detail of his face, from the point of his nose to the wave of his light-brown hair. A tear dropped from my eye as an unfamiliar feeling of strong determination suddenly flowed through my veins. I knew what I had to do.

"John," my voice wavered. I sniffed as another tear rolled down my cheek. John opened his eyes and frowned at me grumpily. I got out of bed and walked over to my dressing table, pulled out the chair and stared at myself in the mirror. For a moment I didn't recognize the sad face I saw staring back at me. John got out of bed and walked over to me.

"What's wrong, why are you crying Azelene"

I turned my face towards him and said, "John, I want a divorce."

I stood up and walked over to our bed and dressed into some clothes I had abandoned at the foot of the bed. I got a small rucksack out from under the bed and filled it with a few of my tops, jeans and underwear. John didn't utter a word, he just watched as I gathered some belongings and walked out of the door. I finally knew it was time to move on and leave all the sorrow and disappointment behind me. I finally knew that I could get on with my life *without* John. I could finally see why God hadn't given us a baby. We

weren't meant to raise a child together. God had another plan, and it took me so long to realise it. I was so relieved to finally be able to surrender the hate I felt for my husband. I only wanted to remember the good times, because there were so many good times when all was said and done. But it was now time for us both to find the love that we deserved. It was time to move on, and I knew it was all going to be okay.

Two weeks later, I walked out of the divorce court a free woman. I smiled as I felt the fresh air on my skin and I knew that all will be ok. I was happy for the first time in years.

## 28

# When One Door Closes, Another One Opens

Life after the divorce wasn't a walk in the park, but it wasn't that hard either. It was more of a case of adjusting. Both friends and family were enormously supportive of my decision, and I knew that I was finally following the right path. Admittedly I was left husbandless and childless, but I was more contented than I had been in years.

I had bought a house for my mom in Pierre van Ryneveld Park, which was also in Pretoria, so I went to stay with her for a couple of months while I found my feet. I decided to have a house built in Irene Farm Villages nearby – a place where I could live in the countryside, with peaceful rural lanes to walk around and fresh farm produce at my fingertips. I couldn't wait for my little haven to be ready, and would fantasise about it daily.

I saw friends each and every day, and finally felt like *me* again. I wanted to engage in hobbies and be adventurous once more, so just a month after the divorce, Melonie persuaded me to sign up for a diving course in Mozambique for a week. Glyn liked the sound of a vacation so came along to be our chaperon, for the trip. After their one date, Glyn

and Melonie had decided they were better off being friends, so I didn't have to feel like the third wheel on our week away. The three of us had established a tight-knit friendship. We had the same sense of humour and loved having a good time, just *being*. Mozambique was unreal too; we had so much fun together. I don't think we could have gone to a more perfect holiday destination.

Unfortunately our dives were not as nice, for we had huge waves and very poor visibility most of the time; the weather was not on our side when it came to the diving! But the Indian Ocean waters are most of the time pleasantly warm and crystal clear, home to the most fantastic coral reefs. There is a great variety of fish species. The entire diving experience was a bit stressful for me. The current was very strong at times, but out of the water we had a great time. It's amazing to see what a truly wonderful world God has created. The preceding three years had faltered my faith somewhat, so I was glad to find that the natural magnificence of Mozambique restored it a little.

At the end of November, Glyn asked me if I had arrangements for December holiday, I suggested he join me for four weeks in Botswana, camping in the bush. I was raring for an adventure, and Glyn was the perfect companion. He was my best friend, and as it had turned out, my saviour. I felt myself when I was with him – I could spread my wings and be free.

We did not plan a lot for we both like an adventure, and are very impulsive. We had to take – sleeping bags, a tent, warm clothes, pots, dishes,

penknives, toilet paper, maps...the list went on and on. Luckily Glyn was just as outdoorsy as me, so we knew what we had to do and organise. The weather was hot during the day, just under 40 degrees Celsius. We would try to stay in the shade, waiting patiently for wildlife to emerge, usually around waterholes. It was a magical experience, and the whole of December dashed by in the blink of an eye. But it was one quiet night in Botswana that our friendship turned. I sat across the campfire from him, almost studying his face. I suddenly realised how much I liked his rugged skinhead of all things. There was something so sexy about it – about him – and I had never really noticed how attractive I actually found him. Then there were his amazingly blue eyes...I found I was drowning in them more and more with every day we were spending together. They were a window to his soul – his warm, caring and loving soul. It was then that I realised how happy he made me, and it was then that I wanted to lean over and kiss his soft lips. It was then that I fell head over heels...for my best friend.

Glyn and my friendship rapidly developed into a beautiful relationship. We both lived our lives to the fullest, and were just so happy to have one another. We did everything together, from bike riding and diving, to fishing and hunting. We were an ideal couple and loved each other so very, very much. Glyn was renting a house in Elardus Park, a place in the south-east region of Pretoria. It was a place that always seemed to be a humble-jumble of housing. There were the most basic of boxy homes

next door to grand and overtly luxurious estates. But Glyn's house had character, and I ended up spending most of my time there while my building project at the Irene Farm Villages was still on the go.

However, once it was completed in 2004, Glyn and I decided we would both move into the new property together. It made perfect sense, not only to us but to everyone else. Our relationship was very much open and serious and it seemed like a natural progression. I had been divorced for nine months at that point, and it was surreal to think the John years were actually part of *my* life. Those memories almost seemed to belong to somebody else. It amazed me at times how unhappy I had been for so long.

Glyn and I had been together for two and a half years and never worried about contraception – there didn't seem to be any point. Glyn and Thelma his ex-wife, also had tried to conceive a child and had also failed, and my body obviously had other plans on the cards other than baby making. For that reason, I was completely shocked when I overheard a conversation Glyn was having with a friend one evening.

"I'd better tell Az to stop drinking. I really think she's pregnant."

I heard this sentence spout from Glyn's mouth at our favourite bar, The Keg, which also doubled up as a rather nice restaurant. It was filled with soft leather couches and contemporary chairs and tables. We loved it there – the atmosphere was always so relaxing, and your ears would be ringing

with the laughter of happy people. I, on the other hand, once hearing that sentence, wasn't so happy. I tapped him on the shoulder, feeling annoyed. I had already had a couple of drinks which could have amplified the supposition that he was mocking me. He knew about my infertility history and he knew that it was a sore topic.

"Why are you saying things like that, Glyn?" I asked, sounding hurt. He just chuckled into his beer, fuelling my rage even more.

"I've also said it to someone else this week, Az, because I honestly do think you are pregnant." His face straightened out and he stared at me seriously. I gaped back at him, gasping for air.

"Why the hell would you say something like that?" I whispered fiercely, close to tears.

"Because every time I hug you, your boobs hurt. Because your period is late. That is why," he said softly, putting an affectionate arm around me.

"You are so stupid!" I replied, crossly. "Of course my boobs are sore, my period is supposed to come anytime now! It is late 90 percent of the time. My boobs being sore is my only indication that I'll be getting my period soon!" I folded my arms and sighed. For the first time ever, I felt angry and disappointed in him. I felt like he didn't know me nearly as well as I had thought.

The following day, I decided to buy a pregnancy test to prove my point. I needed Glyn to see that I would never be pregnant. Any sore boobs and late periods were a sign of something else. He needed to see that with me, there would never be a baby.

I peed on the stick in just the same way I had countless times before. I lay it by the sink while I buttoned up my jeans and washed my hands. I didn't care about checking to see how many lines there were, I knew what the result would be. I picked it up ready to take it through to show Glyn, who was lying on the bed in our room. But then I realised...there were two lines. Two VERY clear lines. It was positive. My heart stopped as I ran through to the room.

"How many lines do you see?" I squealed at him, waving the stick in his face.

"One," Glyn answered, frowning.

"No, how many do you see in the block?" I asked quickly.

"One," he repeated.

"How many do you see in the circle?"

"One," he said again.

"So, how many do you see in total?" I bubbled excitedly.

"One!" he shouted, looking baffled yet amused.

"You are a quantity surveyor and you can't even count! I'm pregnant!"

We embraced in an overwhelmed, shocked and emotional cuddle. It was a miracle and we both knew it. I phoned my mom soon after to tell her the news. She was almost speechless, only just able to tell me that she was on her way round before messily hanging up. I then phoned Ronell, eager to hear her reaction.

"Are you having a baby cat or a baby dog?" she asked kindly.

“No, a real baby! I’m pregnant!” I corrected joyfully. She screamed and laughed but admitted how very, very surprised she was. We were all surprised, every single one of us, and it was hard to know what to say. It was hard to know what to do. I decided to buy three different pregnancy tests and try them all, not letting myself believe that such an amazing miracle could actually happen to me. But they all emitted the same positive result...could it be possible?

The next day, my mom and Glyn took me to the local clinic for a scan. Up on the monitor was the grainy image of a tiny, little baby – so small, in fact, that it was hard to believe it could be alive. But sure enough, there was a heartbeat. It was the most melodious sound I had ever heard and instantly brought tears to my eyes. Yes, at last, after all the years of heartache and pain, I was pregnant. God *was* watching over me all that time, with a bigger and better plan than I could ever have hoped for. Glyn was meant to be the father of my child all along. Glyn was the missing piece of the puzzle. I looked up at him and he looked down at me. My life was finally complete. We are going to have a baby!

## 29

# My Pregnancy

I had a wonderful pregnancy from the beginning. I had no morning sickness or any other problems for that matter. I, for once, was very lucky.

I tried to keep fit through yoga, a healthy diet and no alcohol, and I limited my smoking as much as I could. I felt guilty every time I did smoke, but my gynaecologist reiterated what I already thought.

“After everything you went through during your previous attempts to fall pregnant, you need to keep your stress levels down. Nicotine cravings will make your body more stressed and could potentially cause more damage than the occasional cigarette,” he explained understandingly.

I tried my best to keep my lifestyle as normal as possible, and tried to avoid worrying about problems of the past. I worked hard yet still had bundles of fun with Glyn. He relaxed me and kept my mind at ease. But it wasn't until I felt the baby moving that I really *did* feel relaxed. It was the most incredible feeling I had ever felt and I loved it. Sometimes, even now, I dream about that feeling. I would lie down every time I felt a kick and touch my stomach, making the baby kick more and more. The baby would move around happily when I played music by putting earphones on my belly. I loved my

expanding belly and I cherished being pregnant. Every single aspect of it!

I was over the moon completely when I found out that we were expecting a little girl. I was in heaven as I daydreamed about her. God had blessed me with the little girl I never thought I'd have. God had listened to me during the previous years of pain. He was next to me, holding my hand and walking the sad road with me. God had a plan for my life and my faith in Him was well and truly restored. Ironically, the name we decided to call our daughter was *Sian*, which means 'Gracious Gift from God'. Glyn had chosen the name, not knowing its significance. Her middle name was to be *Hunter*, as one of the biggest bonds her father and I have is our passion for hunting. Hunter was also one of the names Ronell had on her list of baby names, for us. Her surname was to be *Williams*, Glyn's surname, and to make us an official family, Glyn and I married five months before she was born.

Our wedding was on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, and was a wonderful day and one of the happiest days of my life. We had the ceremony at a stunning location in the countryside, where a beautiful rock lectern stands amongst expansive woodlands. Vibrant green trees arched above our heads as we exchanged our vows, and a fresh breeze rippled through the congregation. It was perfect. I look back fondly when I think of that day, knowing that Sian was curled up in my tummy when her father and I made a promise to God to love each other for the rest of our lives. We were a family already.

## 30

# Sian Hunter Williams

Our darling little girl was born on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2006 at 2:16 in the morning, in Pretoria East Hospital. She weighed 2.74 kilograms. It was a Wednesday – just two days before Glyn’s birthday and a day before my planned due date. I fell madly in love with her the moment I laid eyes on her, an unconditional love that will always be there. My search for my baby was finally over and we called her Sian Hunter Williams.

# Letter To Sian

My Dear Little Angel,

Sian from the moment that I realised that I was pregnant with you, I loved you with all my heart and soul. I will never forget how I felt that day when I did that pregnancy test and saw that it was positive.

For so many years I longed for you, praying all the time, until I finally lost faith in it happening for me altogether. But one morning my world changed forever. The change that took place was a wonderful change. The first time I heard your heartbeat placed a smile on my face from ear to ear. Lying there listening to it, knowing that little heartbeat was a part of me. It was an absolute miracle.

My dearest Sian, I would do anything to protect you from harm. You made me the happiest person in this world from the day you decided to grow in my tummy until you were ready to face the world. I will do my best to make sure you are the happiest little girl on this planet. When you grow up and get angry with me for not allowing you to do certain things, remember it is not because I am unfair, it is because I love you unconditionally. You are so special to me and I only want the very best in life for you.

Sian, you are a breath of fresh air in the house. You play. You run. You sing. You make us laugh. You make me laugh – you are the funniest little girl I have

ever seen. You bring a warm and fuzzy feeling to my world. I look at you now and can't believe I was blessed with you. You are, without a doubt, my little gracious gift from God.

I enjoy every single moment I spend with you, and am so glad I am able to be with you every day. I hope and pray that God will give us many more years together, because there is still so much I need to learn from you.

When I took you to bed last night, you looked up at me with those big, blue eyes.

And you said softly. "Mommy, hold me a while,"

I scooped you up in my arms and sat on the bed, just looking at you.

"Mommy, you my angel," you said with your beautiful little voice.

"Sian, you almost made me cry." For there is only one angel in our house, and that, my dearest darling, is you. "Sian, you are my little angel, and you will always be. I love you more than all the sand in the entire world."

And now every time when I see a shooting star, I will say a special prayer to thank God for giving me such a special girl.

Love you forever.

Your Mommy

# **The End**

## **Present Day (2011)**

It has been eight years since my divorce, and five years since the birth of Sian. Today I can honestly say..... I am healed, and very, very happy.

It's been a tough road to walk, and there have been lots of challenges. But in telling my story I hope to encourage other women and to let other women know that they are not alone. I still remember the pain and longing very clearly even now. That pain will always be a part of my life, as some things can't be wiped away, even when there is a happy ending to the tale. Remembering the pain, however, makes me feel human and brings me back down to Earth. I have my little miracle child today, but if I hadn't been on that hellish journey, I wouldn't have realised that life isn't just life. Life is a gift that you need to appreciate and understand. So many times we human beings take everything life gives us for granted, and all those years of struggling with infertility made me see that life must be appreciated every single day.

I contemplate all the decisions I have made on that particular journey, especially the decision not to adopt the little girl back in South Africa. I could have adopted her, and I decided not to. I

think about that choice a lot, especially around her birthday. In March 2010 she would have turned eight years old, and knowing that, despite having my own daughter now, I still feel huge sorrow. I'm not sure if it's because I feel I rejected her after her own biological mother rejected her. However, I do know I made the right decision. Despite all the efforts I had gone through and the pain I was feeling at the time, I managed to give another couple the chance to fulfil their dreams of becoming parents. Adopting her would have been a selfish act on my part, purely because I wanted a child that badly even though I couldn't give her the best home that she deserved. I am glad I put my feelings in the background and gave her a good chance. I am sure that her family loves her so very much, and could give her a lot more than I could have done with my rollercoaster emotions and our unstable marriage at that time.

As for my 'failed' marriage, I am happy to admit that John and I are good friends today. We have been in regular contact, and put all of our past behind us. Life is too short for pointing fingers at each other. We were both in the wrong, but that makes us human. John is now happily married, to a girl who I got to know very well over the last couple of years. They came to visit us for a holiday in Oman in September 2010, and we all had a wonderful time together. I realised during their visit that John finally understood why I wanted children so badly. I could see that Sian touched his heart deeply. It made me slightly sad that he won't be able to experience that for himself, but I know he

is happy for me from the bottom of his heart. I feel like the luckiest person alive. I have a wonderful husband, who I love very much, and a little girl who is my world, an ex-husband who turned out somebody I don't have to hate anymore. What more can I ask for.

I have asked myself on several occasions whether I would have done anything differently, and the truth is, I would do everything exactly the same. It may sound weird, and even unbelievable. But I'm being honest – I wouldn't change a thing.

# Advice

If you are reading this and are going through an infertility battle of your own, you may be wondering if you too will have a happy ending. All I can tell you is to keep your faith, and pray and believe for as long as you can. I do not know why God blessed me with Glyn and Sian, but I do believe that He chose when I was going to fall pregnant and whom with.

I have a couple of thoughts that I want to share with you to help you get through this difficult time in your life. Some may be for you and others may not:

Keep busy. Read a lot about your situation.

Search the web to see whether there is somebody going through what you are going through. Contact them via e-mail, and share your experiences, feelings and longings.

Join chat rooms and websites where you can read other peoples situations, or start your own. It does sometimes help to know you are NOT alone and that there are hundreds of people going through the same thing you are going through.

If you would like to adopt but find getting help with the process is difficult, perhaps write up an e-mail with your details and send it to friends and family to see if there is somebody who might know someone to help you get into the right channels.

Get support from people who understand what you are going through.

Start to write a journal. Write down feelings; write poems...write anything, even if it doesn't make sense. Just write. Remember you don't ever have to publish it or give it to somebody to read. This is just for you, for you to get your feelings out and start a healing process.

Get involved in charities, such as anti-abortion groups and pro-life groups.

Get involved with orphanages and if you want to start taking an orphan out for weekends, then do it! This caring process can be very satisfying, both for you and for a child hoping to have a home one day.

Do not sit around and wait till something just *happens*. Go out and look for it. Look for answers, decide what you want to do next and do it.

Send me an e-mail if you would like to talk and if you need a friend when no one understands.

If you feel you need more support from me then please join the official website or Facebook page.

# If You Are On Treatment

You are going through a very sad and hard time in your life right now. I just want you to know that you are **not** alone. Don't blame yourself for your emotions or outbursts. *Do not* put any pressure on yourself if you can't handle a situation or an emotion at the time. Also, do not let anybody else put pressure on you as it will just make things worse. Never feel that you are supposed to suppress your emotions. Your emotions are normal and understandable, and the fact that you can't cope some days is also normal. Obviously being on treatment makes the situations seem worse and your hormones are scrambled to a new degree that you won't be familiar with.

But that does not mean you will feel sane if you are not on treatment. I sometimes had worse days when I was off treatment. The struggle to fall pregnant was enough to pull me down to the floor and leave me crying for hours. If you feel that you are losing it and that you are going to go nuts, treatment or not, *remember*, it is normal. Take life day by day.

# To Family Or Friends Who Know Someone Going Through Infertility

Listen to them and be that person they can vent their troubles to. Offer comfort but avoid offering suggestions and advice. Show interest and listen to them talk. They will have researched it as much as they can, so they simply need a friend to talk to.

Never make light of their troubles through humor. They will be incredibly sensitive and it will only make them angry rather than happy. They will probably have erratic behavior at times, because they are going on an up and down journey. Their moods do not reflect their feelings about you, but the current hurdle they're jumping over. Accept their emotions, whether good or bad, and don't dwell on their *bad* days.

Try to understand what they're going through, and perhaps read about it so you are a little more informed too. Support every decision they make along the road, whether you agree with them or not. They will have listed the pros and cons

before even discussing a choice with you, so respect their decision and be supportive.

If you are lost for words at times, tell them. They will appreciate your honesty and they will still feel your support even when you're simply listening to them babbling on about their predicament. But being honest will keep your relationship going in the right direction. You are so important to them and being there will be more significant for them than you can imagine.

# **I Am Pro-Life**

I got to know John Claassen a member of Doctor's for life years ago after he received my e-mail via someone, and asked me if he could place my infertility story in one of their news letters.

It appeared in their news letter in March 2002 and was sent to all their members who are medical doctors, specialists and professors of medicine in South-Africa and across the globe.

Ronell and I arranged an Abortion Counselling Course in Pretoria. We attend the intense two day counselling course ourselves, and found it heartbreaking but very informative. I became a strong believer that abortions aren't an easy way out. And hope women and young girls will think twice before undergoing an abortion. I am not here to criticise people's actions. But I have stood on the other side and know how painful it is if you have this incredible longing for a child and people around you decide to have an abortion.

# Doctor's For Life International

I made a promise to God that if I ever published my book, I will donate 50 percent of my profit to an organization that I felt were able to make a difference. I decided to donate half of my income from **INFERTILITY** Road to Hell and Back to *Doctor's For Life International*. I hope that the funds I raise can help them in the work they do.

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Doctors For Life International is a non-governmental and registered Non-Profit making Organization (NPO) established in 1991. They have a growing number of nearly 1300 members. The members are medical doctors, specialists, dentists, veterinary surgeons, and professors of medicine from various medical faculties across South Africa and abroad, in private practice and in government institutions.

They bring together medical professionals to form a united front to uphold the following three principles:

- The sanctity of life from conception till death;
- Sound science in the medical profession;
- A Basic Christian ethic in the medical profession.

# Final Words

Finally, I want to wish you luck on your journey I will be praying for each and every woman around the world who is experiencing infertility problems, and who is on infertility treatment. May God also bless you all with a little miracle one day, whether biologically or through adoption!

# About The Author

Azelene, Glyn and Sian relocated from South Africa, their birth country to Dubai in the U.A.E. in July 2007. They lived in Dubai for eight months. Where she completed her photography course.

After eight months they moved to Muscat, Oman, and lived there for three happy years.

Azelene who loves photography, specialised in baby and kids photography. But soon started doing freelance work for a number of clients. Her work featured in – The Week, Harper's Bazaar, Crème de la Crème, Urbane Redefining Lifestyle, Bespoke - Arabian Luxury Lifestyle and Hello Magazine, just to name a few. She was also given the opportunity to do some freelance photography work for the Royal Family in Muscat.

They left South Africa when Sian was seven months old. The reason they decided to leave their beloved country was because they were not one hundred percent sure that they could protect their little girl in a country with so much violent crime going on. She was too precious, and it was decided that, after such a long struggle, it would be better for them as a family.

They relocated yet again to Perth, Australia in May 2011, where they currently reside and their long term plan is to eventually take citizenship and

make this their permanent home. Azelene enrolled with a college in Australia in 2011 where she is currently completing her Diploma in Holistic Counselling.

She still enjoys her photography tremendously, and does freelance work on request.

The balance of the time she keeps herself busy with Sian's afterschool activities and continues to enjoy the opportunity God gave her to be a Mother to Sian.

# Important Links

## INFERTILITY

### Road to Hell and Back

**Official website**

[www.azelenewilliams.com](http://www.azelenewilliams.com)

**Official e-mail**

[azelenewilliams@gmail.com](mailto:azelenewilliams@gmail.com)

[azelene@kidzucate.com.au](mailto:azelene@kidzucate.com.au)

**Official Facebook Page**

<https://www.facebook.com/azelene.williams.kidzucate/>

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## Doctors For Life

[www.doctorsforlife.co.za](http://www.doctorsforlife.co.za)

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# Acknowledgements

**My Husband:** Glyn, I love you so much. Thank you for being my best friend, my husband, and a wonderful Daddy to Sian. I am so glad that you are part of my life, and I thank God for sending you in my direction. Thank you for the incredible time that began when I met you and all of the love you give us every day. My life is perfect with you in it.

**Sian:** My Gracious Gift from God, Sian, thank you for choosing me to be your Mommy. Sian, I love you more than I ever loved anything in this world. You will always be my special child, the one that was not supposed to be there. I am glad that I walked such a rough road to find you at the end of it. Every tear that I wept was worth it, waiting for you. I love you, my darling child. Always say these words when something isn't going right in your life or if you are in an unfair situation: "God has a plan for my life."

**My Dad:** For all the wonderful memories you left behind, stories I will be able to share with Sian one day, and for the decision I made to have children just before you died in 1999. I still miss you Dad, and I will keep on sending those Red Balloons up in the sky. Hopefully, one day, we will be able to read all the birthday cards together that I send to you every year. I wish you could have met Sian. You would have loved her so much. - Rest In Peace, Dad.

**My Mom:** For not only being a wonderful mother, but also a friend when I need one. Thank you for coming with me to the hospital every time I needed treatment, for holding my hand, wiping my tears, and holding me with your love, the type of love only a mother can give. You never complained, and you always set your own problems aside to share in mine. I will always love you for that. You are a wonderful mother and today the best grandmother ever. I love you so much, Mom.

**My sister, Ronell:** Thank you for the late evenings you spared to listen when I was in constant tears. I know you didn't always understand but you always listened even when you went through your own tough times. Thank you for trying to understand what I was going through. I will always remember our long chats and treasure all the times we spent together. I love you very much. Infinity.

**Maritsa Uys:** For being my best friend in Muscat and for pushing me to finish my book and to get it published. This was a long stressful episode in the end, but I thank you for believing in me and supporting me. If it wasn't for you it would have still been lying in a cupboard somewhere in the house. I hope that wherever the road may take you, you will be happy and safe always.

**Magdeleen van der Walt:** Thank you for trying your utmost best to find a baby for us, and thank you for

understanding why we couldn't go on with the adoption after you found a little baby girl for us to adopt. I also never had the chance to let you know that I was pregnant with Sian, because you were taken from earth before I could tell you. May you - Rest In Peace, Magdeleen.

**For my Ex-husband:** Thank you for being happy for me the day I phoned you to tell you I am expecting a baby. Also for understanding why I needed to get my Infertility story out there.

**Andrew Barlow, my uncle:** For taking the time to translating my script from Afrikaans to English.

**Jeni Williams and Shelley Eagle:** Thank you for helping me with the back page wording.

**For all my friends:** I can't name you all but if you read my book you will know exactly who you are. And yes if your name appears here you have made an impact on my life one way or another. Thank you for being there even when you thought I completely lost it. I know you didn't understand how I felt, but how could you have understood when you were not having any problems to conceive. I will never blame you for not understanding exactly what I have been through. I sometimes didn't understand myself. Just know I love you all very much, and thank you for your friendships.

**Victoria Austen:** You took my journal and helped me to rework it into the more readable memoir style it is in now. Thank you for your time and effort and it was great to work with you.

**Elmin van Rensburg:** You taught me that you do not have to know somebody to care for them. Thank you for your support, messages and phone calls to find out how I was coping during the tough periods in my life. You touched me deeply.

I love being a woman.

To me it is a privilege and there is nothing more satisfying.  
I appreciate being honoured and cherished for my femininity after all,  
I am the potential mother of the next generation.

I value my fertility, value the gift of being able to carry  
a child and become a mother.

To me, this is the very essence of being a woman.

The children we bring into the world are small replicas of ourselves  
and our husbands; the pride and joy of grandfathers and grandmothers.

We dream of being mothers, and for most of us these dreams  
are realised naturally.

For this is the Miracle of Life.

But - what about when that longed for baby never happens?  
When you realise that something is wrong and turn to professionals for  
help. Tests are done; treatments tried without success.

You traipse from one doctor to the next;  
resulting in more disappointment and fading hope.  
Your dream is shattered and the heartache is painful;  
almost unbearable.

What is wrong with you? Is it your fault?  
How are you lacking? Why?

The questions are still desperately being asked - but there are no answers.  
Slowly your conviction grows that your entirety as a woman is incomplete.

I am a woman and this is my story.....



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