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I hear a pop and then a cheer. Seconds later a glass of Prosecco – more fizz than drink – is thrust into my hand and Glen is leading everyone in a toast. To me. I still can't quite take in what's happening.

'To Holly,' they all chorus and I hate myself for blushing. And then of course I blush some more because I'm feeling self-conscious about it. Hardly a move designed to instil confidence in my new-found authority. I take a swig far too quickly and cough as the foam hits the back of my throat.

'Thank you,' I manage to say.

I look round at them all, glasses raised, big grins on their faces. Juliet, of course, is nowhere to be seen. She claimed a sudden doctor's appointment and headed for the door as soon as it became apparent she might be expected to congratulate me. But the other members of my department are all there: assistant Emma brandishing a glass of water because bubbles make her sneeze; short, stocky Lorraine almost as wide as she's high; Joe leaning back in his chair beaming his open smile; Glen holding his glass aloft, but with one eye on his phone, knowing he should be here but wondering how soon he can politely get away; and finally Roz, my desk mate for the past three years, my ally, my campaign manager in my fight for promotion.

I hold my glass higher in her direction, ready for her excitement to mirror my own.

I would never have got this promotion without Roz. There's no one I want to celebrate with more. She's standing there in between Emma and Lorraine, six inches taller than both of them. Glass raised. Grinning from ear to ear. Peroxide-blonde hair spiked up. White teeth held hostage by vivid magenta lips. Canary-yellow top. Red skinny trousers. Heels. She looks like someone turned the lights on.

'I always knew you'd get it,' she says. She knocks back her fizz, leaving a lipstick mark on the glass.

The others are filling up their flutes again, happy to be having a sanctioned skive. Happy for me. I think. In a contest between me, Juliet or a random outsider I'm pretty sure they were all in my corner.

Glen taps his glass to get everyone's attention. Ready to make a speech. Roz rolls her eyes at me and I stifle a laugh. Glen loves the sound of his own voice.

He coughs. 'So, I'd like to formally congratulate Holly . . .'

'I dare you to interrupt and ask him if he's been working out,' Roz whispers in my ear and I snort. I try to turn it into a cough. Glen and his vanity is one of our favourite topics.

'Let's have a quick one after work,' I mutter to Roz as he drones on. 'Just me and you.'

'I can't.' She pulls a face. 'We've got a dinner.' Roz and her husband Hugh have a social life – mainly courtesy of his job – that leaves me exhausted just thinking about it. It sounds fabulous, don't get me wrong, but I find myself

worrying about when she gets to have a night at home slobbering around in her PJs. Of course, I'm the opposite. Pyjama-clad nights in beat glamorous nights out by about 364 to 1. The one being the work Christmas party. And trust me, that's not up to much. The last one was held in the studio where the series we all work on is filmed, in amongst all the regular standing sets, although I don't imagine they'll do that again this year, because someone peed in a prop vase that has been in our central family's living room for years and is supposed to contain the ashes of their fictional dead grandfather.

Listening to Roz's tales sometimes makes me glad that ours is a typical work friendship. Our socializing is always tacked on to the end of a working day. A drink or two in one of the local pubs. A debrief. But outside of that we have very different ideas of what constitutes a good time. Of course, I lap up all her stories. I just would rather have an early night than feature in them.

Glen seems to have reached the point where everyone is about to raise their glasses again in another toast. I have no idea what he's said about me but I assume it's all good. People are smiling anyway. Everyone clinks my glass.

'Well deserved,' Glen says when it's his turn.

'Thanks,' I say. 'I really do appreciate it.'

Roz reaches to the back of her chair for her jacket. Picks up her bag. Pulls her fingers through her short blonde hair.

I see Glen look over. It's only twenty to six and it's pretty much frowned on for anyone to leave before the hour.

‘What?’ she says, flashing everyone a smile. ‘You’re all only going to be boozing anyway. I couldn’t get any work done if I wanted to.’

She drops a kiss on my head as she passes. ‘See you tomorrow.’

By ten past I’m on my way too, teetering gingerly on the icy pavements, slightly tipsy after three glasses of Prosecco. I wrap my scarf over my nose and mouth, pull my coat tight round me and head for the station. I’m still glowing from the news. Or maybe it’s the drink. I didn’t expect to get the job. I thought I was the outsider. That Juliet had the experience, the more impressive CV. I wonder if she’ll resign now that her ambitions have been thwarted.

Lorraine and Joe were all for us moving on to the pub but I managed to convince both myself and them that starting my first day as script executive with a raging hangover wouldn’t give the best impression. So it’s home to a microwave M&S lasagne and an early night. I know how to let my hair down.

On paper I am the sad middle-aged lady living alone with only a cat for company. That’s me. The butt of a million jokes. I realize that makes me sound like I’m tragic. I’m not. I love my basement flat. And the being alone bit is only temporary till I find a lodger. Plus we all know fifty is the new thirty, and I’m only forty-three so that makes me positively youthful. And I didn’t always live on my own. I have a daughter, Ashley, who’s twenty-two.

Father unknown. Or, at least, I know who he is; I just never kept in touch. She's living with her boyfriend in Bristol where they were both at uni until last June.

She's just found out she's pregnant.

I'm not going to lie: I cried when I found out. And not through joy either. She's too young. She barely even knows who she is yet. I know what it's like. I've been there. And, even though I can't imagine my life without my daughter, I don't think I would choose to go there again. The one – big – difference is that she's not on her own. I know that she and Ryan thought long and hard before they decided to keep the baby and I'm proud of them that they dealt with it head on. They're in it together. But do I wish it hadn't happened? Is it terrible to admit that I do?

It was Ashley's pregnancy that persuaded me to let her room – the spare room as we're now trying to get used to calling it – out for some extra cash. Once I heard about the baby – Ashley and Ryan both came to stay and they tearfully broke the news – I knew that I couldn't let them struggle like I had. Having to choose between buying teabags or baby wipes. (Teabags won out every time. Sorry, Ashley.) Between paying for a haircut or a school trip (I don't think a pair of scissors even touched my hair for fifteen years). If nothing else I can offer to help out financially. Just till they get on their feet. Although God only knows how much I'm dreading sharing my kitchen with a stranger. Possibly a psychopath. Or, even worse, someone who wants to be friends. Since Ashley moved to Bristol three and a half years ago I've got used to my own company. I like it.

After years of single mumdom I finally put myself – and my career – first when Ashley left for uni. Before that work was a means to an end. A way to keep us afloat but still leave me enough time to cook dinner every evening and attend every parents’ meeting, netball match, play or concert. Oh, and take a day off at a moment’s notice whenever my daughter was sick, along with every single holiday and inset day. Climbing a corporate ladder was out of the question. I know people do it. Of course they do, millions of them. But it was a choice I made. It was the way I wanted to do things. Suddenly, though, I was on my own, a mother without a child to look after. I wanted to carve out a new identity for myself. I’d made a lot of connections through the part-time script-reading work I’d been doing for years for various theatres and TV companies to make a bit of extra cash. So I always got to hear when jobs cropped up. With *Churchill Road* I think I was just in the right place at the right time. And, let’s face it, they were probably desperate.

Anyway, that’s why this promotion means so much to me. It’s a milestone. I want to shout it from my rooftop but instead I settle for calling Ashley, who insists that she always knew I was going to get it, and my best mate Dee, who squeals so loudly her boyfriend (or partner as she always refers to him, insisting ‘boyfriend’ makes her sound as if she thinks she’s sixteen, whereas I think ‘partner’ gives the impression they run a law firm together) comes running in from the next room to see what’s wrong.

‘Shall we come over? Are you celebrating?’ Dee always wants an excuse to party. I imagine ‘partner’ Gavin rolling

his eyes at her, the prospect of a night vegging on the sofa ebbing away.

‘No. I have work tomorrow and I’m already a bit pissed. Let’s do it at the weekend.’

‘Definitely,’ she says. ‘Don’t think you’re getting away with it.’

I potter round the kitchen getting myself something to eat. Fighting the anti-climax. Wishing I was in the pub with Roz celebrating my good fortune, making it feel real.

‘Holly Cooper, Script Executive,’ I say out loud, trying out my new title for size. Smokey slinks in through the cat flap. Looks round as if he wonders who I’m talking to.

‘I got the job,’ I say to him as I spoon food into his bowl. ‘Really, though, I got the fucking job.’