Very suspicious. Ask your dad Ask your mom Open the door. The big 1-0. You move out of the way. Let's get this party started! Talk to your guests "These are my party clothes, silly. I mean... Sally." "Erm... my party clothes are a surprise. You'll have to wait to see them!" Get this party started 2 Entertain your guests Keep performing "Sorry folks!" "But you were singing it while you fi ... o I figured it must be a funny song!" "I know, sorry Dad" Sneak a peek at your gifts You've no idea what it might be. "I'm sorry, I won't do it again" "But it looked so pretty! Is it from you?" She looks conflicted. "I'm not a good girl, so I don't care." It's gift unwrapping time! The books The sweaters "What have you got there, Jennifer?" You don't think you're afraid, anyway. "What's so funny?" The dolls You don't recall asking her. "I dunno. Do I have to be a mommy?" "Uncle Rob mustn't know that much abo ... w up our TV when he tried to fix it." "But science is for girls too, Aunt Clare!" "Can't I learn about science and take care of people?" "Why does looking fat scare boys?" "No, I don't want to look fat." "I'm not going to be a mommy." "Uncle Rob, are you wearing lots of sweaters too?" You chuckle. Silly Uncle Rob. "Do you really think so, Uncle Rob?" Aunt Clare stifles a laugh. "What about adventuring? Is my brain suited to that?" Uncle Rob looks shocked. Uncle Rob throws his hands in the air. Puppy fat. Yuck. And Aunt Clare wouldn't lie, would she? He clears his throat. "Oh you will, honey, you will." All girls? Aunt Clare doesn't look convinced. "Deal, Jenny, deal." Your dad cheers when you almost manage to raise your arms above your head. Chapter Two The fourth or fifth cheapest, maybe. You're glad you decided to keep your outfit simple You already feel too old to wear clothes like that Where do you recognise that dress from? Greet Louise. "Thanks." But everyone else is a stranger. Find the drinks table. Hard cider Cola Gin Louise isn't back yet. (Ugh. Smile back at them "Well don't you three look like fun?" "Hi there, do you mind if I join you?" One of the guys smiles back at you. "And you are?" Stop staring! Louise joins the group a little while later. "So..." You're staring again. Perfect. "Wow, how do you find the time to work, study and grumble?" "Business school? That's great. Have you got big career plans?" "Daycare? How did you get into that line of work?" "Useful experience for your own daycare center?" "What's your boss like?" You can see him being a great father. You wonder if you sound convincing. You wonder why he's overcompensating. Paul smiles. "What kind of business would you like to be the boss of?" It's tough. You can't help but be impressed. Paul seems to be something special. "I work in marketing. Can I help?" You know you couldn't work with your dad. Paul chuckles softly, probably remembering their last argument. "I believe you will. So is family really important to you?" "Always? Don't you want to spread your wings a bit?" "That's so nice. I couldn't wait to move away from my family." "Someone like your dad?" "Useful experience for your own kids?" "Children? They're much better than children." "You know, settling down and starting a family is optional." "I like the sound of your plan, Paul." "Well, who knows how you'll feel once you've seen some more of the world." You smile back at Paul. Say yes He looks surprised and a little sceptical. Try to change the subject Well done, Jenny, way to scare him off. "Uhm, of course! I mean, I'd like that." Paul is definitely too good to be true. Chapter Three Oh boy. "Can you remember what I was saying, Jenny?" "Damn, Paul, you should have started your own daycare center after all!" "Oh no, Hazel, that's shocking. Maybe ... I should put our names down already!" "Huh. Sounds crazy alright. Are you sure you want kids, Paul?" "It's coffee time. Give me a hand, Jenny?" "We did?" Hazel looks concerned. Did his eye just twitch? You're not convinced. Maybe they weren't paying attention? "Oh Jenny, it's so hard." Paul leaves the room rather abruptly. "Of course we've talked about it." "Is Paul OK? He looked a little shaky on his way to the bathroom." Ouch. She touched a nerve there. You get ready to defend your decision. "How do you mean?" Paul comes back into the room. Come on, Paul. You need backup. "How have you not killed him?" "We made the right choice, you mean." "Look who wants to say hi!" You hand June carefully to Paul. You lean over and give her a hug. You follow Hazel out of the kitchen. Mark doesn't seem offended. Chapter Four childfree You turn to look at Paul. Chapter Four You've never been a big fan of hospitals. "Are you OK, honey?" Paul glances over at you. He's going to be so happy! He's going to be so happy. Paul sits on the edge of the bed, smiling up at you. Paul sits down on the edge of the bed, looking up at you with a nervous smile. "More time to think?" You wonder what he can see in your eyes right now. Oh shit. Shitshitshit. "You're pregnant? How did this happen?" "Oh Jenny, we're going to have a baby!" "Ouch, Paul. You know that no method is 100% effective." Paul grips the wheel so tightly his knuckles turn white. You sigh and take hold of his hand. You lean in close to Paul and put your arm around his shoulder. You gasp as you realize you're digging your fingernails deep into your palms. Is it too soon to blame pregnancy hormones for your sudden flash of anger? You're actually a little relieved tha ... arting your own business for a while. "No, Jenny. You talked about this." You don't buy it. "Jenny. Is the baby mine?" When did he change his mind? You watch him for a while. He turns and walks out of the room. Paul shifts uncomfortably in his seat. He sits down beside you again. Uh-uh. That doesn't add up. Paul bangs his fist on the steering wheel. He wants you to have children for him. The barely restrained rage behind his ... hits you like a punch to the stomach. Paul walks into the room. What happened to him? That is not what he meant at all. "Start talking." He flips out. "Jenny, I don't want to be a daddy." You slam the car door shut. "I know, Paul. I think I've always known." Chapter Five childfree Paul lets out a bitter laugh. Your daydreaming is rudely interrupted by a piercing scream. Chapter Five You look down and place a hand on your stomach. It's Paul. Paul takes you in his arms as you start to cry. "Hi Hazel! Need a hand?" "This is my son, Oscar." Chapter Five has child You laugh as Hazel bends down to scoop up June and dust off her dungarees. And he has a wife. Ruby interrupts your momentary melancholy with a little shriek. You put on your most convincing 'Aww look a baby' expression. You're sure she is. It's Louise. You must have put your foot in it. "No, not yet. You take one last look at Louise and move on. "OK. It's good to see you, Hazel." But you still miss him, sometimes. THE END