

BACK TO WORK

By Kirstie Olley

“Are you sure you’re ready for this?” Shona asked, trying to keep her voice even, her eyes flickering between her husband’s face and the rugged up bundle in his arms.

“I’m more worried about you,” laughed Dave as their daughter, Monique, wriggled in his arms, turning to stare up at her mother with big blue eyes.

Shona’s heart turned to mush at the sight of Monique’s tiny nose, shaped like a racing car lolly. She stooped and kissed it.

“Are you really ready to go back to work?” Dave asked, his brow creasing.

Shona sat down, tightening the laces of her boots. “I have to, besides we discussed this. You always wanted to be the stay at home dad.” They had discussed it. A lot. But the last three months had changed her feelings somewhat.

Struggling through the sleep-deprived first six weeks when Monique woke every two hours had been a form of torture she’d never endured before, but even during that haze there had been moments of magic. The soft, new baby smell that made her insides squiggly. The warm, floaty feeling when she cradled Monique while she breastfed. The elation when Monique smiled at her for the first time (sure some silly scientist claimed that Monique couldn’t be smiling, that it was just gas, but Shona suspected next week another scientist would come forward and disprove that). All those wonderful feelings made her reluctant to leave her daughter. Despite that she still felt the urge to get back to work. It beat in her, like a second pulse flowing through her body. Every second she changed her mind again.

“I know but...” Dave trailed off, looking at her as she pulled her hair back in a tight ponytail. His eyes lingered on his wife’s shape, a smile taking over his face.

“Is my uniform too tight?” she asked, worriedly glancing down at herself, unable to ignore the fact there was a little more skin around her stomach than there had been last time she’d worn these clothes.

“It always was pretty tight,” he teased, grinning broadly.

Monique cooed in her father’s arms, raising a pudgy fist up, demanding the attention of both parents be returned to her.

The ache returned as Shona looked at her daughter. She hadn’t thought it would be this hard to leave. After all she loved her job, she was passionate about what she did and couldn’t possibly give it up. But to leave Monique behind? The infant uncurled her fingers and clutched at the air between herself and her mother.

Shona's phone beeped at her, the ringtone had an agitated sound to it. Shona rolled her eyes and peered at the screen where the words HURRY UP were written all in capitals followed by a ridiculous number of exclamation points. As hard as it was to leave, there were people relying on her.

"I love you," Shona said, leaning in to brush her lips on Dave's. "Both of you." She bent to kiss Monique again.

"When will you get home?"

Shona smiled weakly. "You know I don't know the answer to that," she replied as she affixed her domino mask over her eyes.

"Come back safe."

"I always try to." Shona winked before she stepped out the door and flew off, cape streaming behind her.

END