

Rituals

By Rachel Loveday

**The published copy of Rituals that appears in Perspectives Magazine is a shortened version of this story*

I am not just a mobile phone. I am Ellie Brandon's personal assistant. I am not only her way of verbally communicating with her family, friends and especially work colleagues. I am keeper of her schedule which is mostly booked with meetings, out-of-town events and Friday night drinks with her girlfriends. I am also her personal trainer; my stopwatch records her daily running times which are getting shorter and shorter each day that she gets fitter.

I wake her up in the morning, I keep her pictorial memories of her parties and loved ones, I send her emails, I keep her life in order-I *am* her life. My camera lens is my eye which sees into Ellie's world.

Monday:

The beginning of the working week. Well there doesn't really seem to be a beginning or an end of Ellie's working week. The day always starts the same. I yell at her at 6 am to wake up. She pushes one of my buttons to silence me, than places me down on the bedside table where I sleep of a night so I am prepared for what the next day brings. I snooze for a while, before she wakes me up and places me in the armband that her now-broken iPod use to sit.

She walks across the street on to Lake Albert's walking track and then she starts running. I get dizzy as she quickly moves her arms backwards and forwards to maintain her balance. The lake, the path, the people are all the same and it's starting to bore me, she needs to run somewhere else of a morning.

But one thing happened differently today. Ellie is usually in her own little world when she's running, although she always watches where she's going, but before I knew it, I felt a violent hit across my face. Ellie had run into another runner, someone that neither of us had seen before.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see you there. I'm usually in my own little world when I'm running." He said; he was tall, dark and handsome.

"Mm, mmm...me too. I...I mean I'm sorry." Ellie managed to stutter out.

"It's okay, it's my fault. Do you run around here every day?" He asked

"Yes."

“Impressive, I wish I was that dedicated, I can only manage three or four days. I’m Noah Westfield.”

“Ellie Brandon.” She said, offering out her hand. “Nice to meet you, I’m sorry to cut this short, but I have to get to work.”

“Now? It’s 6.30!”

“A woman’s work is never done.”

“Well, I guess I’ll see you around.”

“Maybe.”

Ellie wasn’t exactly a natural at flirting, but judging by the increased velocity in her running, I knew she saw something she liked.

“So, who is this new editor-in-chief?” Ellie asked photographer; Jenny Lyndon as she sat down at her desk at *The Advertiser*, where she’d spend hours editing and even re-writing the pieces that everyone in Wagga sees in the Health section.

“I don’t know his name, but I saw him in Peter’s office last Wednesday. He looks like some pretty boy from the city.”

“Great, like we really need another one of *those* around here. When is he supposed to start?”

“Friday.”

When Ellie goes to work, I stay in her black leather handbag for the day. I feel lonely in the darkness of the bottom of her bag with her wallet, car keys and glasses case. I’m guessing that the bag is sitting on the desk nearby as I can hear the whole conversation, although it’s a little muffled. All I can do is wait until the day is over to see into Ellie’s world again. I hear Jenny come by again later asking her to lunch, Peter telling her that she has to cover the new gym opening and the phone ring a few times.

Wednesday:

Pay day. After her morning run, in which we are no longer alone as Noah Westfield ran into us again yesterday and Ellie asked him to meet her for another run tomorrow. During her lunch hour, Ellie places me in a black leather holster, and then clips me onto her hip whilst she pays

her bills and covers the new gym opening. The holster is comfy and keeps the sun out of my eye, although I'm always afraid of falling off her hip, I have a few times and sometimes I fall so hard that I split open. Ellie just puts me back together like nothing happened, but it hurts like hell.

Friday:

A busy day. Once again, Ellie places me in the roomy holster, whilst she rushes to the bakery on her way to work to get the "farewell cake" for Peter's party tonight.

I've been watching her all day, as she forgot to take me out of the holster.

Peter's farewell was nothing spectacular. It was just all the staff at The *Advertiser* having drinks and cake in the conference room, toasting to his ten years of hard work and dedication.

"I'd like to thank you all for the party, but it wasn't necessary. It has been a joy working with all of you for these past ten years, but I am getting too old and my golf swing needs more of my time. It gives me great pleasure to introduce the *Advertiser's* new editor-in-chief; Noah Westfield."

I couldn't hear Ellie very clearly, but I thought I heard her say; "Well I'll be damned!"

Noah told Ellie on our last run that he moved here to start a new job, but he didn't tell us what it was. Ellie waited for Noah to come to her as Peter introduced him to all fifty staff there, it was another twenty minutes before they reached her.

"Noah Westfield, this is the editor of our Health section...."

"Ellie Brandon." Noah finished for him.

"You two know each other?"

"Yes, we met a few days ago."

"Oh, okay. Well has Noah told you that he's from Wollongong? He was the features editor at the *Mercury*."

"No, he didn't."

“Peter over here!” someone yelled from a distance.

“Well, it sounds like I’m needed. I’ll talk to you two later.”

“You knew about me. This is the new job you told me about. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted to surprise you.”

“Yeah, I don’t know how I feel about my new running mate being my new boss.”

“Well, maybe we could talk about it over dinner tomorrow night?”

“I don’t know, Noah.”

“We’ve been running together nearly every day this week and yes, I *am* your boss, but I’ll make sure you won’t have too-tough a day.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“If I asked you out on one of our runs, before you found out I was your boss, would you have said yes?”

“Yes.” I heard Ellie sheepishly say.

“You met me as a runner, have known me as that until now. And we’re professionals. Nothing has to change. Will you please have dinner with me tomorrow night?”

There was an awkward silence for about ten seconds before Ellie finally answered.

“I’d love to.”