

EMBRACE

Joe had been searching for weeks and thinking about the perfect gift to give to his wife Emma for their 10th Wedding Anniversary. He'd been flat out at work during weekdays, and most weekends had been spent decorating their small bedroom at home. He really wanted to make it an extra special day for them both this year for their anniversary.

Joe had eventually settled on a weekend away in a secluded country hotel and had been assured by the reservation team that they were happy to accept well behaved pets too. This had meant that they could take their dog Shep with them, who had been an integral part of their family and had filled the hollow gap when their longed-for children hadn't come along.

After many attempts at IVF treatment Joe and Emma were relieved and excited to be finally awaiting the imminent arrival of their own baby. The little spare bedroom, now a nursery, was almost complete with neutral shades and bedecked with baby items lovingly collected when the realisation and belief had sunk in for them both. They hadn't wanted to know the sex of the baby but were convinced that it was going to be a girl.

Emma had sailed through her pregnancy and as check-ups came and went and her tummy grew larger, the growing baby's wriggling was a comfort to them both.

Joe hadn't kept the weekend away a secret from Emma as he knew she was not keen on surprises and was well aware of the pregnancy hormones his darling wife was enduring!

Joe had just taken delivery of a new company car and was excited to try out the new gadgets and to experience this electric car phenomenon for himself. He'd made sure there was going to be plenty of room for baby seats and buggy as well as room for their beloved sheepdog.

"C'mon Em, we don't want to be too late arriving at the hotel" Joe called to his wife. Shep was running around his legs and equally excited to be invited along too.

"Don't rush me Joe, I can't move too quickly now" Emma replied "You know check-in isn't until 3.00pm don't you?"

There were only 4 more weeks to go before baby's arrival and Emma slowly waddled and eased herself into the new car.

"Right, we're ready for off" Joe declared. "Dog, check. Case, check. Mummy to be, check. No need to check about a full fuel tank either!" he joked

It was a typical early December day and even the chilly gloom and murky foggy conditions couldn't dampen their enthusiasm. This was to be their last trip as a couple and they wanted it to be memorable. Their spirits were lifted even further when they spotted the first Christmas tree in their town square.

The journey passed fairly slowly as they left behind city life and wended their way across the bleak moorland twisting roads, climbing ever higher. The weather appeared to be taking a turn for the worse, and the sleet that had been predicted to fall was now turning into heavier flakes of snow as the windscreen wipers switched to double time to clear the view. Joe promised Emma that as soon as they spotted the next hostelry, they would take a break and have some lunch.

“Look, look” Emma declared “I think I can see a gorgeous country pub ahead”

With much relief Joe carefully negotiated the narrow car park entrance and pulled up as close to the door as he could. The snow had covered over the marked bays but he was sure the landlord would make an exception for them given the terrible conditions.

Joe lifted Shep out into the snow who instantly bounded out and rolled around oblivious to the cold. Helping his wife out of the car they hesitantly tiptoed their way into the pub leaving behind their footprints in the snow, immediately followed by their snow-covered dog, who shook himself vigorously covering them both in wet snow.

They were welcomed into a homely cosy traditional country pub with a blazing crackling fire. Given the remote location of the pub they were both surprised to see a bustling atmosphere and soon settled around the glowing fire. Shep nestled quietly under the table at their feet.

With lunch ordered and a quick comfort break for Emma they relaxed and chose from the specials board. Warming soup and crusty bread soon arrived, which was the perfect choice. Joe tried to log onto his phone but really wasn't surprised when he found that there was no phone signal or internet connection to link up to. Country life eh, he mused. The landlord confirmed that the internet was very patchy and the foul weather today just wasn't helping. No worries he thought, we can catch up with the world when we reach our hotel.

Joe and Emma had been animatedly chatting to the couple on the next table, however, with a start suddenly realised that time had run away with them. They quickly donned their coats and roused a sleeping Shep and said it was time to leave. Saying their farewells and thanks they made their way out of the pub to find their car. With a look of abject horror Emma glanced from their car back to Joe. “Oh my goodness, Joe we can hardly see our car” she squealed. “Don't fret my love, I'll soon have the snow cleared” Joe replied. “You and Shep sit in the car with the heater on while I get busy”

To his absolute despair as Joe tried to turn the car's ignition on there was absolutely no sign of life. He very quickly realised that this new electric car, that he'd been so excited to trial, had run out of charge. Emma was desperately trying to hold back her tears as they made their way back into the pub to seek help. The staff sadly advised them that they hadn't yet installed any vehicle charging points for visitors, so charging the car outside wasn't an option.

The internet was still unavailable too, but the Landlord offered his help in telephoning on the pub's landline to the AA. Joe and Emma returned to their seats to wait for the arrival of the breakdown truck. The landlord advised them that it could be a couple of hours before the

AA arrived as he'd been told that not every breakdown truck had the necessary mobile car charging capabilities.

It was getting dark outside when Joe spotted headlights arriving into the car park and breathed a huge sigh of relief to see the flashing beacon on top of the AA van.

Here was their knight in shining armour and he advised Joe that he could charge their car to give them around 30 miles but it would take around an hour or so to do that. The mechanic explained that in very cold weather electric vehicles lost their charge more quickly, so that would explain why they had become stranded. Emma had calculated that they were only 20 miles from the hotel so with much relief they waited patiently.

An hour passed by as Emma continued to check her watch and eventually with trepidation Joe turned on the ignition. Deep sighs of relief all round, and much cheering from the landlord and a huge embrace for the AA man Emma, Joe and Shep were eventually back on the road to their hotel. "Well we wanted this trip to be memorable but this is turning out to be an anniversary we won't forget in a hurry" she said.

Carefully navigating the snowy road, they arrived at their country house hotel in less than an hour. It was almost 7.00 pm by now and they hoped that they would still be in time for supper.

They were greeted at the Reception desk by a friendly young man who asked for their name.

"Mr and Mrs King, and Shep our dog" said Emma. "We're here to celebrate our 10th Wedding Anniversary. We're so sorry for our late arrival but we've had problems with our car" she explained.

There was a concerned look on the receptionist's face and he asked them to wait for a moment. The hotel Manager emerged from a side room to explain to Joe and Emma that their room had been re-let due to their awful weather conditions and late arrival. There was a Games Conference being held by the local Mensa group in the hotel and their room had been re-allocated. They glanced over to the lounge and saw a number of tables of cribbage players all deep in play.

It seemed like today's events were going from bad to worse and Emma couldn't contain her tears any longer.

"Please, please don't worry" the Manager explained. "I think I may have a solution. We have only today completed the refurbishment of a new luxury suite in the stable block. If you don't mind the smell of fresh paint, you are more than welcome to be our first VIP customers"

"By way of an apology we are more than happy to serve you dinner in your room with our compliments too" he added.

Joe and Emma were quite overwhelmed by the luxurious suite which had been spaciouly appointed. After supper had been delivered to their room and enjoyed, they were both

exhausted and decided to retire to spend the remainder of the evening quietly reflecting on their day. There was a huge skylight above their bed and they fell asleep looking up at the twinkling stars.

The following morning Emma was woken early with cramp like pains in her back. She lay for a little while hoping they would pass. She'd read that in late pregnancy you could feel practice contractions so assumed that was it and she let Joe sleep on.

An hour passed by and the cramps had become more frequent and definitely increasing in strength and she nudged Joe awake.

"Joe, Joe wake up please. I think the baby is on it's way" said Emma

"Em are you sure?" said Joe with a very worried look on his face.

"Well I'm positive something is happening; can you get help please?"

After an urgent phone call to reception a plea for help was relayed to the other guests in the hotel and amazingly a doctor had been located who was attending the games conference. She speedily visited their suite and after examining Emma had confirmed that yes, the baby was well and truly on its way and too late for Emma to be moved.

The next couple of hours was spent with Joe feeling helpless but anxiously soothing his wife as she moved through the various stages of labour. With only a little assistance from the doctor a new little baby was safely delivered and wrapped gently and placed in Emma's arms. It was now Joe's turn for tears as he embraced his wife and new born son.

"Words of thanks cannot express our gratitude to you" they both declared, as the doctor explained that she was more than happy to be called on.

"What do you think you will name the baby" she asked

Joe and Emma explained that the baby was a few week's early and they had not yet settled on a name as they really thought they might be having a little girl.

One thing we do know is that we now have three Kings in our family, how fitting is that!

Emma King, Joe King and now our new baby boy!

Postscript - Icymi:

Joe: Joseph

Em: Mary

Shep the dog: Shepherds

Baby boy: Jesus

Mensa gathering - Wise Men

Cribbage: Crib

Luxury Suite: Stable block

Twinkling stars

3 Kings

Joe King: Joking!!