



Source: Geoff Elliott, 'Change in course urgent, Bush told', *The Australian online*, 08/12/06.

Tags: [husband/wife](#)
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Mary Collins put the key into the ignition of her black Mercedes cabriolet. The garage door was rising slowly behind her and she watched the morning sun spill into the darkened cavern flashing golden light into the rearview mirror. She lowered her over-sized sunglasses and turned the key. The car gave out a faint grinding noise, more electronic than mechanical. Mary's coral nailpolish, sparkling diamonds and gold rings distracted her momentarily before the gravity of the situation struck her. She still had twenty presents to buy, she was meeting the girls for lunch, she had tennis in the afternoon, dinner for six tonight and the car had spat the dummy. The two hundred thousand dollar Merc was refusing to allow her to start what she had planned to be a very busy and productive day. To make matters worse her husband Barry was interstate and there was no one at home. What the fuck was she going to do now?

She drew her mobile phone from her handbag and called directory. She needed road service. She had no idea which fund she belonged to, she just needed road service urgently. Forget that, too hard. She called her car dealership. They had to do something immediately. She was stranded and busy and this was not acceptable because the car was still under warranty, wasn't it? She was sure it was. She wanted to speak to Dean. He was the owner and a family friend. Dean would help. Dean got on the phone. Yes of course Mary, he'd send one of the boys around immediately to have a look and in the meantime she could borrow a courtesy car. Give him ten minutes.

Fifteen minutes later Mary Collins was driving along the coast road towards the city in a car identical to her own. She mused on the quality of some of her friends. Dean had gone to school with Barry and although they made the odd joke about him being a used car salesman he really did come through when you needed him. She supposed people made jokes about Barry too. Lord knows that naval men could be the source of humour so cruel and unsavoury she couldn't bear to think of it. Barry was a man of tremendous strength and character and regardless of what people may have thought of him he would always be her knight in shining armour.

The Mercedes, top down, cruised into the underground carpark at the shopping centre. Mary loathed this place but there was so little choice on this side of the harbour. She had never adjusted fully to living on the north side but she could hardly complain given her circumstances and Barry did love it for the sailing. She alighted from the car and watched the roof collapse in a seamless demonstration of German technological superiority before beeping the remote lock and clip clapping across the concrete towards the appalling chaos beyond. She wondered if she'd worn the wrong shoes for a moment but decided to ignore it.

Christmas shopping really was the most burdensome,

thankless task. She approached a homeless man and stopped to make a donation. The man explained that it was not a donation but a purchase as she would receive a magazine in return for her gold coins. She tried to explain that she didn't need the magazine but the man persisted in engaging her in light conversation. He spoke with clipped consonants and a very gentle lilt in his voice. Mary looked him in the eye to make a quick assessment and found him looking at her doing the same thing. His teeth were well maintained and despite his unshaven face he was strikingly handsome and clearly unsuited to his current role. This man could have been an actor such was his presence. As he talked on about the situation of homeless people Mary felt a slight stir in her stomach. She recoiled and politely excused herself, taking the magazine as she left. The actor wished her a merry Christmas as she trotted off, regaining her composure.

She desperately wanted to buy her thirty year old son, Ian, a watch and she knew he fancied one in the jewellers. It was Georg Jensen. Very sleek and minimal. Ian was a stylish boy but not a bit pretentious or flamboyant. Quite reserved really and highly intelligent. Dentistry suited him to a tee and his practice was flourishing down in Melbourne. Sooner or later he would marry and she would have her first grandchildren. She could hardly wait to spoil them.

Mary stopped at the jeweller and looked in the mirror. There it was, thank god. She stepped inside and the door swooshed behind her enveloping her in a cocoon of plush, air-conditioned silence. Momentarily released from the hubbub of Christmas madness she settled into an upholstered chair and waited to be attended to. To the nice gentleman approaching, she explained that she wished to look at the Jensen man's watch in the window. The silver one. The man motioned to retrieve the watch and laid it before her, making the point that it was platinum, not silver. The face of the watch had no numbers or calibrations. No second hand, no date scroll. Just a black face with metallic, presumably platinum, minute and hour hands. It was a superb creation and entirely suited to her son's wrist. The jeweller commented that it was his personal favourite because it reduced time to its most essential elements, free of pretence or ornamentation. He felt there was something Calvinist and, if she would excuse the pun, timeless, about the design. Mary felt his philosophical outburst was unnecessary because she was entirely committed to the purchase.

The price? Five thousand dollars. But that price is too high, remarked the philosopher. Let me see what I can do for you. Mary checked her own watch only to find that it was not there. There was still such a lot to do.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Boris Kelly.