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CROSSROADS

Some call it the beginning of adulthood, some call it the quarter life crisis. A girl's journey to become a woman is, more than anything, highly puzzling. What follows are the thoughts and travails of one such confused being.

AS I looked at the mail that had just landed in my inbox a few million random thoughts crossed my mind. Attached were wedding pictures of my wingie from BITS and standing with the happy couple was another friend with her husband, visibly expecting their first child. As I regretted not being there, my eyes instinctively landed on the wall behind me. My old poster of a cozying couple with much torn edges and very visible creases stared back. I don't even know why I chose to hold on to the one relic my BITSian room was identified with. It had no place in my life and certainly none in a B-school. I told everyone it makes me feel at home. Frankly, I think it just makes me feel younger.

Is the honeymoon over, I wondered. Twenty four is a funny age to be. It's when your opinion has suddenly begun to matter an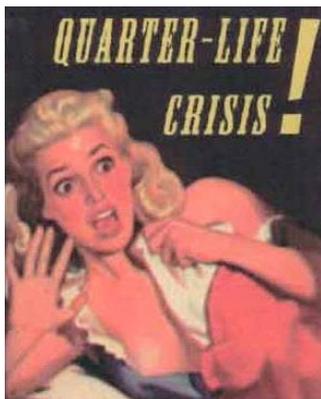d strangely, you don't seem to like it. It is the age when they stop forgiving you for acting like a kid and start expecting you to know how to handle one.

Friends of mine think they might still be a little too young to marry. But of course, you really cannot be taking competitive exams now-for when you graduate there might not be many eligible bachelors left. A corporate woman then? Maybe not, because for all the gorgeous women of this generation, three years is a long time to be working on the same job. For the thousands of women who joined the workforce three odd summers back, the crossroads of life are taking form.

Is there such a thing as too many choices? I thought about my close circle of friends. As independent young women with the freedom to step forward in time or back into domesticity, we are a lot pampered for choice. Gone are the days when working women were the toast of the day. Today it's suddenly cool to stay at home, look after the kids and make aromatic candles. We can study at the best colleges, get the highest degrees, give up everything for the man we love and move to unknown lands. Who is to stop us? Hot shot careers could well be giving way to chocolate chip cookie baking lessons.

As we needle our way out of our protective environments, the comfort of being the new employee, the junior student, the blushing bride, there's an overwhelming amount of challenges and decisions thrown at us. We grapple with them, mostly alone, too independent and proud to ask for help. The truth is, we may not be as tough as we claim to be. We wax eloquent in public on how strong we are. And yet we crumble at the thought of calling a close friend to condole the death of his beloved. Today no one raises as much as an eyebrow when I tell them of my plans to start a restaurant and author a book. Another close friend just made a successful shift from a software techie

to a well paid finance executive-with a one year MBA. Except for some student loans, there's nothing to stop her now. Just as I write this more and more women are changing lanes faster than we can imagine, all to pursue something unusual and more fulfilling. We are breaking stereotypes to form niches of our own. We want to be fashionable and comfortable, silly and suave - all at the same time.

It is true. We now like to pay our own bills. But we aren't going to deny men the pleasure of opening our doors and pulling out chairs for us. After all, there can be nothing wrong in a little pampering and that's exactly how we like our lives too. Among all the generations of women on this earth we are probably the easiest to live with. And the most difficult to understand. I thought of the bright and sunny days spent at BITS. When the next quiz and submission used to be the big obstacles to our carefree life. When 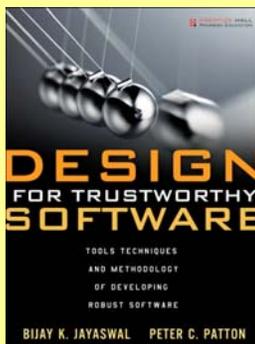girls would huddle around the night canteen at midnight to discuss the next hot topic of discussion. When most of our plans for life ended with the campus job or a flight to the states. When the next best thing to look forward to would be the next movie, not the next wedding. And how much things have changed since then.

As we stand in the way, with the million others zooming past us, there is only one big question. What is life all about? Each of the paths we take may lead us to some kind of successes, but what is it that we are putting at stake? Our careers? Our families? Our capabilities? Or plain personal satisfaction?

I closed my laptop and reached out for a glass of milk. If this were 'Sex and the City', now would be when the camera pans out and the credits roll. Like many others, I wonder what the next episode holds in store.

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