

Girlbooks Presents  
Lorene Haupt

# REARVIEW MIRROR

HER PAST IS CLOSER THAN IT APPEARS

Girlebooks Presents

# REARVIEW MIRROR

BY LORENE HAUPT

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“Have you ever cheated on David?”

Sara nearly dropped her plastic fork into her plastic plate of plastic fast-food spaghetti. “What???”

Elise had been putting off this conversation for weeks, but she felt as if she would lose her mind if she didn’t talk to someone. “You’ve been together for, what, forever? And David was overseas all that time. Didn’t you get...” she couldn’t say the word “horny,” even when talking to her best friend of twenty years “...restless?”

“Where are you going with this?” Sara’s expression was somewhere between annoyed and concerned.

“I don’t know. Just a question.”

Sara looked down at her plate and sighed. “No, I haven’t”

“So you’ve never even considered it?”

“Christ, Elise, no, I haven’t! Is there something you need to share?” Sara threw her fork into the plate, sending a tiny spray of marinara onto the table.

One would think this simple, slightly inappropriate question had been an accusation. Elise hadn’t expected this to be such a delicate topic. She should probably explain herself. “Drew Wilkins and I have been exchanging emails for about a month.”

“Drew, you mean Andrew? *Andy*? As in from high school?”

“Yeah, he goes by Drew now. He’s teaching at some music college in San Diego and he’s in a band on the side. I guess drummers can’t be named Andy.”

“So you’re thinking of having an affair with Andy?”

“No! Number one, he’s miles away. Number two, he’s married. He found me on Facebook and we started emailing. We’ve just been catching up.”

“Then why bring up affairs?”

“I don’t know, I guess it just reminded me that there were other men out there, well at least one, that once found me attractive. I can’t help being excited about hearing from him again, but I feel a little guilty for thinking about him so much. It’s not wrong just to think about someone else, is it?”

“Yes, it is. And I don’t see why you think you need other men to find you attractive. I thought Mike was the only man you cared about.”

Elise quickly figured out that this time her life-long best friend was not even reading the same book, let alone on the same page. “Never mind. Forget I said anything.”

“I’m telling you, Elise, you’re asking for trouble. You may not think of it as cheating, but an emotional affair can be just as devastating as a physical one. Let it go.” Sara got up from the table abruptly. “I have a class at one. I’ll call you later.”

Elise sat there pondering why her question had upset her friend so much. They could usually talk about anything. It troubled her that Sara did not look her in the eye when she denied having cheated. Maybe there

are some things you just can't talk about, even with your best friend. She probably shouldn't read too much into this. Finally she got up and headed home, hoping to check her email before Mike got home.

Mike. There's certainly nothing wrong with Mike. Gorgeous, big blue eyes, black hair, and only a slight beer belly. He played soccer as a kid and still has those amazing soccer-player legs. Certainly nothing wrong with that package.

They met at the University of Michigan when he was a grad student and a teaching assistant for one of her design classes. After ten years of marriage, they were still partners in everything, even the architecture firm they both worked for. Their only child was a sweet little Border Collie mix named Gabby, whom they rescued from the pound. Mike, an animal lover through and through, wanted to take home every dog and cat he saw that day. There's certainly nothing wrong with someone who loves animals, right?

So then, why was it that for the last month, she had lived for coming home and turning on the computer to find another email from Drew? Okay, she had always known him as Andy, but she liked Drew. It made him seem even more appealing, a little sexier. Drew. It was a sensual name, a masculine name, the name of someone who could sweep you off your feet.

Elise logged on and, sure enough, she had mail. When did he find all this time to write to her? He must goof off a lot at work because his emails always came during the day.

This time he had sent pictures. The first ones were of his wife. Tall, blonde, blue eyes, freakin' model probably. She had a California tan, of course. She looked about 18. They had only been married a year and they were "trying." How sweet.

Elise scrolled down the page until she found a shot of Andy, er, Drew with his band. "Oh-My-God!"

Gabby's ears perked up as she looked up from her perch on the sofa, wondering why her mommy was talking to the computer.

In high school, Andy had been cute. But now, *yum*. His dark blonde hair fell to his shoulders in soft (but manly) curls. He was buff and tan, and she could only imagine that his emerald green eyes still sparkled the way they used to when he would tease her.

She sat back, afraid she might be drooling on the keyboard. Why did he have to send pictures? She sure as hell wasn't sending any back. Maybe she would find some shots of Britney or Christina and cut-and-paste her head on them.

She wasn't even reading the email. She had been reduced to a pre-schooler, caring about nothing but the pictures. She scrolled back to the text of the message.

Thought I would send a few pics. Pics of Lisa are from her 30th birthday party – what a mess. The band played, if you can call it that. Don't think we'll ever make it to Carnegie Hall. But don't I just look *hot* behind those drums. You know you still want me. LOL.



What was she supposed to say to that? Yes, you do. Yes, I do. Please fly cross-country right this moment and take me. Now.

She started to click on reply, and then realized there was more to the message. Maybe her subconscious was trying to get her to delete the email before she read all of it.

Seriously, though, if we were both single, what do you think? Would we have a chance again? I have to confess, I often think of the time we spent together and go into “what if” mode. I know we are both happily married, and I don’t mean to undermine that in any way, but do you ever think about us? We could have been really good together, you know...

There it was, can open, worms crawling out. Why did Sara *always* have to be right? Elise didn’t know what was going to come out when she clicked “Reply.”

Drew was actually involved with someone else when they had their little fling, so she shouldn’t have been so surprised, but she thought he had grown up some since then. Still, he was right, what they had *was* intense, and she often wondered what would have happened if they had pursued it.

\*\*\*

New Year’s Eve, 1989. Elise and Sara decided to throw a party at Elise’s parents’ house. Elise’s parents always went into Ann Arbor for a big hotel party, so the girls knew they would have the house to themselves. The party was actually Sara’s idea. Elise had broken up with her high school boyfriend right before Christmas

and was in too much of a funk to really care about New Year's Eve. It was winter break of their freshman year of college. So aside from their high school friends that had gone to Michigan State like Sara (traitors, every one of them), and those that had gone to U of M like Elise (Go Blue!), everyone that had gone to Central or Eastern or, God forbid, even Wayne State was home too. Sara's new boyfriend, David Shrock, was one of a select few at the party that hadn't wandered the halls of Milan High. Being back in the bedroom community of Milan was charming for awhile, but it was definitely time to shake things up.

About twenty-five or thirty people showed up, and a couple of them were old enough to buy booze. Andy wasn't, of course, he was the same age as Elise and Sara, but his date was, so she supplied the tequila. He always joked about her age, calling her Mrs. Robinson every chance he got. Her actual name was Robin, or Ronnie, or Randi, or something like that. They hooked up during pledge week. Andy dropped the fraternity, but kept her. She was a sorostitute through and through, a second year senior who never went to class. Her days were filled with sorority functions, and, as Elise later found out, screwing as many guys as she could.

Sara and Elise found some Jell-O in the pantry, so they decided to experiment with Jell-O shots, sampling the tequila bottle frequently in the process of making them. They both sauntered down the stairs into the den with plates full of little Dixie cups. Elise nearly tripped

over Andy's long legs. He was sprawled out on his belly next to the couch with a beer in hand.

"Oh shit, did I hurt you?" She giggled, grabbing the back of the couch for balance. That cheap tequila that what's-her-name brought took no time in going to her head.

"Nah, come join me..." he tugged on the hem of her long, straight floral skirt (à la *Pretty in Pink*), pulling it down below her belly button and making the room swim just a little more.

Sara rolled her eyes and headed over to the other side of the room with her Jell-O shots. She had never been that fond of Andy, but she knew since he and Elise had been at U of M together, they had been hanging out a lot. It became obvious to her after several late night conversations that Elise was crushing on him, and she knew her friend was still in a pretty fragile place. Andy was probably not the ideal rebound. She would have to keep her eye on them. At least, she would have, if she could have focused her eyes on anything at all.

"Hang on." Elise plunked the plate of Jell-O shots down on the coffee table and turned around slowly, holding the side of the couch and coffee table for balance as she lowered herself on to the floor next to him.

"Jesus Christ, how much have you had to drink?"

"Just what we drank while making the shots." Elise reached up for a Jell-O shot, but Andy pulled her hand

away, lacing his fingers between hers. He put his beer down and downed a shot.

"These are good, but I think you need to lay off. You're a lightweight."

She started laughing. "Lightweight? Yeah, right. Look at this." She nodded to her belly, slightly exposed now that her skirt had slid down and her pink sweater had ridden up. "I'm no lightweight."

Andy released her hand and gently touched her belly, tracing her belly button with his finger. "You're perfect. I like a woman with curves."

"Watch out. Dangerous curves ahead." She giggled again, even though he wasn't tickling her at all. Quite the opposite, really. "Where's Robbie?"

"Who?"

"You know, that Chi Ho you came with." Elise covered her mouth with her hand. "I'm sorry, did I just say that?"

Andy grinned, his eyes sparkling like always, even in this glorious state of intoxication they were both approaching. He grabbed another shot.

"I mean, I guess I should thank her for the tequila, right." Elise pushed her short dark brown hair (à la Demi Moore in *Ghost*) back away from her face while barely balancing herself on the arm she leaned on. Her arms were feeling much like the Jell-O in the shots, and lying on the floor with a hot guy was not making them any more stable.

"I think she went off looking for more music. She said she could only take so much Madonna."

Elise burst out laughing. She heard the opening riff of “Wild Wild West” by The Escape Club start up. “Oh, man, I was gonna play that right at midnight, that would have been cool.” Tapping her fingers against her thigh and bobbing her head (and, remarkably, not crashing into the coffee table) she started singing along, making up the words she didn’t quite know.

Andy decided to chime in on the next verse. “Give me give me Wild West, give me give me safe sex?” He looked into her eyes, hand still on her belly, eyebrows raised suggestively.

Elise’s giggles became uncontrollable and her arm finally gave out as she collapsed onto his chest. He slid his hand down over her hips and started nuzzling her neck.

“What are you doing?” She rolled away a little bit, but couldn’t bring herself to really pull away like she meant it (because, of course, she didn’t mean it. Not in the least.)

“Shh, just relax.” He pulled her into him again and began kissing her neck. His lips were so warm. All of him was just so warm and comfortable; it made her forget about the four inches of snow outside. She slid her hands up under his sweater and he gasped.

“What?”

“Your hands are a little cold.” He took them into his, enveloping them with his strong drummer’s hands, and held them for a few seconds. Then he returned them to his back. “That’s better.” He continued kissing her neck,

sliding his hands up the back of her sweater toward the closure of her bra.

“Aren’t you afraid she’ll see us?” Elise had somehow forgotten there were other people in the room until just now, when his hands on her bare back made her acutely aware of her nipples. She suddenly realized that Sara and David *had* noticed them, and were whispering over in the corner.

“Do you want to go somewhere more private?” he whispered, lips still on her neck.

“We can go up to my room...” Oh, God, was she making a big mistake? She and Andy had been friends since tenth grade. What were they doing on the floor, making out, with all these people around? But, even more importantly, would all these people notice if they snuck off?

“That sounds like a plan.” He slid away from her and got to his feet, taking her hand in his and helping her up. Elise looked back as they slipped up the stairs. Sara shot her a very dirty look and started to make her way across the room, but Elise quickly turned away. David put his hand on Sara’s arm and whispered something to her, and Sara hesitated for a moment, then followed him back over to the loveseat in the opposite corner of the room.

Elise and Andy darted quickly past the living room where Ronnie/Robbie (oh whatever) had her back turned to them as she rifled through someone’s cassette case, then hurried down the hall to Elise’s bedroom. Elise shut the door behind them and locked it, leaning

against it for balance. Her head was mostly cleared from the alcohol but slightly fuzzy from her racing hormones. Andy turned toward her, raising her hands above her head as he pushed her against the door and kissed her. Her doubts melted away in the warmth of his kiss. His lips and tongue felt like home, like everything she ever needed.

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Gabby's sharp bark jolted Elise out of her fugue. "Shoulda, woulda, coulda..." she typed back, fingers shaking. The line from a recent rerun of "Sex and the City" was all she could come up with. She quickly hit "send" and logged off. She knew that bark, followed by frenzied tail-wagging, meant Mike was home.

Elise stared down at her plate of salad, thinking she was going to turn into a rabbit if she saw one more piece of lettuce. Only ten more pounds to go and she would have lost all the weight she absolutely needed to. Those last ten pounds seemed to have no intention of going anywhere, though.

“What’s the matter, babe?” Mike looked up from his steak tips and potatoes to realize his wife was only pushing her food around.

“Nothing, I just wish I could eat real food again. I met Sara for lunch and had pasta, so I guess this is my punishment.”

“Don’t be silly. Here, have some of this steak, it’s really good.”

“Mike, don’t do that to me! You know I can’t.”

“Come on. I like those last ten pounds. I’ll miss them if they go away...”

“Well, they have to eventually. It seems like they never will.”

“I’m tired of seeing you so miserable every time you sit down at the table. It’s just not worth it.”

“Yes, it is, if it means I won’t have to take a million pills a day. Now can we just not talk about food anymore, please?” Years of being overweight had caught up with Elise, forcing her to confront the realities of high blood pressure and diabetes. She was trying to control it with diet and exercise because she hated taking medications. She had gradually lost sixty



pounds over the past four years. Now if that last ten would just come off.

The weight loss had many positive effects on her, including forcing her to buy new clothes. Mike had been complaining for years about her stirrup pants and jackets with enormous shoulder pads, but when she was so heavy, that was all she felt comfortable in. She had been a fashion slave through most of her younger years, from leg-warmers and acid wash to 90210 prep, but her wardrobe never made the transition into the 21st century. Even as the weight came off, she would search second-hand stores for these 80's relics, telling Mike she was "retro" and only giving in and buying new clothes when her wide Madonna-esque belts would no longer hold up her old tapered jeans. Her longing for a *St. Elmo's Fire* inspired wardrobe intensified over the past few years, as the present began to unravel before her eyes.

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It was a year into the new millennium, and her 30th birthday loomed before her as her weight surpassed the 200 mark on the bathroom scale. A doctor's visit for dizzy spells revealed all the other things that went along with the extra pounds. Faced with a mountain of pills, she thought it was as bad as it got. Determined that she was not going to be on medication for the rest of her life, she joined both Weight Watchers and a gym. Things were looking up, until her ob-gyn visit last year.

Elise had never felt an overwhelming urge to have kids of her own, but she knew she could always change

her mind. She had gone off the pill shortly after her blood pressure issues surfaced, thinking this was as good of a time as any, since she was making all these other improvements. Alcohol and pop were now things of the past. She went to the gym almost every day after work, then came home and took Gabby to the dog park. They had started by just walking the perimeter of the fence, but now they were jogging it. She was losing weight, and was proud of herself for the first time in her life. She thought maybe, just maybe, it would be okay if she were to get pregnant. Maybe, just maybe, she could actually do the “mom” thing. So she and Mike decided to “see what happened” if they stopped using birth control. No pressure.

Nothing is what happened, and after two years of actually trying, Elise was beginning to wonder why she had wasted all that money on birth control pills. She seemed to be doing a fine job of not getting pregnant without them. She knew she still had a few years left, but she was really wondering if something was wrong. She voiced these thoughts to Dr. Nicholson at her yearly exam and they decided to go ahead and do some tests. A few days later, she received a phone call requesting that she make another appointment. Quite convinced that she was going to find out she had cancer, or something worse, she paced and worried for several more days until she found herself back in the office.

The soft, cushy chair across from her doctor’s desk should have made her much more comfortable than

the cold table and stirrups that normally greeted her, but she fidgeted and shifted, crossing and uncrossing her legs until Dr. Nicholson came in.

“Good morning, Elise. How are you today?”

“Why don’t you tell me?”

The doctor looked taken aback by Elise’s frankness.

“I’m sorry, but I’m terrified. What is going on that you couldn’t tell me over the phone?”

Dr. Nicholson looked at Elise’s chart. “Well, last time you were here, you said you were having trouble getting pregnant, so we did some extra tests. It’s good that we did, because you tested positive for Chlamydia.”

The room started spinning, and Elise was sure that if she had been hooked up to a blood pressure monitor, it would have instantly blown up. “What???”

“It’s a fairly common sexually transmitted disease. It’s odd that you haven’t had any symptoms, but sometimes that’s how it works.” The doctor’s voice droned on in the background as Elise suddenly remembered, in vivid detail, a time when she noticed some of the symptoms the doctor was listing, but the student health clinic treated her for a urinary tract infection and sent her on her way with a handful of condoms. “It could be something you’ve had for awhile. We can treat it, but if you’ve had it for a long time, there are other issues...”

“What other issues???”

“Left untreated, it tends to cause infertility.”

Now Elise wasn't sure if she was sitting in a chair in a doctor's office, or on some Tilt-A-Whirl ride at the carnival. She certainly felt like she could vomit.

"Elise, this is very serious. You're going to have to tell your husband. You'll just keep passing it back and forth if you both don't get treated."

Elise put her hand over her mouth and ran out the door and down the hall to the bathroom. Her oatmeal came back up in chunks. She stood there for a few minutes, staring into the stainless steel revolving door where countless Chlamydia-free urine specimens were placed for testing.

When Elise finally made it back down to the office, Dr. Nicholson had written out an antibiotic prescription. Handing it to her, she asked if Elise if she was going to be okay, and offered to call her a cab.

"No," Elise mumbled, thinking that if her car just happened to go off the bridge that might be a fitting end to the day.

Mike actually took the news fairly well. After all, it wasn't like either of them should have worn white to their wedding. Elise didn't tell him the part about the infertility.

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It occurred to Elise that Drew was probably the one who gave her Chlamydia, but she hadn't said anything to him yet. Why hadn't he had a condom? Surely he was planning on getting laid that night, only with a different girl. Oh, wait – guess that answered her question. Surely it was him – if he had been riding that

skanky Chi Ho bareback she was probably lucky that was all she ended up with.

“Earth to Elise...” Mike waved his hand in front of her face.

“Oh, sorry, did I just zone out?”

“Yeah, I was asking you if Sara and David were coming over this weekend. It’s Labor Day weekend, so it might be the last time we get to grill out for awhile.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess so.” Honestly, she had forgotten to ask before Sara stormed out from lunch, a reaction that still had Elise puzzled. “I’ll call her tomorrow and make sure. She was in a mood at lunch.”

“What was wrong?”

Elise hadn’t told Mike that she had been emailing Drew, so she couldn’t launch into very much detail. “I don’t know, something to do with work, I guess.” The lie came far too easily. Never mind that Sara’s part-time job as an aerobics instructor was about as low-stress as they come.

“Well, let me know so I’ll know how many spareribs to get. Will you be eating real food by then?”

“No, just get me a salmon filet, please.” Elise knew this new eating plan was a hardship for him, but couldn’t he be a little more supportive?

Mike sighed as he got up from the table and cleaned his plate off, and then went into the den to finish some work. Elise flopped on the couch with Gabby and flipped on the TV. “Cool, *Footloose* is on...”

It had been several months since Elise had heard from Drew. Convinced that their little trip down memory lane was over, she tried to throw herself back into her present life. After all, she had lived without hearing from him for the past thirteen years, so why was it so hard now? Thoughts of him were always there, nagging at the back of her mind. He had become an addiction and she needed her Drew fix. Why didn't he respond to her emails? Had she done something wrong?

She was trying to clean the house one afternoon, and instead found herself falling into a reverie of the history of her relationship with Drew. They sort of fell away from each other after their New Year's Eve fling. He broke up with the Chi Ho after he found out she had cheated on him repeatedly, but by then Elise was dating someone else. The stars just never seemed to align for them. After Elise met Mike during her senior year, Drew stopped coming around. He moved to California after graduation, hoping to find fame and fortune in the music business. She remembered the day before he left pretty vividly.

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At long last, June of 1993 had arrived. Sara and Elise went wedding dress shopping the morning of graduation. Sara and David were planning a Thanksgiving weekend wedding, and Sara could not decide on a dress. The beautiful beaded v-neck showed

“too much collarbone, someone might mistake me for the wishbone and snap me in half.” Elise then picked out several dresses with high collars to which Sara responded “do I look like a freakin’ nun?” Elise’s patience was wearing thin by noon, when she squeezed into the size 20 maroon bridesmaid dress that she would end up trading for a 22 weeks before the wedding. “Guess maybe it is harder to choose when you look great in everything you put on” she muttered, swatting at her baggy arms that oozed out from under the puffy taffeta sleeves.

Needless to say, she was in quite a foul mood by the time graduation ceremonies rolled around. At least the dress she had picked for this day was long and long sleeved, covering every inch of sagging flesh she could manage. Even her feet felt fat, so she dismissed the pumps and went for the flat Mary Janes. Fluffing her long permed hair under the graduation cap for the last time, she ducked out of the bathroom and headed toward the end of the lineup.

“Now, I must say, you are really *wearing* that cap and gown.” Her head snapped back at the sound of Andy’s voice.

“You have to be kidding me. How can there be no one in this graduating class named Wiley, or even a Wilhelm.”

“Nope, you’re stuck next to me.” He handed her a program. Sure enough, straight from Wilder to Wilkins. Why had it never occurred to her how close their last

names were? She would have to sit next to Andy for the whole freakin' ceremony.

"Where were you during rehearsal?"

"Finalizing my plane ticket. I'm heading for California tomorrow morning." He was obviously amused by the stunned look on her face. While doing a really bad version of a rapper dance, he started singing "Going Back to Cali."

"Give me a break. You are way too white for that."

"Hey, ladies love cool Drew."

"Since when do people call you Drew?"

"They will when I hit it big."

"Do you know how many people think they are going to make it in L.A. and just end up waiting tables? You need to have your head examined."

"Ooh, does that mean you want to play nurse?"

"Stop it!" She gave him a shove that nearly knocked him into Stacey Wilkinson. Stacey's eyes shot daggers at her under their heavy black eyeliner, and Elise apologized quickly and hoped she wouldn't end up with a Doc Marten print on her face.

"So are you still dating Mike Brady?"

"It's not Brady, it's Brody, you moron."

"Hey, he's an architect and his name is Mike Brady. Can I call you Carol?"

"Are you going to torture me all evening?"

"Here's a story, of a lovely lady..."

"That's enough, Andy!"

"You know that guy was gay, right? He just died of AIDS last year. You are using protection, aren't you?"



“You’re the one who’s going to be needing protection if you don’t shut up.” She could vaguely hear the sound of “Pomp and Circumstance” in the distance, and the line began to shuffle.

“Hey, all I’m saying is, if you want to get together tonight, it’s my last night in town.”

“You sound like some pathetic sailor in a cheesy war movie.”

“Hey, we can play that game too, if that’s what you’re into.”

“Argh!!!”

“Come on, at least one kiss, just for old times? What if my plane crashes and you never see me again?”

“Then I’d thank God for the favor.”

“Oh, damn. That’s harsh. Come on Elise, where’s the love?”

“We’re about to walk in. Please don’t make a scene in front of the whole graduating class.” Elise was freaking out. She wanted to kiss him so badly, but she didn’t trust him to not use that against her somehow. She turned to walk away, but he grabbed her hand and drew her into his arms. Planting a brotherly peck on her forehead, he let go of her hand and she ran to catch up with the line.

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It was so funny to think of how the mere sight of him had irritated her so back then, but now she would give just about anything to see him again. He really knew how to push her buttons, in more ways than one. Sure, she had already been irritated that day and his

teasing did not improve her mood, but now she kind of wished she had kissed him. It seems like that would have been a better memory than the silly banter that was in her mental library instead. She occasionally allowed herself to wonder what it would have been like if she had followed him to California. Let's face it; he was doing fairly well for himself. Certainly wasn't waiting tables. And she was pretty convinced he wasn't lying about the job because she checked the faculty listings at the college where he claimed to teach. The hair was in a ponytail in that picture, but it was undeniably him. Those eyes could never belong to anyone else.

She decided to entertain herself by dancing around the house with Gabby and a broom, singing a variation of Belle's response to Gaston's marriage proposal in *Beauty and the Beast*. "Madame Wilkins, can't you just see it? Madame Wilkins, his little wife. No sir, not me, I guarantee it..."

Gabby gave her the "mommy's gone off the deep end" look that she had perfected by now. The best thing about a dog is the unconditional love.

A few weeks later, after an extraordinarily long day at work, Elise was tired of fighting the fatigue and flooding that seemed to accompany every period these days. She decided to throw in the towel for the day and finish her work at home. At least she could crawl into sweatpants and take some Midol. As she packed up her briefcase, she looked down at the black leather chair and saw the tiniest drop of blood pooling on the

surface. With a sigh of disgust, she wiped it up with a tissue and stopped at the bathroom before heading home.

Working from home was always a joke. Elise had enough of a work ethic that she didn't play around at the office, but as soon as she got home, there were all sorts of wonderful things to distract her. After making sure she had the super maxi pad fastened securely to her granny-panties, she curled up on the couch with the laptop and turned on the TV. Gabby immediately positioned herself at Elise's feet. Some network was showing *The Breakfast Club*, so she watched that for the millionth time while checking her email. The edited for TV version never failed to make her laugh, and the email that was waiting for her would definitely improve her mood.

There it was, finally. A new message from Drew. Trembling with excitement, she clicked on it.

Hey there, sorry I haven't written in a while, but things have been crazy here. I have some amazing news.

"Great," she muttered, assuming that this meant that the child-bride was finally knocked up.

THE BAND GOT A RECORD DEAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Elise breathed a sigh of relief, and then felt extremely guilty for it.

Can you believe it? We're cutting an album, and we get to tour! This is the most amazing thing! I can't wait to see what happens. I put in for a leave of absence, but, hell, maybe I'll

finally get to quit my day job!

This was for real? Someone she knew was going to be famous? “Holy Shit!” Elise screamed. Gabby jumped down, looking around frantically for the shit, hoping it was derived from a cat, and, therefore, a tasty treat. “It’s okay, Gab.” She petted her baby on the head. “Gabby, your mommy knows a rock star! What do you think about that?” Gabby stared at her with her pale blue eyes, totally unimpressed.

Drew’s emails came sporadically for the next few months, and were mostly just quick notes about the album his band, The White Knights, was recording. One day they were the next Pearl Jam, the next they were “going back to their roots Bob Seger-style” (never mind that he was the only one who was from Ann Arbor.) The band was mostly made up of Drew’s former students who came to him when their drummer quit about a year before. He was the sage old man of the group at 35. “They call me Papa Smurf,” he wrote. It seems their lead singer had done fairly well in some cheesy talent competition and had attracted the attention of a record label. The rest, as they say, is history.

Not long after she and Mike had returned from a quick Valentine’s Day retreat to Wisconsin for some skiing, Elise received the email that she knew was going to change everything.

We’ve finished the album and it’s set to drop next month. We’re supposed to play PJ’s in late April. I really hope you can make it, it would

be so amazing to see you again. I just can't wait to rub your face in it – since you always made fun of my air guitar!

He was coming here??? No, wait. He can't come here! Elise felt her heart pounding. As long as they had been a safe distance (i.e. several hundred miles) apart, she could handle this. But he couldn't come here. No way. She would not be able to resist that temptation.

Now, wait a minute. Let's not forget the fact that he's married, too. He probably had no real thoughts of cheating on his wife. Surely their on-line flirtation had been just that - a little harmless fun between friends. It was just silly of her to assume he would want anything to happen. She clicked "Reply."

So, you're finally gonna be a real rock star. By the time you make it here, you'll have so many groupies lined up that you won't care about seeing me. But I'll be there. Congratulations!

Why did something tell her she was heading for really big trouble?

This was too good to be true. Not only was Drew's band coming to PJ's, but Sara had sneakily arranged for Mike to go help David with a project at their cabin in Oscoda, so he would be miles away that weekend. Fate had just dealt Elise a rather complicated hand, and she was certainly going to roll with it. But she had to be careful.

About two weeks before the big event, Elise decided a new hair cut and color was in order. "Something dramatic," she told her stylist. Soon her long, '80's perm was gone, replaced by a chic shoulder-length style. The caramel highlights were also way cool. She would have to practice daily with the flat iron to get it to look right, but it had to be perfect for Drew's show. Mike wasn't sure what had prompted this sudden jolt into the present day, but he knew better than to complain. He loved his wife's new look, and the sudden spike in her self-confidence. And since she had finally lost that last ten pounds, he was cooking a lot less salmon these days, which made him infinitely happier.

Elise had debated for weeks over whether to tell Sara about the show, but finally broke down when she knew she would need some help getting Mike out of the house. Sara said she couldn't get out of helping David with the cabin project, but she did agree to help Elise shop for something to wear. Considering her over-reaction to Elise's email relationship with Drew, she was being quite supportive.

“Since when are bell-bottoms back in style?” Elise sighed with disgust at the jeans rack.

“Since about five years ago, and they’re not bell-bottoms, they’re *flares*,” Sara pointed out.

“All I know is that if we had worn these in high school, people would have chanted ‘ding-dong’ when we walked down the hall.”

“Well, then, it’s a damn good thing you’re not in high school any more, isn’t it?”

“You know, you are right on so many levels.” Elise examined the hems on several different pairs of Levi’s before settling on the ones with the straightest leg.

“For Christ’s sake, will you just try a pair with a wider leg? You might just be surprised.” Sara threw a couple other pairs of jeans at her.

Elise laughed, always amused when her Jewish friend invoked Jesus. “Fine. Find me a tunic and some flowers for my hair, and I’ll be ready for Woodstock.” She disappeared into the dressing room before Sara could throw anything heavier than jeans at her.

She settled on a pair of moderately flared jeans and a silky v-neck wrap-around paisley blouse in her favorite colors of soft pink and orange. Staring at them laying out on the bed, she couldn’t believe this was really happening. Music from Drew’s CD was pouring through the house as she got ready. It was cool, a cross between Seattle grunge and late 80’s post-modern/alternative. She still couldn’t believe she was going to a bar, by herself, and might not be coming

home that night. She hadn't done this since college, long before she met Mike.

They hadn't really made any plans, but Elise could tell Drew was excited about seeing her again. He wouldn't have time before the show to see her, but afterwards, definitely. She slipped her wedding ring on and off, unable to decide. She didn't know what would happen if he wanted to go back to his hotel room. She didn't want to betray Mike, not in the least, but she didn't know if she could resist Drew's charm.

Finally dressed and ready, Elise headed downtown to the bar. It was already starting to get crowded, mostly with college kids – girls with their long, straight hair and strappy tank tops, oblivious to the chill that still hung in the night air. The guys all wore jeans, T-shirts and flip-flops, also seeming not to notice the brisk temperature.

“What is it about being young that makes you oblivious to the weather?” Elise asked the bartender, and then realized he wasn't much older than these kids. She felt very matronly as she sat up at the bar sipping her Vernor's and fidgeting with her blouse to make sure she wasn't exposing any cleavage. All the little girls were down on the floor, clamoring for the front row, and chattering about how hot the lead singer was.

Finally, about ten minutes behind schedule, the band took the stage. Elise's heart skipped a beat when she saw Drew position himself behind the drums. He wore jeans and a green t-shirt, and his hair was down, even longer now than in his picture. By now the room



was so dark and smoky and the crowd so thick that there was no way he would have seen her. She could just barely see him from her seat at the bar.

Evan, the lead singer, grabbed the mike and twirled it. The girls in front went wild. "Good evening," he said in a very affected, breathless voice, staring out from behind a pile of black eyeliner (or guyliner, as the kids called it.) "We're The White Knights, and we're here to rescue you from a Saturday evening filled with boredom." He launched into an utterly cheesy faux swordfight, using the microphone stand against the two guitarist's guitars. Then they eased into an inappropriately egotistical cover of Pearl Jam's "Alive." The little girls in front were all screaming for Evan, oblivious to the rest of the band. Drew had told her that Evan was a prima donna, and that quickly became evident. Pointing to his chest while singing and strutting about the stage during guitar riffs, he looked like a preening peacock (complete with a blue streak in his jet black hair.) It was clear that neither he nor his primary audience grasped the meaning of the song. Elise imagined that Drew, the man who wanted to *be* Stone Gossard, was rolling his eyes the whole time.

Between each song, Evan would make a licentious comment to some girl in the front row, not even bothering to disguise the fact that he was staring right down her strappy tank top. The girls just ate it up. Elise wondered if she had been that pathetic when she was that age. About an hour into the set, he started babbling incoherently about their influences. She heard

“Pearl Jam, definitely Pearl Jam,” and “Nirvana, long live Kurt Cobain!” (The little girls in the audience looked clueless at this point, and Elise heard the one closest to her whisper “Wait, I thought he was dead.”) Elise had almost tuned him out until she heard Drew’s name.

“You guys know my drummer, Mister Drew Wilkins. This is his hometown.” The girls cheered wildly. “Don’t get too excited, girls. Drew has a special friend who’s supposed to be here tonight, and he made me learn this Cure song just for her. I think The Cure is a bunch of pretentious wanna-be pop-punk, so you can understand how this pains me, but Elise, wherever you are, this is your song, baby.” He then launched into a slightly up-tempo version of “a letter to elise.”

Elise clutched the bar, knuckles white, to keep from falling off the barstool. The little girls up front pouted a bit – surely they had never had a song dedicated to them. Sure, Evan was a far cry from the eccentric sex appeal that was Robert Smith, but no one had ever sung to her before, either. Elise pinched herself slightly and watched the red welt rise up on her pale skin. Drew sat back behind the drums with a little smirk on his face.

A couple of songs later, the set was over. These intimate bar gigs were a new trend for less widely known bands. The band would play for an hour or so, then sign autographs and take pictures with whomever the local radio station or the band’s fan club had hooked up with special Meet & Greet passes. Elise trembled with excitement, thinking it was a shame that

she had quit drinking, because she could really use her old friends Jack, Jim, and Jose right about now. She found herself being swept out with the crowd toward the autograph table.

She approached the table and told the bouncer that she was a friend of Drew and that he was expecting her. The burly guy walked over and whispered to Drew, pointing at Elise.

Drew's jaw almost dropped to the floor. He sprinted over and grabbed her by the waist, lifting her off the ground in a big bear hug. "Oh my God, I can't believe it's you! You're so *tiny*! You look amazing!"

She had to fight back the tears in her eyes, refusing to let her mascara run when she had taken such pains to get ready. His t-shirt and hair were soaked with sweat, but he still smelled like home. She wasn't prepared for the rush of emotions she felt.

He pulled away to look at her, and he had tears in his eyes, too. Or maybe it was just sweat. "It is so incredibly good to see you, and to be home," he whispered, hugging her again.

"Look at you, mister big shot rock star." She was shaking, totally overwhelmed by all of the feelings that came rushing back.

"Did you like your song? We worked so hard on that! Evan is such a pain in the ass, talk about a pretentious wanna-be pop star! You have to meet the band." Drew pulled her through the crowd to the table. "Guys, this is the lady you had to learn that song for. Elise, these are the White Knights. Joe and Tony," he

pointed at two other long-haired guys, one a blonde, the other raven-haired, “are the bass players, Geoff is our keyboard player,” he nodded at a bald guy, “and, of course, Evan thinks he’s the star.”

Evan got up from signing some little girls strappy tank top (while she was wearing it, and you can guess where.) “Elise, you’re stunning.” He came up and hugged her as if they were old pals. Elise was still speechless, still fighting back tears. Evan smelled like a combination of beer, sweat and marijuana. It made her stomach turn over and she quickly pulled away from him, afraid she would retch.

Drew quickly came to her rescue, true to the name of his band. “Go on, Evan. She’s not one of your groupies, so don’t think she’s going to fall for your charm.”

Elise couldn’t help laughing out loud, because charming was the last word she would ever associate with Evan.

Drew grinned, too. “Don’t ask me how he does it,” he whispered to Elise, “I don’t know what they see in him.”

“Well, I guess it’s because you’re not an eighteen-year-old girl.” She was finally able to relax enough to smile back.

“Thank God I’m not, ‘cause if I was, seeing you in that top would make me have to go join the Indigo Girls.”

Elise turned red immediately. “And how would your wife feel about that?”

“Have you ever heard the expression ‘what happens in Ann Arbor stays in Ann Arbor.’”

“I think that’s Vegas.”

“Damn, wrong city. I get so confused - we’ve been touring so long.” His eyes danced with mischief.

“You are so bad!”

“Don’t you know it! Haven’t changed a bit, have I?”

“Not much. I do like the hair, though.”

Drew smoothed his blonde locks back away from his face. “Yeah, we all decided to make up for Geoff’s lack of hair.” He spoke loudly enough for the keyboardist to hear, and Geoff picked up a pen and threw it at Drew’s head. “Hey, I think that’s my cue to get out of here. Can I buy you a drink?”

“Yeah, but better make it a Vernor’s.”

“Ginger ale? What happened to the girl who got drunk on Jell-O shots on New Year’s Eve?” He raised his eyebrows as a clear indication that that wasn’t all he remembered her doing on New Year’s Eve.

“She had to quit.”

“Damn, that sucks!” They walked up to the bar and Drew ordered a beer and a ginger ale. There was only one seat left. “Come here, have a seat.” He jumped up on the barstool and patted his leg.

“Drew, I don’t think so.”

“Come on, you said yourself that your hubby skipped town this weekend. Who’s gonna tell him? You think his friends hang out here?”

“That’s not the point, and you know it.”

“Fine.” He hopped off the barstool and turned it over to her, but she had spotted a small, empty table over in the corner, and pointed him to it. They sat down and she sipped her ginger ale, still desperately wishing it was a Jack and Ginger.

“You guys played really well tonight. That was sweet of you to play that song for me.”

“Oh, I totally screwed up the drums on ‘Save Your Day,’ it’s sweet of *you* not to notice. But I made them start working on ‘a letter to elise’ as soon as I found out we’d gotten the gig here. It was the best I could do on short notice. Next time I’ll have written one for you.”

Elise began blushing again. “Maybe you should try writing one for your wife, first.”

“Can we just not talk about her tonight, please? I want to focus on you.”

“So you just want to ignore the fact that we’re both married?”

“Yeah, is that so hard to do?” He reached across the table to stroke her hair gently. “You won’t believe how often I’ve thought of you in the past fifteen years. I just can’t get you out of my head.”

“So that’s why you moved to California and married a Barbie doll?” Elise wasn’t sure where this conversation was going, but it was starting to make her nervous.

“Come on, Elise. You’re being unfair.”

“I’m being unfair? You’re the one who’s putting me in an awkward position.”

“I’d like to put you in a very comfortable position, maybe back at my hotel room?” He leaned in to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

“Look, I don’t know what’s going on with you and Lisa, but Mike and I are happy, and I’m not about to throw all of that away.”

“Come on, Elise. You and Mike have been together for what, like thirteen years? You can’t tell me you still even have a spark. What we have, it’s magic. I knew as soon as I saw you that nothing had changed for me. I’m still in love with you.”

“In love with me?” Elise nearly choked on her ginger ale.

“Always have been.” Drew was either drunk off his ass, or had completely lost his mind. “Now come on, these smoky bars are killing my lungs. Let’s get out of here.”

Elise was still reeling from his confession. “Um, don’t you need to... sign autographs... or something?” she stammered. She saw a waitress walking by and flagged her down. “I need a shot. 3 wise men. Do they still call it that?” The waitress nodded and headed for the bar.

Drew laughed. “Are you kidding me? Did you even see those chicks? All they care about is Evan. Everyone knows the drummer never gets any respect, especially not when he’s an old man.”

“Then why do you do it?”

“Come on, Elise, you of all people know me better than that. I was born with drumsticks in my hands.

And I couldn't care less about groupies. I'm in it for the music. Now stop trying to change the subject when I'm doing my damndest to sweep you off your feet, here."

"So you're trying to tell me that you haven't slept with a different girl in every town you guys have played?"

He grabbed her shoulders and looked into her eyes. His eyes were dark green now, the color they turned when he was in his "don't bullshit me" mood. "What I'm trying to tell you is that when I found you on Facebook, it was like everything was right with the universe again. I haven't thought of anyone else since. And trust me, I've had plenty of opportunities..."

"And how does Lisa feel about this?"

"I don't give a shit how Lisa feels about anything. We're separated."

Ah, the fairytale was over. That was why he had no qualms about shamelessly hitting on her. Still, this didn't make anything less complicated for her. The waitress came back with the shot and Drew paid her before Elise could get to her purse. Ahh, her old friends, Jack, Jim, and Jose. She closed her eyes and blissfully downed the shot. "So, what happened in the Dreamhouse? I thought you two were Ken and Barbie."

"Basically, I left her for the band. As long as it was just a hobby with a few weekend gigs, she was cool with it, but when she found out I was serious about quitting the teaching gig and going on tour, she got all crazy. She was so convinced I was going to have all these women around and not be faithful."



“Gee, can’t imagine where she would get that idea...”

“Hey, that’s not fair. The point is, she ended up getting involved with someone else as soon as we left on tour. She basically flew up to Portland to see the show and told me she was going to file for divorce. I’m sure it will all be wrapped up in with a neat little bow by the time we make it back to L.A.”

“I’m sorry. That really has to be hard on you.”

“You know, as of tonight, I think I’m officially over it. So, now that I’ve apparently driven you back to the bottle, we may as well go to my room and complete your new bad-girl image.” He began stroking her arm, sending chills down her back.

“What, so you can give me Chlamydia again?” She hadn’t even mentioned the Chlamydia thing to him, not wanting to spoil the nice on-line fantasy they had built, but this was getting way too real for her.

“Chlamydia?” He took her arm and pulled her up, through the crowd, and outside, away from all the noise. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“I tested positive for Chlamydia last year, and the doctor said I’d probably had it for a while because of, well, let’s not go into that...” Elise felt the tears welling up in her eyes again. “I assumed I got it from you, because you had been with Robin, and she screwed half of the Alpha Sig house, so I did the math.”

“Elise, look at me.” Drew pulled her toward him and turned her chin up so she would look him in the eyes. “When I found out Robin was screwing around, I got

tested for everything under the sun. I didn't have anything. Call it dumb luck, or whatever, but I learned my lesson." He shook his head. "Well, or so I thought. I mean, it never occurred to me that it would happen all over again with Lisa. I mean, I don't know for sure that she was cheating, but she found someone else mighty quickly. Anyhow, I made sure I got tested for all that stuff again. I have a clean bill of health, I promise."

"Why should I believe you?" Elise was trembling, because she really did believe him, and she didn't like what the new math was telling her. The only other guy she hadn't used a condom with was the guy she had been sleeping with for the past thirteen years. So if Drew wasn't the source, it had to have been Mike. But how long ago? They had used condoms up until their honeymoon, and again briefly after she went off the pill. She started to feel sick to her stomach, and she was pretty sure it had nothing to do with the liquor.

"Elise, it's me. I may be a lot of scuzzy things, but I'm no liar. You should know me well enough to know that." He pulled her into his arms and she let the tears go. He held her as she sobbed uncontrollably. They knew people were walking by and staring, but neither of them cared.

When Elise finally got her tears under control and could breathe again, Drew asked her, "So, exactly where is that husband of yours this weekend?"

"That's a damn good question." Elise pulled out her cell phone and dialed Mike's number. She didn't even care at this point if he knew where she was calling

from, because it was all falling into place now. His line went to voicemail, and she hung up and dialed the number for the cabin.

“David? Hey, it’s Elise. Can I talk to Mike?” Elise listened for a few seconds, then said, “Hmm, that’s not what he told me. How about Sara?” Elise listened intently again for a minute, then suddenly lost all feeling in her legs. Drew grabbed her before she fell against the brick wall. “David, she’s not with me. You might want to try her cell.” She hung up, hands shaking, and looked up at Drew. “Where are you staying again?”

They walked out to Elise's car, and she threw Drew the keys. "You still have a driver's license, don't you?" He nodded. They got in the car. "We're going to my house first. You can meet Gabby."

Elise stared into space, interrupting her daze long enough to give Drew driving directions periodically. Finally, Drew asked her. "So, do you really think he's with Sara?"

"It all makes perfect sense now. When you and I first started talking again, I was asking her if she had ever cheated..." she knew his eyebrows were about to raise the roof of the car, "and she got very defensive." She sighed. "Then she was a little too eager to help me get Mike out of the house this weekend, after warning me about the, um, emotions I was having about our emails." She shook her head. "How could I be so oblivious? What's next, do I hit the talk show circuit? 'He was sleeping with my best friend – next on Montel.' That's so overdone."

"Elise, I had no idea about Lisa either. Or Robin. At least be glad that it's only been Mike."

"No, you forgot about Paul."

"Paul? The high school boyfriend?" Elise nodded. "Who the hell was he screwing around with?"

"Peter."

"You've got to be freakin' kidding me!"

“Nope. I thought I was terribly clever when I asked him if he expected me to change my name to Mary. But at least I never slept with him.”

“You didn’t?”

“Nope.”

“So, here’s the million dollar question. Who is the keeper of Elise’s cherry?”

“Shouldn’t be too hard to guess.”

“I don’t remember you dating anyone before Paul.”

“That’s right.”

“So that would be...oh shit...”

“That also is right.”

“Elise, we really have some deep issues, you know that? I keep dating cheaters, and you lost your virginity to some asshole who got you drunk at a party.”

“Hey, if there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s to not waste time with regrets. Turn here, this is my street.”

They pulled up in the driveway and Drew turned the ignition off. “Well, at least they aren’t stupid enough to come back here.”

“You know, I guess that means Sara knew I wouldn’t spend the night with you. Kind of funny that she has that much faith in me, huh?”

Gabby greeted them at the kitchen door, and didn’t even utter a bark at Drew, like she somehow knew that he was okay. Dogs *are* excellent judges of character. “Some watchdog you are, Miss Gabrielle,” Elise said, petting her as she attached the leash to her collar. She turned to Drew. “Help yourself to something to drink if you want, this will just take a second.”

When she came back in Drew was sitting at the kitchen table with a Faygo red pop. Gabby bounded back to the living room sofa after sniffing his Chuck Taylor's and getting petted.

"Don't you want a beer?" Elise asked, opening one for herself and sitting down across from him.

"Are you kidding me? Faygo is so hard to come by anywhere other than Michigan. I wish you could still get it glass bottles. It just doesn't taste the same in plastic. What is that about?"

"I don't know. But you're right."

"And, by the way, I thought you quit alcohol. A shot at the bar, and now a beer? Do I need to call your sponsor?"

"Well, I think tonight can be an exception." He made no effort to disguise his concern. "It's not like that, Drew. I quit because alcohol is empty calories, and I had to lose weight. That's all. And it's a light beer..."

"You are really disciplined."

"Well, I have to be. It's about more than just appearances in my case. But I kind of lost it tonight."

"Do you know how amazed I am by you?"

"Come on, it's not that big of a deal."

"Yes it is. Can't you give yourself some credit every so often?"

Elise took a drink of the beer and almost spit it out. It tasted so bad compared to the sweetness of the liquor. "On second thought..." She got up and poured it down the sink, and went back to the refrigerator.

Suddenly Drew was behind her. Putting his hand over hers, he gently shut the refrigerator door. Just like in her room that night so many years ago, she turned around to face him. She met his kiss without hesitation this time. Any guilt, pain or regret she might have had about their on-line flirtation had been washed away by her tears on the sidewalk next to PJ's. Maybe two wrongs didn't make a right, but she didn't care. She and Drew were just too right. He picked her up and she felt her legs wrap around his waist – something she had never been fit enough to do before felt so perfect with him now. She smoothed his hair back and kissed his forehead. He gently put her down. "Do you really want to do this here?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think he might come home?"

"I don't care..." she kissed him again.

"Well, I don't want to find out if he's a friend of Ted Nugent, so maybe we'd be safer back at the hotel."

"I'm tired of playing it safe. Let him catch us. Besides, I'm pretty sure he won't be home." She pulled Drew's sweat-soaked shirt off and let it hit the floor. He lifted her up onto the island and untied her top, letting it slip off the counter. Kicking her shoes off behind his back, she leaned back and let him kiss her down to the low waist of her new jeans. Before she knew it, the rest of their clothes had disappeared and there they were with nowhere and nothing to hide. And in Mike's kitchen, none the less. Elise couldn't remember a time when she had felt so free.

Knowing that Gabby would be settled down for the night, Elise figured it couldn't hurt to accompany Drew back to his hotel room downtown. They barely kept their hands off each other long enough to make it in the door. After another intense tryst in the plush hotel bed, she lay naked under the covers watching him sleep. She could not believe how not guilty she felt. She never thought she would be capable of something like this, but it happened just as easily as her silk blouse slid onto the floor in the kitchen. She got up quietly, meaning to just leave him a note and go home. She had just finished getting dressed when he woke up.

"No, don't leave..." He reached out for her.

"Come on, we both need some sleep, and you know we won't be able to do that if I stay."

"We're in town for the whole weekend. No gig tomorrow, though..." He sat up and rubbed his eyes, then looked at the clock. "Oh, it is tomorrow. I'm supposed to meet my parents for brunch."

"I'm sure they'll be glad to see you."

"We can get together tomorrow, I mean later tonight, before we roll out..."

"Drew, I really can't. I have to figure out what I'm going to do about this Mike and Sara situation. He should be home this evening."

"Damn. When will I see you again?"

"I don't know. You're going to be pretty busy for the next few months. The ride has just begun for you guys."

"I know, I know. Why don't you come with us?"



Elise laughed. "What on earth do you think I would do on a tour bus with five guys? Are you nuts? I have a job, and a dog, and, well, too many other things to deal with."

"Are you going to leave him?"

Elise sat on the edge of the bed, and Drew began rubbing her shoulders. "I honestly don't know what to do. It's like, he and Sara and David are my whole world. I don't have any other friends. I really, really don't know where I would go."

"You know my door is always open, no matter what city it might be in for the next few months."

"I know. Thank you." She kissed him tenderly. "I'm going to go now. You'll still email me, right?"

"Can I call you?"

"Let's just stick to email until things are settled, okay?" Drew pulled her back into his arms. She wanted to stay, she really did, but she had to clear her head and figure out what she was going to say to Mike. "Goodbye Drew..."

Elise finally managed to drift off for a few hours, only to be awakened by her cell phone. It was David. When she checked her missed call log, she saw he had been trying to call her for most of the previous evening. Funny, she didn't even remember hearing the phone ring.

"Elise, where have you been?" David was usually the calm, collected one, so hearing this despair in his voice meant he had also done the math.

"You probably don't want to know..." Elise didn't care by now if Mike found out, because what she had done couldn't even begin to compare to his betrayal.

"Don't tell me you spent the night with little drummer boy..." David and Drew had never really gotten along. David was a wine and cheese and classical music kind of guy and Drew, well, he wasn't.

"Okay, I won't. Now why have you been calling me?"

"It's true, you know. I know it is. They're off somewhere together. I came home from the cabin last night, and she wasn't there. Do you mind if I drop by?"

"Okay, give me about an hour or so to shower, I just got up."

Elise's hair was still wet when David rang the doorbell. He was pulled together on the outside, shirt tucked in, jeans ironed, but it was obvious that he wasn't holding it together so well on the inside. Elise

brought him a pop and sat down in the recliner across from him.

“How long do you think it’s been going on?” David pushed up his glasses and took a sip of his Pepsi.

“I have no idea. Probably years. You’re going to think this is none of my business, but did you get treated for Chlamydia in the past year or so?”

“Yeah. It was weird. Sara said it was probably something she had gotten a long time ago, and it just never showed up. I thought it seemed a little strange, but what do I know about medical stuff? I’m an accountant. God, I’m still trying to recover from tax season, and now this?”

Elise had always suspected that David had a touch of ADD, but she kept on going. “I got the same story. But now I’m wondering, who did they get it from? Maybe he’s screwing around with someone other than her, too.”

“No, it was probably her.” Elise looked surprised. “I found out a few years ago that she’d had a fling with a guy at work. A yoga instructor. It was just embarrassing. We didn’t tell anyone. It was a one-time thing, or so she convinced me. We put it behind us.”

“Well, I don’t think there’s going to be any putting this behind us.”

“Oh, no. I’m going to my lawyer tomorrow morning. I’m done with second chances for her. You know, I wanted kids, but she didn’t. Now I am so glad that we didn’t have any. Can you imagine how much worse this would be? I’ve already wasted fifteen years of my

life with her, Elise. Fifteen years. I'll never get that back."

"I can't even imagine what will happen with Gabby, let alone if there were kids involved. I mean, kids go through this kind of thing every day, but it doesn't make it any better."

"You've known her for years, longer than any of us. This has to be horrible for you, too."

"You know, I've always been her best friend, but I've also always know she was a spoiled little princess. She always got everything she wanted, no matter what the consequences. This is no different." Gabby suddenly jumped up in Elise's lap and licked her face. "How is it that dogs always know just what you need?"

"When do you expect Mike home?"

"Oh, probably anytime. He said he had some work projects to finish up tonight."

"Let's see the look on his face when he sees me here."

"Yeah, you can hang out for awhile."

"So are you going to tell me about your evening?"

"No." Elise flipped on the TV. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was showing. "Cool."

Mike came home around three o'clock that afternoon. He must have seen David's car in the driveway and tried to pull his story together. "Hey, Elise," he called out from the garage entryway. "I see David's here – did I leave something at the cabin?" Elise could hear his voice crack a bit. Gabby jumped down

and ran to greet him, but kept looking back at Elise to see if it was okay with her.

“In here...” Elise called from the living room. He walked in, and she turned off the TV.

“What’s going on? Where’s Sara?”

“I thought you might know.” David looked like he was ready to kill Mike. Elise had never seen him so angry.

“No, I left the cabin when you guys did...” Mike gave David a “help me out” look.

“You weren’t at the cabin, and neither was she. I know that because I *was* at the cabin, laying tile by myself.”

“What’s going on? Elise...” Mike was starting to look panicked.

“We know about you and Sara. Where *did* you guys go this weekend? Let’s see, it’s April. Maybe up to Mackinac Island? I hear that’s pretty romantic in the springtime. You can rent a tandem bike and cruise the whole island to your heart’s content. I haven’t been myself...” Elise was amazed at how calm her voice sounded. She knew she wouldn’t have been able to pull this off if she hadn’t been with Drew when she figured it out.

“What are you talking about?”

“Mike, just give it up, okay? She told me she was going to a concert with Elise, and she told Elise she was going to the cabin with me. It’s not the first time, Mike. I hope you don’t think you’re all that special.” David had tears sneaking out of the corners of his eyes. He got

up to leave. Elise started to go after him, but he turned around and stopped her. "I'll be okay. You go deal with this."

Mike sat down on the couch, dumbfounded. Gabby sat next to him for a minute, but even she knew something was not right, and she ended up back by Elise's side.

"So, how long have you been sleeping with my best friend, honey?" Elise was starting to feel the tears come to her eyes, but she refused to give in.

"Oh, you don't get to be on your high horse this time. I know all about your little cyber-affair with Drew Wilkins. Sara told me you were going to see him last night. Like you thought I'd believe that you didn't want to go the cabin because you had cramps. Please..."

"Well, I wasn't sleeping with my husband's best friend right under his nose for God knows how long. I think I get to be on a slightly higher horse than you do. So are you going to tell me how long this has been going on, so I'll know just how stupid to feel? I'm guessing at least a year, and that she's the one that brought the Chlamydia to the party. Tell her thanks a bunch."

"It's been almost three years..." Mike looked down at the floor, knowing that Elise was right. Not that either of them had done the right thing, but his had certainly been a much bigger betrayal. "So, what do you want? You want me to stop seeing her? I will, if that's what you want."

Elise was incredulous. “You’ve been sleeping with my best friend for three years and you expected me to forgive and forget? You have to be out of your mind! I want you to leave.”

“Where the hell am I supposed to go?”

“That’s not my problem.”

“Elise, let’s be reasonable...”

“Reasonable? You understand that I’m the one losing everything here. My husband, my best friend. You’re not taking Gabby.”

“You still have Drew.”

“That is just not even relevant.”

“How do you think it makes me feel, the way you’re always on the computer trying to relive the past with him? What makes the here and now so horrible that you feel you have to escape it all the time? You were so unhappy for the longest time, then when he came back into the picture, you were all sunshine and roses again. I can’t stand that someone else could make you feel that way when I couldn’t!”

“You were screwing Sara before Drew came back into the picture, so don’t even try to use that as an excuse.”

“Elise, you’ve been miserable for so long. I know you think you look so much better on the outside, but all the changes haven’t been for the better. You took everything so seriously when you started this crazy weight loss business. I couldn’t handle feeling guilty every time I wanted to go to Dairy Queen.”

“So do you get a free Dilly Bar with room rental at Motel 6? Last time I checked, you could have ice cream

with someone without having sex with them, too. And you think I'm too serious? She never cracks a smile."

"You know, you claim to be her best friend, but you don't know her at all."

"I know her enough now to know that she's not much of a best friend. David told me she had another affair a few years ago. I can't believe I was going around for months feeling so guilty about just emailing another man, then I find out everyone else is bed-hopping. Guess I should have asked David who he was sleeping with. It's like freakin' 'Melrose Place' around here..."

"You just don't get it, do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You should have felt guilty. I'm glad you felt guilty. You have a lot to feel guilty about. Why the hell did you spend the last thirteen years with me, when he's the one you wanted to be with all along? You could have run off to California with him after graduation, and we would have never had to have this argument."

"Well, the same could be said for you. Why did you spend all these years with me when you really wanted to be with Sara?"

"I didn't. Not back then. You were a very different person then."

"Yeah, I was a fat girl with no self-esteem. Every man's dream. Let me tell you, I'm dying to go back to that..."

"At least you weren't the obsessive control freak you are now."



“Excuse me?”

“Elise, you weigh peanuts and potato chips to make sure you have exactly one serving. You record calories on your PDA. That’s crazy.”

“That is called discipline. You have no idea how hard it is to break a lifetime of bad habits. Maybe you would have a clue if you had tried along with me.”

“So now this is about trying to get me on that same insane bandwagon that you’re on?”

“No, Mike. It’s about support. You knew it was something I had to do, and you could have supported me instead of making it difficult for me. Maybe that’s what this all comes down to.”

“Okay, I get it. We both screwed up royally. Now the question is how do we fix it?”

“Mike, you don’t get it. I don’t want to fix it. I don’t think we can fix it. It’s a gaping hole that they don’t make a big enough band-aid for.”

“Elise, everything is fixable. Don’t tell me you’re ready to throw everything away over this.”

Finally, the tears started to flow. “Yes, I think I am...” Her cell phone started to ring. She looked down and saw Sara’s number. “Oh, she is so not even calling me...”

Mike picked it up. “Really, really bad timing...” He closed the phone and put his arms around Elise. As angry as she was, she still let him. She had been all set to walk out the door, but now she was afraid to. Where would she go? Like she told Drew, they were her whole

world. Her parents were retired and living in Toronto. She had no other friends, no other family to speak of.

“Come on, Elise. I don’t want to leave, and I don’t want you to leave. I want to move past this. I think we’re strong enough to do that, don’t you?”

Elise nodded, feeling totally defeated. After all, what choice did she have?

"You're staying with him?" Drew was incredulous on the phone that night. "I can't believe you're staying with him, after what you just told me."

"Drew, I don't really have a choice. Besides, you're technically still married, too."

"Yeah, but not for long. I talked to Lisa and she's starting the process. She wants to marry this other guy that she's supposedly only been seeing for a couple of months. Like I'm supposed to believe that."

"Drew, I am so sorry that things happened the way they did. But this is probably for the best."

"How can you possibly think that? I thought you still had feelings for me."

"Oh, I do. Clearly." She shook her head, still unable to deny that all she thought about was making love to him. It was all she wanted to do. She hadn't been this ravenous in ages. It had been about six weeks since they had seen each other or talked, and she was already going crazy without contact from him.

"Then come with me. We're going to Cleveland next. You can hop a bus, or the Amtrak, and meet us there."

"Drew, you know I can't. At least not right now. Give me a little time to work things out, okay?"

"Look, Elise. I love you, and I want to be with you. It's that simple. Nothing else should matter."

"But it's not that simple, you see. There are all sorts of things that complicate it."

“They don’t have to. You’re letting them.”

“Why don’t you men understand that not everything is black and white?” She heard Mike’s car pull into the driveway. “Look, I gotta go. I’ll call you in a couple of weeks.”

“Elise...”

“He’s home. I have to go. Goodbye.”

Mike walked into the house with Sara by his side. Elise froze. “What the hell do you think you’re doing...” The look on Sara’s face was so pained that Elise stopped.

“Elise, we’ve just been talking. David left. He won’t even look at me or talk to me. He sent me papers.”

“Good. At least one person in this mess has some sense.”

“Elise, you’re not the only one losing everything, here. I just came to apologize to you. I know that I betrayed you. And I know that you probably can’t forgive me for that, at least not now. But I hope someday you will be able to.”

“So, what, you just want to go back to being one big happy family? ‘Cause I don’t think that’s going to happen.”

“I need your support, and Mike’s too. I’ve never been all alone before.”

Mike was silently watching the two women he loved trying not to go at each other’s throats.

“So I guess he told you that he’s not leaving me...”

“Yeah, we talked about that, too.”

“What do you mean, you talked about that?”

Mike interjected. "Elise, I think that the best thing for everyone would be for me to stay with Sara."

"What??? Were you not the one who convinced me that we could get past this?"

"Yes, but now I'm not so sure. You don't seem like you're really all that invested in staying with me." He picked up her phone and flipped it open. "See..." he showed her the recent call to Drew. "I can't leave the house for an hour without you running to him."

"I had to tell him something..." she mumbled, knowing that he was right.

"So I'm going to stay at Sara's for awhile. Just until we can all figure out what we really want, okay?"

"Oh, I think you've already figured out what you want." Elise headed down the hall toward the bathroom.

"So you're just going to walk away, just like that?"

"I have to throw up..." When she came back out of the bathroom, Mike was packing his clothes, and Sara was in the car. "So, this is it. Seriously?"

"Elise, I saw the pregnancy test when I was emptying the bathroom trash. It's not too hard for me to count backwards, believe it or not. I know it's his. So I'm making it easier for you to go be with him." Mike was the one with the tears in his eyes this time.

"I still can't believe it myself. I've been trying to accept it. I was going to tell you, though, soon."

"Just add it to the list of things that you wanted that I couldn't provide for you..." Mike slammed the

suitcase shut. "I have to go." He hugged her tight and kissed her one last time, then was gone.

Sitting in a very hard, uncomfortable chair in baggage claim at Detroit Metro Airport, Elise felt as if she'd been "run through the wringer" (as her grandma would have said.) These last few days had been hell. The divorce was final, *finally*. She would never forget the look on Mike's face when he saw her at the lawyer's office. It was the first time they had seen each other in months, and even though he knew she was pregnant, he still wasn't expecting to see *that* much of her.

She smoothed her "Kickin' 24/7" maternity jersey down over her belly. At 6 months, she was getting a little too big to fit comfortably in an airplane seat, and flying wouldn't be the safest thing. Of course, neither was driving cross-country by herself, so Drew was flying in from his last gig in Toronto to ride along. It was nearly November, and they should be back in California before the snow began.

Snow. She was going to really miss the snow. It was going to suck, no doubt, starting over in L.A., but what choice did she have? That was where Drew's work was, and until the band's popularity waned she was just going to have to make it home. Then maybe they could head to Toronto, where her parents were, or maybe New York. Until then, she would just have to deal with being a California girl. "Maybe I can design houses for Bennifer and Brangelina," she thought with a smirk.

She looked up as the flight was announced, knowing that soon Drew would be coming down the escalator.

They would just have to swing by the kennel and pick up Gabby, then they would be on their way. The baby had just delivered a sharp kick to Elise's ribcage, and she was reeling. "Please don't let me go into labor somewhere in freakin' Oklahoma," she muttered under her breath as she staggered to her feet to look for him.

First she caught sight of the long, blonde hair pulled back into a neat ponytail. Then the broad shoulders, tattered jeans, and Chuck Taylor's. Tears rolled down her eyes as he approached, and she saw the look of wonder and amazement in his.

"I have never in my life or any previous lives seen a woman as beautiful as you are right now, right at this moment" he said, enveloping her in his arms. He put his hand on her belly. "What are we having?"

"I decided not to find out..."

"Really. So you like surprises, do you?"

"When they're pleasant ones, yes, I do."

"Well, I have a surprise for you, and I hope it's a pleasant one."

"What is it? Tell me!"

"You have to wait a minute. It's in with my bags. They should be coming soon." The conveyor line for his flight had started moving, but nothing was coming through yet.

"Come on, you know you want to tell me."

"Not so much on the patience, are you?" He smirked and brushed her hair back from her face, kissing her forehead. "How did everything go with the lawyers?"



“Fine. I let him have the house so that he’d quit stalling. It’s not like we need it anyhow.”

“Hey, that might have been where this little rock star was conceived, you could be a little more sentimental!”

“I’ll let it go for the sake of good karma. Now where’s my surprise?”

“It’s coming.” Drew was scanning the bags coming down the conveyor now, looking for his black duffel bag with the band’s logo on the end. A guitar case was coming around, and he grabbed that first, then spotted the duffel.

“Oh, no, you did not buy me a guitar. I’m going to have my hands a little full to be learning guitar, don’t you think?”

“That’s not exactly your surprise. Come here.” He led her over to the seats next to the window and sat down, taking the beautiful honey-gold Gibson acoustic guitar out of its case. “Joe has been giving me lessons, and we’ve been working out an acoustic version of ‘Save Your Day.’” He positioned the guitar on his lap and started playing.

You have no use for Snow White or Cinderella.  
Rapunzel should know not to wait for a fella.  
No fairy tale princess to say the least.  
You like to point out how Belle rescues the  
Beast.  
When I came to your tower, you had cut off  
your hair.  
I brought your glass slipper but you’d bought a  
new pair.  
Just give me the apple, let the poison flow, hey  
I’m just trying to save your day.

A crowd had started to form around them, and a few young girls were whispering “Hey, I think it’s the drummer from The White Knights.” “Yeah, it is.” “Check this out. Are you getting this?” “This is so going on YouTube.”

Don’t fix your TV, don’t help you up off the floor.  
You can change your own tire, how dare I get the door.  
Much too stubborn, you put up a fight  
Don’t you think you might need me tonight?

Just humor me...

Rapunzel, Rapunzel please let down your hair.  
Here’s your glass slipper, don’t buy a new pair  
I won’t need that apple, keep the poison away  
All I want is to save your day.  
Can you please let me save your day?

“Wow.” Elise was in shock. She didn’t even know Drew could sing, let alone play guitar. Everyone around them started clapping, and a young girl timidly approached Drew for an autograph. The crowd began to thin out, and Drew put the guitar away, then helped Elise to her feet.

“Are you going all soft and folk-singery on me?”

“Oh, no. Just an alternate version. Since I can’t ever seem to get the drums right on it anyhow.”

“Your voice is much better than Evan’s. I think it really works. Are you going to record it?”

“Haven’t decided yet. I’ve been working on writing a new song; it just might be the next single. It’s called ‘The Girl in the Rearview Mirror.’”

“How does that one go?”

“Well, it starts out ‘the girl in the rearview mirror just climbed into my front seat.’ Let’s see if we can make the rest up as we go along.”

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