

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

evidence
of the affair

A SHORT STORY

TAYLOR JENKINS REID



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December 10, 1976
Encino, California

Dear Mr. David Mayer,
My name is Carrie Allsop. Please accept my apologies for contacting you out of the blue. I am writing to ask a quite humbling favor.

I recently found some love letters in my husband's briefcase that I believe to be from your wife, Janet. I suspect my husband, Ken Allsop, met your wife while he was at a medical conference in Coronado three months ago. It seems as if they have been sleeping together since then. I have come to this conclusion because the letters from your wife to my husband include references to a relationship of a sexual nature.

I am so sorry, David. I do not know your marriage, and I obviously do not know you at all. But if this brings you any heartbreak, I am sorry to be the bearer.

I also want to apologize for telling you this if, in fact, you do not wish to know it. This feels like an impossible situation. I have made the best decision I know how.

And now I come to the favor mentioned above.

As my husband has letters from your wife, I assume she must have letters from him. As I try to decide what to do about my husband's betrayal, I find myself desperate to know why he would do this. So if you find any letters in your home from Dr. Kenneth Allsop of Encino, California, or his office at the Dermatology Center of Los Angeles, I would truly appreciate you forwarding me copies. Please do not worry that they will be intercepted. I am the only one who picks up the mail at home.

I have not included your wife's letters here as that seems callous. But if you do wish to see them, I will, of course, do you the same favor I am requesting of you.

Lastly, I realize I have appeared out of thin air with nothing to offer but bad news, but it must be said that my heart goes out to you, David. Even though I do not know you.

Sincerely,

Carrie Allsop

January 20, 1977
Encino, California

Dear Mr. David Mayer,

I must apologize for my previous letter. I sent out that missive in a flush of emotion and—seeing as how I have not heard back from you—I fear I made the wrong decision.

Please accept my apologies. I did not mean to interfere with your life in any way.

Sincerely,
Carrie Allsop

February 2, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Dear Carrie,
Please do not apologize.

Your letter took me by surprise. I did not write back initially because I prayed you were mistaken.

While I did look for your husband's letters, I found nothing. I checked my wife's nightstand and her car, as well as her jewelry box and the back of her dresser drawers. I even went looking through the Hanukkah decorations. Not a single letter. I figured that there must be plenty of Janet Mayers in the San Diego area, and it had to have been one of them.

It wasn't until a few days ago that I realized you had it right after all.

I was in the family room with Janet and our four boys watching TV when the phone rang. Janet took the call, and I noticed she picked it up in the bedroom.

I did not mean to spy, but that's exactly what I did.

I heard her talking in a whisper to someone. I distinctly heard her say, "I'll see you soon, Ken."

I ran back into the living room and tried to pretend I'd heard nothing.

When she came around the corner, I said, "Who was that?" and Janet said it was Tricia Mason, the woman who lives two doors down.

It was clear to me at that moment she was cheating.

But I was surprised to find out that my gut told me to keep a straight face. I immediately hid from her what I knew. Why did I do that? Why didn't I confront her? I'm not quite sure. But I take some solace in knowing that you are doing the same thing.

How do you hold it inside and not let it show on your face?

When I got your letter, I worked so hard to convince myself you were crazy because finding out my wife was cheating on me was more than I thought I could bear. But I suppose I am writing to you now because I am bearing it.

You are not crazy, and you are not mistaken, and you are, at this point, perhaps the only person telling me the truth.

I do not have any letters from your husband here. If I find any, I promise to send them on to you. But in the meantime, would you send me the letters from my wife? Like you, I need to know what is going on in my home.

I'm sorry for what you are going through. You are correct when you say that we don't know each other, but right now it feels like you're the only one who understands.

Yours truly,
David Mayer

February 9, 1977
Encino, California

Dear David,

I am sorry to hear that I am correct about your wife. I had some small hope that there might be a misunderstanding that would explain my husband's involvement as well. It is funny the crazy things our brains make up to save us from the truth.

I have had fantasies that Ken is writing a screenplay and that he had the letters for research. Isn't that wild? You don't know him, but I assure you, the man doesn't have a creative bone in his body. My mother said when I married him that I was committing myself to a "bland life of boring."

To be honest, that is part of what I have always loved about him. He was a safe choice. What you see is what you get with Ken, or so I thought. He is methodical and logical and conscientious. I mean, we are talking about a dermatologist who eats a turkey sandwich for lunch every day and only listens to old Simon & Garfunkel and Mick Riva albums. I once put on a David Bowie record, and he said it sounded like "screeching cats crying for more drugs." My point is that it is absurd to think that Ken was writing a screenplay.

It was just easier to consider the possibility that he'd changed his entire personality overnight than it was to believe that he would cheat. But he's the same Ken I've always known and loved and still eats a turkey sandwich every day. It's just that he's capable of things I never knew.

I now have six letters from your wife to my husband. I have included copies of them here.

Ken keeps them in the innermost compartment of his briefcase. Every morning when he takes a shower, I check that pocket. For curiosity's sake, I'm almost happy when I find one. I always want more information.

And yet I'm always miserable after I've read them.

I seem to be a glutton for punishment.

David, if, after you've read these, you want to talk, know that

I am here. I wish I'd had someone to talk to after I read them. You're the only person I've ever mentioned any of this to. I'm too ashamed to confide in anyone I know. Instead, I go about my day—to the supermarket, to the salon, to bridge night, to dinner parties—as if nothing is happening.

You asked how I hide it all. I don't know. I guess I find it pretty easy to look like nothing is happening when everything has changed.

In the evenings when Ken is home, I make sure he has an elaborate dinner, and then I often stick my nose in a book. I suggest things for us to do that don't require us to talk to each other very much, like going to the movies or a play or dinner with another couple.

I'm hoping this entire thing just goes away on its own.

Does it sound like I'm burying my head in the sand? I don't know. Perhaps I am, for now. But Ken and I have a life that works, however imperfect. And I believe he will remember that soon, and everything can go back to normal.

I hope the same for you, David. I'm hoping it for the both of us with my whole heart.

Sincerely,
Carrie

September 6, 1976
Carlsbad, California

Dearest Ken,

When you asked me to write to you as I was leaving last week, I thought you had lost your senses—as if we were planning some long-term clandestine affair!

I'm not saying that I didn't enjoy our time together. You know I did. I think that was clear! But I figured that it was best we chalk it up to what it was.

But now I can't stop thinking of you!

I can't stop thinking about who I was in that room with you. Everything feels sexy to me now. Everything feels new.

Four kids and a messy house and a thousand other things we women deal with had weighed me down. And now I feel lighter.

All thanks to you.

I guess this is just my way of saying thank you for our time together.

I think I needed it. I know I should feel terrible about it all. And I suppose I do. But still, Ken, thank you.

XO,

Janet

September 17, 1976
Carlsbad, California

Ken,

You are too funny! I told you I wrote to you to say thank you and that was all. I certainly didn't intimate that we should get together again. You are incorrigible!

And you ask such personal questions about me and David. I can't tell you any of that! But I suppose the question you were really asking is if it is with him what it was with you that night at the Del.

And the answer is no.

You ignited something in me that I'm not sure has ever truly been touched before. Something I never even knew to want.

Even writing this to you now, confessing this to you, does something to me.

XO,

Janet

September 30, 1976
Carlsbad, California

Ken,

I cannot believe you called me on the phone! I don't even know how you tracked down my number. And yet my heart skipped a beat when it was you. Just hearing your voice again as I stood in the kitchen lit me up.

What is it about you that gets inside my mind and won't let go? I can feel your hands on me even when you are miles away, even though you have only touched me one night. You did things to me no one has done before. Things I need again.

I guess that is my way of saying yes. I will find a way to get back to the Hotel del Coronado—just tell me the night.

XO,

Janet

November 20, 1976
Carlsbad, California

K,

What are we doing? I can't leave my husband, and you simply cannot leave your wife, and I'm afraid that if we carry on like this, it will only hurt everyone.

It was one thing when we were a one-time or two-time (or four times in one night!) thing. But now I worry this is getting away from us. I can't keep pretending I have friends in town or a doctor's appointment an hour away.

We have to end it, don't you think? We have to forget about each other.

Don't we?

Love,

Janet

December 14, 1976
Carlsbad, California

K,

You are the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thought I have as I go to bed. I find it difficult to even kiss my husband now. The other day, he came toward me and I shuddered, accidentally. It's not that I don't care for him, but he is not where my heart is.

You hold my heart, Ken. You own my body.

I am ready to make a plan to spend more time together. Not just an afternoon or a night, but real time.

Could you do mid-January?

Every year, my mother-in-law comes to town to watch the kids so that I can go away with my girlfriends. It's scheduled for January 14 through 17. If I tell my family I am going with them but instead come to meet you somewhere, can you get away?

XO,

Janet

P.S. I heard Simon & Garfunkel the other day at the bank and thought of you dancing in your bathrobe. I started laughing right there in line. My kids thought I was nuts. You make me a little crazy, I think.

January 18, 1977
Carlsbad, California

K,

I am falling in love with you. I should have told you that yesterday when you said it to me, but I was afraid of what loving you would do to my life, to my family. It's true, though. Of course it is.

I love the smell of your aftershave. I love the way you seem to need me, the way you sometimes look like you'll die without holding me. I love how you always order your burgers with the cheese on the side. I've never heard of that before!

The past few days were full of so many moments that made me fall more and more in love with you.

I loved lying in our robes and eating french toast in bed. I loved reading the paper with you out on the balcony. I loved how beautiful you made me feel as I stood there in front of you in an old wrap dress and beat-up knee boots, things I've had for years.

It hurt so much to leave you there. I did not want to come home. I love being the woman I am when I'm with you. I feel like everything in the world is exciting, and everything is something easy and fun to do.

With you, anything is possible. At home, I'm always thinking about my children or whether my family can afford something or how my in-laws will feel. There are so many things that have to be done in a day, and none of them are for me, none of them are what I want. But as I go about all of it now, I think of you. I think of the woman I am when I'm alone with you. With you, I am enjoying myself. I am doing what I want. I am living, in our moments together, with no worries.

You are only for me.

It is as if I have lived with a hard shell all over my body and you have cracked it and it has all fallen off. I am fresh again.

I love you for that. And I needed you to know.

XO,

Janet

February 15, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Dear Carrie,

Thank you for sending those letters. The ambivalence you felt about sending them seems to match my ambivalence about reading them. I wish I hadn't, but I know that I had to.

I feel unending fury at the idea of her sharing what she has shared with your husband. When I think of the two of them in a hotel room together, it burns inside me so hard that I think I might collapse.

Yesterday, on Valentine's Day, Janet left to take a phone call in the bedroom. I pretended I had no idea what she was doing. But before she even came back, I got so mad that I punched a hole through the pantry door and had to pretend it was an accident. You don't know me, but I have never punched a thing in my life. I even pretend to kill spiders, but I actually coax them into a jar and take them outside. Please don't tell Janet that. Not that you would. I guess that's my own secret, isn't it? I'm not quite the man I pretend to be, and she's certainly not the woman I thought she was.

Am I weak for still not confronting her about it? I am scared for the things we will say that we can't take back. I am scared for our children. I do not want to be one of those dads in a condo. She'll take the kids. What if she takes the kids and moves to LA to be with your husband?

But I also don't know how much longer I can go on, living a lie, side by side with her. How much longer can I keep this all inside?

Tell me how you live with it, how you make the days go by. I cannot make it through this alone. I don't think I'll be able to survive. Please, Carrie, tell me how to do this.

Yours,
David

February 16, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Dear Carrie,

I am sorry for my previous letter. I was losing my mind. I know that you can't help me through this. I'm sure I sounded like a crazed maniac.

I'm sorry I wrote to you so desperately.

Yours,

David

February 22, 1977
Encino, California

Dear David,

You have nothing to apologize for. I am always ready to listen. And I find great comfort in your letters. You can consider this a two-way street.

I don't think you're weak for not confronting your wife. As you know, I've decided not to confront my husband just yet. I still think there is a good chance this thing will run its course quickly. If it does, I think we will be happy that we let it.

But even if I didn't have that hope, the truth is I'm still not sure I would confront Ken right away. In general, I prefer not to discuss anything with him until I know exactly how I feel about it. Ken has a frustrating way of always winning any argument. He is very intelligent and very persuasive, and I oftentimes lose track of why I was mad as I'm speaking to him. So no matter what direction this thing leads, I am not going to speak to him or anyone else about this at all until I understand exactly what I want to say.

Which is complicated. Quite obviously.

My situation is different from yours. I do not have children. (We have tried for years, and I have not been able to conceive so far.) So I suppose my fears are different.

I married Ken almost ten years ago. I can't imagine a life without him. I wouldn't even know where to start. I am afraid of losing all that I have ever known.

I feel like I can't tell anyone about this because if I'm not willing to leave him, then no one can know.

What I am saying is that I am alone in this, David.

Except for you. You are the only person who understands exactly what I am going through. And I hope I can be that same thing for you. We are not alone. We at least know of each other. It is a very lame consolation prize, but I will take it if you will.

As for the answer to your question, here is how I get through the days: I spend every moment I am alone asking myself what sort of future I want. Instead of thinking of what has happened, I

think of what will make me happy one day, hopefully soon.

For instance, we are still trying to have a baby. Every month that passes feels like a new opportunity, at least at the beginning. The pursuit has not been easy, especially now. It is almost as if I have to become some other version of myself in order to muster the enthusiasm for both of us lately. But I do it because I still believe in the future I'm hoping for: a family with the man I chose.

I'm trying to think of better times, later in life—not so much the past or the present, but a brighter future.

Maybe that will help you, too.

All my best,

Carrie

February 26, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Dear Carrie,

Your advice was quite helpful. At dinner last night, as Janet put the green beans and brisket on the table, I was looking at her truly mystified. How is it that she is capable of being two people at once? It pains me to think of what else she is capable of. I must have been staring at her because she snapped her fingers in front of my eyes and said, "David! Pass the salt, please."

I looked at my sons, who were now staring at me like I had three heads. And so I decided to redirect my thoughts, as you said to do.

I thought of five years from now when my oldest son, Michael, will be graduating high school. I imagined Janet and me in the audience with our three younger sons, Sam, Andy, and Brian. I thought of the five of us clapping as Michael crossed the stage. And I thought of looking at Janet with full trust and happiness.

I wonder if that future is even possible anymore. But I have to hope that it is because the other future, where I am seated a few rows down from my family, and another man has taken my place . . . I can't bear it.

So I am going to continue to think about the good future for now until I know what I am going to do.

Thank you for being there for me. I know you only as handwriting on a page, and yet you might be my closest friend.

Tell me more about yourself, your life. I'd love to listen as you have for me.

Yours,
David

March 4, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Do you ever feel like your life got away from you somehow?

Lately, it feels like my whole life has a similar feeling to when you check the clock on a Saturday and realize it's already half past four.

I just don't understand how I got here.

I was nineteen when Ken and I met. I had just started my sophomore year at Boston University. I was studying to be a teacher. To be honest, I'm not sure why I was studying to be a teacher. I think it's just what everyone was doing.

I met Ken at a party of a grad student friend of mine. He was about to finish his final year of medical school. He asked me out by offering to take me to an exhibit at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and I said yes. I don't remember what the show was, but I do remember that I had already seen it a few weeks before and pretended otherwise. It's interesting, the things we remember.

Anyway, I fell fast for Ken. He was so confident. I felt like I wasn't quite sure who I was back then, and he was so sure of himself. We got married in Boston when I was twenty-one. As I think I told you, my parents weren't altogether excited about the match. They thought I should stay single a bit longer, try to make my way in the world alone. My mother has always told me that I have more opportunities, as a woman of my generation, than she ever had. She made it seem like I had an obligation to use them how she would have.

But, honestly, I just wanted to marry a nice man who made a good living and have children. I guess I'm no women's libber.

I left school when Ken matched at a residency program in Chicago. We lived there for a few years and then moved here to Los Angeles for a fellowship he took at UCLA.

Now that we're settled, I think of going back to school every now and again. But Ken has been clear about wanting me to stay home and spend my energies on getting pregnant. He says if it's

not happening when I'm home and relaxed, it's definitely not going to happen if I'm up and out of the house all day.

I don't know if that's true or not, but it has been hard to argue it with a doctor.

And so I spend my days maintaining the house, throwing dinner parties for Ken's colleagues and their wives, and, lately, helping his mother settle into her new town house ten minutes away. She says she's moved here to "help" with "things." I suspect she's here expecting a grandchild any minute. She's starting to make comments about me being "too slim."

This just isn't how it was all supposed to go.

All my best,

Carrie

March 9, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I feel like my life has gotten away from me all the time.

I thought by my midthirties I'd have some financial security. But I am a high school biology teacher who has also taken on coaching girls' field hockey and basketball as of late to earn more money. I know almost nothing about field hockey or basketball. I'm considering adding driver's ed since at least I know how to drive.

My students are supposed to call me Mr. Mayer, obviously, but I can hear them referring to me as "Mr. Grayer" behind my back. I've gone fully gray at the age of thirty-seven. I always hoped I'd be one of those men who aged well. You know how ladies are always going on about how attractive they find older men? I was never terribly attractive in my youth, but I thought I'd grow into it. But I'm afraid my late thirties have also been accompanied by a growing gut, a bad back, and tension between my shoulder blades that never quiets down.

Not to mention that I no longer feel like I know my own wife.

As I interact with Janet now, I can see ways in which she and I had lost touch with one another long before this. It's almost as if realizing she was lying about one thing has made me realize how often she and I lie to one another about small things.

She's lying about having an affair, but she's also lying about canceling the newspaper delivery like I asked her to. It's as if she thinks I don't notice that the copies are piling up under her nightstand.

I do things like that, too, though. I do not tell her about my concerns about money or the fact that she goes too easy on our oldest.

Lying has just become so much easier than telling the truth. I don't remember when things got so hard. But life has been a matter of keeping our heads above water for years now.

Money is scarce. Janet knows it and I know it, and I hate

talking about it and it's all she ever wants to talk about. It has become so ever present that it shades everything.

When Janet and I met, I had a habit of collecting pennies I found on the street. I've always loved pennies. I like the copper sheen to them. But I have stopped collecting pennies in front of Janet because I'm afraid she will think I'm doing it for the money. That is how tight things are around here.

Janet keeps offering to get a job, and I can see the look in her eye when she offers it. Complete and total disappointment. It's clear she feels reduced to it because I can't provide. She blames me. She says she hates relying on me to do something that I am not properly doing. She'd rather have some control over it herself. It guts me every time she says it. I've tried to explain to her that I am paid decently. I have a good job. The problem is that, well, kids are expensive.

I know that wanting children has been a trial in your marriage. I can't begin to imagine the pain that must cause. The truth is that having children has been a trial in mine. I stopped desiring my wife quite the same way after she got pregnant with Andy and Brian. The first two were planned, but the twins weren't. They were a downright shock. I was already exhausted and penny-pinching with the first two. To be clear, I can't tell you the joy my youngest two bring me. My oldest, Michael, is impressively willful, and Sam can charm almost anybody. But Andy and Brian have this curiosity about the world and this bond together that I never expected. I can't imagine my life without any of my boys. But since the shock of the twins, being intimate with Janet always makes me nervous. It feels like I am just begging for more to be responsible for.

It has made me forget how I used to see her.

And to know your husband sees her that way, well, it has not been easy.

Just the mere mention of how many times they've slept together in one night has made me feel about as big as a thumbtack.

Sometimes I think the insecurity this brings up is the hardest part. Do you ever feel that way?

Yours,
David

March 14, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Do I ever feel insecure? Oh boy. How much time do you have?

I am afraid that my husband is going to leave me for your wife and that I will be left with nothing. Thirty and single and childless without even so much as a secretary position on my résumé. I'll be a joke.

I don't have anything of my own, anything to show for my time. All I've ever done is marry a doctor.

Often, I feel overwhelmed by this sinking feeling in my heart that I will never be enough. That I am damaged and any man in his right mind would leave me. What man wants a woman who cannot bear him a child?

No matter how hard Ken and I try, I don't get pregnant. I've disappointed us both so many times at this point that it is hard for me to remember feeling like a complete person. The doctor can't say for sure why I am not yet pregnant, but it seems clear that something is wrong with me. He even said it was likely pointless to test Ken. He said it most often lies with the woman. What more evidence do I need that I'm deficient?

When I think about what your wife must be like, I picture her as everything that I am not. Four children, twins by accident! She must be so womanly, so beautiful, so perfect.

I imagine that my husband looks at your wife and sees a real woman. And I am afraid that I will lose the life I have built to a woman who can give him what he wants.

There.

I've said it. Or written it, as it were.

The ugliest, most pathetic parts of my heart.

All my best,

Carrie

March 18, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I promise you there is no ugly part of your heart. And I am so sorry to hear of what you have been through and how it has weighed on you.

I find myself wanting to reassure you about all these things. Is it crazy to suggest we meet for lunch? Perhaps somewhere halfway between us? I could leave work after second period if there's a day you can easily get away.

It would be nice to finally put a face to the name, if nothing else.

All this being said, I realize there is a thin line between a good idea and a god-awful one, so if I've crossed a line even suggesting it, I understand.

Yours,

David

March 23, 1977

Encino, California

David,

I'm actually glad you asked. I think lunch would be nice.

How about next Wednesday the thirtieth at twelve thirty at the Victor Hugo Inn in Laguna? I will make a reservation under my name, but just in case: I'm 5'9" with long brown hair and brown eyes and wire-rimmed glasses.

If you're truly at a loss, just look for the lanky woman with sharp elbows, nervously drinking an Arnold Palmer.

See you soon,

Carrie

April 4, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Thank you so much for our lunch last week.

It's funny, but the moment you walked into the dining room I knew it was you. I think it was your hair. You told me it was gray, but you are selling yourself short. It still has a salt-and-pepper look to it, especially the way it darkens on the sides. It's very becoming. To be frank, that was my first thought: *He doesn't give himself enough credit.*

When you sat down, I think I was staring at you for a bit. The whole thing was a bit disorienting, to be honest. I felt like I knew you so well, and yet I had only just laid eyes on you.

I had enjoyed how easy it was to share things with you when you were just a faceless person a few hours away. Right before meeting you, I started to worry that after our lunch I might not feel as comfortable writing to you anymore. But it's the exact opposite. I find it perhaps even more comforting to know that it is you I have been confiding in all along.

I suppose this has all been a very long way of saying one very small thing, which is this: thank you, David, for being such a wonderful friend.

All my best,
Carrie

April 7, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Carrie,
The pleasure was all mine.

I have been in such a miserable fog lately. But I'm pretty sure talking to a beautiful woman about the various merits of the Dodgers and the Padres could lift even the most suffocating of clouds off any man's head. Add to that that you are a sympathetic ear as I talk about my wife, and well, I'm pretty sure that it is I who am getting the better end of the deal.

Before I go on too long here, I did want to tell you something. I know the original reason we took up a correspondence was due to you seeking out the letters from your husband.

Well, on Sunday, I found four.

They were in a cookbook of Janet's in the kitchen, folded up and placed in between chocolate pudding and chocolate mousse.

Janet was fighting a cold and had gone to bed early, so I made the children dinner. It was steak on the grill and french fries from a bag. A father-made delicacy, I assure you.

But when Andy asked for dessert, I went rummaging through the books to see if we had enough ingredients for any dessert in particular. I ended up making him whipped cream with strawberries. Did you know that if you cut up strawberries and put sugar on them, you can refer to them as "macerated"? I felt very accomplished serving "macerated strawberries."

Anyway, I've read these letters, and since you requested them in the first place, I made copies in the Xerox room at school. But first I must ask: Are you sure you want to read them?

Reading the letters from Janet was excruciating. I cannot help but want to warn you.

But I will respect whatever you decide.

Yours,
David

April 12, 1977
Encino, California

David,
Please send them as soon as possible.

All my best,
Carrie

P.S. Whipped cream and berries—macerated or not—is my very favorite dessert. It sounds like a lovely dinner you made your sons.

April 15, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

Copies are enclosed. I think our spouses have known each other for longer than we initially thought. I just wanted to prepare you for that.

Yours,
David

September 10, 1976
Los Angeles, California

Janet, Janet, Janet,

You must know we could never be a one-time thing. We are once-in-a-lifetime paramours.

Tell me that you have not thought of me, since that day we met? And tell me you did not wonder what it would be like in my arms? As for me, I have imagined the feel of you so many times since I first laid eyes on you.

That night three years ago, when I saw you from across the restaurant, I was struck with the feeling that I had never seen a woman so alive. Your eyes were so bright and your smile so wide. One word appeared in my head: *vivacious*.

When we bumped into each other by the bathroom, I could not take my eyes off you. You held my hand just a bit too long as we introduced ourselves, and you touched my chest briefly. I saw you had a ring on your finger, that another man had claimed you.

And I know that you remember what I said. I said to you, "May we meet in another life."

And then I kissed your hand. And I left.

I drove back to Los Angeles, to my life and my practice here. And I thought of you. I thought of you so often. You seemed like a dream, an aberration.

But you are real. So very real.

And you can't possibly try to tell me it is a coincidence that the next time I was in San Diego I saw you again.

There, in the lobby of my hotel, I heard this laugh, this vibrant and beautiful laugh, and I looked up and there you were. My woman from another life.

It had to have been fate.

That is why I surrendered to you. And I suspect it is why you surrendered to me.

We are meant to be in the same place at the same time. And I believe that you know that, and that is why you wrote to me.

We should plan to do it again. Soon.

Tell me, does your husband make you feel the way I can?
Does he touch you the way I do? Does he make you scream so
loud the people in the next room complain? Because I do. I know
how to do that to you.

Write to me. Tell me you'll meet me.

Love,

Ken

September 23, 1976
Los Angeles, California

My Sweet Janet,
We ignite something in *each other*. I must see you again. Tell me
you'll see me. I will find a way to come to you.
My world is black and white, and you are Technicolor.
Love,
Your Ken

October 4, 1976
Los Angeles, California

My Sweet Janet,

I am sorry for calling. When I heard your voice, I realized that I should not have called you at your home until I had asked you first. I have to admit I feel like a teenager again. And I'm behaving foolishly just as I did back then.

I simply haven't felt this way in so long that I'm overcome by it.

And so, my sweet Janet, I am so happy to hear that you feel the same way.

I've booked a room at our hotel for next week. Thursday, the fourteenth.

I am so happy we will have this night. The knowledge that you will soon be in my arms again is enough to carry me through.

Love,

Ken

November 12, 1976
Los Angeles, California

My Sweet Janet,
I need you. Seeing you once a week has quickly become not enough.

I need your smile, and I need to look up and see the brightness of your eyes. I need your tender and womanly body by my side.

I miss you with all my heart. And when I think I cannot bear it anymore, I think of how it feels to lift you into bed and know that you exist only for me. That I exist only for you.

I have never loved before. If this is what love is.

I will see you Thursday morning at ten. I cannot wait to hold you in my arms.

Love,

Your Ken

April 21, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Does the weather ever really change down there? I can't imagine it does. Nothing ever changes around here. There are no seasons.

When I lived in Boston, April was my favorite month. In the fall, I used to watch as the leaves went from green to yellow to orange and red. And then I always hated December—that was when they fell off, and it seemed like they would never come back. But then April came around, and the sun came out and the leaves started sprouting and life began again. It seemed like the most exquisite thing in the world.

Because the leaves don't really fall off around here, April isn't nearly as exciting. I've always been struck by the idea that you can't be all that happy something has returned if it doesn't go away in the first place.

But what if the thing goes away and never comes back? Is it corny to say my heart feels like an eternal December with no April in sight? Of course it is. Anyone who compares their heart to anything weather related is a square.

I am writing to formally thank you for sending the letters. But more than that, I am writing to say thank you for calling me. After I read them, I sat in the living room by our record player and put on Carly Simon and sobbed. Then I moved on to Daisy Jones and Carole King. All so easy to cry to, if you're in the mood. Then I put on *Blue*. A true classic for the ages. Do you listen to Joni Mitchell at all? Ken gets annoyed when I listen to her. He says she makes me "schmaltzy." I suppose she does get me feeling a little sentimental.

Lately, though, I think I've skipped over sentimental and gone straight to maudlin.

"I have never loved before. If this is what love is."

I cannot believe he wrote that to her. Days later, I still hear it reverberating in my head over and over and over.

I have never felt so alone.

Alone in the world and alone in my marriage. Alone in love, really. With a man who claims he never loved me.

Should I even be surprised? He barely looks at me anymore. Neither of us even attempted to bring up trying for a baby this month. I doubt he even bothered to notice a month had gone by without his touching me.

Sometimes, I swear, I'm invisible. And yet, frankly, David, I often find it to be a relief. I can't stand the idea of him truly looking at me right now. There is so much I do not want him to see.

The phone call from you did wonders to break the spell. I was sitting at the kitchen table still crying when the phone rang, and I swear I knew there was something special about the call before I even picked it up. (But I'm sure that's just me being schmaltzy.)

But allow me one more schmaltzy thing to say: I felt better the moment I knew it was you.

Thank you for telling me that everything will be OK. I don't think either of us is sure about that right now, but it feels nice to hear someone say it.

You did a wonderful job of cheering me up. I was laughing through my tears, and that is quite a gift. So, truly, David, thank you.

Sometimes, when I am lying in bed next to Ken and I can't sleep, I feel so hopelessly pathetic. So unloved, so unremarkable. I feel like the girl at the party nobody wants to dance with.

There I am, hoping someone might choose me, while the rest of the world goes on dancing.

But lately I find that in those moments, I think of you.

I am not alone at the party. You are at this miserable party with me. And it brings a smile to my face to be standing next to you.

All my best,
Carrie

April 26, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Carrie,
I'm glad to know I may have made things a tiny bit easier for you.
God knows you have made all this easier for me.

In fact, I should admit that I called you the other day to check in on you, but I also called you because I needed to hear a warm voice. I needed to call someone I thought would want to hear from me. Talking to you on the phone these few times this week has been the highlight of my days. You are the very definition of a breath of fresh air.

Carrie Allsop, you are never the woman no one will ask to dance.

I will be here dancing with you for as long as we want to get groovy.

All right, that was truly lame. I'll quit writing now before this really goes off the rails.

Thinking of you—

Yours,

David

P.S. I realized who it is you look like. It's Carly Simon. I told you I would place it, and I finally have. It hit me square on the head as I was going to bed last night.

It's your smile and your eyes. Just like Carly Simon.

April 29, 1977
Encino, California

David,
Would you have any interest in meeting for lunch again? I could
use a charming dining companion.

All my best,
Carrie

May 4, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I can get away on Monday the ninth, assuming that works for you.

Let's do the same place, same time.

Yours,

David

May 10, 1977

Encino, California

David,

What a lovely afternoon that was. I can't tell you how wonderful it is to spend time with someone and feel like he is truly listening.

And I had such a great time going through those old records with you at the general store. And talking about books. (This is your reminder that you have to read *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. And, of course, I will read *Ragtime*. I'm always true to my word.)

It was so nice to have such invigorating conversations. Ken never talks about that stuff with me. He mostly just complains about Carter and asks about dinner. As long as I agree with him and don't overcook the fish, he doesn't say too much.

But with you, I felt like I could talk, finally. Talk about anything and everything. I can't remember how long it's been since I felt that unguarded. Or maybe I should say carefree.

And what a pleasure you were to listen to as well. It has been a long time since I laughed that hard, since I was that interested in learning what someone had to say.

Delights can be hard to come by recently, so I truly cherish getting to laugh with you.

All my best,

Carrie

May 13, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

“Delights can be hard to come by recently, so I truly cherish getting to laugh with you.” You took the words right out of my mouth.

How about next week? Friday work for you? Our same place?

Yours,

David

May 20, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I thought of you the entire way home from lunch. You have to be the most well-read, cultured, intelligent woman I know. I am stunned by your insights and your kindness.

I kept replaying the way you dealt with that rude concierge at the hotel. The way you spoke so patiently, with such optimism, to a person who was so curt. You approach everything with such a purity. How do you do it? How do you keep such a sincere heart in the middle of all this?

Sometimes I think mine might turn to stone any minute now, and yet every time I see you I soften, reminded of how you still choose kindness over anger at every step.

I am trying to be more like you, as best I can.

You are a wonder, Carrie Ann.

All yours,

David

May 25, 1977

Encino, California

David,

Thank you for all your kind words. It seems as if you see me exactly as I wish to be seen. There is no greater gift than that.

When can we meet again? Are you free Wednesday the first? Lately, it does not feel enough to write.

All my best,

Carrie

June 2, 1977
Encino, California

David,

I was lying in bed last night, unable to sleep. I was thinking about you and what you said yesterday about the ways in which you feel you stopped complimenting Janet.

I was suddenly overcome with the need to tell you something.

You do not deserve this. What is happening to you. I know that you sometimes wonder if you do. I can tell in the way you talk about not paying enough attention to her, the way you sometimes say the situation is complicated. All marriages are complicated. If I've learned anything in my adult life, I think it's been that.

Compromises are normal, heartbreak is commonplace, et cetera, et cetera.

But you are a good man. I know because I've seen it with my own eyes. I know you, David. And I know that you do not deserve this. You deserve a woman who is mad about you.

You are brilliant and dedicated. You are a tremendous father. You are tenderhearted. You are the kind of man who finds small joys in hard days. You are both chivalrous and respectful.

Men like you are so rare nowadays.

You are exceptional.

And you absolutely do not deserve this.

All my love,

Carrie

June 6, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

You don't deserve it either. You lack nothing, regardless of what roadblocks you have hit in your life, no matter what things in life don't come easy to you. You lack nothing at all. I hope you see that.

You are everything a man could want in a woman.

All yours,

David

June 10, 1977

Encino, California

David,

For so long I have felt as if I am a disappointment to so many. To my parents, for my choices. To my husband, for what I cannot give him.

And now, in many ways, even to myself. For how I am handling all this.

When I was a teenager, one of our neighbors, Mr. Weddington, was caught having an affair with his secretary. And I remember feeling so disgusted when Mrs. Weddington took him back.

I could not, for the life of me, understand why that woman would embarrass herself by accepting his transgressions.

And yet here I am. Doing almost the very same. And it is enough to depress me.

But then I look at you. And I see a man of great integrity. And this man of great integrity is confused just as I am, and he is struggling just as I am, and he does not judge my choices, and he does not wish I were a different person entirely.

And it is enough for me to wonder if I shouldn't reject the idea of disappointment in myself altogether.

Thank you for helping me hold my head a bit higher at a time in which it has every reason to hang low.

All my love,

Carrie

June 15, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

If I have helped show you just how extraordinary your strength is, then I have paid you back only some small percent. You might just be solely responsible for carrying me through.

I wish I could tell you how often your name comes to the tip of my tongue, how many times a day I find myself thinking of something you said. The other day, someone at work was talking about peanut butter, and I had to stop myself from mentioning that you have converted me to cream cheese on toast forever.

I still can't believe just how many ways in which you have enlightened my life.

You are the second half of my heart nowadays, Carrie Ann.

And I am lucky for it.

All yours,

David

June 18, 1977
Encino, California

David,

The other night on the phone, you asked me how much longer I'd be willing to let this affair go on.

I told you that I was still waiting to see if Ken had any intention of coming back to me. But what I did not say—and I think that, perhaps, I should have—is that the waiting has become so much easier now. Now that I have you to go through all this with.

However, now I'm starting to wonder if there is not much left to wait for.

As I told you, Ken stopped keeping Janet's letters in his briefcase. But I recently came across one in his glove compartment when I was updating his car insurance card.

A copy of the letter is enclosed here. But, David, tell me—what are we doing? What is our plan?

Love,
Carrie

May 30, 1977

Carlsbad, California

K,

I agree. I cannot go on without you much longer. But it is not going to be simple. If we are serious, we need to make plans for a lasting future. We have families to consider! We have lives. There is still so much to reconcile.

So, yes, my love, I will get away. My kids are spending the weekend of the Fourth of July with my parents in Catalina this year. I will tell David that I'm going to my cousin's in Anaheim. But instead we can meet, either at the Del or maybe that place in Newport Beach that you mentioned.

And we can talk about what this would mean for our lives and how we can finally be together once and for all.

Love,

J

June 22, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I don't know what we are doing. I ask myself that on a daily basis.

At this point, I think we've probably lost our minds a little bit.

Mine certainly seems long gone.

Should we try to stop them? Is now when we confront them about all this? I worry it will only push them closer to one another. Trying to keep them apart may just be what solidifies them together. I'm not sure what to do.

But I can tell you that I don't want to spend the Fourth of July alone in my house, with my kids in Catalina and my wife with your husband. It sounds terrible. And I won't do it.

I think I'll spend it at our spot. Any chance you know of someone who could offer good company?

All yours,

David

June 25, 1977

Encino, California

David,

I'm going to call the inn and take care of the rooms. You can get us some sparklers and maybe some tiny flags or something. We will be as festive as possible this coming weekend. And we can both try our damndest to not think too much about what awaits us.

Sound good?

All my love,

Carrie

June 29, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

Sparklers secured. I will see you Saturday. Here's to making the best of things.

All yours,

David

July 5, 1977

San Clemente, California

Carrie,

I am currently at a gas station in San Clemente on my way home, and I saw this postcard with a sandbar on it and had to send it to you. I left you just a moment ago, and yet I still miss the sound of your voice, the way you smell like coconuts. I can't believe you didn't know you smell like coconuts!

It breaks my heart that no one had been smelling your hair.

You are a revelation. And beside you, I could feel nothing but peace.

Anyway, about the sandbar. It reminded me of you because you are my sandbar. I was lost at sea, and then you showed up. My dry land.

Love,

David

July 7, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Your postcard made me smile. I still blush at the thought of your hands in my hair.

I had no idea when we made the plans for the Fourth that I would be sad to see the weekend end. I thought for sure the two of us would be holed up there trying to cheer each other up and finding it impossible.

But that wasn't it at all, was it? Somehow, as absurd as it is, we found ways to be truly joyful, didn't we? There were moments, I swear, you made me forget why we were even there.

Thank you for helping me remember how to be happy.

Love,

Carrie

July 12, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

It is I who should be thanking you. You have reminded me that no matter what happens with my marriage, all is not lost. There is still beauty out there, still unexpected wonders.

The only silver lining, should all this end in disaster, is that there is you.

Love,

David

July 19, 1977
Encino, California

David,

You are the biggest surprise of my adult life. I had absolutely no idea when I wrote to you that first time that I was reaching out to a kindred spirit. And as complicated and unforeseen as this all has been, I don't regret a single second of it.

How are things there? I have to ask: Since coming home, have you found any other letters from Ken? Heard anything else from Janet?

Ken has been oddly attentive as of late. He has come home directly after work. He has bought me flowers. Tonight he is taking me out to dinner at the Chateau Marmont (a fancy hotel for movie stars and rock bands).

I do not know what it all means.

Love,
Carrie

July 25, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I have found no letters lately, and Janet has stopped excusing herself after dinner to go for a walk, which I've always assumed she spent at the pay phone. I do not know what it means.

How are you? I hope your cold is better. I'm thinking of you and sending you thoughts of matzo ball soup with extra noodles.

Love,

David

July 29, 1977
Encino, California

David,

I miss you. I hope that is all right to say. I wish, so often, you were here in person.

Yesterday, Ken told me that he is going to Palm Springs for a consult on a former colleague's case. He says he'll be there from August 8 through 13. I am assuming that this is a lie, but I have found no more letters from Janet, so I cannot be sure.

Has Janet mentioned anything to you? Has she planned time away?

If they are going away together again, shall we meet?

Love,
Carrie

August 3, 1977

Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

I've heard nothing from Janet about this. I have no idea.

I'll check to see if there are any letters in the cookbooks or glove compartments or buried in the closet when I get home.

If she does go, I'll call you and set a time for us to meet.

Love,

David

August 6, 1977
Encino, California

David,

Ken leaves Monday for Palm Springs. Still no word from Janet?

Last night, Ken made me dinner. He went to the store after work and bought groceries. He grilled us steaks and made a salad, including homemade dressing that was from a recipe from a nurse at work.

He lit candles and opened a bottle of wine. I was confused and skeptical. But I was also surprised at just how pleasant it was to have his attention again. It had been gone so long, I had forgotten how it felt.

He started talking about when we met. He said he spoke to his father after our first date and told him he would marry me. He told me his father told him to choose a woman he could love for fifty years. And then Ken said to me, "And that's what you are."

I said, "Are you sure you won't ever want someone else?"

And Ken said, "I will never love anyone the way I love you. Never."

Obviously, a large part of me felt like he was lying, but there was another part of me that felt like, *What if he has decided once again that I'm "the One"?*

But I asked him if he really needed to go to Palm Springs on Monday, and he insisted he had to. So Janet must be meeting him there, right?

Love,
Carrie

August 9, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

It's now Tuesday, August 9, and Janet is still here. She seems to have no plans to leave. If Ken has left, I can say definitively he is not with Janet.

Do you think their relationship is over? I can't make heads or tails of all this.

Love,
David

August 15, 1977
Encino, California

David,

On Monday morning, just as Ken was getting ready to get in the car for the drive to Palm Springs, he looked at me and said, "Why don't you come with me?"

I said, "With you?"

And he said, "Yes, come with me."

And I found myself packing up a couple of things and getting into the car with him.

It turns out there truly was a consult. It wasn't a lie.

How odd to feel confused that your husband is telling the truth. And yet, I have to admit, there was real comfort in that. It was as if the Ken I fell in love with reappeared: trustworthy, dependable.

I spent my days walking around the town and shopping, and then during the evenings Ken and I would go out to restaurants and have drinks at bars and order room service for dessert. I swear, when he looked into my eyes, it truly seemed like he loved me. It felt like a new beginning, I suppose. It was as if the past had never transpired.

He said he wants to take me on a vacation to Italy next year. He called it a "second honeymoon." I'm not quite sure how I feel about it all right now. I'm a bit stunned, to be frank.

Is it possible that after all we have both been through, it has ended with them coming back to us?

All my best,

Carrie

August 20, 1977
Carlsbad, California

Carrie,

Last night, Janet and I put the kids to sleep and then decided to watch some TV in the living room. I was sitting in my recliner, Janet on the sofa, when she walked up to the TV and turned it off.

She said, "I've been sleeping with someone else."

And she confessed everything.

She started at the very beginning—how they met years ago and she thought nothing of it but then ran into him for the second time last August. I didn't realize it, but the night they met again was a night in which she and I had gotten into an argument about how I was always grading papers on evenings we were supposed to spend together. She'd decided, rather angrily, to go out with her friend Sharon.

Apparently, she didn't come home until the next morning, and she said I barely even noticed. It strikes me as almost unbelievable how little attention I paid to her back then. Not that I'm blaming myself. After knowing the full details, my anger at Janet has somehow become stronger but also more tolerable. That doesn't make much sense, I guess.

Anyway, she admitted how long they went on like that, how often they met up, what she was feeling, why she did it. And when she confessed, so did I.

I told her I had known for some time. I told her that you and I had been exchanging letters and had become close during this bizarre time. I shared some of our letters as well.

There was no confession left to be made by the end of the night. Or I should say wee hours of the morning. Janet and Ken are through. And there are no more lies living in our marriage anymore.

Janet told me this morning that she wants to stay together, and she asked me point-blank if I thought that she and I could get past this.

It was a difficult question to answer. I kept thinking of you, to

be honest. What you have shown me, how much I look forward to seeing you. You have come to mean so much to me.

But if I ask myself whether I believe I can one day forgive the mother of my children and begin to trust her again, the answer that I keep coming to is yes. I believe that I can.

And if I find that I can't, I still have to try. I want nothing as much as I want to live in the same home as my sons, to see them every morning, to say good night to them every night, as they grow into men. I want the future I had hoped for.

I told Janet that I am not quite ready to forgive her, but I do feel ready to work to get there. And that, right now, is enough of a start for both of us. We believe we can put this thing back together.

As for the details of the end of their relationship and the trip over the Fourth, Janet has told me the full story. And then she showed me Ken's last letters.

From what Janet says, she and Ken spent the Fourth of July in Newport Beach. They made plans to contact divorce attorneys and made some decisions about where they would live and what kind of custody she would request of the boys. It was all but settled.

As they were getting ready to leave, Ken went to pay the bill, and Janet went over to the convenience store next to the hotel and grabbed a drink and a sandwich for the ride home. When she paid, she realized she was a penny short, and so she grabbed one from the "Leave a Penny, Take a Penny" tray. She said it was brand-new, not a scratch on it. It was bright and shiny, exactly the kind I've always loved. And as she held the penny in her hand, she realized she couldn't remember the last time she'd seen me pick one up.

She couldn't remember the last time either of us had taken a second of joy for ourselves.

Janet says that is when she realized that our broken marriage had hurt both of us. That I must be hurting, too.

She says she understood, in that moment, that what she wanted more than anything wasn't a life with a new man but our life back.

As she said this to me, she said, "I could never get back what we had by marrying him. I can only get that back by staying with you."

When your husband came to find her, she told him it was

over.

Apparently, they fought pretty loudly in the parking lot. But there was no changing Janet's mind. She says she drove home and never looked back.

As for Ken's letters, this is where I find myself at a crossroads. Are you sure you want to know everything?

Janet did not want me to send these, but I told her that I have this last remaining loyalty to you, and she understands. And so, I have included them here. All I ask is this: please do not read them if you are happy, Carrie. I know that is quite a lot to ask of a person, but I know you have the strength to hold back and protect yourself. You have been doing that for all these months.

Protect your happiness at all costs.

If he is what you want, put these pages down and choose to be happy. And if he is not what you want, maybe you should leave him without even reading them.

I know that's quite some advice coming from me, but I know you, Carrie Ann Allsop. I know your heart. You underestimate your strength. You always have.

You have changed me for the rest of my life, and if I had to go through all this, I'm lucky to have gone through it with you. You will be in my heart forever.

Take care of yourself.

You deserve only the best.

All my love,

David

July 6, 1977

Los Angeles, California

My Sweet Janet,

You cannot possibly mean the things that you say. We are not over!
We could never be over. We are meant to be. You are just scared
because this is all becoming so real, but it is real, my love.

Leave him.

I will leave Carrie in a heartbeat. She is not you, has not
meant to me in ten years what you have come to mean to me in a
matter of months.

Just write me back, answer my calls, and we can start our
lives together.

Love,

Your Ken

July 13, 1977
Encino, California

Janet,

Please reconsider.

Please.

I know you told me to go back to my wife, but all I can see when I look at her is my dissatisfaction.

You are the only one for me.

I can get away on August 8. I have a consult in Palm Springs. Meet me there, please. Tell me you will meet me there. Give us one last chance together.

Love,

Your Ken

August 10, 1977
Palm Springs, California

Janet,

I brought Carrie with me here to Palm Springs after you spurned me. I think I was hoping we'd have a lovely time together and I'd send you a gloating postcard about how much better off I am without you. But . . . I cannot do it. Even now, when I am trying, Carrie is not half the woman you are.

Janet, you have destroyed me.

I wanted you to bear my children. I saw the family we could make. I believed I could have a life with you that I cannot have with Carrie.

Look, I know that there were some things I said that were inappropriate. I was upset when you broke things off. I said things I didn't mean. I admit that it is true that there were women before you, and if you and I truly are over, then I have no reason to become monogamous. As I've told you, I find it incongruous with our innate human nature. But, Janet, don't you understand? That just speaks to how much I love you, how serious I have been about you. I was willing to give that all up for you, for you and only you.

That is how much I love you, how rare of a woman I believe you to be.

It is not easy to let you go. But I understand that you have made your decision, and it is one I have to live with.

If ever you change your mind, my sweet Janet, please write to me.

I am forever yours.

Love,

Ken

September 16, 1977
Encino, California

Dear Mr. Rosenthal,

As discussed in our meeting last Tuesday, enclosed please find all the letters I have in my possession that were exchanged between my husband, Dr. Kenneth Allsop, and Mrs. Janet Mayer over the last year.

My hope is that this serves as sufficient evidence of the affair.

I think the plan should be just as you said. We should aim to take him for "all that he is worth."

Sincerely,

Carrie Allsop

April 30, 1978

Boston, Massachusetts

Dear David,

Thank you for sending me Ken's letters last year. I am sorry that I never responded to you. I wasn't ready until now.

I am writing to you from the apartment over the garage of my parents' house.

I suppose I should start at the beginning. After reading your letter, as well as Ken's letters, I spent two weeks going along with all his romantic overtures. I cannot say for certain why I did this. The truth was that I knew I had to leave him the moment I read his letters. But I suppose it has taken me too long in my life to find my courage. And apparently I needed an extra two weeks to summon its full passion.

We were out to dinner at an Italian restaurant when I suddenly couldn't bear it any longer. He was in the middle of ordering minestrone soup, and I simply said, "I'm leaving you." And then I threw my napkin onto the table, took the keys out of his jacket pocket, and walked out. I made him walk home.

I could no longer live in a marriage of such disrespect. That is what it had always been, I realized. Even when I thought he was faithful.

And I could not for one more second continue my life in such a manner. For many reasons. But the most pressing of which was that I found out I had someone else's future to consider.

Early last September, I realized I was two months pregnant.

You can imagine my surprise. But you can probably also imagine my glee.

And so I contacted a divorce attorney, packed my things, and within a month, I had moved back in with my parents in Massachusetts.

It brings me pride to tell you that I left that asshole.

And it gives me sheer joy to tell you that, last month, I gave birth to a beautiful daughter I named Margaret.

I am a divorcée and a single mother, and I live with my

parents at the age of thirty-one. All things I never imagined for myself. But I'm doing all right with all of it, I have to say.

I have my maiden name back, and I'm in a city I love, with my family I have missed and my old friends. I'm about to get my real estate license. I listen to Joni Mitchell whenever I want. Right now, the trees are starting to bloom again. Maggie just learned how to smile.

And she feels like a great victory. Frankly, the past year or so has felt like a number of victories, even though it started out feeling like such a loss. But getting to know you—being with you—was the beginning of me understanding just how lost I was in my own life.

I needed so badly to see that regardless of whether I could carry a child, I was still me, still worth something. And no matter what my husband thought of me, I was still important. And while my mother often reminds me that I should have been able to see that myself, I am so thankful that you helped me get there. You gave me hope and perspective and confidence.

Right before you gave me my baby.

We are safe and secure here. I have the money from the divorce, and my mother and father have taken to being grandparents like nothing ever before. We do not need anything from you. I want only for you to know that we are here in Boston, should you ever want to find us.

Margaret and I are two little peas in a pod. I will take care of her with all my heart until my dying breath. She is in the very best hands. She will be loved from here to eternity.

I love her simply for existing. And I love her because she has been my liberation.

My life may not be perfect, but at least I can finally say it belongs to me.

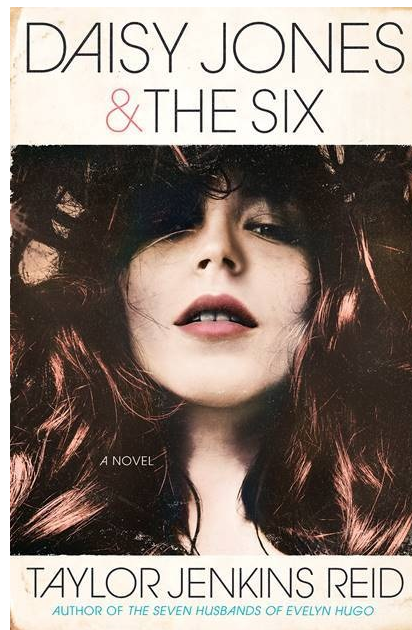
Thank you, David. For everything.

We love you.

Love,

Carrie and Margaret Leah Hennessey

Everyone knows the iconic seventies rock band Daisy Jones & the Six, but nobody knows the real reason why they split at the absolute height of their popularity . . . until now.



[Available Spring 2019](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo © 2017 Scott Witter

Taylor Jenkins Reid is the bestselling author of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, *One True Loves*, *Maybe in Another Life*, *After I Do*, and *Forever, Interrupted*. She worked in feature film casting, development, and various other roles in the entertainment industry before turning to writing full time. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, their daughter, and their dog. Her next novel, *Daisy Jones & The Six*, will be available in Spring 2019. For more information, visit www.taylorjenkinsreid.com.