

The Cheshire Cache

By

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EXT. WOODS - DAY

A youthful woman peels her way through the brightly-colored woods. ELISE's braided ponytail dotted with tufts, draped over a stained beige canvas backpack. She acutely scans the nearby trees. Elise glimpses a man deeper in the woods, but then something below steals her attention.

ELISE

Aha! I actually found it!

She hears recurring crunching of leaves. The tall, dark-haired BRIAN calmly approaches, a bit of scruff covering his well-defined chin.

ELISE

Hi!

Brian nears, his narrowed blue-eyes softening.

BRIAN

Hello! I didn't expect to see anyone else out here.

ELISE

I was looking for the same one!

Elise pulls the lid off a plastic container and sifts through its contents.

ELISE

These things look so fun!

Brian leans in to peek at the colorful trinkets within and forms an asymmetrical grin.

BRIAN

Tell me, what is all this?

Elise eyes Brian's face discerningly.

ELISE (CONT'D)

You have no idea what this is, do you?

Brian shakes his head, his lips pursed.

ELISE

How do I explain geocaching without sounding crazy? You go on this website that lists all these hidden caches with coordinates and use Google Maps or whatever to get in the area.

(CONTINUED)

Elise pulls out a bright yellow electronic device from her pocket.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Then you take out your fancy
schmancy GPS compass to hone in on
where the box is hidden.

(beat)

Or you search half the forest.

BRIAN

And you keep it?

ELISE

What? No, that's not how the game
works! You have to give something
up to get something. You put a
thingamabob in, and take a
thingamajigger out. You should try
it.

Elise drops in a colorful keychain, hesitates, then inhales sharply, yanking out a postcard with an illustration of the Cheshire cat.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Carolyn will love this.

BRIAN

Alice in Wonderland! Brilliant!

ELISE

Wonderland. If Alice was a mother,
she'd be too busy for
Wonderland. Oh shoot! The log!

Elise removes a small notepad and Brian looks on as she scribbles. Elise returns it and reseals the box then slides the postcard into her pack.

BRIAN

You didn't bring your daughter?
...Carolyn?

ELISE

She's sick.

There is an awkward silence.

BRIAN

Manners. I'm Brian.

Brian extends his hand.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE
(hesitantly accepting the
handshake)
Likewise.
(beat)
I'd better be on my way.

BRIAN
Maybe we'll meet by chance at
another cache?

ELISE
Maybe.

Elise backsteps slowly.

ELISE (CONT'D)
Bye.

Elise checks over her shoulder, stealing glances backward as she shuffles away.

Brian remains in place, watching her disappear. In his hand is the log book.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Within a warmly lit colorful landscape of pillows and blankets hides CAROLYN's small, exhausted face. Two small eyelids rest beneath a disheveled helmet of sweaty, matted hair. CHRIS, a red-haired man dressed in a pink shirt and dark trousers, sits alongside her, his smile lit by the glow of his smartphone. In his lap lies a tray with a plate streaked with arcs of dried yellow and dotted with the crumbs, next to a juice-coated glass. The door behind him opens and Elise walks in, postcard in hand, and crouches.

ELISE
(in a low voice)
Chris, how is she?

CHRIS
Her appetite has been improving,
and I let her watch a little TV,
but she needs rest.

ELISE
I would take her place in a
heartbeat if I could.

Elise ever so gently strokes Carolyn's hair, then stands back and turns toward Chris.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE (CONT'D)
Thank you so much for looking after
her.

Chris stands, lifting the tray, and turns toward Elise.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I love Carolyn! So, did you have
fun?

ELISE
I found the cache!

CHRIS
Yay!

ELISE
I met someone out there too.

Chris's face springs toward Elise's.

CHRIS
(his voice projecting)
A man?

Chris's eyebrows jump suggestively.

ELISE
Shhh!

Chris blinks and nods.

CHRIS
I'll get the details from you
later. I'm just going to clean up.
Same time tomorrow then?

ELISE
What did I do to deserve you?

Elise kisses Chris on the cheek before letting him
pass. She turns to Carolyn and presses the back of her free
hand upon her brow.

ELISE
How are you feeling?

CAROLYN
(weakly)
A little better.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE

I have a surprise for you.

Elise shows her the postcard. Carolyn's eyes widen.

CAROLYN

(in a louder but raspy voice)

Wow. The Cheshire Cat!

Carolyn fishes around for a crayon and starts drawing a female stick figure on the back.

ELISE

And who is that supposed to be?

The girl continues putting the final touches on her masterpiece.

CAROLYN

Elise in Wonderland.

ELISE

Hey, that's Mommy's name!

Elise attacks a giggling Carolyn with a playful squeeze.

CAROLYN

Can we get a cat, Mommy?

ELISE

You sneaky little
opportunist. I'll think about
it. Are you ready for some soup?

Carolyn responds with slow breathing, already having drifted off.

Elise places the postcard and crayon to the side, then leans in and sings a gentle lullaby.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Elise stands on her porch across from XAVIER, a sharp-nosed, clean-shaven man. He leans against the railing, meticulously combing his hair.

ELISE

I shouldn't go.

XAVIER

Chris is here. She'll be fine.

(CONTINUED)

Rounding the corner along a sidewalk, a stocky, toothy-grinned woman with a shock of brown hair fast-approaches, holding a small bag.

GEORGIE

I'm here! I'm here! I'm here!

ELISE

Calm down, Georgie. We're not in a rush!

GEORGIE

Says you!

XAVIER

This multi-stop cache just showed up on the website last night.

GEORGIE

So cool!

Georgie starts opening her bag of pretzels.

ELISE

I can't believe you guys got me hooked on this.

GEORGIE

Muahahaha!

Georgie eats a pretzel, then offers them, who shake their heads politely.

ELISE

Xavier, if you're hungry too, we can go somewhere. I don't mind.

XAVIER

No, I have a pack full of granola bars and jerky. We're all set.

Xavier feels a breeze from Georgie racing past, toward a car.

GEORGIE

Shotgun!

EXT. WOODS - ROADSIDE - DAY

Georgie is looking up and down at random trees in a heavily wooded area. Elise paces back and forth, with her phone to her ear.

ELISE

Chris, where are you?

Xavier appears holding an open plastic container with a piece of paper, fixating on the GPS device in his hand.

XAVIER

Guys!

GEORGIE

Yeah?

Elise reluctantly pockets her phone.

XAVIER

Guys! I found the first one!

ELISE

Woohoo!

GEORGIE

Took us long enough. What's on the back of the note?

XAVIER

"Continue down the rabbit hole."
Does this cache have an Alice in Wonderland theme?

ELISE

Huh. This cache just appeared last night you said?

GEORGIE

Maybe we'll be the first to find it!

XAVIER

I'm sure of it.

ELISE

Onwards and upwards! Lead on!

EXT. WOODS - LAKESIDE - DAY

Georgie stands between Elise and Xavier, taking pictures of a sparkling lake.

GEORGIE
Gorgeous.

XAVIER
According to the map, this is actually called "Looking-Glass Lake". I like this cache.

ELISE
Where are we supposed to look?

XAVIER
I have no idea but... oh wow!

GEORGIE
So cool!

Xavier reaches into the lake and pulls out a plastic box, its bottom lined with rocks. Georgie sheathes her camera and rushes toward the box.

GEORGIE
There's something else in the water.

Elise and Xavier sift through the box contents. With a small splash, Georgie pulls out a doll in a dripping blue and white dress.

GEORGIE
The head is missing.

ELISE
(looks up)
What did you say?

Elise's eyes lower to the headless doll.

XAVIER
Someone has a dark sense of humor.

Xavier holds up the notepad, showing the quote "Off with her head!".

GEORGIE
Creepy.

Xavier's eyes connect with Georgie's, then he forces his attention back to the GPS device and leads the two deeper into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - LATE IN THE DAY

Shadows of the trees grow long as the three are once again searching the woods. Elise is raking the leaves around the roots while Xavier is searching higher up.

ELISE

How are we supposed to find anything out here?

XAVIER

The website actually linked to a picture that looked just like this area. It has got to be here. See?

Xavier shows Elise a picture and she nods. Georgie peeks around a tree and starts waving her arms.

GEORGIE

Guys! I think I found something!

Elise, followed by Xavier, joins her. Elise bends to pick up a postcard, of the Cheshire cat. She slowly rotates it to see a crayon drawing. Elise frantically reaches for her phone and dials.

XAVIER

What is it?

Elise listens intently to the phone at her ear.

ELISE

Damn it! Ringing again!

The ringing stops.

ELISE

Chris! Is Carolyn okay?

Elise hears a child's scream through the phone, suddenly muffled.

ELISE

Carolyn! Carolyn!

GEORGIE

Elise, what's wrong?

(CONTINUED)

VOICE
(from the phone)
Don't worry, she's safe.

ELISE
Don't you hurt her! Let her go!

VOICE
No, that's not how the game works.
You have to give something up to
get something.

ELISE
Brian? Is that you? Please...

VOICE
(from the phone)
The tree. Look up on the tree.

ELISE
Why are you doing this?

VOICE
It's what you wanted. I'll see you
in Wonderland, Elise.

Elise hears a click through the phone's speaker. Words die within her throat in futility.

XAVIER
Hurt who? Tell us!

ELISE
(into the phone)
Nooooo!

XAVIER
I'm calling the police.

Xavier's hand moves toward his pocket, but Elise stops it cold. Her breathing slows and she looks up, past two frightened expressions, up the tree behind them. A small bottle hangs above.

GEORGIE
What's that?

Elise lunges and grabs the bottle. She affixes her gaze to its label.

GEORGIE (CONT'D)
What is going on, Elise?

A tear rolls down Elise's cheek.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE

Tell Carolyn I love her.

Elise downs the bottle and lets it drop. The bottle rolls to reveal the words "Drink Me". Elise crumples to the ground.

XAVIER

Elise!

Xavier pulls out his phone as Georgie starts screaming for help.