

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 a crunch of leaves behind her and stands up quickly, startled. The tall, dark-haired BRIAN approaches.

ELISE

(laughing at herself)

Oh! You startled me!

BRIAN

I didn't mean to.

Brian smiles disarmingly. Elise smiles back and holds up the box to him.

ELISE

This cache is great. Look at these things!

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

BRIAN

You found this in the woods?

ELISE

You're not... geocaching?

BRIAN

What's geocaching?

ELISE

Wow, I must look crazy. It's kinda like a treasure hunt. There's a website that list GPS coordinates of the different caches. You pick one out, then go find it. And at the end there is a prize. See?

Elise presents the box again.

BRIAN

And you keep it?

(CONTINUED)

ELISE

Oh, no, that's not how the game works! You have to give something up to get something!

Elise holds up a colorful keychain flirtatiously and drops it into the box. She shuffles through the items, then gasps as she pulls out a postcard with an illustration of the Cheshire Cat. She shows the postcard to Brian.

ELISE

Carolyn will love this.

BRIAN

Is that the Cheshire Cat?

ELISE

(nodding)

From Alice in Wonderland. My mother always read it to me, and now I read it to Carolyn.

BRIAN

Carolyn is your daughter?

ELISE

Yeah

BRIAN

No! You're way too young and beautiful to be a mother!

ELISE

Oh please!

BRIAN

So, she's at home with your husband?

ELISE

No, no, I'm single.

BRIAN

Really?

An awkward pause.

Oh! Manners! I'm Brian.

Brian extends his hand. Elise shakes it.

ELISE

Pleased to meet you. I'm Elise.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

So, you're really single? No
boyfriend or anything?

ELISE

(laughing)

When would I meet one? This is my
first day to myself in weeks, and I
spend it out in the woods alone...
well, sort of alone. Oh! I forgot
to sign the cache log book!

Elise signs the log book and puts it back in the box. She
places the box where she found it.

BRIAN

Maybe we could do this again some
time.

ELISE

Maybe.

BRIAN

It's settled then. I'll meet you in
Wonderland. You can be my Alice.

ELISE

And who will you be?

BRIAN

(leans in and whispers)

I'm the Mad Hatter.

Elise turns to leave. She looks back to wave after a few
steps, smiling. Brian remains at the cache, a slow somewhat
sinister smile forming on his lips.

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)

How was she today?

(CONTINUED)

CHRIS

Her appetite seemed good today. We watched TV and read books but she's been sleeping since four.

ELISE

I'd take her place in a heartbeat if I could.

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

ELISE

Thank you so much for looking after her.

CHRIS

Any time. So, did you have fun?

ELISE

I found the cache!

CHRIS

Oh, good!

ELISE

And... I met someone too.

CHRIS

(his voice projecting)
A man?

Chris's eyebrows jump suggestively.

ELISE

(glancing toward Carolyn)
Shhh!

Chris nods.

CHRIS

I'll get the details from you later. I'll go clean up the dishes downstairs. Same time tomorrow?

ELISE

Thanks Chris. You're the best.

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.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE
How are you feeling?

CAROLYN
(weakly)
A little better.

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
The best Mommy ever.

ELISE
Awww! You made me look so pretty!

Elise squeezes Carolyn tight, forcing out a giggle.

CAROLYN
Can we get a cat, Mommy?

ELISE
You sneaky little
opportunist. I'll think about
it. Are you hungry?

Carolyn shakes her head sleepily, her eyes already beginning to flutter. Elise places the postcard and crayon to the side.

ELISE
(gently)
Come here, Tweedledee.

Elise sits on the edge of the bed close to Carolyn, and snuggles her while singing a 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.

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!

Georgie takes a pretzel from her bag and eats it.

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

GEORGIE
So cool!

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

GEORGIE
(already running to the car)
Shotgun! Elise! Xavier! Let's go!

Elise and Xavier chuckle and head over to the car.

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.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE

Hi Chris, it's Elise again. Just checking on Carolyn. Call me back.

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 that piece of paper?

XAVIER

"Continue down the rabbit hole." I think this cache is Alice in Wonderland themed!

ELISE

Really? And this cache just appeared last night?

XAVIER

Yeah.

GEORGIE

Maybe we'll be the first to find it!

ELISE

Maybe! Xavier, where to next?

EXT. WOODS - LAKESIDE - DAY

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

GEORGIE

Gorgeous.

(CONTINUED)

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

(holding her palm out)

Oh. Yuck.

Xavier grabs the doll and torments the girls with it.

XAVIER

(laughing)

Off with her head!

GEORGIE

Gross!

Georgie squeals and laughs, but Elise can't fake a convincing smile. Xavier puts the doll back, and he and Georgie head merrily into the woods. Elise trails behind with apprehension.

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, her breath coming fast.

ELISE

(whispering)

No, no, Chris, please pick up!

The ringing stops.

ELISE

Chris! Is Carolyn with you? Is she ok?

BRIAN

(from the phone)

Hello Alice. Carolyn and I are having a nice tea party.

Xavier and Georgie are stunned silent by this quick turn of events. They listen intently to Elise.

ELISE

Please, don't hurt her! Just let her go!

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

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

ELISE

Brian? Is that you? Please, I'll
do anything!

BRIAN

Anything?
(beat)
Look up on the tree.

A small bottle hangs from a tree branch. Elise grabs it and
looks at the label.

GEORGIE

(quietly)
What is that?

ELISE

Why are you doing this?

BRIAN

Why not? Wonderland isn't a nice
place, Elise.

CAROLYN

(from the phone)
Mommy? Mommy I'm scared.

ELISE

Carolyn! Carolyn, everything is
going to be okay. I promise.

Elise lowers the phone slightly, as a tear streams down her
cheek.

ELISE

(whispering to herself)
Give something up to get something.

ELISE (CONT'D)

(into the phone)
Carolyn, I love you!

Elise opens the bottle and raises it to her lips.

GEORGIE

No, don't!

(CONTINUED)

XAVIER

Stop!

Elise drinks its liquid, then drops it. The label attached to the bottle reads, "Drink Me". Elise crumples and collapses.

XAVIER

Elise!

Xavier pulls out his phone as Georgie screams in horror.