

The Cheshire Cache

By

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EXT. WOODS - DAY

ELISE exuberantly peels her way through the brightly-colored woods. Her smooth skin contrasts with her torn jeans, worn t-shirt, and braided ponytail dotted with tufts, draped over a stained beige canvas backpack. She acutely scans the nearby trees. Elise glimpses a man within a cluster of trees deeper in the woods, but then something catches her eye beneath her gaze.

ELISE

Aha! I actually found it!

Distant, recurring crunching of leaves redirects her attention. 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. What brings you so far into the woods, may I ask?

ELISE

I'm geocaching!

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

What is all this?

ELISE

This, is a geocache. I figured you might've been out here for the same one.

Elise eyes Brian's face discerningly.

ELISE (CONT'D)

You've never heard of geocaching, have you?

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN
Geocaching?

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

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, like
I just did.

BRIAN
And you keep the box?

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.

Elise drops in a colorful keychain and then hesitates.

ELISE (CONT'D)
Ooh, Wonderland!

She pulls out a postcard with an illustration of the
Cheshire cat and admires it.

ELISE (CONT'D)
Carolyn loves the Cheshire cat.

BRIAN
The Cheshire cat, from Alice in
Wonderland!

ELISE
(chuckling)
My mother always read it to me. Oh
shoot! Almost forgot to log my
visit.

(CONTINUED)

Elise removes a small notepad and Brian looks on as she flips through the pages, and writes on it. Elise returns the notepad and proceeds to close up the box, storing the postcard in her backpack.

BRIAN

And you read the same book to
...Carolyn, is her name?

ELISE

Yeah.

There is an awkward silence.

BRIAN

Manners. I'm Brian. Pleased to
meet you.

Brian extends his hand.

ELISE

(hesitantly accepting the
handshake)

Likewise.

BRIAN

Maybe I can try out this
"geocaching" myself some time.

ELISE

You really should! But, I'd better
be on my way, and let you get back
to whatever it is you woodsy folk
do out here.

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

In a warmly lit room, a landscape of a couple of pillows and an erratically colored pile of blankets spills over the edges of a thick mattress. One of the pillows supports CAROLYN's small, exhausted face with two weary eyes beneath a disheveled helmet of sweaty, matted hair. CHRIS, a red-haired man dressed in a pink shirt and dark trousers, sits in a wooden chair alongside her, thumbing text messages on his phone and smiling widely. 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 down in front, near Carolyn.

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. I hate
seeing her like this.

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

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! Any time! Was
geocaching fun?

ELISE

I found the cache!

CHRIS

Yay!

ELISE

I met someone out there too.

Chris's face springs toward Elise's.

(CONTINUED)

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 such an awesome friend?

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
A little better. I'm tired.

ELISE
I brought you something.

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 cat face on the back.

ELISE
Halloween's coming soon. Do you want me to get you an Alice in Wonderland costume?

The girl continues putting the final touches on her masterpiece, adding a long-haired stick figure.

CAROLYN
Elise in Wonderland.

Elise grins.

(CONTINUED)

ELISE

Hey, that's Mommy's name!

Elise attacks Carolyn with a playful squeeze.

CAROLYN

Can we get a cat, Mommy?

ELISE

You sneaky little opportunist. I'll think about it. Maybe we'll go see what's at the shelter when you're feeling better. Are you ready for some soup?

CAROLYN

I'm not hungry.

ELISE

It's okay, hon. Get some sleep.

Elise places the postcard and crayon to the side and sits in the chair. She leans in and fills her ears with the words of a lullaby. She strokes Carolyn's hair as her eyelids grow heavy and slowly shut.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Elise stands on her porch, across from GEORGIE, a stocky woman with a shock of short brown hair and a toothy grin, and XAVIER, a sharp-nosed, clean-shaven, slender man. Xavier leans against the railing, combing his hair, meticulously reshaping the part on the right.

XAVIER

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

GEORGIE

It looks so awesome. I can't wait!

Chris saunters along the sidewalk, dressy brown shoes glaring in the high sun. He whips around and approaches.

CHRIS

(In a soft voice)

Sorry I'm a little late.

ELISE

Don't worry about it. We're not in a rush.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGIE

Says you!

ELISE

Chris, these are my geocaching buddies, Georgie and Xavier. They kept talking about it at the office. Now I'm hooked too.

CHRIS

How is little Carolyn?

ELISE

She's sleeping again. I feel horrible.

Elise frowns at Georgie.

ELISE (CONT'D)

I should stay home.

CHRIS

This has been going on for months now. Don't worry, I'll take good care of her. This weekend is yours. Now go find Carolyn a new prize!

ELISE

You're so sweet. Thank you.

Chris hugs Elise and marches militarily into the house. Elise turns to Georgie and Xavier.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Hey, before we go, do you want to get anything to eat first?

XAVIER

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

Georgie steals his attention as she sprints past, toward Elise's car.

GEORGIE

Shotgun!

EXT. WOODS - ROADSIDE - DAY

Georgie is standing in a heavily wooded area along a road, looking up and down at random trees. Xavier appears holding an open plastic container with a piece of paper, fixating on the GPS device in his hand. Elise paces back and forth, with her phone to her ear.

ELISE
It's still ringing. I hope Chris
charged his phone.

Elise hangs up and pockets her phone.

XAVIER
Guys! I found the first one!

ELISE
Yes!

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
Yeah, maybe!

ELISE
Lead on, Xavier.

EXT. WOODS - LAKESIDE - DAY

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

GEORGIE
Gorgeous.

(CONTINUED)

XAVIER

Funny. According to the map I printed, 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. She hands Xavier a notepad, who flips it open and takes out the enclosed pencil.

GEORGIE

There's something else in the water.

Elise and Xavier sift through the box contents. They hear a splash of water and observe Georgie pulling out a doll in a dripping wet blue and white dress.

GEORGIE

The head is missing.

ELISE

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?

VOICE

(from the phone)
I have her.

(CONTINUED)

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)
Look up on the tree.

ELISE

Why are you doing this?

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.

Elise snatches Xavier's hand before it reaches his phone. Elise's 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.

ELISE

Tell Carolyn I love her.

Elise quaffs the bottle and drops it. The bottle rolls to reveal the words "Drink Me". Elise crumples to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

XAVIER

Elise!

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