

The Cheshire Cache

By

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EXT. WOODS - DAY

ELISE peels her way through the brightly-colored woods. Her 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 GEORGIE, a stocky brunette with a shock of brown hair and a toothy grin, and XAVIER, a sharp-nosed, clean-shaven man. Xavier leans against the railing, meticulously combing his hair.

XAVIER

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

(CONTINUED)

GEORGIE  
It looks so awesome.

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.

GEORGIE  
Says you!

ELISE  
Chris, these are my geocaching  
buddies, Georgie and Xavier. They  
got me hooked.

GEORGIE  
Muahahaha!

CHRIS  
How is little Carolyn?

ELISE  
Sleeping again.

Elise frowns at Georgie.

ELISE (CONT'D)  
I should stay home.

CHRIS  
You need a break. Don't worry,  
I'll take good care of her. Now go  
find her a new prize!

ELISE  
You're so sweet.

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

ELISE (CONT'D)  
Hey, is anyone hungry?

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

(CONTINUED)

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

(CONTINUED)



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!".

(CONTINUED)

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!

(CONTINUED)

GEORGIE  
Elise, what's wrong?

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.

(CONTINUED)

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

A tear rolls down Elise's cheek.

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.