

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

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. There's a website, with a list of caches. You pick one and try to find it.

Elise presents the box again.

ELISE

It's kinda like a treasure hunt.

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

The Cheshire cat! My daughter loves Alice in Wonderland!

BRIAN

You have a daughter? No way!

ELISE

Oh please!

BRIAN

If I were to believe you had a daughter, then am I also to believe there's a 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.

BRIAN

So, you're really single?

ELISE

(giggles)

When would a single mother have time to meet anyone? Oh! Almost forgot!

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

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Maybe we could do this again some time.

ELISE

Maybe. Umm, sorry, but I'd better be going. It was nice to meet you!

Elise waves, then begins to walk away.

BRIAN

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

ELISE

(shouts back)

And who will you be?

BRIAN

The Mad Hatter, of course!

Elise turns briefly to smile then disappears through the trees. Brian's lips slowly form a sinister smile.

BRIAN

Wonderland it is.

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?

CHRIS

Carolyn's 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.

(CONTINUED)

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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

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.

(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!

Georgie takes a pretzel from her bag and eats it.

XAVIER

This multi-cache just showed up on the website last night. It's named The Cheshire Cache.

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.

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, pocketing his GPS.

XAVIER

Guys!

GEORGIE

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

Elise reluctantly pockets her phone. Xavier clumsily unfolds the paper with his free hand.

XAVIER
Guys! I found the first one!

ELISE
Alright!

GEORGIE
Took us long enough.

Georgie edges over.

GEORGIE
What's on that piece of paper?

XAVIER
"Continue down the rabbit hole."
(beat)
The Cheshire Cache.

Elise flips open the log book to begin signing it.

XAVIER
I bet this cache is Alice in
Wonderland themed!

ELISE
Really? And this cache just
appeared last night?

Xavier sifts about the prizes.

XAVIER
Yeah.

Xavier snatches a 20-sided die and returns the box.

GEORGIE
Hey, maybe we'll be the first to
find it!

ELISE
Maybe! Xavier, where to next?

Xavier strides forth while tossing and catching his prize.

XAVIER
Roll for initiative!

GEORGIE
(chasing after)
Yeah! Let's roll!

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. Xavier lets the sparkling water hypnotize him.

ELISE
Where are we supposed to look?

XAVIER
I'm not sure. 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.

Georgie holds the doll up.

GEORGIE
It's missing.

ELISE
Oh. Yuck.

Xavier grabs the doll and torments Georgie with it.

(CONTINUED)

XAVIER
(laughing)
Off with her head!

GEORGIE
Gross!

Georgie squeals and darts down the path. Elise follows, her mind elsewhere.

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 this thing?

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?

(CONTINUED)

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!

XAVIER
I'm calling the police.

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!

Elise glances behind her, seeing Xavier and Georgie huddled near a phone.

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 very
nice place, Elise.

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

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

(CONTINUED)

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!

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.