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Vintage *Cherish*

Wife Without a Past

ELIZABETH HARBISON

Elizabeth Harbison
Wife Without a Past

«HarperCollins»

Harbison E.

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Fabulous Fathers
HIS AMNESIAC BRIDE... Could Andrew Bennett really be face-to-face with his late wife? She was the woman he'd never stopped loving, without whom he'd felt life wasn't worth living. And now Laura was suddenly, mysteriously back... but she didn't recognize him... or their child. Laura couldn't remember being a wife and mother at all. How could she have forgotten a man like Andrew? So loving, such a good father. And a daughter with eyes so like her own, in need of a mommy. Could Laura be blessed with the chance to make her family whole again? This Fabulous Father can be chosen from the heart....

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“I think you’ve got the wrong person” she said.

“I’m really sorry you lost your wife, but *I’m not her.*”

Andrew made no move to follow her, but his voice rang clearly behind her. “Okay, you’re not her. You just have her face, her eyes, her hair, her voice, and *her scar* on your chin.”

She stopped. She did have a scar on her chin. She’d wondered a million times where it had come from.

“Laura, why did you leave?”

She couldn’t answer him.

“Okay, forget me,” Andrew said angrily. “Forget me altogether. How could you leave your child?”

Child!

Dear Reader,

This month, Silhouette Romance is celebrating the classic love story. That intensely romantic, emotional and compelling novel you just can’t resist. And leading our month of classic love stories is *Wife without a Past* by Elizabeth Harbison, a deeply felt tale of an amnesiac wife who doesn’t recognize the FABULOUS FATHER she’d married...

Pregnant with His Child... by bestselling author Carla Cassidy will warm your heart as a man is reunited with the child he never knew existed—and the woman he never stopped loving. Next, our MEN! promotion continues, as Silhouette Romance proves a good man isn’t hard to find in *The Stranger’s Surprise* by Laura Anthony. In Patricia Thayer’s moving love story, *The Cowboy’s Convenient Bride*, a woman turns up at a Texas ranch with a very poignant secret. And in *Plain Jane Gets Her Man* by Robin Wells, you’ll be delighted by the modern day Cinderella who wins the man of her dreams. Finally, Lisa Kaye Laurel’s wonderful miniseries, ROYAL WEDDINGS, continues with *The Prince’s Baby*.

As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, I’d like to give a special thanks to all of you, the readers, for making Silhouette Romance such a popular and beloved series of books. Enjoy November’s titles!

Regards,

Melissa Senate Senior Editor Silhouette Books

Please address questions and book requests to:

Silhouette Reader Service

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Wife Without a Past

Elizabeth Harbison



www.millsandboon.co.uk

To the witches: Chris, Elaine, Mary,
Mary Kay, Nora and Pat.

ELIZABETH HARBISON

has been writing fiction since elementary school, when she added sixty pages onto her copy of *Black Beauty*, bringing all the horses back to life. “Happily ever after” is a concept she takes seriously!

After publishing three cookbooks, Elizabeth decided to try her hand at writing romance. The rest, as they say... well, you know. Today, in addition to being a Silhouette author, she is an active member of the Washington chapter of the Romance Writers of America.

Elizabeth lives in Germantown, Maryland, with her husband, John, her daughter, Paige, and their dog, Bailey (who is named after George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*).

Always one to appreciate comments and feedback on her work, Elizabeth loves to hear from readers. You can write to her c/o Silhouette Books, 300 E. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017.



Dear Samantha,

Today is your mother's birthday. She's been gone for a little more than a year, but sometimes it seems like she just stepped out yesterday. And sometimes it feels like it's been forever.

I want to tell you about your mother, while it's still so fresh in my mind, but you're too young to understand it all right now. So I thought I'd write it down and give this to you when you're older.

Where do I start? Your mother was the most beautiful and intelligent woman I ever met. The day we got married, I truly felt like the luckiest man on earth. If she were here, she'd probably tell you that she chased me until I caught her—she used to say that all the time—but the truth is that the minute I laid eyes on her, I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her.

You know, I'm finding that even as I write this, I feel strange talking about her in the past tense. In my mind I know she's gone, but, as crazy as it sounds, sometimes I could swear she's nearby. There are days when I even catch myself looking out the window at the front walk, as if it were just a matter of time before she came home...

Love,
Daddy

Chapter One

Laura!

Drew Bennett froze midstep on the sidewalk of Broad Street in Nantucket. His heart gave one mighty bang, like an ax cutting into solid oak, then fluttered, like leaves spiraling to the ground.

Impossible. Still, he didn't move. He couldn't move.

His eyes were fixed, practically burning, on a woman by the old bank building. It was her familiar stance that caught his eye first. In the midst of a crowd she looked untouchable. She was tall and slender—more slender than she'd been before—with a chin-length swish of glossy red hair. It used to be long, he thought vaguely. Past her shoulders. But that vibrant color was unmistakable.

Drew tried to see her face but it was difficult. The light breeze pushed tree shadows back and forth across her, alternately illuminating and hiding her face in darkness. He was too far away. But he was afraid to take a step toward her for fear that she would disappear, a spirit in the mist.

Again.

So he stayed at his vantage point, studying her. He didn't have a lot of experience with hallucinations, but it struck him as odd that he didn't recognize the clothes she wore. Faded jeans and a bright blue T-shirt that read *Ozone Or No Zone*. A threadbare green sweater was knotted around her waist.

The wind lifted again, and she raised her chin and flipped her hair back out of her eyes. His stomach lurched. It was a gesture he'd seen her do a thousand times before.

Laura. Drew swallowed hard and closed his eyes. It wasn't real. It couldn't be. *It felt* real, but his thundering heart, burning eyes and the chill grinding down his spine were *proof* of nothing. Surely it was all a figment of his weary imagination. But when he opened his eyes she was still there. Only ten yards away at the most. A memory, seeming to live and breathe like everyone around her. He could barely breathe.

She was looking at something in her hands. A street map? Of all people, she wouldn't need one. Drew squinted his eyes to see better. It *was* a street map. He frowned. Why would Laura—even his own hallucination of her—need a map of the town she'd lived in all her life?

His pounding heart gave no promise of calming, so he took a moment to gather some strength and moved toward her. One step. Still there. Two steps. She hadn't disappeared yet. She hadn't even moved. Three steps closer made him three times more positive that it was her.

No. It had to be a ghost.

Before he could take a fourth step, she turned away. Not vanished—turned away. He took a moment to catch his breath as she ambled up the street, pausing occasionally to look in a shop window. Drew followed, watching, slowly closing the gap between them. She stopped in front of Addy's Attic, a store featuring the paintings of local artists. Addy's had always been one of her favorite haunts. Now it appeared that was literally true. He watched for her usual enthusiasm to draw her in as it always did.

But as she stood there, her stature took on an odd stiffness. She pressed her lips together and leaned in, laying her hand to the window glass. Her stillness was unnerving. Then she gave a small shake of her head and walked away.

Moving with the slow hesitation of a dreamer, Drew continued following.

When she stopped at a bookshop a block up, there was no more than fifteen feet between the two of them, but he stopped, too. After what he'd been through since she'd...gone...he didn't want to take any chance of spooking her before getting some answers from her. *How can you be here? Can you speak? Can you hear?*

Can you stay?

A crowd of people milled around them. May was busy enough on Nantucket, but add lunch hour to the formula and you had a real mess. Drew had to step aside once or twice just to keep his eyes trained on her.

She must have felt his gaze because she turned suddenly and faced him.

Bam! It was a sucker punch to the gut. Even though he knew the face well, the impact of seeing it, albeit from a slight distance, pulled his stomach straight into his empty lungs.

"It's you..." His voice trailed off and he reached an arm out toward her, even though she was too far away to reach, or to even hear him.

He realized quickly, though, that she wasn't looking at him but at something behind him. Her eyes seemed to search the crowd, as if she was looking for someone else, before she turned and walked away again.

Drew was dazed for a moment; then he moved to catch up with her. "Wait!" he called, but she only picked up her speed. "Laura!"

She didn't even turn around.

"Laura, answer me!" he yelled, heedless of the curious stares of passersby. "What's going on?"

A beefy hand grabbed his arm. "Looks like the lady wants to be left alone," a gruff voice cautioned.

Drew jerked his head toward the interloper. It was a construction worker. Part of the crew that was patching the sidewalk in an effort to keep the historic district in top form. His big face was seared a menacing red by the sun, and his forearm was the size of a small tree trunk.

Drew shrugged him off. "You saw her? A woman with red hair?"

The man's face went slack. "What are you, some sort of nut? Of course I saw her. I'm not blind."

Then she's real. She's not a figment of my imagination.

"Go home, buddy. Sleep it off." The worker walked off, shaking his head.

Drew barely heard him. The man's words had a certain ring to them. *Was she running away from him?*

No, these thoughts were crazy. If she was a ghost, which she surely was, she would have better ways to get away than by running. And maybe she didn't realize he was calling to her. After all, the noise of the crowd created a dull roar.

Drew picked up his pace. She'd be glad to see him. Of course she would. He just had to catch up to her. He lost sight of her for a moment, then saw her again by the menu outside the Cobbler Restaurant

"Laura! Here!" In three strides he was there, and turned her by the shoulders.

The woman who faced him was unfamiliar, and bore little likeness to Laura. For one thing, she couldn't have been older than twenty and she was shorter and a little on the plump side. The hair was similar to Laura's, the cut was the same, but nothing else was.

She smiled a big toothy grin at him and winked an amber eye. "My name's Gert," she said in a broad Australian accent. "Will I do?"

"I'm sorry," Drew said, trying to shake his mind clear. "I thought you were someone else." Was this the woman he'd been following for the past twenty minutes? Was he that far around the bend?

That was a more comfortable explanation than anything else he could come up with.

He flicked a glance across her. No, it wasn't the woman he'd seen. Gert wore a gauzy tie-dyed outfit one of the stores by the wharf was selling, not the jeans and T-shirt he'd seen Laura in. He gave a brief, distracted smile. "Sorry, my mistake."

"If you want to make another one, I'm staying at the Driftwood" the girl called after him.

He walked away, scanning the crowd for Laura. It wasn't long before he spotted her standing at the counter in the drugstore across the street, signing a check and tearing it out of the book.

Do ghosts write checks? The idea was so absurd that he immediately concluded that this was a person with an uncanny resemblance to Laura. Perhaps even a twin she'd never known about. Was that possible? No. A twin wouldn't have the same mannerisms unless they'd grown up together.

The corner traffic light turned green and a veritable stampede of cars roared out in front of him. Drew muttered an oath and searched for a gap in traffic to run through. It was bumper to bumper and moving fast. This time he shouted the oath. What was going on? Suddenly it was like rush hour in New York City.

Finally he got to the other side of the street, and he burst into the drugstore, the tiny bells on the door tingling a small, frantic announcement. He rushed to the crowded counter area.

She was gone.

He pressed through the customers in line and said to the bored-looking cashier, "There was a woman in here just now." He swallowed and tried to catch his breath. "A minute ago. Tall, red hair. Did you see which way she went?"

The cashier snorted. "Do I look like Sherlock Holmes?" A titter of laughter in the line brought a smug smile to her lips.

Drew tried to keep his voice sounding controlled. "This is important."

"I don't know where she went."

He braced his hands on the counter and raised his eyes skyward. Then it hit him. "She wrote a check."

The cashier nodded her gray head and settled back on her considerable haunches, a challenge clear in her eyes. "What about it?"

Drew tried to smile. "You won't believe this..." He reconsidered. Better not to sound like a lunatic. "I think that's someone I went to college with but I'm not sure it's her and I don't want to call all over town trying to find her if I've got the wrong woman."

She was not receptive. "Uh-huh."

"There's a line here, mister," a voice complained behind him.

"She just wrote a check," Drew persisted to the cashier. "Could you just take a look and see if it's the same woman?" Silence. "Her name is Amy," he tried to think of a last name and his eye fell on the cigarette display behind her, "Camela. Amy Camela." *You'll never be an actor, Bennett.*

"Amy Camela," the woman repeated dully.

By now his blood pressure had shot up to nearstroke level. "Please," he said through his teeth. He fumbled for his wallet and slipped a five-dollar bill out. He handed it to her, feeling like a bad actor in a bad movie. "Can you look at the check?"

Unbelievably, she relented and took the cash. For interminable moments she sifted through the cash drawer, then produced a plain beige check and read. "Nope. Says Mary Shepherd."

Well, what had he expected?

He'd expected Laura. He'd been so sure, so *completely* sure, that the cashier was going to say Laura Bennett that it took him a moment to comprehend what she *had* said. "Mary Shepherd?" he repeated, knowing as he spoke how insane his contention was. "You must have picked up the wrong check."

With that the cashier's patience reached its limit. "Look, fella, this is the only check I got today."

"Okay." He started to turn away, then turned back and asked, "Did you happen to notice if she was left-handed or right-handed?" Laura was left-handed. But what would finding out prove?

The cashier glared at him. "No." She looked behind him. "Next, please."

Drew stepped back. Mary Shepherd. This had to be a dream. A terribly realistic dream.

Or was he going insane?

Of course he was going insane. He'd just followed "Laura" across town. If that wasn't crazy, what was? Outside, he stopped by a strip of sidewalk shops and leaned against the warm stucco wall.

He tilted his face toward the sun, then closed his eyes and heaved a sigh. Had it been some sort of mirage? Or had he invented the whole thing? That was seeming more and more possible.

Maybe he needed a vacation. He and Samantha could go someplace far away from Nantucket, far from the memories that haunted every street and alleyway. Samantha had been talking about going away anyhow. After seeing nothing but ocean all year round, she wanted to go to the mountains. Maybe that was just the break he needed.

He opened his eyes and glanced at his watch. One o'clock. One o'clock and no specters in sight. It was just an ordinary Wednesday afternoon. Might as well get back to work, he thought. *As if I can get anything done today.*

His gait back was slow and decidedly heavy. His head ached, and his stomach was in knots. He was tired, he decided, not insane. Drew almost smiled to himself. Bennetts didn't go insane—his father never would have tolerated it

By the time he got to the town house with the Biggins, Bennett and Holloway, Architects sign, he had just about convinced himself that he'd seen a woman that looked something like Laura and his imagination had conjured the rest. He was probably coming down with the flu and had experienced an elaborate hallucination.

Then he saw her again.

She was slipping some postcards into a mailbox not half a block away. This time there was no one else around her, and he got a good look. She was real, all right—and if nothing else, this Mary Shepherd had an extraordinary resemblance to Laura. He wondered again if she was a twin, but he couldn't believe Laura's overbearing mother could ever give up anything she considered hers. And she'd always considered Laura *hers*.

The woman held the last postcard back and took a pen out. She jotted something on it.

With her left hand.

"Hey!" Drew called to her in a voice that trembled. "Laura!"

She didn't even look at him. Instead, she raised her hand to stop a passing cab, and thrust the card at the mailbox, apparently without noticing it slip to the ground. She stepped into the street toward the car.

"Hey!" he called again.

She didn't pause, she didn't turn, she just opened the door and climbed in. As the car trundled toward him, he breathed her name one more time. She turned and looked straight at him. It was an arrow to the heart. Her face was as familiar to him as his own child's except for the utterly blank expression in her eyes.

It was more than blank, it was totally empty. No spark, no smile, no anger, nothing. No emotion at all. She was like a ghost—he went cold at the thought—or a shadow of a person from another time.

A chill—was it fear?—rattled through him.

"*Damn it,*" he muttered as the car disappeared around a corner. Of all the things he would have imagined feeling at seeing Laura again, fear shouldn't have been on the list.

He went to the postcard on the ground and picked it up. His adrenal glands must have worn themselves out because, even as he studied the handwriting, certain it was Laura's, he was numb.

The card was addressed to a Nella Laraby in Litchfield, Connecticut.

Dear Nella,

Everyone was right, this island is heavenly. It's exactly the respite I needed. Thanks again for all your help. I can't wait to see you next week and tell you all about the trip.

Love to all, Mary

Mary. Further proof that this was just a case of mistaken identity. Not a ghost, not a hallucination.

He looked back at the postcard, thinking maybe he should hold on to it as proof. But what did it prove? And who did he need to prove it to? It was handwriting, that was all, and signed by "Mary."

No one would take it as proof that Laura was around. It even gave him doubts. Besides, he had no right to keep it. He opened the mailbox and dropped the card in.

Someone clapped a hand on his shoulder and Drew jumped.

“Whoa! Didn’t mean to scare you, buddy,” Drew’s friend and co-worker Vince Reese said. “What’s going on? What are you doing out here?”

Drew turned to face Vince, whose clownlike orange hair on his tall, lanky body was like a flame on a matchstick. “You wouldn’t believe it if I told you. You’d think I was nuts. Hell, *I* think maybe I’m nuts.”

“Try me.”

Drew hesitated, then shrugged. “I just saw Laura.”

There was a long silence.

“Laura?” Vince echoed at last.

Drew nodded and rubbed his eyes with his thumb and index finger.

“As *in...your* Laura?”

Drew tightened his lips and nodded. “Yup. Chased her all the way across town. Ready to commit me?”

Vince’s screwed up his brow. “You just saw Laura. Uh-huh. What was she doing?”

“Window-shopping mostly.” Drew thrust his hands into his pockets. “And then she went for a ride in a cab. So—” he puffed air into his cheeks, then blew it out “—ready to get back in to work?” He started to walk toward the office building.

Vince put a hand up to stop him. “You just saw Laura shopping and riding in a taxi and now you want to go back in to work?”

Drew raised his shoulders. “I considered chasing the cab but I’m not as fast as I used to be, you know. I can hardly ever run fifty miles an hour anymore.” His flippant tone belied the trembling in his chest

Vince shook his head and fell in step beside Drew. “I don’t get this. Is it April Fool’s Day?” He looked at his watch. “No, it’s May. What’s going on, man? Do you need a visit with the old head shrinker, or are you pulling a joke on me?”

“Neither.” Drew clapped Vince on the shoulder. “I saw a woman who looked just exactly like Laura. Exactly. But she slipped away before I got a chance to see her up close.” *Or I let her slip away*, he thought. *I let her slip away all afternoon because I was afraid to know for sure one way or the other.*

“But you do know it couldn’t have been Laura. I mean, it’s been more than a year since—”

“A year and three months.” Drew nodded. “I know. I haven’t totally lost my mind. It was obviously a case of mistaken identity.”

“That’s it.” Vince’s voice was just a little bit too patronizing.

Drew ignored it. “I probably just need a good long rest. I thought maybe Samantha and I would go up to Vermont for a while.”

“That’s not such a bad idea,” Vince said. “You’ve always been a major workaholic, but over the past year you’ve been killing yourself working here *and* at home. Tell you what, I’ll go with you guys. How about Disney World?”

Drew stopped. “I appreciate the offer, but I was thinking of the mountains. Samantha’s been making noise about seeing them.” He sighed, thinking about her, then shook his head. “I owe her something special. She’s the most precious thing in my life. If it weren’t for her, I don’t know what I would have done this past year.”

Vince gave him a dismissive slap on the back. “Well, you got through it, man.” Obviously he was eager to brush Drew’s momentary lapse in sanity under the carpet.

Did I? “I guess I did.”

“And today you just saw someone who looked a lot like Laura. Not actually Laura herself.” Vince tried to give a little laugh, but it sounded to Drew more like a dismissive cough. “Because, you know...”

“I know.” Their eyes met. Yes, Drew knew. He knew all too well. He’d had more than a year to get used to the idea, to accept it and go on with his life.

Laura Bennett, his beautiful young wife and the mother of little Samantha, had been dead and buried for more than a year.

Chapter Two

The rest of the day passed slowly for Drew. He got nothing done in the way of work. Instead, he spent most of his time looking out the window at the breezy May afternoon. The brilliant sun shining through the old mottled window threw prisms of color across the floor.

He could picture the exact color of Laura's hair in sun like this—it was the color of a copper penny, gleaming as if newly minted. And her eyes, almond shaped, were the palest of blue. Not the emerald green of Irish stereotype, but blue like the sky on a clear summer morning.

It wasn't her, he told himself. *It couldn't have been. That's impossible.* But the truth was he found it harder to believe it *wasn't* her. He'd never been one to experience hallucinations or to imagine things. And his eyesight was perfect, though he was hardly likely to assume someone was Laura, no matter how great the similarity, without some good solid detail.

He closed his stinging eyes tightly, then opened them and looked out the window again. He couldn't stop picturing Laura in the sunny spring day. It had taken more than a year to stop thinking of her every hour of every day. Now there was a look-alike out there somewhere. It made him want to barricade himself in his house and never go out again, never take a chance on seeing that woman—whoever she was—again. He wasn't sure he could survive another delve into that sort of grief.

He wasn't the only one who couldn't go through it again. His eyes fell on a picture on his desk. It was a little girl with auburn hair and blue eyes, smiling into the camera and right into his heart. Samantha, his daughter. Sam, Laura had called her. Like in *Green Eggs and Ham*, the Dr. Seuss book. "I do not like green eggs and ham, I do not like them, Sam I am."

He could still hear Laura's musical voice, like a ghost in the hall, reciting the words.

He remembered every word of the book even though he hadn't picked it up since the day of the accident. She'd left it on the kitchen table after reading it to Sam at breakfast. When he'd come home that afternoon, after a tinny voice on the telephone had informed him that she'd been killed in a crash on I-95 just over the Connecticut state line, the book had still been sitting open on the kitchen table.

For some reason, that had struck him as proof that she was coming back. It was all a bad dream, of course. Laura was coming back; she hadn't finished reading *Green Eggs and Ham* to Sam. It was impossible to imagine that she wouldn't come back and pick it up right where she'd left off. And something in his mind told him that if he just left the book there, didn't touch it, she would come back to it.

That had only lasted a few hours, though. When he came back from the coroner's office in Connecticut late that night, his secretary, Mindy, had already tidied up and put the book back on the bookshelf with hundreds of others. That small fact alone had clinched it for him. The spell of shock and disbelief that had suspended his grief was broken.

Laura was dead. She'd walked out on him without warning or explanation early, one February morning. That alone was baffling enough, but she hadn't just left Drew, she'd also left their three-year-old daughter behind. She'd read the book to her, taken her to preschool and then kept on driving. It was so unlike Laura that to this day he couldn't figure it in to his acceptance of her death.

But during those last few months, she'd done a lot of things he would have thought were unlike her. And there were insecurities, accusations, suspicions. He'd realized she was upset, but he'd had no idea she was upset enough to leave her family.

But she had. And only hours later she was pronounced dead in a hospital two hundred miles away. There was never an opportunity for explanations or restitution.

The long months had plodded by to the present. Drew's eyes focused on the picture of Sam again. He often wondered just how much she remembered about her mother. She'd been so young when it had happened—barely three. At first she'd felt the loss constantly. It had been hell having to explain to her over and over again that, no, Mommy wasn't coming back. Sam seemed to think

that was a concept that had flexibility. Mommy wasn't home one day but maybe the next—when she really wanted to show her a new drawing—she would be back.

Drew picked up a pen and started sketching absently on the ink blotter in front of him.

Gradually Sam's memories seemed to have faded. Now she merely asked questions about Laura. What was she like? Was she nice? Was she pretty? Drew never knew if she'd truly bounced back and lost those young memories, or if she didn't remember because she didn't want to remember.

Just like Drew didn't want to. Because remembering was too painful.

He added a couple of lines to his sketch. A cloud. He couldn't blame Laura for leaving, though. Not entirely. He'd had a lot of time to think about it, and had realized many regrets of his own. There were too many things he should have said but didn't. Perhaps worse, there were too many things he shouldn't have said but did. Sometimes he felt he was as responsible for her death as the car accident had been.

If he had it to do over again, he would have done things so differently.

But he didn't have things to do over again. That had been the hardest lesson to learn over the past year; he had to accept that she wasn't coming back and that his regrets were useless.

Drew looked back down at what he'd been doodling. It was a very rough sketch of the children's beach, near the Port Authority. He added a few lines to the water. Laura had always liked to go there and watch the boats come and go. He hadn't been there in months, hadn't even thought about it until now. Of course, he hadn't drawn anything other than lines and angles in as long, either. He started to sketch her into the picture, then slapped the pen down on the desk. Laura was dead, and like the rest of the dead population, she was going to stay that way. He had to accept it.

Mary Shepherd fingered the ring on the street vendor's cart. It was an Irish Claddagh ring. She knew because one of the women at the shelter had worn one when she'd arrived. She'd come in with it symbolizing attachment to a man who abused her. By the time she'd left, healed and renewed, she'd turned it to symbolize a woman alone. The ring and its meanings had always appealed to Mary in some strange way that she couldn't quite name.

Of course, there were a lot of things Mary couldn't quite name. Herself, not the least of them.

For a year now she'd been Mary Shepherd because she'd woken up in St. Joseph's Memorial Hospital in Connecticut with a horrendous head wound, rope burns on her wrists and ankles and no memory of how any of it had happened. No memory of her life before. She wore no wedding ring, but her left ring finger was creased as though she'd worn a ring there for a long time and only taken it off recently. But she didn't even know her name, much less what sort of ring she might have worn.

"Psychogenic amnesia," the doctors had called it. Her reaction to a trauma so great she couldn't bear to remember it. Could last a month, could last forever. There was no way to tell.

Mary's money was on forever. Because in fifteen months she'd had no memory—good or bad, recent or distant—beyond small instinctive pulls. Like the one that had brought her to Nantucket. She had such an affinity for water that the women at the shelter where she lived and worked had teased that she was probably a navy captain in charge of hundreds of men at sea, and who wouldn't want to forget that? But when she'd seen the pictures of Nantucket in the travel agent's window, she'd known that she *had* to see it in person. It had to be Nantucket, not Cape Cod, not Bayville, but Nantucket.

So her co-workers had pooled their money and sent her north on a bus. A well-deserved rest, they called it, for the hardest worker at Sisters Anonymous.

She looked back at the ring. Turn it one way, you're one thing. Slip it off and turn it around and you're something else altogether. Maybe that was why it had always appealed to her. The idea that she could just turn a magic ring around and be the person she was before the accident would have been so wonderful.

Sam I am. The odd little phrase came to her, as it sometimes did, without warning or explanation. *Sam I am.* She'd twisted it around and analyzed it every way possible. Was her name Sam? Was there a man in her life named Sam? Did the letters stand for something else? It had even

occurred to her that she might have been in the armed services, thinking of “Uncle Sam,” but none of that seemed right.

The sun glinted in her eyes from the silver in her finger. Yes, magic would be wonderful whether it was in the ring or in the air. Too bad it didn’t exist. She set the ring back in its place on the cart, looked at it for a moment and asked the vendor, “How much?”

The wizened old proprietor scratched his chin. “For you, ten dollars.”

She smiled. Most of the pieces there were marked ten dollars. “Will you take five?” He hesitated and she added, “It’s all I have and . . . I really want the ring.” She didn’t have a lot of money and virtually no budget for extras like this, but the magic she’d attributed to the ring didn’t seem as absurd as it should have. When she’d slipped it on her finger, she’d had the feeling that something exciting was about to happen.

“I could never resist a pretty face,” the man said, accepting her money.

She slipped the ring on and marveled at the comfortable way it settled at the base of her finger. In some small way it made her feel a little more whole. It was like another piece in the puzzle this week on Nantucket had become.

As she walked down Federal Street, she listened intently to her inner voice, trying to hear some tiny murmur of recognition, some small explanation of why it had brought her to Nantucket. But there was nothing beyond a strange feeling of comfort and safety in the quaint, winding streets and tall, narrow houses.

She stopped in front of a linen shop and looked at a children’s bunk bed in the window. Something stirred inside of her. Her eyes scanned the other objects for something else that might make her stomach do that small flip. Then she realized the feeling had come not from what she was looking, at but from the fact that someone was looking at her. Someone at her side.

She turned her head sharply and caught the eye of a tall, thin man with vivid red hair sticking straight up and out. His wide pale eyes stared at her as if she were a ghost. His mouth was agape.

For a moment, her heart pounded with terror, then she glanced at the throngs of people milling around them, and relaxed. *Safety in numbers*. When she looked back at him, his face was unchanged. Clearly he was just an unbalanced person, she decided.

She gave him a polite half smile, then cast her eyes down and walked farther down the sidewalk. The feeling that he was following her clung to her back like a cold, wet towel. Every once in a while she was tempted to stop at a shop window, but she kept catching glimpses of the man in the corner of her eye, following her with that comical expression of some sort of shock on his face.

A thought came to her, so absurd that she tried to dismiss it. But she couldn’t. Was it possible that he recognized her? She met his eyes but his expression didn’t change. He didn’t move to speak to her, which he surely would have if he knew her. Instead, he just stared with that weird expression.

Good Lord, did he recognize her for some dark reason? Was she on a *wanted* poster in the Nantucket post offices? Had she done something terrible, then returned to the scene? Was she, even now, frightening the citizens as she passed?

No! The word echoed within her like the voice of a guardian angel. She hadn’t done anything criminal, she knew it. Of course, she had no facts to back her up, no alibi for anything before awakening in the hospital, but she just knew she wasn’t wanted for any crime. The very idea was laughable.

This guy following her was just some nutcase. As soon as he looked away, Mary slipped into one door of a corner kite store, and out the other. Best to stay away from nutcases. Just before she ran down the alley to lose him, she saw him enter the store. She hesitated only for a moment to see the top of that fuzzy orange head as he milled slowly down the aisle behind a tall display shelf.

Then she ran.

The doorbell rang, startling Drew out of the work he was trying so hard to submerge himself in. Somehow he thought it would be easier to work at his home office after the shake-up of “seeing”

Laura, but the truth was the only thing he could submerge himself in was thoughts of her. The doorbell rang again.

He looked up, trying for one irrational moment to place the sound, then got up from his desk and walked to the front door, stopping along the way to pick up a stuffed frog that was in his path. Sam was going to a friend's house after preschool. The baby-sitter wasn't planning to bring her home until after dinner.

When he opened the door, he was surprised to see Vince standing there. His flaming orange hair was in its usual state of disarray, but his skin was ghostly white, with every freckle standing out on his skin like a fleck of dark paint. Alarm zinged in his eyes.

Drew's adrenaline surged. "What's wrong?" The stuffed frog flattened in his grip. - "Nothing." Vince glanced behind Drew and gestured. "Can I come in? We've got to talk."

Drew's heart accelerated. "Sure, come in." He stepped back and led the way through to the kitchen, tossing the frog onto the sofa as they passed.

"Coffee?" Drew offered.

Vince gave a shake of his head. "How are you feeling, man? All right?"

"Fine, Vince." A clammy feeling of trepidation crawled up Drew's spine. "Just fine." He knew, even though his soul rattled with incredulity, what Vince was going to tell him. After long seconds, he found his voice. "What's up?"

Vince scraped a chair back from the table and sat heavily. "Why don't you sit down?"

"I don't need to sit down." Drew leaned against the countertop and folded his arms across his throbbing chest. He studied his friend for a few moments before saying, "You saw her today, didn't you?"

There was no need to ask who they were talking about. Vince nodded.

Drew let out a tight breath. "Tell me."

"I'm sorry, man. When we talked before I really thought you were going nuts. I mean—" he twirled his finger outside of his temple "—Cloud Cuckoo Land, but now—"

"Where was she?"

"Federal Street. Thereabouts."

"Did you get a good look at her?" Drew asked. "I mean a *really* good look?"

"Well, you know, I felt I should be subtle. I just sort of blended into the crowd and followed her. That's how the pros do it. I saw her from three feet away. It was definitely her."

"Did she see you?"

There was a pause. "She saw me once. But she didn't talk to me. Didn't even act like she knew who I was. Just gave me a polite smile then walked past and sort of hurried down the street." Vince frowned and shook his head.

Drew's chest felt as though it was being crushed in a vise. How long could he have this feeling before it developed into a real honest-to-God heart attack? "Where did she go?"

"That's the other odd thing. She went into a kite store then just vanished. I followed her in, but she was gone. Like a gho..." He stopped and bit down on his lower lip.

"What time was this?" Even to his own ears, Drew sounded like Jack Webb from the TV show "Dragnet," but he couldn't manage more than a few direct questions.

Vince shrugged. "Just half an hour ago at the most."

Drew raked a trembling hand through his hair and stood up. "I've got to go." It was her. Logic be damned, he *knew* it was her.

"Whoa, buddy, better let me drive." Vince stood, as well. "You're in no state to get behind the wheel."

Drew met Vince's eyes with more impatience than he intended. "No." He tried to soften his voice but there didn't seem to be time. If Laura was alive and on Nantucket—hell, even if she was

a ghost—he knew where she’d go eventually. “I’ve got to do this alone.” Without giving Vince a moment to respond, he turned, snatched his car keys from the table by the door and left the house.

Mary looked around at the practically empty street she’d turned onto. Even though she’d felt as if she’d been walking in circles on the tiny Nantucket streets, she knew she hadn’t been to this one before. Yet it seemed vaguely familiar, like something from a distant dream. To the right were quaint storefronts, to the left a long border of water, with boats gliding across the glassy surface. The sun was shining, a warm breeze carried the faint scent of saltwater, and in the distance the long expanse of water sparkled like jewels on blue velvet. She hadn’t felt this alive, this *comfortable*, in fifteen months.

Her whole life.

She knotted her sweater around her shoulders, slipped her espadrilles off and ambled down the street swinging them in her hands. The pavement was warm beneath her feet. The atmosphere was delicious. She didn’t think about where she was going, so she was surprised when she found herself on a lovely little square beach that looked out onto the ferry boats. Children ran all around her, squealing and laughing in the warm golden sand. In the summer, the beach was probably crowded with brightly colored towels and rubber floats.

She wanted to be here in the summer. She wanted to see that

An empty wooden park bench sat in front of a colorful jungle gym and Mary sat down and closed her eyes, tilting her face toward the sun. Kaleidoscope patterns played behind her closed eyelids, forming and unforming, never quite becoming memory.

She didn’t know how long she sat like that, but when she opened her eyes again, the sun had shifted its position and shadows had lengthened across the sand. There were fewer children out playing, but the light still danced warmly on her skin. She thought about getting up, but there was something so peaceful about this place that she had to breathe it in, just a little bit longer.

Then he came into view.

A man, perhaps six feet tall, with glossy chestnut hair and piercing eyes of a color she couldn’t see, was walking slowly toward her. For a crazy second, she had an impulse to call out to him. It was an irrational impulse, she mused. Like one you’d follow in a dream.

Something shivered up her spine. *This isn’t a dream. He’s not going to turn into a crow and fly away. He’s coming toward me. No, he’s not*, she told herself. *Why would he be coming to me?*

He continued his even stride toward her. As he got closer, she noticed that his deep brown eyes changed from piercing to something else. A combination of emotions mingled in his expression, each with its own unmistakable distinction. She wasn’t sure why she felt she could read them, but she was sure she could.

He stopped directly before her and stared down into her eyes for a long moment.

She pulled her sweater tighter across her shoulders and stood up, looking back at him. She thought she should say something, but she couldn’t think of one word that would have made sense. Her eyes darted to the right, where a woman lay on a blanket on the sand with two small children at her heels. A few yards away from that, a teenage boy and girl were having what looked like a young lovers’ spat.

She turned back to the stranger before her. Something about his expression was compelling, but she figured that under the circumstances she would be safer just getting away from him. She gave a polite smile and said, “Excuse me.”

She started to brush past, when he grasped her upper arm and spun her around to face him.

They were inches apart. His eyes were lined faintly with red, making him look more tragic than threatening. Mary’s breath caught in her throat, but for some reason the terror she expected didn’t reach her.

A small muscle twitched on the side of his clenched jaw, as if he were keeping some emotion in close check.

She stood frozen, mesmerized by his eyes, as he lifted his other hand to her shoulder and slowly pulled her toward him. Why wasn't she afraid? Any reasonable person would be hightailing it out of there, but she didn't move. The pounding of her heart felt more like excitement than fear.

His hand slipped around to her shoulder blade. The movement was hypnotic, almost as if it were familiar to her. She knew exactly what was next. She saw it coming like a locomotive but was powerless to stop it.

She didn't want to stop it.

He pulled her to him and his mouth descended onto hers. The touch of his lips was a spark. When he deepened his kiss and she felt his tongue probe her mouth, the spark became a raging flame. With an instinct wholly unfamiliar to her, she closed her eyes and raised her hands to the back of his head, tangling her fingers in his thick, dark hair.

This was a dance her body knew, even if her mind didn't.

She felt his shuddering breath on her skin, and her body echoed it. He ran his hands down her sides, slipped them around to her lower back and crushed her to him. Their bodies pressed together like palms in a handshake. Mary drew in a breath and released it in a sigh. His powerful embrace made her feel as if she was finally in exactly the right place.

Which was crazy, she knew, but it was also too comfortable to fight.

His mouth moved over hers, reacting to her movements in a practiced way. Everything felt *right*. Like the last piece clicking easily, triumphantly, into a puzzle.

Except that it wasn't right, it was wrong. This was a stranger! She had to stop.

"Stop!" Mary pulled back with some effort "What do you think you're doing?" Her voice was too breathy to be commanding. "That's assault!" *Maybe, but on whose part? Why did I do that?*

"I thought I'd lost it when I saw you yesterday," the man said in a husky voice that made her insides quiver. "I thought I was nuts, but it *was* you."

Yesterday. What was yesterday? Had they met before? Was that why he seemed familiar? Mary concentrated and remembered. This was the man who watched her drive past in the cab. The only reason she remembered was because the way he'd looked at her had made her feel so peculiar. She'd had a crazy impulse to tell the driver to take her back so she could talk to the man. But she had nothing to say to him. Then or now.

Her eyes returned to the man before her and she found her voice. "I think you must have me confused with someone else." There. That was a nice comfortable explanation. He wasn't a maniac—maniacs didn't kiss like that

Of course that didn't explain why *she'd* indulged so thoroughly in the kiss.

All the emotions fell from his face except onesadness. Anyone could have identified it. His eyelids dipped and he shook his head and uttered a single low word. A name. "Laura."

The tiny hairs on the back of her neck prickled. Why?

"I—I'm sorry—"

"Are you real?"

"Am I *real*?" Where was the fear she should have felt at this strange and intense exchange? Why wasn't she running by now? "I'm as real as you are." She considered. "Maybe more."

"But—the body. I saw the body."

This was getting creepy. "I don't know what you're talking about. Now if you'll excuse me, I see my friend waiting for me over there." She gestured vaguely toward a group of people. Her voice, which was supposed to be confident, was as weak as a child's. She looked into his eyes to see if he'd noticed her lack of conviction.

"Laura...How can this be happening?" He looked lost, she thought. Lost. Utterly defenseless. She knew how that felt.

"My name is Mary Shepherd," she said, like that would clear up all the confusion. "I'm visiting from Connecticut."

“Mary Shepherd?” He repeated the name as if repeating a foreign language on an audiotape. He gave a humorless spike of laughter. “No, you’re not. You’re home.”

The simplicity with which he stated it almost made her laugh. Almost. Instead, she felt her breath catch in her throat. *Home*, he’d said. *You’re home*. A slow tingle moved down the back of her neck.

“I’m...not Mary Shepherd?” She tried to smile but it was tremulous at best. “And who do you think I am, then?” It was meant to sound light, as though *of course* she knew who she was and this man was a fool if he thought she was someone else. But the possibility that he knew more than she did was just too real. A thin vibration ran through her chest, like a single violin note strung out to a trembling finish.

Maybe he *knew* who she was.

“Is this a joke?” he asked, his tone rising.

Ridiculous, she thought. *He doesn’t know who I am. He’s just a madman. Evidently Nantucket is full of them.*

“Are you kidding?” he prodded. His brown eyes searched hers desperately.

It was the desperation that spooked her the most. She had to get away. “Am I laughing?” She took a step back.

He laid a hand on her shoulder and she could feel it shaking. It was like fifty thousand volts running through him to her. “Laura! What the hell is going on?”

She looked around for help—a policeman, anything. A psychiatrist.

“Laura!”

His pleading exclamation turned her attention back to him. She straightened her back. “I told you, I’m not—”

“Good Lord, do you think I don’t know my own wife when I see her?”

A blow to the gut couldn’t have impacted her more.

He continued in a softer voice. “My God, Laura, it really *is* you.”

She stood frozen, looking at him. “You’re mistaken.”

“Do you think I could possibly forget? Your hair.” His fingers tickled through the shoulder-length ends of her hair. “It’s shorter but the same color.”

A tickle skirted her neck and, for reasons she couldn’t begin to understand, she imagined him kissing her there.

“And your face.” His thumb traced a burning line across her cheekbone. “My God, do you think I could forget that face? It’s been over a year, but there wasn’t a day I didn’t think about it—”

Over a year. Her eyes closed and she fought the urge to lean into his touch.

“Your mouth.” He traced the line of her lips with his finger.

Without thinking, she parted her lips and his finger nearly touched the tip of her tongue. A lightning bolt shot straight into the pit of her stomach. He caught her eye and cocked his head slightly. The movement was small, but meaningful. Familiar? No. But electrifying.

He put his finger to his own lips, then dropped his hand as if he’d touched something white-hot. “I thought I would die without you.”

She swallowed but a hard lump remained in her throat. When her voice came out it was barely more than a whisper. “What—what happened to your wife?”

He lowered his brow and a hardness returned to his eyes. “*Great* question. Why the hell did you let me believe—let all of us believe—that you were dead?”

Suddenly she remembered coming to at St. Joseph’s. The thundering head injury. The doctors had said that someone had hit her. It had taken a full year to grow the hair back to a decent length after the surgery. And the rope burns on her wrists and ankles, burns that had burrowed right through her flesh and left scars she could see to this day. She couldn’t ignore the obvious question.

Had Laura wanted this man to find her? Or had she fled him to save herself—only to end up losing herself completely?

The thought was terrifying in its blindness. She pressed past the man whom, only a moment ago, she'd felt desire for. "I think you've got the wrong person," she said. She had to find a place to be alone and think. "I'm really sorry you lost your wife, but I'm not her."

He made no move to follow her, as far as she could tell, but his voice rang clearly behind her. "Okay, you're not her. You just have her face, her eyes, her hair, her voice, and her *scar* on your chin."

She stopped, but didn't turn back. Her heart was banging so ferociously, she was sure he could hear it eight feet away. She *did* have a scar on her chin; it had always been there. She'd wondered a million times where it came from. Without really thinking, she raised her fingers to the small bumpy spot

He spoke again, but he hadn't made a move toward her. "Laura, why did you come back if you were going to hide from me?" He let out an exasperated sigh. "Never mind that, why did you leave?"

She didn't answer. She couldn't

"Okay, forget me." She heard him take two or three steps toward her on the pavement. "Forget me altogether. How could you leave your child?"

Child!

Her knees went weak. It had never occurred to her that she might have children. That seemed like something a mother couldn't forget no matter what happened to her. Her heart twisted inside out and she thought for a moment she might get sick. Then she turned, very slowly, to face him.

"Child?" she repeated faintly.

He gave a curt nod, his eyes mere slits. "Or had you forgotten—"

"As a matter of fact I had."

"That, along with the rest of your family?" He stopped and frowned. "What did you say?"

"I said..." She swallowed. She didn't know who she *was* but she believed she never would have left a child behind with a physically abusive man. "Well, anyway, I *meant* that if I am this Laura you're talking about, then I *have* forgotten. I've forgotten everything. There was...an accident." She smiled but it felt like baring her teeth.

His featured hardened. "And you've forgotten Sam as well as me?"

Sam! The word hit her like a slap across the face. Could this be the Sam she'd been trying to recall? It had to be. Her heart raced. "Sam? Do I—do you— have a little boy?"

"What are you talking about? Sam? Samantha is your *daughter*."

Her breath caught in her throat. Daughter. Sam was her daughter.

"Laura? What's going on here?"

She returned her gaze to him, still barely able to breathe. "That name...I've..." She stopped, realizing how difficult it would be to explain when she herself understood so little. "I'm afraid I don't remember you, either."

He lowered his chin, considering, then seemed to dismiss the thought. "What are you talking about? *Amnesia?*" he scoffed. Then he muttered, "That's a hell of an excuse."

"It's not an excuse" she said. Why would she need an excuse to not find her identity? Her eyes began to burn. Sam. Finally one fact in the months of confusion was starting to make sense. She wanted to spill her whole story and have him fill in all the missing pieces. She wanted to *remember*. But she didn't know this man from...from any other and, without really knowing anything about him, she would have to be an idiot to tell him she was a woman, alone, with no real identity.

"Maybe you can tell me why you're so convinced I'm Laura," she said. It was a pathetic attempt at detached curiosity.

"Tell you? How about I show you?" He whipped his wallet out of the back pocket of his jeans and fumbled through it until he produced a small stack of photos and handed them to her.

Some of them were wallet-size portraits, some snapshots, but all of them had one thing in common. They were unmistakably her. Her with him; her in a graduation cap and gown; her with a blond woman on the beach, in a pink swimsuit; her smiling and resting her hand on her own pregnant belly; and one of her holding hands with a small girl...

"Oh my God," she whispered. She ran her finger across the little girl in the picture. She had light auburn hair that gleamed in the light of the flash. Her eyes were wide and clear blue, and her uninhibited smile was pure happiness. She was a beautiful child.

Oh, how she would have missed her if she were her child, Mary thought "How old is she?"

He hesitated. "Sam is four."

So young. She needed her mother still, but was that Mary? It was difficult to fathom. "She's lovely."

"I agree."

She met his eyes. "I'll bet she's sweet."

"She's the greatest kid ever." He laughed harshly. "Come on, Laura, you *know* that."

"I know that," she echoed without recollection. After another moment, she slipped the photo to the back of the pile and removed the graduation picture of Laura. She examined it closely. The scar on her chin was clearly visible, even a little bigger than it was now. She raised her hand to her chin again, then turned to him.

"How did I get it? The scar, I mean."

"You fell off a horse," he answered slowly, studying her with a different look now.

"I ride?"

"No." He was looking so deeply into her eyes that she felt naked. A tiny smile played at the corner of his mouth. "Not very well." The smile disappeared. "You know that."

"No, I don't."

He cocked his head to one side. "Come on."

"That's fairly cynical."

"I'm not a fool."

She smiled wanly. "Then do I bring out this cynicism in you?"

"I'm not cynical," he protested. "I'm wary. You always did have a way of blowing things way out of proportion. Are you trying to tell me you don't remember *anything*? Nothing at all? Not your name? Your first dog's name? Zero?"

"I remember what I had for breakfast this morning, and where I bought my shoes, but I can't remember anything beyond the last year or so."

He opened his mouth, then closed it and shifted his weight. When he spoke again, his voice registered absolute bemusement. "This isn't a put-on? You honestly have some sort of amnesia or something? Does that really happen?"

She paused and studied him with the impartial eye she'd developed at Sisters Anonymous. "You've got a lot of questions, but let me ask you one." *One that might answer a lot of questions about what happened to me and why, if I'm your wife, I've spent the last year with no identity, hundreds of miles away.* She kept her gaze steady. "Is your wife the kind of person who would lie to you?"

Chapter Three

He eyed her steadily without speaking at first. “My wife,” he said slowly, “is the kind of person who was so scared to trust the people who loved her that she turned away from them.”

“From them? Or from you?”

“From all of us. Especially from me.” He swallowed. “She was so sure that I didn’t love her that she distanced herself from me. To protect herself from the pain of...I guess of losing me.” He looked hard into her eyes. “Isn’t that crazy?”

He was obviously expecting her to take umbrage. “Maybe so, but that sort of thing doesn’t usually happen without a good reason.”

“A good reason,” he scoffed. “You mean like having parents who didn’t love each other and who didn’t *trust* each other? I’m sorry I don’t think that’s a good reason to re-create that atmosphere for your own daughter. I don’t think that’s a good reason to treat your husband like a criminal because he doesn’t...” He shook his head. “I don’t think that’s a good reason to retreat from your life so much that you eventually have to fake your own death in order to be alone.”

“Hey, maybe your wife had reasons to try and get away from you and maybe she didn’t, but I don’t know anything about that.”

“Laura, this is insane!”

“If this is truly me we’re talking about,” she began in a cold tone, noting how absurd her words were, “then I’m telling you for the last time, *I don’t remember*. All I know is that I woke up in a hospital a year ago with no idea who or where I was, and I’ve had to struggle through worse hell than you’ve probably ever known to try and make sense of it.”

They stood face-to-face like boxers. Then she added, “And if you cared so stinking much about me, how is it that you never came to find me?”

“Because you were dead!”

She splayed her arms and looked down at herself. “Apparently not.”

“I *thought* you were.”

“Oh, I see. You *thought* I was. Well, that’s good enough. That makes up for it.” She shook her head. “If that’s the sort of dumb faith you expected of your wife, then no wonder you thought she didn’t trust enough. Who could?”

“It wasn’t dumb faith. Your car was wrecked, there was a body wearing your jewelry, your *wedding* ring.” His voice weakened over those words. “All your identification was there.”

“Did you identify the body?”

“Yes—no. I mean, it was burnt beyond recognition.”

“Did you check the dental records?” She noticed how defensive she sounded, but she couldn’t help it. She felt a little sorry for him, but she felt even sorrier, not for herself, but for the woman she had apparently been.

The woman who had been allowed to disappear as “dead” when she was alive and struggling to go from day to day.

“No,” he answered. “It didn’t seem necessary to check the dental records.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Did you check the hospitals and police stations for Jane Does in the area?”

“Of course not. We thought we had you!” He was clearly losing patience.

So was she. “Then that’s dumb faith.”

He thumped his head with his palm. “God, if that isn’t just like you. You know there are *two* sides to this, not just yours. Don’t you think if there had been an *ounce* of doubt, I would have investigated? No, of course you don’t. You never did think I loved you.”

“Obviously there was reason enough to investigate further.” She shrugged, but his words had thrown her. *You never did think I loved you.* “If I’m Laura, I mean.”

“I give.” He shook his head, and let out a long breath. “I can’t argue with that. But who would believe this?”

“I have no choice but to believe it,” she said simply.

He was obviously still wrestling with believing her. “It’s just so farfetched. Amnesia?”

She folded her arms in front of her. It was a classic self-defense mechanism and she knew it.

“You want my medical history?”

“Yes.”

She considered this for a moment. “Me, too.”

He almost laughed, but sobered quickly. “What am I supposed to say, Laura? What do we do?”

She straightened. “I don’t have a lot of experience with this, either.”

When neither of them spoke, she said, “Let’s try this again. I guess we should get acquainted. I don’t even know your name.” She shook her head. “I’m sorry, but...”

“Drew,” he said. “Bennett. Drew Bennett. You’re—you’re Laura Bennett.” He looked around. “This is unbelievable,” he muttered under his breath.

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