

From the Editing Room Floor

Chapter 1

What was included...

Tom and Susan served as a wonderful example of a couple who knew how to make a marriage work. Laura hungered to learn all of their tricks. Despite taking note of a few key ingredients, such as communication and a sense of humor, Laura struggled to translate lessons learned from Tom and Susan into success for her own marriage. She was frustrated to discover, for the first time in their relationship, that distance didn't solve all strife. Laura was stressed with challenges she had never faced before, and she resented Kevin for not being there--neither physically nor emotionally--to help her.

The juicy details...

Tom and Susan had been high school sweethearts, they got married just out of high school, Tom went into the Navy and they moved to Hawaii. They later returned to New Hampshire to build a beautiful home right next to Susan's parents' house, and have since lived happily ever after. They were living Laura's dream. She looked at them in awe the entire time she lived with them. She wanted to learn their secrets. They were both hard workers, they worked well together, and they had a great sense of humor. Even when they were irritated with each other they maintained that sense of humor. Susan told Laura, too, that to make a marriage work it is important to not even consider divorce as an option. Laura held onto those words and set her sights on making her marriage work. She tried to keep in mind that the grass will always look greener

elsewhere, but one must get past that distraction and concentrate on the tasks at hand within the relationship. There was a song by Paul Simon that was especially inspiring to her called "Train in the Distance". She listened to it when she began to have doubts.

There were plenty of doubts to have, too. For instance, when Kevin finally left California on his ship in August, Laura had to wait for him to write so she could get his address. She didn't hear from him for more than six weeks. She didn't think it would have bothered her so much, but at the time Emily was having problems with her health, there was a lot going on with the whole issue of daycare, and college was chaotic and stressful. She had a lot to report to him and felt like she needed some help and support in dealing with it all. Then, when Kevin finally wrote to Laura, he opened with...

"Sorry I haven't written yet, but not much has happened.

The day we pulled out we had to "Man the Rails", which is stand in the sun on the flight deck and watch all the people on shore cry as we left. I thought it was funny because we had been apart so long already. The next three weeks went really smooth..."

After not hearing from him for so long Laura half expected to hear something more to the tune of, "Sorry I took so long to write, but my arms were shot off and I had to wait until new ones grew in their place before I could pick up a pencil. I tried to dictate letters to another Marine but couldn't find anyone who knew how to write in the English language. Then I tried to record an audio message only to find that all of the machines capable of recording were mysteriously sucked off the ship by aliens."

Inspired to keep a sense of humor about things, Laura attempted to keep her

disappointment at bay. Instead of writing back some nagging, whiny letter, asking Kevin how he could have ignored his family for so long, she composed a joke letter. Laura wrote him a typical letter, but added a post script, saying that she was enclosing something for him to read. Laura pointed out that Kevin had obviously not read his handbook, and that he needed to brush up on his writing home. Then she found a computer, and typed up a mock section from the [purely fictional] "United States Marine Corps Guide to Family Correspondence". She used quotes from Kevin's letter as examples of "Notary No-No's", and she made up a list of bogus writing techniques and subject matters that the USMC had deemed acceptable. Tom, Susan, and a number of Laura's college classmates read what Laura had written, and they all thought it was hilarious. Kevin, on the other hand, did not find it so amusing. He responded with...

You were right; I didn't get one of those handouts.

I see it is my fault though!! As you can tell I got your letter you wrote on Oct. 7th...You said you were more than slightly disappointed with my letter. Does this mean you don't want me to write any more? You were mad at me because I didn't write. Now you are mad at me because I do. I just can't win...

With this, Laura learned that if she wanted to introduce more humor to her relationship with her husband, she was clearly going to have to give Kevin warning. Despite the fact that she had included excerpts from *his* letter in her "handbook", he actually thought that it was something that the USMC had really issued.

What made matters worse, was that their letters took two to three weeks to get to one another, so they each had quite a delay between explanations in which to let negative feelings fester. For instance, when Laura had written that letter on October seventh, she had just gotten his second letter in which he wrote, “By the way, how is she [Emily] doing? You know what happens to me when I go away from people. Well it hasn’t happened to you but to Emily it is starting to...” Kevin had told Laura once that separation from his family felt very “out of sight, out of mind”; this is what he was referring to here. Little did Kevin know that while Emily was “out of sight, out of mind” for him, she had come down with a bad case of pneumonia. That illness landed her in the hospital for four days. Soon after that, she started having asthma attacks, and through all of this she was still having one to two ear infections every month.

With all that Laura was going through with Emily, never mind the simple overwhelming love that she felt for her precious little girl, that insight into Kevin’s heart was incredibly painful. She suddenly felt more like an angry mother bear than an adoring wife. Laura was sure all of that didn’t help the tone in her letters over the next few weeks. Even setting the subject of Emily aside, she was growing frustrated and disappointed with the way things were going in the marriage. Time apart had always helped them in the past. They had been a couple who actually got along better when the relationship was long-distance. But now, just when Laura was attempting to bring a new sense of optimism and energy to the marriage, distance was no longer the perfect answer to their problems.

And on the subject of pregnancy and childhood...

Neither Laura nor Kevin had been born into an ideal family situation. Not only

was Laura unplanned, but she was born the same week her father graduated high school. Her parents “did the right thing” and married, but it just wasn’t to be.

Kevin’s parents were older and were married long before conception, but when his mother, Linda, found out that she was pregnant with him, his father demanded an abortion. He had two children from a previous marriage and wanted no more. Linda refused the abortion and so began a drawn-out battle between the two. The marriage ultimately ended with Kevin’s father leaving Linda and Kevin when Kevin was three years old. He was always openly told this story, and it had always been very clear to him that his father left because he wanted nothing to do with his son. Kevin had said on multiple occasions that he would never demand an abortion, no matter how much he didn’t want a kid.

Chapter 3

An introduction to a hospital...

Upon arrival at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Laura and Carol had to pass some time while awaiting the initial report from Dr. O’Connor. This is what Laura found during that wait...

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center was the biggest, most beautiful hospital Laura had ever seen. Situated on the outskirts of Hanover, New Hampshire, it was utilized by students attending the Ivy League Dartmouth College Medical School (also located in Hanover). Laura found it breath-taking. The patient rooms, and even the

ICU's, all had picture windows to allow in plenty of natural light, and from them one could see the beautifully kept grounds and mountain views that surround the hospital. The set-up in the central part of the building was much like a mall. At first glance Laura saw a florist shop, a general store, a bookstore (with video rentals), dry cleaners, an Italian food shop, a bakery, a gift shop, a bank, a hair salon, a travel agency, and a pharmacy. She learned that at noon on most days, a volunteer came in to play a grand piano in the lobby. All of the walls displayed art by local school children and artists. On the second floor was a cafeteria with food so good that Laura was told local people came in from town to eat there. Laura knew that if she ever had to spend time in a hospital, she would want to be at DHMC. And time to spend is exactly what she had. She thought she'd never get to see the elusive Dr. O'Connor.

...And David's House

Laura didn't know what she expected David's House to be like, but what she found was absolutely amazing. First, she learned that there was a story behind the establishment. David's House is named in memory of David Cyr. When he was almost two years old and still in the process of being adopted by Dick and Gerry Cyr, doctors discovered that he had acute lymphocytic leukemia. Because of his frequent visits to the Medical Center, David became friendly with the other children undergoing treatment there. Whenever he went home, David dreamed of taking these children with him to his house. During David's treatments, Dick and Gerry met the parents of these other children--people who sometimes had to sleep in hospital waiting rooms or in their cars because they couldn't afford a motel room. The Cyrs also began dreaming about creating a haven--one where all of these families could stay. In 1984 David lost his struggle against the leukemia. After his passing, David's parents and many other caring people

created a homelike place near Mary Hitchcock Hospital [the original hospital in Hanover] where families could stay while their children were in treatment.

When Mary Hitchcock Hospital was closed and the new Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center opened for business outside of town in 1991, the volunteers involved with David's House became concerned that the distance between the two establishments was too far for parents. Plans to construct a new house next to DHMC were set into motion. With the help of countless contributors and volunteers, including Michael J. Fox, the new David's House was completed and welcoming parents by 1994.

Laura thought David's House was gorgeous. Of course, the whole idea behind it and the many volunteers involved certainly warmed her heart, but the simple beauty of the house, itself, was enough to overwhelm her. It was a large yellow farmhouse with green shutters and trim. The house was surrounded by beautifully landscaped lawns and had a magnificent playground out front. There were three living rooms inside the house, a casual TV/sitting room on the main floor, a children's living room/playroom on the floor below, complete with a large array of toys and games, and near the front entrance was a beautiful formal living room with a large, welcoming fireplace. There were two gorgeous and fully functional kitchens, off of which sat a warm and inviting sun room. Throughout the house were fifteen bedrooms, eight bathrooms, and even a few laundry rooms. For all of this beauty, convenience, and love, the wonderful people at David's House asked only for a ten dollar per night donation. If parents could not afford that rate, they were just asked to contribute whatever they *could* afford, no questions asked, even if families could afford nothing at all. Laura felt David's House was an absolute blessing for people like her.

She showed up at the door just before eleven o'clock. She was welcomed in by a

volunteer and given keys to both her room and to the front door. She was told that her room was up the stairs and just down the hall to the right--the Duck Room. It was adorable. It had a wooden duck on the door, and inside the room the walls, window treatments, and homemade bed quilt were all decorated in a duck theme. Laura was pleasantly surprised at how well she slept that first night. David's House was warm and comforting, Emily was safe at home with Carol, she had the pager to let her know if anything was happening with Hannah...and she was sooooo tired.

Chapter 10

How does one dislodge from a family?

Christmas of 1995 was a somber one for Laura. She went through the motions for the girls and was thankful that Hannah was home for the holiday, but her mind was certainly not on the festivities of the season. It was an awkward time at Steve's house. Kevin didn't go--Laura thanked God for that. Daniel was there, but he was conveniently "placed" across the room from Laura and the girls. Laura and Daniel barely felt comfortable making eye contact; they certainly didn't want to be caught speaking to one another. Then, as soon as the gifts were opened, Daniel was whisked off to his aunt and uncle's house and Laura and the girls headed to Kevin's grandmother's house.

That was a difficult visit for Laura, too, because she knew that it might be one of her last times in that house. She had had some great times in Kevin's grandmother's house. It was one of those places where everyone felt welcome and everyone congregated. Kevin's grandmother, or "Gram", as everyone called her, was one of the warmest, most loving people that Laura had ever had the pleasure of knowing.

Linda was living there at that time, assisting her elderly mother. Linda and Laura

had a very special relationship. They met when Laura was sixteen, they were quite close as she went through high school--even when Kevin and Laura weren't dating and then Laura lived with Linda over the summers when she was home from college. They had been through a lot together. Linda was a very unique woman. She had a rough childhood; she dropped out of school after struggling for years, both academically and socially. Things weren't much easier for her as an adult. Her husband left her to raise a young boy by herself, which was very challenging for her, and she worked long hours in a factory from the time she dropped out of school until she retired many, many years later. She was quite happy to live alone, yet she was lonely. She was often very angry at the world, yet she was a very loving person. She was a simple woman with a simple life who had loved Laura and treated her as a daughter. Laura knew that "breaking up" was going to be extremely hard on both of them. She knew that Linda wouldn't be the type of person who would easily forgive her for leaving. She figured Linda would likely never forgive her. Meanwhile, Gram and other extended family members knew things weren't great between Kevin and Laura. Laura was confident that they wouldn't blame her for leaving him, but they were Kevin's family. Laura knew she couldn't expect them to still be there for her after she left--especially after Kevin had put his spin on the story in an attempt to gain sympathy, as Laura was certain he would do.

Chapter 13

Conversations with Kevin

Laura thought it strange that Kevin's only request, when he returned from California, was to take Emily to her babysitter's house the next morning. He could have spent the entire day--or even the whole week with her. Furthermore, when he arrived to

pick her up, he practically ignored her and, instead, stood in the doorway and chatted with Daniel for forty-five minutes.

“Dude, I am having the fuckin’ time of my *life* out there!”

“Oh, that’s great,” returned Daniel.

“I just bought a sweet little ’91 Ford Mustang 5.0 ...ten thousand cash--done. It drives fuckin’ awesome, too. Have you ever driven one?”

“Uh...no. Can’t say as I have.”

“Dude, you’ve gotta get yourself one. There’s no going back to another car once you get into something that drives like this. I punch it and she fuckin’ goes. I can’t wait to really get her out on the road. I plan to take a few trips in the next few months.”

“Oh, really? Where do you plan on going?”

“All over. Coast Rica, Mexico, Vegas...wherever the road takes me.”

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Kevin picked Emily up from Rosie’s that evening, spent a few hours with her, and then returned her home at about eight that night. Emily asked him to come in the house for a few minutes.

“No. I have nothing to say to your mother,” Laura heard Kevin reply.

Emily was, again, devastated that Kevin was leaving. In an attempt to give her something to look forward to, Laura asked Kevin if he planned to pick Emily up again in the morning.

“Yeah. I’ll be here around nine,” he said.

“It would work better if you could be here a little earlier; I have to be out of the house by 8:30 for an appointment with Hannah,” Laura explained.

“Well, I can’t make it that early. I’ll see her some other time,” he said.

He then said a last good-bye to a now very disappointed and screaming Emily, and walked away. Laura took Emily for a drive around town to try to calm her down.

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Kevin picked Emily up from Rosie's again the next afternoon. This time, when he dropped her off at home, he stepped inside to chat with Daniel again. Later, Daniel told Laura that the conversation had been very similar to that from the previous morning.

"He had pictures of his car," he recalled, "and a bunch of other pictures, too. As he flipped through each one he had comments like, 'Oh, this is when we went to such-and-such a bar--I was soooo wasted! ...This was at such-and-such a club and I hooked up with such-and-such a chick--man, was I fucked up!' I was wondering the whole time why he was telling me all of this stuff. It's not like that type of thing would impress me...and it's not like we're best of friends or anything. ...Oh, and he also told me he slept in 'til two this afternoon, so I guess that explains why he couldn't possibly be here at 8:30 to pick Em up. ...I don't know. Maybe he's trying to make me jealous somehow...like he's living the life he thinks I should want to be living or something. Who knows; it was just weird. Anyway, I guess his plan to quit drinking didn't exactly work out."

Meeting the Roommates

Throughout the spring, Laura and Hannah made their way down to Plymouth to spend some time with Daniel, to take a look around town, and to start apartment hunting. On Tuesdays and Thursdays Daniel had a few hours free between classes that Laura tried to make it down for, when her schedule allowed. That was when she had an opportunity to really get to know Daniel's roommates. It ended up that she got to know one of them much more than she ever would have anticipated.

One of the roommates, Corey, was just an acquaintance, and he practically lived at his girlfriend's apartment, anyway. That left John and Andrew. Both were very close friends of Daniel's, and both were fellow third year Art Majors.

John was the quintessential free spirit. On any given day of our visit, his hair changed to a different color of the rainbow. Furthermore, it might be styled in a Mohawk, reversed Mohawk, or, perhaps, spiked up everywhere. His clothing choices were just as unique. He might be in all tie-dye one day, a skirt the next, all in black with a spiked collar the day after that. He was an avid and talented skateboarder and snowboarder, and was an extremely gifted dancer. Although he was a wonderful artist, he had many outlets for his creativity. For instance, he was an exceptional poet.

Andrew was just as free a spirit, but it manifested in a totally different way. He had a huge personality--one that began to draw a crowd the minute he entered the room. He and Daniel had a lot of fun with accents. One semester they had an entire class believing that they were from Britain, because they both began speaking exclusively in an English accent in that class. He was a guy of big plans and big ideas. He would decide one day that he just had to learn Latin and he'd begin right away, studying the language. He'd decide another day he wanted to get the ultimate high score on a particular Donkey Kong level and immediately focus all of his energy on that. Daniel and Andrew decided that they should start a comic one day, and before long, copies of a hilarious comic were being read, enjoyed, and talked about all over campus. Andrew was a competitive guy, but in a fun-loving way. Video games were, of course, a major part of life for Daniel and Andrew, but they'd compete down to the very last word. "Pun-offs" were a particularly fun pastime for them.

Laura also learned that modesty wasn't exactly a priority with Andrew. That's

how she got to know him “better” than she had planned. When she went to Plymouth on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Daniel had a class right in the middle of their visiting time. At first, Laura stayed behind at the apartment and cleaned, while Hannah napped. After a few visits, though, Daniel suggested that Laura and Hannah just tag along to his class. It was a drawing class--a human form drawing class--and Andrew was one of the models. At first Laura thought it would be awkward, but it turned out to be no big deal. As a matter of fact, one of her favorite drawings that Daniel had ever done was one he drew of Andrew in that class.

Chapter 14

An ER visit not mentioned (a third ER visit in as many weeks)

The mood during the move to Plymouth was completely different from the one to Laura’s apartment. Fear over the uncertainty of their future, and worry over the wisdom of her choices had plagued Laura’s last move. This move felt much more lighthearted and relaxed to her, as it was a step toward a better life for herself and the girls. The schools and services would be better and they’d have Daniel with them on a daily basis. Laura felt life couldn’t get any better than that, but there were even more perks to look forward to. Plymouth was a gorgeous town where Laura felt just as much at home as she did in Littleton. She looked forward to being surrounded by the beauty of the college campus and quaint Main Street shops. She was getting to know Daniel’s friends pretty well and she was anxious to be closer to them so they could all hang out more often. She was thoroughly enjoying feeling like a member of the gang and she looked forward to inviting the guys over for dinners, video games, and movie nights. Laura was filled with so much excitement and anticipation that she scarcely had room to feel anything else.

She was rather surprised, then, when she found herself having chest pains one afternoon. *This doesn't make any sense. Why is it uncomfortable to breathe? I haven't had any cold symptoms or anything. I don't have a cough. Maybe it's just heartburn. ...But heartburn has never felt like this before. Man...what's going on?*

Laura tried to ignore what she was feeling, but soon the discomfort developed into pain strong enough to make talking difficult. Because they didn't know what was going on, Laura and Daniel decided that she had better go to the ER. Laura was embarrassed. She tried to prepare herself for the humiliation when the doctor would tell her she simply had a case of heartburn, gave her some Tums, and sent her on her way.

As she answered the routine questions by the triage nurse, Laura felt empty-handed. This is when she normally would have been listing off Hannah's previous medical history and medication schedules. She felt downright strange to be in the hospital without Hannah. The bizarre feeling of switching from her role as mother of the patient to that of patient continued in the examining room. She was more familiar with Hannah's history than her own. She scarcely knew how to answer the doctor's questions. *I don't know...when was my last period? I don't even know today's date, much less the date when my last period started. Medications...what medications am I taking? What were the doses again? Family history of heart disease? Let's see...does it count if the family member is your child?*

Laura was also distinctly aware of a skeptical mood among the nurses. It appeared that they, too, felt it was silly for her to be there. It was a subtle difference. They appeared to perform tests on Hannah in an apparent "let's-see-if-we-can-figure-this-out" manner, and when they did the same tests on Laura she felt much more of a "let's-just-prove-there's-nothing-wrong-with-you-so-we-can-get-you-out-the-door"

vibe. Now Laura was almost hoping for something to be wrong with her so she wouldn't feel the sting of the staff's disapproving eyes every time they entered the room.

The unspoken duel between Laura and the nursing staff came to a head when the doctor asked for an EKG to be performed. When the nurse came into the room with the equipment, Laura didn't think he was even trying to hide his annoyance with her presence anymore. He began to explain what he was doing as he prepared to place the leads. Laura told him that he didn't have to bother with the whole speech, as she was all too familiar with the procedure, after having it done numerous times with Hannah. That seemed to lighten his mood a little.

Once all of the leads were in place, the nurse hit the button for a reading. As the paper printed out, Laura braced herself for the inevitable, "Well, looks great! Probably just some heartburn. You're free to go home." Instead, he looked over the readout with a mildly puzzled expression.

"I'm going to go ahead and get another reading. Sometimes the docs like two so they can compare."

No they don't. Even when Sarah had her worst looking EKG's in the beginning they just took one reading. Either something is up with the one you just looked at or you did something wrong and you just don't want to admit to your mistake. He pushed the button again and took a look at the second reading.

"Okay, so I'm going to go give these to the doctor. I'll just leave your leads on in case we need another reading later."

Great...so I'm relieved to not be getting the patronizing 'Nothing is wrong with you' looks anymore but now I'm nervous about what might actually be wrong here. I don't even know which one is worse. Ugh...I just want to get out of here. Maybe I can

just sleep off whatever's wrong with me or something.

The doctor entered the room shortly thereafter. “So we did find some abnormalities on your EKG,” he began, “Have you been under any stress lately?”

Laura nearly laughed. Stress was so much a part of her existence that she didn't know how to answer. What would be considered routine, normal, and harmless stress? What would be deemed stress above and beyond what someone should be facing?

“Well,” she began slowly when the silence started to feel uncomfortable, “I was here with my daughter a week and a half ago with a seizure. But that admission wasn't too, too bad. I mean...it seems like things were much more stressful six to nine months ago when she was in heart failure and we were practically living in the hospital. If this had happened then, I wouldn't have been so surprised. But now? It doesn't make sense. Things are relatively much calmer now.”

“Sometimes our bodies have a delayed response to stress. They'll hold up through the critical time of need, then when everything calms down a bit, like you said it has in your case, the body will respond to the prolonged exposure to a high stress load. So you're free to head home. I'll go write up your discharge paperwork. I want you to just take it easy, and if you have any more problems you can call your primary care physician or come back here.”

His recommendation seemed even funnier to Laura than the question about stress. *Oh, sure. I'll take it easy. I'll just kick back and relax. Why didn't I try that earlier? Oh wait--I know--because it's **impossible!** Ugh, I can't believe I wasted my time here. I could have just gone home and sat on the couch for two hours. It would have been just as productive. He didn't even tell me what “abnormality” it was that he saw. Oh well. I'll be fine. Just get me home and I'll be fine.*

Chapter 16

What Was Written...

Determining what was bothering Hannah had become a frustrating challenge.

The Nitty Gritty...

Hannah wasn't able to speak to how she was feeling, so all Laura and Daniel had were her cries to attempt to decipher. Some seemed like pain cries, others like she was annoyed. Sometimes she'd wail and scream, other times she'd just be chronically fussy. Laura and Daniel were spending considerable time trying to figure out whether one morning's screeches were worse than the crankiness from the day before because she had developed a headache or an ear infection. Or was it because she was nauseous after getting another dose of her seizure meds? Or was it that she was grossly overtired after a long night of fussiness? Were the afternoon's whines better than the morning's shrieks because she had been gassy and that had passed? Or was the Tylenol she had been given effective? Or was it because she had wanted to be in her swing all morning and they had finally figured it out? Was one day worse than another because of something serious like appendicitis or a kidney infection, or was it something more routine like a developing cold?

Laura and Daniel weren't even sure if they'd be able to recognize routine, typical behavior issues if she was having them. Hannah was basically a toddler in chronological age, but she was still a newborn developmentally. Could she be having toddler temper tantrums, or was it more likely that she was colicky like a newborn? They knew that physical problems were more likely with 4p- kids than with typical kids, but which problems? When were they likely to arise? What symptoms were they supposed to be

looking for? How likely was it that she would have the various problems that had been brought up at the conference, like chronic pneumonias, kidney dysfunction, liver issues, and bladder infections? As the summer wore on, Laura and Daniel became increasingly confused and weary.

Chapter 17

Trick and Treat

Halloween was festive that year, despite the hectic schedule. Emily had a homemade lion costume, Daniel threw together odd articles from his closet for a great look, and Laura had gotten Hannah an adorable baby chick costume. Laura even dressed up for the first time in years, throwing together some scrubs and a lab coat she happened to have. As it turned out, Laura's costume worked in her favor. Hannah had a follow-up appointment with Dr. Romano on Halloween. Before sending them home, he wanted a few labs drawn. Laura dragged her feet to the lab, anticipating a long wait in line, as was usually the case. She expected the usual, "Thank you. Please have a seat and we'll call you when we're ready," when she handed in the lab slip.

Instead, she heard, "Oh...thanks. Do you want to take her right back or do you want us to take her in?"

"No...I'll take her." Laura said, somewhat confused, as she looked around at the full waiting room. When they got to the back room, a lab tech promptly began prepping Hannah for the blood draw. Laura sat down with Hannah and properly positioned her arm. The lab tech thanked Laura and asked her to tie the tourniquet. Laura had never been asked to do that before but, having seen it done many times, she didn't think much of it, and began tying. As the lab tech got the needle out, Laura warned her about

Hannah being a tough stick.

“Oh, here, would you like to do it since you’re more familiar with the patient?” she asked, handing the needle to Laura.

That’s when Laura realized what had happened. Until then, she hadn’t given a single thought to the fact that she was walking around a hospital dressed as a healthcare professional. A bit embarrassed, Laura told the lab tech that she was just a parent. The lab tech--equally embarrassed, because nobody had checked Laura for a hospital badge, quickly drew Hannah’s labs. Later that night, Laura joked with Daniel that she should dress in scrubs every time she wanted something done quickly at the hospital.

Reactions to Hannah – More of Laura’s Observations

Laura found that Hannah’s struggles appeared to be affecting everyone around them—everyone except Kevin. One day in particular, when he stopped by to pick Emily up for a visit, Hannah had gone into a status seizure just prior to his arrival. As he knocked on the door, Laura and Daniel were beginning to administer medications. As he waited for Emily, Hannah vomited and turned blue. Kevin glanced over at her, but didn’t offer to help in any way. He shook his head a bit, and as he left he just said, “Good luck.” Laura was thankful to have Emily out of the house so she wouldn’t have to witness the activity, but she was resentful that, as Hannah’s parent, Kevin wasn’t even involving himself enough to lend a hand during an emergency situation.

Meanwhile, Daniel’s friends, John and Andrew, practically lived with Laura and Daniel. From the time school started, they were over at least daily, and once Daniel bought his Nintendo 64 in late September, they ended up sleeping over on average of three to four times per week. Laura got so used to them being around, in fact, that during one seizure she asked John to lend a hand. John just said, “No, I can’t.”

Laura thought he was kidding around, perhaps attempting to keep the mood light. It wasn't until shortly after she and Daniel had administered the seizure meds that she really got a chance to look at John's face. It was clear to her then just how distressed by the whole situation he was, and that asking him to get involved had been just asking too much of a good friend.

Chapter 18

Notes on love and relationships

On Thanksgiving night, while lying in Daniel's arms, Laura pondered the issue of timing in her year-long relationship with the man she so loved. She knew that one could argue they were rushing everything to the point of jeopardizing the relationship all together. After all, studies had found that couples who live together within a year of beginning the relationship were statistically less likely to succeed than those who took more time to let things develop. But Laura decided that, in this case, how things looked on paper and how they felt were entirely different. While her relationship with Daniel had admittedly progressed very quickly, nothing ever felt hurried or forced. And Laura felt she was an expert at the rushed relationship; she had been the very source of such haste in the past. With Kevin, she had been in love with the idea of marriage, so from the beginning she had made a point of steamrolling her way to that goal. Occasionally life had slowed down long enough for her to recognize her haste, but she had carefully ignored any worries that she had about who she was with or why she was with him, and continued to push on even harder.

With Daniel, the difference was that Laura was in love with *the man*, not the relationship. She had hopes for their future, but she was simply happy to be with Daniel

any way she could be with him. Living together was definitely better than living apart because it gave her more time with him--not because it was one step closer to any final goal.

Laura continued to parallel the two relationships. *If someone had said to me at the very beginning of my relationship with Kevin, "I can see into the future, and no matter how long you stay with this guy, there is no way you will ever be married to him," I know for a fact that I would have broken things off rather quickly. After all, why would I continue to waste my time? But if someone were to approach me tomorrow with the same prediction about Daniel? I'd be sad...yeah...I'd be crushed. After all, I do hope that one day we'll be married. But I'd stay with him--without question and without hesitation. Right here is where I belong. There's nowhere in me that I don't feel that.* Daniel's arm twitched under Laura's head as he slept. She breathed in a deep, satisfied breath, snuggled in a little closer, and drifted off to sleep, as well.

Some thoughts on housekeeping

Laura always thought she was raised "right" when it came to housekeeping. She was taught that you keep your house clean. Period. The environment that you keep around you is a reflection of you, so you respect and take pride in it. The only problem is that what you have been taught and what you have the time and energy to actually do can be two entirely different things. Sometimes--actually, most times--Laura's house wasn't perfectly clean. So, like any self-respecting woman (in her view), she faked it. It involved a mad dash around the house in a desperate attempt to tidy things up when she heard that a guest might be on the way. Often just as important as the actual cleaning was the "cover-up" operation. It couldn't be obvious that all of the cleaning took place in the twenty minutes prior to a guest's arrival. It had to appear that the house had always

been that clean. Key tools in Laura's cover-up were phrases like, "Oh, you'll have to excuse any mess. I haven't had a chance to pick up at all today."

The worst thing that could possibly happen to Laura in this regard was an unannounced visit. The first time she met Daniel's dad happened under that very circumstance. Suddenly one Sunday afternoon there was a knock at the door. Daniel's dad, Rick, walked in, and while Laura tried desperately to focus on the visit, she was totally preoccupied with the completely unacceptable level of weekend clutter that surrounded them. She was so thoroughly embarrassed that she could barely speak to the man. Daniel said the next time he talked to his dad on the phone, Rick asked if Laura was alright on the day of his visit, that she seemed upset or something. Laura hated that her first impression had turned out to be that of an unsocial slob. She wished that she had been able to just let it go and enjoy the visit, but she just couldn't seem to get past the shame of the untidy home.

Laura knew, logically, that it is probably impossible—but, at best, extremely difficult—to keep a perfectly clean house at all times, especially when there are children in the home. Yet she continued to hold herself to a ridiculous standard. She knew she wasn't the only one to suffer this affliction, too. What she thought was bizarre was the effect of entering the house of a similarly-minded individual. She felt it was akin to looking at a fashion model and being jealous of the perfect hair, make-up and figure—despite knowing that a good portion of those attributes were accomplished with effects such as lighting and air brushing. She would often go to a friend's house and know full well that the friend had just run a cleaning marathon before her arrival, yet she still looked around the neat and tidy rooms and thought, "Man, what a loser I am. Why can't I keep up with my house the way she can?"

With this mindset, one can imagine the time and difficulty involved with Laura's need to relax her high standards due to the constant influx of nurses and therapists in her home. "Just letting it go" was not at all easily accomplished.

Chapter 21

Layoff Suspicions

Laura's job with the police department came to an abrupt and rather unexpected end that summer. Her boss, the Lieutenant, told her that it was simply a budgeting issue, that because college was out for the summer there wasn't the revenue necessary to keep her on. She sincerely hoped that was it. She wanted to think she was doing well as a meter maid. But she feared...other...considerations--like Chewy.

Laura loved Chewy. He hadn't become the seizure alert dog she had hoped for Hannah, but he was a wonderful companion for the whole family. He was still a puppy, though, and full of energy. Laura walked him as often as possible and had a run for him in the back yard. There was the occasion, however, when Emily left the front door open and Chewy got out...and ran. On one particular sunny and warm spring day, when Laura was at work, Chewy got out and headed off on one of his adventures. Did he trot off to the park like he usually did? No...he thought it would be more interesting to go *into* the bank down the road and greet the patrons as they arrived. Did he head home when he was politely escorted out of the bank? No, he decided to take another stroll--down the middle of the road. Did he get hit by just any car? No, it was Mercedes--a *brand new* Mercedes. Was it being driven by just any random person? No, it was the Lieutenant's wife. Other than a likely bruised and sore hind leg, Chewy survived the accident

uninjured. It was the dent in the middle of the hood of the car that gave Laura an absolute panic attack. She learned that the whole hood of the car would likely need to be replaced and she had no idea how she'd afford that. Luckily, she found out that that sort of thing is covered by homeowner's insurance, and she carried renter's insurance, so all it cost her was the deductible...and maybe her parking enforcement job that mysteriously ran out of funding weeks later.

And as if Laura's life wasn't busy enough...

Laura was asked [and agreed] to house a Swiss foreign exchange student for six weeks, through August and into September. Laura knew she had no business taking on more responsibility than she already had, but she was desperate for distractions that might keep her mind off of Daniel's impending departure. The student's name was Marielle and Laura found her a joy to have around. Marielle was studying education and working on perfecting her English, which she was fluent in, as she was in German, Swiss-German, Italian, Spanish, and French. Laura enjoyed lovely chats with Marianne about the differences between America and Switzerland. She could only imagine the picture of American life Marielle formed while staying with her. Laura warned Marielle in the beginning that they weren't exactly the *average* American family. For the most part, those six weeks were relatively quiet--no calls to 911 and no hour-plus seizure activity, so Laura was confident that they hadn't scared Marielle too badly.

Chapter 22

More conversations with Kevin...

Kevin called one afternoon to request that Laura cancel Emily's speech and occupational therapy appointments for that afternoon. He wanted to pull Emily out of school early because he had just decided that an earlier pick-up time worked better for his schedule. He used the opportunity to announce that he would soon be headed to Oklahoma for three months of training with the National Guards. He expressed how excited he was to go.

Laura said, "Speaking of other states, we need to talk some more about the likelihood that the girls and I will be moving to Washington."

"Well I won't willingly move to another state and I don't think it would be fair for you to ask me to pay for all of Emily's plane tickets for her to come back and see me."

"I agree."

There was a moment of silence that Laura was sure was due to Kevin being stunned by her response. He quickly recovered and, as if to ensure disagreement on the subject, he pushed it further. "I'll be annoyed with long waits between visits with her. I haven't seen her in a month but that's because I got sick and had Guards and OCS, but shit happens. I'll be annoyed when I can't see her for months at a time."

You haven't seen her in a month and you just told me how excited you are that you're leaving for three months. I can't believe that you can't see the hypocrisy here. I mean...what do I even say to that? "Yeah," was the only response Laura could think of.

"So I'll want you and Matt to pay for her to come visit each month."

“Every month!” WHAT? That’s so ridiculous on so many levels! What about school? What about making this poor girl fly six hours back and forth across the country every thirty days? What about when you get all flakey as you constantly do and decide a few days before the trip that you don’t want her, after all? I mean...WHAT! “No, I’m talking about helping with maybe two out of three trips back for summer visits; not every month.” You are not going to play on any guilt I might have about taking the girls across the country to force me into some asinine visitation plan that has nothing to do with you missing your child and everything to do with punishing me for the move. I’m offering to be fair here--not stupid!

“What? ...We’re talking maybe \$300 a month,” Kevin said in a tone of feigned innocence.

“No. First of all, it’s not just \$300; there’s her plane ticket plus the ticket of whoever would be flying with her, plus missed work time, etc., etc.” ...*And missed school—but you, of course, wouldn’t think of that because it has nothing to do with you or money.*

“She can fly alone.”

“Kevin, there is no way I’ll send my little girl ALONE on a plane flying cross-country.” *Christ, even if it was a direct flight you still have to tell the poor girl when to go to the bathroom! Yet again showing either how little you know about your own daughter or how little you fucking care.*

“What’s the problem? You walk her on the plane, I walk her off.”

“NO. THERE’S NO WAY IN HELL I’m going to send my SPECIAL NEEDS LITTLE GIRL to fly ALONE cross country!”

Apparently satisfied that he had gotten the reaction he was looking for from Laura, Kevin abruptly changed the subject. “Anyway, I’ll drop her off between four and five on Sunday.”

Bravo; you have once again succeeded in raising my blood pressure. Bastard.