

Chapter 6: Déjà Vu All Over Again

At first, I thought the hotel was on fire. I was roused from a deep sleep in my big, comfy hotel bed by an acrid aroma that put me in mind of *The Towering Inferno* and being rescued by O.J. Simpson playing the security guard. It turned out just to be Starbucks, and that presented the second conundrum of the day. How had the small coffee pot on the Formica desk filled itself with water, inserted its own pre-packaged coffee disk and turned itself on? Blinking fully awake, everything became clear. Seth, who at that moment was singing “Roxanne” in the shower, had made it for me. Waking to brewed coffee was an unheard of luxury and was another reason waking up with Seth was superior to waking up with Zelda. In all the years we had lived together, my cat had never done that for me. Not even once.

I smiled as thoughts of the previous night’s dinner floated into my consciousness. The entire memory was washed in a golden California light, from the moment Seth picked me up dressed in his beautifully tailored jacket and expensively distressed jeans, his face bearing the sheen of a very recent shave, to the extended goodbye in the hotel parking lot that only ended when the van behind us honked because we were blocking the driveway. His hand on the small of my back gently guiding me to our table on the terrace where we watched the sunset, the easy

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flow of conversation, the way he ignored all seventeen calls that jangled from his iPhone until he finally turned it off, every moment felt beautifully orchestrated and had all the hallmarks of romance, which was strange considering who the players were. That word – romance – was not in our vocabulary in the 80s. Sex, sure. But not romance. Had last night's dinner foreshadowed the kind of relationship that might be possible this time, or was I simply being exposed to the elaborate seduction scheme of an older, wiser and more financially secure Seth? Either way, I was on his turf, glimpsing this tiny slice of his life. I couldn't help thinking about ... possibilities. Was this what an "us" could look like?

I launched the calendar on my Blackberry and stared at the ugly, overscheduled day ahead. I was booked into meetings every hour on the hour right up until the time I was supposed to leave for the airport. I scrolled to that entry and hit "delete." I wasn't going back to Chicago just yet. Somewhere between the clinking of champagne glasses and the cracking of the crème brulee crust, Seth convinced me to spend the weekend with him. I turned him down, of course, but even I could see that my protestations were half-hearted. Seth easily batted down my every objection and then laid out the logistics so effortlessly, I couldn't help but play along. Seth would drop me at the office in my rental car, take the rental back to the airport for me, hop on the airport shuttle to get back to the hotel where he'd pick up his car, handle what he needed to do during the day and then come back to collect me at the office when I was done with work.

"See, tomorrow will be simple," he had declared, reminding me of the zillion or so flights between Chicago and L.A. so getting home on Sunday wouldn't be a problem. And he was certain that Angela could handle looking in on Zelda for two more days. "I guess the only thing left to figure out is what I'll wear. I only packed for business meetings," I told him.

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“You can borrow Beth’s clothes,” he offered nonchalantly. Some of Seth’s solutions were better than others. “Lees, if you want to stay, the details are easy. The question is, do you want to?” Seth had asked me with an earnestness that made me want to stroke his cheek. It revealed his blind spot, the thing that he had never figured out about me. “Want” never really entered into my thought process. My decisions were always a matter of “should”. Yet there he was, innocently asking me what I wanted. I already knew I shouldn’t in that unspecific yet persistent way I know I shouldn’t do lots of things. But something took over. Maybe it was the moonlight or the spark in Seth’s eyes. Maybe it was the sugar rush from dessert. Maybe my body had been overtaken by aliens, because when he asked, I heard myself answering clearly and calmly, “Seth, I think I would like to stay.” And in the bright light of morning, I still wanted to stay.

"How's the coffee?" Seth stepped out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel.

"I was just about to pour myself some. Thank you, it was really nice of you to make it."

"Save your thanks until after you try it. Remember, I'm more of a tea guy." He walked across the room emanating an aroma of warm water and hotel soap. Something about that simple move – something I couldn’t put my finger on – felt familiar and pleasant, the way an unexpected whiff of Lily's crayons could conjure pleasant but generic memories of being a kid.

"Lees, can I ask you something?"

It was early and he was serious. Immediately, I knew he was looking for a way to gracefully back out of asking me to stay the weekend. One look at me rolling out of bed in an oversized, public radio pledge drive tee and he was regretting last night, and probably the nights in Chicago. He needed to stop this thing – whatever this thing was – before it spiraled out of control. Maybe it finally dawned on him that he was supposed to be waking up with girls half his

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– and my – age, girls on whom bedhead would look sexy, not a disastrous mess. The sight of me in the morning was probably just a bit too “Maggie May” for him, with the morning sun in my face and all.

"On the one hand, we've known each other forever," he started. "But on the other, we're really just starting out. I mean, last night was our first proper date in this millennium, wasn't it?"

Actually, the prior night had been our first proper date *ever*, but I didn't bother to correct him. We were about to have a sad, end-of-things conversation in a hotel room at seven in the morning. That was as tawdry as I was willing to get.

"So I'm just going to ask. Can I borrow your toothbrush?"

"My toothbrush?"

"Um, yes, your toothbrush. Why do you have that look on you face?"

That's when my shoulds and wants dovetailed nicely. I knew I shouldn't tell him what I was thinking, nor did I want to, so I simply told him to brush to his heart's content without elaborating on the lunatic dips and assumptions my mind made. Sharing a toothbrush was one thing. Sharing a glimpse of the bizarre way my mind worked was a whole different level of intimacy.

There was a charmed quality to the rest of my day that was so unusual I wondered if I was dreaming. None of the dismissed employees I met with threatened violence or lawsuits. My meetings started and ended at their appointed times. Some of them even wrapped up early, allowing me time for all sorts of extra bonus activities like bathroom breaks and phone calls. The airlines confirmed my Sunday flight and Harry didn't call at all. Things never happened that easily.

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Yet, when I finished my last meeting and texted Seth that I was ready to be picked up, my stomach lurched and made its location in my anatomy known. It wasn't churning or aching. Those feelings I was familiar with; they'd emerge when I was nervous or had gone too long without eating. This was something different, something closer to vibrating. It felt like one of those little hums your computer develops that either means the hard drive is crashing or the fan is simply clogged. I took a deep breath and a ginger ale from the array of leftover sodas littering the conference room credenza.

There was a momentary worry about how long it had been sitting there, but there was no visible dust on the can, unlike the ketchup packets and white tubs of nondairy creamer that were also left behind. With a little ice, I assured myself, the soda would calm my nery stomach. That was what Mom used to call it when Michael and I had stomachaches as kids. The phrase was meant to be accusatory more than descriptive, as in "how dare your stomach misbehave like that. What nerve!" Then she'd convince us that a little ginger ale would put everything right. Before my first sip, I raised the glass skyward in a little toast to her.

This was one nery stomach that she might have recommended a different approach to, however, assuming that Seth was the cause. It wasn't that she and Dad didn't like Seth; they just couldn't figure him out or why I wanted to spend time with him. They were devoted fans of the familiar predictability of the mainstream. These were people who bought a tiny starter home that they didn't live in until they were married and had their first baby, a boy naturally, ten months after their wedding day. After the second baby came, conveniently a girl, they bought a bigger house in a suburb known for its good schools. They named their children conventionally, plucking Michael and Lisa from the top of the popular baby name lists for the 60s. They raised

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their children conventionally and wanted Michael and me to befriend classmates whose backgrounds could best be described as "conventional."

The Austins had several strikes against them. Seth's family had lived in three different states during his childhood. Even worse, when the Austins lived in Boston, Seattle and Chicago, they actually lived within the city limits of Boston, Seattle and Chicago as opposed to suburbs. To my parents, this was just shy of child abuse. Seth's parents' divorce was another concern, along with his mother's subsequent appearances at Parent's Weekend with a rotating cast of new husbands. Naturally, they adored Kevin.

I tried to imagine what it would be like if they were still alive. Maybe they'd be living out their golden years traveling the globe experiencing exotic safaris or indulgent cruises. Maybe they would have mellowed with age and would have been delighted to know I was in touch with Seth again. Or maybe the mention of his name would just keep earning me that look of consternation mixed with fear.

Seth started apologizing for the state of his house even before we pulled into the driveway. His intention had been to clean up a bit before we got there, but the day got away from him. Beth was in a panic about an upcoming show, he was trying to work out the hook of a new song his friend Jeremy in Chicago was struggling with, there were meetings to schedule for next week and he couldn't seem to get Carina off the phone every time she called. "She calls often?" I wanted to ask but couldn't figure out how to pose the question without sounding petty or scared or judgmental.

The guest house appeared tiny from the outside, like something you'd tuck under the Christmas tree to create a mini-village on a blanket of cotton batting. It occupied the farthest

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corner of the lot like an afterthought to Jade's much bigger main house. Apparently, having a fascination with 80s musicians was lucrative.

Balancing my suitcase and an enormous bag of Chinese carryout we were planning to devour for dinner, Seth kicked open the door with his foot and flipped a light switch with his shoulder. One overhead light fixture was enough to illuminate the living room, dining area and kitchen that were carved out of the entire first floor. He wasn't kidding about not having time to clean up. There were books, pieces of paper and bags with unknown contents competing for floor and furniture space with clothes, coffee mugs and assorted musical things. Three guitars stood in racks near the stairs and I was pretty sure I kicked a drum stick as I looked for someplace to drop my computer bag. Seth pointed to the stairs.

"We'll put your things upstairs," he said, dumping the Chinese on the couch, completely unconcerned about what might spill. "The bedroom and the bathroom are up there."

Reaching his bedroom was like making a border crossing. The room was immaculate compared to what I saw downstairs. A vase overstuffed with fresh flowers sat on the nightstand completely dwarfed by the biggest bed I've ever seen. It had to have been built in this space because it was unfathomable that someone could have carried it up the steep, narrow staircase. And Seth treated it with care, which unnerved me and launched a tawdry movie in my mind about rock stars and rampant, easy, anonymous sex. The covers and pillows were perfectly arranged without as much as a wrinkle in sight. The only thing marring the clean lines of his bed were two shopping bags sitting near the edge, but even those were arranged just so and their arched handles pointed at the ceiling, uniformly framed by perfect tissue-paper peaks.

"I made some space in the closet, and just shove aside anything that's in your way in the

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bathroom.” Seth gently set down my suitcase and smiled in that way that made his eyes twinkle.

"Make yourself at home, Lees."

"The flowers are beautiful."

"Yes, well, remember to overlook the bare patches in Jade's garden tomorrow. And those are yours.” He pointed to the bags.

"Mine?"

"Yes. You said you didn't have clothes for the weekend, so I picked up a few things. I hope you don't mind."

Mind? I figured I'd just get him to drive me to Old Navy for a couple of "deals of the week" to wear. But Seth went shopping for me, and it was serious shopping at a chi chi boutique from the looks of the fancy packaging. "Mind" was not the first word that came to mind. I was delighted, but perplexed. I peered into the bigger of the two fuchsia bags, but its contents remained a mystery, wrapped as they were in pink tissue. All I could make out was the unmistakable shape of a shoebox on the bottom of the bag. Two of them, actually. The other bag unnerved me further. It was much smaller, meaning its contents had to be tiny.

"I had to guess at the sizes but I'm sure they'll work. You're pretty small."

No I'm not, I thought.

"And I think you'll like the colors."

He bought something other than black or khaki?

"Are you mad?"

"No, I'm just ... shocked, I guess. Where did you get all this stuff?" The crazy rock star porn movie of my imagination gave way to a less raunchy but still perplexing scene of Seth

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explaining to the anorexic sales girl how some hayseed Midwesterner was staying with him for the weekend and could she please help him pick a few things because he didn't want to die of embarrassment because of her hideous clothes.

“Take a look.”

Slowly, the tissue fell away revealing the contents of the first bag, a pair of jeans. They weren't as immediately scary-looking as the ones Angela was always picking out for me. There were also a couple of simple, tank-style t-shirts in bottle green and robin's egg blue. I put them down next to the jeans and wondered what Seth had against sleeves. There was another denim thing in the bag and I gasped as it unfolded and revealed itself to be a denim jacket with silver snaps and an abundance of white topstitching. It looked almost exactly like the one I had in college, minus the tiny I ♥ The Police button I always wore.

"You know, in most of the pictures I have of you, you're wearing a jacket a lot like that one," Seth said as I slipped it on, half-expecting to find a partially punched cafeteria meal card in the pocket.

The shoes turned out to be two pairs of nearly identical black sandals; one version a flat, one with a precarious-looking heel, because Seth wasn't sure if I was into heels or not. When I flipped one of them over and saw that he'd bought the right size, I lost my grip and dropped it to the floor. The outfit laid out on the bed almost looked like a third person in the room. She looked a lot like the kind of woman I pictured Seth dating, actually, and not one iota like me.

Seth, the stylist savant, looked at me all puppy-dog hopeful and vaguely like Angela when she and I went shopping together. What did it mean when your best friend and a man you were spending the weekend with had the same traits? It was either sick or charming. And

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complicated. Was I comfortable with Seth because he shared traits with Angela? Or had I been drawn into my friendship with Angela because she, on some unconscious level, reminded me of Seth?

"Where did you get all this stuff?" I asked again. Incredulousness had that effect on me; it made me repeat myself.

"A couple of shops I know."

I was spending the weekend with a man who owned an enormous bed and shopped often enough for women's clothes that he knew "a couple of shops" and what sizes to buy. The volume on that rock star movie in my head got louder and I began worrying that there were stories about his current life that Seth glossed over on the plane.

"Oh. You buy women's clothes a lot?"

"I help Beth and her band mates buy clothes for their shows."

I was about to ask what kind of twenty-something asks her father to tag along when she's buying those ungodly low-rise skinny jeans and halter tops when I remembered that Seth was no ordinary dad. He was a dad who had been on MTV.

He handed me the tinier bag. "This is for you, too."

The bag, or something in it, smelled like lavender. I pushed aside the tissue paper and peered into the bag at a puddle of shiny silk that was not quite green, not quite blue. It looked as if part of Lake Michigan was in there. I lifted the fabric and saw that it was a nightgown. When I rearranged it to hold it by its thin straps, a second puddle of silk slipped from my fingers and pooled at my feet, the matching robe.

"Seth, they're beautiful," I said in a whisper inspired by the delicate fabric.

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"I've always loved how you look in green."

"I've never owned anything this pretty."

"You ought to."

"This is much nicer than that old t-shirt I woke up in this morning," I said with a laugh.

"It was completely out of its league."

I wasn't sure what he meant, but I was fairly certain it was one of the nicest compliments I'd ever gotten. It shook away the crazy movies in my brain. It quieted the questions I peppered myself about why I was here, and let me just sink into the night we had planned for ourselves. I completely relaxed into our bounty of Chinese food as we curled up on the couch and laughed ourselves sore at the VH-1 marathon highlighting the *100 Best Songs of the 80s* and the ridiculous memories that the videos ushered in. It was a perfect night, even if Joe's Got a Problem didn't make the cut.

On Saturday morning, I woke up feeling like Snow White at the beginning of the movie where she's happy and singing and hasn't yet eaten the apple. A bright, California sun was streaming through the windows and I heard birds chirping in the yard, although none of them flew through the bedroom window to help me put on my robe. Maybe that happened to Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty; all those saved-by-the-prince damsels I grew up with tended to blend together with their similar stories. At least I knew there was nothing for Seth to save me from.

He was still sleeping, so I crept down the stairs, past the graveyard of carryout boxes we amassed on the coffee table and into the kitchen. More precisely, I went to the kitchen area of the first floor, so designated by the presence of appliances and the wide countertop that jutted out

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and severed the room into its two parts. The kitchen was in no better shape than the rest of the first floor. There was a sink full of dirty dishes, various wrappers and packaging from carry out meals and a fine sprinkling of crumbs on all surfaces. But in the corner, glaringly out of place, was a shiny, apparently new coffee maker with a small can of French roast nestled by its side. Seth was a bit of a slob, but he was also tremendously thoughtful about details. I brewed a pot of coffee for myself and put fresh water in the kettle to make Seth his tea. Rummaging through his cabinets, I found five different boxes to choose from: Earl Grey, English Breakfast, Throat Coat, Lotus and something called Rooibos that sounded far too sinister to start the day with. The English Breakfast, by virtue of its name, seemed the most likely choice, but I couldn't be sure. Upstairs, there was a man who could send me perfect flowers, pick out clothes that looked just right and buy small appliances for me, yet I hadn't a clue about what tea he preferred in the morning or what he put in it. I hadn't even asked if I came close to his preference when I brought him tea that morning in Chicago. I looked around the kitchen, as if there might be a clue spelled out in the crumbs, or the Disney scenario would continue to play out and an appliance would come to life and sing me to the right solution. That would have been preferable to the situation that actually occurred.

I was reading the boxes of tea when the front door burst open and in walked a tall, tiny-waisted young woman whose blond, spiky hair could have given Billy Idol a run for his money. She was shouting.

"Hey, Dad, can I borrow...Oh. Hello woman standing in my father's kitchen."

"Hi," I managed, realizing why they invented the word "flummoxed."

"Who are you?"

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"Oh, sorry. Lisa Grant. I am a friend of your Dad's."

"Yeah, I can see that." I worried about what else she could see and fiddled with the belt on my robe. My beautiful, sexy, silk robe that was a gift from her father. Flummoxed exploded into discomfort, extreme discomfort. We sized each other up silently for a moment until she said, "I'm Beth."

"Nice to meet you," I lied. It wasn't that I didn't want to meet Seth's daughter. I did. Someday. Later. When I was wearing actual clothes, not lingerie.

"Is he still in be...um, is he still sleeping?" It was interesting that this girl, who apparently never met a kohl eyeliner she didn't like and who had pierced her nose, her eyebrow, her belly button and as much as possible of her earlobes, didn't seem comfortable using the word "bed" in a conversation. Or maybe it was just that the conversation was with me, someone who had just, all evidence indicated, emerged from her father's bed.

I nodded in answer to her question and tried to figure out what to say next. One option was to ask her about her piercings, and if she had gotten any of them the way Seth and I got ours. Based on the surprise and judgment showing on her face at discovering me in her dad's kitchen at seven in the morning, I made the leap that Beth didn't want to know about the night her dad and I sat in his dorm room and liberated a needle from a sewing kit that her grandmother had thrown into a care package made up entirely of Ritz Carlton toiletries. Piercing our ears was Seth's idea, of course. He wanted to look more New Wave. I already had my ears pierced, but he persuaded me to a second hole in one ear. I agreed, not even reluctantly if I am honest with myself, because I hoped to keep up with him in the looking cool department. We doused the needle in Seth's roommate's tequila, wiped a little on our lobes and then each took a swig without

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salt or lime or even a shot glass. It wasn't until *after* Seth's ear was punctured that we realized that we didn't have anything to put in the hole. So, I repurposed the pair I was already wearing, which happened to be the small, dainty pearls from my mom to match my Add-A-Pearl necklace. For a week, Seth endured endless jokes about how he looked more Junior League than Human League. After his first paying gig in Chicago, he bought a pair of tiny diamond studs from one of the jewelers on Wabash, kept one for himself and gave the other to me. It was the one he had noticed on the airplane.

"I came by to see if I could borrow his bass. I guess I'll wait." Beth plopped down on the sofa, as if the situation weren't awkward at all.

"Lees, it's so early. Come back to be..." Seth was making his way down the stairs but stopped short at the sight of Beth. He, too, seemed to have a problem with the word "bed."

"Hey, Dad."

"Hey, Beth," he said, slowly looking from her on the couch to me behind the kitchen counter. Fortunately, he had pulled on a pair of sweats before coming downstairs, saving us from a total "Jerry Springer" moment. "So, have you two met each other?" His question was answered with muttered affirmatives to which he could only nod and issue a not very convincing "brilliant" under his breath. As awkward pauses go, this one was a gold medal contender.

"What's on your agenda today, Dad? Gonna go test drive Porsches?"

"No. Why would you ask that?"

"Well, you know. You leave your wife, you bail from the city you loved living in, you buy a bunch of John Varvatos clothes..."

"Beth..."

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Listening to the rising tension in their voices, I knew that I needed to remove myself from the situation. But I also knew that my only escape route meant walking right into the eye of the storm. Wearing lingerie. Instead, I backed into the furthest corner of the kitchen and tried to make myself invisible.

"I'm thinking you're in midlife crisis mode, Pop."

"Beth..."

"I mean, it's not like you to go trolling for women on a Friday night."

"Beth, stop."

"Thank you, though for not picking up one of my friends. That would be so over the top."

"Beth, stop it! You're being incredibly rude and completely insulting to Lisa. I told you she was going to be here this weekend." She shrugged, which wasn't much of an answer, but seemed to be enough for Seth. "By the way, knocking before you walk into someone's house is a very charming habit you might consider adopting."

"I didn't have to knock when it was *my* house. I guess I keep forgetting my dad kicked me out."

"Beth, we've had this conversation..."

"That doesn't make it any less true. Anyway, I just came over to see if I can borrow your bass. I'll just grab it and be on my way, if that's okay with you. Far be it from me to interrupt you and ... whatever is going on here."

In boxing rings, a bell marks end of a round. At Seth's house, a teakettle whistle did the honors.

"Anyone want tea?" I asked, sounding like no one but Donna Reed ready to fix up

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everything with a chipper smile and a batch of homemade cookies. Beth stared at me with a smirk, but Seth managed a genuine smile.

“I’d love some, Lees. Beth, the bass is by the bookshelf. Take it. We will finish this conversation later.” He shifted seamlessly from pleasant companion to irate father and back to pleasant companion in a blink. Short as the moment was, it opened a window for me to see Seth’s life in its current configuration, free of shadows of the past and beyond the patina of the choreographed present we experienced on airplane flights and nice restaurants. Seth and Lisa: The Modern Era had officially begun.

“I’m sorry about that,” he said as he took a steaming mug of hot water out of my hands. “I was looking forward to you and Beth meeting. This was not the circumstances I would have chosen, however. She’s been quite... angry lately.”

“It’s okay,” I responded, even though I didn’t fully believe it was. “I suppose it could have been worse.”

“True. I could have been doing you on the kitchen counter when she walked in.”

“Or I could have been one of her friends.”

“I like my scenario better. I think it would go something like this,” Seth said, putting down his tea and wrapping his warm hands around my waist. We kissed until I heard the all-too-familiar chirp of my cell phone coming to life on the couch and tried to pull away.

“I should get that, Seth.”

“You have voice mail,” he said, tightening his grip.

“Come on, Seth. Let go.”

He stopped kissing me, but didn’t loosen his grip. “I don’t want to.”

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"Just for a minute. Let me go."

He stood motionless for a few seconds looking at me, then slowly released his grip and leaned back against the sink. "Dumbest thing I ever did," he muttered as I grabbed the phone and headed upstairs to check my messages.

"Don't be so dramatic. I'm just going upstairs, not to the airport."

The display on my cell phone told me I had six new messages. The first was from Harry, of course. I skipped it, figuring I could deal with him tomorrow before my flight home took off or on the cab ride back to my apartment. The second was an automated call from the airline telling me that the flight I had already taken was scheduled to depart on time. Three and four were from Harry, too, the last one sounding like he was eating in a very noisy restaurant and being a really irritating dinner companion. I skipped those, too. Number five was Angela and was exactly seven words long, "Oh my God, have fun this weekend!" The final call was Angela again, checking in to see if I was freaking out but since I didn't pick up she was going to assume I was having sex. Ironically, I could have been having sex except that I stepped away from the opportunity to take her call. I decided not to call her back.

Downstairs, Seth was sitting on the couch strumming his guitar with an obstinate look on his face that Beth had clearly learned to mimic over the years.

"It's like déjà vu all over again, isn't it, Lees?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, I am wondering if there is someone I should know about."

"I still don't know what you mean."

Seth ran through the evidence he had amassed that made him suspect I had some kind of

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significant other in Chicago. All it amounted to was my desire to take a phone call “at the crack of dawn on a Saturday,” moving to another room to take it and what he characterized as “long and weird periods of silence” after we saw each other in Chicago. I looked him straight in the eye and told him that I was not hiding someone, but I couldn’t tell if it had any effect on his outlook. He stared at the wall and absently strummed his guitar, head cocked in a way that made me think he was weighing evidence.

“It just all feels a little familiar, doesn’t it?”

“Being with you? Of course, it does, Seth. Now, being with you here in this house with surprise visits from your daughter? That’s brand new.”

“No, the juggling. I was thinking more along the lines of ... Well, never mind. It’s a gorgeous day in L.A. and we have the whole day ahead of us. Focus forward.”

I didn’t know what I had just witnessed. It was possible he was still reacting to his and Beth’s testy exchange, my checking my messages, or something I had no knowledge of whatsoever. And maybe there was a grain of truth to Beth’s midlife crisis assertion, or something unsavory attached to the end of his marriage. All I knew was that he had been unsettled, and I was able to watch him settle back into a calmer state right before my eyes. To continue his mood improvement, I offered to make breakfast and suggested we figure out a plan for our one and only full day together. It was a nice idea, but completely unrealistic. When I swung open the refrigerator door, all there was to pick from was take-out containers of various vintages.

“I don’t think that’s possible unless you can pull off some kind of loaves and fishes miracle. You may have noticed that I am not the grandest housekeeper,” Seth said with a smile that made me know he was back from whatever dark hole I’d found him in a moment earlier. He

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had an alternative plan, though. Seth always had an alternative plan. This one involved a quick shower, a stop at the neighborhood bakery for breakfast, an excursion to the Farmer's Market and a trip to the beach after that. Because, he said, why bother going all the way to California if you don't see the ocean? He pushed his guitar aside, took my hand and walked us up the stairs.

“And if you're going to be in California, you should know it's very important to conserve water. Come join me in the shower.”

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