

THE LAST TO SEE HER

by Courtney Evan Tate

Excerpt

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Genevieve tipped the courier and set the certified letter on the coffee table.

She knew what it was. She'd been waiting for it for almost a week.

Every day, she'd wondered, *Will it be today?*

And each day it wasn't.

Until today.

Nervous energy buzzed through her fingers and toes, tingling through her veins, like ants scurrying in a thousand directions. She paced for a minute, stopping at the floor-to-ceiling windows, staring at the magnificent cityscape lining the horizon. Buildings burst through the hazy pollution, their tips scraping the clouds.

People far below her were bustling here and there, quick to walk, slow to linger. They had things to do, places to be, and she didn't.

Not anymore.

She ripped open the envelope, pulling the banded documents out, scanning through the words, hunting for the official stamps and signatures that declared this an official act of the court.

They were all there.

This was real.

It was finally happening.

She focused her gaze on the words before her.

Honestly, they were simple.

The black-and-whiteness of them was stark and startling. There were no gray areas, no areas open to interpretation.

They reduced the last ten years of her life into a handful of legal phrases and technical terms. *Incompatible differences associated with adultery, marriage dissolution and absolute divorce.*

She stared at the words.

Soon, she would be *absolutely divorced*. She just had to sign the papers.

It had only taken six months of her life to iron out the details. To separate all of their worldly possessions into two camps, his and hers, to figure out who got what. Divorcing a lawyer was the only thing worse than being married to one. No matter that he was the one in error, because he repeatedly fucked someone else, he was out for blood and it took months to sort it all out.

But thank God no children were involved.

That's what people kept saying, like it was a good thing or a blessing.

But if she'd had a child, she wouldn't be all alone, and someone would still love her.

She felt like she was floundering. For so long, she'd put all of her energy into a man who hadn't deemed her worthy to stay faithful to. That had done something to her self-confidence. Something terrible. It wounded her in places she hadn't known she had, and now she had to figure out who she was without him.

She wasn't Genevieve Tibault anymore, one half of a whole. She was Genevieve McCready again, and what was Genevieve McCready going to do now, now that she had to stand alone?

She pushed herself off the couch and ran water in her coffee cup. It was a habit Thad had taught her. He hated it when the cups developed coffee rings. She stared at the running water, and then set her cup down.

She didn't have to do what he wanted anymore. If she wanted coffee rings or tea rings or any kind of fucking rings, she could have them.

It was an epiphany.

She was her own person again. It had been so long since she was a *me* instead of a *we*.

She looked around, at the condo she had fought so hard for...the marble floors that they couldn't agree on—she'd wanted slate, he'd wanted marble—at the modern light fixtures that he'd gotten his way on, at even the tan wall colors. She'd wanted gray.

Why had she even wanted this place?

It was all Thad, and none of Genevieve.

A sense of exuberance, a strange jubilation, welled up in her as she searched online for a realtor and then dialed the phone.

Bubbles of excitement swelled in her belly as she arranged a time for the realtor to come see the place.

And then again, as she stared at a map.

Unlike Thad, someone who had spent years building up his legal practice and honing his networking skills in this one city, she could work from anywhere.

She wrote novels.

She could work in Antarctica if she wanted to.

She *didn't* want to, but she could.

She already had a plan. She knew where she was going, and what she was doing. She just had to have the courage to do it.

She picked up the phone and called her only sister, Meghan.

"Meg, I'm moving home."

Her sister paused. "Home as in...?"

"Cedarburg." There was a long pregnant pause now.

"Um. Why would you want to move back to Wisconsin? You haven't lived there in..."

"In eighteen years. Since I left for college. Yes."

"But...why?"

"I don't know," Gen said honestly. "I just feel a need to get back to my roots. I love Chicago, but the traffic and the noise..." She stared out from her twentieth floor windows again. Even from up here, even though the vehicles looked like Matchbox cars, she could still hear the honking. "This feels like Thad. I want to feel like *me*."

"There's nothing there," Meg said carefully. "Nothing but fields and cold and—"

"And friendly people," Gen interrupted. "And our parents, and familiarity, and open spaces, and distance from Thad."

"But I won't be there," Meg reminded her gently. "I'm not moving back. I think you need to be near me, Gen. You need a support system. Divorce is no joke."

"I know that," Gen said patiently. "I'm the one living it. You're still with your Prince Charming and point five children living the American Dream, and I'm the one sitting in an empty condo." She fought to keep the bitterness out of her voice, as she compared Meg's bustling, messy home to her own stark and empty condo in her mind's eye.

"I'll tell Joey that you're counting him as a point five," Meg chuckled.

"Well, he's only five, so it's fitting. I mean, honestly. He's not a whole person yet."

They laughed again, and then Meg sobered up.

"Is this really something you want to do?"

Gen nodded. "Yeah. I think so."

Meg took a big breath. "Well, let's do it, then. I'll help you with your condo, and finding a moving company, and looking online for a house there, and hell's bells, we've got a lot to do!"

"You don't have to help with all that..." Gen trailed off, but Meg interrupted with their life-long pact.

"Sisters forever," she decreed. They'd used that pact since they were kids. Whenever one didn't want to do something, the other would remind them "sisters forever," and they would concede.

Gen realized she wasn't going to get away with not letting Meg get her hands in all the new plans.

"Sisters forever," she agreed.

"But first, you promised to go to my convention with me," Meg reminded her.

Gen hesitated.

"Don't tell me you forgot. New York City? Spa days, shopping—you need a new wardrobe, sis—and nights on the town. *You promised.*"

Gen paused again, and Meghan cajoled, "Pleasssse. We need this. You need this. It can be your divorce party."

"Okay," Gen found herself saying. "Fine. I'll still come."

Her sister squealed and Gen hung up before Meg could get too excited. She was moving away from everything she'd known for over a decade. Even though the world seemed unsettled and uncertain, for the first time in at least five years, she felt at peace.