

Chapter 11 (Elowyn): Status Quo

I looked at the short letter in my hand and read it for the fourth time since I'd plucked it out of my mail box ten minutes ago. Had I ever received a letter before in my life? A real-live, hand-written letter? I didn't think people did that anymore. And that it was from Lachlan? Doubly rare. When we'd lived together, I got Post-it notes stuck to the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror saying Have a good day I'll miss you Can't wait to see you tonight or the ever popular You know I love you

But this was a full-page of writing:

Wyn, what else would you put on THE BAD list? I'm trying to work on myself and this is what I have so far. I'm trying to fix all of the mistakes I've made in the past with you, so I'm asking for your input instead of me just assuming I got all the shit I've done to you on my list. (I'm afraid I forgot something.) Please let me know what else needs to be added.

THE BAD

1. Cheating to feel like I had control

2. Not listening to Elowyn

3. Fucking with her self-esteem

4. Not letting her talk about my cheating (maybe this is part of #2 on the list?)

5. Never trying to fix/stop my cheating

6. Expecting Elowyn to be OK with my cheating because I warned her from the start

7. Not stopping my cheating a er I saw how much it hurt Elowyn (this could be rolled up with #5, maybe, but it seemed important enough to have its own number)

8. Trying to push her into marriage every year and making it about what I wanted instead of what she wanted

9. Not talking about my past

10. Not talking about her past

11. Not loving Elowyn the way she deserved

12. Telling her you know I love you instead of I love you

I love you, Wyn.

Lachlan

I placed the letter on the counter, and it sat there, watching me, I swear, while I made dinner. I put it in front of my dinner plate when I sat down to eat and read it again. It sat beside me on the couch while I watched some reality TV, it stayed with me while I brushed my teeth and washed and moisturized my face and it slept on my pillow next to me all night. In the morning, it was in the bathroom with me while I showered, and it was on the counter as I made some coffee and ate a yogurt before I left for work.

Apparently, I was officially in a relationship with Lachlan's letter now.

Less than a day old, and the letter was already getting dog-eared. I couldn't even tell you how many times I'd read it. Well, two hundred thirty-nine times, but who was counting? He hadn't sent me a quote from whatever self-help book he was reading last night, but he had sent me an I love you text before I fell asleep and he'd sent me a good morning, have a good day text before I showered.

For three days, that letter stayed with me every moment, and I read that list. Over and over and over again. The next night a er I'd received the letter, I'd gotten the usual quote from a self-help book and an I love you text. We were back to normal.

Well, our new normal. Him reaching out and me not responding. It would have been easy to text him back. Six years with someone, five of which were serious, was a difficult dynamic to give up even if that dynamic had needed to change. His BAD list was horrible and I'd lived it with him, but if he had a GOOD list, I wondered if he had our talks on it. Although we didn't discuss the elephant in the room, having someone to share your day with was nice. Having someone ask a question and care about your answer was an amazing feeling, something I hadn't grown up with and had never experienced prior to Lachlan. And I'd wished we could have talked about our most important issue with the ease we talked about everything else.

A week a er the letter arrived, there was a bulkier package in my mailbox, but I could see from the envelope it was Lachlan's handwriting.

When I opened it up over the kitchen table, a book fell out. A paperback, a used one from the looks of the creased spine, and I turned it over to read the title. Overcoming Your Childhood There was a Post-it on the front.

Don't know about your childhood.

But I'd like to.

This helped me understand some things about myself.

I love you.

The book reminded me of the time I'd tried to get Lachlan to read a spy thriller that I'd just finished.

Not much of a reader, Wyn. About the only thing I read is financial reports and the accounting spreadsheets for the club businesses. It's not how I like to spend my time.

He didn't read. What Lachlan liked to do was work two-thousand piece puzzles while he had the TV on and I was on the couch reading. He wouldn't work one-thousand, five-hundred or three-thousand piece puzzles, only two-thousand piece puzzles. Why? No clue other than he said he found them challenging and two thousand was a nice, round number. Now he was reading self-help books, and extremely serious ones at that? I wondered how long he'd keep this up, or if this self-improvement regimen was like a New Year's diet resolution that was abandoned by January nineteenth.

That night, however, while cuddled on my couch, I picked up the book he'd sent and started thumbing through it. Lach was a highlighter, that was certain. Each page had at least two sentences highlighted, and some of them I recognized from the quotes he'd sent me in his texts.

Many of the highlighted sections hit home with me, so I turned back to the first page and began reading. Two hours later, I lied my head and realized I needed to get to bed so I could open the store early to receive the latest shipment. Carefully marking my page, I left the book on my coffee table and got ready for bed.

I loved Thursdays at the store because we had a book club of older ladies come in, and they ordered tea, ate some goodies and discussed raunchy books.

"I still say he cheated," Roberta said. They were discussing My Double-Tongued Alien Love by Gracelyn Matthewson. "He stuck that delicious tongue of his into the other captive girl's mouth right in front of the heroine."

"They weren't together yet, though," Gladys objected. "Not officially anyway. And he didn't know the human concept of monogamy. So when Crizzall threw the dinner plate at him, he stopped a er the one kiss."

"Still," Velma said, "if he did it once, he could do it again. He definitely had enough tongue to go around."

Smiling as I moved around them, I dusted shelves, tweaked end caps, and planned next month's window displays.

"Give us our five-minute debate topic," they called to me. At the end of every session, they did a round-robin debate, where each of the five book club members got to speak for one minute on the topic of my choice. I was never sure how I got roped into providing a topic, but they always asked me for it.

"Let's see," I said. "Going with the alien tongue action on two women, today's topic is: can cheaters change?"

"I'll start!" Velma said. And they were off, talking heatedly, and loudly, about the subject. At the end of the debate, there were two votes in favor of cheaters being able to change and three against.

"And where do you stand on the subject?" Velma asked me.

Normally, I would have given a joking answer, but I actually responded seriously. "I don't know. It's a question I've been thinking about a lot lately, and I wish I knew the answer."

They came up to buy next week's book club selection -- The Duke's Lusty Loin by Cree Foster -- and I noticed Roberta lingered behind when the other four had left.

"To answer your question, a cheater can change if he, or she, decides to commit to change." She looked me in the eye. "I know. And if you ever want a sounding board, I'd be happy to listen."

She grabbed her bag, and with a wink, walked out of the store. For the next four weeks, Roberta lingered behind the others at the end of book club.

"Have you figured out an answer to your question yet?"

I hadn't and told her so, and she gave me a knowing smile before she left.

For his part, Lach continued with his daily morning and evening texts, never asking me to text back, just keeping in one-sided touch. I'd finished the first book he'd sent, and started on the second one that had arrived in the mail, The Control Myth. It was fascinating to me what he highlighted, and it began to give me more insight to the man.

Although I was building a new set of friends in my new town through work and my apartment complex get-togethers, I still kept in touch with my old friends from the neighborhood, and to a very limited extent, the old ladies from the MC. My life was busy and full and I loved managing my own store. Me, the girl who would never amount to anything.

Life was steady and predictable, and if that was a bit boring, boring was sometimes OK for a time. I could add some excitement in when I felt ready for it. For now, status quo was satisfactory.

Until Lachlan changed things up with a new text one night:

Will you let me come see you?