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Friday, September 10, 9 p.m., *Beauty and the Beast*, Lunt-Fontanne Theater Ladies' Lounge

He hasn't called. I just checked with Mom.

I don't think it's completely fair of her to accuse me of believing the entire world revolves around my breakup with Michael. Because I don't. Really. How was I supposed to know she'd just gotten Rocky down for the night? She should turn off the ringer if he's turning into that much of a problem sleeper.

Anyway, there were no messages.

I guess I shouldn't have expected there to be. I mean, I checked on his flight, and he's not due to arrive in Japan for another seventeen hours.

And you aren't allowed to use cellphones or PDAs while you're actually in the air. At least, not for calls or text-messaging.

Or answering emails.

But that's OK. Really, it is. He'll call.

He'll get my email and then he'll call and we'll make up and everything will go back to normal.

It *has* to.

In the meantime, I just have to go on as if things *are* normal. Well, as normal as things can be while waiting to hear back from your boyfriend of two years with whom you've broken up, but to whom you sent an apology email because you realized you were completely and unequivocally wrong.

Especially since if you don't get back together you know you'll only live a sort of half life and be destined to have a series of meaningless relationships with supermodels.

Oh, wait. That's my dad. Never mind.

But, you know. It's me too. Minus the supermodels.

Watching *Beauty and the Beast* tonight with J.P. has made me realize how completely stupid I've been this past week.

Not that I hadn't realized it already. But the show *really* drove it home.

Which is especially weird, since Michael and I have never exactly seen eye to eye on the theatre. I mean, I could barely get Michael ever even to *go* with me to see the kind of shows I like, which are primarily ones involving girls in hoop skirts and things that fly down from the ceiling of the theatre (such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Tarzan: The Musical*).

And on the few occasions he DID go with me, he spent the whole time leaning over and whispering, 'I can see why this show is closing. No guy would really stand around singing to a talking teapot about how much he likes some girl. You know that, don't you? And where is the full orchestra supposed to be coming from? I mean, they're in a dungeon. It just doesn't make any sense.'

Which I used to think actually ruined the whole experience. As did Michael's excusing himself every five minutes to go to the men's room on the pretence of having drunk too much water at dinner. But really he was just checking for *World of Warcraft* alerts on his cellphone.

But even though I'm having a nice time here with J.P. and all, I can't help wishing Michael was here to complain that *Beauty and the Beast* is just a cheesy Disney musical targeted at little kids, who are hardly discriminating viewers, and that the music's really bad and the

whole thing is just to get the tourists to spend money on expensive T-shirts, sippy cups and glossy theatre programmes.

It's especially sad he's not here, because I realized tonight that the story of *Beauty and the Beast* is really the story of Michael and me.

Not the beauty part (of course). And not the beast part either.

But the part about two people who start out being friends and don't even realize they like each other until it's almost too late . . .

That is totally us.

Except, of course, that Belle is smarter than I am. Like, would it really have mattered to Belle if the Beast, back before he ever held her captive in his castle, had hooked up with Judith Gershner, then failed to mention it?

No. Because that all happened BEFORE Belle and the Beast found each other. So what difference did it make?

Exactly: None.

I just can't believe how stupid I've been about all this. I swear, even cheesy as it is – and, OK, I have to admit, I can see the cheese factor in it now – *Beauty and the Beast* has brought new clarity to my life.

Which shouldn't be all that surprising since it is, after all, a tale as old as time.

Anyway, I know in the past I've said my ideal man is one who can sit through an entire performance of *Beauty and the Beast*, the most romantic and beautiful story ever told, and not snicker in the wrong places (such as when the Beast is undergoing his onstage transformation into the Prince, or when the fake

stuffed wolves come out – well, they can't make them TOO scary, since there are little kids in the audience).

But now I realize that the only guy I've ever attended the show with who has passed that test is J.P. Reynolds-Abernathy the Fourth. He even – I couldn't help noticing – had a single tear trickling down his cheek during the scene where Beauty valiantly exchanges her own life for her father's.

Michael has never cried during a Broadway show. Except in that scene where Tarzan's ape father is brutally murdered.

And that was only because he was laughing so hard.

But here's the thing: and I'm starting to think that isn't necessarily a bad thing. I think guys just might be *different* from girls. Not just because they actually care about stuff like whether or not there'll ever be a *The Nightstalkers* movie starring Jessica Biel, reprising her role as Abby Whistler from *Blade: Trinity*.

Or because they think it's OK to sleep with Judith Gershner and never mention it to their girlfriend because it happened before they started going out.

But because they are just *programmed* differently. Like to be unmoved by the sight of a guy in a gorilla suit getting pretend-shot onstage.

Whereas they completely fall for that scene in the movie *Notting Hill* where Julia Roberts's character goes back to that guy played by Hugh Grant, even though in a million years a snotty movie star like that would never fall for a lowly bookstore owner.

And I say that as a princess who is in love with a college student.

The thing is, I finally get it now: guys are different than we are.

But that's not always a bad thing. In fact, as my ancestors would say, *Vive la différence.* Because, OK, a lot of guys don't like musicals.

But those same guys might also give you a snowflake necklace for your fifteenth birthday to represent the non-denominational winter dance where you first declared your love for one another.

Which, you have to admit, is way romantic.

Oh. The lights just flickered. It's time to go back to my seat for the second act.

Which, truthfully, I'm not really looking forward to. It would be OK if J.P. didn't keep asking me if I'm all right.

I totally get that he's concerned about me as a friend and all, but – what does he expect me to say? How can he not know that the answer is no, I'm *not* all right? Do I need to remind him that not two nights ago I idiotic-ally ripped OFF that snowflake necklace and THREW it at the guy who gave it to me? Does he think you just automatically rebound from something like that, just because you are attending a musical with dancing teacups in it?

J.P. is totally sweet, but he's a little clueless sometimes.

Although Tina is completely right, it turns out: J.P. really *is* a pent-up volcano of passion. The single tear proves it. All he needs is the right woman to unlock his heart – which up until now he has kept in a cold, hard shell for his own emotional protection – and he will explode like the simmering caldera that makes up part of Yellowstone National Park.

And obviously this woman wasn't Lilly (who by the way also hasn't called or emailed me, even to yell at me

some more for being a boyfriend-stealer. Which isn't a bit like her).

On the other hand, maybe J.P. isn't clueless. Maybe he's just a guy.

They can't all be like the Beast, I guess.

Friday, September 10, 11.45 p.m., the Loft

Inbox: 0
No phone messages either.

But Michael's plane is still in the air for another fourteen and a quarter hours. He'll call me when he lands.

I mean, he *has* to. Right?

OK, not thinking about that now. Because every time I do, I get these weird heart palpitations and my palms get sweaty.

Meanwhile, a hand-delivered envelope *did* arrive for me while I was gone. Mom told me about it (not very happily) when I woke her up to ask if Michael had called (honestly, I didn't realize she was asleep. Usually she's up watching *David Letterman* until the musical guest comes on at twelve thirty. How was I supposed to know the musical guest was Fergie, so Mom went to bed early?).

The hand-delivered envelope obviously wasn't from Michael. It was on fancy ivory stationery and had a big red wax seal with the letters D and R stamped in the middle. There was something about it that just screamed Grandmere.

So I wasn't very surprised when Mom said, all crabbily, 'Your grandmother says to open it right away.'

I *was* surprised, however, when she added, 'And she said to call her when you do. No matter what time it is.'

'I'm supposed to call Grandmere *after eleven o'clock at night*?' This didn't make any sense. Grandmere goes to bed right before the eleven o'clock news every night without fail, unless she's out partying with Henry Kissinger or somebody like that. She says if she doesn't

get her full eight hours of beauty sleep, she can't do a thing with the bags under her eyes the next day, no matter how much haemorrhoid cream she puts on them.

'That's the message,' Mom grumped, and pulled the covers back over her head (though how she can sleep with Mr Gianini snoring away like that next to her is a mystery to me. It can only be true love).

I wasn't liking the look of that envelope, and I *definitely* wasn't liking the idea of having to call Grandmere at eleven thirty at night.

But I went to my room and ripped open the seal and pulled out the letter and started reading . . .

And nearly had a heart attack.

I was on the phone with Grandmere in about two seconds flat.

'Oh, Amelia,' she said, sounding completely awake. 'Good. Finally. Did you receive your letter?'

'From Lana Weinberger's MOM?' I practically screamed. I only remembered to keep my voice down because I live in a loft and my little brother was sleeping in the next room and I didn't want to risk the wrath of Mom if I woke him up. 'Asking me to give the keynote speech at her women's society's big charity event to raise money for African orphans? Yes. But . . . how did you know? Did you get one too?'

'Don't be ridiculous,' she scoffed. 'I have my ways of finding out these things. Now, Amelia, I must know. This is very important. Did she mention issuing you an invitation to join the Domina Reis when you come of age?' You could practically hear her salivating, she was so excited. '*Did she say anything about asking you to pledge when you turn eighteen?*'

'Yes,' I said. 'But, Grandmere, I've never even heard of these Domina Reis before. And I don't have time for this right now. I am going through a very stressful time at the moment, and I really have to concentrate on just staying centred—'

This was totally the wrong thing to say, however. Grandmere was practically breathing fire when she replied in her princessiest tone, 'For your information, the Domina Rei is one of the most influential women's societies in the world. How can you not be aware of this, Amelia? They are like the Opus Dei of women's organizations. Only not religiously affiliated.'

I had to admit, this got me kind of interested, in spite of myself. 'Really? Opus Dei? That secret society in *The Da Vinci Code*? The one where the members whip themselves? Lana's mom keeps a weird metal spike wrapped around her leg?'

'Of course not,' Grandmere said with a sniff. 'I meant figuratively.'

This was disappointing to hear. I have never met Lana's mom (and she clearly knows nothing about me, because in her letter she mentioned how much Lana has appreciated my friendship over the years, and how regrettable it is that my busy royal agenda has kept me from attending more of the parties she knows Lana has invited me to at their place. Um. Yeah), but the idea of any member of the Weinberger family with possible spikes digging into her fills me with great joy.

'And,' Grandmere went on, 'I know I've told you about the Domina Reis before, Amelia. The Contessa Trevanni is a member.'

'Bella's grandmother?' Grandmere hasn't mentioned her arch-enemy the Contessa much since the

Contessa's granddaughter, Bella, delighted the entire Trevanni family by running off last Christmas with my pseudo-cousin Prince René and getting, well, knocked up by him (Grandmere says it's more polite to say *enceinte*, which is the French term, but the truth is, he really did knock her up. I mean, hello, has *no one* in my family heard of condoms?).

After a stern talking-to by my dad (and, I suspect, an exchange of cash: René was just days from signing a television deal for a new reality show, *Prince Charming*, in which a number of young single girls were to compete for the chance to date a real-life prince . . . namely, René), René finally married Bella. Sadly for her grandmother, the wedding took place in a quiet private ceremony, since René took so long to finally pop the question that Bella was obviously showing, and they're still sensitive about that kind of thing in *Majesty* magazine.

Now Bella and René are living on the Upper East Side in a penthouse the Contessa bought them as a wedding present, attending Lamaze classes together and looking as if neither of them could be happier.

Grandmere is so jealous that Bella got René instead of me – even though I'm still in *high school*, hello – she could plotz. Basically, we never speak of it.

'Audrey Hepburn was a Domina Rei, as well,' Grandmere went on. 'As well as Princess Grace of Monaco. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Even Oprah Winfrey.'

A hush fell over our conversation then, as it always does in polite society whenever Ms Winfrey's name is mentioned.

Then I said, 'Well, that's all very nice, Grandmere. However, like I said, this really isn't the best time for me. I—'

But Grandmere, as usual, wasn't even listening.

'I, of course, was asked to join years ago. However, due to a complete misunderstanding involving a certain gentleman who shall remain nameless, I was ruthlessly blackballed.'

'Oh,' I said. 'Well, that's too bad. I—'

'Fine. If you must know, it was Prince Rainier of Monaco. But the rumours were completely false! I never even looked at him twice! Was it my fault he was so fascinated by me that he used to follow me around like a puppy? I can't imagine how anyone could have thought it was anything other than what it was . . . a simple infatuation a much older man bore for a young woman who couldn't help sparkling with wit and *joie de vivre*.'

It took me a minute to figure out who she was talking about. 'You mean . . . *you*?'

'Of course me, Amelia! What is wrong with you? Why do you think he married Grace Kelly? Why do you think his family allowed him to marry a movie actress? Only because they were so relieved he agreed to marry *anyone* after the heartbreak he experienced when I rejected him . . .'

I gasped. 'Grandmere! You turned him *gay*?'

'Of course not! Amelia, don't be ridiculous. I – Oh, never mind. How did we even get on this topic? The fact is, the Contessa Trevanni will eat her own head if you give the keynote address at her women's society's charity gala. They've never asked *her* granddaughter to speak. Of course, why would they? She's never

accomplished anything, except to get pregnant, which any halfwit can do, and she's such a namby-pamby, she'd probably freeze up at the sight of those two thousand impeccably groomed successful businesswomen staring up at her—'

I gasped again . . . but this time for a different reason. 'Wait . . . two *thousand*?'

'We'll have to make an appointment at Chanel right away,' Grandmere blathered on. 'Something subdued, I think, yet youthful. I do believe it's time we fitted you with a suit. Dresses are fine, but you can never go wrong with a really good wool suit—'

'Impeccably groomed, successful businesswomen?' I echoed, feeling slightly faint. 'I thought they were all like Lana's mom . . . society wives with full-time nannies and cooks and maids—'

'Nancy Weinberger is one of the most sought-after interior decorators in Manhattan,' Grandmere interrupted coldly. 'She completely furnished the apartment the Contessa bought for René and Bella. Let me see now, the Domina Reis colours are blue and white . . . blue's never been your best colour, but we'll have to make do . . .'

'Grandmere,' I said. Panic was rising in my throat. It was sort of the way I felt every time I thought about Michael, only without the sweaty palms. 'I can't do this. I can't give a speech in front of two thousand successful businesswomen. You don't understand – I'm going through a romantic crisis at the moment and, until it's resolved, I really think I need to keep a low profile . . . in fact, even after it's resolved I don't think I can speak in front of that many people.'

'Nonsense,' Grandmere said crisply. 'You spoke in

front of the Genovian Parliament about the parking meters, remember? As if any of us could forget.'

'Yeah, but they were just old guys in wigs, not Lana Weinberger's mom! I don't know about this, Grandmere. I think maybe I should—'

'Of course, Lord only knows what we'll do about your hair. I don't suppose it will have grown in by then. Maybe Paolo can fashion some sort of extensions. I'll phone him in the morning . . .'

'Seriously, Grandmere,' I said. 'I think I—'

But it was too late. She'd already hung up, still muttering about hair extensions.

Great. This is all I need.