

## An Excerpt from *Smoke In Your Eyes*

The next morning was almost an exact replica of the previous one, sans the braless mishap with Principal Hayward. Addy had been so taken with herself about the new furniture arrangement, she had forgotten about the broken coffeepot and the lack of suitable breakfast food in her pantry, so she spent another coffee-less morning rushing her kids out of the house.

After dropping off Jeremy, responsibility won out over her uncontrollable urge for caffeine and Addy found herself in the supermarket, Luke in tow. She picked out a new coffeepot, some bananas and a box of Fruit Loops, and absently steered her son to the checkout line.

She was trying to make sense of one of the headlines on a tabloid magazine – something about a human woman who gave birth to a reptile of some kind – when Luke yelled out, “Mom, that man has tattoo pictures on his *face*! And his earring is in his *lips*!”

Addy winced as she looked around to see if the “that man” was standing in line right behind them in clear earshot of Luke’s comments, but to her relief, no one was there. She glanced down to see that Luke was just pointing to the cover of a magazine, and breathed a sigh of relief.

Then her eyes focused on the Rolling Stone issue and all the color drained from her face. The pierced, tattooed man Luke was referring to, was as familiar to Addy as her own reflection in the mirror.

Gabe Hollan stared up at her with piercing green eyes through long tendrils of unkempt black hair. He didn’t look so different from the last time she’d seen him. The lip piercing was new, and he had a vine-like tattoo on the left side of his neck that crept up to just below his ear. She swallowed hard as she realized that those vines would connect to the misshapen heart beneath his shirt. The one that matched her own. He didn’t look any older, but his eyes were different, almost vacant, and the lack of warmth in his blank stare made her shiver where she stood.

She had no idea how long she stood there frozen, but Luke’s tugging on her sleeve immediately snapped her back to consciousness. She paid for her groceries like an automaton, answering Luke’s never-ending inquiries about life in general without even realizing what she was saying.

Later, when the boys were tucked in for the night, Addy sat alone in the dark, trying to sort out her thoughts. She had dreaded this quiet time all day, knowing that the moment she was alone, the pain would not be kept at bay. She closed her eyes and let the feeling wash over her.

Most people would give anything to have what she did. Charlie was a devoted husband, a great father. Sure, he was away more than he was home, but he provided a very nice life for their little family. She had two beautiful boys that she cherished, and a house in one of the best neighborhoods in the city. She had so much to be grateful for.

So then why did she feel so incomplete?

Gabe had not been a part of her life for a very long time. She should just accept the fact that they were never meant to be together for the long haul. They’d had each other through the difficult years of their childhood, and in many ways they had saved each other, but eventually they grew up and grew apart. She had a different life now, one that he didn’t fit in.

But his face haunted her nearly every night in her dreams. She had never really let go, if she was being honest with herself. Seeing him stare at her from the magazine cover earlier, had only brought him to the forefront of her mind, and now she couldn't shake off the memories.

More disturbing was the fact that she had been reflecting on her current life, even before seeing that picture of Gabe. She had been wondering over and over how she'd even gotten to where she was. Had she made all the right decisions? Once upon a time she had a career she loved, she'd been self-assured and self-supporting. Was it a moment of weakness that she let Charlie convince her to rely on him for everything? She had never even tried to get another job after the fiasco with Morgan. Within six months of losing her job, she was married, and nine months later Jeremy was born. She didn't remember making a conscious choice to be a stay-at-home mom, yet here she was – keeping the home fires burning while Charlie was making a name for himself. Had she always been bitter, or was she making excuses for thinking about a long lost love, trying to ease her guilt.

A flood of unwelcome images crept up on her... Gabe hunched over his guitar, long black hair over his face, playing the same riff over and over until it was perfect. His smooth voice sending shivers up and down her spine as he sang onstage to thousands of people. The sideways look he sent her way, assuring her that she might as well be the only one in the room. His crooked smile, the intensity of his green eyes when they made love, his sleeping face as she kissed him goodbye that last time... her own self, curled up on the floor in agony after...

She shook her head violently as if that would clear her mind. Then she padded silently into the kitchen, not bothering to turn on any lights. She grabbed the first bottle she saw out of the well-stocked liquor cabinet and made a ritual out of pouring it in a tumbler. Straight vodka, no ice, just like her mama used to drink it. She threw it back then poured another and took it back into her bedroom where she sat in a corner on the floor and tried to forget, just for a little while – just forget.