

## Departure by Michelle

This fictional story is inspired by the season two Boston Legal storyline that implies the romance between Alan and Tara will have a resolution. It is a completely imagined situation, not reflective of any actual script. The characters of Boston Legal are owned by David E. Kelley Productions.

Even though the envelope was out of sight in the top drawer of Tara's desk, it seemed to still be visible, glaring at her through the cherry wood, constantly reminding her of the unpleasant task that lay before her, which she had successfully avoided all day. She knew she couldn't put it off much longer. She knew she had to tell him. The envelope was there, reminding her of it, distracting her constantly from the case she was trying to work on. She should have told him that morning before the meeting, but he had seemed so jovial, and she liked his cheerful side. Then at lunch he had been distracted with his case, and now he was in trial, so she couldn't do it now. Maybe she could wait until tomorrow. Maybe she was worried for nothing. Perhaps his reaction wouldn't be anything. Perhaps he would be happy about it, or at least be happy for her . . . or maybe -

"Hey, Tara," a gentle knock on her door.

She looked up to see Shirley's warm yet slightly terse smile.

"Shirley, hello."

Shirley continued to stand in the doorway, smiling at her in a knowing way.

"Why didn't you tell me the good news?" she eventually asked.

Tara's hesitant stare prompted Shirley to continue.

"I got a call this morning from my friend Blake in London . . . apparently you two have been talking."

Tara looked down.

"You're going to accept the position I would imagine? It's a wonderful opportunity. I mean, it's an unfortunate loss for Crane Poole & Schmidt, but Blake runs an excellent law firm."

"It's a chance to be closer to my family," Tara finally said. "I just got the letter from him this morning. I was going to talk to you about it sooner but -"

“Tara, shhh. It’s okay. I understand, and I’m happy for you.”

“Shirley? Can we keep this quiet for a while though? I just . . . well . . . I want to tell certain people myself. I’m just not sure how he’s going to, or how they’re going to, respond.”

“Sure.”

But Tara was smart enough to know that word would travel fast. She just didn’t anticipate how fast.

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The morning was bright and the sun created a pink glow throughout the office, blending with the smell of fresh coffee, creating a soft serenity in the meeting room, interrupted only by the sound of Alan shuffling the pages of his newspaper. With one leg thrown comfortably over the other, he leaned back in his chair, still feeling the lingering haze of sleep. He was aware of Brad in the room, aware of Brad filling his coffee mug, going over his notes for the imminent morning meeting, but it was too early for their usual office banter. Brad felt this too as he sat down, deliberately leaving an empty seat beside Alan. He closed his eyes, enjoying the momentary silence of the morning, and deeply breathed in the scented steam which gushed from the familiar mug he held in his hands.

They acknowledged each other with polite nods of their heads.

The serenity of the moment was broken a few minutes later, as office noises began to filter through the door, becoming louder and louder and soon Denny burst in, followed by Shirley and Lori, who were arguing about their case. Tara entered the room in the next beat, clutching several overflowing folders and balancing a coffee cup. The group dispersed around the table, creating a symmetrical seating arrangement. However, the seat which Brad had intentionally left vacant was not filled. He noticed this change in pattern – his military training and experience with issues of security had left him with a keen sense of observation – and he wondered what the reason was.

“Good morning Tara,” he said to the new position she had taken across the table.

She smiled at Brad, and then looked quickly at Alan, who, during the commotion of the meeting room filling, had not moved from his morning newspaper. He still embodied the calmness of the morning sun, unflinched by the chaos around him, he sat, absorbed in his space, clinging to the moment as long as possible, reluctant to succumb to the fast paced meeting which was about to ensue. Perhaps he had a sixth sense. Perhaps he somehow felt that the meeting was going to bring more than

the usual banter and heated discussions. Perhaps he was aware that something in his life was about to change, that something about this meeting would be different.

Denny sprang to life and requested the usual synopses of the cases from his colleagues. Shirley argued with him and corrected him as usual as he mis-spoke and misinterpreted most of what was being presented to him. As Brad jumped in to support Shirley, careful to maintain diplomacy, he noticed that Tara was still behaving uncharacteristically. She was not participating in the meeting. She stared straight ahead and appeared alert, appeared to be listening, yet he could tell she was somewhere else, creating an odd tension which was beginning to permeate the entire group at the table. It wasn't until Denny abruptly changed the subject that the source of the aberrancy became clear.

"And on to other business . . . Tara's last day is . . . when did you say? this Friday? She's going back to London to work for . . . which law firm did you say?"

"Uh . . . Denny!" Shirley interrupted, springing up, glancing frantically at Tara.

"Oh, that was the item that was supposed to remain confidential, wasn't it? Well, now it's not. We've loved working with Tara and wish her the best in her new endeavors. Denny Crane."

*Going back to London . . . going back to London . . .*

These were the last words Alan Shore had heard. His fingers tightening around his newspaper, he stared across the table at her, his eyes burning into her, feeling the flush creeping in to his face, giving away his feelings, revealing his humiliation, while the rest of the room became suddenly dim and far away. Even the beautiful pink glow of the sun turned to gray and the voices around him trailed off as he continued to just stare.

She couldn't look at him. She looked down at the table, her hands palms down over the folders she had carried in with her.

Alan had no idea how much time had passed or what else had been discussed at the meeting. He only noticed that the meeting had ended when he saw Tara get up from the table and turn her back on him as she began talking with Lori, who was congratulating her. He saw the movement of Tara's long brown hair against her back as she laughed. He saw Lori smiling at her and saw the shiny bulge created in Tara's hair as Lori put her arms around Tara's neck to hug her.

Eventually he heard the door of the meeting room close.

But she was still in the room with him. She was the one who had closed the door, and now she came to the table and sat in the empty chair next to him.

“Alan?”

“Congratulations!” he recovered beautifully.

“Alan . . . I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“Why would you be sorry? I’m not sorry,” he said, which he realized didn’t make much sense but his heart was pounding and his palms were sweating and he knew his face was still red.

“But I am sorry. I didn’t want you to find out this way. I wanted to talk to you about it. There are a lot of things we need to talk about, things I need to understand – “

He couldn’t do this. Not right now. He got up, taking his newspaper, and decided the best approach was to just mimic the behavior of his co-workers.

“Congratulations,” he said again, so cheerfully, and put his arms briefly around her neck, just enough to feel the bulge in her hair against his forearms. “I’m sure this will be a wonderful opportunity for you. I wish you the best of luck in your new endeavor. I’ve really enjoyed working with you.”

Then he turned from the meeting room and was gone, shutting the door slightly too hard behind him, leaving Tara alone.

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Friday was a day like any other, but to both Alan and Tara it seemed to be the longest day of their lives. But they didn’t share this sentiment with each other, even as they worked across the desk from each other. Sitting together in Alan’s office, silently working on their joint case, the way they had always done.

“Do you have those notes on the Miller case?” he was asking her.

*Miller case. Miller case.*

“Uh, no,” she tried to clear her head and focus on their task. “I’m sorry Alan. I must have left that on my desk.”

“Could you get them, please?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you.”

She walked to the door, and tried to reach out and open it but suddenly the uncomfortable silence in the room became too overwhelming. *No. No. No.* This

wasn't right. It wasn't going to happen this way. She wasn't going to let it end this way.

"Say the word Alan!" she shrieked, turning around, her hair dancing like a skirt around her shoulders. "God Alan. Please. Say the word. Ask me not to go. Ask me not to go and I won't." She could hear herself talking but couldn't believe the sound she heard was coming from her own throat. She had never heard her voice so pained. It sounded absolutely hollow.

He didn't look up.

"I need the Miller notes." He was still holding his pencil but now she could clearly see that his hand was shaking far too hard to him to be writing anything coherent.

Instinctively, or perhaps out of habit, she locked the door and flicked the blinds shut.

"Don't you even want to know why? Don't you even want to talk about this? My God Alan, do you even care? Have you ever cared? Are you capable of caring??"

He suddenly lifted his pencil and flung it as hard as he could across the room, sending it violently spinning, an intended fierce projectile to anything in its path, but the light weight of the pencil only made a quiet tap as it collided with Alan's coat, and another gentle plap as it hit the floor and then began to roll. The quiet rolling motion of the pencil was now the only sound in the room, and it didn't stop, but somehow avoided the garbage cans and desk legs which attempted to block its route, mocking Alan with its gentle rumble, while Tara stood uncomfortably debating whether to pick it up for him, the pencil continued, now completely victorious over him as it made it all the way to the chair where he was sitting, finally ending its journey at Alan's feet.

The unexpectedly long amount of time taken up by this event was enough to make Alan realize the childishness of having done it in the first place, and he couldn't help but chuckle. He closed his eyes, and when he opened them again his expression had changed and he was looking at Tara tenderly.

She mirrored his expression, gazing into his eyes with the honesty and kindness that always seemed to be present when she looked at him. She didn't speak, but instead waited for him to respond as he needed to, in his own time. He got up and walked over to her, standing directly in front of her, his eyes locked on hers, smiling slightly, but not bothering anymore to conceal his sadness. He sighed, and reached for her hair, moving it in front of her shoulders. Then he gently pushed an unruly strand away from her face. She felt his warm breath on her forehead as he gently kissed her there, where the hair had been, and let his lips linger, brushing lightly now against her cheek. .

"See" he finally whispered. "Everything turns out badly in the end."

It was something she had heard him say before. He had said those very words to her a little over a year ago. The sadness and truth of his words had struck her then, and she saw the irony of them again now. Unable to fight the tears away, her lips were on his cheeks and now her mouth was by his ear and she could hear herself whispering. "No, Alan. It doesn't have to be that way this time. Don't let it turn out that way. Just ask me to stay, that's all you have to do."

"Tara. I want you to go to London. I want you to be closer to your family. I can tell it's what you want to do. Go, Tara. Please go."

The resolve with which he said it made her realize there was nothing she could do. No amount of reasoning or crying or begging would move him. He had asked her to go. She had to go. But she could still feel his eyelashes and his breath against her cheek. Her fingers were still wrapped around his arms and instead of letting go, she dug in more tightly. Searching, searching, her eyes tightly closed, she found his lips and pressed them against her own, tasting him, wanting to feel a response from him, to feel his lips kissing her back. She slid her arms up and around his neck, running her hand through his hair, pulling him tightly against her.

There was a noise outside. Neither of them was sure what or who it was, but it was enough to bring them both back to the reality of their situation. And at that moment she felt him change. He stiffened and turned away from her, his face sinking into his hands.

"Alan?" she whispered frantically.

"Tara, you should go," he said, without moving, without letting himself look at her.

She made a slight noise of protest which he interrupted, suddenly lifting his head, his usual self back in charge. "Tara. I asked you to go. I have work to do, and you have a plane to catch, and there are many more women in this office I have to go introduce myself to."

She looked at him and stood there. She stood there by the desk, just watching him, catching her breath, trying to get her heart rate back to normal.

"Tara," he finally said, with mock patience. "Your prolonged staring once again indicates you might have something to say. Would you care to share it this time?"

She paused, knowing she was about to make a huge mistake, but she couldn't stop herself. She knew she shouldn't ask him this, but she also knew she had to know.

"What was her name Alan?"

A pause.

“Who?”

“Her. Her. The woman who hurt you so badly that you’ll never let yourself move on, that you’ll never let yourself feel again. Who made you think you’re somehow undeserving of a healthy loving relationship. Who made you afraid to ever commit to anyone or to admit it when you’re in love. Why are you *like* this? Who was she Alan? What was her name?”

Another pause.

“What makes you think it’s a *she*?” he asked innocently.

She rolled her eyes. He was hopeless, but she couldn’t help but smile at his sarcasm. He just had a way of being so *him*. She couldn’t hate him. Even as he kicked her out of his life, she couldn’t hate him. But as she looked at him, with his adorable lopsided smile and bewitching eyes, she realized that indeed it was hopeless. It was hopeless and the anger she had felt a moment ago was now being replaced by a new sense of profound sorrow accompanied by the acknowledgement that whatever she felt she could have done for him, whatever love and support she could have given him, would never happen. She wasn’t what he needed. She had no idea what he needed, or even what he wanted. But she just knew that, whatever it was, she couldn’t provide it. Yet she didn’t feel anger toward him any more. She only felt pity.

“Take care, Alan. I hope someday you get the help you need, and find the happiness that you deserve.” She reached for his hand.

He looked for a minute like he was going to say something, but instead just smiled and breathed out through his nose. One last gentle squeeze of his hand, and she was gone.

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Logan International was its usual loud, bustling self that night as Tara retrieved her bags from the trunk of the taxi and waved off the attendants who tried to help her. For some reason she enjoyed the strain of her clumsy bag cutting in to her shoulder, and the heaviness of her suitcase was a distraction from the hollow feeling in her chest and the pain in her forehead which had been there since the day before. The drudgery of checking in and passing through security became a blur as she slowly made her way to the gate. The excitement she should have felt, which she wanted to feel, was not there.

A new job.

Time to spend with her family.

Why did none of it seem to matter anymore?

She had arrived at the airport late, and by the time she made it to her gate there were heavy crowds and few places to sit. Throwing her bag between her feet, she leaned against a post and scanned the chairs for an empty one.

That was when she heard the familiar shuffling of a newspaper in the seat directly in front of her, the leather shoes and the black coat, the familiarity of his casual position, leaning back in his chair, one leg thrown over the other. It was so familiar, and yet she studied him for a full minute before it registered. *It was him.* Dear god, it was him.

Still not believing her eyes, she walked to him, standing directly in front of his newspaper, not bothering to conceal the giddy smile that now adorned her face.

“I can’t believe it! You’re here!”

“Excuse me?” the unrecognizable new face said back to her.

“Oh,” The smile faded as the confused glare of the man behind the paper made her realize her mistake. “I – I’m sorry. You look a lot like someone I . . . used to know.”

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Alan worked late. Tara hadn’t gotten him the notes on the Miller case, and after their conversation in his office it seemed inappropriate to try to ask her again for them, so he was now having to work twice as hard. Everyone else had gone, even Denny, who had finally resorted to drinking his scotch with Brad on the terrace that night, while Alan worked. Hearing the silence in the office, Alan put his notes down and closed the folders and books he had been submerged in. *What was her name, Alan?* Why had Tara asked him such a thing. His eyes moved down to his bottom desk drawer, and the familiar knot formed in his stomach and his hand trembled as he reached for it. He hesitated, not wanting to open it, yet knowing that for some reason he had to. He saw his hand moving reluctantly for the drawer and finally open it.

He took out the forty-three year old picture inside.

It’s black and white edges were curled by now, and it was beginning to yellow, but he could still clearly make out the slender image of a woman, her long pale hair tumbling over her shoulders in the style of the time, and he could also see the baby she held in her arms.

Turning the photo over, he quietly whispered her name. Then he quickly thrust the photo back into the drawer and closed it.

Even though the photo was now out of sight, Alan found himself unable to be in the same room with it. He got up and left his office, walking out to the terrace. He fruitlessly hoped that somehow Denny would still be there, that perhaps Brad would still be there, and he could lose himself in their conversation, laughing and joking with them, drinking scotch with them, forgetting about her, forgetting about the picture.

Instead he found himself alone on the terrace.

The chairs where he and Denny always sat were empty, facing the lights of Boston and the black sky above it. The sun had left the sky, which was now obscured in a black cloud cover, its treasures hidden from view, leaving just an inky vast blackness over its entirety. There were the usual sounds from the street below, car horns and street vendors, but the only sound he was aware of was the dull roar of an airplane which appeared to have just departed Logan International. He looked up in time to see its white lights and shiny exterior disappearing from view under the black clouds which filled the sky.

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Outside her window, the sun had already descended under the giant black rooms of ice crystals over which she soared, racing east toward the calm quiet of the night sky, the monotonous roar filling her ears, and the gentle lilted motion rocking her. She looked down at Boston - at what had had been her home, so magical, so full of promise. It suddenly looked small as she strained to make out the angular shape of the office in the cacophony of lights, hoping for one last view, but before she could, the lights began to fade, becoming dimmer and dimmer before succumbing to complete darkness as the plane became shrouded in the clouds.

Pummeling itself forward with ever increasing velocity, the plane fought its way through the darkness, and suddenly, with a sharp jolt of turbulence, it was free, breaking into the clear night sky. Now a new view greeted Tara. She was amazed by the sudden brightness of the moon shining upon her and the endless pattern of stars which stretched before her. Her mouth opened as she gazed at them, trying to focus her eyes on all of them, one at a time, each one suddenly seeming like a new world onto itself. Each one a new possibility. Each one a new beginning.