

Dave's Note

by Michael Barela

Dave Sharpe silently pulled his desk chair out of its nook that was conveniently placed underneath his desk. He took a deep breath as he slowly took his place in the seat and nudged it into a perfect writing position. For nearly ten minutes he sat stoically, staring at the stack of personalized stationary he had placed perfectly on one of the furthest corners of the desk; but to David, it felt like a whole lifetime of thought. He saw himself sitting at his desk, doing nothing but thinking, as he grew older and died. Of course, after he snapped back to attention and noticed the clock, it was far from that long. He reached for a blank page with the *neat* and *colorful*, as his wife (*ex-wife*) used to describe it, header that simply read

David Sharpe — Talent Manager

It was a simple title for a simple job, but even the simplest jobs can carry the heaviest weight.

And bring in the most money.

He reached for a pen he kept in his plastic organizer that he had perfectly placed next to his custom stationary paper and grabbed it with intense purpose. When he drew his arm back to rest in a comfortable writing position with the pen that felt as if had the same weight as a brick; it was as if his pen refused to contribute to his plans. Silly thoughts such as this were easily brushed away by David's busy mind; there was no time for such trite analogies.

David inhaled slowly and deeply as he counted to ten,

one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten

then held his breath for another ten count,

one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten

then exhaled slowly for another count to ten,

one-two-three-four-

before he lost his patience and decided to get to work.

* * *

Elizabeth. Liz. My only daughter. My only happiness. I hope this will find you in good health and high spirits, and I pray that this

will not hurt you. Your mother and I have had our fair share of arguments and bitter fights, as you know. But I write this not to further whine about Abigail; God has already poured enough salt on that wound. I write this in the hopes that when you read this you will have a clear and honest understanding of who your father was. I want you to know who I really was and why I did what I did. Your mother might have thrown around words like *drug-person* or *junkie* to describe me, especially when things got really rocky, but I want you to understand *why* those little white lines got to me and how *hard* it was to get off it. I want you to understand *everything* about me. To understand your daddy.

* * *

David had to stop and put down his pen. Daddy, he had written. He was always so prim and proper, always so damn *professional*. That was one reason things went off the rails, he supposed. But the word daddy always came difficult to him, to say it or to hear it spoken to him.

That's it. Time to stop moping and start writing.

But it just felt right to write the word on this letter to his only family left. He straightened out his tie, which was already straight enough as it was, while he pondered the word. Maybe, he thought briefly, if his own father would have been more loving, the word would come more naturally to him. But this letter was not about David's father and that relationship; this letter was about David, *for* his beloved daughter. He stopped fidgeting with his tie and picked up his pen again.

* * *

Before I start, I want you to know that I love you *very very very very very* much, and I know that you are a beautiful young lady by now, you will find a love that is just as good, if not *better*, than what your mother and I had. Please promise me that you will *never* doubt that.

And know that I will always be with you.

Me and Abby grew up in the same town. If you can believe it, we were even born in the same hospital. We were just kids when

we first met. I think I might have been five when we first met on the playground. Maybe you remember, but she always used to tell everyone how I went up to her and pulled her hair, but what really happened is that she would always come up to *me* and stomp on whatever I was doing. If I was trying to make a drawing in the sand or try to make a sand castle, she would make it disappear. When I was playing with my action figures, she would kick them right out of my hand. She was a little mean, but she always had that smile that made me forget why I was mad at her, even though it only happened a second ago.

I can still remember that smile. It said, *I like you; you better like me too!* And I did.

We grew up really close to each other, only a few blocks away, so we always saw each other at the park when our parents would let us out to play. She would always say hi by kicking away my toys to keep anything from distracting me from her, and I would always stop what I was doing to play with her. We would have fun playing tag, playing on the swing set, going up and down the slide, and whatever else we could think of doing. It was a nice time, just the two of us playing together, paying no attention to any of the other kids or what they were doing. Even then it seemed that the world stopped for us... like the world knew our future before we did.

Soon enough, our parents each noticed we were playing almost exclusively with each other, so they started having little parties together. Mostly an excuse to have play-dates for us, but they also wanted to get to know each other as well. Thinking back on it, they might have seen the love in our eyes and figured it would be better to get to know the new potential addition to the family tree sooner than later.

Oh, Liz, wherever you are when you read this, I want you to *really* understand that you will feel love stronger than ours.

* * *

Dave had another extended pause as he wept nostalgic tears over the sheets of paper. He watched one tear land on a blank area of the page, lightly staining it a slightly different shade; hardly

noticeable. Then he saw another tear fall down on the word Liz he just recently wrote. The ink began to run ever so slightly, not enough to truly distort the word and rendering it unreadable; no, far from that. But the fuzzy quality to the outline compared to the rest of the words would be a clear indicator to Elizabeth that daddy was crying when he wrote this.

David was surprised to find he felt a twang of shame at the thought of Liz reading this, when she was old enough to read, at least, and noticing that her dad was not the strong character he wanted her to think of him as. Dave quickly shooed away the feeling and got back to writing.

* * *

When we started going to middle school, we went to the same school. We were inseparable. Best friends forever, that's what she would tell all of her friends. That's what she would tell all *my* friends when they asked if we were anything more than friends. God, it *hurt* so *badly* every time I would hear her tell someone, anyone, that we were "best friends!" even when she did her slightly suggestive hip gyration in my direction, a little piece of my heart broke off. I can't even truly describe how terrible I felt about where I was as far as she was concerned. She even told me where I stood one night after I practically begged her to be my girlfriend. At that time, there was a thing called the "friend-zone," meaning a male-female relationship where one wants it to be beyond being *just* friends and the other doesn't. She said I was there...

* * *

Dave shook his head; he was writing this like he was writing to a child. Sure, Liz would be far too young to understand what this was about, much less be able to really read it right now, but later... later was a different story. She might burn it away with the last of her memories of him. Hell, she might be able to even understand his and Abigail's relationship better than *he* did by the time she decides to read this. He disregarded the idea of keeping the letter G-rated and would be less gentle than he thought he would be. He pushed on, determined to finish his letter to Liz.

* * *

But I still chased her down until high-school. Finally, I think she just gave up and said yes to one of my proposals. It was a fantastic date. I didn't know it, but it happened to be on the peak night for a meteor shower. During the day, we did the typical movie and dinner thing, which *did not* impress her at all. I was sweating badly over this; I was blowing my chance with the love of my life. I decided that we should go out for a drive and a walk down the nature path; mostly to air myself off.

She started noticing the shooting stars on the drive to the reservation, but started to *really* see them when we got out and started walking down the path. She said it was the most romantic thing she has ever seen, *ever*.

I can still remember the way she held me tight as we got to the top of the hill we were climbing. I remember the way that she held me, even though I'm sure I was drenched in nervous sweat; she started hugging me tight and pressed her face against my chest. I remember the look in her eyes as she looked up at me, and I looked back at her...

and then another stroke of luck.

Apparently, there were some trouble-making kids a little further up the trail that decided that time would be good to fuck around with their bottle-rockets, roman-candles, streamers, and God knows whatever else they had. They actually ended up starting a forest fire the local news covered for days afterwards; but before we saw the trees go up in flames, we had a fantastic light show in the sky.

There were great explosions and lights lighting up the night sky. The blues, greens, and reds that were the most prevalent among the other lights brightened up her face so beautifully that I didn't know what to say. It was as if in one second, I noticed that the most beautiful girl *ever* was hugging me tight and staring into my eyes. I guess she had a similar feeling, because she was at a lack of words as well. All I remember was her saying, really softly, "I like your smell," and the only way I could respond was by holding her closer and kissing her as passionately as I could... probably as

passionately as I ever have. Yeah, it was a cheesy scene out of the worst movie ever, but it meant a lot to us and it struck us deep and stayed with us forever.

But after we had our best kiss ever, those bastard kids came running up the trail in our direction. I distinctly remember hearing one kid screaming out "I'm going to kill you both," and another responding with, "no witnesses!"

Of course we were scared shitless, but it was fun running from those guys; even when I had to carry Abby because she was slowing down because I knew that I was with the girl I would love forever...

* * *

Dave continued to write out the rest of his high-school romance with the girl he would love forever -- if eight years counted as forever. He stayed true to his promise to Liz, through his letter, to remain honest. He went through the rest of the story of them running away from the trouble-making kids and the forest-fire they started (with some extra information in case Liz ever got the desire to fact-check) in decent detail.

Dave told Liz, honestly, about the time that he lost his virginity to Abby. He didn't spare much detail on how Abby had finally decided she was ready to "take it to the next level" and seduced him. Dave was just as forthcoming with Liz, through his letter to her, about how, on that same occasion, Abby's father stormed in through the door, pulled him off his daughter, and proceeded to beat the sense out of him. Dave found the most amusing aspect of this anecdote was that Abby had the luxury of a blanket to cover up, but David was completely naked, save for a condom, as he was beaten mercilessly by her father.

Dave also told Liz about the smaller details, like the times that they would travel a few cities over just to do something fun like going to a zoo, or some reason as silly as, "we wanted a burger from *this* city!" These were funded by Dave's part-time job, if you wanted to call it that. At least he was being honest, though, he admitted that a majority of the money they used for such expeditions were from selling drugs on the side, but he also worked *very* part-time at a

video rental store. Dave explained how it was fun being able to insist on working as little hours as possible while still being able to have such adventures with Abigail. He felt no guilt.

He was also honest with Liz about the time they spent during their college years. David and Abigail had planned to tell Liz that they stayed together, and true to each other, even though the distance of half the country separated them during those years. David couldn't be sure if Liz had been told that or not, as he made clear in his letter, but he wanted her to know the truth. That is, after all, what this whole letter was about...

* * *

By the time we finished high-school, we had a difficult decision to make.

I'm definitely *not* telling you to do the same thing, but this is what *we* did.

After a *long* talk on the hill that we first kissed on, we decided that we would kinda stay together, even though she was going to college on the East coast and I was going to the West. I guess the best way to explain it would be that we were true to our *hearts* with each other, we *always* loved each other; but as you might already know, people have basic desires that drive us, and college is a prime-time for them to drive us wild. We decided to let each other *see* other people, but we promised to never fall in love, and if either of us ever did, we would let the other know. Thankfully, we never had to.

Speaking on my behalf, I know I did my share of college passing around. There were times where I was even afraid that I might have picked up an STD or something. I remember the embarrassing feeling of going to the clinic and telling them that my girlfriend lived far away, but the girl I was worried about giving me a disease lived right around the corner. What was even worse was when she called while I was in the office and I answered. The doctors usually didn't know what to do, so they stayed politely quiet. I guess I should have thanked them for that, but I never did. I remember that was one of the few times I lied to your mother; and it was only by omission.

I never told her that I was afraid I might have caught a case of the clap or anything, because she never *asked*. I'm sure if she did, I would have *had* to tell her; but she never did.

I can't speak for her, but your mother was a *very* beautiful woman by that time. I'm sure she had her fair share of booty-calls and one-night-stands. She never told me about them; but like her, I never asked.

* * *

David pondered, in his letter to Liz, as well as to himself, the subject of honesty, trustworthiness, and other such virtues. While it was true that Dave never told Abby about his college hook-ups, neither did Abby. He supposed that it was possible that Abby had been in the same situation, and it was more probable than not, but the idea did not really shake David. They trusted each other so much, that the idea never even came up that they had ever betrayed the promise of the heart that they made. He also realized he lied just a little; he *had* lied to Abby more than once...

Dave didn't spend much time on the subject of his college life and life-style, but he did want Liz to understand that it was a time that experimentation was generally acceptable and that she should use the time to find herself, rather than find out that tests stress her out. School, in general, was one long period of play-time mixed with the learning experience of growing up, as he put it at the end.

Funny. One simple sentence can cover what he tried to get through in about three pages.

* * *

A little bit before we both graduated, we agreed to meet back in our home-town and figure out if we'd still want to pursue a relationship with each other after the college life. We both graduated, and we both took the first tickets we could back home. We actually ended up arriving at the airport at the same time, from different flights. I didn't see her until I was waiting for my taxi; and even then, I didn't see her first.

She was waiting for her taxi, too, when she saw me she practically tackled me. I was so surprised to feel her slim arms wrap around my body so tightly, but I knew it was her when she pressed her head against my chest. I felt like I could see those fireworks all over again. I looked down at her, already looking at me, and for the first time since that night, I couldn't think of a single witty thing to say, so I just kissed her, again, like that time on the hill. I think we made our decision right then and there that we were still very interested in being together. We never did say anything about it, after all.

We lived in our parents' places again, for a little while. I pursued any and all leads that got me the career that I have now. I would go to every art-showing, every concert, every dance expo I could and quickly developed a network of connections. In one year, I got us our own house on the hills and a very plush life. Our dreams came true before we even knew what they were.

* * *

He went on to describe how he used his college connections in concert with his new network of talent and quickly became one of the most recognizable names in talent management in the whole state. He described, also in great detail, how his meteoric rise in status had brought him and Abby much fortune and luxury. He described their story-tale wedding and their fit-for-the-big-screen honeymoon. He spent a good amount of pages describing the joy that being married to Abby brought him; and for another five pages, he gushed over the light that the birth of Liz had given both him and Abby. He tried to let Liz know how much he tried to make Abby and her happy.

He tried to be as honest as possible; there were some things, like most of his clienteles' dirty little habits, which were bound to be common knowledge by the time Elizabeth would read his letter. But there were some things that Dave figured Liz would not have to know, and would hopefully *never* find out on her own anyway.

Dave knew that Abby had agreed to settling on the reason behind his extended absence was that he was busy managing talent out in

Europe. In the fantasy, the business failed and he returned to a mismanaged company that was on the verge of ruin. The reality was a little harsher than that story.

David was having a great time with his newest, and best, client, Michael. He was a rising star in the field of television astrology. David had set him up with the audition Michael would nail on the hit show, *Purest Product*; but Dave did not expect such great things from him. Honestly, which he *did* confide in Liz through the letter, he expected Michael to crash and burn. Dave expected him to be what he appeared to be: a kid that was simply tickling his newest fancy at the time while burning the candles at both ends. This kid, Michael, did *not* take life seriously at all; he was high all the time. It was hard to tell what the kid was on, because he loved all the different kinds of drugs he could find. Michael was even late for his audition for *Purest Product*, but somehow, he landed the part. David's management fee was enough to double up his and Abby's lifestyle, if they wanted to.

But, apparently, Abby didn't want to.

* * *

With Michael being the shooting star that he was, I was always busy at work with him. I would always be following him around through the shoots, making sure he wouldn't get *too* loaded. I would follow him out to the clubs at night, to make sure that he wouldn't OD or end up getting into a fight that he couldn't handle. I would follow him to the press events, making sure he wouldn't try to sneak off a little extra dope and wind up nodding off in front of an audience. I swear, Liz, managing Michael's career was like babysitting a baby with a pistol glued to its hand

Abby never liked Michael that much anyways, but she *hated* that I had to spend more time with him than with her. I guess that's why she might have told you I was a drug addict or whatever; she did always think that Michael was a bigger influence on me than he actually was. He influenced our bank account more than he influenced my life! But I guess that's probably also why she decided to break up with me.

* * *

Either by omission, or by reason of pride, David *did* end up lying to Elizabeth. What he didn't tell her was that he followed Michael around because he *also* enjoyed those little white lines and all the booze they could drink. Managing *was* like babysitting, sure, if the one you were babysitting was only a few years younger and had a pocket full of money and a cellphone full of drug contacts. David didn't admit that after hearing that Michael landed the spot on *Purest Product*, he silently decided that he would go along for the ride. He figured that he was successful enough that his status would provide him sufficient cover. Being seen *only* as Michael's manager did indeed provide cover from the eyes and perception of the public, for a while at least. But it didn't cover his marriage from the strain of his absence. His sense of honesty was shining through again.

* * *

I can't blame your mother for what she did... I'm just as much at fault. I was never around for either you or Abby, I was too busy playing hot-shot and trying to manage the loose cannon named Michael. The time apart took its toll on our marriage. I don't know what your mother might or might not have told you, but I want you to know the story from my side.

One night, Michael decided to call it an early night, something he almost never did after a wrap party, but he did; even though it was, after all, the series finale of *Purest Product*. I found out later that he did end up OD'ing that same night, but what happened to me that night felt so much worse. I wound up going home early, and... I saw another man in bed with your mom. Stuart. Your step-father.

* * *

Dave went into such terrible detail describing the situation; of how he and Abby had grown apart from the time spent away, that much was easy enough to chronicle in honesty. What he did when he found them in his room, however, was glossed over with less detail and truth. In the letter, Dave tried to show Liz how civil

he was about the situation and how it was *Stuart* who overreacted. In reality, *David* was the one that lost his shit.

He arrived home early, true enough, but he did find it suspicious that his co-worker's sports car was parked out in front of his home. David had been doing an unusually large amount of cocaine that day with Michael, so his senses turned to rage almost immediately. Dave didn't bother calling out to his wife when he opened the door, he could already tell what she was doing by the moans coming down the hall from his bedroom. It didn't take much time to figure out what was going on, but the crystalline amphetamine in his blood stream bounced the sounds and the corresponding images around in his mind. It was enough to enrage any normal person, but it almost made Dave homicidal.

When Dave made his way up the hallway he busted in, red in the face and screaming. His fists flew every way he thought they could. Dave never meant to strike Abby, but in his blind rage, a couple of his stray swings connected with her. Dave knocked Stuart off of Abigail, giving no thought to the irony that he was in the same position Stuart was in when he lost his virginity to Abigail; naked, on the ground, being beaten senseless, and Abby screaming helplessly in the corner.

The whole near-psychotic episode lasted only minutes, but the repercussions were immediate. After Stuart regained consciousness, Abigail had put on her clothes while Dave was sitting on the porch, chain-smoking. Stuart convinced her to pack up a few things and move their kid in with him until Abby could get everything settled. Dave put up no resistance, he felt horrible for even *accidentally* striking his only love. A part of him knew that it was the end, or at least the beginning of.

* * *

We ended up splitting up, obviously. Abby and Stuart got custody of you, which was rough. It took so long, I tried so hard to get to *at least* see you, but I couldn't do anything. It took about a year and eight months to settle everything; the divorce, custody, and all that other fun business. After that was all done, I came to accept

that I couldn't even *see* you anymore and decided to try and take my business to Europe. I didn't leave because I didn't love you, Liz, I left because... I had to. I struggled for five hard years before I finally gave up and came back home.

* * *

Again, when he saw his tears distort the fresh ink, he again imagined Liz reading this letter and realizing that those marks were daddy's tears. Hopefully, she would buy the lie that he tried his hand in European talent management, but he secretly hoped that Liz would grow up to be smart enough to see past this ruse. He hoped that she would grow up to be observant enough to notice the tears on the pages and realize that they were more prominent when he felt like he couldn't tell her the truth, even now.

Dave didn't try to move his business to Europe, no, far from it. He actually spent those missing five years much closer to her than he wanted her to think; in the same state, as a matter of fact.

The night that Michael died of a fatal overdose, the same night Dave found Abigail in bed with his co-worker, Michael had given him two ounces of cocaine to hold on to until he returned from his party. Since Dave had not heard anything from Michael, and he was in a shitty mood, he figured that he could consider it a gift from his favorite client. The following night, David decided to have a private party; and it was one hell of a party, indeed.

After slamming back a fifth of whiskey and snorting about an eight-ball, David decided it was time to buy some peace of mind. He was not satisfied with the throttling he gave Stuart the night before, he wanted *more* blood. In his mind, Stuart had taken everything from him in one single night; a simple beating and humiliation would not suffice alone. Dave never gave thought to the fact that neither Abigail nor Stuart had filed any charges or wanted to involve the authorities in any way.

With all the intoxicants in his system, Dave never noticed that he was going well over the speed limit on an aimless drive. He didn't really know where he was, but he knew where he wanted to

be, just not how to get there. He lost his sense of direction many times, often swinging his car wildly to the left or right at the last possible second. It was during one of these blind turns that his luck ran out.

Dave saw the street sign, indicating he was about to pass through the intersection for Sunrise Street and figured a hard right would do just fine here.

Except it didn't.

He swung his vehicle too hard, too fast. He flipped it over three times, his head being rocked with each slam against the pavement. He was knocked out, and remained so for the next hour. During that hour, police would show up with an ambulance to take him to the nearest hospital. At the hospital, after he came to, he was scorned and shamed by everyone that came into the room, given the usual gambit of *what if you killed someone* or *you're lucky you're still alive*. His blood was also tested, since it was apparent from his slurred speech that he was *at least* drunk.

When his blood tests returned, he was immediately handcuffed and filed away into the prison system. Having had multiple brushes with the law while around Michael, David was already in enough trouble for the judge to be done with him. When the prosecution introduced the bag of cocaine that he had in his pocket at the time of the crash as evidence, the judge had to visibly restrain himself from slamming down the gavel right then. He was sentenced to twenty years in state prison, but his lawyer had been able to reduce the sentence to eight years, five with good behavior.

* * *

When I got back, I wanted to see you and your mom again, just to say hi, but I was told you guys moved. No one wanted to tell me where, so I don't have any address to send this letter to, but I really hope that you find it. I *really* hope that you find this. I want you to know, Liz, that I didn't mean for any of this to happen... it just kind of did. I want you to know how much I love you... how much your daddy loves you. I gotta stop writing, because I can feel myself losing my nerve, but I need you to be strong and to

know that your daddy will always love you and always be with you.

* * *

His hands were shaking and he was racked with sobbing attacks by the time he finished writing his letter to Elizabeth. At that moment, Dave knew he failed at everything. He failed his family. He failed his career. He failed his daughter. At the end of it all, he knew he couldn't help but lie to her; and in that way, he considered himself just for finally pulling the trigger.

