

The Look of Love

A Novel



Excerpt from Chapter 10

Excerpted with permission from *The Look of Love*

She's so lucky. As she sidles in the courtroom the judge has some other couple engaged in discussion at the bench. Her lawyer sits in what she considers the batter's box, mouthing, "Thank God" at her as she slips into the bench behind him. Closing her eyes for an instant, taking a deep breath, she tries to consciously shed the physical tension, the muscular tightening, the cramped facial expression brought on by her fear of being late.

The whispering from the other side of the aisle draws her attention. No wonder the whispering and muttering sounds familiar. Not only is Erik there with an array of impeccably dressed gents from his firm. Betsy and her two best friends are there in the gallery as well. So is Erik's assistant, Marge.

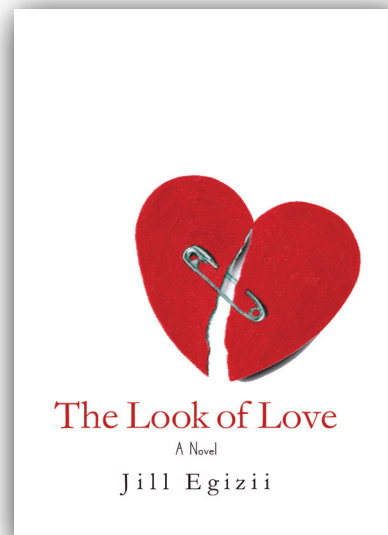
"Should the girls really be here for this? Is that allowed?" Anna whispers to Stanhope. "That's Betsy," she says indicating her daughter and her school friends.

"I can request that they wait outside when our turn comes? Would you like me to?" asks Stanhope. Anna shrugs baffled as to why the kids are even here, out of school for the morning.

To distract herself Anna focuses on her daughter. Betsy looks pale and weepy, as if she's been crying off and on. Anna takes her in for the first time in three and a half weeks. The longest Anna had ever been away from either of her own children, or even her stepchildren, until Greg went off to college that is. 'Is it possible for a twelve-year old to shrink in three weeks?' Anna wonders to herself.

Anna tries catching Betsy's eye, tries to get Betsy to acknowledge her, look at her. Anna expects Betsy to give her a wink or a nod—some signal that she understood Anna was doing everything she could. Anna hoped for some indication that Betsy understood that order would soon be restored and everything would be OK. Things would eventually be even better than before, probably. Anna could hardly wait until the hearing or trial, or whatever the hell it was, was over so she could put her arms around her daughter, comfort and shield her from anymore nonsense. Then the judge calls Erik's name and her own. She watches him rise decked out in his suit and boots as if he is some kind of English manor lord dragged away from his hunting dogs and horses for the day.

The feeling that ran through her nervous system when he took his full height, her conditioned chemical response to his size and the force of his personality: fear. Anna recognizes for perhaps the first time that the complex reactionary emotion she had for Erik underneath everything else was and always had been naked fear.



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